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Revealing Silences: The Representation of Black Identities in Hispanic Afro-Caribbean Autobiographical and Biographical Writing

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by

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ABSTRACT

This project explores how the historical contexts of the Hispanic Caribbean, including the regions of the Circum-Caribbean and the Caribbean Diasporas in the United States, have sustained dominant racial and nationalist ideologies that continue to silence or negate the identity of Afro-Caribbean subjects in national letters. My research focuses on the autobiographical and biographical writing of four Hispanic Afro-Caribbean men: *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1840) by Juan Francisco Manzano—originally published and translated to English in 1840 by Richard R. Madden— *Klabel* (2002) by Víctor Virgilio López García, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) by Piri Thomas, and *Las criadas de la Habana* (2001) by Pedro Pérez Sarduy. I examine how these authors reproduce, negotiate, and contest notions of race and nation through the representation of their identities. Arguably, in the context of a social history of marginalization and the silencing of black voices in national cultures, these autobiographies and biography

represent a contestation of modern ideals of national unity as authors call attention to their racial alterity.

At the same time, the multiple positionalities of black writers—along lines of gender, class, and national identity—complicate the process of constituting black identities. In other words, resistance to dominant discourses of race and nation is likely to be articulated through dynamics of fragmented reproduction and strategic negotiations with dominant ideas. This work will examine how autobiographical and biographical narrations encode discursive silences that, when read contextually, can uncover black resistance to or acceptance of oppressive ideologies.

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Introduction: Race and Nation in Afro-Hispanic Autobiographies and Biographies

Autobiographical and biographical writing by Afro-Hispanic Caribbean authors constitutes an understudied area of research, perhaps because the number of titles remains limited. Yet the richness of the content available renders this a relevant area of study. These works, as Roger Rosenblatt has argued, construct representations of objective realities and, as such, present to the reader the narration of specific historical moments as well as the writers' subjective interpretations.[1] In this dissertation, I propose that the autobiographies and biographies analyzed herein share distinct discursive strategies for the representation of racialized identities. I posit that the few Afro-Hispanic Caribbean authors who have attempted to narrate their lives, have done so by rereading blackness against dominant ideologies of race and nation that have historically silenced them. Each author encodes this silence in his or her discourse, consciously or unconsciously, in diverse ways. One of the central arguments in my research is that Afro-Hispanic authors have used autobiography and biography to challenge, negotiate, and reproduce the beliefs underlying dominant ideologies of national identity in the nineteenth, twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries.

The main questions I consider are: What discursive strategies do Afro-Caribbean writers employ as they attempt to construct their own subjectivity? How do these discursive strategies constitute a contestation of the objectification of the black subject? How does Afro-Caribbean writing reproduce, negotiate or challenge dominant ideologies about national identity and modernization? My methodological approach calls for the

[1] See also Mostern 1999 and Paquet 2002

analysis of literary texts in their specific historical contexts in order to discuss the structural and ideological forces that shape the construction of discourse, including the use of silence as discursive practice. The goal of the analysis is thus to interpret textual practices within their context of production in order to elucidate the anchoring ideologies and discursive strategies that link the autobiographical writings of authors across the Hispanic Afro-Caribbean.

This dissertation explores how the historical contexts of the Hispanic Caribbean, including the regions of the Circum-Caribbean and the Caribbean Diasporas in the United States, have sustained dominant racial and nationalist ideologies that continue to silence or negate the identity of Afro-Caribbean subjects in national letters. My research focuses on the autobiographies and biographies of four Afro-Caribbean men from the nineteenth through the twenty-first century: *Autobiografía de un esclavo* (1840) by Juan Francisco Manzano,[2] *Klabel* (2002) by Víctor Virgilio López García, *Down These Mean Streets* (1967) by Piri Thomas, and *Las criadas de la Habana* (2001) by Pedro Pérez Sarduy. I explore how these works reproduce, negotiate, and contest notions of race and nation through the representation of each author's identity. One might argue that in the context of a social history of marginalization and the silencing of black voices in national cultures, these autobiographies represent contestation or resistance to modern ideals of national unity, as authors call attention to their racial alterity. At the same time, the multiple positionalities of black writers—along lines of gender, class, and national

[2] It is important to note that the original *Autobiografía* was translated to English and published by Richard R. Madden in 1840 under the title *Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba, Recently Liberated; translated from the Spanish by R. R. Madden, M.D. with the History of the Early Life of the Negro Poet, Written by Himself; To Which Are Prefixed Two Pieces of Descriptive of Cuban Slavery and the Slave-Traffic* (Schulman 28).

identity—complicate the process of the constitution of black subjectivities. In other words, resistance is likely to be articulated through dynamics of fragmented reproduction of and strategic negotiations with dominant ideas.

Among these, I will examine the representation of silence in order to elucidate how autobiographical and biographical narrations encode discursive silences that, when read contextually, can uncover black resistance. I define silence as a suppression of information that typically occurs in reference to moments of racial discrimination. Additionally, as authors negotiate their place in the nation their discourses create contradictions that simultaneously reject and accept racial ideologies. I argue that this contradiction forms a silence around their compromised position with regard to their place in the discourse on national identity. Thus, I will address the interrelatedness of the works selected for analysis: specifically, how the strategies of the authors relate to ideals of nation and race, and how each author faces the silencing of the black voice that has traditionally marked the experience of the African diaspora.

In my analysis, I draw upon the theory of *différance*, part of Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction that holds that signification operates through the sign's ability to differ in space and defer in time—the spatio-temporal movement of *différance*. Derrida posits that meaning is not a fixed entity but rather a contingent and unstable one, suggesting that signification is based upon difference and the ability to defer meaning to a later moment. It follows from this theory that any truth we expect to find in a concept is constantly moving through time and space. As Derrida argues: "With its *a*, difference more properly refers to what in classical language would be called the origin or production of differences and the differences between differences, the *play* [*jeu*] of

differences. Its locus and operation will therefore be seen wherever speech appeals to difference" (Derrida 279).

In my research, this theorizing allows for the exploration of the literary legacy of Afro-Hispanic writers, from Manzano's work in the nineteenth century through the work of writers in the twenty-first century. I propose that differing and deferring appear as negotiations of a black identity as developed in the Afro-Hispanic autobiographies and biographies that I analyze. The authors have inherited a tradition of constructing difference or alterity as central to their subjectivity. Therefore, they play with the nonsubstantive relationships that signifiers have with the signified, and the relationship that signs have upon the signified. For instance, in the construction of their racial identities, they continually (re)create new relationships of difference to the terms that have historically been used to mark them as other within racially oppressive societies: for example, slave, nigger, black, mulatto, *mestizo*, *negrito*, and *negro*, among others.

I suggest that the application of *différance* enables the analysis of Manzano's formative discursive strategies to challenge nineteenth century ideals of humanity, reason, and civilization. In Manzano's work, the play of difference from the Latin American and Caribbean slave experience as narrated by the author sets patterns of representation that echo in the twentieth and twenty-first century discourses in the ideals of identity, nation, freedom, and truth. Furthermore, the slave's denial of his own racialization and negation, offers insights into language and literature which when read through a deconstructive lens they shed light on ideologies that attempt to define racialized subjects as static entities. I would add that under the oppression of racism and eugenics in the Hispanic Caribbean and Latin America in the nineteenth century, the play

of difference in identity negotiates with and challenges the dominant discourse where whiteness, or performance of whiteness, is the only means of entering the nation.

Scholar William Luis argues that the antislavery narratives of the nineteenth century were written to evoke sympathy for black subjects by placing them as the focus of discourse (*Literary Bondage* 24). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, authors use the same technique of locating blackness at the center of their experience in order to not only to challenge dominant ideals that continue to oppress people of color, but also to negotiate and resist the supposed inferiority of their racialized identities by assigning new definitions to previous signifiers. Strategically, these authors use their identity to offer critiques of exclusionary national identities and unequal modernization by highlighting the diversity within the experiences of blackness. Juan Francisco Manzano is the first Afro-Hispanic author to assert his own racialized identity as part of a larger Cuban national identity. Because of its position in Latin American letters, his work is vital to my analysis because it provides an analytical paradigm for the examination of Afro-Hispanic writing.

Juan Francisco Manzano as an Analytical Paradigm

This analysis will begin with a close reading of *Autobiografía de un esclavo* by Juan Francisco Manzano, which is the only known work written by a slave in the Hispanic Caribbean. This makes Manzano's autobiography crucial for an initial mapping of how slavery, racialization, and national ideologies influence the writing of a black subject in a compromised and polemic position. The circumstances surrounding Manzano's work reveal his unique positionality and how the socio-political context of his

time shapes his writing about his own subjectivity. Thus, his subjectivity represents and reflects specific epistemologies and the effect they have on his definitions of self. By discussing Manzano's work as a paradigm for analysis, I aim to trace how relevant discursive strategies are enacted, re-enacted, or transformed over time in the representation of the self among Afro-Hispanic Caribbean writers. After identifying the strategies employed by Manzano—a slave, writing while he is a runaway slave seeking his manumission—I then search for similarities in contemporary writing where ideas regarding slavery, racialization, national identity, and modernization emerge.

Typically, an autobiography is built upon the notion of a coherent, self-evident, self-conscious, commanding subject (Smith 81). Authors use the genre as a means of self-expression that textually constructs the imagery of a unique, "free" autonomous ego as the natural form of being. Because Juan Francisco Manzano was a slave at the time he wrote his autobiography, he is not in a position to construct himself as autonomous without compromising his safety in the process. Manzano narrated his life as was requested from him by his protector Domingo del Monte, a prominent Cuban literary figure of his time who solicited his work in order to reform the severe treatment that slaves were suffering. In order to achieve a limited amount of autonomy, Manzano uses silence as a discursive strategy and a deliberate thematic organization to subvert dominant ideologies within an oppressive system. The clandestine writing present in the narrative of Manzano comes in the form of his recognition of the multitude of dominant discourses that seek to marginalize him and other slaves, but also in the contradictions and erasures of these strategies in the organization of his discourse.

As Lloyd King argues in his introduction to *The Autobiography of a Cuban Slave*, Manzano constructs himself in relation to power, which recognizes that this text was conceived with clear expectations (28). The requests of information specific to the slave experience that came from Del Monte has a profound effect on Manzano and his choices to include or exclude specific content. It is pure supposition to suggest that Del Monte wanted to Manzano to portray himself as a humble, obedient slave because there is no definite evidence to support this. Yet, it is evident in the silences of information that Manzano was limited to the accounts of the most horrific abuse. This coincides with Del Monte's desire to reform the slave trade because he was not necessarily in favor of its immediate removal. Even though Del Monte had organized the collection of money from his literary circle to purchase Manzano's freedom, the thing he wanted most in his life, he was still a slave at the moment of his writing (Manzano et al. 14). Thus, Manzano is obliged to write his life in another manner. As scholar Abdeslam Azougarh iterates, Manzano tries to deny the black threat or the image of a rebellious black that was disseminated throughout the Caribbean in the wake of the Haitian revolution (21).[3] This refutation of danger is evident in the narrative as Manzano assimilates to the lifestyle of his masters, religiously, politically, and socially. However, if we view this assimilation as necessary for survival, we begin to see the makings of a less docile and submissive subject who, through his silences, manages to challenge the rhetoric that oppresses him.

It is important to highlight the representation of a collective experience in *Autobiografía de un esclavo,* since Del Monte and Richard R. Madden intended it to

[3] See also: Richard Jackson, 56.

serve as justification for the abolition of slavery. In this way, Manzano is representative of the slave masses, yet he is an exemplary man who also upholds the values of Spanish and Cuban society. However, *Autobiografía* only represents a small minority of slaves and free men and women, namely the literate mulatto population. Manzano is an assimilated slave who reinforces dominant ideologies that view citizenship only in its proximity to whiteness, while suppressing any African or black cultural values (Appelbaum, et al. 4). Accordingly, his narrative does not overtly expose underlying racisms and inequality between black and white populations. Yet, Manzano does provide details of the dehumanization that occurs during his attempt to acquire literacy and knowledge. For Manzano, the more knowledge that he gains, the less free he feels because only then does he realize how he and other slaves have been negated as human beings and excluded from the nation. He addresses these issues with clandestine discursive strategies of contradiction and silence.

According to James Olney in "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," slave narratives are not seen as autobiographical due to the nature of their solicitation, which does not allow for a fictionalization or shaping of the text. They are denied the configurational dimension of narrative that constructs a whole story out of scattered events (150). Olney suggests that these texts are guided episodically. However, we can see that Manzano's strategies provide more than a random recollection of events. There is a process of inclusion and exclusion that guides his words, which is evident in his silences and organization.[4] Manzano chooses to assert his

[4] For more information regarding the consensus that Manzano imposed a logic to his discourse see: Ilia Casanova-Marengo (*Intersticio* 35).

mulatto identity over being *Negro*, just as he chooses to juxtapose ideas of freedom with servitude throughout his work. Even if these decisions are solicited, or impacted during the editing of his work, they provide a better understanding of what was required from its subjugated population and what it hoped to remove.

When we view the writing of Manzano's autobiography as a coherent process of insertion and deletion, we can read it as an act of becoming. Accordingly, autobiography is a process through which he finds himself and creates his metaphor of the self at the summary moment of composition (Olney, *Metaphors* 35). Scholar Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, argues that beginning in the sixteenth century "there appears to be an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process" (1). Thus, I contend that Manzano fashions himself subjectively and objectively in order to reveal his order and the order of his universe. Autobiographies allow authors to discover the meanings of their selfhood, or in Manzano's case, the contradictions inherent to his identity. Writing becomes a process of discovery and revelation about what it means to be oneself. For this reason, the autobiography provides the ability to portray its author reliably. Yet, I suggest that because of the effect that racial and national ideologies have on Manzano, the selective process through which it is written centers predominantly around omission and silence. In this sense, autobiography is like a fictional narrative in which the author creates its protagonist. However, because the author and the protagonist are believed to be one and the same, they both can be created to suit the author's intention and desire, consciously or unconsciously. It is this very malleability of the truth that makes the autobiography intriguing when searching for the voice of Afro-Caribbean men because

we can see how the imposition, or choice, of a racialized identity represents the goals of the author as they reinforce, negotiate, and/or challenge dominant national ideals.

The protean nature of autobiography easily lends itself to each author's distinct purposes. Autobiography, because of its historical referentiality and "real" individual voice, represents an author's beliefs about self, knowledge, and nation, but can also be used as a witness to collective memory. This aspect converts the autobiography into a social narrative and documentation of historical experience. In his book *Autobiography and Black Identity Politics,* Kenneth Mostern suggests that when considering the African American autobiography, it should be placed within a field "where 'I' tends to have a determinate relation to a specifically racial 'we'; and where the text provides for its audience a way to symbolize racialization as a version of the real" (31). Therefore, each author's racial identity represents their subjective memory of trauma and the collective remembrance of histories of domination (10).

Like African American works, the Hispanic Afro-Caribbean autobiography offers a black identity that differentiates itself from dominant white society for various purposes. If one of the main tenets of the autobiography is that it should represent a 'free' autonomous self and commanding subject, as suggested by Smith, then what we see in the Hispanic Afro-Caribbean autobiography is that this free self is being negotiated, sometimes covertly, in contradiction to the racialized political and social systems and national identities that have attempted to deny black autonomy. In the Afro-Caribbean texts to be analyzed here, however, this subjectivity is mediated by the author's circumstance, by the place and time within which each author has been viewed as inferior or superior to others. Each author's writing of self becomes thus a contemporary

reenactment of the struggle between representations of self as subject versus object.

Mostern calls for the need to examine these "historical interrelations between the socioeconomic and psychological meanings of identity as it structures and determines politics" (7). Similarly, there is a need to analyze how these interrelations structure literature, and how literature is constitutive of social relations. In the autobiography, the process of self-narration provides authors with the ability to articulate how their socio-historical realities infiltrate their psychological understanding of self and culture and how they can use their identity to stimulate change. The capacity of the autobiography to articulate history as its author perceives it allows for a deeper understanding of the impact of political and socioeconomic circumstances upon the creation and/or negotiation of identity.

Modernity and the Expression of Racial Identity

Modernity, as a historical and cultural process, has been associated with the emergence and transformation of dominant cultural formations linked to the ideas of the European Enlightenment, the expansion of industrial capitalism, and the formation of the nation-state, nationalism, and racial identity as central political structures. Discourses on modernity are articulated in each work analyzed for this dissertation in their multiplicity of interpretations and representations. Of particular interest for this research are the associations of modernity with socio-cultural and socio-economic notions of modernization in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean as they necessarily coincide with ideals of nation and progress.

In addition, the malleability of race necessarily complicates the analysis of modernity and racialized identities because of the ways in which definitions of race have varied throughout space and time. For instance, nineteenth-century Cuban racial definitions are not equivalent to those used in the twenty-first, and the implications of such racialized identities vary by cultural and political context. Consequently, because of inherent spatiotemporal and sociohistorical differences, individual identity is reflected in the ideology of specific nations. Appelbaum, et al., propose that definitions of race have been shaped by nation building and that their corresponding identities are created in racial terms. Similarly, as racial and national ideals are used to construct hierarchies, assertions of difference have also been used to undermine or reinforce the discrimination that accompanies those hierarchies (2). This work will explore the various constructions of racial and national identity in Cuba, Honduras, and the Caribbean Diaspora in the United States so as to illustrate how these discourses have impacted Afro-Hispanic representation in autobiography and biography.

Since national and individual identities are not static, I suggest that the fluidity of both appear in the autobiographical and biographical works analyzed to represent strategic negotiations with dominant ideologies. These exchanges are revealed as each author attempts to consolidate the whole of their lives by interpreting how their lives are influenced by their specific space and time. The passage of time can disconnect the author from their identity and, as such, the expression of each identity represents the desires of the author at the moment of writing (Maftei 59). Thus, as authors are merging their past and present selves, they may reveal contradictions that create discursive silences reflecting spatial and temporal differences of identity. Because of the self-

reflective nature of the autobiography, these silences alert readers to the resolutions and negotiations of identity that have taken place or are occurring during the process of writing.

Nationalism, as a relevant modern ideology that affects identity discourses, entails the interplay of national symbols and aspirations as tools to unite humans from all areas of life into one homogenous nation-state, even when differences are embraced under terms like racial democracy. As suggested by Appelbaum et al., regional differences and spatial boundaries have been created through racialized ideas of progress and modernity (10). Hence these differences have been used to identify certain regions as backwards because of blackness, such as the Caribbean coast of Central America, which are excluded from the nation, as we will see in *Klabel*. Modernity is a discourse that coincides with the desire to erase the past from our collective consciousness, i.e. war, divisiveness, primitivity, and progress towards a newer, seemingly more cohesive, equitable society. Modernization, then, is the primary mode through which nations develop, as proposed by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*. However, as societies and nations seek homogeneity, any counter-hegemonic voice is silenced in the process. These oppressed voices necessarily oppose, challenge, and seek recognition from their societies through clandestine tactics and strategies to avoid further suppression. In the context of the Hispanic Caribbean, men and women of African descent have been historically oppressed by white supremacy[5] backed by scientific racisms that describe them as biologically inferior, both morally and intellectually.

[5] I define white supremacy as the belief that people defined as racially white are inherently and biologically superior to other racial groups, and thus they should be the dominant group.

With the prevalence of scientific racism during the Enlightenment, men and women of color are made invisible, and in the twentieth century the same is done under the guise of consolidating a national identity. However, when Afro-Hispanic populations are segregated and discriminated against, they are made to suffer in silence, specifically when their governments regulate this silence, as described in *Las criadas* prior to and following the Cuban revolution of the 1950s. These voices are excluded from lettered culture because they are described as anti-nationalist by their opponents and capable of inciting social disjuncture. Any heterogeneous discourse that differs from the homogeneity proposed during nation formation is seen as discordant and disruptive. Modernity's dialectic struggle between our human nature—our past—and a fight to progress towards a new human evolution—our future—has imposed nationalisms upon its men and women that are in themselves exclusionary. However, black men and women are integral to modernity's ideology of historical progression, as Paul Gilroy asserts in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. He argues that by "focusing on racial slavery and its aftermath we are required to consider a historical relationship in which dependency and antagonism are intimately associated and in which black critiques of modernity may also be . . . its affirmation" (48). The autobiographies that I will discuss here participate in an over-arching modernity that has sought to exclude African descendants from the nation, yet their voices remain modern and enact modernity because of their struggles with it and their defiance and/or assimilation to it. These are not stories of men and women deprived of modernity but rather stories of men and women who negotiate, resist, and reside within it.

Another area of criticism that is relevant to this research concerns nationalism as a

cultural formation of modernity that is fraught with projects that appear to benefit a national society yet exclude marginal populations from enjoying the benefits of such projects. The critique of modernity and nationalism appears in the literature and art of Afro-Hispanics in the 20th and 21st centuries as it affects the expression of their identity. Through their work, and even through the strategic use of silence—arguably a legacy of slavery itself—black authors challenge modernity and the marginalizing effects of modernization in their respective nations.

Paul Gilroy offers a rich and relevant discussion of the links between modernity and slavery. In his analysis of the constitution of European modernity, Gilroy proposes that contrary to notions of modernity as a history of progress and diffusion of universal values, there is an intricate connection between modernity and slavery. Gilroy suggests a reevaluation of modernity and the accounts of the dialectics of Enlightenment by incorporating colonialism, slavery, and scientific racism as constitutive elements of modernity (54). He argues for reintegrating the brutality and terror of slavery, which are typically excluded in accounts of modernity, back into our current conceptions. In his view, slavery should not be seen as something that can be erased from our collective memory because it is revealed to be incompatible with modern rationality and capitalist production. Finally, he argues that slavery and its history of brutality, must be approached as part of the project of modernity and the intellectual heritage of the West (49). This idea is relevant to this dissertation as each author incorporates slavery into their critiques of modernity and the current national identity that they resist, negotiate, or contest.

In effect, slaves and the institution of slavery forced many European thinkers to advance notions of universality and Enlightenment. Simultaneously, slavery created a

space from which to critique the universalist and essentialist claims of modern thought. Gilroy offers a critique of the way in which Eurocentric ideas surrounding the constitution of the modern subject have overlooked or undertheorized the impact of race and gender. The uniformity of experience implied by European Enlightenment philosophy did not and cannot convey the multiplicity of lived experiences among social groups. Hence, Gilroy's discussion sheds light on the plurality of modern subjectivities, with a particular focus on the experiences of the individuals in, what he terms, the black Atlantic. The black Atlantic is conceptualized as an intercultural and transnational formation that highlights the "instability and mutability of identities which are always unfinished, always being remade" (xi). Gilroy's re-thinking of modernity from a black-centered epistemology is also at the center of my discussion of each author's response to modernity in their autobiography or biography.

Similarly, as David Punter argues, modernity is a struggle between our brutal past and a search for future improvement. Punter invokes the image of the two-faced Janus as representative of modernity and its competing desires:

> It is also an image of infatuation, of being held in the thrall between two competing desires, the desire to return and the desire to progress: between these two desires we are . . . an enduring commentary on the aims and goals of Enlightenment, an ever-present reminder of the pull towards the dark which shadows the possibility of our emergence into the light, forever strung: . . . we are divided between a desire to return to the bestial . . . and the desires to perfect the species even if— or perhaps especially if— that requires a redrafting of the terms of what it is to be human in any case, a submission to the demands- which we

> ourselves have created- of a post-human world in which we will, no doubt, continue to struggle to find our place and our being. (211)

The ideals of modernity, the struggle between the past and the present and the goals of progress, become inscribed in the words and remembrances of the four authors analyzed in this dissertation. Conversely, they all negotiate with legacies of modern Enlightenment ideals, ideals which have determined their difference on a biological basis. As Piri Thomas metaphorically states in his work, the African Diasporic experience remains in the darkness and the shadows. As he struggles to confront his racialized identity, he uses images of night and darkness to represent comfort because he has been denied entrance into the light. I will examine how each author offers a critique of the proposed transcendence of a past that attempts to relegate them to a space outside modernity. Modernity, as Enlightenment, sought to silence their voice; now they can use their identities to create a present that redefines this modernity fraught with contradictions. In effect, Juan Francisco Manzano, Víctor Virgilio López García, Piri Thomas, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy use the alterity of their racialized identity to redefine conceptions of national identity in their respective historical context.

The desire to create a present that re-defines who we are as humans is accompanied by the enduring fear that transcendence is impossible and fleeting: that the present will somehow be eclipsed by the past. Even as the modern age promotes progress, civilization, and independence, each author illustrates that we have yet to prevail over our violent and oppressive past. However, as we will see in the work of Pedro Pérez Sarduy, we can also look to the past to give us strength. To make direct challenges to oppressive racial and national ideologies each author also represents the home as a site of conflict

because the home is where many of the racial and national discourses are enacted. In *Down,* Thomas uncovers the racism that exists within his own family as he confronts his father and his brother who insist on their whiteness. In *Las criadas,* Marta experiences discrimination in the homes of the men and women for whom she works. Similarly, *Klabel* reveals the home to be a place where racist discourse is reproduced. Each author has (re)presented the home as a space where the reproduction of macro discourses surrounding national identity have continued to subjugate black identity in the name of progress and modernization. In revealing of the home as such a space, they are able to challenge these discourses.

The impact of each author's historical context is represented through their words, and also in the use of discursive silences: metaphors, similes, ellipses, and other literary devices, which highlight the suppression of a voice of resistance, one that now challenges and negotiates definitions of race while it reveals the economic and social displacement inherent in the modernization of the Hispanic Caribbean, Circum-Caribbean and the Caribbean Diaspora in the United States.

Overview of Chapters

My work is structured in terms of the movement from I observe from the creation of complete silences, as seen in Manzano, to decreased silences, as observed with Pérez Sarduy. Chapter 1 will focus on analyzing *Autobiografía de un esclavo* by Juan Francisco Manzano as a critical paradigm for reading and identifying literary techniques in works written by Afro-Hispanic authors. This chapter will provide an overview of the nineteenth century with regards to slavery, race, and nation in Cuba. It will also discuss

how Manzano constructs himself as a mulatto and a literate slave in Cuba against the conventions of the white Spanish colonial society that placed him in such a liminal position. I will draw on the work of Casanova-Marengo, Azougarh, and Schulman to highlight how Manzano creates himself in his narrative yet also rejects that same self clandestinely through his textual organization and use of discursive silences or omissions which challenge the hegemony.

Chapter 2 will present an analysis of Víctor Virgilio López García's *Klabel* and its context of production in Honduras in the latter half of the twentieth century. I will explore the contradictions that arise in López García's discourse surrounding education in Honduras as a sign of unequal processes of modernization. *Klabel* highlights the conflicts between his Garífuna culture and the ideals of Honduran national identity that exclude the Garífuna because of negative associations of blackness with lack of progress. During the protagonist Klabel's journey to receive his education, he must confront a dominant culture that continues to subjugate him and his culture.

Chapter 3 will provide an analysis of the Hispanic Afro-Caribbean experience in the United States in the twentieth century. Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* will be considered for its representation of the ways in which dominant racial ideologies from Puerto Rico create identity conflicts in the mainland United States as illustrated by the protagonist's contestation of these ideologies as constitutive of his identity formation. I will focus on the ways in which Piri Thomas's subjectivity is transformed as he is forced to confront his racialization and its connection with his socioeconomic status. Using metaphors of darkness and heart, Thomas negotiates both his racial and national identity.

Chapter 4 will trace a shift in national identity from early twentieth century Cuba to the twenty-first with an analysis of *Las criadas de la Habana* by Pedro Pérez Sarduy. As economic paradigms began to shift during the Cuban Revolution of the mid-twentieth century, racial expression is silenced in the service of ideologies of racial democracy. As Afro-descendants received societal recognition with the racial awakening of the 1930s, a space opened for them to strive for equality and cultural recognition that was not reliant on white hegemonic ideals. However, as communism takes hold in Cuba, African or black cultural expression or vocalization of racial inequalities are seen as counter to national ideologies of racial democracy. Pérez Sarduy constructs discourses of slavery to resist and negotiate with the racialization of the main character Marta. In doing so, he addresses the many contradictions found in Cuban society that laud African ancestry and culture but continue to utilize derogatory language and practices that create negative associations between the two.

The conclusion will constitute a summary of my findings as well as suggestions for future research. I will explore the ways in which alternative readings aid in our understanding of the underlying historical projects that affect individual subjectivity. I will also address the convergences across the works and offer a comparison of their discursive strategies.

Chapter 1

Juan Francisco Manzano as a Paradigm for Analysis of Discursive Silence

Pero yo, criado en la oscuridad de tanta ignorancia, ¿qué podía saber?
—Juan Francisco Manzano

Introduction

Juan Francisco Manzano was born a slave in Cuba, around 1797, under the possession of the Marquesa Jústiz de Santa Ana (Manzano and Azougarh 10). His parents, María del Pilar Manzano and Toribio de Castro, were also enslaved by the same woman. Juan Francisco's journey as a slave in the Marquesa's house is tempered by the favoritism that was shown to his mother because of her intelligence and beauty. As a child, Manzano was also favored by the Marquesa Jústiz. However, the remainder of his life was marred by the atrocities inflicted upon him by his other master, the Marquesa de Prado Ameno. At the age of 38, Manzano was petitioned to write his autobiography by Domingo del Monte, a prominent literary figure and abolitionist. After it was written Del Monte sent his autobiography to Richard Madden, the English commissioner of the abolitionist campaign for the English Government (Manzano and Azougarh 15). Writing was forbidden to slaves, yet Manzano had taught himself to write by secretly copying the handwriting of his subsequent master's son, Don Nicolás de Cárdenas. It can be assumed that Manzano also learned to read in a clandestine manner. This placed Manzano in a very perilous situation. On the other hand, the fact that he was a literate slave placed him in a position of privilege and provided Manzano with the possibility of manumission with the help of Del Monte and other members of his literary circle. Juan Francisco Manzano

writes his autobiography, under petition, to expose the horrors of the slave experience in detail and, accordingly, his own internal struggles to come to terms with his designation as a Cuban black slave.

Manzano's autobiography illuminates how the conditions of textual production and the circumstances surrounding the lives of afro-descendants, impose a silencing upon their writing. In the case of Manzano, his immediate context requires emphasis: Manzano is writing his autobiography, an act that is forbidden to slaves, and he has just fled from his abusive master, the Marquesa de Prado Ameno. His autobiography is produced under the petition and guidance of a prominent literary and political figure, Domingo del Monte, who is also Manzano's protector. Consequently, this implies that the voice of Manzano is conditioned and coerced by the abolitionist ideological interests of Del Monte; by the conscience of Manzano himself, whose liberty is precarious; and, in addition, by the ideas regarding worth, value, and subjectivity in slave societies in the nineteenth century. However, Manzano's work offers hints for alternative readings that reveal his own identity, unlike the submissive slave he overtly presents, as part of a Cuban national identity.

From my perspective, *Autobiografía de un esclavo* by Juan Francisco Manzano, demands alternative ways of interrogating the text so as to elucidate resistance to, reproductions of, and negotiations with the beliefs underlying dominant ideologies regarding racial and national identity in nineteenth century Cuba. In this chapter, I will I highlight the discursive strategies that Manzano employs and suggest that his strategies can then be used as a paradigm for analysis of the twentieth and twenty-first century Afro-Hispanic Caribbean narratives to be discussed in this dissertation. I will begin by

analyzing the historical context within which Manzano writes and suggest that the way he organizes his narrative is linked to his desire to communicate his resistance or adherence to dominant ideologies of race and nation. I will then examine how the organizational structure of *Autobiografía* represents Manzano's understanding of his own slave identity. Finally, I will explore how the racial discourse represented by Manzano has created a silencing of his black identity by adhering to ideologies of white superiority in order to gain social privilege.

Jacques Derrida postulates the relation between language, meaning, and identity formation of terminology as a matter of difference (Différance 279). He argues that the meaning of a term requires reference to and supplementation by other terms, therefore making each word choice in a written or spoken discourse a play between itself and a highly variable referential web of alternative or related terms. This perspective indicates a departure from the modern approaches to the philosophy of language that postulated that the signifier held a close relationship to the signified. In Derrida's analysis, the connections between the two have various referential and differential possibilities. Drawing on Derrida, I will argue that Manzano constructs a discourse about his own identity by referring to terminology that describes himself and others always in a play of multiple signifiers that relate to the various social contexts in which he lives, both white and black, slave and free. Consequently, I suggest that Manzano describes himself through a web of fractured discourses, some of which, in his time, would typically only apply to the world of white, educated, intellectual, or literate men rather than to black, slave men.

Along these lines, W.E.B. Du Bois argues that American black men enact a

double consciousness or a double view of themselves through which they can see themselves based upon the racialized social structures that have created this duality and also their own subjectivity. To some extent, Du Bois's idea of double consciousness is parallel to Derrida's idea that with *différance* every single element is doubled by means of differential signification. In other words, a man can be black, only in so much that he is not white, because of différance, that is, because of the play of signifiers and significations and their limitless referentiality. As Du Bois describes the experience:

> the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world . . . One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two waring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (168)

Du Bois sees himself as a man in and outside of national society, much like Manzano in nineteenth century Cuba. As Du Bois suggests, his duality or doubleness is described as a problem for society. This permits the inference that the struggle between the two sides of oneself leads black authors to present their lives from such a position: in and outside national culture. Thus, when Manzano constructs his identity as a *mulato,* he does so knowing that this signifier, by means of its own doubleness, relates to ideas of whiteness, blackness, and all associations of worth for each. He is a *mulato*: at once a white man, and a black man. The referentiality of the term *mulato* is "itself" and its "others", which produces new possibilities for signification (Grammatology 301). Manzano can see himself as a slave but not without also acknowledging the relatedness of the signifier

slave to its oppressors and thus, his relation to the qualities of his masters, qualities traditionally denied to him.

In terms of discourse, Manzano advances postmodern practices of the construction of his identity by taking advantage of the various combinations of signifiers available because of the limitless differences inherent in language. Manzano defines himself as a mulatto (black and white), religious, secretly rebellious, passionate, Cuban, poet, and intellectual. His descriptions highlight that being educated or intellectual were not possibilities reserved solely for the white elite and planter classes, as promoted by the dominant ideologies of his era. Rather, he constructs himself in comparison to a class within which he would never be allowed entrance. He does so, I argue, because he is aware that only by reinforcing dominant ideals of white superiority and the demands of Domingo del Monte can he gain his freedom and earn more social mobility. Manzano must accept his position in the social hierarchy to appease the dominant class and assuage the predominant fears of black rebellion. Yet, Manzano is careful to never fully equate himself to members of the white educated elite, such as Del Monte, and carefully represents himself as a humble slave. Manzano's inability to publicly affirm comparisons of his identity to whiteness and dominant ideologies of the time imposes a silencing in his writing since his ability participate in the literary world of his time is severely limited by his slave identity.

By associating himself with characteristics of a class of society to which he will never belong, Manzano distances himself from the general free black and slave population and the corresponding signifiers which have been used to oppress them, like savage, uncivilized, uneducated, and backward. He describes himself based on the

characteristics associated with the dominant classes that he sees in himself; yet, he must also reference the traces of slave identity to distinguish himself from them, or only minimally associate with them. I argue that due to his historical context, which includes global abolitionist movements, contrasted with increased severity of punishment towards slaves due to various slave rebellions, and the proliferation of independence movements circulating in Cuba at that time, Manzano manipulates his contextual signifiers to produce his identity and destroy old relationships between signs previously used to signify slave identity and African inferiority. In addition, Manzano's use of euphemisms and silences questions the validity of established truths in the nineteenth century regarding blackness and slavery, but also regarding whiteness and power.

In this way, when discussing the antislavery narratives, as William Luis suggests, "the narrative strategy reduces the distance between the master's quarters and the slave's barracoon, between the oppressor and the oppressed, the white and the black" (*Literary Bondage* 3). The goal of this type of writing was to incite the reader to enact change for the slave and black population. Without reducing the distance between the two poles, there would be no hope for change. Luis argues that with the introduction of slave narratives the spatial relations changed and therefore, the corresponding categories of black being negative and white being positive, are reversed and are revealed to be arbitrary signs (*Literary Bondage* 3). This discursive reversal, along with other narrative strategies, allows Manzano to construct a conciliatory, yet contentious, Afro-Cuban identity, one that I will use as a paradigm for analysis as part of a larger literary legacy of resistance to oppression found in Afro-Caribbean autobiographies. I will argue that beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth and twenty-first

century, dominant discourses of racial and national identity reject blackness as a formative characteristic, and as such, that the discursive strategies that Manzano develops can be used as a model to analyze works written by authors of African descent who negotiate their place within the nation.

I will begin the next section with a discussion of Manzano's discursive strategies in order to uncover his resistance and acceptance of the dominant ideologies emerging in the first half of the nineteenth century regarding independence and abolition and how they offer Manzano a guide for structuring his autobiography.

Burgeoning Ideas of Independence, Abolition, and a Mulatto Cuban Identity

Michael Omi and Howard Winant define race as a "concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies" (55). Race has become a symbol of historical and social disjunction in Latin American and Caribbean societies. It serves as a tool for oppression but has also historically served as a tool for resistance. As Omi and Winant propose, we should see race as an element of social structure, a dimension of human representation, rather than non-existent (55). Manzano and the other authors I will examine represent race as part of their identity that is based upon the context of its designation by dominant groups in society, whether traumatic or not. As Santiago-Díaz submits, Afro-Puerto Ricans, and I would add Afro-Hispanics, have had a specific racial identity imposed upon them, yet have also chosen to assert this racialized identity (30). The Afro-Hispanic autobiographies that will be discussed here illustrate this imposition of identity and how the authors have accepted, challenged it, or used it to negotiate their place in the nation. Santiago-Díaz emphasizes

that reflections on race tend to emerge at specific moments—through reflection, life, or actions—as a decisive factor of a person's identity (27). He posits that race is also used to connect with the African experience from the first centuries of colonization to contemporary understandings. In this sense, racial identity is vital to the illumination of an Afro-Caribbean voice that has been suppressed because of its negative associations with the signifier "black."

In nineteenth century Latin America, the institution of slavery as well as the ideologies that situate race as a biological concept, where white is naturally superior and black naturally inferior, remain widespread (Omi and Winant 63). Eighteenth century Enlightenment ideals had posited Africans as inferior based on aesthetic ideals of the time that promoted paleness as beautiful and darkness as repulsive. These characteristics were also linked to intelligence and rationality. Naturalists like Buffon and Linnaeus, for example, ranked races based on their intellectual capacity created by environmental factors, which, in turn, could cause degeneration or development. These ideas, as Frederickson asserts, created the framework for biological racism of the nineteenth century (61). In the nineteenth century, as abolitionist sentiment grew, many advocates of slavery used biological determinism to illustrate the corruption of the white race by naturally inferior races. Frederickson suggests that pre-Darwinian racism thrived by some extent due to the revolutionary legacies of the nation-states that, premised on equal rights, kept one exclusionary principle agreed upon: the biological unfitness and incompetence for full citizenship of African descendants (68). As nationalities began to differentiate, exclusionary ideals that viewed those of African descent as marginal served to eliminate

them from the national discourse, incorporate them through homogenization, or create spatial and regional boundaries of difference within the nation (Appelbaum et al. 11).

In Cuba, slavery was not abolished until 1886 and the racial ideologies that upheld it continue to oppress black men and women in various forms well into the twenty-first century. While Enlightenment ideals provided the basis for biological determinism, as Frederickson concludes, racism is nationally specific and becomes enmeshed with searches for national identity and cohesion that vary with the historical experience of each country (75). In this section, I will explore how changing ideologies brought about by independence movements, abolitionist ideas, and racial discourse affect the writing of Manzano and the creation of his discursive silences. This analysis will focus on the interactions between burgeoning ideologies of race and nation with the construction of Manzano's discourse. The point of such an interrogation will be to show the trajectory of these discourses and how they become discursive tools that provide alternative readings of Hispanic Afro-Caribbean autobiographical and biographical writings.

In the nineteenth century, sugar production in Cuba expanded and with it the increase of slave labor. The increased importation of slaves during the period between 1790 and 1820, which was around 300,000, created strict racial divisions between white and black. By 1817, the free black and slave populations in Cuba outnumbered the white population. Among elites and plantation owners, this only increased the fear of slave uprisings that stemmed from the Haitian Revolution. According to Matt Childs, the boom in the sugar industry led to distinctions between rural and urban centers, but the two remained connected through the flow of commerce (48). However, the racial divisions

fostered what Childs calls a "collective identity by uniting, albeit tenuously, the historically disparate rural and urban free and slave populations of African ancestry" (48). Childs suggests that these connections between free blacks and slaves facilitated the organization of the Aponte Rebellion of 1812, led by José Antonio Aponte, a free black man who sought to forcefully overthrow the white planter population.

In many of the debates of the nineteenth-century, one common argument pleaded for the reformation of the treatment of slaves by their masters because of anxiety caused by various rebellions throughout the Caribbean and North America. However, many did not necessarily advocate for the abolition of slavery itself, mainly due to the economic interests of plantation owners and landholders of the time. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) was one of the main catalysts for reform because of the fear and panic it caused in the slave holders of the Caribbean and around the globe. The revolt in Haiti forced many to rethink the treatment of slaves so as not to incur such violent upheavals. However, following the Haitian revolution and the establishment of the first black nation in the Caribbean, revolts, such as the Aponte Rebellion (1812) and the Ladder Conspiracy (1844), took place in Cuba. They all increased the instability of race relations. At the same time, between 1820 to 1830, the independence movement in Cuba was the predominant tendency, and with it came a surge of antislavery narratives that served as a counter-discourse to Spanish power and authority in Cuba (Manzano and Azougarh 18-19; Luis, *Literary* 2). The tensions that arose from these antislavery narratives and independence propaganda in the first half of the nineteenth century opened a space from which Manzano could challenge colonial and slave society and earn his place in the Cuban literary landscape. In the ensuing sub-section, I will explore how Manzano

juxtaposes the ideas of freedom and servitude, which were circulating at the time in order to resist his own oppression and illustrate how they shaped his identity.

Hidden Resistance within Parallel Discourses of Freedom and Servitude

Manzano's autobiography was petitioned by Domingo del Monte to support his abolitionist cause and to subdue fears of slave uprisings. As such, his life must prove to readers that, on the one hand, assimilation to dominant culture is possible because Manzano has adopted many of its traits and, on the other hand, that it is possible for slaves to remain submissive despite the horrible treatment they receive. Manzano's autobiography serves as propaganda to encourage the English commission for abolition, led by Richard Madden, that slaves are being unjustly and unlawfully punished, but also as proof that slaves deserve to be free because of their intellectual capacity. In doing so, Manzano must present himself as part of the lettered community but, conversely, he must remain inferior so as not to incite more hatred towards a black population assimilating to white society.

To accomplish this task, Manzano must refer only to the moments in which he suffered shamefully at the hands of slave owners. He provides only what has been asked of him by Del Monte. Manzano is not to recount the trivial amounts of beauty that he experienced, or any ideas counter to this discourse. However, the structure of his work, or rather his alternations between discourses of servitude and freedom, when read as producers of discursive silences, illustrate to readers that he openly opposes and resists slavery in all its forms, including the just and unjust treatment. His keen awareness of and

desire for freedom, exposes his resistance to his slave identity, even when with the señora Marquesa Jústiz, who was extremely favorable to him.

Manzano's first master, the señora Marquesa Jústiz, treated him as one of her own children. She requested that Manzano be always near and, if not, she would become inconsolable (Manzano and Azougarh 66). After the death of the Marquesa Jústiz, around 1809 or 1810, Manzano is transferred to the Marquesa de Prado Ameno. He states:

> Desde mis doce años doy un salto hasta la de catorce dejando en su intermedio algunos pasajes en que se verifica lo inestable de mi fortuna. Se notará en la relación ésta dicha que no hay épocas fijas, pero era demasiado tierno y sólo conservo unas ideas vagas. Pero la verdadera historia de mi vida empieza desde 18[0]9, en que empezó la fortuna a desplegarse contra mí hasta el grado de mayor encarnizamiento, como veremos. (70)

We see that in his narrative Manzano has chosen to skip over two years, 1809-1811, that coincide with the rise of revolts and conspiracies taking place in Havana. Despite the inherent revolutionary nature of the anti-slavery narrative, Manzano must only narrate the moments that would illustrate his suffering as a slave, as evidenced by his constant elusion of pleasant memories as well as references to incidents of violent resistance to slavery taking place, a discursive strategy in its own right. In the previous quote, Manzano can only recall vague moments because, as he says, he was too young or *tierno.* The word *tierno* can refer to a child or someone who is docile, both of which correspond to his image of an obedient slave child. However, Manzano prefaces this portion of his life with a story that details how the Marquesa Jústiz, prior to her death, provided freedom to the twins his mother birthed. He then goes on to contrast this

freedom with his own servitude and suffering. He highlights the injustice he feels at being a slave, while a woman he called his "mama mía," insisted on his servitude. After her death, Manzano lived with godparents, with whom the Marquesa Jústiz had left him. He lived with them for what he says was around five years. Manzano references this period as a time during which he lived in Havana with relative freedom. Manzano recalls, ". . .entraba y salía de la casa[6] sin que nadie me pusiese obstáculo" (68). Here we see two instances of freedom—his twin siblings and his own—shadowed by his own servitude that was to follow. This serves not only to reinforce the injustice of his servitude but also to highlight Manzano's ability to contrast these ideas in alignment with Del Monte's narrative request, thus illustrating his intellectual capacity.

In Havana, in 1809, rebellions began to take place against the French immigrants because of the abdication of the Spanish crown to Napoleonic forces. Many of the French came to Cuba to avoid slave revolts on the other Caribbean islands. Previously, Spain had limited the import of slaves from French and British colonies because of the rebelliousness of slaves on those islands. However, many slaves continued to arrive in Cuba at the turn of the nineteenth-century (Childs 49). Consequently, many of the wealthy white men in Havana began to circulate seditious pamphlets and recruit men to revolt. Many black corporals and sergeants in the *Batallón de Milicias Disiciplinadas de Pardos y Morenos* were recruited for this cause, including José Antonio Aponte (Franco, *Conspiraciones* 8). Luis Francisco Bassaave y Cárdenas was a wealthy military man from Havana who was found guilty of inciting black men, including Aponte, to rebel in 1810

[6] Azougarh notes that attached to this line was "como de unos amos," once again asserting his freedom of movement (324).

(10). Manzano was living in Havana at that time as a student of tailoring with his godmother Trinidad de Zayas, and godfather, Javier Calvo, who was first sergeant of his battalion.

Manzano was around 10 years old while he lived in Havana and it is unknown whether he was aware of rumors surrounding rebellion because there is no mention of such. Yet, towards the end of his autobiography, Manzano alerts readers that, "Tenía yo desde bien chico la costumbre de leer cuanto era leíble en mi idioma y cuando iba por la calle siempre andaba recogiendo pedacitos de papel impreso . . . " (98). As he could read and did so every at opportunity, and due to the increased unity between rural and urban areas, knowledge of tumultuous events would be very likely among all Cubans.

After he was transferred to Matanzas and to the Marquesa de Prado Ameno, Manzano's life deteriorated. He uses this time period to allude to rebellion in the following brief references: "Este paso me sucedió en tiempos en que estuvo en España el señor don José Antonio y fue la primera vez que vi [un] ingenio" and "Bástame decir que desde tuve bastante conocimiento, hasta poco —después de acabada la primera constitución de 1812 que me arrojé a una fuga—, no hallo un solo día que no esté marcado con algún acaso lacrimoso para mí" (81-82). Manzano hints at rebellion and liberation posited in the constitution counterposed with his own punishment and oppression, which worsened with Manzano's own awareness.

Manzano asserts that his life as a slave truly began around the same moment that black and white Cubans alike began to propagate ideas of abolition, independence, and revolution against Spain and their colonial forces, or as he states in 1809. Sharman and

Roberts note that the Constitution of 1812 "had unintended consequences for Spain and Spanish America, serving to question the legitimacy of Spain's rule in her American colonies and to turn Creole demands for autonomy into calls for full independence" (2). The desire for independence, along with the push for abolition, was gaining prominence in Cuba, as evidenced in the ideas Manzano intertwines into his discursive strategies—freedom and servitude—to emphasize this time in history. This allows him to join in the dominant discourses through the only means available to him. Metaphorically, Manzano's life parallels the developing Cuban national identity. Manzano seeks autonomy in his life and his writing, as do many Cubans seeking independence from colonial rule. While the Constitution sought to provide suffrage to all its citizens, it continued to deny this right to black slaves and free men. The Constitution of 1812 was based on Enlightenment principles that based on scientific notions denied equality among men and further reinforced the racial hierarchy and white supremacy. As Frederickson proposes, the scientific thought of the Enlightenment was the precursor for modern racism (56). Manzano engages the discourse of the Constituion of 1812 to promote liberty to all as he attempts to represent himself as part of a burgeoning Cuba.

With Manzano's growing consciousness of this political context, discourses about national independence provided him with an increased yearning for his own freedom coupled with heightened melancholy, which he emphasizes with examples of amplified baseless punishment post 1809. Manzano is writing his identity through these discursive comparisons, which are encoded in between the lines as silences. As he looks back on himself as a boy and isolates the exact moment he became aware of his place in society, he uses that moment to challenge his own oppression and create a contentious identity.

Luis notes that Manzano uses the autobiography to prove his innocence against unfair treatment and all accusations by his masters (*Literary* 90). Thus, Manzano has created a discursive silence regarding his fleeing, or his *fuga* of 1812, as he juxtaposes his rebellion with the constant suffering that followed that event. As Manzano represents the moment, the two ideas—suffering and running away—cancel each other out and silence the rebelliousness of his actions. In other words, he erases his combative identity and reinstates his submissive slave identity. He cannot state that he attempted to join his companions in the rebellion of 1812 because doing so would undermine the purpose of his manuscript and implicate him as part of a black rebel population, one which he overtly works to distance himself from. However, his contrasting of freedom and slavery reveals a contradictory discourse that, I suggest, is formative of a rebellious identity.

According to Manzano, from 1809 on, he was made to suffer more than he had in the previous twelve years of his life. The severe treatment he endured parallels the rebellions and repressive reactions against blacks in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean. During this time, the colonial forces were attempting to quell rebellions in Havana and Matanzas. Although not stated in the narrative, Manzano's displacement from his godfather, sergeant of his battalion, was unlikely to be coincidental. I suggest, that Manzano's relocation was initiated by the tumultuous condition of the time. However, writing about the conspiracies openly would have placed Manzano in even greater danger, even at the time of his writing in 1835. What Manzano describes as punishment were in fact consequences of racism that heightened due to fears of revolt and the establishment of another black republic.

This was a time in Manzano's life when he was unsure of who his master was and where he was to reside. Again, we see him contrasting his freedom before 1810 with the servitude he endures when, at the age of 12 or 13, he is sent to visit with some servants at the house of la Marquesa de Prado Ameno, or so he thought. Manzano recalls that these servants wanted to see him so badly that it was arranged, and he was sent there. However, we come to understand that the Marquesa de Prado Ameno became his master that same day. Manzano recalls this time by saying: "No sé decir lo que aquí pasó . . . cuando me quería ir a casa de mi amada madrina, no se me llevó. Ella fue a buscarme y yo no fui qué sé yo por qué" (69). From this point on, he belonged to Prado Ameno. Manzano was given new clothes and was taken to the theater and dances, all of which he says made him happy. He remembers: "Con esto y lo demás, pronto olvidé mi antigua y recolecta vida . . . nada sentía haber dejado la casa de madrina. . . ." (69). Here he refers to his life prior to this as one he quickly forgot, but still a memorable life. Manzano has made it appear as if he enjoyed being in this new place with Prado Ameno; yet, as we continue to read about this period, contradictions arise regarding his sentiments and the daily abuse and suffering to which he became accustomed. It appears from his previous statements that Manzano reveled in the company and activities he experienced with the Marquesa de Prado Ameno. However, he promptly began to receive punishments for any minor transgression. Once again, when his freedom and servitude are juxtaposed, he contradicts himself by stating he loved his new master but was abused regularly. He silences his feelings towards the abuse and remains the loyal, submissive slave.

Manzano skips over all the subsequent years to focus on the time between 1809 to 1812. He mentions this age so many times, that we must take note. There is no mention

of any seditious activity on his part, except for his brief escape, but the treatment he suffers indicates that these events negatively impacted him. What was it about Manzano's identity that the Marquesa found so intimidating or threatening? He himself struggles to understand and articulates her fears: "Yo he atribuido mi pequeñez de estatura y la debilidad de mi naturaleza a la amargosa vida que desde [los] trece a catorce años he traído. Siempre flaco, débil y extenuado, llevaba en mi semblante la palidez de un convaleciente con tamañas ojeras" (70). In doing so, he removes his own powers of self-determination and succumbs to the dominant discourse that sees him as naturally less-than. He uses this to lend power to his oppressors, to provide strength to Del Monte's cause. The naturalist discourse of the nineteenth century can only see black men as intellectually and morally inferior, and Manzano manipulates his readers into believing that this is not why he was treated that way but rather because of his weak and thin physical constitution. His strategy then is to temporarily deny any discourse that sees him as intellectual inept, while defining his severe treatment as something completely out of his hands.

More specifically, Manzano excuses slave society as the cause of his suffering, and instead, places the blame on his own nature or biology, perhaps because of the internalization of dominant ideologies. The exemption of the impact of dominant discourses is also noted in the analysis of the autobiography *Klabel* by Víctor Virgilio López García to be discussed in Chapter 2. In López García's account, he equates his negative treatment to the luck of the draw and his small stature in the same way Manzano did. Both men use their physical stature and biology to account for discrimination that is based merely upon skin color. However, the structure of Manzano's narrative indicates

that the circumstances of the time, including the rebellious atmosphere of this time, provided Prado Ameno with increased power. After narrating various moments of suffering and mistreatment, Manzano asserts that he will skip over these years to bring himself to the present of 1835. However, these years harbor significance for him more than any other. In the next paragraph Manzano returns to 1810, to a time when he was severely punished for taking a leaf from the Marquesa's garden. Thus, Manzano lends power to slavery, and then in the subsequent paragraph, he highlights the ridiculous injustices he suffered. These competing discourses shift the focus from rebellion to servitude. Even as he emphasizes this time, he removes any indication that he may have participated or had any knowledge of any rebellious occurrences by constructing himself as weak and mistreated.

Understandably, Manzano is not able to discuss the many seditious papers that were being disseminated at this time, nor the atmosphere of rebellion. However, he does mention that he was privy to conversations of wealthy women and men of Havana at that time.

> Como desde que pude hacer algo fue mi primer destino el de paje, tanto en La Habana como en Matanzas, velaba desde mis *más tiernos años* más de la mitad de la noche en La Habana: si no en las noches de teatro, en las tertulias de en casa del señor Marqués de Monte Hermoso o en casa de las señoras Beatas de Cárdenas de donde salíamos a las diez, y empezaba el paseo hasta las once o doce de la noche después de haber cenado. . . . (75; emphasis added)

Manzano indicates that it was his destiny to be a page, an occupation that would require him to be present during social events held by prominent white landowners and

plantation owners. Manzano spent his youngest years, *tiernos años* serving as a page in Havana. I argue that the use of the word *tierno* is euphemistic and alludes his innocence. He used this word previously to posit his innocence at the age of 12, in 1809, and uses it again here to highlight his ignorance during this time. At the age of around 15 or 16, Manzano was taken from Havana to Matanzas. This would have been in 1812 or 1813, following the Aponte Rebellion. I posit that he writes his identity as a slave boy who was too young and naïve to participate in the rebellion or have any knowledge of such revolts, all of which identify Manzano as submissive and obedient. His statements also serve to emphasize that he did not participate in 1812, just as he did not participate in the Escalera Conspiracy, a rebellion for which he was later jailed for his supposed involvement in 1842. He constructs himself as so submissive that even though he was receiving such constant punishment and describes this time as the worst in his life, this would never have led him to rebel for it is not who he is. In contrast, he silences any mention of the rebellion. Yet, placing such emphasis on the years 1809-1812 undermines his discourse of innocence or naiveté before such events. Manzano has created an immense silence here that he does not wish to uncover, yet he leaves traces for readers to discover. In doing so, he resists the complete silencing of a time in which he desired autonomy. I propose that Manzano describes the beginning of his life as 1809 because this is the moment that he realized that freedom was a possibility and yet was also unattainable. Thus, he continues to narrate his life between the margins of freedom and slavery.

Correspondingly, he clandestinely challenges his submission when he juxtaposes freedom with servitude and innocence with awareness because he cannot truly obtain either. He cannot be free, but he knows that he cannot serve without maintaining his

desire for freedom. His desires and knowledge of current events are being silenced by his reality. Manzano informs his readers that he can memorize multiple ten-lined stanzas with ease and that he had a great capacity for imitation and drawing, yet when he places these capacities next to the moments of suffering and innocence he silences his intellectual identity to reinforce the racialized identity that has been imposed upon him. These contrasts highlight his desires for freedom and his reasoning of why he deserves it. In addition, this provides a structure to his work that suggests a play on différance. Every time Manzano must dictate his suffering, he is negotiating his identity in hopes of gaining his freedom. It is evident that there were moments of joy and kindness that he cannot narrate because they do not fit into the demands placed upon his writing. But because of the cues he provides readers, I perceive that he resists this imposition of an obedient slave placed on his identity. He at once avows for himself certain characteristics saved for the white ruling class and then distances himself from them by reminding his readers of his subservience and acceptance of his subordination. Arguably, Manzano has created a discourse that serves as a metaphor for macro-level, nineteenth century Cuban society: Cuba finds itself between slavery and freedom, colonial dependence and national independence, and political submission and rebellion. Manzano has written a narrative that is a truly nineteenth century Cuban tale that represents the social currents of his time.

Fluctuations Between Ignorance and Awareness and the Process of Becoming

This subsection explores how Manzano creates competing discourses about his awareness and his ignorance in order to challenge slavery while negotiating his place in the Cuban literary landscape. In Manzano's *Autobiografía*, we constantly see his identity

shift to silence one discourse while embracing another. For instance, when offering a detailed account of the circumstances of his birth, which Olney sees as typical of all slave narratives, he emphasizes that his family forms part of the creole Cuban sector ("I Was Born" 135). He states that he begins his life with the recognition of the señora doña Beatriz de Jústiz, Marquesa Jústiz of Santa Ana, known for her exclusivity and taste. He asserts that doña Jústiz only chooses the finest women to serve her and provides them with an education according to their class (Manzano and Azougarh, 44). He underscores the importance of the education and class that these women had while he obscures the other slaves who do not receive such privileges. The status of his mother and his mistress reflects directly upon Manzano's identity. He states that his mother was doña Jústiz´s main servent of "distinción o de estimación, o de razón, como quiera que se llame" (Manzano and Azougarh, 65).

This is the very first mention of the concept 'reason', which he equates with distinction and consideration. Manzano questions the scientific racism that is used during the nineteenth century to negate the rationality of all people of African descent. He emphasizes that his mother was a woman of reason, even though she typically would not be recognized as such because of her status and class. Manzano knows the dictates of his time as well as the limitations of his position. He makes use of the notion of reason against itself, ensuring him a small victory. However, while his own reason becomes the salient point, it silences those others who do not have those same characteristics and reinforces the dominant discourses of his time regarding proper citizens.

Furthermore, he positions himself as part of Cuba's future, while silencing all those who are not creole or do not share the same education that he and his family enjoy.

Manzano eliminates from the Cuban vision all *negro bozales* who had recently arrived from Africa because they do not read or write or speak Spanish and, consequently, are not a part of his Cuban culture, or the future of Cuba. This aligns with the discourse that Del Monte would prefer, a Cuba free of the black population. In this simple discursive strategy of highlighting his mother's reason, he accepts the impositions of dominant society so that he may be included in it while erasing other humans without access to European intellectual heritage from his world view. In this way, he refuses his marginality from birth by claiming an intellectual European heritage from his mistress and his mother.

As the narrative progresses, Manzano details the circumstances of his birth but removes the specificities of the date. He states, "cuando verificóse el matrimonio de Toribio de Castro con María del Pilar a quienes debo el ser, saliendo a luz el año de . . . " (66). He eliminates the date of his birth using the ellipsis in order to suppress that information while alerting the reader that he is suspending it to a further time. Tactically, he chooses to silence his own birth date by highlighting the conditions that dictate it. He positions himself as least important in this story, which centers on his mistress, her family, and the context of his birth. His own worth as a slave is determined by his masters. Manzano plays with the strategies that oppress him while specifying in a roundabout way when he was born, "Con diferencia de horas para unos, de días para otros, nací contemporáneo con el señor don Miguel de Cárdenas y Manzano y con el señor don Manuel O'Reilly, hoy conde de Buena Vista y Marqués Júztiz de Santa Ana" (66). Indirectly, by associating his birth with the birth of upper class men, he legitimates his own existence even if in a position of inferiority and submission to other white men

who were born around the time of his birth. He silences the importance of his own birth with the birth of don Miguel and don Manuel, because Manzano knows that these hierarchical structures dictate his life. He conceals the cruelty of such hierarchical organizations while concurrently stressing their importance. This is a discursive strategy that necessitates clandestineness in order to manipulate his own worth by reinforcing the power of the dominant structures. He does not overtly state that he is higher up in the social hierarchy, but these details provide validity to his writing because his life is legitimized by a demonstration of knowledge about the life of elite families, which indicates a measure of closeness to prominent figures.

Manzano illustrates his intellectual capacity when the omission of his birth date is read against the previous evocation of his mother's status. He sets himself up, only to break himself down. He constantly fluctuates between ideas of worth and insignificance as dictated by the dominant class. His life is written as a constant struggle to consolidate these two sides of himself. On the one hand, he sees himself as born to a noble woman with class and status. On the other hand, he is still just a worthless slave. However, when these two ideas are juxtaposed, I read this a contestation of nineteenth century ideals of slave value and identity. He understands that he has received more instruction and consideration than most, yet he also recognizes that his value is determined by his masters. He reiterates this point when he states: ". . . Así sería ocioso pintar cuál andaría yo entre la tropa de nietos de mi señora, traveseando y algo *más bien mirado de lo que merecía* por los favores que me dispensaba me señora . . ." (66; emphasis added). He begins to paint himself as a humble slave that does not deserve to be seen in such a light. In doing so, he challenges the idea that his master's actions should determine his value.

He does not wish to be defined by the Marquesa Jústiz as a pet for her enjoyment; rather, he wishes to determine his own worth and does so in subsequent paragraphs in which he divulges his intellectual capacity.

The religious ideals of Spain and Cuba bear strong evaluative power over the judgment of the properties of humans and are used to determine redemptive features, as explained by Manzano as he references his own religious understandings. He affirms that at the age of 10 he had memorized long sermons pertaining to Fray Luis de Granada, the man who promoted the idea of *compete il ius utendi* not *el isu abutendi* (67). Essentially, Granada was a proponent of making use, but not abuse, of others. Appropriately, Manzano chooses to utilize de Granada as his main example of religious understanding as it is one that promotes the purposes set forth by Del Monte. The ideas of de Granada are used by Manzano to contest the circumstances and outcomes of his learning. Manzano was used as entertainment for many visitors to the Marquesa's home and, as he looks back upon this time, he rejects the abuse of his mental capacities for the pleasure of others, even if he benefited from them (Manzano et al. 10). For example, memorization of this kind had become a tool of his oppressors. Manzano appears to revere this ability; yet, he later rejects this tool because it removes his identity as a man and places him as a puppet. Later in his autobiography, he describes how he would take the books of his then master, Don Nicolás, and memorize them. However, he knows that mere memorization does not equate to ability. Manzano recalls:

> La poesía, en todos los trámites de mi vida, me suministraba versos análogos a mi situación, ya próspera, ya adversa. Tomaba sus libros de retórica; me ponía mi lección de memoria. La aprendía como el papagayo y *ya creía yo que sabía algo*.

> Pero conocía el poco fruto que sacaba de aquello, pues nunca había ocasión de hacer uso de ello. Entonces determiné darme otro más útil, que fue el de aprender a escribir. (89; emphasis added)

Manzano contemplates his ignorance and realizes that memorizing material is nothing more than a parlor trick, a show for white men and women. He is aware at the moment of the autobiography's production, that as a younger man he knew nothing. He now understands the necessity of integration into written culture in order to have any real power or self-expression. Ilia Casanova Marengo suggests that this rote memorization did not allow him to truly exist in front of his masters. In fact, it did the opposite. It made him invisible, a caricature of a man (*Intersticio* 42). Casanova-Marengo asserts:

> El distanciamiento que crea entre amo y esclavo la palabra escrita anula por completo su existencia, pues su oralidad no tiene cabida dentro del abecedario de sus amos . . . En esta escena en la que lo escrito se impone a lo oral, la relación de Manzano con el lenguaje queda totalmente anulada (*Intersticio* 43).

In learning to write clandestinely, Manzano seeks to validate his existence within dominant culture with the use of the written word. He learns to write by copying the letters of Don Nicolás, which is no small feat. He taught himself to write, and he knew how to read from a very young age (Manzano and Azougarh 98). Manzano had a great capacity for learning, something that he consistently illustrates throughout his work. Yet he constantly disavows this knowledge by equating his abilities to a mere show. Everything he did as a boy was an imitation and not his own creation. We see that he desperately wishes to write his own life, to be his own man. ". . . me figuraba que con parecerme a él [Arriaza] ya era poeta o *sabía* hacer versos" (90). "Yo era demasiado

i<g>nocente y todavía no amaba; de consiguiente, mis composiciones eran frías imitaciones" (99). He tells his readers that he is skilled in so many ways and then he tells them that he was ignorant and unoriginal. He constantly praises himself only to deconstruct that image using the representation of a humble slave.

His humility acts as a type of metonymy in which humility represents oppression, but also serves as a platform from which to speak. This technique will also be examined in the work of Víctor Virgilio López García. In early modern England, humility was used when writing to noblemen or the clergy to illustrate the submission of the writer or speaker to the organization of hierarchical society (Clement 1). Manzano and López García employ humility in acquiescence to the demands of their time. As a slave, Manzano must maintain his humility in exchange for his ability to speak to those out of his class status. However, as Manzano forgoes his humility he highlights his unease in doing so by creating contradictory discourses by silencing various aspects of his personality. For example, he may silence his intelligence in one section when he states "qué sé yo porqué," or "pensé que sabía algo." Then, in subsequent descriptions he lauds his accomplishments by revealing his capacity for teaching himself to read, write, and draw. By creating these competing discourses, I read this as a rejection of his humility.

Similarly, there are many instances when Manzano excuses his punishment due to his weak nature, or the fact that he did not pray enough. When he faults others for his misfortunes, he silences the entire institution of slavery through which he has been subjected to tremendous suffering. Instead of insinuating that his mistress was cruel, he states that he loved her like a mother, even if he feared her. For instance, he evokes his religious fervor to excuse him from harm or as the reason for his treatment:

> . . . porque desde mi infancia, mis directores me enseñaron a amar y temer a Dios. . . Si me acontecía algunos de mis comunes y dolorosos apremios, lo atribuía solamente a mi falta de devoción o a enojo de algún santo que había echado en olvido para el día siguiente. Todavía creo que ellos me depararon la ocasión y me custodiaron la noche de mi fuga a Matanzas para La Habana, como veremos. Pues tomaba el almanaque y todos los santos de aquel mes eran rezados por mí diariamente. (82)

Manzano used religion to understand his suffering as a child. However, we can read that he now sees that slavery was the cause. The word *solamente* suggests that as he writes he understands that his painful oppression was due to more than his lack of devotion and that his suffering can now be attributed to his masters.

In Christianity, humility is used to refer to one's position in relation to God and the acceptance of one's faults and fate. So, whereas he used to see himself as culpable and humble, at some point, perhaps when he was forced to confront his status as slave, he began to remove his fault and his humility. In the following paragraphs, Manzano then proceeds to discuss his many artistic talents. This indicates that his talents were the cause of his suffering, or that the more knowledge that he gained the more he suffered. He counteracts his talents with further suffering and increased humility. He proclaims that he will never be a perfect man no matter what he says, but he hopes that an impartial man will understand how this institution has caused his debilities (83). The constant fluctuation between good and bad, intelligence and ignorance, humility and vanity, are the narrative strategies that Manzano utilizes to challenge his status. He does so clandestinely when he juxtaposes these discourses and does so without fear of reproach

because he always maintains an identity that is naïve, submissive, and loyal to his masters.

Towards the end of his autobiography, Manzano suggests darkness metaphorically as the veil for his ignorance, a metaphor that is repeated in *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri Thomas and will be discussed in Chapter 3. Manzano combines his humility with a direct revelation of his oppresive circumstance: "Pero yo, criado en la oscuridad de tanta ignorancia, ¿qué podía saber?" (96). The ignorance of his ignorance, a dominant theme in Manzano's work, serves as a metaphor for the deception he must continually endure. Slavery is that darkness, that ignorance, under which he was raised. In the shadow of that same darkness, Piri Thomas uses that veil as his freedom from oppression, but for Manzano it is his deception. However, as an older man, at the moment of the autobiography's production, he has removed that veil and now the darkness provides him with insight into his situation. Still, Manzano knows that he cannot directly leave or destroy the darkness of ignorance and enter the light because it is still forbidden to him. Manzano represents his awareness as the cause of his previous and enduring suffering. Piri Thomas also reveals that once this veil is lifted, the truth of the light is just as painful as the darkness. Yet through the competing discourses of light and dark, ignorance and clarity, Manzano and Thomas expose past injustices, and the truth of their situation is revealed. These strategies can be seen in the other works discussed in my analysis as part of the literary legacy of Manzano. These have become strategies of defiance and negotiation with dominant discourses that silence Afro-Hispanic voices. I suggest that by engaging discursive silences that erase parts of an author's identity, they have turned their silencing into power and thus, have incorporated these techniques into

the literary landscape of Latin America, the Hispanic Caribbean, and the Caribbean Diaspora in the United States.

In conclusion, Manzano represents all his knowledge prior to his full awareness of his unfortunate circumstance as a rouse. Anything that he thought he knew, the poetry he memorized, the drawings, were all part of a performance that he was required to display for his masters. When Manzano's veil has been lifted, he can ruminate on the farce of his knowledge because all of it had done nothing to make him free of the racial designations of inferiority forced upon him. His rarity was a blessing and a curse, for in the end it did provide him with his freedom from slavery, but it cannot free him from racism, as he expresses in letters to his friends. In the next section, I will explore how Manzano attempts to remove the racism that plagues him by asserting his identity as a *mulato*

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Mulato Identity as Adherence to White Superiority and Rejection of Blackness

In this subsection, I will explore the racial discourse developed by Juan Francisco Manzano and the silences he imposes on a black identity. I posit that as Manzano silences his blackness, he reinforces the modern ideals that see whiteness as biologically superior. José Piedra in "Literary Whiteness and the Afro-Hispanic Difference" reminds us that there is a legacy of literary whiteness that denies the voice of Afro-Hispanics in Latin American lettered society. He traces the use of language as a dominant force starting with Antonio Nebrija's *Gramática de la lengua castellana* which conceives language as a tool of empire (Piedra 303). Feigning unity and national solidarity, the Spanish language was used to subsume whole cultures under one language. However, conflicts of identity arise for many Afro-Hispanics as they begin to reflect on their lack of cultural and linguistic

representation among the lettered elite and dominant classes. Manzano's autobiography itself was edited on various occasions to eliminate the orthographical and syntactical errors, thus altering his content and message. His original edition was made to coincide with proper Spanish, and in Madden's version, proper English. However, as Casanova-Marengo asserts, "aunque el texto no responde ni a reglas ortográficas y sintácticas ni a determinado orden cronológico, sí responde a la lógica que Manzano establece por medio de sus silencios" (*Interticio* 35). Even though Manzano's autobiography was replete with grammatical errors, and even though he wrote his life to respond to the requests of Del Monte, his silences of information highlight negotiations with and challenges to the dominant discourses of his time.

In a letter to Del Monte, separate from his autobiography, Manzano recognizes his position in this literary hegemony. He remarks that he wishes in the future to be able to write, "una novela propiamente cubana" (Manzano and Azougarh 23). Manzano states here to Del Monte that his autobiography is not truly Cuban because he is not free to recount all the details of his life. Thus, his work cannot be an autobiography in the strict sense because it forms part of the anti-slavery narrative genre and, as such, is limited by the guidelines set forth by his petitioner. In this same letter, Manzano mentions that he has reserved the most interesting parts of his life for a time in which he is truly safe and free to write as he pleases. Manzano personally excludes his work from what, during his time, is considered a Cuban novel, in other words, a novel written by a free man for his own purposes and not at the behest of another. Conversely, Manzano's words coincide with a modern vision for the future of a Cuba that has progressed past slavery and within which he would form part of a larger Cuban national identity and culture. What he fails to

discuss is the fact that his inability to integrate into the literary world is a legacy that began with the development of the New World, one in which men of color are relegated to writing about the concerns of the white elite. Manzano is forced to write within a white aesthetic, the only aesthetic of his time (Luis 65). Therefore, under the guise of a burgeoning national identity, one which is white and speaks Spanish, the black slave experience simply does not fit unless it serves the abolitionist cause.

Manzano is forced by his protector to write about white issues, such as the slave trade, white planter behavior and his "exceptional" status as a literate black man. His true life and experiences are not important to his readers. What is more important is how slaves like him will or can affect the lives of white men. Manzano remains within the realm of white dominance and concerns because his self-representation is compromised. In the aforementioned letter to Del Monte, he affirms that, in the hopes of attaining his freedom, he silenced his own desires because of their lack of importance as a means of reproducing the dominant ideologies about an expanding Cuban national identity. However, Manzano's mere mention of his exclusion can be read as a contestation of his objectification as a black subject who is excluded from the world of letters. Manzano's recognition of his autobiography as outside of the Cuban literary landscape constitutes a deep understanding of his objectification and an awareness of the literary tendencies of his time. He is torn between writing his subjective self and the type of writing he knows cannot truly represent him as an author. Manzano must negotiate his identity in a way that allows him some authorial power yet also positions him as representative of the slave experience. Accordingly, as Paul Gilroy asserts:

> . . . the slaves' perspectives require a discrete view not just of the dynamics of power and domination but of such central categories of the Enlightenment project as the idea of universality, the fixity of meaning, the coherence of the subject, and, of course, the foundational ethnocentrism in which these have all tended to be anchored. (55)

Thus, Manzano has done more with his narrative than had been prescribed by Del Monte, and he has done so with discursive silences. As he negotiates his identity between slave and intellectual, white and black, Manzano reinterprets his own subjectivity and the immobility of meaning. As Gilroy advocates, the slave perspective requires a rethinking of rationality, autonomy, reflection, subjectivity, and power through contemplation of the slave condition and the correlation between racial terror and occidental rationality (56). In the case of Manzano, he addresses the question of rationality on various occasions as he details the unjust treatment he received at the hand of the Marquesa de Prado Ameno, Furthermore, he challenges supposedly rational racial ideologies by utilizing the power of silence in order to reveal the truth of his situation.

It is important to note that Domingo del Monte, a white prominent landholder and slave owner, is the main inspiration for the *Autobiografía*. Domingo del Monte is a man who acts according to the white upper-class interests that require him to maintain racial divisions in order to ensure his own personal success. Del Monte, in petitioning the writing of an autobiography that aims to diminish the severity of treatment of the slaves, serves to illustrate his own compromised position. At this point, the middle part of the nineteenth century, the creole plantation owners are suffering because Spain has ceased slave commerce, in agreement with Great Britain. The agreement causes the prices of

slaves to rise and, therefore, forces slave owners to incur more debt. While other intellectuals are promoting independence from Spain to control the slave trade and insure its continuance, Del Monte's group was not a proponent of that option. As Azougarh indicates, due to Del Monte's economic interests in the sugar trade, he was not in favor of drastic solutions toward independence of the country nor the immediate abolition of slavery, even if he did believe that slavery was an abominable institution (21-22; Manzano et al. 17). What the delmontine group sought was a more passive reduction of the slave trade in order to appease the interests of the landholding slaveowners. Del Monte himself feared violent rebellion from the black population and in *Escritos del Domingo del Monte*, he writes that after slavery is abolished, Cuba must then rid itself of the African race (Manzano and Azougarh 22).

The socioeconomic and ideological interests of Del Monte take precedence in Manzano's writing. Del Monte does not necessarily desire independence from Spain or the abolition of slavery because he has too much to gain from remaining under imperial power and continuing to profit from free labor. The goal of maintaining slavery yet reform it becomes imposed on the voice of Manzano, changing the way his autobiography might have been written if he had been a free man, driven by his own free will. As Azougarh concludes, "el relato de Manzano es consecuencia del sistema esclavista y, en cierto modo, su representación; el esclavo descrito es un esclavo religioso, obediente y sumiso que abandonó su marco cultural negro aprendiendo a leer y a escribir la lengua del blanco" (30). The way that Manzano portrays himself coincides with the demands of Del Monte and the Cuban society of his time. Not being seen as a threat by the dominant powers can only benefit Manzano, especially because his main

goal is to be free. Under these circumstances, hence, he must silence aspects of his rebelliousness, strong character, and any associations with blackness.

At the same time, Manzano challenges the dominant discourse of his own racial inferiority. He, who has been marginalized by the socioeconomic and racial ideologies of the nineteenth century, must attempt to reorganize the established discourse on power by clandestinely juxtaposing opposing theories in ways that contradict the racial order they presuppose. More than a fixed point in identity, race, as it intersects with other areas of internal or external identification, is and has been a factor that many seek to manipulate for social ascension or subjugation. Manzano's work demonstrates how the categorical marker of race, after having been established as part of the political and social atmosphere of Latin America in light of positivistic scientific understandings, could be deployed in the construction of discourses that would either contest or reify power relations.

One of the primary racial discourses that Manzano constructs in his work views mulattoes as superior to blacks. Through Manzano's construction of his racial identity, we can see aspects of a shifting identity position that seeks a better social standing within white culture and yet does not entirely reject a slave identity. Jerome Branche argues that Manzano tries to separate himself from blacks and position himself as a *mulato*. However, because of the strict racial lines and attitudes that persisted at this time, this would be a useless act. Branch analyzes the racial position of Manzano emphasizing that the constant references to himself as a *mulato* or *mulatico,* and all the associations of pedigree and upward social mobility inherent in these terms, is a conscious act (79). In doing this, Manzano reinforces the distinctions between races in order to improve upon

his own status. Here, we find a silencing of the Manzano as a black man to gain privilege and ascension on the hierarchical racial scale. Manzano illustrates, as Amilcar Cabral argues, that through cultural assimilation, there is a process of dividing or deepening of divisions in society in which the colonizer's mentality is assimilated; in this process, the colonized, subordinate subject considers himself culturally superior to his own people and ignores their cultural values (57). In Manzano's narrative, there is a rejection of an identity aligned with a black, enslaved, and uneducated population, which serves to create a physical and theoretical distance from other slaves. However, he also distances himself ideologically from white slave owners who abuse their slaves as he positions himself as morally superior to this white class of plantation owners, specifically the unreasonable Marquesa de Prado Ameno. Manzano's assertions serve, on the one hand, to reinforce the rigid color line persistent in Cuba as he defines himself as a *mulato* because he illustrates that being of pure African blood is undesirable, while asserting that anything approaching white is better. Thus, by rejecting blackness, he provides increased power to the ideology of white superiority, therefore reinforcing the very racial divide he seeks to navigate. On the other hand, he challenges that line as he clandestinely criticizes the morality of the white elite.

Lloyd King suggests that the text provides a certain mulatto sensibility that posits a possible entrance into dominant society based upon the assimilation of dominant ideologies (29). Whether Manzano's acceptance into dominant society was attainable or not, his discursive tactics represent a malleable reality concerning identity choices and how those reflect opportunities for social and economic gain. His discursive choices represent an awareness of Cuban reality. The decision he makes to present himself as a

"mulatto among negros", assumes that there is a benefit to be gained from it. What one reader may see as an acceptance of his racial identity, another can also read as dissension. Manzano rejects the classification of his identity based upon arbitrary social signifiers and instead chooses to dispute the entire system by representing himself as he wishes to be seen, even within the political limitations he faced. His self-designation of racial identity is a direct challenge to the national identity of Cuba as white and as Manzano seeks entrance into that sphere, he questions its validity as the gauge for normalcy.

Manzano wishes to represent himself as a *mulato* in order to stress that his education and social upbringing make him socially superior to the *negro bozal*. On various occasions, he references his superior abilities and the immense pride he takes in completing his tasks to the best of his abilities. For example, when he is forced to return to the service of Prado Ameno after being under the care of Don Nicolás, Manzano feels compelled to flee out of fear. After being captured he is sent to prison and from there back to El Molino, the plantation that originally belonged to Marquesa Jústiz de Santa Ana. Upon his return, he reflects on his situation:

> El que ya había olvidado todo lo pasado—probando las delicias de unos amos jóvenes y amables, algún tanto envanecido con los favores prodigados a mis habilidades y algo alocado también con el aire de cortesano que había tomado en la ciudad sirviendo a personas que me recompensaban siempre—y se veía tratado de este modo, me hacían pensar incesantemente que en la Habana lograría mejor fortuna. (93)

In this passage, he alludes to the distance he feels from other slaves, and his past, because of the special treatment he was receiving based upon his abilities. When he is punished and sent to El Molino, he sees this as improper treatment for a man of his talents and capabilities. Contrarily, following this incident, he states: "yo ya era un objeto conocido por el chinito o el mulatico de la Marquesa. Todos me preguntaban qué había sido aquello y me abochornaba satisfacer a tanto curioso" (Manzano and Azougarh 93). Here, Manzano admits the embarrassment that he felt for being favored by the *Marquesa* because of how this differentiated him from other slaves. Through his embarrassment, we see that Manzano's identity shifts toward recognition of his difference and identification with the slave community, whereas in the previous statements his identity position stressed more respect and distinction than the other slaves. Thus, as he is forced to work alongside other slaves in the fields of El Molino he reveals his alignment with them. Manzano represents himself as part of this culture, as much as that was possible for a man of his status. Nonetheless, Manzano's identity continuously fluctuates between slave/mulatto, and privileged/ (un)educated, as seen in the following example.

When a group of servants was playing cards in the warehouse, a location that Manzano declares was forbidden to him because he did not sleep near there and because the other servants would never let him know what they were doing, he is nevertheless implicated with them. He has dissociated himself from the slaves, not only physically, but morally, when he describes the other servants as men who would play cards when they were not allowed to do so, suggesting that he would never engage in these types of activities. On various occasions, he mentions that even at an early age he was told to stay away from other black children and slaves. He makes numerous attempts to illustrate his

disdain for El Molino and any punishment he received there. When Prado Ameno attempts to assign him an identity that directly links him with El Molino and the Marquesa de Prado Ameno herself, he immediately destroys that connection. He declares:

> Es de admirarse que mi señora no pudiese estar sin mí 10 días seguidos. Así era que mis prisiones jamás pasaban de 11 a 12 días. Pintándome siempre como el más mal de todos los nacidos en El Molino, de donde decía que era yo criollo. Esto era otro género de mortificación que yo tenía. La amaba a pesar de la dureza con que me trataba, y yo sabía muy bien que estaba bautizado en La Habana. (97)

Manzano associates El Molino with his own mortification, as he was viciously abused there, both physically and mentally. Even the mention of any connection with El Molino is rejected by him because this identity of an unruly slave is not how he wishes to be portrayed nor what Del Monte has requested of him. He refuses to align himself with that other identity position within the slave population and instead places himself as a member of the more refined and educated Havana sector of slavery.

During his renewed servitude under the Marquesa de Prado Ameno, she began to treat Manzano with immense kindness, so much so that he thought he would soon earn his freedom. However, matters worsened once again and Manzano became disillusioned with his fate. At that moment, a free servant addressed Manzano and told him the following: “Hombre, ¿qué, tú no tienes verguenza para estar pasando tanto trabajos? Cualquiera negro bozal está mejor tratado que tú. Un mulatico fino, con tantas habilidades como tú al momento hallará quien lo compre” (100). Manzano includes this conversation to further represents himself as a “mulatico fino” among the free black

population. This illustrates that not only does he see himself as such, but free black society sees him as more valuable than other servants, reiterating his distance from the other black servants and slaves.

At the end of Manzano's work, his racial identity, which he describes as a "mulato y entre negros," comes into question as he decides to flee from the administrator Don Saturnino. In this retelling, Manzano is warned by others that Don Saturnino had come to take him back to El Molino. Manzano could not bear this humiliation for a second time and feared being in El Molino all alone without his family and with only other slaves that he did not associate with. Manzano did not want to face the punishment of being returned to El Molino by Don Saturnino. He did not wish to be a "mulato y entre negros." He states that he was not allowed to play with the other "negritos de la hacienda" and that he was not well-liked by the others because his father distinguished himself from them (Manzano and Azougarh 101). Manzano's father was an interesting man who also created his identity based upon a theoretical distance from other slaves. Yet, we do know that his father had bonds with the foreman of San Miguel, a man who protected him from harm as his father requested and whose name he cannot recall (81). His father created bonds with men of power and suggested that his children do the same. His father knew how to navigate the system and distinguish himself from the crowd, and he also represents himself in this same way.

Nevertheless, on the night he decided to flee El Molino, he states: "Cuando iba a andar para retirarme de la casa oí una voz que me dijo: 'Dios te lleve con bien. Arrea duro.' Yo creía que nadien me veía y todos me observaban, pero ninguno se me opuso como lo supe después" (102). In this passage Manzano reveals solidarity between himself

and the other slaves with whom he worked. Consequently, it illustrates to his readers that this moment resonated deeply in his consciousness. Upon learning of the support that he received in his moment of defiance, he becomes more like the other slaves than he had previously imagined. He begins to question his own superiority as he recognizes the kindness shown to him by those from whom he felt distanced, and consequently questions the racial order in Cuba as he is reminded of his own marginal slave status. However, as he recounts his fleeing, the racial identity he wished to present, or rather his identification as a *mulato*, is silenced in favor of a man that the other slaves protected. Even if he is a *mulato*, among the other slaves he is a man who deserves freedom from unjust treatment. This all happens in contradiction to what Manzano previously stated regarding the favor shown to him by the Marquesa de Prado Ameno: "Pero el prurito de abatir el amor propio del que está más cerca de la gracia de su amo es un *mal contagioso* que hay en todas las casas grandes" (Manzano and Azougarh 92; emphasis added). Whereas he suggests that his favor created resentment among the other slaves, here we see the opposite of such a statement, one that represents the intricacies of slavery and Manzano's notions of alliances between slaves.

As Manzano ends his autobiography, his sorrows and accomplishments become part of a collective slave community that he now begins to recognize. His ability to defy the unjust treatment he received in El Molino, is supported by everyone who witnessed his suffering. Accordingly, his voice becomes the voice of Cuban slavery and the fight for freedom. Everything that Manzano did to gain his freedom— becoming literate, accepting his special treatment from La Marqueza Jústiz and others, lauding his superior abilities, and denying a connection to the negro bozales—serves as a negotiation with the

dominant discourses and provides a legacy of resistance to other slaves. Yet, the institution of slavery, which set him apart as superior, continues to oppress him because of his privileged position even after his emancipation, as he struggles to assimilate into Cuban culture.

One might argue that cultural assimilation appeared to serve Manzano early on; yet, Aline Helg asserts that many Cubans in the 20th century still perpetuated the notion of a race of color or a class of color without differentiating mulattoes from blacks, often regarding both *pardos* and *morenos* as *negros* (3). In this sense, although Manzano designates himself as a member of a specific racial category that lent itself to a slightly superior social standing, and rejects a liminal racial identity, in the hegemonic model of Manzano's time there is still little be gained. Manzano comes to this realization after his emancipation. His disillusion with his circumstance is revealed in a letter he sent to his friend stating that after his emancipation, Manzano "se encontró convertido en paria, víctima de la sociedad colonial por ser un intellectual y un negro…" (Manzano and Azougarh, 13). In his writing Manzano seeks to negotiate with his racial restrictions; however, in the reality of his social context he is left secluded and rejected because of that same ability to do so.

Even though Manzano did enjoy some upward mobility and inclusion into the white educated class of Del Monte and his literary circle, the color bar was still too rigid to, as Helg affirms, allow the absorption of highly educated mulattoes into the white elite class. What she does affirm, however, is how the rigidity of a color line tends to provide more cohesion amongst the Cuban population of color (4). In the *Autobiografía* as Manzano rejects an identity of a certain color or accepts another, those being displaced

find cohesion in their liminality. After the mid-nineteenth century, the population of free people of color continues to increase, only causing more tensions between races. While Manzano promotes his own class interests and social privilege, he subsequently adds to these social tensions by blurring the boundaries between white and people of color.

Helg discusses the continuous fight of Afro-Cubans for liberty from oppression after abolition. For instance, she describes the assassination of a prominent figure of Cuban society in the year 1912. Pedro Ivonnet, a black man, was assassinated on July 12th for his political involvement in a supposed 'race war' for freedom promoted by the Partido Independiente de Color. Although his party's war was a mostly peaceful resistance, his death signals otherwise. Ivonnet, along with other leaders like Evaristo Estonez, who was also killed, worked toward a more egalitarian Cuban society. However, their attempts quickly provoked racist propaganda and a war between white and black Cubans, with the white prevailing. In effect, their deaths signaled the end of the Partido Independiente de Color and alerted to its followers that attempts to change or highlight the social order would be harshly punished (Helg 194). This story serves to illustrate that even after the abolition of slavery, racial tensions remained high in Cuba, as evidenced in Pedro Pérez Sarduy's work, *Las criadas de La Habana*. As Helg concludes, even a decade after independence and the abolition of slavery, Cuban society was divided along racial lines and fears of black revolution were still prominent in the Cuban consciousness (2). The racial ideologies that served to oppress slaves and free men and women of color remained strategies of the established powers on the island well after abolition.

Conclusions

The subtle negotiations of power linked to whitening ideologies that Manzano enacts challenges the racial hierarchy. However, his inability to successfully integrate into society after his release from prison, after his supposed involvement in the Ladder Conspiracy, illustrates the limits of his discursive strategies. His discourse on race, power, slavery, and education suggest discursive strategies that other writers have deployed to address injustice in an unjust society, even if this must be done through silences. By contrasting competing discourses of freedom and servitude, ignorance and awareness, Manzano represents his identity as a negotiation with his socio-historical context.

The discursive strategies that Manzano uses in his *Autobiografía* are meant to approach hegemonic power, by reinforcing it; and, yet, in accomplishing this he disturbs the space that seeks to marginalize him. As he accepts his liminal position, postulating his place in relation to the dominant discourses and its strategies, his discourse subverts them and allows for alternative readings of the themes that he silences. Although Manzano will never be a part of the established or theoretical power, he can maintain a measure of his own creative expression and utilizes it to silence the unwanted aspects of his identity and that of others who share his liminal position. What I gather from this analysis of Manzano is how the ideologies that he reinforces (i.e. hegemony, patriarchal dominance, and white superiority) remain integral to the building of the modern Cuban nation well into the 20th century. Simultaneously, the narrative strategies that Manzano creates in the nineteenth century echo in the works of Piri Thomas, Víctor Virgilio López García, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy, as discursive challenges to, negotiations with, and affirmation of, the strategies

used against them. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth and twenty-first century, dominant discourses of racial and national identity that reject blackness as a formative characteristic are counteracted through the discursive strategies that Manzano develops and thus, can be used as a model to analyze works written by other authors of African descent who negotiate their place within the nation.

Chapter 2

Klabel: Educational, Racial, and National Identity Discourse

A la distancia sentimos el peso de nuestra carga.
—Luagu lidise wéibugu wasanderei lihürü wanagün.
—Proverbio Garífuna

Introduction: Tradition Versus Modernity in Honduran Garífuna Culture

Víctor Virgilio López García narrates the transformation of a young man, named Klabel, who comes from humble beginnings and becomes a revered educator. This largely autobiographical novel details the life of Klabel from birth to adulthood. Narrated in the third person, the work centers on Klabel's pursuit of education and the struggles that he encounters on his way. His story begins with a brief synopsis of his mother's life and how this has shaped his beliefs. From there the story explores how Klabel and his family do whatever is necessary so that he may fulfill his dream of becoming someone in life.

López García has written what he considers a biographical novel of Klabel. In the introduction to the novel he explains:

> Esta obra la estoy titulando Klabel, es una biografía que revela parte de la vida de su autor, tomando en cuanta [sic] sus trayectorias desde niño como estudiante de primaria, secundaria hata [sic] llegar a ser profesional. Toma el seudónimo de Klabel para no revelar al principio su verdadero nombre. (15)

He states that he has adopted the pseudonym so as to not reveal his true name from the beginning. As I will argue later, the distance between López García and Klabel

diminishes as the narrator reveals more details about Klabel´s life. In addition, López García mentions at the end of the introduction that Klabel had written and published many books, including *Klabel*. So, he has effectively conflated himself with the protagonist Klabel.

Like the author, the protagonist Klabel is a Garífuna man born into a family of modest means in Tornabé, in the municipality of Tela, department of Atlántida, Honduras. According to Matthei and Smith: "The Garifuna were a product of European colonization of the insular Caribbean. Essentially, a Maroon population, the Garifuna are reputedly descendants of escaped African slaves who lived among, and adopted the language of, the indigenous Carib Indians on the Island of St. Vincent in the Eastern Caribbean" (216). In his scholarly writing, López García, the author of *Klabel,* believes that the Garífuna arrived from St. Vincent to Honduras in 1797. Since their arrival, they maintained their culture through oral and written tradition passed down from generation to generation. The Garífuna traditions are a mixture of African, Carib and Arawak. Their language features influences from all the cultures with which they have come into contact: African, Arawak, French, Spanish, English, and Portuguese. The maintenance of their culture is highly regarded among the older generations; however, the traditions are being forgotten by the younger generations who are influenced by food and music imported from other countries (López García and López Castillo 7).

López García centers on the discourse of education to challenge his protagonist's position as a discriminated Garífuna man within the hierarchical ranks of Honduran society during the twentieth century. This autobiographical narrative highlights the ways in which the Garífuna people have been marginalized by national ideologies that view

their community as liminal due to their maintenance of agricultural subsistence and Afro-Caribbean roots. Dominant Honduran society views itself as an Indo-Hispanic nation, or people of European and indigenous descent, which excludes those of African roots from the definition of the ideal citizen. These ideas are disseminated through a modern formal education, one that is state sponsored and represents the values of dominant Honduran society: Spanish-speaking, Indo-Hispanic values. These schools contrast with the traditional Garífuna education imparted at home, which centers on the maintenance of Garífuna language and culture through oral traditions, agriculture, ranching, fishing, hunting, and craftwork.

Through the exploration of the relationship between knowledge, education, and power, López García delves into the cultural and economic inequalities that have structured the development of rural and urban areas in Honduras. However, the autobiography also highlights how one man, in the face of such economic and racial discrimination, can persevere through educational opportunity and attainment. Thus, there is a duality of condemnation and acceptance of modern and traditional education as López García narrates Klabel's journey. He overtly criticizes both traditional practices and modern formal education, yet Klabel becomes an educator so that he may give back to his community and transform the system as he sees fit.

This chapter will analyze how López García represents the personal struggles of a Garífuna man with the acquisition of knowledge and how that struggle is formative in the protagonists' discourse of racial and national identity. Klabel's identity can be read as embodying the author's discontent with and/or acceptance of Honduran modernity and modernization as it affects him and his Garífuna people. Klabel's educational journey is

so compelling because of the key role that state schools play in the creation of nationalism. Language, at an intra-state level, is used in schools to create national solidarity; Honduran classroom texts are produced in Spanish and the language of instruction is Spanish. Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* views language, in conjunction with print capitalism, as a key factor in the development of nationalist ideologies, in much the same way that Antonio de Nebrija saw language as a tool of imperialism in the fifteenth century. Language can be used as "formal models to be imitated, and, . . . consciously exploited . . . " (Anderson 45). In this sense, Spanish is used as a discriminatory tool which rejects other languages from Honduran institutions and creates national boundaries. As an educator, Klabel himself faces discrimination based on the idea that his Garífuna language somehow limits his intellectual capacity and ability to instruct students, consequently denying his ability to disseminate national ideology.

Formal education is instrumental in the development of national identity. For example, the national anthem of Honduras is sung in Spanish and all students are expected to understand the anthem in its entirety by the end of the sixth grade. However, only one stanza mentions the indigenous hero Lempira—the symbol of resistance to the Spanish empire after whom the national currency was named—and there is no mention of anyone of African or Garífuna ancestry, which makes the national anthem itself, exclusionary. In this sense, an outsider like Klabel would necessarily experience discrimination regarding his ability to instill national solidarity, inasmuch as his identity does not coincide with what the state prescribes. In the history of modernization, the idea

of development "has to proceed to a point of arborescent[7] supremacy in which the 'fundamentals' of economies, of cultures, of ways of life have to be surpassed in the name of a common global goal wherein all local knowledges and proclivities will be subsumed, sublated—or lost" (Punter 92). Our protagonist is one who challenges and is challenged by this ideology because he refuses to have his culture forgotten by larger Honduran nationalism.

In his narrative about education, a dialectic can be read between national ideology and Garífuna ideology, as illustrative of the internal workings of López García's memory. The writer, I will argue, tries to resolve a dichotomy between his past identity, rooted in his Garífuna culture and constructed as "traditional," and the "modern" identity he wishes to construct discursively for his readers. Klabel's identity embodies the author's discontent with and acceptance of Honduran modernity and modernization as it affects him and his Garífuna people.

To begin, I will analyze how López García uses Klabel's mother to represent the current situation facing the Garífuna, specifically a lack of access to education, to criticize his traditional culture and the larger systemic failure he sees in Honduras. Then, I will discuss how López García indirectly accentuates the lack of education in his Garífuna community while exposing it as the main cause of Klabel's suffering. Finally, I will analyze how López García uses euphemisms, dysphemisms, and a specific

[7] David Punter refers to a model of thought about arborescence as one opposed to rhizomatic. The difference being that arborescent culture ascends vertically, whereas rhizomatic would be a society in which no one is either superior or inferior. (Punter 91)

application of demonstrative adjectives to conceal and contest the racial and national ideologies that Klabel faces.

Garífuna Cultural Challenges to Modernization and State Education

The aesthetics of *Klabel* construct a time and space that are fragmented by social and economic forces. We see a man who suffers this fragmentation and oppression at the hands of an enclave economy, one that is based on the international exportation of goods and which leaves the intranational wage workers impoverished. Foreign investors and multinational companies, like the United Fruit Company, overran the agricultural sector of Honduras in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As large corporations, such as United Fruit Company, entered Honduras in the early 1900's they created a monopoly on agriculture that depleted small agricultural businesses. By the time Kalbe is born in the mid-twentieth century, his community has been stripped of economic autonomy and stability. The Garífuna culture traditionally has subsisted on agriculture, fishing, ranching and craftwork and with the influx of large corporations that dominate the markets, they are forced to relinquish their rural customs so that they may survive. This economic undermining of traditions that have maintained his Garífuna community, along with increased migration to urban areas and the United States, aspects of his culture begin to dissolve and as Klabel recognizes this fact, he turns to education. Subsequently, López García turns to literature and the representation of the protagonist Klabel in the hopes of renewed stability.

In effect, the economic and social changes that occurred with the process of modernization of Honduras in the twentieth century contributed to the social fragmentation

and instability of rural communities. As communities began to employ modern technologies of cultivation, communication, and transportation, they have experienced "violence, destruction of traditions, oppression [and] reduction of the valuation of all activity to the cold calculus of money and profit" (Harvey 99). This sociocultural destruction caused by modernization of the agricultural sector is integral to the story of Klabel.

Klabel was raised in Tornabé, in the municipality of Tela, department of Atlántida, Honduras, where the educational system only offered first and second grade. The narrator states that Klabel repeated the second grade until he was 14 years of age so that he could attend school at all, and then was moved by his mother to Trujillo, Department of Colón, in 1955 to continue his education. His story represents the history of the educational system in Honduras, which is based on an unequal modernization and industrialization. In this system, the rural sectors suffer from lack of education while the urban sectors become slightly more developed. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the United Fruit Company (UFCO) along with the Vacarros Brothers Fruit Company (SFCO) gained control of the banana producing industry. These companies controlled vast amounts of land, many of which were in contention with small farmers who had occupied that land for many years but lacked paperwork to prove ownership, they also "built wharves and railroads; and controlled transportation, prices, and markets, undermining competition in their spheres of influence" (Mark Anderson 79). The increase in banana production caused a large shift in the development and occupation of the northern coast of Honduras. Mark Anderson states that this agricultural boom changed the northern coast "from a region marginal to the nation into a burgeoning enclave economy

dominated by U.S.-based fruit companies" (79). These companies promised to build railroads, which in effect would have connected the coast with the interior of the country, and their failure to fulfill these promises contributes to the isolation of the Garífuna and is further complicated by the lack of funding they receive for education.

This economic shift is illustrated by the fact that Klabel's family was compelled to leave their town to move to an area with more job opportunities as well as access to primary education. The children were also forced to sell yucca and wood before school to supplement their father's income, and Klabel's half-brother Franck had to shine shoes after school to be able to afford a uniform. In order for Klabel's half-sister María to attend school, her father was obligated to emigrate from "la comunidad a los campos bananeros de Tocoa en busca de empleo que le proporcionara mejores entradas económicas para sufragar las necesidades de la familia" (29). The life of Klabel's family becomes the microcosm of Garífunas within larger Honduran society. The poverty and inequality that his family experiences, impedes their economic success and forces Klabel's father to abandon the shoemaking trade in order to work for the banana company.

In his scholarly work, López García offers his critique of the attitudes of the Garífuna people in Honduras with respect to formal education. He notes that schooling for the Garífuna is limited mostly to the men. In a 2007 publication, he argues that there is a lack of desire to obtain a formal education and that many of the younger generations would prefer to immigrate to the United States to pursue the American dream (*Papel de la Mujer* 69). However, the community has recently seen an increase in the demand for equal education and opportunity for women. As López García observes, in the last few

decades, organizations such as el Instituto de la Mujer, Organización de Desarrollo Étnico Comunitario, Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras, and the Programa Nacional de Educación para las Etnias Autóctonas y Antillanas de Honduras have encouraged the Garífuna population to seek education while maintaining ties to their traditions and language. There has also been a push for bilingual education that recognizes the importance of the linguistic and ethnic diversity of Honduras.

Nonetheless, the journey for Klabel was arduous and speaks of the very conditions that forced the creation of these organizations and movements of resistance that support the affirmation of Garífuna identity. The disregard for formal education becomes understandable when one reads Klabel's narrative of the travails the protagonist had to suffer to attain his degree in primary education in the 1960's. Klabel originally planned to be a doctor but decided to abandon this pursuit because he was confronted with so much resistance from those he met along the way. One of the women he worked for thought that education was not for a man of his class. Because of this, and other overt discrimination, Klabel confronted hardship in his effort to maintain a job, continue his studies, and preserve his dignity. Through the portrayal of his travails, the author advances a critique of both traditional and modern educational practices.

In the Garífuna culture, gender plays a significant role in the narrative about education outside of formal schooling. For the Garífuna, a matriarchal culture, women oversee the education of the children. The women maintain the customs, religion, artistry, and the mother tongue. According to López García, the women are responsible for

> las normas disciplinarias y las leyes del urbanismo, manejando la tesis que todos los Garífunas son parientes entre sí porque siempre reina el respeto a los ancianos.

> Este hecho constituye una prueba tangible de la persistencia en la cultura Garífuna por mantener como modelo el "Código Moral" dentro de la sociedad humana. (*Papel de la mujer* 71)

The figure of the mother as educator and preserver of culture is central in the journey for education as it shapes Klabel's early childhood identity.

However, throughout *Klabel* there is a play between acceptance and dismissal as López García portrays Klabel's journey from child to man. As Klabel rejects the traditional views towards education that his childhood community represents, he is highlighting his desire for a formal education as an adult. For example, Klabel rejects the sexism and gender inequality that he sees within his own family that is directed toward his mother. His mother's lack of education is due to his grandparent's lack of trust of formal schooling. The traditions and beliefs that he was raised with impact how he views education and his own community.

Klabel's story begins with his mother. Much like in the case of Juan Francisco Manzano discussed above and Pedro Pérez Sarduy discussed below, Klabel mediates his own existence with that of his mother. Each author recognizes the importance of the mother figure and the role they play in educating their children. *Klabel* uses the deficiencies of the mother figure to represent his situation and the lack of access to education that the Garífuna suffer from. Klabel criticizes Garífuna culture stating that it has stunted his educational and intellectual growth, and yet he attempts to explain these faults as part of a more complex systemic failure.

For instance, Klabel's mother, Cecilia, is described as an uneducated Garífuna woman who has been marginalized by her own cultural traditions and values. Her story begins: "Era una mujer humilde, ama de casa y por falta de oportunidad de entrar a la escuela, quedó analfabeta ya que sus padres le negaron entrar a la escuela aduciendo que si aprendía escribir y leer, mandaría cartas amorosas a su novio y decidieron ponerla a trabajar en la casa…" (21). Cecilia's education is hindered by traditional values and the skepticism of her parents. She is forced to become a nanny and abandon any hope of becoming educated. Klabel recognizes that his own grandparents deprived his mother of any hope of entering a larger Honduran society that requires education for success. We know that Garífuna culture holds women accountable for the education of the children, however as *Klabel* represents the situation, women are not and cannot be held responsible for passing on an education that they themselves never had the opportunity to receive.

This is an instance of the dichotomy of Klabel's two selves. On the one hand, there is a man who resents how he has been educationally stunted by his culture. On the other hand, there is a man who loves and respects his culture, represented by his mother. In this way, López García portrays Garífuna defiance to formal institutions of education in the national system, as illustrated by Klabel's grandparents and their reluctance to send their daughter to school because they see it as a perversion of their values if their child learns to write. Through the representation of the grandparents, Klabel highlights the underlying aversion that the Garífuna have toward a mainstream, formal education influenced by Honduran national identity and administered by the educational institutions of the national state. At the same time, the narrator posits Klabel's elders as ignorant regarding their treatment of his mother, by stating "por la misma ignorancia de ellos la

despreciaron…" (21). He criticizes his grandparent's ignorance and consequently that of his mother. Klabel's mother is portrayed as naive and weak for becoming pregnant at a young age, which ironically is what his grandparents feared her schooling would do in the first place. By placing the blame on Cecilia's parents for her misfortunes, the narrator attempts to restore Klabel's mother's reputation while condemning his family's ignorance. Yet, conversely, in doing so formal education's power to limit such behaviors is promoted. In this view, Klabel's cultural values conflict with what he believes will bring his community success.

Through the portrayal of Klabel's grandparents, and their traditional values, as an example of Garífuna culture, López García shows how older generations of Garífuna fear the educational system and argues that they must also learn to embrace it in order to avoid further marginalization. What is being silenced by this narration is the story of the discrimination that his grandparents must have encountered during their lifetime. We do not see specific accounts of the marginalization or discrimination that they may have suffered and that may have led them to fear modernity and its institutions. For example, the narrator states that per Klabel's grandparents, Cecilia cannot be with the man she wishes because that man's father lacks education. In an ambiguous way, the narrator rebukes Garífuna culture by demeaning its logic and, in doing so, moves ideologically towards the embrace of a modernized Honduran national culture.

In the telling of his life story, the tensions between his Garífuna culture and Honduran nationality are constitutive of Klabel's identity discourse. Klabel must discursively silence his Garífuna traditions to negotiate with the dominant ideologies of modernization that have historically marginalized his community in the first place.

However, Klabel simultaneously challenges this marginalization by illustrating the injustices he suffers in the 1950's and 1960's due to the inequality of resource allocation, specifically regarding education, as well as racial bias towards the black Garífuna population.

Regardless of the hardships he experienced on the path toward achieving a state-sponsored education, formal education is promoted by López García as the main road to success and self-improvement, even if earlier Garífuna generations do not share the same sentiment. Klabel seeks out higher education with the reluctant support of his mother. Although she sends Klabel to live with his father for primary education, she later hesitates to let Klabel continue his secondary education in San Pedro Sula. López García explains:

> Klabel con el afán de seguir su educación habló con sus padres sobre el propósito en alzar vuelo para experimentar la vida fuera del seno del hogar como todo joven que no piensa quedarse de rémora familiar, decisión que fue desaprobada por la madre de él por temor que le sucediera algo mal lejos de ella. (30)

Eventually, she concedes and Klabel is able to follow his dream of "being someone in life". His mother's hesitation, like that of her own parents, serves as foreshadowing for the difficulties Klabel is soon to face on his journey.

Along with economic factors, social prejudice plays a large part in Klabel's failure or success. When Klabel, now 18, arrives to San Pedro Sula he must find work and a place to stay. He boards with a family as their gardener for a mere 18.00 lempiras per month, roughly a little less than one U.S dollar. In his new home, as López García

states, “Klabel, un muchacho criado en un hogar de mucho respeto, aunque humilde pero con buenas orientaciones cristianas fue ganando poco a poco la confianza de la familia” (32). He is true to his humble roots as this is what defines his character; however, he still seeks acceptance into a higher social status, which he expects to find through education and his Christian faith.

In this manner, Klabel tactically positions himself as a supporter of education, while surreptitiously silencing the direct denunciation of the structural processes that have denied it to him. The meager wages he receives keep him impoverished yet Klabel continues to see himself as a purveyor of education to his friends and family. With his influence and drive “ya algo se estaba logrando respecto la educación” in his community (35). López García elliptically approaches the social structures that have denied his community economic success by consistently eclipsing them within the details of his personal gains and struggles. He accentuates the lack of education of the Garífuna all the while indirectly or clandestinely exposing the main causes of their suffering as he sees it.

In Klabel’s travails, he encounters many who do not support his pursuit because a Garífuna man does not coincide with their ideologies about who should succeed and who should not. For example, the employers that give Klabel a job as a gardener and offer him room and board, tell him that they might have to move him to a position in their car dealership if he continues to succeed in his educational pursuits. A paternalistic relationship is suggested between Klabel and his employers. They treat him as a son and offer him priority based upon his education and gender. This causes friction with the cook in the same household, who is jealous because she had never received such a proposition (35). This offer created such immense tension between himself and the cook,

that he was forced to abandon his work to avoid any further harm. Even though Klabel was given the opportunity for job advancement within the ranks of the working class, he refuses to give up on his education and his ultimate goal to bring education to his community. López García silences the discourse of the educational discrimination based on class that was shown by his *patrones* towards the household cook, choosing instead to emphasize his strength against the hostility of the cook and his unending quest for an education. What he perceived to be an attempt to marginalize him by the *cocinera*, another working-class subject suffering discrimination, becomes an opportunity to illustrate his own character and value rather than an opportunity to address class oppression, division within the working class, and class solidarity.

However, what is suggested by this incident is that formal education is a means for success that not only he values but is also valued nationally by those with power and privilege. On the other hand, the cook's lack of education continues to marginalize her in a society that assigns privilege based on compliance with educational norms but keeps education inaccessible to the poor. In other words, those with higher education receive better opportunities regardless of ability or access. After Klabel refuses to suffer any more mistreatment from the cook, he decides to leave and find another job. López García quickly brushes over the mistreatment that he faced in this home saying "de tanto soportar tantos malos tratos, decidió abandonar el trabajo…" (35).

However, in his next job Klabel finds that racial inequalities become the focus of his ordeals. His narrative echoes discourses found in similar autobiographies from the Caribbean such as *Autobiografía de un esclavo,* by Juan Francisco Manzano. In the same way that Manzano challenges the nineteenth century ideology concerning reading and

writing as not appropriate for a man of his class and race, Klabel too encounters this enduring discourse in the twentieth century. [8]

Discursive Tactics and Strategies to Approach Racial Identity and Marginalization

This section will examine how, through his use of discursive tactics and strategies, López García approaches the racial, economic, and social structures that have marginalized him as a Garífuna man in Honduras. Each subsection will focus on specific techniques that he employs to challenge or accept how his Garífuna identity affects him and his story, specifically through his use of euphemisms, humility and demonstrative adjectives.

Honduras is considered an Indo-Hispanic nation, meaning that Hondurans recognize themselves as majority mestizo, or rather a blend of European and Indigenous. However, this national identity fails to account for those populations that are marginalized because they identify as black or of African ancestry, such as the Garífuna populations. Mark Anderson, in *Black and Indigenous: Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras,* explores the many ways in which the Garífuna identify themselves in opposition to or in conjunction with Honduran national identity in the twentieth century. He argues

> that the tensions between different modes of identification (between indigenous assertions and cosmopolitan affiliations) reflect the difficulties in navigating contemporary structures of power and difference, where Garífuna are both

[8] For more information regarding the discussion of class and race in *Autobiografía,* see Manzano and Azougarh, pg. 90.

> recognized as an 'ethnic subject' with collective rights and cultural value and stigmatized as a black, racial-cultural other still at the margins of modernity and the nation. (9)

Mark Anderson goes on to state that 'indigenous' carries a different connotation than does the signifier black: whereas black is removed from tradition and modernity, indigenous is representative of "deep cultural roots" (12). The Garífuna are liminal to Honduras because they are black and as black they are not seen as worthy or native to the Americas, thus they are excluded from positions of power. In *Klabel,* López García represents the same racialized structures that aim to remove Klabel from modernity and relegate him to a diminished social position because of the lack of access to resources and education.

In a fashion similar to Juan Franciscio Manzano, López García addresses the racial aspects of the discrimination Klabel encounters when it is revealed that Klabel's skin color "ante la honorable señora prevalecía sobre su capacidad intelectual, para ella Klabel era un simple lacayo sin derecho para estudiar . . . " (37). The woman is his current employer and has recently learned of Klabel's intention to continue his education. The narrator accentuates the racial discrimination while maintaining the woman's "honorable" status. Even in the face of such unwarranted bigotry, his discourse provides la *señora* with an elevated social status, excusing her indictment and once again highlighting his own humility and respect. Previously, the narrator had described the importance of Garífuna moral values which respect women, therefore silencing Klabel's distaste of this woman's ideals. The prevalence of racism is highlighted and Klabel's willingness to accept it and not challenge it overtly. His maintenance of cultural values is

juxtaposed with the rejection of them as he also leaves this job and dismisses the señora due to her racist attitudes. For a Garífuna man like Klabel, it is not acceptable for him to be an intellectual or to study, but it is acceptable for him to be in a servile position.

The euphemisms that López García employs in the previous scene are used to conceal realities. In one of the most important moments regarding Klabel's racial identity, he uses the terms *mala suerte, honorable,* and *lacayo*. When la *señora* rejects Klabel´s desire to become someone in life, it is referred to it as just part of his bad luck. Instead of condemning the woman's actions as racist or bigoted, he is accepting and dismissive of this woman's ignorance. He considers his skin color as synonymous with bad luck, as well as his newly found unemployment. Our protagonist begins to define these moments of racial inequality as a matter of luck, instead of a cultural or national ideology that deems the Garifuna people inferior and unworthy of success. This same idea of luck repeats throughout the autobiography and begins to form part of his identity. Somehow, his racial identity is seen to him as just the luck of the draw. However, the term *lacayo,* meaning servile lackey, seems to represent the author's contradictory attitude regarding such prejudices. His "unfortunate" skin color makes him destined to serve others, whereas the woman is entitled to a higher honor. The interplay of these three terms highlights the racial ideologies that shape Klabel's world and his clandestine challenge to this woman is consequently his rejection of these marginalizing attitudes.

The racial prejudice that becomes encoded into Klabel's life story is intertwined with the collective suffering of his community. His picaresque trials and tribulations serve to highlight the injustices that lead to the lack of access to economic and social resources. The same education that reproduces poverty is the main tool to overcome it.

What becomes apparent throughout the autobiography is the racial and cultural discrimination directed toward the Garífuna people. The discrimination and mistreatment that Klabel encounters only provides him with more vigor to complete his goals.

When Klabel is sent to work in the small community of Zapote while completing his education degree, he encounters a very volatile environment because of the *alcalde auxiliar*. The alcalde, who was having a relationship with one of the teachers, tries to have him fired and replaced with his girlfriend. In his attempt to accomplish this the alcalde rallies many of the parents against Klabel using arguments such as: "con Klabel solo aprenderían Moreno". The alcalde went around town "recogiendo firmas y falcificando[sic] la mayoría para lograr que lo despidieran del trabajo por el simple pecado de ser Negro…" (73). The alcalde tries to use existing racial and cultural ideologies to achieve his own personal goals.

According to Mark Anderson, "Attributions of African origins can still be leveraged to cast doubt on Garífuna indigeneity and their status as 'real' Hondurans" (16). This denial of worth remains in Honduras and continues to affect the Garífuna, as we see in the previous example. It is interesting here that even López García refers to being black as a simple sin. What is López García stating about his environment? Is it that being black is a sin to him or to others? If this is read in conjunction with the prior commentary about skin color as synonymous with bad luck, I argue that the racial context of his time places him in a difficult position. Klabel finds himself as liminal within his own country. He recognizes that one does not have control over one's skin color, yet he is also aware that people see his skin color as a threat to their national identity. However, in

this case Klabel does win this fight against racism, yet the memory of this battle remains closely tied to his present-day memory, as I will discuss later.

Still, there remains a certain resistance to replacing traditional education with state education, especially considering the national displacement that Klabel suffers. Nonetheless, the narrative repeatedly suggests intellectual redemption as a means of erasure of class, racial, and ethnic difference, perhaps through entrance into the national imagined community. In viewing the dialectic or rather the unresolved dichotomy between the two educational discourses, tradition versus modernity, it is possible to expose the societal restraints imposed upon his community because of discriminatory ideologies enacted by those in power. López García seeks the redistribution of power and knowledge amongst all Garífuna people in his humanitarian attempt to bridge the social and economic gaps between rural and urban sectors of Honduras. He provides a clear portrait of his conception for the future of his people and humanity, which is equal and unrestricted access to a formal education and which also provides the means to maintain traditional values.

Klabel emphasizes the ways in which a man deprived of knowledge, uses his own understanding of worth to fight against an oppressive society. Through López García's voice, he highlights how one man seeks to reconcile the marginalization that he and other Garífuna men and women face in Honduras. Klabel and the Garífuna people are displaced to outlying districts and marginal jobs that deny their ability to fully integrate into mainstream society and at the same time limit their ability to appreciate their own traditional culture. The writing of this autobiography provides its author with the insight to re-examine and challenge the historical interrelations that sought to silence his voice.

Humility as Trope and a Tactic

López-García writes under the pseudonym Klabel and in the third person, which can be read as a deliberate act. Every author makes deliberate choices that represent his or her reality and the implications of such choices deserve our attention. The writing of an autobiography in third person is a way of creating an objective reality of the author's own identity. Philippe Lejeune and Paul John Eaking in *On Autobiography,* state that: "Talking about oneself in the third person can imply either tremendous conceit, or a certain kind of humility" (6). In this way, I view humility as a trope, not only in this work but in many of the other works analyzed in this dissertation. The designation of humility acts as a type of metonymy where humility represents oppression and objectivity. I see this in Juan Manzano Francisco, as a humble slave, and I see it here with Klabel, as a humble Garífuna man. Still, as each story progresses we see the authors forego their humility as they praise their own accomplishments. Nevertheless, the idea of humility continues to resurface.

In chapter 2 of Klabel, we see our protagonist begin his journey to complete his education. This was described as: "Klabel entraría al colegio en busca de otro status [sic] social sin dejar su humildad que lo caracterizaba" (34). Education becomes synonymous with a specific socioeconomic status as well as a cultural marker. Klabel wishes to be revered and conversely be humble about his accomplishments. In many instances, the narrator refers to how humble Klabel is and how this is his best and most defining characteristic. Humility is a tactic that can be used in many ways. In oration, stating one's humility places the audience in a more receptive mood because they begin to see their

orator as modest and more trustworthy. It also alerts readers that the author may be wary of that which he is about to expose or disclose. In Christianity, humility is used to refer to one's position in relation to God and the acceptance of one's faults and fate. These facets of humility seem to surface in *Klabel*, and *Autobiografía de un esclavo*.

Jennifer Clement's, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* helps us to view humility and how it was used when writing to persons of nobility, or clergy. Their humility, she states, served as a "demonstration of deference to the expectations of a strong hierarchical society" (1). It appears in these texts in much the same way, almost as mandatory in exchange for the writer's ability to speak about themselves and comment upon their contexts. I am suggesting here that this quality of humility appears as a legacy of slavery and a condition of modernity. Modernization is fraught with projects that appear to benefit a national society, yet it excludes marginal populations from enjoying the benefits of such projects. During this marginalization, these authors seek entrance into a world that denies them recognition and silences their voices. Humility surfaces as a literary strategy, in that it highlights their alterity in the hierarchy of their respective nations and allows them to voice their opinions.

When confronted with mistreatment and abuse at his first job, the narrator iterates the humility and respect that Klabel possesses. This passage reads: "Klabel, un muchacho humilde y respetuoso nunca le contestó ni puso la queja a sus patrones…" (35) In this way his humility provides more information about our protagonist and his ability to defend himself. The protagonist is non-confrontational, yet I read the revelation of this episode as a direct challenge to this treatment; his humility becomes a double-edged sword. Klabel knows that if he were to have spoken about his treatment, there may have

been negative repercussions for himself or the maid. It is much like a scene in *Autobiografía de un esclavo,* in which Manzano suffers severe punishment when he supposedly stole money from his master. The error made was because of Manzano's lack of understanding about the currency of that time; however, he could not complain or explain, because his punishment would have been worse. In the case of Klabel, he does not stand up for himself so that he may avoid any type of punishment and instead chooses to leave before he can be kicked out or incur further embarrassment or mistreatment.

Humility functions for López García as a strategy that allows him entrance into larger society and yet also maintains the structures that have marginalized the Garífuna. Humility is a dual strategy of resistance and acceptance. It alerts the readers to the complacent nature of Klabel, yet in doing so it makes evident the structures that have placed him in that position, therefore challenging the nature of such placement. As Michel de Certeau argues: "The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (XVIII). Humility then, serves as a marker of difference. Klabel's humility is one way in which he separates himself from a dominant society full of arrogance and conceit. The narrator sees the men and women who have become educated or entered modernized Honduras as lacking modesty. The world that has denied Klabel entrance is a world that does not share his morality and values. Yet, we see that in the final chapter of *Klabel*, all of Klabel's accomplishments are lauded and exposed in detail, yet it is done so in third person which allows our author/protagonist to maintain his humility.

In *On Autobiography,* Philippe Lejeune and Paul John Eakin assert that upon using a third-person narrator, the narrator or protagonist assumes a distancing which introduces a certain transcendence with which the author, in our case of study López García, identifies. In a sense, Klabel is the protagonist of a story which López García has transcended. He no longer views himself as the man that is being narrated: López García is now another man. It is as if he had assumed a double identity: One is Klabel, a young uneducated traditional Garífuna man; the other is Victor Virgilio López García, the knowledgeable educator. This narrative technique allows readers to see these two sides and the distance between them. But, I also see that this distance between the two men collapses during the narration as the two subjects merge with each other through particular rhetorical patterns.

Euphemistic Metaphors and Dysphemistic Realities

A close examination of word choice in *Klabel* evinces that the narrator fluctuates between a euphemistic and dysphemistic discourse in particular ways in order to express the underlying sentiments connected to the events he describes. The language used is elliptical in the sense that it highlights a characteristic of its referent yet at the same time reflects the workings of the author's memory. In other words, the vocabulary that López-García chooses to describe Klabel's past indicates an emotional connection to the story that is being represented and at the same time produces multiple readings that can suggest a silencing of information. I maintain that his words are denoting their referent and their connotations in terms of his critique of power relations found in schools and within his family.

Euphemisms are typically used to obfuscate what the speaker feels would otherwise be offensive or blunt, while a metaphor is typically used to enlighten or express something more vividly. What I see in *Klabel* is the use of a metaphor that highlights and simultaneously silences discourses that may be too painful to recall, or that contain an anger our author does not wish to narrate overtly, much like how a euphemism would function. When Klabel went to live with his father in Trujillo, Department of Colón, a specific discourse begins to take place, a reality that our author wishes to hide. López-García appears to offer a critique of his father's family: "La ausencia del eje del hogar en esa familia dio lugar que aprovechara la gente meterse en la interioridad de la familia" (29). Here the narrator criticizes the family structure that creates weakness. The *eje del hogar* is traditionally seen as the female, or mother, in Garífuna culture, so this lack of focus is causing the family structure to collapse. In this account, the narrator expresses anger towards Klabel's father for leaving him and his mother behind all those years ago. He criticizes the life that Klabel's father made without his mother and how this created a weak family structure. As a metaphor, Klabel's tradition, which values a strong female axis, takes shape alongside his antagonism for how his father has strayed from those values. According to López García, the female is the head of household and provides strength to the family and in her absence the family structure is corrupted and will easily break down. It is also important to note that Klabel's father has been obliged to stray from the community in search of work, and in doing so has entered a more mainstream society, one that does not share his values. Klabel not only critiques his father, but also the economic marginalization of his community that forced his father to abandon his culture. The word choice of *eje del hogar* serves as a metaphor by comparing the value of

the mother figure in Garífuna culture with a stabilizing force that keeps the family working. As a metaphor, this phrase clarifies the importance of his culture and as a euphemism it is meant to conceal the negative feelings associated with the cause and effect of not having a strong female. In other words, *eje de hogar* serves as euphemistic metaphor that highlights while it diminishes the author's negativity surrounding this specific memory.

There are many moments in which the vocabulary choices are euphemistic metaphors that seem to silence the negative aspects of Klabel´s journey. When Klabel is assigned a job in La Quebrada, the narrator describes the first family that he encounters. The whole scene, from beginning to end is softened with euphemistic metaphors. It reads: "Cuando llegó Klabel donde estaba esa casa o palacio aéreo, solo estaba una mujer embarazada y escuálida con dos niños que asomaban sus cabecitas del pisovolante que mostraba su carita igual a su madre la presencia de la misma anemia profunda…" (58). Two key terms used here are *palacio aéreo* and *pisovolante.* The language verges on sarcasm as this humble home is described as a floating palace, and serves as a bit of humor. Conversely, López García uses straightforward and exact terms, like *escuálida* and *anemia,* to describe the family yet chooses to give their home more of a fantastical aura. Comparatively, when describing the stairs in the house he was rooming in he states: "Klabel y Santos se subieron mediante el ascensor automático (escalera hecha con un tronco de árbol) …" (78). Our narrator tends to use figurative language to describe the impoverished families that Klabel encounters. When the language becomes figurative it functions as an ellipsis that suppresses information. This technique adds humanity to the communities in which Klabel works, while simultaneously concealing and revealing the

ugliness of the situation. The metaphors are indirect critiques that are aimed toward a larger Honduran society and reflect the author's discontent with how modernization affects rural communities. The intimate details of these impoverished communities are recounted in a way that is more universal, more understandable. Whereas the language choice used to expose discontent with larger structures approaches a more literal, elevated register, which is directed to a more educated reader.

At one point in his journey, Klabel finds work as a salesman with a distributor of domestic goods, however he finds out that his company wishes to send him to Nicaragua to work for a year. Upon hearing this news, he becomes distraught because he knows that this will interfere with his quest for knowledge. He knows that without this job he cannot afford to go to school and that without his schooling he will never be the man he wishes to be. Upon recounting this information, our narrator states: "Ahora el tiempo y la pobreza castigaba nuevamente a Klabel resignandose [sic] sumarse al ejército de los vagos de Tornabé porque la misma frustración lo puso indispuesto viajar a la República de Nicaragua" (40). The men and women of Tornabé are referred to as an *ejército de los vagos*, an army of laziness. With this commentary, our narrator reveals his strong feelings toward his hometown of Tornabé. Without education, they are lazy and do not seek more out of life. This is not what Klabel wishes for himself nor for his people. This moment of defeat causes our narrator to lash out metaphorically at his town. This has struck a chord with our narrator, evident in the use of *ahora.* This past moment is brought to the past present, where he finds himself suffering simultaneously with Klabel. In this instance, *ejército de los vagos* verges on being a dysphemistic metaphor which reinforces the

negative emotions surrounding the disconnection that he sees between his community and a more modern Honduran society.

Much of the dysphemism remains negative and works to highlight the author's frustration because the language becomes more visible, meaning certain words stand out because of their usage. For example, López García tells of a time when Klabel is searching for a job and goes to visit his younger brother. He states: "…de vez en cuando pasaba por la casa donde estaba trabajando su hermano menor quien compartía su exiguo almuerzo para no dejarlo aguantar hambre" (36). Here, the use of the word *exiguo* is part of a literal, elevated discourse of an educated man. The word "exiguous" calls attention to the meager portions of food his brother has. In this instance, his language choice is more dysphemistic because the overtness of the language choice highlights his critique. The author uses a slightly more aggressive vocabulary to highlight what could have been quickly brushed over. If *exiguo* were replaced with *pequeño*, he would not connote the same discontent. A small lunch, or *pequeño*, refers only to the size, but *exiguo* refers to more than the size; it indicates that the amount is not enough for one man to be sufficiently satisfied, not to mention for two men. I can clearly understand that not only does his brother not have enough lunch to share, but that López García is making a direct social commentary regarding the fact that he and his brother do not receive enough money to even have a decent lunch. Despite this fact, we also see the cultural values of Klabel and his brother as they choose to share what little food they do have.

In the beginning of his autobiography López García discusses how the educational system in Honduras, specifically in his town of Tornabé, functions. He states: "Había una modalidad que había que cumplir a la cabalidad, era que el niño para ser

matriculado, debía que contar con 7 años de edad cumplidos" (*Klabel* 27). At first glance, he is stating a fact that a child must be 7 years old to enter school. His use of the words *modalidad* and *a la cabalidad* however, have different connotations. The language used is not as neutral as one might think when taking into consideration López García's personality as a black, Garífuna educator. The register is elevated and educated, implying a deeper understanding of the processes that affect our narrator. In fact, as the story progresses, Klabel returns to this point as he recounts his efforts to change that process in his community. Many years later, Klabel starts a pre-K program that allows students to enroll in school at a younger age, to the end of keeping them out of trouble and hence to lessen the burden on their parents. As the story unfolds, it becomes more evident that the language choice, that is the use of the words *modalidad* and *a la cabalidad*, suggest his discontent with the educational system in Honduras. Consequently, the dysphemistic discourse highlights López García's discontent, if read in much the same way as one would read an ellipsis. There appears to be a suspension and a suppression of information. This discourse serves as a type of ellipsis to highlight a suspension of information—information that will be discussed at a later point—whereas the euphemistic discourse suppresses the author's dissatisfaction.

The euphemism and dysphemism both allow the author to provide his readers with direct and indirect challenges to the social structures that he deems have relegated him and his family to a liminal position in Honduras. This discourse suggests a dichotomy between tradition—represented by his Garífuna culture—and modernity—represented by formal state education and their lack of access to this education— in which the use of euphemistic metaphors reflects the desire to conceal his

discontent with his own community, and a harsh dysphemistic register to critique those modern processes.

Emotional Distancing with Demonstrative Adjectives

Elliptical writing in *Klabel* serves to reveal many of the emotional connections our author has with his past without having to discuss them in detail. This type of writing allows López García to brush over specific details, yet he leaves a trail so that readers can decipher a deeper meaning. Elliptical writing in *Klabel* also operates with demonstrative adjectives, such as *este, ese* and *aquel,* to suggest emotional distancing in López García's memory. As the points of reference, be it an event or a character, move in and out of the past and into the present representations, their importance or emotional impact on the author is reflected in his discourse.

For example, Klabel initially lived with his mother in Tornabé and his father lived in Trujillo, a nearby town. When Klabel was 14 he was sent to live with his father so that he could continue his education. At that point Klabel had spent 4 years in the second grade because that was all that Tornabé had to offer. As López-García begins to recount the time Klabel spends living with his father, the same euphemistic way of writing resurfaces. The discourse begins to represent feelings of rancor towards his father. Lopéz-García describes Klabel's father by stating that he began to see Klabel in a new light: "…ahora se daba cuenta aquel hombre que ese muchacho de fisonomía delgada pero con mirar vivaz, inteligente y con pasos firmes y movimientos felinos, ahora ese padre ya mostraba interés en él" (28). Here amid the odd sentence structure, poor grammar and lack of punctuation, a pattern begins to reveal itself. The use of demonstrative adjectives

represents the author's emotions regarding his relationship with his father. He refers to him as "aquel hombre". *Aquel* indicates a temporal or spatial distancing. In this instance, the use of *aquel* also carries a negative connotation. It is as if López-García had no real emotional ties to "that man" at all. Also of note is the use of *ese*. As López-García recounts his past, he creates a distance between who that boy was, "ese muchacho," and the man that he is in the present. He also separates "ese padre" from the stepfather who raised him and who treated his mother kindly. This use of *ese* can also indicate a type of scorn or contempt for the referent, as well as *aquel*. The pages that follow seem to iterate this discontent with Klabel's biological father. He criticizes his household and the lack of interest that he showed in Klabel's life up to that point. Consequently, Lopéz García uses demonstrative adjectives, in more than one case, to represent a distancing, and yet conversely also to indicate psychological closeness.

As the story progresses, the narration tends to shift between metaphorical distances of memory and emotional recognition. For instance, our narrator recalls a time when Klabel obtained a job working in San Pedro Sula as a gardener and an errand boy. He states, "Aquí le daban la comida pero no la dormida. Para que Klabel pudiera dormir, tuvo que hacerlo en una perrera de los perros de los dueños de la casa para no melestar [sic] otra vez a sus amigos" (36). This account of what appears to be a sad time in his life, considering he is made to sleep in a dog pen, is retold using "aquí" instead of "allí" as was done in the prior sentence: "…fué que una mañana llegó a una casa de habitación propiedad de los dueños de una fábrica de jabón allí mismo en San Pedro Sula…". The narrator brings this story to the present using here instead of there. What we can see is a

connection between those events and the narrator's, and by extension Klabel's, psyche. This way of narrating places him in that moment, in that place.

Using the same technique, whether consciously or unconsciously, our narrator recalls how his boss, at the same job as gardener and errand boy, rejected Klabel´s desire to work and continue his education. This scene is also brought to the present using the demonstrative adjective *estas*. When the boss lady told Klabel to gather his things and go. López García narrates Klabel's emotional reaction at that moment:

> Estas expresiones cayeron como agua fría al muchacho, no hizo otra cosa Klabel que obedecer al mandato de la dueña de la casa y resignarse a su mala suerte y decidiéndose a buscar otro trabajo y aceptar la realidad, su color ante la honorable señora prevalecía sobre su capacidad intelectual, para ella Klabel era un simple lacayo sin derecho para estudiar… (37).

The theoretical distance has collapsed as the memory of that moment is brought into the present by our narrator. These moments could be reflective of what Derrida has termed *différance*, or rather the process of deferment in time and difference in space. This process is taking place as our narrator recalls certain experiences. I see this process represented as past present moments that are being differentiated from the present moment of writing, yet their difference is only recognizable when the emotions recalled are marginal. In other words, his word choice represents not only his present moment, but simultaneously his past present. These expressions from his past still resonate with Klabel and consequently with López García, therefore negating their difference in time and space.

The racial tensions strike a resonant chord that continues to echo as López García narrates this moment. It would not be as relevant to state *esas expresiones*. The use of *esas* or *aquellas* sends those memories to a distant past, whereas *estas* places them in the here and now. The Real Academia Española dictionary defines the use of the demonstrative adjectives *esta, este,* and *esto* as, "dicho de un período de tiempo, de un momento o de un lugar: En el que se encuentra quien habla". It is also described as "Más próximo al que habla, sea en el pasado o en el futuro". This, as in other moments, represents the author's true emotions regarding the recollection of difficult moments, as well as how these specific moments remain tied to his present state of mind. This discourse of racial identity has not left Klabel; he has not forgotten the traumatizing effects of this woman's words. That moment has shaped who he is and how he expresses his identity.

Similarly, in the passage where the Alcalde Auxiliar of Zapote attempts to have Klabel removed from his teaching position because of his skin color and because students would only learn *moreno* from him, this is narrated using the demonstrative adjective *este*. It reads: "Este caso de Klabel le sucede a muchos maestros en varias comunidades donde algunos padres de familia y autoridades no valoran los esfuerzos que realizan algunos maestros por el bien de sus hijos" (73). He also goes on to say that "…los alumnos estaban aprendiendo satisfactoriamente y los padres de familia demostran[sic] a granel su agradecimiento…" and that "Esta actitud de Klabel, le agradó a los padres…" (74). The implications of *este* and *esta* here aid in the reading of these moments and establish their lasting importance to the protagonist and by extension to López García. Through the use of demonstrative adjectives, I suggest that there is a collapse of the

distance between our narrator and the protagonist. These moments diminish what was presented biographically and convert it into autobiography as the narrator reveals his own feelings about himself, symbolically changing the pseudonym Klabel to Víctor Virgilio López García.

Conclusions

López García shows his discontent with the modernization of his country with euphemistic and dysphemistic discourse. The combination of these discourses with metaphors highlights the ways in which the author challenges certain aspects of change to his community, be it educational, socioeconomic or cultural. When the changes associated with modernization do affect his Garífuna cultural values or people, López García employs euphemistic metaphors that at once diminish his discontent and highlight it. The metaphors are euphemistic because they soften the critiques that he offers and lend humor to the situation, in a way that conceals his feelings regarding them. On the other hand, when the author critiques social structures that larger Honduran society uses to marginalize his people, he challenges them directly with straightforward dysphemism. His elevated register calls attention to the economic and educational institutions that he views as oppressive.

By using education as his platform, López García highlights the dichotomy between tradition and modernity as represented by the figurative and literal discourses. *Klabel* represents traditional Garífuna values with figurative metaphors and euphemisms in order to expose and silence negative aspects of his culture. Modern Honduran values are represented by dysphemism and by literal, direct challenges to how these affect his

own and his community's success in terms of education and economics. The two discourses become intertwined as Klabel tries to resolve how he can maintain his traditions and embrace modernity. To do so, the author must conceal his negative feelings about his own Garífuna culture so that he may embrace modern Honduran culture. As he moves into mainstream Honduran culture during the 1960s, he critiques the values that do not and cannot coincide with his humanistic approach to life. For example, the racist ideologies that many still hold regarding the intellectual capacities of black men and women conflict with his own views.

López García thus elliptically approaches the racial ideologies that seek to marginalize his race and culture. These have a lasting emotional resonance that demand empathy for his situation. The national and racial ideologies that he encounters remain in the author's present state of existence. As an author, as a narrator, and as a protagonist he is unable to transcend the effect that these ideologies had and have on him. The racist ideologies that he encounters may be silenced through euphemisms or his use of humility, but they are not erased and instead become indirect challenges. Because of this approach, I understand that these ideologies remain dominant in Honduras in the twentieth century, and that Víctor Virgilio López García is reluctant to insist on their removal as he seeks convergence between his local and national cultures.

Chapter 3

Puerto Rican Racial Identity Formation in a United States Context: Heart and Darkness in Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*

Introduction

Piri Thomas was born in Harlem, New York in 1928 to a Puerto Rican mother and Afro-Cuban father who had both migrated to the United States in hopes of economic stability.[9] Thomas's autobiography, *Down These Mean Streets* (1997), documents his racial, class, and ethnic struggles in New York between 1930 and the 1950s. His life is narrated chronologically from childhood to adulthood, focusing on the moments in which Thomas searches for recognition and understanding of himself and his surroundings. Thomas emphasizes his confrontations with, on the one hand, an essentialist U.S. society that negates his Puerto Rican nationality, opting to define him by his black skin. On the other hand, he remains tied to a Puerto Rican ideology that denies him a black Afro-descendant identity (Caminero-Santangelo 211). Through Thomas's exploration of his personal context he challenges the socio-ideological forces of nationality and modernity in the United States and Puerto Rico that continue to silence or negate the identity of Afro-Caribbean subjects in national letters.

In this chapter, I will explore how Piri Thomas represents his identity so as to counteract or accept notions of blackness in the United States through various discursive techniques: metaphor, interior monologues, and the manipulation of epithets. I will begin

[9] See Antonio López pp. 112-153 for a discussion of the race and nationality of Thomas and his father. López argues that Thomas's father adopted a Puerto Rican identity as a means of whitening himself.

by reviewing the sociocultural context that shapes Thomas's identity and the dominant racial and national ideologies of Puerto Rico and the United States. Thus, I aim to elucidate how this context continually imposes ideas of blackness upon Thomas, therefore challenging him to redefine his identity, and by extension the identities of Afro-Hispanic American youth. Subsequently, I will examine Thomas's simultaneous metaphorical contestation and acquiescence to ideas of modernity: progress, unity, nationality, and white supremacy. I will explore how specific language choices signify resistance to and acceptance of racial ideologies of superiority and inferiority between white and black. I will also present an analysis of the multiplicity of interior monologues as a representation of Thomas's continuous dialectical effort to negotiate black and Puerto Rican identity discourses.

Down These Mean Streets was written and published at the height of the civil rights movement and black nationalist movements in the United States. The original publication of *Down* in 1967 coincided with the shifting political and social climate that exposed the injustices surrounding the longstanding treatment of African Americans. The anti-discriminatory and anti-racist discourses promoted in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States had, by the 1960s, led to the creation of various organizations, such as the NAACP, CORE, SCLC, Black Panthers, Black Power and the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party among others,[10] which provided a voice of resistance to black men and women who experienced oppression in the United States. It was not until 1954, with *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, that the U.S. Supreme Court

[10] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Congress of Racial Equality, Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

found public school segregation unconstitutional, counteracting Jim Crow legislation stemming from the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896 which dictated a discourse of "separate but equal." Rosa Parks's rejection of racism in 1955, the Freedom Rides of 1961, and the March on Washington of 1963, all led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. However, significant political and social gains notwithstanding, these movements did not eradicate racist and classist ideologies that shape everyday life, as the pervasiveness of these ideologies remain embedded within the political and social structure of the United States.

In *Down These Mean Streets*, the writer locates these racial discourses within his personal context to promote social change in the United States and Puerto Rico, and, on the micro level, in Harlem, New York. If we view Thomas's production as part of a racial project, we can consequently consider its position within a specific racial discourse capable of enacting change. In other words, by reinforcing the socio-historical contexts in which racial signification takes place, the possibility for social and ideological transformation arises. Omi and Winant argue that representing race discursively requires locating it, explicitly or implicitly, within its historical and social setting. Further, they posit the impossibility of change without engagement of racial signification. These scholars discuss the notion of racial formation "as a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (55). They theorize that racial formation is a process of historically situated racial projects that organize and represent social structures and have impacted the evolution of hegemony. Projects can be state activities, art, journalism, academic discourse, as well as individual experience, which seek a redistribution of resources along racial lines (56). As a writer emerging

during the civil rights era, Thomas—who realizes that being Puerto Rican does not remove his "blackness"—becomes part of a larger racial project as his writing challenges both the color-blind ideologies that guide Puerto Rican identity formation and the dogma of white versus black in the United States. By strategically employing his own personal context, Thomas's work becomes a racial project with the capability of undermining culturally oppressive ideologies.

Moreover, *Down* not only interrogates US racial formation, but also how it is tied to ideas of modernity on the mainland and the island. Modernity hinged on colonialism as a process that structured human experiences on the basis of a specific racial hierarchy. The Eurocentrism that constituted modernity subjugated—and continues to subjugate—non-European races based upon interested notions of rationality and socially constructed strata of superiority and inferiority among racial groups. Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis argue that race was used as a tool for colonization and has since become the basis for social classification: "…race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society's structure of power" (534-535).

When the United States became the colonial power in Puerto Rico after the Spanish American War in 1898, one of their first military acts was to impose a school system based on North American models in order to promote U.S. values and racial ideologies on the island (Figueroa Parker 4). With the enactment of the Foraker Act in 1900, the United States denied Puerto Rico control over its own political and economic development. Consequently, Spanish language and the local educational system were deemed inferior, along with Puerto Rican culture overall. Hence, Spanish was removed as

the official language of instruction in schools with the goal of starting a process of Americanization of the island's population. It was not until 1948, when the island's first elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, declared a return to Spanish instruction.

Prejudice toward Puerto Ricans—and even greater prejudice toward Afro-Puerto Ricans—was felt both on the island and on the mainland, particularly when immigration from Puerto Rico to the United States increased by the mid-twentieth century due to failed economic policies and instability on the island. In the case of Piri Thomas, a product of the Puerto Rican migration to New York during the first half of the twentieth century, cultural discrimination and ideas of white supremacy on the mainland cause him to question how U.S. nationalist discourse promising modernity and progress for all combined with oppressive ideologies that affected people of color in particular. In this way, US Latino literature becomes a space and practice capable of disrupting and challenging this power dynamic. Piri Thomas, for instance, writes his life and constructs his identity in tension and opposition to the social stratification of modernity and the US nationalist ideologies that promise progress, freedom, development, and civilization in the United States and Puerto Rico. As Thomas attempts to (re)define his previous racialized identity, he fears that he must also destroy his sense of Puerto Rican nationality, which leads him to examine how his identity position as a black Puerto Rican complicates the dominant national and racial axes of identity in both the United States and Puerto Rico.

In the prologue, Piri Thomas states, ". . . I am here and I want recognition . . ." (ix). These simple words guide his work and continue to resurface in dialogues with himself, his family, his neighborhood, and his country as they express his need to be seen

and heard in a national culture that silences his voice. Thomas seeks a recognition from his family and society that he feels he has been denied his entire life. In his family life, for example, he reveals how at age 12 he already felt distanced from his family, especially his father. Eleuterio Santiago-Díaz and Ilia sRodríguez explore the family and the home as a site of conflict where Piri transgresses racial and national identity discourses that have historically been silenced in Latin America. They illuminate the ways in which the institution of family fails to recognize individual racial subjectivity by using national identity and language to suppress notions of black identity (Santiago-Díaz and Rodríguez 14). My analysis will approach the home as such an institution, one that, along with other social influences, makes it difficult for Piri to constitute his own identity. These institutions and ideological discourses shape Piri's subjectivity: how he sees himself and how he can successfully narrate that self. His context thus influences the external and internal definitions of who he is. To further elucidate, I will begin by analyzing the conflicting racial ideologies of the United States of America and Puerto Rico and the continued effect they have on how US Afro-Latinos define themselves.

The United States and Puerto Rico: Conflicting Racial Paradigms

The voice of Piri Thomas in *Down* represents the conflicts of national and racial identity as they converge in Harlem, New York in the twentieth century. As a young boy, Thomas had always thought of himself as a Puerto Rican, yet with the strict racial divide between white and black in the United States, he realizes that his nationality and race are not synonymous, which creates disjunction in the representation of his identity. As Thomas confronts his fragmented identity he comes to understand that the black/white

dichotomy of race in the United States not only fails to account for his identity but also collides with ideologies of racial whitening and colorblindness in the Puerto Rican national discourse reproduced by his family.

Arguably, Thomas's work anticipates the latter argument by revealing the complicated and contradictory nature of race in the first half of the twentieth century in the United States. Today, some scholars posit that the reforms implemented after the civil rights era have created conditions in which the black versus white model no longer accurately depicts race in the United States. However, scholars like Joe Feagin and Andrew Hacker continue to support the prevalence of the model:

> Feagin emphasizes the continued impact of anti-black racism in the United States and sees the black-white model as fundamental to understanding the oppression of other non-European groups, which he argues, is a direct outcome of white supremacy and the various institutions and practices initially developed to dominate blacks. (Gold 955)

Other scholars like Rita Chaudhry Sethi and Tomas Almaguer argue that the black-white binary system fails to recognize the impacts of race on other groups who are not white or black, such as Latinos. As Gold asserts, "a more nuanced understanding of racial inequality is achieved when the bipolar approach is replaced by one that comprehends the multiple and even contradictory nature of racial disadvantage and racial inequality in contemporary societies" (951).[11] Thomas's narrative of his identity as a black Puerto

[11] For a continued discussion, see Gold 951-968; Bonilla-Silva, 2001.

Rican man in the 1950s and ‘60s certainly offers a reflection that foreshadows this debate in the post-civil rights era.

When Puerto Rican migrants were confronted with a stricter definition of race in the United States, many chose to identify as white, as evidenced by the rising number of whites versus non-whites in the US census from 1802 to 2000 (Duany, *Puerto Rican Nation* 248). Accordingly, there was a significant drop from 52% non-white in 1802 to 20.3% in 1950. This decline is suggestive of an enactment of the ideology of whitening as a form of “bettering the race” that has historically been promoted in Puerto Rico. Jorge Duany argues that this drop references an “ideology of white supremacy and black inferiority [that] has prevailed since the days of colonial slavery” in both Puerto Rico and the United States (*Puerto Rican Nation* 246).

Piri Thomas was thus born into a cultural system where racial ideologies promoted the erasure or hiding of blackness under the guise of racial democracy, mestizaje, and class harmony. In this sense, in Puerto Rico there is a long history of color-blind ideology, a form of racial whitening, that suppresses discourse on racial difference and conflict to privilege national unity. As in much of Latin America, this ideology is cultivated across class sectors by economic and political elites to promote unity across the nation through institutions like schools and other cultural organization. At the discursive level, national unity–often signified through metaphors of nation as family or home–is promoted by elites and accepted by the popular sectors as a condition that defines national identity and benefits all members of society. However, at the structural level, it is an ideology that supports the kind of economic and political stability that best serves the class interests of the elites. Furthermore, this ideology hides the racial

inequality and racism that pervades national life. And when the importance of race is minimized through a color-blind ideology, the idealization of whiteness is not erased nor are its effects on Afro-Hispanic populations.

For instance, the *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega*, which narrates Vega's life as an immigrant in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, illustrates how the dominant discourse of color-blindness that manifested under the guise of Puerto Rican national unity is articulated by a member of the working class. As Vega states:

> No existía separación notable de color entre los núcleos poblacionales puertorriqueños. Especialmente en el sector de las calles 99 y 106 vivían no pocos paisanos negros. Algunos de éstos . . . se desplazaron hacia el barrio negro norteamericano. En los vecindarios puertorriqueños, como regla general, se vivía en armonía, sin tomarse cuenta las diferencias raciales. (49-50)

Interestingly, the idea that, in general, Puerto Ricans do not recognize racial difference, fails to explain why the men Vega refers to move closer to the African American neighborhood. Vega's self-contradictory discourse is a relevant intertext in Thomas's autobiography. Vega´s insistence on the racial harmony of Puerto Rican peoples is challenged by Thomas's representation of the tensions that arise in Piri's home when he exposes the African ancestry that his family continues to deny. At the same time, parallel to Vega's story about Afro-Puerto Ricans leaving the Puerto Rican neighborhood for African American neighborhoods, in Thomas's work the black Puerto Rican protagonist leaves his home after he exposes the color-blind ideologies operating in his culture and family and finds refuge and understanding as he integrates with the African American community.

According to Duany, the Puerto Rican island population tends to identify race in a broader color spectrum from white to brown and to black. The terminology to designate racial categories varies widely and is based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features. In the prologue, Thomas exemplifies Puerto Rican island racial definitions when he says: "I'm a skinny, dark-face, curly-haired, intense Porty-Ree-can" (x). Thomas's racial understandings, which have been passed on to him from his parents, resemble ideologies from island populations which embrace minor differences in appearance. However, Duany also points out that in contemporary mainland censuses, there appears to be a browning effect on the population as many Puerto Ricans choose to identify as Hispanic or Other rather than white. This may suggest, as we see with Piri, that when the two racial systems converge, many Afro-Hispanics reject the black/white paradigm and attempt to remain tied to island definitions.

However, we must also consider that the option to identify as Hispanic or Other is a rejection of the system of racial classification itself. In this way, by asserting a Hispanic identity or ethnicity over race, Puerto Ricans can remove any blackness and thus, confirm colorblind ideology or mestizaje, which is also another form of whitening. Mestizaje, as a project and identity position, has been used to unify disparate populations and affirm the ideology of whitening. Mestizaje has served to deny blackness and does not contribute to demands for equal rights. Thus, those who are mestizos in Puerto Rico and the United States tend to identify as white, like Piri's siblings, and those with dark skin identify as mestizos or assume a national identity.

In the next subsection, I will examine more closely the Puerto Rican discourse on national identity and how the image of the *jíbaro*, a symbol of Puerto Rican identity, was

used to propel literary and cultural whiteness under the guise of national cohesion in Puerto Rico. I will focus the discussion on how this discourse operates at the micro level in Thomas's narrative about his Puerto Rican family.

The Jíbaro and the Whitening of Puerto Rican National Identity

In Puerto Rican dominant discourse on national identity, the *jíbaro* or *campesino* (peasant) is represented as a poor, white, rural farmer or campesino (Kanellos). The figure of the Jíbaro became part of the foundational fiction of Puerto Rican culture in the nineteenth century. Since then, the image of the *jíbaros* and their agrarian culture entered art and literature to be exalted as central to Puerto Rican national identity. Poets like Miguel Cabrera and Manuel Alonzo first wrote about the *jíbaro* image in the early nineteenth century. This same image has resurfaced and redefined contemporary literature by twentieth century poets like Tato Laviera.

Lillian Guerra asserts that the image of the *jíbaro* that has become symbolic of a Puerto Rican ethos is an ideological construction of the Puerto Rican intellectual elite of the 1930s. This elite represented the vision and class interests of a creole bourgeoisie of descendants of *encomenderos/hacendados* or landowners under Spanish colonial rule who faced a new political position under US colonial rule.[12] Guerra states, "In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, images of the *jíbaro* emerged to signify the elite's cultural defiance of colonial mandates…" (47). Not only does the elite sector culturally appropriate the image of the *jíbaro*—ironically the sector of the labor force that was

[12] See also Rodríguez Castro, María Elena. "Tradición y modernidad: el intelectual puertorriqueño ante la década del treinta". Boletín del Centro de Investigaciones Históricas 3 (1987-1988): 45-65.

oppressed by the elite landowners themselves—but it also uses the *jíbaro* to combat US colonization of their own national identity. It is important to note that US control of Puerto Rico was originally welcomed by the local elites because of promised democratic and capitalist benefits. However, they became wary of the Americanization of their culture. Consequently, leading Puerto Rican intellectuals were seeking to find originality that would separate them culturally from both Spain and the United States, and hence the return to a creole image like that of the *jibaro* in order to construct a national identity.[13]

Once again, Bernardo Vega's memoirs provide us with intriguing insight into how this Puerto Rican imaginary is reproduced by members of the Puerto Rican working class after they emigrate to the United States. Vega immigrated to the United States in 1916. He was a Puerto Rican tobacco worker who then became a journalist and author. He arrived at a time of mass migration from Puerto Rico to the United States. His account of life in New York in the early twentieth century represents a population unlike Thomas's representations of Puerto Ricans in New York in the 1940s. While Thomas represents a lower-class Puerto Rican family whose father is constantly moving from job to job, and whose mother cannot work with the WPA which employs only heads of household, Vega describes himself as a skilled cigar worker, and as an intellectual based on his knowledge of the prominent literary and political figures of his time. In the opening of his first chapter, he states: "Era yo…Jíbaro de la montaña, era blanco, y en mi rostro había un matiz de cera, característico de los hombres de corazón de nuestra patria" (37). Vega

[13] Antonio Pedreira addresses this cultural appropriation in 1935 in his influential book *Insularismo.*

identifies himself as a *jíbaro* and correlates *patria* and whiteness at the heart of the national discourse of the *jíbaro*.

In Puerto Rico, the image of the *jíbaro*, as discussed here, conceals a differentiated ethnic history in Puerto Rico by homogenizing the general population. According to dominant ideology, true Puerto Ricans are either boricua or *jíbaro* at heart, both terms that erase African ancestry and mixed-racial heritage from Puerto Rico's identity discourse. José Luis González contends that by appropriating the *jíbaro* identity, Puerto Ricans have denied their African heritage. He suggests that elite intellectuals looked to a creole past in Puerto Rico to assuage their own fears of loss of power and capital, due to the economic changes brought about by US intervention. The people that were most affected by this new colonization in the early twentieth century were the creole bourgeoisie, and consequently it sought to reinstitute its values by reinterpreting their *jíbaro* past that was developed in the nineteenth century (González 47).

Accordingly, González refers to the literary development of the image of the *jíbaro* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a manifestation of racial and social prejudice against African culture and the reverence of colonial oppression. The discourse about the *jíbaro* paradoxically exalts the peasant populations and culture as the foundation of Puerto Rican identity while concealing the elite's exploitation of this same population and their dominance over the definition of such identity. Further, the same discourse that exalts the *jíbaro* and stresses harmony across classes obscures underlying racial ideologies

In *Down These Mean Streets*, for instance, Piri's mother enacts these ideals of class unity—in this case unity within the working class—as she explains how she views Puerto Rico:

> *Bueno hijo,* you have people everywhere who, because they have more, don't remember those who have very little. But in Puerto Rico those around you share *la pobreza* with you and they love you, because only poor people can understand poor people. (10)

Although her words challenge the dominant discourse on class unity by stressing difference between those who "have more" and those who "have very little," her characterization of Puerto Ricans still reinforces the notion of class over race as the main social identifier. As Guerra notes, the removal of race from the national imaginary was meant to consolidate communities based on class ideologies; however, it did so only with allegiance to ideals of whiteness (230).

Thomas's autobiography begins to confront and question these notions of class and *jíbaro* identity that adhere to cultural whiteness, as he gains awareness of race in the U.S and Puerto Rico. For example, the national discourse of the *jíbaro,* which obscures African heritage, is found at home when Piri confronts his brother José, and José denies any claim to African ancestry while insisting on his whiteness:

> I ain't black, damn you! Look at my hair. It's almost blond. My eyes are blue, my nose is straight. My motherfuckin' lips are not like a baboon's ass. My skin is white. White, goddamit! White! Maybe Poppa's a little dark, but that's the Indian blood in him. He's got white blood in him . . . (144).

The conversation continues back and forth between Piri and José, each one trying to prove his racial identity:

> "Poppa's the same as you," he [José] said, avoiding my eyes, "Indian."
>
> "What kinda Indian?" I said bitterly. "Caribe or maybe Borinquén? Say, José, didn't you know the Negro made the scene in Puerto Rico way back? And when the Spanish spics ran outta Indian coolies, they brought them big blacks from you know where. Poppa's got *moyeto* blood. I got it. Sis got it. James got it. And, mah deah brudder, you-all got it! . . . Like I said, man, that shit-ass poison I've been living with is on its way out. It's a played out lie about me—us—being white." (145)

Thomas's discourse references slavery in Puerto Rico and how invoking an indigenous or *jíbaro* past removes African ancestry from the national imagery. This conversation, and Piri's transgression of national identity boundaries, forces Piri to abandon his home and question his own feelings about the anger he directed toward José. This scene illuminates the conflicting dialogues between Puerto Rican and U.S. racial identity which have caused Piri's protest. In Puerto Rico, his mother, brothers, and sister would be seen as white because of their lighter skin color. And in New York, they continue to identify as white. However, in the United States Piri and his father are only seen as black by the dominant society, while José—following the image of national identity established by the Puerto Rican elite—sees them as Indian.

By speaking out against his own family's racial ideologies, which separate him and mark him as an outsider in his own home, Piri adheres to the US black versus white

paradigm while exposing the hypocrisy of Puerto Rican beliefs. In Puerto Rico, those with dark skin cannot be seen as black and instead are described as mestizo or mulato, which affirms whitening ideologies and denies blackness. Piri begins to pity himself because he can now only see himself as he is seen in the United States, and he can no longer hide under the blanket of supposed Puerto Rican inclusivity. After the conversation with José, Thomas asks his father: ". . . what's wrong with not being white? What's so wrong with being tregeño? ...We gotta have pride and dignity, Poppa; we gotta walk big and bad" (147). Having pride in his racial identity, a facet of his metaphorical heart explained later, allows Piri to accept who he is and to challenge the sense of inferiority imposed by the homogenizing image of the *jíbaro* as a symbol of Puerto Rican identity on the island and the mainland. Thomas can now define this ideology of whitening as a poison that has infected him and his family, as a "played out lie."

After this conversation, Thomas begins to see how maintaining the fabrications of whiteness, through discourses of Boricua or *jíbaro* identity, have affected him and his family. Despite discourses on racial democracy and national unity in Puerto Rico, Thomas would still be subject to racism and discrimination if he lived on the island. He recognizes that skin color is an indicator of worth to others, and he attempts to understand how this affects him psychologically. After all, in the United States, he is identified by his skin color and not his national identity. He urges José to "Ask any true *corazón* white motherfucker what the score is" (144). Thomas assigns "heart" to anyone who has the courage to admit that the black versus white racial paradigm exists in the United States and Puerto Rico, and that this system continues to subjugate anyone identified as having

African ancestry. In doing so, Thomas challenges Puerto Ricans to question their own racial ideologies to end this cycle of oppression.

In much the same way as in *Klabel* home was associated with Garífuna identity, the house is used in *Down* as a metaphor for Puerto Rican national ideology. The conflict among family members at home symbolizes the racial conflicts that have been negated in the discourse about nation that supports the political domination of white creole elites. A discourse of national cohesion under the guise of Puerto Rican identity blinds the nation to the social structures that underlie discrimination. Much like Gracielita, a character from *Las criadas de La Habana* by Pedro Pérez Sarduy, who once in the United States begins to retrospectively see Cuba in all its hypocrisy, Thomas's understanding of hidden racial discourses in Puerto Rican culture reaches its apex while living in the United States.

Santiago-Díaz and Rodríguez postulate that in Puerto Rico the establishment of a literary canon founded on the house and family as symbols of the nation leads to the suppression of racial difference lest it can undermine notions of national unity (1206). In Thomas's autobiography, the apogee of this silencing of Afro-Latino discourses is revealed in the fight between Piri and his father with the home as the space of contradiction. After this confrontation, Thomas's house begins to deteriorate; his father leaves his mother and the relationship between the siblings changes. Symbolically, as Thomas's house falls apart, so do ideas of Puerto Rican national unity. His forced departure from the house reveals the consequences inherent in the expression of a racialized discourse. In this sense, *Down These Mean Streets* stands out as a narrative that

makes a radical departure from the social and literary norms that have typically supported ideologies of whitening in Puerto Rico and the United States.

The disruption of the silenced racial discourses that have subjugated Afro-Hispanics in Latin America gave rise to Thomas's new racial awareness. Thomas refuses to silence his feelings about whitening and homogenization and assumes a radical opposition to all rules and hierarchical ideas that subjugate him, and others like him. He must leave his family after he reveals his father's own negation of racist and assimilationist tendencies during a violent confrontation between the two:

> "Damn you, I'll teach you," he yelled. I'm throwing you out of this house and you come back no more. Talking like you came from some goddamned cotton field."
>
> "Is that where you came from, Pops?" I teased him. "Ain't that what bugs you? Ain't that what bugs the hell out of you, Mistuh Blanco in natural black-face? Let me go, Pops, or I'll put my knee in your phony white balls." (198)

Thomas's father emphasizes the separation between Puerto Ricans and African Americans by iterating the dramas of slavery, as referenced by the cotton field. In his attempt to distance himself and his family from any African ancestry, he reinforces the whitening of Puerto Rican national identity. Thomas rejects this whiteness by redefining his Puerto Rican identity and embracing his blackness. The attempted consolidation of a national and racial identity in the figure of Piri Thomas thus provides Afro-Puerto Ricans with a voice that challenges discrimination and the impositions of racial inferiority.

In the following section, I will argue that the economic crisis of the 1930s and '40s along with heightened racial tensions in Harlem, NY, complicate Thomas's

discourse on Puerto Rican identity. The ways in which these processes are represented highlight how these conditions shaped the identities of Afro-Hispanic American youth. Furthermore, an analysis of Thomas's discourse surrounding government relief programs dispels the myth of class harmony promoted in Puerto Rico. I suggest that Thomas posits a more racially and ethnically defined identity discourse that alludes to his continued challenge to the dominant discourse on Puerto Rican nationality. As Piri explores the poverty that surrounds his family, he finds a mirror or parallel conditions in other Hispanic and African American cultures, which propels a more critical understanding of his own class and racial predicament.

Economic Depression, Government Relief, and the Beginnings of an Afro-Hispanic Identity among Puerto Ricans in New York

Thomas's family arrived from Puerto Rico in the late 1920's and Piri was born in Harlem in 1928. His parents joined many other Puerto Ricans who migrated to the United States during the first decades of the twentieth century in search of greater economic stability at a time of consolidation of US colonial control over Puerto Rico. After the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898, it was not until the passing of the Jones Act in 1917, that Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship and were then eligible to serve in the U.S. military. This decision was not a coincidence, but rather a measure that responded to the US government's interest in recruiting soldiers for World War I.

Although Puerto Rico played a key role in the protection of the geopolitical and economic interests of the United States, the US government's interest in the political and economic development of Puerto Rico was limited. For instance, Puerto Ricans living on

the island were denied the right to vote for President of the United States, and Puerto Rico remained underrepresented in U.S. government affairs, a condition that had direct effects on the island's political participation and access to federal resources. Ultimately, US policies and laws, like the Jones Act, guaranteed a continued colonial status, ambiguous political position, and dependent economic development of Puerto Rico.

Not only did US control affect political and economic conditions, it also impacted Puerto Ricans' own redefinition of their cultural and national identity. With the transition from Spanish to US colonialism, Puerto Rico's creole intellectual and political elites—now playing a subordinate position to US governmental business interests—continued to affirm their identification with the Spanish language and cultural heritage as the main markers of a distinct national identity, as seen in the promotion of the *jíbaro* image discussed earlier. According to Lillian Guerra, the creole elite's discourse on Puerto Rican identity was built upon a presumed discourse of US racist colonizers who operated on a white/black binary and espoused a different racial ideology (228). Nonetheless, despite their differences, both ideologies centered on whiteness as an anchor of identity. Guerra states:

> …By asserting that classism, rather than racism, was to blame for their subordinate condition, *these people effectively proved their own whiteness* and simultaneously distinguished themselves from darker members of the popular classes as more worthy of access to the socioeconomic power controlled by the white elite (230; emphasis in original).

Consequently, classism rather than racism is blamed as the key cause of discrimination, thus reinforcing the suppression of a discourse on African heritage and identity even within the diaspora of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

In effect, the passing of the Jones Act created a new wave of Puerto Rican immigrants who traveled to the United States and were confronted with discrimination; much of it due to language, racial, cultural, and political differences. The immigrants were exploited economically as labor and forced to live in segregated neighborhoods. According to Bernardo Vega, there were 16,000 Hispanics in New York upon his arrival in 1916, with 6,000 being Puerto Rican (49). Between 1945 and 1965, nearly one quarter of the total population of Puerto Rico had immigrated to the United States (Duany, "Nation on the Move" 13). Spanish Harlem housed the majority of Puerto Rican immigrants along with others from the Caribbean and other Spanish speaking countries. These neighborhoods allowed for social solidarity among residents that maintained language and cultural ties to their home countries. However, with the substantial number of immigrants arriving from Puerto Rico, anti-Puerto Rican discourse intensified. For example, Vega chastises First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for her overestimate of tuberculosis on the island and in New York because it reinforced a negative stereotype of Puerto Rican immigration as a public health threat. As Vega recalls, discrimination during the early twentieth century was often justified on the basis of a discourse that described Puerto Ricans as criminals and paupers (251). He states:

> Entre otros infundios, el articulista aseguraba que de cada 18 puertorriqueños que llegaba ni uno solo resultaba bueno…diez iban a vivir de la caridad pública, uno era tuberculoso, dos padecían de malaria, tres eran sifilíticos, y los dos restantes

> venían a vivir en concubinato…Los puertorriqueños negros resultaban todavía peor. Estos sencillamente eran agentes de perdición y de vicio entre los negros norteamericanos. (251)

Per Vega's discourse, discrimination against Puerto Ricans, and even more so concerning black Puerto Ricans, served to increase tensions among racial and ethnic groups in the early twentieth century. Thomas's autobiography represents the conditions of discrimination in New York in the 1930s and 1940s as produced by dominant discourses on immigrants and African Americans. Because Puerto Rican neighborhoods were juxtaposed with other ethnic groups and neighborhoods, conflict was a daily occurrence in Piri's young life. The impoverished neighborhoods they were forced to live in for lack of financial resources, and the lack of building maintenance on the part of property owners is presented as evidence of such discrimination. I see the representation of these conditions early on in Piri's life, as he describes freezing conditions at home, and the filthy conditions that cause the death of one of the local boys.

Thomas narrates his life at a time in which racial tensions were high due to the legalized discrimination of Jim Crow laws and their resonance, as African Americans continued to suffer well into the twentieth century. Just six years before Thomas writes about his appearance in the home relief office—part of the governmental distribution of aid to those in need—to ask for more resources, Harlem went through the Race Riot of 1935, and yet another riot in 1943. "With Harlem being one of the worst hit communities in America during the Great Depression and with racial tensions mounting, it took only one spark of misunderstanding to set off the tinderbox that became the Harlem Race Riot of 1935" (Gabbidon, et. al. 333).

These tensions did not dissipate overnight, as illustrated by Thomas's life story. However, the political climate was beginning to change because of pressure from African American advocacy groups who sought transformation. In 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt, under compulsion from A. Philip Randolph, issued Executive Order 8802. The order attempted to eliminate racial discrimination in the federal wartime defense industry. In Thomas's autobiography, 1944 is the year that his family moved to Long Island because his father was succeeding at his job in an unnamed airplane factory, possibly a federal defense program. Still the conflicts between blacks, whites, Puerto Ricans, Jews, and Italians continue to resurface after the family's move from Harlem to Long Island. In fact, in Long Island, Thomas confronts harsh discrimination at school by his teachers and classmates, which ultimately leads to his decision to return to Harlem. Therefore, even as strides are being made to eliminate racial prejudice, governmental programs and executive orders did little to reduce hatred on the micro level.

With the onset of the Great Depression, The Works Progress Administration and the Home Relief programs created under president Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration provided many of the jobs available to the communities in Harlem from 1935 to 1943. A relief roll was created with the names of all the men and women who due to unemployment and poverty needed aid, such as food and clothing. Based upon this relief roll, men and women were chosen for work with the WPA. About 90% of the people chosen for work were already on the relief roll and receiving aid. All the same

because of racial and ethnic tensions, black men and women faced discrimination in their attempts to receive aid from these social services.[14]

Various episodes narrated by Piri represent the conditions of discrimination faced by working class people during this time, although his narrative does not directly recount racial discrimination that he and his family may have suffered. For example, in the beginning of the book, Thomas states: "He [Poppa] lost his night job—I forget why, and probably it was worth forgetting—and went back on home relief" (8). He continues, "But there was still the good old WPA. If a man was poor enough, he could dig a ditch for the government. Now Poppa was poor enough again" (8). The narration of this first incident silences any direct discussion of discrimination at work based upon race or ethnicity as a cause for his father losing his job. The narrative does, however, represent the disadvantaged economic and social conditions that the Thomas family endured.

In other scenes, Thomas does address racial discrimination and the racial ideologies through which his father navigated. Through the voice of Piri's father, the author alludes to the racism faced by the father and how he replicated it. In this scene, the father, in a dialogue with Piri, states that he has no African American friends:

> I ain't got one colored friend…at least not one American Negro friend. Only dark ones I got are Puerto Ricans or Cubans. I'm not a stupid man. I saw the look of the white people on me…I noticed their cold rejection turned into indifferent acceptance when they heard my exaggerated accent. I can remember the time

[14] See Cheryl Greenberg. "*Or Does it Explode?": Black Harlem in the Great Depression.* Oxford UP, 1997.

> when I made my accent heavier, to make me more of a Puerto Rican than the most Puerto Rican there ever was . . . . (153)

His father has clearly experienced North American racism and because of this he attempts to use his Puerto Rican accent to conceal his blackness, a tactic that in effect reinforces white superiority and black inferiority. He even speaks about his attempt to use the argument that he has Indian blood, the same discourse iterated by his other son José. Thomas's father thus negotiates his identity as he moves through US society to gain a slight advantage, a temporary shift in power.

Another story of discrimination towards Thomas's father refers to a time when Piri and his mother had to go to the Home Relief office to beg for clothing, food and other necessities because his father had lost his job: "It was something about Poppa having lost his job with the WPA. Poppa was saying that foreman or no foreman, he wasn't gonna take crap from nobody" (41). His mother reinforces this point as she tells the investigator in the Relief Office that her husband's boss "le tenía antipatía," or had something against him (44).

Antonio Ford suggests that the racial tensions of 1930s Harlem made it more difficult for black men and women to succeed during the depression:

> While dealing with mounting obstacles such as inadequate health care, poor education, and mounting poverty, blacks also had to face discrimination that made it harder for them to receive any of the limited social services that were available

> at the time. If there was assistance in the form of health care, food, or jobs, it was offered to the White community first. (333)[15]

Thomas's representation of his trip to the Home Relief office and the conversations he overheard offers a glimpse into the subjective experience of poor people of color as they interacted with the governmental bureaucracy in charge of distribution of goods and employment.

While at the Home Relief Office, Piri describes one woman, Mrs. Romero, as she pleads with the investigator to make him believe that she truly does need aid. He sees this woman's pleading as "too close to my people's: taking with outstretched hands and resenting it in the same breath" (43). Thomas identifies with this woman's struggle for survival, maybe in part because she is Hispanic, as her name suggests, and because he sees his father constantly going between Home Relief and WPA (40). By connecting with Mrs. Romero, he suggests a form of ethnic identification among Hispanics (i.e. his "own people") as well as class solidarity as it extends to others in his financial situation who are driven to beg for basic necessities. The representation of these alliances among working class subjects echoes to some extent the Puerto Rican national discourse that suppresses racial difference in favor of class cohesion. Yet, by focusing on working class solidarity, it challenges the homogenizing notions of national unity that glosses over class differences in the dominant discourse.

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[15] For a complete discussion of economic and racial disparities during Great Depression in Harlem, see Greenberg, 1992.

Further, Piri quickly turns his attention to a “colored woman” who is pleading with a different investigator, a Mr. Rowduski. Thomas quotes Mrs. Powell’s words much like he does for his African American friend Brew, with specific apostrophic inclusions and phonetic spelling, a technique I will discuss later. This woman appears to be cheating the system and telling the investigator that her husband no longer lives with them so that she can receive more aid. She states, “What you-all mean, man? ... That Ah’m taking help frum you-all an’ hit ain’t legal? . . .” (43). He even reveres Mrs. Powell for her ability to “put up a defense that would have made any trial lawyer proud” (44).

Regardless of race, the lower classes had to defend themselves against investigators who consistently doubted their words and refused them aid. These women are stuck between Home Relief and the WPA, much like his family. Accordingly, in the family qualified, the head of household was the only one hired for work. Because of this fact, the women were forced either to seek work elsewhere or not work at all. For Thomas, his mother stayed at home with the children while his father worked full time in poor and often freezing conditions. This patriarchal system effectively forces these families to suffer, even if the circumstances are not of their own making.

In the Home Relief narratives, in which Thomas juxtaposes African American suffering with Hispanic suffering, he shows readers two sides to Home Relief recipients and empathizes with both, and in doing so, implicitly begins to show the two sides of his own identity. However, it is early on in his racial understandings and the development of his own racial identity at this point in his narrative.

The story of Thomas’s family is illustrative of the turmoil that many suffered under the Great Depression. Thomas recounts the various times that he had been to the

Home Relief Office and how each person that he saw there seemed to struggle to receive what he or she needed. He criticizes the Home Relief program because it strips away the people's dignity. Piri thinks to himself, "*Damn,* I thought, *don't beg that* maricón, *don't get on your knees no more, Momma"* (45). He paints a picture of the very subjective experience of being a recipient of the Home Relief system. These scenes illustrate that these programs allowed investigators to discriminate against people of color.

As Piri and his mother leave the office, Thomas offers one last elliptical insight about racial and ethnic dynamics.[16] He begins to narrate how his father was best at haggling for better prices, while his mother would just accept whatever the vendors gave her and never argued. His father had taught him to distrust the vendors and to always fight. This scene echoes the prior scenario in the Home Relief Office. Thomas clandestinely correlates his father's distrust with his own distrust for the Home Relief investigator. Alluding to how the investigator previously stated that he spoke Spanish, Piri echoes, his father's statement that vendors learn to say *cómo estás* "to win the people's confidence and gyp them in their own language" (46). Thomas begins to correlate his past experiences with his father's experiences. His father is the man who taught Piri to question other people's motives, yet any mention of racial oppression was silenced here. In spite of this, the last words of this chapter offer a clue: "I wondered if Poppa didn't like Jews the way I didn't like Italians" (46). Elliptically, Thomas refers to his reaction to the racial hatred that the Italians showed him and to the historical tension between Jews and African Americans[17].

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[16] For a more detailed explanation of elliptical discourse see Santiago-Díaz pp.83-84
[17] See: West, Cornell. "On Black-Jewish Relations." *Race Matters*, Vintage Books, 2001, pp. 103–116.

Although he silences the discourse on racial hatred, when the passage is read alongside the previous chapter it becomes clear: Thomas orders these chapters to slowly expose his racial awakening, just as it was happening to him. Just as Juan Francisco Manzano ordered his *Autobiografía* to highlight his awakening to the injustices of slavery and racism, so does Piri Thomas. As a young man, he had yet to grasp how this part of his identity was going to affect him. It is written as if the author is taking this same journey along with readers, piecing together past moments, and separating himself from the protagonist. It illustrates how these governmental programs reproduce discrimination, which alongside impoverished conditions and a racially charged climate in the neighborhoods, leads Thomas to question who he is and how he will define himself.

In this self-examination, Thomas attempts to control his subjectivity and circumstances by employing metaphors that represent the modern culture that guides his episteme. The next sections of this chapter explore two main metaphors in Thomas's discourse of racial and national identity: metaphors of darkness and heart. They serve to illuminate the ways in which he represents his own personal oppression in a white versus black dichotomy in the United States, and these metaphors are also the tools through which he challenges the everyday transgressions he experiences.

Heart and Darkness as Modern Resistance to Oppression

Heart, so named by Thomas and his surrounding environment, is a persistent symbol in his autobiography. The definition of heart is never explicitly articulated and is usually obscured by the tumultuous events that precede and follow events in Thomas's

life. However, heart is referenced in almost every chapter of his work in some form. Symbolically, heart is complex and multifaceted. Found in this symbol are Thomas's ideas of courage, anger, *hombre* (masculinity or manhood), dignity, belonging, and reputation. In many instances, heart is used as a defense mechanism to protect Thomas from imposed silences or emotional harm. When heart is juxtaposed with modern ideals of rational thinking, individual self-interest, progress, civilization and modernization, I see that the two sets of ideas relate. Acting with heart or from the heart is called for when progress, civilization, and national moral values are being undermined or contradicted, which posits a need for a humanitarian redefinition of modern society that would offer dignity and equality to all.

To begin, when Piri has a violent encounter with some Italian boys who live in his neighborhood, they immediately begin to conjecture about his race and nationality. They accuse him of being "black enuff to be a nigger," although Thomas insists upon his Puerto Rican nationality. This leads to a fight because Piri defends himself by offending the leader of these boys, Rocky. After this fight, Piri returns home and decides that even if he was "shook up" he was going to go back out in the street after dinner because "…cats like me had to show heart" (27). Thomas begins to show that how he responds to threats of violence and racial discrimination is mediated by the performance of heart and, consequently, the decolonization of modern ideals of civilization, rationality, and morality. Thomas's own concepts of modernity and progress are based upon true equality, and he fights for these ideals every day with heart. When he faces his aggressors directly he can overcome the oppression and cheat death, or at least obtain a momentary transcendence.

Similarly, this passage alerts the reader to the place that the Italian boys occupy in the racial hierarchy with respect to the black boys. The Italian boys intend to put Piri in his place, i.e. at the bottom of the social pyramid. Acts of aggression such as these are representative of the coloniality of modern Harlem. The attempts to define Thomas as a black man serve to reinforce their power, or at the very least serve as a temporary moment of power for these boys. In response to their threats, the phrase "cats like me" obscures Thomas's identity, highlighting his resistance to others' deliberate definition of him as inferior. At this point in the autobiography, Thomas does not define himself as black or American, but rather as a Puerto Rican. After this physical and psychological attack, Thomas is forced to reconsider himself based on how others see him, and a dialectic between external and internal self-representation ensues.

Whereas in the United States racial identity is defined by hypodescent, or the one drop rule, in Puerto Rico as in much of Latin America, race is described phenotypically based on physical appearance (Duany, *Puerto Rican Nation* 258). The dichotomous understandings of race in the United States, i.e. black versus white, historically have not coincided with the racial ideology in Puerto Rico. Correspondingly, since he initially viewed himself as a Puerto Rican dark skinned man, Thomas, must now try to transition from his family's values to broader society's definitions of race in the United States. He attempts to defend against racially oriented attacks, which seek to undermine and define his subjectivity with the symbolic use of heart.

Heart is a powerful tool that functions to mediate racial tensions on the streets of Harlem. Heart can be found at the core of Piri's identity discourse. For Piri, having heart means that he can be more than just his racial identity, as demonstrated in the following

scenes. When one of the Italian boys, Tony, says that he and his friends are going to "kick the shit" out of Piri, he replies: "'Kick the shit outta me yourself if you got any heart, you motherfuckin' fucker,' I screamed at him. I felt kind of happy, the kind of feeling that you get only when you got heart" (31). In this instance, heart represents courage and defiance, the kind of courage it takes to confront your oppressors and the kind of courage needed to fight a fair fight. Here, Piri fights off his own metaphorical death based upon the assumption that he would have won this fight if it were one on one. In his modern world, the progress of minorities towards equality is dictated by street justice and ruled by heart.

As the fight raged on between Piri and his aggressors, each boy tries to prove how much heart he has by not backing down and by getting back up when they get knocked down. When Tony decides not to fight fair and throws asphalt into Piri's eyes, his heart is called into question and the fight ceases. All of Tony's friends berate him saying "…you could've fucked him up fair and square" (32). This fight is the beginning of a truce between the boys as they recognize the heart that Piri had showed in the fight. "'He got much heart for a nigger,' somebody else said. A spic, I thought. 'For anybody,' Rocky said." (32). This rule of the street is one by which all the boys live, regardless of color or ethnicity. Here we see that, symbolically, heart attempts to temporarily alleviate racial prejudice in much the same way that Puerto Rican nationalism had promised. Heart is a solidifying and unifying principle that functions to move the narrative along while highlighting a twentieth century modern ideology as seen by those excluded from the hegemonic discourse. Therefore, heart becomes central to the culture of Harlem.

Yet, even as Rocky and Piri have attempted to function outside of racial discourse, Thomas's narrative suggests a link to the racially charged atmosphere present in boxing in the United States in the 1940s and '50s. After the first encounter with Rocky, Thomas represents himself as a black boxer when he recounts the story to his father. He states:

> He [Piri's father] sat down on the stoop and made a motion for me to do the same. He listened and I talked. I gained confidence. I went from a tone of being shook up by the Italians to being a better fighter than Joe Louis and Pedro Montanez lumped together, with Kid Chocolate thrown in for extra. (28)

Thomas sees himself as the black boxer in this battle. Historically, Joe Louis was defeated by Rocky Marciano, an Italian boxer who was celebrated for his fights with African American fighters. In the historical context represented in the autobiography, boxing was seen as an arena outside of race or above it, yet in US culture the boxers that Piri mentions were codified as symbols of the black race. So, the conflicts between Italians and blacks were already racially codified, and not even heart could exempt Thomas from that. Thus, the fights between Piri and Rocky remain a naïve attempt to place himself and others outside of racial discourse.

From the onset of the interactions with the Italian boys, Piri is being excluded from the imaginary of US national identity. One of the boys assumes that if Thomas is black, he is somehow not American; he is stripped of national belonging. If a national identity, as Ernest Renan defines it, is based upon a concordance of shared values (and shared losses), culture, history and language, how can African American populations be external to American identity? It is only through the persistent reinforcement of the racial hierarchy of coloniality in modern culture that this occurs. The interactions between the

boys expose what David Punter describes as "the fear that, in the midst of the modern state, other languages are being spoken and are being made to carry a freight of resistance to modernity…" (88). In this way, the boys see Thomas as a challenge to hegemony and modernity because of his skin color and his language. The interactions between the Italian boys and Thomas highlight the alterity of the Italian population as well. Even as, facilitated by their whiteness, they attempt to assimilate to North American identity they themselves are excluded based upon their language and socio-economic status, as evidenced by their acceptance and utilization of heart as a discourse of inclusion and resistance to marginalization.

Heart offers transcendence. According to Punter, modernity "attempts to deny or circumvent death in its assertion of temporary transcendence, in its embarrassed rejection of ageing, it offers instead a series of snapshots of 'favourite moments' where everybody is young and beautiful" (208). This discourse of modernity is represented in the interplay of death, transcendence and idyllic memories at the foundation of the symbolic use of heart within *Down.* Thomas provides his readers with an idyllic version of himself; a tough, strong man in every aspect of his life, *un hombre*. His heart is what makes Piri a man and helps him fight his fears.

In chapter 3 entitled "Playing it Smooth," the narrator, explores the idea of death when a boy on his street, Dopey they called him, dies after drinking the water that accumulated in the gutters. He avers: "I thought about death, that bogeyman we all knew as kids, which came only to the other guy, never to you. You would live forever. There in front of Dopey's very small, very cheap coffin I promised myself to live forever; that no matter what, I'd never die" (15). In this scene, Thomas confronts death head on and

refuses to acknowledge that he too will die. He and his friends play with the idea of death, and Piri even acts out his own dramatic death. He states that "It was all a part of becoming *hombre*" (16). I argue that heart is used symbolically to fight off and transcend the threat of death that constantly surrounds Thomas, whether it be from the impoverished living conditions, discrimination, or the hostility he encounters from other gangs or cliques in Harlem and throughout the US in the 1930s through the 1950s. In conjunction with the idea of 'becoming *hombre*', heart is a way of life, or rather the only way of life. As a result, heart is closely linked to national and racial discourses surrounding masculinity. Heart is a symbol of masculinity in that it prescribes how men are to (re)act in the modern world. Masculinity as represented by heart and being *hombre* silences the anger, fear, and hatred caused by racism and nationalism.

Similarly, the metaphorical interplay between darkness and light tracks Piri's racial awareness and silences the negativity of his context. For Thomas, darkness erases the hierarchical conditions of humanity and allows him to navigate his own subjectivity, albeit momentarily. This darkness was created during slavery, as described by Juan Francisco Manzano when he employs darkness as a metaphor for his ignorance. Whereas for Manzano the darkness was oppressive, for Thomas, who has inherited that darkness, it is as a means of escape and a tool for reflection. I submit that as the narrative progresses, the metaphor of darkness shifts parallel to Thomas's own identity discourse.

Our introduction to the protagonist, Piri Thomas, runs parallel to the description of poverty that surrounds him. Thomas is raised in Harlem in New York, in a low-income, Spanish-speaking sector. His father works, and his mother raises the children. The first memory that Piri shares is one of solitude and displacement from his own home.

Piri runs away from home and encounters scenes of drug abuse which presage his own destiny. Piri's home life causes him to leave and run into the arms of his "warm amigo darkness". Thomas uses the darkness to hide all that separates him from the world culturally, racially and economically. As the narrative progresses, I see how this darkness, a place that shapes his identity, one that he struggles to come to terms with, is also one that allows him a space from which to analyze his own worth and contemplate his life.

Thomas's warm *amigo* darkness guides his racial transformation from a young Puerto Rican boy to a black Puerto Rican man as he expands his worldview to include his peers and broader society. From the prologue, Thomas uses darkness as a metaphor that silences or conceals the hate and anger that leads him to feel subjected to a marginalized group identity.

> Man! How many times have I stood on the rooftop of my broken-down building at night and watched the bulb-lit world below. Like somehow it's different at night, this my Harlem. There ain't no bright sunlight to reveal the stark naked truth of garbage-lepered streets. Gone is the drabness and hurt, covered by a friendly night. It makes clean the dirty-faced kids. […] Yee-ah! I feel like part of the shadows that make company for me in this warm *amigo* darkness. (ix)

He uses darkness as an equalizer that erases difference by the removal of light. In the darkness, as he mentions on various occasions, he does not feel his pain in much the same way he does in the light. In the light, Thomas is forced to confront the truth of his social standing because the cruelty of Spanish Harlem is revealed. However, in the dark, he is invisible, and as Ralph Ellison states: "Invisibility, let me explain, gives one a slightly

different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind. Instead of the swift and imperceptible flowing of time, you are aware of its nodes, those points where time stands still or from which it leaps ahead" (8). Darkness represents an invisibility, one that slows time down and allows Piri to contemplate, to transcend his circumstance. In this way, darkness functions as a symbol in order to resist the inhumane aspects of modernity, and one that circumvents death as heart does.

This same invisibility is described when Thomas's father moves with his family out of Harlem to suburbia, and Piri realizes that he prefers Harlem because it has life at night, because in Harlem one can seek respite in the form of darkness. By comparison, Babylon, in Long Island, is devoid of the same life, or escape. There is no escaping the cruelty of the racial divide in Babylon. Thomas refers to it as "white and sticky, and tasteless . . ." (105). But Harlem, he argues is a swinging place:

> In the daytime Harlem looks kinda dirty and the people a little drab and down. But at night, man, it's a swinging place, especially Spanish Harlem. The lights transform everything into life and movement and *blend the different colors* into a magic cover-all that makes the drabness and garbage, wailing kids and tired people invisible. (105; emphasis added)

The artificial light of Harlem at night offers a cloak of invisibility to its dwellers. Thomas sees this as the only way to truly live without being seen as an outsider. There is no escape to be found in suburbia where Thomas is constantly categorized as being black. His race is used as a tool of oppression by the other children and the night in Babylon

offers no life, no rhythm, just a bland homogenous hegemonic light where he is exposed to hatred and loosely veiled discrimination.

The metaphor of darkness is used as a veil that can hide truths. At night, when the streets are full of life, the poverty and the filth are hidden, and the people of Harlem can enjoy their lives. On the other hand, absence of darkness is a world that is virtually unknown to Piri and other marginalized African descendants. This world of sunlight is oppressive and stratified. It is as if Thomas, and by extension other Afro-Puerto Rican men and women, were constantly seeking truth and light but were consistently denied that right. Consequently, in the light they cannot define their own identities, which are constantly defined for them. Brew, Thomas's African American friend touches on the inequality he faced in the Southern United States, a place where segregation and racial tensions run high. Brew recounts how the education system was not designed for everyone:

> Naw, man, schooling was for few in my country […] Near Mobile, Alabama. Won't say where, man, 'cause I almost forgot its fuckin' name. A black man there could appreciate what a boot in the ass and in the chest at the same time can be. But a lot of black men couldn't dig that style. Some left for here, and others hadda leave. Anyway, my mom showed me some lessons she figured would keep me and my brothers alive. Kind of an ABC. (133)

In this dialogue between Piri and Brew, Brew reveals many of the fears of being a black person in the South during the first half of the twentieth century. He touches on the fact that he was unable to attend school and how his mother only taught him how to speak and obey, and how to, "A-accept, B-behave, and C-care" or what he refers to as his ABC's.

From an early age, Brew was taught that he would have to accept his marginal position and the hatred that white men and women would direct towards him. He was not allowed to stand up for himself, but to behave and above all to care for those who hate him. His mother knew what he would encounter and tried to keep him safe. The experiences in which he had to use his ABC's are ones which Brew would rather forget. Brew is attempting to hide part of his identity in order to evade any repercussions from the last incident he had when he still lived in Alabama. He is silencing his past in order to keep his distance and save himself. In the same conversation, Brew states that his mother wanted him to believe that we are all God's children and that we must care and share. In response to this Brew says, "Poor mom…We shared awright [sic]—*white men got the sun and we got a black night*" (134; emphasis added). Brew uses the metaphor of day and night to represent his struggles between white and black.

This is a recurrent theme in Thomas's work. The representation of black marginalization is posited as constantly in the dark, never allowed to achieve success or grow in the light of the sun. According to Brew, in the mid-twentieth century United States, people of color have been denied access to quality education, relegated to impoverished districts, and deprived of job opportunities. This same point is iterated by Thomas when he helps his mother obtain aid from the Home Relief administration and when he reveals the trouble his father has with the WPA. Similarly, when Piri applies for a job as door to door salesman, he is denied a position because of his skin color. He is told by the hiring agent that they will call him when an additional territory opens up, but it is revealed later that his white friend was hired immediately and that many other black

men had been denied that same opportunity. The lack of equality forces Piri into the darkness, where he can hide and forget.

At the end of the autobiography, following his arrest and incarceration for attempted robbery and for shooting an officer, Piri has been deemed eligible for release by the parole board in prison and as a result, he hopes to help others with the knowledge that he has gained. Upon his release from prison, he notes: "Inside, the dizziness of being free was like a night that changed into day; all the shadows became daylight sharp" (319). Thomas now "sees the light" of his circumstance. He can no longer hide inside the darkness and silence of his hatred and confusion if he wishes to remain free. He expresses his transformation using the metaphor of darkness, which in this case represents his past indiscretions, his former self who struggled to come to terms with his identity. Yet, we do see that in the days following his return to society he is not quite prepared for a life in the light.

Piri retreats to his *tía's* apartment and hides away once again, "I pushed my way to the window, pulled the light cord and hid from myself in the friendly darkness" (322). He had spent most of his adolescent life trapped in what he calls his warm *amigo* darkness. In the dark, he finds peace, solitude, and freedom from injustice. However, once he has been offered a piece of the sunlight, he struggles to come to terms with his situation, to accept the modern world he lives in. The dichotomy between dark and light, reveals his own personal dialectic. He wants to be successful, yet he knows that doing so will be more difficult, in light of the discrimination he will continue to suffer. He knows, much like Brew knew, that the world of light is part of the hegemonic discourse that restricts access to those of color. Once in the light, Piri must recognize society for what it

is and use his voice to change the treatment that many Afro-Hispanics and African Americans are made to suffer.

Discursive Masks of Resistance and Acceptance of Racial Paradigms

In this section, I will explore how Thomas uses African American and Puerto Rican vernacular as a discursive mask to resist or accept ideas of blackness. In his book, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance,* Houston A. Baker describes two types of discursive masks that Afro-American writers, as well as other artists, use to either conceal or advertise their purpose. He distinguishes between cryptic masks—mastery of form—and phaneric masks—deformation of mastery. "The mastery of form conceals, disguises, floats like a trickster butterfly in order to sting like a bee" (50), whereas, the ". . . phaneric mask is meant to advertise. It distinguishes rather than conceals" (51). I posit that Piri Thomas's language choice fluctuates between these two masks. At times, Thomas employs a phaneric mask by representing African American language with phonetic and apostrophic lenses, as well as Spanish and American slang. At other times, Thomas uses a cryptic mask, especially towards the end of his autobiography, when he writes about his newly rehabilitated state. I argue that his language choices form part of the *sounds* of African American modernism that Baker has described. However, Thomas's modernism is one that seeks to combine African American sounds with Puerto Rican ones, or rather his modern vision of himself and other "cats" like him.

To explain the idea of masks, Baker refers to the "the mastery of the minstrel mask by blacks that constitutes a primary move in Afro-American discursive modernism" (47). Baker refers to the writer's ability, in this case using Booker T. Washington as an

example, to use stereotypical nonsense language and actions of black minstrel shows to transform "the mask and its sounds into a negotiable discursive currency…" (24). In other words, the authors of the Harlem Renaissance have used the minstrel nonsense as a marker that signifies African American adherence to dominant discourses to a broader audience and yet provides those authors with a means for African American advancement. Baker explains:

> I have suggested that the *sound* emanating from the mask reverberates through a white American discursive universe as the sound of the Negro. If it is true that myth is the detritus of ritual, then the most clearly identifiable atavistic remains of minstrelsy are narrative or stories of ignorant and pathetically comic brutes who speak nonsense syllables. (22)

Arguably, the remains of this minstrel performance can be found in many of the representations of African Americans in *Down These Mean Streets,* and in the (re)production of Piri Thomas the protagonist. Thomas's autobiography can be defined as a bildungsroman, or a coming of age story, of our picaresque narrator. Piri is a humorous character who employs Spanish vocabulary and represents an African American discourse. Much like Washington, Thomas "demonstrates in his manipulations of form that there are rhetorical possibilities for crafting a voice out of tight places" (Baker 33). However, what differentiates Thomas's autobiography is that the phonetic and apostrophic representations are not nonsense, and that each utterance conveys a deep understanding of racial paradigms in the United States and a challenge to the marginalization of divergences from the standard English language in the United States and Puerto Rico.

Santiago-Díaz argues that the Puerto Rican poet Fortunato Vizcarrondo's representation of the *lengua bozal*–the language of black Puerto Ricans–employed the use of the apostrophe, which signals the lack of something, when in fact nothing is lacking (*Escritura* 88). As he notes, the inclusion of apostrophes is meant to express a linguistic omission and marks the African American discourse as deficient. He argues: "Con la inscripción del apóstrofo como señal de ausencia, la 'elisión' pasa a funcionar como una elipsis que signa la opresión de la ley gramatical" (89). Consequently, Thomas's use of apostrophes in the representation of African American language is not only a signifier of grammatical oppression, but correspondingly also one of cultural oppression.

The African American characters are represented through speech patterns that suggest a lack of education, yet the ideas of social injustice posited by Thomas's friend Brew, express deeper understandings of racial dynamics. As Baker states, the phaneric mask seeks to advertise, to highlight, but the cryptic mask conceals. I argue that Thomas uses a combination of these two masks to highlight the racial hierarchy and its effects. For example, when Piri decides to go South to acquire a more in-depth racial understanding, he and Brew first have a conversation concerning what exactly they are about to encounter. In this conversation, Brew and his girlfriend Alayce recall traumatic experiences from their past and express their understanding of the racial hierarchy in America. Brew's language is represented as follows:

> Sure he's a Porty Rican, but his skin makes him a member of the black man's race an' hit don't make no difference he can talk that Porty Rican talk. His skin is dark an' that makes him jus' anudder rock right along wif the res' of us, an' tha' goes

> for all the rest of the foreign-talkin' black men all ovah tha' world. When you're a shoe, yuh stays a shoe. (159)

The representation of this conversation, among many others, is written phonetically with apostrophic inclusions to demonstrate how Brew speaks. By writing the exact sound of his speech, Thomas mixes a phaneric mask and a cryptic one. Thomas highlights how African American speech patterns do not follow English grammatical rules, and are therefore, deficient, but the message conveyed uncovers the racial ideologies that reinforce discrimination against black men and women in the United States. As Mikhail Bakhtin offers in reference to heteroglossia: "To one degree or another, the author distances himself from this common language, he steps back and objectifies it, forcing his own intentions to refract and diffuse themselves through the medium of this common view that has become embodied in language (a view that is always superficial and frequently hypocritical) . . ." (678). Thomas includes this dialogue with Brew to represent the common ideology of blackness that is promoted by American society and concealed/revealed in Brew's speech. The use of the apostrophe and phonetic representations, highlight Brew's language as part of the discourse of an ignorant black man, providing a "truth" that his audience expects to hear. In so doing, he silently advocates for the integration of African American speech patterns in much the same way as Washington employed the minstrel mask.

Correspondingly, I analyze the specific epithets that Thomas employs and how he does so as part of a strategy to condemn derogatory language that marks some humans as others. Thomas's strategy reinterprets language and its use for his own advancement and that of all African American and Afro-Hispanic peoples. For example, when referring to

African American people, there are numerous ways that Thomas signifies black: morenito, tregueño [trigueño], negro, negrito, nigger, rock, black, coolie and coon. The numerous ways that he refers to black men are often used in a derogatory manner. I argue that Thomas uses a vocabulary that aims to discriminate as part of a discursive tactic, or as Baker explains:

> These tones and types, as I have suggested, are reassuring sounds from the black quarters. Although the [Washington's] narrator may be stunningly capable of standard English phraseology, crafty political analyses, and smooth verbal gymnastics …, there can be no worry that the Negro is getting "out of hand." For at all the proper turns, there are comforting sounds and figures of the minstrel theater … (30)

I argue that these tones and types suggested by Baker are seen in Thomas's work as pejorative epithets, which alert the reader to his seemingly accepted subjugated status and yet clandestinely offer a challenge to this imposition of status. This suggests that Thomas is playing to a discriminatory audience that is familiar with the ways that white hegemony refers to African Americans and Afro-Hispanics. By doing so, he creates a space from which to criticize their use, yet in doing so it ostensible reinforces it but surreptitiously questions it.

This tactic is reminiscent of the discourse created by Juan Francisco Manzano. Manzano engages the racial paradigms of nineteenth-century Cuba to gain entrance into a higher social status, i.e. mulatto status. He derogatively speaks about other slaves and presents a picture of himself as an obedient and loyal slave. These techniques are used to assuage listeners and convince readers of Manzano's loyalty and assimilation to

hegemonic dominance and whitening ideals. The same techniques also provide readers with what is expected of Manzano and Thomas, the dominant "truths" of their status and race, however stereotypical they might be. Nevertheless, if read as Janus-like cryptic and phaneric masks, these strategies are a direct challenge to the same ideologies to which they feign their acceptance.

The use of multiple epithets to refer to Afro descendants could arguably harken back to the multiplicity of terminology used in Puerto Rico to identify race, as mentioned above. I suggest, however, that the language variation, to which Thomas refers, signifies differently depending on context and the motive for using such terms. As Bakhtin elucidates, language "becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the work, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (677). Bakhtin explains that language is never free of its own socio-ideological context, but rather that each context creates its own language. In that case, the author must choose the language that he will write with; from what time, what socio-economic group, what age group, etc. Thus, each author's language is representative of different subgroups within its historical context. Bakhtin argues that, "with each literary-verbal performance, consciousness must actively orient itself amidst heteroglossia, it must move in and occupy a position for itself within it, it chooses, in other words, a 'language'" (677). Therefore, I submit that Thomas employs specific epithets to further his own point of view, for his own intentions.

The term black is one that Thomas uses with the most varied implications, especially as part of a self-referential discourse. When Piri's subjectivity is called into question by a white community, they designate him as black. Therefore, this term

resonates with hatred and racism. For example, in yet another fight that Piri finds himself in, a group of white men overwhelm him and his friend Louie. As Piri begins to run away, one of the boys shouts to him: "'You dirty, fucking shine! I'll get one of you black bastards.'" After this, Piri thinks to himself, "*One of us black bastards. Was that me?*" (119). The term black here is used to cause pain and provoke anger in Piri and Louie, and it causes Thomas to question his identity and the negativity associated with that designation. Equally as belittling is when the word black is used by Marcia, Piri's schoolmate in Babylon. She asserts: "'Imagine the nerve of that black thing'" (85). The referent becomes a thing, an object of scorn and hatred. Marcia attempts to marginalize Piri by downgrading him from a man to a mere thing that she feels has no place in her world.

It appears that Piri never fully accepts being called black unless he uses the term himself in defiance to those that are trying to subjugate him. For instance, he answers back to the white boys who attack him and Louie in New York by shouting "Your mammy got fucked by one of us black bastards" (119). He employs this term so that he can harm others with his own identity. Similarly, at the end of Piri's stay in the South, he goes into a brothel hoping to have sex with a white woman. To do so, he over-emphasizes his Puerto Rican identity, as his father did, by feigning his lack of English. At the end of the encounter with the woman, Piri tells her "'I just want you to know,' I repeated, 'that you got fucked by a nigger, *by a black man!"*" (189). He uses blackness to cause offense and psychological harm to this woman. He adopts this identity when he sees that it can gain him an emotional advantage, but more often to challenge the ideologies of that identity that have sought to oppress him. Thomas "makes use of words that are already

populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his new intentions…" (Bakhtin, 678). He uses the terms black and nigger because of the socio-ideologies inherent in those words, because he knows that at that moment in time, and perhaps at the time of the writing of his book, these identities offend those who would use them to discriminate. By accepting these racial designations, he reinterprets the connotations and makes them his own.

When Piri is sent to Sing Sing for attempted robbery and attempted murder, he encounters some men who ask him to draw. Piri, performing heart, draws this African American man, Rocky, as "a funny-book black cannibal, complete with a big bone through his nose" (252). This is taken as an immense insult to Rocky and tensions rise. That night, after the incident, Piri asks his cellmate for a shank to defend himself if need be. The narrator states: "I didn't want to, but if I had to, that motherfucker was gonna pick cotton in hell" (253). In this instance, the references to slavery are meant to denigrate Rocky and create distance between himself and African American men. Thomas's father had previously used a similar cotton-picking reference to separate his family from slavery and to insult Piri, and now his son repeats the same rhetoric. By using this discursive strategy, Thomas is displacing himself from the history of African American slavery and placing himself closer to his Puerto Rican identity.

On the other hand, the words *negrito* and *morenito* are used as terms of endearment especially by Piri's mother. In Puerto Rico, this term is used lovingly by parents to address their children. "What a funny *morenito*" and "*Ai, qué negrito*" are both used in a moment of playfulness between Piri and his mother. They are not meant to cause harm, but to indicate love and closeness. As Piri confronts his own blackness and

decides to go South with Brew, his mother ponders her son's own self-hatred. She says: "Why does it hurt you so to be *un Negrito*?" To which Piri responds, "I shook my head and kept walking. I wished she could see inside me. I wished she could see it didn't hurt-so much" (148). Piri struggles to merge the two ideas about his status in his family and society in this moment. He admits that it does not hurt to be her *negrito,* yet he also realizes that this love ends with his mother and does not extend to all American society.

In contrast, negro is a word that Thomas uses to discuss a system of ethnic categorization in the United States. Thomas uses negro to designate African American culture as seen in the conversation with the hiring agent for the door-to-door salesman job. Piri describes Harlem as separated into Italian, Irish, Negro and Puerto Rican sections. In the encounter between Brew, Gerald and Piri, Gerald uses the term Negro as being linked to blood or genetics. However, Thomas highlights how he sees Negro as part of his cultural identity. Discussing the racial standards, Gerald insists: "It's true that I don't look like a true Caucasian, but neither do I look like a true Negro. So I ask you, if a white man can be a Negro if he has some Negro blood in him, why can't a Negro be a white man if he has some white blood in him?" (176). Interestingly, Gerald exposes the two racial paradigms of Puerto Rico and the United States. Whereas in the United States, a person, irrespective of skin color, is black if he or she has African blood, in Puerto Rico he or she can be approached as white if he or she has white blood. Regardless, both doctrines posit whiteness as the ideal. Similarly, Gerald's discourse reveals the fluidity of cultural choice that Piri also ascribes to. When prompted by Gerald, Thomas replies that he is a Puerto Rican Negro (173). In this moment, he accepts this designation to prove to Gerald that he has pride in who he is and that he has chosen to be a part of the Negro

community. He uses his identity to defy standards that relegate the term as racially pejorative and redefine it as having a culturally constitutive function.

The vocabulary choices made by Thomas reveal the multifaceted racial paradigms of the United States and Puerto Rico. The words black and negro that can refer to skin color, also convey hierarchy and hatred. Regardless of which term Thomas or any of the other characters uses, the ways in which we signify skin color creates division among our society. The representation of this language of subordination illustrates Thomas's attempts to use these words to challenge their meaning and redefine their connotative value.

In this closing section, I will highlight how the disjunction in the representations of thoughts can be read as a form of silence. The two ways that Thomas recalls his past serve to illustrate how he has interpreted that past and how he wishes to reveal it. By analyzing these processes, I hope to show that identity, far from being fully fixed; rather, it is in constant flux and continually redefined for our own purposes.

Internal Dialogue Disjunction and Racial Prejudice

In his autobiography, Thomas narrates his internal dialogues using italics. However, his internal dialogue is not consistently represented by italics. There are moments when Thomas writes his thoughts without using italics, which suggests that these are approximations of his thoughts versus a more reliable version of his thoughts. When I analyze the content of the non-italicized thoughts and compare them with the italicized ones, I see that the thoughts expressed by each represent different men, or different facets of Thomas's identity.

The italicized dialogues represent a process of transformation and changes in his point of view. These dialogues come from a man who has changed his ways and these thoughts are reflections upon feelings or ideas that he has overcome or reconciled in the present. These are representations of a man who no longer exists. The inner dialogue that is represented in italics come from a man who no longer must think this thought, it appears that he has resolved the inner turmoil represented by these thoughts that have led him to be the man that he is in the present. William Luis, in *Dance Between Two Cultures*, discusses how for Thomas, writing was a means of salvation (145). He argues that Thomas is writing this book from a different state of mind than that which he had prior to incarceration: ". . . Piri's racial frustrations and his outspoken hatred toward whites have been resolved and transcended" (145). I argue that the internal italicized dialogue is Thomas's proof that he no longer holds those same thoughts. On the other hand, the internal thoughts that the narrator expresses in non-italicized print leave clues as to what are the remaining frustrations and prejudices. If I consider one font type to express transformation and the other enduring feelings regarding racial discrimination, this comparison reveals dialectics that are yet to be resolved.

From the beginning of the book, Thomas overtly expresses what he is thinking in the present in relation to past experiences. For instance, after a hospital stay caused by the street fight with Rocky and his Italian friends, Piri explains that because he showed so much heart he could now hold his head up high. He and Rocky were now friends and he had earned his respect and that of the neighborhood. Thomas states that heart can mend the bridges between nationalities. He reflects on the hatred he once felt and states: "I flung my skates over my shoulder and walked up the stoop, thinking Italianos wouldn't

be so bad if they spoke Spanish. In the dark hallway I thought how nasty 'spic' sounded hand in hand with 'guinea'" (39). Thomas shares his feelings surrounding the clash between Italians and Puerto Ricans in his neighborhood. He shows his compassion and understanding for how disrespectful both terms are. These thoughts are not expressed in the past moment, like thoughts in italics are, which I suggest indicates that these are reflections from his present self.

If we compare the previous thoughts with the following example, we see that the two thinkers are not the same person. "*Oh, you shitty world, why do you have to smell so bad?* I thought. *Why do you make me choose sides?*" (41). When read against the compassion expressed in the opposite thought, we can see that this is the voice of a boy, a boy who does not exist in the present. The italicized passages offer the adolescent voice of our protagonist juxtaposed to the adult voice of the narrator. However, as our protagonist ages, the distinction between the two voices diminishes, indicating that the man towards the end of the book is closer the man he is in the present. While in prison, Thomas learns about Islam and being Muslim. "I thought of the Jews in Harlem and how close this sounded to the 'Sholom' I'd heard them great each other with once in a while" (290). As a transformed man, he can make comparisons and see others with tolerance and understanding. In the protagonist's thoughts, this idea is: "*Around the world, hear this, North and South, East and West: We are all the same in our souls and spirits and there's nobody better than anybody else, only just maybe better off"* (299). The narrator and protagonist merge in this thought process. After Piri has begun to study psychology and philosophy, he gains a better understanding of himself and others. He states: "*It's not gonna be an easy thing to dig me*, I thought. *This psychology means that people's worst*

troubles are in their minds. That's cool. This jailhouse is just jumping with nuts and slip-times" (299). When reflecting upon the racial disjunction he felt as a boy compared to his feelings an adult, these narrative techniques point to an ongoing dialectic between a fearful boy facing discrimination and violence because of his racial and ethnic identity, and a man who gains a new social consciousness through education.

Conclusions

Piri Thomas represents the many facets of his identity to resist the homogenization of his Afro-Puerto Rican identity, both in U.S. society and in Puerto Rican culture. In the revelation of his subjective experiences within his historical context, he highlights the inequality and discrimination that men of color suffered during the mid-twentieth century in Harlem, NY. His work integrates itself into the Civil Rights Movement by condemning racism and discrimination. In so far as he aligns himself with these ideologies, his identity distances itself from a homogenous definition of blackness that does not reflect his subjectivity. Thomas creates for himself a space of contestation from which he represents his Afro-Puerto Rican identity as contrary to ideas of U.S. nationality and blackness that remove him from his Puerto Rican heritage. Thomas separates himself from the African American experience of slavery and instead offers a redefinition of what it means to be black in the United States. He defines his blackness as integral to his Puerto Rican national identity. He asserts his blackness as a contestation to Puerto Rican and U.S. ideologies of race and nation that have sought to silence his identity.

By using tactics that silence racial discourses as well as using strategies that unveil them, Piri Thomas manipulates and negotiates hegemonic discourses that seek to marginalize his voice. Thomas navigates racist oppression metaphorically with images of "heart" and "darkness." These tactics provide him with refuge and salvation from hatred and fear. Under the guise of nation building projects and modernization, many Afro-descendant voices are negated in a preference for homogenization. However, autobiographical projects, such as *Down These Mean Streets,* clamor for heterogeneity within a national identity which recognizes the diversity of blackness. Thomas's redefinition of racial signification, represented by his discordant usage of oppressive epithets, illuminates the underlying structures that oppress Afro-Hispanic voices of past, present and future.

As has been explored here, literature can serve as a force of Enlightenment against processes that guide hegemonic thought and, contrarily, as a reinforcement of such ideas. However, in the wake of the limited political gains of civil rights movements in Latin America and the United States, authors such as Thomas, can express overt forms of resistance to the conflicting zones of racial paradigms. In the twentieth century we continue to see the processes of double consciousness as conceived by W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Gilroy. Double consciousness, seen as a representation of imposed imperial power structures upon the subjectivity of one's own identity, highlights as Gilroy has written, "instability and mutability of identities that are always unfinished, always being remade" (xi). As discussed in this and other chapters of this dissertation, there is a constant struggle evidenced in Afro-Hispanic autobiographies to counteract the strategies of colonial and post-colonial ideologies.

Chapter 4

Assertions of Afro-Cuban Heritage to Challenge Ideologies of Racial Democracy

Within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing

–Fidel Castro

Introduction

Las criadas de la Habana (2001) by Pedro Pérez Sarduy, narrates the life story of Marta, an Afro-Cuban maid who lived in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba in the mid-twentieth century. In the novel, Marta has decided to write her memoirs at the behest of her son. Consequently, Pérez Sarduy's work juxtaposes the genres of fiction and non-fiction to uncover female Afro-Cuban contestations to silences that have been imposed by a national ideology that proclaims racial democracy. *Las criadas* is a novel with autobiographical and biographical aspects. The voice of the protagonist Marta unequivocally belongs to her because most of the stories are retold from interviews with Pérez Sarduy's mother. Yet, the author also incorporates his own lived experiences expressed through his mother's first-person narration. I thus consider this work a combination of autobiography, biography and fiction. By combining these genres, Pérez Sarduy can insert his own discursive strategies into his mother's historical context to challenge ideologies of race and nation in Cuba.

In this chapter, I will explore how in the narration of her memories, the protagonist simultaneously reveals and conceals her own silences when retelling the events that expose the injustices and racism she and other Afro-Cuban domestic workers suffered at the hands of a white elitist society. I will argue that these characters engage in a dialectical process of subjectivity and objectification as they challenge national and

racial ideologies that position them as inferior based on skin color, gender, and socioeconomic status. Marta's gender, race, and class become determining factors of her experience as represented in this novel. Marta attempts to resist her own marginality in a Cuban patriarchal society that posits racial awareness as superfluous to the revolutionary cause, and that, before the revolutionary process, violently suppressed such awareness. Pérez Sarduy represents oppression and resistance through Marta's silences and enactments of discourses of slavery in moments of racial tension, all of which are juxtaposed to fictional and historical content to create new truths about Cuban national identity. The representations of Marta's personal and social life challenge definitions of *cubanidad* and underscore the system of inclusions and exclusions that it places on national, gender, and racial identities.

In addition, the use of footnotes therein lends historicity to the novel. When read against the fictional passage to which they refer, the footnotes enable a racial consciousness that arises in contradiction to the discourse on racial democracy that was advocated by the socialist government in Cuba and, in doing so, a discursive silence is created. These silences function to contradict what is being stated explicitly. For example, there are moments in which Marta promotes pride in her African ancestry, yet she also reinforces the use of racist vocabulary that negatively values any visible signs of African ancestry. These contradictions complicate her identity and silence her voice, which inhibits her ability to fully express reverence for her culture and its history.

As Inés María Martiatu Terry discusses, "en la literatura cubana el sujeto subalterno, muchas veces invisibilizado se muestra en su condición de raza y género." In her review of *Las criadas,* Martiatu Terry argues that the novel highlights how women

have been made invisible as social actors in Cuban history because they are unable to escape representations based solely on race and gender. Insufficient socioeconomic opportunities coupled with ideologies of racial democracy that obscure persistent racism have led to a silencing of black female voices and therefore contribute to their invisibility. Martiatu Terry also asserts that Afro-Cuban women's multifaceted lives are often reduced to a racial category; "el entorno, las costumbres y las formas de vida y asociación de ese sector de la sociedad cubana, [se han] reducido a una visión unidimensional en base a la categoría raza." In the national discourse these women are being reduced to physical and phenotypical traits and therefore their histories and culture are erased. Although Castro publicly stated that he had rid Cuba of its racism after he successfully took over as president of Cuba in 1959, Marta's character reveals that skin color and gender continued to influence how others defined the worth of a black woman and subsequently how these definitions influenced her actions.

The racial and gender paradigms represented in *Las criadas* travel beyond the island with the introduction of the character Gracielita, the young daughter of Marta's friend Inesita, who emigrates from Cuba to the United States along with many other Cubans during the Mariel boatlift in the 1980's. Gracielita's ability to define herself as Cuban in Miami has to be negotiated with U.S. culture and its ideologies of white supremacy. She alters her personal identity as she is forced into a narrowly defined category of black, much like Piri Thomas in *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), who fought against being labeled black instead of Puerto Rican in New York. Gracielita's identity as Cuban, Hispanic, or Latina, is confiscated by the racial ideology of the one-drop rule in the United States. Her self-perception changes as she is faced with a society

that characterizes her only by her African ancestry and outward appearance. Thus, as the female characters in *Las criadas* are confronted with external definitions of their place in society, they are forced to redefine themselves in contention with racial and gender paradigms that attempt to deny them full integration and participation in Cuban and U.S. society.

The national identities promulgated during pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba in the twentieth century are represented in the fictional writing of Pedro Pérez Sarduy in the form of discursive tensions between a national rhetoric of racial democracy and the silencing of the racist, sexist, and classist relations that have reinforced discriminatory behavior at the micro and macro level. For the protagonist Marta, and consequently for Pérez Sarduy, Afro-Cuban identity is directly related to the everyday practices that have resulted from historical experience and traditions passed on from women to their children. Pérez Sarduy's novel is a literary narrative that attempts to document the historical experience of Afro-Cuban female identity. Pérez Sarduy uses the fictionalized voice of his mother coupled with historical references in the narrative, and in the footnotes, to highlight the Afro-Cuban experience and inscribe it in the history of Cuba.

Nancy Morejón's poetry accomplishes a similar task in rewriting Cuban history as it places Afro-Cuban women at the center of her writing. For example, in the poem "Mujer negra," from her collection of poems, *Octubre imprescindible* (1975), Morejón begins with the female slave experience as foundational to Cuban history. In this poem, the female poetic voice traces her life from slavery up to the Cuban revolution. Her voice becomes a guiding and constructive force that is integral to Cuba's development and national identity. However, "Mujer negra" reinforces the idea of a post-racial society

after the revolution, an idea that Pérez Sarduy's novel contradicts. Whereas in Morejón's poem, the women are planting the tree of communism together, Marta is reluctant to express any interest in politics for fear of retribution. Nonetheless, in each work, art and politics intertwine as the female experience is written as history, as integral to the past, present, and future of Cuba. Pérez Sarduy's work, in particular, juxtaposes his voice with his mother's to represent her identity, and concomitantly place women as guardians of truth and co-creators of Afro-Cuban history and culture.

Paradoxically, perhaps the biggest silence that appears in *Las criadas* comes from the publication itself. Pérez Sarduy has written a novel that addresses sexist and racist ideologies in Cuba, yet the mere existence of this work makes evident the absence of black women's authorship. There are many female poets who have garnered fame in Cuba, yet fictional writing by African descendant women in Cuba remains limited.[18] Even in the successful representation of a strong female character, his work highlights the inability of poor black females to attain education in Cuba, both pre- and post-revolution. It represents the condition of black women who were denied full integration into every aspect of Cuban culture. Nevertheless, with the educational advances made after the revolution, when Marta attempts to return to school, she finds the classroom and its structure overwhelming. Marta is unable to balance her school work with her home and work life. She regretfully drops out, thereby representing the limitations women like Marta faced to improve their own circumstance, even if the opportunities did present themselves.

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[18] See *A Place in the Sun?: Women Writers in Twentieth Century Cuba* by Catherine Davies (1997)

Like many women, Marta was responsible for all the domestic work at home, yet it was also necessary for her to seek domestic work outside of the home to supplement her husband's income. In this way, *Las criadas* echoes the concerns of Aurora Levins Morales in her essay entitled "Revision:"

> Ours is the work they decided to call unwork. The tasks necessary as air. Not a single thing they did could have been done without us. Not a treasure taken. Not a crop brought in. Not a town built up around its plaza, not a fortress manned without our cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundering, childbearing. We have always been here, doing what had to be done. As reliable as furniture, as supportive as their favorite *sillón*. Who thanks his bed? But we are not furniture. We are full of fire, dreams, pain, subversive laughter. How could they not honor us? We were always here, working, eating, sleeping, suffering, giving birth, dying. . . . This is *our* story, and the truth of our lives will overthrow them. (15)

Levins Morales' essay defines the struggles for visibility that women all over Latin America and the Caribbean have endured for centuries. As she remarks, women have always been here, yet their deeds go unnoticed and taken for granted. Likewise, Marta recalls: "Limpiar, cocinar y lavar lo que ellos llamaban menudencias" (79). For Marta's "unwork" as a maid and for completing the tasks that are as "necessary as air," she receives a meager salary of thirty-five pesos per month, accompanied by constant reminders of her assumed socio-economic and racial inferiority. Her wages do not even allow her to cover the cost of a phone call to her son who lives in the town she was forced to abandon in search of work. Although mothers are revered by their children, and even lauded in considerable artistic representation, the abuse of their efforts and bodies, and

the silencing they experience has been forcefully trivialized. *Las criadas* honors the traditional female figure by detailing Marta's life and her history as integral to the development and maintenance of Cuban society and culture.

However, Marta apparently does not wish to represent a collective suffering. Rather, her identity is decentered and her story is specific to her life, a fact that she makes abundantly clear with the repeated use of the phrase, "no soy una de ésas." She constructs her identity in opposition to those she sees as weak; those that have forgotten their African religion and the strength of their ancestors who survived slavery with dignity and pride. Marta's distancing of herself from submissive women fractures the feminist cause through her silencing of their voices. Her identity formation parallels the superiority/inferiority complexes that the women she serves also use to define their identities in contrast to those they hire as maids. Still, Marta's strength reverberates throughout her environment, promoting resistance and change. Through her stories, we see agency as well as the limits of a woman's strength; we also see her inability to forget specific incidents that formed her identity and reinforced sexist and racist ideologies. Even so, *Las criadas,* written by a man, a son, embodies his mother's voice as a challenge to racist, classist, and sexist oppression.

The immediate circumstances of Marta's life center on her economic and social standing in a society that embraces colorblind ideologies and promotes ideas of a united Cuba. In the following section, I will explore how racism in Cuba has consistently oppressed African descendants through dominant discourses that have denied or ignored racial inequality from the nineteenth through to the twenty-first century.

Historical Context of Race Relations in Cuba

Race relations in Cuba have been shaped by violence, tension, and inequality since the arrival of the Spanish to the island in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries when the native Taínos were devastated by Spanish conquest due to disease, slavery, and the punitive *encomienda* system. Subsequently, in the sixteenth century, African populations were brought in as enslaved labor to replace indigenous labor. The number of Africans on the island increased significantly since 1790 to at least 300,000 in 1820; by the turn of the nineteenth century the number of slave and free individuals of African descent constituted close to a third of the total inhabitants (Childs 9; Helg 3). The increases in sugar production and slave importation in Cuba dramatically affected the socio-political and racial landscape. The tensions between slaves, free blacks and mulattoes, and white creoles only increased with various rebellions, such as the Aponte Rebellion of 1812, and the Ladder/La Escalera Conspiracy of 1844. Accordingly, these rebellions, following the successful 1791-1804 Haitian Revolution, continued to incite fear in white Spanish creoles that the *raza de color* would overtake Cuba and threaten their livelihood. Correspondingly, prominent literary figures of the nineteenth century envisioned Cuba's future as a white, non-African, nation. For instance, José Antonio Saco—renowned author of a detailed account of slavery in Cuba—and Domingo del Monte—the man who supported and petitioned the autobiography written by the slave Juan Francisco Manzano in 1865—both hoped that eventually Cuba would be free of its African population through increased European immigration and the deportation of blacks back to Africa, and thus each promoted a white Spanish nation.

Consequently, even the great General Antonio Maceo, the national symbol of liberation from Spanish colonial domination in Cuba, was described by anthropologists as more white than black in a study undertaken in 1900. By highlighting Maceo's European ancestry, white elites and intellectuals construed him as an extraordinary man and promoted him as a national hero (Helg 105). However, Maceo's father was mulatto, originally from Venezuela, and his mother was Afro-Cuban, thus his description as white removes his blackness as it attempts to erase his African ancestry from his identity discourse.[19] Accordingly, if Cuba was to be a unified, independent nation, one that embraced all racial and ethnic aspects of its identity, then it had to accept its past as part of its future. However, the ideology of whitening illustrated in the lauding of Maceo as European, coupled with the idea of one unified Cuban race as promoted by another prominent hero of Cuban independence, José Martí, contributed to the formation of national ideologies of racial democracy that obscured the racism that persisted in Cuba. Even after the socialist revolution led by Fidel Castro against the oppressive regime of Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the assumptions of superiority of the white, Spanish culture continued to underlie a national discourse of racial democracy. By emphasizing national unity and downplaying racial difference and racism, said national discourse undermined people's ability to question the racist foundations of Cuban national identity. As a result, Afro-Cubans who wished to express any opposition to the racial dynamics of the post-revolutionary system, risked being placed outside of the nation. As Peter Wade observes, in doing so they would be classed with both national and non-national identities,

[19] See Franco, José L. *Antonio Maceo: Apuntes para una historia de su vida.* Editorial de ciencas sociales. 1973

furthering their own marginality (91). In turn, without affirmations of black racial difference and distinct cultural identities, it was easier to proclaim that Cubans were united, even if Afro-Cubans continued to suffer discrimination.

During the war for independence from Spain in 1898, there was a disproportionate number of black men who volunteered their lives in hopes of freedom and inclusion within Cuban national identity. Yet, even with the dedication of Afro-Cubans to liberation, their efforts continued to be undermined by segregation and racism. According to Aline Helg, African descendants were overrepresented in combat, while the white creole populations mostly sided with Spain or were neutral (105). Many Afro-Cubans felt that their participation in the wars for independence in 1878 and 1898 were a guarantee of more rights in their imminent independent nation. After abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886, Afro-Cubans began to fight for equal rights and participation in political and social activities, thus their resultant inclusion in military service. This mindset brought Cubans of color together in a fight against racism and ideologies of African inferiority. They hoped that their socio-political battles would lead to recognition of their specific role in the development of Cuban identity.

Many societies and institutions aided in the fight for equality, like the Partido Independiente de Color, founded in 1908 and the first of its kind in the hemisphere (Helg 4). The unified front among the *raza de color* reinforced the importance of black-only organizations which allowed African descendants a place to voice their political opinions and ideological commitments, preserve their religions and African heritage, and provide a place for social gatherings and support.

Black associations are a significant historical referent in Pérez Sarduy's novel. Traditionally, black societies had been places amenable to maintaining African culture and traditions. However, over time they not only recognized religious and cultural freedom, but they also reinforced dominant national and racial ideologies as they supported their members' desire to remain segregated on the basis of race and class. In the following section, I will analyze the importance of black societies represented within *Las criadas*.

Black and White Societies as Purveyors of Racial and Cultural Understanding

Prior to the abolition of slavery, the existence of *cofradías* from the sixteenth century on, provided African descendants a means to secure funds for funerals, burials, but also to increase one's own social status. Montejo Arrechea states, "puede adelantarse que muchas de las sociedades de pardos y morenos procedían de ellas [las cofradías], y la simpatía política de sus miembros por la independencia era tal que facilitó los trabajos revolucionarios de Juan Gualberto Gómez. . ." (20).[20] *Cofradías, cabildos,* and *ñáñigos*, were societies that were originally segregated by color. However, each society was a civil institution that was authorized by the government of Spain. Each *cofradía* had a relationship with the Catholic church, yet over time *cabildos* and *ñáñigos* arose allowing slaves, free Africans, and creole Afro-Cubans the ability to preserve their religions and cultures; yet, even so, they remained liminal to the nation.

[20] Juan Gualberto Gómez was revolutionary leader in the war for independence from Spain. He also wrote for *La Fraternidad y La Igualdad*. He was a defender of the *raza de color* and in favor of independence from Spain. Montejo Arrechea, 8.

In the eighteenth century, “el cristianismo en efecto, las penetró, pero como forma de enmascaramiento que no pudo evitar sincretismos. . . . La división sirvió para preservar y fortalecer valores culturales de todo género” (Montejo Arrechea 41). Therefore, even though these societies were related to Christian organizations, they gave African descendants a space from which to celebrate cultural heritage and values, and as Montejo Arrechea notes, they served as an affirmation of human dignity during a time of African dehumanization (41). However, ñáñigos were outlawed in 1876 due to the enormous amount of negative press they received. A periodical of that time depicted all ñáñigo members as criminals and cannibals (Helg 107). The adverse perception of the ñáñigos pushed them to the margins where they continued to exist unofficially.

From the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, men and women of color remained segregated from white clubs, casinos, and recreational centers, and continued to maintain their own societies. For example, they could not belong to la Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País y la Academia de Ciencias Médicas, Físicas y Naturales de La Habana (Montejo Arrechea 7). However, not only were these sectors segregated by skin color, but segregation existed within white and black societies based on economic or social status. As Montejo Arrechea notes, these societies prior to independence allowed Spain to control all the activities in Cuba, both white and black, suggesting that these institutions grouped likeminded men together; but within, they could also remain segregated from unwanted social classes. *Las criadas* highlights this continued division of white and black Cuban societies well into the twentieth century. These separate social clubs and societies disconnected Cubans from each other and prolonged negative

ideological beliefs about class and racial superiority, a point that Castro iterated in his discourse against classism and racism in Cuba.

In Pérez Sarduy's novel, the character of Alberto Menéndez, a man for whom Marta worked in Habana, echoes the social seclusion in Cuba in a discourse that privileges class over racial discrimination:

> —Mira, aquí no se discrimina solamente por el color de la piel, Marta, porque en definitiva este país es más negro de lo que realmente quisiera ser. Lo que pasa es que no nos da la gana de reconocerlo porque no nos conviene. Por ejemplo, al Casino Español al que va el juez de ahí enfrente, el señor juez Carabela ese, no puedo ir yo, y mucho menos aspirar a ser miembro como su familia. . . .
>
> —Yo nada más que soy el dueño de una tiendecita de canastilla que llevo más de diez años luchando por expandirme y no puedo. Donde va la esposa del gerente de mi banco no puede ir mi mujer, o bueno, si va es por lo atrevida que es . . . (55)

The segregation of social affairs continued well past the revolution of 1959. This is represented at the beginning of Pérez Sarduy's novel as Marta frequents clubs solely for Afro-Cubans in the pre-revolutionary period, and, at the end, as another character, Katia, reveals the new social divisions in popular culture in the post-revolutionary period. As previously mentioned, the social significance of all black clubs or societies began prior to 1585. They preserved their importance due to the racial tensions in Cuba. They are purveyors of African culture and rhythms, in addition to centers of instruction and recreation. The men and women who attended these clubs took immense pride in their participation in social events and the reputation of the clubs and their attendees. Thus, the

societies were competitive in terms of the celebrations and the musicians that they recruited.

Las criadas begins with Marta and her friends attending the "Baile de las Flores" at the *Sociedad Bella Unión,* which was a social club only for persons of color. The men and women who celebrated in these clubs spared no expense to create their clothing. Marta and her friends sewed their own clothing, and Orlando, Marta's husband at the time, made his own shoes. Fittingly, Pérez Sarduy's novel begins with the narration of this space which provides Afro-Cubans a place to maintain and voice their culture. Marta describes how on that day, which celebrated the beginning of spring, there were parties throughout Santa Clara, in all the clubs and societies:

> Ese día había fiesta en todo Santa Clara. En la Sociedad El Gran Maceo, de los mulatos y algunos negros con dinero; en el Casino Español, de los blancos de buena posición; en el Santa Clara Tennis Club y en el Liceo, frente a Parque Vidal, que era donde los blancos ricos se reunían a celebrar lo suyo. Pero a nosotros no nos importaban esas fiestas, porque los miembros de la Bella Unión hacíamos todo lo posible porque nuestras fiestas fueran las mejores organizadas y las que consiguieran las mejores orquestas. (14)

In Santa Clara, a town in the Villa Clara province in the center of Cuba, society in the early twentieth century was hierarchically divided by class and race. The society *Bella Unión* began in 1884 and was one of nine social clubs for people of color in Villa Clara. Throughout Cuba there were around seventy social clubs for *pardos y morenos* from 1888 to 1895 (Montejo Arrechea 80). *Las criadas* explores this tradition of segregated social clubs, which can be traced back from the sixteenth century and well into the

twenty-first, as they function to structure and institutionalize racism. The social clubs and societies represent two distinct spheres of cultural life in Cuba. On one side there are the Afro-Cuban clubs and on the other the white Cuban clubs, both being divided by class. Marta expresses a lack of concern for these social divisions because clearly her *Bella Unión* was better in many ways and housed the best Afro-Cuban bands of the time. She makes no mention of the underlying racial inequality of such social stratification. Rather, she silences any opinion of such and speaks only of the pride she has for her culture and community. Access to the interior of the social clubs makes clear that they also serve to reinforce patriarchal ideas of female comportment and white superiority.

In addition to the cultural erasure enacted by white elites who feared increased African influence on Cuban national identity, Marta silently recalls the historical ideologies surrounding the physical movements of Afro-Cubans. The historical detail provided by Martha contrasts with the contextual elements representative of the Afro-Cuban experiences, and creates a discursive silence surrounding whitening ideologies. For example, in the nineteenth century, the white elites negatively associated the *danzón*, a dance with traditional African rhythms, with the sounds of the *cabildos de nación* (Madrid and Moore 84). In the twentieth century, as evidenced by the following lyrics, the *danzón* had lost all ties with Afro-Cubans, and instead became a sign of cultural loss for the nation. However, the connection between these societies like *Bella Unión* and their reverence for the *danzón* remains significant to Cuban culture and pride. During the spring celebration, Marta recalls a song that the orchestra Aragón played as they danced the *danzón*: "No negrita, no…/no bailes más la conga así…/No, negrita no, mira que soy de sociedad…/porque si me ven,/ bailando como en el Manglar,/toda mi argumentación

de negro fino/se me va a caer…/No…" (16). In this song the female, *negrita*, lacks social awareness and because of this she presents a threat to the black man who is attempting to assimilate into popular culture. The man must remind her that they are evolving and must present themselves as such. In this song, the woman simultaneously represents the myths of progress and degeneration; she is stuck in the past, unable to progress, therefore causing the degeneration of Cuban culture. The racialized female subject is contrary to ideas of modernity and evolution. As Felski notes:

> . . . women of other races and classes were often depicted as primitive and backward, yet to be awakened to the light of feminist consciousness. The strategic value of metaphors of evolution and revolution in helping some women to express their agency . . . cannot be separated from this more problematic inheritance of exclusion. (150)

Correspondingly, the *negrita* is responsible for this man's temptation by luring him into the primitive past. However, there is no vilification of the dominant culture that has deemed the traditional African conga rhythms unacceptable, nor the displacement of the *danzón* from the African community.

Alejandro Madrid and Robin Moore assert that due to ideological shifts in Cuba, the *danzón* was distanced from any African roots in favor of a shared national heritage. He states that after 1880, the *danzón* was a white form or otherwise unmarked by race, which assumes European predominance (75). The dominant discourse in Cuba removed any influences the *danzón* had to African ancestry during the wars of independence in the late nineteenth century, during which time all things Afro-Cuban were rejected due to fear of slave uprisings. In the twentieth century, the *danzón* had lost all associations with

the black community (Madrid and Moore 76). These limitations on and appropriateness of certain rhythms and music determined the accepted mobility of bodies, therefore limiting physical Afro-Cuban movement. Further complicating the matter is the antiquated female counterpart who is unable to adapt to modern rhythms and themes. Afro-Cuban women are depicted as hyper-sexual beings, capable of demeaning the will of white society and corrupting men. Thus, the song reinforces the patriarchal white superiority in Cuban culture to which Afro-Cubans must concede to the new rhythms of the *danzón*.

The *danzón* played by Aragón is accompanied by Marta's reverence for the way her husband Orlando danced its rhythms, so much so that she states that this night she became pregnant with her first child. Symbolically, we see how this song coupled with Marta's pregnancy ends up limiting her mobility and "progress," thus reinforcing negative stereotypes about African sexuality, fertility, and regression. She recalls how this song would cause madness as everyone would sing it aloud. Her admiration for this song, and the underlying history behind *danzón*, creates a silence and triggers a questioning about the corresponding acceptance of the loss of African rhythms, as well as the marginalization of Afro-Cuban women.

After the revolution, the Cuban government created the *Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* to address the inequality and exclusion women were experiencing. According to Clealand, women were given a voice to effect change, but that voice had to be homogenous. In other words, race was excluded from discussions of gender equality. Whereas racial identity was removed from Cuba because it was divisive, fighting for women's rights was not regarded in the same way (Clealand 81). This ideology silences

Afro-Cuban female identity and expression. Undoubtedly, it would be easier for the Cuban government not to address racial inequality in a country that has been racially segregated for centuries. However, the manner in which desegregation was performed, under the guise of racial democracy, deemed racial identity superfluous to national identity. By allowing women to organize, the government appeased their cause, but continued to limit the access of African descendants to the same privileges. In this way, the Cuban state effectively controls the expression of counter-ideology and to whom it reaches, once again silencing any racial cognizance. Clealand argues that, "the presence of black consciousness refutes Cuba as a colorblind nation, but blacks cannot express this, act on it, or organize around this consciousness to demand more from their government, to open up dialogue and increase awareness of the issue" (83). Accordingly, Marta and her second husband, Guillermo, are forced to abstain from prayers to Changó and she must hide her saints from view because Guillermo is a member of *el Partido* (Cuban Communist Party) (Pérez Sarduy 149). In this respect, the government has infringed upon the private space of Afro-Cubans and created a literal silencing of their religious and cultural traditions. In addition, when Cuban President Fidel Castro declared that white elite societies would be unable to continue to segregate themselves, thereby removing racism in social settings, he also silenced centuries of resistance to this segregation and oppression by negating the importance of all black societies, like *cabildos de nación,* or *ñáñigos,* and in the twentieth century, the *sociedades.* In effect, the government removed the public and private spaces from which African heritage could be maintained, practiced, and celebrated. Restricting the celebration of blackness and African culture as an attempt to negate discriminatory practices and consolidate the

nation, does not erase the micro-aggressions that occur on a daily basis. *Las criadas* represents the techniques that Marta used prior to the revolution to combat these attacks, such as calling upon her ancestry to guide her. Post-revolution, these tools became inaccessible, and stripped Afro-Cubans of ways to resist maltreatment.

Slave Discourse to Contest Afro-Cuban Female Invisibility

Black women in Cuba are made invisible by ideologies that construct whiteness as superior and promote the desire to make blackness invisible. The erasure of blackness in the dominant culture also dictates the movement and actions of Afro-Cuban women. In *Las criadas,* this is presented in the confrontations between Marta and Cuqui, the daughter of an affluent family for which Marta worked as a servant. This section will highlight the representation of these racialized and gendered expectations and how they affect Marta's identity expression and her ability to maintain economic security.

Prior to the revolution of 1959, Marta experiences both white and black societies, one as a member and one as an outsider. Her experiences provide insight into the social stratification of Cuba, as well as to how they impact her identity. In Cuba, not only were the social clubs segregated, but the restaurants that were associated with those clubs were also limited by wealth and color. For instance, in the novel Marta recalls that while she was working for the Menendez family, she took Cuqui to lunch at a well-known restaurant called El Carmelo de Calzada. This restaurant was associated with the Sociedad Pro Arte Musical and was located across from the Teatro Amadeo Roldán and the Ballet Nacional de Cuba. El Carmelo was well known as a high society restaurant in the beginning of the twentieth century. Marta describes the lunch as follows:

> Un día fuimos a El Carmelo, de Calzada, y la única sirvienta de color que estaba en aquella *dichosa* cafetería era yo. Cuqui fue a ocupar una mesa y me senté con ella. Saludó a algunas de sus amiguitas, una de las cuales le dijo a la otra:
>
> —Por eso es que a nosotras no nos gustan las personas de color para que nos atiendan. . . . aunque sean muy buenas, pero no pueden entrar a todos estos lugares sin que den la nota. (56; emphasis added)

The girl that made these remarks did so to allow everyone to hear her. This was meant to injure Marta and Cuqui. Marta describes this restaurant using a naturalized euphemism by calling it that *dichosa cafeteria*, or that damned restaurant. Marta negatively represents this establishment, not for the food, but for the clientele that inhabit it, and the experience that it provided her with. The placement of the word *dichosa*—directly following a reference to the racial structure of El Carmelo—Marta rejects the dominant racial discourse that excludes people of color in public establishments and the institutions that reinforce it. Subsequently, upon hearing this girl's remarks, Marta gets up from the table and walks outside, because she feels that her presence is unwelcome. Waiting outside, she is reminded of the ballet that she had always loved as she watches from a distance. The previous derogatory comments about people of color repeat the racist discourses that exclude Marta from this economic sphere, and Marta connects them to another world she has also been barred from, the world of ballet. She knows that she could never have danced ballet, "pero ni soñarlo!" because of the racial segregation during that time, and because of the socio-economic boundaries of such activities. These two moments highlight the dearth of opportunities for black women in Cuba. As the girls illustrated,

black women were not desired as maids, nor ballet dancers, nor was their presence desired, because white elite culture deems that these women should remain invisible.

To further humiliate Marta, Cuqui imitates the elitist remarks of the girls by reminding Marta of her place when she reprimands her for leaving the table:

> —Oye, Marta, ¿y tú por qué te levantaste de la mesa y te fuiste por ahí a ver los ensayos de ballet . . . desde cuándo acá tú sabes lo que es eso? [. . .]
>
> —A lo mejor yo lucía mal entre ustedes, según dijo aquella amiguita tuya…además en voz alta.
>
> —Bueno, y aun así, lo que tú tenías que hacer era . . . [. . .]
>
> —Usted es la criada de Cuqui, no tenía que irse a ninguna parte mientras yo no se lo ordenara, oyera lo que oyera. Obró muy mal con haberse levantado de la mesa. (57)

Marta represents the normalization of the (in)visibility of blackness when she states that "yo lucía mal entre ustedes." As such, Marta signifies blackness and at the same time, the dominant desire to remove that blackness. In other words, Marta's visibility was offensive to the girls and Cuqui, just as the expression of blackness was counter to Cuban national and racial ideology. In this way, the treatment Marta receives publicly is the microcosm of the Afro-Cuban community. Her struggles represent what is happening to women across the country. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, black women have been made invisible by racist ideologies that seek to limit their movements within dominant society.

Cuqui is attempting to control Marta's physical movement by imposing her will upon Marta. However, upon receiving this treatment from Cuqui, Marta quickly reminds

her that she will not tolerate this girl's attitude as Marta refuses to be constrained in this manner. Both, the girls at the restaurant and Cuqui, have attempted to make Marta invisible and restrict her movement, much as Cuban ideologies have concealed black identity expression. In response, Marta tells Cuqui's mother Ofeila, ". . . ustedes tienen que respetarme al igual que yo las respeto a ustedes" (58). Marta removes the power that these women attempted to have over her by rejecting the racist and classist ideologies they enacted, and consequently challenges the dominant discourse. Cuqui treats Marta as a slave who must obey and always be submissive, if not invisible. Cuqui's discourse reenacts what the slave Juan Francisco Manzano states in a letter to his protector Domingo del Monte: "acuérdese su merced cuando lea, que yo soy esclavo, y que el esclavo es un ser muerto ante su señor" (Manzano and Azougarh 17). Marta denies Cuqui this power over her and reaffirms that even though she may work for this family, she is not their slave and she deserves respect. As Cuqui attempts to enact a nineteenth century slave discourse, Marta responds by using the anti-slavery discourse that views black men and women as deserving of respect.

Marta has never seen her position as a maid as inferior, or as "unwork." It is a job that she takes very seriously as she fulfills her duties with pride and grace, which she demonstrates through the immense care she takes with her own appearance and her work. Marta is a revolutionary in that she sees her identity as equal to that of all other Cubans and she will not relegate herself to a racist past in which her presence is negated by white supremacy. She maintains ties to her ancestry and fights for recognition and respect. Pérez Sarduy represents the continued segregation and psychological struggles with racial identity through his mother Marta's first-person narrative. Through her voice, black

women are reduced to marginal working conditions and treated as invisible objects. Yet, Marta's identity also highlights how the collective suffering of African descendants gives her strength.

Accordingly, Marta reacts defiantly to Cuqui's racial discrimination using her ancestry as her guide. The same discourse used here is a repetition of what her grandmother, a former slave, used to say in order to challenge her own oppression. Marta reprimands the child stating:

> Fíjate lo que te voy a decir, Cuqui que a mí no me gustan los muchachos malcriados. No te vayas a equivocar conmigo que yo no soy Morbila. Si tu madre y ella se han fajado hasta a los piñazos *yo no soy de ésas*. *Conmigo no se puede jugar* porque tú sabes que *yo sí sé bien darme mi lugar*. (57-58; emphasis added)

Marta uses the same discourse as her grandmother, that she is not to be messed with, as she distances herself from other servants. Her grandmother would say, ". . . yo que sí que soy negra gangá de nación. . . ." (103). By repeating these ideas of pride found in her difference, Marta's quick response removes the indictments of racial inferiority posited by Cuqui and her friends, who seek to put Marta in her place as a black servant, and by extension remove her from public view. Marta distances herself from other servants, like Morbila, who have accepted these racist and classist discourses promulgated by the dominant classes that seek to subjugate women of color. In doing so, she rejects those whitening ideologies and embraces her blackness as an inheritance from her grandmother.

After the abolition of slavery, black men and women remained liminal in Cuban society. During slavery, the publication of antislavery narratives was a powerful way to

promote abolition, as seen with the *Autobiografía de un eslavo* by Juan Francisco Manzano. Correspondingly, in the twentieth-century, evocation of antislavery themes, such as the unfair treatment of the tragic black protagonist, continues this tradition of opposition to injustice. This is evident in the novel when, for instance, Marta recalls the discourse of her grandmother, a former slave brought to Cuba from Africa, it provides her with power. Her authorial voice creates a historical continuity from slavery to the twentieth century that represents a collective strength against oppression. Slavery, for Marta, is synonymous with resistance and courage, instead of a stain on one's ancestry, as seen in whitening ideology. Her grandmother, Eduviges, was a well-respected figure in her family, one that Marta uses as a counter-discourse of discrimination:

> Yo quería mucho a mi abuela, que se pasaba tiempo diciendo que ella era 'negra de nación'. Nunca se me olvidarán aquellas palabras suyas. Lo repetía con mucha autoridad, con un dejecito en la voz que no era como el de nosotros. Todos sabíamos por ella misma que había sido esclava y que la trajeron sin su madre cuando tenía menos de diez años, pero ella nunca quería hablar mucho de eso y menos conmigo que me quería mucho. Cuando alguien o algo le molestaba, levantaba su bastón y con la otra mano en la cintura decía en alta voz 'conmigo no se juega, yo que sí soy negra gangá de nación, carajo.' (102-03)

Marta takes pride in her ancestry, which passed on the strength to defy any subjugation. However, these scenes also reveal a silencing by the women in her family surrounding slavery. Her grandmother was a slave, yet she refused to speak of it to shield her granddaughter, or perhaps herself. Marta's mother knew of Eduviges' time as a slave, and she too refused to speak of it. Accordingly, Marta has also inherited a tradition of silence,

one that can silence negative discourses, but one that also silences their resistance. As Modestin highlights:

> Latin America, rather than celebrating the true diversity that colors it, and acknowledging the painful and violent history upon which it is built, attempts to hide the truth by repressing resistance and subjugating the millions of people whose daily struggle is born from it. This projection of internalized racism, oppression and Eurocentrism impedes development and justice, and threatens our humanity. (153)

Nevertheless, Eduviges' defiance provides Marta with the power to openly renounce racial discrimination and cultural homogenization.

The evocation of history by Marta threatens the dominant powers that sought to obliterate African culture from the territory. The so called civilizing mission of European ideologies, coupled with biologic theories that justified the hierarchical separation of white from black, are contradicted with Marta's resilient Afro-Cuban identity. Gay Wilentz argues that women of the African Diaspora are the purveyors of culture and tradition and that as such they are responsible for passing on strength and morality (397). Marta is represented as that woman. Her ancestral past is expressed through her memory, a past that provides her with the power to refuse to participate in her own silencing. Thus, by reconstructing her grandmother's voice, Marta challenges the hegemony of dominant culture.

A common phrase throughout *Las criadas* is, "no soy una de ésas,*"* which when coupled with "conmigo no se juega," they become phrases that distance Marta from women who have been silenced and who have silenced the past. Though the way that

Marta expresses her power is in the negotiation with her own subordination. For example, Marta relates how her employers attempt to subjugate her, yet before they can do so, she generates a situation that forces her to leave and then demands payment for her work. She does not allow discrimination to control when she leaves a job, nor will she be controlled by her need to work. On various occasions, Marta breaks ties with the families who consider themselves superior to her before they can fire her. In other words, it becomes a 'get them before they get you' situation, which highlights Marta's lack of trust toward dominant white culture. I suggest that this type of behavior produces a silencing of racial dynamics. By never directly confronting these families and by doing so in an indirect manner, she reinforces the silences imposed by racial democracy and white superiority. Marta never exposes any families for being racist, yet she consistently states that she will not let anyone tell her what her place is, nor who or how she is supposed to be. Her tactic is to subordinate racists in their attempts to impose their will while she imposes her will. Thus, Marta makes a preemptive effort to ensure that she has the advantage and leaves her work on her terms, never on anyone else's.

The tactics used by Marta are indicative of two problems. The first is the lack of recognition of the existence of racism in the Cuban society of her time. The second is the absence of institutions dedicated to the defense and legal protection of victims of discrimination and racism at work and elsewhere. There were no institutions where Marta could have taken her grievances for a formal resolution. In the absence of these institutions, Marta's only recourse is to negotiate with her employers based on her dignity and the high standards and quality of the work she can offer.

Along these lines, while searching for a new job as a maid, Marta interviews with a woman who does not believe that Marta could possibly be a good maid because her hands are too beautiful and nicely kept. Marta will not tolerate someone who has an inferiority complex and refuses to work for this woman no matter how much she begs. Marta knew that this woman saw her as less than, as an "other" whose body should be broken down by her work. By rejecting this job Marta refutes the idea that there is a physical and/or social standard that all Afro-Cubans are meant to maintain. This woman re-enacted the slaver/master complex by promoting the physical degradation of black bodies as the standard.

In his analysis of race and ethnicity in Latin America, Wade has argued that the national culture prescribed by dominant ideological forces sets forth expectations for the marginal groups as to how they are meant to contribute. Wade argues that:

> This is a useful approach to ethnicity and race in the nation-state because it directs attention towards processes of resignification by which particular cultural elements become incorporated (accommodated) into nationalist versions of the nation's culture as long as their significance is defined within the central value complex of the dominant groups – just as individual blacks may be accommodated on condition that they behave in certain 'acceptable' ways. (93)

In the novel, Mart's potential employer represents how white Cubans uphold stereotypical ideas as to how Afro-Cuban women should contribute to Cuba socially and economically, as well as the prescription of their appearance. This becomes apparent in the various confrontations that Marta has with her employers, she is meant to be subservient, worn-out, and unkempt.

Marta's body, as a symbol of Afro-Cuban culture has been accommodated by white Cubans so long as it remains inferior. Yet, Marta will not be accommodated as such and demands that she be an equal in every aspect of her life, once again counteracting dominant discourses. In her analysis of race and gender in Caribbean culture, sociologist Mimi Sheller has noted how, historically, the "defeminisation of Afro-Caribbean women was a crucial aspect for the practice of securing white femininity, and establishing a 'natural' hierarchy of human distinction, and continues to inform racial discourses today" (134). As in the previous example, the unnamed woman has defined herself in contrast to what she expects to see of Afro-Cuban women. She believes herself to be physically, mentally, and economically superior to Marta, and when her expectations are not met, she is confused and offended, regressing to ideas of white supremacy that give her theoretical power. This power, however, is tactically denied when Pérez Sarduy allows his mother to remove herself from this racial dynamic by announcing its presence and positioning herself as morally superior.

In the previous examples, class is represented as a means to social superiority, one which is being denied to black women like Marta. In Cuba, according to Fidel Castro, institutional racism was going to be dismantled when the barriers of class were removed. This notwithstanding, in the next section, I will argue that by deconstructing this discourse, we see that racism is not removed by class disintegration, but rather that class issues are used as a mask to conceal racism in pre and post-revolutionary Cuba.

Disconnecting Ideologies of Class and Race in Order to Expose Racism

Pérez Sarduy has constructed his novel around the premise of social deterioration caused by racism and classism. Marta offers sordid details of the families she works and lives with. The home thus functions as a metaphor for the nation, a common theme in Latin American literature.[21] Inside the home and family structure, Pérez Sarduy has created a microcosm of the nation, where the home represents "a deeply rooted racial code that since the imposition of Spanish grammar has muffled the voice of Afro-Hispanics in the name of unity" (Santiago-Díaz 18). The home is the site of dominant discourses that reinforce racism and silence Afro-Cuban experience amid ideologies of one Cuban nation. The Cuban elite families in *Las criadas* offer readers portraits of deceit, gambling vices, racism, infidelity, and a life where the main concern is keeping up the appearance of wealth and status in order to separate the bourgeois socially from their Afro-Cuban counterparts. The self-imposed social alienation of these families reinforces class and racial segregation. Ultimately, the breakdown in economic structure forced these wealthy families to leave Cuba in order to preserve their ideologies in a country that would allow them to do so, i.e. the United States of America. Unfortunately, for many Afro-Cubans who fled to the U.S. to seek the financial opportunities they were being denied in Cuba, life in the U.S. only reinforced what they were previously experiencing. The racial discrimination did not end and many continued to suffer economically, as we will discuss in the analysis of the character Gracielita.

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[21] See Santiago-Díaz, Eleuterio and Ilia Rodríguez. "Writing Race against Literary Whiteness: The Afro-Puerto Rican Outcry of Piri Thomas." *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe*, no. 1, 2012, p. 12.

Marta's life as a maid allows us an intimate view of the innerworkings of wealthy Cuban families. In the context of labor relations, Marta is able to construct her authority and lack of timidity in her interactions with her elitist bosses and their children. In the Menéndez family, which includes la señora Ofelia, her daughter Cuqui, and her husband Alberto, the women are those responsible for passing on their hatred and sense of superiority, while Alberto is fully aware of the position that Marta finds herself in. Alberto recognizes the hypocrisy of the racial situation in Cuba. He discerns the full extent of discrimination:

> —Mire, aquí no se discrimina solamente por el color de la piel, Marta, porque en definitivo este país es más negro de lo que realmente quisiera ser. Lo que pasa es que no nos da la gana de reconocerlo porque no nos conviene. Por ejemplo, al Casino Español al que va el juez de ahí enfrente, el señor juez Carabela ese, no puedo ir yo, y mucho menos aspirar a ser miembro como su familia. (55)

His indictment of Cuban society attempts to lend power to Marta's resistance, but because his discourse equates class issues with those of race, her issues would necessarily be resolved with erasure of class, a common ideological position underpinning nationalist discourses in Latin America in general in the rhetoric of the Cuban Revolution in particular. In many ways, the classist dialogues presented by white elite characters, alongside racist ones, serve to hide racism and reinforce the revolutionary attitudes that view the removal of class struggles as the key to social equality. Pérez Sarduy examines his mother's life as a part of a social phenomenon that combines social relations, economic forms, and the political relations of the time in which she lived. In doing so, Pérez Sarduy reveals the absurdity of ideals that see racism as a natural by-product of

class differences. The revelation of certain fraught moments and class relations permit the conclusion that racial inequality cannot be absolved by economic equality.

Accordingly, Marta must bite her tongue and avoid confrontation to keep her job, as illustrated in the following scene. Marta worked for a wealthy foreign French woman named Evelyn who owned a jewelry store with her husband. On one occassion, Evelyn says to Marta: "—¡Qué hubiera sido de ti si tuvieras dinero como yo!" Marta responds internally to herself saying:

> No solamente dinero, madam, pensé para mis adentros. Yo sé lo que ella quería decirme, porque aunque yo era una sirvienta negra, divorciada con dos hijos y tenía mis resabios, era dueña y señora de una buena figura y por mi forma de ser, ella podía distinguir que yo no era de ésas que se dejan avasallar y cosas por el estilo. Yo le dije que no había necesidad de dejarse atropellar porque una fuera sirvienta. (106)

In this scene, Marta reveals that she is not a typical servant and that she will not be forced to obey. The term *avasallar* signals a submission to the authority of another. Marta refuses to obey someone who assumes superiority and power over her. Without directly stating the racism that Marta is representing here, Marta again reveals a discourse of servitude, but also of power and oppression. By extension, Pérez Sarduy is equating Evelyn's discourse with medieval strategies of domination and subordination of poor servants by the wealthy. Once more, the racial discourse is approached elliptically and juxtaposed with economic concerns to represent how economic discourses conceal racism.

Marta confronts economic and racial differences by stating, “no solamente dinero, madam,” and subsequently reveals her self-imposed silence with, “pensé para mis adentros.” This phrasing, or technique of thinking to herself is used by Pérez Sarduy on various occasions and is similar to the internal dialogue created by author Piri Thomas in *Down These Mean Streets*, as analyzed in Chapter 3. However, by revealing Marta’s own silencing, or internalized resistance, Pérez Sarduy fights that silence. In other words, he first creates a silence and then proceeds to break it. This warrants the conclusion that although racial democracy is the national norm, the reality of race relations forces Afro-Cubans to use silence to express their discontent.

Immediately following the statement made by Evelyn, Marta reveals that she was tired of the constant abuse and disregard. Marta was offended by Evelyn’s comment and from there began an intricate process to remove herself from this woman’s home by intentionally ruining the expensive clothing of Evelyn’s daughter’s by washing it at home instead of sending it out as requested. Marta generates more silences upon refusing to address the discrimination directly. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, by revealing Marta’s self-silencing, Pérez Sarduy can then break that silence for his mother. Shortly after Marta begins to distance herself from this family, Monique, Evelyn’s daughter, offends her and she quits: the very situation that she anticipated, so that her removal be her own choice and not that of Evelyn. Monique tells Marta:

> —No te creas que te va a vestir así, con esa saya, como si fueras a pasear. Ponte tu uniforme porque si no, no vas conmigo.
>
> —¡No, niña. . . ! Si aunque no me lo ponga se tiene que saber que yo soy tu tata. Vaya o no con el uniforme, yo no soy pariente tuya. Yo soy tu sirvienta, tu

manejadora. Además esto se acabó aquí mismo. Voy a hablar con tu madre para que me liquide. (110)

There are various instances of abuse from the children of the families that Marta served. These scenarios, more than others, highlight the racist discourses that are being passed on through the generations, irrespective of Cuban national ideologies of racial democracy. Metaphorically, the home continues to be the purveyor of cultural ideologies that reinforce racisms. The children represented within the novel understand how segregation and racial difference function without being formally taught. So, when these issues are removed from private and public discourse, children reinforce their own assumptions about why society is divided that they should adopt this behavior to uphold a social order that privileges them.

The previous scenes were set in Cuba prior to 1959. When Fidel Castro and other revolutionary leaders began propagating ideas of social equality and communism, many of the women that had oppressed Marta began to wonder what the future of Cuba might hold. In *Las criadas,* rumors began to circulate that the black maids were going to be relinquished from their service and allowed to pursue other jobs. These rumors reinforced the prejudice that Marta had faced and revealed the racism that many attempted to hide. The following conversation between two women occurred around the time of the revolutionary shift:

—¡No me digas nada, mi amiga, mi criadita se me fue esta semana!

—¡Ay, chica, si eso está de moda, la mía también se me fue de lo más embulladita! Ahora les han dado por decir que van a estudiar, no sé estudiar qué. Pero total, si esto va a ser nada más que Reina por un Día . . . .

—¡Déjalas que sueñen un poco y esperemos a ver qué pasa cuando se despierten!

—¡Te imaginas, les han dado ahora por creer lo que ese loco degenerado todavía con peste a manigua está diciendo de que va a convertir a las criaditas en secretarias, maestras y médicos y ellas se lo creen, están arrebatadas! (136)

Marta's only response to this type of thinking is "el Diablo son las cosas." Marta's answer illustrates that she has hope for the changes that may come. She believes, like many, that change is coming because of the ideas disseminated by the communist revolution led by Fidel Castro, which allowed these other maids to quit their jobs. They were provided with the hope that they too could participate in Cuban life much as these white women had, that they would be given the opportunity to succeed in whatever economic sphere they desired.

Ambivalence to Revolution as a Challenge to the Silencing of African Heritage

This section will discuss discourses of racial democracy that have been used to conceal racism and promote alignment with revolutionary goals aimed at instating communism and removing Fulgencio Batista from the presidency. Pérez Sarduy shows how racist terminology embedded in Cuban Spanish language and culture remained even after ideologies of a race-less nation were disseminated. I suggest that Marta's inability to relate to the revolutionary movement represents a rejection of the silencing and negativity surrounding African culture and blackness. The later subsections analyze how post-revolutionary ideologies continue to remove blackness and reverence of African heritage from public discourse as seen through the experiences of the characters of Gracielita and Katia.

Before the revolution of 1959, there were many attempts to consolidate the nation and revise a past wrought with hatred and fear. For example, José Martí, generally upheld as the national poet of Cuba, wrote about a unified Cuba that appreciated and integrated its Spanish and African pasts into its future. Similarly, Cuban artistic expression has been a purveyor and defender of Afro-Hispanic culture, yet due to persistent racism stemming from 19th century ideals of white superiority and slavery, it can be determined that art cannot remove antiquated prejudice. In the 1930's, Nicolás Guillen helped to inaugurate Cuba's reverence for its African roots with his poetry that highlighted African sounds and rhythms. Equally, Nancy Morejón and David Frye extoled Cuba's deep Africanity and recognized the dual Afro and Hispano cultures that make up *Cubanía*. Morejón and Frye point out:

> The historical and social evolution of the Cuban people is based on this give-and take, on the overwhelming common denominator underlying our entire culture: mestizaje. The natural way we embrace this understanding of Cuban culture implies that we accept the African component as basic to its foundation. This is a victory resulting from the struggle for independence that culminated in the revolutions of 1930 and 1959. (935)

In contrast to the seemingly "natural acceptance" of Cuba's African component, the limits of this acknowledgement of racial democracy and African ancestry during pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba spurred Pérez Sarduy to write this book to dispel these myths.

Even though Pérez Sarduy does not negate the benefits that all Cubans received from the revolution, his novel speaks to the changes that were not made. Pérez Sarduy in "Culture and the Cuban Revolution" observes:

> I was a product of the revolution and the openings it had given the people. While I may have had reservations about the handling of cultural policy, these were conditioned by the overwhelming fact that had the revolution not survived, I would, among other things, be suffering the consequences of a latter-day, Cuban-style Jim Crow racism. (20)

On the one hand, Pérez Sarduy defends and supports the revolution because of the social gains that have allowed Afro-Cuban and all Cubans a greater level of success. On the other hand, *Las criadas* represents the lack of growth in terms eliminating racist discourses that continued to circulate through Cuba and suppress African cultural expression. In order to express this dissolution with race in Cuba, Pérez Sarduy attempts to tell two stories. The first takes place prior to the revolution and the second is the story of the post-revolution, one that compares racial ideologies in Cuba and the United States. The two sides highlight the continuity in black subordination and resistance. However, we only see as much condemnation as a revolutionary national ideology will allow, thus counter-discourses would necessarily be approached through discursive silences which serve to contradict but also reinforce them.

Men and women who were categorized as black were relegated to a race of color, or "raza de color" which did not coincide with Cuban national identity as evidenced by the literary representations in Cuba in the nineteenth century. For example, Helg states that "…newspapers promoted the character of Liborio–a thin, short, white Latin guajiro (peasant) with sideburns and a mustache–as the typical Cuban, personifying the national good sense" (105). This distinction allowed for increased subordination and segregation of black men and women in Cuban society. José Martí's discourse of one Cuban race in

which all were equal was endorsed by white elites to assuage Afro-Cuban resentment for their underrepresentation in politics and literary circles (Helg 16). In "Mi raza," Martí writes:

> En Cuba no hay temor a la guerra de razas. Hombre es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro. En los campos de batalla murieron por Cuba, han subido juntas por los aires, las almas de los blancos y de los negros. En la vida diaria de defensa, de lealtad, de hermandad, de astucia, al lado de cada blanco hubo siempre un negro. Los negros, como los blancos, se dividen por sus caracteres, tímidos o valerosos, abnegados o egoístas, en los partidos diversos en que se agrupan los hombres. Los partidos políticos son agregados de preocupaciones, de aspiraciones, de intereses y de caracteres. (2)

The ideologies of racial democracy and equality that were disseminated in Cuba in the 19th and 20th century provided a beautiful utopian ideal, yet they also silenced the voices of Afro-Cubans who were continually being restricted, segregated, and oppressed. By quoting Martí and using his words as proof of racial equality, racist sentiment and claims of discrimination were negated and removed from public social discourse.

Discourses of racial democracy, from 1898 until the Cuban Revolution of the twentieth century, essentially eliminated racism from the national dialogue as any movement that reinforced blackness was violently suppressed; as seen, for instance, in the deaths of Pedro Ivonnet and the race wars of 1912 (Helg 2). Revolution and race became antonyms, and if one wanted to share in Cuban national identity, the two terms were necessarily mutually exclusive. Although institutional racism was addressed and measures were taken to remove it from the national structure as the regime led by Castro

equalized access to resources, education, and jobs, revolutionary ideologies of racial democracy in Cuba—and much of Latin America—instituted a direct silencing of nonwhite voices that desired to express any opposition to racism or pride in their African ancestry. Therefore, the gains made institutionally and the limitations of revolutionary expression, provided a veil under which racial prejudice could hide. Men and women experiencing racism and social inequities in pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba were stripped of their resistance to oppression and faced being labeled anti-revolutionary or anti-Cuban. As Danielle Clealand offers, racial affirmation in Cuba was considered counter to national identity (2). The idea that "we are all Cuban" sought to unite people across races, religions, and ethnicities, but fell short as we see in *Las criadas.*

When race is removed from public discourse, specifically in post-abolition societies: "It keeps discussions of the subject minimal and hides awareness of the presence of racial inequality and a racist culture, both of which maintain black subordination" (Clealand 6). That is not to say that African culture is not recognized in Cuba; however, the reverence of Yoruba religion and African rhythms does not equate to social equality and the removal of prejudice. As Wade argues, under nationalist attempts to create unity, cultural domination worked by appropriation and resignification, as we explored earlier with the *danzón*. Wade notes that "If low-ranked groups maintained their claim to certain cultural contributions in the amalgam of national culture, these were devalued and these groups were defined as '"not '"true"' members of the ideologically defined nation'" (93). African cultural heritage was replaced with Cubanía, a homogenized and reinterpreted Hispanic culture.

I argue that Marta's ambivalence toward the revolutionary movement represents a reaction against the silencing of her ties to African heritage and her pride in being a black woman. Marta continues to assert that she is not political and does not consider herself part of the revolution, but her actions contradict these statements as they align with revolutionary ideologies. She advocates racial and economic equality, and in every rejection of inferiority she embraces those ideals. Marta agrees that some type of revolution is needed in order to change her life and reverse the situation of the white elites and the black maids so that the elite society will know what it means to do the work they consider of no importance. In one scene, Marta recalls a conversation with Zoraida, the wife of doctor Ramiro Bejart who hired Marta as his maid, whereby Zoraida attempts to exclude Marta from her social sector at the Havana Hilton:

> —Negra, tú no sabes que me hice social del Havana Hilton.
>
> —¿Qué cosa es eso?
>
> —Eso es lo que tú no vas a conocer ni aunque te saques el Premio Gordo. Fíjate que me costó mil pesos hacerme socia allí. Lo acaban de inaugurar la semana pasada y ya me pasé todo el día en la piscina.
>
> —¡Ay, señora, el mundo da tantas vueltas, que a lo mejor un día yo sea la que vaya a la piscina y de usted no se sepa ni dónde esté. . . .
>
> —¡Mírenla, qué atrevida es! Yo voy hasta llegar a pensar que tú eres de Fidel.
>
> —Yo no soy ningún Fidel, pero sí sé que algo o alguien tiene que hacer cambiar las cosas para que algún día el trabajo que estamos pasando nosotras lo pasen ustedes un poco, para que sepan bien lo que es la vida. (120)

Marta finds herself in a precarious position because she cannot express any political affiliation without fear of retribution for being considered part of Castro's regime. In 1957, alliance with the revolution was being punished with violent force, as evidenced in the killing of José Antonio Echevarría, the leader of the Revolutionary Student Directorate (Pérez-Stable 58). Marta's identity supports the revolution early on. Yet, she finds out later that the revolution has done little to change her life and circumstance.

Zoraida, in contrast, is a character who vehemently refuses to acknowledge any kind of African ancestry. Marta described her boss, Zoraida, as a *trigueña*, with thick curly brown hair and green eyes. Zoraida states that she is not liked by her husband's family and that they did not approve of their marriage because they thought Zoraida was a person of color, which Zoraida fervently denies. Yet, her husband's mother was *mulata* with light eyes, similar to Zoraida. The conversations between Zoraida and Marta reveal deep prejudices against traces of African ancestry. In a similar comment made by Evelyn to Marta, about how different things would be if Marta had her money, Zoraida jokes that Marta is a black attorney, but that it is a shame that she is so black (127). Marta responds in kind by jokingly pointing out the hair and skin color of Zoraida's father. Zoraida correspondingly complains to her father: "—Tú ves papa, no ves lo que yo te digo, mira que está diciendo, que tú eres de color, que me fije en tus pasas" (127).

Pérez Sarduy reveals to readers in the footnote that *pasas* is a negative term describing "pelo afroide.*"* The conversation is blatantly racist and marked with whitening ideologies that posit whiteness as the standard for superiority and that associate any signs of blackness with inferiority. Even if Zoraida's father is not black, but rather Lebanese, the conversation represents the racist stance of the wealthy as well as Marta's

understanding of such. Marta makes those comments to Zoraida knowing that she will be offended to be associated with any African ancestry. As Antonio Olliz-Boyd proposes, any indication of a relationship with Africa "in ascending or descending progressions can psychologically affect that person's acceptance or rejection in that society . . ." (95). When Marta uses the dominant discourse to offend Zoraida, she silences any pride she has for her African identity. Yet, by highlighting the word *pasas* and its negative connotation, Pérez Sarduy challenges that dominant discourse with Marta's silence.

Las criadas connects various racial ideologies that continually circulate around Cuba in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It represents an ever-changing cultural diversity through the removal of historical silences set upon Afro-Cuban men and women. In many ways Pérez Sarduy speaks to those who suffer racial discrimination and provides them with a means of escape through Marta's voice. She becomes a voice of resistance for a diverse national culture that has been silenced. From Pérez Sarduy's national consciousness an international awareness emerges as he seeks to address the racial divide not only in Cuba but abroad in the United States with the departure of the Marieles and others who left Cuba in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Tourism Industry as Reinforcement of Exclusionary Racial Discourses

In the second half of the novel, Gracielita, the daughter of one of Marta's friends, gives expression to the racial problems in Cuba as seen from the United States. Gracielita writes to her mother from the United States regarding the arrival of the Marielitos from Cuba. The Marielitos, so named because they left from the Mariel boatlift in Havana, emigrated to the United States to escape the political and economic effects of the

Revolution in the 1980s. The racial make-up was higher for non-whites when compared to those who left in the beginning of the revolution (Clealand 146). Again, in 1994, the government opened Cuba's borders to allow all those who did not wish to be a part of the country the ability to leave in their own rafts. Gracielita recalls the turmoil that occurs in the temporary camps set up for Cubans with shock concerning the racist assumptions being made on United States soil. She states, ". . . es que todos no somos iguales, que es una cosa con las cuales siempre tuve problemas. Juntos, pero no revueltos, como dice el refrán" (184). Gracielita is the new generation that is confronted with the color-blind ideologies masking the racial realities in Cuba. The theories that intend to hide racial diversity create more tension as they silence the unequal political structures they have come to represent. Gracielita faces racial discrimination in much the same way that Marta does, with strength and courage. She eventually comes to recognize, as many do in exile, that distance from one's country provides new insight into its organization. When confronted with a black and white paradigm in the United States, as seen with Piri Thomas, Gracielita is forced to acknowledge boundaries between races that she did not see in Cuba.

It is not until Gracielita befriends another Cuban that she begins to see Cuba in a different light. Yamila, a close friend of Gracielita, takes a trip to Cuba from the United States with a promise to visit Gracielita's mother. She enters Cuba as a coordinator with a travel group. While they were in Cuba, the African American men and women encountered racism at the hotel CAPRI where they were staying and in the city of Havana. One of the hotels even denied one of the men entrance because they thought he was a black Cuban (Pérez Sarduy, *Criadas* 248). According to Zurbano, this blatant

racism against Afro-Cubans in the hotel industry is meant to ensure the continued investment of their white European clientele. He also argues that the prostitution of Afro-Cubans was largely supported by the same foreigners. For Zurbano, the exclusion of Afro-Cubans from the dominant economic sectors has led to their overrepresentation in the underground and criminal realms.

Thus, in the twenty-first century, race relations in Cuba remain tense. In 2013, Afro-Cuban author, Robert Zurbano, was fired from his job at the publishing house of the Casa de las Américas cultural center after writing an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*. Zurbano stated that the title of his article, "For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn't Begun," was incorrectly translated from Spanish, and should have read, the revolution has not yet finished (Archibold). Zurbano's piece spoke about the work that has yet to be done in Cuba regarding race relations. He discusses the economic inequalities that are prevalent in Cuba in the twenty-first century due the split economy into a private sector and the old socialist order. Zurbano argues that white Cubans have been able to succeed from the system enacted since the downfall of the Soviet Union, but that the black population had no resources to trade or sell and therefore are unable to attain the same level of success. He also argues that the fact that any comments made against or about racism were counter-revolutionary. The loss of his job reinforces this point and illustrates how the ideologies of the revolution remain strong, even after the passing of Fidel Castro. As represented in *Las criadas*, the tourism sector enjoyed the greatest surge in economic gains; however, the black population was restricted from entrance into this sphere, unless they did so illegally.

Contesting Racial Exclusion in Tourist Industry with Afro-Cuban Language

In *Las criadas,* Katia, a daughter of Eneida and Baba who were friends of Marta, uses her sexuality to make money in the tourism industry as a prostitute. Katia's *jinerterismo* is an economic activity that needs to be seen in the context of the economic transformations taking place in Cuba toward the turn of the century. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba entered the Special Period of financial decline. Cuba's economic crisis heightened inequalities and class differences as the government attempted to save itself (Clealand 145). The government was unable to provide for all the necessities of the total population, forcing residents to purchase what they needed. In 1993, Cuba legalized the dollar in the pursuit of its economic reconstruction and a domestic market economy. The money that Katia earned was most likely in the form of dollars, which allowed her to purchase goods that the government did not provide for them, whence the reason her parents chose to disregard Katia's prostitution. However, according to Clealand, with the creation of this dollar market and dollar stores, a significant variation arose in who had access to dollars and the necessities they could provide (146). The dollars were mostly obtained from those in the tourism sector, one which, as mentioned earlier, was segregated racially to exclude blacks, or by remittances from abroad. Clealand also notes that there was a substantial racial division among those who could send remittances back to Cuba. This increased the disparity between those who have access to goods and those who do not. Accordingly, in the novel, Katia's prostitution is silenced in the home, because the foreigners that she entertained could shop where she could not, and with that money she could obtain things for her family that they normally were unable to buy.

Katia even goes so far as to state that her work should be rewarded: "No sé qué tanto misterio con una, si a nosotras lo que hay es que darnos una medalla porque con nuestro aporte a la economía estamos poniendo el nombre de Cuba bien alto y ayudando al país" (266). Katia thinks that her work as a prostitute lends distinction to Cuba, especially economically. This claim can be seen in the light of the work of Sheller in *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*. Sheller argues that prostitution in the Caribbean has been used as a tool of tourist consumption since colonization and well into the twentieth century. Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Cuba was sold to foreigners as an island of rum, cigars, and women. Consequently, Cuba has long since enjoyed a reputation as an island of pleasure. The sexualization of *mulata* bodies has become central to the Cuban tourism industry (Sheller 164). In *Las criadas,* Katia represents this truth as she reiterates the economic growth that the prostitution industry provides to Cuba by bringing in foreign dollars. Her sexualized and racialized body is commodified for foreign enjoyment, even by her mother who suggests that Castro should industrialize the exportation of *mulatas* (269). As Sheller points out, with the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty an alternative modernity developed in the twentieth century that set the Caribbean apart from the time-space of Western modernity (165). A discourse of the Caribbean was created by the tourism industry as a place removed from industrialization and a place in which travelers could experience an anachronistic modernity; an escape from the civilized world (2). In the twentieth century successive Cuban governments have exploited Afro-Cuban racial difference and racisms for financial profit, particularly through the promotion of tourism, in conjunction with the European and American consumption of this different Caribbean modernity. This type of economic model

continues to relegate Afro-Cubans to a regressive inability to "progress" in the modern world.

Katia internalizes this preference for foreigners, over Cubans and Afro-Cubans, because they, ". . . saben apreciar lo que es bueno" (265). She also addresses the discriminatory discourses surrounding the racial disparities in her social groups and other affairs. However, Katia's discourse reinforces whitening ideologies that continue to dominate in her home and social atmosphere. Marta blames Katia's mother Eneida for brainwashing Katia into searching for a white man with money:

> Pero ella misma, Eneida, tenía la culpa al fin y al cabo, por embullar a la muchacha para que buscara un "macho con dinero y si es blanco mejor, porque los negros no sirven para nada más que para darte golpes y hacerte barrigas". O si no, le decía que buscara siempre un hombre de piel más clara que ella, para adelantar la raza; o que le iba a recomendar a Fidel que si quería resolver los problemas del país, que industrializara la mulatada y las incluyera en los planes de exportación" (269).

Her mother describes black men as useless by regressing to stereotypes of animalistic sexuality and violence. Historically, black men and women have been sexualized throughout the Caribbean and their bodies are portrayed as sensual and animalistic, with women being even more desirable when they are *mulata* (Wade 94). Katia's mother reinforces these notions because they coincide with what will bring her the most economic success and reinforce dominant whitening ideologies in Cuba.

Concomitantly, whitening or *blanqueamiento* is a common ideology that is coupled with sexuality, throughout Latin America since colonization. As Wade argues,

mestizaje is a gendered process, one that is intimately tied to sex, family, and the body (94). Katia's mother reinforces these notions when she sexualizes her own daughter and advises her to find a white or light skinned man to marry. From early on, Katia has been listening to these ideas within the home and taken them to heart. As a young woman she now appears to enact whitening discourses in her sexual preferences, but I suggest that she only does so as part of her rejection of the racial ideologies of Cuba. However, Katia has been consumed by the tourist trade, and, in return, she consumes the men, all the while supporting what Sheller describes as "embodied racisms" (164). The commodification of difference allows Katia such success, and as such, she reinforces ideologies of the racial otherness of Afro-Cubans enforcing a silence around her own racial awareness.

To accentuate the dialectic between Cuban whitening ideologies and the reverence of African heritage, Pérez Sarduy utilizes footnotes to define terminology found in Katia's discourse. The words *aseres* and *mambisas* are terms that refer specifically to African culture. The interplay of Katia's underlying Afro-Cubanness and her rejection of Cuban men challenges the Cuban national ideology of racial inclusivity. While Katia states that she prefers European men to racist Cuban men, her choice of language hints that it is because of her affiliation and reverence of her African heritage. At the same time, it highlights the rejection of African heritage within the privileged white sector of Cuba. Pérez Sarduy defines *aseres* as a friend or *amigo.* He states in the footnotes that it is a, "Salutación en el lenguaje del culto secreto abakuá, de origen africano" (265). Pérez Sarduy uses African terminology to contest the racism that

accompanies them. Katia describes the club scene and how it is devoid of salsa or Cuban music:

> —¡Ay, no, hija, qué va! Los prietos no tienen cabida allí. La música que se toca en El Johnny es disco-miusic, que es música extranjera, de brinquitos, meneítos y esas boberías. Allí no hay nada de salsa o música cubana de los Van Van o esas orquestas de música chea que bailan los aseres. Allí es como si estuvieras en Miami, sin salir de Cuba. Todos son pepillos, y que yo sepa, los negros no son pepillos, sino guaposos. (265)

Her discourse represents the division of black and white in Cuban social life. The social split between white and black harkens back to pre-revolutionary times, where Marta and her friends attended clubs solely for Afro-Cubans and vice versa. Katia refers to the music as the boundary between cultures. The younger generation, sons of leaders and intellectuals, have separated themselves in more than one aspect of their lives. They have money that the general population does not, which allows them to shop in the stores designated for foreigner currency. Katia refers to them as racists who only mingle with blonde women, "ni siquiera con una mulata como yo" (265).

Katia continued to prostitute herself to diplomats, tourists, and intellectuals and was eventually arrested and sent to a women's prison where she was to be rehabilitated. Upon her release from prison, the first comment that Katia makes to Marta is: "—¡Tanta cosa y en un final, nosotras sí que somos guerrilleras de verdad, jineteras mambisas, y a mucha honra!" (270). The term *Mambí* is defined in the footnote as a derogatory name that the Spanish used to refer to the Cubans who fought against the colonial forces. Pérez Sarduy states that it means "salvaje, indómito, negro." But over time it was converted

into the symbol of Cubans who fought for freedom or would die for it. This statement reveals Katia's ties to her African ancestry and to those free and enslaved men and women who fought against Spain in order to make Cuba what it is today. She is proud of her heritage, yet her behavior is guided by dominant ideas of white superiority and whitening ideologies that have been ingrained in her family's ideas of worth. Katia's situation also reflects the lack of change that occurred after the Revolution. She was forced to prostitute herself to provide for her family, yet she was punished for doing so. Katia embodies the continued distinction between races in social centers and tourism, which is fueled by racist discourse.

Ellipsis to Expose the Limits of Racial Democracy

This last section will briefly explore how racism and the rejection of African culture and religion continued in post-revolutionary Cuba. By using ellipsis, Pérez Sarduy highlights how ideologies of racial democracy have not eliminated racism but instead allowed them to continue uncontested.

In 1959, Fidel Castro addressed the nation by arguing for desegregation in schools and social clubs. His plan was to integrate black and white on a daily basis, which he felt would end racial discrimination in recreational and cultural centers (Clealand 74). However, *Las criadas* illustrates that these structural changes were unable to remove latent racial discrimination. When Marta's friend Olguita comes to have her hair done, she begins to describe a relationship between a man and woman that was forbidden by the woman's father. Even though, the father knew and worked with the boy's father, he forbids their relationship because the boy was black and should stick to his own kind

(273). The man went as far as to resign from his job stating that, “La Revolución le ha pedido todo tipo de sacrificio y que él nunca se ha negado, pero que no está dispuesto a permitir que su hija mantenga relaciones amorosas y que se case con . . . .” Here the use of the ellipses parallels the discourse of colorblindness that attempts to hide racism, yet only pauses its appearance. The man was afraid to announce aloud that his insistence was due to the man’s skin color. His discourse restates the position of many Cubans that Marta and her friends encounter. Many fully supported the Revolution, yet not all could erase their racism and were able to maintain it under the guise of racial democracy that removed other’s ability to challenge it.

Sarduy uses the ellipse here to represent how colorblindness only casts a temporary shadow over racial hatred. Even with the anti-discrimination laws of 1976, racism and prejudice were not removed. As the parents in this novel pass on their beliefs to their children, as seen on both sides with the white elites that Marta served, and among the stories coming from her friends like Olguita and Eneida, prejudice continued to silently affect the whole Cuban population. These characters, and those they represent, are constantly living in the elliptical elusion of truth where one side is darkened while the other is highlighted. In the darkness, they are waiting for the revelation of truth, of discrimination. Only with the revelation can the problems created by silencing voices and by imposing elliptical discourses of colorblind ideologies be addressed.

While racial affirmation was deemed subversive and any mention of racism was erased from Cuba’s history, whiteness remained the national desire and means to attain social privilege. Within the *Partido*, black men were not treated or seen as equals. This is highlighted in the story told by Olguita and the treatment that Marta’s husband Guillermo

receives. Due to the suppression of African religions and racial affirmations, many were forced to publicly abandon their religions. Marta expresses her frustration:

> Yo cogía tremendos berrinches con Guillermo, porque tanto carné del Partido, tanto tener que esconder los santos y las asistencias para que sus compañeros no vieran y supieran que yo sí creía, y total nada, ninguno de los apartamentos de la micro donde trabajaba voluntario era para él a la hora de la repartición y espera y espera y sacrifícate un año y otro año y total para nada. . . . A mí me daba pena, pero mucho más roña. ¡Pero qué carajo . . . !, si hasta el mismo que era abakuá había tenido que renegar de su creencia con tal de que lo aceptaran en el Partido y nosotros ahí todavía viviendo en la misma cochambre desde que nos juntamos hacía ya 25 años. (142-143)

The revolution made many promises of educational and social equality, yet only in an amount significant enough to appease the black population, to not offend the white population, and most importantly to maintain national unity (Clealand 76). In the novel, Guillermo was included in the *Partido* but was not given the benefits that the white men received. Marta expresses her anger at the fact that even after negating their beliefs and silencing their ancestry, they still were not treated as equals. Marta becomes disillusioned with the lack of progress and hypocrisy she is made to suffer. Whereas in stories that refer to the time before the revolution Marta addressed racial discrimination as an individual occurrence, even with the numerous examples in each home, now Marta reveals that it is being reinforced institutionally in governmental jobs and structurally at home.

Conclusions

Pérez Sarduy has written a novel that explores racial subjectivities in twentieth century Cuba through the intricate details of his mother's memories. Marta's Afro-Cuban identity is represented in the historical referents that describe cultural traditions passed on from women to their children. The narration provides names and places, intersections and towns, which all highlight the Afro-Cuban influence in greater Cuban society as well as how the white elite and wealthy sectors have influenced Afro-Cuban life. Accordingly, Pérez Sarduy details the racial discrimination that is contained within institutions, such as the home, and is reinforced by everyday affronts committed against someone based upon their marginalized group association. Marta experiences racial discrimination on what appears to be a daily basis while working in Havana. Her struggles for autonomy and self-identification are limited by the racial understandings of the twentieth century. However, Marta never lets her identity or strength waiver when confronted with racial prejudice, and Pérez Sarduy uses euphemisms, metaphors, footnotes, and a discourse of slavery as the discursive strategies to challenge any impositions of inferiority that dominant society attempts to enact.

The national identity promulgated during pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba in the twentieth century was meant to unify Cuba by eliminating racial bias. Pérez Sarduy represents the identity conflicts that racial democracy enacted with the discursive silencing of racist, sexist, and classist relations that were reinforced with discriminatory behavior at the micro and macro level. For example, the footnotes, which explain racial terminology, reveal a racial consciousness that is contrary to racial democracy and to the explicit silencing of Marta's identity. By combining the two discourses, Pérez Sarduy

creates a counter-discourse of simultaneous silence and awareness of Afro-Cuban identity. In other words, by explicitly highlighting racist terminology and counterposing it to silencing, a challenge is presented. Similarly, Pérez Sarduy uses the fictional voice of his mother coupled with specific historical referents—African societies, the revolution, the special period, the Mariel boatlift—that reinforce the Afro-Cuban experience and inscribe it on the history of Cuba. Pérez Sarduy dialectically represents resistance and oppression through Marta's explicit silences, euphemisms, and repeated ellipses in moments of racial tension, all of which are juxtaposed with fictional and historical referents to create new truths about Cuban national identity.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I propose that the autobiographies and biographies analyzed herein share distinct discursive strategies for the representation of racialized identities. I posit that the few Afro-Hispanic Caribbean authors who have attempted to narrate their life, have done so by rereading blackness against dominant ideologies of race and nation that have historically silenced them. Each author encodes this silence in his or her discourse, consciously or unconsciously, in diverse ways. One of the central arguments in my research is that Hispanic Afro-Caribbean authors have used autobiography and biography to challenge, negotiate, and reproduce the epistemological beliefs underlying dominant ideologies of national identity in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. To do so, Juan Francisco Manzano, Víctor Virgilio López García, Piri Thomas, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy have enacted silence as a main discursive strategy to redefine what it means to be black in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Honduras, and the United States. The use of silence is a strategy that is necessary in a society that promotes institutional racism based on an ideology of white superiority that excludes those of African descent from full integration into the nation. The four authors analyzed in this dissertation subvert the dominant discourse by, in many ways contradictorily, silencing parts of their identity while highlighting others. To fully assert one's blackness is to go against national identity discourses from the nineteenth and twentieth century where whiteness, literary and racial, is the dominant desire.

The Afro-Caribbean writers I analyzed employ various discursive strategies as they attempt to construct their own subjectivity. The salient strategies are: silences of racial discrimination—including the silencing of information about blackness as a

performance of whiteness—engaging discourses of slavery, contradictory discourses that reject and accept racial ideologies, creating metaphors to contest racism and modernity, using euphemisms to conceal racism, and finally, by playing on difference in the redefinition of signifiers that have historically been used to exclude them from the discourse on national identity.

The main questions I consider are: What discursive strategies do Afro-Caribbean writers employ as they attempt to construct their own subjectivity? How do these discursive strategies constitute a contestation of the objectification of the black subject? How does Afro-Caribbean writing reproduce, negotiate or challenge dominant ideologies about national identity and modernization?

Many of these discursive strategies constitute a contestation of the objectification of the black subject. I argue that the rejections of blackness found in the autobiographies of Manzano and Piri Thomas, reinforce whitening ideologies, but in doing so both authors are also negotiating with dominant discourses regarding race to assert their own definition of blackness to challenge ideologies that see them as intellectually inferior. The negotiations of each author's black identity contests exclusionary discourses of national identity as they seek entrance into national institutions and culture. In addition, *Klabel, Down These Mean Streets,* and *Las criadas de la Habana,* all reference slavery in some way to contest their own objectification.

The connection to discourses of slavery is another salient strategy. In *Las criadas,* it operates as a source of strength and resistance against racial discrimination. While Manzano resisted the inferiority of his slave status with discursive silences, contradictions, and other textual organizational strategies, the protagonist of *Las criadas,*

Marta, invokes a discourse of slavery to overtly resist the impositions of racial and national ideologies that have reinforced racist discourse and created unequal access to resources in twentieth century Cuban society.

> Todos sabíamos por ella misma [su abuela] que había sido esclava y que la trajeron sin su madre cuando tenía menos de diez años . . . Cuando alguien o algo le molestaba, levantaba su bastón y con la otra mano en la cintura decía en alta voz 'conmigo no se juega, yo que sí soy negra gangá de nación, carajo.'(Pérez Sarduy 102-03)

Nonetheless, Marta contradicts here reverence for her ancestry when she uses derogatory language to describe her friend Basilia: ". . . Basilia, una sirvienta mulata jabá de pelo malo-malo. . . (Pérez Sarduy 107). Marta iterates a discourse that sees any physical expression of African heritage as negative when she describes her hair as *malo*. Thus, Marta has created a silence through the contradictions between the pride she illustrates for her African grandmother and her choice of language that continues to see it as negative.

Piri Thomas also invokes discourses of slavery. In the following example, Thomas's father critiques his language choices because of their relation to being African American and reminiscent of slavery in the US: '"Damn you, I'll teach you,"' he yelled. '"I'm throwing you out of this house and you come back no more. Talking like you came from some goddamned cotton field"' (Thomas 198). Similarly, Thomas repeats the same discourse of his father as he attempts to insult an African American man, "I didn't want to, but if I had to, that motherfucker was gonna pick cotton in hell" (253). Thomas rejects any connection to the history of slavery in the United States that is imposed upon him

because of his blackness and, instead, redefines what it means for him to be black and Puerto Rican in the United States. Thomas also rejects the discourse of slavery in Puerto Rico that has silenced any African heritage in favor of the representation and lauding of an indigenous past.

In *Klabel,* the author does not directly address slavery, but he does reiterate racist discourses that are also found in Manzano's work, specifically that education was not for people of color:

> . . . no hizo otra cosa Klabel que obedecer el mandato de la dueña de la casa y resignarse a su mala suerte y decidiendose [sic] a buscar otro trabajo y aceptar la realidad, su color ante la honorable señora prevalecía sobre su capacidad intelectual, para ella Klabel era un simple lacayo sin derecho para estudiar . . . (López García 37)

Thus, he indirectly connects his current situation in Honduras during the twentieth century to racial discourses from the nineteenth century that were used to segregate black people from the world of the lettered elite.

The Afro-Caribbean writing that I have analyzed has reproduces, negotiates, and challenges dominant ideologies about national identity and modernization through various discursive strategies. For instance, the reproduction of whitening ideologies as codified in discourses about modernization and the national imaginary is found in the silencing of a black identity that in various moments each author chooses to accept and laud as foundational to their identity. Yet, on the other hand, Piri Thomas negotiates with modernity and racism through his metaphors of heart and darkness as he attempts to avert racial codes that oppress him because of his blackness. Manzano also negotiates with the

racial codes of his time as he asserts his mulatto identity, but this strategy also reinforces whitening ideologies that define national identity.

Each author represents the home as a site of conflict to challenge oppressive racial and national ideologies because the home is where many of the racial and national discourses are enacted. In *Down,* Thomas uncovers the racism that exists within his own family as he confronts his father and his brother who insist on their whiteness. In *Las criadas,* Marta experiences discrimination in the homes of the men and women for whom she works. Similarly, *Klabel* reveals the home to be a place where racist discourse is reproduced. Each author has (re)presented the home as a space where the reproduction of macro discourses surrounding national identity have continued to subjugate black identity in the name of progress and modernization. Juan Francisco Manzano, Víctor Virgilio López García, Piri Thomas, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy use family as a metaphor for the nation. The connections between family, race, and sex are evident in all the works and serves as the micro level representation of larger problems in each respective time and space. Thus, these men look to impact their immediate environment, their families, their neighbors, and the members of their nation through literature. To challenge this space, they have carefully written the home as constitutive of part of their racial and national identity.

The Hispanic Caribbean, Circum-Caribbean, or the Caribbean Diaspora in the United States has been represented in these works as part of a constantly shifting racialized identity. This identity is one that is based upon difference and comparisons that are not always internally constructed, but externally imposed by racial and national discourses that arose in the nineteenth century and have been reenacted or transformed in

the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Beginning with Juan Francisco Manzano, race was socially constructed as a barrier to freedom, autonomy, education, and wealth, but because of his understanding and negotiation of racial categories, Manzano was provided with greater privilege. The racial epithets—*moreno*, black, *negro*, *mulato*, and white—and the use of such for each authors purpose, represents the malleability of racial identity in literary discourse. With Piri Thomas, Víctor Virgilio López García, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy, race is represented as a construct that has silenced their voices, and thus each author uses that silence as a discursive strategy to challenge or affirm racial and national ideologies as a function of their identity.

Manzano's voice became representative of nineteenth century Cuban national identity development as it circulated among the literary circles of his time, even if his life was an aspect of that identity that many wished to remove. His work was well-known and his life story impacted the lives of the men who were attempting to define Cuba's future at that time, men like Domingo del Monte and José Antonio Saco. Unfortunately, because of the silences in his work, and the loss of the second half of his autobiography, we only have access to a partial identity written through a process of selection of events that his petitioner prescribed. We are the recipients of the partial truths that together form a narrative that is specific to the Afro-Hispanic slave experience. Manzano's life story highlights the racial ideologies that surrounded him with hatred, fear, and violence and silenced his ability to freely express himself. Yet, the oppression created by the dominant racial and national discourses that his life represents, has been used to inspire the cause of equality, love, and humanity. I hear a hope in his words that love and humanity will influence the identity of his nation, his family, and the lives of each who reads his words.

As much as Manzano's work is about the erasure and exposure of racism and abuse, it is also representative of modern ideals of progress and evolution toward a more equitable future for all.

López García elliptically approaches the racial ideologies that seek to marginalize his race and culture. In the narrative, the accounts of the racism he experienced have a lasting emotional resonance that demands empathy for his situation. The national and racial ideologies that he encounters remain in the author's present state of existence. As an author, as a narrator, and as a protagonist he is unable to transcend the effect that these ideologies had and have on him. The racist ideologies that he encounters may be silenced through euphemisms or his use of humility, but they are not erased and instead become challenges to those same ideologies. Reading his life story, we gain understanding that these ideologies remain dominant in Honduras in the 20th century, and that Victor Virgilio López García feels reluctant to insist on their removal as he seeks convergence between his local and national cultures. The silencing of information about race was a difficult discourse to identify, especially in the work of López García. His intent to respond to racial prejudice embedded in national identity discourses created many silences in his work. López García circumvented the topic of race as much as possible to instead highlight his educational achievements in an attempt to erase the discrimination he suffered. As he responded to or resisted racial discrimination in Honduras in the twentieth century, he also hid himself under a pseudonym and arbitrary discourses of luck and fate. These silences are representative of the racial and national discourses that have attempted to define what it means to be black in Latin America, the Hispanic Caribbean, and the United States. However, these authors use their discourse to challenge and

negotiate the signifiers that have come to be a part of their identity and that were used to remove them from discourse of national identity.

Piri Thomas represents the many facets of his identity to resist the homogenization and whitening of his Puerto Rican identity, both in US society and in Puerto Rican culture. In the revelation of his subjective experiences within his historical context, he highlights the inequality and discrimination that men of color suffered during the twentieth century in Harlem, NY. His work integrates itself into the Civil Rights Movement by condemning racism and discrimination. In so much as he aligns himself with these ideologies, his identity distances itself from a homogenous definition of blackness that does not reflect his subjectivity. Thomas creates for himself a space of contestation from which he represents his Afro-Puerto Rican identity as contrary to ideas of US nationality and blackness that remove him from his Puerto Rican heritage.

Pérez Sarduy has written a novel that explores racial subjectivities in twentieth century Cuba through the intricate details of his mother's memories. Marta's Afro-Cuban identity is represented in historical referents that reiterate cultural traditions passed on from women to their children. The narration provides names and places, intersections and towns, all which highlight the Afro-Cuban influence in greater Cuban society, as well as how the white elite and wealthy sectors have influenced Afro-Cuban life. Accordingly, Pérez Sarduy details the racial discrimination that is contained within institutions, such as the home, and is reinforced by microaggressions. Marta experiences racial discrimination on what appears to be a daily basis while working in Havana. Her struggles for autonomy and self-identification are limited by the racial understandings of the twentieth century. However, Marta never lets her identity or strength waiver when confronted with racial

prejudice, and Pérez Sarduy uses euphemisms, metaphors, footnotes, and a discourse of slavery as the discursive strategies to challenge any impositions of inferiority that dominant society attempts to enact.

While education was not the primary focus of each novel, its impact on each author's identity is represented in the narrations. The authors analyzed in this dissertation have asserted the removal of a metaphorical veil of ignorance imposed upon them by eugenics and racist national discourses that had displaced them from the land of the lettered elites. For example, Juan Francisco Manzano and Víctor Virgilio López García are both told that education, writing, and reading were not for men of their class. For Manzano, literacy was dangerous because it was forbidden to slaves and because a literate slave was viewed as a threat. For López García, societal prejudice against the Garífuna community and geographical economic exclusion complicated his attempts to become an educator. Piri Thomas also experienced the school system in the United States as a place of prejudice and discrimination where dominant racial and national discourses were enacted against him. Lastly, for Marta in *Las criadas de La Habana,* education was necessarily secondary to providing for herself and her family. Each author represents a discourse on education in their narrative because of the ideological efforts made at the micro and macro levels of society to deny it to them. However, as they define their own identity, they begin to see how this metaphorical veil of ignorance, imposed by negative racialization and discrimination, has displaced them from the national ideal and excluded them from full participation in the affairs of the nation state.

Each author uses his identity to challenge national ideologies and redefine their blackness as an asset to not only himself but also his community and nation. Manzano,

Thomas, López García, and Pérez Sarduy have written their identities as constitutive of their historical contexts. Their histories have now become our history. They have inscribed their story, and that of those involved, on Latin American, Caribbean, and United States history. As much as racial discrimination and institutional racism have attempted to remove or marginalize them, these Hispanic Afro-Caribbean authors have now incorporated their discourse into the literary landscape.

Suggestions for Further Research

The authors analyzed in this dissertation were men from the Circum-Caribbean, Hispanic Caribbean, or the Caribbean Diaspora in the United States. This is a substantial limitation to this type of inquiry, but one imposed by restraints on time needed to conduct bibliographic searches and analysis. To expand scholarship around silence as discursive strategy used by Hispanic Afro-Caribbean writers, further research calls for the inclusion of female authors. For example, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century* by María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno would be a valuable addition to this area of research.

To add another biographical account to the collection of Hispanic Afro-Caribbean authors, *Biografia de un cimarrón* by Esteban Montejo and Miguel Barnet could be included. This work reveals many of the same discursive strategies and silences that we have seen with Manzano, Thomas, López García, and Pérez Sarduy. However, Montejo's biography was not included in this dissertation because I desired a greater geographical variety, instead of a heavy focus on works from Cuba. For a more in-depth analysis of racial and national discourses, I believe this study could be expanded to include works from

Brazil, like the autobiographical writings of Rosa Egipcíaca, the *Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*—a slave from Brazil who wrote his life as a free man in Canada—or *Primeiras Trovas Burlescas de Getulino* by Luis Gama. Additionally, the inclusion of works from Afro-Peruvian and Afro-Colombian authors, such as Nicomedes Santa Cruz, Manuel Zapato Olivella, and Arnoldo Palacios, would diversify the investigation of authors who articulate a black experience through written discourse across national and geographical contexts. Finally, I believe my research could open new avenues for the investigation of silence as a discursive strategy, not only in literature but also in art, music, and other types of expression.

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