

# **Cimarronaje Cultural: Towards A Counter-Cartography of Blackness and Belonging in Mexico**

by

Talia Weltman-Cisneros

Department of Classical & Modern Languages, Literatures, & Cultures  
Wayne State University

*Place, one might add, is the location of a multiplicity of forms  
of cultural politics, that is of the cultural-becoming-political.*

-Arturo Escobar

## **Abstract**

Blackness has been displaced and disappeared from the dominant cartographies of *mexicanidad* (Mexican-ness). However, contemporary Afro-Mexican artists and community organizations within the Costa Chica region are engaging the discourse of *cimarronaje* (maroonage) as a counter-cartography of blackness, and as a decolonization of being and belonging. This paper analyzes cultural texts such as visual arts and radio, which employ the discourse of *cimarronaje* as a tool of critical consciousness and as a multidimensional configuration of identity that is based on an interplay of social conditions, alternative historical memory, and cultural traditions. As such, this paper presents an interrogation of the geo-politics and bio-politics of the belonging of Afro-Mexicans in contemporary Mexico.

## **Introduction**

In his essay on the alternative constructions of place by Black social movements and communities in the Pacific rainforest region of Colombia, the anthropologist Arturo Escobar delineates the roles of strategies of localization in place-based consciousness. In particular, he suggests that the construction of place “is central to issues of development, culture, and the environment, and is equally essential for imagining other contexts for thinking about the construction of politics, knowledge and identity” (155). He further proposes that it is important to intervene in discussions and analyses of place in order to connect them with the political strategies of social movements who are attempting to counter the placeless-ness that has marked their identity and existence.

This paper links with Escobar’s intervention by examining the constructions of place by artists and social activists within Afro-Mexican communities in the Costa Chica region in southern Mexico. In particular, it focuses on the role of cultural production as a political tool in re-constructing place-based consciousness and in re-articulating Black identity in Mexico.

In addition, in the sense of the “cultural-becoming-political,” I demonstrate how local Afro-Mexican artists, social activists, and cultural collectives are utilizing particular strategies of localization, which appropriate culture as a disclosive space that produces and disseminates knowledge about who they are and how they live. Moreover, I discuss how they are utilizing an alternative discourse of *cimarronaje* (maroonage) as a place-making narrative that counteracts the condition of invisibility that has contributed to a segregated relationship between blackness and *mexicanidad* (Mexican-ness). As such, with a general theoretical compass that presents an interrogation of the geo-politics and bio-politics of space, place, and identity formations in Mexico, I analyze and question strategies of location and dislocation that are linked to national, regional, and local politics of identity, representation, and knowledge production.

## **Understanding *Cimarronaje Cultural* as a Counter-Cartography and Place-Making Narrative**

The maroon narrative has long been a central literary trope and historical marker used to delineate European and non-European imaginaries and boundaries of space, place, being, and belonging. For example, colonial literature and travel accounts employed this narrative in order to characterize the separate boundaries between the tempest tossed encounters of European explorers with other primitive and exotic peoples and lands. It was the European maroon, once shipwrecked and displaced to unknown spaces, who would arise as a hero and subjugate barbaric peoples and lands.

Later, the narrative was employed by Europeans as a signifier of the untamed and unruly, escaped enslaved person: the maroon who had fled to hidden spaces and defied the “civilizing” missions of their master. Here again, geographic displacement, now linked to the rebellious, non-European other, served to segregate the spatial and ontological boundaries between the European and non-European. Through a postcolonial lens, historians and literary theorists have critiqued the binaries forged by these two maroon narratives, both of which were produced by Europeans. Whether they were used to exalt the lost explorer, or criminalize and isolate the escaped enslaved person, scholars have understood these European-produced, maroon narratives as tools of colonial expansion over and subjugation of non-European others who thus became place-less in their space of existence.

More recently, however, twentieth-century authors and scholars have re-appropriated this narrative as a marker of resistance and survival, especially when produced by non-European entities (James, 2). For example, often employed by non-European artists, intellectuals, and authors in the Caribbean, this narrative has transformed the isolated and criminalized maroon into a figure whose flight and displacement have become symbolic of warriorhood, endurance, and a search for self-determination. That is, this alternative maroon narrative has become a signifier of “resilience, survival, resourcefulness, and innovation” (8). And, as a result, it is a narrative that has served as a tool with which to re-map the boundaries of identity, imbuing a sense of place to constructions of knowledge and being that have often been framed as place-less.

It is within this framework of maroonage or *cimarronaje* as a counter-cartography place, of knowledge, and of being, that I examine contemporary cultural production in Afro-Mexican communities. Specifically, I explore how the areas of visual arts and radio engage the maroon narrative as a “cultural-becoming-political” strategy of location and representation, hence a counter-cartography of place and being. Following the anti-communist revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe during the early 1990’s, Jacques Derrida envisioned counter-cartographies of Europe, or decolonial transformations or reshaping of the borders of Europe. He called for the possibility of new “spiritual geographies” that would result in a Europe heading in new directions accompanied by changing goals. In this paper I extend this notion of counter-cartographies or decolonial transformations to Mexico in order to understand how cultural projects contest dominant and hegemonic boundaries of identity, belonging, representation, and knowledge production and dissemination. Moreover, I apply the Derridian concept of counter-cartography to Afro-Mexican projects that are attempting to articulate, contest and re-draw hybrid networks of identity formation and representation.

More specifically, I examine projects that envision and incorporate this notion of counter-cartography through a contemporary, alternative maroon narrative: *cimarronaje cultural* or cultural maroonage. Defined by Cynthia James as an “artistic mission of resistance,” this narrative stakes its distinction on “writing against the grain of the European tradition and depiction [of identity]” (9). While James applies this to Caribbean creations of cultural maroonage, here I apply a similar notion to Afro-Mexican-produced projects that not only speak against hegemonic constructions and representations of Mexicans of African descent, but also, specifically envision counter-cartographies of the relationship between blackness and *mexicanidad* (I define *mexicanidad* as Mexican national and cultural consciousness). It is this particular relationship, an “uneasy tension,” between blackness and *mexicanidad* that is important to elucidate in this paper (Vaughn, 49). Blackness has been historically and culturally marooned elsewhere, beyond the geo- and bio-graphic borders of *mexicanidad*. However, through the projects analyzed in this paper, we are able to understand and theorize how the discourse of *cimarronaje cultural* is being deployed as a local, national, and global place-making narrative and cartographic tool that serves as a decolonial project of knowledge and being, and as strategy of re-existence, relocation, resilience, and innovation.

## **Blackness Mapped Beyond the Borders of *Mexicanidad***

In order to best understand the significance and contribution of these projects in the Costa Chica and their appropriation of the discourse of *cimarronaje cultural* as a place-making narrative, first it is important to examine the racialized, historical and cultural relationships between Afro-descendants, blackness, and *mexicanidad*. Due to processes of racialization and exclusory discourses and codes of belonging, the dominant and hegemonic cartography of *mexicanidad* has displaced and dislocated not only the notion of *afromexicanidad*, but also that of blackness beyond the nation’s geo-political and bio-political borders. That is, both identity constructions, the Afro-Mexican and the black, have been configured as dispossessed identity markers that reside beyond the geographic, biographic, cultural, and epistemic borders of imagined community in Mexico. Agustín Lao-Montes’ description of Afro-Latin identity or *afrolatinidad* in general, is useful to understand this hegemonic relationship of dislocation between *mexicanidad*, *Afromexicanidad* and blackness.

Similar to *afrolatinidad*, the conceptually hyphenated phrase Afro-Mexican (*afromexicano*) also “signifies two complex and contested fields of identification” (76). That is, similar to the incomprehensible union of Afro-descendency and *latinidad* (Latin-ness), to be of African descent and to be Mexican has simultaneously signified two contradictory sites of identity and identification. That is, through the lens of dominant, hegemonic formations of identity, the space and place of blackness in Mexico has been framed as historically impossible, thus isolating and marooning Afro-descendency elsewhere, as a construct unable to be imagined within the borders of Mexican national consciousness. In essence, *afromexicanidad* has been made place-less.

These seemingly contradictory and contestatory fields of identification are a result of what Anibel Quijano defines as the logic of coloniality: projects of racialization linked to Western ways of thinking and assigning meaning/being that have been “seductive” tools used to provide and sustain access to power, and more so, access to modernity (42). In this particular case, the racialized, dominant construction of *mexicanidad* has mirrored and embraced Quijano’s characterization of a Western cartography of identity formation; that is, in Mexico the dominant geo- and bio-graphic politics of identity formation and belonging have been produced and implemented as a strategic modern/colonial configuration of the national geo-body. In this case the cartography of this geo-body is bounded by particular, racialized spaces that have been hierarchically organized and managed in order to create a specific national identity, and to maintain the formation of and access to structures of power. In the case of Mexico, as well as within Latin America in general, the discourse of *mestizaje* (as a mixed European and Indigenous racial formation) has functioned as the foundational marker that has defined the national geo-body and thus the borders of the Mexican imagined community. I propose that this function of *mestizaje* follows the logic of coloniality, since it has not been an inclusive discourse that has practiced equality in being, place, and power in Mexico. Contrary to its original, ideological epithets, the dominant discourse of *mestizaje* has used racial formations not only to assign hierarchical and exclusory codes of meaning and belonging, but also to carve and sustain a logic of whitening. That is, in Mexico, the discourse of *mestizaje* has assigned a superior meaning and being to whiteness, which has become the preferred identity construct associated with and having access to modernity in the borderlands of *mexicanidad*. As such, this discourse of *mestizaje*, despite being framed as a unifying, coherent, and cosmic politics of identity, has actually operated as a divisive and hierarchical process of racialization, thus marooning particular factions beyond its borders.

As a result of this dominant and hierarchical discourse of *mestizaje*, blackness and Afro-descendency have historically and culturally been denied place, space, and being within the borders of a *mestizo*-centered and whitened imagination of *mexicanidad*. More precisely, as illustrated in the Vasconcelian theorization of *mestizaje*, blackness has been excised from the contemporary national, modern geo-body because it has been coded and essentialized as an inferior identity construct that belongs to the past. That is, blackness and Afro-descendency have been imagined as markers that link a modern Mexico with its darker, colonial past. It is a past from which this nation on a trajectory of modernity has wished to separate. And, as a result of this logic, the black racial thread or *tercera raíz* (third root) has been destined for absorption and marked as disappeared from the cosmic path of the modern, Mexican, *mestizo* geo-body.

In addition, since the Afro-descendent has historically and culturally been framed as an object of the past tied to an archaic economic system (that of slavery) with no cultural nor epistemic contributions to be made in modernity (different to the case of Indigenous and the Euro-descendent populations in modern Mexico), blackness has been mapped as being whitened and faded into brown. In essence, it would be made invisible. Thus, according to this dominant, hegemonic logic, the presence, visibility, and contemporary contribution of *afromexicanidad* has not only be framed as contradictory, but it has also been de-linked, displaced, dispossessed, and in turn, marooned from the modern cartography of *mexicanidad*.

Moreover, in terms of the cultural cartography of Mexico, another foundational marker and map of citizenship and national belonging, *afromexicanidad* and blackness have again faced fates similar to their ethno-racial excision from place in Mexico. While the contemporary, post-Revolutionary politicization and marketing of Mexican culture has demanded an investment in Indigenous heritage as Mexico's re-discovered cultural relic, communities of African heritage have been excluded from the Mexican culture industry and from the focus of study and investigative "rescue." Mexican anthropologists have claimed that since Mexicans of African descent have not procured a distinct language nor formal, distinctive dress (two markers that are used today by Mexican ethnographers to define and distinguish "ethnic" groups), this group could not be classified as a specific ethnicity. Rather, they would be and are currently located in the spatial, ontological, and epistemic sphere of "*culturas populares*" (popular cultures). As a result, the cartography of contemporary blackness and *afromexicanidad* has been framed as displaced and disposed from the politics of culture as well. And today, it is no wonder that one is commonly met with the phrase "*no hay negros en México*" (there are no blacks in Mexico). Thus, through racialized identity and cultural formations, the citizenship (cultural and often political) of Mexicans of African descent has been denied place within the nation.

In terms of cultural and national displacement, if imaged and imagined as present in Mexico, blackness and Afro-Mexicans have often been framed and labeled as *cubanos*. In fact, it is the link between blackness and Cubanness that is most often referenced in terms of a contemporary Afro-descendent presence in Mexico, especially due to the vibrant Cuban migration and cultural exchange with Mexico in the late 1800's and early 1900's. As an effect of this association, when stopped at military check-points, Afro-Mexicans are often asked to sing the Mexican national anthem in order to prove their *Mexicanness*, not their Cubanness.

Moreover, if we examine Mexican cultural production from the 1920's to the early 1950's, a period labeled as the "cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution" by Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas, we encounter echoes of this logic of dislocation and the placeless-ness of blackness and Afro-descendency in Mexico. For example, the title character of the popular, late 1940's comic *Memín Pinguín*, was supposedly created after the comic's author, Yolanda Vargas Dulché, visited Cuba and was enchanted with all the "*negritos cubanos* (Cuban children)." Furthermore, if we examine popular films of this time period, films such as "Al son del mambo," released in 1950, we encounter a narrative similar to that of the popular comic. This film portrays Mexican protagonists who venture to Cuba in search of primitive culture that was attributed to "authentic" Afro-descendents. Here again, Afro-descendents could be found in Cuba, not in Mexico. And, as a result, it becomes only possible to image and imagine blackness in Mexico as essentially Cuban.

As such, I suggest that this post-Revolutionary time period is a strategic moment of the configuration of the national-cultural, one in which the invisibility and denial of blackness is one of a cultural racist discourse that is based on a biological racist discourse. And within this strategic time period, cultural production has displaced Afro-Mexicans beyond Mexico's borders and has denied place and visibility of blackness within Mexican cultural consciousness.

Thus, examining circuits of knowledge and cultural production and representation whether in archives, ethnography, film, or literature, this denial of localization has indeed marooned *afromexicanidad* elsewhere, to silenced and invisible spaces beyond the borderlands of *mexicanidad*.

So, we are then left to ask, is *this* place-less and de-linked cartography of blackness and *afromexicanidad* the only relationship with contemporary *mexicanidad*? Are they destined to be marooned and mapped beyond the borders of Mexico?

### **Towards a Counter-Cartography of *Afromexicanidad***

On the contrary, one just needs to look to the Mexican geo-body, from the metropolitan centers to the tiny fishing villages, to the beats of the Marimba, to the versos in the chilenas. Blackness and *afromexicanidad* are certainly present, visible, and placed within *mexicanidad*. They are appropriated, identified with, reified, and practiced from within; they are what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "*lo propio* (one's own)."

Thus, for a re-mapping or counter-cartography of *afromexicanidad*, which is reified as an intrinsic part of Mexico, as its own, I look to cultural production in the area of the Costa Chica, the towns and cities along the Mexican Pacific Coast from Acapulco in the state of Guerrero, to Puerto Escondido in the state of Oaxaca. While several contemporary photographic exhibits, as well as some historical and sociological studies have documented this region because it is the most visibly constitutive of Afro-descendent communities, I have chosen this area because there are political and cultural projects of re-identification or re-existence that are being developed in order to create a different cartography, archive, epistemology, ontology, and experience of *afromexicanidad*: one that is tied to an alternative consciousness, oral testimonies, traditions, cosmologies, and social conditions such as the need for improved access to educational and socio-economic investment. These areas are some of the poorest in the country, and as the Afro-descendent individuals and communities have historically been abandoned and framed as invisible, so has social infrastructure.

My interest lies in the particular narratives of knowledge production, identity formation, and representation that are produced within these communities, especially through visual arts and radio. These forms of cultural texts are especially accessible tools to these communities with high rates of illiteracy and very limited financial resources.

The first cultural text or site that I will discuss is the Centro Cultural Cimarrón, a center focused on youth-based artistic production that originated in El Ciruelo, Oaxaca. The Centro Cultural was originally envisioned as a constructive and artistic space for students to congregate during the summer vacations.

Today, it functions as umbrella organization for art workshops and programs that engage youth throughout the Costa Chica. More importantly, as described by one of its founders, Padre Glyn Jemmott, it is a positive space in which the youth can employ visual arts as a means to reflect upon what it means to be “*negro*, where they can look at themselves through their own eyes,” where their visibility, their memories, their being are not denied and disappeared. Exhibitions of the art created by students involved in the Centro Cultural Cimarrón have had great success touring around Mexico, particularly in Oaxaca and recently in Mexico City, and in the United States, including Los Angeles and New Mexico.

In order to illustrate a counter-cartography of *afromexicanidad* by the cultural production of this particular group of artists, I present a recent mural or wall painting erected by the members of this Center during the 11<sup>th</sup> *Encuentro de Pueblos Negros de Oaxaca y Guerrero* in March 2007. Plates 1-3 represent different sections and close-ups of the mural painting.

If we read this wall painting as a text, analyzing the content and aesthetics of the work, we see depictions of the terrain, activities practiced within it (particularly fishing and coastal-related activities), and animals that hold symbolic relevance to daily life and to cultural traditions and rituals. More specifically, we notice the body as an important site of reference, particularly the eyes. As expressed by several of the artists, the eyes hold a dual-function: first, they represent the own eyes of these artists, looking at themselves, their community, their culture, their memories, and their history. Second, they also represent the eyes of people beyond the borders of their communities, eyes looking in, noting their presence, their being, and their belonging. Most importantly, these images and the narratives they represent engage the name of the center and the discourse of *cimarronaje* as a looking, *una búsqueda* (a searching), for liberation, for visibility, for access, for existence, and for an un-disappeared culture, history, ontology and epistemology; they are eyes in search of a visible subjectivity and consciousness. For access to resources and opportunities, for future, and for their own configuration of subjectivity. As such, they are not merely objects of consciousness, what Gloria Anzaldúa terms “*lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto* (that which is inherited, acquired, and imposed” (104), but are instead agents in their own configuration and representation of space and being through the use of the maroon narrative and the articulation of a critical consciousness. I use the term “critical consciousness” to reference a shift in conception and perception of being, which results from persons looking at themselves through their own eyes, a rupture from “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 5).

These notions of critical consciousness and visualizing subjectivity or making subjectivity visible are also present in a second site of cultural production, that of the work by Aydée Rodríguez Lopez. A self-taught painter in Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero who grew up in the Costa Chica of Guerrero, Rodríguez Lopez describes her work, which represents Afro-Mexican people, culture, memory, and traditions, as “expressions that come from the blood--*los temas surgen de la sangre.*” Her work has been displayed throughout the region, at the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, and at various locations in the United States, including at the exhibition entitled “The African Presence in México” at the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago and “Pathways to Freedom in the Americas” at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History in Detroit, Michigan.

Several of her pieces depict daily life and the Afro-Mexican traditions and cosmologies that circulate in the Costa Chica region of Guerrero. Plates 4-6 depict a particular piece entitled “*Nafragio*” (Shipwreck). It represents an oral testimony that continues to be widely circulated among the older generations in the area, about a shipwreck in which enslaved Africans escaped from bondage and lived freely in the region. No official documentation of the shipwreck has been found; however, various testimonies speak of a ship owned by a Spanish woman, carrying human and material cargo, which crashed on the coast near Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero. As these testimonies recount, Afro-descendent and *afromestizo* communities in the area are said to link back to the enslaved who escaped from the shipwreck.

Again, while Spanish chronicles and Mexican government archives that recount this shipwreck have not been found, the narration of this particular memory and history is important to the subjectivity and to the experience of *afromexicanidad* as conceptualized by these communities and within this particular work of art. I suggest that this painting functions as a piece of knowledge production and dissemination, as it represents *an-other* archive, *an-other* history, *an-other* memory of knowledge and being. Furthermore, it is also one that employs a discourse of *cimarronaje*, albeit an indirect discourse, different from the named Centro Cultural Cimarrón. Here the escaped slave, the *cimarrón* or maroon, is part creator of a future and a present community. This community and its ancestors are the *pueblos del cimarronaje* (maroon communities). More importantly, this other-memory and other-history of *cimarronaje* as displayed in the painting do not envision maroon communities as criminal entities that were hidden until *granted* liberty by a post-independent nation-state. Rather, this narrative envisions an empowered and embodied liberty created by the self, *una búsqueda propia* (one’s own search). As depicted in plate 6, which is a close-up of the work “*Nafragio*,” both a Spanish sailor and a free slave hold whips in their hands. This symbolic gesture illuminates a narrative of dual self-empowerment, in which both figures contribute to the foundation of these Mexican communities in the Costa Chica region. Both the European and the African are struggling for place in this scene. As such, this work of Rodriguez Lopez brings an oral testimony to the foreground of identity formation and articulation by making visible an alternative memory and an alternative archive of the presence and history of Afro-Mexicans in this particular region. I suggest that it recovers marooned, displaced, and disappeared voices, histories, and subjectivities. Furthermore, through this shipwreck and the maroon narrative that is depicted in the piece, these Afro-descendents who are represented in the painting are transformed into “catalysts of rebirth” (James, 77), forging new cartographies of place and being within the borderlands of this region, and it turn within the nation and the construction of *mexicanidad* as well.

A final cultural text that I wish to discuss is a radio program entitled *Cimarrón: voz de la Costa Chica*. This program originally began in 1996 and was re-initiated in 2006 under the direction of a few individuals including Professor Israel Reyes Larrea from José Maria Morelos, Oaxaca. The half-hour long program currently circulates weekly in numerous communities in Oaxaca and Guerrero. The content of the program includes local musical productions, poetry, verse, and stories associated with Afro-Mexican cultural traditions and dances. The program also presents interviews and discussion forums with community members and those involved with the communities on issues related to community events, politics, economics, and culture. More importantly, as described by Professor Larrea, the program functions not only to circulate awareness about the history, cultural productions, contributions, and expressions in the region, but also to strengthen the cultural identity of the communities.

He does not envision this radio program as one that *rescues* culture, but rather elevates its status within the community and beyond. Significantly, in appropriating the discourse of *cimarronaje*, the radio program (and its creators) is consistently looking for (*en búsqueda de*), better conditions which are fed by artistic, musical, poetic, and historical narratives that are produced by and in these communities. In addition, as a “traveling” project, whose composition and programming circulate throughout numerous cities, towns, and villages throughout the Costa Chica region, I suggest that we can further apply the concept of *cimarronaje* as one of movement beyond limiting borders of space, place, and being. As the traditional maroon narrative describing the escaped slave links migration with isolation, alienation, and invisibility, here we see a counter-narrative of maroonage and migration. That is, the circulation of this program, its content, participants, and audience, demonstrate a maroon narrative of movement within multiple networks of identification. It is a program that moves from “one surrogate home to another” (James, 14), re-defining borders as intercultural and inclusive spaces of being and belonging.

I have chosen these three cultural texts precisely because they engage the discourse of *cimarronaje*, whether directly by name, such as the Centro Cultural Cimarrón and the radio program *Cimarrón: voz de la Costa Chica*, or indirectly such as the painting produced by Aydée Rodríguez Lopez. It is ironic that, while traditional narratives of *cimarronaje* or maroonage have been linked to criminal escapism (the escaped, hidden fugitive maroon) or isolated displacement (to be marooned), these three sites of cultural production theorize, appropriate, and employ an alternative narrative of *cimarronaje*. I suggest that they employ the discourse of *cimarronaje cultural* as a counter cartography of *afromexicanidad*.

First, this counter-cartography is illustrated in the narratives and signifiers of rootedness that are present in all three cultural texts. Via depictions of the land, the customs lived in it, the people who are an part of it, or the intellectual, cultural, and historical contributions that circulate throughout the region, all of these pieces utilize the figure of the *cimarrón* or the discourse of *cimarronaje* as one that inherently links or ties the Afro-Mexican presence, their traditions, their history, their culture, their memories, and their knowledge and being to the land. They are not only present, but more so, they are a part of the land in every way. *Tierra* (land) is visible, tangible, and concrete. And as such, *afromexicanidad* is not evasive, lost, hidden, or dislocated to a temporal space, imprisoned within Mexico’s colonial past. Nor is it displaced beyond the borders of Mexico, only to be located in Cuba. On the contrary, *cimarronaje* as a symbol of rootedness serves as a place-making narrative. And, it is also converted into a symbol of warriorhood, resourcefulness, resilience, re-existence, and intercultural encounter. In this sense, I propose that *cimarronaje cultural* produces a bio-political and geo-political counter-cartography of *mexicanidad* in which Afro-Mexicans are placed within the borders of this identity construct, and they are represented and recognized as heroic, inventive, and spirited members of the population.

Second, *cimarronaje*, while rooted, simultaneously envisions a searching for (*una búsqueda de*) an existence or better yet, a re-existence and re-location of a network of identity formations and experiences that is shackled to the modern/colonial yoke that has tied certain ethno-racial communities to economic, social, and political limitation and invisibility. Instead, I propose that these texts engage *cimarronaje* as a discourse that seeks something better, something else, *otro mundo posible* (another possible world).

As such, this alternative narrative of *cimarronaje* is not only about resistance, but it also constitutes re-existence, as Walter D. Mignolo would suggest. That is, this is a narrative in which consciousness and subjectivity are made visible, re-located, and re-mapped as a counter cartography of knowledge, place, and being.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this theorization of *cimarronaje cultural* as a counter-cartography and as an alternative maroon narrative, is crucial for tracing how knowledge production and the politics of identity and representation are connected to race, space, and place. More specifically, it also allows us to interrogate local, national, and global relationships between the geo-politics and bio-politics of being and belonging, particularly in Mexico. As presented in this paper, *cimarronaje cultural* departs from traditional maroon narratives and instead presents a decolonial transformation and contestation of dominant, hegemonic geo-politics and bio-politics that have made Afro-Mexicans invisible and de-linked from codes and configurations of belonging within the nation. Furthermore, the cultural texts presented in this paper serve as decolonial projects that are speaking and writing against the logic of coloniality and a condition and representation of displacement, alienation, and invisibility. As a result, I suggest that these projects and their engagement with the narrative of *cimarronaje cultural* are tools of counter-cartography that envision alternative and hybrid archives of knowledge production and networks of identity formation and representation. Furthermore, they incorporate strategies of localization in order to demonstrate the place of *afromexicanidad* within the past, present, and future of Mexico.



Plate 1: Mural Painting, Centro Cultural Cimarrón



Plate 2: Mural Painting, Centro Cultural Cimarrón

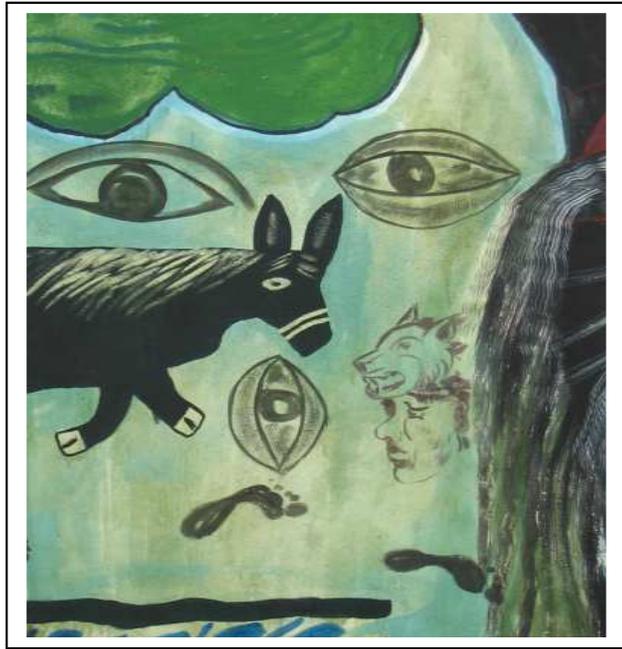


Plate 3: Mural Painting, Centro Cultural Cimarrón

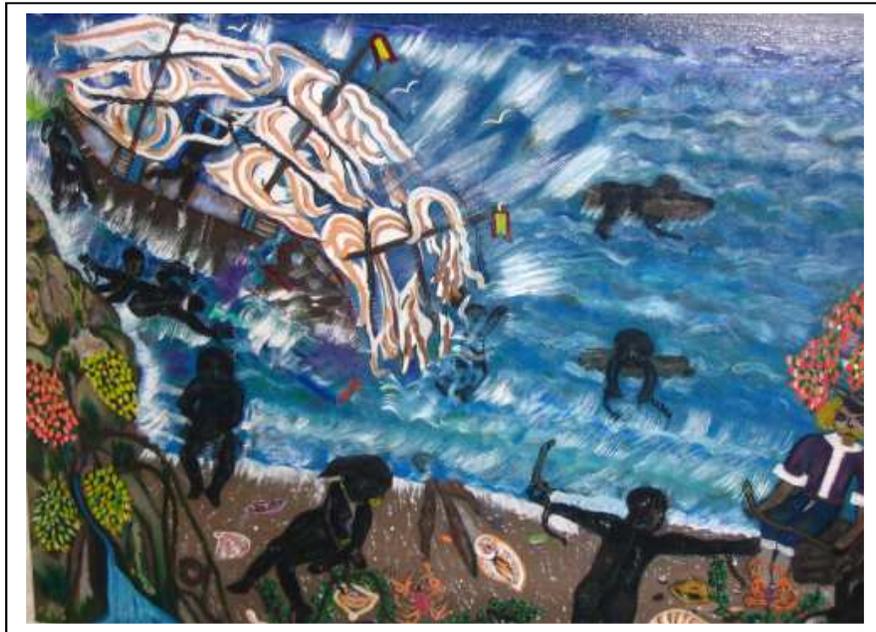


Plate 4: Aydee Rodriguez Lopez, "Nafragio"

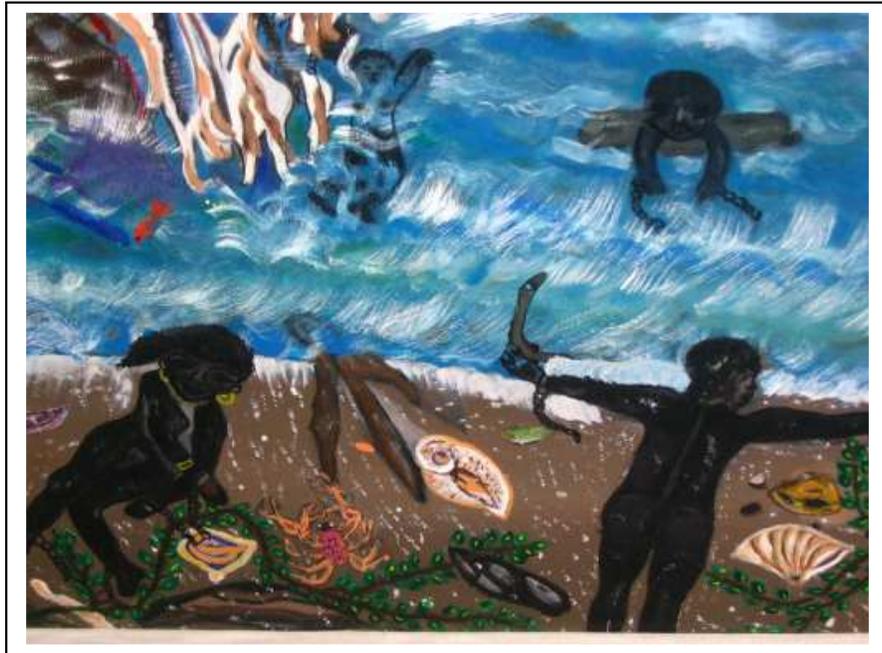


Plate 5: Aydée Rodriguez Lopez, "Naufragio"



Plate 6: Aydée Rodriguez Lopez, "Naufragio"

## Bibliographic References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands. La Frontera. The New Mestiza*. San Francisco. Aunt Lute Books, 1999.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Indianapolis: Bloomington and Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.
- Escobar, Arturo. "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization." *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 139-174.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *The Racial State*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Grosfoguel, Ramón, *Latin@s in The World-System. Decolonization Struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.S. Empire*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Hernández Cuevas, Marco Polo. *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation*. Maryland: University Press of America, 2004.
- James, Cynthia. *The Maroon Narrative. Caribbean Literature in English Across Boundaries, Ethnicities, & Centuries*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
- Lao-Montes, Agustín. "Afro-Latin@ Difference and the Politics of Decolonization." *Latin@s in The World-System. Decolonization Struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.S. Empire*. Eds. Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres and José David Saldívar. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.
- Mbembe, Achille. "The Imaginative Roots of Racism." *The Future of Values*. Ed. Jérôme Bindé. New York: UNESCO, 2004.
- Mignolo, Walter. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality", *Globalizations and Modernities*. Ed. Goran Therborn. Stockholm: FRN, 1999.
- Vaughn, Bobby. "The African Diaspora through *Ojos Mexicanos*: Blackness and *Mexicanidad* in Southern Mexico." *The Review of Black Political Economy* (Summer 2005): 49-57.
- Vasconcelos, José. *La raza cósmica*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

## Notes

(1.) In this maroon narrative, we are able to identify what Achille Mbembe describes this as a shift from a “sphere of geography to a sphere of representation,” where to be of a particular location (and how one arrives at the location) delineates an essential and authentic experience and signification. Here, the location of the marooned sailor transforms this figure into one that represents exploration, survival, and conquest.

(2.) The Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos, who published *La raza cósmica* in 1925, provided the dominant, contemporary roadmap for theorizing *mestizaje* as the foundational code of belonging within the borders of mexicanidad and latinidad. According to the Vasconcelian theorization of *mestizaje*, a theorization from above, and racial mixture was spun as a discourse of inclusion and not the violent exclusion that was tied to Latin America’s colonial heritage. As David Theo Goldberg suggests, it would function as a “fitting response to [the region’s] pernicious racist past” (10). Moreover, *mestizaje* was the tool used to imagine and image a future in which the “romanticism of modernity [conceived] heterogeneity [as] a celebrated virtue.” According to numerous intellectuals and political leaders, *la raza cósmica*, the magical mixing of races, the coherence of hybridity painted as a raceless, colorblind ideology and project was the compass to “*el porvenir*” (the future), a compass on the roadmap to modernity.