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## Discovering Resemblances: Language and Identity in Caribbean Poetry

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### Abstract

"Hispanic" is an identification generally accepted in the Caribbean by both black and white residents of the islands. Examination of poems by several black Caribbean poets (the Puerto Ricans Mayra Santos Febres and Magaly Quiñones, the Dominicans Sherezada [Chiqui] Vicioso and Blas Jiménez, and the Cuban Escilia Saldaña) reveals how they use Spanish to communicate the life experience unique to black bearers of the cultural term "Hispanic."

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"Hispanidad" is the term used in Spanish to identify the culture of people of Hispanic heritage around the world. Given the growing trend across the Americas and indeed globally in the areas of "Latin" or Hispanic pop culture and music, a timely discussion of what constitutes Hispanic identity is both engaging and justifiable. Today, the term "Hispanic" is being contested in varied circles in the United States, where "latino/a" is preferred.<sup>1</sup> In the main this is because "Hispanic" is a largely pejorative term in the United States, although discrimination against Hispanics is in no way limited to that country alone. Unfortunately "Hispanic" in the United States is often associated with such negativity as poverty, low class, laziness, prostitution and drug use. Additionally there are older forms of debates that further complicate the notion of a Hispanic identity. For example, the historical debate about Europe's subjugation of a continent of Amerindian people remains relevant today because it gives substance to the experiences of one group of Hispanic people. Cuban American critic Jorge Gracia insists upon the differences among the groups of people generally classified as Hispanics:

"Hispanic" unfairly privileges Spanish, Iberian and European elements to the detriment of Amerindian and African ones; "Hispanic" perpetuates or tends to perpetuate the submission of America to Europe, and particularly of Latin America to Spain; and, finally, "Hispanic" is a deprecatory term whose use serves only to degrade us in the eyes of others and to put obstacles in the way of our social acceptance and development.<sup>2</sup>

He asserts that nothing save their situation of marginalization unites them:

The reason that there are no properties that can be associated with the peoples for whom we are seeking a name is that they are not a cohesive group of people, free to develop as a community and a society. The only thing that these diverse peoples have in common is their marginalization and the domination imposed on them by others.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that Gracia is writing as a Cuban-American from a North American perspective. In contrast to his rejection of the label *Hispanic*, in the Caribbean today the term is largely accepted. In this area blacks have been marginalized more severely than members of other racial groups. If we concede that *Hispanic* is a blanket term covering all races of Spanish-speaking persons, we must also understand that when applied to the whole issue of blackness and black identity in the Caribbean, the erasure of blackness is almost total. Given the factors described above, it is quite ironic that in the Caribbean today, the term "Hispanic" is largely accepted as a form of self-identification and moreover as a racial grouping. Caribbean people have developed a keen sense of their "Caribbeanness" but as importantly, as we navigate the 21st century, across the Caribbean, race continues to be a divisive issue socially and even politically. Because of this, it is easier and more acceptable in the Caribbean to identify oneself as Hispanic rather than choose another racial label such as Black or African, which may carry with it a certain stigma. And this is true of the entire Caribbean. In one sense then, the maintenance of an Hispanic identity was and is able to unify the people of the three nations of the Hispanic Caribbean: Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

Identity is simply a way of making sense of our experiences and in the Caribbean, like elsewhere, we inherit black

identity together with all the negativity of being Black. As such, many people also consciously choose an Hispanic identity which oftentimes subsumes their black identity. In the Hispanic Caribbean, "Hispanidad" is perhaps the best code of identification since it excludes no one, rich nor poor, Black nor White. Many people see "Hispanidad" as having a connection to a White European heritage, which is very desirable. For others, "hispanidad" masks a blackness (in terms of race), which they do not accept. For yet others, as there is no one race which can be called "hispanic" and because "hispanidad" by its very nature includes the notion of hybridity, then it perfectly symbolizes the unique nature of Hispanic Caribbean identity: a fragmented yet indivisible whole. Seen in this light, it can be ascertained that "Hispanidad" encompasses all of the configurations and ideals of the peoples of the Hispanic Caribbean.

Linguistic unity should also be considered in an examination of Hispanic Caribbean identity because language is one of the principal systems of identification among the peoples of any nation. In this sense, the peoples of the Hispanic Caribbean do share a common language: Spanish. Alternately, Gracia argues that: "the linguistic criterion, ...is of no use"<sup>4</sup> because, he points out, the Spanish language cannot and does not explain the source of Hispanic identity. It simply involves too little. Yet, the theorist Julia Kristeva has identified language as "a signifying system in which the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself."<sup>5</sup> And although the Spanish language does not unify all Hispanic people, it is clear that the linguistic commonality of the Hispanic Caribbean has resulted in a link among the three nations within the Caribbean region. Critical theorist Satya P. Mohanty points out that:

...our emotions provide evidence of the extent to which even our deepest personal experiences are socially constructed, mediated by visions and values that are "political" in nature, that refer outward to the world beyond the individual.<sup>6</sup>

This argument is perhaps best supported by the fact that within the Caribbean, the Hispanic nations are seen as a community by the non-Hispanic countries. In the main, this is based on politico-historical ties as well as the linguistic criterion.<sup>7</sup> Additionally Mohanty goes on to explain that: "There are different ways of making sense of an experience, and the way we make sense of it can in fact create a new experience" (Mohanty, p. 34) We can take this to mean that in a Caribbean context, there is a particular understanding of an Hispanic community. Normally it is one which, in some measure, excludes blackness or subsumes it, and which provides a certain cultural cohesiveness. Thus, while we must examine in more detail the role of language in the Hispanic Caribbean, we must also consider race and specifically, the invisibility of Blacks in any attempt to articulate identity in the Hispanic Caribbean. This paper attempts a close reading of several poems written by contemporary Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican poets who all articulate a shared sense of vision in the construction and representation of an Hispanic Caribbean identity. These writers are Black or Mulatto and identify themselves as writing from that subjective space. If we accept Evelyn Fishburn's thesis that: "language [is] our means of access to reality" and that "literature, one of the most powerful vehicles for the expression of language, has a fundamental role to play in constituting our ways of thinking and establishing our cultural norms," then poetry -- which is an expression of our self-knowledge and a means of expression which reflects the imaginative outpourings of an author's life experience -- is the perfect tool to use in any examination of the question of identity.

The poems considered in this article are by the Puerto Ricans Mayra Santos Febres, and Magaly Quiñones, the Dominicans, Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso, and Blas Jiménez, and the Cuban Excilia Saldaña. The choice of these poets was predicated on the fact that their poetic production enters the racial debate and contributes to the discussion at hand. Admittedly Cuban poet Nancy Morejón (1944- ) is the most prolific Afro-Cuban poet writing today, however, her work is not here included as poets were also chosen for their relatively unknown status so as to observe whether the topic of language and identity was engaging debate generally among writers in the Hispanic Caribbean and not solely of interest to the larger world figures.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore most noteworthy that the poets of this study all seek to privilege blackness and to revise the model by which Afro-Hispanic Caribbean identity and indeed Caribbean identity has been considered. Many of the poems are an experimental deconstruction of language and through it a reconstruction of an identity which is acceptable to the people as Cuban, Puerto Rican or Dominican. At the same time, they bring into consideration aspects of identity formation pertinent to Caribbean history such as race, whitening or "blanqueamiento" and hybridity. Psychoanalyst and theorist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) argues in his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*, that Blacks in the Caribbean face an "arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment,"<sup>9</sup> and further to that, language, as we have already ascertained, is central to a person's sense of identity. Again, it is Fanon who declares that "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is" (*Black Skin*, p.38). Thus it can be argued that this explains the extraordinarily refined nature of language use among many Hispanic Caribbean poets. References to language among the poets of this study do not foreground the language, which they speak, as a barrier that prevents the old

colonizer (Spain) and the former colonized subject (The Hispanic Caribbean) from having a shared sense of identity. Moreover, polysemy is a common device in several of these poems. The multifaceted play on words and meaning/s can be seen in one sense, as proof of having “measured up to the culture” (*Black Skin*, p. 39) as Fanon suggests. But an alternative interpretation might highlight it as indicative of the poets’ sense of confusion in terms of identity and race. Central to the language used by these Hispanic Caribbean poets is a keen sense of the colors and the rhythmic way of life shared by the people of the Caribbean together with an ironic questioning of the black Caribbean Self.

Mayra Santos Febres’ poem ‘Palabra en el puño’ aptly demonstrates her opinion of the role which language plays in the creation of identity. The poem begins:

Palabra en el puño  
isla en la palabra  
vulva en la palabra  
color, historia, geografía  
hinchándole la panza  
preñándola de flechas  
de agudísimos receptáculos para la furia.<sup>10</sup>

Here Santos Febres uses images of penetration, pregnancy and reproduction to describe the creation of Puerto Rico. She points out that language is central to identity. It informs history. It is history. It exemplifies the generations of violence and pain inflicted on individuals on the island. For the islander, language can represent the noose around the neck, which can kill, but equally it is symbolic of hope because by hanging on to it, survival can be insured. The poet describes: “la palabra / ombligo con tentáculos” (p. 68). She uses language to redefine herself and seems constantly wary of it as she presents the duality which is inherent in language: “de palancas y tuercas para el amor / explotando la palabra” (p. 68). This duality at once presents the repressive nature of language as well as its liberating potential. Santos Febres is concerned for the mind of the people in the Caribbean. At times, her imagery is harsh and suggests fear and pain. In trying to speak, to grasp the meaning of the words in her homeland, the poet recognizes the difficulty of the job for the colonized mind. There is so much of the past wrapped up in language and tied to the present that any rewriting of the Self becomes an almost impossible task:

impelidos sus ágiles clavos de cólera  
reventando hasta el párpado  
del dios soñoliento que en su pesadilla  
lleva y trae la sangre hasta la luna,  
hasta los bancos suizos.  
la palabra-isla-puño-diente-vulva-historia. (p. 68)

The words are all jumbled. The poet returns to the space of creation, the earth, to begin again: “regresa al ombligo de las máquinas / de la tierra” (p. 68) and she assumes her indestructibility through writing and by rewriting her/Self:

en sílabas desembocadas  
explota por las bocas del solar  
retumbando sus marcos encerados. (p. 68)

The poem does end with hope for the future. Santos Febres, having discovered her own place in the context of the island and that of language, finds herself forced to speak out to the people. Her words reject the past in looking ahead to a new day. She seeks to help the Caribbean people to rid themselves of the chains of history and to move forward with a sense of their right to choose their own forms of self-expression and thus to write their own identity.

In the poem entitled ‘Malecón’, the Dominican poet Chiqui Vicioso presents the idea of the torment of language and the role which it plays in the self-identification of the individual. The poem opens with a very sexualised description: “Amurallada en blancos pantalones / ofrece la ciudad sus orificios.”<sup>11</sup> The city, covered in virginal white, lies spread open. This description revokes the visual image of purity normally associated with whiteness and with it, the mental assimilation of the language of the Whites in the Caribbean. Educated Blacks in the Caribbean are often accused of “thinking” White. Mentally blanketed in a White language, Vicioso presents the idea that the black individual must strip bare in order to represent himself truthfully. Vicioso describes the country as a place where poverty is endemic and passes from one generation to the next:

multiplícanse los niños hambrientos  
y en el mal eco del malecón  
en estado de gestación  
los que no han de parirse. (p. 6)

All around the country, the poet is faced with scenes of poverty and social injustice. Even the animals are victims who suffer the same plight as their human “compañeros.” Vicioso’s comments highlight the harshness of a country which allows its inhabitants to suffer to this extreme with no relief in sight:

Súbense los perros a las azoteas  
Agreden las cucarachas a los árboles  
Lentos, desesperantes, desnutridos. (p. 6)

In one sense, this poem responds intertextually to the poem ‘Una realidad nuestra’ by Vicioso’s fellow Dominican poet Blas Jiménez, in which he questions the adequacy of the Spanish language to write of the poverty and the suffering of Blacks in a world which has been for so long, dominated by Whites. Jiménez describes the Caribbean as a world where: “quedaron los llantos / esperando en los cambios / pensando que la palabra seriedad tiene significado.”<sup>12</sup> He argues that Caribbean people must acknowledge their suffering and work to effect change. Vicioso, like Jiménez, recognizes that there are limited choices for Caribbean people. Therefore she experiments with language in order to create her own more expressive vehicle. Vicioso uses the final eight lines to ask two questions. First: “¿Qué pueden los poemas contra la alcantarilla?” (p. 6). The second question is the poet’s response to the first but at the same time, it is a reworking of language:

¿Qué pueden si en la orilla  
del límite el mar  
se acerca, mira  
da un (sal)to  
se dil(h)uye  
y queda sol(o) y (sol)a  
la pregunta? (p. 6)

Here Vicioso is skilful with language use. Her words both ask and answer the question. The sea rushes in to the shore in an unceasing tidal wave of humanity in the same way that the lives of the people are awash with poverty. The sea surrounds the island and limits flight or escape. The poet queries what can be done to address these questions of deprivation and suffering. Vicioso’s play on the words “sal” and “salto” presents a beautiful image. The “salto” can be the ebbing tide. The “sal” contained in the sea is also essential to both the life of the sea and the people. Vicioso ends the poem with another play on the words “sol” and “solo”. At the end, the blistering sun remains looking down on the vast spread of the sea and it is alone. The poet’s comparison is with her own loneliness. She faces the tremendous task of the deconstruction of the language and she expresses the sense of isolation which she feels as she stands alone, one individual, asking what she can do for her country as she considers the destitution of the people, and the creeping sense of fear and isolation.

In the poem ‘Romana’, Vicioso plays on the use of colors and their context within the space of language and successfully deconstructs their symbolism. The poem opens with the words:

Humo negro que se enreda  
por las ennegrecidas pieles  
de estas niñas que soy. (p. 8)

The plurality of existence by which the poet describes herself is most interesting. She sees herself as the many and the one. She represents all the black girls in the black woman that she has become. In the play on textures, the lightness of smoke and the hard quality of the “piedras labradas,” Vicioso also establishes a play on blackness and whiteness. Both are ethereal states. The smoke is black and it surrounds the black skin of the poet as it infiltrates the air. It is everywhere. She calls on the people to respect blackness because these are the people on whom the nation is built and whose ancestors built the country. They are the rock of the land:

piedras  
labradas para abrir calles  
por donde pase el blanco tedio  
de los implacables días grises. (p. 8)



Here Vicioso also describes the whiteness which is everywhere and which is integral to the land. Yet she describes the unrelenting grayness of the days; a reflection on the unceasing and relentless hardship in which the people live. In this poem, the poet deconstructs all words; many of the lines can be read in several ways. In the final stanza of the poem, Vicioso writes:

Entre el humo y la piedra  
mis palabras recargadas de mundos  
precarios, transeúntes, circulares  
que inéditos las re(claman). (p. 8)

The poet's words lie in the space between the smoke and the rocks. Her poetry is a medium of communication with the people, and it plays a very important role in the reconstruction of identity. With the words "re(claman)" Vicioso both demands solutions as well as protests the state of affairs in the country. This, like many of Vicioso's poems, requires that the reader expand his/her way of thinking and look for alternative means of self-identification to fixed notions of language as well as race.

Puerto Rican poet Magaly Quiñones also suggests that language is central to the construction of identity in her poem "La palabra es el germen." Quiñones is specifically concerned with the idea that language is central to all identity. Language is what we use to create ourselves, to name ourselves, to identify ourselves. She sees the job of the poet as one of creation, and language is at the core of creation. As Julia Kristeva points out: "language is so intimately linked to man and society that they are inseparable."<sup>13</sup> So too, Quiñones presents her writing as an obligation and the language which she uses as an important instrument to master. In the first stanza, she suggests that she is only "una vieja memoria que se inventa" (p. 30). In a sense, Quiñones expounds the Borgesian idea that nothing new is being written.<sup>14</sup> Indeed all that will be written has been written before and all that exists has been the subject of past writing. Limited by use of the only possible tool, language, with which she can represent her reality, Quiñones writes and constructs her world. At the same time, she identifies the role of language in the (re)construction of the Self:

**La palabra es el germen**  
y en medio de la noche, en cucullas,  
va dando forma a la matriz del templo.<sup>15</sup>

Four lines in the poem appear in bold print, emphasizing the idea of the centrality of language. Quiñones identifies this notion as central to the poem and by presenting these words in bold face, she stresses the importance of the idea to the reader. The poem's central message is that language reflects the world. Critic and theorist Bill Ashcroft writes:

While it is quite clear that language is more than a 'reproducing instrument for voicing ideas' (for what do thoughts or ideas look like apart from their expression in language?) the same objections can be applied to the idea of language as the 'shaper' or 'programmer' of ideas. Such ideas are still inaccessible apart from language. To possess a language is to possess a technique, not necessarily a quantum of knowledge about the world.<sup>16</sup>

There can be no denying that language is a technique, but it is much more than simply this; for if language is a shaper, then it also falls to language to define the Self. In the two final lines of the poem, Quiñones writes: "**Ya no soy sino un verso / creando lo creado**" (p. 30). With these words, Quiñones defines herself, her role as a poet and again she reinforces the central role that language plays in the self-defining process, but it is one which is undoubtedly repetitive.

Interestingly, the influence of the English language is an important factor in the study of Hispanic Caribbean poetry. English is the language which most threatens the culture of all of the Caribbean, given the strong US influence on all areas of life. This would seem most obvious in the case of Puerto Rico, which forms a part of the English-speaking United States, and the latter's influence on the small Caribbean nation is incontrovertible. Undeniably though, the political sway of the USA in the region is seen as an unequivocal risk, and many of the poets thus use their poetry to warn the people of this infiltration. In Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the cultural invasion of the countries via American television and popular music is aggressive. Duncan Green writes:

Film, radio and TV have become the main channels of public communication in society, thereby acquiring a central role in creating and passing on cultural values. The mass media has also become a

battleground in the struggle to define Latin America's identity. Increased dependence on Western technology has given huge influence to films and TV programmes, with the film industry in particular dominated by Hollywood. [...] It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the US as a purveyor of mass culture.<sup>17</sup>

Americanisms infiltrate the popular street language in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic and Spanglish,<sup>18</sup> in the past more common to New York and Miami, has found its way into popular use on the streets of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Given the political tie with the United States, Puerto Rican poetry obviously stands out among the three Hispanic Caribbean countries as the one in which an English influence is expectedly the strongest, although the island continues to maintain a separate Caribbean cultural identity. Like the Puerto Ricans, Dominican and Cuban poets have also begun to write between English and Spanish. Of the poets in this study, this is especially the case with Mayra Santos Febres and Chiqui Vicioso. All of the poems in Vicioso's anthology *Internamiento* experiment with the use of both Spanish and Spanglish. However the influence of English on all of the writers is marked. In the poems this can take several forms: from the overt practice of code-switching, to the more subtle form in which one or two English words are interwoven into a poem or used as the title, to the publication of bilingual works which access a wider readership across the Caribbean.

With regard to code-switching, numerous texts have sought to define this well-known phenomenon. It is a rapid switch between languages, which can occur from word to word or line to line:

Code-switching is used, by ordinary writers and speakers, for two main strategic reasons: first to fit style of speech to the changing social circumstances of the speech situation; and second, to impose a certain definition on the speech situation by the choice of a style of speech.<sup>19</sup>

Code switching is extremely common in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, thus it is natural that the societies' use of the languages is reflected in the poetry. An example can be found in Chiqui Vicioso's defiant poem "Convalecencia." Vicioso dedicates the poem to Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), who saw life from the depths of turmoil, reflected this despair in much of her poetry and eventually found release in suicide. The poem opens with her name and Vicioso plays on sounds and meanings:

Sylvia, sabia, sal(via)  
puente, clavo ardiendo  
siempre me dijeron  
que cuando se tienen hijos  
una no se suicida (p. 36)

Vicioso makes a shocking image out of the reconstruction of simple words. The poet empathizes with Plath as a woman whose angst in life points to the release of suicide. The stanza continues:

hablo del suicidio que es  
porque el otro nos es  
como "This white wall  
above which the sky creates itself"  
o "the voice of nothing that was"  
que es  
nuestra cordura. (p. 36)

The switch in languages is unexpected and creative. As Vicioso is quoting from the writing of Plath herself, the switch in languages is used in two contexts. It brings home to the reader the importance of English especially in a social context in the Dominican Republic, while at the same time the poet signals a similarity between the pessimism of the two worlds: that of Plath and that of Vicioso who, as a Dominican, is struggling with the type of language that most represents "lo dominicano". Vicioso uses code-switching as a strategic device which strikes the reader forcefully. Throughout the poem the Spanish (Vicioso's voice) alternating with the English (Plath's words echoed by Vicioso) is at once surprising and compelling to the reader. Simultaneously, the two languages foreshadow and mirror each other. Vicioso writes:

que evita que nuestra piel sin raíces  
se desenrolle  
"away easy as paper"  
y que nos sintamos

"nude as Cleopatra." (p. 36)

The suggestion is that no matter what language is used, the problems common to Blacks, to women and to Caribbean people remain timeless. The switching between English and Spanish allows Vicioso to comment on the role of the poet within the discourse of criticism and revolution in Hispanic Caribbean society. She examines her role as a Black Hispanic woman yet her comparison is of herself with Plath, a White Bostonian of German parentage. That both Vicioso and Plath should feel a rootlessness is not surprising, and the comparison with a naked Cleopatra links them both as women who are struggling with the physicality of time and who are linked between cultures.

The less overt form of Anglicisms is noted in the poets' insertion of an English word or phrase for cultural reference. This is found in poems in which the poet deals with an issue of particular importance in the Hispanic Caribbean and which is referenced to the USA, usually the target for much criticism. In addition, the poets use this technique in an attempt to point out similarities between the other Caribbean countries and the Hispanic Caribbean. One example of this is Mayra Santos Febres' poem "En Carolina." This poem is dedicated to the Puerto Rican Julia de Burgos (1914-1953), known in the regions as a "poeta del Caribe":

En carolina  
antes de las urbanizaciones  
cuando en el río  
la gente se ahogaba sin reparo alguno  
y el anamú no era yerba sorpresiva. (p. 50)

Here Santos Febres presents a veiled appreciation of the town and the countryside. The rurality of the area contrasts with the encroaching development. Santos Febres skillfully enters the debate on the divide which is the heritage of the entire Caribbean and which still plagues the region up to the present day. The rural way of life must make way for urbanization which is the model of the developed world. In the poem, the water, which gives life, is also the taker of life, in the form of the river. This echoes the reality of the Caribbean setting, where the waters which surround the countries of the Caribbean are heavily patrolled by the United States and thus dominated by them. In the second stanza, she writes:

en carolina  
recién desaparecida la central  
antes de que la 65 de infantería  
se abriera las arterias  
y apareciera la eli lily, la tecnicos  
el autoparts convertido en kinneys  
convertido en pizza hut  
de al campo rico (avenida de la fiebre) (p. 50)

Santos Febres points out that despite the apparent liberation, the Caribbean remains bedevilled by a cycle of dependency (on corporate USA) which is both economical and psychological. The take-over by the USA is made complete by industrialization and commerce. Santos Febres identifies by name the American mega chain stores, which in a sense invade the countries of the region from top to bottom. Santos Febres, like de Burgos, is aware of the need for a reconfirmation of a positive and strong Caribbean identity flowing from its peoples and she enforces this idea in her poetry:

allí mismito en carolina  
julia se sentaba chiquitita  
en una caja de latón  
con su grifería pitonisa sobre la falda. (p. 50)

Julia de Burgos learned from earliest childhood the complexity of life. She was a Black woman who came from a poor Puerto Rican family. She grew up in a small rural town through which a river ran. The possibilities for comparison are countless. In Carolina, de Burgos, like Santos Febres much later, would have learned the contradictions of Puerto Rican society: Black versus White, poor versus rich, urban life versus rural life, the accepting attitude inherent in the colonial mentality versus the power and dominance of the metropolis, that is New York. However Julia de Burgos never accepted a lesser position as a woman, a poet, or someone from the Caribbean. On the day of her death, she was taken by ambulance to the Mayflower Hospital in New York, less than two blocks from where she collapsed, but was refused treatment because she was Black, and was therefore dispatched to one in Harlem. Of this, Chiqui Vicioso writes:

Esta historia despertó en mí, de inmediato, una gran solidaridad hacia esa mujer, que primero que todo era eso: Una mujer, y luego una caribeña.<sup>20</sup>

What de Burgos establishes in her poetry is a strong sense of solidarity with the other nations of the Caribbean. Thus, her acute sense of Caribbean identity is a part of what makes her whole. Some of these other Caribbean nations, she visited; others barred her entry because of the political views expressed in her poetry. Santos Febres reminds the reader of this in the final stanza of the poem:

todavía de hígado estival  
inventaba canciones de trabajo  
canciones de sudores amorosos  
enredadas a las tripas de la isla.

los gusarapos no pudieron detenerla. (p. 50)

Santos Febres sees in Julia de Burgos a Puerto Rico personified, and at the same time, the voice of humanity. Julia de Burgos never gave up on life and was always willing to speak out through her poetry. Above all, she felt a strong moral obligation to write as a Caribbean woman and this commitment is echoed by Santos Febres. The title of the anthology in which this poem "En Carolina" appears is *Anamú y Manigua*. The poem appears in the section "conjuro de manigua." Santos Febres demands that the people of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean not let themselves be swamped by this "anamú" (the United States) and that they protest, by taking flight (manigua) if necessary, as did the maroons historically, or even cast spells (conjuro). She points out that not even in death was Burgos's voice stilled. In death, as in life, her words continue to ring out: Burgos's life was one of resistance by word and Santos Febres is carrying on this tradition as she urges the people of the Caribbean to unite in (re)gaining control over their own lives. Indeed what we have seen is that Santos Febres, like Chiqui Vicioso, criticizes the infiltration and the influence of the North Americans in the Caribbean region. They both argue that it is a domination that the people of the region (Cuba in the past) have accepted. They repeatedly warn the people against an acceptance and an internalisation of US values, which in turn leads to a culture of dependency.

There has been no suggestion on the political or literary level that "castellano" is not an acceptable literary language in all of the nations of the Hispanic Caribbean. Cuba is the country where the main influence of Blacks is most noticeable and where there has been a marked influence by Blacks on the language. Nicolás Guillén employed the use of *dicharacho* (a type of refrain) in his poetry in the 1930s and he wrote several poems in such a way as to capture the rhythm of language use among Blacks. However, Guillén was writing at a time when the AfroCuban culture and people were invisible in the context of Cuban letters and Cuban society, and he charged himself with the obligation to redress this situation. Today, AfroCuban as well as other Black writers of the Hispanic Caribbean do not write to raise awareness of the existence of the Black community. Rather, their poetry questions the Hispanic Caribbean identity which today exists for the Black population, reflects the social conditions which prevail, challenges the status quo where Blacks, as a social grouping, remain at the bottom of the society, and marks out a nascent Caribbean identity which reveals the similarities among the nations in the region. In addition, it must be noted that, in the Hispanic Caribbean, language is not seen as an ethnically identifying marker.

The colonised nation which seeks to assert its nationalism usually employs its own language to reject the imposed language and the colonialist mentality which is adopted by the local people. Thus language can be used as a tool to demonstrate independence. The Spanish language remains the language of communication and identification among the peoples of the Hispanic Caribbean and moreover no dialects exist which are perceived as a threat to the Spanish language and which separate or differentiate the people from the Hispanic Caribbean who are dialect speakers (usually Blacks) from the non-dialect speakers (usually non-Blacks). In the three nations alike, the language of the people, and that of creative writing is significantly the same as the language of the former colonizers. Importantly too, none of the poems of this study are written in dialect.

This situation is unlike that of the English-speaking nations of the Caribbean where the English language is constantly under threat because of the dialect of the particular country. However, it must be emphasized that the poems of this study, although not written in any particular dialect, nevertheless speak directly to the people through a medium that in no way falsifies the experiences described. Their commentary on the condition of Black people in the Hispanic Caribbean talks directly to the people who share and understand the experience. Moreover, their very use of the Spanish language legitimizes and establishes that language as one in which they can talk to each other about each other with no perception of threat as is the case in some countries, where for example, dialect is used as the language of the people to condemn the former colonizers.



Blas Jiménez is the only poet of the study who touches on this issue of the language of the colonizer as not being a suitable language for the expression of Black Hispanic culture. In the poem 'Otra vez....Aquí', his central premise is that for the person living in a black skin, in the Hispanic Caribbean, it is difficult to construct oneself from a platform of "Hispanidad" or "lo español" because the Spanish language has been imposed upon the Black. Using anaphoric structure to hammer home the point, seven of the poem's eight stanzas begin with the line "En este pueblo español" (p. 54). It suggests that in the poet's opinion, this is the identity to which Dominicans aspire. For Jiménez any aspiration to "Hispanidad" thus indicates a desire to construct oneself along the lines of whiteness, and this is an absolute impossibility for the Blacks in the country. In the seventh stanza, Jiménez focuses on language and its link to the construction of identity:

En este pueblo español  
escuchando los lamentos  
es este azúcar maldito, una lengua que no siento. (p. 54)

Here, Jiménez centers more on the social situation of most Blacks at the lower end of the economic scale rather than on the loss of the original languages of the African brought unwillingly to the New World. Ironically, there is no regret at the loss of an African language, but the Spanish language is one which the poet suggests is not his own. Psychologically he simply does not feel the language, nor is he a part of the collective consciousness, which he should be as an Hispanic. This verse is more the lament of the Hispanic Caribbean Black whose vibrant and expressive use of word and rhythm is at times limited by the restraints of European language structures. In addition, the poet feels himself locked in by language when he attempts to write of the social problems experienced by so many Blacks.

Historically in the Hispanic Caribbean, as in the English-speaking Caribbean countries, writers have imitated those of the European tradition. Characteristically, most of the poets of this study use language in an unconventional way and develop a unique thematic content, peculiar to their own situation. Yet, Blas Jiménez strongly urges self-acceptance by way of the maintenance and the uplifting of Caribbean culture. He indicates through notes to the reader that his poem "Ese hombre rasta" was written from his observations in Puerto España, Trinidad and "Identificación" was written while he was in Kingston, Jamaica. The poems deal with issues of identity, which are of concern to the Dominican as much as to the Trinidadian or Jamaican peoples. Poems like these incorporate themes that are relevant across the entire Caribbean: identity, US domination in the region, and racial unification throughout the Caribbean. Haiti appears, for example, as the title of a poem by Vicioso and for Jiménez, Haiti symbolises black strength in withstanding adversity. The music and rhythm of Cuba, Jamaica and Trinidad are all present in poems by Jiménez and Santos Febres.

To (re)present Africanness, the poets rely on rhythm and sound; to describe the social order of life for Black people in the Hispanic Caribbean, many of the poets make use of color and vivid descriptions. In the poem "Schonried," Chiqui Vicioso identifies the power of language by (re)presenting and thus questioning the interpretation which has always been attributed to color. In the three stanzas of this poem the poet uses color and the usual interpretation of color as the standpoint from which she effects a (re)reading of Caribbean society. In the opening stanza, Vicioso writes:

Serpientes de yerba zigzagueando alborotadas  
rumor de flores amarillas  
como niñas nerviosas  
ante la proximidad del viento.<sup>21</sup>

The image of the grass snakes, which opens the description, is alluring as the reader is immediately caught up in the world of the tropics. The sights, sounds and smells are here presented with vivid words and images, which filter precipitately into the imagination. The first stanza continues:

En hileras erguidas chaperonas rosa  
puñados de arcoiris  
disperso por la lluvia.

In these lines Vicioso captures the magnificent beauty of the tropical setting with all the vivid colors of nature and the glistening droplets of water sprinkled over everything after a heavy downpour. The rain, when it arrives, purifies both the air and the land. In the second stanza, the poet moves from the land to the water. She writes:

La montaña respira verde

olor a pinos  
a troncos recién cortados.  
Sus lágrimas descienden rápidas hacia nosotros...  
Parir la primavera cuesta ríos,  
arroyuelos, lagos.

In one sense, Vicioso compares the destruction of nature with the isolation and despair inherent in Caribbean life:

Mis ojos cansados no se cansan  
se desata la vieja lucha entre presentes  
la realidad se hace real.

Like the revitalization which can take place in nature, the poet too can be refreshed. This stanza reinforces the idea of the rejuvenation of both the self and of nature. Vicioso writes:

¿de qué realidad hablo?  
si no sé si este verde es verde  
o una interpretación azul del amarillo.

The play on color is interesting. Of course, blue and yellow when mixed make green; however, it is also likely that the poet is presenting the idea that images of color, like those of beauty, are constantly changing. Thus, a society that apportions beauty to certain colors is making a mistake. Colors, like the self, are no longer ascribed meaning. According to Vicioso, the visible is an illusion. As such, what matters or what should matter is not what is seen but what remains unseen. At the same time, the poet resists limitation by raising the idea that our reality is what we make of it. Consequently we can argue that what Vicioso skillfully presents here is the notion that, in the Caribbean, we can re-define the thus far limited boundaries of the Black experience, but it all has to begin in the minds of Afro-Dominican people.

Several of the poets write about the art of the poet and the skill necessary to the construction of a poem. It is useful to single out what these poets have to say of themselves as poets, not only because they are writing to construct images of blackness but also because they are formulating descriptions of their identities. In the poem 'Mi Oficio,' Magaly Quiñones writes:

Yo que voy desde un extremo al otro de la casa  
inventando canciones.  
Yo que voy desde un extremo al otro de la casa  
quebrándole la calma al sentimiento,  
toco mi biografía de mujer y en el trajín eterno  
mientras doy de comer a los niños, al perro y a las plantas,  
abro abanicos verdes de memoria,  
dibujo soledades que dibujan. (*Razón*, p. 54)

The poem begins with Quiñones' contemplation of her "oficio" or role in life. She meditates on her situation as a woman, wife, and mother and she ponders the drudgery and the repetitive tasks of that role. She examines all of the things that made her into what she is today:

Yo que soy lucha y canción en desolada rienda,  
confín de vida en el pequeño cerco de mi adentro,  
toco la historia del milenio  
y los minutos se amotinan, exigen rutas nuevas,  
tiempos nuevos, insensatos, golosos, inconfidentes. (*Razón*, p. 54)

Quiñones suggests that she grows as a writer with the acceptance of her present self, as she is now, and of her past self/selves. This is what gives her the strength to continue. She lives in the knowledge that "Nada me puede herir" (p. 54) or rather that "nada más que la vida / que la dura expresión de la vida en medio del recuerdo / me mata" (p. 54). She points out that life in the Hispanic Caribbean is extremely difficult and she indicates that what is needed is strength through self-affirmation. Symbolically, she suggests that the only thing that can hurt her is life itself. Yet she sees the solution as lying within her, by the very act of living. She writes:

Yo que ato mis tobillos y mis ansias a la ventana  
en la pared por donde miro.

Yo que ato el oprobio de la especie, el dolor de la raza  
 al rayado papel que relleno de letras  
 mientras duermo los niños y limpio cada esquina de la casa,  
 toco los expedientes de mi oficio  
 cuando toco los dientes de mi almohada. (p. 54)

Quiñones the poet must be the witness who documents the lives of the Hispanic Caribbean people. She makes direct comparisons between the harshness of life for Blacks during the time of slavery and that of Caribbean life today. Her vivid description of the shackles of oppression historically ties her to the past of her people. She writes to cleanse the dishonor heaped on Puerto Rican and Caribbean people. She perceives herself as seer, one who is able to present a positive description for the future of Hispanic Caribbean identity. In equal measure, Quiñones presents a positive image of her self-acceptance to the reader:

Yo soy quien debo ser y a toda hora:  
 escritora,  
 exorcista,  
 amante,  
 socialista,  
 ama de casa,  
 pero al tocar la huella de mi oficio  
 sé que el amor es mi tarea más amplia,  
 dibujando palabras que dibujan,  
 trazando estrellas sobre mis pisadas. (p. 54)

Here the poet's love of her self and her country are all that she needs to validate her identity and her place in the Caribbean. To communicate her life experiences, she uses everyday language, language she describes in the poem "La Promesa" with the words: "Los que, más que deseo, traemos el osario del deseo / en lenguaje de piedra." (p. 7) The poet emphasizes the difficulty of creating her own poetic voice with the implied comparison of herself as poet to a sculptress who must chisel a "language of stone." For Quiñones, the immense task of the Caribbean poet in rewriting the self is also one of liberation, and it helps her to reaffirm her Caribbean Self.

In the Hispanic Caribbean, the role of the writer is often interpreted as that of educator: this role is especially important given the need for dialogue with history, which must be undertaken if the role of Blacks in society is to be re-examined. There is strong consensus among Black critics that the task of rewriting the image of Blacks must fall to Black writers because they speak most directly to the black peoples of the Caribbean and they share the black experience, knowledge and sense of identity. The use of language as a means to vindicate a people is a key concept expounded by African-American critics. They center on the idea that language itself is loaded against Black people in colonialist and postcolonialist societies. Henry Louis Gates Jr. asks two critical questions which demonstrate this position:

How can the black subject posit a full and sufficient self in a language in which blackness is a sign of absence? Can writing, with the very difference it makes and marks, mask the blackness of the black face that addresses the text of western letters, in a voice that speaks English through an idiom which contains the irreducible element of cultural difference that will always separate the white voice from the black?<sup>22</sup>

Here Gates Jr.'s argument centers on the English speaking USA but its main ideas echo across the Hispanic Caribbean. It can be argued that if the literary language of blackness is negative, then the representations of Blacks within that society will be interpreted negatively. Given the distilled language used in poetry, it is understandable that a negative image of Blacks can be intensified in poetry. In actively redressing this, many African-American poets choose to use their language and the images created to reconstruct images of blackness in the USA in a positive light. Many such examples are found in the poetry of the African-American poet Langston Hughes. In the poem "A New Song" the poet opens with the defiant words: "I speak in the name of black millions / Let all others keep silent a moment."<sup>23</sup> In demanding the silence of all others, Hughes ascribes to himself the role of the voice of African-Americans. The poem later continues:

That day is past.  
 I know full well now  
 Jesus could not die for me—  
 That only my own hands

Dark as the earth,  
Can make my earth-dark body free.<sup>24</sup>

Hughes gives a positive connotation to the dark and by extension to all things black. He takes the blackness of the earth, with all its mineral riches, and compares it to his black hands and body. This is a reversing of the negative imagery normally associated with blackness. By comparing the black skin of the protagonist with the dark earth that yields such goodness, Hughes positively reinvents blackness by using a different construct to that normally used in the language of the United States and the English-speaking world. Thus, the poet, as an African-American man, is able to (re)construct the world in which he lives and to “free” himself.

In terms of Hispanic Caribbean literature, Blacks and blackness are written into the language in both positive and negative terms. One explanation for this lies in the societies themselves, which by the early part of the seventeenth century had taken in enough Black slaves to double or even triple, in some cases, the White population. A fear of Blacks was created and then intensified by the Haitian Revolution. By the nineteenth century, although literary references to Blacks had increased, many of their roles remained stereotypical. Cuban novelists such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda (1814-1873), the author of *Sab*, was among a leading group of Hispanic Caribbean novelists who presented Black protagonists in Caribbean literature. Furthermore, among the poets of the era there was a continued interest in the Black theme. The Black woman, in the form of “mulata,” “trigueña,” and “negra” or “morena,” appears frequently as the object of (White) male desire.<sup>25</sup>

At that time, it was mainly the work of Cubans that demonstrated an interest in Blacks. One such poet was the Afro-Cuban Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés (1804-1844), known as “Plácido”. Such poets were among the first to accord to Blacks not only the position of literary speaking subject but also that of authenticity. Richard L. Jackson argues that those writers who were the first to champion sincerely the cause of Blacks must be praised because they present the Black “authentically, talking his own language, expressing his own thoughts, and singing his own songs”.<sup>26</sup> However one century later, the job is far from complete. The Black poets of the Hispanic Caribbean included in this study write to redress a past history in the Hispanic Caribbean in which the role of the Black has been substantially diminished, and through their poetry, they have made great strides towards restoring the value of Black people and Black identity. These poets, writing from within, use images which do not (mis)represent Blacks in a stereotypical way. Their language presents Blacks and the Black identity quite positively.

Excilia Saldaña uses exquisite imagery to write of Blacks and presents blackness as a beautiful concept. In the poem “—¿Soy yo, abuela, sólo carne” she describes herself in the following words:

—¿Soy yo, abuela, sólo carne y sangre,  
uñas, pelo, lengua, un cuerpo  
que camina, una idea? (p. 198)

The grandmother’s response, “—Eres más. Eres la tierra” (p. 198), expands the poet’s definition of herself: she is a human being who encompasses all the dignity that the term affords. The grandmother goes on throughout the poem to specify: “eres el agua,” “el aire,” “el fuego” and “el amor” (pp. 198-199). Three of the four elements as well as the emotion of love combine in the creation of the little girl. Here Saldaña shapes existence as a positive experience. She presents life as cyclical. The poem ends with the grandmother telling the little girl that with the passing of time, another little girl (this time her own grand-daughter) will in turn ask her (the little girl, by then herself a grandmother) the same question. The passing on of ideas on identity is very important in Saldaña’s poetry. She writes:

Eres más. Eres el amor: para que una  
noche, aún inédita, contestes a otra niña  
esta pregunta eternal “¿Soy yo, abuela,  
sólo carne y sangre, uñas, pelo, lengua,  
un cuerpo que camina, un pensamiento  
que sueña?” (p. 199)

In her poetry, Saldaña’s general tone is optimistic. Love and hope, understanding and acceptance, life and dreams are interwoven in descriptions of the people. Saldaña expresses her ideas in a language free from negative associations of Blacks and presents them, like all people, with a sense of hope.

In employing a language not previously used to represent Blacks, these Hispanic Caribbean poets address the preconceived notion of the Caribbean that exists across the world and to do so, they consciously use a language



thas-t addresses stereotypical images of the Caribbean as well as the people. The Caribbean is frequently represented mythically by images of indolent tropical days which are seemingly filled with nothing more than sun, sea, sand and sex. The people, it is often intimated, do little work, especially the Black ones. One poet in particular, who strongly challenges these stereotypical ideas, is Blas Jiménez. In the poem 'Humedad tropical', every negative stereotype is challenged, from the Caribbean way of life which is seen as slow and lazy "lenta, espaciada, pegajosa" (p. 75), to the women with "cuerpos de guitarras" (p. 75). Jiménez presents the idea that this is an environment with a "naturaleza harangana" (p. 75) and it is seen by many as only producing people who are themselves vagabonds.

Of all of the poets in the study, Jiménez is the only one who specifically alludes to the difficulty of (re)constructing a positive Black identity using the language of the master, that is, a language which at its base invokes negative images of blackness. He invokes the wisdom of the elders as well as the language of the master to retell the tale in a sort of search like Fernández Retamar's Caliban. The language of the master is not used to curse him *per se* but rather to alter the negative images that occur in the Hispanic Caribbean because of the colonialists. In the poem entitled "Escribiendo atado aún escribiendo," Jiménez tells the reader of the need to write which completely overwhelms him. The poem opens with the stanza:

No debo hacerlo (escribir)  
razonamiento lógico  
imposible de comprender (aún tengo hambre)  
fuente de inalcanzables sabidurías. (p. 78)

Here the poet's intention is to point out the force which drives him to carry out what for him is a calling in life. He equates the need to write with hunger. Yet Jiménez is faced with a dilemma. The choices that are open to him are writing in the western European mode or with his own perhaps more unconventional style. He describes the power of the European intellectuals who frame the world of literature and poetry. He writes:

Concentrarme en el maestro ideal  
comprender la metafísica (la vida)  
y como discípulo aplicado (seguir escribiendo)  
sobre la piel color leopardo  
el último latex de popular. (p. 78)

However, Jiménez indicates that he is unable to subscribe to this ideology. This trend of thought leads him to question his role as a poet and his need to change the colonialist ideologies. Because he refuses to allow himself to be dominated, his task is to rewrite the Caribbean as he sees fit. This task, he suggests is gargantuan. He writes:

No debo hacerlo (escribir)  
que tengo cojones para guardarme en mis mundos  
los mismos lugares  
las mismas viejas historias  
los tiempos de fábulas (fabulosos)  
los tiempos espléndidos. (p. 79)

He tells the reader that he could follow the trend to fame and perhaps fortune in literature by imitating the Eurocentrism which is advocated in the Caribbean to write of the self as well as the imperialist presence. He does not conform. This is a type of subversion as the poet uses the same language of the colonizer to rewrite the rules. Jiménez points out that he is writing in:

Los tiempos  
en momentos estúpidos  
los sonidos en el futuro  
en formas de pensar  
en liberaciones (en guerras)  
bajo una opresión constante de la filosofía  
las liberaciones económicas. (p. 79)

Jiménez takes it upon himself to do this rewriting. He suggests that he cannot assume the beliefs of Europeans knowing the negativity of their import to the people of the Caribbean. As much as he admonishes himself for writing, three times he repeats: "No debo hacerlo [escribir]" (pp. 78-79), he realizes that he cannot stop and that in

continuing to do so, he goes against the grain of accepted Eurocentric thought in the society. He always returns to reason and points out that he is prepared to take a stance alone “porque no escucho a nadie en mi camino (al triunfo)” (p. 79), so as to show the people the irrationality of living and trying to emulate a White colonialist past tradition which was not theirs in the first instance and which never spoke truthfully of them.

In conclusion, we have seen that Self-definition is an important part of the poetry of contemporary Afro-Hispanic poets because it is central to the question of identity. Although they each present differing shades and strengths of opinions on Black identity, they all write of personal experiences with a collective voice. They see themselves as seers and in the role of reality definers. Mixing artistic messages with social voice, they collectively seek to present a consciously Black Hispanic Caribbean poetry. In addition, the importance of these poems lies in the commentary that they make on life in general, and on the condition of Blacks in the Hispanic Caribbean because their writing, as we have seen, reflects one subject: the Black Hispanic individual's experiences over the 20th century. These poets speak directly to the people so as to convey their personal experiences. This is a lived reality. Their confusion, their social situation, their endurance and their resistance are all debated. Repeatedly, and regardless of the country of their origin, the poets emphasize that the situation of discrimination inherited by the Blacks in the Hispanic Caribbean can change, but only when the Blacks themselves take a major role in the redefining of their identity. This is undoubtedly a process being carried out by these Hispanic Caribbean poets.

**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> It should however be noted that the term “latino” is also problematic in certain quarters in the USA where some critics argue that among heritage speakers “latino” rejects the notion of Africanity or African links. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>2</sup> Jorge J.E. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 61. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>5</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown An Initiation into Linguistics*, trans. Anne M. Menke (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 265. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>6</sup> Satya P. Mohanty, “The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity” in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist theory and the predicament of postmodernism*, Paula M.L. Moya and Michael R. Hamés-García eds. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000), p. 34. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>7</sup> Cuba, Puerto Rico and The Dominican Republic do not form part of the Caribbean Community of nations (CARICOM) although the latter two do hold observer status. While Cuba and the Dominican Republic are members of the Association of Caribbean States, Puerto Rico is not. And while Cuba remains a member of the Organization of American States (OAS), its government has been excluded from participation in the OAS since 1962. Non-hispanic nations of the Caribbean do not sit on the IberoAmerican community. It must be recognised that these are largely political entities and, additionally, the political status of Puerto Rico as an “Estado Libre Asociado” in connection with the USA must be taken into consideration. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>8</sup> Morejón is largely credited as being the successor to the great Cuban Mulatto poet Nicolás Guillén (1902-1989), whose writing in the 1930s and 1940s was heavily focused on the Black question in Cuba. Thus it is widely acknowledged that her poetry follows in the same vein. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>9</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann, trans. (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. 30. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>10</sup> Mayra Santos Febres, ‘Palabra en el puño’ in *Anamú y Manigua* (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial La iguana dorada, 1991), p. 68. All subsequent quotes will be taken from this edition and page numbers indicated in the body of the article. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>11</sup> Sherezada (Chiqui) Vicioso, ‘Malecon’ in *Internamiento* (Santo Domingo: Mediabyte, 1992), p.6. All subsequent quotes will be taken from this anthology and the pages signaled in the body text. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>12</sup> Blas Jiménez, ‘Una realidad nuestra’ in *Caribe africano en despertar* (Santo Domingo: Editora Nuevas Rutas, 1984), p. 74. Subsequent quotes are taken from this anthology and are signaled in parentheses in the body text. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Language: The Unknown An Initiation into Linguistics*, trans. Anne M. Menke (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), p. 3. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>14</sup> Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges (1896-1989) argued in his short story that nothing new is ever written. [Return to reading](#)
- <sup>15</sup> Magaly Quiñones, ‘La palabra es el germen’ in *Razón de lucha, Razón de amor* (San Juan, Puerto Rico:

Editorial Mairena, 1989), p. 30. Subsequent quotes are taken from this edition and are signaled in the body text.

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**16** Bill Ashcroft, "Constitutive Graphonomy" in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 301. [Return to reading](#)

**17** Duncan Green, *Faces of Latin America* (Nottingham: Russell Press, Latin America Bureau, 1997), pp. 98-99.

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**18** This term is seen as prejudicial in areas of the United States where the dominant monolingual English speakers use it as a label. However, it should be noted that this is not the case in the Hispanic Caribbean. [Return to reading](#)

**19** Sándor Hervey, Ian Higgins and Louise M. Haywood, *Thinking Spanish Translation A Course in Translation Method: Spanish to English* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 115. [Return to reading](#)

**20** Chiqui Vicioso, "Julia de Burgos La nuestra" in *Algo que decir: Ensayos sobre literatura femenina* (1981-1991) (Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 1991), p. 57. [Return to reading](#)

**21** Chiqui Vicioso, *Un extraño ulular traía el viento* (Santo Domingo: Editora Alfa y Omega, 1985). [Return to reading](#)

**22** Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" in *"Race" Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 12. [Return to reading](#)

**23** Langston Hughes 'A New Song' in *Langston Hughes The poet and his critics*, Richard Barksdale, ed. (Chicago: American Library Association, 1977), p. 42. [Return to reading](#)

**24** *Ibid.*, p. 43. [Return to reading](#)

**25** Vera Kutzinski explores in depth this theme of masculine desire and Black/Mulatto female objectification in her book *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993). [Return to reading](#)

**26** Richard L. Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), p. 54. [Return to reading](#)