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## Antonio Preciado and the Afro Presence in Ecuadorian Literature

Rebecca Gail Howes  
rhowes@utk.edu

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Rebecca Gail Howes entitled "Antonio Preciado and the Afro Presence in Ecuadorian Literature." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Modern Foreign Languages.

Michael Handelsman, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Óscar Rivera-Rodas, Dawn Duke, Chad Black

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**Antonio Preciado and the Afro Presence in  
Ecuadorian Literature**

A Dissertation Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy Degree  
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Rebecca Gail Howes  
May 2013

## DEDICATION

*To my parents, William and Gail Howes.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Apart from my individual efforts, the success of any project depends largely on the encouragement and guidance of many others. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the people who have been instrumental in the successful completion of my Doctor of Philosophy degree in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the literary trajectory of Antonio Preciado Bedoya (1941), a major Afroecuadorian writer, poet and diplomat whose work spans more than 50 years. Although relatively unknown outside of Ecuador, this dissertation will address that lack of recognition by studying his work in the more general context of the African Diaspora. It will reflect upon Preciado's re-definition of Ecuadorian identity in the new millennium. Preciado is a poet who portrays the Afro presence as central to the national experience of ethnic diversity and the construction of a pluricultural Ecuador. He emphasizes that Afroecuadorians be recognized as an integral component of national identity, and this all encompassing paradigm affirms the existence, subjectivity, and importance of Ecuador's Afro descendants.

Additionally, this dissertation examines Afro-Latin American diasporic thought. It seeks to analyze the various ways in which Afro-diasporic subjects assert their identities and being in the world, particularly in Ecuador. Preciado's poetry stresses the positive values of the black experience by concentrating on negritude. According to the poet, a spiritual awakening found in negritude and the African connection will lead to the physical liberation of Blacks. In other words, freedom for the people of African descent is predicated upon the conscious activation of one's Africanness and ultimately, their own agency. Many of his works are rooted in the ethnic memory of past experiences which he recovers through the African tradition of the talking drums. His poems reflect his African heritage and emphasize black ethnic identity as positive. Finally, his Afro-centered worldview stresses the propagation of an 'other's' sensibility, the

tolerance of difference, respect for all mankind regardless of racial and ideological difference, identification with and love of nature and universality.

While Preciado's poetry is most definitely Afro-centered, his works also address a wide-range of themes that transcend geographical and cultural borders. Therefore, his Afro-centric poetry should not be interpreted as isolationist. His poetic message reflects not only a black experience, but he has also adapted his poetry to the national needs of his country which reflect a collective experience, thus utilizing his personal trials to convey the pathos of the Ecuadorian nation.



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## Introduction

Throughout Latin America the exclusion of Blacks from official history, politics, economic spheres of influence, civic and social organizations, and institutions vis-à-vis a hegemonic discourse articulated through such projects as *mestizaje* and racial democracy has been an attempt to socially nullify and marginalize the African presence in the Americas. Many Latin American countries embrace ideologies of *mestizaje*, which on the one hand perpetuates the racial mixture between indigenous cultures and descendants of the European colonizers, and on the other hand bolsters the notion of racial democracy. Therefore, not only is African influence minimized or considered non-existent, but the question of ethnicity is suppressed in order to put forth an image of racial and national unity. This invisibility is the denial of the presence and cultural influences of vibrant communities of Afro descendants as well as the negation of an African philosophical thought and expression. Africans have not only been removed from their own cultural place, they have also been cast as “ontologically inferior and epistemically disabled” (Mignolo 1738). Furthermore, they have been relegated to the margins of European consciousness and knowledge of human experience. Socially and mentally dispossessed and culturally displaced, African descendants have not been regarded as knowledgeable agents capable of making their own history. For centuries their historical and cultural mores were exclusively defined by white men of European descent. With the exception of references made to slavery, sports or music, Blacks have been socially, culturally, historically and ethnically cleansed from the imaginaries of their respective countries.

In that regard, Afro-Hispanic literary works that portray the image of the Afro-Hispanic population are often disregarded, marginalized, labeled as convoluted, or rendered insignificant in Latin American literary discourse. Afro-Hispanic writers have been alienated from dominant discourses in Europe, the United States and even from those in Latin America and the Caribbean. Their relative obscurity in comparison to their white and / or white-mestizo counterparts is connected not only to the politics of race, but also to the politics of discursive legitimacy, which alludes to the meaning of what constitutes an intellectual in settings that have denied their access as well as to which literary works are considered legitimate for publication in national and international anthologies. Similarly, many Afro-Hispanic writers have not been incorporated into the curriculum of most major universities in the United States, Latin America or Spain. According to Marvin Lewis, although the most noteworthy exceptions are Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989) and Nancy Morejón (1944) from Cuba (*Afro-Hispanic Writers 2*), a literature course on Latin America would not normally include the critical works of the Afroecuadorian writer Nelson Estupiñán Bass (1912-2002) or the Afroperuvian writer Nicomedes Santa Cruz (1925-1992).

As stated by Richard Jackson, Afro-Hispanic writers are overlooked or omitted by traditional Hispanic literary canonical norms due to the fact that their writing is looked upon as too particular in terms of its thematic approach regarding the black experience (*Black Writers and the Hispanic Canon* 104). Therefore, the concern is not only about inclusion within civil society, but also inclusion within the canon of Hispanic literature. In fact, Jackson argues that

“as Black Hispanic literature emerges, it will offer a challenge for admission into the canon ‘worthy’ of Hispanic texts” (*Black Writers and the Hispanic Canon* 104).

Within the broad parameters of literary discourse, a long-standing and controversial debate has evolved with regard to what exactly constitutes a literary canon. In other words, the focus has centered upon the inclusions and exclusions as well as when and where subjects enter recognized cultural spaces and how such points of entry are pivotal to textual interrogation. This on-going dispute is vital to Afro-Hispanic and other literary critics. According to customary literary standards, the canon is defined as “a body of writing or other creative work that has been recognized as standard or authoritative” (Ross 514). John Gilroy in defining the term canon has proposed “a principle of selection by which some authors or texts were worthier of preservation than others” (233). A fundamental dilemma in the paradigmatic development of literature in general has always been whose writing will be censored and whose writing will be accepted, validated and thus, promoted as part of the taught canon of literary trends and criticism. Such notions of what constitutes a legitimate literary canon have effectively excluded Afro-Hispanic writers from mainstream cultural expression. For this reason works that focus on and examine critically Afro-Hispanic cultural production are crucial because they intervene in culturally recognized spaces, and by doing so have gradually reshaped and reconstructed the image of Blacks in Latin America.

Within the last 30 years, primarily due to the upsurge in the interest in black diasporic cultures that emerged with the postcolonial societies of the 1950s and the Civil Rights Movement

of the 1960s in the United States, growing interest in Afro-Hispanic writers and their works continues to challenge the spectrum of Latin American literature. The proliferation of new literary theories and critiques such as subaltern and postcolonial studies has generated renewed interest in Afro-Hispanic writers and their works. Moreover, it has disrupted traditional Hispanic literary discourse that often times neglected the close ties between gender, race, and class. Indeed, the work of new theory by contemporary scholars promises to be more inclusive with regard to the works of Afro-Hispanic writers whose commitment to social justice and aesthetic innovation has traditionally been overlooked and underdeveloped.

The development of Afro-Hispanic literary scholarship and, by extension, an emerging Afro-Hispanic canon, has not only begun to redress an imbalance in Latin American scholarship, but it has also rescued from obscurity several Afro-Hispanic writers. Without a doubt, the importance and persuasiveness of some accomplished scholars of Hispanic literature have contributed to bringing much needed attention to Afro-Hispanic literature while, at the same time, arguing for the inclusion of more Afro-Hispanic writers into the Latin American literary canon. One such writer who merits critical analysis is the Afroecuadorian writer, poet and diplomat, Antonio Preciado Bedoya (1941).

In most articles and books written about Afroecuadorian literature, Antonio Preciado falls within the company of Adalberto Ortiz (1914-2003) and Nelson Estupiñán Bass (1912-2002). These three Afroecuadorian writers have been identified as significant representatives of literary blackness in Ecuador. More importantly, however, they have been accepted into the national

literary canon. According to Lewis, “their works have been reviewed and are being published by established institutions, including the Casa de Cultura Ecuatoriana, which subsidizes and distributes at no charge numerous books” (*Afro-Hispanic Poetry* 83). Paradoxically, even though the presence of an Afroecuadorian voice has received some attention within Ecuador and also from foreign critics of Afro-Hispanic literature, the dearth of literary criticism regarding the literary trajectory of Preciado is striking.

Born in Ecuador's Esmeraldas Province, a predominantly black coastal region of northern Ecuador, Preciado continues to develop the literary trends established by his Afroecuadorian mentors, Adalberto Ortiz and Nelson Estupiñán Bass. Unlike his predecessors who worked primarily in narrative, however, Preciado is a poet who portrays the Afro presence as central to the national experience of ethnic diversity and the construction of a pluricultural Ecuador.

To date he has written eleven poetry collections. Among these are *Jolgorio* (1961), *Más acá de los muertos* (1966), and *Tal como somos* (1969), a poetic trilogy. Selections from all three volumes are included in *De sol a sol* (1979), an anthology of Preciado's works that also includes a number of new poems. *De sol a sol* traces the literary trajectory of poems published from 1961-1979. Republished in 1992, Preciado's latest publication of *De sol a sol* also includes a literary critical analysis by Esther Bermejo de Crespo. Among his latter works, which span from 1994 to the present, Preciado has published *De ahora en adelante* (1994), *Jututo* (1995), a poetic anthology of *De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo* titled *De par en par* (1998), *De boca en boca* (2005), *Antología personal* (2006), a book of poetry which includes selections from all nine

volumes, *Tal como si juntáramos campanas: Antología esencial 1961-2009* (2009), an abbreviated anthology of the poet's previous works as well as two new poems, "La efigie de Sandino" and "Yo «Alonso de Illescas»," and finally, *Con todos los que soy* (2012), his most recent anthology. In addition to publishing several poetry books and recording selected poems on CDs, Preciado has narrated the documentary *Entre cantos y marimbas: Antonio Preciado, poeta* (2007), a documentary on his life and literary trajectory in collaboration with noted individuals of Esmeraldas.

The poetry of Preciado seeks to re-construct the Afro presence in Ecuador, an important task since official versions of Ecuadorian history and literature (as in the rest of Latin America) tend to limit blackness to such obvious topics as musicality, folkloric traditions and religion. Founded within the ethnic memory of past experiences, Preciado's works address the ways in which Afro descendants have asserted their subjectivity when their existence has been and continues to be denied. Regardless of their conspicuous presence, Afro descendants have remained on the periphery of the constructs of both Andean and national identities. Negation of existence, an 'other' knowledge, an 'other' thought, and an 'other' philosophy have been silenced by dominant power structures of Creole, white-mestizo and indigenous cultures (Walsh and León 212). However, according to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is not a fixed and absolute entity, rather it is constructed across difference "through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 226). Thus, within the context of poetic discourse, memory functions as a voice that awakens a consciousness containing both individual and collective



dimensions. Memory as a main theme serves Afroecuadorians engaged in the revival to remember a collective past of the cultural memory they did not personally experience. It serves as a means in which Afro descendants not only gain a consciousness of self, but more importantly, it provides Blacks with a life-line to existence. In the performance of memory, consciousness is gained and restored and new forms of understanding are acquired. Memory unearths subjectivities that are capable of reconstructing a nation lost in exclusion.

In Preciado's writings, the discourse of memory is performed through the African phenomenon of the talking drums. Preciado uses the sound, rhythm and beat of both the drum and the marimba in his poetry to show their importance within the Afro-Hispanic milieu. The metaphor of the talking drum is a form of ancestral communication that crosses time, cultural space, and transcends borders. It connects black cultures throughout the New World Diaspora. Those who hold and carry memories, stories, and traditions sustain intellectual and social survival by engaging in acts of remembering and, by extension, the act of performing the past. The discourse of memory not only brings the individual subject to an awareness of self, but it also slowly encourages a connection of that self to others through oral tradition, collective memory and the lived experience within communities. In fact, ancestral memory forms the compass by which the oppressed people of Afro descent can find their way through the many layers of deculturation, subalternization and marginalization that have caused their alienation.

Even though Preciado's poetry is most definitely Afro-centered, he also writes about such topics as love, fear, and hope. Consequently, to limit his literary production to poems that only

speak specifically about blackness fails to assess and fully evaluate the extent to which Preciado writes about concrete Latin American reality in general. It must be understood that minority and ethnic voices not only celebrate their culture, but they also create an awareness of the ills of society and an environment of tolerance for difference and diversity so that all people will be able to work together to achieve a common goal of dignity and equal opportunity. Therefore, one does not always have to speak openly about blackness for race to be a driving force within the process of artistic representation. In fact, being Black often conditions how one sees the world. Preciado uses his individual black experience as a point of departure in all of his poetry, albeit obliquely. The black perspective includes all the deep-seated pain and affliction of mankind (Jackson, *Black Literature and Humanism* 120). Not only does Preciado present themes, form and content which mirror a different perspective of reality based on being Black in Esmeraldas, but he also shows his concern for the humanity of others. Preciado identifies with all oppressed people whether Black or white; he is against the inhumanity of all human oppression. Much of his poetry focuses on the mental and physiological state associated with a wide variety of feelings and emotions without making direct reference to Blacks. Preciado writes about the oppressed black community, as well as the subjugated and disenfranchised populations as a whole. In effect, the literature of Preciado stands out as Black even when recognized for its socialist, grassroots, social protest or worldwide expression.

As seen in Preciado's work, as well as that of other writers from underrepresented minority groups, struggles of identity take on a particular intensity, especially when writers

negotiate and question the multiple dimensions of their identities. The development of multiple aspects of identity in a context that may be hostile and exclusive presents psychosocial identity challenges for black writers, particularly for those in predominantly white societal contexts.<sup>1</sup> Born and raised in what Angel Rama coined as the *Ciudad Real*, Preciado's entry into the so-called *Ciudad Letrada* creates a social and cultural contradiction that is at the core of being a black intellectual. Preciado is a poet who is Black, Ecuadorian and, at the same time, Latin American. In other words, Preciado is a black poet which means that he writes from the experience of being a Black Latin American man from Esmeraldas. These descriptors—poet, Black, black poet, Ecuadorian and Latin American—are always present, even though at times, all are not visible in his writing. However, only by placing Preciado within the full historical literary context of Ecuadorian literature from the experience of being Black, and all that it means to be Black, will the underlining contradictions between these multiple identities become apparent. The constant negotiation of identity between the past and the present, the imagined, the desired, the real and the contemporary provides a sense of coherence about who one is and how one lives within a social, political, intellectual and cultural context. Thus, although blackness is a focal point for his artistic expression, his poetry reflects this incessant struggle with an identity dilemma that constrains and liberates him all at once. In effect, his poetry

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<sup>1</sup> In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon provides an account of the psychological effects of racism. Based, in part, on his own struggles against the psychologically alienating effects of colonialism and racism, Fanon points out the difficulties Blacks, in particular, face in trying to develop affirming, positive identities in the face of white supremacy (109-40).

reflects this history of seemingly irreconcilable differences of multiple identities in relation to his historical past and personal present.

Although, Marvin Lewis, Richard Jackson and Esther Bermejo de Crespo have contributed to drawing attention to this Afro-Hispanic writer, their scholarly appraisal has only focused on the first part of Preciado's literary creation published between 1961 and 1979. In addition, there are a few scholarly articles that have been written as well. Unfortunately, his works published after 1994 have received little if any critical attention.<sup>2</sup> In fact, due to perhaps a lack of interest or misconceptions regarding literary intent, Preciado, for the most part, has deemed it necessary to talk about his own literary production through his personal website, interviews and newspaper articles. At present, no critical work exists that analyzes the totality of Preciado's literary production, and without such a comprehensive view, it is impossible to appreciate the complexity of his poetic trajectory as well as his importance in Afroecuadorian cultural affirmation.

In addition to his extensive poetic literary production, CDs and documentary, Preciado has been an avid proponent of black identity and black self-awareness in Ecuador. In fact, he has brought black awareness to new levels. From 2002-2003, Preciado was Ecuador's ambassador to UNESCO in Paris.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 he was named Ecuador's first Minister of Culture.<sup>4</sup> He currently

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<sup>2</sup> For an exception to this lack of critical attention, see Michael Handelsman's work titled "Antonio Preciado, poeta de la diáspora," which was published in 2011 (in *Género, raza y nación* 133-64).

<sup>3</sup> Established in 1945, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) is a special agency of the United Nations that serves as a vehicle for promoting and bringing together different cultures and viewpoints through educational, scientific and cultural collaboration from all corners of the globe.

holds the position of Ecuadorian ambassador to Nicaragua where he continues to promote Afroecuadorian culture via poetry readings of his works. In effect, Preciado embraces his responsibility as a writer, both artistically and politically. His poetic message reflects not only a black experience, but he has also adapted his poetry to the national needs of his country which reflect a collective experience, thus utilizing his personal trials to convey the pathos of the Ecuadorian nation.

### **Methodology of the Dissertation**

Through close textual readings, my dissertation will analyze Preciado's literary work from the standpoint of an Afro-centric perspective anchored in the historical experience of being Black.<sup>5</sup> A critical analysis within the context of Afrocentrism produces a dis-alienation and a de-colonization of official accounts of Afro descendants while also serving as a means by which Afro-descendant subjects assert their identities and subjectivities in the world, particularly in Ecuador (Walsh and León 211-12). Explicitly noteworthy are the reconstruction and reshaping

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<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Culture was created by the current president Rafael Correa. Prior to Preciado's appointment, the position was under the direction of the Ministry of Education. See Clara Medina, "Preciado, el poeta de la negritud para un ministerio que nace."

<sup>5</sup> An Afro-centered approach rooted in a process of de-colonization liberates Blacks from the antagonistic, hierarchical dichotomization of Eurocentrism. Whereas on the one hand, an Afro-centric paradigm recognizes a heritage shared by Blacks as descendants of the first Diaspora, it also acknowledges the plurality of African descendant identity. This more inclusive approach regarding blackness underscores the multiple ways in which this collective or shared experience has been altered by historical, political, socio-economic, social and cultural experiences. Moreover, it takes into consideration the empirical circumstances of individual lives. In short, it challenges Eurocentric notions of African-derived identity, radical Afro-centric discourse of racial essentialism, and transcends the reinscription of notions of authentic identity. See Victor Anderson 9-11; G. Reginald Daniel, in *More than Black?* 172-75; hooks 23-31 and Hall, in "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223-25.

of self and community and the creation of new and revitalized ethno-racial identities that produce ethno-racial solidarity in the minds of the disenfranchised who seek self-affirmation and self-legitimation as part of a vital project of self-rehabilitation. Finally, this type of critical analysis will allow for Afroecuatorians who have had their identity, culture and history impacted upon or disrupted by forces of Conquest and imperialism, namely slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, to be active social advocates capable of defining their own cultural and historical contributions to the Ecuadorian nation.

In addition to a close reading of both primary and secondary sources, I conducted various interviews in both Nicaragua and Ecuador. In the case of Nicaragua, I traveled to Managua during the month of April, 2010 to meet with Preciado as well as to discuss at length his poems. In June, 2010 I made a more extensive trip to Esmeraldas, Guayaquil and Quito where I conducted interviews with several contemporary Ecuadorian writers, poets, critics and literary scholars regarding Preciado's literary production.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter one provides a brief overview of the Afroecuatorian within the historical and sociopolitical context of Ecuador. If we are to understand the meanings of blackness in Ecuador, we must critically examine the three historical moments (1553, 18<sup>th</sup> century, 1900) in which the African became part of Ecuador's history as well as the paradigms that have emerged from Euro-American racism and black liberation over the past five centuries. In addition, I will briefly discuss the literary contributions of both Adalberto Ortiz and Nelson Estupiñán Bass. Ortiz

represents the initial impetus of the literary appropriation of blackness in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, and, thus, represents the inauguration of the Black-as-author in Ecuadorian literature. Although, much of his literary production focuses on Afroecuadorian identity, the struggle against oppression and social injustice, his works also deal with the subject of racial duality (mulatez), a fundamental problem many multicultural and multiracial societies encounter in their quest for national solidarity. The literary trajectory of Estupiñán Bass, on the other hand, emphasizes black pride, solidarity with other Blacks, locally and globally, and social and revolutionary change. By providing an overview of the Afroecuadorian within these initial attempts to create an alternative national imaginary, one can more readily evaluate some of the emerging trends in Ecuadorian literature regarding the re-definition of Ecuadorian identity in the new millennium.

*Jolgorio*, *Más acá de los muertos* and *Tal como somos* will be analyzed in chapter two. As a whole, this poetic trilogy reflects the formation of a black poet's intellectual and artistic sensibility. As a young black writer of the 1960s, the formative influence of Black America, the Black Power Movement, and the political and diplomatic climate of social protest in the United States, Latin America, Africa and the Third World in general made an impression on Preciado and his writing. This climate formed the background for the poet's work as well as defined the context in which his ideas, thoughts and worldviews emerged.

In *Bom, bom, bom*, the first part of *Jolgorio*, Preciado deals with the legitimization and the demystification of the Afro presence in Ecuador. More specifically, Preciado assesses the role of Blacks and black culture in Ecuador. Concerned with the expression of his own African

heritage, *Bom, bom, bom* focuses to a great extent on Africa and Africa's contribution to the Americas. Themes include black pride and the poet's racial identification with blackness, his Ecuadorian milieu and the poor black neighborhood of Esmeraldas. Clearly, Preciado does not overlook the social conditions of Blacks in Ecuador. The lived experience of Ecuadorian Blacks is also characterized by suffering.

In *Amanecer*, the second half of *Jolgorio*, Preciado goes beyond Ecuador's borders to address a tradition of societal values that have perpetuated social, economic and political stratification. As the title suggests, the intent of the writer is to create social awareness. Owing to the political and social climate of the 1960s in Latin America, the Cuban Revolution and its impact both on Latin America and the Third World in general, *Amanecer* reflects a passionate commitment on the part of the poet to social justice. He emphasizes collective action and shared power rather than command and control in creating change for the common good.

In *Más acá de los muertos*, Preciado argues that there is more to the black legacy in Ecuador than just cultural influences. Although *Más acá de los muertos* does not speak out specifically about blackness, it does reveal evidence of an African epistemology, rooted in the presence of the ancestral figure. For the poet, the ancestors reflect the communal history of Blacks in Latin America, more specifically, in Ecuador. In this work Preciado talks about death and the hereafter, African people's affiliation with nature and the role of the ancestors in articulating the link between the past and the present, that is, the notion of continuity across generations as well as the construction of both personal and communal identities.



In *Tal como somos*, Preciado reflects upon the re-definition of Ecuadorian identity in the new millennium. Desirous of bringing all segments of the community into national life and the arts, Preciado explores the historical and ethnic factors which have helped shape Ecuador. More specifically, his poetry exposes the challenges of nation-states in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to achieve national cohesion while promoting diversity. In *Tal como somos*, Preciado addresses the writer's role in society as an important voice in shaping and defining national identity while challenging preconceived notions about a homogeneous national identity. Not only does *Tal como somos* depict an individual's subjective struggle of the interrelationships that exist amongst his or her multiple group identities, but it also reflects a more complex conception of both national and racial identity grounded on egalitarian and pluralist tenets that seek to achieve the equality of difference.

First and foremost, he proposes the need to rethink Andean identity, but not in terms of conformity. Rather, he promotes the notion of pluriculturalism. National unity should not be predicated on the refutation, benign acceptance, or merely the coexistence of ethnic and cultural diversity. He gravitates towards the recreation of new imaginaries of a pluricultural construct. In highlighting pluriculturalism, he implicates an approach to the self and the other as complex beings which act and react from the perspective of those multiple identifications. He advocates for the incorporation of all ethnic groups into the national cultural hegemony while simultaneously acknowledging each group's particularities. Thus, marginalized communities that were once barred and silenced can now assume an active role in the social transformation of

Ecuadorian society.

Furthermore, he proposes a new path of reflection regarding the Afroecuadorian who is not viewed as peripheral to the Ecuadorian experience. Preciado emphasizes that Afroecuadorians be recognized as an integral component of national identity, and this all encompassing paradigm affirms the existence, subjectivity, and importance of Ecuador's Afro descendants. The affirmation of racial identity is not only an important element of self, but it is also a reminder that ancestral memory is a guide by which Afro descendants can find new paths to agency and citizenship.

Although Preciado's interest revolves around the exclusion of Afros from their respective national imaginaries and the impact this exclusion has had on their identity as well as knowledge articulation, his interpretation of negritude points to a more inclusive construct of self and identity. Not only does Preciado challenge essentialist and reductionist notions of negritude by addressing the historical specificity of blackness, he also moves beyond the either / or paradigm of dichotomous hierarchical ranking of difference. As with Ecuadorian identity, Afroecuadorian identity is not pure or static; neither is it a single or isolated category. Black identity in Ecuador is also characterized by hybridity, diversity and above all, difference. In *Tal como somos*, Preciado explores the infinite permutations and the complexity of Afroecuadorians' historical lived experiences. Finally, Preciado's concern for Blacks also serves as a point of departure for a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary struggles of other groups of exclusion. His Afro-centered worldview stresses the propagation of an 'other's' sensibility, the tolerance of

difference, respect for all mankind regardless of racial and ideological difference, identification with and love of nature and universality.

*De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo* will be analyzed in chapter three. As in his earlier works, memory, the historical past, the social and political changes taking place throughout the world continue to serve as dominant features for *De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo*. Written as well as published during the era of globalization, both *De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo* reflect upon the contemporary international and global social order. Since processes of globalization brought significant changes to Latin America, Preciado's poetry explores the effects of globalization on society, daily life, folkloric culture, oral tradition and black cultural expressiveness.

In *De ahora en adelante*, Preciado's poetry reflects upon the effects of cultural globalization. Although cultural globalization has increased cross-cultural contacts between individuals, it has also contributed to the alienation of individuals from their ancestral and oral traditions. In Latin America, more specifically in Ecuador, cultural globalization has led to the homogenization of culture, that is, the replacement of African and indigenous folk culture by mass popular culture that has appropriated, distorted and commodified certain elements of both Ecuadorian Black and indigenous cultural expressiveness. Since oral tradition is relevant to the safeguarding of traditional cultural and folklore heritage, Preciado's primary mission in *De ahora en adelante* is to focus on the bearers of this tradition.

In *De ahora en adelante* Preciado is invested with the question of collective and marginal

identities within the context of the contemporary international and global social order. He posits a more inclusive identity, grounded on a sense of collective commonality of a people who not only feel marginal to mainstream society, but also share an identity that reflects the negative tendencies of dislocation, exclusion and oppression brought about by the processes of globalization. Since the forgotten occupy a pivotal space in this process of construction, marginalized characters dominate *De ahora en adelante*. Preciado's primary mission is to revive memory and, thus, ensure continuity of life. At the same time, he shows a pronounced interest in relinquishing the author's privilege of control from above while allowing ordinary people to make themselves heard from below. For the poet, the continued existence of folklore is inextricably linked to the social, political, economic and cultural well-being of its creators, and its continued value to them and their way of life must be sustained, even if changed in the modern context.

*Jututo* is an in-depth study of Afroecuadorian culture, customs and its people. For nearly four and a half centuries, Afroecuadorians have identified themselves as a distinct people as well as possessing a distinct culture. Although their distinctiveness has arisen in a cultural space that has been bounded by racial, ethnic, political, economic and artistic boundaries, Ecuadorian Blacks have managed to carve out, create and maintain a distinct cultural tradition largely independent of white and / or white-mestizo influence. In *Jututo*, Preciado explores the multiple ways in which Ecuadorian Blacks have promoted blackness, that is, a self-conscious black ethnic

project of articulation. As identity and as blackness, the articulation of blackness in Ecuador is also reflexive of a plurality of ethos, ideologies and visions.

## **Justification of Topic**

The explosion will not happen today. It is too soon...or too late. I do not come with timeless truths. My consciousness is not illuminated with ultimate radiances. Nevertheless, in complete composure, I think it would be good if certain things were said. These things I am going to say, not shout. For it is a long time since shouting has gone out of my life. So very long...Why this book? No one has asked me for it. Especially those to who it is directed. Well? Well, I reply quite calmly that there are too many idiots in this world. And having said it, I have the burden of proving it. Toward a new humanism...Understanding among men...Our colored brothers...Mankind, I believe in you...Race prejudice...To understand and to love... (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 7).

One might question what good it is to study a tragic past. Knowledge of the past is certainly not the Afroecuadorians' sole salvation, but it is the first affirmative step toward overcoming the historical shackles of human suffering and exploitation which continue to afflict the African descendant community to the present day. Many people of African descent in the Americas lack a sense of themselves and their history. They are keenly aware of the contributions made by people of European descent and others in their society. However, they are unaware of their place and the contributions of people like themselves to ancient civilizations or the Americas. On a continuum from the past, even before their arrival to the Americas, their contribution is rich and important to the development of humankind. History as well as literature tells us what is important. If a segment of the population is excluded from the historical as well

as the literary context, that segment is seemingly not important. This exclusion also carries over into national development. If the hegemonic ideology deems a group unimportant, this type of thinking is perpetuated within mainstream society and there are political and economic implications. At the same time, a group that lacks a sense of self and national identity also contributes to this exclusion. This lack of racial solidarity contributes to their incapacity to effect change and to mobilize their African community to take action and transform their current situation.

Finally, the 21<sup>st</sup> century promises to be one in which multiple voices of all the people, and not just a selected few, must be heard in order to meet the challenges of exploitative capitalism, imperialistic hegemony and globalization. Therefore, the difference between the ways in which one approaches the study of literature of the past, present and future will be influenced by the multiple images of Latin American identity that one will find in literature written within this century. Thus, the main goals of this dissertation are accordingly twofold. On the one hand, my objective here is to highlight the existence of an African heritage-based identity in Ecuador, and on the other hand to demonstrate to what extent the development of an Afro-Hispanic discourse has challenged, counteracted and overcome the harmful effects of coloniality and modernity. In the case of Preciado, his Afro-centric writing has as its primary purpose to make the Afro-diasporic query discernible within the national imaginary. His Afro-centric perspective propagates an 'other's' awareness which not only advocates its particular

interests, but also promotes a black world vision which in the final analysis represents the interests of all Ecuadorians.

# 1. Precursors of Blackness in Ecuador<sup>1</sup>

## 1.1 Regional Origins of Blackness

History rarely addresses the people of African origin in the Andean region. Made up of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, Catherine Walsh and Edizon León estimate that there are 15 million people of African descent in the region (2).<sup>2</sup> Although predominately in the Caribbean and Pacific coasts, sizeable populations of black people are also found in the central valleys as well as the urban hubs of the highlands. As was the case in other Latin American countries, the initial arrival of Africans into the Andean region originated with the Spanish slave trade. In order to cope with the unprecedented decline in the indigenous populations, which hitherto had supplied much of the needed labor, the Spanish crown authorized the exploitation of Africans. According to Herbert S. Klein, colonists brought a substantial number of enslaved Africans to work in the Colombian gold mines and the coastal

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, blackness in Ecuador refers to the historical, social, cultural, artistic, economic and political contributions that have emanated from people classed as, or self-identifying as Black.

<sup>2</sup> The total population of Blacks in Latin America is uncertain. According to Juliet Hooker, not only does the national census fail to classify people according to their ancestral patrimony, but it also does not include questions regarding race. In fact, the demography of blackness is based on individuals who self-identify themselves as Black (287). Unlike other Latin American countries, however, Ecuador's 2001 census did include a question about ethnic self-identification (Robinson 33). Whereas 77.7 % of the population self-identified as mestizo, 10.8 % as white and 6.1 % as indigenous, 5.0 % identified themselves as Black or mulatto (León Guzmán 117). Prior to 2001, the official calculation used by the Ecuadorian government for the black population was 3% (Robinson 33). Nevertheless, activists and some scholars estimate the black population in Ecuador to be as high as 15%. For further discussion of this topic, see chapter one, footnote 4.



plantations of Peru, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador (29). Thus, slaves from both Western and Central Africa became an additional, ongoing source of the much needed labor force in the Andes.<sup>3</sup>

Because Ecuador, like most Andean nations, is typically associated with its indigenous heritage, few seldom comprehend the extent to which Blacks have been an integral part of the national experience. Although the total population of Blacks in Ecuador is difficult to ascertain, Norman E. Whitten and Diego Quiroga estimate the Ecuadorian population to be 6 to 7 percent Black (87).<sup>4</sup> Primarily located along the northwest coast, in the province of Esmeraldas, Blacks have lived in Ecuador since the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

For those populations whose ancestors arrived from Africa, an African rebellion marks the introduction of Blacks and black culture into Ecuador. Unlike other Latin American countries, whose Afro presence represents the forced migration of Africans into Latin America vis-à-vis the institution of slavery, blackness as a stimulus of self-liberation represents the first historical moment in which the African became part of Ecuador's history. A violent tropical storm off the northwest coast of Ecuador in what is now the province of Esmeraldas, caused the

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<sup>3</sup> Due to the opening of the West African coast by the Portuguese, most of the Africans brought over to South America came from the Senegambia region between the Senegal and Niger rivers. Upon reaching Lima, African slaves were sold throughout the viceroyalty (Klein 29).

<sup>4</sup> In a personal interview, Catherine Walsh stated that Ecuadorian Blacks make up approximately 12 to 15% of Ecuador's total population. Walsh claims that the number of individuals who self-identify themselves as either mulattos or Blacks is increasing. This growth has been due in part to the 1998 Constitution. Prior to 1998, Blacks were not mentioned or even recognized by the State as a separate and distinct cultural community (22 June 2010).

shipwreck of a Spanish slave ship in 1553 (Whitten and Quiroga 79).<sup>5</sup> According to the Esmeraldan historian Julio Estupiñán Tello (1913-2009), the twenty-three African slaves bounded for Peru and under the leadership of a black warrior, Antón, resisted the Spanish slavers and managed to free themselves (45-46). Along with other self-liberated Blacks entering the region led by a *ladino*,<sup>6</sup> Alonso de Illescas, the fugitive slaves established themselves as rulers among the neighboring indigenous people and *zambos*<sup>7</sup> (Estupiñán Tello 47-48). Slave rebellion and black resistance resulted not only in the African dominance over other indigenous groups in the region, but it also prohibited Spanish infiltration and domination. By 1599, Blacks controlled what are today parts of the southern coast of Colombia and the northern coast of Ecuador (Whitten and Quiroga 70-80). This black remote area, *palenque*,<sup>8</sup> known as the Zambo Republic, became a refuge for runaway slaves and fugitives. Free from colonial rule, these coastal dwellers of African descent remained virtually self-governing throughout the entire era of slavery in Ecuador (Estupiñán Tello 62).

The second influx of African slaves into Ecuador takes place in the Chota-Mira Valley.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Although many historians, writers and scholars alike document the wrecked slaving ship as Blacks first recorded history of entry into the province, such references begin with a work by the traveler Miguel Cabello de Balboa (1535-1608) entitled, “Verdadera descripción y relación larga de la provincia y tierra de las Esmeraldas” (García-Barrio, in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations* 535).

<sup>6</sup> *Ladino* refers to a Black born in Africa but acculturated in Hispanic language and culture.

<sup>7</sup> *Zambo* refers to individuals who are of mixed African and Amerindian ancestry.

<sup>8</sup> *Palenque* refers to a settlement founded by self-liberated people of African descent. It is the equivalent to American and Caribbean maroon communities.

<sup>9</sup> The Chota-Mira Valley is located in the north-central provinces of Imbabura and Carchi.

Early history dictates that the conflictive and antagonistic relationship between the colonial authorities and the indigenous in the Chota-Mira Valley played a pivotal role in determining the African's fate. According to Whitten and Quiroga, from 1550 until 1770, aboriginal communities and villages were dismantled and runaway slaves and fugitives from the coastal region as well as from the Andes began entering the area (81). Indigenous exploitation by white and / or white-mestizo overseers provoked violent outbreaks between indigenous and non-indigenous people (Whitten and Quiroga 81). Incessant conflict between these two factions later prompted the direct importation of African slaves by the Jesuit Order (Whitten and Quiroga 81). According to Leslie B. Rout, from the time of their arrival to their expulsion, from 1586 until 1767, the Jesuits brought enslaved Africans to work the land (232). These slaves originated from West Africa, Spain, Portugal, the Caribbean and Colombia (Whitten and Quiroga 81).

The Jesuits ran slave-based plantations in the area. They took advantage of the semi-arid climate to grow sugarcane and other crops ill-suited to most of the highlands. Enormous sugarcane production came from the labor of black slaves. Contrary to popular belief, the Jesuits resorted to military force to repress black desertion and to put down slave rebellions (Whitten and Quiroga 81). As was the case of many run-away and fugitive slaves, acts such as *cimarronaje*<sup>10</sup> were common to the area.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Cimarronaje* refers to an act of defiance or flight resulting in the self-liberation of Blacks.

<sup>11</sup> To confront the cruelty and the privation of liberty to which Africans were subjugated during the proslavery system, African slaves fled west to Esmeraldas, south, to the metropolises of colonial rule and east to the Amazonian Region (Whitten and Quiroga 82).

After the expulsion of the Jesuits, African slave labor continued to be exploited in Ecuador. In addition to slave enclaves fueling production in both Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley, a smaller number of slaves were brought to the southern part of Ecuador, in Loja, to work as house servants and miners (Whitten and Quiroga 82). Although several attempts were made to abolish slavery in Ecuador, the use of African slave labor continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to national law, slaves were emancipated in 1854. In actuality, however, emancipation came at different times. Whereas slavery in Esmeraldas lasted until the 1860s, slavery in the Chota-Mira Valley lasted until the 1890s (Whitten and Quiroga 83). At the time of emancipation there were about 8,000 Afroecuadorians (Klein 251).

The third historical stream of Africans into Ecuador coincides with the construction of the railway link between Guayaquil and Quito. In 1900 about 4,000 Jamaicans entered the country to participate in railroad construction work. According to A. Kim Clark, foreign black labor was preferable to the local Ecuadorian workforce (90).<sup>12</sup> For one, since 1899, a series of legal protective measures had been set into place to safeguard against the labor exploitation of the indigenous people as well as placing limits on debt peonage (Clark 80-81). Consequently, indigenous laborers were hard to come by. Second, peasant labor was scarce. Their livelihood was contingent upon subsistence agriculture. During peak agricultural periods railway construction was stagnant and it was impossible to acquire workers (Clark 86). Third, Blacks were looked upon as being better acclimated, not only to the tropical disposition of the region,

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<sup>12</sup> The following comments about the construction of the railway link between Guayaquil and Quito are taken from Clark, in *The Redemptive Work: Railway and Nation in Ecuador, 1895-1930*.

but also to the specific work required for the job, than the locals.<sup>13</sup> However, soon after their arrival, complaints regarding their treatment were sent back to Jamaica. According to published reports, Jamaicans were forced to work under inhumane conditions.<sup>14</sup> Desertions were common, resulting in the use of armed military police to avert black laborers from defecting, staying on the line and capturing fugitive runaways (Clark 91). As was the case with other Blacks, after the completion of the railway link from Guayaquil to Quito, those individuals who had survived the extremely hazardous working conditions emigrated to the province of Esmeraldas (Rout 233).<sup>15</sup>

These three historical migrations of Africans into Ecuador resulted in a majority of persons of African origin in at least one province, Esmeraldas, and a sizable minority in three others.<sup>16</sup> In the case of Esmeraldas, runaway slaves and fugitives during the colonial era, freed slaves with the abolition of slavery in 1854, and an undetermined number of Jamaicans who participated in railroad construction work migrated to this region, making it the place of highest concentration of the Afroecuadorian population. However, the stigma associated with this region as a center of black settlement and black resistance served to undermine the quality of life for Afroecuadorians. In fact, according to Rout, as late as the mid 1900s major towns in the

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<sup>13</sup> The construction of the railroad from Quito to Guayaquil cost the lives of many Jamaicans. Workers were not only exposed to sickness and cold, but also explosions in tunneling through the mountains. The primary motive for importing Jamaicans was due to their experience with dynamite which they had previously utilized in the construction of the Panama Canal (Clark 90).

<sup>14</sup> See "American Foremen Unpopular: Serious Trouble between Them and Jamaican Laborers in Ecuador," 4.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to the Esmeraldan province, Jamaican Blacks also emigrated to Bucay (Clark 91). Bucay is a town located on the eastern edge of Guayas, Ecuador, near the Chimborazo province.

<sup>16</sup> In addition to Esmeraldas, Afroecuadorians are also highly concentrated in the extreme southern province of Loja and in the far northern provinces of Imbabura and Carchi (Rout 232).

province of Esmeraldas still lacked the basic necessities of life such as paved roads, hospitals, schools and electricity (233).

However, in the 1950s an agricultural boom resulted in the construction of a railroad from Quito to San Lorenzo, a small town located in the northern sector of the Esmeraldas Province. The impact of the railway for the Afroecuadorian was two-fold. According to Rout, the construction of the railway between the Esmeraldas Province and Quito resulted in the accelerated escalation of both racial and social tensions between the mestizo population recruited from the highlands to help with the construction of the railroad, and the black workmen (233). Although additional police were brought in to deal with clashes between mestizos and Blacks, local officials failed to protect Blacks from persistent problems of police brutality (Whitten, *Class, Kinship, and Power* 31). Second, the new wealth accumulated in the Esmeraldas Province due to the completion of the railroad and booming lumber industry rendered few benefits to Afroecuadorians (Rout 234-35). Not only were Afroecuadorians ignored, but they also were replaced by white and / or white-mestizos.<sup>17</sup> In short, resources and power continued to be concentrated in the hands of the light-skinned minority, while the needs of the black communities continued to be ignored by the dominant power structures of Ecuadorian society.

Although the majority of Afroecuadorians today still reside in the Esmeraldas, Loja,

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<sup>17</sup> According to Whitten, the completion of the railroad along with the ensuing boom of the lumber industry stimulated waves of white and / or white-mestizo settlers into the province. This increased migration led to severe consequences for Blacks. White and / or white-mestizos devised an array of techniques designed to discredit and disenfranchise Blacks. In effect, black merchants were bought out or forced out of business (*Black Frontiersman: a South American Case* 187-94).

Imbabura and Carchi Provinces, a substantial number of Ecuadorian Blacks are also found in the two major urban areas of the country: Guayaquil and Quito. For the last thirty years, Ecuadorian Blacks have migrated to Guayaquil and Quito for work. However, according to Jean Muteba Rahier, black migration to the urban centers has been problematic (“Blackness, the Racial / Spatial Order,” 422).<sup>18</sup> Blacks are treated with hostility. Furthermore, there are some clear disparities for Afroecuatorians in terms of job opportunities.<sup>19</sup> In addition to a sizeable population in Guayaquil, Whitten and Quiroga estimate the black population in Quito to be about 50,000 to 60,000 (84).<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, Ecuadorian Blacks make up an integral part of both Guayaquil’s and Quito’s populations.

## **1.2 *Mestizaje* and the Myth of Racial Democracy in Latin America**

According to Ronald Stutzman, African descendants in Ecuador, as well as in other Latin American countries, have been at a distinct disadvantage compared to indigenous groups due to the different ways in which they have historically been racialized in Latin America (see Whitten,

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout the history of modern Ecuador, the provinces of Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley have historically, socially and traditionally been looked down upon by the white and / or white-mestizo urban citizenry. Racist stereotypes have played and continue to play a crucial role in the way Ecuadorian Blacks are perceived. Rahier explains that white and / or white-mestizos from Quito have described Ecuadorian Blacks as “an uncivilized people living in remote areas outside of the scope of modernity, where hot climates gave shape to their innate laziness and violence, which they bring with them when they migrate” (“Blackness, the Racial / Spatial Order,” 422).

<sup>19</sup> Most Blacks in Quito and Guayaquil have secured jobs in only a limited number of occupations, all clustered at the bottom of the wage scale. For example, whereas most black urban women work as nannies, cooks, maids and unskilled laborers in factories, most black urban men have found employment as construction and factory workers, watchmen, drivers and gardeners (Rahier, “Blackness, the Racial / Spatial Order,” 425).

<sup>20</sup> Whitten and Quiroga explain that the total population of Blacks in Quito may in fact be 10,000 more than reported (84). In large part due to problems in data collection, exact statistics do not exist.

*Cultural Transformations* 63). Present realities such as racism, discrimination, and Afroecuadorians' lack of an Afro-diasporic consciousness<sup>21</sup> and Afro-Andean philosophy of thought<sup>22</sup> are by-products of a European ethnocentric mentality which originated with the Conquest of the Americas.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the roots of racism are in the history of colonialism. From the outset of the Spanish Conquest in the Americas, racism emerged as a means for the conquerors to ethnically and culturally categorize and depreciate adversaries, to rationalize the usurpation of land as well as the exploitation of labor.<sup>24</sup> Dehumanization of the imperial

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<sup>21</sup> As a basis for understanding the African Diaspora, the influence of Hall with his emphasis on continuity and discontinuity, similarity and dissimilarity, is essential here. According to Hall, the Diaspora experience is defined, "not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 235).

<sup>22</sup> In a personal interview, Juan García Salazar, an Afroesmeraldan historian and community organizer, stated that Afro-Andean philosophy of thought, traditional knowledge and history find their base, in part, in ancestral memory, that is, the lived experiences, traditions, teachings and the collective memory associated with the ancestors (20 June 2010).

<sup>23</sup> Since colonial times, traditions of wisdom or systems of knowledge of non-western cultures have been subject to social, political and epistemic subalternizations. These subalternizations are constitutive of what Quijano refers to as the coloniality of power and the coloniality of knowledge. However, unlike colonialism which ended with the era of independence, coloniality is a model of power and knowledge that outlasted formal colonialism. According to Quijano, colonial structures of power and knowledge based on race; i.e., a hierarchical placement and categorization of social and cultural identities as well as a European epistemological perspective, resulted in a racist and discriminatory discourse that not only reflected the political, cultural, social and economic structures of the colony, but most importantly, it continues to be reproduced in the structures of modern postcolonial societies (218-21). As with the coloniality of power and knowledge, the coloniality of being is also marked by dynamics of power that prescribe value to certain people and societies while disenfranchising others. According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, the coloniality of being refers to the dehumanization as well as the negation, both in terms of thought and existence, of non-western people (43-44).

<sup>24</sup> The discovery and Conquest of the New World inspired a serious debate about the rationality and Christianization of the indigenous population. In 1550-1551 in the Junta de Valladolid, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1489-1573), a fierce advocate of the enslavement of the indigenous population countered the human rights advocacy of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566). Whereas Las Casas argued against the enslavement and the violent colonial abuse of indigenous peoples, Sepúlveda, on the other hand, justified the Conquest and the evangelization of the indigenous community through war. He believed that the indigenous populations were biologically and culturally



adversary was an indispensable appendage to the wars of Conquest. It was easier to justify atrocities if they were committed against infidels or people of an inferior race. According to Aníbal Quijano, race and ethnicity were basal determinates in classifying the rank, place and roles of the new found populations within the New World societal power structures (216). Therefore, when King Ferdinand, the Catholic (1452-1516), decided to abolish the enslavement of the native aboriginals to avoid their further extermination, the indigenous race was bound legally, economically and socially as serfs.<sup>25</sup> In the case of the indigenous nobility, although exempt from enforced labor, they were consigned to the status of non-noble Spanish and served as mediators with the dominant white race (Quijano 217). Blacks, on the other hand, were reduced to the stigma of slavery.<sup>26</sup>

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inferior and that they were therefore condemned to be dominated by a more cultured society. The punishments especially to those he referred to as “hombrecillos con apenas vestigios de humanidad” (Sepúlveda 105) were based on Aristotle, Saint Augustin, Saint Tomas de Aquinas and some biblical passages. For an overview of the argumentative framework regarding this controversial debate, see Hanke in *All Mankind is One* 79-99.

<sup>25</sup> The first comprehensive code of indigenous legislation in the New World, the Laws of Burgos, was promulgated on December 27, 1512. The document’s bylaws stipulated that the Castilian monarchy considered the Amerindian to be legal subjects of the Crown and therefore, a free man. However, the categorization of legal subject implicated the paying of tribute or, if by default, a personal service to the representatives of authority (Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice* 23-25).

<sup>26</sup> In 1511, King Ferdinand questioned the apparent weakness of the indigenous population. He claimed that they were in effect not physically capable of the rigorous labor which was required for the Indies and later concluded that black slave labor was necessary if the colony was to survive (Rout 23). This royal decree effectively sanctioned black slavery as the rectification against the vertiginous collapse of the indigenous population. Las Casas supported this royal dictum and insinuated that the indigenous population of the island of Hispaniola was indeed in danger of extinction if another type of labor source could not be found and thus, proposed the importation of 12 black slaves to every Spanish resident (Rout 24). Although Las Casas initially endorsed African slavery, his position later changed. In the latter stages of his life, Las Casas adopted a critical stance against colonialism and slavery; he condemned both Portugal and Spain for endorsing the trafficking of African slaves (Friede 165-66).

In Latin American society racist notions regarding the indigenous and black populations were inserted into colonial realities of race and social hierarchy. According to Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, the development of the caste system, with extremely precise categories, intended to distinguish one group of people from another (162). The established colonial system was a hierarchal and rigid organization in which the white population occupied the highest echelon of this structural pyramid, while the bottom stratum was reserved for both the indigenous and black populace. This scheme represented the political, economic and cultural status for each race within colonial society. Accordingly, people's functions within the economic system became differentiated. It is this demarcation that inevitably divides people into social classes. Thus, the caste system served two purposes: not only did it define the status of each individual, but it also corresponded with the function that each would perform within this societal environment.

However, this New World caste system created a false sense of identity that was exclusively linked to the pigmentation of the individual. Consequently, Latin American citizens accepted Occidental ideology that obligated them to deny certain aspects of their ethnic composition. Peter Wade explains that though ancestral lineage was a determining factor in the social classification, the color of one's skin permitted the individual certain movement between classes (21). According to Wade, caste and class were synonymous because the classification of caste determined the social class of each individual, thus compelling many to deny their black ethnicity if their color permitted them to do so (21). In other words, if a mulatto, a person of mixed white and black ancestry appeared more white than Black, this component of their racial

composition was celebrated at the cost of the other. For the purpose of attaining higher social mobility and status, white ethnic identity was seen as more valuable in the political and economic spectrum. However, the color of one's skin has not been the only obstacle hindering the Afro from truly accepting and identifying with his black heritage. The manipulation of one's pigmentation had been a weapon used by the European conquerors to maintain their power and superiority over the black population, which in essence had obligated the oppressed Afro to accept the national agenda of *blanqueamiento* (Wade 21). This false propaganda manifested itself within Afro-descendant consciousness. In order to establish for themselves a better position within society, they adhered to the social dictates of their European oppressors.

The Black, unlike his indigenous counterpart, was also saddled with another unfortunate impediment, that of *mala sangre*. The Afrocolombian writer, Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004) states that this pejorative was applied exclusively to the Afro and his descendents (265).<sup>27</sup> According to Zapata Olivella, the process of miscegenation and race-mixing based on the colonial caste system which privileged whiteness, a form of racial discrimination, did not help to elevate the political and economic status of the black community (265). Therefore, within colonial society, *mala sangre* was commensurate with blackness and slavery. This connotation, directed towards the Black, was one way in which the upper class subjugated the Afro while simultaneously conserving his status of slave subject within the colonial economic system. In short, construction of identity and ethnic rejection were the result of the various images

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<sup>27</sup> The following comments about *mala sangre* are taken from Zapata Olivella, in *La rebelión de los genes*.

associated with the African population that emerged during the colonial period.

Even though independence and emancipation led to the eventual abolition of the colonial caste system and the erasure of *raza* from the national census and official doctrine, this by no means signified the end to racial discrimination (Beltrán 111). In fact, economic, political and social power structures initiated in the past remained unresolved in the present. Latin American scholars, as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, began to deliberate about the future prospect of Latin American society. In their quest for progress, Latin American countries were not on par with Western Europe or the United States. They struggled socially, politically and economically. According to Harold Davis, Latin American intellectuals, explicitly those associated with the bourgeoisie, attributed Latin America's social, political and economic stagnation to a form of social illness (101). The root of the problem was thought to be miscegenation or racial mixture. Deeply ingrained in positivism, a by-product of Western philosophical thought, they attempted to construct a science of progress through the rationale of race.

Since the institutionalization of race was a prominent feature of social construction and order in colonial America, and in view of the fact that this racial differentiation was also accepted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is reasonable to conclude that Latin American thinkers represented individuals who socially, politically and economically distinguished themselves from the lower and subalternized classes. Moreover, given that African descendants and Native Americans had been portrayed as a culturally, morally and intellectually inferior race by Western colonial powers and the colonizing elite, and in view of the growing imperialistic power

and influence of the United States, who in its quest for progress had subjugated its own indigenous and African populations, it stood to reason that racial discourse in Latin America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would parallel that of Europe and the United States.

Dominant Latin American thinking, predicated on the interconnectedness between the notion of societal illness and miscegenation, had grave repercussions not only for the development and advancement of a well-conceived and autonomous branch of Latin American philosophical, political, social and economic thought, but also on national, ethnic and individual identities as well.<sup>28</sup> Within this context *mestizaje* was conceived as a political ideology which sought to imagine the construction of a united nation.<sup>29</sup> *Mestizaje* permitted Latin American thinkers to reclaim for their countries a national racial unity which previously had been

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<sup>28</sup> By the late 1800s, European notions regarding modernity and progress with its positivism approach were trusted foundations for both ideological and political thought among intellectual and political elites in much of Latin America. However, unlike Latin America, modernity and progress were being carried out by European nations with little to no Blacks and indigenous people, or in the case of the United States where austere measures had been put into place separating whites from both its Black and Native American populations (Wade 10).

<sup>29</sup> The concept of *mestizaje* first came into fruition in the late 1800s in Mexico. Although José Vasconcelos (1882-1959) is most notably credited for its conception, the theory of *mestizaje* was in fact an intellectual movement that involved many Mexican scholars, such as Manuel Gamio (1883-1960), Alfonso Caso Andrade (1896-1970) and Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908-1996) (Smith 152 and Knight 102). Mexico's conception of *mestizaje* as an ideological tool for nation building also served as a prototype for other Latin American countries. In fact, by the early 1900s, *mestizaje* was an essential component in the construction of national identity throughout Latin America, including the Ecuadorian state (Benavides 46-47). In Ecuador, the development of *mestizaje* as a trope for the nation comes mainly from the work by the Ecuadorian writer, critic and educator, Benjamín Carrión (1897-1979) (Robles 118). In *Los creadores de la nueva América* (1928), Carrión comments on four Latin American intellectuals whose writings regarding the redefinition of race and culture significantly contributed to the development of an Ecuadorian articulation of *mestizaje*. In addition to Vasconcelos, Manuel Ugarte (1875-1951), Francisco García Calderón (1883-1953) and Alcides Arguedas (1879-1946) of Argentina, Peru and Bolivia respectively, also impacted Carrión's discourse on Ecuadorian *mestizaje*. Although each of the four Latin American authors Carrión comments on are important, it is Carrión's discussion of Vasconcelos entitled, "El civilizador y el constructor," that highlights the impact of Vasconcelian ideology on Ecuadorian *mestizaje*. He explicitly aligns his philosophy and discourse on racial mixing with the ideology of Vasconcelos (29, 64).

conceived in European terms.<sup>30</sup> Thus, *mestizaje* was seen as a way in which diverse races living in Latin America could be incorporated within the same national project, living together in order to form a mixed race in which the constitutive qualities of each ethnic group would contribute and, at the same time, form a new egalitarian society.

Of course *mestizaje* as a pillar in the construction of nation building, as well as a viable ideological tool for national cohesion, was tainted because the discourse of racial mixture contained several contradictory elements. On the one hand, the glorification of *mestizaje* conceives its signification and its force from the history of *mestizaje* and the emergence of a grand population composed of individuals of various races in Ecuador. The perception of *mestizaje* as central to the development of modern national identity and unity is seen by its supporters as a positive step towards modernity and progress for all Ecuador.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the populist and democratic rhetoric attempts to promote the proposal that one must understand *mestizaje* as a convergence of multiple races that supposedly are found in an impartial, egalitarian environment.

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<sup>30</sup> Through generations of interbreeding between the four main races in Latin America identified by Vasconcelos as Black, Native Amerindian, Mongoloid and the colonizing European of the Iberian regions of the Americas, that is, the parts of the continent colonized by both Portugal and Spain, Vasconcelos imagined the creation and development of a futuristic race. The creation and development of what Vasconcelos referred to as the “cosmic” race would carry the best traits of each of these four races. Vasconcelos argued that this “cosmic” race, known also as the “fifth” race, would epitomize Latin America’s racial diversity (909).

<sup>31</sup> According to Wade, *mestizaje* provided Latin American intellectuals with both a distinct and unique response to European and U.S. theories of race associated with positivism as well as to their respective country’s racial diversity founded in their black and indigenous populations (10). Predicated on the democratic and inclusive ideology of “todos somos mestizos,” *mestizaje* as a homogenizing ideology of hybridity legitimates racial and regional heterogeneity in the nation (Wade 11).

This discourse overlooks differences and pretends that they no longer exist.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, *mestizaje* takes on powerful moral connotations. It is not just a neutral mixture but a hierarchical movement seen as a collective transformation towards whiteness.<sup>33</sup> In effect it undermines racial and pluricultural identities.

Another type of hegemonic political ideology which sought to imagine the creation of a united nation has been racial democracy. Countries like Brazil with large Afro-descendant populations have been greatly impacted by racial democracy. According to Howard Winant, racial democracy ascribes the dissimilar socio-economic conditions under which Blacks, whites and mestizos subsist to differences in class and not ethnic and racial discrimination (177). Advocates of this theory, which is prevalent in Ecuador as well as Colombia and Venezuela, assume that being Black is a “transitory state” that can be changed by “whitening” through miscegenation or the accumulation of wealth (Winant 177).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As in the case of Ecuador and other Latin American countries, racial heterogeneity or pluralism was, “considered by many politically counterproductive in the face of Latin America’s move toward refurbishing the nation-state” in a particular intellectual, economic and political climate during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Martínez-Echazabal 38). According to Benavides, *mestizaje* ideology as synonymous with a national Ecuadorian identity represented a fundamentally Western perspective that excluded both black and indigenous’ ways of viewing the world. It was a rhetorical device used by the local elite for covering up any racial, ethnic, economic and political differences in the country. References to difference would only threaten elite prototypes of a homogenous political, economic and national identity. Thus, Latin American nation-states viewed heterogeneity as a threat to the homogenous representation that facilitated state control (46-47).

<sup>33</sup> According to Nancy Stepan, Vasconcelos’s theory of the “cosmic” race was based on “a far superior spiritual eugenics,” that is, a “mysterious eugenics of aesthetic taste” (148). Rather than a merging of equals, Vasconcelos is elevating the mestizo above all other races and simply relabeling them the “fifth” race, the amalgamation of his four identified races. This process of creating a “eugenic, *mestizo* race” would make the “non-aesthetic Negro race” vanish entirely (150).

<sup>34</sup> The whole notion of whitening harkens back to the pseudoscientific movement in America and Germany during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Edwin Black, advocates of racism attempted to disguise their beliefs by

The processes of colonization have impacted the conceptualization of racial identity in Ecuador. Regarding the contemporary situation of African descendants in Ecuador, the existence of a black population in Ecuador is not considered historically significant. For the most part, with the exception of Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley, black communities are not consciously acknowledged in Ecuador.<sup>35</sup> Many Ecuadorians do not recognize, or ignore the fact, that in Ecuador Blacks are, indeed, ubiquitous throughout the country.

Regardless of societal perceptions vis-à-vis race and identity in contemporary Ecuador, African descendent communities are present in all of Ecuador. However, some regions introduced more Africans than others and that is where you find today examples of a vibrant Afro culture that has endured centuries of mestizo integrationist stratagems designed to ethnically and culturally cleanse all remnants of a separate and distinct black identity within the

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medicalizing it and wrapping it in scientific terms like eugenics to ensconce their racism, especially if it was championed by their nation's social, political and academic elite (xvi). Not surprising Latin American countries like Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela were all part of the International Commission on Eugenics. When examining so-called racial democracy in countries like Brazil, it is pertinent to recall the history associated with such terminology as whitening through miscegenation, especially when questioning who are the adherents of this theory. Not only does the ideology of racial democracy prevent effective action to combat racial discrimination, but by misleading people to attribute discrimination to other forms of oppression, it often allows government officials to deny its existence.

<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that Ecuadorian society is spatially constitutive of what Wade describes as a particular "cultural topography" (50). According to Rahier, in Ecuador, different ethnic groups inhabit specific places, have particular histories, benefit from dissimilar concentrations of economic and political control and occupy different positionings within the country's societal hierarchy and racial order. Whereas Quito and Guayaquil are seen as epicenters for progress and modernity, as well as places where white and / or white-mestizos habitually reside, Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley, on the other hand, are viewed as places where ill-bred, uneducated black people predominantly live. In effect, the historical and stereotypical distribution of Blacks is perceived as the contemporary population and hierarchical designation for Blacks. Regardless of contemporary migration of Ecuadorian Blacks into the urban areas, Blacks are not considered a vital component of the two urban areas of the country ("Blackness, the Racial / Spatial Order," 421- 22).



nation. For example, in Esmeraldas and in the Chota-Mira Valley, important Afro-cultural forms exist in music, dance and poetry. Music originating from both Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley is distinctly African-based. The rhythms emanate from the Bantu and the Mande areas of West Africa (Whitten and Quiroga 87). As Laura Hidalgo indicates, another form of cultural expression prevalent in Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley is the oral transmission of poetry in the form of *décimas* and *coplas* (*Décimas esmeraldeñas*15). Drums, the most important musical instrument in Africa, accompany non-poetic texts as well as other artistic forms, including storytelling, singing and dancing (Whitten and Quiroga 87-89). In fact, the ensemble of oral tradition, the human voice, music and the drum is the method in which black histories, stories, folktales and religious beliefs have been passed on from one generation to another (Whitten and Quiroga 87-88).

Contemporary Ecuador does not have any kind of color line in contrast to the United States, where one drop of African blood frequently categorizes a person as Black.<sup>36</sup> These kinds of sharp-edged racial categories rarely exist in Latin American countries. What Ecuador does have instead of a color line, is a color continuum. Racial appearance, including color and not the drop of one's blood, determines one's status in Ecuador (Wade 345). In other words, the process of racial mixing or miscegenation ceases to rigidly classify Blacks with Blacks as long as one distances himself culturally and biologically from the black end of the color matrix (Wade 345).

Although there are no sharp racial divides as in the United States, the rule for social prestige still

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<sup>36</sup> The U.S. one-drop rule uses ancestry rather than an individual's phenotype as standard in determining racial identification (Wade 344).

remains the whiter the better.

Wade states that not all Afro Latinos see themselves as an ethnic group, nor do they necessarily identify as being of black descent (6). Elite constructs of national identity have monopolized Latin American politics and cultures since before independence. Traditional national models of identity have, in many cases, visualized the nation as the by-product of racial and cultural mixing between Spanish men and indigenous women, largely emanating from the predominance of a Spanish culture with some token acceptance of indigenous folk traditions (Stutzman, in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations* 65). Within this imaginary, indigenous people occupy a certain symbolic status as ancestral contributors to this new, amalgamated, mestizo nation and culture.

People of African descent have been made invisible in many Latin American national narratives of *mestizaje*. Issues of race have been so influenced by Latin America's preoccupation with the indigenous question that, in the case of Ecuador, the Afroecuadorian experience tends to blend almost invisibly into the background, even for Afroecuadorians themselves.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the official imaginary of Ecuadorian national identity leaves

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<sup>37</sup> In Ecuador, the history of *mestizaje*, that is, the history of the nation, defines Ecuadorianness in terms of mestizeness. For Erika Silva, two myths provide the ground work within which Ecuadorianness has taken root. In the first myth, "Mito del Señorío sobre el suelo," it was the Spanish conquerors and not the indigenous people who were able to dominate Ecuador's unruly topography (12-14). The second myth, "Mito de la raza vencida," refers to the indigenous as a vanquished race. Not only had they been defeated by Ecuador's rebellious geography, but also by the Incas and the Spanish (14-15). This latter conquest, however, resulted in the origin of the mestizo. According to Silva, the mestizo represents the "hijo del mito de la 'raza vencida' y fruto de la resurrección que trajo consigo la conquista" (14). Since homogeneity in the ideology of *mestizaje* operates through fashioning the mestizo as the ethnicity of the nation and region, national belonging thus resides with the mestizo. However, although the terms *mestizaje* and mestizo refer exclusively to the racial mixing involving Europeans and the indigenous, according to Whitten, it is not the European, but the indigenous that needs to assimilate both ethnically and culturally to the

Afroecuatorians outside of the national consciousness, nullifying the contribution of African descendants to the racial makeup of the nation.

Afroecuatorians had to deny their negritude in order to fit into a national project of identity determined by *mestizaje* and a racial democracy valued in terms of *blanqueamiento*.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, instead of celebrating their African heritage, many Blacks reject it and identify themselves as *morenos* or *mulatos*. In fact, not only does the term *negro* have a pejorative connotation, but also the idiom *gente morena* is generally preferred when speaking about Blacks in Ecuador (Whitten and Quiroga 85). In part, Afroecuatorians see their Africanness as an outside imposition that causes conflict with their understanding of themselves as Ecuadorians while, at the same time, reinforcing their political and economic marginality.

The positivist climate of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Ecuador, which was scientifically driven and historicist in nature, failed to accurately reflect the cultural and social reality of the black

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dominant homogenous center (“Etnocidio ecuatoriano y etnogénesis indígena: resurgencia amazónica ante la colonización andina,” 178-79). The perception that Ecuadorian history has produced a mestizo admixture between Amerindian and European descent conceives the mestizo as the prototype of modern Ecuadorian citizenry. According to Rahier, this ideology of Ecuadorianness as mestizo-ness suggests that there is no logical place for Blacks. For Afroecuatorians who identify or are identified as Black, the terms of citizenship and belonging do not apply. Since Blacks are not part of *mestizaje* per se, they remain invisible within Ecuador’s national imaginary (“Blackness, the Racial / Spatial Order,” 422).

<sup>38</sup> According to Whitten and Quiroga, another impediment that the Afroecuatorian has had to contend with has been the negative connotations generally associated with negritude or blackness. For the most part, negritude is generally feared by white and / or white-mestizo residents living in the Spanish Caribbean, the Spanish Main, that is, the mainland of the American continent enclosing the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, and the Andean region. Within the dominant power structures of Anglo-Caribbean politics, for example, the concept of Negritude harkens back to images of black revolts and rebellions in Haiti. The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) is regarded as a defining moment in the history of Africans in the New World. Haiti was the first republic ruled by people of African ancestry, and the imagery of black Haiti held by Latin American white and / or white-mestizos suggests an aura of black power that is to be feared and controlled within the integrationist politics of *mestizaje* (12).

population. Moreover, it continues to dominate official Ecuadorian historical discourse. This false historicism corresponds to what Howard Zinn refers to as “the memory of states,” or in other words, history from the viewpoint of the dominant power structures of society (*The Twentieth Century* xi). The influence of European positivist thought, prevalent in Spanish American intellectual circles, posited a hierarchy of values that propagated racial and ethnic difference. According to Geraldo Maloney, a number of historical accounts regarding the Concha Revolution (1895-1916)<sup>39</sup> maligned the physical prowess of mulattos as well as Blacks (64-65). Even though they fought magnificently in battle, their success, or lack thereof, was attributed to racial factors such as their African ancestry and cannibalistic tendencies (Maloney 65). By equating racial differentiation with barbarity, historical accounts of Blacks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century produced the trope of illness. Deeply imbedded in the foundational thought of one of the region’s leading South American social philosophers, Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui (1894-1930), Ecuadorian intellectuals such as José de la Cuadra (1903-1941), Alfredo Espinosa Tamayo (1880-1918) and Alfredo Fuentes Roldán (1926) depicted Blacks as having inferior mental qualities.<sup>40</sup> In the case of De la Cuadra and Espinosa Tamayo, their primitive, savage-

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<sup>39</sup> According to Nicola Foote, the assassination of the Liberal leader, Eloy Alfaro (1842-1911), culminated in a relatively minor uprising of resistance. Limited to Esmeraldas, this armed struggle, known as the Concha Revolution, was in support of Alfaro and against a more conservative wing of the Liberal party. The Concha Revolution pitted poor and ill-equipped Ecuadorian Blacks, loyal followers of Alfaro, against well-armed federal troops. Not only did Ecuadorian Blacks notably contribute to the military effort, but they also formed the bulk of Alfaro’s army (422).

<sup>40</sup> Despite Mariátegui’s well known advocacy for the inclusion of the indigenous people and peasants in the process of national construction, he manifested an attitude of indifference and contempt towards Blacks. In comparison to the Chinese, Mariátegui claimed that Blacks were not only “worthless,” but barbaric (280).

like non-European ways were a source of national shame and social regression (Maloney 69 - 70). More than a generation later, however, the influence of European positivist thought was still rampant among Ecuadorian thinkers. In “San Lorenzo: puerto marítimo de población negra” (1958), written by Fuentes Roldán, for example, Blacks were still being described in similar terms (Lewis, *Afro-Hispanic Poetry* 81). According to Lewis, Fuentes Roldán characterized Blacks as content, frivolous, ignorant and childlike (81). As in the case of Mariátegui, Ecuadorian intellectuals depicted Blacks as lacking in mental capacity and having an adverse effect upon the Ecuadorian populace.

As was the case in many former Spanish colonies, Ecuador did not produce important intellectual and historical writings that incorporated the African population as a subject of study. What is of interest, however, is how Ecuadorian historians and writers applied their European stereotypes to everyday realities that were far removed from a European context and official historical discourse. Consequently, these histories about Ecuador should not be read for their objectivity, but rather for the revelation of the intellectual climate of the era in which they were written. What emerges from these texts, then, is the question of race. These sources tell us in what manner Blacks were perceived by whites, how they were classified in specific categories, and how their lives were processed within predominant white and / or white-mestizo Ecuadorian society.

Racialized portraits of Blacks conceived as inferior people have permeated national ideologies, ethnographies and histories which in turn have contributed to the problematic of

Afroecuadorian identity in contemporary Ecuador. Despite their vital presence, Blacks suffer from social exclusion and racial discrimination in Ecuador as well as in other Latin American nations. Afro-descendent subjects are oppressed and marginalized. They suffer from poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to proper health care and political agency. In addition to societal ills, there exists a substantive discourse that accentuates invisibility in the culture where they live. In large measure, this social invisibility produces such outcomes as exclusion from national culture, the lack of government recognition, inaccurate census data, the absence from politics and the media, a negation of their contributions to national history, and a denial of their participation in the construction of the nation-state.

However, it is within literature where projects of blackness have been most notably acknowledged and recognized. The response in literary circles to the indifference and labeling regarding the black population has been undertaken by those individual writers most affected by these racist and stereotypical images. In fact, black intellectuals, such as Adalberto Ortiz, Nelson Estupiñán Bass and Antonio Preciado, have to a large extent contributed substantially not only to Ecuadorian literature, but also to an international literature. Although few in number, these black creative writers in Ecuador have consistently attacked the pseudo logic of race that breeds racism, discrimination and social, political and economic marginalization. Their literature which includes novels, short stories, essays and poetry has been an important window through which to understand the meanings of blackness. Moreover, they have helped to demystify commonly held stereotypes regarding Blacks, their motivations, philosophy and cultural impact in the Americas.

Finally, they are the most persuasive promoters of Afroecuadorian literary expression to have attracted critical attention beyond their national borders while raising critical literary issues regarding race, writing and difference.

### **1.3 Adalberto Ortiz**

A native of Esmeraldas, Adalberto Ortiz (1914-2003) represents the appropriation of blackness in the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the Black-as-author. A country already well-known for its *indigenista* and social protest literature, beginning in the 1940s Ortiz brought to the forefront the racial, cultural and historical realities of the black experience in Ecuador, especially with the publication of his seminal novel, *Juyungo* (1943). Although many of his works deal with the universal struggle against oppression, exploitation, the societal and collective pursuit of freedom, his body of work also rescues from unconscious neglect vital rudiments of Afroecuadorian culture, traditions, customs, mores and colloquialisms (Jackson, *Black Image* 102).<sup>41</sup> However, his most noteworthy attribute as a writer has been his exploration of Afroecuadorian identity within a setting where the ideological dogma of racial mixture predominates. Ortiz delves into the psychological and idiosyncratic complexity of multiple identities, i.e., the question of racial mixture and racial identity within the constructs of a

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<sup>41</sup> In addition to novels, short stories and poetry, Ortiz has also published critical essays. His study, “La negritude en la cultura latinoamericana y ecuatoriana,” analyzes the significance of negritude in Latin America. More specifically, he addresses how African principles such as ancestry, orality, drum communication and Bantu philosophy have impacted both Latin American and Ecuadorian cultures and customs. Furthermore, he provides critical commentary about Hispanic black writers and literatures (97-118).

preeminent white-mestizo Ecuadorian nation.<sup>42</sup>

As an integral figure to the development of Ecuadorian literature, Ortiz was heavily influenced by the *Grupo de Guayaquil*. According to Franklin Miranda, historically speaking the *Grupo de Guayaquil* (the generation of the 1930s) coincides with the failures of liberalism, the emergence of communism, socialism and the makings of a bona fide Ecuadorian republic (62). Politically speaking, the majority of the national narratives identified with leftist politics and contributed to the consolidation of the Ecuadorian realist novel (Miranda 63). The innovative writing style, literary technique and social orientation of its members - José de la Cuadra (1903-1941) - Enrique Gil Gilbert (1912-1973) - Joaquín Gallegos Lara (1911-1947) - Demetrio Aguilera Malta (1909-1981) - Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco (1908-1993) - not only altered the course of Ecuadorian literature, but also subverted prevailing archetypes of national narratives. Contrary to their 19<sup>th</sup> century predecessors, who drew their protagonists from the ruling class elite while simultaneously romanticizing or rather manipulating the socially impoverished and ethnically marginalized as an embellishment to the central trauma, the *Grupo de Guayaquil* provoked a rupture in the national as well as Latin American literature by placing the country's oppressed and forgotten masses at the forefront of national narratives (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 92-93).

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<sup>42</sup> In "Ethnic Ambivalence and Afro-Hispanic Novelists," Stanley Cyrus discusses the impact of *mestizaje* on Latin American black writers, especially Ortiz. According to Cyrus, Latin American black writer's struggle with the black / mestizo dichotomy, that is, the assertion of having an African-based identity and Latin America's allegiance to the concept of *mestizaje*. The acceptance of one's origins and accommodating that acceptance within a context that tends to minimize, distort, or deny its existence illustrates the psychological dualism present in their works (29-32).



In a literary movement that would later be coined social realism, the *Grupo de Guayaquil* incorporated the life of an assortment of inhabitants from the coastal region of the country into their literary texts (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 93). This collective entity from Guayaquil created its own style of writing where the innovative literary techniques of the time were adjusted to the individual, cultural and natural surroundings. By incorporating these elements into real life subjects, these authors made their protagonists more authentic. It was more than just the expression of language, of colloquial syntaxes and the every day speech of the subject. By means of crude and vulgar language, telling images of poverty, immorality, violence and sexuality, these writers redefined the ideal of national identity while debunking the typical stereotypes and the external models of the ethnically and socially disenfranchised (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 93.)

In their quest to create an authentic literature, one based on Ecuadorian heterogeneous identity and cultural and ethnic diversity, the national literary movement of the 1930s and 1940s contributed to a more egalitarian and all-encompassing national portrayal of the country's inhabitants (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 94). The *Grupo de Guayaquil* opened the way for Ecuadorians to examine the lives of the poor *costeños*, the *montuvios*, and Blacks without the typical romantic exoticism. Free of one-dimensional, simplistic and commonly held stereotypes, these writers came to condemn the state of affairs that the country's exploited and forgotten masses had to endure. In the process, these writers highlighted distinct customs, traditions, cultures and mores previously disregarded and unacknowledged by the majority of the

Ecuadorian populace (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 95). By amplifying the concept of Ecuadorian identity, this collective group engendered a new vision of Ecuadorian reality and, by extension, that of the nation.

However, prior to Ortiz, Afroecuadorian literature did not form part of the mainstream intellectual literary circles. In addition, and as was the case of traditional, official, historical accounts, the very first literary manifestations regarding Blacks in Ecuador propagated stereotyped thought about black people. According to García-Barrio, initial treatment of black coastal culture is found in the novel written by the *serrano* author Luís A. Martínez (1869-1909), *A la Costa* (1904) (538).<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the perspective of a white outsider perpetuated numerous stereotypes: the ill and mistreated black ex-slave; the immorality and barbaric tendencies of the *mulato*; and the sexual promiscuousness of the *mulata* (García-Barrio 538).

The first short-stories about Afroecuadorians appeared in *Los que se van, cuentos del cholo y del montuvio* (1930) by Aguilera Malta, Gallegos Lara and Gil Gilbert (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 93). These three writers first set their sights on the *cholo* and the *montuvio*. According to García-Barrio, the insertion of black characters gave their works the vivacity of local color and customs, while simultaneously denouncing the misery, hopelessness and silent frustration of the poor *costeños* (538-39). However, their treatment of Ecuadorian Blacks has been rather perfunctory. To be precise, black characters were not only utilized as an appendage of the main plot as picturesque representations, but also as objective targets used to validate the

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<sup>43</sup> The following comments about *A la Costa* and *Los que se van, cuentos del cholo y montuvio* are taken from García-Barrio, in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations* 535.

author's protest. According to Handelsman, even though the *Grupo de Guayaquil* acknowledged Ecuadorian Blacks as part of the oppressed masses, given their outside perspective as writers, they too continued to perpetuate certain prejudicial stereotypes with respect to the Afroecuadorian (*Lo afro* 26).

However, the arrival of Ortiz to the literary scene gives the Ecuadorian novel a distinct type of writing. In *Juyungo*, Ortiz carries his early poetic *negrismo* into prose fiction and redefines the notion of national identity by debunking traditional stereotypes and pejorative representations of Afro descendants. According to Ángel F. Rojas, what had been omitted from the literary project of social realism were “los relatos que se refieren al hombre y al paisaje de una zona literal poco conocida literalmente: ésta de Esmeraldas, ardiente y húmeda, escasamente poblada y rica en reviviscencias negras, y aquella de Manabí, ardiente y seca, influida por la bocanada de la corriente de Humboldt” (213). Due to the growing importance of social realism in Ecuadorian literature and the conspicuous absence of Ecuadorian Blacks, Ortiz seized upon the opportunity to write about his native province of Esmeraldas, where the majority of Ecuadorian Blacks lived.

With *Juyungo*, Ortiz provides readers with a different perspective of the Ecuadorian populace; unlike other social protest novelists, his treatment of Blacks lacks the typically held objectification of the subject (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 100). Not only does Ortiz censure the suffering and abuse brought on by social injustice, exploitation and war, but by underscoring the black experience as rooted in an African-originated ancestry and the array of

psychological positionings that Blacks are forced to take in Ecuador, Ortiz provides insight into the cultural and socio-psychological complexity of the Afroecuadorian. In addition, by bringing to the forefront the significance of the creation and preservation of Afroecuadorian culture that has enabled black people to survive their diasporic displacement from the Ecuadorian national consciousness, *Juyungo* transcends the parameters of the national canon to connect to a larger African diasporic literary context.

The study of Afroecuadorian culture, customs, traditions, mores and folklore in Afroecuadorian literature is vital to understanding the black experience in Ecuador. Although many question the extent to which slavery stripped the Afroecuadorian of all vestiges of a black cultural identity, African culture survived in the New World because Blacks maintained ties to their African past. The bond to their African past enabled Africans to survive and create a meaningful existence in a world where they were not welcomed. They adapted to environmental change and social upheaval by relying on familiar traditions and practices.<sup>44</sup> In *Juyungo*, Ortiz not only presents evidence of a distinct African diasporic culture in Ecuador, but he also gives a clear view of a distinct black coastal culture that has survived centuries of white-mestizo homogenized assimilative stratagems (Miranda 90-91). Ortiz presents the black experience as unique to the national experience in that he defines Blacks as a product of slavery and, more

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<sup>44</sup> According to Klein, an Afro-American culture that emerged during the pro-slavery era emanated from a variety of African, American and European sources (163). However, that is not to say that Afro-American culture was not distinct. Blacks integrated specific African traits within white societal norms. By maintaining autonomous aspects of African culture, Blacks were able to survive the harshness of their forced assimilation into a white, hostile, oppressive and racist society which both rejected black self-identity and self-worth (Klein 186-87).

importantly, as a vital expression of the African Diaspora (Handelsman, *Lo afro* 88).

One pivotal area that continues to capture the attention of Afroecuadorian writers has been the question surrounding the source of black oral tradition. The institution of slavery stripped Blacks of their original identity, mother tongue, culture and religion.<sup>45</sup> Hence, African-based oral tradition, consistent with the griot practices of oral history in many African and other cultures that did not rely on the written word, became the primary means of preserving history, mores and other cultural information among the African populace of the New World (Hale 15-16). Black folklore, the telling of tales, is one such example. Familiar with black coastal oral tradition, Ortiz incorporates into *Juyungo* a motif of water creatures that are part of West African folklore.<sup>46</sup> In *Juyungo*, Ortiz talks about both “la madre del agua” as well as “la tunda” (143).<sup>47</sup> Within the context of *Juyungo*, the function of “la tunda” is didactic. It reflects how African

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<sup>45</sup> Blacks of various ethnic groups were often mixed purposely or divided politically by white slavers and their owners to reduce solidarity, to integrate Blacks into white society and control slave rebellions, conspiracies and revolts (Klein 163, 182-83).

<sup>46</sup> In “La negritude en la cultura latinoamericana y ecuatoriana,” Ortiz remarks upon the continuance of West African folklore in South America, more specifically in Colombia and Ecuador: “Es interesante [...] observar como han sido trasladados a este Continente algunos monstruos de la selva, como por ejemplo la Tunda en Esmeraldas o la Madre Monte o Patuca en Colombia, que es similar al Quimbungo de los bantúes, para inspirar terror a los niños, a fin de que no se orinasen en la cama, no saliesen de noche de casa, no se aventurasen selva adentro y para que fuesen obedientes a sus padres” (107).

<sup>47</sup> According to García Pérez, “la tunda” dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century fighting between the indigenous and Blacks over the Esmeraldan Province. Apparently, the Devil took part in the battle. Disguising himself as a black prince, Macumba, he aided Blacks in winning the war. However, soon after, he fell in love with a beautiful black princess. This union between the Devil, now mortal, and the black woman resulted in a number of offspring, among which is found “la tunda.” Physically maimed and unable to have children, “la tunda” steals children from Esmeraldan Blacks. Upon bringing them back to her den, she uses both her shrimplike tail and black devil magic to cast a spell over them (“Leyenda canción de la tunda,” in Estupiñán Tello 150-52).

slaves, faced with new and enforced ideologies, found innovative ways to follow their own established practices. For example, it reflects the cosmology of black people of Esmeraldas regarding the theory of the origin and nature of the universe. Furthermore, it serves as an antidote for parents to teach their children obedience and respect.

The slave trade and the discovery of the New World ushered in a number of new belief systems. In Latin America, for instance, elements of Roman Catholicism were integrated with a number of slave cultures. Within the context of *Juyungo*, the history of “la tunda” manifests juxtapositions of both Catholicism and African religion. According to Don Clemente, a squatter on Peperán Island, “Según las Sagradas Escrituras, la tunda fue, en el tiempo en que los animales hablaban, uno de los ángeles preferidos del Señor; pero por desobedecer la voluntad del Todopoderoso, cayó en este valle de lágrimas para castigo de ella misma y de los niños malos” (148). In spite of the time and distance which separated African descendants from their place of origin, Afroecuadorians not only transplanted, but also maintained their ancestors’ folk characters in South America.

Another time honored African tradition present in *Juyungo* is the influence of African music. As is the case with African folklore, oral tradition nurtured in slavery encouraged the use of music to pass on history, teach lessons, ease suffering and relay messages. African influences on Afroecuadorian music are evident in such features as the call and response, syncopation, percussion and improvisation. In *Juyungo*, not only does Ortiz give a clear view of the importance of musical life in the province, but he also makes reference to two popular forms of

Afroecuadorian music.<sup>48</sup> The first manifestation, the marimba, lies in its Bantu and Mande West-African roots (Whitten and Quiroga 87). As the dominant musical and cultural expression of Afroecuadorians, Ortiz provides a window into marimba performance. The *glosador*, the male soloist, accompanied by the marimba, *bombos*, *guasá* and *conunos* sings improvised songs, while the *respondedoras*, the chorus of female singers, answer the *glosador*. In addition, vis-à-vis the use of *negrista* poetics, i.e., the use of onomatopoeia and *jitanjáforas*, Ortiz captures the rhythmic musicality of the percussion instruments and dance movements. Marimba music accompanies the second Afroecuadorian cultural expression presented in *Juyungo*, the *currulao*, the marimba dance. Ortiz features a number of very different presentations of marimba dances, such as the *torbellino*, *andariel*, *agua larga*, *caramba* and the *bambuco*.<sup>49</sup> Known as the *baile de respeto*, the *currulao* re-enacts male-female relations in the community.<sup>50</sup> Ortiz conveys the antagonistic but egalitarian relationship among men and women. Musical tension involving the alternation between leader and chorus, descriptive seductive dance moves, overt messages of seduction and conquest emphasize the struggle and the fight for dominance between the *glosador* and *respondedoras* as well as male and female dance partners.

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<sup>48</sup> According to Whitten, marimba folk music and dance was an important Afroecuadorian cultural expression. As recently as the mid-1960s, Whitten estimated that every town in the Esmeraldas Province had at least one marimba house where marimba dances, *currulaos*, occurred every Saturday night (*Black Frontiersman: A South American Case* 108-09).

<sup>49</sup> According to Whitten and Fuentes, there are nine Afroecuadorian marimba dances. However, the *bambuco*, also known for its title, the *Berejú*, is the most common and popularly known (176).

<sup>50</sup> The *currulao* in all its distinct manifestations is known as a dance of respect. The *currulao* reflects the dyadic relationship between male and female sex roles. Though equal, the relationship between men and women is also conflictive. Both tend to want to dominate (Whitten, *Black Frontiersman: A South American Case* 118-19).

As has been the case in Latin America as well as in Ecuador, black culture with underlying African motifs has been held hostage to the dominant white culture. In many ways, black culture has been undervalued, underappreciated, suppressed and devalued to conform to Eurocentric America.<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, remnants of a distinct African diasporic culture have not been assessed for their own merit or for their resilience of cultural survival within New World realities, nor within the context of a nationalistic white-mestizo discourse. In fact, the inferiority of black culture, as manifested in marimba performance, is made clear in *Juyungo*. Mirroring the historical reality and time frame of the city, authoritative power structures in the novel proclaim the following: “De la fecha en adelante, queda enteramente prohibido el efectuar bailes de marimba en las zonas centrales de la ciudad, por cuanto constituyen un atentado contra el orden, la moralidad y las buenas costumbres de los pueblos civilizados” (Ortiz 230). Still victimized by white supremacist epistemologies that both devalue and marginalize blackness, Esmeraldan black culture is negated by a white and / or white-mestizo dominated society.

Another crucial theme present in *Juyungo* is the complexity of racial mixture and racial identity. Based upon his own personal experience as a mulatto living within the confines of a nationalistic, white-mestizo nation, Ortiz explores the range of psychosomatic placement that individuals along the matrix of racial color are consciously or unconsciously forced or compelled

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<sup>51</sup> Historically, Afroecuadorian culture has been looked down upon by Ecuadorian white and / or white-mestizos. According to Whitten and Fuentes, highland mestizos viewed coastal blacks’ marimba music and dance as uncivilized and barbaric. Furthermore, in districts where Blacks had the opportunity to move up in the class hierarchy, upwardly-orientated Blacks distanced themselves from lower and rural class Blacks and ceased to participate in marimba music and dance performance. Today, marimba music and dance is considered a lower class and rural occurrence (169-70).



to take in Ecuador (Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* 123). By drawing on his characters' experiences, i.e., the socio-psychological experience of both Blacks and mulattos, not only does Ortiz show the effects of racism, bigotry, racial discrimination and racial intolerance, he also conveys how Blacks and mulattos must come to terms or negotiate with racist attitudes in Ecuador.

Representative of the bildungsroman genre, *Juyungo* illustrates the psychological, moral and social shaping of a proud, young black man, Ascención Lastre, who searches for meaningful existence, experience and self-identity. The process of maturation is long, arduous and gradual, involving repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order. What he discovers is a distortion of justice based on racial and ethnic differentiation. At the outset, Lastre hates all white people. In fact, he does not hesitate to strike back. According to Jackson, his first sexual encounter with a white woman, María, is based on conquest and black revenge, not love (*Black Writers in Latin America* 125). However, during the course of his lifetime he experiences a transformation of self. He discovers that he can love and feel affection for and respect white people as well as detest Blacks, especially Blacks who use their physical prowess against other Blacks in the employment of whites. However, while using race and racial pride as a point of departure, Ortiz seems to propagate a broader understanding of racism, more explicitly, a universal significance of justice to illustrate that racism against Blacks is equivalent to racism against humanity. Regardless of color, all mankind is deserving of racial equality and social justice.

Another key theme in *Juyungo* is the conflictive positioning of the mulatto within a nationally recognized white-mestizo nation. *Juyungo* provides an insightful and thorough portrayal of the mulatto. Three representative prototypes of mulatto characters are depicted. In the case of Max Ramírez, not only does he negate his black ethnicity and try to pass as white, but he also spurns other Blacks and in the process tries to take advantage of Blacks. As for Antonio Angulo, he agonizes over his inability to decide if he is more Black than white. He finds himself between two worlds and feels alienated by both Blacks and whites. In addition, he is hesitant regarding his sexual preference towards women. He seems to prefer white women. Therefore, when he falls in love with a black woman, he struggles with his decision. The third character, Nelson Díaz, is pivotal. Although Ortiz refers to him as a mulatto with light colored skin, he emphasizes Nelson's strong identification with his black heritage.

Even though Ortiz may delve into the socio-psychological ramifications of mulatto and even black positioning within Ecuadorian society, he is cautious about expressing his blackness in ways that might alienate readers who view any racial type of discourse as conflict-ridden and even racially prejudiced. In fact, Ortiz uses Díaz to perpetuate a proletariat type of message, rather than one based on race. By means of the character Díaz, Ortiz makes clear that class rather than race is inextricably connected to his black and mulatto characters' socio-economic condition (Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* 125). Indeed, in the concluding analysis, like Lastre, Antonio opts for blackness and even Nelson would have liked to be more Black than white (Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* 129). By drawing on the personal experiences of

his black and mulatto characters, Ortiz exemplifies the fundamental problem of race which all multicultural and multiracial societies confront in their quest for national solidarity.

Although, *Juyungo* fails to fully clarify Ortiz's personal stance regarding the precarious relationship between Ecuadorianness and Afroecuadorianness, Ortiz returns to the question of racial and ethnic duality in his poetry. Following the models of Emilio Ballagas (1908-1954), Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959) and Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), Ortiz introduced poetic *negrismo* to Ecuadorian readers. The period from 1920 to 1935 saw the advent of this phenomenon. Poetic *negrismo*, a cultural and artistic movement marked by the cultivation of an African-originated ancestry, redefined and reinterpreted African traditions within the nationalistic framework of culture and identity.

The range of poetic *negrismo* regarding the portrayal of the Afro Hispanic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was twofold. On the one hand, the aesthetic movement reflected the predominantly white authorial presence. The literary production of both Ballagas and Palés Matos brought black culture as well as the Black as subject to the forefront of international consciousness. Once referred to as a degenerate of society, the Black as subject became an object of aesthetic contemplation. However, *negrismo's* greatest challenge lies in the very representation of Blacks by its white writers. More concerned with cultural atavism and black tradition and ritual for entertainment purposes than with a true understanding of the black subject per se, white writers explored black culture and the black subject for what it could contribute to artistic innovation. Not only did white writers manipulate the black image, but *negrismo* subjectivity was also

transfixed on the perpetuation of black folklore which basically propagated a racist, negative and one-dimensional stereotypical image of Blacks. Poetic devices of *negrismo* poetry such as the use of rhythms reminiscent of African drumbeats, onomatopoeia, neologisms, and Afro-Latino dialect promoted a simplistic, primitive and backward race. In short, these distortions of black culture and the black subject had negative implications for that segment of society.

However, literary blackness developed by such black authors as Guillén and Ortiz brought to the forefront another form of representation of the black populace. In an effort to address the stereotypes inherent in *negrismo*, black authors embraced Negritude, the literary movement of the 1930s, to rediscover their African roots. The founders of this movement, Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-2001), Aimé Césaire (1913-2008) and Léon Damas (1912-1978) reflected not only on their ethnic past and an acceptance of and pride in being Black, but they also began to critically scrutinize Western political and intellectual domination.

Negritude, a movement aimed at valuing African history, traditions and belief systems, was also a reaction to colonization, Europe's lack of humanity and a rejection of Western thought and the politics of assimilation and integration. The influence of Negritude was a call to which both Guillén and Ortiz answered in the form of a political, social and creative consciousness, developed from a dialogue among Afro-diasporic intellectuals, movements and people around the globe. Not only did these authors rediscover their African roots while deconstructing *mestizaje*, but they were more direct on matters of race than their white counterparts as they confronted white cultural hegemony in Latin America.<sup>52</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>52</sup> For a comparative study of Guillén, Ortiz and Palés Matos, see G.R. Coulthard 73-77.

Negritude has been fundamental for the gradual construction of a black aesthetic; it brought to the forefront issues of racial identity and ethnic consciousness.

One of Ortiz's more acclaimed books of poetry is *Tierra, son y tambor: Cantares negros y mulatos* (1945). Thematically speaking, this work chronicles the black experience in Ecuador which is characterized by a past remembered and reclaimed, black adaptability and survival, the positive cultural contributions of Africans to America, the adverse situation of Blacks in Ecuador regarding ethnic relations, and finally the reconciliation of ethnic identity with social reality, a dilemma experienced by many Afroecuadorians. As in the case of *Juyungo*, *Tierra, son y tambor* addresses Afroecuadorian relations and resistance to the dominant culture. However, unlike *Juyungo*, *Tierra, son y tambor* reconciles the question of racial mixture and racial identity within an official, nationalistic framework that propagates a white-mestizo culture and identity. In fact, Ortiz leaves no question where he stands in *Tierra, son y tambor* which expresses his desire to be more Black and to proclaim his solidarity with other Blacks both locally and globally (Jackson, *Black Image* 102).

As an early precursor of black authorship in Ecuador, Ortiz brought to the forefront Afroecuadorian history, culture and social dynamics. Although critics have labeled *Juyungo* as ambiguous and problematic regarding his views on race, individual identity and nationality, *Tierra, son y tambor: Cantares negros y mulatos* illustrates how committed Ortiz was to his blackness.<sup>53</sup> Just like many other writers of African descent in Latin America, Ortiz also evoked

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<sup>53</sup> A number of literary critics have examined Ortiz's ambivalence on racial and cultural issues; these include Jackson, Handelsman, Cyrus, Rojas and Miranda, to name but a few.

his African culture and heritage. By recognizing that Blacks have a legitimate history, culture, heritage and identity, Ortiz recalled and reclaimed his black past. In short, the black protagonists of his writings have transformed Ecuador's literary landscape and prepared the way for future Afroecuadorian writers like Antonio Preciado.

#### **1.4 Nelson Estupiñán Bass**

Nelson Estupiñán Bass (1912-2002) is another noteworthy Afroecuadorian writer whose literary works reflect the experiences of being Black in Ecuador and Latin America. Along with his contemporary Ortiz, the literary works of Estupiñán Bass also show black agency during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Being social realists, they both wrote about what they witnessed in a society that imagined Blacks as an unthinkable constituency within the national imaginary. Like Ortiz, Estupiñán Bass also engaged issues of anti-black racism and invisibility in Ecuadorian society through his black protagonists.

Noted for his strong activist defense of his racial identity, Estupiñán Bass, an Afroecuadorian novelist, poet and essayist was born and raised in the province of Esmeraldas. As a writer of fiction and poetry, he established himself as a major literary figure within the African Diaspora. Several of his works emphasize black pride and social change.

Similar to Ortiz, the social orientation of the *Grupo de Guayaquil* and the earlier portrayals of black life by Ballagas, Palés Matos and Guillén made an impression on Estupiñán Bass, who, in the late 1930s, began writing fiction about black coastal culture and people (García-Barrio, in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations* 540). However, whereas Ortiz has been

criticized for his ambiguity with respect to his analysis on ethnicity, race and nationality, Estupiñán Bass has been more consistent in his defense of racial identity. Racially speaking, Estupiñán Bass was a mulatto. However, unlike Ortiz, Estupiñán Bass always insisted: “Yo me siento más negro que mulato” (Andrade 14). Because of his unbending identification to his black racial heritage, culture and commitment to social discourse, his literary trajectory explores the role hegemony plays in racial and ethnic inequality. Unlike Ortiz who believed he had solved the Afroecuadorian problem by placing race within the concept of class struggle, Estupiñán Bass addressed how inequality is perpetuated through racism and racialized discourses.

Such is the case with *Cuando los guayacanes florecían* (1954), Estupiñán Bass’s first and, arguably, his most representative novel based on a crucial moment in Esmeraldan history. Specifically, the novel refers to the Concha Revolution (1913-16) which pitted Colonel Carlos Concha and his black Esmeraldan rebels against the Andean-based governmental forces of oppression. From the standpoint of an Afro-centric perspective anchored in the historical experience of being Black, Estupiñán Bass employs a system of representation, which is structurally similar to social realism, to interpret the life of the period from the viewpoint of those individuals who have been most subjugated in society, namely Ecuadorian Blacks.

Throughout his literary works, Estupiñán Bass proposes a form of self-determination where Afroecuadorians have the right to decide freely their own fate without external pressure or outside interference. However, he is not isolationist. He understands that Afroecuadorian self-

determination cannot, by itself, confront immediately and effectively the strategies of domination and hegemonic manipulation. In fact, he supports the relationship between popular Afro-descendent culture and western culture. The Afro-cultural origin of education which can be qualified as both communal and informal acknowledges the historical and contemporary circumstance of both racial bias and inequality, while western culture, in the form of formal education, serves as an initial impetus for Afroecuadorian liberation. An Afro-cultural worldview combined with western formal education will enable Afroecuadorians to effectively challenge racism, exclusion, and exploitation.<sup>54</sup>

Though better known as a novelist, as in the case of Ortiz, Estupiñán Bass also wrote poetry. His first book of poetry, *Canto negro por la luz: Poemas para negros y blancos* (1954), is similar to the poetic *negrismo* of Ortiz in that he uses African sounding words and rhythms to affirm black culture, heritage and pride. However, his most noteworthy attribute as a poet has been his dissemination of black Esmeraldan oral tradition within written poetic verse. A defender of Afroecuadorian knowledge, thought and oral tradition, Estupiñán Bass illustrates the

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<sup>54</sup> Fanon talks at length how colonized intellectuals attempt to liberate their own people. However, what the colonized liberators fail to acknowledge is how their identities and worldviews have been distorted. They both now think and act like colonizers. Liberation will only come once the colonized intellectual has returned to the general population. Accordingly, colonized intellectuals learn to evaluate their internalized colonizer perspective from the perspective of colonized or racially subjugated people (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 160,163; *Black Skin, White Masks* 109-10). Seeing oneself and one's culture through the perspective of the subjugated, marginalized and silenced populations connects with the teachings of Paulo Freire (1921-1997). A Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy, Freire wants the oppressed to form himself rather than be formed. He proposes that the colonized intellectual / the educator establish what he calls "dialogue" with the oppressed (Freire 59). Since this entails the use of language akin to that with which the oppressed is familiar, it is essential for the colonized intellectual / the educator to incorporate himself into the life of the oppressed. Since both parties have elements to bring to learning, Freire puts forth a pedagogy in which the colonized intellectual / the educator and the oppressed engage equally. When all parties participate in a bidirectional dialogue about how they are seen by each other, they then can become aware of how much they can learn about themselves and each other (Freire 59).



importance of communal and informal Afro-descendent culture in *Timarán y Cuabú* (1956) as well as in *El desempate* (1980). As in the case of *Cuando los guayacanes florecían*, Estupiñán Bass addresses the complex relationship between one's own culture and that of the dominant one. Through the use of popular folk forms, Estupiñán Bass seeks to bridge the seemingly wide gap between popular oral discourse of the masses and the intellectualized poetic verse of the literary elites.

Estupiñán Bass builds on what his predecessors started by passing on communal and informal Afro oral traditions that he inherited. As already pointed out in this chapter, black orality has played a vital role in the construction of Afroecuadorian history that was otherwise suppressed by the written discourse of the white-mestizo elite. In short, oral thought and verbal expression are important repositories of social knowledge about the past as well as the present. In *Timarán y Cuabú* and *El desempate*, oral tradition gives a voice to the marginalized identities within a dominant, written discourse.

It is especially important to point out that in *Timarán y Cuabú* and *El desempate*, Estupiñán Bass challenges literate society's misconception about oral culture. He brings to the forefront Esmeraldan oral black art form that maintains the authenticity of that genre, while simultaneously showing its didactic potential and its philosophical depth. By addressing the complexity of the formal structure of oral black art as well as the demand placed on composing, improvising, speaking and presenting a superior context of the issue, Estupiñán Bass questions literate society's hidden abomination for cultures that are primarily oral. He argues for the

respectability of African cultures and history. At the same time, Estupiñán Bass refuses to sanction literate society's mutual exclusivity of oral and written discourse. Rather they should be treated as complementary. In *Timarán y Cuabú* as well as *El desempate*, Estupiñán Bass leaves a memory of oral tradition that with every passing day is becoming more and more extinct. It is the voice of the oppressed, whose history and culture has been distorted.

Clearly, Estupiñán Bass established himself as a leading literary writer within the African Diaspora (Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* 164). Several of his writings emphasize black pride and he is noted for being more aggressive in defense of his racial identity than other black Latin American writers. A promoter of Afroecuadorian culture and history, Estupiñán Bass honors his black heritage and expresses it in his writings. By relating Ecuadorian Blacks to the respectability of African cultures and history, Estupiñán Bass insists on the recognition of blackness in Ecuador. As Ortiz had done earlier, Estupiñán Bass gives his black protagonists a voice to assert their identity and affirm the important contributions of Afro descendants to Latin America and, more specifically, to Ecuador.

Whereas the historical overviews provided by the different sections of this chapter signaled a silencing of the black subject, the literary works of Afroecuadorians like Adalberto Ortiz and Nelson Estupiñán Bass represented oppositional racial projects in the incorporation of the black experience within the national imaginary. It is this paradox of belonging, but yet, not quite belonging, from which Antonio Preciado will emerge as a leading Afroecuadorian poet who will continue to develop the pioneering work of his predecessors. As was the case with

Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, Preciado illuminates his function as a writer in reconfiguring local and transnational meanings of blackness that continue to impact Afro descendants well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century regarding concepts of race, nationality and what it means to be Black in Ecuadorian society.

## **2. Antonio Preciado and the Emergence of an Afroecuadorian Poet (1961-1969)**

### **2.1 Historical and Literary Foundation**

As a product of the social and cultural revolution as well as the military dictatorships of the 1960s and 1970s, the turbulent 1960s made an impression on Preciado. The proliferation of utopian projects for social change grounded on egalitarian and pluralist tenets that sought to achieve equality had a profound impact on his writing. His publications from 1961-1969 range from his concern for his black identity to his fraternal identification with the oppressed. His writings embrace difference in an era when people throughout the world were challenging longstanding traditions of intolerance and fragmentation.

Because the initial impetus for Preciado's literary trajectory was founded within the historical demarcation of the 1960s, it would be an error to discuss Preciado's early years of literary production without taking into consideration the historical as well as literary milieu in which the poet first began publishing. The social and political environment of the 1960s had a dramatic influence on writers of all origins. Worldwide, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of political and creative turmoil. The political and diplomatic climate strongly influenced by the dynamics of the Cold War, U.S. counter-insurgency activities and the Alliance for Progress dominated world politics. However, within a setting shaped by U.S. military intervention and invasion, government corruption, human rights abuses and despotism, the 1960s also represented in Ecuador, as in many parts of the world, utopian visions, projects and initiatives for social

change and revolution. This radical political, social and cultural climate not only formed the backdrop for writers, but also the context in which their writing emerged. Writers became adroit at creating and mobilizing artistic symbols, music and literature to endorse a political agenda of social transformation. As was the case with the 1930s and 1940s, Ecuadorian literature of the 1960s and 1970s also saw major changes in the way in which both history and literature were approached in terms of interpretation and writing.

In Latin America, the 1960s was a period of heightened political mobilization and social conflict as well as dramatic cultural transformation. The realization that peace, democracy and justice could be achieved in the face of racial discrimination, sexism, war and U.S. imperialism was an emerging idealism of the 1960s. This era of newfound ideals stimulated young people to fight against the conformity of the 1950s and raise a social and political consciousness of the oppressive state in which Latin Americans lived. Thus, those individuals who came of age in the 1960s began to assert themselves socially, politically and culturally.

The social, political and cultural struggle in Latin America was inspired by Marxist philosophy, socialism, communism and Liberation Theology. During the 1960s and 1970s leftist ideology gained popularity because it represented a break from imperialist control and dependence. Commitment to such ideals of political and economic liberation led to the emergence of guerrilla movements, the rise of a youth counterculture, the evolution of student, women, indigenous and urban social movements and the spread of innovative intellectual and religious approaches to critical social issues of the day. Thus, the social, political and cultural

conflict of the 1960s led to the greater visibility of the region in world politics and the circumstances of the victims of oppression. Although these developments altered the contours of Latin American history, they also brought about a series of catastrophic circumstances. Despite illusions of creating a free and egalitarian society unique to Latin America and epitomized by Fidel Castro (1926), Che Guevara (1928-1967), and Salvador Allende (1908-1973), cruel dictatorships and military regimes emerged throughout the continent.

Within the context of Ecuador, political and social turmoil coupled with an economic crisis and the resurgence of *caudillismo*<sup>1</sup> characterized the decade of the 1960s. Democratic instability was due in part to the fall of banana as well as coffee prices. By taking advantage of the social discontent of the Ecuadorian people, José María Velasco Ibarra (1893-1979)<sup>2</sup> effected a strong campaign against his opponent Galo Plaza Lasso (1906-1987).<sup>3</sup> Not only did he succeed

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<sup>1</sup> *Caudillo* refers to the political-military leadership of an authoritarian form of government.

<sup>2</sup> From the 1930s to the early 1970s, Velasco Ibarra dominated Ecuadorian politics. In addition to winning five presidential elections, Velasco Ibarra also introduced mass politics in Ecuador. *Velasquismo*, or as Augustín Cueva refers to as *caudillismo* or populism, represented a new method of political manipulation in Ecuador (de la Torre 32). Velasco Ibarra's populist movement attracted both the masses and the political elites (de la Torre 32). In his campaign against Galo Plaza and in light of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, Velasco Ibarra gained political power by capitalizing on popular dissatisfaction to U.S. imperialist exploitation emerging throughout the Americas (Cueva 47).

<sup>3</sup> Galo Plaza differed from previous Ecuadorian presidents. First and foremost, Galo Plaza was both born and educated in the United States. Furthermore, he served as Ecuador's ambassador to the United States from 1944 to 1946. From 1948 to 1952, Galo Plaza served as President of Ecuador. As president, he brought economic stability to Ecuador. According to Cueva, Galo Plaza initiated a developmentalist and technocratic approach to Ecuadorian government (42). He contracted foreign specialists in the fields of economic development and governmental administration. Under Galo Plaza's administration, Ecuador's economy showed a marked improvement for the first time in years (Cueva 42-43). However, during the 1960 presidential election, Galo Plaza's ties to the United States "rendered him vulnerable to charges by Velasco Ibarra and other demagogic opponents of being the lackey of U.S. imperialism" (Pike 299).

in winning the election of 1960, but also this victory resulted in his fourth term in office. Nonetheless, his presidential mandate was cut short when in November of that same year the Vice President, Carlos Julio Arosemena Monroy (1919-2004), assumed the presidency. Similar to what occurred with Velasco Ibarra, Arosemena's time in office was also short-lived. The Ecuadorian right engaged in an all-out propaganda campaign; they did everything in their power to discredit and destroy the legitimacy of their opponent (Freire García 15). Surrounded by an unfavorable political climate, Arosemena's presidency culminated in a military coup d'état on July 11, 1963. Immediately after assuming power, the military junta implemented a policy of agrarian reform (1964) which by no means resolved the situation of the *campesinado*, but, in fact, favored the interests of the *latifundistas* (Freire García 15).<sup>4</sup> In reaction to Ecuador's worsening economic crisis and the Cuban revolution, the military junta implemented the National Security Act which gave the government a free hand in repressing all forms of opposition that might be associated with Castro and his sympathizers. However, public unrest and national protest against repression culminated in the withdrawal of the military junta in 1966 and Clemente Yerovi Indaburu (1904-1981) was designated interim president. As one of his first official acts, he called for a constituent assembly which culminated in the election of Otto Arosemena Gómez (1925-1984) as president of the republic.

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<sup>4</sup> According to Galo Viteri Díaz, the land reform act of 1964 banned the *huasipungo* system and also put into place the *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización* (IERAC) which was responsible for the expropriation and the redistribution of land to farmers (8,9). Nevertheless, political opposition slowed implementation of the land reform act (Cueva 51). Thus, distribution of the land remained highly unequal (Viteri Díaz 12-13).

In 1968, full-scale elections took place and Velasco Ibarra assumed the presidency for the fifth time. Internal conflict, deep seated antagonism, lack of consensus within government and an unmanageable economic crisis characterized the initial stages of Velasco Ibarra's return to power. However, this precarious circumstance proved favorable to Velasco Ibarra who in June of 1970 proclaimed himself dictator of Ecuador. As dictator, Velasco Ibarra closed universities, failed to acknowledge parliamentary elections, dissolved Congress and called for the restructuring of the Supreme Court of Justice.

In 1971, and still under the Velasco Ibarra dictatorship, the Texaco-Gulf consortium initiated their first petroleum excavations in Ecuador. During this time, Ecuador experienced a period of economic growth. Oil extraction and the ensuing oil boom generated rapid population growth in both Quito and Guayaquil. With economic prosperity came the emergence of a flourishing middle class. Although Ecuador's oil boom of the 1970s benefitted the political and wealthy elite, as well as a small sector of the Ecuadorian populace, such fiscal growth did little to improve the conditions in which the average Ecuadorian increasingly lived. In effect, the majority of the Ecuadorian population continued to live under economic deprivation.

The aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and the social liberation movements had a profound effect on Latin American writers. The 1960s stimulated groups, movements, workshops and individual writers to question the foundational principles of literature. Such was the case in Ecuador. As with previous generations, more specifically those from the 1930s and 1940s, this generation of Ecuadorian writers also concluded that literature was a useful tool for



reflecting social and economic conditions as well as promoting change, new direction, personal testimony and growth. In effect, both the 1960s and 1970s brought about radical literary movements that stressed intellectual commitment to the political, social and cultural authenticity of the times while simultaneously breaking from the status quo.

With the advent of the 1960s, a new generation of Ecuadorian writers emerged onto the scene. One group in particular that broke free from the literary restraints of the prior generation was the *Tzántzicos* with its journal, *Pucuna*. More specifically, this group of writers from the 1960s challenged the antiquated and conventional constraints of the 1950s to frame their literary work within a political project in the hopes of capturing the country's political and social authenticity of the day (Freire García 19). However, the need to ferment artistic creation with political action was not the only objective of the *Tzántzicos*. In addition, this group of individuals began to question their role as writers. In other words, the *Tzántzicos* reevaluated their participatory role within society. They viewed themselves as any other member of society. Their premise was to deconstruct societal and literary perceptions about the literary profession as being more noteworthy than that of other sectors of society (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 102). In short, their mission was to redefine the role of the intellectual in a developing country like Ecuador.

In reconfiguring the role of the literary writer, the *Tzántzicos* insisted that writers dedicate their art to carrying out fundamental social changes within Ecuadorian society. Their mission was to produce a literature that was both socially and artistically revolutionary. More

specifically, they wanted to leave a mark in literature by striking a blow against the indifference and ignorance which continued to undermine creativity and renovation. Well aware of the tendency of previous generations to compromise their intent and art to public and private sectors of hegemonic publishing institutions and ideologies, the *Tzántzicos* were committed to reaffirm their subversive and dissident stance (Freire García 137-38). As part of their literary and political commitment to society, this new generation of writers from the 1960s became active agents of change. They challenged the value and merit of the country's cultural institutions and literary traditions. Furthermore, many became activists in leftist organizations.<sup>5</sup>

In general, critics, scholars, writers and poets identify Preciado as a member of the generation of the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> However, the difficulty that arises in identifying Preciado as a member of the 1960s is how critics, writers and poets can argue for Preciado's inclusiveness on the one hand, while on the other hand, historical reality implicates his exclusion from the principal literary movements and trends of Ecuadorian literature from the 1960s. Questions of race, such as racial privilege and /or the experience of racial oppression need to be addressed to better contextualize Preciado's historical literary importance within Ecuadorian literature.

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<sup>5</sup> The social activism of the *Grupo de Guayaquil* had a profound effect on the *Tzántzicos*. Like the *Grupo de Guayaquil*, the *Tzántzicos* also took on a leadership role as the social and moral conscience of their generation (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 102).

<sup>6</sup> In June, 2010, I had the opportunity to meet and interview a number of prominent Ecuadorian critics, scholars, writers and poets from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s regarding the literary trajectory of Preciado. Among the list include: poets from the 1960s Carlos Eduardo Jaramillo (1932), Fernando Cazón Vera (1935) and Ulises Estrella (1940); poets from the 1970s Julio Pazos Barrera (1944), Humberto Vinuesa (1944), Hugo Jaramillo (1945) and Simón Zavala Guzmán (1945); and contemporary literary critics Fernando Balseca, Alicia Ortega and Cecilia Ansaldo. As a select group, these leading literary poets, writers, critics and academics seemed inclined to simply place Preciado within the general literary movement of the 1960s.

First and foremost, the historical, social, ethnic space of the Afroecuadorian during the 1960s depicted a world in which Blacks were not acknowledged. According to Ulises Estrella (1940), an Ecuadorian poet, as well as one of the most influential members of the *Tzántzicos*, “hubo un marginamiento, hubo un separatismo.”<sup>7</sup> Lack of attention and negligence regarding the province of Esmeraldas by the central government was due to the province’s reputation as a center of black settlement. The province of Esmeraldas had the highest percentage of persons of African origin. Consequently, “había un marginamiento hacia la cultura negra en ese entonces.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Estrella has commented that “había un provincianismo.”<sup>9</sup>

With respect to the cultural situation in Ecuador during the 1960s, the state of literature had deteriorated. The 1950s, a time of economic and political stability had anesthetized writers into a state of conformity where few writers dared to challenge the country’s cultural institutions and literary traditions of the day which were still connected in some fashion to colonial European modes of thought. Such conventionalism had created a situation of cultural provincialism detrimental to the progress of the literary arts as a whole. This narrowing of perspective and debate was especially evident in the 1960s in Ecuador. Estrella points out the disconnectedness of literary communities and its detrimental effects on the scope of Ecuadorian literature:

Existe en nuestro país, desde hace mucho tiempo, un manifiesto provincianismo

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<sup>7</sup> Personal Interview. 6 June 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Estrella, Ulises. Personal Interview. 6 June 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Personal Interview. 6 June 2010.

en la cultura. Los horizontes que se nos presentan, acerca de los campos o las novedades que se desenvuelven en otros lugares, son los más reducidos. Apenas, «los escogidos» que han logrado salir fuera de las fronteras, logran ponerse en comunicación con hombres de cultura del mundo y adquieren una visión más amplia sobre la problemática del arte universal. Y se agudiza más la situación, en cuanto agrupados en cerrados círculos—en tres ciudades del país—, independientemente se trabaja. Así, en Quito muy poco se conoce sobre la actividad que se realiza en Guayaquil, y en la ciudad de Cuenca se ignora totalmente de que se hace en Quito, y viceversa. (...) ¿Las razones? Están claras; siempre han estado claras, a pesar de que se han cerrado los ojos ante ellas. La fundamental: la ineficaz labor de los organismos culturales especializados y de los más grandes medios de difusión ciudadana como son la prensa y la radio.<sup>10</sup>

In short, cultural and geographical distances between Ecuador's provinces and distinct regions hindered the exchange of intellectual literary development and practice. The exchange of ideas is a necessary social and political practice, without which informed opinions and social conscience cannot fully develop.

Generally speaking, Preciado's identity as a member of the 1960s has been interpreted through the lens of the dominant culture, that is, from a dominant white and / or white-mestizo perspective. Consequently, what often times has been overlooked are the consequences of racial

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<sup>10</sup> See Freire García 43.

privilege in white-mestizo authored opinion and analysis that are not consonant with historical reality. During the 1960s, Preciado was living, writing and publishing in Esmeraldas. Despite post-emancipation, Ecuador was not free from racism. Discriminatory practices continued in Ecuador. Racist attitudes held by a substantial portion of the Ecuadorian populace dictated the country's economic, political and cultural interests. Esmeraldas was marginalized and isolated not only from mainstream society, but also from dominant literary circles. This is an important issue, for it emphasizes that literary development was dependent on the socio-economic prosperity of a people. Intellectual literary activity regarding point and purpose of Ecuadorian literary trends and movements was taking place in the hubs of the metropolises. In addition to the many causes of exclusion from Ecuador's literary canon, not the least of which is the "provincianismo" identified by Ulises Estrella, one must also take into account the racial privilege and racial oppression that tended to diminish or stereotype Preciado's contributions to the literary activism of the 1960s in Ecuador.

Although Preciado does not question his Afro identity, he does question the stereotypical expectations that come with being labeled an Afro writer. In a personal interview with the poet, Preciado lamented the automatic categorization of himself as a black writer and its effects on how his work has been perceived. For the poet, being labeled as a black writer by the dominant *blanco*-mestizo society has the tendency to marginalize as well as obscure the literary profundity of one's work: "la literatura escrita por negros es una literatura secundaria, que es una literatura marginal. Limitar al escritor negro en su importancia solo al ámbito de la negritud."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Personal Interview. 10 April 2010.

Moreover, theorists and textual scholars in general have marginalized minority literature, either by ignoring it all together or by considering it superficially, in comparison to more extensive examinations of white and or / white-mestizo canonical texts.<sup>12</sup> By labeling black writers as lower class or subaltern, critics place Blacks outside of the totalizing posturing that Western traditional canonical norms claim to acknowledge. More importantly, however, parochial and racist approaches to literature have diminished the important contributions black writers have made to literary writing.

Not only does Preciado's literary trajectory highlight the shortcomings of existing rubrics, but also it brings to the forefront the arbitrariness of categories. In the case of Preciado, his poetry embodies, among other things, the legacies of Conquest that have afflicted not only the country from which he comes, but all of humanity, that is, the subjugation and the marginalization of heterogeneity by self-centralizing, monolithic paradigms. In fact, these same legacies lie behind the much discussed debated problems of Ecuadorian identity, a problem embedded in the imposition of models of sameness upon a reality exemplified by hybridity and diversity.

As a writer of the African Diaspora living in Ecuador, Preciado's early writings reflect

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<sup>12</sup> In a personal interview, Preciado commented on the longstanding consequences of classifying, interpreting, politicizing and assessing the aesthetic value of literature based on the author's skin color. In one anthology in particular, *Antología de poesía ecuatoriana* (2009), edited by Javier Vásquez, Preciado talked about how race factored into the way in which *Alfaguara*, a Spanish - language publishing house, both characterized and critiqued the literary works written by authors who identified themselves or were identified by others as Black in Ecuador. As members of a marginalized group, their contribution as writers was regarded as inconsequential. For instance, *Alfaguara* referred to both Preciado and Ortiz as marginal writers whose work they labeled as folk wisdom, and thus relegated to secondary status. Furthermore, the editors of *Alfaguara* failed to include Estupiñán Bass (10 April 2010).

much of the place and age in which he lived. As a representative of Esmeraldas, Esmeraldas as a place, history, society and culture is always present. It serves as an incubator of ideas, emotions, aspirations, hopes, dreams and celebrations. However, Esmeraldas is more than African cultural influences wrapped up in images of song, dance, rhythm, black orality and descriptions of black people involved in their day-to-day activities. Esmeraldas is also a metaphorical location where the ideals of the country confront the realities of slavery, segregation, racism and discrimination. Thus, the early literature of Preciado reflects and embodies Esmeraldas' social and historical context. In effect, his works express sentiments coming out of an underdeveloped, marginalized, exploitative existence as a black man living in 1960s Esmeraldas.

At the same time, Preciado's early works convey an understanding of the human condition, that is, the conflicts, relationships and philosophies that transcend time, place and ethnic space. This important realization—that blackness need not be one's central subject, but equally need not be minimized—has governed Preciado's work since the beginning. Not only does Preciado present themes, issues, form and content which mirror a different perspective of reality (i.e., being Black in Esmeraldas), but also Preciado has taken on the daunting aesthetic question of how to be faithful to and unconstrained by the presence of blackness. Preciado is committed to the basic unity of all human beings while at the same time recognizing, legitimizing, accepting, and appreciating the differences that exist between people of different ethnicities and cultures. Only by locating a writer like Preciado, rooted in an African-based

legacy within the historical, social, political and cultural 1960s on a broad scale, is one able to appreciate the full breadth of his literary work.

## 2.2 Jolgorio

Preciado's first book of poetry, *Jolgorio*, was published in 1961 when he was 21. This was quite an accomplishment given the sociological divisions of the time and Esmeraldas' marginalization from mainstream society. In a personal interview, Preciado reflects upon his first published work in Ecuador. According to the poet, Estupiñán Bass was instrumental in developing his skills as a poet as well as getting his first book of poems published:

Un poco de la mano de Nelson Estupiñán Bass, quien conocía mis primeros poemitas y todo eso, y que me aconsejaba. Me indujo a seguir escribiendo. Él tuvo mucho que ver con la primera, con la publicación de mi primer librito, llamado *Jolgorio*. Le pidió al Dr. Benjamín Carrión, que era Presidente de la casa de la cultura ecuatoriana que lo publicara y el Dr. Carrión, que no era negro, con gusto, en quince días estuvo, para mi sorpresa. Yo casi me desmayé de sorpresa, un ejemplar todavía oloroso a tinta, de tener mi primer librito en mis manos.<sup>13</sup>

A work of discovery, *Jolgorio* sets the ideological and literary foundational basis for Preciado's poetic expression which spans more than 50 years.

*Jolgorio* is divided into 2 parts: *Bom, bom, bom* and *Amanecer*. Overall, *Jolgorio*

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<sup>13</sup> Personal Interview. 10 April 2010.



reflects upon the experience of being Black. Negritude and black liberation set the tone for the collection. Structurally speaking, in *Bom, bom, bom* and in *Amanecer* the octasyllable dominates poetic structure and form. However, whereas *Bom, bom, bom* reveals manifestations of the poet's most immediate surroundings, the lives of black people, black culture and black customs in Esmeraldas, more specifically, the poet's birthplace, *Barrio Caliente*, *Amanecer*, on the other hand, reflects the political climate of social protest in Latin America during the 1960s.

*Bom, bom, bom* is a collection of 16 poems in which Preciado reflects upon the cultural and foundational base of Afroesmeraldan mores. Concerned with the expression of his own African heritage, his work focuses to a great extent on Africa and Africa's contribution to the Americas. He presents a community of individuals who have a sense of pride in their past, a sense of an African heritage and an Afro identity. In depicting the world of the Afroesmeraldan, Preciado relies heavily on a poetic interpretation of black legends, superstitions and witchcraft. In addition, these poems are notable for their simulation of African and Esmeraldan percussive instruments and their recreation of Afroesmeraldan dialectical speech. At the same time, because Preciado does not overlook the social conditions of Blacks in Ecuador, the reader understands the extent to which the experience of the Afroesmeraldan is characterized by suffering.

As was the case with Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, Preciado reflects an identity in relation to his historical past and personal present. However, unlike Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, in *Bom, bom, bom* Preciado does not address the role of *mestizaje* on black identity. As a young black writer of

the 1960s, he was deeply influenced by the Black Power Movement and the Civil Rights Movement of the United States. In addition, the proliferation of civil rights activism in the Third World in general had a profound effect on Preciado. Whereas in later volumes Preciado's locus turns inward, focusing on the more private, personal and subjective manifestations of the impact of racial and racist constructions on black identity, in *Bom, bom, bom* Preciado is more invested in particularizing and making specific his Afro identity.

Racial pride, identification with blackness and Ecuadorianness are the thematic concerns of "Yo soy de aquí." In the first two stanzas, the poet establishes a sense of belonging and a sense of rootedness by stressing not only the physical and geographical space of Esmeraldas, but also his ethnic roots and African heritage:

Yo soy de aquí,  
de esta tierra de mar,  
de esta tierra de sol.

Negro soy,  
negros, papá y mamá. (1-3, 4-5)

By defining himself in terms of both geography and identity, the poet examines the importance of place as it relates to self and cultural identity amongst Afroesmeraldans. One will remember that Afroesmeraldan identity emerged as the result of forced migration of a colonized population which was once the ethnic majority in Africa to a situation of a neo-colonized, ethnic minority

in Ecuador with a distinct cultural identity. “Yo soy de aquí” makes it possible to imagine a scenario whereby African inhabitants make up a distinct social entity determinedly seeking to recreate a local place for themselves within a nationalist, mestizo hegemonic community. From the perspective of the Afroesmeraldan, it is thus Esmeraldas, and not Africa, that constitutes home.

The imaginative recreations of local place in terms of both black community and the nation as a whole serve as a cultural site of resistance. In the third stanza, the poet shows what it is like to be Black in Esmeraldas. He repeatedly juxtaposes the phrase “Yo soy de aquí” to accentuate a sense of belonging with various accounts of the black experience in Esmeraldas.

Yo soy de aquí,  
y el hombro de alquitrán sabe del peso de una ba-  
nana.

Yo soy de aquí,  
y amo a la camisa verde de la tierra.

Yo soy de aquí,  
y sé que el oro del guayacán es perfumado.

Yo soy de aquí,  
y he tenido a la tunda.

Yo soy de aquí,  
y sé que la cáscara del coco mancha. (6-16)

On the one hand, racial unfairness lies at the core of what it means to be Black in Esmeraldas. Although the poet feels allegiance to Ecuador, he also feels anger at Ecuador's racial inequalities. He criticizes Ecuador for the oppression of Blacks. The experience of the Afroesmeraldan is characterized by his heritage of exploitation and suffering. The poet depicts the hardships of the Afroecuadorian banana workers: "Yo soy de aquí, / y el hombro de alquitrán sabe del peso de una banana" (6-8). Not only is the emphasis upon blackness, but also the role and place of Blacks in the development of Esmeraldas. Economic development has been contingent upon the exploitation of black labor.

On the other hand, Esmeraldas as a local space affirms the Afroesmeraldan's cultural distinctiveness that is rooted in an African cosmological and worldview perspective.<sup>14</sup> One very important aspect of that reality is his relationship with nature. The experience of the Afroesmeraldan is characterized by his love for the natural world: "Yo soy de aquí, / y amo a la camisa verde de la tierra. / Yo soy de aquí, / y sé que el oro del guayacán es perfumado" (9-12). For the Afroesmeraldan, home relates directly to the earth and landscape of Esmeraldas. An African worldview is further implicated by the insertion of the Afroesmeraldan legend of "la tunda:" "Yo soy de aquí / y he temido a la tunda" (13-14). As was the case in Ortiz, Preciado

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<sup>14</sup> According to John S. Mbiti, an African worldview emphasizes the importance of the community that can be summed up in the well-known concept of *ubuntu*: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (108-09). However, this belief in the community does not only include human beings, but also nature, the world of the spirits, ancestors and even God (Du Toit 398). Since an African cosmology embodies a worldview of connectedness where all elements of creation are woven together, human beings have a moral obligation to take care of the earth as well as one another; put differently, an offense against another human, element of nature or ancestors, is seen as an offence to God (Du Toit 398).

puts into literary form “la tunda,” a West African spirit.<sup>15</sup> A sense of an Afro identity and African culture is also found in the Afroesmeraldan’s love for music. Rhythm-based genres were inspired to varying degrees by the music of African slaves, which in turn influenced Afroesmeraldan popular music (Adalberto Ortiz, “La negritud,” 100-01). The poet stresses the importance of African musical influence on the Afroesmeraldan:

Yo soy de aquí,  
y mis oídos se nutren de ¡BOM!  
y la sangre enloquece.  
Soy de carbón,  
y mis pies zapatean por librarse de la candela de  
una rumba.  
Soy de carbón,  
y el fosforo del bombo enciende mi cintura. (17-24)

Despite the continued dispersal of African people to other parts of the world and the negative effects of colonialism, the poet illustrates that a vibrant presence of an African worldview characterized by the Afroesmeraldan’s love and respect for nature, the preservation and cultivation of a West-African folk character, “la tunda,” and African roots in national music, is a living phenomenon in Esmeraldas as well as Ecuador in general.

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<sup>15</sup> See chapter one, footnote 47, for an explanation of the history of “la tunda.”

The poet's racial identification and the meaning of home is further explored in the poem "Barrio caliente." As Preciado states:

En mi ciudad, en Esmeraldas había dos sectores muy diferenciados. El sector blanco mestizo, y el sector negro. Generalmente integrado por personas de extracción campesina, y ubicados en un barrio que se llamaba Barrio Caliente. Caliente le decían porque había fiestas, se tocaba la marimba, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, "Barrio caliente" not only provides insight into the daily lives and cultural customs of the Afroesmeraldan, but it also depicts a broad sphere of emotional experiences, sensory perceptions, memories and feelings of nostalgia. In the first stanza, the poet describes the physical reality of the *Barrio Caliente*:

Barrio de los negros,  
palmeras y brisa;  
barrio de guadúa,  
pambil y piquigua,  
de pieles de brea,  
de cade y rampida  
de encendidas bembas,  
de blancas sonrisas. (1-8)

This predominately black populated locale is described as earthy, verdant and untouched by

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<sup>16</sup> Personal Interview. 10 April 2010.

modern civilization.

In various parts of the poem the reader encounters allusions to drums, dance and rhythm. The intentionally repeated motif of musicality throughout the poem reveals the integrated role music plays in the life of the Afroesmeraldan. At the same time, this recurrent element documents the relevance of African influences:

¡Candombe, marimba,  
candome, bongó,  
la tumba, la timba,  
en la virazón! (9-12)

Rooted in the African tradition of the talking drums, the confluence of African and Afroesmeraldan musical traditions permeates the region. The sea breeze carries the memory, spirit and sense of home to a nearer and more tangible place. The invisible world of traditional Africa is linked with the visible world of Esmeraldas. This syncretism of existence and communication bears testimony to the development of an Afro-diasporic consciousness.

Representations of various sights, sounds and smells are juxtaposed with short, rhythmic and recurrent passages of music. Sensory imagery provides insight into Afroesmeraldan knowledge and everyday life experiences. In the third stanza the poet describes a longstanding Spanish and Latin American tradition, the “siesta:”

Barrio Caliente,  
olor a tabaco,

humo de cachimba,  
bulliciosa siesta  
en la hamaca amiga. (13-17)

For the Afroesmeraldan, a short nap taken in the early afternoon forms part of his day-to-day activities. The aroma of tobacco and the smoke of the pipe fill the afternoon period of napping.

However, the sounds of the “barrio” converge on “siesta” time:

Barrio del jolgorio,  
barrio de mandinga,  
cantados velorios,  
notas de marimba,  
que encienden la sangre,  
que al cadombe invitan. (18-23)

An interesting mix of percussion instruments, which are the most popular instruments of the Afroesmeraldan way of life, breaks up the monotony of the traditional “siesta:”

Duras palmas prietas,  
que el guasá agitan,  
maltratan al bombo,  
que fuerte se queja,  
se lamenta, grita. (28-32)

Clearly, music fulfills social, ritual, and ceremonial functions as well as some purely



recreational purposes. In terms of musical expression, marimba music is prominent in Esmeraldas and is named for the use of marimbas, drums, and other instruments specific to this region such as the “bombo” and the “guasá” (Whitten and Quiroga 87). This music is played in religious ceremonies, celebrations and parties. It marks the cycles of life and communicates societal values. A distinctly black autonomous cultural expression, marimba music remains intimately attached to the daily life of Afroesmeraldan society.

However, *Barrio Caliente* is not limited to the physical presence of sights, sounds and smells of everyday life; it also emanates a kind of mystical aura. Therefore, Preciado emphasizes the spiritual element of *Barrio Caliente* in the final stanzas of the poem:

Barrio de los negros,  
de calles oscuras,  
preñadas de espantos,  
que llevan, que asustan,  
que paran los pelos,  
en noches sin luna.

Barrio encendido;  
de noche y de día,  
infierno moreno,  
envuelto en las llamas

de son y alegría. (45-50, 51-55)

Familiar with coastal oral tradition, in these final stanzas, Preciado alludes to the cosmology of the Afroesmeraldan. In addition to the natural world, the Afroesmeraldan also believes in the existence of another kind of world, the spiritual one. According to Mbiti, the spirit world of people of African descent is inhabited by spirits, ghosts, visions, apparitions and specters (75). Mythical beings specific to Esmeraldas are “la tunda” as well as “el riviél” (Whitten and Quiroga 89). Both “la tunda” and the “el riviél” are spirits affiliated with Hell. Whereas “la tunda” is the love child of the devil and a young black Esmeraldan woman (García-Barrio, in Whitten, *Cultural Transformations* 544), “el riviél,” once a man and condemned to Hell “is able to move freely in the world, on the sea, in Hell, and all parts of the sky and in other worlds” (Whitten, *Black Frontiersmen* 100). These Afroesmeraldan phenomena are malicious, wicked and are to be feared. Within the context of the poem, Preciado describes *Barrio Caliente* as a sulphurous pit. Although invisible, Afroesmeraldans know or believe that these folkloric legends are present.

*Barrio Caliente*, which represents home for many Afroesmeraldans, is connected to African traditional rituals that give meaning to their lives. Just as with marimba music, “la tunda” and “el riviél” also function as markers of a black ethnic identity that transcends local borders and unites with a larger African Diaspora. Through a profound sense of home, Afroesmeraldan cultural creativity of blackness is related to memory and the desire to honor the past while communicating to others their identities and distinctly black autonomous cultural

expressions.

Although the role of black women in Afroesmeraldan society is rarely addressed in the works of Preciado, “Rumbera” offers a lens through which to view societal perceptions of black women in Afroesmeraldan culture.<sup>17</sup> As was the case with Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, the earlier portrayals of the black women’s role in black culture by the three Antillean poets, Ballegas, Palés Matos and Guillén, made an impression on Preciado. However, even though early black poetry provoked the redefinitions and re-interpretations of Africa and an African heritage while simultaneously emphasizing the racial, cultural and historical realities of the black experience in the New World, it also promoted the denigrating stereotyping of the female black figure in the formation of national racial identity.<sup>18</sup>

“Rumbera” underscores the importance of African influence on the Afroesmeraldan’s

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<sup>17</sup> Amongst the few representations of women of African descent prevalent in the earlier works of Preciado are those that center on the nurturing role of black women within Esmeraldan society. In “Poema para mi madre que debe ser leído junto al fuego,” Preciado reflects upon the image of the black woman as mother. The representation of the black woman as grandmother is present in the poem, “Las protecciones.” In addition to the representation of black women as nurturers, in the poems “Nacha” and “Juana,” for example, Preciado also presents women of African descent as an emblem of exploitation and suffering. See Esther Bermejo de Crespo, “Antonio Preciado, el hombre, y el poeta,” 28-30.

<sup>18</sup> Although images of black and mulatto women were brought to the forefront by elite white *negrista* practitioners, the representation of Afro-descendant women within male-defined sexual parameters is also present in texts by Afro-descendant male writers (Mosby 83-84). Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass also reproduced stereotypes about black women’s bodies and sexuality in their poems. However, these male-defined representations of black and mulatto women were formed not only by cultural dogma and customary postcolonial racial ideologies, but also were sustained by other disciplinary discourses such as anthropology, medicine, biology, public health and psychology that “had concluded with ever-increasing ‘scientific’ evidence, that the black female embodied notions of uncontrolled sexuality” (Hammonds 172).

sense of rhythm, life and culture. The poem captures the rhythmic beat of percussion instruments, the Afroesmeraldan's close relationship with nature, and highlights music's functionality in Afroesmeraldan everyday life. Historically speaking, the *rumba* is an imported artistic dance form from Africa (Fernando Ortiz, *Glosario de afronegrismos* 406). *Rumba* influence in Latin America dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the initial impetus of the black slave trade (Yvonne Daniel 33-34). Grammatically speaking, the expression *rumba* comes from the verbs "rumbanchar" and "cumbanchar," infinitives that imply partying, dancing and having a pleasurable time (Fernando Ortiz, *Glosario de afronegrismos* 409-11). The native *rumba* folk dance is basically highly sexual role-playing between a man and a woman (Yvonne Daniel 69). Accompanying instruments include the *maracas*, the *claves* and the *drums* (Yvonne Daniel 80-81). *Rumba* music is the result of continuous or periodic repetition or staccato movement (Yvonne Daniel 82-83). The use of repetition creates movement while the staccato beat is in sync with the vigorous expressive movements of both the male and female dancers.

"Rumbera" clearly illustrates the dichotomy of the celebration of a black folkloric expression and a historically constructed and culturally imposed image of the woman of African descent. The poem recreates the sensations of music, rhythm and dance of the *rumba*. With its use of rhythmic and percussionist beats, "Rumbera" captures the poet's pride in his African heritage.

Morena, la rumba tiene

locura pa tu cadera,

óyela, negra, ya viene,  
enredada en la candela.  
Látigo pa tu cintura,  
es el bum bum bum de la tumba,  
y oye que viene la rumba,  
¡suelta tu cuerpo, rumbera! (1-8)

Another African influence found in “Rumbera” is the Afroesmeraldan’s close relationship with nature and dependence on the land. The expressive movements and different bodily positions of the black female dancer as she executes the *rumba* are in direct relation to her natural environment. Metaphorically speaking, the poet compares her dance movements to a violent storm at sea. The movements of her bust emulate the powerful swell of the waves rolling across the surface of the water during a heavy rainstorm.

¡Caramba!, en las piernas locas,  
la tormenta se desata,  
y tu pecho se alborota,  
como la mar agitada.  
Se desbarata, ¡caramba!,  
tu cuerpo de berbiquí,  
¡eso!, ¡muy bien!, ¡dale así!,  
¡dale que dale, mulata! (27-34)

Finally, music, rhythm and dance are not only celebratory expressions of everyday life, but also reveal manifestations of the community's anguish and sorrow. Within the context of the poem, the *rumba* evokes a kind of cleansing of the emotions:

Que se rompe tu cintura,  
y el bum navega en tus venas,  
que sube la calentura,  
y el baile negro no frena.  
¡Ay!, que sudas mucho, zamba,  
tu fiebre de movimientos,  
en tu cuerpo—negro infierno—  
paga la rumba sus penas.  
¡Dale que dale al meneo!  
¡Dale que dale, morena! (17-26)

In short, with its use of onomatopoeia, accented staccato beat of the drums and verbal affirmations of black ethnicity, “Rumbera” expresses the poet’s pride in his blackness and his African heritage.

Even though “Rumbera” is rich in its recovery and expansion of African folkloric representation within Afroesmeraldan culture, it has a damaging effect upon the role the female black figure must play. As the title of the poem suggests, it is the poet’s interest to capture the woman’s role within this black folkloric dance. Therefore, what is implied is the masculine gaze

on the “female Black Other.”<sup>19</sup> The *rumba*, known for its sexual pantomime between the male and female dancer, and for its implicit flirting and the exotic sensuousness of bodily movement of the black female dancer promotes a subject that is sexually pleasing as well as the presumption of easy accessibility to the male observer.

“Rumbera” focuses on the black female dancer’s skin color, physical attributes, specific sex-typed body movements and gestures. The image of the black female dancer is described as “morena,” “negra,” “zamba” and “mulata.” Unlike *negrismo*’s predilection for the *mulata* over the *negra*, Preciado’s muse is more representative of the region.<sup>20</sup> By focusing on the race of the dancer, Preciado addresses the racial complexity and the varying degrees of blackness in Latin America. He resists the simplistic implication imposed on the *mulata* by earlier *negrista* poets who had marginalized history in representing her as a central value of national identity in terms of racial mixture and the movement towards whiteness. Concerned with defining and empowering blackness, the poet positions the image of the “mulata” with that of other

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<sup>19</sup> The masculine gaze on the “female Black Other” attests to the relationship between male writers and their female black poetic subjects. According to Claudette Williams, the representation of Afro-descendant women in Latin American literature has been narrowly defined through the voyeuristic imaginary of male writers; hence, the image of the “female Black Other” is based on an image of sensuality which reflects masculine superiority, desire, and sexual expression (69).

<sup>20</sup> In their quest to produce Latin American culture as different from the European, a “select minority” of Latin American writers acknowledged that originality had to be sought in Latin America’s nonwhite and ethnic populations (Jackson, “Literary Blackness and Literary Americanism,” 5). For the creators of *negrista* verse, the figure of the *mulata* represented the iconic emblem of national identity and racial integration. Her central status in the ideological formation of Latin American nationhood represented the synthesis of both African and European elements, whereby both Blacks and whites would recognize themselves as well as one another as legitimized constituents of their respective countries and thus, exemplifying the fundamental unity of the nation (Williams 13, 90). In effect, the *mulata* as a symbol of a hybrid national identity was a metaphorical device used by *negrista* writers to address the heterogeneous and racial complexity of Latin American societies.

references denoting blackness; therefore, like the “morena,” “negra” and “zamba,” the “mulata” is primarily associated with blackness. By using pluralism rather than hierarchy as the basis of his comparison, the poet contests the notion of the dark-skinned woman as an aberration from the Western norm. Any suggestion of the *mulata* as a symbol of Latin American culture and of racial and national integration is nullified through the negrification of the *mulata*. Not only does the poet reverse the cultural whitewashing of the image of the *mulata*, but he also challenges essentialist notions of Ecuadorian national identity. By linking the mulatto woman with her black heritage, the *mulata* embodies a national identity defined less by cultural whitening and more by the dominance of the African-oriented culture.

Although “Rumbera” attempts to transform and resignify hegemonic definitions of national and ethnic identities in a way that destabilizes racial hierarchies, Preciado also contributes to a legacy of feminine stereotyping and degrading images of women of African descent. Depicted in a primarily one-dimensional role as a dancer of the *rumba*, the value of the black female dancer is that of a richly exotic object of desire. Sexually explicit verses capture the gyratory movement of the “morena,” “negra,” “zamba” and “mulata” woman:

Morena, la rumba tiene  
locura pa tu cadera,  
óyela, negra, ya viene,  
enredada en la candela.  
Látigo pa tu cintura,



es el bum bum bum bum de la tumba,  
y oye que viene la rumba,  
¡suelta tu cuerpo, rumbera! (1-8)

Expressed by way of an exaggerated emphasis on hips, waist and body, the “morena” and “negra” woman is a vigorous dancer. For added emphasis, the poet incorporates savage-like imagery and rhythmic repetition to capture the sounds of percussion instruments and the staccato beat of the *rumba*. However, what stands out is the sexual connotation of the “negra”:

Caliente, negra, caliente!  
la cosa se desenfrena,  
y en el fuego de tu vientre,  
los ritmos negros se queman.  
Tu epiléptica figura,  
de la cabeza a los pies,  
al derecho y al revés,  
retuerce la rumba negra. (9-16)

Despite the poet’s inclination to modify inherited discourse, “Rumbera” as well joins several *negrista* poems, including ones written by other black writers, whose main trait in treating the black or mulatto woman is associated with hypersexuality as well as an intellectually and morally inferior subject. While Preciado’s representation of the black female dancer represents a unique contribution to the iconography of the black woman that is more appropriate to Latin

American racial reality, his muse also tends to objectify and demean the woman of African descent. Rather than reflect the full extent of the black or mulatto woman's reality, individuality and humanity, Preciado's muse appears as an aesthetic sex object and voiceless "Other." As with Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, Preciado conforms to patriarchal and societal expectations of black femininity and sexuality.<sup>21</sup> In short, Preciado's representation of the black female dancer remains within narrowly defined sexual parameters that place male desire and masculine sexual expression at the core of black female sexuality.

In "Embarque," Preciado portrays life in *Barrio Caliente* through the physical activity involved with working on the docks. Unlike *Amanecer* where Preciado exposes commercial exploitation and the exploitative economic relationships of class and ethnicity, in "Embarque" Preciado presents Afroesmeraldan work from a purely cultural perspective.

In "Embarque," Preciado writes from his own personal experience. He worked as a stevedore on banana boats for several years.<sup>22</sup> In the first stanza the poet gives a vivid description of the physical toil associated with cargo loading.

Empuñan las manos negras,  
la fuerte espalda se quema,

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<sup>21</sup> The expansion of Europe into the Americas along with the racialization of non-European peoples as mentally and morally inferior by the dominant culture impacted the representations of black and mulatto women in literature. Beginning with the 18<sup>th</sup> century, European imperialist discourse described black and mulatto women as possessing atypical sexual behavior. Accordingly, black and mulatto women were depicted as being prone to sexual excesses and perversions. These narratives have affected the ways in which contemporary Afroecuadorian women have shaped their lives, their self-perceptions and their sexuality. See Jean Muteba Rahier, "Racist Stereotypes and the Embodiment of Blackness: Some Narratives of Female Sexuality in Quito," 298.

<sup>22</sup> Personal Interview. 10 April 2010.

se mueve brazos de brea,  
en guindola o en cadena. (1-4)

Although the workers may struggle under the weight of their cargo, the Afroesmeraldan is depicted as hard-working.

In the second and the third stanzas, Preciado emphasizes the Afroesmeraldan's role in the economic structure of the Pacific Coast. Since the socio-racial structure inherited from the colonial period maintained much of its original configurations, and Blacks were the main members of the laboring class, labor-intensive work was performed by the Blacks of Esmeraldas.

Y las gruesas bocas negras  
prenden fuego a la cuestión;  
está ardiendo la bodega,  
con las voces de carbón:  
— ¡Mandá la fruta de abajo!  
— ¡Allá voy, estibador!  
— ¡Más trabajo, más trabajo!  
— ¿Sí, o no, calificador? (5-8, 9-12)

By underscoring blackness through popular dialect common to the region and descriptive markers as “negras,” “brea,” and “carbón,” Preciado creates a space of identity and belonging for working class Afroesmeraldan men within the national imaginary. As with “Yo soy de aquí,” “Barrio caliente” and “Rumbera,” “Embarque” also reflects upon how black people have added

their original contributions to Ecuadorian society. In addition to music, dance, the arts, folklore, literature, speech forms, religious practices and philosophical belief systems, Blacks have also exerted their influence on Ecuadorian economic life.

Similarly to *Bom, bom, bom*, *Amanecer* also reflects the social and political milieu of the 1960s. However, whereas *Bom, bom, bom* exhibits a rather superficial dimension of the daily life and customs of the Afroesmeraldan, *Amanecer* manifests the creation of a social and political consciousness in the writings of the poet. In *Amanecer*, Preciado transcends the regional and national context of *Bom, bom, bom* to assess a tradition of societal values that have perpetuated social, economic and political stratification within a global setting. In addition, *Amanecer* addresses the world's liberation movements of the 1960s within social protest writing.

*Amanecer* is a collection of six poems. While the first part of *Amanecer* underlines race as an inherent part of exploitation and the root of social, economic, and political inequality, the second part of *Amanecer* creates a sense of hope for the future within the context of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. From the perspective of the poet, the Cuban Revolution reflects social change as well as the spread of hopes and dreams for a new and more egalitarian society.

In "Banano," Preciado sheds light into the effects of commercial exploitation on Latin American Blacks in the banana industry. The first stanza, "¡Este banano tan dulce se vuelve amargo!" (1) not only sets the tone for the poem, but also serves as a recurring thematic motif as it is repeated throughout. Within the context of the first stanza, "este banano" has two meanings. On the one hand, it represents economic wealth and prosperity, and on the other hand, it is

synonymous with the exploitation of the region's natural resources, the displacement of communities, a pool of cheap labor, and the loss of culture. Banana cultivation is a lucrative business primarily for transnational companies. The primary objective of these companies was (and still is) to sell in industrialized countries the fruit produced in tropical and developing countries. Yet, to be competitive in a global market, companies have to find the cheapest bananas. Since they have control of all stages of production and commercial activity, their solution has been to cut labor costs. Although labor cuts may decrease production costs while simultaneously increasing corporate profits, banana workers are hit hard by debilitating conditions of exploitation.

“Banano” represents the poet's activism in his writing. Historic events as well as contemporary structural barriers in the form of residential segregation, concentrated poverty, lack of formal education and underfunded schools—a direct result of past policies and practices of racialization and privilege—have affected every area of black life from education, to employment, to socio-economic status. According to the poet:

El sector negro de Esmeraldas tenía una escolaridad muy baja porque había que dedicarse a las tareas de producción económica, que eran las más relegadas, las que corresponden a los oficios que no realizaban los blancos mestizos. Por ejemplo, había productos de exportación, productos agrícolas de exportación traídos de la selva, como la balsa, latagua, entonces había que masear decía,

pelar la tagua, dándole golpes sacarle la cobertura exterior. Y eso lo hacía la gente negra, las mujeres también ayudaban a eso.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, the more a group of people is marginalized and discriminated against, the easier it is to exploit their labor. In Latin American countries, millions of tons of bananas are exported which in turn contributes billions of dollars to their national economies. Still, their extraordinary success is due in large part to the inadequate pay and poor working conditions of its black laborers:

De este banano tan verde no hay esperanza.

De este banano abundante no queda nada:

Al negro que es su partero lo está arruinando,

al negro que es su niño lo está matando. (2-5)

For the poet, Blacks are the caretakers of the banana. They have nurtured it and watched it grow and feel that the time and effort placed on banana farming makes the banana rightly theirs.

Nevertheless, the bananas do not belong to them. In fact, at the end of the second stanza cited above, there is the implication that the commercial exploitation of bananas is not only ruining the workers, but it also is killing them. Blacks have forfeited their health and lives to amass the fortunes of the exploiters. The process of commercial exploitation comes to its climatic close with the fourth stanza:

Este banana tan nuestro no es nuestro nada:

se va volando y volando, como alas.

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<sup>23</sup> Personal Interview. 10 April 2010.

Se va el banana en un barco, pa'l otro lado,  
con el banano viajero van nuestras manos. (7-10)

Even though the black banana worker has put his heart and soul into cultivating the banana, foreign interests strip him of the fruits of his labor. Capitalist interests are more concerned with growth for growth's sake without any attention paid to social consequences. As the banana is shipped off to market, black banana workers experience a sense of loss. In short, black banana workers have little power under the current structure.

Whereas in "Banano" Preciado sheds insight into the exploitation of black workers in the banana industry, "Caucho" focuses on the same problem in the rubber fields of Latin America and assesses the effects of capitalism, the world's dominant economic system, on developing Third World countries. Under a capitalist system, property, natural resources and economic wealth are concentrated in the hands of the few while leaving the majority of the people at the mercy of the wealthy. At the same time, the poem insists that capitalism often produces greed and the destruction of a sense of community as individual interests prevail over the common good.

Throughout "Caucho" the sap from the rubber tree serves as a metaphor for blood. Within the first stanza, the poet establishes two paradoxical perspectives regarding rubber tapping:

Heridos allá en el monte, cada mañana:  
el negro, con su machete, corta y no mata,

y el caucho suelta su sangre,  
¡sangre deseada!  
Y el caucho suelta su sangre,  
¡su sangre amada!  
Y el caucho suelta su sangre,  
¡sangra que sangra!  
¡saca que saca!,  
de la cabeza a los pies,  
¡su sangre elástica! (1-11)

Once an incision is made, a liquid stream of sap begins to flow. Whereas on the one hand sap extraction implicates vitality, on the other hand, it is also representative of loss. Since black rubber workers earn their living from rubber tapping, sap extraction is a way of life; it is a provider of food.<sup>24</sup> However, a market-based economy has devastating effects on the black rubber worker's lifestyle, worldview, modes of production and environment. Under a capitalist system, money is necessary for life. Therefore, people are forced to do anything and everything to earn money. Within the context of the poem, the black rubber worker is depicted as hardworking and deeply engaged with his natural environment. He extracts the sap without killing the tree. Although he takes pride in his work, he knows that he will be poorly

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<sup>24</sup> Since the 1900s rubber tapping has been a traditional way of life for many people living in the northern sector of Esmeraldas. Although today rubber is no longer being extracted to any appreciable extent, it was the dominant income source for Esmeraldan Blacks during the 1940s and the 1950s (Whitten, *Class, Kinship, and Power* 15).



compensated. The poem's title might as well be in reference to oil. Oil, like sap, or bananas, is everywhere, but not evenly distributed. As the sap continues to flow, it serves as a consistent reminder of the power and greed of transnational corporations. They drain the life out of the rubber tree by robbing it of its sap as well as the black rubber workers by destroying their way of life.

Once the sap is extracted from the rubber tree it is processed and later manufactured into such products as elastic rubber bands and rubber balls. Like banana production, rubber extraction is cheap. However, within a market based economy, maximizing profit rather than satisfying social needs is the aim of production and investment. Therefore, bananas, like elastic rubber bands and rubber balls are expensive to buy:

Se va la sangre del caucho,  
se va muy baja,  
y vuelve de mil colores,  
pero muy alta:  
P'al negro del monte adentro,  
¡cero pelotas!  
Pal negro de los tormentos,  
¡dura la goma! (13-20)

Those who produce the wealth of society, such as Blacks, cannot afford the products they produce. Blacks are socially, politically and economically impotent. By denouncing the flaws in

a market based economy that encourages policies of privatization and deregulation which, in turn, allows corporate monopolies free reign in every sector of Latin American economies, Preciado rejects capitalism's alienating consequences.

Equality, justice and freedom are the foundational principles of democracy which advocate equal recognition before the law; no power is above the law and all have equal access to power. From the perspective of the poet, the Cuban Revolution's principles of sharing and collaboration epitomize such democratic ideals. A shift in values from a competitive to a collaborative culture and a more inclusive vision of members of society are the only coherent choices for a more egalitarian society.

The latter poems of *Amanecer* assess the accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution which is both unique and of universal importance. However, the Cuban Revolution was not fought on the battle field alone. "Many writers had helped to bring it about: some in mountainous guerrilla warfare, some in the cities and towns in clandestine activity, and still others through years of writing, lecturing, and other forms of militancy" (Ellis 40). Of the two poems that specifically address the Cuban Revolution, "Un poema a Guillén" highlights the collective efforts between writers and the many other revolutionaries of the period.

In "Un poema a Guillén," Preciado focuses on the revolutionary work of the Cuban poet, Nicolas Guillén. For Preciado, the Cuban Revolution represents the dawn of a new day and a new era.

¡Ay! Nicolás, ¡qué alegría!,

tu Cuba ya amaneció;  
le sujetaban el día,  
pero con barbas bajó. (1-4)

The awakening metaphor utilized in the first stanza contextualizes the extraordinary feat of Cuban liberation. It reiterates the vision of José Martí (1853-1895), a Cuban national hero as well as an important figure in Latin American literature. More than one hundred years ago, shortly before independence from Spain, Martí predicted that Cuban emancipation would only be complete when Cuba had finally succeeded in ousting the United States from its territorial sphere of influence. Thus, for Preciado, Cuba represents the impetus of conscious awareness for all of mankind regarding the world crisis of imperialism. The Cuban Revolution has enlightened man to the necessity of revolutionary change and the certainty that it is possible.

While, “Banano” and “Caucho” depict the situation prior to the Cuban Revolution, the result of a capitalist system that sought to establish hegemony for the purpose of exploitation, “Un poema a Guillén” reveals the changes that have transpired since Cuban liberation. One significant transformation has been change of ownership. Prior to the Revolution, Batista in partnership with U.S. corporations and the U.S. Mafia profited from the exploitation of Cuba’s commercial interests (English xviii). As with the conditions depicted in “Banano” and “Caucho,” foreign interests took precedence over the poor and powerless of prerevolutionary Cuba. In the second and third stanzas there is a sense of jubilation as the Revolution has brought about a change in the structures of power to create equality through a redistribution of the wealth

in society to benefit the greatest number of people:

¡Ay!, ¡qué gigantesca hazaña!:

Cuba dueña de su mar,

Cuba dueña de su cana,

Cuba dueña de su pan!

Va el negro con su alegría,

cortando la caña buena:

¡Pesos cubanos pa arriba!

¡Pesos cubanos que quedan! (5-8, 9-12)

No longer is the income earned by sugar to go to the coffers of foreign interests; Cuba is a resource-rich country (it has the sugar). Instead, monies from sugar exports are staying in Cuba and being invested in the future well-being and prospects of the people. In the process, the poor and the powerless retain their human dignity.

Starting with the fifth stanza, Preciado specifically addresses Guillén's revolutionary work within the context of Cuban liberation:

Y a ti, por ser un cubano,

de esos que hicieron el sol,

yo quiero decirte, hermano,

que está esparciendo calor.

Tú, con tu profunda pluma;  
tú, con tu pluma tan larga;  
tú, con tu frase, madura,  
fuiste duro en la batalla.

Tú estuviste en la pelea,  
antes que Fidel llegara;  
tú comenzaste la Guerra,  
con tu lírica metralla. (17-20, 21-24, 25-28)

From the perspective of the poet, it takes a revolution of ideas to bring about a revolution of sovereignty. Preciado makes it clear that even before Castro's emergence Guillén was setting the foundation for a revolution of change. Guillén's writing not only challenged the legitimacy of an existing economic, political, social order, but a cultural one as well. His work was artistic as well as political. This was especially significant in light of the literary fashions of the time which privileged "art for art's sake" (Ellis 34-35). It was during this time that Guillén envisaged an activist purpose for his writing (Ellis 35). He undertook the task of identifying the real roots of the problems affecting the lives of so many people suffering in Latin America, especially Blacks. His purpose was to denounce economic exploitation, discrimination, racism, inequality while simultaneously underscoring the new voices amongst the poor and the powerless who were

to change the situation. What Guillén's revolution of ideas uncovered were the contradictions that challenged the legitimacy of a monolithic social order which continued to afflict many Latin Americans. He brought to the forefront the economic, political and cultural interests of the large masses of Latin America. Furthermore, his work included key components that made up Latin America's cultural identity and the connections of that identity with humanity in general.

However, in the last two stanzas, Preciado is cautious not to give more credit to Guillén than to Castro. As with the writer (Guillén), so should the soldier (Castro) play his part in the task of bringing about lasting economic, political, social and cultural change to Cuba:

Fidel en sierra Maestra  
— luminoso con su barba—  
tú, con la pluma en la diestra,  
como blandiendo una espalda,

Por eso grito: ¡Fidel,  
gran Fidel o Claridad!

Por eso grito: ¡Guillén  
o versos de Libertad! (29-32, 33-36)

Preciado views the triumph of the Cuban Revolution as a collaborative effort. The contributions of both writer and soldier have transformed Cuba. They have provided a living and still vibrant example of the people who rose up in the face of oppression and demanded the revolutionary

right to change the material and ideological conditions of their everyday lives. Furthermore, they have produced a compelling and powerful example for others to emulate. For the poet, it is Cuba that remains his reference point and inspiration for his life and his writings.

As evidenced in *Bom, bom, bom* and *Amanecer*, Preciado's first book of poetry, *Jolgorio*, reflects the cultural, ideological and literary beginnings of a poet who has studied his craft. He emulates as well as writes in the style of his predecessors. The main characteristics of his earliest writings are honesty, simplicity, egalitarian conviction, commitment to the worth and dignity of human beings, and desires and visions of a better world. While in *Bom, bom, bom* the poet focuses on giving a positive portrait of Afroesmeraldan culture and mores, *Amanecer* manifests the development of his literary voice, a voice that reflects the interests and concerns of Ecuadorian Blacks. With an emphasis on direct, personal communication, Preciado uses *Amanecer* to write a poetry of explicit social protest. He continues the cultural exchanges between Africa and Ecuador, cultural exchanges that stimulate different insights on issues of race and identity in Latin America and specifically in Ecuador.

### **2.3 Más áca de los muertos**

*Más acá de los muertos*, Preciado's second book of poetry, was published in 1966. Unlike *Jolgorio*, *Más acá de los muertos* does not speak specifically about blackness. In this work, Preciado talks about death and the hereafter. Although in *Más acá de los muertos* Preciado deviates from the thematic concerns presented in *Jolgorio*, he still reveals evidence of an African epistemology.

In *Más acá de los muertos*, death refers to a broad range of experiences. On the one hand, death is looked upon as unavoidable, inescapable and irreversible. In “Mariposa negra” the image of the black butterfly is a metaphor for death. It announces the impending death of a young child:

La mariposa negra

vino temprano.

Llegó de la misma noche

y se fué volando.

¡Ah, niño, si algún lucero

llenara de luz tu cuarto!...

La muerte viene cerrando

una sombra que te alcanza.

Ves, niño, la mariposa

te abrió sus alas.

¡Ah, la lumbre de un lucero

en el filo de tu cama!

Pero, ya ves, los luceros

crecen a mucha distancia



y tendríamos que andar  
abismos para alcanzarla.

¡Ay, niño, la mariposa  
hacía tiempo te buscaba! (1-18)

Because the empirical world is the context in which death occurs, death cannot be denied. It is simply an irrefutable reality that surrounds us. Though death, for a moment, transforms into the most subtle perception of hope via the presence of the “luceros,” the notion of life, at least from an objective standpoint, is illusory. From the perspective of the poet, death does not mark the demarcation between this life and life in the hereafter. The far off lights, while inaccessible in this lifetime, imply the existence of a world parallel to our own.

The conception of death as well as the belief in the continuation of life after death is an important component of African religiosity. The question of continued existence after death is African people’s belief in the supernatural world. Though tragic, death by no means signifies the end of life. Death is looked upon as a departure from the visible, tangible world into a new phase of existence. At the moment of passing, the soul releases itself from the body and moves on to the invisible, spiritual world (Mbiti 157).

The supernatural world of African people is densely populated with a number of spiritual beings. Hierarchical in structure, a Supreme Being, generally regarded as God, forms the top-level echelon of power (Mbiti 75). Subsequent levels of power consist of a number of lesser

divinities, ordinary spirits, ancestors and the living dead (Mbiti 75). Within this hierarchy, the departed, namely, the ancestral spirits and the living dead, occupy an important place in African religiosity (Mbiti 83).

Whereas in previous poems Preciado touches briefly upon such Afroecuadorian spirits as *la tunda* and *el riviél*, in “Dádiva,” the world of the living dead takes center stage. The living dead and the ancestors are of utmost importance to Afro descendants. It is only via these supernatural beings that man maintains contact with the spirit world and, thus, with God (Mbiti 83). Unlike ordinary spirits, the living dead, like the ancestors, speak the language of man as well as the language of the spirit world (Mbiti 83). Accordingly, it is through the living dead and the ancestral spirits that this sacred place becomes personal to men.

In “Dádiva” Preciado addresses the important place the living dead occupy in African religion and philosophy. The title, “Dádiva,” not only sets the tone for the poem, but also its poetic intent. According to the poet, the living dead are custodians to a lost and forgotten treasure: “Busco al fondo de todos los cadáveres / sus tesoros abiertos...” (1-2). In short, the commemoration of the living dead contributes to the preservation and transmission of an intangible African cultural heritage.

In the second stanza, the poet defines and clarifies his poetic discourse. The living dead, in this case, do not refer to the ancestral spirits. In fact, his subjects are those individuals who were not the ancestors of the living. According to African traditional cultures, the living dead also incorporate “children, brothers, sisters, barren wives and other members of the family”

(Mbiti 83). From the perspective of the poet, a child's passing is as noteworthy as the departed souls of African people's ancestors: "Los que murieron niños / muestran a flor de tierra / sus recientes estrellas sepultadas (3-5).

In the third stanza, Preciado alludes to the role the living dead play in the visible world. Their primary activity is to communicate with the living as they make their presence known to man. Although invisible, man hears the rumor of their voices as they cry out. The flicker of their light is hypnotic; they illuminate even from the depths of darkness:<sup>25</sup>

¡Ah, esta suerte de topo que me dieron!

¡Ah, la confusa tierra que me llama!

¡Ah, mis ojos despiertos que ven luces

detrás de la tiniebla más cerrada! (6-9)

However, their communication with the living is not limited to an empty impersonal phenomenon; it resonates with religious and spiritual significance. For African people, God and nature constitute one unity; they are interconnected and mutually interrelated (Mbiti 48). Since the living dead are "intermediaries between men and God," such visible, natural phenomena, albeit manifestations of the living dead, not only symbolize God's work, but also the intervention of the living dead into the affairs of men (Mbiti 83). By means of the living dead, man is thus privy to God's work: "¡Un muerto me dió cal / para escribirle un claro verso al alba!" (10-11). The dawn, a source of wonderment and inspiration for the poet, brings to life the deceased as

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<sup>25</sup> According to Mbiti, the living dead have been known to reveal their presence "especially on hillsides and along the river beds. In such places, their lights are seen at night, their cattle heard mooing or their children crying" (85).

well as clarifies the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

For the majority of people of African descent, the hereafter is not found in another world or in a faraway place. The world of the living dead is, in fact, close to the home of the living (Mbiti 159). In the fourth and final stanza, the poet makes reference to those particular places that the living dead mostly inhabit. Their final resting place and the fires that burn throughout the night prove the existence, power and purpose of the living dead.

Ved que al norte de mí  
se alza una hoguera pálida:  
Un niño recién muerto quiere darme  
su anémica flor blanca  
y me guiña su tumba  
con la tímida luz de esa fogata. (12-17)

The subtle signs of the living dead not only attest to their presence, but also are a reminder of a forgotten voice. These voices are representative of a past as lived and experienced.

Furthermore, they relate to the maintenance of family ties, and thus, encapsulate a notion of continuity across generations.

Like the living dead, the presence of the ancestral spirits is particularly felt in traditional African religions and cultures. In “Andan,” the poet addresses the role the ancestors play in African traditional communities. Community is not just a social grouping of people brought together through common interests, belief systems and identities. In a broader sense, African

traditional community encompasses the totality of an African worldview experience. For the people of African descent, community is also the unity of the visible with the invisible world as well as the role the ancestral spirits play in man's understanding of natural phenomena.

In "Andan," the poet underscores the ancestral role in earthly life. Unlike the living dead in "Dádiva," the ancestral spirits in "Andan" are those intangible spirits of people who were once the ancestors of the physically living. Since they have spent time here on Earth, like the living dead, the ancestors are also interested in the comings and goings of the living (Mbiti 83, 85). In addition, since their burials took place in the visible world (i.e., they have received the proper funeral rites of passage and thus are buried beneath the Earth's surface), they are deeply connected with the "law of the land/earth" (Kamalu 49). Thus for the living, the Earth and the ancestors are inextricably linked.

The ancestors are not simply an invisible force which wields its power over the living. They reaffirm highly cherished values of traditional African life and represent the importance of community. In *Andan*, community is reflected through the interrelationship between human beings, the visible world and nature. Metaphorically speaking, the wind is the vehicle by which the ancestors make their presence felt: "Los muertos andan / calculando alaridos para el viento, / sin palabras" (1-3). The living feel reconnected to the departed and thus are sustained by their presence.

Even though in African ontological thought and practice, God, the Supreme Being, is given credit for the Earth's creation, it is the ancestral spirits who establish order on Earth. As

benevolent and powerful representatives of the community, the ancestral spirits are concerned with the general good of their descendants. In the second stanza, the poet reflects upon the ways in which the ancestors intervene into the affairs of everyday life experience:

Cuando cerráis los ojos,  
sabadlo de una vez,  
los muertos se alzan  
y caminan secretamente vivos,  
sin pisadas,  
acomodando signos en el aire,  
liberando palomas enterradas,  
erigiendo colores escondidos  
en la asomada cal de los fantasmas. (4-12)

Through natural phenomena, the ancestral spirits influence daily life and have power over nature which provides the ancestors the means to monitor and maintain the moral and social order of the living.

The network among human beings, the ancestral spirits and nature is a very real, active and powerful relationship. Since death symbolically links the ancestral spirits to the earth, closeness to nature makes it possible for the living to enter into a relationship with their ancestors. Afro descendants experience a bond with their natural environment which is thus looked upon as an extended community to which both humans and the ancestral spirits belong.

Y cuando despertáis  
Llamáis al viento, viento.  
Le llamáis alborada a la alborada.  
Sencillamente cosas a las cosas:  
Desperdiciadamente insomnio.  
Ciegamente mañana.  
Inadvertidamente lirio.  
Indiferentemente planta.  
Oscuramente sol.  
Cálidamente escarcha.  
Despreocupadamente lluvia.  
Inútilmente charca. (13-24)

The ancestral spirits help the living to understand the interconnectedness of existence. Humans, like nature, are not entities that exist in an isolated state. They are the embodiment of the physical, biological and social interrelationships of such existence. Metaphorically speaking, the ancestral spirit is representative of the umbilical cord for life. On the one hand, they provide sustenance as well as give significant meaning to nature, while on the other hand, they are a source or means of support for the living. Nature is not merely an object of beauty to behold, it is central in the promotion and realization of the harmonious inter-relationships amongst individuals, the spirit world and hence community. The bond of man to nature is in a sense

man's bond with the departed. As with nature, the ancestral spirits are a continuous force in the lives of people. Man is privy to the dawn of a new day, the setting of the sun and the changing of seasons. In short, from the perspective of the poet, the ancestral spirits are the bridge of communication between man and nature, and by means of natural phenomena people on earth are witnesses to the resilient presence of the ancestral spirits who are looked upon as guardians of the living:

Pero entonces,  
sabedlo,  
todos los muertos andan  
empujando rumores detenidos  
a la lengua vivísima del agua. (25-29)

In the seventh and last poem of this collection, "Su voz," the poet reflects upon the intimate relationship that exists between the living and the ancestral spirits. It is a relationship of reciprocity, of mutual dependence, action and influence. The ancestral spirits live on in the memory of the living. The act of remembering brings about the act of performing the past. The ancestral spirits are kept alive vis-à-vis the living's recollection of them. Memory serves as a symbol of remembrance and respect being extended to those who are the pillars or roots of the community. However, the living also benefit from this spiritual tie with the ancestral spirits. Life experiences along with death are the accumulation of wisdom. They represent the spiritual maturation as well as the enhancement of a society. Commemorating the ancestral spirits



implies, at one and the same time, a cultivation of morality, ethics and belief systems from those who came before and, thus solidifies and binds together a sense of continued existence as well as community (Kamalu 49-50).

In the first stanza, Manuel, the ancestral spirit, is the voice who individualizes the common experience between the living and the recently departed. “Su voz” transports participants back to the time of origin recalling events and persons who gave structure, meaning, and life to the community. At the same time, it calls upon the living to believe in a new world to come. In “Su voz” the poet’s aim is to re-create the sacred in the present moment.

A ver, yo soy Manuel,  
morí dormido  
con un viejo dolor en la mirada.  
  
Fue a tres pasos de tí,  
todos los días,  
en todas las esquinas  
de la calle más larga.  
  
Tú viniste a mi entierro,  
— ¿lo recuerdas?—,  
con un ramo de dardos bajo el alma. (1-10)

It is the pained voice of the ancestral spirit Manuel who attests to the struggle to create life and beauty in a brutal environment. Before his passing to the hereafter, Manuel was

oppressed and afflicted. However, his death does not release him from the burden of responsibility. As an ancestral spirit he is responsible for the welfare of the living. By paying tribute to the deceased, the living show their respect with relation to the dead. This reverent gesture has an effect on Manuel who fulfills his role as an ancestor. He passes on his lived experiences and teachings that help the living carry on a purposeful life, face death, as well as cultivate a collective sense of belonging.

The implication that the spirits of the dead remain inert, passive or powerless is refuted in the second stanza; that favors for the dead from the living could be reciprocated indicates, at least, that the dead could act for or on behalf of the living. By paying their respects to the dead, the living desire their constant involvement. Manuel is well aware that the living seek solace and suffer greatly from what could be considered guilt, a troubled conscience or the purposelessness of existence.

Desde entonces me llegas  
por un túnel de gritos enterrados.  
Y yo siempre te agito mi silencio,  
trepando hasta la copa de algún árbol. (11-14)

The living not only summon but also give power to Manuel to act. Manuel in turn leaves a sign: “una viva raíz recién sembrada,” (16) which indicates his existence. The term “raíz” serves as a metaphor for ancestral origins; the plant and / or tree symbolize ancestral presence and provide meaning to one’s existence. It provides a life-line to existence and a reason for

being. Moreover, the roots of the tree represent a sense of belonging, something many people strive to achieve in a community. The leaves of the tree draw energy from its surroundings. The leaves that absorb energy from the environment symbolize the need to draw upon one's cultural heritage as a source of vitalization.

Hoy deajo aquí a tu puerta  
una viva raíz recién sembrada.  
Yo llegaré a regarla cada día  
con gotas de rocío bien tempranas. (15-18)

Consequently, *Más acá de los muertos* complements *Jolgorio* by addressing the role of ancestry in the processes of life and death, revealing how the experience of the ancestors affects the present. Clearly, *Más acá de los muertos* reaffirms a belief system rooted in the spiritual world of the people of African descent whereby history and tradition are imperative if one is to establish a harmonious and balanced relationship with the universe.

## **2.4 Tal como somos**

In *Jolgorio* and *Más acá de los muertos*, Preciado gives proof of the contributions made by the people of African descent to the Ecuadorian nation by reflecting upon the specific nature of black culture, traditions and philosophy. However, unlike these earlier works, *Tal como somos* depicts a multifaceted self who has had to confront the effects of slavery like labor exploitation, class and ethnic exclusion and societal values that make for a stratified society. In addition, *Tal como somos* expounds upon the complexity of social identity. It problematizes

multiple group membership by questioning if it leads to a more or less inclusive construct of self and identity when compared to single group identities.

*Tal como somos*, which was published in 1969, was Preciado's third book of poetry. Made up of five parts, *Tal como somos* is an anthology that also includes a compilation of his previously published prize-winning poetry titled *Este hombre y su planeta* (1965) and *Siete veces la vida* (1967), both written when the poet was a university student. As a whole, *Tal como somos* reflects Preciado's struggle to understand himself. More specifically, it depicts an individual's struggle with his multiple group identities. Given the fact that individuals belong to multiple groups with multiple corresponding identities, an important question that needs to be addressed is how individuals combine complex group identities while simultaneously defining their inner most self. From the perspective of the poet, a spiritual awakening anchored in negritude and an African heritage is essential if Afro descendants are to be the subjects of their own history.

Although Preciado's interest revolves around the exclusion of Afros from their respective national imaginaries and the impact this exclusion has had on their identity and ability to validate their own forms of knowledge, his concern for Blacks also serves as a point of departure for a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary struggles of other groups of exclusion. As Jackson suggests:

Black literature has a role to play not just in Latin American history but in the classroom as well because it provides models for both black and nonblack

students seeking humanistic statements about life. Black literature relates in Latin America, as elsewhere, to the struggle for human dignity, and it teaches readers how to live and how to seek the freedom that should be an automatic quality of one's life. The theme of liberty, so prominently displayed in Zapata Olivella's *Changó, el gran putas*, is an outstanding one in black literature, but it is in the real lives of black people that this theme takes root. Blacks must see this literature's relevance to their own feelings about racial, social, political, and humanistic questions. This is really what black literature teaches, knowing oneself through one's own models and example, both in literature and in the real life literature reflects (*Black Literature and Humanism* 120).

What this implies then is that literature written by Blacks is at the service of all of humanity. Furthermore, one does not always have to speak openly about blackness for race (among other factors) to be a driving force within the process of artistic representation, nor does this shift of focus mean that there is a deviation from black concerns. In fact, being Black conditions how one sees the world. In *Tal como somos* there are moments when feelings of black assertion lead to feelings of international empathy and solidarity. In effect, Preciado's concept of Negritude shows the capacity to identify with others who have suffered similar types of exclusion and injustice.

"Algo así como humano" is the first poem of *Tal como somos* and it reflects upon the experience of black slaves. Slavery as a whole left an indelible mark on all peoples of African

descent. It tore apart families, destroyed linguistic and cultural ties to Africa, made Blacks susceptible to violence and illiteracy and caused severe social, physical, spiritual and psychological trauma. Blacks will always remember the memories and racism of slavery. Overcoming such an obstacle is impossible. However, behind every memory of slavery, there is a narrative, a construction of collective experiences. As a vehicle to address the necessity of historical memory, the desire to forget the horror of slavery and the impossibility of forgetting, Preciado uses this poem to demonstrate the need to remember slavery and racism in a manner in which memory is not destructive. These visible markers of memory provide a point of departure for healing. Thus, Blacks who have been oppressed find meaningful ways to redress human rights violations and, by remembering, they create new goals.

At the outset of the poem, we are immediately confronted with a sense of injustice. Although Blacks were worn down both physically and mentally, they had the fortitude to survive the injustices and abuses perpetrated by slavery and racism. Within the first stanza, Preciado reveals how Blacks endured and reacted to such adversity.

Cuando le hicieron sitio,  
ya fue tarde,  
porque le había crecido otro cabello  
y tenía en la lengua otra palabra.  
También le habían crecido las uñas  
y los dientes,

y, como es hombre,

le había salido punta en la esperanza. (1-8)

In effect, the impact of the memories of slavery caused Blacks to take positions of self-defense against society's oppressive actions.

In the second stanza, the poet reflects upon the social, physical and the cultural ramifications of slavery on Blacks:

Desde entonces se vive solitario

y ahueca con las uñas su morada,

se entretiene tejiendo

un látigo terrible con su barba,

cantando ese murmullo indescifrable,

mascando roca,

vigilando el alba,

o atrapando luciérnagas,

luciérnagas,

para hacerse un farol como la luna

y un faro para hormigas extraviadas,

cortando escamas de hojas,

para peces,

o parchando el tonel para sus lágrimas. (9-22)

Slavery not only dehumanized Blacks, but it also made them invisible. The initiation of the slave trade and slavery negated the existence of Blacks as individual and collective subjects: “Desde entonces se vive solitario / y ahueca con las uñas su morada” (9-10). It is well known that because of their fear of the desire of Blacks to become free, especially in light of Haitian Independence, slave owners prohibited Blacks from practicing any form of African culture. In addition, Blacks were forbidden a formal education. Consequently, slavery brought about the physical isolation and the social marginalization of Blacks.

However, perhaps the most obvious way in which the institution of slavery has negatively impacted black slaves was physically. In the poem, Preciado alludes to the physical toil, the human suffering and the brutality of the slaveholders. The line, “vigilando el alba” (15), for example, refers to the slaves who worked in the fields. Field hands were expected to work from sunrise to sunset. Moreover, if they did not complete the required task, they were often times treated harshly. Slave owners used a variety of punishments to discipline and dominate slaves; food deprivation was a form of punishment in the slave community. In the verse, “mascando roca” (14), Preciado refers to how slave owners withheld food as a means of controlling slaves whom they deemed troublesome. However, the chief instrument of physical punishment for unruly or defiant slaves was “un látigo terrible” (12).

Though the life of the black slave was synonymous with violence, fear, hunger, and the negation of their culture, these restrictions paradoxically facilitated the retention of significant elements of traditional culture among Blacks in the New World. To survive the rigors of their



inhuman treatment and forced integration into white society, Blacks created a counter-culture based upon an identity and meaning that protected them from slave society's oppression and hostility. They maintained and preserved many aspects of their Afro-cultural identity and practices. For example, out of negation, came a strong oral tradition expressed in "cantando ese murmullo indescifrable" (5); out of exclusion, Blacks bonded like an extended family: "o atrapando luciérnagas, / luciérnagas, / para hacerse un farol como la luna / y un faro para hormigas extraviadas" (8-11). Through the cruelty of slavery, the privation of liberty and racism, Blacks have come to understand themselves and their culture. Their Afro-cultural identity and practices made possible survival and self-determination under the desperate circumstances of enslavement.

In the third and final stanza, the poet makes clear the concrete identity of his subject matter. His reference to "la caña de azúcar" alludes to the sugar plantations in which the black slaves worked in Latin America. In effect, the growing of sugarcane and the production of sugar were done by black slaves:

Dicen que por las noches  
se desata la piel  
y que la cuelga  
de la caña de azúcar de la entrada,  
bebe un poco de hiel de sus panales  
y se acuesta en el aire

con su viejo brasero como almohada,  
que duerme a ojos abiertos  
y que sueña  
qué sueñan los que sueñan,  
y de mañana,  
al minuto del sol,  
cierra los ojos,  
empieza su canción,  
y se levanta. (25-39)

Although “la caña de azúcar” evokes the memory and history of slavery and black oppression, Preciado does not fall prey to a sense of victimization. Rather he speaks to the continuing importance and vitality of the slave descendants’ legacy. Blacks resisted dehumanization and thus, survived slavery. The impact of the memories of slavery caused slave descendants to create and maintain their own traditions and history so as to foster a collective sense of community. Moreover, slavery had a transformative impact on black culture which resulted in a kind of confrontational culture against established social norms. From the inception of slavery in the Americas, Blacks developed a culture of resistance that equated survival with insurgency. In their struggle for self- and communal liberation, it is this indomitable legacy of hope, “su canción” that constitutes the future for Blacks.

Although various poems in *Tal como somos* assert pride in African ancestry coupled with

a strong affirmation of black dignity and self-worth, it is in “Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba” where Preciado develops an Afro-centered worldview in interpreting old and new phenomena relevant to Afroecuadorian experiences. An Afro-centered worldview rooted in a process of decolonization liberates Blacks from the antagonistic, hierarchical dichotomization of Eurocentrism. At the same time, it serves as a conceptual map that assists black people in understanding their experiences and identities as well as their cultural history. In “Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba,” Preciado calls for the return to the black subject as a conscientious individual who will take responsibility for his own intellectual, social and political destiny.

“Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba” is made up of two parts. Although the poem’s focus centers on the life and achievement of Cuamé Bamba, it also reflects the importance of Blacks to reclaim their spiritual and human dignity through the restoration of their black heritage. According to Bermejo de Crespo, Cuamé Bamba, originally of Panamanian descent, worked on the docks of Esmeraldas and is considered an important historical figure for Blacks because he embodies the process of self-affirmation by asserting his African heritage (“Antonio Preciado, el hombre, y el poeta,” 35). However, not only does the poem restore a collective ethnic memory, it also has a didactic purpose for the community.

Written in first person, Preciado addresses the importance of oral tradition in the preservation of the past. First person accounts by people of African descent are often undervalued, as is all too common with experiences of marginalized people. However, the first person voice is crucial to understanding oral histories. First person accounts embody the richest

sources of practical knowledge about human experiences articulated over time. Furthermore, they assist people in educating the young and in teaching important lessons about the past and about life.

In “Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba,” the pronoun, “Yo,” refers to the subject in the title of the poem. With the pronoun, “Yo,” Preciado creates the illusion that it is Cuamé Bamba who is truly speaking and narrating the poem. As the subject of the first-person discourse, Cuamé Bamba presents himself as a social and political actor rather than as a mere victim of slavery and colonial history. His sense of self draws importantly on his specific identity choice. To Cuamé Bamba, self-affirmation of black identity is a source of self-knowledge, self-identity, pride and self-worth. Not only does he speak to the question of his psychological relationship to his African origins, but he also addresses the role of a black consciousness in the experience of being Black.

The distinctive work of Cuamé Bamba sets the tone for the poem. His life’s works provide a glimpse into how his own experiences and evolving thought on blackness can be used to educate other Blacks. Moreover, along with the other poems from *Tal como somos*, it reflects the evolution of Preciado’s poetry and his concept of Negritude. Blackness is not just a theoretical proposition; it is also a practical one. Within the first stanza, blackness is looked upon as a part of everyday life. For Cuamé Bamba, blackness is reflected in all his life’s actions:

Vengo de andar,  
de largo a largo,

más de mis propios días,  
porque para llegar,  
si no me alcanzan,  
voy tomando prestadas las semanas. (1-6)

Grounded in African cultural concepts of collectivity and sharing, Cuamé Bamba hopes that by articulating and thus sharing his experience and identity with other Blacks, he will assist black people in making sense of their experiences. In order for Blacks to construct frameworks of liberation, they must first be provided with the skills that enhance their self-understanding of what it means to be Black. Furthermore, it is the power of revelation, that is, the collective sharing of that information that heals the individual and thus, the community at large.

With respect to his name, Bermejo de Crespo asserts that Cuamé Bamba's greatest legacy "consistía en enfatizar su origen negro autonombrándose Cuamé Bamba" ("Antonio Preciado, el hombre, y el poeta," 35). As was the case in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement with Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X, for example, Cuamé Bamba was also inspired to replace his name whose roots can be traced back to slavery:

Me llamo Cuamé Bamba,  
antiguo caminante que anda  
y anda,  
con una enorme huella sobre el polvo,  
ofreciendo un volcán en cada casa. (7-11)

By reclaiming the power to name, and thus, the power of the Word, Cuamé Bamba assists black people in navigating the epistemological boundaries implanted in the constructed persona of black identity in Latin America. The dehumanizing name given by the master was not only an act of ontological violence, but also a reminder of enslavement. Naming was never meant to assist in the ontological actualization of Blacks. Rather, it was just another means in which black agency could be undercut. According to Lewis Gordon, in the normative Orthodox state, “the more present a black is qua a black, the more absent he is as a point of epistemic limitation and assertion of agency. One doesn’t *ask* a black; one *concludes* about him” (*Existencia Africana* 161-2). Thus, for Blacks wishing to articulate their experiences and identities in a system that had defined them as less than human, they needed first to remove their self-definition from the controlling yoke of Western Orthodoxy. By renaming himself, Cuamé Bamba is able to move forward to a new conceptualization of what it means to be Cuamé Bamba as well as Black:

Yo, soy Cuamé,

de atrás hacia adelante:

viento,

rio,

paso,

lanza! (12-17)

Thus, the name Cuamé Bamba symbolizes the true African family name that he never could know. In addition, the name means to move forward, to rid oneself of the shackles of slavery;

in the words of Elijah Muhammad: “You must remember that slave-names will keep you a slave in the eyes of the civilized world today. You have seen, and recently, that Africa and Asia will not honor you or give you any respect as long as you are called by the white man’s name” (43). Only by building up his own value systems, seeing himself as self-defined rather than defined by others can the black man lay the foundation for a viable future.

In the second part of “Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba,” Preciado continues to approximate the voice of Cuamé Bamba in articulating the historical reality of blackness. As the subject of the first-person discourse, Cuamé Bamba shows how his life history (oral testimony) serves as a lens for other Blacks in overcoming the crippling complexes associated with blackness. In analyzing not only his own personal experiences, but also those of an unidentified “Tú,” Cuamé Bamba brings to light how different perceptions of blackness have separated Blacks along different fault lines:

Hombre de sangre azul,  
quieres decirme tú de dónde vienes?,  
de dónde vengo yo,  
hacia dónde vamos? (1-4)

Furthermore, he explores the lived experiences and possibilities open to Blacks living in a negrophobic world. Being Black in a white-dominated world is to be relegated to a position of ethnic disadvantage.<sup>26</sup> Thus, some Blacks often feel compelled to select only one aspect of their

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<sup>26</sup> In analyzing the black person’s experience, Fanon argues: “I am overdetermined from outside. I am not the slave of the ‘idea’ that others have of me but of my appearance. I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no

identity as central to their being. Not only are Blacks caught between contending constructs of identity, but they struggle to sustain a sense of wholeness in a repressive culture dominated by whiteness.<sup>27</sup> More often than not, individuals with a European phenotype and cultural orientation disavow their African heritage in order to enjoy the privileges of whiteness.<sup>28</sup> In analyzing the black person's experience, Cuamé Bamba provides insight into how some Blacks have reacted to the imposition of white standards on the black psyche:<sup>29</sup>

Comenzamos iguales la jornada,  
el mismo ayer,  
sobre las mismas aguas.  
  
Yo sigo caminando,  
sigo,  
sigo,  
  
yo sigo caminando con la misma pisada,

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longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 116).

<sup>27</sup> For Fanon, it is the white gaze that "dissect[s]," "fix[es]," and "cut[s]" the black man, and instills in him feelings of "shame and self-contempt" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 116).

<sup>28</sup> Since the black experience has been "fundamentally conditioned in the modern world through the lens of a racist re-presentation" whereby the colonizer is perceived as superior and the colonized is made to feel inferior, the black person attempts to escape the historic reality of blackness by identifying him or herself with white values and standards (Gordon, "The Black and the Body Politic," 77). Thus, Blacks are drawn toward the white person in their "neurotic search for redemption" (McCulloch 66).

<sup>29</sup> According to Fanon, the black person is faced with two options: he can either choose action or passivity (*Black Skin, White Masks* 100).



y tú has quedado atrás,  
junto a ti mismo,  
con una triste vena solitaria. (5-14)

Whereas Cuamé Bamba resists psychic annihilation and remains unrelentingly attached to his blackness, Cuamé Bamba's "Tú," on the other hand, exhibits the other side of blackness, that is, the yearning to be white or the fear of being Black. Compared to overt battles against racial inequality, "passing" or negating one's blackness may appear to be a form of getting ahead. Not only does "passing" or the denial of one's blackness serve as an illusionary shelter of an assumed whiteness, but also in the end, Blacks never actually achieve equality with whites. As victims of a socially produced, but real situation of irrational hatred by "an entire race," Blacks are made to feel inferior (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 118). For Cuamé Bamba, it is the adoption of white values that limits the black person's ability to develop his full human potential: "y tú has quedado atrás, / junto a ti mismo, / con una triste vena solitaria" (12-14).<sup>30</sup> The self-imposed alienation that results from the "Tú's" obsession with an inaccessible whiteness, affects not only his own sense of self, but also his place in society.<sup>31</sup> As Cuamé Bamba suggests:

Dime:

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<sup>30</sup> Fanon contends that most people of color are incapable of an "authentic upheaval" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 8). Not only do they suffer from a "psycho-existential complex," that inhibits them from an authentic sense of self, human development and social transformation, but also they have the tendency to engage in forms of flight (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 12).

<sup>31</sup> According to Fanon, "In the man of color there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. Whenever a man of color protests, there is alienation. Whenever a man of color rebukes, there is alienation" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 60).

Sobre tu ayer,

¿quién ahora eres?

Dime:

Con tu cansancio,

¿cómo andas? (15-20)

Although “passing” or negating one’s blackness may create the illusion of having escaped the historical reality of blackness, that is, the stigma of subordinate group status, Cuamé Bamba makes clear that the consciousness of the black person who seeks to be white is the repository of crippling inferiority complexes:

Hermano sin embargo,

la misma latitud,

el mismo mapa.

Simplemente, dormido,

o, digamos,

sonámbulo en tu sombra,

yo recuerdo ese mar que nos confunde,

ese mismo silencio,

aquella misma paz inaugurada. (21-29)

In denying his very blackness and identifying with whiteness, the black person who seeks to be white appears to endure his inferiority willingly and passively: “Simplemente, dormido, / o,

digamos, / sonámbulo en tu sombra” (24-26).<sup>32</sup> At one point in his life, even Cuamé Bamba was faced with this dilemma to “turn white, or disappear” (Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 100): “yo recuerdo ese mar que nos confunde, / ese mismo silencio, / aquella misma paz inaugurada” (21-29).<sup>33</sup> Preoccupied with the fear and the crippling complexes engendered by the imposition of white standards, Cuamé Bamba was thus, faced with the urgent task of freeing himself:

Hermano,  
yo recuerdo  
esa huella común que nos abraza,  
y te amo sobre el muro de tu sangre,  
sobre todas tus venas derrotadas,  
y en realidad te quiero hace ya siglos,  
desde que, como yo,  
eras el leve atisbo de un murmullo  
sobre la paz del agua. (30-38)

In order for Blacks to construct frameworks of liberation, Blacks must seek out alternative paths

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<sup>32</sup> As Fanon suggests, this situation is sometimes experienced without being conceptualized as unjust because of internalized white values, which justify the situation (*Black Skin, White Masks* 100).

<sup>33</sup> From early on, Blacks are exposed to white education through games, comic books and magazines. This exposure that projects whiteness as progress and success results in black children developing a desire to further explore whiteness. In Fanon’s particular case, he states that: “The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about ‘our ancestors, the Gauls,’ identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man’s attitude. He invests the hero, who is white, with all his own aggression—at that age closely linked to sacrificial dedication, a sacrificial dedication permeated with sadism” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 147).

for understanding their blackness. Rather than harboring paralyzing complexes and idolizing whiteness, Cuamé Bamba suggests that Blacks should be aware of the significance and the importance of their own value systems.<sup>34</sup> They must construct value systems and see themselves as self-defined. Not only must Blacks reject all value systems that seek to reduce their human dignity, but also they must claim particular values as their own. For Cuamé Bamba it is this search for an authentic sense of self that affirms blackness in positive terms and places it within a social context, which is black solidarity.<sup>35</sup> Only through forms of solidarity and identification with blackness can Blacks carry out common struggle and overcome the internalization of the self as “Other.” As Cuamé Bamba suggests:

Y hoy que tenemos voces,  
voces,  
voces,  
te digo, compañero,  
vamos,

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<sup>34</sup> According to Fanon, colonialism denigrated the values and traditions of both Blacks and indigenous. It attacked their culture and shattered their frame of reference while encouraging the adoption of white European values as relevant for human development and progress. As Fanon suggests, “Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 210).

<sup>35</sup> The adoption of a black consciousness will lead Blacks to the realization of their total liberation and, for Fanon, it should be defined in positive terms: “The dialectic that brings necessity into the foundation of my freedom drives me out of myself. It shatters my unreflected position. Still in terms of consciousness, black consciousness is imminent in its own eyes. I am not a potentiality of something. I am wholly what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside me. My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 135).

anda! (39-44)

In effect, Blacks must reclaim the past. In the past one will understand the present and in turn will find the future. The history of one's past not only heals but also is a form of power. Once established, it becomes a lens through which Blacks can resignify the world as well as initiate a process of social activism.

Whereas in the first selection of poems, Preciado provides insight into the difficulties encountered by Blacks in their endeavor to regain their identity, dignity and self-respect, the second series of poems titled, *Este hombre y su planeta*, illustrates the role of the writer in building a new nation. As a whole, the 18 poems that comprise *Este hombre y su planeta* is a reflection of the poet's concerns regarding Ecuador and its people. However, the most prevalent theme is the poet's desire to understand the socio-economic and racial divide between Ecuadorian Blacks, the indigenous and whites.<sup>36</sup> To insist upon racial divisions not only places obstacles in the way people think and interact with one another, but also prevents people from coming together as a nation. The advancement of humanity is contingent upon the contributions of all races to the nation as well as to its national culture and identity. In the poem "Fundo un

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<sup>36</sup> In the case of Ecuador as well as other Latin American countries, politicized ethnicity has been damaging to national unity and socio-economic welfare. However, it is imperative to note that conflicts between Blacks, Native Americans and whites were caused by colonialism. The colonized environment is characterized by social and racial divisions which Fanon describes as a "Manichean world" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 41). According to Fanon, the "Manichean world," is that which is made up of two irreconcilable worlds: an area belonging to whites and an area belonging to Blacks and the indigenous people (*The Wretched of the Earth* 38-39). Whereas the white community "is a strong-built town, all made of stone and steel" as well as "a town of white people, of foreigners" who see themselves as archetypes of supreme ethical and moral principles, "the native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light" and "peopled by men of evil repute" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 39). Wherever such inequality manifests among groups, conflict is inevitable.

mar en el Chota,”<sup>37</sup> Preciado addresses the writer’s role in society as an important voice in shaping and defining national identity or, indeed, in challenging preconceived notions about a homogenous national identity.

Preciado represents a more diverse conception of black identity which reflects a deeper understanding of Afroecuadorianness in “Fundo un mar en el Chota.” While in this poem Preciado emphasizes the importance of Blacks and their contributions to the nation’s development, he also addresses the complex ancestral and cultural diversity of blackness in Ecuador. His blackness does not only consist of his immediate surroundings in Esmeraldas, but it also includes the Chota River Valley. Because of their contrasting landscapes, histories, experiences and cultures, highland Blacks reflect the heterogeneity of Ecuadorian Blacks. Whereas on the one hand Preciado recognizes a heritage shared by all Ecuadorian Blacks as descendants of the first Diaspora, he also acknowledges the plurality of African descendant identity between highland Blacks from the Chota River Valley and Blacks from coastal Esmeraldas. This more inclusive approach regarding blackness underscores the multiple ways in which these collective or shared experiences have been altered and grossly simplified. At the same time, “Fundo un mar en el Chota” shows Preciado as an active agent in constructing, maintaining, reconstructing and deconstructing his own identity, an identity capable of reconstructing circumstances via the actions and writings he sets into motion.

Although in “Fundo un mar en el Chota” Preciado focuses upon the social activism of

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<sup>37</sup> “Fundo un mar en el Chota” refers to the Chota River Valley of northern Highland Ecuador.

José Antonio Chalá, a long-time advocate from Ecuador's Chota River Valley,<sup>38</sup> the poet also refers to how there can exist a common struggle of resistance without negating the heterogeneity of interests and identities among Blacks. Historically speaking, the relationship between highland Blacks and Blacks from Esmeraldas has been strained. Many Esmeraldan Blacks have often looked down upon Blacks from the Chota River Valley. In fact, data presented by Whitten suggests that in 1968 Esmeraldan Blacks considered highland Blacks as racially inferior (*Black Frontiersmen* 197). Within the context of the poem, Preciado wants to unify Blacks from the two regions:

José Antonio Chalá,  
entre un desnudo pez  
y el agua  
cabén todos mis ríos,  
tus lagunas  
y este mar que te escribo. (1-6)

By exploring the concept of unity in diversity as an assertion of unity without conformity and diversity without fragmentation, the poet creates a collective sense of belonging which attempts to engage rather than suppress geographical and historical differences among Blacks, all of which points to a more complex reconstruction of black identity in Ecuador and throughout the Diaspora.

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<sup>38</sup> For generations the Chalá family has been deeply involved in community grassroots activism.

In the second stanza, Preciado refers to the insurmountable challenges that lie ahead for the activist due to the diversity of Blacks and the challenges this presents for group solidarity.

Puede ser que algún día  
se le antoje a la lluvia  
caer hacia las nubes  
y empaparlas.  
Mientras tanto,  
José,  
cosecha este delfín entre tus plantas. (7-13)

Thus, Preciado's reference to himself as the "delfín" capable of being part of Chala's highland harvest is used to describe complementary opposites that interact within a greater whole, demonstrating that highland and coastal Blacks are interconnected and form a comprehensive system of social relations.

Despite the cultural, economic, political and social differences among highland and Esmeraldan Blacks, they do however share an emotional bond based on their common heritage. Furthermore, highland and Esmeraldan Blacks are united by a past of racial oppression and the struggle to combat it. Regardless of their geographic location, both highland and Esmeraldan Blacks face similar problems. In Ecuador, there continues to be racially connected disparities that can be traced to inequalities passed on from earlier generations. Therefore, rather than continue to pit their differences against one another, the poet refers to how there can exist a



common struggle of resistance among Ecuadorian Blacks.

Así es como entre el viento y su gaviota  
cabén todas las alas,  
y es hora de decirte  
— no es secreto—  
que los cañaverales  
te van juntando toda su melaza,  
así es que entre la miel y tu ancha  
lengua  
le anticipo sabor a mi garganta. (14-22)

Since blackness originated from a common situation of oppression, namely slavery, the poet encourages highland and Esmeraldan Blacks to embrace the past. However, rather than becoming victims of the past, the poet posits an alternative future reality. In looking to their shared past, highland and Esmeraldan Blacks become aware of the meaning of their blackness.

As an economically poor, exploited and politically marginal population, Preciado encourages highland and Esmeraldan Blacks to unite. Joining with others who have suffered similar experiences of oppression is an important organizing tool to effect change and black solidarity.

Ha de ser que algún día  
alcanzarán las olas mi ventana...

Mientras tanto

José,

ya tu ciruelo que sembré en mi arena

va floreciendo su primera escama. (23-28)

The next series of poems in *Tal como somos* is *Siete veces la vida*. Made up of seven poems, *Siete veces la vida* is a self-assessment of the poet's life and works. It is the process of the poet looking inward and reflecting upon certain aspects of his life that he finds most important to the formation of his identity. As these poems illustrate, many of his beliefs have been shaped by his early social experiences. For example, in "Identidad" Preciado speaks of his search for self and manhood in his early years that could only come from his family upbringing.

In addition to his childhood, another important aspect about his sense of self has been his ongoing efforts to understand the meanings of being Black. In "El regreso" Preciado speaks of his quest for self-discovery vis-à-vis the search for his ancestors. This search for his African roots is a way for the poet to make sense of his transatlantic heritage. However, the project of making his life meaningful moves Preciado towards a confounding problem: the problem of race. In "Cierto," "Sabedlo," "Ejemplo" and "Así" Preciado illustrates the problematic of achieving blackness in a world defined as ontologically white and therefore socio-genetically white.<sup>39</sup> For instance, in "Ejemplo" and "Así" Preciado shows how black people are subjected to

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<sup>39</sup> Since ontology puts to one side the existence of a black man, this search for self-identity becomes painstakingly difficult because it does not allow a black man to understand his being. As Fanon suggests, "The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on

many different faces of racism, such as the denigration of their values, education, religion, and other violent experiences that humiliate, torture and torment them.

Though it is through his journey into blackness where Preciado addresses the conundrum of being a black man, he also speaks of the need for Blacks to fight against those forces that seek to use blackness as a stamp that marks them as subservient beings. Such a struggle will enable Blacks to restore their lost humanity. However, it is in the last poem of the collection, “El hombre abominable del pantano,” where Preciado calls for all people to fight against the forces of oppression. It is only through camaraderie and cooperation that people are able to liberate both themselves as well as one another.

Taken as a whole, these seven poems capture the voice of the poet as he tells his experiences and the impact these experiences have had on his identity and his writing. Though all are seen as important, one experience that particularly stands out is presented in “El regreso” where the poet reflects upon man’s need to leave his legacy as an affirmation of his existence. However, rather than foregrounding the act of writing as testament to the poet’s existence, Preciado chooses his African heritage. In “El regreso” Preciado reminds his readers that an African legacy is a social history made up of multiple voices that bind past generations to future ones. That legacy helps Blacks understand their past, their blackness and, thus, provides them with the knowledge and the tools to construct their own destiny. This basic human

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which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 110).

connectedness among members of a widely dispersed and fragmented family, both past and present, provides the emotional and philosophical basis for Blacks. The better the understanding Blacks have of their own life, and the more they can live in the truth and from the truth, the more progress will be made within their respective communities.

In the first stanza, Preciado reflects upon the importance of preserving and communicating his ancestral heritage. As his maternal grandmother had done for him, Preciado also insists upon passing on his African legacy to those of tomorrow's world, namely his grandchildren.<sup>40</sup>

Día tras día,  
en el asiento de su gran costado,  
en esta desmedida posición  
de sol atravesado,  
con un designio entre el amor y el tiempo  
y un llameante cariño en este aroma  
de pan desenterrado,  
reúne el corazón sus corazones  
y prepara el regreso  
a donde empieza mi caliente espiga

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<sup>40</sup> According to Bermejo de Crespo, "La abuela materna, doña Francisca, fue quien enraizó al niño en la tradición negra, fue quien le hizo conocer a sus antepasados, sentir cerca a sus ancestros, atesorar sus mitos y sus tradiciones culturales; a ella se debió el que el pequeñuelo los sintiera correr en su sangre, respetara y justipreciara toda aquella riqueza" ("Antonio Preciado, el hombre, y el poeta," 9).

su incalculable longitud de barro. (1-11)

Since much of the poet's identity is directly related to feelings of pride regarding the important voices of the past, Preciado looks to his ancestors for guidance and wisdom. He understands the power that his heritage has bestowed upon him. According to the poet, "el regreso" of his ancestors first began "con un designio entre el amor y el tiempo" (5). This connection with his ancestors causes the poet to feel their presence which he describes as "un llameante cariño" (6). It has served as an important tool for trying to unify black identities and peoples: "reúne el corazón sus corazones" (8). Furthermore, it describes the kinship network of the whole family, namely, the family and the lines of descent, thus, linking individuals in the present to their ancestors in the past. Therefore, for the poet, it is both a privilege and a responsibility to communicate this rich heritage to his "caliente espiga," namely, his offspring. In referencing his "caliente espiga" as the end of "su incalculable longitud de barro" (11), in other words, the end of his lineage, Preciado embodies a notion of continuity across generations.

In the second stanza, the poet reflects upon the impact of his ancestors' legacy. Prompted by his subconscious need to remember both his individual and his community identity, Preciado reconstructs the past to recover and reconnect with what is important. However, given the fact that the forced departure from Africa occurred centuries ago, the poet can only deal with the memories inspired and influenced by his ancestors.

Quiero decir que al fondo,

muy fondo,

donde tengo que ser mucho más alto,  
donde tienen las sombras  
sus invencibles lunas trabajando,  
y arriman las resacas  
a la invariable boca de mi cántaro,  
yo tengo en los metales escondidos  
las huellas de los astros desterrados. (12-20)

In societies that have experienced genocide or mass violence, an important aspect for reconstructing one's self and, thus, one's society is the acknowledgement and remembrance of the past. Through the act of remembering, the poet appropriates the suffering of his ancestors: "yo tengo en los metales escondidos / las huellas de los astros desterrados" (19-20). His ancestors, "las sombras," represent the voice of a collective consciousness which reminds him of all that is unforgiving and worthy of his past. In effect, the past suffering endured by the ancestors from physical punishment, psychological abuse and hard labor, coupled with their ability to survive through the centuries, leave with Preciado a keen sense of affirmation and validation of his heritage.

In the third stanza, the poet emphasizes the responsibility the younger generation has with the older generation, namely, the "abuelos." He urges the younger generation to reconnect to its ancestral heritage. Just as the poet has done, his own "hijos" should also put their trust in the past so they too can reclaim their dignity and humanity.

Abuelos,  
cadena inacabada donde me han ofendido,  
venerable dolor  
en la suerte arrogante de mis hijos,  
no ha transcurrido nada,  
nada,  
ni siquiera mi nombre,  
de la fiebre al delirio.  
Entonces,  
entregadme, para el viento,  
ese polvo sin fin de los caminos,  
que necesito estrellas  
rondándome el ayer  
mientras yo sigo. (21-34)

Instead of blackness, that is, the “venerable dolor” of the “abuelos” being a stigma, it should be a source of pride for the poet’s “hijos.” Only by knowing their past can future generations expect real progress to take place within their own lives. Indeed, honoring and understanding the wisdom of past generations is essential for Blacks to overcome the perpetuation of the negative stereotypes that have heretofore dehumanized them.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In Ecuador, Juan García argues that the clash between the values and self-perceptions transmitted by the family members to children and the negation of those values once children come into contact with white culture creates a

In the fourth compilation of poems presented in *Tal como somos*, Preciado continues to illustrate his understanding of the concept of Negritude. As reflected throughout his works, Negritude has always been an important medium of expression for the poet. However, it is in this fourth set of poems where Preciado recognizes and appreciates what Negritude has brought to the world regarding his understanding of the concepts of race, citizenship, and human relationships.

Most notably associated with francophone writers of African descent such as Léon Damas, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, the concept of Negritude signified a historic phenomenon in the formulation of African diasporic identity and culture on the part of New World Blacks.<sup>42</sup> Although these poets defined Negritude as the revalorization of black culture, the rejection of cultural integration and the promotion of black and African agency, the inspiration for Preciado's interpretation of Negritude comes most directly, however, from Césaire's multi-faceted definition of the concept.

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conflict in black children. This situation is said by García to be responsible for the major disruption of the African cultures of respect for one's elders. As García suggests, "Hace unos 30 años atrás la comunidad afro empezó a perder su vinculación con las tradiciones orales de origen africano y las empezó a perder porque casi todo el mundo estaba vinculado a la escuela, a la escolarización, a la educación, al mejoramiento de la cultura afroecuatoriana a través de la educación. Y yo pensaba que esa educación era negativa en algunas partes para la comunidad afro, especialmente para la cultura porque impone modelos culturales racistas y les impone a los niños y a las niñas negras. Y esa imposición a veces es violenta porque viene por el sistema educativo que obliga que el niño negro o la niña negra aprenda de las otras culturas y de las otras historias, olvide su propia historia, olvide su cultura, tenga rechazo a su propia cultura para amar la otra cultura" (Personal Interview. 20 June 2010).

<sup>42</sup> The term Negritude was first used by Césaire in his 1939 poem "Notebook of a Return to My Native Land" (Creary 876). Césaire uses Negritude to identify the people of the African Diaspora, that is, those who share a common historical and cultural experience of oppression. As Césaire suggests Negritude is "no longer a cephalic index, or plasma, or soma, but measured by the compass of suffering" ("Notebook of a Return to My Native Land" 43).



Titled after the book itself, *Tal como somos*, this selection of poems opens with three quotations taken from Césaire’s “Notebook of a Return to My Native Land.” As a whole, these three extracts define the concept of Negritude as “the awareness of being black, the simple acknowledgment of a fact that implies the acceptance of it, a taking charge of one’s destiny as a black man, of one’s history and culture” (Creary 876). Not only does Césaire challenge essentialist and reductionist notions of Negritude by addressing the historical specificity of blackness, he also moves beyond the either / or paradigm of dichotomous hierarchical ranking of difference. However, it is the third citation that most notably resonates for the poet. Césaire is not just concerned with the definition of Negritude but also its practice:

Puesto que para encerrarme en esta única raza,  
sabes sin embargo mi amor tiránico,  
sabes que no es por odio hacia las otras razas  
que me exijo luchador de esta raza única,  
que lo que yo quiero  
es por el hambre universal,  
por la sed universal.  
Obligarla libre por fin  
de producir de intimidad cerrada  
la succulencia de los frutos.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> These three citations taken from Césaire’s “Notebook of a Return to My Native Land” are not found in the original version of *Tal como somos*, but rather in *De sol a sol*. See *De sol a sol* (Círculo de Lectores, 1979), 111; *De*

For Césaire, the focus on blackness does not mean that only black people suffer from racism, but that blackness is symbolic of an ethics and philosophy of social justice and social change. In other words, blackness is to counter white racism since Negritude as a concept and a transformative process is intended to end the oppression and exploitation of all oppressed peoples. Consequently, blackness is not about negating other races, but rather establishing solidarity with all victims of oppression.

As in previous poems, the four poems that comprise *Tal como somos* also historicize and contextualize blackness. In *Tal como somos*, Preciado's blackness is an expression and resignification of the African Diaspora on the one hand, and Ecuadorian history as experienced by Blacks, on the other. However, blackness also speaks to the need of using this historical understanding to analyze critically what is currently happening both nationally and internationally, and to better implement means of healing to facilitate self-determination and empowerment. Clearly, Preciado's portrayal of blackness displays his ability to transcend the provincial particularities of Esmeraldas. Not only does blackness serve as a point of departure to share the sadness as well as to show compassion for others in similar oppressive predicaments, but also constitutes moments of empathy within a transnational experience. In the poem, "Los sabe hermanos y les tiende el corazón," Preciado empathizes with the plight of the indigenous peoples, particularly the miners of Bolivia.

Whereas "Dos solos de tambor de Cuamé Bamba" and "Fundo un mar en el Chota" challenge Eurocentric notions of African-derived identity, it is in "Los sabe hermanos y les

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*sol a sol* (Libresa, 1992), 159.

tiende el corazón” that Preciado’s multifaceted concept of Negritude resonates most markedly. An Afro-centered worldview is not only optimal for people of African descent but for all of humanity.<sup>44</sup> In this poem Preciado shows how blackness also forms part of an emerging project of decolonization. Preciado challenges racial essentialism, and goes beyond the reinscription of notions of authentic identity. Within the context of the poem, Preciado’s concept of Negritude also includes ways of constructing self and community. He posits a more inclusive identity that shares a kinship with more than one community.

The poem opens with an allusion to the arrival of African Blacks to the New World. According to Antonio D. Tillis, an important feature that affected Africans was the drastic weakening and decline of the indigenous population, which previously had provided the first source of free manual labor required by the first European invaders (1). With the development and eventual expansion of various industrial projects, such as mining and agriculture, the need to replace the void left by the destruction of the indigenous population led to the establishment of an alternative labor force. Due to their adaptability to the land and this labor demand, Africans became the most likely replacement (Tillis 1). However, this by no means signified the end of indigenous oppression. Blacks as well as the indigenous people suffered under the era of Conquest, slavery and colonization:

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<sup>44</sup> Fanon suggests that while blackness may begin with the lives of black people it also reaches out to all of humanity. As Fanon points out, “I as a man of color, to the extent that it becomes possible for me to exist absolutely, do not have the right to lock myself into a world of retroactive reparations. I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 231).

Cuando llegamos  
ya estaban encendidos los faroles  
en todas las esquinas de la angustia de  
América,  
y toda la sonrisa ya estaba repartida.  
Entonces,  
con los hijos del sol compartimos el ay!  
como buenos hermanos.  
Y hemos venido andando  
lentamente,  
tristemente,  
con el dolor pegado a la piel  
a las manos,  
a los pies, tan cansados  
de ese camino largo,  
y hemos aumentado  
hasta ser una mancha indeleble,  
hasta poder decir: ¡somos de casa!  
que ya somos de aquí como los ríos  
o como las montañas. (1-20)

By advocating a sense of belonging and appropriating a legitimate place in the world, Preciado posits a pluralistic form of identity that not only resists socially constructed categories of differentiation, but also is grounded on a shared commonality. This commonality is intended to enhance and help concretize a feeling of kinship amongst Blacks and the indigenous. At the same time, it also aspires to form a sense of cohesion, a sense of Afro-indigenous alliance, where both groups are recognized by national and transnational entities as having similar collective, cultural and legal rights.<sup>45</sup> This land to which Blacks were forcefully brought and where they have suffered, lived and evolved is now a place where both Blacks and the indigenous ought to co-exist while maintaining the heterogeneity of their group's interests and identities.<sup>46</sup>

In the second stanza, although the poetic voice changes from a “we” to an “I,” this by no

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<sup>45</sup> Obviously, Preciado's vision is a work in progress. Indeed, despite the political alliances established between both Blacks and the indigenous during the mid-1990s there still does not exist a fully realized Afro-indigenous alliance at the national level. Black interests and identities continue to be overshadowed by indigenous politics. As Walsh and García suggest: “El hecho de que la exclusión y marginalización viene no sólo del poder blanco-mestizo, sino también de algunas tendencias de la hegemonía indígena, muestra el carácter jerárquica de lo que Mignolo (2000) llama la diferencia colonial, y su complicidad racial / racista. Dentro de esta coyuntura e inclusive en la mirada de la izquierda y de los movimientos sociales, los afroecuatorianos son vistos a la sombra de los indígenas, es decir, siempre en comparación a ellos y desde su marco organizativo, sociopolítico y cultural. En esta comparación, los negros aparecen como débiles y fragmentados, incapaces de la organización y movilización como también de la producción de un pensamiento propio” (325).

<sup>46</sup> Rather than Blacks being forced to view themselves through the negative perceptions of indigenous cultural reality, Preciado suggests that both parties engage equally. When all social groups “confront their differences” by learning about how they are seen by each other; then they can become more aware of their “unfinishedness” (Freire 59). As illustrated in chapter one, footnote 54, such an exchange is what Freire calls, “dialogue” (59). According to Freire, “[T]he possibility of true dialogue, in which subjects in dialogue learn and grow by confronting their differences, becomes a coherent demand required by an assumed unfinishedness that reveals itself as ethical” (59).

means dismantles Preciado's initial premise of a pluralistic identity based on the commonality of human life experiences. The most obvious and striking failure of humanity is the inability to empathize with others. From the perspective of the poet, compassion is the only way society will avoid repeating past mistakes, because if one cannot empathize, one can easily overlook history as well as past suffering. Within the context of the poem, Blacks suffer along with their indigenous brothers. The poetic voice especially suffers vicariously with "los mineros de Bolivia," (28) who defended their rights and were persecuted and assaulted. Solidarity creates a sense of similarity in feelings without blurring the line between black and indigenous interests and identities. In the end, the poet calls for both Blacks and the indigenous to join forces in their fight against the oppression of humanity.

Por eso es que en tu muerte estoy muriendo,

y siento que resbalo por tus lágrimas.

Por eso es que la herida que me duele

es tuya,

enorme,

abierta,

¡hermana!

Por eso los mineros de Bolivia

me duelen en el alma.

Por eso es que sumamos los dolores

y entregamos la hoguera que trajimos,

al total de la rabia! (21-32)

Although Preciado's early works, *Jolgorio*, *Más acá de los muertos* and *Tal como somos* illustrate the principle of blackness as ethnic and cultural diversity, his writings as a whole challenge racialized social structures and systems of domination that construct dichotomous racial hierarchies that have excluded, controlled and constrained human agency. Not only does he recognize the commonalities between Blacks, the indigenous and other ethnic groups while at the same time acknowledging each group's particularities, he also understands that a necessary prerequisite for such unity is contingent upon the formation of each group's self-conscious identity. While *Jolgorio* and *Más acá de los muertos* show the formative influence of Black America throughout the 1960s and demonstrate Preciado's interest in particularizing his Afro identity, *Tal como somos* reflects the proliferation of utopian projects for social change grounded on egalitarian and pluralist tenets that sought to achieve the equality of difference during the 1960s. By pointing out the illusions and falsehoods spawned by history, he forges a new and transformative consciousness. At the same time, he alters traditional racial categories and boundaries by fashioning a constructive and beneficial relationship between different ethnic groups based on mutual respect, interdependence and a collective commitment to community.

### 3. Antonio Preciado, Afro Poet Unbound (1992-1998)

#### 3.1 Historical and Literary Foundation

Preciado's next burst of literary production coincides within the historical demarcation of the 1990s. In addition to *De sol a sol* which was published in 1979 and 1992, Preciado also published *De ahora en adelante* (1994), *Jututo* (1995) and *De par en par* (1998), a poetic anthology that consists of both *De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo*.<sup>1</sup> As in the case of *De sol a sol*, Preciado's latter works also express the nonconformity of the poet regarding the inequalities of society, not only within his own country of Ecuador, but also throughout the world. However, while *De sol a sol* manifests the social and political environment of the 1960s, *De ahora en adelante*, *Jututo* and *De Par en par* deal with the phenomenon of globalization. His poems consider some of the key historical forces that have brought people into contact with one another as well as globalization's effects on society. More specifically, he incorporates themes of hybridity and multi-rootedness, which in part, underscores the contradictory nature of globalization.

Although the era of globalization may be associated with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) and the ensuing conclusion of the Cold War (Gupta 7), processes of economic globalization in the years after World War II set the guidelines for national and international

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<sup>1</sup> *De sol a sol* (1979, 1992) is an anthology of selected works which traces the poet's literary trajectory of poems published from 1961-1979. Unlike the first edition, Preciado's latest publication also includes a literary critical analysis by Esther Bermejo de Crespo.



economic, political, cultural and environmental activities throughout the world.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the world order, following World War II, drastically changed the lives of millions of people around the globe. The reconstruction of Europe after World War II led Western leaders to lay down a new international framework for trade, commerce, and finance. Known as the Bretton Woods Conference, world leaders considered ways in which to ensure global economic stability. In addition, this conference culminated in the foundation of several international institutions, most importantly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, both of which intended to oversee the economic processes of globalization. Along with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the IMF and the World Bank established the rules, regulations and policies for the world's economic systems for the next several decades.<sup>3</sup> Dominated not just by the wealthiest industrial countries, but also by the commercial and financial interests in those countries, the IMF, World Bank and the GATT reflected the political and economic interests of the industrialized nations.<sup>4</sup>

The debt crisis of the 1980s in Latin America brought about dramatic changes in how

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<sup>2</sup> Processes of economic globalization represent the transition from a centrally-planned economy to a free market economy. Whereas the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War represent the transition to a market economy in the former Soviet Union and Communist bloc countries in Europe, the debt crisis of the 1980s in Latin America represents the shift from import-substitution industrialization to export-orientation accompanied by the partial dismantling of the state (Stiglitz 14; Clark, "Globalization Seen from the Margins," 19).

<sup>3</sup> In 1995, the GATT was replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Stiglitz 15-16).

<sup>4</sup> The IMF, World Bank and the GATT have been driven by the collaborative force of the heads of government from the G-7: United States, Japan, Germany, Canada, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. As of 1994, Russia became a limited partner of the G-7 (Stiglitz 14-15). With the dismantling of the GATT and the subsequent creation of the WTO in 1995, Chalmers Johnson points out that both the European Union and the U.S. dictated the global terms of trade within the agricultural sector. Although negotiations took place in Uruguay, representatives from the European Union and the U.S. barred all legislative bodies from the developing world and rigged the agenda to privilege their own agricultural interests (269-70).

both the IMF and the World Bank provided funds for countries facing economic downturn.<sup>5</sup> Even though developing countries in need of loans and grants were allocated structural adjustment loans, the guidelines to pay the debt were established by the IMF and World Bank and included such neoliberal measures as privatization, deregulation, and the elimination of trade barriers which generally favored multinational corporations over local business interests. Although the global expansion of capitalism was meant to provide greater opportunities for people, processes of economic restructuring (e.g., liberalization, privatization and deregulation) exacerbated Third World economies and undermined state institutions and social support systems. Within the context of Latin America, the promise of globalization did not materialize as expected. Globalization was, and still continues to be, a very uneven process that frequently fosters widespread dissent.<sup>6</sup>

As was the case in other Latin American countries, processes of economic globalization in Ecuador brought about a series of catastrophic transformations. After periods of unprecedented economic prosperity, Ecuador along with the rest of Latin America, found itself in the midst of an economic crisis (Handelsman, *Culture and Customs* 16). This economic

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<sup>5</sup> According to Stiglitz, the original orientation of the IMF was based on the Keynesian model of economics. Keynesian economics argued that the decisions made by private business sectors sometimes lead to inefficient macroeconomic outcomes. Thus, Keynesian economics advocated for governments to play a role in the stabilization of market economies. However, the Keynesian model was replaced by the free market, the free trade ideology of the 1980s. What resulted was the Washington Consensus. In effect, a consensus was formed between the IMF, the World Bank and the U.S. Treasury (16).

<sup>6</sup> Rather than commit to national interests, the elites of the developing world are more interested in maintaining the economic, social and political interests of the elites in the more advanced and industrialized countries. According to Paul Streeten, lack of commitment by the elites of the developing world regarding national interests has resulted in the neglect of such fundamental social programs as education and health care (74).

downturn along with the debt crisis of the 1980s provoked the first of a series of democratically elected governments to turn to the SAPs proposed by both the IMF and the World Bank (Clark, “Globalization Seen from the Margins,” 20).

Within Ecuador, these economic adjustment policies affected social groups differently. Since the incorporation of these adjustment measures came from above, it has been the Ecuadorian elite who have prospered the most from these policies. Part of their profits came precisely from economic policies that involved forms of domination rather than inclusion. The processes of globalization have led to the decline of workers’ rights.<sup>7</sup>

One of the responses of the poor and middle-class mestizo Ecuadorians to economic globalization has been wide-scale immigration to developed countries. According to Clark, “While the New York area had 300,000 legal Ecuadorian residents at the end of the 1980s, it was estimated that the additional illegal immigrants in the area numbered between 300,000 and 600,000, making New York Ecuador’s third largest city” (“Globalization Seen from the Margins,” 20-21). Economic depression, forced relocation, discriminatory laws and depreciation of their contributions as a people to the Ecuadorian nation promoted mass resignation among the poor and middle-class mestizo Ecuadorians.

It seems that if any sector of the Ecuadorian populace has played an active role in the restructuring of the Ecuadorian nation, it has been the indigenous movement which has been

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see Beine, Docquier and Rapoport 631.

steadfast in its opposition to neoliberal policies. Indeed, the indigenous population has taken the initiative to press for social, political and economic change. In the wake of the growing social, economic, political and environmental ills caused by unchecked neoliberal policies aimed to privatize, liberalize and deregulate the economy, the 1990s represented a time in which the Ecuadorian indigenous people began to represent their own interests.

As a direct result of the negative impact of neoliberalism, the indigenous population took matters into their own hands. Created in 1986, the contemporary indigenous movement in Ecuador, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), pursued social, political, economic change through mobilization (Sawyer 43).<sup>8</sup> However, it was the uprising that took place on May 28, 1990 that was a major turning point in the history of the indigenous movement as it convinced the government to enter into direct negotiations with the indigenous populace. They contested a long history of hegemonic, exclusionary and antidemocratic policies. In oppositional terms to the white-mestizo controlled state, the goal was to construct a new and more humanistic and democratic society which sought the recreation of place, identity, agency and nation within a plurinational construct.

Two significant advances of this movement have been in bilingual education and agrarian land reform. The indigenous movement has also been a source of inspiration for other

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<sup>8</sup> According to Suzana Sawyer, the organizational structure of indigenous organizations in Ecuador is divided into three levels: national, regional and local. Since CONAIE occupies the upper stratum, it serves as the primary indigenous body for the majority of indigenous peoples in Ecuador. In effect, they play a central role in negotiations between the indigenous and the Ecuadorian state as well as other progressive indigenous rights and environmental organizations in the United States and Europe (43).

subalternized groups, more specifically, Ecuadorian Blacks (Walsh and García 320).<sup>9</sup> Not only does the 1998 Constitution recognize the collective land rights for both Ecuadorian indigenous and Blacks, but it also acknowledges Ecuador as “un estado social de derecho, soberano, unitario, independiente, democrático, pluricultural y multiétnico.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, Título III, Capítulo 5, Artículo 83 of the Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador (1998) states that “Los pueblos indígenas, que se autodefinen como nacionalidades de raíces ancestrales, y los pueblos negros o afroecuatorianos, forman parte del Estado ecuatoriano, único e indivisible.”<sup>11</sup>

The debate surrounding plurinationalism is not only in response to the issues raised by globalization, but also a statement of an identity that makes both indigenous and Blacks part of a larger community. Proponents of plurinationalism propagate a process of creating a collective sense of belonging and participation which attempts to engage rather than suppress difference. Although plurinationalism is looked upon as a politics of difference, this by no means suggests difference as invidious, hierarchical or the implementation of the difference of power. Basically, what proponents of plurinationalism argue is an approach to the self and the “Other” as complex beings who act and react from the perspective of those multiple identifications. At the same time, they advocate for the incorporation of all ethnic groups into the national cultural hegemony

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<sup>9</sup> Whereas on the one hand, the struggles and successes of the indigenous movement have served as motivation for the Afroecuatorian movement, on the other hand, it has also been a crippling force. For further discussion of this topic, see chapter two, footnote 45.

<sup>10</sup> See Título I, Artículo I of the Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador (1998), <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/ecuador98.html>.

<sup>11</sup> See Título III, Capítulo 5, Artículo 83 of the Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador (1998), <http://pdba.georgetown.edu/Constitutions/Ecuador/ecuador98.html>.

while simultaneously acknowledging each group's particularities. Thus, marginalized communities that were once barred and silenced can now assume an active role in the social transformation of Ecuadorian society. Not only does plurinationalism point to an eventual reconciliation of Latin American national identity, more specifically Ecuadorian identity, but it also addresses the problematic of the admixture of foreign influences brought on by globalization, a major phenomenon of the modern world.

Processes of globalization, namely the assimilation of the people in the peripheral countries into a homogenized economic, social and political world order, had a profound effect on many Latin American writers. The inflationary 1960s and 1970s, the debt crisis of the 1980s, the collapse of communism and the global expansion of capitalism had brought about severe economic, political, and cultural consequences. Thus, like previous generations, the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s also represented a time in which many Latin American writers sought new political values to address Latin America's complex social, political and cultural realities.

As was the case in Latin America, Ecuadorian contemporary writers also reacted in myriad ways to such key historical forces. With the rise of feminism and the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the prominence of bureaucratic authoritarianism and the recent phenomenon of the new social movements which appeared in many countries after the debt crisis of 1982, Ecuadorian contemporary literature represented democratic pluralism in action. Whereas on the one hand, Ecuadorian contemporary writers profited from the experimentation of the 1960s Boom to extend their critique of authoritarianism to the very notion of authorship

itself, as evident in the novel *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda* (1976) by Jorge Enrique Adoum (1923-2009), other significant Ecuadorian contemporary literary trends included testimonial literature, the rise to prominence of women writers and cultural pluralism.<sup>12</sup>

Since the 1970s, Ecuadorian writers have continued to produce works that are both aesthetically innovative and socially committed. Like previous generations, Ecuadorian contemporary writers have also created an argument in favor of plurality and open-endedness in their approach to complex cultural realities. Ecuadorian contemporary literature constitutes a continuum of stylistic commonalities of themes and influences. It reflects the evolving democratization of writing, authorship and cultural pluralism of Ecuadorian culture. Most importantly, however, Ecuadorian contemporary literature illustrates the extent to which Ecuadorian literature, in general, has developed from a gamut of sources both past and present.

### **3.2 De ahora en adelante**

*De ahora en adelante*, Preciado's fifth book of poetry, was published in 1994 and clearly reflects the extent to which Ecuadorian literature embraced the social and artistic complexities of the contemporary world. This volume is divided into seven sections. While the first section is preceded by a prologue by Nelson Estupiñán Bass, the six other sections after the prologue include Preciado's assimilation of both past and present literary masters from the Andean region, Latin America and elsewhere. Although the use of the onomatopoeia and the ancestral language

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Ecuadorian contemporary literary trends and specific works, see Regina Harrison 281-82 and Handelsman, in *Culture and Customs* 104-08.

of African and Afroesmeraldan dialects has been replaced with a standardized form of Spanish, Preciado's poetry continues to reflect his firm commitment to negritude. However, unlike his earlier poetry where Preciado speaks openly about blackness regarding the formation of his Afro identity and African epistemology, *De ahora en adelante* is more invested in the question of collective and marginal identities within the context of the contemporary international and global social order. He posits a more inclusive identity grounded on a sense of collective commonality of a people who not only feel marginal to mainstream society, but also share an identity that reflects the negative tendencies of dislocation, exclusion and oppression.

Since the forgotten occupy a pivotal space in this process of construction, marginalized characters dominate *De ahora en adelante*. Preciado's primary mission is to revive memory and, thus, ensure continuity of life. At the same time, he shows a pronounced interest in relinquishing the author's privilege of control from above while allowing ordinary people to make themselves heard from below. He uses the life stories of everyday people to re-write history. These stories reflect not only a turning away from objectivity, but also a privileging of subjectivity and positionality.<sup>13</sup> In effect, Preciado illustrates identity as something that is mediated between individuals, collectives and society in general.

Similar to Preciado's earlier works, memory, the historical past, the social and political changes taking place throughout the world continue to serve as touchstones for *De ahora en*

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<sup>13</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see chapter one, footnote 54 and chapter two, footnote 46.



*adelante*. Overall, his poems are intense in personal emotion, deeply solitary, yet hopeful about the possibilities of meaningful collective action in the face of injustice and adversity. Not only does *De ahora en adelante* continue to track the evolution of a consciousness committed to compassionate participation in the agonies of humankind, but it also demonstrates Preciado's awareness of society's ills and his benevolent sense of social responsibility. In *De ahora en adelante*, Preciado continues to build on what his predecessors started. By raising the issue of justice in his work, acting in solidarity with victims of exclusion, dislocation and oppression, Preciado does his part to pass the torch he himself inherited to those coming after. Although various poems in *De ahora en adelante* focus on the experiences of the individual, as a whole, they are representative of a collective memory and identity. Through the personal testimony of the oppressed, Preciado gives readers a glimpse into how history, culture and tradition are constructed from below. More specifically, Preciado illustrates how the discourse of memory can broaden our understanding of wider societal phenomena.

Within the context of poetic discourse, the active re-construction of life stories via oral tradition serves as a means in which the oppressed gain a consciousness of self. In the performance of memory, consciousness containing both individual and collective dimensions is gained and restored and new forms of understanding are acquired. While in previous poems the discourse of memory is performed by means of the African phenomena of the talking drums, in *De ahora en adelante* memory is performed through the medium of oral tradition based on the collective memory and the lived experiences within communities.

In “Conversando con Fátima,” Preciado offers us a portrait of the black experience in Brazil. Based on a conversation between the poet and a young Afrobrazilian girl, Fátima, Preciado retells Fátima’s account of the life of her father, an Afrobrazilian miner. Explicitly grounded in memory, one of the fundamental messages to emerge from the poem is that Fátima’s personal testimony is the product of an oral rather than a literary tradition. By emphasizing popular oral discourse through Fátima’s remembrance and individual recollection as a witness and victim of oppression, her testimony both unearths and asserts the historical and collective memory of a people who have been marginalized by mainstream socio-cultural, political and economic processes.

The primary objective in “Conversando con Fátima” is to illustrate the presence of an ‘other’ voice and philosophy. Fátima’s oral testimony reflects the reconstruction of a personal, individual memory based in part on what she experienced growing up with her father. By engaging in acts of remembering, the poem serves both a historical and functional purpose. In other words, the recollection of memory by means of oral transmission is more than just the personal memoir of Fátima and her father; it is also representative of a community’s historical record. Within the first two stanzas of the poem, Preciado uses Fátima’s personal recollection of her father to represent the collective memory of slavery in Brazil:

Ahora,  
en mi recuerdo,  
y tan a la distancia,

creo que esos minutos fueron siglos,  
viejos caminos para andar de nuevo,  
sobre una historia amarga,  
tras esa voz plural  
que, eco tras eco,  
salía de la profunda transparencia  
de una dulce muchacha. (1-10)

Fátima, entre otras cosas,  
habló del padre muerto  
que por el alba se iba con la casa a la mina,  
y a la tarde volvía  
con la mina a la casa,  
de su tos persistente,  
los dolores del pecho y de la espalda.  
Me preguntó, de pronto,  
atrás de que dolores creía yo que andaba,  
y contó, finalmente, que la vida,  
por igual, come,  
duerme,

bebe vino  
y resignadamente se aniquila  
en las casas de negros y de blancos,  
en el barrio minero de Santana. (11-26)

Through the interplay between Preciado (author/interviewer) and Fátima (subject/interviewee), “Conversando con Fátima” is the result of a collaborative and collective project. By means of Fátima’s own recollection of life with her father, the poet gains knowledge and, thus, deepens his understanding of the social realities of Afrobrazailians.

Despite the fact that Preciado uses his own voice to recount Fátima’s life story, the truths that emerge are subjective rather than objective representations of a collective reality. They serve as documentary sources to explain social phenomena that might otherwise have remained invisible and to challenge conventionally held beliefs about the black experience. Within the context of the poem, Fátima focuses on the lives of black slaves in mining society in Brazil. According to Fátima’s account, African slavery penetrated each and every aspect of black life. In the case of her father, he suffered: “de su tos persistente, / los dolores del pecho y de la espalda” (16-17). At the same time, he was expected to work from sun up to sundown. In the end, he died as he had lived, at the margins of society, amongst the oppressed and the powerless.

In addition to the recovery and the reconstruction of a lost history, Preciado also shows a pronounced interest in the restoration of an autochthonous language, tradition and culture. By approximating a voice from the pueblo, Preciado reaffirms the vitality of a different voice:

Según la historia,  
rigurosamente,  
habló en la lengua de la madre patria;  
pero era un portugués con pájaros y aromas,  
palabras florecidas,  
tambores pronunciándose,  
y, opinando en voz alta,  
a flor de labios,  
incesantes maracas.  
Así era que podía  
decir lastimadura  
o sufrimiento,  
tal como si con música  
seguida de más música  
y repentinas silabas de azaleas. (27- 41)

While uncovering and bringing to light Fátima's life history of her father, Preciado exhibits another prime responsibility of the poet as an active cultural worker in the recovery and defense of important works, forgotten texts and voices. He captures black life in the poem while trying, at the same time, to celebrate oral tradition. In keeping with oral tradition, Preciado helps the reader imagine hearing aloud the voice of Fátima. For example, Preciado's poetic interpretation

of Fátima's voice reflects her mother tongue, Portuguese. However, the Portuguese that she speaks also shows remnants of her black, African heritage. The sound, rhythm and syncopation of the "tambores" and the "maracas" are manifestations of Fátima's Africanized speech. Fused with feeling, Preciado emphasizes the musical and cultural contributions of Fatima's ancestors. Generally speaking, music was a primary form of communication for slaves, just as it had been for her African forebears. As in the African tradition, the songs of the slaves told their history and revealed everyday concerns: "Así era que podía / decir lastimadura / o sufrimiento, / tal como si con música / seguida de más música" (36-40). Thus, Preciado does more than just memorialize tradition; he uses it to teach and preserve black history itself, especially slave history.

For the poet, these stories are the secret of existence for the lost and forgotten and the key to their hidden strength. By engaging in acts of remembering and, by extension, the act of performing the past, those who hold and carry memories, stories and traditions sustain intellectual and social survival. Whereas the memory of Fátima's father still lives on in the memory of his daughter, so too does the memory of Fátima live in the memory and the writings of the poet. Despite the fact that it is the poet who creates their likeness in art and brings them to life in anecdote, from the perspective of the poet, Fátima's oral testimony is key to the central meaning of a prophetic native tradition.

Definitivamente,

ella habló aquella tarde en infinito,

y a mí se me hace claro  
y tomo a pecho  
todo lo que se entiende,  
francamente,  
de una vez con el alma. (42- 48)

In addition to illustrating the capacity of oral tradition to articulate the reality of Blacks living in a spectrum of marginalized situations, Preciado also raises important questions about the role and capacity of art in documenting, preserving and disseminating the historical, cultural and intellectual heritage of a people. By recollecting memory through orality and carrying over the communication of a community's knowledge and experiences into his poetry, Preciado keeps a community's heritage alive from one generation to the next. His texts safeguard the memories of a group of people whose authorship is claimed by no one, but yet, reflect those individuals who live mostly on the fringes of society.

While this nostalgia for retrieving the lost origin of an 'other' voice pervades the entirety of Preciado's poetic works, it is in *De ahora en adelante* where Preciado illustrates how acting on behalf of minority voices is part of a political and an aesthetic social project that consists of many voices. In *De ahora en adelante*, Preciado borrows the faces and works of other artists as an acknowledgement of his admiration and their influence on his work. At the same time, his poems demonstrate that there exists a range of voices that have come into contact with one another to address the toll that racism and injustice have taken on other groups of exclusion.

Through their work, these voices interact with one another and, thus, establish a conversation of which writers are just one small part.

Where “Conversando con Fátima” illustrates the role of the writer and literature in redressing the forgotten silences of a history of people, “Ante el Che de Guayasamín” brings to the forefront alternative scripts for narrating the past. As in literature, art also highlights and brings to light the trials and injustices faced by the common man on a day-to-day basis. Within the context of “Ante el Che de Guayasamín,” Preciado reflects upon the influence of the Ecuadorian painter and sculptor, Oswaldo Guayasamín (1919-1999).

“Ante el Che de Guayasamín” is a poem based upon a painting by Guayasamín; titled *Autorretrato* (1950), this work of art is a self-portrait. As the title of the poem suggests, “Ante el Che de Guayasamín” provides us the context from where the speaker / the poet writes. By juxtaposing the iconic image of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (1928-1967) alongside that of Guayasamín, Preciado firmly plants in the mind of the reader that like Che, Guayasamín is also a symbolic and inspirational figure for the oppressed.

As was the case of Che, a signature theme in Guayasamín’s work from his earliest days was his identification with the oppressed, especially the indigenous peoples in Ecuador. As strong advocates of Marxism, both Che Guevara and Guayasamín had expressed their support for revolutionary change in Latin America. While Che Guevara gave his life defending and fighting on behalf of the oppressed, Guayasamín, on the other hand, gave a face to the faceless. His art is a product of who he was and where he came from.



Born in Quito and of Quechua descent, Guayasamín experienced firsthand the pains of racial prejudice and contempt in a society that was and is still to this day largely defined by its colonial heritage of racial and ethnic discrimination and by the institutionalized omission of the indigenous (Jáuregui and Fischer 19). His paintings carry powerful social messages. The exploitation of Indians, peasants, workers, and miners, killings, poverty, caste problems, *mestizaje* and displacement all figure in his work. As Che Guevara, Guayasamín chose to dedicate his life to the poor, the oppressed and the downtrodden.

During the course of his life, Guayasamín's approach to art was both politically and socially driven. His paintings rage against any form of injustice, torture and oppression. However, for the poet, the painting is much more than a personal narrative that merely comments on the painter's personal artistic accomplishments. It is also the recording of the life experiences of real people. More specifically, it is about an artist who saw the marginalized and, through his art, attempted to establish their humanity and self-worth in the face of oppression and official disdain. Within the context of the poem, the poet reflects upon the impact this iconic symbol has had not only on himself and his own agenda for writing, but also on the marginalized and the oppressed whom main-stream society has deemed as inferior.

At the outset of the poem, the reader is privy to the immediate situation of the poet, that is, the poet standing before the painting. The poem thus moves from the immediate situation to a more general look at life: the poet's sense of bewilderment owing to the fleeting nature of life.

Una vida es apenas

algo así como un breve parpadeo del tiempo,  
y no hubiera bastado... (1-3)

Upon reflecting on the shortness and thus, tenuous nature of life, Preciado engages in his own subjective fascinations about art, life and humanity.

Debió de ser en cosa de milenios,  
muchísimos milenios,  
que enardecidos fuegos celestiales  
arduamente aprendieron  
este sagaz  
y tierno  
oficio de mirada. (4-10)

Like literature, art is a window into existence and accordingly, life. Since no writer or artist has been brought up completely unexposed to the world around him, literature as art also reflects the attitudes and values of its creator. Moved by the poverty, hunger and disease he witnessed, Guayasamín decided early on in life to paint human suffering as an act of protest against oppression and injustice. However, the poet points out that to paint humanity as Guayasamín had done, “debió de ser en cosas de milenios, / muchísimos milenios” (4-5). Unable to explain rationally “este sagaz / y tierno / oficio de mirada” (8-10), Preciado looks to the universe for meaning:

Solo así se comprende que esos ojos

alguna vez no fueran

más que un par de relámpagos. (11-13)

In the end, there is no logical reason for the existence of the artist any more than there is for his art. He was every artist's artist and every human's human. He was man, but yet his eye for painting was most uncommon. Thus, for the poet, Guayasamín is an apparition from that mysterious world beyond nature, that final world which contains—if anything contains—the explanation of man, art and life.

Similar to “Conversando con Fátima” and “Ante el Che de Guayasamín,” “Cándida y la metáfora” also pays special attention to another historically marginalized voice of oppression. In this poem, Preciado specifically addresses the “female black Other.”<sup>14</sup> As illustrated in chapter two, women, in general, have rarely been addressed in the works of Preciado. In addition to “Rumbera,” whose main trait in treating the black or mulatto woman is one associated with hypersexuality, other representations of women of African descent prevalent in the works of Preciado are those that center on the nurturing role of black women.<sup>15</sup> Obviously, these earlier accounts of womanhood contributed to a legacy of feminine stereotyping and one-dimensional images of women of African descent. With “Cándida y la metáfora,” Preciado rejects the dehumanized stereotype of the black or mulatto woman as hypersexual, but simultaneously embraces an equally undesirable one. He appropriates a conventional metaphor that identifies

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<sup>14</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see chapter two, footnote 19.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of this topic, see chapter two, footnote 17.

woman with the earth. For the poet, it is nature that provides the most appropriate context for the aesthetic characterization of the black or mulatto woman. In the process, the poet positions himself within her world, so that, beyond the erotic interest she holds, she is united with him in a deeper bond deriving from their sexual encounter. By providing more direct revelations of the actors themselves, Preciado attempts to transform a rather complex and most often misunderstood human relationship.

Structurally speaking, “Cándida y la metáfora” is a self-referential work. It is a form of metadiscourse in which the creative process becomes the principal subject of the poetic text. “Cándida y la metáfora” is a poem about writing a poem. It is about a poet who is struggling to write. In effect, this poem is the articulation of his internal struggles, a quarrel with himself, out of which he illustrates the problem of male artists representing women in art.

There are two stories being told by the speaker / poet. The first story speaks to the female experience of a sexual union between a man and woman. More notably, it reflects upon a misunderstanding that has taken place between the poet and “Ella,” that is, Cándida. Overall, the poem is a metaphor that compares Cándida to Mother Earth. Although the poet does reproduce the stereotype of the sensual black or mulatto woman in the poem, he has also modified it. He links the black or mulatto woman’s sensuality less to erotic body signs and more to the pleasing sights, smells, products and sensations of the natural world. From a feminist viewpoint, the poet may, defensibly, be criticized for seeming to value the sensuality of women with nature’s productive forces. Yet, by inviting the reader to observe Cándida as she views and is viewed by

the poet, Preciado discloses other sides of the female personality. However, the poem is not entirely free of ambiguities. In effect, “Cándida y la metáfora” affords the reader a complex, romanticized, yet, still disturbing view of the love affairs of Afro-Latino men and women.

In the first part of the poem, the poet describes his position. He writes from a point of affective tension between his experiences and his reflection on those experiences. Although the sexual encounter between the poet and Cándida has already taken place, the poet reflects upon its aftermath. Both the poet and Cándida find themselves caught in a whirlwind of personal feelings and emotions. However, whereas the poet feels that Cándida has misunderstood his intentions, “Ella no comprendía...” (1), Cándida on the other hand, feels strong resentment towards the poet. When the poet, at the climax of his passion, sings the praises of the connection between Cándida and Mother Earth, Cándida becomes introspective and withdrawn:

Ella,  
sinceramente,  
nunca llegó a decírselo,  
nunca,  
nunca;  
pero lo cierto era  
que, muy a solas con sus sentimientos,  
secretamente se lo reprochaba. (2-9)

Beneath the silence, lies the disquieting truth of her unhappiness and unfulfilled desire: “que,

muy a solas con sentimientos, / secretamente se lo reprochaba” (8-9). Consequently, her reaction causes the poet to retrace his steps, his own past actions in order to comprehend the differences that exist between men and women regarding feminine sexuality.

Y en realidad no era que el poeta  
pretendía enlodarla con aquella metáfora  
que  
aunque siempre al oído casi se la rezaba,  
ella,  
sencillamente,  
con todo el cuerpo la malentendía,  
y,  
según el error,  
la salpicaba,  
y hasta visiblemente le ofendía  
esa intachable nitidez  
que, de pies a cabeza,  
con esmero y amor, le dedicaba... (10-23)

At this point of the poem, the poet is ambiguous to the many metaphors used to describe Cándida. He explores the present moment (Cándida’s reaction) but maintains connections to other moments of time such as remembering, memories and echoes of past actions. By reflecting

upon his own concerns regarding the problem of male artists in defining black or mulatto women's sexuality, Preciado expresses a critical awareness of how he is writing about the subject. For the poet, Cándida's silence speaks to her being at odds with the threatening images of black or mulatto women's sexuality in the imagination of the male poet. She is not satisfied with the role into which she has been forced. Conscious of the "female Black Other," Preciado examines the imaginary constructed around them. In the process, we are presented with a male perspective of a female character regarding representations of female sexuality.

The second story of the poem reflects upon the poet's process of signification regarding the metaphorical imagery used to describe Cándida. The particular medium expressed in "Cándida y la metáfora" takes the form of a confession in which the poet presents two separate discourses. On the one hand, the black or mulatto woman serves as a metaphorical vehicle for the poet to celebrate the importance of nature. Seen in this light, Cándida is associated with nature, and thus, Mother Earth. On the other hand, however, man, in this case, the poet, is attracted and aroused by his sight of the black and mulatto woman's sexual form through nature's sexual parable.

Ella nunca lo supo,  
nunca,  
nunca,  
pero si ese poeta,  
con ternura,

le susurraba que se parecía  
a tierra elemental, recién mojada,  
era por los poderes que emanaba,  
las colinas,  
los surcos,  
los vigores agrestes,  
su cálida humedad  
y, por entero,  
la plenitud que la naturaleza  
tan generosamente le rendía. (24-38).

Historically speaking, women in general have long been associated with nature. The earth was seen as a female with two identities: a virgin forest, untouched by man and awaiting exploitation as well as the bearer of life.<sup>16</sup> Not only did women encounter pressure to be submissive, but they also were discouraged to act upon their sexual desires and needs. Such controlling images of womanhood have served as cultural restraints. In “Cándida y la metáfora” Preciado uses these same traditional practices in his representation of feminine sexuality. He uses the nature-as-woman metaphor to explore his relationship with both nature and women.

Although Preciado metaphorically identifies Cándida with nature, what he is describing

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<sup>16</sup> According to Irvin Cemil Schick, European colonial discourse vacillates between positing black and indigenous women as ignorant, child-like, pure, submissive, welcoming and available as well as uncontrollable savages in need of domestication. Thus, both black and indigenous women’s bodies are symbolic for foreign and faraway lands waiting to be penetrated by white male conquerors (113).



is his relationship with nature through a representation of it as woman and thus he transposes his relationship with woman to his relationship with the world. For Preciado, Cándida symbolizes moist wet earth, “a tierra elemental, recién mojada” (30). Like nature, Cándida’s breasts “las colinas” (32), vagina “los surcos” (33), vestibule of the vagina “su cálida humedad” (35), that is, her entire body is the receptacle for all vital energies in their emerging, growing forms. Nature as Cándida is symbolic for vitality. Both represent the nourishing force that sustains life.

Eran las levaduras primordiales,  
eran las eclosiones prodigadas,  
eran los dones que desparramaba;  
era que desde el fondo provenía,  
y desde el mismo fondo se entregaba,  
y era que en los instantes jubilosos  
como que el mundo se desenterraba  
y,  
justo a flor de ella,  
el mundo, palpitando, se tendía,  
y era que ese era el mundo en que el poeta  
su más feliz metáfora plantaba. (39-50)

Through the identification of Cándida with nature’s productive forces, Preciado encapsulates both the concrete and the intangible aspects of women and nature. The poet associates Cándida’s

uterus with the uterus of the earth. As minerals, metals and grains ripen in the uterus of the earth, the reproduction of human life develops in the uterus of women. Because they sustain creation, women and nature are symbolic for fertility and reproduction. Seen in this light, it is considered unethical to exploit or to carry out violence against them. Thus, like Cándida, the earth is alive, sensitive and vulnerable.

It is not until the last stanza of the poem where the poet provides the reader with the first hint that “Cándida y la metáfora” is about the sexual union between a man and a woman. Although the vision of Cándida attracts the poet, he finds both nature and Cándida sensual. He invites Cándida to reflect back on her seductive nature, that is, to be a woman.

Ella no lo sabía,  
y nunca,  
nunca entendió que prodigio le brotaba  
ni el verdadero aroma que esparcía;  
pero,  
aun sin entenderlo, ella era tierra,  
y era que a sol y sombra él la sembraba,  
era que con sudores la regaba,  
y era que, ciertamente,  
¡florecía! (51-60)

Through his personification of the land as a woman, Preciado articulates two discourses

that he intends to be complementary, but that in fact compete with one another. In the case of nature, the poet sees man as the solution to nature and nature as the solution to man. They represent two fragmentary yet complementary opposites. One cannot live without the other. Man must partner with the land to create abundance and life. Thus, it is the role of the poet to recognize the wholeness inherent in nature. Their merger is humanity while their creation is poetry.

However, when the poet speaks to the situation of black or mulatto women, he sheds light into man's own personal struggle with women regarding their feminine sexuality. Rather than addressing the needs of women, the poet lays bare the discrepancy that exists between literary stereotypes and lived reality. In spite of presenting intimations of emotional engagement and interaction of the actors themselves, Preciado is more concerned here with literary rhetoric than lived reality. Though he does reflect the differences that exist between men and women, his account does not provide a complete picture of the situation of black or mulatto women. His affirmation of Cándida as Mother Earth upholds the black or mulatto woman's subaltern status as the "Other." In his depiction of the black or mulatto woman, the poet has passed over the more disquieting side of her experience, and takes comfort in the illusion that she, rather than the poet has misunderstood. Instead of presenting Cándida as a conscientious individual who has assumed the role as maker of her own image, Cándida's self image depends totally on the creative imaginations of the poet. Although the poet is not silent on the question of Cándida's contempt, he speaks less out of altruistic concern and more out of a desire to validate man's

virility. For the poet, it is through man whereby Cándida “¡florecía!” Thus, while the poet may be earnest in his praise of Cándida’s beauty, he is equally emphatic in his denial of Cándida as a human subject capable of commenting on her present situation.

Whether it is giving a voice to the voiceless, commemorating the impact art has had on the silent voices of oppression, or questioning the representation of the historically muted subject of the subaltern black or mulatto woman, Preciado in “Genio y figura” continues to re-enforce contested identities, voices and spaces that symbolize that wider community of exclusion. In “Genio y figura” the poet writes about whether or not one’s sense of self will survive one’s death or rather one’s survival is contingent upon the labels that one has come to associate with one’s identity. In anticipating life in the hereafter, the poet reflects on the genuineness and originality of his own personal self. While many of the predicaments that the poet enters into are in relation to the identity he has made for himself, this poem gives readers the opportunity to see how individuals negotiate, negate, question and finally, confront the most ultimate questions of one’s existence, such as that which gives meaning to life in all of its complexities.

In *De ahora en adelante*, “Genio y figura” is one of three poems that make up the collection’s third division of poetry, *Jugando a las eternas escondidas*. As the subtitle suggests, these poems explore beliefs about afterlives and the meaning of death. While the concept of death in the first poem of the collection, “Impaciencia,” demonstrates that prolonged mourning at the expense of the living is inappropriate, especially in light of the transition from one world to the next, as illustrated in “Idilio muerto,” “Genio y figura,” calls our attention to an internal

struggle raging inside the poet. Taken from the saying, “genio y figura hasta la sepultura,” this conflict reflects the poet’s struggle with his inner and outer selves. Although the poet understands the context of the axiom (people cannot change who they are), he also understands the constitution of man, that is, of being double. There are two distinct sides to man. On the one hand, man has a side of self which reflects those characteristics of a person that make him unique. They disclose his personal values, opinions, preferences and lifestyle choices. The other side of man refers to his social identity, such as his gender, racial, religious, political, ideological and national group membership. In “Genio y figura,” the poet examines how the development of one’s self involves the personal and social processes of definition, construction and negotiation. Seen in this light, the development of one’s sense of self, therefore, reflects the formation of one’s own philosophy on life. Not only is it connected to how people think about themselves, but also how they decide which aspects of the self are most important.

At the outset of the poem, the poet makes the distinction between his conscious self “I” and his body. He presents both as possessing an awareness of self as two-fold. At the same time, he brings forth still another component of self of an utterly different kind and quality, his soul. For the poet, there is something in man, whether it is an intuition, a subconscious certainty, or something more elusive and undefinable that leads the majority of humanity to question the survival of the individual spirit, the soul, the personality or simply the consciousness after physical death. While it is the poet’s body that first articulates concern regarding life in the hereafter for this spiritual being, this preoccupation causes the conscious self “I” to consider the

pervasiveness of identity-related issues. In the process, the poet wonders whether or not it is true what they say: “de tal palo tal astilla” (23), implying, as is the father, so is the son, and in turn, as is the conscious self, so is the soul.

Acaso, por respeto,  
por consideración,  
o lo que sea,  
creo haberlo pensado  
como uno a veces piensa,  
como quien no se atreve,  
medio de refilón,  
medio en secreto;  
pero,  
de todos modos,  
el caso es que hace tiempo  
me viene preocupando mi cadáver,  
y ahora,  
viéndolo bien,  
o,  
mejor dicho, viéndome,  
tal como finalmente debo verme,

con un cabal,  
sincero  
e inevitable reconocimiento;  
y si, por lo demás,  
como me late,  
eso que “de tal palo tal astilla”,  
justo después,  
y con dedicatoria,  
puede salirme cierto, (1-26)

Of the many questions about life and existence in general, the poet considers the matter of life after death. He wonders whether or not his soul will live on after the death of his body. If life does in fact continue after death, then, the question arises as to whether or not the poet's inner and outer selves will remain intact once his body passes on to that most elusive and spiritual place. In hypothesizing about his spiritual self, the poet considers all the possibilities available to him.

At this point of the poem, a second part begins. Once dead, the poet, by means of an interior monologue, reflects upon eternity, life in the hereafter. At death, the soul is separated from the “cadáver” and passes on to the next stage of existence, his new life, the afterlife. Not only does the poet's vision of the afterlife reflect his life here on earth, but also his own sense of self. Whereas on the one hand, this section demonstrates the longing the poet has for a better

world, on the other hand, it also illustrates the poet's quest for immortality. More importantly, it exemplifies his need to leave a part of himself for all of eternity. This imaginative voyage that the poet takes in the poem from one place to a more appealing one is directly influenced by his personal experiences, feelings, emotions and desires, especially in the context of his Afroecuadorian roots. From the perspective of the poet, life after death reflects his ancestors, the living dead. Moreover, it is a source of history. Not only does it reflect collective and cultural-specific experiences, but it also provides unique insight into the poet's personal values, opinions, preferences and lifestyle choices:

sería de esperar que a mi cadáver  
le dé no solamente por quererme,  
por recordarme,  
por saberme de cerca,  
sino que francamente  
se salga de esa inmóvil compostura,  
y ande por todas partes,  
hable con otros muertos,  
converse con el Che sobre las cosas  
que en su ausencia pasaron,  
se vuelva popular,  
reparta abrazos,



beba cerveza sin helar,  
orine,  
baile, por alegría, mis guarachas,  
cante, por añoranza, mis boleros;  
y,  
para que la historia se repita  
como manda el destino  
y saben de memoria los recuerdos,  
mi cadáver persista,  
y, sin ningún olvido,  
lo siga haciendo todo como en los viejos tiempos. (27-49)

In effect, the poet would like his spiritual self to sustain both his personal past and collective life experiences.<sup>17</sup>

Although the poet provides a sense of coherence about who he is, he still ponders whether or not his spiritual being will bear any physical continuity or causal relation to the one possessed before his death. In the process, Preciado explores his own thoughts, and thoroughly examines his individual beliefs about himself, including the most basic part of his existential self: this sense of being separate and distinct from others. For the poet, it is this existential self,

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<sup>17</sup> According to Hall, there are two aspects of cultural identity. First, there are the experiences that can be considered collective or shared by most in the group. Thus, there is a kind of group identity. The second aspect reflects the more specific or particular experiences that reaffirm everyone's uniqueness and singularity ("Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 223-25.)

or as Manuel Zapata Olivella has suggested, this idiosyncratic aspect of self, that the poet finds most compelling in defining his own personal self. Not only is it representative of the poet's "temperamento propio," namely his individual peculiarities, but also it reflects that part of the poet's self which as Manuel Zapata has asserted: "jamás podrá enajenarse."<sup>18</sup>

Tal como me conozco,  
mi gran preocupación es que lo expulsen,  
que lo echen de la muerte sin ningún miramiento  
por constantes delitos,  
por grave falta de recogimiento,  
porque,  
viéndolo bien,  
tal como finalmente debo verlo,  
en realidad,  
¿qué tumbo tomaría?,  
pues resulta imposible regresar,  
y aun si regresara yo ya estaría lejos;  
¿a dónde iría a parar,

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<sup>18</sup> In *La rebelión de los genes*, Zapata Olivella makes the distinction between idiosyncrasy and identity. According to Zapata Olivella, "La idiosincrasia es inalienable (etimológicamente significa 'temperamento propio'—por tanto inalienable—), hereda y determina la naturaleza del ser. La identidad es un concepto abstracto del ser, que puede cuestionarse, hipotecarse, venderse y negociarse. Hay quienes se preguntan si existe o no una cultura latinoamericana para negarla. En cambio, la idiosincrasia jamás podrá enajenarse: 'Genio y figura hasta la sepultura'" (13).

qué puerta le abrirían,  
en que otra eternidad recalaría  
con esa inocultable franqueza de estar vivo,  
fiel a su vocación definitiva  
de llevar desde acá todo aprendido  
para seguir, con pasos prevenidos,  
por todo el más allá  
mi mal ejemplo? (50-70)

Whether it is in reference to his “constantes delitos,” his “grave falta,” “esa inocultable franqueza de estar vivo,” or even his “mal ejemplo,” as the poet suggests, it is his idiosyncratic aspect of self that best encompasses the way he sees or defines himself and the network of values and convictions that have structured his life: “tal como finalmente debo verlo.” According to the poet, however, with this desire for establishing and determining one’s individuality and uniqueness comes greater difficulty, choice and effort in achieving this when he also suggests:

¿qué tumbo tomaría?,  
pues resulta imposible regresar,  
y aun si regresara yo ya estaría lejos;  
¿a dónde iría a parar,  
qué puerta le abrirían,

From the perspective of the poet, as life here on earth, this struggle between one’s inner and

outer selves will be sustained long into eternity. However, knowing himself as he does, “Tal como me conozco,” as the conscious self, this spiritual self will also follow the same path as the poet. Nevertheless, it is the fear of the poet that his outer self will obscure and deny the idiosyncratic side of his spiritual self when he suggests:

mi gran preocupación es que lo expulsen,  
que lo echen de la muerte sin ningún miramiento  
por constantes delitos,  
por grave falta de recogimiento, (51-54)

Thus, while the poet is certain that both his personal and social aspects of self will survive the death of his body, he is also cognizant that individuality defines a unitary and continuous awareness of who one is. In the end, individuality is essential to the cultivation of one’s sense of self and in turn, one’s sense of well-being, namely, that each individual person has his or her own potentialities worthy of attention.

Similar to “Genio y figura,” the collection’s fifth division of poetry, *En primera persona* also reflects the poet’s commitment to the recreation and the exploration of his own personal identity. Taken as a whole, these six poems explore the enlightening but often complex interaction and competition between the personal and collective levels of self. Rather than trying to decide whether the individual self or the collective self is more important, however, Preciado chooses to examine the conditions under which one is likely to take precedence over the other, and with what effect. In the process, he explores how the past, the reality of diverse and ever-

changing historical, cultural, social and personal experiences informs the present understanding of one's own selfhood.

As the subtitle suggests, *En primera persona*, reflects the poet's personal point of view regarding the construction of his individual sense of self. Similar to *Jugando a las eternas escondidas*, it is the intertext "Hombre común" taken from *Hombre común y otros poemas* (1979) by the Brazilian poet, playwright and essayist Ferreira Gullar (1930) that enables a deeper understanding of the collection's poetic texts. Generally speaking, "Hombre común" explores the multiple dimensions of man's identity. Where on the one hand, the poet provides a definable enumeration of the multiple aspects of his identity (he is "brasileño, mayor, casado, reservista" (29), as well as "poeta" (33)), on the other hand, his sense of self reveals a collective sense of belonging. This sense of one-ness that the poet shares with others is his personal choice to associate with the common man. By identifying first and foremost as "un hombre común"(1), the poet is identifying himself with the oppression, ostracism and plight of the weak, the poor and those whose lives are made bitter by having to bear heavier burdens than rightfully corresponds to them.

Soy un hombre común

de carne y de memoria

de hueso y olvido. (1-3)

Estoy, como vos,

hecho de cosas recordadas  
y olvidadas (11-13)

It is the poet's distinctive repositioning of self that reflects both an inner independent identity of stable uniqueness from others and a sense of affiliation with the subjugated and disenfranchised population as a whole. More importantly, it represents a more diverse concept of identity. By manifesting the many in one, the poet acknowledges a diversity of self and an awareness of the collective shared experiences of imperialism.

Hombre común, igual  
a vos,  
cruzo la Avenida bajo la presión del imperialismo. (48-50)

La sombra del latifundio

mancha el paisaje.  
turba las aguas del mar  
y la infancia nos vuelve  
a la boca, amarga,  
sucia de fango y de hambre. (51-56)

As the common man, the poet too has suffered the bitterness of imperialist society. Greed for corporate expansion has not only corrupted society but also has caused exploitation. By identifying with the common man, the poet creates a collective sense of belonging. For the poet,

it is this solidarity, this shared oppression that makes common struggle and resistance possible.

Pero somos muchos millones de hombres

comunes

y podemos formar una muralla

con nuestros cuerpos de sueño y

[margaritas. (57-61)

Only through the identification or construction of a collective identity will the colonized people of the world be able to overcome marginalization, economic exploitation and bring about societal changes. Ultimately, solidarity through the identification with oppression seeks to reframe the brokenness caused by the denial of humanity into a community based on reciprocal respect and regard. It is that common struggle of resistance without the suppression of the real heterogeneity of interests and identities that forms the basis of *En primera persona*.

In *En primera persona*, Preciado explores the dilemmas of modern personhood. As the title suggests, *En primera persona* is a form of self-analysis: it reflects the poet's incessant struggle with the multiple dimensions of his identity.<sup>19</sup> Not only does the poet find himself

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<sup>19</sup> As many academic scholars and writers have noted, the development of multiple aspects of identity, more importantly, a black identity, within a repressive societal context characterized by a white and / or a white-mestizo hegemonic culture presents psychosocial identity challenges for Blacks. According to W.E.B Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and Frantz Fanon's work regarding the psychic pathology generated by the situation of the colonized subject in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and later, his notion of inferiority on the Black psyche in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Blacks are more or less forced to view themselves through the negative perceptions of white cultural reality. Accordingly, Blacks struggle between contending constructs of identity: their own sense of self based on their customs and the sources upon which they were founded and their distorted view of self based on the misrepresentations from the outside world.

caught amidst multiple cultures and identities (e.g. he is Ecuadorian, Black and Latin American), but he is also a black poet facing a multiplicity of uncertainties advocated by white hegemony. He lives in a world that historically speaking has evoked and enforced hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony and the dismissive Othering of people like himself. Thus, the poet has to contend with the demands of society where the “Other” is continuously discriminated against in the name of *mestizaje* and racial democracy while, paradoxically, the affirmation of blackness is denounced as separatist and even racist. In effect, *En primera persona* demonstrates the poet’s personal attempt at resolving the conflict he endures when confronted with opposing ideologies of racial and cultural identity.

The first poem of the collection, “Yo y mi sombra,” is about the poet’s recognition and then acceptance of himself in a world of confusing norms and ideologies. The confusion that Preciado encounters is due to his cultural self-identification as Latin American / Ecuadorian, a socially imposed identity, and his affirmation of blackness. Whereas on the one hand, the poet realizes that the inclination to assimilate, especially in terms of one’s Latin American / Ecuadorian heritage of *mestizaje* and racial democracy, supposes an awareness of commitment, closeness, or emotional attachment for people that share a similar heritage, on the other hand he is aware of how such hegemonic projects of national and cultural imagery are filled with constructed meanings that are in need of constant decoding and interrogation. As it is, *mestizaje* and racial democracy have often been a conversation about *blanqueamiento*, or the reclaiming of whiteness. However, this idea reflects those of many Latin Americans and Ecuadorians who are



more interested in nationalist or cultural homogeneity rather than racial and pluricultural identities. Such ideas are flawed largely because they assume that ethnic communities will adopt, to some extent, a more Latin American / Ecuadorian identity and thereby suppress cultural differences in order to put forth an image of national and cultural unity. Within the context of Latin America and Ecuador, racial and cultural difference contrasts sharply with Latin American and Ecuadorian concepts of racial amalgamation and racial homogeneity. Furthermore, racial prejudice and discrimination continue to be significant for Blacks throughout Latin America and Ecuador, in particular. To be called Black in Ecuador is generally demeaning. Within the text “Yo y mi sombra,” not only does Preciado represent a more diverse conception of Latin American and Ecuadorian identity, but more importantly, he attempts to bridge a space in between by adopting both a racial and cultural identity: Black, Latin American and Ecuadorian.

Similar to “Genio y figura,” “Yo y mi sombra” also explores the intuitive and psychological confusing nature of mankind to be twofold. This state of double-consciousness reflects the poet’s ever-present conflict between his inner and outer selves, that is, the on-going struggle between the poet’s “cuerpo” (53) and his “Sombra” (50). By means of an interior monologue, the poet enacts both his own personal struggle and the struggle of Blacks in their search for identity.

Por cierto,  
si te fueras,  
me quedaría solo,

y no habría en el mundo soledad más completa.

Lo digo por que pienso [sic]

que pudieras cansarte de ser como yo soy,

o que tal vez descubras

que vamos a pasar sobre nuevos abismos,

y a lo mejor entonces te dé miedo,

de aquí para adelante,

seguirme la carrera. (1-11)

Desirous of bringing about the reconciliation of a Latin American / Ecuadorian cultural, racial and ethnic identity, the poet's identity represents complementary traits that interact within a greater whole. While the "cuerpo" of the poet is the physical embodiment of the self, his "Sombra" serves as a metaphor for the mental colonization from which people of African descent have suffered historically. These two selves are what both Du Bois and Fanon refer to as two conflicting identities.<sup>20</sup> They reflect the tension between the poet's true sense of self (Black)

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<sup>20</sup> Du Bois describes double-consciousness as follows: "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, 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. It is a particular sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (9). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon shows how Du Bois' theory of double-consciousness is also a condition of colonized people when he writes, " 'I speak as a Senegalese and as a Frenchman... ' 'I speak as an Algerian and as a Frenchman... ' The intellectual who is Arab and French, or Nigerian and English, when he comes up against the need to take on two nationalities, chooses, if he wants to remain true to himself, the negation of one of these determinations. But most often, since they cannot or will not make a choice, such intellectuals gather together all the historical determining factors which have conditioned them and take up a fundamentally 'universal standpoint'" (218).

and a socially imposed racial and cultural identity (Latin American / Ecuadorian / white and / or white-mestizo). Furthermore, they demonstrate to what extent Blacks must struggle to sustain a sense of wholeness in a repressive culture dominated by whiteness:

que pudieras cansarte de ser como yo soy,  
o que tal vez descubras  
que vamos a pasar sobre nuevos abismos,  
y a lo mejor entonces te dé miedo, (6-9)

This confusion leads the poet to reflect upon his life in hopes of better understanding the dynamics of race in Latin America / Ecuador as well as reconciling his conflicted identity.

Atrás,  
tú bien lo sabes,  
queda un largo camino  
que has andado conmigo  
como mi inseparable compañera,  
has leído mis libros,  
has bebido mi vino,  
has comido a mi mesa;  
en fin,  
has hecho innumerables cosas mías,  
como ésta,

tan no sé cómo decirte,  
de pasarte mis noches,  
noches,  
noches,  
escribiendo poemas. (12-27)

In the second stanza the poet emphasizes how both his inner and outer selves are interconnected. According to the poet, this outer self is “como mi inseparable compañera” (16). Thus, like his inner self, the poet’s outer self has also experienced the life of the poet:

has leído mis libros,  
has bebido mi vino,  
has comido a mi mesa;  
en fin,  
has hecho innumerables cosas mías, (17-21)

Whereas the first half of the poem demonstrates the poet’s awareness of the complementariness that exists between his inner and outer selves, it is in the second half of the poem where the poet demonstrates a stage of racial consciousness and takes custodianship of the black experience and his own personal identity. It is here where his double-consciousness and notion of inferiority (following Du Bois and Fanon) become a form of insight. Blacks want to be like the dominant white society that they see surrounding their black culture.

A veces se me ocurre

que bien pudo gustarte vivir algo otra vida,  
por ejemplo,  
ser blanca,  
hacer cosas distintas,  
oír música suave,  
y no andar alelada al son de mis tambores  
desde que eras pequeña,  
volverte contra mí,  
ser anticomunista,  
y acaso recién ir  
cuando yo, en cambio,  
ya estaba de regreso;  
pero no,  
si hasta en mis malos ratos  
siempre estuvo,  
flaca,  
comprometida,  
al lado de mis culpas,  
tu leal inocencia. (28-47)

Although the poet is aware of the demands of Latin American and Ecuadorian society for

Blacks to culturally identify as white, he is also cognizant of how social forces impact and control identity formation. In a society that embraces and institutionalizes such projects of national identity as *mestizaje* and / or racial democracy, Blacks are pressured to assimilate and adopt the main design of the dominant culture. Within the context of the verses just cited, the poet reflects upon how pressure to assimilate dominant identities contrasts sharply with his concept of blackness.

It is in the final stanza of the poem where the poet redefines himself on his own terms. However, rather than representing the complexity of multiple identities as a simple, binary opposition as white or Black, Preciado embraces both his Latin American / Ecuadorian heritage and his black racial identity. By accepting his blackness, Preciado does not claim that Blacks can or should forget how they have been racially framed as the inferior / illegitimate “Other” by whites. Rather he maintains that Blacks should not be limited to that outside perspective. Within the context of the poem, Preciado underscores the role his “Sombra” plays in the reconciliation of his Latin American / Ecuadorian and racial and ethnic identity.

Definitivamente,

tú vales mucho más de lo que pesas.

Sombra mía,

sopórtame,

no me falles jamás:

¡yo soy tu cuerpo! (48-53)

Rather than selecting only one aspect of his identity as central to his being, rather than privileging one identity over another, Preciado chooses to find the positiveness in both his Latin American / Ecuadorian and black racial identities. What comes from this encounter between his inner and outer self is the merging of two positive meanings of being both Black and Latin American / Ecuadorian within a Latin American / Ecuadorian national context.

In “Yo y mis pasos,” the last poem of *En primera persona*, Preciado continues to address questions of choice in racial identity by setting out to discover and redefine self, while at the same time, attempting to redefine and valorize blackness within the national imaginary. Although as a whole the six poems in *En primera persona* provide insight into the poet’s reconceptualization of blackness, it is in “Yo y mis pasos” where Preciado enacts his blackness as a writer. As Preciado sees it, it is the role of the artist to form clear messages that will help forge a new consciousness of racial identity. Given the devastating effects of Conquest, slavery, colonization, constructed ideologies of national identity such as *mestizaje* and / or racial democracy, neoliberalism and globalization, Preciado in “Yo y mi sombra” demonstrates how such historical, political and economic processes have lead to the dislocation of Blacks from their past and to their invisibility in the dominant culture. In the process, he emphasizes the need to look at the ways in which both hegemonic and peripheral discourse is framed. This recognition of blackness as a complex concept is an opportunity for him as a writer to express, recognize and question specific sets of ideas or values surrounding hypothetical notions of an “authentic” black experience and in turn, an “authentic” black identity.

In “Yo y mis pasos,” Preciado illustrates how his identity as well as his writing forms part of knowing, becoming and valuing blackness. Whereas in the first half of the stanza the poet reflects upon the formation of his own personal identity, being Black, the second half of the stanza addresses how the poet’s identity is relevant to his writing. For the poet, living in blackness possesses important human attributes that go hand in hand with the act of making literature, the act of forming a consciousness, and a genuine interest in the means of producing, reproducing, distributing and interpreting that consciousness.

Pues

voy a continuar en esta andanza,

y,

decididamente,

por dentro, he estado todo yo de pie,

sin moverme un instante de mi ser,

para que, así dispuesto,

con toda la certeza de este mundo,

en cualquier multitud me reencontraran,

al venir otra vez

siguiéndose,

pisada tras pisada,

abriéndose camino hasta estos versos,



zanqueando sin cesar todo este tiempo,  
desde las lejanías de mi infancia. (1-15)

For the poet, blackness is not simply about genetics. It is representative of a concrete awareness of historical lived experiences. Thus, to live in blackness, to become Black speaks to how the creation of self, the recognition of self and self-knowledge comes from within, namely, “desde las lejanías de mi infancia” (15). Finally, whether it is in reference to his “pasos,” as indicated in the title, or in this case, his “pisadas,” (12) as with his identity, his writing also reflects an ever-present black consciousness.

While in the first stanza the poet presents an immutable sense of himself, the second stanza speaks to the poet’s identity as a writer. Within the first few lines, Preciado explores the tributary streams of culture, history and experience which have endowed him with the material out of which to write: “Y antes que nada, quiero / dar las gracias a todos por lo que han caminado.” (16-17). Simply put, Preciado is beholden to his past; he is indebted to those that have gone before him. They provided the poet with a sense of identity and a historical awareness. This ancestral influence of negritude is a call to which the poet answers in the form of a political, social, and creative consciousness.

Within the remaining stanza, it is the call of the poet whose voice reverberates knowledge about blackness and existence:

Pero también tenemos  
que reanudar ahora

y aquí mismo la marcha,  
sin que me pongan peros,  
sin que se me distraigan,  
o alguien consiga atarlos a la idea  
de que, a partir de ahora,  
lo que más les importa,  
es definir,  
de golpe y para siempre,  
que el pasado es pisado;  
que atrochando conmigo  
en todo este azaroso recorrido,  
únicamente se han desperdiciado,  
que más les vale un rumbo diferente;  
que hay mejores caminos,  
por lo que yo jamás lo he llevado. (16-34)

The awakening of a consciousness, namely, the knowing of blackness is fueled and sustained in large part by the actions, activisms and writings of other kindred spirits. Preciado urges others to act, to make a decision to follow him as he has followed others to participate in correcting actions deemed to have transgressed Blacks. For the poet, to grow up Black, that is, to grow up dominated by hegemonic discourses and narratives that preceded one's consciousness is to risk

having one's own histories, stories, experiences and identities displaced. Therefore, he insists that part of what it means to liberate, embody and assert one's Afro self is found in avoiding the alienation engendered by imposed discourses of culture and identity. Based on that belief, he challenges Blacks to stand firm against outside pressures and forces when he comments:

sin que me pongan peros,  
sin que se me distraigan,  
o alguien consiga atarlos a la idea  
de que, a partir de ahora,  
lo que más les importa  
es definir,  
de golpe y para siempre,  
que el pasado es pisado; (21-28)

However, at the same time, the poet is still aware of the trappings of contemporary identity discourse from the periphery that uses blackness as an ontological symbol for whiteness which has the tendency to distort, misrepresent, alienate and limit one's subjectivity. What Preciado is referring to is what religious critic Victor Anderson posits as "ontological blackness." In *Beyond Ontological Blackness*, Anderson notes how "ontological blackness" has inadvertently enforced forms of essentialism that emphasize the antithesis between two worlds: white and its alleged racial and social polar opposite, Black. Where the latter identity labels one a problem, to be ignored, pitied, or stigmatized, the former identity serves as a constant reminder of a legacy of

exclusion and oppression. In other words, if one chooses whiteness, then he denies himself the possibility of wholeness, yet, if one chooses blackness over whiteness he is bound by unresolved binary dialects, such as Black and white and by extension, insider and outsider.<sup>21</sup>

On numerous occasions Preciado has cautioned against dwelling upon heritage and past abuses which separates Blacks from the rest of society and consequentially, one's "cultural fulfillment" (Anderson 27, 49).<sup>22</sup> Thus, for the poet, there is a need to move past the limiting flaws of "ontological blackness" when he suggests: "que más les vale un rumbo diferente" (32) or "que hay mejores caminos" (33).<sup>23</sup> Of interest here is not an essentialist perception of black

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson uses "ontological blackness" as an umbrella term that examines the way that racial discourse operates rhetorically in African American culture and religious thought. For Anderson, the conscious life of the black experience is bound by unresolved binary dialectics such as slavery and freedom and struggle and survival. Seen in this light, blackness is still dependent on whiteness (suffering, resistance, survival) and is thus limited. As Anderson suggests, the black individual still "remains an alienated being whose mode of existence is determined by crisis, struggle, resistance and survival—not thriving, flourishing, or fulfillment" (87). Not only is black self-identity "bound by white racism and the culture of survival" (87), but also "black existence is without the possibility of transcendence from the blackness that whiteness created" (92). According to Anderson, "the motive of transcendence from this unresolved matrix of struggle and survival recedes into the background as oppression is required for the self-disclosure of the oppressed" (87).

<sup>22</sup> According to Anderson, "Cultural fulfillment is the reflexive integration of basic human needs and subjective goods. It involves the satisfaction of categorical goods that human beings minimally require for maintaining biological life (life, safety, work, leisure, knowledge, and the like). It also involves the satisfaction of subjective goods (friendship, peace of mind, integrity of conscience, and spiritual meaning) that individuals require for alleviating subjective alienation, assuring subjective equilibrium, and realizing positive personalities. Fulfillment of such needs and goods motivates the cultural activities of persons within society" (49).

<sup>23</sup> Besides embracing a reactionary black self-identity as radically oppositional to white, "ontological blackness" also connotes black collective life as one that is synonymous with "the cult of black heroic genius" and its orthodox activities and attitudes (Anderson 13). For Anderson, the word "cult" points to the "dispositions of devotion, loyalty, and admiration for racial categories and the essentialized principles that determine black identity," while "black heroic genius" refers to "the exceptional, sometimes essentialized cultural qualities, that positively represent the racial group in the action of at least one of the group's members" (13). As Anderson suggests, "the need among African Americans to promote a positive racial community has too often taken binary dialectical formation against individuality. In the dialectic of community and individuality, where community is totalized, blacks who pursue goods that contribute to their fulfillment as individuals (whether selecting marriage partners,

identity, but rather the concretization of a certain sense of blackness promoted from within.<sup>24</sup>

Hence, what he is suggesting is the recognition of blackness that acknowledges the impact of blackness on Afro-descendant subjects (e.g., oppression), but as only one of the many factors affecting subjectivity. This position taken by Preciado would not only include the various forms of oppression, but it would also protect one's individuality and one's personal quest for "cultural fulfillment."

Like identity, then, life is not binary—black and white—or communal at the expense of individual lifestyle choices, desires or rights. Nevertheless, this questioning of all racial discourses and cultural idolatry, represent critical steps in the construction of consciousness-raising. For the poet, consciousness-raising is central to the process of creating a critical awareness of the Afro self; it is a way to address blacks' negative self-concepts, divisions between Blacks, and to counter persuasive social forces resistant to ideas of blackness and the rights of Blacks.

In the third stanza, Preciado attempts to conceptualize, explore and understand the sources of self, namely, how Blacks have been able to maintain a sense of an Afro self despite being marked by the particularities of the coloniality of power, knowledge and being. According to the poet, the return to an ancestral past is one way for Blacks to regain what was lost. The

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exercising the freedom of movement, acting on gay and lesbian preferences, or choosing political parties) often find themselves ostracized and their cultural fulfillment repressed by an ontological blackness" (16-17).

<sup>24</sup> According to Anthony B. Pinn, "Essentialism is oppressive because it seeks to falsely restrict being / identity to a narrow range of options—to objectify the body or body collective in such a way as to render its signification relegated to its one dimensionality as an instrument of others enjoyment or abuse" (50).

implication is that remembering your ancestors is crucial to an awareness of self. Within this context, an ancestral past re-calls as well as re-confirms the existence of Blacks, and thus, the existence of the poet.

Empero,  
el porvenir  
viene tirando desde muy atrás,  
desde donde,  
a la vez,  
también, venimos,  
y ahora que de nuevo nos rebasa  
y nos vuelve a llamar con sus fulgores,  
mientras,  
como hasta aquí,  
esté yo convencido de que debo  
ir tenazmente a pie por mi existencia,  
he de obligarlos a seguir tras ellos,  
aunque haya que empujarlos a patadas. (35-48)

For the poet, the return to an ancestral past is a crucial element for survival. Not only does an ancestral past connect past, present and future into one, but also it connects the ancestors in the past to real descendants in the future, binds them and thus assures that a subjectivity exists even

when this existence has been denied.

What is of interest here, however, is not the return to Africa, but rather the recovery of an ‘other’ thought. This ‘other’ thought is representative of a collective consciousness whose foundation is found in ancestrality. According to Walsh and León, to speak of an ‘other’ thought is to speak of “an attitude, and a collective consciousness of thinking aimed at reconstructing existence, freedom, and liberty in the present but in conversation with the ancestors” (219).<sup>25</sup> Thus, it is in the reconstruction of this ‘other’ thought that Preciado turns not only to the ancestors who continue to pass on their ancestral thoughts, epistemologies and philosophies, but also to the thinkers whose knowledge has been transmitted in both oral and written form.

The fourth stanza of the poem clearly sets the tone for the emergence of blackness with its genesis in ancestrality. For the poet, ancestrality is the central unifying element for the discovery of blackness among people of the Diaspora. It is constitutive of the alliances among peoples of African origin from whatever place, and alliances among their philosophies and their ‘other’ thought. At the heart, is a spiritual unity of action, projects, thoughts and knowledge conceived from within and connected to struggles of existence that have ancestral memories in common.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> This ‘other’ thought is what both Walsh and León refer to as “cimarrón thought.” For further discussion of this topic, see Walsh and León 219-20 and Walsh, in “‘Other’ Knowledges, ‘Other’ Critiques: Reflections on the Politics and Practices of Philosophy and Decoloniality in the ‘Other’ America,” 19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Seen in this light, ancestrality allows for an imaginary cohesiveness with Africa. This interconnectedness with Africa, however, is not based on a direct related experience or memory, but rather as a lived philosophy and collective ancestral memory or as Hall suggests, a retelling of the past: “The past continues to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple, factual ‘past’, since our relation to it, like the child’s relation to the mother, is

As illustrated throughout *De ahora en adelante*, in “Yo y mis pasos” Preciado continues to assimilate the literary works from both past and present literary masters from the Andean region, Latin America and elsewhere. In “Yo y mis pasos” Preciado makes reference to Manuel Zapata Olivella’s epic novel-narrative *Changó, el gran putas*. In fact, Zapata Olivella’s work provides the interpretative context and the cultural setting for the fourth stanza of the poem.

HIJOS DE LA GRANDiosa y trajinada vida,  
hijos de PUro esfuerzo,  
hijos de paTAs, cumplan,  
que, pese a resbalones y tropiezos,  
han de avanzar conmigo todavía,  
se van a levantar de las caídas,  
y no los dejaré quedarse quietos,  
ni rezagarse,  
menos descarriarse,  
aliándose con malas compañías  
que se les trepen  
y los hagan seguir,  
a pie juntillas,  
por donde cada vez quieran que vayan,

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always —already 'after the break'. It is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 226).



y que,  
después del uso  
y el abuso,  
los dejen por ahí,  
muy mal parados,  
cuando les dé la regalada gana. (36-55)

The manner in which the reader is presented with the myth of Changó is through Preciado's use of capitalization. His irregular capitalization within the first three lines spell out the deity who lends his name to the title of Zapata Olivella's novel. Out of all the possible options Preciado might have made, there are some very sound reasons for his selection of Zapata Olivella's *Changó, el gran putas* as the mythological construction of the African Diaspora in the Americas and beyond. Not only does Zapata Olivella's work suggest the mythological, religious and historical vision of Yoruban cosmogony and culture for the literary remaking of the world,<sup>27</sup> but it also serves as an excellent example of the functionality of ancestry.<sup>28</sup>

As a point of departure, it is crucial to comprehend the connotation of the divine figure, Changó, as Zapata Olivella imagined him. The African deity Changó is the son of Yemayá and

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<sup>27</sup> According to Whitten and Torres, from the Pacific lowlands of both Colombia and Ecuador, to Brazil, Haiti, Cuba and Puerto Rico, the emergence of a marked oppositional subversion of racial and ethnic power has often taken place within the mythical and religious contextual framework of two entities drawn from Yoruba African deities: Ogún and Shangó (50-53).

<sup>28</sup> Ancestrality, and in turn the ancestors is based on the notion that even in death the ancestors still live on and thus, continue to contribute today to Afro-descendant thought and knowledge. For Walsh, this concept of the ancestral is best exemplified in Zapata Olivella's novel *Changó, el gran putas* ("'Other' Knowledges, 'Other' Critiques: Reflections on the Politics and Practices of Philosophy and Decoloniality in the 'Other' America," 25).

Orungán who gave birth to fourteen of the most significant gods of the Yoruba faith. As an appendage to the work itself, Zapata Olivella provides a rather lengthy “cuaderno de bitácora” that serves as a vehicle for maneuvering through the text’s mythos. Within this appendix, Changó is described in the following manner:

En la mitología yoruba, hijo de  
Yemayá and Orungán. Fue el tercer  
soberano del estado imperial de Oyo,  
cuyo capital, Ife, ubicada en las  
cercanías del Níger, fue cuna de  
los Orichas creadores del mundo.  
La vida y hazañas de Changó se  
confunden en la mitología de Africa  
y América donde se le venera como al  
Dios de la guerra, la fecundidad y  
la danza. En la sincretización con  
los santos católicos se le identifica  
con Santa Bárbara. (Zapata Olivella 735) <sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Similar to Zapata Olivella’s “cuaderno de bitácora,” Preciado’s next collection of poetry, *Jututo* (1995), also provides an addendum that serves as a compass for navigating the poetic text’s mythology. Within this appendix, Changó is described as the “Dios de la guerra, los rayos, el fuego y las tempestades” (96). In the syncretization with Catholic Saints, as Zapata Olivella, Preciado also identifies Changó with “Santa Bárbara” (96). In addition to a list of Yoruba divinities and their corresponding Catholic Saints, Preciado also includes their respective colors. As suggested by Preciado, Changó is associated with the colors: red and white (96). Whereas red “is a sign of war and

Despite Zapata Olivella's reference to Changó as African origin, however, the Changó that is written about in *Changó, el gran putas* is in fact not African, but rather African-American.

According to Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo:

Once the deity transcends the ocean he is no longer, strictly speaking, African or even Yoruba. In fact, the Atlantic Ocean, as presented in the text, constitutes a metaphorical birth water for the infant Muntu, who arrives onto the shore of the Americas. It is a new coming into existence that transforms the New World black into an American (*The Culture of Fiction* 137).

Seen in this light, Changó then is not merely an extension of Africa across the Atlantic, but rather a New World phenomenon. For Preciado it is this concept of Muntu that embodies the New World Black in his poem.

Whether it is in reference to Blacks as "HIJOS DE LA GRANDiosa," "hijos de paTAs" or "HIJOS DE LA GRAN PUTA," Blacks in the New World, of which the poet himself forms part, are the new Blacks. They are marked or typed by an identity rooted in their Africanness and their oppression. As "HIJOS DE LA GRANDiosa," Blacks in the New World are descendants of Yemayá, the Yoruba river goddess. According to Orisha worship, Yemayá is the mother to all the Orishas as well as the mother of all civilization.<sup>30</sup> Within the context of the

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revolution," white symbolizes Chango's "good pride" as "he is a provider of children to his devotees" and his relationship with his mother, Yemayá whose color is also white (Fólárànmí 177).

<sup>30</sup> In the case of Yemayá, Preciado describes her as the "Diosa de los mares" and the "Diosa de la maternidad." In the syncretization with Catholic Saints, she is identified as the "Virgen de Regla" and as "Nuestra Señora de la Concepción" (*Jututo* 97).

poem, Yemayá represents the symbolic womb that gave birth not only to the Yoruban diety Changó, LA GRAN PUTA, but also Blacks in the New World. Thus, Yemayá is the mother of Changó and of his New World offspring. As “HIJOS DE LA GRAN PUTA,” Blacks in the New World remain true to Changó’s character even after his physical demise. Whereas on the one hand, Changó, as Preciado imagines him, belongs in part to all of the downtrodden of the world, on the other hand, it is the specific attribute as “LA GRAN PUTA” of Changó’s character that most notably speaks to the black community. According to Zapata Olivella, the word “putas:”

Se trata de un ente imaginario capaz de sobreponerse a la muerte, a la adversidad que pudo asumir todas las formas malignas, que encarna el Demonio, pero a la par reunir en sí todas las formas nobles y bondadosas que se atribuyen a Dios. Incluso se llega a concebir que es superior a Dios y al Diablo. Pues bien, yo creo que ésta es la palabra justa para aplicarse al pueblo negro, que ha podido sobrevivir de las cacerías en Africa, de las tremendas condiciones de misera y de hambre a las cuales fue sometido durante la travesía y que pudo sobrevivir a todos los regímenes de esclavitud en este continente... (Capitain-Hidalgo, “Conversación con Zapata,” 30-31).

As the term “putas” suggests, like Changó, Blacks in the New World are capable of accomplishing the impossible. Not only has the black community been able to survive the slave trade, the tremendous conditions of misery and hunger brought about by slavery, but also the brand, the crippling negative memories of their past that mainstream society has imposed on

their soul.

At the same time, it is at this point in the poem where Preciado's experience as a black man is set in the context of his role as a black poet. Knowing and valuing blackness speaks to the following challenges that the poet sets for himself:

y no los dejaré quedarse quietos,  
ni rezagarse,  
menos descarriarse,  
aliándose con malas compañías  
que se les trepen  
y los hagan seguir,  
a pie juntillas,  
por donde cada vez quieran que vayan,  
y que,  
después del uso  
y el abuso,  
los dejen por ahí,  
muy mal parados,  
cuando les dé la regalada gana. (55-68)

As for the poet, his strength as a writer lies in his blackness. The underlying message to Blacks in the New World is that all African-ancestored people in the Americas were faced with

essentially the same kind of systematic brutality, oppression, domination, degradation and subordination. As outsiders, rootless, invisible as well as ahistorical, Blacks were left without a history, a culture, and an identity.

O aun peor,  
que se pasen el resto de mis días  
sin ton ni son,  
sin guía,  
titubeando,  
en una liviandad asustadiza,  
con tal recelo de estampar mis huellas,  
que así, no extrañaría si pudiera  
llevárselos también alguna brisa. (56-64)

For the poet, it is his ethnic and cultural roots, the remembering of his ancestors, that forms the compass by which the oppressed, namely, Afro descendants, can find their way through the many layers of acculturation that has caused their alienation.

Whether it is in reference to his “pasos,” “pisadas” or even his “huellas,” it is his blackness, his knowing of blackness that forms part of the poet’s legacy as a writer. His poetry is a record of who he was, how he lived and what he contributed to the world. His identity as a black poet speaks to his need to document his legacy of colonization, slavery and oppression. It is a legacy of survival, resistance and therefore, continued existence. It is representative of a

collective community which includes the living and the dead; without the ancestors there would be no community with which to identify. Thus, as his ancestors and even his predecessors, Preciado chooses to continue to cultivate critical themes of blackness: “Sí, / voy a continuar en esta andanza,” (80-81). Although Preciado is cognizant of an underlying collective unity that exists amongst black people, an identity rooted in their legacy, their history of colonization, slavery and oppression, he also makes evident that the understanding of black collective identity as synonymous with essentialist activities and attitudes has the tendency to create conflict between the group and the individual. Not only is individuality lost, but also the freedom to live, move and assert one’s being is compromised through the obsession of race.<sup>31</sup> Thus, whereas on the one hand, identity development involves a sense of sameness, continuity, and unity, on the other hand, it also refers to an individual’s need for transcendent visions of life, or as Victor Anderson refers to as “cultural transcendence” (161).

pero,  
en la realidad,  
con mis zapatos,  
con mi incansable número,  
con este encallecido 39;

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<sup>31</sup> According to Anderson, “ontological blackness mirrors categorical racism. It represents categorical ways of transferring negative qualities associated with the group onto others within the group. It creates essential criteria for defining insiders and outsiders within the group. It subjugates the creative, expressive activities of blacks (whether in performance arts or literature) under the symbolism of black heroic genius. In this case, black subjectivity has internal meaning insofar as it represents the genius of the group. It makes race identity a totality that subordinates and orders internal differences among blacks, so that gender, social standing, and sexual orientations are secondary to racial identity” (85).

y,  
agregando otras señas  
que son empedernidamente mías,  
por su puesto que sobre mis dos plantas,  
con mis altos empeines,  
bajo la paralela  
responsabilidad de mis rodillas;  
y,  
como si no fuera suficiente,  
pues más reconocible todavía  
por mi habitual manera  
de ladearme un poquito en cada tranco,  
por mi viejo dolor en una pierna,  
y el lunar sucesivo en mi familia,  
puntal en el talón del otro lado. (87-106)

Whether it is in reference to his shoes, “con mis zapatos,” his shoe size, “con mi incansable número, / con este encallecido 39,” his high insteps, “con mis altos empeines,” his habitual way of shifting from one side to another, “por mi habitual manera / de ladearme un poquito en cada tranco,” or even his unique family birthmark, “el lunar sucesivo en mi familia,” it is these “señas” that the poet himself most adamantly declares as “empedernidamente mías.” Thus,



although his “pasos,” his “pisadas,” and his “huellas” are inextricably tied to the poet’s consciousness of his identity as a black man, his African cultures, as well as the shared oppression of Blacks by mainstream society, they also reaffirm his uniqueness and singularity. It is this uniqueness with respect to his identity and his writing that reflects his individuality and his specific or particular lived experiences as a man, or more specifically as a black poet.

The entire last section of the poem revolves around the ways in which Preciado views his blackness and how he positions himself as a black man in and through his work, along with how he understands and promotes his individuality in his writings. For the poet, his poems present a self-evident frame of reference that shapes the parameters of his concerns. Within the context of the poem, the poet acknowledges the impact his identity as a black man and as a black writer has on his work.

Although being Black undoubtedly constitutes a lens through which the poet perceives the world, he does not wish to make blackness a means of isolation or one based on a discredited or essentialist conception of blackness that all Blacks are supposed to affirm and embody. Rather, blackness serves as an emancipatory tool for Blacks. By maintaining critical themes of blackness Preciado becomes the new Black in the New World, marked by an identity rooted in his opposition to all forms of domination. By producing proof of the specific nature of black culture and traditions and showing that Blacks can be proud of these Preciado gives hope to the black community. This acknowledgment and acceptance of self will strengthen Blacks as they continue to speak out and challenge the prevalence of racial and / or color criteria theories of

mestizaje and / or racial democracy of assimilation and contemporary critical discourse which represent one-dimensional black paradigms that persist to this day.

More than any other collection of poetry written by the poet, *De ahora en adelante* bears testimony to the poet's ability to engage in the explorations of a wider variety of thematic, cultural, geographic and historical locations. Taken as a whole, *De ahora en adelante* is a tribute to some of the poet's cultural, artistic, ideological and literary inspirations whose examples have served as a beacon for many of the poet's concerns as a writer. While the majority of the poems selected for this study do in fact deal with the specificity of blackness, *De ahora en adelante* reflects the poet's diversity of artistic attitudes, perspectives, heritages and influences. The ways in which Preciado positions himself points to the relevance of both his personal and collective experiences and the underlying role they play in his choice of themes. Although for the poet being Black conditions how he perceives the world, another part of being Black is to write, to speak, and to act on behalf of other groups of exclusion. Through his own personal exploration of his personal and collective levels of self, Preciado rearticulates the basis for collective bonding. Not only does he recognize the multiple experiences of oppression, but also the different concerns and motives that come into play as a result of threats to personal and group identity. By providing new and varied forms of bonding, Preciado brings to the forefront new possibilities for the construction of the self and the assertion of agency. Consequently, although blackness never gains exclusivity with regard to the poet's thematic choices, *De ahora en adelante* stands out as an expression of black literature precisely because Preciado's

understanding of blackness engages all of mankind regardless of racial and ideological differences.

### 3.3 Jututo

Preciado's sixth book of poetry, *Jututo*, was published in 1995. Taken as a whole, *Jututo* is an in-depth study of Afroecuadorian culture, customs and its people. Whether it is in reference to his African cultural traditions, such as his ancestors, the Orishas, or the result of the sharing of cultures between Africa and Ecuador, as the title suggests, *Jututo* is representative of what the poet himself finds to be the most authentic of Afroecuadorian traditions.<sup>32</sup> Not only does the poet render homage to Afroecuadorian cuisine, such as *tapao*, and the everyday language of Afroecuadorian life and popular culture, but he also pays special tribute to such distinguished Afroecuadorians as Petita Palma, Juan García Salazar and Jaime Hurtado González. Divided into five subsections, *Jututo* is an affirmation of the importance of Afro descendants to the Ecuadorian nation. In a country where Blacks are amongst the poorest and most marginalized and invisibilized groups in Ecuador, in *Jututo* Preciado calls for the inclusion of Blacks in a nationalist cultural hegemony that has privileged the cultural and racial mixture between indigenous communities and cultures with descendants of the European colonizers. For Preciado, who has repeatedly shown his commitment to his black identity and African cultural roots, this inclusion is both an acknowledgement of a long and sustained history of the

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to providing an addendum that serves as a compass for navigating the poetic text's mythology, *Jututo* also includes a list of terms with accompanying definitions specific to the region. Within this glossary, "jututo," or as the poet also refers to as "fututo," is defined as: "verdadero, propio, característico, auténticamente del lugar (95).

contributions of Blacks in Ecuadorian society and an affirmation of the importance of Afro descendants as a valuable and integral part of the nation.

Although slavery and the persistence of racial discrimination restricted Ecuadorian Blacks from practicing their African cultural practices, values and beliefs, Ecuadorian Blacks managed to maintain some of their ancestors' sacred customs and cultures. Dating back to the earliest days of Spanish colonization, Afroecuadorian culture developed separately from mainstream Ecuadorian culture. Due in part to the emergence of Esmeraldas as a destination point for escaped slaves from all over the region, particularly the mining towns of southwestern Colombia, African influences on the region increased over time.<sup>33</sup> Thus, by the time the national government in Quito (in the late nineteenth century) initiated efforts to incorporate the Esmeraldas Province into the nationalist mestizo fabric, a distinct cultural synthesis with both indigenous and Spanish customs had already taken place.<sup>34</sup> In effect, Afroecuadorian slave descendants not only have maintained distinctive cultural traditions, but they also have created major innovations in music, literature, cuisine, and religion, for example.

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<sup>33</sup> According to Christina Martínez-Labarga, "A partir del siglo XVIII una nueva vía de entrada de población de origen africano aparece en Esmeraldas. Procedentes de Colombia llegaron numerosos cimarrones, esclavos en su país, que lograron fugarse y adentrarse en las selvas de Ecuador. A comienzos del presente siglo [siglo XX] se han dado sucesivas migraciones de y hacia Colombia, dependiendo de las fluctuaciones en el comercio de algunos productos agrícolas: café, cacao y plátano. Además, la población minera de la zona de Barbacoas, al sur de Colombia, se dispersó hacia la región de Tumaco y más hacia el sur, ya en territorio ecuatoriano, hasta la zona de Limones y de los ríos Santiago, Cayapas y sus afluentes. Esas vías migratorias siguen abiertas actualmente de forma que el incremento de población negra en Ecuador ha sido notable" (131).

<sup>34</sup> As Estupiñán Tello argues, the Esmeraldas Province maintained their political and cultural independence for more than three centuries, even despite the official integration of the province into the *Audencia* of Quito in the early seventeenth century and later into the Ecuadorian state (62).

In the first poem of the collection, “Tapao,” Preciado emphasizes Afroesmeraldan food. For the poet, *tapao*<sup>35</sup> is an integral part of Afroesmeraldan culture. Generally speaking, *tapao* is a meat and / or fish and plantain stew. It is cooked in water and seasoned with *chirarán*,<sup>36</sup> *chillangua*,<sup>37</sup> basil, oregano, garlic, salt and coconut. Although *tapao* is representative of the diversity of Ecuadorian food, culture and tradition, it is also symbolic of the full impact Blacks have had in the development of a form of cuisine that is regionally distinct. Within the context of the first stanza, it is the sight, sounds and smells of *tapao* that evoke a loving nostalgia for the poet.

Hierva furiosamente este furiosa aroma,  
en esta misma olla en que, al desgaire,  
hierven mis pensamientos. (1-3)

The noise, the movement of the water, the agitation of boiling fluids, the intensity of the fire reflects the poet’s inner most thoughts. For the poet, *tapao* is representative of a long and twisted history of slavery, colonialism, the cross-cultural encounter and the cultural exchanges between Native Americans and Blacks. Like Ecuador, *tapao* is the confluence of indigenous and African experiences that most often have been ignored, historically negated, hidden or have gone

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<sup>35</sup> There are different variations of *tapao*, such as *tapao caldiao* and *tapao de pescado seco*. Generally speaking, *tapao* may consist of some kind of meat, fish or other types of seafood. According to Allan García, however, the most authentic type of *tapao* prepared in Esmeraldas is *tapao de pescado seco* (122).

<sup>36</sup> According to Allan García, *chirarán* is an aromatic plant used to season certain dishes (46).

<sup>37</sup> Like *chirarán*, *chillangua* is an aromatic plant used to season certain dishes (Allan García 45).

unrecognized and, consequently, have been locked away in one's memory.

En realidad, es un hervor enorme,  
y, a medida que, absorbo, avivo el fuego,  
humean carnes,  
continentes,  
plátanos,  
hambrunas,  
hojitas de chillangua,  
olvidos  
y recuerdos. (4-12)

This Afroecuadorian dish encompasses an entirety of ethnic experiences and influences. The Conquest of the Americas along with the transatlantic slave trade brought to the New World experiences from both Europe and Africa. More importantly, it allowed for the continental arrival of African customs and cultures. Over time, these African experiences helped fashion a form of Ecuadorian cuisine that has become regionally distinct. Although incapable of capturing or putting into words the specific characteristic aroma associated with *tapoa*, for the poet the smells that emanate are infectious. It is an aroma that lingers and transcends time.

Total,  
en esta olla se cuece todo un mundo,  
y el inefable olor se desparrama,

cruza los mares

y trajina oloroso por el tiempo. (13-17)

The existence, persistence and impact of *tapao* is not only a source of history but also a source of pleasure, comfort and security.

En realidad, es un olor inmenso,  
tanto que desde antaño ya olía en el futuro,  
olor inmensurable a hervido succulento;  
irresistible olor con impaciencia,  
este jututo olor que va de apuro  
para ser el furioso olor primero  
en aromar la mesa  
a la hora postergada de sentarnos  
a merendar los negros. (18-26)

As a source of history, food is constitutive of a personal, individual, collective, national and thus, unforgettable account to understanding society. This identification by present day descendants of slaves with a certain aspect of their past ensures the existence and survival of Afro-diasporic peoples. Their cultures and customs have survived captivity, enslavement, oppression and processes of globalization. Under captivity and enslavement, Ecuadorian Blacks survived starvation. With whatever they could hunt, fish, or grow Ecuadorian Blacks invented new food dishes that spoke of the preservation of their culture and the shared experiences of

indigenous and Spanish cultures and customs. However, it is “este jututo olor,” that most resonates for the poet. Like literature and music, food also served as an outlet for black creativity. By validating the African heritage in Ecuadorian cuisine, Preciado carves out a black space that is distinct within the context of a mestizo Ecuadorian nationalistic identity.

Another component of Afroecuadorian culture is religion. As in other parts of the world, religion has traditionally played a significant role in the daily lives of Ecuadorian Blacks. It has influenced family life, community affairs and has given spiritual meaning to the Afroecuadorian community.<sup>38</sup> Like every other Latin American country with a history of slavery, traces of both indigenous and African religions are found in the Catholicism that Black Ecuadorians practice.<sup>39</sup> As a means of survival and rebellion against the oppression brought on by slavery, Ecuadorian Blacks integrated their African religious beliefs and practices into Christian worship.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A common characteristic that unites Ecuadorian Blacks in the Manabí region, located in the southern part of Esmeraldas, to their African religious beliefs and practices is their respect for the spirits and the ancestors. According to Whitten and Quiroga, many Blacks from the region believe that there is no separation between the spirit world and the tangible world; rather the spirit world, “the divino,” and the human environment, “the humano” coexist in the same sphere (90). Whereas the *divino* is populated by the “virgins and the saints (of colloquial Afro-Latin American Catholicism),” the *humano* is populated by the “Devil and of all the spirits and dangerous souls” (90), such as the “Tunda” and “Riviel” (89). As indicated in chapter one, *la tunda* is remnant of West African folklore in Ecuador (51-52). Whitten and Quiroga state that “Many people [in the Manabí region] have shrines in their homes on which they light votive candles to the saints who protect them from diseases and other misfortunes” (90). In addition to reciting prayers and lighting candles to the saints and virgins, many Blacks also rely on the spiritual guidance and intervention of the *curanderas* (female healers) (90). As active mediators of the *divino*, the *curanderas* “use the power of the saints and virgins” to heal such ailments as “evil eye, malignant air and magical fright” (90).

<sup>39</sup> According to Whitten and Quiroga, “The cosmology of black people of Esmeraldas reflects conjunctures of Catholicism and African religion that have fused and reconfigured from the mid-sixteenth century to the present” (89). For example, funeral customs of this region exhibit marked syncretism between “archaic Spain and North Africa” still to this day (80).

<sup>40</sup> Wherever there was slavery, there was resistance. Even under the threat of violence, slaves continued to carve spaces of autonomy through negotiation and overt or disguised rebellion, whether individual or collective.



Similar to “Tapao,” the second grouping of poems titled *De los dioses* reflects upon the way in which Blacks, in general, have maintained African religious belief systems and practices during slavery. As evidenced in “Yo y mis pasos,” the last poem of *En primera persona* of *De ahora en adelante*, in *De los dioses* Preciado continues to explore the role Yoruba religious ideology has played in the development of Orisha traditional belief systems in Latin America.<sup>41</sup>

By incorporating themes relevant to all Africans throughout the Diaspora, Preciado displays how Blacks created their own niches, environmental adaptations, ideologies and cosmologies. African religious beliefs and practices survived because they were passed on from generation to generation through syncretism.<sup>42</sup> For example, in “Los colores divinos,” “Gestión,” “Supervivencia,” “Sincretismo” and “Aclaración necesaria sobre los colores amarillo, azul y rojo,” Preciado discusses the pantheon of Yoruba gods that are reflected behind the various images of Catholic saints. He sheds light on the specific, individual attributes of each Orisha,

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According to Whitten and Quiroga, the most dramatic ceremony symbolic for black ethnicity, difference and rebellion is the *tropa* (the troop or troops) (88). This cultural performance is held in the Esmeraldas Province during Easter. It is a reenactment of the capture, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, that Whitten and Quiroga suggest, serves as an extended metaphor for the formation of an Afro-indigenous maroon settlement and the resurrection of Christ within it (88).

<sup>41</sup> An appendix containing a list of Yoruba divinities that have survived throughout the Diaspora and their corresponding Catholic saints accompanies the collection. Generally speaking, this appendix gives insight into how the evolution of Yoruba religious ideology is indicative of the way African slaves adapted themselves to Christianity (96-97).

<sup>42</sup> According to Albert J. Raboteau, “African styles of worship, forms of ritual, systems of belief, and fundamental perspectives have remained vital on this side of the Atlantic, not because they were preserved in a ‘pure’ orthodoxy but because they were transformed. Adaptability, based upon respect for spiritual power wherever it originated, accounted for the openness of African religions to syncretism with other traditions and for the continuity of a distinctive African religious consciousness” (4-5).

such as their individual powers, symbols, colors and legends.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the Orishas are more than just mere representations of the syncretism of Catholic saints with African gods. They are also symbolic of the communion of ancestors and their responsibilities to those left behind.

In “Desolación,” the first poem of the collection, Preciado gives readers a clear example of the meaning afforded to the notion of the Orishas. For the poet, the Orishas have served as important markers in the formation and subsequent building of a present-day Afro-Latin American and Andean thought.<sup>44</sup> In “Desolación,” for example, Preciado offers a compelling and thought-provoking meditation on how Orisha thought and practice have given meaning to the affirmation of his own personal black identity and his sense of belonging that is intimately connected to the past. The various permutations of African beliefs that have found their way into contemporary Afro-ideological and philosophical thought are a testament to the survival and vision of African slaves. At the same time, they serve as a point of departure for Blacks to question not only their own teachings and practices, but also the modern epistemology of western rationality and the ontological inadequacy widely associated with blackness and African descendants.

In “Carta abierta a mis dioses,” the last poem of the collection, the challenge and opportunity of contemporary Blacks is to acknowledge and appreciate the genius of their

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<sup>43</sup> Since each Oricha has many facets to his or / her being, Preciado, in the appendix, has also included a list of each Oricha’s individual powers, symbols and colors (96-97).

<sup>44</sup> In a personal interview, Preciado discussed the importance of Orisha ritual and thought in his poetry. According to the poet, the Orishas “son referents atávicos, de mi herencia africana” (4 April 2010).

ancestors while cultivating their own through what they pass on to the next generations. Generally speaking, “Carta abierta a mis dioses” reflects upon Afroecuadorians’ continued struggle regarding visibility within the white and / or white-mestizo imagery of Ecuadorian national and cultural development. As the title suggests, “Carta abierta a mis dioses” is an open letter specifically directed to the gods. However, just as the Catholic faith sustains the worship of one God with his cadre of saints who serve as intermediaries between God and man, so too does Yoruba religious ideology support this claim of one God along with his many emissaries, the Orishas.<sup>45</sup> Similar to the saints, the Orishas are regarded as intermediaries between God and man. Thus, within the context of the poem, it is the Orishas to whom the poet directs his poignant discourse.

Parecería que ustedes no supieran  
que el Ecuador  
con todo lo que encierra  
esta adorable herida de país,  
también con nuestra  
insoslayable realidad por dentro;  
pero esta,  
por cierto,

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<sup>45</sup> According to Mbiti, “Every African people recognizes God as One” (36). In addition to the worshipping of one God, however, there is also a hierarchical pantheon of divinities, known as the Orishas, who serves as intermediaries between God and man (Mbiti 71-77).

es una irreverencia, una  
suposición de ignorancia universal,  
que no es, precisamente,  
el lado flaco de los dioses. (1-12)

In Ecuador, as well as other parts of Latin America, history has been defined by the successive erasures and rewritings of the past by the white and / or white-mestizo hegemonic elites of society. However, as has been the case with any historical period, place and people, it has been the writers and artists who have shed light on the numerous myths and erasures of the past upon which societies have been built. As indicated by the poet himself, a black space in the Ecuadorian national consciousness has always been a site of contestation and erasure: “es una irreverencia, una / suposición de ignorancia universal” (9-10). Nevertheless, despite slavery, colonialism and deeply rooted racism and discrimination, Afroecuadorians have managed to maintain a strong association with their black / African ancestry:

Ahora  
ya no podrán hacerse los muy desentendidos;  
de par en par les pongo por escrito  
que aquí hemos estado  
(desde que ustedes  
perfectamente saben que vinimos)  
puñados de esos negros de hace mares,

de hace ya travesías,  
de hace lejos;  
de hace una larga historia;  
de hace ya harto terruño,  
de hace ya innumerables cementerios;  
de hace indios,  
de hace ya un revoltijo en mayoría,  
de hace ya tantos de nosotros mismos;  
de hace todo el pasado que traemos,  
de hace ya mucho de este todavía,  
de hoy sigue siendo, como siempre ha sido,  
palmario,  
desde atrás,  
desde hace tiempo. (76-96)

According to the poet, the black founding fathers entered Ecuadorian history as faceless and nameless men, “puñados de esos negros de hace mares.” Although they came from afar, “de hace lejos,” from another history and legacy, “de hace una larga historia,” were uprooted from Africa, “de hace ya harto terruño,” survived the Middle Passage, “de hace ya innumerable cementerios,” slavery, “de hace indios,” these 23 Africans set a standard of resistance and empowerment that have inspired and continue to inspire Afro descendants for hundreds of years.

As indicated in “Desolación,” the Orishas have played a vital role for promoting and disseminating paradigm-shifting notions for understanding the past and for interpreting the present.

Ellísimos,  
los propios,  
los primeros,  
mis entrañables dioses,  
más que de cabecera,  
tenidos propiamente  
casi como si fueran  
mis más altos parientes consanguíneos,  
(tibiezas de una vieja cercanía,  
cimas de mi incumbencia,  
buena fe de la luz,  
larga maduración de los secretos) (1-12)

For the poet, one of the core features of blackness in Latin American has been the enduring resilience of Orisha thought and practice based on the notions of the ancestors and their ancestral heritage.<sup>46</sup> The important observation here is that the ancestors are those who no longer live within the physical dimension, but whose thought, knowledge and accomplishments in life

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<sup>46</sup> See chapter three, footnote 44, for an explanation of the importance of the Orishas in Preciado’s poetry.

continue to influence the daily lives of Blacks in the present.<sup>47</sup> In other words, the Orishas are present and thus, continue to be part of the human family and community. As part of the black community, the Orishas have instilled the idea of family and togetherness. According to the poet, the Orishas are “como si fueran / mis más altos parientes consanguíneos” (7-8). As members of one’s ancestral connection to the past, the Orishas are familial in the sense that they are connected to one’s historical legacies and continuity. They are representative of the “tibiezas de una vieja cercanía” (9). From the beginning of time, the Orishas have preserved and passed onto each succeeding generation the values the poet shares and cherishes, values that have been foundational not only for his life, but also for the lives of others in the community.

From the Orishas the poet first learned the lessons of responsibility. According to the poet, the Orishas are the “cimas de mi incumbencia” (10). They have taught him about the lessons of God. For example, the Orishas are symbolic of the “buena fe de la luz” (11). Furthermore, they have been the poet’s keeper of secrets for a long period of time described as a “larga maduración de los secretos” (12). Indeed, the Orishas are connected to Ecuadorian Blacks through their shared ethnic bond and their common cultural kinship with one another. For the poet, now is the time, not only for Ecuador, but also for the Orishas to take part in commemorating Ecuadorian Blacks.

In addition to *tapao* and the Orishas, another way in which Ecuadorian Blacks have

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<sup>47</sup> As Walsh suggests, “Within many Latin American Afro-descendant communities, the ancestors live on after death, maintain the same status of ‘being’ and ‘existence’ that have the living, that is as subjects of thought, rights, and obligations” (“‘Other’ Knowledges, ‘Other’ Critiques: Reflections on the Politics and Practices of Philosophy and Decoloniality in the ‘Other’ America,” 25).

carved out a distinctly black space against, and yet within, the context of a nationalist white and / or white mestizo state has been through the works and accomplishments of artists, athletes, activists and politicians. Similar to food and religion, the works of singers, musicians, dancers and writers, as well as the accomplishments of athletes, social activists and elected politicians have also played an important role in the creation and maintenance of a distinct black space in Ecuador. Overall, the 13 poems that make up *Jututo*'s fourth grouping of poems titled *Algunos de los míos* represent very different subjects and figures representative of the Ecuadorian nation, the Afroecuadorian community and even the African Diaspora. In *Algunos de los míos*, Preciado explores the multiple ways in which African descendants both in and outside of Ecuador have articulated blackness. More specifically, Preciado sheds light on the political, economic, social and cultural contributions of a number of prominent personalities who have made extraordinary achievements in their fields, their respective countries and throughout the African Diaspora. For the poet, their names, their stories and their accomplishments have become synonymous with the rich and diverse legacy that is Afro-Latin American culture.

Like identity, the articulation of blackness in Ecuador is also reflexive of a plurality of meanings. For the poet, there is no singular or coherent approach for articulating blackness. Rather, the articulation of blackness encompasses a wide gamut of social, cultural, economic and political dimensions. For example, one way in which Blacks in Ecuador have promoted a self-consciously black ethnic project of articulation has been through the performance of traditional Afroecuadorian marimba music and dance. In "Petita Palma," Preciado pays tribute to Petita



Palma, an Afroecuadorian singer and founder of one of the province's first folkloric troupes, Tierra Caliente. Within the poem itself, the poet acknowledges her role as a vocal, instrumental and dance interpreter of this tradition.

No,  
no ha de pasar en vano tanto afán,  
tanto llevar por corazón  
como si a un consumado cunumero.

No,  
la gente así no pasa,  
no se acaba,  
y ella no ha de morir  
definitivamente,  
si la muerte es silencio.

Más bien  
prolongará en el aire sus trajines,  
será después un eco permanente,  
pues,  
como digo que diría el dicho:  
“quien anda con tambores,  
a retumbar aprende”. (1-17)

In addition to *Petita Palma*, Preciado also pays homage to other black singers and social activists within the African Diaspora. Whether it is in reference to the Afrobrazilian singer, Cesária Évora, in “Cesária Évora,” the South African singer and civil rights activist, Zenzile Miriam Makeba, in “Miriam Makeba,” or even the Afrocuban singer, Benny Moré, in “Benny Moré en discos compactos,” for the poet, the articulation of blackness among Blacks in and outside of Ecuador embodies the maintenance of black ethnicity and identity by means of traditional musical practices.

Besides culture, *Algunos de los míos* also reveals how Ecuadorian Blacks have been constructively and critically engaged both politically and socially. For example, in the poem “Sobre un discurso de Jaime Hurtado,” Preciado reflects upon the political activism of Jaime Hurtado González (1937-1999), an Ecuadorian politician of African descent. According to Whitten and Quiroga, Hurtado González, also known throughout various parts of Ecuador as “*El negro*,” was a black congressman from Esmeraldas who twice ran for president of the republic (85).<sup>48</sup> Though the political activism of Hurtado González may not have resulted in direct policy, this black activist’s approach to politics provided political models for later movements.

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<sup>48</sup> The manner in which Hurtado González’s blackness in Ecuador has been interpreted underscores the racial conundrum inherent in the national identity’s configuration of a racial black identity. Whereas on the one hand, “black spokesmen and spokeswoman for blackness and for Esmeraldas as a black province say that he gave up his blackness by joining the power structure of Ecuador” (Whitten and Quiroga 85), on the other hand, “to be black in modern Ecuador can be dangerous” (Whitten, “Symbolic Inversion,” 70). After Hurtado González’s assassination in 1998, “the Ecuadorian military occupied the black areas of the interior of Esmeraldas province, especially the Ónzole River region. In this occupation an association was made between an unconfirmed accusation of a congressman’s involvement with radical Colombian politics and an Ecuadorian region known for its ‘blackness’ and its ‘remoteness’” (Whitten, “Symbolic Inversion,” 70-71).

An avid proponent of workers' rights, Hurtado González founded the political party, Movimiento Popular Democrático (MPD) (Adoum, *Cronología del siglo XX* 192). Moreover, he brought sensitive issues to the forefront of Ecuadorian politics.<sup>49</sup> In “Sobre un discurso de Jaime Hurtado,” Preciado pays tribute to a speech that was given by the political activist.

Se refería al hombre,  
al hombre universal,  
incluidos nosotros, por supuesto;  
y,  
en ristre,  
plantado con aplomo  
sobre el lomo  
de Ginés de Sepúlveda  
y sobre el de cualquiera  
al que badomía le quepa en la cabeza,  
altivamente él se mostró al trasluz,

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<sup>49</sup> Deeply committed to workers' rights, economic equality, agrarian reform and environmental protection, Hurtado González spoke out against the neoliberal policies of Ecuador's then-president, Jamil Mahuad (1949). This is especially significant, since it was during Mahuad's administration when human rights organizations had denounced “Ecuador as being among countries with the worst human rights violations” (Lucas 41). The government of Mahuad came under fire for its severe suppression of popular sectors, killings and disappearances of people associated to leftist and other social movements. In fact, Amnesty International condemned Mahuad and his followers for “the murder of the left-wing member of parliament Jaime Hurtado, in which a police collaborator was implicated” (Lucas 41-42).

al revés  
y al derecho.

El acerado Jaime de ese día  
habló solemnemente,  
e izando las palabras,  
dijo que para el hombre  
(el hombre universal,  
incluidos los negros,  
al revés  
y al derecho)  
y que, aunque arañatándose,  
“siempre seguirá siendo todavía”,  
a pesar de las dudas  
y los malos agujeros.

Han transcurrido días,  
ha transcurrido el hombre,  
ha transcurrido aprisa su universo,  
y ahora,  
más que nunca,

(todavía)

yo le sigo creyendo. (1-32)

Simply put, the message delivered that day spoke to the rights and dignity of man: “Se refería al hombre, / al hombre universal,” (1-2). For the poet, the rights and dignity of man are universal. They are not limited by such factors as geographic location, race, gender, age, or even one’s personal belief systems. They pertain to all men, “incluidos nosotros, por supuesto;” (3). As “el hombre universal,” Blacks as well have a place in society. Not only are Blacks human beings, but also, they matter as human beings. Like any other human being, Blacks are intrinsically valuable, and their dignity and worth ought to be respected. However, it is this sensibility for all of mankind regardless of racial and ideological difference that makes meaningful the black presence in Latin America, more specifically in Ecuador. Being black has conditioned the way both the poet and the political activist see the world. Like the poet, the political activist has used his individual black experience as a point of departure to speak, act, write and feel on behalf of the oppressed black community, as well as the subjugated and disenfranchised population as a whole.<sup>50</sup> They are against the inhumanity of all human oppression. As in the case of the poet, protest against human slavery of any kind and respect for the rights and dignity of man have also formed part of the activist’s political and social platform:

y,

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<sup>50</sup> Hurtado González was instrumental in fighting for the rights of workers and rural laborers—groups that not only included Afroecuadorians, but also indigenous peasants and other groups.

en ristre,  
plantado con aplomo  
sobre el lomo  
de Ginés de Sepúlveda  
y sobre el de cualquiera  
al que badomía le quepa en la cabeza,  
altivamente él se mostró al trasluz,  
al revés  
y al derecho. (4-13)

In referencing Ginés de Sepúlveda, Preciado underscores the historical origins of the idea of human rights in Western political thought. Based on the teachings of Aristotle, Ginés de Sepúlveda believed that certain men were biologically and culturally inferior and that they were therefore condemned to be dominated by a more cultured society.<sup>51</sup> However, according to the poet, the life and work of Hurtado González symbolize important steps in the movement for human rights in Ecuador. Hurtado González has been an important force in campaigns for human rights, particularly campaigns for the human rights of poor and marginalized groups.

As a minority and ethnic voice, both the political activist and the poet share a similar

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<sup>51</sup> Despite modern literature's critique on Aristotle's ethical and political views on political liberalism, equality, democracy, women and slavery, his works as a whole have been interpreted as setting the ground work for later theories of natural law and natural rights in Western ethical traditions and political thought (Waldron 1362). Such was the case concerning the justification of the Spanish Conquest of the Indies. In arguing against Bartolomé de las Casas in the Junta de Valladolid, Ginés Sepúlveda based his arguments largely on Aristotle's book *Politics*. For further discussion of this topic, see chapter two, footnote 24.

project for the articulation of blackness. Since a substantial part of the pain and anguish Blacks experience is, in effect, a result of society's racist constructions, a unique type of humanism is called for, one that takes into account the specific kinds of oppression the aggrieved and marginalized experience. For Jackson, this type of humanism manifests itself as "black humanism" which "derives from blacks' discovery of their own humanity as well as from the realization that they have become, over the years, not only defenders and representatives of nations and symbols or preservers of national cultures but also symbolic guardians of humanity in general" (*Black Literature and Humanism*130). For Jackson, black humanism is firmly rooted in the black experience. However, although Afro-centered, it is never separatist. It is not just about the humanism of people who happen to be of African descent. Rather, black humanism stresses the propagation of an 'other's' sensibility, the tolerance of difference and respect for all mankind regardless of racial and ideological difference. It is this humanistic value of the black experience, namely, how being Black has conditioned the way the political activist not only sees the world, but also how he has confronted systems of oppression as well as responded to human suffering in general that most notably resonates for the poet.

In focusing on the historical and cultural contributions of the lived Diaspora among black people in Ecuador, Preciado makes Blacks visible within constructions of the broader African Diaspora whose center is frequently thought of as only being from the United States, Brazil and the Caribbean. He demonstrates the nuanced roles that Ecuadorian Blacks have played in the articulation of an Afro-diasporic identity, especially in the context of the dominant culture's

historical rejection of black culture and identity. Furthermore, by presenting the multiple voices representative of black agency throughout the Afroecuadorian community and even the African Diaspora, Preciado shows how blackness, in general, speaks from different social and geographical places. Consequently, *Jututo* complements *De ahora en adelante* by offering different viewpoints and angles of the same complex phenomenon that is Ecuadorian reality.



## Conclusion

From the literary contributions of Afroecuadorian writers like Adalberto Ortiz, Nelson Estupiñán Bass and Antonio Preciado, it becomes clear that the expression of Afroecuadorian cultural identity is constituted by the confluence of history, political and social movements and places. From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, Afroecuadorian discourse has been transformed from a state of invisibility to visibility. As precursors to black agency during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the works of Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass represented oppositional racial projects in the incorporation of the black experience within the national imaginary. While Ortiz focused on Afroecuadorian identity, the struggle against oppression and social injustice, and the subject of racial duality (*mulatez*), Estupiñán Bass, on the other hand, emphasized black pride, solidarity with other Blacks, locally and globally, and social and revolutionary change. More importantly, however, their works articulated a common concern that ultimately all black writers must confront: this tension between cultural difference and prevailing national ideologies that have long claimed to be homogenous and free of racial conflict. It is this struggle with how to be Black and Ecuadorian, characterized by a difficult negotiation of difference and national identity, from which Preciado has illuminated his function as a writer in reconfiguring local and transnational concepts of blackness in Ecuador in the new millennium.

While the literature of Antonio Preciado revolves around the omission of Blacks from their respective national imaginaries and the impact this exclusion has had on their identity and knowledge articulation, his interpretation of *negritude* points to a more inclusive construct of self

and identity. Not only does Preciado refute essentialist and reductionist notions of negritude by addressing the historical and geographical specificity of blackness, he also moves beyond the binary representations of simplistic dichotomies of social antagonism. In the process, he presents a more complex and comprehensive understanding of cultural identity. As with Ecuadorian identity, black identity in Ecuador is also characterized by hybridity, diversity and above all, difference.

Although Preciado's writings clearly address the problems of race and racial issues apparent in Latin American society, many of his works do not mention exclusively his blackness. Not only does Preciado present themes, issues, form and content which mirror a different perspective of reality (i.e., being Black in Esmeraldas), but also he has taken on the daunting aesthetic question of how to be faithful to and unconstrained by the presence of blackness. As Jackson suggests, "...black writers who choose to say little or nothing about the black experience in Latin America are, at the same time, telling us much about it" (*Black Writers in Latin America* 6-7). Consequently, to limit his literary production to poems that only speak specifically about blackness fails to assess and fully evaluate the extent to which Preciado writes about concrete Latin American reality in general. In fact, Preciado uses his individual black experiences as a point of departure for a more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary struggles of other groups of exclusion. He is committed to the basic unity of all human beings while at the same time recognizing, legitimizing, accepting, and appreciating the differences that exist between people of different ethnicities and cultures.

While most readers of Preciado, and other Afro writers in Latin America, tend to limit the thematic of blackness to such obvious topics as musicality, folkloric traditions, religion and overt social protest, this dissertation argues for a much more incisive and inclusive reading that is Afro-centered, but never separatist. Not only is Preciado's blackness an expression and re-signification of the African Diaspora and Ecuadorian history as experienced by Blacks, but it also reflects the poet's understanding of the concepts of race, citizenship, and human relationships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Upon completing this dissertation, it has become apparent that much remains to be explored. For example, there have been numerous articles and books published on Ortiz and Estupiñán Bass, whereas Preciado has received little, if any, critical attention that addresses the entirety of his literary development, transformation and artistic merit. In fact, at present, no critical work exists that analyzes the totality of Preciado's literary production, and without such a comprehensive view, it is impossible to appreciate the complexity of his poetic trajectory as well as his importance in Afroecuadorian cultural affirmation. Although this dissertation, like many others, does not claim to be fully comprehensive, it does address a significant range of Preciado's literary production which spans from 1961 to 1998 with the publication of *De par en par*, a poetic anthology of *De ahora en adelante* and *Jututo*. This dissertation will hopefully provoke interest in future scholars to further explore Preciado's writings and that of other Afroecuadorian writers in general. In short, the literature of Preciado in particular deserves

critical regard because of its distinct development of race, ethnicity and nation in Ecuador and beyond.

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## **Vita**

Rebecca Gail Howes was born in Escanaba, Michigan. She attended St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin, where she completed her Bachelor's Degree in Voice Performance in 1995. After graduation, she moved to Heredia, Costa Rica where she lived, studied and worked for two years. In 2001, she taught high school Spanish at Episcopal High School in Jacksonville, Florida. In 2003, Rebecca began working on her Master's Degree in Spanish at the University of Tennessee. After completing her Master's Degree in 2005, she taught high school Spanish at Knoxville Catholic High School. In 2007, Rebecca began working on her Ph.D. in Spanish, and in 2013 she completed her Ph.D. in Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at the University of Tennessee. Rebecca currently lives in Jacksonville, Florida with her family.