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Home is Where the Womb Is: Towards a New Consideration of Home in Diaspora

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Abstract

The ensuing discussion argues that historical imagination functions as a highly abstract metaphor for *home* and sets out to analyze the representation of the womb and menstrual blood in 21st-century black diasporic writing as re-signifying the place and nature of historical imagination. The womban-trope found in spoken word poet and artivist Queen Nzinga Maxwell constitutes the object of study here, which is approached as an unconventional metaphor for thinking about home, belonging, and exile in the context of the African diaspora, then and now. Asserting that history functions as symbolic capital in the consolidation of belongingness, I shall attempt to answer the ensuing question: *how is the womban-trope like 'home'?*

Keywords: diaspora, belonging, exile, home, Queen Nzinga Maxwell

History, taught as action, is art.
Derek Walcott

1. Introduction

In *At Home in Diaspora*, Wendy Walters analyzes diasporic narratives by approaching how black authors living abroad write about home, community, and exile (viii-ix). Though the subject of the homeland has been traditionally approached in diaspora studies as a fundamental element in the conformation of diasporic communities, meaning that "one cannot be at home and in diaspora at the same time" (x), Walters asserts that these concepts no longer constitute a dichotomy. Instead, black writers who have written outside their place of origin perform, she argues, a home in diaspora because "the diaspora itself … represents a home" (xvi). Home, in this sense, is also a rhetoric, a place of refuge created through literary acts. In the ensuing discussion, I expand on this idea by affirming that historical imagination functions as a highly abstract metaphor for *home* and analyze the representation of the womb and menstrual blood in 21st-century black diasporic writing as re-signifying the place and nature of historical imagination. Asserting that historical narratives function as symbolic capital in the consolidation of belongingness, I shall attempt to answer the ensuing question: *how is the womban-trope like 'home'?*

2. Herstory: Engendering History

Historical narratives and their literary, artistic, and/or discursive imaginations are central in crafting a sense of cohesion among members of an imagined community. [1] An official story of the past, crafted upon amnesias and selected memories, lays the foundation for a common heritage, which becomes a crucial marker of group identity since it connects various generations of a collectivity across time. In other words, stories of the past provide a place of origin from which an imagined community progresses towards a shared horizon as a collectivity whose members, although they have never met, share the feeling of belonging to a 'people'. Historical imagination thus articulates a shared heritage in the form of 'invented traditions' regarding specific glories, wo/men, heroes, places, memories, and things performed as a homogeneous collectivity. [2] Narratives of the past, therefore, craft a

subjectivity of belonging through the illusion of historical continuity (Ravasio, *Black Costa Rica* 52-55).

Like nations, states Khachig Tölölyan, diasporas are also imagined communities. Like national stories of the past, diasporic historical imagination is constructed as well through discourse, tropes, and ideology that are bound together to create a subjectivity of belonging to a distant homeland (Tölölyan 23). However, since diasporas are defined by the rift between the location of residence and the location of origin (Gilroy, "Diaspora" 207), diasporic historical imagination elaborates on an imaginary homeland that is re-created endlessly through language, literature, art, performance, and music. [3] The case of the African victim diaspora is paradigmatic. [4] As assessed by Stuart Hall, for the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade, Africa "has acquired an imaginative or figurative value we can name and feel. Our belongingness to it constitutes what Benedict Anderson calls 'an imagined community'" (Hall 232). Afro-descendant writers, musicians, and intellectuals outside the continent shape a poetics of the imaginary African homeland in which diasporic historical imagination is essential to the articulation of belongingness.

The fundamental narrative that crafts cohesion among Afro-descendants outside the African continent is not, however, the illusion of historical continuity. Instead, rupture, violence, and uprooting, so eloquently condensed in the imagery of the sea trope and the middle passage in "The Sea is History" (Walcott, *The Star-Apple Kingdom* 25-28), represent the black beginning of Afro-descendant historical imagination. By traversing it, colonial relationships of power and the violent transatlantic experience gradually submerged African collective memories into oblivion. In the 1970s, Derek Walcott referred to this as "the loss of history, the amnesia of the races" ("The Caribbean" 6), while Wilson Harris defined it as a void that haunts Afro-descendants who, because of it, experience a condition of "historylessness" (17). Along the same lines, Édouard Glissant discussed the erasure of collective memories as the consolidation of an Afro-descendant "non-history" (*Caribbean Discourse* 62). This apparent void or amnesia corresponds figuratively to a loss of home because it makes it impossible to access a true knowledge of the past, or in other words, to remember. This absolute unknown (Glissant, *Poetics* 8), hence, functions as the foundational element defining the experience of 'afroexile', that is, the impossibility of going back to the original place of origin, both physically and memorially. 'Afroexile' stands as a rhetorical figure for the experience of homelessness in Afro-descendant historical imaginations. [5]

Beyond this black beginning and the impossibility of accessing the original homeland memorially, the difficult task of reconstructing history at the Caribbean has also been compromised by the homogenization of the diversity of experiences that characterize and compose the diffracted Afro-descendant collectivities. In the forging of ethnic, national or diasporic identities, states Patricia Mohammed, "women are frequently ascribed an adjunctive and less valued role" ("Introduction" xv), remaining unheard. As a result, feminist and womanist movements have led the way in shifting the theoretical approach to history in the Caribbean, which has dealt, in the last five decades, with the "tremendous invisibility problem which needed to be addressed" (Brereton 131) regarding the centrality of black women's historical experiences, or *herstories*, in the reconstruction of the past.

The same year that Walcott exposed his ideas on "history as exile" ("The Muse" 21), the first comprehensive study on Caribbean women's historical experiences was completed by Lucille Marthurin Mair under the title *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844.* Mair's doctoral thesis inaugurated a new theoretical approach to Caribbean stories of the past that made evident the need to approach women's lives in order to write, study, and reconstruct Caribbean history in a more inclusive and wide-ranging manner that incorporated female voices in the discussion. This approach to women's history has become stronger in Caribbean historiography ever since Mair's pioneering study, especially since the 1980s, developing the field of gender history as well (Brereton 129). Bridget Brereton refers to the work done by scholars such as Erna Brodber, Rhoda Reddock, and Patricia Mohammed as

fundamental to the consolidation of such fields, who began inserting gender and gender relations into the study of the past and whose work has been essential in the process of successfully *engendering history* in the Caribbean. [6] It must, however, not go without saying that the insular and continental Caribbean represents a transhistorical space of multiple diasporas from diverse areas like Africa, Europe, China, and India, which is why it is necessary to take into consideration differences based not only on gender, but also on color, class, race, nationality, and occupation when reconstructing the region's complex and kaleidoscopic history (Sheperd et al. xii). The ensuing pages of this article focus specifically on the intersection between race and gender.

The editors of *Engendering History* consider the concept of gender as an analytical tool, which alters traditional historical epistemologies and is hence useful in rewriting history in a manner that may "restore a balance in the history of men and women" (xii). Focusing on herstory in order to incorporate the particular life experiences of women into the narratives of the past, this approach has led the way in overturning black female voicelessness. [7] The intersection of race and gender is fundamental in the construction of knowledge and in developing 'women's history' and 'gender history' away from a universalist and homogenizing perspective. Instead, experiences as lived by men and women in specific societies and at a given historical period are approached by studying, fundamentally, their differences. With regards to the reconstruction of history in the Caribbean, these new fields have taken on the task of evaluating critically not only the influence of sociohistorical processes on the lives of black women, but also the influence that historical contexts have had on the ideological construction of black women and womanhood (Sheperd et al. xi). While memoirs, diaries, testimonies, and oral histories have served this purpose for scholars of women's and gender history, Brereton also refers to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's proposition in the 1990s to use creative writing as a viable gateway for thinking about the past and thus 'placing women's history in history' (131).

The ensuing discussion follows this suggestion and sets out to rethink the discourse of 'home' in 21st-century Caribbean diaspora literacy from the perspective of the womb as found in spoken word poet and artivist Queen Nzinga Maxwell. By drawing on the considerations of 'amnesia', 'historylessness', and 'non-history' on the one hand, the womban-trope found in Queen Nzinga's multidimensional edition *Afrokon* is approached, on the other, as an unconventional metaphor for thinking about home, belonging, and exile in the context of the African diaspora, then and now, from a gendered perspective. The paper is grounded upon the premise that menstrual blood taps into a rich metaphor for the homeland. Though the discussion departs from the notion of 'home' as a rhetoric crafting a subjectivity of belonging that is determined above all by identification with a diasporic story of the past, 'home' is also approached here as a place of refuge. Together, these ideas articulate herstorical consciousness, by which it is possible to feel at home in diaspora.

3. On Diasporic Origins

Born Wendy Patricia Maxwell Edwards in San José, Costa Rica, Queen Nzinga Maxwell (hereafter referred to as "Queen") constitutes a fourth generation Afro-Costa Rican whose familiar roots branch out to the Caribbean archipelago, specifically to Jamaica, while her herstorical consciousness as an Afro-descendant draws routes from the Central American Caribbean all the way back to Africa. [8] In fact, the African victim diaspora constitutes the foundation of Queen's diasporic historical imagination. Her life-story has been moreover sketched out from one location to the next: from the capital of San José to the Costa Rican Caribbean province of Limón; from Costa Rica to Canada; and, after a decade abroad, back from Toronto to San José, where she currently resides; recurrent trips to Cuba also define her routes and roots of artistic creation. Re-settled in Costa Rica, Queen self-published her opera prima, a transmedial edition entitled *Afrokon: WombVoliushan Poetry* (2012). This edition represents the outcome of her enriching experience in the community of performance artists in Toronto, while *Ibẹ̀rẹ̀: My*

Origin. Mi Origen constitutes her second book project. [9]

In *Afrokon*, Queen constructs a multidimension discourse interlocking organic art, spoken word poetry, and womanist thought around the figure of the 'womban.' The publication is a very rich object of study because it deploys an intratextuality whose artistic foundation is, as I refer to it from here on, *the womban-trope*, which represents the leitmotiv of *Afrokon* and the object of study of the ensuing analysis. The edition is a multilingual compilation with spoken word poems in English, Spanish, Spanglish, and Costa Rican Patois. [10] Furthermore, it contains a CD with recordings of Queen performing seven of the twenty-six multilingual texts. Together with the demo album *WombVoliushan* (2013), which contains other texts apart from the seven recordings included in *Afrokon*, these constitute the oral archives of Queen Nzinga's womban-trope. [11] Its representation is accompanied moreover with pictures of her art collection entitled "Art from my Womb," which she elaborated with her menstrual blood. This, in turn, adds an organic and pictorial dimension to the scribal and oral ones.

Precisely because of its orality, multilingualism, and its organic drawings, *Afrokon*'s significance in literary and cultural studies expands beyond Costa Rican borders, surpasses regional genres, and oversteps transnational approaches. As elaborated upon by Afua Cooper in the Prologue to *Afrokon*, Queen's poetics "complicate[s] the discourses of Latin American studies or Hispanic studies" (xxxviii), begging thus for another kind of reading. One that searches unknown sites of meaning and that requires a strategy that necessarily interprets these unforeseen sites by revealing its connectedness with other genres, languages, and metaphors beyond the location of residence. It is not gratuitous that Queen inaugurates *Afrokon* with "I Am: Declaration of a Black Womban":

I
I am
I am a Womban
I am a Black Womban
I am an Afrikan Black Womban
I am an Afrikan, Caribbean, Black Womban
Afrikan
Caribbean
Womban
Black
I am
I (21)

The first text is programmatic in the sense that it declares her pluricentrical belonging to various origins, cultures, locations, and stories of the past on account of diasporic mobility, colonial as well as neocolonial (Ravasio, *Black Costa Rica* 37-48). She elaborates further on the subject in "Babylon Chant," where she introduces the reader/hearer to the poem by echoing Bob Marley's "*come mek we chant down Babylon one more time*" ("Babylong Chant" 121). In it, Queen poetizes her herstorical consciousness as a daughter of the diaspora:

then I
a diasporic child
my nomadic soul made to trot
back and forth
without a place to call my home

I take my home wherever I go (123)

This deterritorialized feeling of diasporic origin is poetized constantly across *Afrokon* in and through aural, literary, and organic art. As a result, Queen participates in the consolidation of a diaspora literacy as an Afra-Costa Rican whose cultural production is revolutionizing national cultural memory, while contributing to an emerging literary tradition across Latin America. [12] Her multidimensional work thus networks the multi-layered cultural expressions of black diaspora/s around the world from the gendered perspective of an Afrikan, Caribbean, Black, Womban. Queen's artivism holds, in this respect, an important place in black women's intellectual tradition insofar, as Patricia Hill Collins assesses it (*Black Feminist Though* 16-17), black musicians, poets, writers, and activists constitute a distinct group of intellectuals who contribute to the tradition of black women's thought and consciousness in the world from a place located outside institutions and beyond academic circles.

Being the only Costa Rican carrying out spoken word poetry in Costa Rican Patois, Queen's orality is best understood in relation to performance artists like Jamaicans Miss Lou or Jean Binta Breeze (Ravasio, "The Routes" 123-125), on the one hand, while her womban-trope, on the other, is traceable to performer d'bi.young anitafrika and the effervescent artistic community of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto.

4. From *blood.claat* to *Afrokon*

In 2005, "one of North America's most celebrated storytellers" (Luhling 10), d'bi.young anitafrika, a Jamaican-born "dub poet, theatre interventionist & decolonial scholar" – first based in Toronto and since 2018 in London as a PhD candidate at London South Bank University (young, "Biography" par. 1) – presented a play entitled ***blood****.claat*.

blood*.claat* is the first piece in young's *sankofa trilogy* – followed by *benu* (2010) and *word!sound!powah!* (2010) – which is elaborated upon the transgenerational herstories of mudgu, her daughter sekesu, and granddaughter benu, sekesu's daughter. The title of the first play is a Jamaican Patois word indicating 'blood cloth,' which refers to the sanitary towel used to retain a women's period; it is moreover used as a cuss word, being "as common in Patois as the word fuck is in English" (Gleiberman 33). young's play re-claims the curse word by reenacting the story of fifteen-year-old mudgu in a poor neighborhood in Kingston, Jamaica: her coming-of-age; of her womanhood; of her menstruation; of her pregnancy at fifteen. The play's central focus is childhood sexual assault (young, "Artist Statement" par. 7). The story deploys mudgu's life-story by incorporating her mother's and grandmother's, for ***blood****.claat* is, in young's words, "the story of the womben in my family" ("notes" 7). And yet, the playwright simultaneously goes beyond her personal life-story by incorporating Queen Nanny the Maroon into the script. In so doing, narrative and historical frames intersect and tie into a broader historical perspective which "depicts the idea that there is a cultural bloodline" linking these women, and herstories of liberation, across time (K. Walker 4). "Bloodline" is here the key word.

As elaborated upon by Klive Walters in "The Dialectics of Blood," d'bi.young's play tells us "that blood shed through violence is death blood, while a woman's period is life blood." (3) On the subject, the playwright herself affirms in an interview with Holly Luhling that "i'm really interested in these ideas of cycles and the womb and birth and blood, … and really interested in getting to a place in terms of planting, growing, and healing" (Luhning 6). *Blood* acts as the background of the play's development, sketching out the story from violence, to life, to past ancestors. Above all, ***blood****.claat* inverts the pejorative value ascribed to female bleeding by celebrating menstrual flow as a woman's robust power to give life. In 2006, the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA) nominated ***blood****.claat* for five Dora Mavor Moore Awards, including Outstanding Design, Outstanding Direction, and Outstanding Production, Outstanding New Play and Outstanding Performance by a Womxn. It won in the last two of these categories. (TAPA; young, "The Sankofa Trilogy").

In 2012, Ric Knowles defined d'bi.young as one of the most influential women to have developed performance aesthetic in Toronto, transforming the city's theatrical scene together with Rhoma Spence and ahdri and zhina mandiela, the latter a mentor of young and a Toronto theatre festival coordinator (Knowles; K. Walker). Almost a decade before Knowles, Walker too had described young as a gifted artist who had "redefine[d] the dub aesthetic in poetry and theatre" (4), representing a different generation that was committed to exploring new ways of making theatre as transformative action. young is in fact a versatile artist who has been and still continues to be very productive. A visit to her website (dbiyounganitafrika.com) introduces the curious spectator to her work as a multidisciplinary artist. In her "Artist Statement," young defines herself as a "[d]ub poet, monodramatist, playwright, director, dramaturge, educator and emerging scholar," intellectual author furthermore of the Anitafrika and *sorplusi* Method. [13] Using a performance technique developed by young across the years, it is her intention to contribute to the field of Black Feminist Performance with her anti-oppressive,

anti-colonial, and intersectional performance praxis (young, "Artist Statement").

For Knowles, d'bi.young – together with Spence and mandiela – is one of three Afro-Caribbean artists who have revolutionized theatrical practices in Toronto through woman-centered perspectives that "celebrate Black women's bodies in a transnational Canadian-Caribbean diaspora." (78) young carries this out through an artistic practice that she has called "biomyth monodrama". Drawing on Audre Lorde's 1982 *Zami*, young re-interprets the author's idea of biomyth in order to ground her own artistic process as a bringing together of her personal biography with mythology, creating a "mythologized auto-biographical play told by the story's creator/performer, using the eight sorplusi elements as the foundation of the creative process in order to weave the story together." (young, "r/evolution" 29) ***blood.****claat* is young's first published biomyth monodrama, a one-woman show in which numerous characters are all performed by herself. Moreover, as the title and the content of the storyline make evident, ***blood****.claat* is *womban*-centered.

It is in fact not preposterous to infer that Queen's artistic use of the womban-trope has a direct relation to d'bi.young's work. On the one hand, Queen's "Art from my Womb" website (artfrommywomb.com) *used* to play young's dub poem "blood" in the background. [14] young wrote it in Havana in 2002 as a response to Kwesi Johnson's "5 nights of bleeding" and "dread beat and blood". The poem engages "womben[,] our relationship to menstrual blood. and society's relationship to us" (young, "notes") and was recorded as part of young's first album *Wombanifesto* (2010). [15] On the other hand, though, the 2005 edition of ***blood****.claat* is bilingual and includes *sangre*, the Spanish translation of the play performed by none other than Queen Nzinga Maxwell. Queen reveals—and shares in her "translation notes" to ***blood.*** *claat*—the mesmerizing moment in 2001 when she met young at the live filming of "Lord Have Mercy!," a Canadian multi-ethnic sitcom (Luhling 10), a full three years after having arrived herself in Toronto (Queen, "translation notes" 11). After seeing young perform once more, this time in a "one womban show" in the pre-launching of "blood," Queen states, a bond was installed. "I felt at home," she writes (idem), given the cultural and linguistic similarities that the diasporic community of Toronto had with her own cultural homeland, referring to the Jamaican origins of her Afro-Costa Rican background. 'Home,' hence, is here not a geographical location nor a national discourse, but a place of refuge consolidated through a feeling of cohesion and of belongingness to a supranational collectivity as an Afro-descendent through diasporic colonial and neocolonial mobility. From here on, artistic cooperation developed: Queen translated "blood" for a music video and documentary (idem). This opened a world of artistic opportunities for her. In *Sicultura*, Costa Rica's website for national Cultural Information, Queen states how support from various theatre and spoken word performers in Toronto, like d'bi. young and Rhoma Spencer, helped her move her poetry to the city's cultural scene ("Queen Nzinga Maxwell" par. 3).

The cooperation that developed between Queen Nzinga and d'bi.young in Toronto represents the dynamic routes~roots quintessence that characterizes Black circum-Atlantic mobility, as well as its vital cultural production. Though Queen is a Central American of Caribbean origin, her artivism, specifically *Afrokon*, is traversed principally by the cultural scene of the Caribbean diasporic community of Toronto, as she herself experienced it and participated in it. As children of the diaspora, and mothers of the diaspora themselves, Queen's and d'bi.young's stories of mobility, past and present, have defined their talent, creating an artistic and cultural network that goes beyond the place of residence, of origin, and of national belonging. Originating in North America within a creatively vibrant artistic community and later materializing in Costa Rica in the form of *Afrokon*, the multidimensional womban-trope escapes confinement and instead conceives geopolitical imaginaries of 'home' from the deterritorialized perspective of the womb/an.

5. Home is Where the Womb is

Womban. The word is transparent, straightforward, literal. Clearly, 'womban' is a blend of 'womb' and 'woman'. Nonetheless, despite the graphical literality, its semantic does not reduce the woman to a womb. As it will be argued, the womban-trope represents a highly charged symbol of historical meaning because, as I argue, it provides a revised sense of 'home' for the children of the African diaspora. The blood of her menstrual flow is its most eloquent materialization, for even if a blood clot may seem opaque in its color and texture, its meaningfulness in herstorical consciousness, that is, in the narratives of the past told from a womanist point of view (A. Walker), is not.

As mentioned previously, the conditions of historylessness, non-history, and history as exile represent the particular tropes across which Afro-descendant historical imagination has been conceived from the perspective of uprooting and slavery. Queen's "Maafa: un mensaje a la diaspora," also present in the anthology in its translated version to Costa Rican Patois, engages this origin by referring to how African people were "scattered like dust" ("Maafa" 157) due to Modernity's slave economy. This represents not only the beginning of the afroexile condition but also, as stated in "By di Sea, Anda di Sun," the "post traumatic slave syndrome / an di pien dat nevah ends…" (133). Queen refers to Maafa, the transatlantic travesty, as "di Afrikan Halacasst" ("Maafa" 156) and describes how it destroyed communities by separating families and kidnapping people from their homeland (157), hindering furthermore their return back home, thus exiling them physically and memorially:

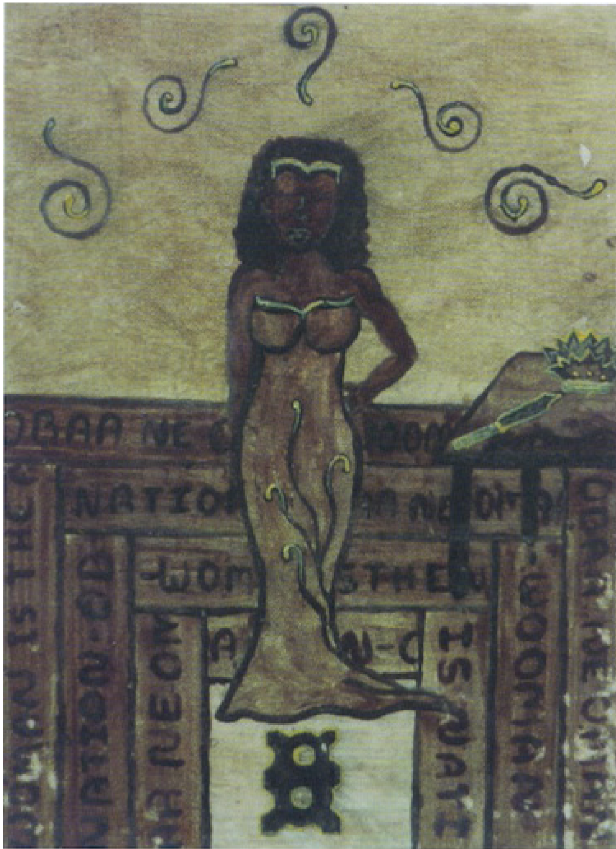
> exiled …
> enslaved …,
> raped …,
> dehumanized, …
> (158)

She confronts this historical imagination directly through the poem's content and next complements visually the Spanish version of it with her painting "Trapped" (*Afrokon* 84). As implied by the title, the canvas displays chained, literally *bloody* hands scratching away an entrapping wall in the search of release and freedom, both physical and ideological.

An existential torment for the children of the African diaspora, the desire to access the absolute unknown determines, in turn, a neurotic obsession that Glissant called the "longing of history," which manifests itself in the writer's obsession to delineate "the primordial source" (*Caribbean Discourse* 79). In Queen's poetics, this is triggered with menstrual blood, named by the womban-trope, and heard through her diasporic tongues. Like Walcott's *the sea is history*, Queen's womban-trope recreates a diasporic historical imagination where the *past* constitutes its walls, the *longing* of it its roof, and *memory of uprooting* its foundation. Queen, like Walcott, also resorts to an 'aquatic' metaphor so as to cure the torment of the absolute unknown. Yet she *"wombanizes"* (Queen, *Afrokon* x) such ideas by focusing on the Afrikan, Caribbean, Black Womban as the place of collective memory, whose menstrual blood provides an unpredicted sense of home in the form of organic origins. Consequently, if for Walcott Afro-Caribbean people are "mocked as a people without history" by Western thought (Walcott, "The Caribbean" 13), then Queen's womban-trope provides in turn liquid traces of people with history. For it drafts a subjectivity of belonging from the location of the womb, by which menstrual blood withholds the historical imagination of an organic homeland. 'Home' is thus represented in the form of animate primordial origins: "deep inna di womb / down inna Afrika" (Queen, "Wombanifesto" 2). Queen's menstrual blood fortifies the lost origins in a biological fashion and provides a concrete, tangible link to a herstorical memory that helps cope with the experience of afroexile by placing the mothers of the diaspora at the center of his- and herstory. Menstrual blood constitutes therefore the foundation of Queen's home rhetoric, by which the historical imagination of afroexile is intertwined with her subjectivity of belonging to the African diaspora.

Though Anderson stated that imagined communities are crafted through language rather than in *blood* (145), Queen's multidimensional use of her menstruation re-signifies the nature

of the imagined community on a conceptual level, and likewise of historical imagination, by affirming that "Womban is the Nation" (*Afrokon* 140).



Obaa Ne Oman

This paratextual element (i.e. the title), coupled with the design of the womban dressed with an elegant long gown, elevated against what seems to be a pedestal, disrupts and supplements nation-based discourses by providing the womban as the homeland. The interrelationship between womb, woman, and home is made explicit by the use of the word 'nation' as well as by her menstrual blood. By coupling 'womb' and 'woman' graphically, semantically, and pictorially with the organic element used to paint on the canvas, "Womban is the Nation" correlates feelings of belonging and of afroexile through womb blood as indivisible from one another. The organic element thus "worlds" Afro-descendants as children of the diaspora by comprising both the roots and routes of their past, present, and future, placing, furthermore, the black menstruating woman as the entity articulating both correlates. In this manner, the nation as the space to which a subjectivity of belonging is articulated is here called into question. This corresponds to a statement that resonates across *Afrokon.* Queen's verses in "Self Love" override, for example, the idea of "imaginary boundaries / imaginary countries / imaginary rules" (56), while "Happy to be Nappy" affirms that the lyrical-I is "moving forward to redeem / the nation in my womb" ("Happy to by Nappy" 45). Furthermore, in the opening poem "I Am," the lyrical-I underlines the fact that

> the root of all nations
> the cradle of all civilizations
> lays within me
> that is me (21)

In this unexpected frame of thought, then, the womb is the *putative, original home* from where history and its imagination expand in the form of blood. A Janus-faced element, its red image parallels death and violence, and yet holds, in its organic essence, the key to survival as well.

In other words, historical continuity is provided by the womban-trope. On the one hand, it underscores the womb as the site *par excellence*, tangible in blood, from where black people outside of the African continent come. On the other hand, womb blood expands these dispersed seeds as future generations of Afro-descendants, underlining an indestructible nature:

> this ancestral love
> honours our foremothers
> who have endowed me with
> the cradle of future Afrikan Nations
> ("Soulful Love" 39)

Because of its embodied knowledge, which is actualized in regenerative menstrual blood, diverse *lieux de mémoire* (Nora) like monuments, grandiose architecture, or a written history of great deeds are not in place. Instead, Queen uses the womban-trope to re-signify black diasporic historylessness with a monthly bleeding that corrects uprooting and traces the primordial lost origins to the Afrikan, Caribbean, Black, Womban, projecting her additionally as the promise of a future. Because

of this, and contrary to V.S. Naipaul's affirmation that "[h]istory is built around achievement and creation, and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29), the womban-trope proves that the 'achievements' and 'creations' of the Caribbean are in fact held by the womban. It is through her, in her womb and through her periodical blood, that the past can be rescued from oblivion, going beyond the claims of non-history, amnesia, and exile by performing a home in diaspora through menstruation.

6. The Womban Speaks in Tongues but also in Blood

Queen's trope can be rescued, moreover, as a concept of home itself because the womb provides an artistic bloodline that reverts the damaging images of black womanhood. Her womb and blood, thus, craft not only a subjectivity of belongingness as an Afra-descendant but also complement the former as a place of shelter.

In the opening pages of *Afrokon*, Queen introduces the reader to her "Wombanifesto" (1), another hint of Queen's connection to d'bi. young. The first verses introduce her readers to her "WombVoliushan" poetry in Spanish, English, and Patois, which is moreover anticipated by a picture of red fallopian tubes from which menstrual blood drips. The same image is used for the cover picture of her demo album *WombVoliushan*, in which, unlike *Afrokon,* her performance is played back against dubbed out songs.

As defined in her introduction, "Afrokon WombVoliushan Poetry" (5) corresponds to an artistic concept composed by Queen so as to reflect literally the fusion of afrocentric revolution/revelation in art, emerging specifically from the power of the womb. A philosophical play of words enunciating revolution, will, evolution, and revelation (5-7), its meaning is fundamental to Queen's artistic performance and most importantly, to the womb as the site of her artivism. The performer asserts that the womb stands as the "most important organ of the Universe" the power of which "is wrongly feared" (5), which is why *Afrokon* encourages a reconnection with this regenerative power so as to cure the trauma and long-lasting effects of slavery and of racial and gender oppression of black womanhood. This with the purpose of consolidating the womban's place in Afro-descendant historical imagination as foundational. In her introduction to *Afrokon*, Queen elaborates on the fact that she approaches the womb and its healing power "from an afrocentric wombanist viewpoint" (8). This afrocentric perspective views, as defined by Rosalyn Terborg Penn, Caribbean women's historical experience as part of a broader diaspora in which gender ideologies are derived essentially from African origins (Brereton 130; see Terborg). The wombanist perspective, on the other hand, makes evident the relation with African American writer Alice Walker, a connection which is not only literal, but also conceptual.

Walker provides four definitions for "womanist" in *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). The first one delimits the word as a "black feminist or feminist of color" (Alice Walker xi). Further on, in the second definition, Walker asserts that a womanist "[a]ppreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility … and women's strength" (xi). Moreover, a womanist is "[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female" (Alice Walker xi). The third description refers to a womanist's love of music and of dance, which Walker connects to the womanist's love of struggle and of herself. "*Regardless*" (xii). With a final poetic stroke, Walker provides an analogy as definition number four: "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (xii). [13] Queen's womban-trope is not at all estranged from Walker's frame of thought. In fact, there are several points of encounter between Walker's catalogue and Queen's multidimensional womban-trope that are worth addressing. The literal resemblance of the words, distinguished only by a single letter 'b,' makes this obvious, as well as Walker's choice of words for describing a womanist: *strength, struggle, love, survival* – all of which can be found in *Afrokon* in the literal, aural, and pictorial dimensions as elements of Queen's rhetoric of home.

Patricia Hill Collins asserts that Alice Walker's definitions of womanism are "rooted in black women's concrete history in racial and gendered oppression," which fosters a particular worldview

that pertains exclusively to black women of the African diaspora ("What's in a Name" 10). She goes on to explain how the concept provides black women with a vocabulary that enables them to tackle the subject of white supremacy, defined by Queen as "the root of all forms of oppression" (*Afrokon* xxi), from a gendered perspective. d'bi.young's coining of the term *womban* and Queen's artistic use of it as a literary, aural, and pictorial trope acknowledge this, placing the womb not only as a highly abstract imaginary of the homeland, but as the site of struggle and of emancipation as well. This is fundamental to the rhetoric of home deployed by the womban-trope.

As maintained by the Walker, a womanist has a strong, passionate interest in 'fighting'. This resonates across *Afrokon*'s use of the womban-trope and, specifically, in the portraits entitled "Warrior" (29), "Death of Oppression" (77), "Restoration" (78), and "Freedom" (83).

Death of Oppression
(Muerte a la Opresión)

Menstrual blood and acrylic / Sangre menstrual y acrílico
Canvas / Lienzo: 24" x 18"

2005

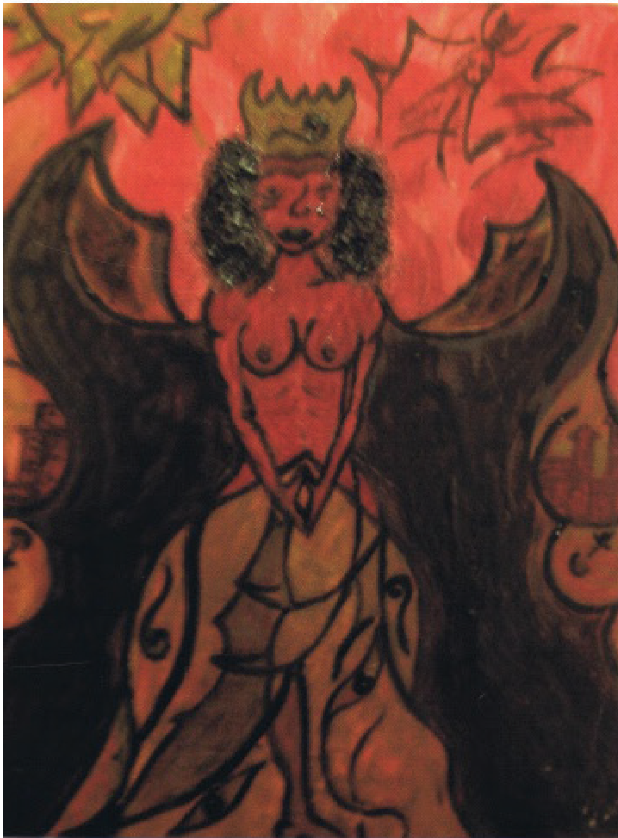
Here, Queen depicts the womban as a warrior-figure whose struggle is made evident in menstrual blood, and focuses primordially on the womb's symbolic capital as the organic entity withholding an unlimited source of strength. With her paintings, Queen conveys material and emblematic authority to womb blood, underlining and affirming proudly its capability of baring life. In so doing, she drives subordination away from black women's objectification and asserts instead the womb and menstruation as mighty sites of meaning from which a rehabilitated herstorical consciousness arises, both individual and collective, as the foundation of her Afro-descendant collectivity's existence in time.

The womb is also portrayed here as the site of liberation precisely *because* it is where the interlocking of race, gender, and class are grounded. According to Collins (*Black Feminist Thought* 69-96), black women have been politically, economically, and ideologically oppressed since the time of slavery because of disenfranchisement, exploitation of their labor as domestic help, and the negative stereotypes regarding them. She goes on to name the "mammy" figure, the matriarch image, the breeder woman, and the sexually aggressive Jezebel character as controlling images thereof, where black women's sexuality, fertility, and their roles in the political economy of the West came to be interlocked. The wounding effects and thus successful outcome of this ideological terrorism of patriarchal nature are poetized by Queen in "Poem to Ulsegun a.k.a. The Struggle Continues," where she names the damaging consequences that slavery has meant for black women's self-esteem. She poetizes how black women have

> no self – respect
> or self – worth
> self – appreciation
> self – love
> real self – love at least (27)

The recording of Queen's spoken word performance reflects this audibly by pronouncing the words from deep within, with low abysmal tones, and smooth, soft accents on the words, drawn out furthermore between patient breaths

of silence (*Afrokon*, track 5, 00:46-00:58). All these aural characteristics help consolidate the grim atmosphere that sounds the pain of these black oppressed bodies. The printed edition, moreover, places the painting entitled "Warrior" (29) as an eloquent closing statement to the poem.



Warrior

Mestrual blood, hair and acrylic / Sangre menstrual, cabello y acrílico
Canvas / Lienzo: 12" x 9"

2004

Carried out with menstrual blood, acrylic, and hair, the portrait on canvas entitled "Warrior" makes an explicit statement by portraying a black womban in an empowering stance in which the womb is portrayed as the battle site. The fundamental hint that underscores the warrior nature of the figure is the depiction of the womban's hands, which are purposively positioned at the center so as to frame the vulva, and hence the womb, as the site of struggle. Queen crafts her artivism around it with the purpose of unlocking the oppressive images of black womanhood, portrayed in European writings as physically unappealing, lazy, hypersexualized, or uncivilized (Sheperd et al. xiii). It is therefore through the multidimensional womban-trope that Queen crafts her artivism so as to heal and rescue the "perforated womb of Black Women's Americas" (Cooper xxvii).

In conjunction with the explicit framing of the vulva, the illustration of the Warrior-womban is elaborated upon with wings and a bare chest that potentialize the symbolic representation of the womban-warrior. This explains the title of the canvas, while the bare breasts and the open wings suggest deliverance and imply freedom. Like Sojourner Truth, who exposed her naked chest in an anti-slavery rally in Indiana in 1858 (Mabee 187-192), Queen's womb-warrior bears her breasts, too, "without fear, without shame, proud of having been born black and female" (hooks 159). Placed purposively as the closing image of "Poem to Ulsegun," the framing of the Warrior's vulva and of the wings upon which her magnanimous presence is lifted support together the struggle for self-healing and restoration through acceptance of the self:

> but in the scheme you are in
> you are greater than you even think
> from your perspective
> I know it's so hard to see
> …
> but i say fly,
> just fly,
> just fly away my love
> fly like the bird in the endless wind
> let it be the wind
> who gives you the path
> to find that Victory you seek
> that is greater than you
> that is within you
> ("Poem to Ulsegun" 28)

Alice Walker also underlines the fact that a womanist *loves herself*, which, following d'bi. young's interests, corresponds to Queen's ulterior purpose in *Afrokon*. Expanding on d'bi. young's ***blood****.claat*, where menstrual blood appears "as a transformed weapon of women's liberation" (K. Walker 3), Queen too underscores the womb as a site of emancipation. Like young, Queen also wants to arrive at 'a place of growing and healing.' The title of one of her texts, "Wish no more!!! healing's within," refers explicitly

to the womb's potential in this respect, whose poetic content nourishes, furthermore, warm menstrual blood and celebrates "my womb…/ feisty an bwold" (167).

Following young's appreciation, Queen too aims to produce a place of healing, of curing, and of growing through art that allows women of color to become free of the colonial and patriarchal oppression of their womanhood. The use of menstrual blood by Queen in the symbolic, literal, and organic forms thus strongly engages the stereotypes that have meant subordination of black female bodies across time and place ever since colonial uprooting. *Afrokon*, explains Queen, "is a collection of poems and paintings that … focuses on the reconnection with personal nature and self love, through the appreciation of the physiognomy of the Afrikan Womban" (*Afrokon* 8). Accordingly, the womban-trope deploys positive images of black female beauty that are traversed and defined by the womb, its body, her hair, her curves, and, above all, her menstrual blood. In "Soulful Love," for example, the lyrical-I is sure to affirm that the controlling image of black womanhood

> makes me feel like
> there's something wrong with me
> cos' the beauty that they seek
> they can't find in me
>
> or in my…
> honey dipped chocolate skin…
> my long arms and everlasting legs…
> the tight spiral in my wooly hair
> or my long, broad and smooth strong back(36)

The womban-trope acts as an artistic womanist strategy directed at inspiring black women's self-esteem and power to love herself – *regardless*, as emphasized by Alice Walker, of the meanings, despotic imageries, and experiences that have been imposed on her individual and collective self. "Soulful Love," "Happy to be Nappy," "Self Love," "Bendito tu Vientre," "Derecho de Ser," "Ain't I a Womban," "Blessed thy Womb," "Images of Beauty," and "Wish no More!!! healing's within" are spoken word texts by Queen whose titles (and content) make this stance and struggle for self-love evident. The message is quite clear: "never feel ashamed / of where you came from / those lies where. . . weaved / just to forget" ("Happy to be Nappy" 41).

Other menstrual paintings also accompany the spoken word texts with the purpose of recomposing the profoundly damaged image of black womanhood on account of slavery and colonialism. Images like "Death of Oppression," "Restoration," and "Freedom," mentioned previously, are placed before and after the poem entitled "Derecho de Ser" in order to complement the textual content of the spoken word text, where she reclaims her womanhood: "reclamo mi poder de ser mujer / retomando mi derecho de ser mujer / reclamo mi poder mujer / retomo mi derecho de ser mujer" (Queen, "Dereche de Ser" 79-82) It is worth mentioning here that the spoken word poem, like young's ***blood****.claat*, focuses on child sexual assault, which in turn explains Queen's numerous repetition of the verses so as to liberate the womb from gender violence and, consequently, to transform it into a place of refuge. Drawing on Frantz Fanon, the womban-trope discovers a past that is branded with glory and dignity rather than with oppression and shame. It in fact "triggers a change of fundamental importance in the colonized psycho-affective equilibrium" (148) by which the oppressive images of black womanhood are restored through an organic origin. As a result, the womb becomes a symbolic safe space for *feeling* at home in diaspora.

The up-beat poem "Happy to be Nappy," on the other hand, also makes use of the rhetorical technique of repetition; yet its tone is lively and proud. It is introduced with the painting entitled "Afr-Disia" (*Afrokon* 40) in order to address the beauty of afro hair. In it, the naked woman's afro is represented in the form of a mushroom the size and umbrella-form of which expresses graciousness, grandness, and refuge. Likewise, the poem "Self Love" can also be read against the painting that accompanies it, "Transition", in which the afro is surrounded by the words "Natural hair is revolutionary and sexy" (54). The recorded version of "Self Love" (*WombVoliushan*, track 3, 00:50-01:02) complements the painting by underscoring aurally the confusing effect of

such controlling images. Vertiginous trumpets sound and an accelerated declamation of carefully chosen strophes define the tone of the lyrical-I's troubled state of mind:

> raped then called a ho
> nappy head is unattractive
> body hair is not seductive
> melanin is bad
> being bold and strong is mad
> its manly
> hhmmm…
> ("Self Love" 55)

In the closing verses, however, the lyrical-I affirms that she "rebelled against those rules / and in that achieved self-rule / and self-love" (56).

Afrokon's spoken words, paintings, and lyrics range on the one hand from positive re-appropriations of the black female body to, on the other, naming and claiming herstories. Womben leaders like Sojourner Truth, Queen Nanny of the Maroons, and even Nina Simone, are all present in *Afrokon* in the tonal, textual and organic dimensions as spokeswomben of herstories. Sartje Baartman as well. She is one of Queen's chosen womben to tell herstory, together with "Ain't I a Womban?". Queen translated Truth's discourse into Costa Rican Patois with the purpose of being performed as a play, which she varied by writing "womban" into the interrogative:

> I donn breed
> thirteen pikni
> an a see muos a dem
> self aff inna slavery
>
> an when me cry out
> wid mi mada pain,
> nobady but Jesus yier me!
>
> And ain't I a womban?
> (118)

Truth's query, "ain't I a womban," is also quoted in the opening and closing lines of the spoken word poem "Images of Beauty" (1-4; 90-91), whereby the lyrical-I poses the question to Sojourner Truth and Nina Simone. Inspired by Nina Simone's 1964 version of "No images" (Queen, *Afrokon* 141), Queen counteracts the images of beauty that have made the womban not know her own beauty ("Images of Beauty" 4-7). Nina Simone is another figure constituting her manifold transnational connections with North American diaspora literacy. In "Soulful Love," Queen transforms Simone's "Four Women" (35-39) and sings her lyrics as part of her own apology for self-love. Furthermore, a bloody framed suede entitled "Nina Sojourns" (*Afrokon* 100) fuses both these womben as the consolidation of Queen's herstorical consciousness.

Nina Sojourns
a tribute to Nina Simone and Sojourner Truth
un tributo a Nina Simone y Sojourner Truth

Menstrual blood / Sangre menstrual
Framed suede / Cuero gamuzado en marco: 51" x 39"

2010

By representing these significantly important female figures, the womban-trope is used consciously by Queen to help replace stereotypical images of black womanhood and in so doing grants black women a place in narratives of the past as agents of herstory, thus *engendering history*.

7. Conclusion

This paper has striven to demonstrate how womb blood provides a home in diaspora by performing herstorical consciousness from the perspective of the mothers of the diaspora. With the purpose of scrutinizing the place that menstrual blood holds in telling black herstories in performative ways, Queen's multidimensional womban-trope has been approached as a rhetoric articulating a subjectivity of belonging, and thus a rhetoric of 'home', through bloody cultural acts. It has been, moreover, argued that Queen promotes a distinctive organic-pictorial, aural, and discursive wombanist discourse in *Afrokon*, expanding black diaspora literacies from her location of residence in Central America through her connection with the diasporic community of artists in Toronto. Like d'bi.young, Queen celebrates black women's bodies in a transnational manner and in so doing, her womban-trope becomes a remarkable metaphor of the imaginary African homeland by which menstruation enacts a feeling of belongingness and of exile that places the womban as the past, present, and future entity articulating a feeling of cohesion among Afro-descendants.

With womb blood, Queen moves into the future without leaving the past. She, as Edward Baugh ascribes to Walcott, goes "to a point beyond history" (Baugh 71). Mainly because the womban-trope places the idea of home not within geographical coordinates, but rather within a cyclical and organic conception of time. Menstrual blood, in its liquid essence, thus implies historical continuation by establishing the womb as the place of beginnings and of indestructible ends, overturning the ideas of historylessness and amnesia. In response to Terborg's question *how did African women and their female descendants carry the African culture which enabled them to survive in the twentieth century* (4), *Afrokon* provides here an eloquent answer: *the womb*.

Like Alice Walker, who stated that the womanist is committed to survival and wholeness of an entire people, Queen's womban-trope elaborates on historical continuation precisely through this frame of thought. References to her womb as the entity comprising the roots of the past and as the cradle of the future corroborates such a commitment. The renewing and re-forming aspect of menstruation blood, through the recurrent and monthly actualization of life and death, represents the concrete promise of future life when absent, as well as the simultaneous remembrance of the non-consecration of it when present. In this sense, the diaspora itself represents a home that is given organic form and crafted in artistic acts by the vitally eternal, periodical, and biological performance of menstruating. Menstrual blood acts as the absolute place of origin, but also stands as the symbolic gateway for curing the damaging effects that colonialism, racism, and patriarchy have had on the daughters of the African diaspora, becoming thus a safe place where the womban 'feels homebased.'

In conclusion, Queen's poetics of the womban-trope elaborate on the womb as a place of refuge in which its menstrual blood articulates a subjectivity of belonging as an Afra-descendant. Through her varied linguistic repertoire, her oral enactment, and by materializing paintings that emerge literally from her loins, Queen Nzinga Maxwell engenders history by performing the interrelation of subjects like history, diaspora, and the female black body through the womban-trope. The womban stands thus as a homeland of a completely different caliber, underscoring moreover black women's role in the postmemory of the African diaspora and thus delineating Afro-descendent historical imagination in herstorical key.

In its transmedial materiality, *Afrokon* becomes an exemplary edition actualizing what Derek Walcott stated in "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" Namely, "[h]istory, taught as action, is art" (13).

Endnotes

[1] Scholars of nations and nationalism have pointed to the foundational relationship between narratives of a shared past, constructed from above (Hobsbawm 10), and the consolidation of a feeling of belongingness among the members of an imagined community (Anderson 5-7). See Gellner 1983, De Certeau 1988, Renan 1993, Hobsbawm 1994, and Hobsbawm and Ranger 1996.

[2] See Hobsbawm and Ranger 1996.

[3] Salman Rushdie elaborates on the concept of imaginary homelands as “fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands … of the mind” (10). These are recreated by exile, emigrant, or expatriate authors as a figment of a fragmented memory that seeks to reclaim a homeland that has been lost due to the diasporic condition.

[4] Regarding the concept of “victim diaspora,” see Cohen 39-59.

[5] In *Chombo* (1981), Afro-Panamanian Carlos Wilson gives literary form to the sociohistorical process that meant the relocation of thousands of Afro-Caribbeans to Panama to build first ‘La Grande Tranchée’ under Lesseps, then the ‘Big Ditch’ under the U.S. government (Ravasio, *Este tren*, ch. 1). Across the novel, Cubena accords the epithet of “afroexiliados” to these black workers, tracing their condition of exiled beings back to the original victim diaspora. In so doing, he underscores the repetition of homelessness due to the experience of constant displacement, by which blacks have become the “racially subordinated migrant labourers” in their host lands (Gilroy 81).

[6] See Brereton 2002, Mohammed 2002, Sheperd et al 1995.

[7] Relevant to the process of engendering history is overcoming female voicelenessness in the study of the Caribbean. Boyce Davies and Savory Fido discuss the condition of black female “voicelessness” in their introductory chapter to *Out of the Kumbla* as “the historical absence of a specifically female position on major issues like slavery, colonialism, decolonization …”, as well as the absence of critical discussion in Academia concerning the work of Caribbean women writers (1).

[8] Representing the largest minority in Costa Rica, the term “Afro-Costa Rican” refers here specifically to the descendants of anglophone Afro-Caribbean laborers, mostly Jamaicans, who migrated from 1872 onwards to the Caribbean province of Limón with the purpose of building the railroad to the Atlantic in Costa Rica (Olien qtd in Herzfeld, “Vida o muerte”). Also emigrating to work at the Panama Canal and at the United Fruit Company during the first decades of the twentieth century, Afro-Caribbean wageworkers slowly acquired citizenship across the Central American isthmus throughout the second half of the twentieth century. As a result, continental sites of moorings yielded new generations of “Afro-Central Americans” whose diasporic identity, though necessarily linked to the African diaspora, is best expressed as Central Americans of Caribbean origin (see Ravasio, *Black Costa Rica* 5).

[9] See “Support ‘Ìbèrè: My Origin. Mi origen’ book publication” at the GoGetFunding website.

[10] In *Afrokon*, Queen Nzinga inscribes Costa Rican Patois as “Mekatelyu” (xiii), which means “let me tell you something” in Standard English (Herzfeld, *Mekaytelyuw* xvii). I discard this nomenclature, since I once heard Afro-Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan reject it during the international symposium “Convergencias Transculturales en el Caribe. Literatura, arte, cultura, historia, comunicación” (November 18-21, 2015 in San José/Limón, Costa Rica). Linguists and literary critics have referred to it as “Limon Creole” (Herzfeld, “Second Language”; Ravasio, *Black Costa Rica*) or as “Limonese (Creole) English” (Winkler). Given that Afro-Costa Ricans refer to it as ‘patois’, I have chosen here to refer to it as Costa Rican Patois.

[11] See/hear the *WombVoliushan Demo CD* on the website reverbnation.com.

[12] On the subject of Afra-Hispanic writers and the emergence of a new literary canon in Latin America, see De Costa-Willis 1993. “Diaspora literacy” has been defined by Vè Vè Clark as “the ability to read and comprehend the discourses of Africa, Afro-America and the Caribbean from an informed indigenous perspective” (42). For Clark, this is not an exercise of a purely intellectual nature. Instead, it is a skill that both the reader and narrator must articulate to recognize the historical, political, social, and cultural development of the African diasporas. I appropriate the term here with the purpose of making evident Queen’s literary expression of her diasporic origin, which begins in Africa and reaches Afro-America and the Caribbean as an entanglement of cultural and sociopolitical histories.

[13] young developed the *sorplusi* method by drawing on Anita Stewart, her mother, mainly from her life-teachings and unpublished thesis on “*dubbing theatre: dub poetry as a theatre form.”* young added to Stewart’s four main elements of dubpoetry (music, language, politics, and performance) four new ones. By reorganizing them, she created the *s.o.r.p.l.u.s.i.* method, an acronym which stands for Self-knowledge, Orality, Rhythm, Political content and context, Language, Urgency, Sacredness, and Integrity. (young, “r/evolution” 27).

[14] I first accessed the webpage in 2015, after encountering Queen Nzinga’s work for the first time. The website is no longer in use.

[15] See/hear *wombanifesto* on the website bandcamp.com.

[16] Patricia Hill Collins maintains that the closing analogy provided by Walker is designed to set up a comparison between feminists’ different histories with racism, dependent on if they are white or black. In her words, “black women are ‘womanist’ while white women remain merely ‘feminist’.” (“What’s in a Name?” 10)

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Paola Ravasio holds a Ph.D. in Romance Studies with an emphasis on the Central American Caribbean literary and cultural studies from the Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg. For her doctoral project, Black Costa Rica (Würzburg University Press 2020), the German Society of Caribbean Research (SOCARE e.v.) awarded her the prize for best dissertation 2019/2020. As a research associate at the Center for InterAmerican Studies (Bielefeld University), she subsequently developed her postdoctoral research project on literary trainscapes in literature from the Americas. Her current research interests include poetic multilingualism (oral and written) in Afro-Central America and its relation to the insular Caribbean, the representation of the train as a trope of historical meaning, and the relationship between literature and historical imagination in the Black circum-Atlantic.