The Nicaribbeans: African-Descended Writers in Nicaragua

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Abstract: Nicaragua's eastern coast experienced many of the forces that conditioned the history of the broader continental and island Caribbean: European colonialization, incorporation into the contemporary international economic system, African presence, neocolonialism. However, its development differentiated the area from the rest of the country as well as from the Caribbean. Home to Black Creoles, who studied and prayed in English, and to indigenous peoples, and isolated – physically and culturally — from the Hispanic, Catholic Pacific area, the Atlantic Coast was long considered the "other" Nicaragua, unacknowledged in the dominant myth of Mestizo nationality. After the 1950s, imperfect efforts to incorporate the Coast eventually resulted in the 1980s in the creation of two unique autonomous Atlantic regions within the nation-state. Poetry as a cultural product and contribution to self-identity is analyzed here in its evolution from *Negrista* poetry using Black or coastal tropes, to Black pride and the proclaiming of difference, praise and defense of Autonomy, and the celebration of multiethnicity and pluriculturalism as the essence of the Caribbean Coast. Poetry by Nicaribbean, or Mestigro, writers emphasizes the region's self-definition as Nicaraguan but different, distinct but not an "Other" to be excluded, a land of promise, given the pooling of cultural resources of many ethnicities, including the now-predominant Mestizos.

Keywords: Nicaragua, poetry, Afro-Nicaraguans, Blacks, Caribbean, pluriculturalism

lavery, migration, resistance and ethnic pride have marked the history and existence of the African-descended 9% of the population of Nicaragua, whose Caribbean coastline is home to half a million "Kriols" or "Creoles."[1] Historical forces have created similarities and distinctions between the Nicaraguans' experience and those of other Caribbean peoples, especially

[1] "Creole," meaning African-descended of Caribbean origin, not to be confused with the Spanish concept of "criollo," often translated "creole," of Spanish heritage born in the Americas. Cf. Shalini Puri's comparison of Creole identity formulations by Kamau Brathwaite and by Derek Walcott (61-66).

on the islands. Many of the Caribbean Coast Africans arrived fleeing from enslavement, not being dragged into it, and relatively recently. They spoke English and an English-based Creole, established British-style schools and Anglican churches, later accepting Moravian schools and worship, became a professional class sandwiched between business owners and indigenous workers, ate rundown and rice & beans, celebrated the May Pole, and generally disparaged nationals and nationalism that would subjugate them to outsiders –meddlesome, ignorant, uneducated "Spaniards" from the other coast. Not surprisingly, the national social imaginary homogenized, marginalized and invisibilized Blacks and other "Others."

History is also slightly different in Nicaragua as compared to other Central American Hispanic nations with significant African-descended populations along their Caribbean coasts. Unlike the situation in Panama, Afro-Nicaraguans did not descend principally from colonial Africans and Antillean workers imported to build a canal (although plans existed in the 19th century to build the canal across Nicaragua). Unlike Honduras, only a small percentage of Nicaraguan blacks are Garífunas, descended from escapees and shipwrecked enslaved Africans deported from St. Vincent. Costa Rica imported West Indian workers to build its transisthmus railroad, but no such efforts obtained in Nicaragua and even today no road or railroad runs from coast to coast. And, according to some scholars, Nicaragua lacks the essentially homogeneous trait of Anglophone "West Indianness" in its cultural and literary expressions (Smart, *Central American Writers of West Indian Origin* 109).

Abrupt changes began to occur in the 1950s, with new developmentalist strategies designed under the Somoza regimes (1935-1979) that sparked waves of migration into Creole areas of dominance and spheres of economic power, which created upheavals, resistance and adjustments that continue today. The Sandinistas (1979-1990) interfered, trying to impose ill-informed plans and nationalistic concepts. Movements for regional autonomy in the 1980s pitted ancestral-land-based indigenous communities against the landless Kriols, and multiculturalism, as a reality and political goal, diluted any sort of heritage-based claim to privilege. The evolution of these changes is a fascinating story apparent in the literary production about and by Afro-Nicaraguans, which this essay will analyze. Actors and writers resistant to erroneous, projected definitions (re)claimed their presence and right to self-define in terms of identity as ethnic group, race, and regional actors in a process that reflected and contributed to the evolving national dialogue.

The Two Nicaraguas

Like the other Central American republics (except El Salvador) and Mexico, Nicaragua's coastlines are washed by the waters of two seas. Until recently this duality was reflected in the concept of "the two Nicaraguas," separated by geography, economic base and ethnicity: the populated Pacific coast inhabited by Whites and

Mestizos (mixed European and Indian) and the sparsely inhabited Atlantic or Caribbean coast that was part of the national territory but not of the imagined nation. Populated by Miskito, Mayagna[2] and Rama Indians, African-descended Garífunas and English-speaking "foreigners," this 50% of the national territory with 15% of the population was excluded from the ethnocentric formulation of Nicaraguan national identity, defined as Hispanic-indigenous, that is, mestizo. Historians Jeffrey L. Gould and Miguel Angel Herrera C. define the origins of this "myth of a Nicaragua mestiza," or of a mestizo Nicaragua, as emerging from the defeat of the Indian rebellion of 1881—defeat of the actual indigenous highland communities, but incorporation of a mystified, historical, ideal, heroic Indian. Therefore, Nicaragua had nothing in common with the Caribbean, seen as an outpost to which criminals were exiled, and no common history, because there were no large plantations dependent on the massive importation of enslaved Africans, no common culture, since social practices and religious celebrations derived from the Spanish Catholic calendar and not from indigenous "folklore" or British culture.

Certain identity explorations, however, have extended Caribbean-based identity to Central and South America, and even to the southern coast of the United States, as examined by Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan, who defined the Grand Caribbean as inclusive of the islands and continental areas of the Mexican Atlantic coast, the entire Caribbean coast of Central America, all of Belize, the isthmus of Panama, San Andrés, and the Atlantic northern coasts of Colombia and Venezuela (*Contra el silencio* 1-2).[3] Duncan defines as the most characteristic aspect of the Grand Caribbean its impressive cultural diversity, with its specific forms of participation in international capitalism from the 18th century forward, and the constant element of the African ethnic presence (2). Cultural traits distinguish this area from, for example, the non-coastal areas of the continent and the Pacific coast of each of those countries (3).

For some theorists, the islands and coastlines of the Caribbean "basin" also constitute an area united by geography and experience, in its history of "sugar and slavery," as C.L.R. James called it, its constant communication throughout five centuries of colonial and neocolonial existence. Even without large sugar plantations common in the rest of the Caribbean, Nicaragua was implicated in the "plantation machine" in the sense in which Antonio Benítez-Rojo interprets slave-based societies and all the related systems that supported the machine and were an essential part of it (*The Repeating Island*).

Euroindoethnocentrism

In Nicaragua the Spanish Crown configured two extensive, distinct and distant, sociocultural and economic regions: the Atlantic area of indigenous peoples, and the

[2] Mayagna: Formerly called Sumo and Sumus; also spelled Mayangna.

[3] Translations and summaries from sources in Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

Pacific, where colonial authority would reside. With independence in the 19th century, the Pacific region defined its nationalist project with pretensions of homogeneity in language (Spanish), religion (Catholicism) and culture (mestizo) (Torres-Rivas, "Los avatares del Estado nacional en Nicaragua" xiv). The construction of regional and national identity by 19th-century elites promoted the idea of European and indigenous mixing that produced a rather homogeneous group united by Spanish language and culture through marginalization and inferiorization of "Others": the Indians as subnational, the Creoles as nonnational.[4]

In the 20th century the imposition of the myth of mestizo Nicaragua, ethnically homogeneous since the 19th century, was accompanied by a celebration of indigenous heritage by renowned intellectuals such as Pablo Antonio Cuadra. Atlantic Coast Indians and Creoles not incorporated into the national economy were invisibilized in this process, despite the supposed "reincorporation" of the old Atlantic Mosquito Coast region in 1894. Cuadra, in defining Nicaraguan identity, omitted the cultural and genetic African influences. As sociologist and poet Carlos Castro Jo observes in his essay on race, color consciousness and Black militancy in Nicaraguan literature, in a country where the marimba (a name that already sounds African) is the national instrument, Cuadra not only omitted the Black cultural influence, he denied it, even though, paradoxically, he penned a poem called exactly "The Black Man" ("El negro"), but this must have been one who was assimilated by mestizo culture (Castro Jo 29). The Indian is present as a romanticization of the past—the dead Indian, while the African past is ignored.

Africans in Nicaragua

Africans arrived in Nicaragua with Spanish settlers, first as enslaved servants of church and Crown officials who followed the first conquerors after 1523, and by the 19th century their descendants held positions in the military and judicial services (Romero Vargas 23). Although the Black slave population was "practically insignificant" in colonial Nicaragua, their descendants were quite numerous: in 1790 the ethnic distribution of the population of the old city of Granada showed a 69% identification as Blacks (4%) or mulattoes and sambos—Black and Indian mixtures (65%). The Black African was absorbed by the Indo-Hispanic society. As a Black person, he practically disappears. But as a mulatto, he not only survives, he forms a broad sector of the

[4] "On the one hand, the ways in which Nicaraguan elites represent Creoles and Miskitu as marginal and inferior are different. The racialization of Creoles as 'African' and their simultaneous association with internationally prestigious 'Anglo' cultures make them 'non-national' and therefore more alien and threatening than the 'subnational,' 'Indian' Miskitu. On the other hand, the distinct character of each elite's political struggles and the specific sociopolitical conjunctures within which each operates have produced a series of qualitatively different racist discourses about Creoles and about Miskitu" (Gordon, *Disparate Diasporas* 121).

population. He does not stand out as a mulatto, but rather melds into mestizo society and overcomes the prior ethnic distinction (34). Deconstructing the nationalist mestizo myth, in 2008 cultural historian Jorge Eduardo Arellano documented the African presence in the Pacific region and concludes that by independence in 1821, sambos, mulattoes, quadroons and other combinations made up 84% of the population: "there were more inhabitants with Black blood in the Pacific side than in the Mosquito Kingdom [on the Atlantic Coast]. There, the escaped slaves coming from Jamaica numbered some 4,500 in 1768 (Arellano, "Afronegrismos").

The "unattended" Atlantic coast was occupied by the English from the 17th century, in part to isolate Spain from the region, and proclaimed in 1687 a sort of protectorate, the Mosquito Kingdom with a native king, that continued until 1860. The British used enslaved Africans on their sugar and indigo plantations, and the number of Blacks increased with slave shipwrecks and mutinied slaves who touched land, in addition to free Black immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean islands, who congregated around the town of Bluefields as urban, English-speaking Creoles. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the Creoles continued to identify with Anglophone people, and among the coastal population who were in close alliance with the United States, General Augusto César Sandino was "just another Spanish strongman," and the Creoles, like the Miskitu, considered themselves a separate people (Frühling et al. 32-34).

As a result of the abandonment by the national State until the 1950s, Afro-Caribbeans achieved an advanced level of educational development, with the support of protestant churches, and zealously maintained their (mainly Jamaican) social and cultural institutions and good relations with indigenous communities (Duncan 182). As historian Miguel Ángel Herrera C. observes, possessing a higher level of education than the Mestizos, the Creoles occupied a prominent place in the new social plane of Bluefields that emerged with the annexation of the Caribbean coast in 1894. In the 1950s, a number of strategies and policies to promote socioeconomic transformation were imposed in accordance with modernizing, developmentalist designs by the Somoza government (Urtecho, "Reseña" 100).[5]

At the beginning of the 1970s, the Atlantic coast population had the highest level of literacy and health in the country and a high-school and college educated elite, with cultural institutions tolerated and even promoted by the Somoza family (Duncan 182). The Atlantic area participated little in the battle against the Somoza dictatorship, which reflected and augmented the historical distrust between the two Nicaraguas (Frühling et al. 9ss y 351ss). The 1979 triumph of the Sandinista revolution brought in "outsiders," mestizo officials who attempted to impose a new national discourse on the region. Following the Cuban model, Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega declared that there

[5] Economist Carlos M. Vilas has studied these measures as an aspect of the unequal development of capitalism in Nicaragua between 1950 and 1979.

were no longer any indigenous peoples in Nicaragua, as the revolution had put an end to all ethnic and racial discrimination. However, neither real Indians nor African-descended people entered into the Sandinistas' preconceived, mestizo mentality of the Atlantic coast inhabitants as backwards, primitive, in need of being integrated into civilization (Urtecho 100). The coast was an area attractive for large scale agroexportation and state investment projects in African palm, a new deep port, lumbering projects, fishing industries –plans that could not be carried out due to the counterrevolutionary war (Frühling et al. 89). The Sandinista revolution led to the first "real encounter" between the two Nicaraguas as, tragically, the Atlantic Coast became the site of a brutal war between 1981 and 1987 (Frühling et al. 344). In the 1980s, the United States ended maintenance of infrastructure services in the area –electricity, roads, ports– and the war changed the face of the Coast by eliminating traditional agriculture and subsistence fishing (Frühling et al. 91). It forced migration from unsafe rural areas into the cities, debilitated industrial fishing and paralyzed mining. In October of 1988, Hurricane Joan destroyed 70% of the houses and processing plants in the area.

Autonomy: Cultural and Linguistic Rescue and Recovery

The Sandinistas considered the Miskitu potential collaborators with the counterrevolution and eventually negotiated a sort of autonomy for the Atlantic Coast. In 1987, the Law of Autonomy 28, created two regions of ethnic-territorial autonomy, North (RAAN) and South (RAAS), almost without precedents in the contemporary history of Latin America, a unique and novel experience (Frühling et al. 3). It was hoped by historians such as the Guatemalan Edelberto Torres-Rivas, that this would generate a model for the peaceful coexistence of multiethnic nations in Latin America (xx). Afro-Caribbeans were concentrated in the Southern Autonomous Region, with the strongest population being that of the English-speaking Creoles. However, historian Pierre Frühling and colleagues report that by 2005, the Atlantic Coast population was 20% indigenous, 4.2% African-descended, and 75% mestizo (Frühling et al. 95, 97, 281). A 1997 poll in the Atlantic Coast reflected a higher sense of identity as indigenous and Creoles than as Nicaraguans; but by 2004, the majority of Creoles and of Rama Indians considered themselves as strongly Nicaraguan as members of their ethnic groups. The same poll reported a tendency throughout the country to accept the concept of a multiethnic nation, with different customs and languages, but the Atlantic Coast was considered an area fraught with danger, crime, drugs and folklore, and 71% of Nicaraguans recognized that racism still exists against Indians and Blacks (Frühling et al. 325-328).[6]

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[6] Personal histories are collected by Deborah Robb Taylor in *The Times & Life of Bluefields—An Intergenerational Dialogue*.

Indigenous peoples and Creoles have become increasingly excluded from positions of political power, and in the struggle to defend their rights, splits have occurred between indigenous and non-indigenous organizations, and local groups have been left out of regional politics (González 111, 116). Economic underdevelopment leaves 75% of the Caribbean Coast population in poverty or absolute poverty, and basic infrastructure is lacking (FADCANIC, "Regiones Autónomas de Nicaragua").

One of the successes of Autonomy has been the creation after 1992 of university centers dedicated to strengthening intercultural and bilingual education and the recovery of the culture, identity and history of the Caribbean Coast. The Autonomous Regional University—URACCAN (Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense), has four campuses in the North and two in the South with the mission to provide higher education in accordance with the socioeconomic and politicocultural needs of the area (URACCAN, "Reseña histórica de la Universidad"). A private university funded by the Moravian Church, the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU), has taken over publication of an important journal for cultural, linguistic and literary studies, *Revista Wani* (founded in 1984), published by the Center for Information and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast (Centro de Información y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica, CIDCA), created in 1982. Besides the inclusion of poets from the Coast, *Revista Wani* has published Creole and indigenous short stories and studies on ethnic issues, Nicaraguan Creole English, the Garífuna language, Creole literature, and cultural practices.

Poetry about Blacks[7]

In several Caribbean literatures poetic expressions of African heritage or the Black presence appear prior to the Negritude movements, even in poets not ethnically identified as African-descended. In the Hispanic Caribbean, we recognize precursors who, though not biologically or culturally West Indian, were influenced in their creativity by the African presence, such as Luis Palés Matos in Puerto Rico, Emilio Ballagas in Cuba and Manuel del Cabral in the Dominican Republic. "Negrista" poetry also appeared in Nicaragua, some written by the dean of Nicaraguan letters, Pablo Antonio Cuadra, who emphasized the simplicity of African descendants in "El negro" and "Jalalela del esclavo negro" (Arellano). Manolo Cuadra, Vanguard poet, sang to the (stereotypical) physical allure of Black women in his "Único poema del mar." Castro Jo perceives, more than overt racism, an ethnic insensitivity, even in poems by Ernesto Cardenal that focus on the scenery or Indians (25). In general, the Negrista poets saw only physical stereotypes of the cultural "Other" and reflected the sounds and rhythms,

[7] The racist, segregationist opinions of the "Prince of Hispanic Letters," Nicaraguan Rubén Darío (1867-1916), influenced by racist ideologies in Europe and the U.S., are examined in detail by Erick Aguirre and Carlos Castro Jo. Darío's works circulated in the Pacific area and forms part of the intellectual inheritance of contemporary and future writers in Nicaragua.

the picturesque part of Black life in superficial, distorted images. They were unable to go beyond exterior impressions to express profundity and rage and the great theme of Black poetry: affirmation of Black identity (Richard L. Jackson, *Black Writers* 127, 174).

José Santos Cermeño, however, is considered the first Mestizo poet who shows respect for the Black "Other" as he tries to incorporate Caribbean rhythms in his poetry, following Nicolás Guillén in Cuba, using the cadences of the May Pole songs in his "Blanquinegra canción de las neninas," "Palo de Mayo en Bluefields" and "Jardín en Beholden" (Castro Jo 28). Critic Julio Valle-Castillo considers Santos Cermeño the first poet to assume modern Afro-Caribbean thematics and expression and systematically explore the other history and other side of the country: a poet unifying the Pacific and the Atlantic, who uses onomatopoeias, Creole bilingualism, rhythm, musicality, and even social denunciation, like other Negritude poets in the Americas. After Santos Cermeño, the river and sea coast of the Atlantic will be a constant in Nicaraguan poetry, according to Valle-Castillo ("Los cien años de Santos Cermeño y de Bluefields"). In their introduction to the poet in the anthology, *Bluefields en la sangre*, the editors cite him as the creator of the new Atlantic poetry, or of a certain poetry of the Atlantic—that of Bluefields, stylistically within the Caribbean Negrista movement of the 1930s (13). Santos Centeño is little known outside Nicaragua, and his poetry has not been translated into English, however these samples show elements of May Pole songs and rhythms:

> Suena toda la noche el canto, en el oscuro
> rincón de la barriada, que se desvela al son
> de los Palos de Mayo, friolentos en la aurora
> del mar que entona el coro: Sin saima simaló. (…)
> Todo el olor del mundo
> (Sin saima simaló)
> cabe en una pareja
> (Sin saima simaló) (…)
> Y siempre desasosegado
> el ritmo africano, airado,
> Sin saima simaló.
> Sin saima simaló.
> Sin saima simaló.
> ("Palos de Mayo en Bluefields," *Bluefields en la sangre* 13-17)

Santos Cermeño repeats this poetic incorporation of sounds and rhythms in his "May Pole in Bluefields," which includes a Creole song from the Atlantic:

> (…)
> (Mayaya lost the ky
> Mayayaón).

Comienza a moverte
sin temor.
(Mayaya lost the ky
Mayayaón).
Se incendian tus dos
latas de carbón
(Mayaya lost the ky
Mayayaón).
La llave estás perdiendo,
y se perdió.
(Mayaya lost the ky
Mayayaón). (…)
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 20-21)

The origins of the May Pole songs and celebrations and other Creole expressions have been a point of controversy among scholars. Some relate them to the African goddess Maya, invoked in fertility rituals, but little is known about her origins, though Thomas Wayne Edison speculates that it would be logical to consider her a version of the African Orisha known as Yemayá and venerated in other parts of the Caribbean, Central America, Cuba and Brazil (Edison, "La cultura afro-caribeña vista en la poesía…" 24). However, the May Pole is also considered a homage to tree spirits, a tradition brought by the British that became a celebration and reflects the cosmovision of the Atlantic Coast (26).

One of the most prominent historians of the Atlantic Coast, Donovan Brautigam Beer, argued in the 1970s in favor of the European origin of the May Pole, as the spokesperson for a culturalist movement attempting to establish the cultural difference of the Creole coast that should be included in the national identity on equal footing with others, thereby countering the ethnocentrism of the Pacific by generating a Creole counterhegemonic discourse (Gordon 173). The May Pole would reflect the confluence of cultures that created a new celebration in the Atlantic Coast, where British customs prevailed more than African ones (Gordon 170ff). The tradition would be considered similar to other syncretic cultural practices, such as the *candomblé* in Brazil, voodoo in Haiti, and *santería* in Cuba, "social-religious practices that emphasize the powerful presence of African heritage in resisting apparatuses of discrimination" (Falola and Roberts, *The Atlantic World* 122). Santos Cermeño, then, offers an example of using Caribbean traditions in resistance to hegemonic mestizo ethnocentrism.

Celebration of African and Caribbean Heritage

Literary scholars Julio Valle-Castillo and Carlos Castro Jo cite two Pacific Coast poets who celebrate dark skin and African ancestors, Luis Alberto Cabrales and Alejandro Bravo. Cabrales wrote his song to dark ancestors, "Canto a los sombríos ancestros" (1932), that claims pride in African heritage and in its continuation in the New World through the poetic voice:

> Tambor olvidado de la tribu
> lejano bate mi corazón nocturno.
> Mi sangre huele a selva del África. (…)
> Mi canto es vuestro canto dormido en los milenios;
> mi grito es vuestro grito amordazado en tinieblas.
> Ríspido surge de la esclavitud eterna,
> impetuoso y ágil, como vosotros, ancestros. (…)
> Desde la colina de los dioses
> mi canto, violador y violento,
> por sobre las estatuas perfectas,
> hacia vosotros va,
> silenciosos y sombríos ancestros:
> Alto, violento canto,
> antorcha retorcida por tenebrosos vientos.

In its praise of African heritage, this song of protest and reclamation coincides with works by Caribbean Negritude poets, such as Aimé Césaire (Martinique) and Léon Damas (French Guiana).[8]

The 1970s saw the awakening of ethnic consciousness in Latin America, which implied new forms of political and artistic organization (Duncan 183). Among the first voices considered authentic expressions of the African Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua were those of David McField (Rama, 1936) and Carlos Rigby (Laguna de Perlas, 1945), whose works have been included in all anthologies and studies of the region's literature. However, neither of these writers began by exploring a Black identity on the Atlantic Coast. In his first books, McField constructs an Atlantic Coast imaginary composed of British and West Indian elements, yet the majority of his poems are not concerned with questions of identity, but rather political, social and romantic topics. Early scholars of Afro-Hispanic literature, Ian Smart and Richard L. Jackson, coincided in their opinion that poetry by McField and Rigby did not reveal their African heritage.[9] Jackson reads a certain pride of African origins in McField's poem in his third book (1970) about a

[8] We can also hear resonances of Pablo Neruda's attempt to speak for indigenous ancestors in his *Canto General* (1950).

[9] Dorothy E. Mosby corrects this misperception in her excellent study, "Nuevos nómadas: Negritud y ciudadanía en la literatura centroamericana."

Black baseball star, "Cuando el equipo de León,"[10] but agrees that there is little Afro-Caribbean flavor in his poetry. Jackson also observes in Rigby and McField a lack of knowledge of Blacks outside Nicaragua, in contrast, for example, to Nicolás Guillén and Nancy Morejón in Cuba ("Escritores afro-centroamericanos contemporáneos" 30). Edmund T. Gordon sees McField and Rigby as representatives of the autochthonous "high" culture of Creoles who demonstrated the relatedness (equality) of Atlantic Coast culture in language, genres and styles to (Pacific) Nicaraguan cultural traditions (Gordon 137).

McField's poetry reflects two main concerns: (1) unity with the lower classes, the people, workers, citizens of every race and ethnicity, in the political struggle against the Somoza dictatorship; and (2) Pan-Africanism, identification of the Black diaspora with Africa, established from an early poem, "Black is Black" to his more recent "Tangañica," an expression of his experiences as Sandinista ambassador to Angola, Congo, and Mozambique. As a university professor in Managua, and in contrast to most Atlantic Coast Creoles who avoided participation in the antidictatorship struggle, McField unifies his double concern in his first "multiracial and insurgent" book, *Dios es negro*: "God is Black, like Nkrumah / like Lumumba," which established a new direction in Caribbean Coast poetry with its rhythmic cadence and social realism (Agüero "'Dios es negro'"). He made his poetry a weapon in the struggle against the dictatorship and incorporated marginalized Blacks into the fight, accompanied by a Black God (Espinoza Moncada, "David McField").

In 2008, as a Sandinista government official McField continued to support the unification of the marginalized poor in a racial melting pot that included Blacks and Indians… "We are all there" (quoted in Espinoza Moncada). This is McField's message in many poems published before and after the triumph of the Sandinista revolution. In his Note to the Reader in his early *En la calle de enmedio* (On the street in between, 1968), he states that the most important identity among people rests on their commonalities, to such an extent that it is difficult to say who is who (15). His *Poemas para el año del elefante* (Poems for the year of the elephant, 1970) and *Poemas populares* (Popular poems, 1972) announce the unification of all voices to strike the final blow against the dictatorship – "UNIOS —UNITE!" Some of his songs from *Las veinticuatro (poemas y canciones)* (Twenty-four, poems and songs, 1975) were incorporated into political protest songs by the Mejía Godoys and others and became popular songs heard by millions of Nicaraguans (Agüero). Although one critic opines in 2000 that McField's poetry from this period suffers from pseudo-revolutionary Sandinista contamination, after 25 years, they are still fresh and emblemize the incorporation of Nicaraguan Black culture into

[10] This is the only poem in McField's *Poemas para el año del elefante* (1970) that mentions race at all and actually seems to emphasize the (typically Caribbean) multiethnicity of the Nicaraguan baseball player with a West Indian/European name, Duncan Campbell, who is the pride of all Blacks but also of the entire country –he of the slanted Chinese eyes. Rigby likewise creates a Coast imaginary in non-racialized terms.

the national discourse, in repudiation of the Catholic, bourgeois, capitalist icon of nationalism (Yllescas Salinas, "Afro-caribeños en Managua").

Mc Field's "Black is Black" (1972) introduces Pan-Africanism first as a transnational identification among members of the Black diaspora:

> Ser negro da lo mismo,
> en cualquier latitud.
> Black is Black.
> Si no que lo digan,
> las magníficas actuaciones de Sid Poitier,
> los formidables músculos de Jim Brown,
> Caupolicán moderno,
> o Lotario, fiel como el golpe que asesta a los enemigos
> de Mandrake. (…)
> Negro en los muelles de New York
> en Old Bank
> en los algodonales de Atlanta
> en Vietnam, Laos y Camboya (…)
> (*Poemas populares* 37)

With the allusion to Caupolicán, hero among the indigenous Mapuche of Chile and to the modern Mandrake, McField links the struggle of Blacks to that of all oppressed peoples. In this sense, he elaborates a transcultural cosmovision that includes Africans, Indians and Europeans (Edison 22).

"Oyendo unos tambores en Tangañica," (Hearing drums in Tanganika), written while McField was Sandinista ambassador in Africa in the 1980s, reinforces linkages between the diaspora and the continent:

> (…) empiezan a tumbar los negros
> la noche se viene cerquita
> y mil años son nada.
> Rumba, rumba, tumbamba, tumba
> y la escena soy yo
> tumbando, rumbando
> rumbo al Congo
> a Benin
> a Zambia.
> (…)
> ¡Ay Río Escondido, triste!
> soñándote estoy así
> en el corazón de ZAMBIA

que es el mismo de Bluefields
es Ramakí
es Atlántico
es Pacífico.
¡Qué bruto! ¡Bruto! ¡Bruto!
es mi Nicaragua aquí
reventando sus cadenas
construyendo el porvenir
revolviendo el pasado
hasta el infinito ¡Al fin!
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 44-45)

Carlos Rigby, one of the best Caribbean Coast poets (*Bluefields en la sangre* 73), incorporates themes from the Atlantic, center and Pacific in a colloquial version of Creole language that translates and mixes Creole English with popular Spanish, generating neologisms, bilingualisms and unusual word play that sensualize his poetry (Valle-Castillo, *Neovanguardia* 347). Like the social and political denunciation in McField's poetry, Rigby's May Pole poems go beyond the celebration to present a reality of poverty and marginalization; with his ludic, bilingual verbalism, Rigby theorizes about Nicaribbean identity (347), for which he creates the metonym, "Nicaribe soy": "Yo soy de Nicaribia—/ nicaribe soy…" (I'm from Nicaribbia–/ I am Nicaribbean) (poem in *Bluefields en la sangre* 78).[11] Rigby weaves the rhythms and natural, social and cultural manifestations of the Coast into his literary creations —May Pole, "sim-sáima-sima-ló," ron-down patties, Tropical Reggae, "máyaya lasiqui máyaya-ooo," Corn Island—not as exotic or decorative elements, but as political denunciation or praise that covers the whole country:[12]

:yo como mi ron-down
    patti ron-down
    pan de coco patti
como comida –no como mierda
como que como comida no como mierda
desde el 19 de julio del '79
se me compuso mi hambre & sed de justicia
tremenda justicia y libertad—
¿quién no ha comido…? (…)
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 79)

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[11] Renowned Atlantic Coast novelist Lizandro Chávez Alfaro calls it "Nicaribea" (Prologue 13).

[12] The motifs in this Rigby poem would seem to belie Smart's and Jackson's dismissal of his works for their lack of "West Indianness."

Several critics have commented on African elements in Rigby's poems and the deconstruction of traditional Spanish verse forms in his musicality and ideophonic formulations. African scholar J. Bekunuru Kubayanda "went beyond 'literary blackness' to seek the African source of this blackness manifest in African principles such as ancestrality, drum communication, ideophonic expression, plant symbolism, and heroic codes" (Jackson, *Black Writers* 170). Kubayanda's observations are quite pertinent: "Briefly stated, ideophones are communicative monosyllabic, disyllabic, or trisyllabic words with identical or near-identical sounds that can further be reduplicated or multiplied by the speaker at his own discretion. Ideophones have both phonological and grammatical functions; and are dependent upon subject matter, audience, and the intentions of the speaking subject" ("The Linguistic Core of Afro-Hispanic Poetry").[13] Ideophones are absent in the standard speech of Western Europeans and, therefore, not noticed by them. "Some high quality African-consciousness poetry, not only in Spanish but also in French and English, is constructed on the ideophonic principle: for instance, Guillén, Antonio Portuondo, Carlos Rigby, among several other poets in Spanish; Césaire, Damas, and others in French; Brathwaite, Okai [Ghana] and others in English." Ideophonic expressions were attempted by the Negrista writers, though without what Kubayanda calls "imaginative originality." In Rigby's "Si yo fuera mayo" (If I Were May) Kubayanda sees Blackness in conflict with the Nicaraguan status quo, energized by ideophonic sounds like "sinsaima-sinma-lo", "shiqui shaque," a rhythmic harmonization of maracas,[14] and "mayaya lasiqui mayaya-ooo ...."

"If I Were May"

If every event on the calendar
went sim-saima-sima-lo with dead leaves
and
a black boy and a black girl
snaking their thighs
towards dawn
with or without moonlight
falling on the roof of the world
to the sound of the Vulture Dance
which unsheathes its
yard and a half
against the daughter
of Mrs. Average and sheeke shacke sheekee shackee
repushing repushing and repushing

[13] A description that might serve for contemporary rap music!

[14] Or, I believe, in the poetic context, the sound of stockings rubbing together.

until . . . then we would have reason enough
to examine things
from the upside-down angle
of the bat
suspended from the open sky of the universe (…)
demonstrators
words demonstrating
words decompostoning
but unheard unhearthed unbludgeoned
with the pride
of so many workers
who in spite of being such
don't all eat bread
nor sweat from their brow
nor will even have a wage increase
nor far less new promotions
to the old profession of earning money
within the marches and protests
by ma-yaya lasike ma-yaya-o . . .
with the feet of the policemen
dancing against their will: sim-saima-sima-lo
then i would dance
happy
in the centre of the May-wheel (…)
comprehending the voice of the people
— which is the voice of God —
shouting from the top of the Maypole
ma-yaya lasike ma-yaya-ooo.

The ideophonic lines remit to Caribbean culture and cultural rituals practiced by the Afro-descended community (introduced into the rest of Nicaragua by Rigby himself), not only as a manifestation of culture, but also as political and social solidarity against capitalist exploitation and a ritualistic return to the life source: "the voice of the people which is the voice of God."

Rigby, like McField, expresses political support for the Sandinista revolution and government of the 1980s and embraces the Sandinista Marxian class-based, not race-based, perspectives for political solutions: "Everything is classial / nothing racial," he suggests, as he reviews historical connotations linked to races and dismisses them:

cuesta mucho dinero ser blanco
y no poco amor para lograrlo

por eso:
    ni blanquinegro
    ni blanco y/o negro
para mí son todos los colores o nada
:yo quiero sólo los colores que hay en mi clase
    y no
la clase de colores de que pintan mi humana raza
todo clasial –nada racial (…)
cuántas vidas cuesta el dinero/y la cantidad de muertos
    /para mantenerlo con vida
: el precio de las libertades mínimas/y la más
    /cara de todas (…)
…dinero
aprendido en escuelas capitalistas
: ¡todo el dinero o nada!: en nosotros se ensañan
    /y enseñan sus dinerólogos
: todo es dinero o nada (…)
("Todo clasial / nada racial" 525-527)

These last poems, besides their political content, reflect the Rigby who is considered "a very distinguished poet who introduced a new rhythm to poetry, a new way of writing poetry, new word play of poetry as drum sound, trumpet sound, contrabasso sound, musical sound, the word as music, verse conserving music within itself. That is, going back to the roots, recovering music as an instrument of poetry. (…) Carlos Rigby, one of the strongest poetic personalities of the country, not just the Coast, but the country" (Alemán Ocampo, "The Culture of Power").

In his analysis of race and color consciousness in Nicaraguan literature, Carlos Castro Jo characterizes Rigby as "our great unpublished poet",[15] who had always fought for the inclusion of Caribbean culture as part of national culture. And this Caribbean culture is Black but also indigenous. Rigby explains the need to transcend racial divisions and unite in a popular class struggle that simultaneously combats racism (30-31). Nicaragua as a space of ethnic unity was projected by Creole painter and poet, June Beer (Bluefields, 1935-1986), who served as a Bluefields library director under the Sandinistas in the 1980s and, in terms of nationality, as a Nicaraguan, embraces all races in a love poem to Blacks, Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas and Mestizos as worthy children of Sandino:

"Poema de amor"
(…)

[15] "Unpublished" because Rigby refuses to put his poems in book form.

Mi patria se llama Nicaragua
a mi pueblo entero los amo
Negros, Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas y Mestizos (…)
Dignos, libres y soberanos
hijos de Sandino.

McField, Rigby and Beer demand the inclusion of the Atlantic Coast in the national imaginary and utilize cultural elements derived from Caribbean races and cultures to found the construction of a more just and equal, multiethnic Nicaragua. By 2008 Sergio Ramírez had reconceptualized the national imaginary to include the Atlantic Coast as the forgotten drum-root of Nicaragua in *Tambor olvidado*.

New Directions

With the creation of the North and South Autonomous Regions and the definition of Nicaragua as a multiethnic and plurilanguage country, new poetry from the Caribbean Coast continues the work of previous writers but in response to new realities. Several poetry anthologies have been key in publicizing old and new works: *Antología poética de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua*, edited by Víctor Obando Sancho, Ronald Brooks Saldaña and Eddy Alemán Porras, published by the URACCAN university press in 1998, with 33 poets and 70 poems; and *Bluefields en la sangre: poesía del Caribe Sur Nicaragüense*, compiled by Eddy Alemán Porras and Franklin Brooks Vargas in 2011, with 38 authors and 169 poems. Both are inclusive in terms of gender, ethnic diversity, geography and themes. An anthology of 12 African-descended poets with 58 poems was published by the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) in 2011, *Antología poética "Afrocarinica." Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur*, as part of an initiative to visibilize and give new dimension to the potentialities of African- descended people in the development of the Caribbean Coast.

Editor Víctor Obando Sancho links the new directions in poetry to changes in cultural, political, economic and gender aspirations brought about by autonomy, as writers seek to avoid losing their identity by exploring their cultural roots (introduction to *Antología poética* 5). Other anthologies, such as *Neovanguardia* compiled by Julio Valle-Castillo, and Héctor Avellán's *Nicaragua: el más alto canto*, reinforce the conceptualization of the Atlantic Coast writers as non-other, as national poets, identified by their geographical and ethnic origins but not placed into separate categories. Contemporary poetry expresses many traditional topics and themes, such as philosophical subjects of time and forgetting, life and death, homage to Atlantic Coast landscapes, the luxuriant flora, advice to children, gender relations, love, dreams. In the most recent poetry, the following characteristics of Caribbean Coast poetry seem most prominent.

1. Praise and Defense of Autonomy

Caribbean Coast sociologist, anthropologist and poet Yolanda Rossman Tejada, in her study of expressions of multicultural autonomy in publications of poetry, denounces the flagrant absence of indigenous and African-descended voices, especially those of women who are writing in their mother tongues. A common axis among the diversity of themes is the transforming process of Autonomy, which in most cases, is seen as positive and promising ("La Autonomía multicultural desde la poesía de escritoras costeñas").

Erna Narciso (Bluefields, 1942), Creole, writes mainly in English but also in Spanish and continues the ethnically unifying perspectives of McField, Rigby and Beer in her poem, "Autonomía":

(…)
Permitan que nuestra Autonomía
sea un símbolo reconocido por el mundo entero,
pero no como un emblema de corrupción y vergüenza. (…)
Recordemos que Autonomía es darnos las manos
los mestizos, indígenas, ramas, garífunas y,
por supuesto, los creoles.
La Autonomía es abrazar al débil y al fuerte
y a los que por siempre han sido oprimidos. (…)
y unámonos voluntariamente
para defender nuestra tierra y nuestra Autonomía.
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 63)

Other poets coincide in reading autonomy as synonymous with ethnic unity as project and goal on the Caribbean Coast. Creole poet Lovette Martínez (Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas, 1952) writes in English and Spanish and proposes this definition of the new reality:

"It Is Autonomy"
Autonomy is Ramas power
autonomy is Sumus power
autonomy is Garifunas power
and why not? Miskitos, mestizos and creoles power.

Autonomy is unity in diversity
autonomy is equality
autonomy is strength.

Autonomy is speak and study in our mother tong
sing and dance our traditional songs (…)

> participate in making decisions
> keeping our environment and our natural resources clean. (…)
> (*Bluefields en la sangre* 108)

This optimistic image suggests a reformulation of the Caribbean Coast as an earthly paradise. Some poets identify the integrity of the autonomous regions with the preservation of natural resources and resistance to economic exploitation, such as Moravian Creole pastor Allan Budier (Bluefields, 1962) in his brief poem, "Encomio" (Eulogy): when the rivers are dry, when the trees have been felled, gold gone, and all the shrimp and lobsters exported, autonomy is dead: "¡PAZ A TUS RESTOS, AUTONOMÍA!" But, according the Creole fisherman, farmer and poet Marvin Ramírez Rocha (Bluefields, 1949), ecological disaster brought on by "modernization" will be corrected in the future to recover the living paradise that was the Coast:

> Hoy solo está en mi mente
> lo que queda de aquel Paraíso Viviente. (…)
> ¿Quién les hizo daño?
> machetes, hachas y motosierras. (…)
> Los bosques volverán a soñar
> y los ríos volverán a cantar,
> porque siempre habrá un sembrador,
> un poeta y un soñador.
> ("Campos azules," *Bluefields en la sangre* 97-98)

This idealistic, but not folkloric, interpretation marks an important tendency in Caribbean Coast poetry that retains the promise of utopia and union that some foresaw in Autonomy. My 2007 study of poetry by Nicaraguan women after the 1990 elections that ended Sandinista governance (until 2007) uncovered a remarkable difference between writers on the two coasts. Some of the younger Pacific poets propose escaping from the "ridiculous world" through "drugs, drink and sex," like Natalia Hernández Somarriba (Managua, 1982) in "domingo naranja" (sunday orange):

> en permanente espera
> con el porro en una mano y el trago en la otra. (…)
> consigo moldear cualquier situación en dependencia del grupo
> presente
> con más o menos droga, (…)
> coca, ron, monte, sexo, risa, idioma, amor, todo.

In contrast to the disheartened Pacific Coast poets who abandoned revolutionary political and social ideals for escapist relief, the Atlantic region, with new autonomy, a

new university, a new press and new poets, expresses an optimism grounded in a distinct history (Roof, "Más allá de la revolución").

Annette Fenton (Bluefields, 1973) writes in standard and Creole English and proposes a certain traditional morality based on a strong work ethic and individual self-improvement, which is likely a reflection of Jamaican-West Indian cultural values: "That di failure to accomplish goals is only one of plenty kina ways Fa gain strenght and / character, until e wake up the wise master ah e soul E goping get some weh" ("Di first thing"). In comparison to the disillusionment and sense of failure among contemporaries residing on the Pacific Coast, Garífuna wood sculptor, teacher and poet Frank López Monroe (Orinoco, 1946) adds the question of language and unity linked to autonomy:

"Some Dark Day be Bright"

Culture is language
Language is culture.
Why brothers! We can't start?
Language es the key.
Autonomy es free,
join hands together,
work for each other. (…)
Someday Autonomy will shine
soon culture be mine
Autonomy es free,
language is the key,
someday dark be bright.
(*Antología poética de la Costa Caribe* 45)

2. Black Pride

Creoles on the Atlantic Coast until the 1960s denied or discounted their African roots, preferring the construction of a transnational historical identity that was predominantly British (Gordon, 18, 97, 126). McField and Rigby, enunciators and actors in the awakening of ethnic consciousness in Latin America in the 1970s, brought about a revision of this ethnic imaginary, with Black themes and African rhythms as structural elements of poetry. While the rest of Nicaragua identified its Spanish and indigenous roots, omitting African cultural and genetic contributions to the national heritage, the

Atlantic Coast proclaimed its Blackness.[16] Brenda Green (Bluefields, 1954) continues the tendency that proclaims African heritage and racial pride in "Identity":

> It's a fact that I'll always face,
> 'cause I surely love my race,
> very proud that I am black
> and no one can turn that back.
> (*Bluefields en la sangre* 132)

Isabel Estrada Colindres (La Fe, Laguna de Perlas, 1953), bilingual nurse who writes in Spanish and English, utilizes colloquial Creole English to define her Garífuna enthnicity in traditional, phenotypical terms, as a permanent component in the continuation of culture, in her "Yesterday":

> Yesterday, today, tomorrow, forever
> our voice will shout all over. (…)
> Garifuna tick lips
> garifona big flat nose
> garifona big Rollin buttock.
>
> When I horde the sound of my father drum
> drum, drum, drum
> the sound of my grandfather drum
> drum, drum, drum
> my feet keep moving on mother ground
> for the healing of our ancestors wallagallo. (…)
> (*Bluefields en la sangre* 118-119)

Isabel Estrada Colindres is one of the few Atlantic Coast poets who denounce not just racial discrimination against the Garífuna in the "traditionally Creole" city of Bluefields (according to her biography for the next poem), but also racial profiling in a way that could resonate with contemporary readers in the U.S. in "One Day on My Way," where her leisurely trip treats her to sights of a little bird, a tiny little rabbit, healthy and happy children, some old friends, then suddenly:[17]

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[16] Although, as in other regions, not without internal divisions and distinctions between old residents and newcomers, similar to the debate in Panama between colonial Africans and West Indian 19th- and 20th-century immigrants, or in Honduras, between the Spanish-speaking colonial and the English-speaking Garífunas).

[17] *Times & Life of Bluefields* registers complaints by Mestizos and Chinese of discrimination against them in Bluefields (198).

there were two young men joined together
a hand cuff, was the third, police and guns around
My heart skip a beat, my eyes got loaded with tears
I said Lord help me, for my three loving children, paradise for them I wish

When I looked at that tall handsome young black man,
with that hand cuff, guns and police around
it made my mind flash all over
Black look up, those funny and nasty words
Black stay in the back, don't belong to us.
(*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 83)

Owyn Fernando Hodgson Blandford (Rama, 1954), Creole lawyer, farm manager and rector of the Bluefields Indian & Caribbean University (BICU), writes in English and Spanish and addresses a non-Black as interlocutor to rail against racial discrimination and proclaim that he is beautiful, free, good, great, and Black, and if he were reborn, he would wish to come back Black in "Proclamas del negro":

¡Yo soy Bello!
Aunque ayer,
para ti
sólo negro
y feo fui
yo nací
guapo y bello.
¡Yo soy libre! (…)
¡Yo soy Bueno! (…)
¡Yo soy Grande (…)
¡Yo soy negro! (…)
…Si yo Volviera
a nacer…
¡Negro quisiera ser!
(*Antología poética* 79-80)

Regardless of their ethnic origins, current Atlantic Coast dwellers seem to have embraced Creole customs as their own and tend to reject the Spanish root of identity that represents exploitation. Creole chemical engineer Noel Campbell Hooker cites the advice of an elder that everyone learn Spanish: "you cannot fight your enemy if you don't know their language" ("Learn Spanish"). Poems by Orlando Cuadra Tablada (Bluefields, 1960), who considers himself biologically mestizo, damns the arrival of

Columbus on American shores ("¡Pluguiera Dios las aguas antes intactas / no reflejaran nunca las blancas velas"), that launched the beginning of a brutal history, full of bloody slavery, of treachery ("el inicio de una historia funesta / llena de esclavitud sanguinaria, de engaños." On October 12th, then, there is NOTHING to celebrate ("no hay NADA que celebrar!" ("¿Celebrando Qué?", *Bluefields en la sangre* 169-170). Africa, however, has provided one of his "metaphysical roots":

(…)
Tum, tum, tum burum
se oye el retumbar de los tambores
catalizando la ebullición en mis venas.
Con cada golpe de tambor
la resonancia en la oscuridad
hace vibrar mis fibras ancestrales
y entre ellas emerge la más fuerte,
ruda, ensortijada y sensiblemente negra. (…)

Tum, tum, tum burum
se oye el retumbar de los tambores,
y cual hechizo transmitido en el tiempo
(desde hace más de 300 años)
y trasladado en el espacio material
(desde África a Nicaragua).
me lanzo al círculo de cimbreantes bailarines (…)
Agradeciendo a la madre naturaleza
por la abundancia de la cosecha,
por la continuidad de la procreación
…por la perpetuidad de nuestras raíces.
("Raíces metafísicas," *Bluefields en la sangre* 171)

Examples abound of a new, or renewed, sense of pride in Blackness and African roots. Franklin Brooks Vargas (Bluefields, 1960) calls himself a "mestigro" descended from a Black grandfather and Mestizo grandmother. His poem to Black men and women of the Coast, "Canción al negro/negra costeño/a," perhaps idealizes his surroundings in the paradise of the prodigious bay, the beautiful scene of Black fishermen cast against a unique background that no painter could capture, as he expresses his happiness in this very own Black smile ("propia sonrisa de negro") (*Bluefields en la sangre* 178-180). Lovette Martínez signifies the transition from racial inferiorization to superiority in her "Black on Top":

There is a saying:

When you black
You stay in the black
When you brown
You hang around

When you are white
You are always right.
But now I say and it must be so:
If you are black you on top
If you are black you must act
If you are black you must attract.

So by we are black
We are on top
We must ask
We must attract
To counteract
The racial discrimination act.
(*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 89)

Brenda Green perceives optimism as part of the geographical and racial essence of the Atlantic Coast in her "Soy costeña" (I am a woman from the coast):

Esta alegría caribeña
que siente tu negrísima costeña,
compartirla contigo quiero,
quiero borrar de tu rostro esa tristura
y contagiarte con mi energía vivaracha …
Ven y endulcemos juntos
cada momento disponible de los dos.
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 129)

In speaking to the "other" who evidences sadness, the poetic voice of a "very Black coastal woman" presents herself as the embodiment of Caribbean joy and lively energy to sweeten their time together.

Andira Watson (Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas, 1977) replies to McField's "Dios es negro" (God is Black) with the poem, "Diosa negra" (Black goddess), but also replicates the stereotypical association of Black women with sexuality:

Dios en nuestras bocas es una blasfemia
pero su nombre emerge gramíneo (…)

"¡Misericordia! –dices–, ¡misericordia!".
Dios nos ha fundido por esta noche desde los genes.
¡Dios debe ser una Diosa de mi color!

Watson illustrates the potential of dialogue among Afro-Hispanic poets in her response to Costa Rican Shirley Campbell Barr's famous poem, "Rotundamente negra" (A resoundingly Black woman). She describes her identification with Shirley, and, like her, is a tree snatched from Africa and transplanted:

Soy como vos Shirley
Rotundamente negra
Vivo en Managua y
desayuno
rice and beans
green banana
bread fruit
ginger tea
black tea

La gente me ve blanca
pero yo me siento negra
Negra como mi padre
como mis primas

Negra como mi hermano
y mi abuelo
Soy como vos Shirley
un árbol robado de África (…)
("Rotundamente negra," *El más alto canto* 224)

Andira Watson says her light skin makes people see in her a White woman, but she feels Black, like her father, cousins, brother, grandfather.[18] She further develops her African identity in "Reclamo de Negritud" (Reclaiming negritude) –"África /-Aquí estuvo mi estirpe- / En esta tierra ajena de sí/ que alguna vez fue nuestra casa"– but in her journal of a trip to the continent as representative of a south-south cooperation program sponsored by the international development organization Hivos, "Zimbabwe en la memoria" (Zimbabwe remembered), she describes an incident when an African man scoffed at her claim to African heritage in "Rotundamente negra" because of her light

[18] As far as I know, Andira Watson has yet to explore any sense of White privilege she might have experienced because of this.

skin. It was of no use to explain that she comes from the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, that her father's family is African-descended, supposedly coming from Jamaica, and Nigeria before that. Now, she feels, is the time to throw off the shame of African blood imposed historically through silencing and invisibilization, "even though Africa may not remember us": "Por mucho tiempo sentimos vergüenza de tener el estigma de la africanidad en nuestras venas. Se trata de una experiencia histórica de silenciamiento, de invisibilidad que hoy ponemos de manifiesto como afro descendientes. Aunque África, tal vez ya no nos recuerde" ("Zimbabwe en la memoria").

One of the most direct expressions of Africa as paradise lost for the diaspora is the poem "Some time, Somewhere" by Sidney Francis Martin (Bluefields), president of ONECA/CABO, Central American Black Organization, who writes in standard English, Creole English and Spanish:

> Some time, somewhere
> In Africa, we born
> Some time, somewhere
> In Africa, together we live in Peace
> Some time, some where
> Out Africa in pieces we die.
> (*Antología poética* 101)

Acknowledgement of African ancestry can be seen as a phenomenon firmly anchored in the diaspora experience, and in Nicaragua, Black pride is relatively recent in its appearance in poetry but constitutes a constant presence in expressions by Garífuna and Creole writers.

3. Thanks Be to God, Whose Advice I Channel

For historical reasons, contemporary Atlantic Coast writers were raised primarily in the Anglican and Moravian churches and schools and seem much more prone to include religious images in their poetry. Pacific Coast writers who include faith-based images (such as mystic poets Michèle Najlis and Conny Palacios and, of course, Father Ernesto Cardenal) tend to include Roman Catholic markers. The appeal to religion among the Caribbeans is often coupled with moralistic, pious statements that paternalize others to give advice and admonishments, offer corrective suggestions and lessons, and attempt to enforce certain community standards derived from Godly practices, in an essentially ahistorical analysis of current realities.

Erna Narciso sees herself and others as embodiments of God in "A Portrait of God's Extended Love," which provides "a hand to help the feeble / and swift feet to run, to rescue the poor, the halt, the needy"; "keen ears to hear cries of sympathy, and sorrows for / others even your worst enemies, so much more your brothers"; "a

sympathetic heart for the desolate and lonely / as you share their deepest pain, of grief and agony." (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 39). Her poems are sprinkled with good advice: In times of personal loss, "Weep not… Trust Him… Ask for strength" (40); "Don't be among those who need therapy to smile / be like a happy, energetic child. / Smile! you aren't too poor you cannot give it, / neither too rich that you do not need it" (43). In a process of poetic self-examination, Annette Fenton advises us: "Look at the pain / Stare it in the face, and make it bow its head; / Look at the anxiety, and make it flee from our stare; / Look at sorrow and really laugh at its face. (…) Let's delve, think, thrive.- / Don't let others do your thinking!" ("Poem XIII").

Joan Yamilith Sinclair (Corn Island, 1975), educator, administrator and Bluefields Creole Community representative, considers herself "Black by the grace of God" (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 94). Like many Atlantic Coast poets, she proclaims Christianity, invokes her God in poetry and is a member of a protestant congregation, the Church of the Tabernacle. She presents a marvelous example of the postulation of religious corrections to counter negative social practices. Her analysis of today's lost youth in "La juventud de hoy" (The youth of today) cites their lack of religion and no one's ability to convince them that damnation awaits them for using drugs, drinking, "adulterating," aborting, joining gangs; they lack a fear of their creator, love for their mothers and respect for their elders. She asks, "Do they have no other options?" But they can choose to change, and she urges them to sin no more! And they will find true Love in their creator ("¡Juventud de hoy, basta, / ya no peques más! / Os espera su creador / quien les brindará / su verdadero Amor." *Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 102).[19]

Much more often than in poems from other areas of Nicaragua, religion appears linked to questions of personal decisions to impose self-control. This suggests that interpretations of empirical reality on the Atlantic Coast are more in line with moralistic, ahistorical interpretations.

4. Multiethnicity is Our Project and Essence

Without much exaggeration, we could consider the May Pole as a symbol of Atlantic Coast identity, revered as it is in many poems, and described as the May festival that gathers different economic classes, social sectors and erotic passions together for a brief cosmic moment (Edison 29, linking this interpretation to similar ideas about Mexican fiestas by Octavio Paz). Union in diversity was a component in identity constructions for political or strategic purpose as postulated by McField and Rigby. Later, in the new Atlantic Coast imaginary, Autonomy is the joining of hands by Miskitu, indigenous, Ramas, Garífunas and, of course, Creoles, in Erna Narciso's poem ("darnos las manos / los mestizos, indígenas, ramas, garífunas y, / por supuesto, los creoles," from "Autonomía"); Autonomy is the power of unity among Ramas, Sumos,

[19] *Sic* in the varied use of "you plural" pronouns and possessive adjectives.

Garífunas, Miskitus, Mestizos and Creoles says Lovette Martínez ("It Is Autonomy"). In Brenda Green's version in "Maying Tide in Bluefields," May festivities create a community with input from different cultures:[20]

> (…)
> This slender and magnificent May pole tree,
> symbol of fertility, sensuality and delight (…)
> The colors and gloom and music pounds
> with sounds of banjo, maracas, mule jawbone,
> deer skin drums and acoustic guitars,
> tuning out all May pole songs
> such as Mayaya Lost the key, oh Rido Rido,
> Launch Turn Over, Tululu and many others.
> Dancers go round and around the tree,
> wiggling hips, bellies and butts off balance (…)
> During these jolly festivities of May,
> where effusing joys to all abound,
> all ethnic groups perform,
> breaking bitter furies of complexity
> and promoting unity in diversity. (…)
> (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 74-75)

Multiethnicity is an important part of many Atlantic Coast people's individual genetic and cultural identity, as in Franklin Brooks Vargas's neologism for self-definition, "mestigro," and likewise for the region. Andira Watson theorizes the existence of an "identitary limbo" when Coast people want to define their ethnicity and claims, as Guatemala poet Maya Cu puts it, that they are a product of history, with equal parts of an indigenous ancestor, an African, a Spanish settler:

[20] Bluefields mayor Ray Hodgson described it as follows: "We have a Caribe movement. It's Nicaribe, where there's drum music, dance, it's a festival in Bluefields among the blacks. And we invite the Miskito Indians from the north, and the Sumo and Rama Indians from the south, and the Garifonas from Orinoco, and so these people come together in a mass movement the whole month of May in Bluefields. It's called Mayo-ya! which means Maypole, or Mayday, but in May, Mayday lasts 30 days" (Hodgson interview in Congress 73). He must contrast this to his disdain for May Pole festivities: "May Pole has never, ever been part of our culture more than some old ladies in all my youth going to dance May Pole" (*Times & Life of Bluefields* 322). As May Pole celebrations have taken on more characteristics of a touristic carnival, *Times & Life of Bluefields* calls it "May or Money Pole?" (319) and criticizes its contemporary form as an attraction promoted by the Sandinistas. By 1993, it was termed "a dirty display of dirty dancing" by "couples performing erotic contortions in all conceivable positions," by John Otis in *The Washington Times* (cited in *Times & Life of Bluefields* 321).

> el limbo identitario en que nos encontramos a la hora de asumir una identidad étnica que no se limita a un solo grupo étnico, nos toca, entonces, volver la vista hacia nuestras raíces valorando el aporte que cada cultura nos ha dado, sabiendo que somos, como ha dicho la poeta guatemalteca Maya Cú, *producto de la historia*, entendiendo que nos habitan por igual, un indígena, un africano y un colono. ("Las reacciones" 57)

The warm embrace among brothers and sisters of six ethnicities sculpting their history is the essence of the Atlantic Coast says mestizo poet Julio Monterrey (Bluefields, 1962) in "Un burilado crisol" (An engraved melting pot). In this land of burning suns, the ancestors never lowered their brows before (Spanish) helmets, proud Africans came, and people of all sorts of skins joined their nostalgias and embraced:

> Pueblos de negros altivos del Africa ardiente
> que preñaron esta tierra con impetuoso
> cimiento de virtudes y pasiones. (…)
> maravillosa tierra de la que diría
> el artero poeta Alì Alà:
> "Es un burilado crisol
> donde las pieles todas
> comulgan sus nostalgias…" (…)
> Pueblo de savia sanguínea (…)
> del cálido abrazo entre hermanos
> de seis etnias esculpiendo su historia.
> (*Bluefields en la sangre* 198-199)

Atlantic Coast poets, much more than those of the Pacific, construct an imaginary in which ethnic considerations are paramount. Cultural sociologist and poet, Yolanda Rossman Tejada (Mina Rosita, 1961), typifies this ethnic consciousness in claiming her heritage as Creole, indigenous, European, pagan, Christian and Jewish. She proposes this multiethnicity as essentially Caribbean in her poem "Raíces" (Roots):

> Mi abuela paterna
> Ardiente mujer KRIOL,
> Con un toque de NAGA
> Mágica, poderosa,
> Hizo sucumbir
> Con su inquietante aroma a flores,
> Al ojiazul emigrante alemán,
> Venido del viejo continente.

Soy crisol,
Soy amalgama,
Sangre, lengua, piel.

SOY MUJER DEL CARIBE!
("Raíces")

Karl Tinkam (Laguna de Perlas, 1967), BICU mathematics professor and RAAS technical advisor, is a bilingual writer in Spanish and English who claims Creole, Miskito and Garífuna ancestry. He assumes as part of his cultural heritage the transnational discourse of the African diaspora in his "I Have A Dream": "Soon we'll return to Africa / Land of our fathers, ours too / Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa / So good to meet our big brada's." His Garveyesque return to Africa reflects a "paradise lost" image of an idealized continent, with children playing, lions roaring and palm trees waving their leaves as a sign of peace. But, like other poets, he celebrates his African heritage as one of several roots in his heritage, because he is who he is, as he proclaims in "Soy quien soy":

Soy Garífuna
porque mi abuela Garífuna era (…)
Soy miskito
porque mi abuelo miskito era (…)
Soy creole
porque dice mi querida abuela
que su padre creole era (…)
Soy negro porque negro fui desde el día en que yo nací. (…)
soy un negro bello
simplemente así lo creo
soy un negro loco
lo que tú dices a mí me vale poco.

Soy Garífo-Miki-Creole el negro loco
porque siempre pinto negro
todo lo que toco.
(*Bluefields en la sangre* 218-219)

Tinkam epitomizes Marvin Lewis's observations regarding South American Black writers: "Ethnicity, identity, self-affirmation in an internally colonized situation, and the myth of Africa are vital issues" (5). This "myth of Africa" is a projection of community values; to progress in the future; we must look back toward a mythic past and search for authenticity in the present (7).

Once the coexistence of multiple ethnicities is accepted, the linkage of Atlantic Coast and African heritage becomes less pronounced, as identity refers to cultural markers within a reserve of positive values, a different way of being. As Alta Hooker, URACCAN rector explains, first you are from the Coast and then, Nicaraguan. It means living and learning the ways of this place, building up to being a part of this identity ("Ser costeña es antes de ser nicaragüense. Significa vivir y aprender a comportarse en este entorno, construir y lograr ser parte de esta identidad"; cited in Silvio Sirias Duarte, "Nicaragua Multiétnica: ¿Una farsa para los Costeños?"). To eternal question, "Who Am I?," mestizo Atlantic Coast poets emphasize that cultural belonging is not about race. Mestizo poet Inés Hernández García (Bluefields, 1977), explains in "Yo soy" (I am) that identification with the Coast is not just a question of color, but of life experiences, her eternal memory of the place where her umbilical cord is buried, site of her first kiss and first love (*Bluefields en la sangre* 245-246).

It is not surprising, then, that Coast identity has evolved as demographics have changed and seems to be more distant from questions of ethnicity and from the history that produced the congregation on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua of people from different parts of the world. Identity can be rooted in genetic heritage, birthplace and childhood experiential geography and also linked to customs, values, traditions that are historical products of the area. Typical Caribbean Coast cultural traditions, such as the May Pole, for example, are no longer exclusively Atlantic practices, but are considered part of Nicaraguan national culture, with performances in Pacific Coast cities, introduced by the very poets, McField and Rigby, who attempted to establish a dialogue between the two Nicaraguas and incorporate the "other" within a new concept of a pluri- or multicultural nation. They rejected racialized exclusivity in favor of broader considerations, such as Rigby's insistence on class interests, to arrive at the possibility of surpassing exclusionary cultural markers such as phenotype, race and ethnicity. Poet William Grigsby cites the opinion of Cuba-trained, Black feminist, lawyer and sociologist Matilde Lindo Crisanto (Bilwi/Puerto Cabezas) that dominant ethnic groups tend to culturally absorb others in a region to create new synthesis. She points to people in Nicaragua who look Black or White or Chinese but call themselves Miskito. They say they are Miskito, assume that identity, and they are right ("Costa Caribe: pluriétnica, multilingüe, ¿autonómica?"). A polymorphic sense of identity, then, prevails on the Caribbean Coast.[21]

[21] I believe it is more polymorphic and shape-shifting than Bluefields mayor Ray Hodgson's perception of an amorphous cultural identity. Hodgson "said the elements that define a person's ethnicity keep changing and that is one of the reasons why 'you have people with Indian features claiming they are Creole, then you have Creoles with black features claiming they are Indian. Because now identity is like a cultural thing.' Race was told by your genes, then language defined your identity, and nowadays it is a question of feelings, he added, 'You are who you feel you are.' Amorphous cultural identification is perhaps to be expected in a multiethnic society like ours" (*Times & Life in Bluefields* 295-296).

This combining of cultures, mixing while retaining diversity, reflects the project of regional autonomy as synonymous with unity in diversity, unity of ethnicities. Noel Campbell Hooker, the chemical engineer who cited a suggestion to learn Spanish, educated in universities in Nicaragua, Poland and the United States, production manager at a pharmaceutical laboratory in Managua, explains that surroundings trump ethnicities. A Mestizo from Masaya, he says, arrives in Bluefields and doesn't eat the local food, doesn't like the music. But his children and grandchildren identify with the Coast. They want to be heard and to participate, that's why they work to preserve Autonomy. He explains this support for Autonomy in historical terms, as a characteristic of the Atlantic Coast as the result of a mixture of peoples and histories:

> La forma en que los habitantes de Bluefields ven el mundo (…) es resultado de la dinámica participación de piratas holandeses y franceses, de los domados moravo germanos del centro de la antigua Checoslovaquia -y digo domados porque su férrea disciplina germana tuvo que acomodarse al trópico-, de los implantados descendientes de africanos no esclavizados, y de los taciturnos indios ramas. Por esa mezcla, que está ahí, es por lo que creo que todos los que vivan en el Caribe se seguirán sintiendo diferentes a los del resto del país y por lo tanto, seguirán sintiendo como una necesidad propia la Autonomía. Y es por esa mezcla que yo digo que, aunque étnicamente seamos minoría, nuestra forma de ver el mundo seguirá siendo moldeada por las formas originales que nos trajeron estos pueblos. (cited in Grigsby)

The migration of large numbers of Mestizos from north and central Nicaragua to the autonomous areas has led some researchers to predict that separate ethnicities will cease to exist in the Atlantic Coast, as blended physical and genetic factors yield to regional identities (see Elmer Alfaro McField for details). While whitening of the Black population has never been official policy, as it was in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, economic migration after the 1950s of Mestizos into coastal areas has had this effect. Perhaps "hyper-Creole" international administrator Norman Russle Howard Taylor Chin (Laguna de Perlas, 1967) is a model for future Caribbean Coast identity; he claims as his ancestry Miskito, Rama, African, Mestizo, Náhuatl, Chinese and Anglo Saxon (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica"* 121).

5. Language as Metonym

Creole poets write in Spanish, standard English and Creole English. J. Bekunuru Kubayanda, in his African reading of Afro-Hispanic poetry, defines as key to some major texts an acute sensitivity to language, to the structures and functions of spoken and written language (21). In addition to the creative reappropriation of African

phonological and ideophonic systems, lexical loan, riddling and proverbial structures and magical nomination, Afro-Hispanic poets are involved in the pidginization and creolization in writing official European languages, as advocated by Guillén and later supported by Fanon, Césaire, Senghor, Brathwaite, Walcott, Fernández Retamar, and others. Kubayanda sees writing in Black social-class dialects as creating a linguistics of dialogue and liberation against the "colonial written linguistics of monologue and violence" (21-22).[22]

Among Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast Creoles, the language issue presents an additional dimension. The use of standard or Creole English implies self-definition as an independent group not willing to be homogenized into the predominance of Spanish, in a way similar to the resistance of Francophone writers of Creole to metropolitan French, but here the resisted framework is, if postcolonial, still national. The historical context supported the use of English in the economic enclave run by U.S. capitalists after the 1920s in the northern Atlantic area, with Bilwi (renamed Puerto Cabezas) as its capital for the exportation of wood and bananas, which provided jobs and identification with the U.S., reinforced by the surge in gold, silver and copper mining between 1940 and the 1970s, which ended in 1978, just before the triumph of the Sandinista revolution (Frühling et al. 40).

The intricate question of language use for political liberation or cultural identity, and also for practical communication, became an acute issue during the Sandinista literacy campaign in the Atlantic region. Creole English can be a distinctive marker of Caribbean and historical identity: "Creole does not mean Black just as the Creole language is not just a bastardized British English (…). If you trace it back, this language of ours comes from England spiced up with some kind of African language of slaves in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands as well as with the essence of the Dutch and German outlook because those people were also living for a time on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua" (Marvin Taylor). But practical communication is problematic: "Our Creole talk sets up apart as Caribbean people and it forms part of our culture just as much as our food and music. But for me, when it comes to language, I am convinced that we have to teach or children English" (Deborah Grandison); "Creole is a language, for me personally here in Bluefields. But when you go out from Bluefields no one understands what you are saying. Either you talk English or Spanish or some other language. The people who can more or less understand my Creole are the Jamaicans but if I talk fast Creole they probably won't understand me either" (Jessica Pinocks). So, in terms of communication, Creole English is perceivec by many speakers as of limited value for communication outside the group.

In his study of Nicaraguan Creole poetry in English, linguist Josef Hurtubise calls attention to the economic influence of the United States in the Atlantic region as

[22] Direct parallels could be drawn to Paulo Freire's analyses of language use and pedagogy for oppression or liberation.

sparking continuous pressure to impose standard English over Creole versions (44). He also finds linkages between the Creole author's topic or intention and the choice of language, and, if the choice is Creole, between a basilect form at the non-standard English extreme, mesolecto in the middle, or acrolect as closest to standard. He cites June Beer as a "populist" Creole poet (in contrast to Carlos Rigby, with "academic style") who employs basilect forms when the content protests oppression, as in "Ressarrection a' da wud":

> dem wah nat deh brada keepa
> is deh brada killa
> dem da de same wan
> who meh spit in Jesus face
> an stone 'im too, on 'i' way to Calvary. (…)
> (In Hurtubise 46)

> And to express the specific types of exploitation experienced by Creole farmers in "Chunku Faam":

> …dat banka wit de slipry smile
> give me just enough money to pot me in de hole
> an tek me faam (…)
> I tek it an I try, laad in heaven know I try
> I try fa dem little picniny
> (In Hurtubise 49)

Describing foreign exploitation of the past and rejecting it as an assault on the community, Sidney Francis Martin utilizes a basilect Creole English, and humor directly dependent on this language, to favor autonomy and independence in "Tell dem fa mi":

> Dem a talk bout democrasy, dem styla way
> wen dem yustu go wit banana, an wi lomba
> wi gold an wi labsta, wi fish an so fort
> dem was happy, tings was good, fa dem do. (…)
> But tel dem fa mi, wi da billup owa democracy
> ina owa styla way statin fram wi roots.
> Wi no wan dem democracy ina owa land,
> dem-a-crazy.
> (In Hurtubise 50)

Much of Nicaraguan Creole English appears to reflect the phonics of Jamaican orality, on a differentiation continuum that ranges from slight spelling and grammatical

variations to poems that are barely decipherable to the Anglophone reader, though probably easily understood in oral performance.[23] In the few poems published by Joan Yamilith Sinclair a basilect Creole English seems preferred even in non-political contexts for delivery of evangelizing or testimonial messages, such as "JIIZOS IZ MI SIEVYA":

> Jiizos, iz mi Sievya
> Huu a chuuz fa falo,
> Kaaz Ih tek mi outa
> Di daarkes shado.
>
> Ih di pap di chien dem
> Ih di pie di prais
> fa siev mi suol
> fa bii Gaad chail. (…)
> (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica*" 99)

Sinclair provides a standard English version of the poem, "Jesus is My Saviour":

> Jesus is my Savior,
> Whom I choose to follow
> Because He has rescued me
> out of the darkest shadow.
>
> He broke the chains
> He paid the price
> To save my soul,
> To be God's child. (…)
> (*Antología poética "Afrocarinica*" 98)

Another of Sinclair's poems continues the religious pronouncements in Creole English in a stand-alone version, "SCHRUAIVIN IIN CHRIBYULIESHAN":

> Chribyulieted bot nat
> Desesperieted,
> Di biges seyin
> kristian dem
> aalwiez seyin.

[23] When translations into Spanish are provided in anthologies such as *Antología poética de la Costa Caribe de Nicaragua* and *Bluefields en la sangre: poesía del Caribe Sur Nicaragüense*, we notice that standard Spanish is used. No attempt is made to creolize the Spanish.

Chribyulieshan mek
Yu schranga
Kaal di "Lord"
An im gwain ansa. (…)[24]
(*Antología poética "Afrocarinica*" 103)

Little evidence is found in Atlantic Coast poetry of a creolized form of Spanish that participates in the sort of *creolité* movement proposed by Francophone Caribbean writers (Glissant, Constant, Chamoiseau), with the exception of some of Carlos Rigby's work. Historical and demographic factors undoubtedly influence the predominance of standard Nicaraguan Spanish. The one distinction that currently stands out is actually the use of more standard Spanish in the Atlantic, in that poets give consistent preference to the pronoun "tú" as the "you, singular, non-formal" pronoun, in contrast to the Pacific poets who, during Sandinista prominence, began to use the more colloquial "vos." When I first noticed the shift from "tú" to "vos" in poetry by Pacific mestizo author Vidaluz Meneses, which coincided chronologically with the Sandinista triumph in 1979, author and historian Isolda Rodríguez Rosales explained: "As witnessed in Meneses's texts, the use of 'vos' corresponds to evolving cultural changes reflected in language: prior to the Revolutionary period 'vos' was considered inappropriate and improper in poetry, whereas it later became an indicator of social egalitarianism, and 'tú' is now considered an affectation" (cited in Roof, Preface 22). "Vos" appears less frequently in Atlantic Coast texts and could mark resistance to mestizo Sandinista culture and modalities.

Recent poetry by African-descended Nicaraguans reflects demographic changes and the Caribbean imaginary that proposes identity as a community unified by values, life experiences grounded in geography, social practices, histories that are assumed and shared, and hopes for the fulfillment of the aspiration of the Atlantic Coast for cultural and economic welfare through self-governing Autonomy. Recent poetry continues the long tradition of contestatory reactions to exclusionary national projects and proposes the possibility of coexistence and/or tolerance, to create a new order based on unity in diversity which, utopian or not, contributes to the Caribbean Coast imaginary of the best possibilities for the whole community.

In summary, poetry by African-descended Nicaraguans, or Nicaribbeans, or Mestigros, or Garífo-Miki-Creoles, or Africarinicaraguans, expresses the geographical, economic, racial and social conditions of the Atlantic Coast region, correctly characterized by Edmund T. Gordon as: a potential source of great wealth, nationally

[24] The final three stanzas are: "Chribyulieshan kom, / Mai sistaz an mai bradaz / Biin a kristian / Yuu gwain aalwiez / bii fala. // Anada seyin kristian dem / aalwiez seyin / Houl yu piis / An mek di "Lord" / fait yu bakl. / Naar di flesh, / naar di blod / wi gwain rasl. // Wel das di chruut / Noh kier hou yuu tek it. / Aal wii haftu nuo iz / dat wid di "Lord" / Wii wil aalwiez mek it."

ambivalent, physically isolated, unintegrated economically, whose sovereignty was disputed by "foreign" national or international powers, populated by heretofore non-national (African) or subnational (indigenous) peoples, and potentially dangerous, if it would organize as an independent political unit (140-149). Autonomy has provided an option for racial and cultural heterogeneity without homogenization, but with mixed practical results, mainly due, I believe, to economic issues of historical origins that have not been resolved.[25] Incorporation into the national political structure, even as autonomous units, has yet to bring particular benefits to the Caribbean Coast, where poets emphasize the region's self-definition as Nicaraguan but different, distinct but not an "Other" to be excluded, a land of promise due to the pooling of cultural resources of many ethnicities, including the now-predominant Mestizos. Nicaraguans, yes, but also Caribbeans—Nicaribbeans.

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[25] See a summary of the myriad challenges to the success of Autonomy in *Times & Life of Bluefields*, 350ff.

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