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# A Framework for Resistance: Violence, Hope, and Rebellion in the Novels of Manuel Zapata Olivella

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A Framework for Resistance: Violence, Hope, and Rebellion  
in the Novels of Manuel Zapata Olivella

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

### A Framework for Resistance: Violence, Hope, and Rebellion in the Novels of Manuel Zapata Olivella

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Master of Arts

This study seeks to analyze the circular nature of violence and its relation to hope and rebellion in two of Manuel Zapata Olivella's earliest and most important novels: *La Calle 10* and *Chambacú, corral de negros*. These works explore the themes of institutional violence and racial and cultural marginalization within the context of early twentieth century Colombian society. They also present the themes of hope and rebellion in varying ways. By presenting the topic of violence I explore important similarities and differences between the protagonists of the novels and demonstrate how the novels are interconnected thematically and historically.

Keywords: Manuel Zapata Olivella, *La Calle 10*, *Chambacú, corral de negros*, Violence, Hope, Rebellion

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowhere are black literature and humanism better illustrated than in the work of Afro-Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella, whose novels begin with the lives of black people and reach out to all humanity.

*Richard L. Jackson*

Committed black writers seem to agree with Fanon that the black man can only find freedom in and through violence.

*Kashim Ibrahim Tala*

In early 2010, twenty-seven years after its initial publication, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983), Manuel Zapata Olivella's crowning work, was published for the first time in the English language. Very few outside of Afro-Hispania had known of this novel and even fewer had spent their careers analyzing it. One of the few, William Luis describes the novel as "one of the most remarkable works of twentieth-century Spanish American Literature" (*Changó* xii) and Antonio Tillis adds that the novel is the author's "obra maestra" (76). The novel's importance comes from its originality in form and content. Luis adds that it is "postmodern, hybrid, subaltern, and post-colonial, and it decenters any homogeneous notion of Western discourse" by mixing "poetry and narrative, the living and the dead, the spirit and the material body, humans and animals, one language region and another, magic and the mundane, history and myth, fact and fiction, African beliefs and Western cultures, oral and written traditions" (xiv). The novel's publication in English demonstrates a growing interest in the author and his writings.

Manuel Zapata Olivella was born in Lorica, Colombia to Antonio María Zapata and Edelmira Olivella and died at his home in Bogotá on November 19, 2004, at the age of eighty-four (Lewis 85). Throughout his life he dedicated himself to writing, as evidenced by the publication of a large and diverse collection of novels, essays, short stories, dramas, and travel narrative. He has received many awards and recognitions for his writing and has been described as the "dean of Black Hispanic writers" (Jackson, *Canon* 51). His most prolific period came in the decade of the 1960s when he published four novels (*La Calle 10*, *Detrás del rostro*, *Chambacú*, *corral de negros*, and *En Chima nace un santo*), three short story collections (*Cuentos de muerte y libertad*, *El cirujano de la selva*, and *¿Quién dio el fusil a Oswald?*) and three dramas (*Los pasos del indio*, *Caronte liberado*, and *El retorno de Caín*). Zapata Olivella's works share similar topics of poverty, hunger, marginalization, race, and violence. More

importantly, they are presented in order to demonstrate real problems encountered by Afro-Hispanics, Indigenous, and other peoples who live on the fringes of society, for he was concerned “for the future of men of all colors who are victims of oppression” (Jackson, *Image* 120).

In his essay entitled *La rebelión de los genes: El mestizaje americano en la sociedad futura* (1997), Zapata Olivella shares an important insight into the overall thematic concern of his writing. He explains how his narrative acts as a tool to share with the reader the pains and afflictions of the needy and socially marginalized and how this desire comes from his own life experiences. Additionally, he claims that it is his duty to “sembrar, deslinear y combatir contra toda clase de injusticia” (22-23). He identifies himself strongly with the same marginalized characters from his novels and his advocacy on their behalf is something repeated in all of his writing (Jackson, *Canon* 51). Marvin Lewis adds that this sense of commitment from the writer is common in all Afro-Colombian literature and that it comes from the necessity to change existing social structures. This is in response to a long history of exploitation in Colombia and the rest of Latin America (4). In this sense, Zapata Olivella’s novels become spaces of protest and tools of change because he searched for a way to give a voice to those who could not do so themselves (Lewis 4). The author’s strong belief that literature could be used in this manner is a result of a desire to find his own literary voice.

The author’s eagerness to give voice to the marginalized populations of Colombia comes from an understanding of his diverse ethnic heritage “which becomes a major point of reference in his latter works [and] results from historical miscegenation and slavery in the New World. His father was a black-identified mulatto and his mother was Creole (half-Spanish and half-Indian)” (Tillis 5). Consequently, his tri-ethnicity creates a mixed cultural identity from which he writes



(Tillis 5) and as a result he is able to present varying perspectives and give voice to multiple oppressed populations. Also within this process of giving others a voice he searches for his own. Richard Jackson explains that the author as “a Black intellectual, is often the star of his own works, either overtly or covertly through a *persona*, or fictional voice. His uplifting message is embodied in heroic characters whose acts of resistance anchor his aesthetic of the downtrodden” (*Canon* 52). The author’s ability to put himself in his texts demonstrates this search for self. Furthermore, as he is integrated into the novels through various *personas* the protagonists can then present topics important to the author.

The most vital of these themes is violence and its relationship to self and community. This topic is born out of the author’s desire to give voice to the oppressed of society and to demonstrate historical realities with regard to the marginalized, poor, and non-white peoples of his native Colombia. Additionally, the author’s topical concerns transcend the local and national and become important in all of Latin America. Violence is at the heart of both the Spanish colonization of America and the continued disenfranchisement of the masses and is a matter of everyday life for oppressed populations. In Zapata Olivella’s novels, it is depicted in multiple ways including political oppression, sexual abuse, and dehumanization<sup>1</sup> although the focus is on institutional violence. Both novels in this study share foundations of violence and further demonstrate its importance for the author. *La Calle 10* (1960) and *Chambacú, corral de negros* (1963) are two of the author’s earlier works. Written at the beginning of the 1960s, they serve as foundations for a long and productive career that lasted nearly 60 years. The presence of violence in his narrative that began with his first novel *Tierra mojada* (1947) continues as an essential theme in both texts.

As the primary focus of this thesis, both *La Calle 10* and *Chambacú, corral de negros* are connected by their treatment of violence. They are the best examples of the topic in the author's narrative and each share similar images of marginalized peoples being oppressed by their governments. Although the novels are united in this manner they each present it in unique and varying ways. My goal in this thesis is to present the multiple manifestations in both texts while at the same time emphasizing their differences. As I do this I argue for an intimate, important relationship between the novels that goes beyond just theme.

The first chapter of this study focuses on *La Calle 10* and presents the reader with the numerous and diverse images of violence in the text. Here, it is a constant reality of young and old, black and white, and poor and wealthy although special focus is paid to the poor and down-trodden citizens of the street that gives the novel its name. These images are organized into categories of dehumanization, physical and sexual abuse, and exploitation. They demonstrate how each character in the text is affected directly or indirectly by them. As I analyze the various scenes in the text I present each of them within the circular framework of violence, hope, and rebellion. Each character in the text experiences violence in one way or another, they then believe and hope that their situation will improve and, as a consequence, they then take their lives into their own hands and rebel for a better future.

As the title of the first chapter suggests, *La Calle 10* is only the beginning of a broader image of change in the novels. The protagonists understand their circumstances and believe that through a violent upheaval against authority they can bring about meaningful change for themselves and their community. The end of the novel is ambiguous as to whether they were successful in their attempt and hints at the possibility of future violence. The forthcoming

violence comes in the second novel where the characters in the text have learned from history and rebel in their own manner.

The second chapter of this study is dedicated to Zapata Olivella's most well-known novel, *Chambacú, corral de negros*. Violence here takes a different shape from the previous text as it is presented entirely within a vertical context. Those in authority are entirely responsible for its presence as demonstrated by military intervention, kidnapping, torture, and occupation. Furthermore, whereas in the previous text the focus of the narration was on the many diverse citizens of Calle 10, here, the spotlight shines on one character in particular and his personification of rebellion's voice. Máximo, the protagonist, is at the center of hope and rebellion in the text. He uses history as his guide in order to convince the community that peaceful resistance is the way to a better future. His use of the past in order to affect the present and future links the two novels beyond theme itself.

## CHAPTER 1

### *LA CALLE 10: THE SEEDS OF CHANGE*

Colombia has come to represent Latin America's ultimate instance of violence as a constant, pervasive element in the nation's self-definition.

*Idelber Avelar*

One of the most vital political novels is *La Calle 10*.

*John S. Brushwood*

*La Calle 10* (1960) is perhaps Manuel Zapata Olivella's most violent novel. Published thirteen years after his first novel, *Tierra mojada*, and three years previous to the first edition of *Chambacú, corral de negros* (1963), it presents many of the themes he would use in the texts that followed. Topics such as poverty, hunger, violence, and politics form an important part of the narration. The violence at the center of *La Calle 10* can be broken down into the categories of dehumanization, exploitation, and physical and sexual abuse, and most characters experience one or more of them directly or indirectly. The author presents these classifications within the circular structure of violence, hope, and rebellion: Scenes of hope mirror these instances of violence, and such hope provides them with a desire for change and the belief that it is possible. This last step leads them to rebel against their oppressors in search of justice and revenge. Finally, violence returns as the final image of the text suggesting that the cycle is about to begin anew. Both novels treated in this analysis display similar designs, although their ideological base and the outcomes of their rebellion are different. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the aforementioned cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion forces the characters to seek redress through violent action. Also, we will see how *La Calle 10* serves as a precursor to the other novel of this study, *Chambacú, corral de negros*. The actions of the characters in the first novel pave the way for those in the second to bring about change on their own terms. Without the violent backlash of the protagonists of *Calle 10*, it is likely that the citizens of *Chambacú* would not be able to seek change in their community in a peaceful manner.

*La Calle 10* follows the lives of the people from the street that bears its name, a place that society's rejects call home. Beggars, prostitutes, the poor, and other marginalized figures are confined to this space that the narrator describes as "un túnel" and "un caudal humano" where "todo se aquietaba dentro [y] que hacía perder la noción del tiempo, que aproximaba y alejaba

las cosas” (12). Along Calle 10 the author creates dozens of diverse characters that experience life as a daily struggle for survival. Those who stand out are “el Pelúo” who suffers greatly from the death of his wife Saturnina; Parmenio and his children who are forced to beg in order to survive; “el Oso”, a severely deformed man who is made to display his anomalies for money; an unnamed young prostitute who is forced into white slavery by others; Epaminondas and his dog Desprecio that had been severely mistreated by previous owners; and, Mamatoco and Tamayo, the self-proclaimed revolutionaries of the community, whose paper *La Voz del Pueblo* “denuncia la prostitución del capitalismo” (38). The author presents these characters in the first part of the novel entitled “SEMILLA” and their hardships become the basis for their actions in the second half, designated as “COSECHA”. Here, the citizens of Calle 10 find inspiration in the words of Mamatoco and Tamayo and spontaneously rebel against their oppressors. While brandishing weapons of all kinds, they murder, loot, and destroy homes and businesses. The immediate consequences of this violence are a street “sembrada de cadáveres, donde la pirotecnia de las descargas iluminaba el rostro de los muertos” and a city where “habían comenzado a arder grandes edificios” (101-02).

As a historical background for the novel itself, from 1948 until approximately 1964, warring political parties and the ideologies that formed them created a state of constant violence and fear for the people of Colombia. The atrocities and cruelties that characterized this period of sectarian violence became known as the *Violencia* (Palacios 137). Palacios explains its chronology:

A political description of the *Violencia* starts with its periodization into four phases: (1) traditional sectarianism, 1945-49; (2) from the Liberals’ decision not to field a candidate in late 1949 to the installation of the military government in 1953; (3) the rise of the

pájaros or Conservative assassins from 1954 to 1958; and (4) the residual violence that lasted, as the death squads sought to thrust themselves back into Colombian civic life on their own terms. (135)

He adds that at times it was “impossible to bring up its causes and context” (135) because “relatively few deaths were the result of armed contact between guerillas or other unofficial forces on one side and military, police, or other state forces on the other. One or another armed group, legal or illegal, would take over a territory and impose its control on the population” (137). Often those uninvolved with either political party would be caught in the middle of this violence. The true count of the dead and dispossessed is said to be near 300,000, although “in many communities the dividing line between common criminality and the Violencia was too blurred to permit an accurate accounting” (136).

Since the Violencia was such a vital part of Colombia’s history it is understandable that it became an integral part of the culture. As Palacios notes, “its interpretations and symbolism ran through all musing about the past and the present” (136). Literature was no exception. Raymond Williams writes:

During this period the political dialogue was affected predominately in novels of La Violencia, a type of fictionalization so prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s that until the advent of Garcia Marquez’s *Macondo*, the contemporary novel in Colombia was virtually synonymous to “the novel of the Violencia.” Over forty such works were published during this period. (49)

Williams posits that the Violencia dominated the novels of the time and anything written during the period was considered to be a reflection or documentary of the chaos that engulfed

Colombian society, since these novels tended to include the naming of names, recounting real events, and demonstrating the crude violence associated with civil wars. Thus, many consider *La Calle 10*, to be a novel of the Violencia. He uses images of savage brutality and cruel violence as a historical backdrop and therefore is able to focus on the varying categories of violence and how they are connected. He consciously avoids using historical figures and actual occurrences to help maintain the focus on the novel as literature rather than an historical account.

Williams also believes that those that are either uninformed or uninterested in the political dialogue of the time consider the novels of the Violencia to be faulty because of their slavish focus on the events of the period (49). Consequently, critics and scholars unfamiliar with Colombian history tend to ignore novels written during this period that seem to be mere history or journalistic reportage of political events. For this reason, *La Calle 10* stands out as a literary work that extends beyond immediate circumstances by including such global topics as marginalization, violence, poverty, hunger, and revolution. Furthermore, the narrative gives voice to individuals and groups that—while they seem to be affected only indirectly by the skirmishes of the Violencia—find themselves living on the fringes of society due to the larger, more discriminatory issues such as race, ethnicity or other social factors.

In his book *Treading the Ebony Path: Ideology and Violence in Contemporary Afro-Colombian Prose Fiction* (1987), Marvin Lewis dedicates a chapter to the topic of violence in Zapata Olivella's novels which begins with his first novel, *Tierra mojada* (1947), and ends with his most important work, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983). Lewis' analysis of *La Calle 10* is limited in its scope as it contains analyses of only a small number of the characters in the novel. Because of this, the categories of violence that he includes are limited to prostitution, death, and mass violence. The few pages that he dedicates to the novel limit his ability to include the diverse



types of characters in the novel—young and old, human and animal—and the diverse categories of violence—dehumanization, exploitation, physical and sexual abuse. It is particularly significant that Lewis' analysis avoids—intentionally or unintentionally—and explanation of how *La Calle 10* and *Chambacú, corral de negros* are related beyond their common theme, and how the first novel becomes an historical example of rebellion which, ultimately, helps the characters of the second novel look at revolution and change in a different light. At first glance, the two novels seem to have little in common other than being narratives of violence and oppression but as one looks deeper the novels present a clear stylistic and historical progression.

Lewis begins his study by following certain tenets found in Ariel Dorfman's book *Imaginación y violencia en America* (1970). This classic work on violence in Latin American literature identifies four basic structures of violence: vertical and social, horizontal and individual, nonspatial and interior, and narrative (Lewis 8). The first two categories are what Lewis applies to his analysis and both are helpful to this study. Dorfman defines vertical violence as social violence and explains that it exists as the characters realize they are victims and decide to rebel against the society they believe has created their situation. This rebellion is violent and is justified because of institutionalized violence and systematic exploitation and marginalization (17). Horizontal and individual violence is different from the vertical kind as it is characterized as violence committed by characters toward others with no clear social meaning, although society serves as an invisible background to all actions no matter how trivial (23). For Lewis, Dorfman's study becomes vital to understanding the writings of all Afro-Colombian novelists because they are "integral components of the world views projected by all these writers and...they portray a constant struggle against oppressive social constraints and against neighbors"

(10). This statement is pertinent when referring to *La Calle 10* since it portrays topics of a social concern to the author which include poverty, hunger, and violence.

Violence in *La Calle 10*, as previously noted, can be put into categories of dehumanization, exploitation, and physical and sexual abuse, all of which affect the majority of characters in the novel. The focus of this chapter will be on those that I believe fit best into each characterization. Dehumanization is most often portrayed through hunger and death and thus, the analysis will focus on “el Pelúo” and Parmenio who both experience hunger and the tragedy of losing a loved one. Also, included in my analysis of Parmenio will be an account of the members of his family who share his dehumanization. Exploitation is closely related to dehumanization especially in the case of “el Oso” who is the victim of both types of violence. Included with “el Oso” in my analysis of exploitation is an unnamed young prostitute who is exploited both sexually and financially. The last category of violence incorporated into this analysis is physical and sexual abuse and the two characters that suffer most from this type of violence are Desprecio and his owner Epaminondas and Ruperta, Parmenio’s daughter. Not only does each of these characters suffer a different type of violence but they also experience the cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion in distinct ways.

The novel commences with the discovery of Saturnina’s lifeless corpse gunned down on Calle 10. Soon after, her husband, “el Pelúo,” “había perdido la serenidad. Sus ojos, nublados por las lágrimas, no alcanzaban a ver los primeros rayos de luz diluidos en la madrugada” (9). As he looks at her face, he remembers vividly what they had already experienced previous to the narration as a result of his wife’s illness:

La mueca que desfiguraba el rostro de Saturnina trajo a su mente los recuerdos de angustiosa enfermedad: la tos sofocante; los vómitos de sangre; la espera a las puertas del hospital; su hijo chupando leche del seno vacío; el médico con la nariz tapada, todo lleno de escrúpulos y, sobre todo, aquella negativa: “¡No hay camas!”. “¡No hay camas...!”.

Luego, hipeando, vino a morir en el piso duro y frío de la Calle 10. (9-10)

“El Pelúo” strongly believes that society has forgotten his wife and that her death is the cause of extreme poverty. The hunger they experience leads them to steal and scavenge for food in order to survive. For him, “estaban solos en el mundo” (9), and this feelings of loneliness lead him to further isolation later in the text. He leaves little time for grief and desperately tries to figure out how to remove his wife from the street and prepare a proper burial. He has no coffin and is forced to search for one because the alternative to this is so horrific. “Debía darse prisa para llevarla al cementerio. Si llegaban a descubrir allí el cadáver de su mujer, lo conducirían al anfiteatro. Esta idea lo horrorizaba más que la misma muerte de su compañera” (9), because the *anfiteatro* is where medical students dissect and study the bodies of the poor that can’t afford a proper cemetery burial.

“El Pelúo” is so upset with the thought of Saturnina being dissected in the *anfiteatro* that he contemplates vengeance. “Sabía quiénes la habían dejado morir, y aunque le hubiera sido placentero dejar expuesto el cadáver a sus miradas como una acusación, se resolvió a enterrarla sin cura, sin velas” (10). The narrative of Zapata Olivella avoids revealing who killed Saturnina and we are left with the words of her husband. He blames her death on the hospital that refused to admit her when she was coughing up blood and on a society that rejects the poor. Indeed, “el Pelúo” believes that those in positions of power are responsible for the violence that he and his wife have experienced. Thus, the violence surrounding her becomes an example of Dorfman’s

vertical violence as he realizes that they are victims. Even though the reader never knows for certain who killed Saturnina, all of the elements for vertical violence are present. The belief of her husband and the experiences they shared together point to exploitive violence.

“El Pelúo” and Saturnina both experience violence directly through poverty and hunger. He also experiences death indirectly through his wife’s murder. This scene places him at the beginning of the cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion. In the novel, the author presents scenes of hope to contrast with scenes of violence in order to give the characters a belief that change is possible. Different from other characters in the novel, “el Pelúo” fails to experience hope. With the death of his wife he is left with nothing. There are no images of hope accompanying this sad scene and even the presence of his child is insufficient. The child further emphasizes the death of his wife as he seeks warmth and comfort from his dead mother. The thoughts of vengeance that follow his wife’s death soon disappear as he focuses entirely on finding a way to bury his wife.

“El Pelúo” exemplifies the destructive psychological force of violence in the novel. At times, systematic violence is too much for any one character to handle and they are unable to comprehend the possibility of change and do not seek it. “El Pelúo” fits this characterization. Initially he has thoughts of vengeance as demonstrated previously, but forgoes following through with his desire. In the second section of the novel, “el Pelúo” appears in the midst of the violence only as a secondary character. He becomes “hundido en su delirio” as his search for a coffin becomes his obsession. He refrains from seeking justice for Saturnina by participating in the spontaneous mass rebellion. At this point in the novel he stumbles onto a mahogany coffin. “El ‘Pelúo’ llevaba los brazos en alto, como si sobre sus hombros acarreará el ataúd de su mujer. Sus pasos se movían libremente, pero oculto grillete los detenía cuando intentaba cruzar más allá de la Calle 10, donde habían muerto su Saturnina y su Froilán” (100). His search culminates in the

discovery of a coffin and only now can he experience hope that up until this point he was unable to comprehend. “El Pelúo” becomes a tragic character in *La Calle 10* that fails to see beyond the present and whose situations seem too traumatic to leave any room for hope or rebellion. For this reason, he can’t get past the initial violence he experienced and believe in a better future.

Parmenio is another character who experiences violence through dehumanization. Similar to “el Pelúo” he and his family are forced to beg. The father of a large family, Parmenio uses his children as a means to obtain food and makes them ask for alms at the doors of the church. His children are referred to as “pulgas” and as Tillis argues, “the interconnection between man and his environment is intimate and disgusting. Readers feel the filth and decay of Tenth Street as it is revealed through the characters” (48). Parmenio’s children take the form of animals demonstrating their dehumanized existence. These animal metaphors are important when considering the implications of hunger and poverty and their relationship to violence. The relation between the two is causal; the violence they experience forces them to act as animals in their search for sustenance and are therefore forced to do things that they would otherwise avoid.

The similarities between Parmenio and “el Pelúo” go beyond hunger and poverty. Parmenio experiences the death of a family member that pushes him to violence and vengeance and begins the aforementioned cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion. The Plaza de Mercado, the center of trade and business in the city is crowded with pedestrians either trying to sell their goods or just passing through. A streetcar, trying to navigate through the market, is stalled because of the crowd. What follows is an unexpected tragedy:

El tranvía delantero logró recuperar los rieles y el conductor tuvo deseos incontenibles de dejarlo correr por la pendiente de la calle. Los pasajeros que abarrotaban los estribos

comenzaron a respirar mejor un su apretujamiento. De repente se oyó un grito ronco, urgido y escalofriante. El conductor apretó los frenos y los hombres se apilonaron en el interior del carro. Se acrecentó el rumor confuso de voces, interjecciones y gritos. En mitad de la calle había quedado el cuerpo de un niño decapitado. El filo de un azadón que emergía de un volquete había servido de guillotina imprevista. Un hombre subió al carro y sujetó la cabeza por el mechón de pelo rojo. (19)

Parmenio immediately identifies the child. The streetcar kills Gabriel his oldest son and for the father the violent cycle alluded to earlier begins with this death. He will soon seek revenge on those he considers responsible.

In order for Parmenio to reach the point of rebellion, he must first encounter hope and the belief that change is possible. He finds a glimmer of hope in the midst of this chaotic scene as he soon realizes his wife, Teolinda, is in labor in the street. He will gain a child as he has just lost another. The birth of a new son gives him hope in the future and, despite such violence and desperation, there is still a possibility for change. This is the motivating factor for Parmenio to believe in change and to join the rebellion in the second half of the novel and leads to fight “no sólo por su hijo, sino por todos los hijos de esas madres asesinadas” (99).

This scene also becomes one of the more important events in the novel because later in the narration, the birth of Parmenio’s son will become a rare instance of hope in the middle of continuous death and violence. It also becomes the culminating image of hope in the novel and a symbol of future violence. Furthermore, this scene becomes an instance of distrust and rebellion toward authority. After Parmenio realizes his wife is in labor, he refuses, at the behest of a police officer named Rengifo, to take her to the hospital because he believes “es mejor que la dejen aquí.

¡No quiero que la maten!” (19). A crowd of on-lookers soon surrounds Teolinda and observes the scene. Parmenio “tenía conciencia de que quienes no lo dejaban alimentarse, esos cazadores uniformados que bufaban hasta por verlo recoger una naranja de la basura, eran los asesinos de su hijo. Se sentía al borde de la rebelión. A él también le sobraban fuerzas para destruir” (20). Parmenio’s distrust for those in uniform adds fuel to the fire that was lit when the streetcar killed his son. His unwillingness to take his wife to the hospital mirrors the image of “el Pelúo” and his refusal to do the same. The difference in the two characters comes later in the second half of the novel as Parmenio is at the heart of the rebellion and his despair has led him to violent action.

During the “COSECHA” Parmenio is at the center of the violent mass rebellion and is willing to do whatever is necessary to seek vengeance for Gabriel’s death:

Un sentimiento de venganza impulsaba a Parmenio a vaciar hasta el último grano. Sabía que actuaba contra los opresores, contra los asesinos de su hijo, contra los que le habían negado trabajo y el derecho de alimentarse. Por sus hombros rodaban más y más bultos hacia la calle y cuando sobre ellos caían las manos hambrientas, delirante entusiasmo colmaba su corazón. (99)

The vengeance that Parmenio initially feels when Gabriel was killed continues with him as he rebels against those responsible. His hope for justice overshadows any thought of remorse for his actions and his natural inclination for revenge pushes him to do whatever possible to bring about change for himself and his family.

The violent cycle that Parmenio has experienced throughout the novel comes full circle with the closing images of the text. There is no happy ending to the novel although here the reader experiences the scene of Teolinda giving birth to a new baby boy who has black hair just

like his mother's. Parmenio "respiraba fuerzas y optimismo que jamás conoció" (120). Yet, despite the novel culminating in a scene of hope, the author is conscious of the cyclical nature of violence, and because of this, leaves space for imminent action. The last image we have in the novel is of Tamayo and Rengifo, the police officer that decided to fight against the same authority he represented. After realizing the fighting had ceased and they had lost the battle, Rengifo, clearly upset, tries to break his gun against the ground. Tamayo prevents it and tells the police officer "¡Guárdalo, hermano, mañana, muy pronto, lo necesitaremos!" (124). Here, violence ends and begins and represents the point where the cycle culminates and starts over again.

Several of the characters experience both dehumanization and exploitation and are forced into sub-human and animal-like conditions where they lack the ability to make their own choices and are subjected to the will of others. In most instances, the violence is horizontal as it is performed by members of their own community with no clear political motivation. The focus of this section is on two characters that suffer greatly from exploitation at the hands of others in the community: "el Oso" and the unnamed young prostitute. The principal difference between them is the way they go about rebelling against their circumstances. "El Oso" seeks revenge for the man that exploited him while the young girl is unable to overcome initial violence and does not pursue her own revenge.

When first introduced in the novel, "el Oso" appears innocent with a limited understanding of his circumstances. Hunchbacked, grotesque and with "una cara de horror, pero de curiosidad" (27), he is manipulated into being a street performer. A character known as "el Artista" convinces "el Oso" to take off his clothes and jump over a rope that also serves as a leash. A tragic scene follows:



El “Artista” se frotó las manos con satisfacción de un modisto que logra agradar a una exigente compradora. Le ató una cuerda a la cintura y triunfalmente salió con él a rastras, a través del solar, sacudiendo una pandereta. Incómodo por el frío que acosaba su desnudez y aun sin comprender las intenciones del otro, el jorobado daba saltitos, obediente a la soga. (31-32)

Soon after this display a crowd gathers and tosses coins in the direction of the performers. “El Artista” rebukes “El Oso” as he reaches for them and at this point he realizes he is being treated unjustly and this knowledge convinces him to seek retribution later in the novel. There are no images of hope that accompany this scene and, as a result, the cycle as defined is unable to proceed. Yet, despite the lack of any accompanying images of hope in “el Oso” he is still successful at pursuing revenge. He returns to the home of his “patron” with a knife in hand and when asked about his bloody hands and if he has killed anybody, his response is simply that there is “mucho sangre en las calles” (107). He has witnessed the violence and looting of others during the rebellion and follows their example by attacking “el Artista” from behind, killing him in the process. After the attack, he walks toward the corner of the room and finds the box that his victim had used to hide rings, bracelets, watches, necklaces and other valuables. He grabs them, cleans them on his pants, and leaves.

There is a pair of similarities between “el Oso” and the unnamed young prostitute introduced in the first section of the text. Each of them is exploited for financial gain and neither fits entirely into the cycle of violence, hope and rebellion. As previously noted, “el Oso” is incapable of experiencing hope and takes vengeance on his oppressor outside of the cycle. He fails to understand hope but is still able to rebel. The unnamed young prostitute on the other hand, does not rebel within the narration because she is unable to choose for herself. The young girl is

sexually exploited by the men that pay her for pleasure, and financially exploited by her mother that “comercia con el sexo de su hija adolescente” (37). We are introduced to this character through the words of Mamatoco who “acab[a] de verlo con [sus] propios ojos” (37). Mamatoco recounts his experience to another person and, in order to prove it, they go to where he saw the girl and proceed to solicit her. They enter the alley and after walking a short distance in between the thick walls, they see the girl, “frente a una puerta semidestruida, la niña que apenas enderezaba sus caderas con los primeros brotes de la adolescencia, le sonrió, empegostados los labios de cosméticos. Todavía ignoraba la ciencia de atraer a los hombres y sus ojitos claros relampagueaban como niña que prepara una travesura” (39). Mamatoco enters the brothel and, “en una cama pequeña lo esperaba la niña de ojos claros; el pollerín rojo, subido más allá de sus rodillas, mostraba sus muslos todavía sin sazonar” (40). The prostitute is a child that shows her immaturity through her actions and appearance. As Mamatoco nervously stands looking at the girl, he hears a voice of an older woman asking a peso for the transaction. As her mother appears from the darkness, he has proven his argument. Mamatoco, unable to handle the scene any longer, walks to the door and leaves. After he exits, he looks back and sees that “la niña se había desnudado del todo y lo esperaba con una sonrisa de ángel inocente” (41).

The narrator presents the young girl only at the beginning of a potential violent act in order to demonstrate that she never arrives at the point of revenge and rebellion within the narration. She is similar to “el Oso” because her innocence limits her understanding of the situation. The difference between the two is a result of her youth and inexperience and his mental and physical handicaps. Her innocence is further demonstrated as she follows her mother unquestioningly. Because of her youth she is unable to make decisions for herself. This is an

important contrast to other characters in the novel that have the opportunity to experience hope, believe in change, and rebel.

Although the young prostitute is never entirely inside the cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion, she becomes a symbol of hope for others. The girl's story is presented through the eyes of Mamatoco, one of the revolutionary journalists of Calle 10. He is so incensed at the idea that a mother is prostituting her own child that he decides to use the situation to further denounce the government:

¿Qué importan esas acusaciones a las ratas politiqueras? ¿Para qué continuar diciendo que el Gobernador es un asesino? ¿Qué ganaremos con afirmar que la policía es una guardia de salteadores? Desde ahora la “Voz del Pueblo” denunciará la prostitución del capitalismo. ¡Las madres que lanzan sus hijas al lenocinio, son apenas las víctimas de los ricos que les imponen su dictadura de hambre! (37-8)

While Mamatoco sees violence indirectly through the exploitation of this young girl he also finds hope in her innocence and converts her into a symbol for his cause. Similarly, Mamatoco's death at the hands of the police becomes motivation for others to fight. He, like the girl, becomes a symbol of hope for others.

Physical and sexual abuse is the final category of violence that this study examines and similar to the previous examples, affects multiple characters in the novel. Physical abuse is presented in various instances toward animals. Along with humans, animals—in particular dogs—are victims of violence. They also become symbols of hope and motivating factors for revenge. Early in the novel, the narrator introduces the reader to Epaminondas and initially, we don't know much about him except that he lives on Calle 10. The focus of the initial scene with

this character is his relationship with his dog, Desprecio. They have a strong, loving relationship that all began when Epaminondas took him off the streets and gave him a home:

El mulo y Epaminondas formaban una pareja inseparable cuando los conoció. El carretero lo vio llegar hambreado, dolido por la paliza que le propinaron sus primitivos dueños hasta hacerlo huir. Nunca supo por qué lo echaron a pesar de que ya habían dejado de alimentarlo. Epaminondas le dio comida y comenzó a llamarlo “Desprecio”. El mulo no le hablaba, pero se había dado cuenta de que también lo quería, pues le alargaba su cuello para olfatearlo. (11)

Epaminondas finds the dog emaciated, beaten and in dire need of care. Desprecio, because he is a dog, is incapable of seeking revenge on those responsible for the abuse. Later in the novel when the dog again experiences violence, his master then is able to seek revenge on his behalf.

Epaminondas experiences the cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion in different ways at two junctures in the novel. When the reader is first introduced to him, he has just experienced violence indirectly through his canine companion. He becomes a witness to the results of physical abuse and hunger. Epaminondas is a unique character because he creates his own hope. He decides to help a sick dog and shows love toward this animal demonstrating a rare glimpse of humanity in the text. He shows that it is possible to bring hope to others by simple kindness. In this context, the cycle takes on a different form since hope is the culminating image of the cycle. The images of hope that accompany most instances of initial violence in the novel are often the result of a character witnessing the event indirectly. This is the case for the aforementioned Parmenio who sees hope in the birth of a new child. The fact that Epaminondas creates hope within the cycle of violence sets him apart from others in the novel.

Epaminondas' ability to use hope and kindness to end the cycle of violence becomes insufficient later on in the novel when his beloved Desprecio is stabbed to death by a butcher.

The narrator describes this heart-wrenching scene:

Desprecio se escurrió por debajo de las mesas y se detuvo en la puerta de una ventana de carne. No había nadie en el interior y su vista se fijó en el pellejo que goteaba sangre. Penetró resuelto, y ya regresaba con la presa hacia la calle, cuando el carnicero, plantándosele en la mitad del camino, con ágil golpe le hundió el cuchillo en el pecho. Ahogado en su propia hemorragia, el arma clavada, huyó por entre la gente, sombrero sus pasos con sangre y aullidos... Desprecio alcanzó a llegar hasta los pies de Epaminondas, la lengua negra, agitando su mocho en inequívocos síntomas de la muerte. (33)

Epaminondas immediately removes the knife from his friend and seeks the person responsible. The butcher who follows Desprecio after stabbing him soon appears yielding a knife and Epaminondas reacts instantly by attacking him. He is unsuccessful as the attack is soon broken up by the police. Epaminondas returns to his dog and consoles it during its last moments of life. For Epaminondas, “los últimos momentos de su perro eran su vida, sus oídos, su boca, sus manos” (34), and his death represents his own. The thing he loves most in the world is now dead and “su mente sólo tamizaba obsesionante idea de la venganza” (34).

The second instance of violence involving Epaminondas reinserts him into the cycle of violence. Epaminondas finds hope in his beloved dog and the combination of this hope and his desire for vengeance leads him to the center of the mass rebellion. Toward the end of the first section of the novel, a group gathers on Calle 10 to listen to the words of their leaders Mamatoco

and Tamayo. During the gathering “el Artista” reads from the *Voz del Pueblo*, “Al pueblo no le queda otra salida que enfrentarse a sus opresores. Hasta cuando va a permitir que los enriquecidos a su costa le marquen el camino de la miseria con la fusta de la demagogia” (48). A group of police interrupt the reading of the paper “propinando golpes sobre cabezas y espaldas” (48-49). This altercation precedes the community’s discovery of Mamatoco’s bloody corpse, the victim of police gunfire:

Los perros se peleaban el charco de sangre del cadáver de un hombre, que hundía su cara en las aguas negras de la acera. Se detuvo irresoluto para observarlo. No le era del todo desconocido. Sí, era la corpulencia inconfundible de “Mamatoco”. “¡Lo han asesinado!”. La pregunta le saltó espontánea a los labios: “¿Por qué?”. El día anterior le había comprado un número de “La Voz del Pueblo” y se alegró de que se dijera tanta verdad en sus páginas. Había hasta pensado que podían ponerlo preso por sus artículos. Pero he aquí que lo encontraba muerto. “Han preferido asesinarlo”. (73)

Soon, the rest of Calle 10 sees the lifeless body of their leader.

La gente corría y se apilonaba a un lado de la calle, disputándose por ver a “Mamatoco” en su lecho de muerte. Veintiséis puñaladas habían vaciado su sangre. Muy serios, como buitres recelosos, tres policías vigilaban el cadáver. Eran impotentes ante la peregrinación de los habitantes de la Calle 10. Las verduleras, olvidadas de sus bultos, comenzaron a elevar la plegaria de sus insultos:

— ¡Malditos sean los asesinos!

— ¡Como no podían matar a todo el pueblo, han cortado su lengua! (76-77)

Mamatoco's death is the last straw for many from Calle 10 for they believe that his murder is "un crimen político" and "Los de arriba han querido silenciar su voz, la voz del pueblo, pero sólo hacen que su grito sea más potente. Este crimen llevará su acusación más allá de la Calle 10. Aquí no se ha matado un hombre, se ha herido de muerte a un pueblo" (78). Up until this point their desire to rebel against their oppressors appeared to be just an empty statement but as a result of Mamatoco's death, they take action and fight back. Epaminondas channels his anger toward a search for weapons for the masses. He finds machetes, pickaxes, and hoes to give to the crowd and then leads them in their attack. Soon after the initial launch of attacks, Epaminondas gets lost in the chaos. The narrator abstains from describing what happened to him and we are left with the testimony of another character that "pareció ver a Epaminondas, mucho más voluminoso con la muerte" (91). Epaminondas' focus on revenge and violent rebellion leads to his death and reunion with Desprecio.

Similar to Desprecio, Parmenio's daughter Ruperta is the victim of abuse, although in this instance it is of a sexual nature. The narrator introduces the reader to Ruperta early in the novel alongside her father and siblings. She is described as a "mocosa cargándose con la sazón de la pubertad, modelando sus caderas con inesperadas onzas de grasa y empinando el busto con la insinuación de los senos" (13). She is also presented against the backdrop of incest and rape. Her father is pleased at her physical development because her developing body indicates her readiness to help relieve the family's hunger through prostitution. Ruperta is thrust into the cycle of violence, as her first sexual encounter is a combination of rape and prostitution. A character by the name of "el Sátiro" lures her with a piece of cheese and proceeds to abuse her sexually. Although the scene seems to be an example of abuse, Ruperta understands what she is doing and only goes along with it because "el queso le recordó que su hermanito tenía hambre" (74). The

whole scene is difficult to read as her obvious youth and innocence is exposed by “el Sático” as he asks her to be unafraid and courageous. She wants to resist “aquella boca que la lamía, pero no tuvo voluntad” (75).

Ruperta is an entirely selfless character that thinks only of her hungry siblings that are forced to roam the streets for sustenance. Her selflessness makes it so she never thinks of revenge and refuses to seek it. Similar to the unnamed young prostitute, the cycle ends with her initial violent experience. Both characters’ innocence makes them incapable of continuing within the cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion.

The cycle of violence, hope, and rebellion alluded to during this chapter helps understand the role of violence in the lives of those that live on Calle 10. The marginalized characters of the novel experience dehumanization, exploitation, and abuse on a daily basis, either from an oppressive government or from others in their community. They also create and form part of the cycle. There are those that develop their own hope and refrain from using it to search for justice and others that start the cycle of violence but never get past that initial step because they refuse to or are unable to understand the necessity of rebellion. The end of the novel is ambiguous as to whether there will be a better future for those that have fought against their circumstances but it is clear that it will include violence. The initial steps that the citizens of Calle 10 take to come together for a particular cause will pave the way for others to utilize their example and rebel in their own terms.



## CHAPTER 2

### *CHAMBACÚ, CORRAL DE NEGROS: VIOLENCE, HISTORY AND REBELLION'S VOICE*

La frustración a la que se ven sometidos no puede menos que llevarnos a expresar una conducta violenta a fin de conseguir la igualdad racial, social y económica.

*Sylvia G. Carullo*

[*Chambacú, corral de negros*] representa un capítulo en la historia silenciada de los afrodescendientes colombianos.

*Lucía Ortiz*

*Chambacú, corral de negros*, one of Zapata Olivella's most important novels<sup>2</sup>, is founded on the place where it receives its name: a small Afro-Hispanic community outside of the larger Colombian city of Cartagena. It is a town that the author knows well "which enriches his narration and makes for the authentic dialogue that is one of the book's strengths" (Jackson, *Canon* 53). A novel thematically similar to *La Calle 10*, it reveals another instance of marginalization and violence within the country but, different from the earlier novel, this text is decidedly Afro-Hispanic in that it takes place in an entirely black community. Antonio Tillis adds that it is "[una] novela [que] tiene que ver con los gritos de una comunidad afro-colombiana que a través de los siglos existía como víctima de la esclavitud, la pobreza, la marginalidad, la opresión social y la búsqueda de una salida" (68). From the beginning of the narration the reader is thrown into the lives of displaced Afro-Colombians who are forced to submit to the non-black authority. The military has invaded the community snatching away and forcing able-bodied men to fight in the Korean War, a war in which they have no vested interest<sup>3</sup>. Later in the novel after the traumatic events that came earlier, the army returns to remove the chambaculeros from their homes so a tourist resort can be built. This process of gentrification becomes the last straw for many in the community and leads them to take action against their oppressors.

The most crucial element of the novel and what connects it to the previous text is the role of history in the narration. Before any of the characters reads, studies and learns from their past, the reader gets a sense that the community has a deep, important relationship to its cultural roots. This is evident in the fact that they have maintained "un sentido de la cultura nacional afro-colombiana por medio del cimarronaje cultural, el sincretismo religioso y la unión con los antepasados" (Tillis 68). Cultural understanding and traditions give the characters a solid base

from which to seek a deeper knowledge of the history of their community. What they find as a result of this search is a past replete with examples of social resistance.

Lucía Ortiz, another prominent Zapata Olivella scholar, introduces readers to the well-known Afro-Colombian folk singer Totó la Momposina, who in at least two instances has shared the historical realities of Chambacú in her music. She introduces the topic of black resistance against displacement when she sings the following:

Chambacú, Chambacú, Chambacú...

La historia la escribes tú [...]

Chambacú, Chambacú, Chambacú...

La historia de las murallas

Con sangre la escribió la canalla,

Con sangre la escribió la canalla,

Con la pluma del dolor,

Con la pluma del dolor,

Curando la carne esclava

A lo lejos se ve la muralla,

A San Pedro Clave con la saya,

Curando al negro Bembe,

Curando al negro Bembe,

Chambacú, Chambacú,

Chambacú, Chambaculero

De aquí no me sacas tú

Chambacú, Chambacú, Chambacú...

La historia la escribes tú

(qtd. in Ortiz 157)

Momposina's verses serve as an introduction to the heart of Chambacú's history of oppression at the hands of the government and its defiance against these forces. For Momposina, social defiance is and will continue to be a fundamental part of the community's identity.

Additionally, Ortiz points out that “durante la época colonial, este sector fue importante escenario de las luchas de los africanos por su liberación de la esclavitud” (155). Furthermore, the town's evolution came to mirror the continued history of marginalized Afro-Hispanics in Colombian society. Ortiz explains:

A principios del siglo XX, debido al trabajo creado por la construcción del tranvía y más tarde por la construcción de una carretera, Chambacú se convirtió en el más grande de los barrios aledaños a las murallas. Al finalizarse esas obras, chambaculeros y chambaculeras se desempeñaron como obreros de construcción, lavanderas, y cocineras en las casas de los sectores más pudientes de la región. Como es el caso de muchos barrios pobres cercanos a las ciudades, las autoridades nunca se preocuparon por el bienestar de Chambacú y sus habitantes no conocieron los servicios básicos de electricidad, acueductos e higiene. (155)

These conditions reflected in the beginning of the century would continue decades later with the eradication of the neighborhood in the 1970s and the dispersion of its inhabitants throughout other nearby cities (Ortiz 155-56).<sup>4</sup> Although Chambacú was destroyed and its citizens were forgotten by the masses, the town for many represents “un capítulo abierto de la historia del país donde se combinan elementos culturales, políticos, sociales y económicos que merecen un lugar en la memoria colectiva de la nación” (Ortiz 156). Ortiz's argument that the history of Chambacú

is important in the collective memory of Colombians is confirmed by the text of Manuel Zapata Olivella, for the author, along with other writers, “han rescatado del olvido a Chambacú” (157). But, my goal in this chapter isn’t to analyze the topic of collective memory in the writings of the author. Rather, I wish to display that the novel is a historical and literary continuation of the first novel of this study. It clearly shares similar themes of marginalization, violence, and opposition but even more importantly it demonstrates the interconnectedness of the novels. This relationship leads me to conclude that both works are closely related and lend each other strength.

In his groundbreaking study on racism and colonialism Frantz Fanon examines the role of history and violence in the processes of colonization and decolonization. For Fanon, decolonization is “a historical process” (*Wretched* 1) and those who are presently fighting against their oppressors can learn from their predecessors in order to build from their successes and failures. He elaborates:

Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity. In the underdeveloped countries preceding generations have simultaneously resisted the insidious agenda of colonialism and paved the way for the emergence of the current struggles. Now that we are in the heat of combat, we must shed the habit of decrying the efforts of our forefathers or feigning incomprehension at their silence or passiveness. They fought as best they could with the weapons they possessed at the time... More than one colonized subject had to say, “We’ve had enough,” more than one tribe had to rebel, more than one peasant revolt had to be quelled, more than one demonstration to be repressed, for us today to stand firm, certain of our victory. (145-46)

It is clear that with regard to social upheaval and the decolonizing process it is necessary to learn from those who have gone before and to rebel differently. Furthermore, one must take history into their own hands and re-write it for themselves and for their community. Reclaiming history is fundamental because “colonialism is not content to impose its law on the colonized country’s present and future... With a kind of perverted logic, it turns its attention to the past of the colonized people and distorts it, disfigures it, and destroys it” (Fanon, *Wretched* 149).

Consequently, the characters in the novel, as they follow this process, are able to find, learn from, and re-write the history of Chambacú.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, both novels share similar topics of oppression, poverty, rebellion, and violence. The circular nature of violence shared in the first part of this study is also pertinent to the second text. The characters experience violence at the hands of authority, they experience hope, and this leads them to rebel against their oppressors. Different from the previous novel, here, the chambaculeros encounter violence in an entirely vertical manner. The government is responsible for all of its manifestations in the text. Even when the community decides to rebel it is through a peaceful demonstration. But, rather than pointing out each of these instances I emphasize the reactions against it, mainly that of the protagonist Máximo.

It is clear from the first pages of the novel that Máximo is a rebellious figure. Although still young, he has become what Fanon describes as a colonized intellectual; someone who has set themselves apart by assimilating the dominant culture, educating themselves in the colonizer’s language, and then returning to their community and becoming a voice for their cause and leading them in rebellion. From the onset of the novel he demonstrates his use of the colonizers language in his graffiti. He, along with a friend, is being pursued by the army captain

and a group of soldiers for having written anti-government slogans on the outer walls of the city. This act of defiance is simple yet powerful as it precedes the following scene:

— ¡Por ahí van! ¡Deténgalos!

La orden del Capitán. Los soldados sudaban macerado sudor de correas, fusiles y cantimploras. Pegaban las narices contra el muro y gritaban encolerizados.

— ¡Aquí también escribieron!

— ¡Rodeen el barrio! ¡Los quiero vivos o muertos! (5)

Máximo understands that “la superficie urbana, en todas sus materias, es obviamente legible [y] de esa superficie rescato sobre todo ciertos usos de las palabras y de las imágenes cifradas en graffitis y pintadas que intervienen en el territorio organizando saberes, dándole sentidos, trazando fronteras” (Kozak 12-13). The ultimate power of graffiti comes from its legibility, availability to all, and ability to convey beliefs and break down barriers. It is subversive by nature and feared by a repressive authority. Maximiliano Ruiz adds that “going out to paint was part of a generation’s feeling of hope during a specific time in history, and their political disenchantment was reflected on the walls” (149). Máximo’s actions at first seem no more than this, a simple projection of dislike towards those in power. Later they become much more.

Hope is the foundation of Máximo’s rebellion. This belief that change is possible comes from the character’s deep commitment to learning. He has dedicated much of his time to collecting, reading, and studying books. He has also learned from the history of Afro-Hispanics in Colombia and desires to follow their example. This will become more evident later in this

chapter as he shares what he has learned with his family and friends in an effort to teach and lead the community. But, the protagonist's search for knowledge hasn't come without opposition, first from authorities and then from his mother. At first, La Cotena disagrees with her son's actions and describes him as "apasionado por la lectura, prefería ser porter, celador, ascensorista. Dedicarse a cualquier empleo donde le quedara tiempo para leer. Los malditos libros. Si no hubiera sido por ellos no le perseguirían" (9). She understands well the dangers that have come with her son's ambitions and wishes only for his safety. In an effort to dissuade from continuing she commences to burn his books. The scene that follows bears the echoes of Don Quijote:

Arrojaba los legajos de revistas. La escoba barría los folletos, sumándolos con furia a la fogata. Clotilde trataba de sujetarla.

— ¡Mamá! ¡Si son los libros de Máximo!

Era muy fuerte para que la hija pudiera contenerla. Los vecinos rodearon las llamas. Los sobrecogía el asombro. Jamás imaginaron que Máximo acumulara tantos libracos. Los analfabetos apenas veían arder el papel emborronado. Basura. (10)

By taking and setting ablaze the many books that her son had accumulated, La Cotena actively tries to dissuade him from any further harm.

Soon after this episode her strong desire to protect her son is replaced by understanding and commitment. She strongly objects to the government taking men from the town to fight and would rather see Máximo die than to take part in murder. Her feelings are clear: "¡No se lo llevarán! Me costó mucho dolor parirlo. ¿Por qué quieren que vaya a matar gente que no conoce ni le ha hecho daño? ¿No tienen bastante con los que asesinan aquí? Máximo, hijo mío, déjate matar. ¡Prefiero verte muerto que convertido en asesino!" (17). Here, La Cotena reveals her true



beliefs about the war and about the military who tries to force the men to join. Emphasizing this point is the fact that one of her other sons, José Raquel, volunteers to fight. She immediately renounces his decision and goes as far as to reject him as a son, “no lloraré por él. Que se pudra en la Guerra. ¡No es hijo mío!” (45). Although La Cotena was strongly against the actions of Máximo she has been convinced by his dedication and example and will now accompany him in rebellion.

It is vital that Máximo, as a “colonized intellectual,” reach out to the community and bring hope for change to the masses. In this process he first goes to his mother and, despite her initial rejection, she soon comes to understand his reasons and decides to support him. He now must expand his audience outside of his immediate circle of influence into the hearts and minds of the other citizens. In order to do this he must serve as an example as one who is not just preaching for change, rather someone who is at the heart of the physical resistance. Fanon explains that to be successful in teaching hope one must first commit himself physically to the cause:

When the colonized intellectual writing for his people uses the past he must do so with the intention of opening up the future, of spurring them into action and fostering hope. But in order to secure hope, in order to give it substance, he must take part in the action and commit himself body and soul to the national struggle. You can talk about anything you like, but when it comes to talking about that one thing in a man’s life that involves opening up new horizons, enlightening your country and standing tall alongside your own people, then muscle power is required. (167)

From the initial pages of the narrative we witness a character both physically and mentally dedicated to change. Early in the text after being pursued by police for painting slogans on the wall he is arrested by the police. He, along with others who are incarcerated, is subjected to various forms of extreme torture. And while in prison he is singled out by the guards. He is defiant in the face of his oppressors and stands firm knowing he will be tortured because “podrían mutilarlo pero no cambiarían su decisión” (33). Máximo’s full commitment to standing up for his beliefs continues during this period of intense opposition and when he is eventually released in the second part of the novel, it is apparent that his dedication has not changed but shows a renewed vigor.

Máximo’s profound belief in maintaining hope in the possibility of change comes from a clear understanding of history. The books that he reads and studies foster these feelings in him and lead him to revolutionary thought and action. Marvin Lewis writes that the character’s “approach to the problem of liberation for Chambacú’s population involves more than rhetoric. He operates from a strong historical and ideological frame of reference” (106). This sets him apart from others in the same novel and also the revolutionaries in *La Calle 10*. Sylvia Carullo adds that, “la influencia de la oposición intelectual que Máximo desea poner en acción, lenta y progresivamente durante el transcurso de la novela, contiene en sí misma más validez que la violencia irracional y primitiva que el ejército y la policía llevan a práctica” (21). Here, Carullo points to the vital difference between the intellectual opposition of Máximo and the government’s “language of pure violence” (Fanon, *Wretched* 4). This difference is also pertinent to the differences between the novels in this study. As the text progresses and Máximo becomes the revolutionary leader of Chambacú, what surfaces is a clear picture of the differences between him and Mamatoco and Tamayo from *La Calle 10*. The protagonists from the previous novel

were content with writing a revolutionary newspaper and recounting, to anyone who would listen, the evils of the government. They, unlike Máximo, did not use previous rebellions as their guide and, more importantly, their lack of strong leadership is highlighted by the fact that they weren't examples of action. Rather, they worked from a rhetorical standpoint and through their words were able to convince many to fight. I hesitate to describe them as persuasive since many of those who participated in the looting and killing didn't need much convincing as they had already shown a desire to rebel against their oppressors. Instead, their words and, ultimately, Mamatoco's death at the hands of police officers becomes the last straw. In the end their words are insufficient to bring about the change they so desperately seek.

The difference between the protagonists of both novels is evident but their relationship goes deeper than simple contrasts. Their link is generated through Máximo's studies. He has read thoroughly about both his community and country. Consequently, he has been exposed to histories similar to that of *La Calle 10*, which takes place outside of Bogotá. Although the reader does not know for a certainty whether or not the actions from the novel are factual or entirely literary in nature. It is inevitable that previous struggles similar to those in the novel existed in Colombia and, furthermore, that Máximo has read about them. Instead of relating the shortcomings of his predecessors, he teaches of their nobility. I'm sure that he "decided to go further, to delve deeper, and...must have been overjoyed to discover that the past was not branded with shame, but dignity, glory, and sobriety" (Fanon, *Wretched* 148). The dignity and glory present in *La Calle 10* are born from the individuals who fight with all of their capabilities against their oppressors. Much is learned from their dedication and quest for change.

Máximo is clearly aware of the actions of those who preceded him and is motivated by them. This leads him to reach out and teach the importance of history to the Afro-Hispanic

community. In order to reclaim the past he returns to its beginnings and demonstrates the role of slaves in the foundations of Chambacú:

No es ocasional que Chambacú, corral de negros, haya nacido al pie de las murallas. Nuestros antepasados fueron traídos aquí para construir las murallas. Los barcos negreros llegaban atestados de esclavos provenientes de toda África. Mandingas, yorubas, más de cuarenta tribus. Para diferenciarlos marcaban las espaldas y pechos con hierros candentes... Las fortificaciones se construyeron en varios siglos. Los esqueletos de los esclavos muertos en ellas, habrían bastado para levantar murallas más altas y extensas que las que vemos. Morían de hambre, de sed, de peste, de torturas. Se les enterraba en la playa, en el mismo lugar donde morían. Los que sobrevivían cavaban las fosas a sabiendas de que al día siguiente, otras abrirían las suyas. (121-22)

Máximo follows this declaration with a detailed description of historical figures like Pedro Claver and Benkos Biojo who were essential to the community's history of violence and revolt. He follows the example of both of these figures and in a way, like Alejandra Rengifo argues, Máximo himself becomes an important historical person in Chambacú.<sup>5</sup> Máximo's knowledge about his town's history leads him to organize peaceful resistance against his oppressors.

Furthermore, this awareness helps him link the past to the present. Marvin Lewis explains:

In Chambacú, the characters are just as hungry and oppressed as those in [*La Calle 10*], but their outlook and sense of historical causality are different. Máximo interprets preliminary action in which the residents have thwarted an attempt to dislocate them in order to construct tourist hotels as a transformation from the traditional spiritual liberation of his ancestors to the physical dimension of the present. (102)

The linking, for which Máximo is the instigator, is necessary in reclaiming the colonized individual's past. The process of restoration helps re-define the past, present, and future. The protagonist's desire is for a better future for himself and for his community.

Máximo's success in convincing others of the necessity for change has not come without some rejection, especially from his own family. While his mother soon comes around and is convinced of his actions, his brother does not. In fact, never at any point in the narration does he choose to listen. José Raquel is Máximo's antithesis, a character that clearly looks after his own interests of monetary gain and social standing. In the second section of the novel, "EL BOTÍN," the reader witnesses his return from the war with a new motorcycle and a "Nordic trophy-wife" (Tillis 65). This outward display demonstrates a desire to be noticed and to boast of his accomplishments. However, his goals fall short as the people seem to be more interested in the bike than in the driver. La Cotena, already upset by her son's decision to volunteer for the war, becomes even more incensed by the fact he brought a white woman with him to Chambacú. She is unable to comprehend that this type of woman, a white foreigner, would come to their town unless she had already known similar circumstances of poverty. She even concludes that Inge must be some sort of prostitute. She expresses her feelings: "¿Qué humos se han metido en la cabeza de ese imbécil para traer una gringa a Chambacú? ¿Será una puta? ¡Sabe Dios en que burdel la recogió!" (49). This demonstration represents a gap between José Raquel and his people and the fact that he brought Inge back home displays a "mindset [that] embodies the concept of 'blanqueamiento,' or 'whitening,' the process of attaching himself to the dominant, white structure" (Tillis 66). This is a deep contrast to his brother, who accepts, learns from, and teaches the nobleness of the history of the black population. The clear differences that the

brothers share will culminate in a confrontation between the two in the final pages of the narrative.

Even if Máximo is unable to reach out to his brother, he continues teaching within his own home where he finds an important ally. In the third section of the novel, “LA BATALLA,” he returns from his incarceration and finds Inge, who has been abandoned by her husband due to his self-interests. At this juncture, she has been in Chambacú for an extended period of time in which she has become close to her mother-in-law and has branched out to friends and neighbors. She has slowly become an accepted part of the black community. Regardless of the differences in race and culture she encounters, she becomes assimilated. Jonathon Tittler states that “Inge, who is first shocked by the conditions she discovers, which include ‘discredited’ practices (within the industrialized West ranging from cockfights to sorcery), gradually comes to understand and appreciate the people and their cultural forms” (297). Máximo sees that she has become a part of his people and therefore must teach her the history of Chambacú. He understands very well that in order to affect real change there needs to be some type of solidarity with the enemy, in this case, the non-Black majority. Inge, as an embodiment of the other, takes on this role. After she learns from her brother-in-law and absorbs his words she becomes another one of his disciples, and as a symbol of the white colonizer, the importance of converting her to the cause takes on greater significance.

She is moved by his historical accounts of resistance and rebellion and her resolve to continue with La Cotena and her family is strengthened. The association between Inge and Máximo is an understated, yet crucially important part of the text. Lucía Ortiz eloquently describes the hope and fellowship that form part of this relationship. She explains: “esto demuestra el nivel humano y la solidaridad de los chambaculeros, y la esperanza de que el

trabajo conjunto y la convivencia pacífica sea la manera de lograr la liberación real” (164). The author seems to agree with this assessment. Máximo has learned that the outright violence and unorganized resistance of the previous novel is not necessarily the best way to bring about change and can now rebel on his own terms.

Inge’s acknowledgement of the people and culture of Chambacú transforms into a deep love and acceptance. Towards the end of the novel she makes this clear and declares to her husband that she has not only become part of the Afro-Colombian community but also has found herself in the process:

Aquí en Chambacú he conseguido lo que nunca tuve. Amor. En mi país jamás supe que existían otras condiciones de vida que son una afrenta a la dignidad humana. Ahora no podría vivir sin el calor de los pobres. De tu madre y de tu hermana, de todos. Luchar por ello no sólo ha llenado mi soledad, sino que ha dado sentido a mi existencia. (142)

Inge’s growth culminates in her decision to join Máximo and the rest of the chambaculeros and march for change. Her mere presence in the novel and her relationship to others is vital in understanding one of the more important points of the novel, union through difference, an idea that Máximo acutely understands.

The importance of community in the novel cannot be understated. As I have stated throughout these few pages it is at the center of the protagonists’ actions. Máximo’s desire to bring hope to his family and neighbors makes him act in order to change the future. I’ve also noted that when Máximo returns home from prison his desire to achieve change in the community hasn’t dissipated while being incarcerated; in fact, he has a renewed vigor and desperation once he finds out the government’s plan to replace the chambaculeros’ homes with a

tourist resort. Because of this he takes as many opportunities as he can to tell people of the history of Chambacú and to instill in them a desire for change. His mother has been convinced by his actions and words and the power they have over her are apparent when, at one point, after recounting the history of Chambacú to Inge, La Cotena “tosió. Las palabras de su hijo le producían escalofríos” (123). Here, it is evident that Máximo’s words have a powerful effect on whoever listens to them. Soon after relating this history to these members of his family he decides to gather people from the community. At this point, we experience another manifestation of the rhetorical power of the character:

La isla crece. Mañana seremos quince mil familias. El “Cáncer negro”, como nos llaman. Quieren destruirnos. Temen que un día crucemos el puente y la ola de tugurios inunde la ciudad. Por eso, para nosotros no hay calles, alcantarillados, escuelas ni higiene. Pretenden ahogarnos en la miseria. Se engañan. No nos dejaremos expulsar de Chambacú. Jamás cambiarán el rostro negro de Cartagena. Su grandeza y su gloria descansan sobre los huesos de nuestros antepasados. (128)

Within these lines Máximo’s strong historical rhetoric is obvious. His use of the past is apparent in affecting the present and future. The example of gentrification already mentioned is at the heart of his decision to take action against the government. The importance of conserving the history of the community and its inhabitants is his impetus for action in order to bring about change. And as we will see at the end of the narrative, Máximo’s words and actions that accompany him throughout the novel culminate in his death and subsequent proclamation of the character as a martyr.



The culminating scenes in the novel further demonstrate and perpetuate the differences at the heart of both texts. What I've tried to show up to this point is that Máximo accounts for the major divisions in the two novels. He contrasts significantly with the revolutionary leaders of *La Calle 10* in his willingness to use history as his guide in the search for change and also to serve as an example in both word and deed to those who follow him. Also important is that he has not fully decried the failures of his predecessors, rather, he has taught of the nobleness of their actions. He has learned from the past, including experiences from the other novel, in order to bring about change in different terms. The violent, unorganized actions of the characters in *La Calle 10* serve as examples for the chambaculeros. But instead of reacting against their oppression with the same violence that had been used against them in the past, the people of Chambacú, led by Máximo, begin a peaceful march across the bridge to Cartagena to confront their oppressors. They have united themselves politically in order to fight racial inequality and second-class citizenship.

Despite the best of intentions, this peaceful grouping of Afro-Colombians is met with violent resistance by the military. At the head of the opposition is José Raquel, Máximo's brother who has been promoted in the army and now fights against his own people. The novel ends with Máximo's murder at the hands of his brother; a representation of one protagonist's treachery contrasting with the other's martyrdom. José Raquel's last act represents his ultimate betrayal of his brother, family and also his community and his race.<sup>6</sup> He renounces "a las normas de su grupo para adoptar las de la población blanca, convirtiéndose en enemigo de su propia raza" (Heredia 3). José Raquel's actions further emphasize the importance of Máximo's learning from the past and sharing in the present. He taught of the slaves that built Chambacú and their desire to better their lives through rebellion to social norms. He emphasized the racial history of his

people so they would respect and love it. José Raquel failed to cultivate a love for his people and consequently fought against them.

The final event of the novel does not represent Máximo's failure to perform change in Chambacú. Rather, it symbolizes the spirit of the revolution that he himself possessed and successfully shared with the community. Zapata Olivella demonstrates this with the final and most important image of the text, Máximo's eyes closing after his death. The message that accompanies the image is clear: "la dobladora de tabaco podía cerrar los ojos a Máximo con cuatro puntadas de hilo, pues muchos ya los tenían abiertos" (155). This strong scene emphasizes the importance of the protagonist to the narrative. As he has taught his family, friends, and community the history of their forefathers, he has opened their eyes to the possibility of change, something absent in past struggles for freedom. Also important here is the fact that Máximo is clearly defined in the text as a leader and voice of his people. His example in both word and action will spur further necessary action. For Chambacú, he clearly becomes "un mártir ya que su muerte simboliza el principio de la lucha colectiva, y la unión de dos mundos opuestos representados en la figure de Inge y los habitantes de Chambacú" (Ortiz 164). Máximo has become a martyr and his words and example will live in the hearts of the chambaculeros and will motivate them in future action against their oppressors.

Further emphasizing the link between *La Calle 10* and *Chambacú, corral de negros*, Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo concludes that there is a continuity in Zapata Olivella's novels that comes from recognizing each text as a rewriting of previous ones (8). The foundation of this re-writing is found in the repetition of places, persons, and themes. Indeed, his texts are thematically similar and they do not stray too far from the topics of race, violence, oppression, and social ills. Captain-Hidalgo's argument is valid and must be taken into consideration when

comparing any of the author's novels. The two novels in this study are clearly linked thematically and if one wanted to analyze them according to Captain-Hidalgo's formula there is ample evidence that this is the case. For example, one could conclude that the second novel re-wrote the manner in which revolutionary change should be sought. The failures of the characters in the first text led to the successes of those in the second. Additionally, one can see in both texts an author who has improved in his ability to narrate with more complexity and style. But, although a very pertinent conclusion, I do not wish to go this route as evidenced by my earlier analysis of the first novel as a stepping stone or precursor to the second.

The interdependence of the texts is at the heart of this chapter and this thesis. *La Calle 10* represents the history of resistance and rebellion through which Máximo learns of the nobleness and glory of his predecessors. This knowledge is his impetus for action. The novels together represent a historical link that positions them alongside one another as complementary texts. As a result of this relationship, each novel ceases to exist without the other further emphasizing the bond between them.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout Manuel Zapata Olivella's extensive writing career, the form and presentation of his narrative has varied considerably. It is easy to see the difference in his writings from such early novels as *Tierra mojada* (1947) and *La Calle 10* (1960) up to his postmodern masterpiece *Changó, el gran putas* (1983) and such theoretical writings as *La rebelión de los genes: El mestizaje americano en la sociedad futura* (1997). Even with this variation in his texts, Zapata Olivella's belief in the power of literature as a way to convey actual social problems and his understanding that it can act as a tool for social change has remained a constant. As I have shown throughout this study, the author uses his novels to demonstrate the plight of the poor and marginalized people in society by conveying their situation through images of violence, poverty, hunger, and loss. The author confirms this when he writes "En mi vida siempre he compartido el dolor de los afligidos y necesitados" (*Mestizaje* 22). He strongly believed that it was his duty as an Afro-Hispanic writer to do so.

These two works explore how violence forms part of the everyday life of the poor and racially marginalized in Colombia, ranging from exploitation and abuse to institutional oppression. In both novels one thing is clear: hope within so much despair is necessary to bring about change for self, family, and community. Hope comes from different places, whether it is from personal experience or from historical accounts. It is often an idea that is taught by those who have already felt its power and believe strongly that it can bring about a better present and future. It is clear that hope motivates the protagonists of both texts and leads them in their rebellion.

The concept of violence in a post-colonial context, like that of these two works, is very broad and has many elements that this study does not explore. For example, one thing that it does not examine is the importance of racism and its relation to continued disenfranchisement and oppression. Race is clearly an important element of the second novel but for reasons related to the focus of this study was not examined in detail. Additionally, *Chambacú, corral de negros* contains diverse manifestations of violence both vertical and horizontal. The focus of the second chapter was on the former and as a result the instances of the horizontal type (for example, cockfighting, familial violence, war) were not studied. Consequently, a study dedicated to examining horizontal violence and its relation to the text would be beneficial.

Furthermore, when comparing these novels there is more that this study does not explore. An analysis comparing the violent rebellion of the first novel to the peaceful resistance of the second is important when looking at both texts. Was one more successful than the other? If so, does this demonstrate the author's preference towards either one? Also, as I have shown, an intimate relationship between the texts would be necessary to examine this link within the larger context of Zapata Olivella's other novels. Is *Tierra mojada* a precursor to *La Calle 10* and is *Detrás del rostro* a continuation of *Chambacú, corral de negros*?

Finally, I believe that as the author is slowly becoming known outside of Afro-Hispania there is still a lack of important studies dedicated to Zapata Olivella's novels. A small group of scholars has understood the necessity of studying his works and have given us strong research and analysis. The importance of his writings with regards to the marginalized<sup>8</sup> Afro-Hispanic population of Latin America cannot be understated. As we branch out and examine more of his texts and the texts of other Afro-Hispanic authors we will see that he teaches the importance of

giving voice and relating the experience of those who are unable to do so themselves and hopes that we the readers decide to listen.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Images of a dehumanizing nature are common in the novels and essays of Manuel Zapata Olivella. In *Las claves mágicas de América (Raza, clase y cultura)* he writes of the sexual violence against the Indigenous woman and describes how the colonizers, “más concretamente los peninsulares” treated her as “un animal insaciable, carente de alma” (33). The author’s use of animal descriptions when referring to marginalized characters, Indigenous and Black, emphasizes the inhumane aspects of colonialism.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Tillis argues that *Chambacú, corral de negros* is “approaching canonical status and is, without doubt, one of Manuel Zapata Olivella’s best works of fiction” (61). As the title of his book suggests the author is able to present the “darker side of the struggle for social equality in Colombia and illustrates the author’s progression toward an Afro-Colombian thematic in his work” (61).

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Tittler explains: “In addition to suffering the normal misery of poverty, disease, and hunger, the Afro-Caribbean characters are represented as having to fight a faceless Other (the communist oriental) alongside a different Other (the U.S. Army), while being conscripted by a third Other (the mestizo-or white-dominated Colombian power structure) (296)”.

<sup>4</sup> At center of this eradication and dispersion was “El caso Chambacú,” a controversy that surrounded the community and its politics and finances. The scandal involved diverting public funds and the disappearance of administrative documents (Ortiz 156).

<sup>5</sup> Alejandra Rengifo places Máximo’s character within the same historical context in which he finds his inspiration. He becomes a historical figure with the likes of Marcus Garvey, Karl Marx,

Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, and more importantly other Afro-Colombians, such as Pedro Claver and Benkos Biojo who fought for the freedom of Chambacú.

<sup>6</sup> Frantz Fanon dedicates a chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* to this phenomenon. He writes in the chapter entitled, “The Man of Color and the White Woman,” that the Black man, in the context of colonization, desires to be recognized as White and that being with a White woman is the best way to accomplish this. He elaborates: “her [a White woman] love opens the illustrious path that leads to total fulfillment... I espouse white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. Between these white breasts that my wandering hands fondle, white civilization and worthiness become mine” (45).

<sup>8</sup> For Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo the author’s treatment of the marginalized character become more than mere description. She describes the author’s literary creations as an “aesthetic of the downtrodden”:

His works grow well beyond the development of theme; instead, theme achieves technique. This occurs particularly at the juncture where Zapata subconsciously accepts his primary role as an artist of creative fiction rather than a mere recorder of life as it is. Furthermore, as one gleans from his variant discourse, Zapata’s narrative strength becomes possible through the artful mingling of several dialogic voices, notably anthropology, psychology, and history. (164-65)



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