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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACKNESS IN HONDURAN CULTURAL
PRODUCTION**

BY

ERIN AMASON MONTERO

B.A., Spanish and Psychology, California Lutheran University, 1996
M.A., Latin American Studies, University of New Mexico, 2001

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Spanish and Portuguese**

The University of New Mexico
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DEDICATION

I dedicate my work to the past and present generations of my family: Diane and Katiya. My mother Diane Clare (1942-2005) taught me to value knowledge, but unfortunately she could not see me graduate. My daughter Katiya Clare was born in 2007, the year in which I started to write my dissertation, and the hope for a happy future with my precious daughter was what served as my inspiration to finish.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates how marginalized communities of Afro-Hondurans are represented in literature and cinematic productions of non-black writers and film producers. Despite the efforts of the dominant Honduran community to suppress or alter the image of Afro-descendants, a small handful of Ladinos, or individuals of a mixed indigenous and Spanish background, have chosen to explore the Afro-Honduran image in their works.

Chapter I, “Through the Eyes of Another: Racial Identity in Honduras,” discusses the Honduran search for national identity during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. After experiencing periods of political and economic instability, the Honduran government began to promote ancient Mayan and Lenca civilizations in order to define the Honduran population. As a result, the Garífuna, West Indian and Miskito people, all Afro-descendant groups living in Honduras, were often not seen as part of the national imaginary. While many Hondurans did not question these exclusionary practices, others did in the form of cultural production.

Chapter II, “Literary Creation of the Afro-Descendant Subject in Honduran *Poesía Negroide*,” affirms that the work *Antología de poesía negra* (1962), compiled by Claudio

Barrera, is a clear example of the *poesía negroide* movement, yet unlike other manifestations of *poesía negroide*, the poems of this anthology exhibit a greater dependence on archetypal images of blacks. Images such as the tragic mulatta, the Jezebel and lazy black man tend to be one-dimensional constructions that create stereotypical portraits of Afro-Hondurans and as a result, do not allow for other interpretations of blackness in Honduras.

Chapter III, “Blackness, Romance and National Identity in Julio Escoto’s *Madrugada: El Rey del Albor*,” confirms that Julio Escoto’s novel *Madrugada* (1993) proposes several Afro-descendant characters as potential “parents” to Honduran history. The plot depicts Afro-descendants in relationships, but in the end, the relationships either do not produce offspring or the offspring is killed. The novel suggests that without any surviving descendants, the future of blackness in Honduras is tenuous.

Chapter IV, “The Search for a Garífuna ‘Homeplace’ in the Face of Displacement: Immigration, and Nation in Cultural Production,” discusses the novel *Big Banana* (2001) by Roberto Quesada, the play *Louvabagu* (1980) by Rafael Murillo Selva Rendón and the film *El espíritu de mi mamá* (2002) directed by Alí Allié. These works portray Garífunas (an Afro-indigenous community) that immigrate to the United States in search of the American Dream. In the end, the dislocated Garífunas become disillusioned after questioning their identities in the racial context of the United States, and realize that after experiencing discrimination both abroad and in Honduras, the black Honduran subject perhaps does not have a “homeplace.”

In conclusion, we can see that although these authors have taken the initiative to explore issues of identity and nationality through cultural production, they express

ambivalence and confusion on how to insert the multiple racial and cultural identities of the Afro-Honduran communities into Honduran national identity.

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Chapter I

Through the Eyes of Another: Racial Identity in Honduras

When I began my investigation, Honduras was a country that rarely entered the consciousness of the international media in the twenty-first century. Destitute, “banana republic” or third world were some of words that people used to describe this country when I mentioned that I had decided to make it the focus of my writing.¹ Now, several years later, Honduras tends not to drift to the margins of the media quite as much due to the recent ousting of President Manuel Zelaya. As new elites have continued to gain political power in Honduras, the issue of race has surfaced again as Honduras struggles to establish a racial identity to stabilize the political and social unrest after the coup d’état in 2009 (Euraque 14). The de facto government’s foreign minister Enrique Ortez Colindres made a comment that bespoke a tense racial climate and unresolved racial conflicts. In a televised interview on the show “Frente a Frente,” he referred to President Barack Obama as a “negrito,” and went as far as to say, “He negociado con maricones, prostitutas, con ñángaras, negros, blancos. Ese es mi trabajo, yo estudié eso. No tengo prejuicios raciales, me gusta el negrito del batey que está presidiendo los Estados Unidos.” Although Obama is not Honduran, the fact that the interim foreign minister would refer to a world leader as a “negrito del batey” alludes to the inherent racism so common in Honduran elite classes that has kept Honduran blacks in the margins of their society for centuries.²

¹ “Banana republic” is the phrase that Darío Euraque uses to describe Honduras in his book *Reinterpreting the Banana Republic* (1996), but the term has been in use since the 1800s when the United Fruit Company began to dominate the economy of several Latin American countries.

² The term “el negrito de batey,” or “plantation negro” is an offensive term used in Honduras to denigrate members of the African diaspora.

The purpose of this study is to use literary and cultural production to understand Honduran national identity. In his pioneering book *Imagined Communities* (1982), Benedict Anderson underscores the importance of print as a reflection of identity. Print and identity have a symbiotic relationship in which each shapes and forms the other (44-45). Authors write and reflect upon their particular vision of their own society while readers absorb the ideologies that they read. In the following pages, I first examine the groups that form part of Honduran national identity: Ladinos and past Amerindian societies. In order to unify the population, I propose that Honduras created a mythical racial identity in which Hondurans were encouraged to identify as Ladino, yet recognize the greatness of ancient indigenous civilizations. Second, I outline the Afro-Honduran role in supporting Honduran economy and enriching Honduran culture. Unfortunately, due to the pre-established construction of national identity, the Honduran hegemony ignored the Afro-Honduran contributions to nation building, and as a result, the majority of the subject matter of twentieth-century Honduran literature (and Central American literature in general) placed emphasis on social injustice and class problems within the Ladino population (Arias 18). Finally, I arrive to the principal theme of this study in which I introduce how non-black writers use cultural production to explore how to incorporate blackness in the Honduran national imaginary.

Forces at Work in the Construction of National Identity: Indigeneity

In order to understand why blackness has become a marginalized identity in Honduras, we must first understand how national projects in Honduras have constructed Honduran identity from conquest to independence. At the time of the Spanish conquest in the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Spanish and the criollos were a small part of the

population of the region while the indigenous people were still the majority (Newson 3).³ Yet during the colonial period (1524-1821), the criollos tried to establish their hegemony in Honduras (Barahona 60). Their effort to exert hegemony forever changed the country's image of its citizens, for as Honduran anthropologist Marvin Barahona confirms, when Honduras was still a colony of Spain, "La pretensión de los criollos de trasplantar el modelo republicano europeo en Honduras profundizó el distanciamiento histórico entre ellos y la sociedad multirracial en la que habían nacido" (60). To gain dominance over the existing indigenous population was one of the most destructive goals of the Spanish conquest, and in order to suffocate the indigenous presence, the criollos felt as though they must create a negative fictional identity for the indigenous people so that they could strip them of their power. According to anthropologists Marvin Barahona and Ramón Rivas:

Los españoles y los criollos, en distintos momentos (de colonización) inventaron para su beneficio una ideología justificadora del poder que ejercían sobre los pueblos indígenas y legitimadora de la dominación [. . .] La idea que dominó la mentalidad colonial, desde el primer momento, fue la de que los "indios," en realidad, no eran seres humanos, que apenas podía considerárseles semi-hombres [. . .] La concepción que los indios eran bárbaros, salvajes, incivilizados, idólatras, viciosos, y haraganes fue heredada por los criollos. (18)

As I will illustrate, even though those of European descent fostered a negative opinion towards the native peoples of Honduras, ironically the Amerindian influence in Mesoamerica exists to this day. It is apparent that the strength of their ancient culture of is relevant in

³ The criollos were the American born descendants of the Spanish. Although there was no racial difference between a criollo and a Spaniard, the Spanish caste system placed the criollos as racially inferior for having been born outside of Europe (Lewis 30).

defining even present-day Hondurans. The original inhabitants of the area that is now Honduras were the Maya, Lenca, Chorti, Jicaque, and Chorotega groups. Sadly, most of these groups were victims of ethnocide during the conquest, thus their populations were severely diminished. Nevertheless, their altered image remains in the national conscious of modern day Honduras, for they exist not in their present reality as a tiny, dislocated population of people, but rather as a memory of past grandeur.⁴ As Barahona and Rivas verify, for all of the present day pride in Amerindian heritage, the idea of the modern day “pure Indian” is unsettling and is more readily associated with the idea of “indios salvajes” (18). Such derogatory descriptions have a long history of usage, so it should come as no surprise that the Europeans applied such terms to the indigenous groups. At the turn of the millennium, some remnants of their indigenous societies still exist but their native languages and cultural practices were hastily dismissed by many Hondurans as being counterproductive to modernity and progress (Tojeira 47-48).⁵ Surprisingly, most contemporary Hondurans still associate themselves with an indigenous heritage as long as they are not associated with the image of the present-day Indian.

These two contrary movements that alternately associate Indians with savagery or with the great civilizations of the past have created a bifurcated national identity. It appears that through myth-building efforts, Honduras has been able to construct a national identity

⁴ In this chapter I discuss the Miskito Indians in a separate section of Honduran ethnic groups because unlike the tribes mentioned here, they are still an active, culturally viable group and above all, the Miskito tribe in its present state was not a pre-conquest indigenous group. They differ from the traditional Honduran tribes because they have become a culture of contact for having miscegenated with escaped slaves of African ancestry (Dodds 87).

⁵ Tojeira asseveres that the Jicaques still live in isolated areas of the Department of Yoro, and names the various communities to which they pertain (60). Other groups, such as the Lenca, were more readily absorbed into Ladino society; as Atanasio Herranz, the professor of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras claims, in the 1950s there were anywhere between 27,000 to 58,000 Lenca in Honduras, but that they were rapidly being ladinized so that by the 1990s, there were only, “campesinos de tradición lenca” (57).

based on an imagined indigeneity in which the subject holds pride in having an indigenous heritage as long as it is associated with the grand culture of yesteryears, and as long as he or she doesn't appear to be racially "too indio." In general, what the Ladinos know about the Indians of the past is based on cultural legends and national symbols. Barahona concurs:

[L]os datos se hallan difusos en la obra de los cronistas de Indias, en las primeras relaciones de los conquistadores y en algunos informes administrativos, aunque pocas veces se habla de cifras específicas. De muchos de los pueblos mencionados por los españoles no sabemos nada en la actualidad, la información resulta incompleta aun en las investigaciones más recientes. (75)

What many Ladinos do know is that groups such as the Lenca and Maya had advanced systems of agriculture and government, thus promoting the idea that the indigenous people came from a glorious but lost past (76-77). Such grandeur is evidenced by the fact that in the fifth letter of *Cartas de relación*, a series of letters addressed to Spanish emperor Carlos V, Hernán Cortés, Spanish explorer, describes the Honduran indigenous past with glowing words. Cortés writes that the areas near present day Trujillo consisted of "muy grandes y ricas provincias," and that "aunque falten los dos tercios, hace mucha ventaja a esta de México en riqueza, e iguala en grandeza de pueblos y multitud de gente y policía de ella" (265-68). Cortés's descriptions of Honduras bring to mind the glorious images of Tenochtitlan, although since he wrote to win the financial support of Carlos V, it would make sense that he would use such flattering images to describe the region.

Many Ladino Honduran historians portray the indigenous people as brave warriors in the face of the Spanish onslaught (83-87). Immediately following the conquest, Lempira, Honduras's national figure of resistance, becomes legendary for his supposed actions against

the Spanish. Being that the story has been told for centuries, the details often vary, and the version commonly told in schools reveals that Lempira had hidden himself atop a hill near Gracias a Dios when he came out to talk with a Spaniard. Upon revealing himself to the Spaniard, a harquebus shot and killed him (Martínez Castillo 16). Not surprising is that the Spanish have a different version of the confrontation. According to historian Mario Felipe Martínez Castillo, a scribe recorded several eyewitness accounts in documents contained in the Archivo General de Indias located in Sevilla, Spain. Rodrigo Ruís, the man responsible for Lempira's death, confronted Lempira (or "Elenpira" as he was known in the documents) and the following events occurred:

[A]via entrado entre la gente y esquadron de guerra de la parte de los enemigos con su espada y rodela y peleando con el dicho capitan Elenpira le avia muerto cortado la cabeça y que nunca la avia dexado de las manos [. . .] vinieron a su capitan muerto al qual temian todos los que dentro de las dichas fuerças estaban desmayaron. (75)

As seen, there remains a disparity between the mythical figure of Lempira in Honduran oral tradition and the Spanish written accounts of what had happened between Rodrigo Ruís and Lempira. Nevertheless, Lempira has found his way into Honduran history as an indigenous figure that represents resistance; above all, he is a part of national identity despite the fact that he does not racially represent the majority of Ladinos.

Although Honduras achieved political independence from Spain in 1821, it was not until the twentieth century that Hondurans initiated its quest for identity consolidation. Honduras has a history of instability and during the nineteenth century, the economy impeded the nation from creating a central state (Euraque 3). Like in other Latin American

nations, the creation of an identity that recognizes indigenous roots became the modern standard for national identity, thus limiting the representation of other ethnic groups in the Honduran national imaginary. The legislation that institutionalized Honduras's imagined identity began in the 1920s. This legislation promoted the Lencan Indians as representative of the Honduran population. In his article, "Social, Economic, and Political Aspects of the Carías Dictatorship in Honduras: The Historiography," Honduran anthropologist Darío A. Euraque explains that, "In 1926 the Honduran Congress voted to name the country's national currency in honor of Lempira, an indigenous chieftain who died fighting the Spaniards in the 1530s" (229). The currency bearing the name "Lempira," leads to the creation of a "community." In other words, the indigenous Lempira binds together this imagined, universal Honduran identity (B. Anderson 9-10).⁶ Besides the national currency's ties with indigenous identity, there are multiple other reminders of Honduran indigeneity that provide a monolithic image of identity. Common across the soil of Honduras are the toponyms which reveal hundreds of names in various indigenous languages, thus the Honduran citizen cannot escape reminders of the indigenous presence as he or she moves from location to location (Membreño 67-69).

The Lencans are the not only indigenous group important to the Ladino identity because Ladinos also recognize an indigenous past linked to the Mayans. During the 1930s, the president Tiburcio Carías Andino initiated what Darío Euraque calls the "mayanization" of Honduran culture. Carías, the Honduran dictator who ruled from 1933 to 1949, implemented many economic and political changes. In a study on this controversial Honduran leader, Euraque attests that "the Carías regime between 1933 and 1949 represented

⁶ The Lempira note depicts a rendering of Lempira's profile on one side, and an image of Copán on the other. Honduran coins also have the image of Lempira stamped on them.

an unusual period of Honduran history, one that seems to have institutionalized the worst aspects of the social, economic, and political processes that emerged during Carías's early years" (239). Euraque, former director of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History, gave a lecture on March 8, 2010 at the University of New Mexico. This lecture, titled "Archaeology, National Identity and the Coup in Honduras: Tourism and the Role of the Ancient Maya," focused on mayanization. While it is true that Copán is a major Mayan monument, it is located on the periphery of Honduran territory only 12 kilometers from the Guatemalan and Honduran border. Yet due to Carías's efforts, the ruins of this ancient city that only occupy less than 1% of the national territory were thrust into the forefront of the Honduran national consciousness. It has since become part of national identity, despite the fact that very few Hondurans are of Maya descent (Euraque). One of the most notable decisions that Carías made in the promotion of an imaginary Mayan identity was the construction of the Parque la Concordia in Tegucigalpa (Euraque). This park boasts a replica of a Mayan pyramid from Chichen Itza, Mexico, and replicas of Stela C and Altar Q from Copan (El Herald). The construction of this park initiated a period of time in which Hondurans aligned themselves with a Mayan identity that found its way into almost every aspect of life. National institutions embraced the newfound appropriation of the Mayan reference and even went so far as to include images from Copán on the Honduran passport, the national currency, soccer uniforms and stamps. Across Honduras, it was not uncommon to find hotels and casinos constructed in the shape of stelae, or to find replicas of stelae scattered in areas of tourism.

Taking into consideration the ubiquitous reminders of indigeneity, we must question if there is space in Honduras for those who fall outside the identity paradigm of ladinization

and mayanization. At the time of the coup in 2009, the Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia (IHAH) was involved in a decentralization project that was designed to take the focus away from the fictional Mayan identity, but with the onset of political squabbling, the project was halted in summer 2009 (Euraque). Darío Euraque suspects that the de facto Honduran government wanted to promote the Mayan focus in order to distract people from the political instability that the coup had caused.

Forces at Work in the Construction of Identity: Ladinization

Paired with the desire to identify with the grandeur of indigenous civilization was the tendency towards ladinization. Ladinization describes a process in which indigenous groups, either by force or by choice, were slowly assimilated by the dominant Spanish society (Barahona 88-89). The definition of ladinization and Ladino is complex, for some define these terms as something similar to mestizaje implying that they refer to a subject from a mixed blood indigenous and European background. On the other hand, to be Ladino does not necessarily imply that the individual comes from a mixed heritage. A Ladino can be somebody from a mixed background, but it can also be an indigenous person who is “decultured,” and denies a native background by attaching himself or herself to Hispanic culture (Fiehrer 43). The fact remains that Ladino implies both a racial and cultural identity. Returning to the history of how Honduras came to be a ladinized country, we can see that the first step of ladinization occurred during the conquest and colonial period. The Spanish had a history of forced acculturation of conquered groups, and in Central America, this practice “set a series of strong precedents for the assimilation of non-whites, both indigenous and African” (Fiehrer 42). Through genocide, the spread of European diseases, and forced racial miscegenation (often by rape), the Spanish had reduced the indigenous population of

Honduras to around 35,000 people by the end of the colonial period. Any communication between these small groups of people was hindered by the mountainous terrain and dense vegetation, yet at the same time, the treacherous geography of the country aided the indigenous tribes' survival (Barahona 88). Those groups such as the Lencans who remained in areas populated by the Spanish quickly lost their native tongue and other cultural traditions. After having lost so many of their cultural identifiers, the Spanish called these indigenous people, "campesinos de tradición indígena," which is a name that diminishes the importance of ethnic heritage and instead relies more on the class marker of "campesino." Consequently, with this cultural loss, the Lencans lost their cultural identity and gradually assimilated into the dominant society (Barahona 92).

The Sources of Afro-Honduran Exclusion

Towards the end of the twentieth century and in the present century, many Honduran intellectuals began to reassess the question of national identity. Although Ladinos dominate Honduran society, Afro-Hondurans have lived in Honduras for centuries; however, they have only recently started to appear in the national consciousness. As I have delineated, Honduras has struggled for centuries to create a viable national identity. It has gone from forming an identity that embraces the indigenous peoples of past eras while simultaneously rejecting the modern reality of indigeneity. Although we see that there have been fluctuations in this country's identity, the fact remains that blackness was rarely considered as part of Honduras until the latter half of the twentieth century. Despite the strong indigenous influence found in Honduras, the cultural production of the twentieth century begins to open a very limited space for blackness. The hesitation to include blacks in cultural production was present because unlike the indigenous population, Afro-descendant populations were regarded as a

foreign element, and their traditions were deemed as exotic and outside of national identity. Because of the foreign qualities attributed to black culture, blacks were not considered to be “authentically” Honduran and therefore interest in their culture was only present as long as it was presented through the legitimizing Ladino voice.

It was not until the 1940s that these dominant Ladino groups that were in control of the dissemination of culture began to incorporate black characters and black images in their work. Problematic with this movement is that it appears that the only legitimate way to recognize “black” culture was after it had been filtered through the lens of the dominant culture’s gaze. As I wish to accentuate in the paragraphs that follow, blacks were indeed an integral part in the formation of Honduras’s economy and culture, but in return, what they received was abuse and marginalization and above all, limited opportunities to present their own communities in their own examples of cultural production.

Throughout the twentieth century, Honduras functioned as a tool for military and economic gain for foreign powers. The years spent as a banana republic under the United States did little for the stabilization of identity, yet as I wish to delineate, the banana plantations forcibly created a more racially diverse country by importing West Indian blacks and by creating a Ladino dependence on the black labor force (Euraque 302). The interest in banana cultivation began in the later half of the nineteenth century. In 1891, the writers of the magazine *Science* first published an article on the emerging banana cultivation in Honduras and other parts of Central America, stating that, “the banana industry [. . .] was only commenced in 1883 [and] is becoming more and more important every day” (289). At the time of the banana development, Honduras scarcely had time to solidify as a nation; it had gained independence from Spain in 1821 only to become part of the Federal Republic of

Central America. The Federal Republic's dissolution began in 1838, but existed in a fictional sense until Guatemala formally seceded in 1847. As part of the Federal Republic, Honduras was not an independent nation but rather a state. The time spent as a state and the tumultuous political environment in Central America during this era did little for the Honduran elite's desire to establish a strong national identity. Economist Robert S. Smith confirms that, "[because of] the absolute nature of Spanish rule, the new nation lacked experience in self-government" (483). He also cites the isolated nature of the region as a detriment, since, "most people [were] indifferent to political, social and economic goals transcending local interests" (484).

Between 1847 and 1883, Honduras remained in a debilitated state from debt and social conflict and it wasn't long before foreign powers began to show interest in investing in the country. The United States and Great Britain mined Honduras for gold and silver but when mining proved to be less profitable than hoped, interest turned to banana plantations and the Honduran government slid into a puppet state for U.S. banana grower's interests. By 1910, banana production had increased (Echeverri-Gent 298). Honduran philosopher Ramón Romero cites the banana growers as being one of the primary obstacles to the development of a cohesive national identity, affirming that, "Para arrastrar a Honduras a una condición mercenaria [. . .] han usado el chantaje económico y la siembra del terror en todo el pueblo" (9). The ability of the United States to control Honduras's economy and politics was strong. According to Mario Posas, Honduras was unable to negotiate with foreign capital (U.S.) other than to set low export taxes. Otherwise, basic political control was transferred to imperialist banana capital (46-47). With the United States so firmly entrenched in the Honduran political and economic spheres, nurturing the Honduran culture that would provide

the base for national identity was a difficult task. Romero claims that foreign elements brought in by the United States have either replaced the Honduran way of life or have impeded new facets of culture from developing:

En la conciencia colectiva de los hondureños no están orgánicamente integrados, los elementos constitutivos de nuestra Identidad Nacional. Ello se evidencia aún en hechos poco importantes, como el predominio de nombres foráneos en los comercios, o la incapacidad para retener el modo de habla hondureña cuando se está expuesto a acentos extranjeros, o la sustitución casi total, de los refrescos elaborados a partir de nuestras frutas y cereales, por aguas gaseosas. (21)

Given this complex background, it comes as no surprise that the popular national identity is often biased in terms of who is represented as Honduran. The pre-Colombian indigenous icon that Honduras so often promotes as the representative figure of identity brings the nation back to a glorified past in which the Honduras could imagine itself as autochthonous as opposed to a country beleaguered by a foreign power. This desire to be “authentically Honduran” (of Mayan or Ladino descent), and to shrug the weight of foreign powers is evidenced in the government’s attempts to oust blacks from the eastern shores of the country in the early twentieth century.

West Indian Afro-descendants

Although there are no reliable statistics on how many West Indians were brought to work in Honduras during the late 1800s to early 1900s, it cannot be denied that they served as a catalyst for the Honduran identity crisis.⁷ As a result of the laborer’s supposed

⁷ Elisvinda Echeverri-Gent wrote that the West Indian blacks made up the dominant group of workers on the plantations, but other scholars such as Darío Euraque contest this claim. While Euraque agrees that the West Indians were part of the labor force, he argues that Echeverri-Gent’s findings rely on inconclusive data found in

resistance to Honduran law, they routinely experienced abuse. In 1916, non-black Hondurans complained of the presence of the black workers and the government threatened to send the British citizens back to Jamaica. Consequently, in 1917 the Honduran government asked the UFCO (United Fruit Company) to repatriate the black labor force, a request that was ignored. In desperation, the poorly organized Honduran government began to prohibit the entrance of blacks into Honduras because, as President Rafael López Gutiérrez argued, the foreign workers were supplanting the emerging Honduran labor force. Finally, in 1929, the Honduran government passed a law which kept West Indian and other immigrants from entering the country; this law was strongly contested by the UFCO because the company would no longer benefit from a cheap labor force (Echeverri-Gent 301). The fighting continued, with constant skirmishes occurring between the West Indian workers and the Honduran government until the last strike in 1932. Eventually, due to the problems in the plantations, the company decided that the West Indian workers were more problematic than had been expected and they hired Salvadoran immigrants that did not present such a great racial and cultural schism with the Honduran Ladinos.

While it was true that blacks contributed to the banana economy, they were still viewed with suspicion by many segments of the Ladino population and in fact, many Ladinos strongly resented them. Historian George Reid Andrews agrees that in order to cleanse the country of the blacks that were seen as a threat to the development of national identity, Ladinos would have to take extreme measure. He asserts that, “Hispanic workers were not above invoking racist stereotypes and language . . . Honduran workers used similar language in their calls to expel West Indians from the country, threatening with death those who failed

U.S. consular reports. Although there are very few records about how many blacks immigrated to Honduras, Echeverri-Gent claims that tens of thousands arrived in the early 1900s (279).

to leave the country” (20). The truth was that the West Indian laborers were not Honduran citizens but rather British citizens (usually Jamaican), and Hondurans believed that the West Indians were resistant to assimilation (Echeverri-Gent 282). The children of the workers were registered as British subjects, rarely learned Spanish, and instead opted to speak English. Nevertheless, the intimidation of the blacks was so fierce that many finally did find a way to return to the Caribbean, but still others remained, and continue to live in Honduras to this day.

The Garífuna Culture

The second group of Afro-descendants that appear in the Honduran cultural production seen in this analysis is the Garífuna.⁸ Like the West Indians, the Garífuna emerge from a complex background. Many prominent Honduran and North American anthropologists have debated their cultural identity throughout much of the twentieth century. The center of this debate lies in the fact that the Garífuna embrace a hybrid culture of both indigenous and African traits. In the eighteenth century, Sir William Young, a British citizen in the Caribbean, wrote a series of documents about the Garífuna people. These documents include the “Chairaib Treaty of 1773” and other such official letters that describe the genesis of Garífuna history.⁹ According to the documents, Garífuna society came into being in the late seventeenth century when an African slave ship from the Bite of Benin, a part of the Gulf on Guinea in Western Africa, shipwrecked south of the island of San Vicente.¹⁰ A group of indigenous people that the British called “Red Caribs” already inhabited the island of San

⁸ The word “Garífuna” is thought to be an Africanization of the word “Carib.” The term “Black Carib” was first used by European explorers in the seventeenth century while the people were still living on the island of San Vicente (Greene Jr. 189).

⁹ “Chairaib” is the archaic English spelling of “Carib.” Other sources refer to them as “Yellow Carib.”

¹⁰ The timing of the arrival of the Africans is debatable. In the sources I have used, Sir William Young and other anthropologists such as Francesca Gargallo claim that it occurred in 1675, whereas Nancie Gonzalez asserts that the shipwreck occurred in 1635.

Vincente. According to Nancie Gonzalez, a prominent ethnographer known for her work on the Garífuna, the Red Caribs were an indigenous group with a somewhat mysterious past (7). They created a linguistically pluralistic society based on gender, in which men spoke Carib while women spoke Arawak. As time passed, the Arawak language endured while the Carib language eventually fell out of use (Gonzalez 26). Sometime in the seventeenth century, the shipwrecked group of Africans arrived onto the island and merged with the Red Caribs. Sir William Young characterizes the escaped slave population as “restive and indocile,” thus implicating that the relationship between the two groups was one of conflict. According to him, although the Red Caribs enslaved the Africans, Africans conquered these struggles of differential power by massacring the indigenous people. Ruy Galvão de Andrade Coelho, a professor of social sciences in Brazil, has written much on the history of the Garífuna, and contradicts Young’s account of conflict, saying that, “desde el principio los esclavos fugitivos se mostraron ansiosos por establecer relaciones amistosas con sus anfitriones, para evitar ser devueltos a sus amos” (30). Whatever the case, racial miscegenation between the Red Caribs and the Africans took place despite any conflict, thus creating a mixed-race group of people called the Black Caribs. These Black Caribs formed a separate group that was often adversarial towards the Red Caribs that had not mixed with the Africans. Due to the racial miscegenation between the black and indigenous populations of the island, the black Caribs embraced an amalgamation of West African and native traditions. As a result, the foundation of the modern Honduran Garífuna culture was created (Jenkins 431).

During the 1700s, the British renewed their interest in San Vicente. In 1719, a group of English soldiers arrived and attacked the Black Caribs (Andrade Coelho 31). The conflict between the Black Caribs and the English continued for the greater part of the

eighteenth century. Meanwhile, the island itself was a point of contention between the British and the French, but was annexed to the British crown by a treaty of peace with France in 1763 (Young 18). Because Chatoyé, the supreme chief of the Black Caribs had proclaimed his allegiance to the French Revolution, the Afro-descendants of the island were soon seen as enemies to the British (Andrade Coelho 35). Such incidents set the scene for the capture and forced deportation of the Black Caribs to Roatán, an island off the coast of Honduras, in 1797 (Gonzalez 42). The time spent in Roatán was indeed difficult, for although the British had left the Black Caribs with some supplies, the island did not sustain their community and they migrated to the Central American mainland. On the mainland, the communities spread out to the point that the current Garífuna population stretches from its northernmost point in Livingston, Guatemala through Belize and by the mid-twentieth century, they inhabited parts of Nicaragua (70). By the end of the twentieth century, the Garífuna had initiated transmigrational patterns to the United States and currently a large part of the population lives in New York and Los Angeles (Anderson and England 259).

Without a doubt, the Garífuna gave a strong cultural contribution to Honduras along with economic support. There has been much debate on the degree of Garífuna involvement on the banana plantations. As previously stated, those scholars that write about the black presence on the eastern coasts of Honduras do not agree on how many of the workers were West Indian and how many were Garífuna. Despite the debate, what is important is that statistics confirm the presence of both groups. Euraque states that during the turn of the century, the Garífuna were the first stable black population employed by the companies, yet in spite of their many contributions because of their hard labor, they were seen as a threat and again, were systematically excluded from the national imaginary. To quell the menace, they

were accused of causing “debauchery,” and this created further mistrust of the Garífuna. During the 1920s, Ladinos also condemned the possibility that the Garífuna would mix with the indigenous people of the area and create a new “zambo” threat, a fear somewhat imbued with irony since the Garífuna already descended from indigenous Caribbean groups.¹¹

Like the West Indian banana plantation workers, the dominant Honduran population saw the Garífuna as inferior. Different from the West Indians, was that the Garífuna were not imported from other countries but rather they had lived in Honduras since 1797 and had a long history in this nation. Nevertheless, they occupied an inferior status due to their ethnic origin and Ladinos often questioned their place in society. Because the Garífuna came from rural areas and because they were black, the elites looked at them as a threat to achieving modernity in Honduras (Anderson and England 264). The Ladinos elite also feared that the Garífuna, who already cultivated bananas, would gain too much power and thwart burgeoning foreign plantations (238-39). North American banana plantations were economically linked to the Honduran elite, and therefore the Honduran upper class did everything in its power to ensure that the Garífuna were oppressed both socially and financially in order to prevent them from threatening Ladino hegemony. During the early part of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon to see them working as gardeners, cooks and servants in Ladino homes in the eastern part of the country. Sadly, even though they entered the homes of the rich in order to serve them, the Garífuna and other Afro-descendants were prohibited from entering the hotels, restaurants and parks of cities such as La Ceiba (263). As a result, many Garífuna involved themselves politically in strikes and unions that

¹¹ In this case, the term “zambo” or “sambo” refers to a person of black and indigenous heritage (Keen 115).

helped to diminish some of the discriminatory practices found in the workplace and other state institutions (265).

Although the focus of this project is not to determine the cultural and racial identity of the Garífuna people, in order to examine the perception of them as represented in literature and film, it is important to acknowledge that their racial identity has been a polemic debate for a number of years. They maintain their ties with the African diaspora, while simultaneously honoring their indigenous past. Even today, the Garífuna have questions about their self-definition. OFRANEH (Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña), the black fraternal organization of Honduras, refers to the Garífuna as a “pueblo indígena,” or an indigenous group of people. Yet as I will discuss in chapter four, the Garífuna people still embrace their ties to Africa, displaying a pride in their cultural roots with other black communities. The focus of the present study is to determine how the non-black citizens of Honduras view the Garífuna. Census reports from the first half of the twentieth century categorized the Garífuna as “negros” along with other Afro-descendant groups (M. Anderson 24). It was not until the 1990s that the Honduran government listed the Garífuna as separate from other Afro-descendant groups; the idea that they were finally recognized as a separate group hints at a movement that acknowledges their hybrid identity. Mark Anderson, an anthropologist who has studied the Garífuna culture of Honduras in depth, stresses that although on the surface Honduras has fostered new approaches towards national identity, “the relatively new discourses of ethnicity and multiculturalism have not replaced previous understandings of difference that rendered the Garífuna as racially negro and culturally backward” (25). In other words, although Hondurans have opened the dialogue on ethnic,

racial and cultural diversity, they are still trying to understand the mixed-race black and indigenous heritage of the Garífuna.

The struggle to consider the hybridized indigenous and African identity of the Garífuna is somewhat ironic since the base of Ladino identity is found in the construction of a mixed indigenous and European identity. Yet the difference is that culturally Ladinos do not identify with modern indigenous culture and tradition on anything but a superficial and symbolic level. In previous paragraphs, I discussed how the Honduran Ladinos embrace certain remnants of ancient indigenous grandeur without including modern indigenous people as part of their national heritage. It is acceptable to be of mixed indigenous and European roots as long as the indigenous factor is derived from the highly touted past accomplishments of ancient Amerindian society, but since these societies lie in the distant past, they are not seen as a threat to whiteness but rather treated with reverence and pride by modern society.

On the other hand, as in any pigmentocracy, the color of skin is still fundamental in assigning social privilege. According to Peter Wade, the ideology behind mestizaje is to create a nation that despite its multi-ethnic roots, still attempts to homogenize itself by means of racial whitening (295-99). Ideally, the mestizo (or in this case Ladino) nation should be, “más blanca que negra, con las diferencias raciales y culturales indígenas y negras reducidas a meros emblemas de la nación y finalmente regaladas a un pasado distante (Anderson and England 270).

The Miskito People: Both Indigenous and Afro-descendant

The principal focus of this work will be the representation of the Garífuna and West Indians. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to mention the Miskito people even though they only

play a minor role in the works to be studied.¹² During the colonial period, the indigenous people of the eastern coast of Central America mixed with the escaped African slaves, forming a new society (Olien 119). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the Miskito people are traditionally referred to as an indigenous group, yet during the colonial period and up until the nineteenth century, various sources refer to them as “black.” There were several occasions for the Miskito to miscegenate with members of the African diaspora. Around 1640, a slave ship ran aground south of Cape Gracias a Dios off the eastern shores of Honduras, and the blacks that escaped joined with the Sumu tribe. The resulting group of people was the Miskito.

The Miskito maintained close ties with the English. In the late 1600s to the early 1700s, there were a series of slave rebellions in Jamaica. Since Jamaica was once a British colony, the English would hire the Miskito men to put down the rebellions. During the time spent on the island, the men would often intermarry with black Jamaican women, and when they returned to Honduras, they would take their wives and mixed-race children with them. This tendency further strengthened the Miskito ties with the African diaspora (Preston 8). During the late eighteenth century, the British power in the region began to weaken, and as a result, the Spanish began making overtures to the Miskito in order to form an alliance. When the British finally pulled out of eastern Honduras in 1787, the Spanish began to baptize many of the Miskito leaders as Catholics, but they still resisted the incorporation of their land into the Honduran mainland (Preston 25-26).

¹² The origin of the name “Miskito” is obscure. Some suggest that because they were a musket-bearing tribe, the Spanish named them the “mosquete.” Throughout the years the name has evolved to Miskito, Mosquito or Moskito (Preston 6). In this work, I choose to use “Miskito.”

The racial classification of the Miskito people has often been debated by outsiders whereas the Miskito themselves call themselves “la raza miskita,” thus negating any of the traditional racial terms (Pérez Chiriboga 81). What is most important for the purposes of this study is that the Spanish would generally refer to them as “zambos,” thus recognizing the Miskito connection with the African diaspora (120). In the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for Hondurans to conflate Miskito and blackness as a tool for their continued marginalization. In the 1850s, Ephraim George Squier, a leading archaeologist from the United States, sided with the Honduran and Nicaraguan governments and announced that the Miskito people were more black than Indian (117). The tendency to associate them with the African diaspora continued throughout most of the twentieth century. Since this study studies the construction of blackness from the Ladino perspective, I will be referring the Miskito people are part of the African diaspora.

Trends of Marginalization in Literature and Cultural Production

I would now like to turn to the literary scene in Honduras during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Unfortunately, there are not many formal studies and criticism on Honduran literature. To understand the lack of material written on Honduran literature, it is useful to understand the general political climate in Central America. Throughout much of the twentieth century, government repression, foreign economic and political involvement and general instability destroyed the social and political structures of Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Honduras and Nicaragua (Stahler-Sholk 136-38).¹³

¹³ Some of the bloodiest moments of Central American conflict were found in the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996), the Salvadoran civil war (1980-1992), and in the Nicaraguan Revolution (1979-1990) (Stahler-Sholk 138). Honduras had its own problems with unrest during the time period in which so many other Central American countries were experiencing terrible civil wars, such as the Honduran and Salvadoran “Football War.” Due to border issues in 1969, Hondurans fought this brief war against El Salvador because they were

Despite the fact that these nations are still recovering from their conflicts, a curious aftereffect was that more academics began to research Central American literature. Although the literature had received limited attention in previous years, in recent decades, academic circles recognized that the Central American testimonial novel presented an innovative format for the nonfiction narration of a series of events. Yet the interest in testimonial literature was also limiting, for because of it, the focus of Central American literature narrowed. It appears as though Central America has been equated with the testimonial novel, and if a nation did not have testimonial literature, the literature was not studied. With the testimonial novel representing Central America, it is easier to dismiss the idea that there could be other facets of this region's literature. Although I do not deny the importance of this genre, I would contend that the focus placed upon the testimony has come to represent Central American literature in its entirety. It offers a restricted and often authoritarian perspective on what the Central American canon *should* be, without considering other facets of the Central American reality communicated with writing and other forms of cultural production. Therefore, in light of these restrictive parameters that define the Central American canon, in this study I would like to go beyond the testimonial novel and investigate the Honduran works that do not fit into this literary genre of "testimony."

Honduran Cultural Production

Honduras, despite its relative anonymity, can boast a plethora of literary works stemming from the beginning of the twentieth century. These works have remained unrecognized to the international community. It is primarily for this reason that I choose to

upset about the number of Salvadoran immigrants entering their country. Nevertheless, relative peace followed after this war of four days. During the 1980s, Honduran president Roberto Sauzo established massive developmental projects that helped the country's progress, and the United States also maintained a strong presence in the country that may have stifled any conflict between opposing factions (Stahler-Sholk 140).

concentrate upon twentieth and twenty-first century Honduran literature and cultural production as the subject of this study. The nation of Honduras has suffered from extreme underdevelopment and poverty that makes it one of the poorest Latin American countries and the country's concern has been more on economic survival. Fortunately, the enthusiasm for researching Honduran cultural production has grown, but so much of this production remains untouched and unexamined. Therefore, numerous examples of Honduran cultural production often lay stagnant; the books and manuscripts collecting dust in some distant corner of an archive or library.

When considering the subject matter for this project, I had always been curious as to how Hondurans saw themselves racially, and in fact, there were two possible approaches towards race that interested me the most. First, there were those works that spoke about blackness from the perspective of the marginalized black writer. One author who has written about the black writers of Latin America, including Central American, is Richard L. Jackson. Many of his books such as *Black Writers in Latin America* (1979) confirm that literary works come from countries such as Panama and Costa Rica. In particular, he exhibits a strong interest in Afro-Latino writers such as the Costa Rican novelist Quince Duncan and the Panamanian poet Gaspar Octavio Hernández. Although his work does not address Honduran writers, he recognizes the literature produced in marginalized Central American countries and in fact, promotes the black writers that have written both poetry and prose. While the corpus of black-authored literature from Honduras is growing, it still is a developing area of study. At the date when I began this study, I was unable to find enough material to write a project on black voices.

The second approach that intrigued me also had to do with blackness and cultural production. Critics have written in depth on the literature written by non-black authors that depict Afro-descendants of other Latin American countries. For example, many writers have studied the representation of blackness in Cuban Cirilo Villaverde's novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1892), Cuban Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's novel *Sab* (1841), and various poems stemming from the Caribbean *poesía negroide* movement in the 1940s. Honduras boasts a well-developed corpus of literature written by Ladinos that addresses the question of blackness and national identity. In a country in which pluralistic and multi-ethnic voices ask to be heard, it is the Ladino that attempts to control the volume. As discussed above, Honduras is a country that has often questioned its national and racial identity, and in order to solve the Honduran identity crisis, its citizens and government have created a fictionalized identity that serves as a cohesive model for citizenship. Nevertheless, the dominant model of identity that emerges in the country's cultural production is not monolithic. Despite the preference for a "whitened" version of Ladino identity that pays homage to past indigenous grandeur, non-black authors and film producers have demonstrated an interest in exploring the role of the Afro-Honduran subject in national identity during the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although these works open the dialogue on blackness in Honduras, we must question how these authors represent race and national identity. In his article, "Black Phobia and the White Aesthetic in Spanish American Literature," (1975) Richard L. Jackson states that in Latin America there is a long history of associating blackness with "ugliness, sin, darkness [and] immorality" (467). Jackson also ascertains that groups of non-black Latin American authors display good intentions by including black characters in their works, but despite their genuine interest in

black culture, they tend to rely on archetypal representations and a desire to classify blackness as “exotic” (469). The literature produced by non-black Honduran writers is no exception; despite an expressed admiration for Afro-Honduran culture, the authors in question rely on formulaic interpretations of blackness that do little to expand the role of black Hondurans in national identity. As I mentioned in the beginning of this introduction, Benedict Anderson embraces the concept that a “print-capitalism” was imperative in the development of national identity in the imagined community of the nascent nation. This distribution of written and visual material may not have reached all Hondurans, but we can look at the opinions expressed by the authors and artists of these works as representative of the racist cosmovision of the time in which they were produced.

Curiously, those works penned by non-black authors share similar themes with those works found within the black Latin American canon of literature. These themes such as sexuality, immigration, and the search for identity appear in the literary works of blacks and the non-blacks that represent Afro-descendant characters. US/Afro-Caribbean authors such as the Puerto Rican novelist Piri Thomas, who wrote *Down these Mean Streets* (1967), and Dominican novelist Junot Diaz who wrote *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), write about journey and the double-consciousness that their protagonists develop as they navigate identity and race politics while living in the United States. While Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén writes about a large variety of subjects, he also has written several poems about the exotic qualities of the Afro-descendant woman, placing her outside the parameters of the normative group’s definition of beauty.¹⁴ Through these examples we can see an interesting phenomenon in which black writers have mastered the master’s language and

¹⁴ See “Mulata” (1987) by Nicolás Guillén. In this poem the author uses the voice of the black subject to criticize the features of the mixed-race woman, emphasizing her sexuality.

have created their own discourse in order to define identity, but ironically, the non-black writers have appropriated the voice of the Afro-Latino author and taking the most common themes of black literature to use for their own literary purposes (Kubayanda 120).

In order to understand the Ladino construction of blackness, we must begin chronologically with the first works that insert the black subject into the national imaginary. Starting with the second chapter, I will demonstrate how the poetry produced from the *poesía negroide* movement in Honduras writes Afro-Hondurans into the literary scene. Claudio Barrera, the editor of the anthology *Poesía negra de Honduras* (1962), claims that the works that he has selected for the anthology inscribe the Afro-Honduran into national identity, but I propose that this selection of poetry has the opposite effect. Although the poetry of the anthology breaks with the Honduran tendency to rely on Ladino/indigenous paradigms of identity, it still depends on a series of archetypal images of Garífuna and West Indian blacks to present the role of the Afro-Honduran to the Ladino reader. This creates a greater degree of difference between Ladinos and Afro-Hondurans as opposed to a shared bond based on national identity. In the poetic images, the poets depict the black Honduran as an outsider as he or she lounges or dances on the beach, removed from the daily life of mainstream society. In other examples of poetry, the authors present racial stereotypes such as the sensual black woman, the tragic mulatta, the lazy black Sambo, the emasculated black man and the lazy black man. According to Barrera, the well-meaning authors who have penned these racist images have tried to show the reality of the black community, but the truth is that the abovementioned archetypes are limiting and one-dimensional representations of blackness that have appeared in other cultures such as the United States and the Caribbean as tools of

domination. If a nation cannot imagine its black citizens in any role other than sensual or lazy, there is no way to topple the dominant interpretation of national race and identity.

In the third chapter, I explore how blackness, indigeneity and nationality fuse together as Hondurans consider their future as they anticipate the new millennium. The novel *Madrugada: El rey del albor* (1993) by Julio Escoto proposes an African American historian living within the borders of Honduras as the potential catalyst for change in national identity. Dr. Jones, a black man from the United States, pursues and is pursued by various Honduran women of different races. Most notable are his relationships with Erika, an indigenous Mayan woman and Sheila, a West Indian Honduran woman of mixed race. I examine how Dr. Jones's romantic trysts are reminiscent of the Latin American foundational fictions, for the text itself uses the possible outcomes of Dr. Jones's relationships as an avenue to ponder the direction in which to take Honduran racial identity. Although definitions of race in *Madrugada* are different than the definitions found in the poems from the *poesía negroide* movement of Barrera's anthology, Escoto still relies heavily on mayanizing Honduran national identity and limiting the depiction of his black characters as revolutionaries.

Also notable are the novel's minor characters found in various flashbacks to past historical periods during Honduran history. Although these situations don't apply to a contemporary interpretation of national identity since they occurred before Honduran independence, they are important in that they set the backdrop for the events that take place in the narration concerning Dr. Jones. These secondary characters such as Aurelina and Don Robinson try to decipher the relationship between desire and hybridity during the conquest and colonial periods and above all, explore to what degree blackness could be included in the national imaginary.

In the fourth chapter, I discuss how the Garífuna perform different identities in transmigrational Honduran literature. It is apparent that the issue of national identity is still at stake, but in this case, the question of Honduran national identity is posited from outside its borders. This chapter focuses on the play *Loubavagu* (1980) by Rafael Murillo Selva Rendón, the novel *Big Banana* (2001) by Roberto Quesada, and the film *El espíritu de mi mamá* (2002) directed by Alí Allié. In *Loubavagu*, the anonymous Garífuna immigrant is only known as the “Newyorkino.” Not only is he not represented as both indigenous and black but Murillo Selva’s portrait of the Newyorkino borders on the absurd, for this character only presents a stereotypical representation of blackness in which he acts as the buffoon. In the end, the author’s attempts to insert the black Honduran into national identity are thwarted, for the Newyorkino’s one-dimensional rendering portrays the Garífuna as individuals too ignorant to contribute to national identity. In *Big Banana*, the Garífuna subject Mairena struggles to define himself. He eventually decides to refer to himself as “negro,” thus denying his indigenous roots. Finally, in *El espíritu de mi mamá*, the character Manuel presents a curious interpretation of black masculinity. Manuel, who is the assumed boyfriend of the protagonist Sonia, creates a new personality for himself based on African American concepts of masculine identity and therefore, not only does he deny his indigeneity, he also performs as another Afro-descendant group to which he does not pertain.

To recapitulate, the monolithic racial identity of Honduras leaves little room for a dynamic national identity. The campaign fought by the Carísta government in the 1930s ensured that any hope for change would be suffocated. Due to this campaign to create a fictionalized national identity, Hondurans could not escape the multitude of visual references to a Mayan and Lencan past, nor the simultaneous tendency towards ladinization. To

compound the atmosphere of racial prejudice, many Hondurans mistreated and abused the Afro-descendant banana plantation workers during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. In light of racial discrimination practiced in Honduras, it comes as no surprise that blacks were kept out of the national imaginary. During the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, small groups of Ladinos have begun to explore the role of the Honduran Afro-descendants in regards to national identity. Nevertheless, despite the varied attempts to somehow rewrite racial identity by means of poetry, plays, prose, and movie scripts, the works present mixed results. Due to the limited representations of blackness included in these works, they cannot always function as vehicles for change, yet they demonstrate an interest in reconsidering national identity.

Chapter II

Literary Creation of the Afro-Descendant Subject in Honduran *Poesía Negroide*

Es un aporte, que lleva el sentimiento de un pedazo de nuestro pueblo, que vive arrullado por el mar, trabajando duramente en su parcela humilde, creando el nuevo concepto de la raza, y cultivando sus nobles sentimientos de hondureñidad a través de su piel fina, oscura, adolorida y triste. (Barrera 7)

Antecedents to the Honduran *Poesía Negroide* Movement

The attempt to construct the black subject is a desire manifested not only in film and narrative, but also in poetry. This desire appears in the Honduran literary scene of the twentieth century in which Ladino authors began to construct representations of blackness in their poems. One example of Ladino desire to depict blackness appears in the anthology *Poesía negra en Honduras* (1962) edited by Claudio Barrera.¹⁵ In the introduction to the anthology, Barrera, an esteemed Honduran poet himself, attempts to create a discourse counter to the racial discrimination towards Afro-Hondurans that he witnessed throughout much of the twentieth century. His efforts to include Honduran Afro-descendants within the national imaginary come at an interesting point in Honduran history, yet as I will also propose, his efforts are not without debate. But first, it is useful to elaborate upon the historical context in which Barrera did his work, for the historical context is paramount in the effort to comprehend why Honduran authors attempted to write blacks into the Honduran imaginary. Although this feat would have been of utmost importance for the revision of national identity, it also would prove to be a slippery slope of representation. As I will detail

¹⁵ Claudio Barrera, also known as Vicente Alemán, published various anthologies of Honduran poetry. Also notable is his work *Antología de poetas jóvenes de Honduras desde 1935* (1950).

in the following paragraphs, racial tension in Honduras peaked during the early to mid-twentieth century, so therefore it can be assumed that the poets from this anthology would have been living in a climate of open hostility towards Afro-descendants. Taking this into consideration, the group of Ladinos whose poetry is published in this particular anthology raises vital questions as to how they chose to depict and insert the black subject into Honduran society. Barrera, a Ladino himself, has selected poems for this anthology that are models of the Honduran *negroide* movement. Barrera expresses an interest in incorporating Afro-Hondurans into Ladino society, and he states that the poetry in his anthology provides a message of unity. While it is true that many of these poems provide a general condemnation of discriminatory practices found in Honduras, other poems reinforce practices of racial stereotyping; as a consequence they counteract Barrera's original anti-racist intentions that were to be the backbone of the anthology.

First, it is useful to understand what events initially solidified the efforts to erase any representation of blackness from Honduran society. The racist zeitgeist led to Honduras's elimination of Afro-descendants from the national imaginary. As discussed in the introduction, starting in the 1920s, Honduras was undergoing a phase of nationalism in which the nation strived to redefine itself through the indigenous peoples' struggle for freedom (Euraque 231). Lempira, the indigenous war captain of the Lencan tribe during the sixteenth century, has been touted since the early twentieth century as an iconographic representation of national identity and he, via numerous visual manifestations, eventually was seen as representative of all Hondurans (Euraque 230). Not only is his portrait prominent in Honduran national identity (albeit a fictionalized representation of him), his name has also been applied to Honduran currency and various toponyms. While I do not wish to refute the

importance of the creation of a symbolic indigenous model for national belonging, I also would argue that the creation of an image so seeped in ethnic identity cannot adequately represent a pluralistic society such as Honduras.¹⁶ In census reports taken in 2008, 97% of Hondurans claim some degree of heritage linked to Honduran indigenous groups, but many believe that this number is inflated because it is not uncommon for Hondurans to claim an indigenous background in order to fit with the dominant model of race and citizenship. Nevertheless, the fact remains that as a symbol of Honduran national identity, Lempira does not embody the identity of Hondurans that claim either European and/or African ancestry (CIA World Factbook). The percentage of those claiming African heritage is suspiciously low, and therefore must be questioned. Honduras does not use the U.S. definition of one drop of black blood to measure blackness, and I would suggest that perhaps more people are Afro-descendants, yet due to prevalent racial prejudice, they use what Gates and Appiah would call methods of social whitening to avoid being placed in the category of “black” and may not self-categorize as black for purposes of the census (200). Needless to say, regardless of what the true percentage of Afro-descendants may be, they are not accurately represented by a monolithic, indigenous construction of identity.

As mentioned in the introduction, axiomatic in the interpretation of blackness in Honduras during the middle of the twentieth century was the negative image that Afro-descendants gained as laborers on the United Fruit Company’s banana plantations. These Garífuna and West Indian laborers were regarded as foreign, and therefore Ladinos refused to classify them as authentically “Honduran.” Ladinos did not recognize the cultural differences between the two groups of blacks, and only saw blacks as resistant to

¹⁶ By using the term “symbolic”, I am not denying the existence of Lempira. What I wish to challenge is the idea that indigeneity must be the standard for an “authentic” Honduran identity.

“hondureñidad.” The Ladinos concluded that as a result of the African heritage of the plantation workers, it would be impossible to incorporate these black groups into the nation. In the 1920s, the debate as to whether Afro-descendants could become “authentic” Hondurans became so heated within government factions that the FOH (Federación Obrera Hondureña) attempted to prohibit the, “importation into the territory of the Republic of negroes of the African race” (Darío 245). This measure never passed, yet racist attitudes such as this snowballed into mass hysteria. Eventually in the 1930s, the Carísta government descended upon the San Juan Garífuna communities and murdered several innocent citizens.¹⁷ Even though the Garífuna had lived in Honduras for centuries, they were designated as foreign citizens due to their marginalized status, with the underlying reason being race and the sociopolitical context of the banana plantations.

Taking into consideration the exclusionary policies and racism prevalent in Honduras during the first half of the twentieth century, I believe that the negroide poetry produced in Honduras during the mid-twentieth century faced a difficult challenge in that it had to ingratiate itself to a hostile audience. Above all, it creates an unrecognized identity crisis, for even though it strives to bring the Afro-descendant community into a place of inclusion within Honduras, the reality is that it is bipolar in nature. On a certain level this genre of poetry includes the Afro-Honduran, but on another level it places the black subject in the realm of the exotic, the sensual, or the comical. I propose that upon being placed into this

¹⁷ The presidency of Tiburcio Carías Andino was fraught with controversy. Beginning in 1933, Carías promoted a xenophobic environment in which many foreign nationals were not welcome to immigrate to Honduras (Contreras 248-50). It is suspected that race, ethnic, origin and religion were key factors in who the government excluded from Honduras, for there are several accounts of Jews being refused entry to Honduran ports.

space, the Afro-Honduran is unable to integrate himself into Honduran national identity as something more than a mere curiosity.

Blackness as a Subject/Object in Honduran Poetry: A Dispute in Terminology

The Honduran *poesía negroide* of the 1940s to the 1960s movement has rarely been studied. The one exception is a study published in Spain in 2007. Jorge Alberto Amaya wrote an extensive literary criticism on those Honduran literary works that incorporate a Garífuna character in their plots or as an image in a poem. Important to this chapter is that his study, *Las imágenes de los negros garífunas en la literatura hondureña y extranjera*, broaches the topic of the black subject in Honduran literature, and of even more relevance is that he includes the Honduran *poesía negroide*.¹⁸ Amaya's investigation attempts to establish that there is a correlation between the works of the authors in this anthology and national identity, asserting that these particular works are axiomatic in the depiction of the Afro-Honduran as part of Honduran history. What concerns me is his declaration that this poetry fits into the Caribbean *négritude* movement, which I do not agree with.¹⁹ According to Abiola Irele, the *négritude* movement (with Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon being some of the most prominent thinkers) encompasses themes of servitude, alienation, revolt (with a refusal of western values) and finally rediscovery, all within the colonial situation. Also important is that *négritude* is a movement stemming from black thinkers, while the authors cited in Amaya's investigation are Ladinos trying to paint an outsider's verbal portrait of blacks in their "vida cotidiana," completing activities which they would normally do. This is

¹⁹Amaya never defines what aspects of *négritude* are incorporated into the Honduran poetry. He simply declares that a particular poet, in this case Jesús Cornelio Rojas "mezcla en sus poesías palabras características del Movimiento de la Negritud" (140). Amaya subsequently cites the poem and proceeds to discuss the poem's usage of jitanjáforas.

a concept which falls more into the *negroide* movement than the *négritude* movement which is an argument that I will justify in the following section.

The Caribbean *Poesía Negroide* Movement

The brightly painted portraits of the Afro-descendant in Honduran poetry are not solely limited to the Honduran literary imaginary but rather were prevalent in Latin American literature. In order to better comprehend the general themes that the *negroide* authors insert into their works, it is useful to look towards the Caribbean where there exists a large body of literature from the *poesía negroide* tradition. Equally just as important, there are more formal studies published on these Caribbean poems that can help guide the present study.²⁰ They come from a long literary tradition that was initiated in the Caribbean by the poetry of Puerto Rican Luis Palés Matos and Cuban Emilio Ballagas (Morales 24). In the *poesía afroantillana*, the representation of blackness in national identity is also blurred, and, depending on the author, idealized to a certain extent. Jorge Luis Morales presents this polemic subject by citing Spanish poet Gerardo Diego, who proposes the idea that:

[E]n Palés como en Ballagas, lo negro está hondamente sentido, pero desde fuera, ya que ellos son blancos. Como se ha visto muy bien, los atractivos, los problemas y las angustias del alma negra están vividos por ellos no sólo como espectadores más o menos turísticos, sino compartiéndolos fraternalmente en cuanto hombres que aman una patria, la suya, que quedaría amputada si se prescindiera del negro. El negro es un ingrediente esencial en toda Antilla. (25)

²⁰ The Caribbean *poesía negroide* movement serves as a point of departure for the present study, but it is important to remember that unlike the authors in Honduras, many of the Caribbean authors were afro-descendants themselves. The Caribbean movement is useful in that it defines the actual themes and characteristics of the poetry, but the poems produced reflect their demographic variations.

Diego's assertion that "el negro es un ingrediente esencial en toda Antilla," provides a contrast to Honduras's mayanization and ladinization movements. While it is true that Caribbean nations and Honduras attempt to unify their populations under the guise of an imagined racial solidarity and/or harmonious interracial relationships, they differ in the racial affiliations which they involve, and due to greater numbers of *afroantillano* populations, the Caribbean *poesía negroide* movement would have been more successful in proposing blackness as a feasible component of national identity.²¹ Although Honduras has a much smaller population of black inhabitants, their representation on a national level is so limited that during the mid-twentieth century they were an almost invisible population, so ignored by the state that they were deprived of running water, basic education and other resources. Unlike Honduras, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic have very few tangible ties to indigenous cultures due to the fact that most Amerindian populations were decimated in the first decades of the conquest by war and various illnesses brought upon them by the Spanish conquerors. Therefore, unlike Honduras, there are no competing indigenous identities in the social sphere or the literary scene.²² The idea that everybody has a black

²¹ Ironically, despite the poetry's attempt to homogenize the Puerto Rican population, the reality is that Puerto Rico and Cuba actually "claim" (depending on census statistics) societies that are as racially stratified as Honduras's population. According to the CIA World Fact Book, Puerto Rico's population consists of 80% white, 8% black and "mixed and other" hovering around 10.9%. There is no definition for "mixed". Since the time that this poetry was written, the racial composition of Cuban society has changed dramatically due to the Cuban Revolution and white flight to Miami, so I will cite statistics from the 1950s. Pre-revolutionary times, Cuba boasted a population that was 75% white, with the rest of the inhabitants being black and Asian. Honduras consists of mestizo (defined as indigenous and white) being 90%, Amerindian 7%, black 2% and white 1%. All have a large dominant racial group preceded by several smaller racial groups. But I would say that the key piece of information is that Honduras's black/mulatto population is notably smaller than that of Cuba and Puerto Rico, while its Amerindian and mestizo population is remarkably higher. I do not include the Dominican Republic's census figures because the CIA uses "mixed" to describe the majority of their population without defining what this mixture consists of, although I would presume that it is primarily mulatto.

²² Also important to Honduras's reliance on indigenous motifs for self-identification was the Modernism movement which relied on autochthonous imagery to redefine national identity. Being that Afro-Hondurans were not autochthonous to Honduras but rather they were the result of mixing between Africans and Caribbean indigenous groups, this could be another motive for the rarity in which they are portrayed in literature.

grandmother hidden away in the back room of the house (an idea taken from the Puerto Rican *poesía negroide* movement's Fortunato Vizcarrondo's famous poem "¿Y tu agüela a'ónde ejtá?") proves to be useful in opening the discussion of Puerto Rican racial identity even though not all Puerto Ricans are of African descent (Vizcarrondo 77-78).²³ Yet as I will underscore, the Honduran *negroide* movement parallels the Antillean *negroide* movement in some regards (such as the poetic images), but unfortunately this literary trend tends not to racially unite the Honduran population for it depicts a heterogeneous and racially divided society. As I will explain, it figuratively drove the Afro-Hondurans to the peripheral zones of the nation for these poetic examples do not accentuate *la hondureñidad* of their subjects but rather their exotic quality. With this I do not mean to imply that the *poesía afroantillana* did not have the same effect; many agree with Juan A. Guisti Cordero that the *poesía negroide* poets extol the Afro-Antillean's sensual characteristics while making some attempt to sympathize with their plight, or as he says:

The main *negroide* traits include [. . .] indeed a heightened experience and deployment of all the senses, directly corresponding to a de-emphasis on the rational, and an appeal to the "primitive;" festiveness (*bachata*) [. . .] fluid body movement, upbeat movement and rhythm [. . .] enchantment with the coastal landscape; idealization of the traditional, rustic lifestyle of the *negros de la costa*. (59)

²³ The importance behind Vicarrondo's seemingly innocent question has to do with the fact that Puerto Rican African roots have been so often denied by its citizens; that is to say, in order to whiten oneself, the Puerto Rican hides his or her grandmother with African features from public view. Vicarrondo was one of the few writers of the Negroide movement who was an Afro-descendant, and many critics such as Morales have suggested that it was perhaps due to his skin color that the message of his poetry uncovers a profound truth in Puerto Rican racial identity. The other famous line from the same poem is, "Aquí el que no tiene dinga/Tiene mandinga," which again, refers to the shared African heritage of Puerto Ricans. The meaning of Vizcarrondo's words refers to African tribal affiliation, for if a person is not from the Dinga tribe of Africa, he or she is from the Mandinga tribe, thus implying that the Puerto Rican subject may verbally deny a vinculum to Africa, but the reality is that no whitening tactic can truly deny one's heritage (Gordon 382-83).

The poet within the *poesía negroide* movement often attempts the transference of black identity upon the poetic voice, meaning that even if he or she is not an Afro-descendant, the poet often writes from the first person perspective, thus granting himself or herself a greater freedom to imbue the African image with his or her own interpretation of their life.

Regardless of authenticity issues, the emphasis that the poetry placed on body movement and the so-called “primitive” would achieve the effect of placing the black subject just barely inside national boundaries. I would adduce that the manner in which they are portrayed, that is, as exotic and sensual, places the Afro-descendant body into a fantasy realm which has little to do with reality. Above all, this approach towards blackness concentrates more on the body as a vessel of cultural manifestations, yet when we look at how Ladinos construct Afro-Honduran culture, we see that culture is conflated with sexuality. Furthermore, the elements of Afro-Honduran culture that are included in *poesía negroide* are often exaggerated and transformed into a vision that can be used to address the non-black’s desire to dominate the black subject.

The reason for including this discussion of the Caribbean *poesía negroide* movement is that it preceded the brief Honduran entry into the same theme and therefore it could have feasibly set the standards for the Honduran variant of *poesía negroide*. Although the Caribbean *poesía negroide* movement came into fruition first, the Honduran movement was soon to follow and for a time the two regions concurrently produced similarly themed poetry. Perhaps like the Caribbean authors, the Honduran authors of *poesía negroide* desired to have a racially all inclusive *hondureñidad* as their national identity, even if this entailed disputing the monolithic indigenous identity already in place. An interesting sidebar to this comparison is that upon reading the works included in *Poesía negra en Honduras*, it

becomes clear that despite their close parallels to the *poesía afroantillana*, they still incorporate some unmistakably Honduran aspects into their verse that differentiate the two corpuses of work from each other, creating a unique vision of blackness that melds the African diasporic culture and Honduran nationality together, for example the inclusion of words in the Garífuna language and certain Afro-Honduran historical figures.

Performing as “Black” in *Poesía Negroide*

One of the functions that the *poesía negroide* movement of the Caribbean accomplishes is that the authors (within the movement itself) attempt to define blackness in the Caribbean context. Whether these depictions of blackness are “correct” or “authentic” is a subject that falls outside the scope of this study. What is important is that, according to the poets, these portraits of blackness lend themselves to the general perception of what a black subject was and how he or she pertained to national identity. As I have already mentioned, some of the key identifiers of what these authors designate as being innate characteristics of the Afro-descendant subject are underscored in multiple examples of poetry. The principal examples are: the eroticization of black body; mulatta beauty; and exotic portraits of a rural countryside where blacks are thought to live (usually it is a seaside location). Guisti Cordero confirms that the *cultura negroide* (that is, Caribbean art and literature depicting Afro-descendants) embraces a “social and political comment from a democratic perspective. Partly because Palés did not practice that subgenre, it is not usually seen as part and parcel of the definition of *cultura negroide*” (59). Palés is indeed considered to be in the forefront of the Caribbean movement, although at the same time I would agree that his portrayal of the Afro-descendants begs the readers to pity the black subject by the humble, victimized

attributes granted to them, and therefore there is little space left for a more multi-dimensional portrait of the black subject.

Nevertheless, upon taking the above concepts into consideration, it can be deduced that blackness is granted to the subject that performs as black (that is, he or she must be erotic), and in order to fit into the national identity of the nation (whether it be Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Honduras), he or she must adhere to this static representation of blackness. Any misstep that falls out of line with the following limited descriptions of blacks would cause them to no longer fit into the national imaginary. The Afro-descendant who no longer lives along the coast, who does not perform as an exotic, dancing figure, or who dares to be masculine does not adhere to the set role that he or she is assigned by the dominant culture. Therefore these blacks are rejected because if they were to relocate to urban areas or assert their masculinity, or perform the same societal roles as Ladinos, they suddenly become a threat to racial purity (Echeverri-Gent 282). The dominant culture in Honduras considered it to be in the best interest of the nation to only depict blacks in certain areas in order to maintain the particular “racial order” that was mandated by Carías.

Returning to the Honduran *poesía negroide* movement, Barrera has written a prologue that justifies this importance for black Hondurans to perform as black in these particular manners because it intrinsically ties the black subject to the land itself. He pictures his country as a “HONDURAS primaveral, hecha en la fantasía de la Naturaleza” (5). If Honduras itself is a “fantasía,” then it is logical to assume that there is room for an exotic race of people in the exotic locals across the country. Barrera affirms this concept, and in his desire to legitimize the inclusion of blacks in the national panorama, he asserts that blacks have found their home in Honduras “bajo las sombras de las palmas [. . .] sobre la arena

blanca de las playas” (6). Therefore, as long as the Afro-descendants perform as black (that is doing “exotic” activities and dancing in a sensual manner), he or she is permitted to occupy Honduran space, but again, this space should be exotic (beaches, palm trees, coconuts).

Barrera portrays a degree of discomfort with the idea of blacks occupying a more urban space. Instead, he celebrates that the Afro-descendant “tiene sus costumbres, sus ambiciones y sus alegrías frente al mar” (7), while lamenting the exigencies that have made it imperative for the black subject to move to the city “se va internando en las ciudades [. . .] buscando su destino” (7). By associating black Honduras with far-off locals, the text *others* them so that it is impossible to imagine blacks living in the city with Ladinos. Furthermore it appears that while in the exotic local, the Afro-descendant is content and “in his or her place,” whereas while in an urban space, he or she is out of place, that is, still looking for an identity to perform, but unable to perform as black. This brings us back to the original quote of Barrera that I included as an epigraph to this chapter in which he conflates the ideas of “pueblo” (nation), the Afro-descendant in his or her exotic seaside location and a “hondureñidad a través de su piel fina [y] obscura” (7). Barrera in effect has collapsed the concepts of race, geography and national identity to non-separable entities that constitute how a black Honduran must perform: to perform as authentically black and Honduran, one must live on the coast with the palm trees; one must be sensual; one cannot live in urban space, because in this space a “dis-authentication” can occur. The Afro-descendant must “represent” himself or herself with this montage of images and be recognized by not only the

canonical Honduran poets of the mid-twentieth century, but also by Hondurans as a whole in what Barrera terms a “bibliografía nacional” of images.²⁴

While the visibility designated to Afro-Hondurans by these Ladino Honduran poets certainly would seem preferable to having blackness be subsumed through mayanization and ladinization, by extending the visibility of Afro-Honduran subjects with these reduced descriptions, further questions are raised. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault postulates that the idea of visibility of culture and difference is inherent in society. He comments that, “our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance . . . the hierarchical, permanent exercise of indefinite discipline” (193). Any perceived difference from the normative group thus becomes something that must be monitored and observed in order to contain it, or at least limit it from affecting the paradigmatic construction of beauty. Yet some level of difference is allowed as long as it can be successfully pushed to peripheral zones of the nation, a space in which observation can be facilitated. In this case, observation is only “safe” if it comes under the Ladino gaze; that is, if the Ladino can construct blackness in a manner that is fit to be consumed by Ladinos, then it can be properly surveyed. In the following sections of this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that during the mid-twentieth century, the constructions of blackness as found in Barrera’s *Antología de poesía negra* are created following a certain formula so that both black men and women are reduced to images created for the consumption of the Ladino reader. For the most part these images fit into particular stereotypical parameters that assert Ladino superiority over Afro-Honduran inferiority. The terminology employed to describe these stereotypical parameters stem from various slave societies. Thus, it is a reasonable strategy to rely on these images, for they are

²⁴ By “biblioteca nacional,” Barrera signifies that he is interested in maintaining the image of the Afro-Honduran in the mind of the Ladino.

images that have all been woven into Honduran *poesía negroide*. While some of these black archetypes are purely related to the United States, a country which exerted a strong cultural influence over Honduras during the twentieth century, others have their origins in lore produced by slave traders of various nationalities (such as the Sambo archetype). What is important to realize is that sources from the United States, Europe and other parts of Latin America have generated a majority of the literature about these archetypes and have shaped how this theme has been studied.

Performing as a Black Woman: The Jezebel

In patriarchal society, the female body has always fallen under the scrutiny of the masculine gaze. Film critic Laura Mulvey speaks of voyeuristic pleasure and the “male gaze” in which females are viewed as the object of the gaze. In other words, this pleasure entails the act of a male “looking” at the human form (female) as an object (17). She explains that, “It [the instinct to observe] can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified Other” (17). While Mulvey specifically focuses upon film as being an outlet for voyeuristic fantasy, she also discusses Freud’s definition of “scopophilia” which defines the basic human desire to “take in other people as objects” (16). Scopophilia which is defined as the male erotic pleasure of observing the female form is commonly expressed in the Honduran *poesía negroide*, often paired with the term “sandunguería,” which specifically refers to the manner in which the woman moves her body.

The white male fascination with the black female body has antecedents that arose long before the advent of *poesía negroide*, and it is worth taking a brief look at how such

attitudes developed in order to better comprehend the poetry's social context. Historically black female bodies have been touted as deviant and extremely sensual. Due to these qualities, the black female body has been thought to perform in certain manners that only a black body can achieve (Hobson 11). The nineteenth-century fixation on the buttocks of the "Hottentot Venus," Saartjie Baartman, serves as a harbinger for later endeavors to treat parts of the female black body as a commodity that is marketable to the public.²⁵ The black female body has been appropriated as an object for the visual consumption of the Eurocentric gaze, and has been placed in various different locations of the beauty spectrum by Europeans. The discourse on black female beauty varies from temporal period to geographical location. As seen in the case of Saartjie Baartman, during the early nineteenth century her body was categorized as having binary characteristics, from being purely "grotesque" to being "hypersexualized" (Hobson 12-13). The body of Baartman was regarded as a curiosity, even an abnormality by some, many of them males with voyeuristic intentions. There was much discourse generated from the mixed reactions over Baartman's figure. On one hand the dominant discourse emphasized the hypersexual qualities of Baartman's buttocks, yet on the other hand the normative group ascribed a strong aversion to her buttock area. As Hobson reiterates, "She [Baartman] suffer[s] under the dominant cultural gaze that defines her as an anomaly, a freak, oversexed and subhuman" (6). Even in the absence of having pronounced buttocks or any other physical feature that is deemed as "abnormal" by the normative group's standards, a black woman still cannot escape the voyeuristic glare of the dominant culture,

²⁵ Saartjie Baartman, a Khoesan woman from South Africa, had a condition known as steatopygia in which large amounts of adipose tissue deposits in the buttock area. Due to this condition, Baartman's body was exhibited in France and England so that the public could observe her large buttocks. Her body was deemed to be "deviant" because the buttocks were pronounced in comparison with the idealistic Euro-centric paradigms of beauty. Tragically, a fair amount of profit was gained from the curious who gathered to mock her figure during her life and even after her death (Abrahams 43-44).

for it appears that solely by having black skin, the Afro-descendant female is constructed as being overly sexual. Therefore the idea of needing an anatomical “abnormality” in order to be categorized as hypersexualized is often ignored and the bodies of black women, no matter what their physical composition may be, are read solely “as a sign of sexual experience” (hooks 160). This projected sexuality and advanced degree of sexual experience ascribed to the body of the Other comes from arguments of alleged superior sexual abilities from the dominant groups, for as I detail later in this chapter, the fantasy of a wanton and sexually free woman, contrasts sharply with the “good girl” standards of sexual purity often assigned to white women in a society (whether it be Europe, the United States or Latin America) so wrought with absolute binary oppositions.²⁶

Therefore this discussion begs the question, how does the dominant (white) male sector deal with black women that they perceive as so flagrantly scorning the rules of proper female behavior?²⁷ Where does the dominant (white) male population place the “rebellious” curves of the black female?

Bell hooks alludes to the aspect of cannibalism in her essay “Eating the Other,” accentuating that the act of “eating” another culture comes in many forms, and is often manifested by sexual domination of the Other, or by cultural appropriation of the Other’s

²⁶ The case of the mulatta women does not fall within the scope of hooks’ investigation, but as I will affirm in later sections of this chapter, historically the bodies of mulatta women are not associated with the same sense of shame as those of supposedly non-mulatta black women until they “. . . aspire higher than [they] should” (Anderson 45). In other words, in many literary and film representations, the “almost white” mulatta is considered innocent and virginal until she realizes that because of her black blood she is shut out of the privilege and power granted by whiteness, subsequently she becomes malicious, or in some cases, a tragic figure deserving of pity (53).

²⁷ As insinuated in the quote from bell hooks, black skin alone implies sexual transgression. In her essay “Madonna: Plantation Mistress or Soul Sister,” she highlights that despite the white performer Madonna’s open sexuality, she is looked at as more of a good girl led astray via circumstance, while regardless of how they dress, black female artists are rarely seen as innocent and are always perceived as being sexually “open.” The black woman feels that she does not have “the ‘freedom’ to act in rebellious ways in regards to sexuality without being punished” (160).

traditions. In the realm of possessing and controlling black behavior, perhaps one of the more efficient routes towards domination would be found through the more vulnerable sectors of the Other's population: the body of the black female. Across history, sexual penetration has been an effective way of controlling a population, and has been used as a tool for the subordination of conquered and colonized peoples and those placed in situations of bondage. Bell hooks concurs with this idea, verifying that, "A devaluation of black womanhood occurred as a result of the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery that has not altered in the course of hundreds of years" (53). Historian Gerda Lerner also confirms this, suggesting that, "The practice of raping the women of a defeated enemy is world-wide and is found in every culture" (172). The same paradigms of submission were set firmly in place in Latin America, for numerous authors such as Octavio Paz have written on the rape of indigenous women to enforce the control of the Spanish conquistador. Who can easily forget Paz's discourse on the Malinche Chingada? But the act of forced penetration does not always need to be present in order to enforce control; often it is merely the gaze of the male that creates a discourse that controls the body of the black woman without resorting to rape. In such a manner, the discourse created about Afro-descendant women by Ladino men controls these women who become object of their *poesía negroide*. Simply put, the Ladino man in Honduran society has greater access to power, and this allows him to disseminate a particular discourse to other Hondurans about his construction of blackness, femininity and sexuality. He can desire to consume blackness, although he eventually spits it back out, molded into his own interpretation of race and nationality.

Before any of the verbal images painted by the words of the poets included in Barrera's anthology, what first catches the reader's attention is the artwork included in the

text. It was not uncommon for many of the Caribbean *poesía negroide* works to contain artistic renditions of Afro-descendants performing an activity that relates to the theme of the poetry. In Barrera's anthology, one of the paintings depicting the distorted figure of an Afro-Honduran female accentuates stereotypical African features and the very obvious flaunting of sexuality. The woman has exaggerated lips, pronounced buttocks, large breasts and erect nipples that are visible through a tight shirt. The mere fact that the woman's body is extremely distorted gives the impression that she is somehow abnormal and outside the realm of humanity as defined by the normative group. The pronounced buttocks and nipples construct a visual narrative of desire and above all, connote sexual availability. The scene surrounding the woman, a deserted beach scattered with palm trees, creates nostalgia for the past, for it is a primitive scene in which there are no signs of modernity present. Blackness is reminiscent of a time frozen in the past, in which the Afro-Honduran woman was perceived to be sexually available and willing to be taken by the Ladino male. Patricia Hill Collins traces perceptions of black female sexuality (as seen by non-blacks), and she notes that "biological notions of race and gender prevalent in the early nineteenth century that fostered the animalistic icon of Black female sexuality were joined by the appearance of a racist biology incorporating the concept of degeneracy" (171). The combined "degeneracy" of the black woman's behavior and her supposedly naturally sexual body justified the white men using her (whether visually or physically) for their personal pleasure. The figure of the black woman, with her sexual openness, is ready for the visual consumption of the portrait's viewers and reduces her to a sum of her sexual parts (breasts, lips, legs and buttocks). As for fitting into any part of Honduran national identity, the Afro-Honduran is literally painted into the peripheral areas of hegemonic society as a resident of the coast. Due to the sexual nature

of the portrait, the black woman is construed as an object of pleasure (visual and/or physical) but not a participant of the formation of nation. She exists for the purpose of a leering “admiration” while in the isolated coasts of eastern Honduras, a sort of folkloric figure which plays no part in modernity.

Due to the exaggerated sexuality of the black woman of the portrait, she depicts a threat of emanating an unbridled passion aimed towards enticing otherwise upstanding Ladino men to sexually consume her. This piece of artwork serves as a visual harbinger of many of the sexually charged themes displayed in various examples of the poetry included in the anthology. In fact, much of the poetry displays an almost overwhelming fear/desire for a potentially mutual consumption in which the black woman’s sexuality is so pervasive that the Ladino male voyeur cannot keep himself from being consumed by her *sandunguería*. This is not to say that the black female subjects in the following examples are explicitly “asking” for a sexual encounter with their male voyeurs, but rather the poets seem to express an implicit “she asked for it” attitude through their expressed desire to consume the Other. In her scholarship on gender studies, Lisa M. Anderson concurs that in the Americas, males of European heritage felt a right over the black women that they observed, noting that, “The myth of black female sexuality provided an opportunity for white males to own women who would then be available to them sexually” (87). She verifies that this image of the libertine Afro-descendant woman has not diminished over the centuries, but rather it is manifested in various artistic renditions of blackness such as the Jezebel figure (87-88). This observation is relevant in the poem “Canto a la Rumbera Porteña” by Honduran Daniel Laínez.²⁸ The

²⁸ As in much of the *poesía negroide* of the Caribbean, the playing of rumba music is the impetus for the movement of the black women that the Ladino observer witnesses (Cartey 79). Hernández Catá’s “Rumba”

premise is the same as in much of the Honduran *poesía negroide*; the Ladino male is the voyeur that is secretly gazing upon the body of the black female and subsequently cannot quell his lust:

Serpentina,
Serpenteante,
negra carne,
loco son,
al retorcerte jadeante
pienso en un mal torturante,
que olvidó la inquisición . . .
.....
Al volar tus leves faldas,
mis instintos definidos
gimen y vagan perdidos
en el va-i-ven de tus nalgas. (18)

The “sandunguera” element so integral to *poesía negroide* is extremely prominent in “Canto a la rumbera porteña,” but as detailed in the previous paragraphs, the construction of the black female figure is multi-faceted.²⁹ The black temptress is evidenced as the poetic voice of the poem attempts to depict himself as victimized by the sensuality of this particular woman. He falls prey to her when her skirt flies up and he is exposed to her swaying buttocks. His helplessness before her sexuality is apparent by his admission that his once

also incorporates similar scenes in which an anonymous observer spies upon the dancing, semi-nude body of a black woman (80).

²⁹ “Sandunguera” is a term used often in *poesía negroide*. It is a style of dance known for its sensual movements (Fairley 481).

defined instincts “vagan perdidos.” Clearly, we can see that the male poetic voice in the poem claims no responsibility for his state of arousal before this woman. It is the Jezebel attributes of the Afro-descendant woman that impel him to go countercurrent to the traditional Amerindian/European relationship established as he desires to be with a woman of African heritage.

Jesús Cornelio Rojas writes an even more revealing poem on white shame and desire to consume otherness. In his poem, “Loco son,” he describes his contact with a black woman while dancing. He writes:

Quiero que se lleve el viento
de tu raudo movimiento
la negra pena que siento
clavada en el corazón.
.....
Que mi corazón se empache,
fiera Venus de Azabache
con tu continuo bailar.
el ron de tu danza loca
negra de bembuda boca,
pueden hacerme olvidar. (43-45)

Again, we find a situation in which the Ladino observing a black woman dancing elaborates upon his feelings on being witness to this sight. In the beginning he feels a “black shame” for even daring to watch her sensual dance, but feels helpless to avert his gaze because he is entranced by her sexuality. He continues with his commentaries:

como el de tu danza, suba,
africana flor del mal,
hasta mi alma ensombrecida
por una dicha perdida.
Y ponle tú, de escalera,
tu sudorosa cadera
salvaje negra fatal.

.....

Y que se enreden mis males
en las raudas espirales
de tu danza de ciclón. (45)

Due to what he perceives as her sexually aggressive nature, his heart is forced to figuratively “overfeed itself” on the sight of this black woman, yet despite *his* inability to stop staring, he assigns negative attributes to this woman, using such phrases as, “africana flor del mal” (evil African flower) , and, “salvaje negra fatal” (deadly black savage).

In both poems, the interpretation of the women’s sexuality share many parallels. As already stated, they fall into the constructed identity of the Jezebel, that is, the wanton temptress, but it is the explicit association with the color of their skin that leads the male onlookers to construe their blackness as akin to libertine behavior. Interspersed with the allusions to sexuality, the two poets accentuate the women’s skin color to a high degree, making it impossible for us to forget that these are (sexual) women of color that they are describing, but even more revealing is that the poets appear not to be able to separate blackness and sexual behavior; the two concepts are intrinsically intertwined. In “Canto a la

rumbera porteña,” Laínez refers to the observed women as “negra carne” (black flesh or meat), or “ardiente negra rumbera” (burning black rumba dancer), while in “Loco son,” Rojas refers to the woman as a “fiera Venus de Azabache” (fierce jet-black Venus), a “raudo huracán de carbón” (swift hurricane of charcoal), and also states that her hips are the color of “charol,” or patent leather. In the first example, both references are direct parallels between the color of her skin and her sexuality. While the word “negra” quite simply translates into “black,” the meaning of the word “carne” is at best ambiguous, for the poet could be talking about her black flesh and at the same time he could be characterizing her as “black meat.”

The second reference to her blackness can be more easily interpreted as an ardent (in the sense of passionate) black rumba dancer. Whatever the case, we see by associating the black woman with objects such as charcoal that this leads to an effect that bell hooks categorizes as “devaluation” of black womanhood, where there is an “effort on the part of whites to sabotage mounting black female self-confidence” (59). When reduced to an inhuman object such as meat, or when compartmentalized as a particular body part (especially one that is sexually charged such as hips) instead of seen as a whole, the woman of the poem loses all humanity. Furthermore, by being reduced to meat, she is an object that is only fit for the consumption of the male onlooker. After dehumanizing her, this “meat” or “flesh” devolves into nothing more than a sexual object, for he perceives that by showing off her body by dancing, she demonstrates to him that she is passionately burning for him to touch her. In the second example, we witness how the sexuality and color of the Afro-descendant woman turns into metaphor. Hooks uses several such examples of race-based metaphor when discussing how African American women are demeaned by white men; the woman in her analysis is called “hot chocolate;” like “hot chocolate,” Afro-Honduran woman

is reduced to inanimate objects that deny the humanity of the female subject (59). In the Honduran poems, the black woman can be a “huracán” or “azabache,” but she cannot be human because the color of her skin will not permit her to be viewed on equal terms with her Ladino onlooker. Also revealing is that the poetic voice uses metaphors that are linked with images of nature, another aspect in which the black female is robbed of her human status.

After discussing the manners in which the descriptions used dehumanize the Afro-Honduran women depicted in these poems, we are led to question the way in which they are somehow being written into Honduran national identity. It becomes obvious that the exclusion from dominant society is being used as a tool to prevent blacks from even being constructed as human, much less legitimate members of their nation. Hooks speaks of national identity, race and miscegenation, postulating that “[We] have been socialized, even brainwashed to accept a version of American history in the form of white supremacy and sexual imperialism in the form of patriarchy” (120). Although she speaks about the U.S. context, it has parallels with Honduras. Hooks challenges the systems in which both racism and national identity/patriotism are taught, which therefore makes it difficult to disentangle the two discourses. How can one embrace national identity if one does not embrace racism? This racism lays buried deep within the psyche of a nation, and manifests itself in daily discourse. Likewise, in Honduras, from an early age students have been taught not only that the indigenous Lencan chief Lempira is a Honduran hero, but they were also taught about the Spanish contribution to Honduran culture. It is only recently that Hondurans of all races been taught about African cultural contributions on a somewhat limited basis, but the reality is that there has been very little effort to write blacks into Honduran national identity (M. Anderson 25). Taking hooks’s thoughts into consideration, I would confirm that a similar

dialogue appears in the abovementioned Honduran poetry. As stated, Barrera claims that the determinant for including these particular works in the anthology is that they assist in writing blacks into national identity. I do not wish to argue this point; I agree that even in countries with institutionalized forms of racism and segregation, such as slavery, that blacks are still somehow seen as part of national identity. What I do wish to highlight is that the particular images of Afro-descendant women that appear in the national imaginary are what Cheryl Townsend Gilkes calls, “stereotypes much larger than reality” (171). As long as the black woman conforms to one of the particular stereotypes, she can appear as part of Honduran national identity. The moment she oversteps this boundary and desires to be something different, her image disappears from the national imaginary. This definition of black womanhood is seen in almost all of the examples of *poesía negroide* that Barrera has chosen; there are very few examples of poetry that go beyond the sexuality of the Afro-Honduran woman.

The Image of the Mulatta

The mulatta woman receives a somewhat different treatment and approach than the black woman in many examples of literary production. As I have underscored, in Barrera’s anthology there is the reoccurring theme of the Jezebel that dominates the construction of black femininity in which hapless Ladinos are seduced by lascivious black women. The mulatta woman is more often than not constructed in a less monolithic manner, leaving some room for a dynamic identity. While the mulatta is still seen as sexual, she is looked upon with a degree of pity for her hybrid identity, and as a result of this pity, the poetic voices demonstrate varying degrees of compassion towards her presumed struggle with identity. This multi-faceted construction of bi-racial individuals has been popular in literature for

years. As seen in Cuban author Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), the treatment towards lighter-skinned individuals of mixed race is considerably different than that of those with darker skin. The mulatta is more sensual and more of a sexual and social threat than the black woman. Furthermore, she is not a candidate for marriage to a white man. Although in the United States the mixed-race person is still considered to be black (due to the one drop of black blood), Honduras follows the Latin American paradigm of racial definition in which is it possible for a bi-racial individual to considerably whiten himself or herself via social relations.

Another characteristic that defines the perception of mulatta behavior has to do with the race and gender of the authors themselves. In the various approaches regarding the figure of the mulatta, we can divide these works into different categories: white-authored fiction and Afro-descendant-authored fiction, female-authored fiction and male-authored fiction, each of which would give the reader a unique perspective on the mulatta figure. Much of the literature that has been written about the tragic mulatta adheres to an analysis of racial difference without taking into consideration the question of varying perspectives based on the gender of the writer. For example, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has written about the approaches towards the mixed-race female subject in literature but focuses more upon the female perspective. She asserts that in the case of the female Afro-descendant writer, she is more apt to choose a path for the construction of the mulatta that tends to be more dynamic:

[B]lack women writers have consistently preferred to emphasize blood rather than slavery . . . they have not been alone in evoking the trope of the tragic mulatto, but they have informed it with a complexity that no black man or white woman has easily appreciated [. . .] By inviting the identification of white readers with the tragic

mulatto, black women writers have lured them into the emotional recognition that skin color counts for nothing. (469)

While Fox-Genovese acknowledges the black/white dichotomy of female authors, her analysis does not include the non-black male construction of mulatta women, and it is this particular aspect of the depiction of the mulatta archetype that concerns us here. It is apparent that the male patriarchal gaze upon the black female body would become even more complex due to the difference of race and gender. As previously stated, a primary factor in this analysis would of course concern sexuality, or rather, the issue of male desire. The mulatta woman has historically been considered attractive by non-black males due to being closer to the normative group's construction of ideal beauty, yet by having black blood, the male cannot deny her heightened sexuality. In both literature and in social situations, whites have traditionally valued Caucasian features (usually the hair, nose, lips, and skin) as more desirable than more African features. Hill Collins uses the true anecdote of a mixed-race slave woman named Harriet Jacobs as an example of the double jeopardy in which lighter-skinned African American women are placed; she verifies that for Jacobs, "her appearance as a dusky white woman made her physically attractive to white men. But the fact that she was black, and thus part of a group of sexually denigrated women, made her available to white men as no group of white women had been" (81). In other words, the mulatta woman gains respect for fitting into the paradigmatic definition of beauty as established by the normative group, although due to her blackness she is still touted as open to sexual encounters with non-black men, for there is no escaping the black blood that supposedly urges her to act in such a manner. Lisa M. Anderson writes about the non-black male attitude towards blackness, agreeing that, "For white men, the mulatta is the body of a white woman imbued

with the mythic sexuality of black women” (46). According to the myth, while with a mulatta woman, the white man can have the best of both worlds: in the public sphere he could still keep up appearances by being with a woman who appears to be white; while in the private sphere he can take advantage of her supposedly lascivious sexuality linked to her African heritage. Differing systems of private/public were not uncommon in the dynamics between white/black, male/female relationships (Jones 203-04). It is this ability of the mulatta woman to be able to “pass” that leads her to be constructed as more respectable by general standards, yet if the rest of “society” were to discover her “secret,” she would be ostracized for her supposed secret sexual perversions (Hobson 93).

Besides the sexuality of the mulatta woman, the other common trait that has been thrust upon the figure of the mulatta has been the idea that she is somehow tragic. Author Annamarie Christensen affirms that the mulatta is universally seen as a “complicated figure who suggests more about the union of races than their separation [. . .] the vulnerability of color usually results in death, often suicide” (78). Lisa M. Anderson takes the description of “tragic” even further by ascribing different stages of development to the figure of the tragic mulatta: on one end of the spectrum she is innocent and virginal yet she is simultaneously desperate because her blood thwarts her social aspirations; on the other end of the spectrum she is cruel and angry because she is bitter about her tarnished blood. Even when the subject of the work concerns the tragic outcome of the mulatta woman’s life, it appears that it is impossible for many authors to deny the element of her sexuality. Woven into the air of tragedy, many examples of literary production hint that the black blood of the mulatta impels her to act in a lustful manner, but also her ambitions of whitening herself and her offspring compel her to make herself sexually available to powerful white men (45-46). Yet in the

end, despite her lofty intentions and sexual ambition, some event or possibly a flaw in her personality prevent her from accomplishing her attempted social climbing and endeavors to whiten herself.

In the case of U.S. and Caribbean literature, interracial affairs quite often form the base of many literary examples (for example Dion Boucicault's play *The Octoroon* (1859), the novel *Quality* (1947) by Cid Rickett Sumner or *Cecilia Valdés* (1882) by Cirilo Villaverde) and add to the tragic tone.³⁰ Unlike the mulattas seen in North American and Caribbean cultural production, the mulattas of the Honduran anthology do not become tragic explicitly because they desire to marry a white man (although they do maintain relationships with them), but rather the Honduran mulatta seems to be more entrenched in tragedy for an inability to reconcile her racially fragmented identity. Here, cultural identity is confounded with romantic relationships. In "Mulatas de las Islas" by Jorge Federico, the Ladino poetic voice expresses his dismay in the transitory relationship he once shared with a mulatta woman. He writes:

Tú me hubieras amado. . . Mulata.
Un mes, quizá
y un día. . . Y unas horas. . .
Pero nunca después,
y yo te habría amado, muchacha,
mientras no se extinguieran en tu boca

³⁰ In *The Octoroon*, Zoe, a mulatta, falls in love with George, her white cousin. They are unable to marry because she is still legally owned as part of the plantation's estates, thus foiling her entry into white society. In *Quality*, the mulatta heroine at first desires to enter the white world by marrying her white fiancé, but later regrets this decision and removes herself from the white world. In *Cecilia Valdés*, the mulatta protagonist Cecilia is seduced by her half-brother, the Creole Leonardo, and has a baby with him. When the relationship doesn't work, she seeks revenge and is thrown into jail, thus erasing any chance of gaining access to better opportunities.

aquellos nombres bárbaros:
Roatán, Guanaja, Utila
que me hacían sentir
pirata de tu cuerpo. (25-26)

In this example we find a prime case in which the mulatta becomes tragic because of her fragmented identity; in some ways the author reconceptualizes the image of the mulatta, but in other ways he adheres to the already established paradigms of the tragic mulatta/white relationship. The concept of double-consciousness is recognized in that the woman, despite being with a Ladino man, can never completely forget the history of her people. By mentioning geographical locations such as Roatán and Guanaja, it can be assumed that this particular mulatta is of Garífuna descent.³¹ The poetic voice hints at the doomed aspect of the relationship by placing temporal limits on the duration of the love that they would have shared between them, implying that this romance would have been a temporary relationship, nothing solid. Furthermore, he also mentions that these geographical reminders of her past and her community would have prevented this mulatta woman from ever truly returning his love. Here we can see that as in the classic interpretation of the mulatta, even though she has formed a relationship with a non-black man, circumstance will bring her back to her own people. Despite the fact that the mulatta is of mixed origins, she finds solidarity within the black community of Honduras.

Her white blood is apparent though, for in a brief verse in which the author mentions that, “a los barcos que no te recordaban/a los barcos de gin y de cerveza/de hombres

³¹ As discussed in the introduction, Roatán is one of the principal loci of the Garífuna diaspora. The Garífuna perceive Roatán as a homeland, despite arriving there as part of a forced exodus when the British took over San Vicente.

borrachos y mujeres altas” (26). Here we see that the “hombres borrachos” who were the sailors of the boats laden with beer and gin would be English pirates, common on the eastern coast of Honduras. It can be deduced that the mulatta that is the subject of this poem is the product of a relationship between a black Garífuna woman and an English pirate, a fact which in turn creates havoc in her construction of self and as a result, creates this tragic depiction of a woman who cannot reconcile with her past sufficiently enough to be able to discover a space for herself in either culture. She has left her home in order to seek her fortune with a Ladino man, and when inserted into this new racial space, she immediately longs for the roots of her black culture.

Returning to the concept of description of space, we see that the images created of the mulatta have to do with solitude, isolation, and insularism. For example, the poetic voice of the poem describes the mulattas that he observes as “solas” (alone) and “présbitas en afán de lejanías” (eager to be in the distance). While it is true that the mulatta subject of the poem identifies more with her African roots, it is also clear that the narrator of the poem is accentuating the fact that these mixed blood women are decentered subjects in that they can neither belong to his Ladino world, or be able to return to the world of their Garífuna ancestors in Roatán. With this, we see that she pertains to what Lisa M. Anderson defines as the mulatta that is “restless and mysterious [. . .] who is inherently a sexual character” (53). The mulatta of the poem is depicted as mysterious in that due to her mixed blood, she is unable to relate to either race, and she is also restless, moving from place to place, or as the author describes her, she is unstable. Above all, her mixed race heritage makes her an exotic, sensual image for the poetic voice; she does not associate with the civilized world but rather with a more natural world bathed in a sensual aura, “Brisa del trébol verde sobre el

pelo./Sobre los hombros en los senos altos/cuerpos de bugambilia florecida”, or, “mientras te me ofrecías desnuda como el mar” (25).

The tragedy of this mulatta lies in the fact that according to the narrator, she realizes that she cannot be part of his white world, but she also realizes that in spite of her nostalgia for the places of her Garífuna ancestors, she cannot return to these locations either. She has become displaced and a vagrant among races, while still maintaining a sensuality that is represented as a biological trait of her race. Like many of the fictional tragic mulattas from parts of the Americas, after choosing to be with a Ladino man, she becomes cognizant of the fact that she does not belong to this world; unlike many of the other literary mulatta heroines, her place is not found within the black community and she must find a third space in wandering itself, “a través de los vientos/Sobre rutas amargas.” Many of the tragic mulattas meet a sad death (often by suicide) in American fiction. In this situation, it becomes apparent that this particular woman does not end her life; even though she is not physically dead, she has been stripped of self-definition and belonging. With the poetic narrative, we can see that she is destined to continue searching for this unacknowledged and unnamed third space of acceptance and community for an undetermined amount of time, therefore suffering a sort of spiritual death due to her double-consciousness.

As I have hinted, the poem re-imagines and reconstructs the image of the mulatta. Tragic in her displacement, though sexual in her conduct, he insinuates that she despairs at her inability to find community. As in many of the other works analyzed, there is no explicit reference to national identity in this poem, yet there are implicit allusions to the effects of miscegenation within Honduras. That the mulatta is unstable, isolated, and destined to wander, verifies that the hybrid subject can neither geographically nor socially find refuge

within a Honduran national identity, existing as a peripheral figure. Even as a sexual object she has no permanence, no hope for at least producing offspring that would propose a new direction for Honduran identity, for as the author laments, she was unsuccessful in loving him due to her roaming spirit and her lack of home. This hybrid, mixed race subject cannot not fit within the context of the hegemony, but even more perplexing is that this subject cannot even belong to the social realm of the Other (the Afro-Honduran), thus proposing an unanswered, open-ended question to the reader: to where and whom does she belong?

Constructions of Black Masculinity in *Poesía Negroide*

An unusual undercurrent that has been stitched into the fabric of the social commentary of Honduran *poesía negroide* is a subtle commentary directed towards the gender position of the black Honduran male. In light of the sexualized constructions of black femininity as seen in many of the examples of *poesía negroide*, the constructions of black masculinity take the opposite stance in that the black male appears to be depleted of sexuality. What seems to be paramount in the authors' interpretations of the black male is an emasculated view of his subjugated presence in the Honduran imaginary.

In many U.S. and Caribbean cultural representations of blackness, the representation of black males can often be contradictory in that they are seen as both physically and sexually powerful and as weak and impotent. While I propose that Honduran poetry diminishes the masculine role of the black male, in order to understand the logic of this strategy, it is of value to review the European concepts of Afro-descendant male sexual superiority. First and foremost in the attack of the black man's sexuality is the idea that he is oversexed. In her essay, "Reconstructing Black Masculinity," bell hooks attempts to rewrite the subject of black masculine identity. Hooks feels that much of the scholarly work,

“suggest[s] that all black men [are] tormented by their inability to fulfill the phallogentric masculine ideal” (89). During the transatlantic slave trade of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, Europeans scripted Afro-descendant males as being sexually superior; as a result of their perceived superiority, black men became threat to white male patriarchy and dominance. Most threatening was that slave traders considered Africans to be more sexually permissive than Europeans; that is, many African tribes did not see sexuality as a crime against a god, but rather against society, thus eliminating religious constraints from sexual relationships (Hoch 48-49).

While the idea of the black man as a sexual beast has been the most prevalent myth surrounding black sexuality, on the other end of the spectrum is the concept of the symbolically castrated black man. As a response to the fear of the sexual black beast, white racists attempted to emasculate black men in order to assert white sexual superiority (hooks 93). As a result, the sexuality of the black man is often disavowed, diminished and erased, thus converting the Afro-descendant into a sexual non-entity, childlike in his comportment and without agency. In Anglocentric rhetoric over the centuries, black manhood has cycled from being the epitome of sexual superiority to the point in which black men could not assert their masculinity as they clashed with the white patriarchy; there was not enough space in society for two definitions of the word “man.”

It is true that the above speaks of an anxiety originating in the United States, but I would also venture that Honduran Ladinos have imposed similar stereotypical imagery upon Afro-Hondurans. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find any published studies that discuss Ladino attitudes towards Afro-Honduran sexuality, but I feel that several examples of poetry included in the anthology take the stance in which the black subject is emasculated.

The sexuality of the black subject is a theme that appears in Honduran literature, so it can be deduced that the Ladino population has yet to demystify black masculinity.³²

The sexually superior African has been viewed as a threat to non-black masculinity in Latin America and the United States for centuries; if the purpose of Barrera's anthology is to create a "friendlier," more approachable vision of blackness, it would be useful to remove a certain degree of their sexual agency and construct them more as innocent victims of racism. No longer is the black man to be feared, rather he is to be pitied as if he were a child.

Therefore, the images of black masculinity in the following examples of poetry reduce him to a more one-dimensional figure that is victimized by Ladino hegemony. It is in this that we find the political message that Guisti Cordero cites as a fundamental part of much of the *poesía negroide*; it appears that the poets that center their work upon the reconstruction of black masculinity attempt to insert the element of pity in order to humanize the subjects of their work. But as I wish to accentuate, these one-dimensional portrayals actually hinder the creation of different interpretations of blackness; hooks declares that white supremacist patriarchy erases, ". . . the realities of black men who have diverse understandings of masculinity [and] put in place of this lived complexity a flat, one-dimensional representation" (88). In other words, even in spite of benevolent intentions, these "flat" interpretations of black manhood fail to explore the nuances and facets of black identity.

An example of a poem that tends to erase all signs of the subject's masculinity is found in the poem "Danza negra" by Jesús Cornelio Rojas. In this poem, the poetic voice questions a black man as to why he continues to dance when he appears to be famished:

³² In a contemporary context, black masculinity continues to be looked upon as threatening. Gilroy and Anderson anecdotally narrate a situation in which the Garífuna have adopted a U.S. gangster representation of masculinity in which the black male is constructed as impermeable and strong, thus implying that he could feasibly present a threat to white masculinity.

De dónde Simón tu fuerza
para tanta agitación,
si hace veinte años te chupa
la pobre sangre el patrón?
Ay Simón, no bailes tanto
que estás muy flaco, Simón.
Tus pobres carnes quedaron
en el plato del patrón. (38-40)

Here we see a scenario in which the black man not only is fully emasculated, but his body is also treated as if there were something physically wrong with it. Scripting the black body as weak or ill has been a common tactic for several reasons because a body imbued with illness distances it from dominant groups (Richardson 84). Despite the degree of pity that appears to be bestowed upon Simón, his body is also viewed as abject because of his emaciated condition. The poetic voice underscores the fact that he is extremely gaunt and from this description, the poem accentuates the Afro-Honduran man's physical differences. Above all, we find in this discourse that the black body is inscribed as having a lack of agency. The Ladino observer takes a benevolent patriarchal attitude towards the black subject that he observes dancing; in spite of his perceived sadness upon seeing his "pobres carnes," he feels as though it is his role to advise Simón that he should not dance until he can gain weight and be strong, or "fortechón."

He also dons a condescending attitude towards Simón in regards to other cultural aspects of black identity, for in another stanza of the poem the poetic voice criticizes the Afro-Honduran diet of "Bananas, casaba y coco," as not being sufficient enough to maintain

the human body. Because of his lack of physical masculine strength and because of his lack of agency, Simón has been symbolically castrated and is seen in more of an infantile, emasculated state. Although the poetic voice seemingly desires for him to move beyond subordination, it cannot be denied that by robbing Simón of his agency, the poem represents him as more of a child than a man.

Another poem which similarly reveals a deviant vision of black masculinity is “El negro José” by Carlos Manuel Arita. As in “Danza negra,” the black man is depicted as gaunt and feeble:

El negrito Juan José
tiene hambre y tiene sé.
Ha pasado muchos días,
sin comé y sin bebé.
se le saltan las costillas,
se le pueden casi vé.
.....
y la cara tiene un rictus
que revela el padecé.
Todo exangüe está su cuerpo
de la frente hasta los pies,
y se mira ya en su rostro
Prematura la veje. (51)

Arita’s language clearly robs the black man of his manhood. The word “negrito,” the diminutive of “black man” in Spanish, is especially relevant in regard to the poet’s attitude

towards Juan José. While it can often be a term of endearment, the diminutive is also commonly used when talking to small children or to devalue something or somebody. Again, we see the representational limitations of the black man in the scenario that Arita paints. The image of Juan José is confined to his black body depicted as inferior due to its pathological condition, while the white man is portrayed as being healthy, fat and happy in his old age. We can see that Juan José is so emaciated that his ribs stand out, he is suffering, and he has aged prematurely. His function as a male participant in Honduran society is extremely restricted and his position devalued due to his lack of access to sustenance to grant him energy. Literary critic Linda G. Tucker confirms that several images of black masculinity (in the hands of whites) have circulated internationally, some of which are successful at, “demonizing, devaluing, eroticizing and criminalizing them [black men]. Such representational processes reassure whites that the imagined threat of black men is controlled, while often exploiting the image of black men . . . for purposes of white pleasure and consumption” (48). Although it appears that this poem was written in order to convey the plight of the Afro-Honduran, that is, to inform its readers of the Afro-Honduran’s impoverished state, in a sudden turn the poem adopts a rather glib tone in order to conclude the tale of Juan José:

aun alegre se le vé,
y al pasar un chancho gordo
con sus ojos grita: Olé!
y sus dientes tastacean
ante un plato de puré

y glu. . . glu. . . le hace hasta el buche
ante un jarro de café. . . (51)

It is at this point that the message of the poem becomes obfuscated. The description of Juan José almost approaches a comical tone, despite the author's previous assertion that Juan José is in dire straits because he is starving to death. Whereas at first the work appears to embrace a social message concerning racism and the plight of the Afro-Honduran population, the tone changes dramatically, thus lessening the impact of Arita's message for social change. In this second description of Juan José, he finds several commonalities with the stereotypical vision of the black Sambo and the Latin American stereotype of the "black thief" (Cavalho-Neto 69).

There have been variations on the Sambo character; some interpretations view him as a comical, dancing black man while still others portray Sambo as a lazy thief, an attribute which parallels Latin American interpretations (Leab 1-2). Although the word "Sambo" is not used in Latin America to designate a particular slave "personality" (the description that the dominant society uses to characterize blacks), scholars concur that the personality description was used in the slave systems of other countries, including Latin America.³³ As Vincent P. Franklin writes in his study on black culture, "The personality of the [. . .] slaves in the South could be found among slaves in other societies at the same or different times" (55). Eugene Genovese also agrees, stating, ". . . every slave system contained a powerful tendency to generate Sambos . . ." (69). In some interpretations he was portrayed as a "childlike black male figure characterized by a constant grin, the ability and the desire to

³³ "Sambo" is different than "zambo." Sambo is a personality while zambo referred to mixed indigenous and black blood.

work for, to entertain, and to serve whites; and the absence of anything resembling wisdom or political potency” (Tucker 62).

Taking this into consideration, I now return to the figure of Juan José. The fact that he is depicted as a happy individual belies his state of misery and starvation, yet, in accordance with the black Sambo imagery, he is good-humored, and the images of his eyes yelling “Olé” at the sight of a pig or the “glu, glu” noise he would make upon drinking coffee are not descriptions that would necessarily provoke a great degree of pity. Seemingly, the representation of Juan José would more readily find parallels with the Sambo character who was “a comic performer, *par excellence*” (Boskin 4).³⁴ The image of black Sambo was also known for his penchant for stealing items from whites in order to feed himself; in U.S. and Latin American lore he is sometimes a bumbling thief. He is infamous for stealing food, and in Honduras the impotent black subject eyes the pig of a Ladino (with a desire to consume it), yet he is not successful in obtaining it for himself. Historian Gerald R. Butters Jr. comments on the association of black Sambo and food, and confirms that, “The implication inherent within this racial slur [of desiring the white man’s food] was that African-American men could not honestly fulfill their own gastronomical desires, let alone feed their families” (24).

Also important to the racist imagery surrounding blacks is the idea of appetite itself, not just the manner in which the black character is able to obtain food. The fact remains that Juan José demonstrates a tremendous appetite. The appetite of the black man has been historically linked to his sexuality; it was believed that a black man who was able to consume

³⁴ The image of Sambo is multifaceted; as Boskin writes, “Sambo was apparently conceived in the minds of Western Europeans in their early interactions with Africans in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries and was born during the early period of the slave trade” (43). The principal impetus for the creation of the prevailing Sambo character came into existence as Europeans observed African dance; thus the idea of Sambo as a comical entertainment for whites was born.

large quantities of food revealed certain aspects about his sexual prowess (Butters 21).³⁵

While Juan José reveals that he has the propensity for gluttony, his desires are stymied by Ladinos who prevent him from consuming food and implicitly also from manifesting his potentially enormous sexual appetite. In fact, the poem subtly warns the reader about giving the Afro-Honduran male too much to eat, stating:

El negrito Juan José
tiene hambre y tiene sé.
Quien le diera un bocadito,
no digamos de bisté
aunque fuera una tortilla
untadita de conqué. (51)

In essence, to avoid Juan José from overstepping his boundaries, he must not be given too much to eat or given food of high quality. Instead, he should be granted his tortilla (which provides minimal sustenance and does not fulfill nutritional needs) in order to keep him in his place and arrest any sort of growing sexual desire. This is one possible method to subdue the threat of racial tension, for a black man who cannot sate his appetite for food is presumably a black man with an inability to disrupt hegemonic order.

Returning to the stanza in which Juan José is shown coveting the Ladino man's food, we also see that it contains a humoristic tone. As I have acknowledged, on one hand the idea that Juan José covets Ladino property hints at the supposed innate criminality of blacks. On the other hand, the fact that he does not act upon his urges also suggests a comic element that

³⁵ Watermelons were seen as full of sexual innuendo for being juicy and having pink flesh, and Charles Musser argues that symbolically the consumption of watermelons had a link to the fear of an uncontrolled black masculine appetite for white civilization (312-14).

ameliorates white fear of black resistance and agency. Ultimately, the black man is rendered powerless and therefore less of a threat to Ladino hegemony. Furthermore, as Tucker elaborates in his discussion of the black Sambo, the thwarted Sambo is an emasculated figure of blackness (64). Boskin also discusses the role of the Sambo, stating that, “To make the black male into an object of laughter and conversely to force him to devise laughter was to strip him of masculinity” (14). While this system of poetic, verbal representation is not as advanced as other methods of imagining the Sambo (such as a more visual representation in film or art), the verbal portrait nevertheless reduces the black man to a comic relief that perhaps would be more readily accepted as part of national identity. Therefore, as a black man, Juan José poses less of a threat to Ladinos, for due to his comical depiction, he is destined to remain in a non-threatening state.

As the dominant culture began to lose control over black agency, they desired to reconstruct them as fools who couldn't be successful in their alleged criminal endeavors. Therefore, though it is true that criminal elements are commonly eschewed in the construction of national identity, the bumbling thief amalgamated with the Sambo figure was a definite part of culture across the Americas; furthermore it would fit neatly into Honduran national identity, for the Sambo-like qualities of Juan José perform a dual function (Tucker 62-63). On one side they soften the image of the black man so that he is almost approachable, yet on the other side they emasculate and infantilize him to such an extent he cannot play a viable role in nation-building efforts. Thus, the Afro-Honduran male is put in his (peripheral) place in Honduran society.

The principal attribute bestowed upon black males is that of laziness, an attribute that is commonly seen in figures such as Sambos and coon caricatures. The image of the lazy

black man has been widespread as manifested in the coon caricature in the United States, and as the “lazy black” in Latin American culture. Slightly different than the Sambo figure, the coon caricature is always an adult black male who is slothful. While this portrait of black masculinity does not provide a complete correlation to the coon caricature of the black male, it does embrace a few of its qualities, principally focusing upon the association between laziness and blackness. Cinema critic Donald Bogle verifies that the cultural image of the coon caricature is extremely negative, “The pure coons emerged as [. . .] unreliable, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing” (8).

On a certain level, the following two poems fulfill a few of the characteristics of the above tropes of blackness (Sambo and coon caricature), however the matches are in no way exact parallels. One such poem which places several unfavorable qualities upon the male Afro-Honduran figure is titled “El Negro Mr. Brown,” by Martín Paz (33). Unlike the previous two works centered upon Afro-Honduran men, this particular work has very little political or social commentary associated with it. While brief, the poem provides more of a portrait that highlights Mr. Brown’s absolute blackness almost to a point in which the poetic voice has turned his skin color into a fetish. In this verbal portrait of a black man, Mr. Brown appears to be inherently lazy; first we witness him passing great quantities of leisure time on a balcony and in the final stanza of the poem, the author writes that Mr. Brown, “Sueña y espera/y rumia una ilusión” (33). Like the coon figure, Mr. Brown apparently has no occupation other than to sit on his balcony and dream with only his smile that stands out against the “carbón” of his dark skin visible enough to prove his existence.

The other poem which provides a strong association between blackness and lethargy is “El bardo negro” by Jacobo Cárcamo (29). This short poem describes a black poet who

reclines in the grass to write. While being a poet is indeed a worthy occupation, it is a fact that each of the three stanzas reiterates the concept that this bard is lethargic and sleepy and as a consequence, they imply that black Hondurans are lazy. In the poem we see that, “El era un pobre bardo, desgarrado y sumiso/que dormía en el césped recibiendo el sereno” (29). As seen in “El negro Mr. Brown,” the black subject of the poem sets himself apart from Honduran society. Mr. Brown remains on his balcony and is so black that the dark night eventually erases him from view while the *bardo* is isolated from civilization. The poems imply that Afro-Honduran man is simply too lazy to participate in Ladino society, therefore if he cannot participate, he is not active in constructing national identity.

Furthermore, in the case of the *bardo*, his image is even more emasculated by being submissive, or “sumiso.” To whom or what he is being submissive still remains a question, for the poem does not specify, but the mere mention of the word harkens us back to times of slavery in Honduran history when black men were forced to be submissive. Above all, this conjures up memories of a time when one man belonged to another, putting him in a situation which questioned his manhood. Allusions to the submissive black man only highlight how he cannot be an active participant in the forming of the nation due to his second-class citizenship. Honduras is principally a Catholic country, and traditionally Christianity has looked unfavorably upon idleness. Bell hooks discusses the topic of male idleness in Christian society, stating that Christians in general, “saw all idle activity as evil, or at least a breeding ground for wrong-doing” (91). Being that both poems “El bardo negro” and “El negro Mr. Brown” question the lethargy of their black subjects, it becomes clear that these work ethics are being placed upon these two men who live in a different cultural context. Hooks underlines a principal difference between occidental thought and African thought,

confirming that leisure time in African culture was not looked upon as a “waste,” but rather it was valuable because, “For Native Americans and Africans, idle time was space for reverie and contemplation” (91). Taking this into consideration, we can see that Mr. Brown and the *bardo*, perhaps value their leisure time, for indeed Mr. Brown “sueña” and the *bardo* is creating poetry during downtime. Nevertheless, they are represented as shiftless and lacking ambition from the Ladino’s perspective. Once again, the black man is scripted in a monolithic manner, thus erasing what hooks calls “the significance of black male labor from public consciousness” (90). As discussed above, ironically it was slave labor and West Indian and Garífuna labor in the banana plantations (which I mentioned in the beginning of the present work) that helped to found and develop the nation.

In the case of Mr. Brown, he is symbolically erased from the Honduran consciousness, for as night falls his blackness is so overwhelming that he blends in with the darkness of the night sky and can no longer be seen, thus eliminating the black figure entirely from the Honduran imaginary. The idle black man apparently has no place in the Honduran vision of nation except as a counter-image against which to define national identity.

¿Nuevo Concepto de la Raza?

In this chapter I have verified that the *poesía negroide* movement, in spite of a desire to highlight the Afro-Honduran contribution to national identity, in reality projects a confusing trajectory. It cannot be denied that Afro-Hondurans come from a rich and diverse background in which they maintain their culture. Through their grueling labor as slaves and banana plantation workers, they contributed greatly to the economic building of a nation, and in contemporary times they embrace many roles in Honduran society. In other words, they are a multifaceted sector of the Honduran population. Unfortunately, however dynamic their

potential may be, we can see in Barrera's anthology that their image is constructed with very few options for a multi-layered representation. Also curious is that the sparse gamut of representations that are offered present stereotypical depictions of blackness. Despite the limitations of Afro-Honduran representation, this poetry places them in a more visible position than they had been previously. Sadly though, much of the poetry does nothing to change the image of the Afro-Honduran female as anything other than sensual and full of sandunguería, and the Afro-Honduran male as a lazy, jocular fool. Barrera's claim that the Honduran poetry's attempts to create "el nuevo concepto de raza" have been successful proves to be questionable, for in these pages we find that Ladino concepts of race still follow the stereotypical pattern that has existed in multiple geographical regions for centuries. As I interpret his idea of this "nuevo concepto de raza," I see little change, for the black woman still is portrayed as sensual and the black male still is characterized as lazy and lacking in ambition. It appears that Barrera and the other poets of the anthology have agreed that blackness has few options for interpretation. Because of these limited parameters imposed upon black behavior, the poets of Barrera's work have shut the door on a more ample construction of blackness. As a consequence, the authors' efforts to insert the figure of the Afro-Honduran in the canon of literary production are only partially successful.

The next chapter examines a more modern interpretation of blackness and national identity in Honduran literature. Despite having been published thirty years later, the novel *Madrugada: el rey del albor* (1993) by Julio Escoto, still searches to define the role of the Afro-Honduran. As with the *poesía negroide* of Barrera's anthology, *Madrugada* presents a desire to include blackness as part of the national imaginary. Also like the *poesía negroide*,

it appears that *Madrugada* has a tendency to designate blacks as peripheral players in the creation of history and identity.

Chapter III

Blackness, Romance and National Identity in Julio Escoto's

Madrugada: El Rey del Albor

The 1990s opened a different phase of Central American literature. In his article, “Descolonizando el conocimiento, reformulando la textualidad: Repensando el papel de la narrativa centroamericana,” Arturo Arias laments that in the literature from this decade, “observamos todavía pocas cosas nuevas” (85). Although Arias concludes that there is a lack of critical Central American works, he does mention Julio Escoto's novel *Madrugada: El Rey del Albor* (1993) as being of interest, but in general, concludes that this work is not as innovative as its literary predecessors from past decades, stating that “Podemos mencionar el surgimiento de la última novela del hondureño Julio Escoto, *Madrugada: el rey del albor* [. . .] Pero el hecho es que después de la explosión anterior, no parece haber quedado ahora sino la modorra y el empacho” (85).³⁶ Regardless of the lack of enthusiasm on Arias's part, *Madrugada* is a novel that is of interest for its approach towards race and nationality. Few critics have written about this 500 page novel with the exception of Linda J. Craft, a literary critic who has published on the subject of Central American literature. Craft addresses the question of race and nationality in *Madrugada* in her article “Ethnicity, Oral Tradition and the Processed Word.” In her article Craft speaks of the novel's ability to promote a new interpretation of Honduran society, suggesting that:

In Escoto's vision, the survival of multi-cultural discourses within the nation should contribute to its vitality and should counter outside forces which would render the nation's subjects invisible [. . .] Escoto deconstructs official myths of exclusivity and reconstructs a

³⁶ Julio Escoto has also written *El árbol de los pañuelos* (1972).

different national story in order to promote multicultural solidarity and to affirm his nation's right to exist alongside others—and in spite of others who are determined to exploit Honduras for their own purposes. (145)

In my opinion, the text does offer an alternate image of race and nationality that had yet to be seen in Honduran literature up to this point in history. *Madrugada* depicts several indigenous, Ladino and Afro-descendant characters that offer a new vision on what races played an important role in the making of Honduran history. Although I would agree to a certain extent with Craft's idea that Escoto promotes "multicultural solidarity," I propose that this supposed "solidarity" is at times superficial. Simply because a particular race is represented in a literary work, this does not signify that the representation of this race adequately addresses the question of national identity, and in fact, as certain races are written into the national imaginary, we see that their role as builders of nation is diminished. For example, in the last chapter various Ladino poets proposed that by merely writing poetry about Afro-Hondurans that they could answer the Honduran race question. Instead of depicting blacks as integrated into mainstream society, those blacks found in the *poesía negroide* were more likely than not to be seen as exotic, overtly sexual or demasculated. All these qualities place them apart from their Ladino compatriots and therefore, do not comply with the stated objective of integration. In *Madrugada* the same effect of non-integration is visible, but Escoto uses a different strategy than those poets of the Barrera anthology. As I will demonstrate, despite the presence of several Afro-Honduran characters, the novel continuously rejects the idea of racial solidarity by either not allowing its Afro-descendant characters to successfully reproduce and populate the Honduran nation, or by leaving the outcome of the Afro-descendant character's relationship open-ended, with no possible way

for the reader to know if any offspring was produced. Although the Afro-descendant personalities of the plot often have sexual relationships with other non Afro-descendants, the fact that we never witness any of their offspring living into maturity stymies the ability of blacks to create a future in Honduras and furthermore, it dismisses the multi-cultural solidarity that supposedly is integral to the novel.

Escoto's fictional protagonist Dr. Quentin H. Jones is a respected, African-American professor of history who has been contracted by the Honduran government to write, or rather "re-write" the official history of Honduras. Of course when I say "official history," what he is creating is a myth consisting of loosely constructed "historical data." This myth that he creates in no way depicts the multiple voices of Honduran history, but rather represents a body of information that is spoon-fed to him by the Honduran government. His government contacts closely monitor the information that he writes into the book of Honduran history. The primary job of these contacts is to not only ensure that Dr. Jones features Ladinos as the representative group of Honduras but that he also promotes the country as peaceful and harmonious. Oddly, even as a highly-esteemed North American history professor, Dr. Jones appears oblivious to the fact that there could feasibly exist multiple versions of a historical event, a concept that seems to elude him until much later in his Honduran adventure of discovery.

During historical investigations, Dr. Jones's secretary-cum-lover, Erika, stumbles upon a secret government file titled "Madrugada." As a result of this file, Dr. Jones is a changed man. This mysterious file piques his curiosity, and he attempts to open it with various passwords. Though in no way a revolutionary, his subversive activities and a scholarly article that he published years ago prompt the interest of a Honduran revolutionary

group. At first he resists the efforts of the revolutionary group to recruit him into the fold, but they persist, citing his article as evidence that he is indeed a true revolutionary. Yet according to the professor, this particular article about the demilitarization of Latin America was published in the respectable (read dominant discourse focused) *New Society Journal* whereas the revolutionary factors had read the same article (albeit a somewhat re-edited version that fit a more liberal agenda) in the *New Left de Londres* journal. This slightly altered version of the article incited the revolutionaries to seek out the professor in order to recruit him in their subversive activities; they had erroneously assumed that Dr. Jones was like-minded in his ideological beliefs. Nevertheless, despite his initial trepidations, he appears to be entrenched within the revolutionary lifestyle if only for his passion for instigating a sexual relationship with the various women of the movement such as Erika and Sheela.

In the end, Dr. Jones succeeds in opening “Madrugada,” subsequently describing a wealth of information that details the domination of United States ideology in Honduras with a pummeling of mass media influence. In a series of plot twists, the file is taken from Jones and sent to Israel and the CIA arrives to his office to question him. He is to be flown back to the United States because his life is supposedly in danger, but while on the plane Sheela finds him, and the two of them plan to return to Honduras to continue their insurgent activities.

Peppered in the plot of insurgency is a historical panorama of multiple “unofficial histories” that broach periods of Honduran national development from the colonial period to the twentieth century. The flashbacks narrate other sub-plots that stand apart from the main narrative of the book. For the purposes of this analysis, the two flashbacks that are most relevant concern the descriptions of Afro-descendants as they navigate their lives in a hostile

environment. In the first historical flashback, Mateu Cassanga, a black slave, tells the tale of the killing of an Afro-indigenous mixed-blood infant. In the second historical flashback, a Spanish woman named Aurelina is kidnapped by an Afro-indigenous tribe and held as a hostage.

The Body as Territory in *Madrugada*

When discussing the concept of race and nationality in *Madrugada*, the bodies of many of the characters come to represent much more than a creation of flesh and blood. For example, the bodies of Dr. Jones and his two lovers, Erika and Sheela, come into question, for they represent a double meaning and a double-consciousness. The bodies of other characters that will appear later on in this study, such as those of Aurelina and Don Robinson, also are imbued with meaning. In other words, the body is not a simple object but rather one infused with significance. It has been written upon with words and ideologies that define it, just as Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "nation language" is written upon a nation and in turn, defines a culture and its related national identity (67). Like national identity, the body encompasses a mobile and fluid component that enables it to evolve with time, yet it is also influenced by the institutions that surround it. Foucault writes that the human body is the ultimate material that can be shaped by all political, economic or penal institutions (Garland 852). In order to have a successful society, the human body must be used in order to support said society by means of the body's labor in relationship to how it is disciplined to produce. With discipline, the body can be trained to embrace a particular ideology, such as national identity, that in turn enables it to represent its country. The body can be almost anything, yet oftentimes the soul that occupies the body is not the one that makes the decisions as to how the body is defined (Foucault 138). Following the ideas of Michel

Foucault, José Carlos Aguado Vázquez confirms that, “El cuerpo humano ha sido objeto de diversas significaciones a través de los tiempos. El proceso de simbolización corporal está relacionado íntimamente con el contexto sociocultural y el universo ideológico particular” (31). In other words, the body’s significance has much to do with its chronological and geographical place. I concur with Aguado Vázquez that time and space are paramount to the interpretation of corporal definition, but in addition, those individuals that are linked to these specific times and spaces are the true actors in defining the body. In the current chapter, I would like to turn to the body as the focal point for the definition of identity of the black subject. It cannot be denied that the body can embrace many levels of significance, with these levels of significance being vital to the methods in which the subject embraces either endogenous or exogenous sources for self-definition.

It is evident that the body can also serve as a tool to influence others, for it crosses borders and oceans, transmitting culture from one territory to another, often by force. As Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton demonstrate, throughout history “bodies [are] raced, classed, and ethnicized as sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised (6). When the body travels, sometimes it is a voluntary voyage, often it is not; what is important to remember about a body in movement is that it is a key disseminator of culture and ideology (B. Anderson 54-55).³⁷ Yet despite the ability of the body to migrate across various territories, it is also in itself its own type of territory, a territory that contains a span of land with definite borders and personal ideologies. It is territorial in nature for it will launch plans of attack against other body-territories if its borders are violated. But like sovereign territories composed of soil, each one of these body-territories endures experiences

³⁷ See Benedict Anderson’s description on how religious pilgrimages disseminate information and identity.

that shape and mold it in unique ways that serve to differentiate each and every one of these body-territories from other body-territories. Such is the case of the black body-territory.

It is in this chapter that I will be discussing the usage of the body as a determinant for the future of national identity. Escoto represents several Afro-descendant characters in *Madrugada*, and through them, the text showcases the ability in which the nation state attempts to control the body through national belonging and ideology. Vital to his depiction of nation and control is that in the end, Escoto's novel demonstrates how in many circumstances this control can fail. One such character that models the state's failure to master the human body is Dr. Jones. Although Dr. Jones is not Honduran, he has much to do with the construction of blackness and nationality in Honduras through his relationships with Honduran women of other races. As I will underscore, it is his body that could feasibly supply the genetic material for future generations of Hondurans. Since he is an Afro-descendant subject, the new race of Honduras would always have this cultural tie with Africa, and furthermore, embrace a different ideology than the Ladino Honduran. Other characters, such as the Miskito king Don Robinson and the nameless mixed-race infant all carry in their bodies the representation of different nations, races and possibilities, and therefore propose a new direction in race and ideology for the future of Hondurans, a new direction that does not always come into fruition.

The Rebuilding of a Nation without a Foundation

Through the relationships posited in the text, Dr. Jones opens the possibility of a new direction for the future of the Honduran people. This would occur with his potential offspring. At first glance it may appear to be a somewhat arbitrary endeavor to posit *Madrugada* as containing some degree of parity with some of Latin America's most salient

examples of what Doris Sommer would call the “foundational fictions.” While other Latin American nations developed foundational fictions in the nineteenth century, the literary movements of Central American evolved at a slower pace.³⁸ From the selection of Honduran works that are available today, for many of the better-known authors of *romanticismo* still reigned as one of the more popular forms of literary expression around the turn of the twentieth century (Argueta 12). There does not exist much documentation as to why Honduras maintained such a delay in its literary evolution, but it is certain that a lack of technological advancement (meaning fewer printing presses) could possibly be attributed to Honduras’ slower rate of modernization in comparison with Nicaragua and Guatemala (Troncoso 23-26). Both the aforementioned nations had ties to the world market whereas Honduras remained treading in the backwater of economic development. Historically, Honduras has been one of the poorest countries of Latin America due to American imperialistic endeavors and government corruption. In other words, during the beginning of the twentieth century, without modernization and economic progress, the cultivation of a group of intelligentsia would be difficult at best. Above all, without modernization, communication with the outside world via a viable postal service or transportation service would also be difficult.³⁹

In the early twentieth century, Honduran author Lucila Gamero de Medina was weaving her tale of an unfortunate governess who had fallen in love with her employer’s

³⁸ My usage of the word “developed” implies that the nation would have solidified a somewhat coherent national identity. Whether or not this national identity is applicable to all and accepted by all is debatable, but nations such as Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and Cuba among many others have strong literary histories that also portray a national image of their citizens in the nineteenth century.

³⁹ Beverly and Zimmerman propose that Central American ideology was more often stagnant than dynamic due to lack of modernization. It makes sense that from the point of the breakup of Nueva Granada and the subsequent Central American Union that certain nations were not able to modernize at a rapid pace. Honduras was subject to a lack of so called “modernization” and as a result, the desired communication with the international community failed to develop.

nephew in her book *Blanca Olmedo* (1908). The novel stresses *romanticismo* in high levels, suggesting a bond with nature with an undercurrent of *falacia patética* and a heightened sense of Honduran nationalism when Gustavo, Blanca's love interest goes off to fight in an unnamed war on the Honduran border. *Madrugada* in no way classifies itself as a nineteenth-century novel, but it would be feasible to postulate that it espouses the element of nation building.⁴⁰ Such a notion is axiomatic to the fact that Honduras has been so underdeveloped that literary development also moves at a different pace, but above all it would imply that the nation is still attempting to define itself both politically and racially with literature that posits nineteenth century questions. Doris Sommer touches upon those novels of the twentieth century whose authors "had written circles around history in the sixties and seventies [and] began to experiment with new versions of the historical narrative" (3). Although published in the 1990s, *Madrugada* takes several elements of the Boom literary era of the 1960s in its non-linear presentation of Honduran history, but the appearance and significance given to the novel's various sexual trysts cannot be as neatly inserted into Boom era depictions of romance. Yet as I see it, the insinuations of Dr. Jones's love affairs with both Erika and Sheila have implications regarding the direction that Honduras's future shall take. This concern for the future of the nation is something that is not always present in the Boom era's historical musings, for as I will detail, the search for the romantic Honduran match that would solidify the love affair between a subversive Honduras and the marginalized of the United States consumes much of the novel's plot and

⁴⁰ Despite embracing many of the elements of a foundational fiction, I do not desire to imply that *Madrugada* is indeed a true foundational fiction. The reality is that it contains certain characteristics in common yet it defines itself within the context of its literary generation.

simultaneously provides Jones with the opportunity to use his body-territory as not only a tool of resistance, but also a method to change destiny.

Dr. Jones exhibits an anomalous combination of false overconfidence in his sexual prowess mixed with an even stronger persuasion towards chastity that does not equal the aggressive hypermasculinity seen in the other interpretations of black sexuality found in *Madrugada*. The symbolic nature of the African American body is integral to the story of Dr. Jones and his relationships, for in the chapters that unfold, the plot uses him as a mechanism for nation-building. While Jones cannot be an allegory for Honduras since he is clearly from the United States, to a certain respect he and Honduras share much in common, for both are mired in the process of rebirth and renovation. While Escoto omits many of the details surrounding Jones's personal life in the United States, what is clear is that he once had a wife named Jenniffer and that she died in a car crash 10 years earlier, a crash in which Jones was driving the vehicle. This tragedy seems to run as a deep undercurrent in his psyche and contributes to Dr. Jones's wavering desire to initiate relationships with Erika and Sheela. It seems that Dr. Jones feels that by participating in a new relationship, he would betray Jenniffer's memory. Yet as will be discussed, the novel also implies that Dr. Jones would be successful in building a new empire of civilization that comes from his flesh and therefore, he could generate a new identity, liberated from his past, much as Honduras must rebuild itself in its search for a liberated national identity.

Returning to the foundational fiction qualities of *Madrugada*, it is valuable to observe how the novel connects race, sex and nation-building in a contemporary context. As in the foundational fictions of the nineteenth century, the mixed-race sexual conquest is nothing new to the literary scene. As Sommer explains, this interracial love experimentation occurs

in many nineteenth century Latin American novels (126-28). The only difference between many of the relationships of yesteryears and the relationships found in *Madrugada* is that the modesty of the past prohibited the reader from truly knowing what transpired between the couple whereas the comparatively liberal sexual norms of the twentieth century allow the reader to be a virtual voyeur into the moment of sexual contact. In other words no coupling is left to the imagination; no longer must we depend on suppositions and insinuations to gain insight into the character's romantic desires and acts. Most importantly, oftentimes in the past it was taboo to even broach the theme of sexual contact between people of different races, but today literary production has cracked through racial barriers, and the interracial relationships that the foundational fictions could only imagine are fully disclosed in *Madrugada*.

Dr. Jones's first opportunity to alter the Honduran racial future comes in the form of his Honduran secretary. Upon meeting Erika Chac Alvarado, Dr. Jones is left to ponder the linguistic pluralism of her name. As her name denotes, her identity encompasses a hybridization of a European and indigenous identity. The effect is not lost on Jones, for it occurs to him that “¿a qué padre, a qué madre se le podía haber ocurrido aquella combinación?’ Un nombre alemán y otro indio junto a un apellido español [. . .] ¿Qué clase de hervidero o de coladero de fundición, qué magma del mundo era este país, todo este raro continente?” (37). Despite possessing such a multi-cultural name, Erika is not racially identified until the end of the novel. For the majority of the plot, there is no physical description of her, no physical description of her mother and above all, Escoto accentuates the fact that she is the product of rape and therefore absent of a verifiable paternal lineage that racially categorizes her. Whereas for the much of the novel Jones does not manifest a

palpable sexual desire for her, in a surprise turn of events the two of them make love, and in these final scenes the text finally reveals her racial identity in greater detail when, “[Erika] apoyó sus manos *mestizas* sobre la piel negra y empezó a frotarla con un movimiento circular (488 emphasis mine). The text indicates that Jones has noticed her racial appearance for the first time. He uses the term “mestizo” which denotes her European and indigenous heritage. He observes that, “Su cara mestiza—ladina, reconoció Jones—no dejaba adivinar sus pensamientos y sus ojos lo veían intensamente sin parpadear, como contemplarían impertérritos el paso de los turistas los rostros de piedra de Copán” (493). By referring to “Copán,” the famous Mayan ruins located in western Honduras, the text promotes the mayanization movement in Honduras and attributes to Erika a Mayan identity. Clearly, the fictionalization of Honduran identity is at work in this citation, for by associating Erika with Copán, the text denies the fact that the reality is that very few Hondurans are actually of Mayan descent.

The two lovers have finally been united, and upon uniting, racial difference has finally burst to the surface of the narrative, proving that mestizo skin still stands in stark contrast to the blackness exuding from Dr. Jones’s body-territory. Sommer delineates the importance of racial homogeneity or heterogeneity in her description of the nineteenth-century foundational fictions as being paramount to the racial composition of the characters in order to indicate the future direction of the nation, confirming that they “cross class, gender, and racial stereotypes unspeakable for European romance” (49). True to the nature of the Latin American romance, our characters perform an act that crosses class and racial stereotypes, for there is a meeting of classes, with Erika being from a lower class, and Dr.

Jones from the academic elite, and a meeting of races, with Erika being Ladina and Dr. Jones being black.

Taking a step backwards, we can grasp a more panoramic look at the situation. The racial heterogeneity of the two is only a small fraction of their difference; for it is not only race that is involved in the determination of the future of the nation but also nationality. A romance has coalesced between the citizens of two separate nations, the United States and Honduras. The mestizaje of Erika is consummate for the representation of Honduras; it embraces the autochthonous character of indigeneity springing from Honduras and mixed with the European blood of the conquerors. Jones is not blind to the link between Latin American autochthony and the body-territory of Erika, for the text shows him observing that “Su cuerpo desnudo, trigueño y mestizo era como las sombras que proyectan las ceibas sobre la tierra fértil y oscura de América” (490). Dr. Jones’s blackness is also as quintessential to the relationship as his nationality. The idea of a white male betokens the ultimate authority, for the white skinned male has traditionally triumphed as a member of the dominant race in the majority of societies. While the white North American male evokes classic tales of conquest, Escoto successfully softens this image by introducing his somewhat ingenuous African American character. In other words, Dr. Jones cannot represent the voice from the center and he is removed from this position due to his skin color. As a result, the narrative softens the inequalities between the national and gender positions of Dr. Jones and Erika.

In the end, the coupling of Erika and Dr. Jones is a failed attempt to liberate his body-territory, for Dr. Jones decides that their relationship is not meant to last beyond the present moment. The two make love and meld the mestizaje and Mayan indigeneity of Latin America and the marginalized blackness of the United States. In light of nineteenth century

norms, such an event would indicate a movement towards a permanent relationship and foreshadow the arrival of nuptials and biracial children. Yet here we are not operating within a nineteenth-century context in which sexual contact almost always (at least for the higher classes which were often the principal actors of the foundation fictions) lead to marriage, children, and a national future. But within a twentieth-century timeframe, sex doesn't necessarily signify any of the above; sex is often quite simply a recreational event, but it can also be an event imbued with ambiguities. In this case it at least opens the possibility for future encounters between the two races and erases many of the social taboos for another sexual liaison.

As the plot unfurls, it becomes clear that Dr. Jones and Erika have different intentions, and are moving in different directions. Soon after the romantic encounter, Dr. Jones is confronted by the FBI, and he learns that because of his subversive activities, he must leave Honduras. In their last moments together, Erika asks Dr. Jones what the "H" stands for in his name, and he reveals that his middle name is Heródoto. As he ponders on why Erika would be interested in his middle name, he realizes that their relationship, contrary to what he has imagined, has been more than a one night stand. He interprets that her inquiry into his middle name signifies her interest in developing the relationship into more than just a casual encounter. When he recognizes the implications of their sexual contact, he stumbles onto a startling realization, "[Jones] descubría que él tampoco se salvaba de la ley de la vida de extender el mestizaje. Pero descartó aquella idea, más bien la estranguló, la reprimió esforzadamente sepultándola en lo más íntimo de su imaginación" (502). What Jones has "discovered" is that racially he could never serve as a "national" father and have Erika as a "national" mother to a new race of mestizaje that conjoins blackness and mestizaje with

nationality. Although he realizes their potential to serve as national parents, he refuses to entertain this idea.

Returning to the idea of Dr. Jones's middle name, Heródoto, we see that the reference to this historian has two feasible interpretations (Hartog 297). Herodotus is the Greek father of history, or the father of lies. Dr. Jones has a choice of which interpretation of the name he could embrace, and he denies being the father of history and chooses deception instead. As the father of history and the father to the child of Erika, he could have potentially altered Honduran history with his offspring; their child would have redefined the Honduran racial mixture. Fundamental to his role as father of history is that this child would have had the potential to change Honduran history. Because the child would have been Afro-descendant, it would have also been marginalized for being black. At the same time, by having a dual nationality of being Honduran and North American, the offspring would be centered in the dominant society as being a child of privilege, for it is clear that Dr. Jones's nationality gives him an advantageous background that would be passed onto his progeny. It is here that the blurring of binary post-colonial identities occurs, and the opening of a new third space could emerge in which the child could be representative of multiple races and nationalities (Slemon 104). Regardless, since he does not choose to be with Erika, he will not be the father of the new Honduran history. Instead, he opts to be the father of deception. He promises a return to Erika, except that as the narrative continues, it becomes clear that he has no intention of seeing her again.

Madrugada proposes that on various levels, racial heterogeneity or miscegenation between people of indigenous, African and European descent cannot be considered at this point in Honduran history. More than anything, it is Dr. Jones that denies making this

situation a reality for Honduras, and he treats his encounter with Erika as simply a one-night stand. We can see that their relationship demarcates a paternalistic relationship between the two lovers that mirrors the nature of the relationship between the United States and Honduras. If we see their bodies in a metaphorical sense, their relationship agrees with the US/Honduras historical relations. Taking into consideration Escoto's preponderance for comparing Erika's body to the "tierra fértil y oscura" of the Americas she is classified as an autochthonous element. Therefore, she stands as a metaphor for the nation of Honduras with Jones as metaphor for the United States. During their encounter, Dr. Jones's interior monologue indicates his feelings towards Erika. Although it is unknown what Erika is thinking, it is apparent that he entertains a somewhat patriarchal attitude towards her as her "instructor" during their didactic sexual encounter. Directly paralleling the personal relationship between Dr. Jones and Erika, is the relationship between the United States and Honduras. Oftentimes the United States has been the "instructor" of Latin America in the various interventions that have taken place throughout history in its attempts to "Americanize" foreign nations with its ideology. With the long arm of US interventions that have reached out to tame Honduran soil, it comes as no surprise that Jones would try to plant his influence on the "soil" of Erika, thus transforming her body-territory from the rebellious, subversive person that she was into a submissive individual, dependent on Dr. Jones to fulfill certain needs, just as Honduras is considered to be one of the Latin American countries most dependent on the United States.⁴¹

⁴¹ Episodes of US intervention and/or land usage in Honduras are too numerous to list, but the following examples will prove useful in illustrating the extent of American influence in this Central American nation. What comes to mind though when discussing interventions linked with land are episodes in which American companies (United Fruit and Standard Fruit) designated Honduras as one of the primary banana republics, used

Like the actual nation of Honduras, Erika has been colonized by the United States. But it proves to be a transitory moment for two reasons. First and foremost, once her resources have been usurped from her body, she is of little value to Dr. Jones. Second, as already mentioned, Dr. Jones cannot envision her as the key to the creation of a new humanity that proposes the amalgamation of race and nation. Therefore, he shows no hesitation in pursuing a new romantic relationship. After he leaves Erika, he is ushered into a plane and mid-air, he receives a mysterious note from a woman. Soon after, it is revealed that Sheela, an Afro-Honduran woman and his principal love interest, had written the letter and is in the plane with him. Despite never having consummated their relationship (Sheela is supposedly married), the text hints at a romantic future for them. As they sit together, the two look out of the window at the scene that unrolls below them, “Parecía como si acababa de salir el día sobre las montañas, como si la luna y el sol se hubieran dado cita en el meridiano 88 para iluminar el amor” (507). With this meeting 10,000 feet above Copán, the story of Dr. Jones ends, yet the implications of their relationship are hardly over. Although I have begun this discussion with the end result of their romance, it is worthwhile to go back in time to fully understand the relevance of the balance of power between them. Sheela has been “assigned” to Jones as his puppet girlfriend while revolutionaries use him for their subversive practices. The relationship between them has every appearance of being romantic, yet despite Jones’s strong yearnings to have sex with Sheela, she constantly refuses his endeavors. As he soon discovers, the purpose of having a “girlfriend” is so that he looks less suspicious to any government agency (whether it be Honduran or North American) that may be spying on his activities. After a dramatic meeting in which Sheela rejects Dr. Jones’s

Honduran land as a staging area for military operations in Nicaragua, and created a military base in Trujillo (MacCameron 10-11).

sexual advances, he gives up his romantic ambitions and abandons her momentarily until their meeting on the plane.

As can be seen, 500 years after the initial conquest of the Americas, the desire for territory is still relevant. In *Madrugada*, the focus on territory is important, but more in the allegorical sense of using the human body as territory. For Dr. Jones, Erika is one version of Honduras. She is merely a dark and fertile loam that in reality is simply dirt, an inanimate object that is porous in its ability to absorb whatever attributes and characteristics that are imposed upon it. Sheela represents a different Honduras, a rebellious Honduras that bespeaks subversion not only in ideology, but also in skin color. As Sheela explains to Dr. Jones, “Tengo antepasados esclavos traídos por los portugueses a las minas de plata de Tegucigalpa” (224). The text also insinuates that she could quite possibly have biracial ancestors from the West Indies due to her light eyes and lighter skin. Her blackness and her status as a mulatta already designates her as an outsider, a being placed in a peripheral zone who is unable to be incorporated into the soil of Honduras. To elaborate, even though the Garífuna are a marginalized group, Honduras’s other black populations tend to fall even further outside of the definition of national identity. Two of Honduras’s leading intellectuals on national identity, Marvin Barahona y Darío A. Euraque, approach blackness in their native land with varying degrees of acceptance of a black Honduras. While Barahona virtually ignores any aspect of race other than the indigenous, he does pay lip-service to Afro-Hondurans in both the beginning and final pages of his study, first citing that at independence the Honduran population was “90% indios, mestizos, mulatos [y] negros” (55) and later citing that “la identidad de la población hondureña no se corporizó exclusivamente en la cultura y religión indígena, hispana o africana sino más bien en el entrecruce de éstas” (278).

Euraque paints a more complete picture of Honduras's African influence and despite a reluctance to criticize Barahona, he argues for the incorporation of the Garífuna as part of the greater panorama of national identity.⁴² But as stated, Euraque's recognition of blackness in Honduras paints a portrait of a national identity primarily associated with the Garífuna. Euraque also refutes the essay of Echeverri-Gent in which she argues for the inclusion of the West Indian blacks as part of an important factor in the construction of racial identity. Therefore, Sheela is a marginalized figure not only because of her race, but also because of the geographical roots of her race, and she is even further depicted as an outsider not just to Ladinos, but also to other Afro-Hondurans.

In the end, the important part of Sheela's identity is that she is of black descent but not linked to the Garífuna population. Because her particular kind of African ancestry is diminished and questioned by the Honduran hegemony, Sheela can only insert herself into her country's national identity in a manner that almost erases all imprints of blackness from her body; in the following citation we can observe that she eradicates color from the word "raza" and collapses it into a signifier based on nationality:

Somos una raza, Quentin, que nació peleando y cuatro siglos después sigue peleando, y esas volubilidades que usted le ve al latinoamericano no son más que los tiempos del reposo mientras se asienta por dentro el nuevo aprendizaje del último triunfo o de la última derrota [. . .] Es una raza que aprendió a sufrir y a callar, casi se podría decir que incluso aprendió a explotar [. . .] El latinoamericano nació con una gran glándula de la paciencia y esa le secreta la hormona de la oportunidad sólo en el momento exacto, en el instante preciso cuando se necesita. (228)

⁴² In this case he criticizes anthropologist Linda A. Newson, questioning, "¿Es esta una fiel representación de la heterogeneidad racial de Honduras?" (19).

By erasing color from race Sheela achieves various objectives. As already stated, when she refers to all Hondurans as a “raza” she unites them under the term of nationality. Yet this feat has its own implications. By ignoring the racial differences between her and other citizens, she approaches some of the ramifications that originate from what Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre would designate as “racial democracy,” a type of situation in which due to a high degree of miscegenation, the subjects ignore race and concentrate on forming a national identity.⁴³ Sheela’s positioning of herself and other Latin Americans as part of the “meta-race” on one hand belies the fact that she views herself within the greater Latin American and Honduran community, but at the same time denies her the ability to see the racism that still exists in Honduras towards blacks. The fact that many Hondurans do not acknowledge the different sources of black identity questions the status of racial identity in Honduras. Therefore, when considering the future of the relationship between Sheela and Jones, we find that race is conflated with nationality, a state which further confounds Escoto’s vision of the future. In what direction is Honduras headed? What factors will be most axiomatic in the determination of the future of racial or Honduran national identity?

A curious characteristic in Jones’s relationships with the two women is that of submission and dominance, for it is a characteristic that proves to be somewhat allegorical towards international and gender relations. As previously stated, Erika/hegemonic Honduras is dominated by Jones/United States in their sexual liaison, yet despite this domination there is a failure to produce any level of a viable future for a mixed US/Honduras relationship based on submission. On the other hand, Jones repeatedly fails to dominate

⁴³ With this I do not intend to imply that Honduras is in fact a racial democracy as defined by Gilberto Freyre’s description, but that in many cases Sheela’s attitude towards Honduran race relations accomplishes many of the same goals that are illustrated by Freyre’s concept of race and nationality in *Casa-Grande & Senzala*.

Sheela/subversive Honduras, and instead, she seemingly dominates him by refusing to give up her “resources” under his terms. To a certain respect, the ideology she professes of a Latin America united under the guise of national identity is debunked perhaps not by her words, but rather by her actions. By initiating a relationship with a subject that embraces a shared African diaspora, she does not veer towards racial heterogeneity but rather a future racial homogeneity. Assuming that the two continue with a romantic relationship as implied, and assuming that they are the “future,” the degree of hybridity that Sheela exudes as a light-eyed mulatta is somewhat eradicated from the picture; any offspring from their relationship would be physically blackened by Jones, yet culturally whitened by his nationality. According to the text, the status of having U.S. citizenship has, at least in the case of Dr. Jones, the ability to open doors and grant opportunities no matter what one’s race may be.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the ramifications of Dr. Jones and Sheela possibly having offspring lead Honduras to a different definition of national identity than what has held to be “truth” in the past. The future proposed by the text is one that entails a degree of racial miscegenation, but one that still fragments the concept of a Ladino nation in that it creates space for another racial reality, one that encompasses blackness and a racial hybridity other than the one-dimensional portrait of indigenous/Spanish race mixture. It also creates a space for a hybridization of national identity that suggests that Honduras will move further in becoming a globalized nation, for the subject with the dual U.S. American/Honduran identity would be able to create a third space of national identity that falls outside the limits of any border. In any case, the end result of their relationship remains open-ended and the reader will never know if the couple has any descendants.

⁴⁴ This idea comes from the text and does not reflect the reality of others.

Colonial Desire and Nation

The flashbacks of *Madrugada* do not parallel the events of the principal narrative, but rather provide historical glimpses into pivotal moments of Honduran history. In many of the flashbacks, we see a series of proposed relationships. These sexual liaisons do not follow the exact paradigm of the national romance, for the concept of nation had not even been invented when these events took place. The heady rush of “love and patriotism” that characters such as Erika and Sheela feel in regards to Honduras would be totally absent in the colonial context. Regardless, these relationships have an important function in the novel in the possibilities that they present for understanding Honduran history. They underscore that it is fundamental to examine the elements of desire and romance as key determinants for the creation of identity and to examine how the narrative of these proposed unions offer a new direction (at least in literature) for the racial component of the nation’s citizens.

As stated above, Escoto brings the narratives of multiple characters living in multiple time periods into his narrative. In several flashbacks he demonstrates that the desire for the Other is a phenomenon that erupted at the point of contact during the Spanish conquest. Escoto’s plot highlights that the conquest and colonization of Honduras was not only the beginning of Spanish and indigenous conflict, but that it was also the beginning of conflict based on indigenous, Spanish and later on, African strife.⁴⁵ While it wasn’t uncommon for groups of runaway slaves to befriend tribes of native people, just because the Africans and indigenous people were two marginalized groups does not mean that they necessarily always had a friendly relationship (Lewis 101).⁴⁶ The disaccord between Amerindians and blacks

⁴⁵ The most famous story of Spanish and indigenous conflict was the encounter between the Lenca Indians, led by Lempira, and a group of Spanish conquerors.

⁴⁶ The best example of black and indigenous alliance would be the Miskito of Honduras.

was in part a situation that occurred as a result of Spanish intervention, for the caste system that was imposed on colonial life fostered an atmosphere of suspicion and rejection between the two groups. It was believed that Afro-Latinos used their cunning to “trick” Indians into committing crime (102).⁴⁷ As discussed in the introduction to the present study, the native people were discriminated against while simultaneously becoming the national symbol of many Latin American countries, including Honduras (Wade 34). The Spanish treatment of the indigenous people was often contradictory, for Spaniards would marry indigenous women yet they would sometimes enslave the indigenous population (31). Afro-descendants on the other hand were brought to the Americas as slaves and had no link to national identity due to the fact that they were not native to the Americas (32-33).⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it was impossible to stymie the desire that evolved between the various races in Latin America and as a result, the caste system expanded in order to accommodate the new mixed race groups that had to be incorporated into the vision of the “New World.” As Robert J. C. Young verifies:

Whereas the difference between civilization and savagery was something most readers could assume but not themselves experience (however much they thought they might have thought that they knew all about it), the visual distinction between the ideals of Western beauty and deliberately debased representations of other races could be judged from a quick glance at the page. The repulsion that writers commonly express when describing other races, particularly the Africans, is however,

⁴⁷ Lewis highlights a case in colonial Mexico in which a black man and an indigenous man named Juan Agustín were accused of robbery. The lawyer who defended Agustín argued that the black man was the “aggressor of all of it and that Juan Agustín was a ‘domestic’ Indian” (101). Such incendiary rhetoric in which the Spanish attempted to “draw Indians into the Spanish sphere of influence,” caused friction between the two groups (Lewis 101-02).

⁴⁸ Although the Spanish were not native to the Americas either, they were in a position of power and could construct rhetoric of legitimacy to justify their social position.

often accompanied at other points, with an equal emphasis, sometimes apparently inadvertent, on the beauty, attractiveness or desirability of the racial other. (96)

In accordance with Young's ideas, the following two sexual liaisons of *Madrugada* combine the elements of civilization and savagery, desire and repulsion and the possible construction of a new national identity. Upon reading these fictional situations, what stands out is Escoto's interpretation of the role that the Afro-descendant plays in the formation of Honduran history.

The first flashback occurs in 1621. Mateu Casanga is a slave that has recently been brought to Honduras and he observes the relationships between the Spanish, Indians and other Afro-descendants. The scene that provides much insight into the potential avenues of miscegenation and colonial desire revolves around a relationship between an Indian woman and a black slave man. The relationship is discovered when the woman appears with a dark infant with African features, an act which thus causes the indigenous population to erupt in violence, "el viejo no torció su voluntad antes bien alzando de sorpresa al menor lo desbarrancó piedras abajo, con lo que el agua hirvió de rojo y el infante nos cayó a los pies dando tumbos: y era negro" (355). In an act of disgust, the Indians kill the infant for having black skin and African features. Mateu, the narrator of the event, underlines the horror of the indigenous people as they discuss the undesirable African hair of the infant. Mateu mentions the baby's "cabellos ensortijados como alambres," and his "pelos enrizados" (355). The fact that Mateu compares the baby's hair to "alambre," or barbwire, leads us to believe that he has appropriated the master narrative of racism, for the degradation of African features was a common trait in racist discourses on the inferiority of blacks (White and White 48). Those of European descent tended to attribute negativity to the "wooly hair" of the Afro-descendants

but here we see that it is the Afro-descendant slave himself that takes these terms and uses them in reference to a baby that as he says, is a “negro puto esclavo como *nosotros*” (355 emphasis mine). By using these descriptions, it becomes clear that Mateu maintains a negative opinion towards his own race and also we can easily see the abjection that he holds towards the baby of the mixed-race background as he contemplates this creature that physically looks similar to him yet exhibits few of the physical traits of the Indians. This disgust that he holds towards the blackness of the infant demonstrates that he has absorbed the ideals of beauty of the colonial era and those traits removed from whiteness are viewed as vile and disgusting. This disgust also facilitates his ability to place the blame on the Amerindians for the death of the infant instead of blaming the Spanish for creating these negative constructions of race.

Without a doubt, despite viewing blackness as something abhorrent, the element of desire is also present. As the text indicates, the young indigenous woman gave up her virginity easily to a black slave, and as a result, they created a child that pertained to the zambo caste in colonial Latin American society. This colonial desire is fundamental to the creation of new races and cultures, for as Young highlights, without sex there is no possibility for racial mixture, but with this hybridity comes racism towards the subject of mixed blood (12). The idea that the hybrid subject created by the mingling of races was dangerous was not uncommon, and it was thought that people of mixed blood were damaged, perhaps infertile:

A hybrid is a cross between two species, such as the mule and the hinny, which are female-male and male-female crosses between horse and ass. The point generally made is that both the mule and the hinny are infertile, which results in the species

remaining distinct, held separate by an apparent natural check, as a result of this definition, the argument that the different races of men were different species hinged on the question of whether the product of a union between different races was fertile or not. (8)

The idea of the hybrid individual being damaged is present in this text, for we can see that all of the races in question—that is, the black slaves, their Spanish owners, and the indigenous family of the baby—are disgusted by its color and breathe a sigh of relief when it dies.

Another important element to infanticide is that with the child's death, indigenous and African mestizaje is suffocated and imbued with negative associations. The fact that the infant meets a violent death insinuates that the combination of black and indigenous blood is considered a dangerous hybridity. Hybridity was often seen as something monstrous. This monstrous example of mestizaje with the wiry hair and the skin that is dark yet “descolorido,” is an abnormality, and not permitted to survive, and therefore, the novel proposes that at this particular time in colonial history, the zambo figure is considered unfit to play a part in building the emerging nation of Honduras. With the death of the doomed infant, *Madrugada* proposes that the only possible solution to the impending threat of the miscegenation of marginalized groups is infanticide.

Miskito Possibilities

An interesting aspect of the novel is Escoto's treatment of the people of the Miskito nation. As discussed in the introduction, the general consensus among anthropologists is that this group of people who live on the southeasternmost section of Honduras is an indigenous group, yet it cannot be denied that they also have African roots. Despite their indigenous status, in *Madrugada* Escoto clearly identifies them as Afro-descendants, and it is for this

reason that in the following analysis I will be treating the Miskito as Afro-descendants. To illustrate this point, I will highlight a scene in the text which justifies my confirmation that the Miskito figure in *Madrugada* is constructed as black. In the scene in question, Dr. Jones meets a Miskito man named Marcial Sambulá in Tegucigalpa. Based on the color of his skin, the narrative places Sambulá in the same racial category as Dr. Jones and the Garífuna. When Dr. Jones first sees Marcial, he thinks to himself that “era obvio que estaba ante un negro racialmente sólido íntegro, quizás más o tan negro como él [. . .] En Estados Unidos sería el mismo fulano que aparece sin sombrero a la derecha, en el fondo de la última fotografía tomada a Martin Luther King rodeado de sus seguidores” (126). By connecting Marcial with Dr. Jones, who identifies himself as black, and by connecting him with civil rights leader Martin Luther King, it becomes evident that in the text the Miskito people are classified as an integral part of the African diaspora. Even the name “Sambulá” sounds remarkably like the term “zambo.” To further verify that the text associates the Miskitos with blackness, we see that after meeting Marcial, Dr. Jones is curious about the Miskito connection to other Afro-Honduran groups. He asks Erika about the difference between the Miskito people and the Garífuna (128). The fact that he conflates the Garífuna and the Miskito people further demonstrates that the text views the Miskito as Afro-descendants. These scenes in which Dr. Jones questions the racial identity of the Miskito people provide an opening to the following chapter of the book in which we find the discussion of race and miscegenation between the Spanish and the Miskitos.

In the chapter of *Madrugada* titled “Aurelina (1785-1786),” the protagonist Aurelina is a young Spanish woman from the town of Granagua. Aurelina and her servant Ana are kidnapped by the Miskito people and held for ransom. As captives of the Miskitos, they

witness the destruction of Granagua and soon realize that the life they once knew is no longer. At first they hope to be rescued, but eventually Aurelina recognizes that they are too far away from other Spanish cities to escape and that her father can neither provide the money to pay her ransom nor can he find the support to stage a rescue. Don Robinson, the Miskito chief, takes an interest in Aurelina and has sexual feelings towards her, which initially she does not return. After continued advances and persuasion, she eventually resigns to her fate and as the text implies, makes herself sexually available to him.

Again, we see the common dichotomy of color, moral value and aesthetics in which blackness is associated with horror and sexual degeneration and whiteness with chastity. We see a situation in which, to borrow Young's words, "blackness evokes an attractive, but dangerous sexuality" (97). As Young also confirms, nineteenth-century race theory proposed by Count Gobineau is that the white male was to be the colonizer because white males are more attracted to the females of the "yellow and black races." The descriptions of the mechanisms of colonial power usually refer to the white colonizers taking power of the colonized who almost always have darker skin (109). But with Don Robinson and Aurelina, it becomes apparent that Escoto has reversed the normal paradigms of submission and has the once colonized black subject (Don Robinson) desiring the white colonizer (Aurelina). Such a situation in which the *sistema de castas* was inverted was supposedly a fear that many Spaniards entertained (M. Martínez 483). With this inversion of the *sistema de castas* Escoto highlights the violence associated with miscegenation during the colonial period; yet curiously he insinuates that the Other was responsible for miscegenation, for instead of the white colonizer violently coercing the marginalized subject to have sexual contact, the violent mechanisms of colonization are maneuvered by an Afro-descendant subject.

The first time Aurelina sees Don Robinson, there is something about the dark color of his skin attracts her eyes as she contemplates his “tez negra” (263). Despite her secret fascination with him, she still pejoratively refers to him and the Miskitos as “una mejenga de negros” (272). By the descriptions in the text, it is clear that Don Robinson’s blackness is viewed as something negative and at the same time, something perversely sexual. In fact, his insatiable sexual desire is a fundamental part of the construction of this character. Historian María Elena Martínez writes that during the colonial period the Spanish believed that the Afro-descendants exhibited an unbridled sexuality. We can see that Escoto’s text portrays Don Robinson as very sexual, yet at the same time he has also taken the role of the colonizer in that he holds the power. He demonstrates a superior sexuality the first time he meets Aurelina, and immediately tries to dominate her against her will, “[él] optó más bien por enredar un pie entre los mulsos de Aurelina, tumbarla en el suelo y montar su cuerpo sobre ella como quien aplaca las aspas desgobernadas de un pequeño huracán” (265). Don Robinson also reveals his large sexual appetite in the number of wives that he has. Aurelina observes that next to the comal he has two women shucking corn; he identifies the women as belonging to him and then he tells Aurelina that, “Hermenegilda y Paula [son] mis dos mujeres. Paula es nueva, Hermenegilda es mayor” (276). With his descriptions of his relationship with the two women, he proudly makes it clear that he has sexually conquered them, thus indicating that he is virile enough to satisfy more than one woman.

If colonialism is a machine, Don Robinson has learned to use this machine well to exert his power over the Spanish subjects that he has captured as fruits of his re-conquest of territory. The nation-building ideology that was so integral to eighteenth-century Latin America is present in the closing scenes of this chapter in which he continues to pursue

Aurelina. When she rejects yet another of his advances, he tries to change her mind, proposing that, “No le estoy solicitando que sea mi concubina . . . le estoy pidiendo que hagamos la historia” (295).⁴⁹ He continues, “Lo que pido es solamente un poco de amor para mi buena raza, no para mí [. . .] un pedazo de vida civilizada” (295). The chapter closes with him finally seducing her, “El mundo [. . .] el destino [. . .] nada es de uno hasta que se tiene que llorar por él’ dijo Don Robinson en la semioscuridad y tomó despaciosamente, delicadamente, la mano de ella sin resistencia de ella por primera vez” (296). It was a common belief that white people, in other words, the colonizers create history whether it is through racial miscegenation or war (Young 100). As can be seen here, Don Robinson’s words are contradictory; he refutes the idea that only Europeans can create history by demonstrating that he has agency in determining the future of the Miskito people, yet he gives prestige to whites by admitting that it would give his people a piece of “civilized life” to have Aurelina join him. He appropriates the colonizing mentality with his belief that if he can physically conquer a Spanish woman’s body, seen as a metaphor for the crown, he can take this power of whiteness and use it to benefit the Miskito kingdom.

It remains unclear what Don Robinson desires as the end results of his intentions. It can be assumed that by having sex with Don Robinson, Aurelina will have to integrate herself into the Miskito community and renounce Spain as her homeland. Not only would it be impossible for her to escape from Granagua, she would never be accepted by the Spanish for her loss of virginity to an Afro-descendant. Therefore, not only would she now be

⁴⁹ Hernán Cortés and la Malinche are often considered the parents of a new race, the mestizos (Franco 69). The relationship between Don Robinson and Aurelina parallel many of the aspects of the relationship between Cortés and la Malinche. Here, Escoto paints a scenario which depicts an inversion of the relationship of la Malinche and Hernán Cortés, yet with a few major differences. Instead of privileging the European male with the power of conquest as seen with Cortés, Escoto privileges the Afro-descendant autochthonous male of Honduras with the power to conquer the Spanish female and start the new “race.”

contributing to the Miskito identity as an active member of their kingdom, she also quite possibly could be helping to form a new identity for Honduras, one based on the miscegenation of three races: black, indigenous and white. The chapter ends abruptly and leaves the fate of Aurelina and Don Robinson open to interpretation; there is no possibility to discover if the couple eventually produced offspring, but the text implies that it may be a possibility. To apply Doris Sommer's theory, it can be assumed that if a child were to result from the union, the dream of a new national identity for Honduras could become a reality.

A New Dawn of Honduran Identity?

With this said, we can now see that the black characters of *Madrugada* have physically "written" in the pages of Honduran history yet in the end, *Madrugada* proposes a complex and often contradictory view of the inclusion of blackness in Honduras, which questions what direction the text proposes for the future of race and nationality. Such a viewpoint of a limited representation for Afro-Hondurans is certainly not unique, for many Afro-descendants express dismay towards their status in their respective countries. For many Afro-descendants, the actual liberation as a cultural/racial group in its entirety is difficult; at least the liberation for the individual body-territory is a feasible endeavor if viewed by their creation of a new set of cultural norms. But Afro-descendants offer various cultural products as proof that many black subjects have created their own unique hybrid culture, one that is replete of mixed African and European traditions. Despite the fact that Dr. Jones has had the option to pertain to this hybridization of culture, this creation of a third space, the plot ends with an open conclusion. Without a doubt his questioning of American international policy is axiomatic in the development of a new set of values, but the fact remains that he creates nothing new. He no longer accepts the "official story" of Honduran history (a creation of the

dominant discourse) and instead accepts an alternative story of Honduran history that has also been fabricated by sectors of the community with an opposing agenda.

Even though *Madrugada* attempts to incorporate the Afro-Honduran subject into Honduran national community, it is not entirely successful. Sheela and Dr. Jones have yet to create a “product” that is accepted and incorporated into the dominant Honduran society. They are apparently approaching the creation of a third space by divaricating from Honduran racial norms and paradigms of behavior, but since any sort of product (or offspring), whether it be one from the physical realm or one based on ideology, has yet to be integrated into the Honduran community, I would venture that they are unsuccessful. What they do have is the fostering of anti-imperialist sentiment and the inklings of a romance. Unfortunately nothing is confirmed, the text only leaves us with speculations about the future. To a certain extent the fact that they flee to exile in Jamaica (oddly the country formally criticized by Dr. Jones) denotes a lack of closure. The door has not been closed on any future creations yet the reader is left hanging.

In conclusion, the text affirms that Honduras is not ready to insert any brand of hybrid African identity into the imagined community. Although there is the feasible relationship between Aurelina and Don Robinson, and Jones and Sheela, the rest of the attempts to create racial unity are thwarted. The infant born as a result between an indigenous subject and a black slave is murdered. Dr. Jones and Erika do not create any offspring, nor does their romance continue. In the final chapters of *Madrugada*, blackness is something that must be geographically shuttled off to a foreign land that perhaps is more readily able to accept its various permutations instead of damning it to exile. As Jamaica has had a stronger tradition of African influence, it appears to be a nation acceptable of Dr. Jones and Sheela’s agenda.

On the other hand, according to the text, Honduras vacillates in a monocultural quagmire that causes the nation to deny its racial nuances and depend on the more widely accepted Ladino identity.

The text of *Madrugada* mocks this one dimensional view of history and presents national identity by juxtaposing scenes from historical moments in Honduran history with images of African and indigenous subjects that have in some way contributed to Honduran history, yet unfortunately been obliterated from national memory. Benedict Anderson verifies that, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members [. . .] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (6). I would argue for the veracity of this statement in the majority of situations, but I feel that in the cases of extreme marginalization that are presented in *Madrugada* that this does not always apply. The fragmented manner in which history is narrated signals that Escoto recognizes that the communities in Honduras have disintegrated to the degree that they are simply groups without a real base in nationalism. In spite of the title *Madrugada*, there does not appear to be a new dawn of Honduran identity in the horizon, at least for the time being. The fact that Sheela and Dr. Jones promise to return when the revolutionary time is right provides a glimmer of hope for the evolution of national identity but it offers no promises; the book leaves its readers to question if the nation will ever embrace its true multi-racial identity.

The following chapter continues with the theme of Honduran blackness in exile. As with Sheela and Dr. Jones, the Afro-descendant characters of the next group of works also express a desire to move beyond the boundaries of their native land in order to find that sense of national belonging that they cannot discover in Honduras. Whereas in *Madrugada* the reader never knows the outcome of Sheela and Dr. Jones’s journey out of Honduras, the

works of chapter IV explore the black subject's desire to immigrate and assimilate into North American culture.

Chapter IV

The Search for a Garífuna “Homeplace” in the Face of Displacement: Immigration, and Nation in Cultural Production

For many, the word “home” is a word that invokes a feeling of security, a sense of belonging, a sensation of peace. Whether this home is a structure or a particular geographical locality does not matter. While arrival to the homeplace is of importance to the subject in need of this fixed location for recuperation from a hostile world, it is in all actuality the journey itself that so often solidifies how we define ourselves in the face of opposition.⁵⁰ Although in many ways nationality molds and shapes one’s experience, it can be said that any subject with a shared background in the African diaspora living in the Americas must also initiate a journey (whether it be domestic or transnational, figurative or literal) in order to search for this illusive yet secure homeplace. Upon considering the situation of Afro-Latinos, one must posit the question: what happens when the hope and desire for a homeplace is destroyed or impeded by institutionalized (that is to say government initiated), exogenous circumstances such as a loss of land rights and/or violence? Are these marginalized subjects then forced to embark upon a journey to locate a new homeplace? According to the examples of Honduran cultural production dealing with Afro-Honduran issues, the Garífuna subject falls into such an unhappy category.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The word “homeplace” is originally used by bell hooks in her essay “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance.” In the essay, she embarks upon a journey to her grandma’s house. While traveling through a racist, white neighborhood, she feels a sense of “safety, of arrival, of homecoming when [she] finally reached the edge” of her grandma’s yard where she could find solace (41). This place of safety is her homeplace.

⁵¹ For the duration of this chapter I use the term “cultural production” to allude to literature, film and theater, although in reality the true definition is much broader. In her article “The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers,” Maureen Mahon defines cultural production as, “. . . the practice through which individuals and groups produce music, video, film, visual arts and theater, and the ideological and institutional frameworks within which these processes occur” (467).

The three works of Honduran immigration cultural production explored in this chapter touch this conundrum and follow a similar paradigm of events in the plot. They demonstrate that due to economics and racial discrimination, the impoverished Garífuna often find themselves crossing transnational boundaries in order to follow a dream of finding a homeplace. Oftentimes this dream may be the American dream, as seen in more contemporary manifestations of Garífuna cultural production, yet once living upon North American soil, they inevitably must make a decision that embraces options that are polar opposites: to either attempt to assimilate to their new host culture (often an impossibility) or to resist and try to carve out a sort of internal cultural Garífuna colony. As seen in literary and media depictions of transnational Garífuna life, said dilemma between approaches to adaptation creates a schism in whatever imagined community those Garífuna immigrants attempt to construct.⁵² While not completely parallel to the African American experience, the Garífuna experience does share several commonalities other than a similar color of their skin, hence the effort to employ the African American experience as a basis of comparison.⁵³ Therefore the Garífuna, like the African American subject, must question whether or not he or she can ever find a homeplace in order to “recover” himself or herself. Above all, it is often difficult to insert the Garífuna subject into any brand of theoretical framework given that unlike “African American studies,” “Afro-Honduran studies” is simply not a term that has been formalized in any university’s list of disciplines, for blackness has only recently

⁵² By referring to the idea of an “imagined community,” I employ the terminology used by Benedict Anderson to allude to the definition of what a nation is (at least in a modern context), that is, “. . . an imagined political community—and imagines both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). Although such a definition is normally applied to ideas of nation, I use it in looser terms to signify a cohesive social group bound together by a shared history and ideology.

⁵³ Mark Anderson also asserts that while African-American and Garífuna “racial conditions” are different, the fact remains that comparisons can be drawn between the two groups in certain circumstances, such as when discussing migration.

even been inserted into the national identity of Honduras (England 4). Due to years of discrimination and limited resources, black Hondurans seemingly have been written out of much of the literature centered upon Honduras, save for a few exception.

In many African American writings, the leitmotif of the journey and border crossing has been visited and revisited numerous times from W.E.B. Du Bois to more recent writers such as bell hooks. Their writing blazes a path for other African Americans to defy marginalization and expose their voices, even if they must first start this exposure of voice via the usage of a validating hegemonic voice in order to gain acceptance.⁵⁴ It is worthwhile to underscore the experience of these African American thinkers who have created this opening for other individuals from a similar diasporic background since their journeys and their arrivals serve as a point of departure for the study at hand. I would like to initiate this discussion on African diasporic journey with the discourse of the black traveler in the United States, bell hooks. Hooks writes of the importance of journey. She speaks of her fear as she crosses the invisible yet real racial divide between the segregated neighborhoods of the Deep South; she feels the “terrifying whiteness” emanating from the white inhabitants of those houses located in the poor white areas of town. For bell hooks, one must create one’s own homeplace wherever possible. Said homeplace transforms into a site of resistance for the African American subject, and above all, while within the home the individual is in a safe space. In the public domain, the white southerner becomes entrenched with his or her black counterpart in what Foucault might describe as a Panopticon-like situation, with the white antagonist possessing the omnipotent eye that observes, modulates and above all punishes

⁵⁴ Though “African-American” is a term often limited to those of African descent living within the United States, in this instance I propose a far more global definition of the terminology to imply that all those of African descent living in the Americas as “African-American”.

black behavior that is “too black.” Meanwhile, back within the refuge of the homeplace, the black subject can shed all inhibitions and act as desired.

Behaving as one desires therefore transmogrifies into a form of resistance. Remembering is honoring the African American struggle to “keep something for their own,” and to acknowledge a “‘homeplace’ in which [African-Americans] can recover [themselves]” (43). While arrival to the homeplace is of high importance to the black individual needing to recuperate identity, it is the adversity of the journey that strengthens one’s sense of self. Such an idea evidences itself in hook’s contact with the poor whites that scorn her black skin; she learns not what she is but rather what she is not. She does not belong, she is not wanted and she is not powerful (41). Finally when she arrives at her homeplace, it serves as a sacred area in which she can ponder on her nascent identity and immerse herself in the Sisyphus cycle of deconstruction and reconstruction of self-image.

On one hand, hooks must confront the effects of an unspoken, socially imposed segregation that delegates geographical space. On the other hand, writers such as Frederick Douglass have had to suffer under the laws of slavery during the antebellum period and the subsequent institutionalized segregation during Reconstruction. During Reconstruction, homeplace becomes a site of resistance in the commentary “The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States” (1880) by Frederick Douglass. Douglass employs the leitmotif of journey prevalent in African American cultural production. Although he agrees that moving north of the Mason-Dixon Line promised blacks more freedom, he also argues that:

[T]he colored race is a remarkable home-loving race. It has done very little in the way of voluntary colonization. It shrinks from the untried and the unknown. It thinks its own locality is the best in the world. Of all the galling conditions to which the Negro

was subjected in the days of his bondage, the one most galling to him was the liability of separation from home and friends. His love of home and dread of change made him even partially content in slavery. (42)

Douglass then goes to reiterate that in order for Negroes to take back their power from the white hegemony they must find a homeplace in the south. For him, the journey also has negative connotations but for different reasons. Douglass comprehends the journey as an abdication, an acknowledgement that whites have been successful in unraveling black roots by forcing them to relocate to the unknown northern territories. According to Paul Gilroy in his work *The Black Atlantic* (1993), the terror that W.E.B Du Bois feels isn't just from being assaulted by the gaze of a horrifying whiteness, but also from conclusions derived from his own gaze that observed how whites treated blacks (119-19).⁵⁵

Gilroy acknowledges the importance of the theme of homeplace, yet he expands the definition. He posits a return to Africa as a solution to the ravages of racial discrimination that had wrecked havoc upon the African American community (122). Gilroy delineates Du Bois's three phases of evolution of the cultures of the black Atlantic, stating that the last phase would be the pursuit of an autonomous black state in which "[the] black community can develop at their own pace and in their own direction. This final component encompassed the desire of U. S. American and Caribbean blacks to "secure an independent African homeland in Liberia and elsewhere" (122-23). While not explicitly expressed in the citation above, the leitmotif of voyage and immigration is paramount to the return of a homeplace which embraces national identity and safety. The writings of Du Bois also link the concepts of journey, border crossing and nation. Throughout much of *The Souls of Black Folks*, he

⁵⁵ By "consequences" I allude to when Gilroy mentions the act of lynching as an institution that aimed to serve as a means of "political administration" (118).

recounts his travels not only in the North, but also in the South, where he crosses the border into what is known as the “Black Belt,” an area which boasts rich, black fertile loam, ideal for cotton cultivation. While the color “black” initially referred to the soil, throughout time the name evolved to imply that a large quantity of African Americans farmed the land (Falk, Talley and Rankin 53-54).

The stories and theories of African American writers and philosophers serve as a point of departure for the study of the perpetuating, hegemonic gaze that follows the Garífuna. As I plan to demonstrate, the Garífuna subject of immigration literature is so deeply intertwined with a Ladino perspective that it is not always easy to separate their voices. I feel that it is important to reiterate that since so few Afro-Hondurans have been featured as characters in any manifestation of cultural production, it can be an arduous task to establish the theoretical framework or frame of reference in which to analyze those scant works. How does one approach a work that neither explores the traditional Latino paradigm of race relations in the United States nor the traditional experience of African Americans within the very same nation? It seems that the experience of transnational immigration would equate the Garífuna border crossing with that of their fellow Ladino countrymen and women. But this is not the case, for the Garífuna are marginalized within Honduras, and because of their otherness, the Ladino population often shuns them.⁵⁶ As evidenced in the previous paragraphs, immigration is a leitmotif witnessed throughout African history and it is important for the comprehension of our cultural fabric. As to be demonstrated, it is logical

⁵⁶ Although the Garífuna do live in larger cities such as San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa, they mainly inhabit areas considered to be in the hinterlands of Honduras thus limiting their contact with the dominant population (Rivas 257). Plus in the first half of the 20th century Ladinos expended tremendous amounts of energy in a racist campaign to exclude the Garífuna from the Honduran community, stating that they were foreigners because they originated from San Vicente or that they should be excluded based on the color of their skin (Griffin 22-24).

that the writer or producer that involves the Afro-Honduran subject in his or her work would incorporate themes of displacement because such large portions of Garífuna have been impelled to cross national borders. It is with the waves of African immigration that I lay the framework for imagining the Honduran, Garífuna immigration to the United States as a situation analogous in many respects to African American migration. The analogies that can be deduced may not be an exact parallel, but similarities between immigration and displacement embrace enough congruencies that it is possible to establish a dialogue between the two communities that are linked by a shared past diaspora rooted in Africa. Although the commonalities between blacks in the United States and Honduran blacks have not been explored more in depth; their similarities are often striking. Both share the background of movement in search of a better economic situation, both cross an invisible yet dangerous border to find this improved economic situation, and both find the need to navigate between the North/South dichotomy that delineates their subordination within their society.

Above all, what can be taken from this dialogue on blackness and migration is that homeplace is an enigmatic entity. While Ladinos feel comfortable in their own skin within their national territory, the traveling Garífuna is subject to discrimination and persecution, a situation not unlike the black American during the time of Jim Crow. Both flee, crossing borders not only to escape from racial tension but also to find economic improvement. The American dream is open to only a select few, and those with dark skin are often locked out no matter what their citizenship may be.

The Garífuna Reality versus Ladino Transnational Movements

So why categorize the cinematic and literary representation of Garífuna journey and dislocation as an experience separate from the Honduran Ladino experience? Why not group

the Garífuna narratives in the general theme of “immigration literature?” The fact remains that in many arenas the Garífuna transnational experience is profoundly different in both its reality and representation. The yearning for a homeplace is a Daedalian issue, for as I have illustrated above, it can serve as a refuge from racial discrimination, but it can also be perceived (although mainly erroneously) as an unattainable pipedream of upward mobility.

In general, the tale of an arrival or return to a homeplace is interwoven in many an immigration experience, but as I wish to accentuate, this yearning espouses a number of permutations when paired with the concept of race and/or ethnic identity, an element that accentuates the uniqueness of the Garífuna transnational narrative, thus my desire to highlight the manner in which it is portrayed. It may seem that to immigrate from Honduras to the United States would be a monolithic experience because people often do not consider race as a factor in social acceptance. Nevertheless, what happens as one immigrates varies highly depending on one’s background. Therefore it proves to be a useful endeavor to explore the variations involved in the immigration experience to highlight that race does cause a difference in perception and outcome. With this said, we can specifically address the fact that in some cases the Ladino experience varies considerably from the Garífuna experience because in so many cases what was left behind, that is, Honduras, remains the homeplace to the Ladino while the United States serves as a financial means to an end.

According to many of those Garífuna characters seen in the works included in this chapter, initially the United States is also viewed as a locus for upward financial mobility, but the differentiating factor regarding attitudes towards Honduras is that viewed as a monolithic entity, it is rejected for its inhospitable cultural climate and therefore not originally considered to be a homeplace (Gargallo 85-87). In recent decades, large portions

of territory have been usurped from the Garífuna owners and are being developed into tourist resorts (Loperena). Also problematic to Garífuna territorial rights is that foreigners have also been allowed to buy beachside areas for private vacation residences on what was formally Garífuna territory (Griffin 80). As a consequence, in many instances the Garífuna leave Honduras with feelings of ambivalence towards their nationality.

This is not to say that the Garífuna people do not recognize their role as part of a greater national community. What I am trying to communicate is that in the cinematic and literary representations of the Garífuna subject this adherence to a national identity is often tenuous. I would concur that because of this ambivalence, the characters to be presented in this chapter assume a nomadic state while in the United States, in some cases spending decades in an identity search before they return to Honduras; in other cases they are so lost that they can never retrace their steps back to their country of origin. Statistical data concerning Honduran immigration to the United States is available, but the racial component of those immigrants, whether documented or undocumented is scarce, so it is necessary to rely on anecdotal information rather than statistical information. While not providing any statistics, John C. Everitt confirms that the Garífuna segment of immigrants to the United States is growing due to a “latinization” of Central America. As Spanish-speaking Ladinos encroach upon formerly Garífuna territories, the Garífunas flee. Mary C. Walters and Karl Eschbach cite the arbitrary nature of racial classification on the part of the Honduran Office of Management and Budget for not providing information on subpopulations of immigrant groups.

While the Garífunas are accustomed to marginalization, the Ladinos are used to being the dominant race.⁵⁷ The difficulties encountered by the protagonist can demonstrate the hardships of living in a foreign country without documentation. The text by human rights group Pastoral Social/Cáritas includes a series of testimonies of immigration stories to the United States told by immigrants that identify themselves as Ladinos.⁵⁸ The significance in such data is that their personal stories express nostalgia for a homeplace left behind paired with a refusal to admit the United States as a new homeplace. This attitude appears to be slowly burned into the national consciousness of Honduran immigrants as they cross borders. Barring the one immigrant who died before he could return to Honduras, all recognize the importance of their motherland, Honduras, as their homeplace. In an account by an undocumented immigrant named Lili Escobar, this desire becomes apparent in her interview “Ahora sí, ya voy para Honduras. Sólo me acuerdo de los primeros días, que lloraba y lloraba. Me acordaba de mi bebida que sólo tiene un año, pero es bien vivita. Y me decían que pensaban que yo tenía algún dolor . . . mejor si regresamos [a Honduras]” (168). The words of this young mother explicitly stress a yearning for homeplace based upon Honduran national identity. Here a fixed nationality of being Honduran has woven itself into this immigrant’s desire to return to her homeplace; instead of having a homeplace that is created of the physical walls of a house as seen in the account of hooks, the Honduran homeplace is created out of walls composed of institutions, culture, and any other elements involved in the creation of a national identity. For immigrants, these imaginary walls can also be limiting as they attempt to establish themselves in a new culture that can potentially reject them.

⁵⁸ In many of the anecdotes, nationality appears to be what determines the discrimination and hardships experienced by those immigrants interviewed as opposed to race, thus solidifying the interviewee’s Ladino heritage as opposed to an Afro-Honduran heritage.

When compared to Garífuna transnational movements discussed below, whereas Ladinos cannot repress their desire to return to this home, the Garífuna can potentially reject Honduras as a home. Taking these thoughts into consideration, we now arrive to the three works included in this chapter, starting with the play *Loubavagu* (1980) by Rafael Murillo Selva Rendón, followed with the novel *Big Banana* (2001) by Roberto Quesada, and ending with the short movie *Espíritu de mi mama* (2002) directed by Alí Allié.

Home, Journey and Identity in *Loubavagu*

While most would question the notion of any slave being “partially content” in a situation of bondage, it is useful to return to the writings of Douglass in which he claims that blacks would rather suffer under the lash than move away from home. This idea of Douglass serves as a point of departure for the present section, for many of the migrant characters in the next two works actually do return to Honduras. Apart from the character Mairena who wanders, a lost soul no matter where he resides, many of the characters that materialize in the play *Loubavagu: el otro lado lejano* eventually return to their Honduran origins. But as with so many tales of immigration, it takes this rupture that ensues from exile and repatriation to achieve a level of self-awareness that would enable these subjects to determine where their homeplace lies.

Garífuna history embraces a striated historical narrative that constitutes the displacement, placement and migrations of the Garífuna in a multi-layered odyssey that spans 300 years. In fact, it would be absurd to assume that Garífuna displacement occurred only as this marginalized community began to migrate to cities within Honduras that are primarily populated by Ladinos or as they initiated migrations to the United States; the reality is that Garífuna identity is formed and based upon displacement and a quest for a homeplace

that has endured for centuries. Rafael Murillo Selva provides a historical panorama of the Garífuna experience that serves as a recuperation effort of Garífuna history.⁵⁹ Being that this historical experience of their community is a multi-national journey, he touches upon various conflagrations related to the effort to coerce the Garífuna into accepting a national identity in place of their own varied regional identities.⁶⁰ In this section I will analyze the process of assimilation and journey that are both tied to the individual Garífuna search for identity. I conclude that according to *Loubavagu*, this search leads the subject to a circular pattern of immigration between Garífuna villages in Honduras and the United States. This pattern of journey has mixed results in securing a homeplace for the Garífuna; it would be logical to deduce that in many instances it appears that the immigration process impels the characters to be written out of the Honduran nation to a greater degree as opposed to finding inclusion within a national identity.

The play *Loubavagu* includes both dialogue and verse. Among the multiple themes presented in the play, the theme that is highlighted continually throughout the body of the work has to do with the multiple diasporic horizons of the Garífuna people. In other words, the work embraces the elements of anteriority, present and futurity in the effort to comprise a cohesive definition of self loosely based on the genealogical and geographical associations of the Garífuna. Each one of these diasporic locations (San Vicente, Honduras and the United States) serves as a stepping stone that is symbiotically linked with a parallel development of identity. This development of identity not only brings the Garífuna people on a physical

⁵⁹ Murillo Selva has also published the script to the play *Creo que nadie es capaz de mentir, o, el caso de Riccy Mabel* (1999).

⁶⁰ Sadly for much time it was difficult to compare historical accounts of what constitutes the Garífuna history due to the fact that as Selva Murillo acknowledges, “La historia del pueblo garífuna (sobre todo la comprendida en la época colonial) se encontraba totalmente olvidada; como se señaló anteriormente ni siquiera se conservaba a través de la tradición oral” (3). It was only until recently that formal investigations into Garífuna history have been published.

journey across borders, but also an ideological journey that at times challenges preconceived notions about national identity and to a lesser extent, racial identity . Explicit references to racial identity in *Loubavagu* are absent in much of the play. It does present somewhat oblique messages concatenated with the American “Black is Beautiful” movement and presents other scenes in which the race question subtly enters into dialogues which deal with the genesis and initial migrations of the Garífuna people. Above all, these scenes question the amalgamation of the concepts of racial and national formation, highlighting them as concurrent events that depend on immigration to bring them into fruition and also simultaneously interweave the temporal phases of the African diaspora within this formation, thus creating a multi-faceted portrait of the events that created the present Garífuna community.

Loubavagu does what no other work does: it begins its narrative in the conception of the Garífuna people on San Vicente, an island that serves as the site of one of the multiple diasporas that is an integral part of Garífuna identity. The island is presented as a paradise on earth, a lost garden of Eden that can be seen as a sanctuary for its inhabitants, “Érase una vez una pequeña isla/nacida en el azulado mar Caribe,” and follows, “Durante algún tiempo, indios y negros/en paz convivieron y en calma se amaron” (4). By initiating the opening scenes of the play with the words “Erase una vez,” the narrator establishes an almost fairytale feeling to the work. “Érase una vez” is the language of fairy tales, of fantastical events that are engrained upon the fabric of our respective societies and is often the prelude to a magical journey that takes its readers to a far off fantasy land. In this case, “Érase una vez” refers to San Vicente, an island that is very real for its present day inhabitants, but appears as an almost legendary reference in the collective memory of the Black Caribs who were the

ancestors of the Honduran Garífuna. Therefore, the island takes on fantasy-like aspects as the point of origin for the Garífuna and the formation of their people; it is there that they acquire the racial components of their hybrid indigenous and African identity.⁶¹ It is only with the British colonization of San Vicente that this diaspora's tranquility is shattered. In other words, the entry of the English serves as the apple that ejects the Garífuna from their Edenic environment.

Displacement, immigration and the question of assimilation are the leitmotifs most primordial to the text of *Loubavagu*, yet the beginning scenes set in San Vicente treat these themes with more simplicity and less reality than later scenes that focus on immigration patterns to the United States. Despite their abrupt ejection from this perceived paradise of San Vicente, the play adopts a positive attitude towards the displacement of the Garífuna, citing the nation of Honduras as elemental in the construction and formation of their nascent identity as Afro-indigenous subjects. As seen in the following passage, the play hypothesizes that their hybrid identity stems more from a questioning of national ties than racial confusion given that the narrator imagines Honduras as a unifying entity rather than one of division, “Es esta vida que se mueve y cambia/que sube y que baja, que vuela y navega/desde Yurumain hasta nuestra Honduras/es el mundo nuestro que contar queremos/es la vida nuestra que a cantarles vamos” (5). Curiously, despite showing a preference for San Vicente (also known as Yurumain in the Garífuna language), the voices of the Garífuna chorus clearly assert a sense of ownership towards their new country and moreover, they appropriate a Honduran national identity based in solidarity. It is not until a subsequent scene in the play

⁶¹ While the text presents the Black and Red Caribs as peaceful, historical accounts argue that there was fighting between the groups.

that racial identity is brought into the light. In a brief instant, the Garífunas linger in their diasporic homeplace of San Vicente as they consider their future:

El padre: Fué así como un nuevo color surge en medio del verde azulado de San Vicente. India y negro se juntaron como el grano y la mazorca, como el pez y el agua, e hicieron surgir en nuestra América un mundo diferente.

Aquí están los primeros garífunas, uno se llama Satuyé el otro Duval y éste Iduwa.

Un indio viejo: (viendo los niños) ¡Púchica!, todos salieron prietos, parecidos más al tata que a la nana . . . y qué cachimbo Dios mío, como preñan, son puros sementales . . . miren que marimba de negros y mi pobre hija tan desgonzada . . . si ésto sigue así, en poco tiempo habrán más negros que indios en la isla, nos quedaremos sin tierra y sin mujeres. (22)

While the first part of the citation firmly inserts the Garífuna as a member of a pan-diasporic identity (yet still not a Honduran one), the comments of the “indio viejo” are reminiscent of the stereotypical images of the African as animalistic and sexualized, only useful for breeding purposes, as seen by the usage of the word “sementales.” In a rare moment the text focuses on miscegenation as a polemic divider of race by implicating that the mixing of races destroyed the original indigeneity of the Red Caribs as it was subsumed by the blackness of the marooned Africans.

The middle section of the play presents an often conflicting view of the role of the Garífuna in the historical narrative of Honduras. While the play mentions Satuyé, the Garífuna leader that fought in the Carib Wars of San Vicente, it also demonstrates

ambivalence towards the historical importance of the Garífuna. In a scene that depicts a group of children and their teacher discussing history, the teacher tells the children, “Vamos a aprender un poquito de historia nacional e historia garífuna . . . ¿Ustedes conocen los héroes garífunas? (34). It is true that the teacher includes the Garífuna in the class discussion, yet here it is important to note that he separates “historia nacional” from “historia garífuna.” Despite that the Garífuna have lived in the same country as the Ladino students and teacher, the author notes that national history is not Garífuna history and vice versa. This act of separation implies that although the Garífuna may live in the same country as the Ladinos, they are not “authentically” Honduran, and that the “true” national history is not inclusive of multiple versions of history.

After presenting a lopsided version of national history and belonging, the play then moves to the questions of identity, nationality and migration. In these acts the audience is brought to yet one more geographic location, key to the text’s attempt to construct a comprehensive approach to self-definition: New York, USA. The plot presents a Garífuna living in New York, known only as the Newyorkino, who phones his wife Catalina to inform her that after a 15 year absence he will finally return to Honduras. When he returns, with him he brings a plethora of material cultural tokens of American success: televisions, radios, clothing and rock music. With the money earned in the United States, he wishes to build a road to Trujillo in order to modernize their village, yet ironically, this access is only valuable to the influx of Yankee tourists to the area, an action that further disintegrates Garífuna land rights and Garífuna culture. Race is not the central issue of this act but rather it is the conundrum of cultural assimilation that remains vital to the play as the Newyorkino demonstrates the pluralism rooted in the transplanted Garífuna culture by marking it with

classifiers more related to dominant North American and African American culture (Johnson 20-21). In a conversation with his wife, the Newyorkino exhibits levels of linguistic pluralism that are significant:

Catalina: Gracias, haló.

El Garífuna: ¡Oh! Catalina?

Catalina: ¡Ajá!

El Garífuna: How are you feeling my dear?

Catalina: Hayuti fflini?

El Garífuna: ¿Qué tal estás? (38)

Of particular interest in this dialogue between the Newyorkino and his wife is his query posited to Catalina in English. Why he would deliberately attempt to converse in a language unknown to her has different interpretations. It could imply a desire to assimilate to his host culture of the United States, or hint at a need to prove that he has mastered the dominant culture's linguistic codes. On the other hand, the fact that a Ladino author would chose to represent an Afro-Honduran as buffoonish reinforces other stereotypes of blackness. The Newyorkino's hasty rejection of the Spanish language suggests that perhaps he was never really part of the Honduran national imaginary for although he could speak the dominant language of Honduras, he displays resentment towards having to use Spanish.

His inability to reassimilate back to his native culture is further fortified by a linguistic and visual cultural resistance when he finally arrives to Honduras. Per the stage directions of the play, the Newyorkino arrives in his home village wearing an outlandish outfit: “. . . ropa norteamericana, también gafas y zapatos muy finos, su peinado es modernísimo . . . habla en inglés, los tambores suenan con ritmo de rock, o cualquier música

de disco” (39). Besides his apparent preference for a North American style of dress, an issue which I will address at a later point, he also continues with his linguistic pluralism as a form of proving his assimilation; after vain efforts to communicate only in English to his family, he finally resorts to speaking to them in Spanish, albeit a broken Spanish that would be more akin to what a North American tourist would say instead of a Garífuna Honduran:

El Newyorkino: Oh . . . a mi no gustar mas, mi estómago no aguantar esas comidas, tampoco la yuca.

Las mujeres preguntando: ¿y que querés que te preparemos?

El Newyorkino: Ham and eggs

Las mujeres: ¿Ham and eggs?

El Newyorkino: Yes man, t’bone steak. (40)

The Newyorkino’s apparent resistance to a reassimilation back into the culture of his motherland brings to mind Fanon’s description of the black Martinican who travels to France. According to Fanon, such a person, despite his status as the Other, follows a behavioral paradigm in which he performs as if of a different nationality based on patterns of speech. He states, “He no longer understands the dialect [of his native land], he talks about the Opéra, which he may never have seen except from a distance, but above all he adopts a critical attitude toward his compatriots [. . .] He is the one who knows. He betrays himself in his speech” (24). For Fanon speech is not an issue of mere syntax and semiotics but rather it entails the assumption of a particular culture in the way in which the speaker forms and pronounces his or her words. Words can link their speaker to a certain class of people, a certain nationality that can elicit either a positive or negative reaction from the listener. Linguistically the Newyorkino has adopted a new way of speaking that demonstrates his

dislocation from the Honduran Garífuna culture. Also linked with the subject of dislocation is the idea that by using English and a grammatically incorrect Spanish he creates a hierarchal bifurcation of language in which he assigns value to the cultural manifestation of communication, that is to say, language, with English being designated as superior over Spanish. Above all, as previously stated, the adoption of the dominant culture's language implies an appropriation of identity that signifies the imitation of the norms of the hegemonic culture in which the subject resides, thus by his language preference the Newyorkino underscores his opinion that North American culture is superior over Garífuna culture.

Curiously, there exist two versions of the play: one in the Garífuna language and one in Spanish. In the Garífuna version of *Loubavagu*, the Newyorkino exhibits a similar linguistic resistance in his language but with a few variations added to the script, as seen in the following dialogue:

Itunu: kaba ti baiga . . . ¿kaba biaga?

Ñuyáküna: Hámon egs.

Itunu: ¿katai hámon egs?

Ñuyáküna: yes man, tibón estik. (45)

In the preceding dialogue it becomes evident that the hierarchal values given to language are displaced. In the Spanish language version of the play, English displaces the Spanish as the master language, but in the Garífuna version, Spanish is elevated to the same level of importance as English and is displaced by Garífuna as the “sub-standard” language. But according to Fanon it is the actual mastery of language that renders inclusion within the exclusive coterie of nationality. As can be seen in the dialogue, the Garífuna's command of

English is hardly that of mastery but rather a type of code-switching flecked with various neologisms based on three languages.

It takes the natural disaster of a hurricane on the eastern coast of Honduras to bring the Newyorkino back to his regional Garífuna reality and identity, that is to say a return to a reality in which he remains a marginalized citizen despite his newly acquired transnational identity. Upon his return to a regional identity one can see a marked change in the Newyorkino's demeanor. He is now fluent in Spanish (or Garífuna in the Garífuna version), and above all, he melts into the collective identity of the Garífuna people of his village, thus completing the circular transnational journey which has returned him to his original homeplace so neglected by the dominant Honduran society. For him, it has been a journey that has brought him from geographical relocation, through cultural dislocation and finally to finding his location within his original community. It is at this point in the text that names and monikers are abolished and the individual Garífuna people fade into collective anonymity, thus stressing the idea that their imagined community has been reconstructed and revitalized. The reader only sees characters with titles such as "todos" or "una voz" which is a change that erases any sort of ideological border that the Newyorkino could have feasibly utilized to influence the regional identity of his community.⁶²

This dialogue centered on cultural fluidity brings to mind the discourse on the body as the signifier of importance. Judith Butler signals that the prevailing idea has been that the body remains the entity in which meaning and identity can be inscribed, yet it is our acts (or more specifically, our behavior) that create who we are (178). Although her work focuses on gender, like gender, nationality and cultural identity are tenuous constructions of identity. In

⁶² As Sara England cites, North American culture is slowly replacing many Garífuna traditions (25).

other words, the transformation of cultural identity is a malleable and dynamic event and is more dependent upon how the subject defines himself or herself rather than an outsider's imposed definition. In the beginning, the Newyorkino demonstrates that his nationality and cultural identity are not facts but rather a repetition of behaviors, yet even with this repetition of behaviors he can only create a problematic self-definition. He remains stuck in the crossroads, located in an interstice of cultural duality in which by trying to find his identity as a subject with one foot planted tenuously in two different nations, he can relate to neither.

The cultural tokens the Newyorkino wears are signifiers of another cultural identity that create a performance of being "North American" that he must repeat in order to insert himself within a new cultural framework that unfortunately does not succeed in providing the correct fit when he returns to Honduras. The audience can observe that the body of the Garífuna not only serves as a sort of vehicle through which U.S. cultural signifiers are used to transport ideology across borders but also performs a series of repetitive acts in which the Newyorkino undergoes a "cultural" transformation. Regardless, the evolutionary process in which the Newyorkino attempts to slip between nationalities is faulty by the fact that such transformations are not always convincing to an outsider even if the individual is convinced of "authenticity." As a point of departure we can consider the male cross-dresser as the closest parallel that can be found between sexual performance and cultural performance. The cross-dresser utilizes tokens of femininity such as dress, make-up, style of hair, etc, that in turn some would argue makes a masculine body perform as female. When an individual performs as female, with the visual appearance of one who is biologically female, the

genitalia still remains male in its biological nature, hence the one flaw in the effort to change hegemonic perceptions of gender/sex/sexuality.⁶³

Before the hurricane arrives, the Newyorkino experiences a dualism between identities in which his style of dress (or his exterior) exhibits the cultural markers of U.S. culture not unlike how the body of a transvestite exhibits the objects that mark the body as female. Whether or not he “feels” like he is from the United States cannot be determined through the text, for the presentation of the Newyorkino is superficial at best, but what can be observed is that by resisting those cultural norms of the Garífuna, Murillo Selva gives a Ladino perspective of a character that has attempted to “become a North American” through the usage of objects. This is an act that creates a slippery slope when defining the transformation of “becoming” any specific nationality/regional identity. What is implied in the text is that the abovementioned cultural items do not constitute an identity; by the refusal of the other Garífuna to accept the ostensible assimilation of the Newyorkino, it can be deduced that the adoption of cultural tokens does not lead to a transformation of identity. As the Garífuna returns to his homeplace, the reinforcement for performing and repeating the behaviors that construe him as a North American (albeit superficially) slowly dissipate. In the environment of his homeplace following the hurricane, we find that he later performs as Garífuna. His performance is replete with a new variety of external markers of identification, that is, he embraces a style of dress and speech more common to the Garífuna, and therefore he returns to his culture of origin.

In the end, *Loubavagu* inhabits a rare place in the field of cultural production for its conflicting message of black pride coexisting with stereotypical representations of blackness.

⁶³ Many individuals who are cross-gender “feel” female, thus suggesting that sex does not determine gender or sexuality (Bullough, Bullough and Smith 240).

In the foreword of *Black Cultural Traffic* (2005), Tricia Ross underlines the mobile nature of black culture seen in the international community. What concerns us most is that although “black cultural traffic” can merely be dissemination of black culture and ideas; it can also be cultural artifacts that are circulated between different groups of people. Black cultural traffic can promote an exchange of culture but it also risks the subjugation of one culture to another. Taking the concept of cultural traffic into consideration, we can see that *Loubavagu* serves as a vehicle for trafficking culture. On his website, Murillo Selva posts an essay titled “Sudor y lágrimas.” In this essay, he discusses the difficulties that he faced as a Ladino trying to write the play. While in the Garífuna town of Guadalupe, Honduras, he complained that he had “constantes fricciones” with the Garífunas. He expressed an inability to establish a working relationship with the Garífunas of Guadalupe, and stated that their lack of cooperation prohibited him from completing the play. Above all, he expressed that since the Garífunas did not support him, the message of his play was clouded. There is a trafficking of black culture in *Loubavagu* in that a Ladino author takes Garífuna culture and presents it to non-black audiences. He attempts to disseminate black culture in the form of a play, but in the end, the tone of his work must be questioned. While the work claims to unite the Garífuna communities with each other and find their space in the Honduran national imaginary, the ridiculous nature of the Newyorkino’s appearance presents a stereotypical rendering of blackness, and relies more on a representation based on caricature than reality. Therefore, it can be assumed that this caricature of blackness traffics an interpretation of black culture based more on stereotype than cultural understanding.

Above all *Loubavagu* questions whether the returned Newyorkino can be inserted into a national Honduran identity. The work itself hands out a harsh criticism to those

immigrants who abandon their Garífuna roots in order to search elsewhere for cultural acceptance or social and economic improvement, for the Newyorkino is painted as a truly absurd character. While he does seem successful at reinstating his identity at a regional level, I would argue that the play proposes that in spite of his efforts, he cannot be written into the Honduran nation. At the end of the play the Garífuna show their readiness, chanting, “Soy hondureño/ de nacimiento/ déjame pasar/ déjame pasar” (44). But is the nation ready for them to enter? Based on the events of the play, I would conclude that Honduras is not. The closing scenes of the play show that as the Newyorkino eventually re-assimilates back into his native culture, the Honduran government, an institutionalized promoter of national identity, is preparing to usurp Garífuna land for tourism. This act pushes them even further into peripheral zones.

Big Banana: Another Ladino Construction of Garífuna Homelessness

Novelist Roberto Quesada has written extensively on the theme of displacement due to immigration. His work *Big Banana* (1999) traces the journey of Eduardo, an aspiring Ladino Honduran actor, as he tries to become famous in the Big Apple. Although the novel does not primarily focus on Afro-Hondurans, it presents Afro-Honduran characters.⁶⁴ The majority of Quesada’s novel follows the exploits of Eduardo (Quesada himself is Ladino), although the Garífuna character by the name of Mairena who appears in the plot of his novel is significant in revealing some of Honduras’s racial tension. The general concept as presented by Quesada rings true with other works that explore questions of race and national identity. For example, Mairena’s estrangement with the Latino community of New York is not unlike when Afro-Caribbean author Piri Thomas grapples with the pressure of a double

⁶⁴ Quesada is also recognized for his novel *Nunca entres por Miami* (2002).

consciousness. Thomas's questioning of race and nationality draws him in multiple directions, for it either impedes him from identifying with either Latinos or African Americans, or he can only identify with one race at a time.⁶⁵

Mairena's quest to find a homeplace has brought him to New York where there is a vibrant community of Garífuna immigrants, yet he is unsuccessful in finding refuge among them. Here the journey towards homeplace exists based on a multi-layered level of significance in that not only has Mairena embarked upon a geographical transnational journey towards this presumed yet perhaps chimerical locus of racial acceptance, but he also cognitively processes his perpetual mental journey towards self-definition in the face of a triple consciousness as being black, Hispanic and indigenous.⁶⁶

When the character Mairena is first introduced, he is in mourning following the aftermath of the Happy Land Social Club fire that killed 87 of his fellow Garífunas in 1990. The historical Happy Land Social Club incident affected not only the Garífuna inhabitants of New York but also other Latinos, although the majority of deaths were Garífuna. Most sources claim that Cuban Julio González set the fire because he was trying to avenge the breakup of a relationship with his girlfriend who happened to be at the club that evening (Reiss 64). Regardless of the circumstances, this event serves as an impetus for Mairena's questioning of his place in society in both the United States and Honduras, for he is

⁶⁵ In *Down These Mean Streets*, Piri Thomas chronicles his quest to define himself by either African American, white or Latino standards, and soon realizes that none of the abovementioned racial categories accept him based on his double identity as black and Puerto Rican. Sadly, even his family has problems coming to terms with his blackness and this issue eventually divides the family, thus causing him to flee to the Deep South in order to immerse himself in another black culture that he hopes will provide him with a sort of homecoming or homeplace. While in the South he only is confronted by resistance and rejection by the black community for his ties to another experience, to another nationality which thus propels him into the position as the Other with nobody else to accompany him in his particular marginalized position.

⁶⁶ Michael Gomez allows that while many subjects fall within the parameters of having a double conscious, we should expand the term to include those with a triple conscious which would be more appropriate for the Garífuna status abroad (179).

undergoing a process of conscientization which brings him to a rejection of diasporic ideas of homeland. Unlike Ladino immigrants, he rejects Honduras as the place to which he belongs. In a conversation between other immigrants and Mairena, it is manifest that a breach inheres between the two factions:

--Un accidente, sí, un accidente; pero ¿por qué da la casualidad que la mayoría eran garífunas? Esto demuestra la marginación de que somos objeto tanto en Honduras como aquí, como en cualquier parte. ¿La raza negra no tiene futuro?

--¿Por qué tan resentido—preguntó Casagrande.

--Perdí muchos amigos y algunos familiares.—Mairena hundió la mirada en la grama--. Yo no estoy resentido, sólo un poco triste de que en la repartición de colores a mí me haya tocado éste.

--Estás siendo injusto—dijo Eduardo--, si bien es cierto que la mayoría eran garífunas, es por la misma situación de ustedes, a ustedes no les gusta mezclarse con nosotros. Ustedes hacen sus fiestas, sus reuniones, y todo lo demás, muy en grupo, no es de extrañar entonces que el Happy Land de alguna manera estuviera tomado por ustedes.

--Digamos que sí, que estaba tomado por nosotros, pero ves a qué clase de lugar, qué clase de antros son los únicos a los que nosotros tenemos acceso. (217-18)

As noted, a Cuban may have been responsible for the massacre at Happy Land Social Club; it is hard to find a racial motivation in González's actions, but the important issue seen in this citation is not the truth behind his actions but rather the interpretation that Mairena bestows upon the events: because of discrimination and because of poverty, the Garífuna are subject to situations in which they put their lives in danger. Ironically, in the novel Mairena is the

one who is blamed for his people's estrangement from the rest of the Hispanic community, for the Ladino Eduardo cites the Garífuna people as initiating the gaping schism between Ladinos and Garífuna. The picture that Eduardo paints is antipodal to the reality in Honduras in which the Ladinos have historically repudiated the Garífuna people. Although in this brief meeting in which the two groups are brought together, the rejection that Eduardo and his friend, Casagrande, demonstrate towards Mairena is evident. The fact that Casagrande and Eduardo question Mairena's sense of outrage towards the Happy Land Social Club tragedy only proves that they have a lack of understanding of the Garífuna people's perspective. In fact, Mairena specifically highlights the concept that the problems existing between the two groups in Honduras continue to haunt him even in the United States, stating that, "Esto demuestra la marginación de que somos objeto tanto en Honduras como aquí, como en cualquier parte" (217). As illustrated in this citation, Mairena's idea that he is just as marginalized in the United States as in Honduras annuls any idea that national borders can contain and trap prejudice within their parameters.

Mairena's quest for a homeplace takes place on two different levels, one being on the national level and the other being on the level of domestic space. In his study "The Concept of Diaspora," (2004) Brian Keith Axel broaches the concept of diaspora and asserts that any particular group whether it be ethnic, racial or religious can be rooted in a multiple diasporic horizon.⁶⁷ Historically the Garífuna have been teetering on the edge of this multiple diasporic horizon for years which is now further complicated by their transnational migrations to New York, thus creating various possibilities of homeplace ranging from

⁶⁷ Also useful in the understanding of the fluidity of time involved in the concept of diaspora is the term the "Black Atlantic" as used by Paul Gilroy, for it disavows the centrality of Africa and as the sole determinant of identity formation and, "reflects his attempt to analyze the formation and transformation of New World Black Cultures without assuming the centrality of African cultural continuities" (Gordon and Anderson 281).

Africa, to San Vicente to Honduras. Mairena's confrontation of his diasporic horizon leaves him with nothing as he realizes that the only geographical location that he has nationally been associated with rejects him just as much as his new adopted homeplace, the United States. Paramount in the claiming of a diasporic horizon is the sense of futurity and desire (27-28). Clearly with his question, "¿la raza negra no tiene futuro?" he indicates that this concept of futurity essential to the creation of a diasporic horizon has been depleted from his expectations. Furthermore, by immigrating to the United States, Mairena has rejected Honduras as his homeplace, only to discover that the new nation in which he resides presents a continuation of the same problematic issues of race that he left behind. In turn this potential homeplace has rejected him, leaving him homeless in the figurative sense.

In the representation of the Happy Land Social Club fire, we can see an analogy to the dichotomy between private and public space in the journey which hooks takes from the white neighborhoods of the Deep South to the safety of her grandmother's house. Happy Land, a site that was "tomado" by the Garífuna, could be seen in a certain respect as an approximation to a type of homeplace being that it was an area in which the Garífunas could congregate and feel free to express themselves culturally. The sanctity of this homeplace was violated when González supposedly set fire to this particular physical location and as a result, the Garífunas like Mairena began to attribute racial motivations to the act and to the fact that they were somehow "forced" to spend time in this location due to their marginalized social status.

Another noticeable characteristic of Mairena's statements is the assertion of the Garífuna people as "negro."⁶⁸ The use of the word "negro" is loaded as this Afro-centric perspective erases the hybridity of the Garífuna heritage. In one sense such an assertion betrays a stagnation of any type of journey for Mairena on a figurative level by the fact that the term "negro" leaves little room for any other type of identity/cultural negotiation. Although in much of my analysis I too have employed the equivalent racial term of "black" in order to describe the Garífuna, the fact remains that "negro" or black is a monolithic term that does not take into consideration any nuances such as the Garífuna's hybrid ethnic identity of being black and indigenous. Stemming from several waves of xenophobia and nationalism in Honduras, those social groups which were not considered to pertain to any particular autochthonous group of people were marginalized and persecuted by the socially, politically and economically dominant sector of society. Because the Garífuna could trace their roots back to transnational migrations from Africa and San Vicente, Ladinos confounded these categories of race as a result of their inability to neatly insert the Garífuna into any such native group. In the 1930s, as a tactic of marginalization, the Carías government wanted to classify them as a "foreign" element placed upon the face of Honduran territory. Their black blood Africanized them and categorized them as foreigners despite having lived within Honduran borders for centuries (Anderson and England 253). Capitalizing their racial miscegenation, Garífuna activists were eventually successful in

⁶⁸ Across time and social groups there has been much variation in the racial categorization of the Garífuna people. Gordon and Anderson emphasize that intellectuals and laypeople tend to insert the Garífuna in the category of "lack" without paying heed to the various nuances of their cultural definitions, that is to say that those from outside the Garífuna communities are more apt to classify them as "negro" because it is the term that most facilitates an arrival to any cultural comprehension. Up until the mid-twentieth century the Garífuna identity downplayed any sort of connection to an African diaspora until they took their cue from African-Americans (Gonzalez 5). This concept is important in the present analysis of *Big Banana* being that it is a work created by an outsider, in other words, somebody who falls into the category of intellectual or layperson (Gordon and Anderson 290-91).

changing their racial status in Honduran law and becoming “indigenized,” an act that creates an autochthonous identity and presumably would lessen their marginalization (England).⁶⁹ Today, the Garífuna are legally considered an indigenous/autochthonous group which thus affords them special rights and privileges within Honduran society. While this double consciousness creates a slippery slope for those living in Honduras, the ability to embrace blackness in the United States gives the Garífuna the chance to adhere to a more monolithic identity. African American culture could provide pre-established ways to exhibit cultural pride that gives subjects such as Mairena a new identity (Gordon and Anderson 291). Thus by his multiple references to himself as “negro,” he inserts himself into a preexisting category with its preexisting polemic issues. Above the usage of this racial category proves to be a brand of rebellion against the Honduran national identity in which being “black” is not a viable option for its citizens. Honduras promotes itself as a “Ladino” nation, a term which could possibly erase blackness. In Quesada’s novel, Mairena continually attempts to define himself by use of diametrically opposed terms of black versus white, leaving very little room to create a multi-faceted self-portrait in which he could feasibly negotiate a range of identities whose fluid nature could be employed as a social bargaining tool.

On the other hand, by using the word “negro,” the novel does not deny Mairena’s race and culture. According to Latin Americanist Richard L. Jackson, the term “mestizaje” has dangerous implications (1-3). Racial bleaching through association with those of lighter skin, denial, or actual biological whitening (or as Jackson calls it, *linchamiento étnico*)

⁶⁹ Again, it is essential to remember that the Garífuna people come from a mixture of Red Caribs and marooned Africans which is the reason for their ability to navigate racial identities. According to Sara England being autochthonous in Honduras is not only important for ethnic and racial categorization, but also important for the ability to claim territory. The ability to claim territory in turn enables the Garífuna to settle the eastern coast of Honduras as a homeplace for their people (England n.p.).

threatens to extinguish all forms of black expression in Latin America. Whereas in the United States one drop of black blood can still identify an individual as African American, in Latin America having white blood can enable one to appropriate a white identity and attempt to “pass.” While on one hand Mairena’s discourse negates the hybridity of the Garífuna people, on the other hand his acceptance of blackness can be seen as an effort to maintain cohesion within his racial group. Above all, he refuses to appropriate the white/Ladino ideas of racial superiority. As Jackson corroborates, “The upward ascent [of individual blacks in Latin America] was not conducive to racial solidarity among those of African descent” (11). Mairena has not fallen into this trap in which he is tempted to turn his back on those within his racial group; instead, by opening this branch of discourse he affirms his blackness and dreams of racial solidarity. Mairena embarks upon a journey of self-realization in which he has partially arrived to a homeplace, and this homeplace is the black body which he must struggle to accept. Thus, we can see his assertion of race as his desire to eschew the “historical pressure of white racism [which has] forced an identity crisis on black people in Latin America (R. Jackson 12).⁷⁰

Despite Mairena’s efforts to assert his blackness, his journey of racial conscientization is far from harmonious and is in fact, often contradictory. As the novel continues, he reveals underlying sentiments of inferiority which he fosters while in the company of a white woman. It is in this segment of the novel that the text signals a more stereotypical depiction of what it means to be black due to the underlying dialogue

⁷⁰ I am not convinced that Jackson’s condemnation is warranted in every case concerning a subject of hybrid identity, for it does not recognize that duality in race does exist in numerous Central American groups such as the Honduran Garífuna and Miskito tribes. It is critical to recognize that Jackson appears to employ the word *mestizaje* loosely without taking into consideration that certain Latin-American cultures embrace a hybridity of indigeneity and blackness and do not always use this dualism to racially bleach themselves.

concerning black male sexuality. This occurs not through Mairena's interpretation of his own sexual prowess but rather the preconceived notions of his sexuality as viewed by Ruth, the white woman with whom he has sexual relations. Mairena's insecurity in relation to white women is based upon a pervasive thought that he maintains that white women are not sexually interested in him because of the color of his skin, and due to this obsession of inferiority, he dreams of sexually conquering Caucasian women. Although Mairena's dream of sleeping with a white woman does come to fruition, he realizes that this does not grant him full access to the white world, and in the end, he sinks into abjection stemming from the deed, "Y Mairena se sintió mudo, avergonzado, ¿qué había logrado? Pensó retirarse en busca de su compañera negra, no quedarse a dormir con Ruth como lo había planificado" (230). Ruth expresses that she has slept with Mairena out of curiosity, a curiosity fueled by the myth of what African American studies scholar Robert Staples calls the hypersexual animalistic prowess of the black man (25-27). According to scholar Ronald Jackson, such a script of sexual superiority has been written for years upon the black body; Mairena has unknowingly perpetuated this scripting by fulfilling Ruth's curiosity to sexually conquer a black man, but after completing the act, Mairena expresses a desire to cleanse himself by having relations yet again with a black woman (78-80). In a quick route to defiance, by refusing to spend the rest of the night with Ruth and instead returning to an unnamed black female partner, Mairena consequently closes the door on any further connection between race and nationality. Furthermore, he learns to depend on his regional and racial identity as black and Garífuna by directing his romantic inclinations towards somebody of a shared background.

A brief digression to the present chapter's point of origin would serve well in the effort to maintain a dialogue between Honduran notions of blackness and the African-American narratives of displacement. Again, I would like to highlight that to a certain extent this comparison is difficult due to Quesada's Ladino heritage, that is, he is not of African descent and therefore presents an outsider's perspective. Nevertheless, on many levels the characters of *Big Banana* appropriate and construct the author's interpretation of blackness that embrace some parallels with African American thought, but his appropriation of blackness confounds the multi-faceted nature of what it is to be Afro-Honduran. Yet surprisingly, the cultural bridges formed based on the concept of homeplace certainly exist, and there even exists numerous other analogous correspondences that Quesada writes into his narrative. Returning to Gilroy's conclusions of Du Bois's evolutionary phases of black Atlantic culture wherein the black subject must secure an independent African or Caribbean homeplace, we find that like Du Bois, Quesada posits a questioning of which direction the Garífuna must take. Quesada insinuates that the future of the Afro-Hondurans cannot be found in the either Honduras or the United States, and instead, the freedom which they strive for must be found elsewhere. But their thoughts diverge. While Du Bois has specific ideas as to where this liberty could be located, Quesada's thoughts as represented by Mairena remain cloudy as to where the Garífuna could find their future in order to recover their identity.

The Clothes that Make the Man: Assimilation and African American Imaginary

In the previous two works by Ladino authors, we saw that issues of blackness were brought up with varying degrees of relevance. In *Big Banana* Mairena's skin color was a focal point that led to a portrait of Garífuna racial identity while in *Loubavagu* the theme of

blackness was mentioned several times but the search for cultural identity in the face of transnational migrations took precedence over race discussion throughout most of the work. What the movie *El espíritu de mi mamá* (1999), directed by Alí Allié and with collaboration from Honduran Ladinos, does have in common with the past two works is that again, it is a story whose characters definitely encompass a journey with a dual purpose that involves not only the personal/emotional but also the physical journey of immigration.⁷¹ This last example of cultural production which I include in this chapter ironically addresses blackness through silence and image creation as opposed to open discourse on the subject. Simultaneously, it interweaves a discovery of a “new” black Honduran identity in the protagonist, a Garífuna woman named Sonia, with a stereotypical interpretation of African American black culture as seen in the character Manuel, a Garífuna man. In the film, Allié provides insight to the deconstruction of Garífuna culture abroad in the United States from the perspective of Sonia, while positing that Honduras contains a magical power able to reconstruct and maintain their culture.

The film is about the lives of Garífuna immigrants in the United States. It opens with scenes depicting the life of Sonia, who has initially immigrated to the United States in search of an American soldier with whom she fell in love and had a child with. Upon re-establishing contact with him, she learns that he has forgotten her and has a new romantic partner. Now that she is alone, Sonia must forge her niche in a foreign society as a Garífuna immigrant in Los Angeles, facing the endless cycle of poverty that so many immigrants endure. The scenes regarding Sonia lead the audience to the next character of importance, Manuel. Manuel is an abusive money-hungry Garífuna man that continuously steals her

⁷¹ As of the present moment, Allié has only produced this one film.

meager earnings. Even more frustrating to Sonia than her relationship with Manuel is she cannot provide for her infant child.⁷² After several years in Los Angeles, Sonia is haunted by dreams of her dead mother in which the mother asks her to return to Honduras to “refrescarla” in a traditional ceremony involving a dügü ritual.⁷³ Sonia finally travels back to Honduras where she reconnects with her family, fellow villagers, the buyei (or high priest or priestess) of her community and the Garífuna culture.⁷⁴ The movie is somewhat sparse in dialogue at times and seemingly works to transmit culture via prolonged scenes of Garífuna rituals.

Although Sonia is the main character of *Espíritu de mi mamá*, for the purposes of this study we will be looking at Manuel, for it appears that he struggles with the concept of self-definition. A key component of constructing Manuel’s identity has to do with appropriating blackness. It may seem a curious feat to speak of a Garífuna “appropriating blackness,” and in fact this concept proves to be complex because the reality is that blackness is a loosely defined concept. The tendency to move towards a definition of blackness lies in two arenas: first, blackness is a diametrically opposed term to whiteness, a definition that hardly is sufficient in exposing the essence of a racial identity (R. Jackson 5). Second, the definition of blackness leans towards being North American-centric, which is not to say that blacks in

⁷² According to Alí Allié “The relationship between Sonia and Manuel is decidedly nebulous. A lot of the details of the film are that way; I’m not concerned with details (factual or otherwise)” (Taken from a personal e-mail, 7/21/2008). Despite the “nebulous” relationship between the two, it is clear that Manuel is the head of the household with Sonia as his subordinate.

⁷³ Dügü is a culture affirming ritual performed by the Garífuna that not only reaffirms the authority of Garífuna elders but also serves as an ancestral cult activity (Jenkins 430). Dügü also creates a bridge between the living and dead members of a family. Deceased ancestors are considered to be witnesses of the activities of the living and sympathize with their children still on this earth. When the living cannot find a situation to their earthly problems, the dügü ceremony is utilized to call upon the ancestors who then must intervene and repair the unfortunate situation that has befallen their kin (Greene 169). Curious in *Espíritu* is that the dügü ceremony performed for Sonia’s mother also seems to be conflated with the ritual of amuiadahani, a bathing ceremony meant to “refrescar” a soul five years after one’s death (Gonzalez 84). It should be noted that there are several conflicting timelines as to when these ceremonies should be performed.

⁷⁴ A buyei or buwiye is a Garífuna high priest or priestess (Johnson 316, Gonzalez 95).

other countries don't generate viable examples of cultural production, but I would say that the mass media of the United States is very effective in promoting a stereotypical impression of black culture as popular culture. Many intellectuals have observed that the media has transmogrified black culture into a monolithic, one-dimensional Hip-hop-centric creation that is disseminated both domestically and abroad; therefore, those individuals outside of black culture gain an impression of what it is (R.L. Jackson 23).

An open discourse of blackness is never the focal point of *Espíritu*, yet given the subject matter of the film—Garífuna immigration and the journey to find one's culture—the theme of identity is clearly present in the film. Unlike the other works discussed above, the skin color of the characters is never verbally mentioned. What does appear is an essentialism of North American blackness as described by Richard L. Jackson, an essentialism which devalues and reduces black culture to a mere progression of visual symbols and behavior. This one-dimensional portrait of blackness moves one of the film's Garífuna immigrants on a journey from his cultural roots as he tries to conform to an essentialized version of African American blacks. This essentialized version of North American blackness aligns itself with a master narrative that defines their identity as black and American as one steeped in violence (Hall 472-73 and R.L. Jackson 51-53). Perhaps the most glaring example of this cultural straying is found with Manuel. Sadly, Manuel borders on the edge of being abusive towards her. He apparently has no occupation and constantly badgers her for the money she earns from her job as a domestic servant. Upon procuring her money, he leaves her at home with her baby and goes out to parties.

First it is useful to look at the visual portrayal of Manuel. Previously I had signaled that the Newyorkino of *Loubavagu* wears clothing indicative of assimilation to a new

national identity; here we find that Manuel takes the significance of clothing a step further, for not only does he wear North American clothing antipodal to the Garífuna traditional dress, he wears clothing that can be classified as 1990s Hip-hop fashion. In an effort to assimilate to a foreign culture, Manuel sports a newly fashioned body dressed in the so-called urban wear of his era, two gaudy gold hoops in his left ear, a gold chain around his neck, numerous gold rings and a baggy shirt and pair of baggy pants. Above all, the baggy clothing itself is indicative of entering into a state of rupture and separation, for according to many writers, baggy clothing is key to the definition of a hip-hop and counter-hegemonic code of behavior.⁷⁵ While perhaps it would be expected that not all immigrants to the United States would always maintain their traditional garb, Manuel chooses to adorn himself in the clothing of an American sub-culture, a mode of dress that has often symbolized a deviation from the norm of hegemonic dress.

The creation of identity begins at an early age. As Stephen Greenblatt confirms, human beings are born “unfinished,” but throughout life there is the desire to “fashion” one’s self-consciousness to follow the unstated rules of various institutions or cultures (4-5). Roland Barthes writes about the effect of fashion and its ability to “fictionalize” a personality, that is, when the subject dresses himself or herself using a particular vestimentary code he or she is trying to communicate a certain message to the rest of the world, “Fashion presents the reader with an activity defined either in itself or by its circumstances of time and place (*If you want to signify what you are doing here, dress like*

⁷⁵ Fleetwood asserts that baggy clothing, especially baggy jeans, is what has defined hip-hop trends for years, and that the baggy nature of the clothing has been a standard trait of this particular style despite other permutations in fashion lines. While it can be argued that presently members of all races have adopted this type of urban vestimentary code in which baggy clothing is a means of belonging to a certain social group, at the time that the movie was filmed (late 1990s) it was still more of an black urban expression that Tommy Hilfiger had solely marketed to black rappers as a method of promoting his clothing line, and therefore it was more associated with African Americans than any other racial group (Fleetwood 332).

this); according to the second, it offers an identity to be read (*If you want to be like this, you must dress like this*)” (249). But for Barthes, fashion is about conformity to a particular mainstream cultural sector without acknowledging that the signified (that is, the message one desires to communicate via his or her vestimentary code) could have counter-hegemonic implications as we can see in the case of Manuel. Nicole R. Fleetwood and Marilyn Horn also concur that fashion holds great importance in self-definition but they also underscore fashion’s revolutionary attributes when utilized as a tool to establish an anti-hegemonic countercurrent against social norms. While Horn provides more of a historical panorama dedicated to the symbiotic relationship between fashion and culture, Fleetwood pinpoints fashion’s extreme rebellious undertones when paired with hip-hop culture. While black urban style symbolizes defiance from a mainstream mode of dress, she also proposes that hip-hop fashion embraces a variegated system of significance that affects more African American males than females. Her essay proposes that the quest for “authenticity” of urban style is confounded with masculinity and sexual prowess:

Authenticity is a highly racialized and complex term in American culture. In the context of race and masculinity, authenticity imbues the subject with a mythic sense of virility, danger, and physicality; in representations of hip-hop, authenticity most often manifests itself through the body of the young black male who stands in for the ‘urban real.’ (327)

Though Fleetwood’s discourse over the representation of authenticity is in regards to the black American male, it proves to be useful in our analysis of Manuel’s efforts to craft his self-image in a new country.

To backtrack, the Garífuna immigrants of the film acknowledge that life in the United States does not fit their perception of the “American Dream.” Sonia admits her feelings of defeat and disillusionment in a letter to her friend Emilce, stating: “La situación para mí aquí en los Estados Unidos ha sido bastante difícil. Bueno, he sentido un poco de todo, todo lo bueno y todo lo malo. Muy pronto voy a regresar a Honduras [. . .] yo me regreso por muchas razones, una, por el prejuicio contra los inmigrantes aquí.” Sonia is the only character in the production that is able to verbalize the alienation that the rest of the Garífuna personalities appear to be experiencing; the remainder of the Garífunas become impotent in the face of difficulty. As a result, they experience a type of mutism towards voicing their frustrations with life in the United States. This disintegration of the traditional Garífuna is most evident in Manuel as he leaves ideas of respect behind and attempts to conform to another culture’s social norms through a new vestimentary code, one that emulates rebellion. In his journey far removed from his homeland, Manuel hides behind his new attire in order to adopt an angry and abusive attitude towards Sonia, one that is more interested in patriarchal domination and capitalistic ideologies as he tries to procure her hard earned salary. In a confrontation with Sonia, he asserts his masculinity in his typical urban wear, a vestimentary codification of authority:

Manuel: Al fin llegaste. ¿Y el dinero?

Sonia: ¿Cuál dinero?

Manuel: Tú sabes que soy el hombre de la casa, ¿no?

Sonia: ¿Desde cuándo?

Manuel: Desde siempre, desde el primer día que estaba aquí.

When Sonia finally leaves Los Angeles to return to Honduras to *refrescar* the spirit of her mother, the patriarchal image that Manuel gives the audience implies that, according to the film, the Garífuna have a more gender-balanced community in their native land. This can be seen in the contrast of the two scenes. While Sonia is in Honduras, she consults female elders that act as spiritual leaders, or *buyei*, who are in charge of leading the Dügü ceremony that she desires to have in honor of her mother. As spiritual leaders these women command respect from all within their community, both male and female, and the movie depicts them as wise and strong leaders.

In the scenes taking place in Los Angeles, we can see that all respect for the female Garífuna has disintegrated as Manuel and Sonia navigate the complex cultural fabric of immigrant life in the United States. Although the movie does not disclose in what country Manuel and Sonia met, he states that he has been “el hombre de la casa [. . .] desde el primer día que estaba aquí,” with the word “aquí” implying the United States. It would be implausible to assume that all male Garífunas residing within their original Central American communities maintain respectful attitudes towards female Garífunas, despite the fact that many anthropologists write that a Garífuna male would never mistreat a woman as does Manuel. Ruy Galvão de Andrade Coelho accepts this description, stating, “La posición de la mujer en la familia no se concibe en manera alguna como subordinada, según el principio de que la familia es una sociedad en que hombre y mujer participan en igualdad de condiciones y no se trata de una persona que manda y otra que obedece” (66). Victor Virgilio López Garcia also confirms that the women are the “pilar de la cultura garífuna” in a historic panorama he gives of the achievements of Garífuna women (19). Clearly López Garcia and Coelho believe the once widespread notion that gender equality defines those Garífuna who

have not adopted another culture. In my opinion, the movie also suggests that immigration to the United States disrupts the gender balance as seen in the comparison between the antagonistic relationship of Manuel and Sonia in the United States and the peaceful balance between genders in the Honduran Garífuna community.

The implications of Manuel's rejection of his own culture are numerous. Due to his inchoate adoption of a new culture, he has rejected his own, and appears to desire to perform as a member of an urban sub-culture based on his newfound vestimentary code, much like how the Newyorkino in Murillo Selva's play *Loubavagu* performs his perception of being African American. Manuel must "signify" what he is "doing" in the United States through his clothing, thus he employs a vestimentary code that enables his identity to be read as one of defiance, one of rejection of his past as the dislocated Other, and one of his acceptance of a new American otherness. As I see it, he fashions himself by adopting a new vestimentary code that can signify two distinct yet possibly intertwined messages. The first message hints at a voluntary separation from the Garífuna culture and subsequent fragmentation of Manuel's cultural values. As a result of this fragmentation, he is led to devalue former cultural norms, in this case the cultural norm being a respect for a female member of his community. Such a scenario creates a situation based upon a disintegration of identity, but makes for little commentary on racial issues.

The second message goes beyond looking at his vestimentary code as strictly African American, for the reality is that the individual relying on hegemonic American norms to guide him or her to choose a vestimentary code would not adorn himself or herself in flashy gold jewelry and oversized clothing. Therefore, what proves to be troubling in this depiction of cultural transformation is that the film seems to imbricate his newly discovered Hip-hop

style with his abusive nature towards Sonia. He believes that the Hip-hop style imbues the masculine subject with virility, but unfortunately, Manuel defines virility as abuse. It is this virility that Manuel utilizes to enable him to create this antagonistic relationship with Sonia based on a situation of differential power. Manuel has become what is imagined as the “urban real,” bringing with it a plethora of stereotypes of North American blackness such as misogynistic, emotionally abusive, and mired in consumerism. Thus, this litany of stereotypes not only encompasses a negative attitude towards women, it also reveals another facet of his identity. His transformation into a money hungry individual also relies heavily on stereotyped images of African American culture. In her essay, Fleetwood posits that urban image (that is, the urban image derived from vestimentary codification) is fueled by an over-emphasis on consumerism and the pursuit of image revealing objects, in this instance, clothing and jewelry (333). Above all, what the urban real and hip-hop fashion connotes is a normative quality for the fashioned body of belonging to a coterie of individuals that, while they are not included in the hegemonic social groups of the United States, are at least bound by strong racial, national and social ties to one another.⁷⁶ Ironically, while Manuel tries to emulate African American style in order to belong, he is never shown with other social groups, but rather remains in his apartment.

In the end, unlike the Newyorkino’s journey in *Loubavagu*, there is no return journey for Manuel and the film leaves its audience with an open ending. Manuel never sheds his

⁷⁶ Gordon and Anderson agree that Garífuna immigrant fashion tends to, “display a self-conscious Black aesthetic” (292). Although the cultural consumption of African American culture erases a primordialist vision of what constitutes Garífuna culture, many young Garífuna-Americans explain that by aligning themselves with African-Americans, they are rebelling against mestizo and white norms and above all it demonstrates a participation in “first-world modernity” (292). In “Bad Boys and Peaceful Garífuna,” Anderson asserts that perhaps the reason for the Garífuna fascination with African-American culture is that through film and media the Garífuna construe African-Americans as “bad boyz,” in other words they are almost mythical figures that fight against racism using any method available to them (110-11).

visual identifiers of African American culture, and Sonia must leave Honduras to come back to the United States, despite a happy albeit brief return back home. As a result, *Espíritu* paints an ambiguous portrait of what homeplace is for the film's Garífuna characters. Key to this analysis is that it proves that not only can the immigrant not be written into a national Honduran identity; the immigrant cannot be written back into his or her own regional and ethnic identity. It provides a stereotypical portrayal of blackness that fails to challenge essentialist notions of race. Yet the film does highlight that not all exiles can return home, or, not all exiles can find their homeplace. In fact, not all exiles possess enough self-awareness to realize that they are wandering and lost such as can be seen with Manuel. Sonia serves as a point of comparison to understand Manuel with more depth. She stands in stark contrast to Manuel's nomadic state, for it is she that is aware of her anfractuous homeless wanderings and is cognizant that to bring her journey to a close she must return to her point of origin. But she cannot. Despite being able to return home to *refrescar* the spirit of her mother she returns to the United States and with the final closings scenes of the film, she is viewed walking the pavement of a gang-infested area of Los Angeles, doomed to never be able to complete her journey despite a yearning to come full circle and secure a Garífuna identity for her daughter.

Afro-descendant Outsiders

Recent studies of globalization have opened new ground in the study of the African diaspora and black transnationalism. Both concepts have been popular subjects in academia and intellectual thought (Hanchard 140). Yet with their popularity comes problems. Richard Jackson claims that others such as Neo-Africanist critic Jahnheinz Jahn would argue that any author who inserts an "africanism" within his or her work could be included within the canon

of international African diasporic literature. Much has been said about the tendency of non-black authors to rely on a “symbolic but negative black stereotype” to define blackness, and in the present analysis this level of stereotyping seems to confound the various character’s presumed goal of arriving to a state of stable self-definition (5).

The reality is that I personally have a difficult time accepting the idea that literary critics or casual readers must categorize and consequently set forth a rubric in order to agree upon what factors determine whether or not a work depicts the black experience. The truth is that the experience is incommensurable and infinite in its capacity to define and be defined by those subjects within its realm. Nevertheless, in the three works mentioned in the present chapter, we can see that the Ladino authors try to define blackness using a variety of stereotypes in regards to the transmigrational black subject. According to what we have seen in these cultural works, Mairena, el Newyorkino and Manuel are homeless wanderers who take on the cultural elements of African Americans in their quest to find belonging, yet even their attempts to perform as African American are problematic in that they only portrays the most surface elements of culture, such as dress. By presenting these three characters in this manner, it becomes apparent that these Ladino works propose an outsider status for the Afro-Honduran; two of the characters never return to Honduras while the one that does can only return to the outside coastline. These works declare that for the Garífuna, the idealized notion of finding a homeplace is difficult at this point in history. Like the African Americans that the Garífuna characters try to emulate, there exists the desire to find a homeplace. Unlike the African Americans, the ability to find this homeplace is severely diminished because of their transmigrational status no matter where they live, whether they are in Honduras or the United States.

Conclusion

In his book *Black and Indigenous*, Mark Anderson cites the Honduran textbook *Estudios sociales, rendimientos básicos, ciclo común, primer curso* (1995). This textbook provides a revealing glimpse into the racial climate of Honduras. It states, “The ladino youth, that is you, the Honduran student, should respect these ethnic groups, love them and accept them because they are part of our racial heritage” (25). Hidden behind the benevolent words is a message that speaks of exclusion and inclusion. First of all, the text assumes that none of the Honduran students are of any racial group other than Ladino. Secondly, Honduran and Ladino are conflated, thus leaving little room for the inclusion of any other identity and furthermore, the “true” Honduran, that is the Ladino, is placed in a patriarchal position towards these undefined ethnic groups. The goal of acceptance is contradicted by their exclusion from being legitimized as “Honduran.”

I feel that the above quote parallels the attitude of the authors of the works discussed in this study. Whether expressed explicitly or implicitly, Claudio Barrera, Roberto Quesada, Rafael Murillo Selva Rendón, Julio Escoto and Alí Allié, partially open the door to racial inclusion for they express an interest in incorporating Afro-Honduran figures in their works. Yet this door is not opened wide enough for total incorporation of blacks into Honduran identity; if viewed in chronological order of publication, there is less of a dependence on stereotypes as we progress chronologically from the authors of Barrera’s anthology to the characters of *El espíritu de mi mamá*, but this evolution is uneven. Interestingly there is a definite dichotomy of representation in the construction of gender, race and nationality.

Starting with the female subject, the first series of Afro-descendant women that appear in the *poesía negroide* exist only in exotic locations, thus, according to the poems in

which they appear, it would be implausible that they integrate themselves into the dominant culture due to geographical isolation. Furthermore, they appear to only function on a sexual level, therefore limiting their role in that their only purpose is to perform sexual behavior for the pleasure of the male Ladino voyeur. The next female character that appears is Sheela from *Madrugada*. Again, we see that sexuality is the defining characteristic of Sheela, for part of her job is to seduce Dr. Jones. She also is a mulatta and exhibits one of the defining characteristics associated with individuals of mixed blood in which she is restless and unable to conform to either black society or the mainstream society and instead chooses to live outside of both as a revolutionary. The fact that she is a revolutionary grants her contradictory attributes, yet it adds more dimension to her personality. On one hand she gains agency by being a revolutionary because in general, revolutionaries are the impetus for change. On the other hand, the revolutionary figure is one that exists on the margins of society; due to her oppositional ideology, Sheila has no hope to integrate herself into the dominant society. While Escoto still relies on archetypal figures of blackness and places the Afro-descendant figure on the periphery of Honduran society, he at least creates a black character—albeit a non-Honduran—that has agency. Finally we come to Sonia. Sonia is probably the most developed female Afro-descendant character. While she cannot assimilate into either Honduran or North American society, the film at least presents her questioning of identity as problematic instead of presenting it as a situation that is natural to her gender and race.

In regards to the male Afro-descendant characters, it would appear that there is less evolution of character and more reliance on archetypes of blackness. The masculine characters of the *poesía negroide* movement in Honduras verify that black males were seen

as lazy and ineffective, attributes that in no way allowed them to participate as builders of the national imaginary. In the novel *Madrugada*, the fact that Escoto chose an African American man instead of an Afro-Honduran man is an action that bespeaks a certain lack of confidence in the capacity of the black Honduran male to contribute to the nation. The work suggests that if there were to be black participation in molding a new national identity, it would have to be in the hands of an African American. Although there are a limited number of Afro-Honduran males in the novel, they play secondary roles to the main characters. Once again, the positioning of Afro-Hondurans as secondary characters hints at a marginalization of their image.

The black males whose quest for identity appears in the transmigrational works fare no better. Curiously, in these representations is that it appears that these works tend to blame the Afro-Honduran characters for their inability to conform to the image of the dominant population. For example, in *Big Banana*, Mairena has left Honduras entirely, and in the end, he chooses not to return to Honduras but rather continue his identity search in a foreign country. Because the Mairena has removed himself from the national imaginary, the novel suggests that he does not belong and instead, is destined to live a life as a dislocated individual. In regards to Murillo Selva's *Newyorkino*, although he returns home after living in the United States for many years, he shields himself from the greater Honduran society by returning to his insular life in his small Garífuna community. The fact that he refuses contact with outside Ladino groups implies that the Garífuna as the instigators of the cultural rift between them and the Ladino population. In the case of Allié's Manuel, not only do we see a return to the stereotype of the lazy black man, we also see that he has rejected his cultural ties with the Garífuna and Honduras. It is apparent that his role in the formation of national

identity is diminished by the fact that he is far removed from his home country and above all, he remains in his apartment, has no job and only leaves in order to attend parties. Not only is he depicted as lazy, he has also rejected cultural tradition and has assimilated into an African American sub-culture that does not pertain to his homeland.

In the end, the Afro-Honduran in the hands of the non-black author or film producer presents a contradictory scenario. The former assumption that Honduras was solely a Ladino nation with ties to past Mayan greatness has been broken by these authors, for without a doubt they propose that Honduras does have black citizens. Yet they have given Afro-Hondurans limited options for the expression of identity. Such a conclusion can only lead us to consider the Afro-Honduran authors as another interpretation of national identity. Perhaps their voices are not heard as clearly as those coming from the normative culture, but these are the voices that can also propose new directions for the Afro-descendant population.

From my investigations I have been able to discover several black authored works in Honduras. The Garífuna have a long oral tradition of telling *uragas*, which are short, didactic stories, but these stories are rarely told in the larger social groups of Honduras and are relatively unpublished (López 3-5). Armando Crisanto published an *uraga* called “El pez turribiyu” in his book *Adeija sisira gererun aguburigu garinagu: el enojo de las sonajas: palabras del ancestro* (1997). While it does not explicitly address race and nationality, it provides an interesting look at the pluralistic cultural components that create Garífuna society. Two authors that celebrate the complexity and contributions of the Garífuna in Honduras are Víctor Virgilio López García, who wrote the novel *Klabel* (2002), an autobiographical novel which presents the author’s life as a rural teacher, and Xiomara Cacho Cabellero, who has published several volumes of poetry and short stories such as *Dios*

negro (2003) and *Wafien y sus maracas* (2001). While López García's novel only subtly mentions the protagonist's race, he places the protagonist, Klabel, in Tegucigalpa for part of the novel, thus relocating blackness to the center of the country instead of the usual eastern beach local. Meanwhile, the poetry of Cacho Cabellero extols the contribution of Garífuna culture to Honduras while at the same time she promotes a message of racial awareness by writing specifically on the beauty of black skin. As can be deduced by the descriptions above, the *uragas*, poetry and novels created by the Garífuna are a rich area of research that has yet to be explored.

It is only after we consider the perspective of Afro-Honduran writers that we can visualize an image of Honduras other than the monolithic indigenous and Ladino identity that has prevailed since the colonial period. I predict that as more black Hondurans gain exposure as writers, the Ladino concept of blackness will move beyond the folkloric images of Afro-Hondurans on the beach and hopefully the country can create multiple visions of nationality.

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