

Central American Coastal Identity Multiple Faces of *Mestizaje* in Narrative by the Costa Rican novelist Anacristna Rossi

“Donde quiera que voy limonense soy”.¹

The implications of *mestizaje*, understood as “racial and/or cultural mixing”,² have been at the forefront of investigation throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. As part of this process, in recent times, the multiple cultural, ethnic and linguistic mixtures that have occurred in the Americas since colonial times have raised crucial questions about social identity and, consequently, the understanding of self. However, amongst the many studies on Latin American identity, few can be found that tackle the issues of collective and personal identities on the Caribbean coast of Central America, even though it is home to one of the most diverse populations in the region.³ To fill that void this article investigates the theme of Central American coastal identities, as seen embodied in two novels by the Costa Rican novelist Anacristina Rossi, namely *Limón Blues* (2002), previously studied

1 Seen at the central bus terminal in the Costa Rican port city of Limón. “Wherever I go I’m a Limonene” (Icel. “Hvert sem ég fer er ég límoni”) (own translations).

2 For more information see: <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3424300472.html>

3 Stavenhagen, Rodolfo, “La diversidad cultural en el desarrollo de las Américas: Los pueblos indígenas y los estados nacionales en Hispanoamérica”, 2013, pp. missing, <http://www.oas.org/udse/documentos/stavenhagen.doc> See also: Mackenbach, Werner, “Representaciones del Caribe en la narrativa centroamericana, 2007, pp. missing, <http://collaborations.denison.edu/istmo/n05/articulos/representaciones.html> [Accessed August 2016]. Also Garðarsdóttir, Hólmfríður, “Að skyggjast í skúmaskotín. Um fjölmenningsáhrif við Karíbahafsströnd Kostaríku í verkum Anacristina Rossi”. *Milli mála* 2011, pp. 31-63.

for its historical content and the representation of black Costa Rica,⁴ and *Limón Reggae* (2007), studied for its political analysis and erotic undertones.⁵ The novels are perceived to contest earlier disregard for the importance of Costa Rican minorities, cultural mixing, ethnicity and women's role as protagonists in the enhancement of cultural heritage and diversity. As a consequence, particular attention is paid in this article to Rossi's portrayal of the Costa Rican Caribbean coast and the port city of Limón, where co-ethnic experiences and constant cultural regenerations are highlighted as a fundamental component in the formation of local community, hence identity, while, simultaneously, special attention is paid to the leading roles Rossi assigns to her female characters.

1. Identity formation inseparable from sociopolitical developments

In Central America, the question 'Who are we?' has been particularly urgent since Independence in the nineteenth century. Early on, the different nation states struggled with how to go about managing their own affairs as independent entities, and the question of representation became critical as different social groups demanded their place at the ruling table. The belated industrialization of Latin America at the beginning of the twentieth century, the subsequent development of labor unions, and the aspirations of the growing middle classes rendered the previously 'simple' liberal-conservative divide obsolete: a traditional bipartisan political structure was no longer representative or appropriate. On a larger scale and taking into account the whole of the Americas, the two World Wars and the Great Depression contributed to ever-increasing interregional collaboration. Central and South America became the providers of raw materials and agricultural products, while North America, pre-

4 See e.g. Kearns, Sofia's article "Postcoloniality in Anacristina Rossi's *Limón Blues*", *The South Carolina Modern Language Review*. Vol. 5, Nr. 1. 2006, pp. 1-36, <http://images.acswebnetworks.com/2017/78/ANACRIST.pdf> [Accessed August 2016].

5 See e.g. Manzari, H.J.'s article "*Limón Reggae*, una visión alternativa del Caribe costarricense", *Istmica*. 2007, (11): pp. 253-259, <http://www.revistas.una.ac.cr/index.php/istmica/article/view/721> [Accessed August 2016]. See also Poe, Karen, "*Limón Reggae*: La reinención utópica del sexo", *Página Litera*, 2007, pp. 62-71, <https://editoriallegado.com/category/libros/limon-reggae/> [Accessed August 2016].

dominantly the United States, gained worldwide economic and political dominance. The construction of the Panama Canal (1914)⁶ and increased trade relations across the Caribbean further contributed to the formation of multiethnic and plurilingual communities across the region, promoting mobility, migration and more complex cultural diversity.⁷

During the latter part of the twentieth century, social unrest, ideological struggles, dictatorships and civil wars affected everyday life and most political developments in all parts of Central and South America. A fundamental factor was, without doubt, the emerging demand for people to embrace national images and identities more fully, which led to a search for a common denominator that could unite the different national communities, composed of heterogeneous racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups.⁸ Hand in hand with Latin America's efforts to redefine its image and position itself on the international political platform as a cluster of independent nations bound by a shared history as colonized *pueblos* and peoples, theoretical debates about what determines identity, self and self-understanding were an ongoing research subject amongst European intellectuals.

The changing theoretical debates on the formation of self – and therefore identity – evolved from the theories of philosopher Søren Kierkegaard highlighting subjectivity and personal experience as a

6 To complete the construction of the Panama Canal, thousands of migrant workers were lured to the project by the promise of lucrative work. They came from Europe and the US, but mostly from the Caribbean islands and the region itself. Olive Senior observes: "West Indians provided the bulk of the workforce [...] between 1850 and 1914 untold numbers sacrificed their lives, limbs and mental faculties [...]. Many West Indians remained as settlers, their descendants now citizens of Panama; many returned home with enough of a nest egg to better themselves; and others launched themselves elsewhere in the Americas as work beckoned." From *Dying to better themselves: West Indians and the Building of the Panama Canal*, Mona, Jamaica: UWI Press, 2015. Here, p. 17.

7 For further information, see: Soto Quirós, Ronald, "Imaginando una nación de raza blanca en Costa Rica: 1821-1914", 2008, pp. missing, <http://alhim.revues.org/index2930.html> [Accessed August 2016], and Gudmundson and Woulf, *Blacks & Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2010.

8 For more see: Gudmundson and Woulf, *Blacks & Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place*, 2010. See also: Dixon, Qwame, "Race, Democracy and Black Social Movements in Latin America", in *Experiencia de Democracia Participativa en America Latina*, Madrid; CIDEAL 2002, pp. missing, and "Mestizaje and Racial Categories as Hegemonic Forms of Representation in Costa Rican Literature", *ContraCorriente*, 2003, pp. missing.

determinant factor in the conception of self,⁹ to Martin Heidegger's emphasis on being-in-the-world – DASEIN – underscoring individual-existential reality and temporality.¹⁰ In Heidegger's formulation, each person is influenced by his/her particular spatial and temporal situation.¹¹ Consequently, and of most interest for this study, from the early twentieth century, the subject has been considered a community of individuals sharing certain basic needs, rights and responsibilities while theorizing has become more inclusive and appropriate to the context of Central and South America.¹²

First, drawing on the work of the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and his theorizing on blackness in the North American South, there are those who underscore that each person is responsible for him- or herself, while others emphasize the self as inseparable from and intertwined with the workings of societal structures and institutions.¹³ During the 1980's, social scientists, such as Cornelius Castoriadis, attempted to bridge the gap between these two positions by arguing that no opposition exists between the individual and society, but that the individual is a social construct and simultaneously forms society.¹⁴ Moreover, in his discussion of the present-day understanding of identity, Manuel Montobbio underscores that collective identities function like adhesive contracts

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- 9 Chamberlain, Jane and Jonathan Rée (Eds.), "Introduction: Becoming a Philosopher". *The Kierkegaard Reader*. 2001, pp. 13–34.
 - 10 Kellner, Douglas, "Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities", *Modernity and Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992, p. 141–177.
 - 11 Olafson, Frederick A., "Philosophical anthropology", <https://www.britannica.com/topic/philosophical-anthropology/Modern-science-and-the-demotion-of-mind#ref1011552> [Accessed August 2016].
 - 12 Acebo Ibáñez, Enrique del, *Mundo sociocultural y mundo del sujeto*. Buenos Aires: EUDEBA. 2015 and *Félagsfræði rófestunna* (sp. Sociología del arraigo). Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2007. See also: Fagan, Andrew. "Human Rights", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP – A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource), <http://www.iep.utm.edu/hum-rts> [Accessed August 2016].
 - 13 Latimer, Dan, *Contemporary Critical Theory*, New York; Hardcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1989, here p. 6. Furthermore, in the context of this study, the following becomes particularly relevant: "Sartre dealt implicitly with issue of race in many of his works, beginning with *Being and Nothingness*. Race relations, especially segregation in the South, figured centrally in his reports from the United States during two visits after the War (in 1945 and 1946) and were a major topic of his many writings on colonialism and neocolonialism thereafter." From "Jean-Paul Sartre" (first published 2004, reviewed 2011), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sartre/> [Accessed August 2016].
 - 14 Castoriadis, Cornelius, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987. Here p. 3.

that hold together the members of a group who share values, beliefs, communal experiences, language, citizenship and political community.¹⁵ Individuals within a social entity are asked to agree to certain norms, beliefs, dogmas, authority, conduct and rituals, i.e., to accept certain social constructs and follow certain patterns. Yet, the individual social subject simultaneously enjoys the liberty to reject or abstain from taking part, thus potentially suffering the ultimate consequence of condemnation and/or exclusion. Montobbio ponders over his own uncertainties regarding the meaning of identity, observing that:

Identity is, above all, a fundamental human need. It is a need for belonging, for sharing a reference to a representation of a “we” beyond the immediate. [...] Identity is therefore unique, “that what makes me not identical to any other person” in the words of Amin Maalouf in *Les Murderers Identities* (1998), although not immutable; depositary of two inheritances – “a ‘vertical’ one, that comes to us from our ancestors, traditions of our people, of our religious community; the other, the ‘horizontal’ one, is a product of our time, of our contemporaries”; and although it is made up of multiple belongings, it is one and we experience it as complete. [...] Identity is constructed. It changes. It can be transformed.”¹⁶

Montobbio’s reservations become particularly relevant when Anacristina Rossi’s literary representations of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, as represented in *Limón Blues* (2002) and *Limón Reggae* (2007), are researched, as both novels underscore a multiplicity of

15 Montobbio, Manuel, “Sobre la identidad de la identidad en la era de la globalización”, *Revista de Occidente*. Madrid, 2010, N°352. pp. 130-159. Here p. 132.

16 Montobbio, Manuel, in his article “Sobre la identidad de la identidad en la era de la globalización”, *Revista de Occidente*, Madrid, 2010, explains that: “La identidad es, ante todo, una necesidad fundamental del ser humano. Necesidad de pertenencia, de referentes de representación de compartir un nosotros más allá de lo inmediato. [] La identidad es, asimismo, única, “aquello que hace que yo no sea idéntico a ninguna otra persona”, en palabras de Amin Maalouf en *Les identities meurtrières* (1998), aunque no inmutable; depositaria de dos herencias – “una “vertical”, nos viene de nuestros antepasados, de las tradiciones de nuestro pueblo, de nuestra comunidad religiosa; la otra “horizontal”, es producto de nuestra época, de nuestros contemporáneos”; y, aunque esté hecha de múltiples pertenencias, es una y la vivimos como un todo. [...] La identidad se construye. Se transforma. Puede transformarse”, p. 131-132.

social entities.¹⁷ The characters of her novels define their ‘selves’ in comparison to others around them, while their understanding and perception of the collective ‘we’ is defined in relation to a more distant ‘other’. Hence, regional identity, where ethnic, racial, linguistic and gendered differences are taken into account, is multi-layered and sensitive. While each member has to determine his/her place of belonging, being a political subject requires either accepting someone else’s definition or going through the process of finding a place of one’s own within the range of options, or simply living outside, or at the margins of, the establishment’s ever-changing definition of the nation. The freedom to choose can be liberating, but it can also be restrictive and marked by social expectations.

Therefore, before turning to Rossi’s literary representation of the coastal region in and around Limón, the myth of the supposed racial uniqueness of the Costa Ricans needs to be addressed.¹⁸ In *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class, and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority*, Ronald N. Harpelle stresses the fact that the Central Valley, the highlands hosting the current capital San José and its predecessor Cartago, is commonly seen as “the real Costa Rica”, while “Limón is exotic, populated by people of African descent” (xiii and 21). Similarly, Carolina A. Miranda and Paige R. Penland point out that native people and those of African descent living outside the Central Valley have been ignored and excluded from the Costa Rican national imaginary.¹⁹ This exclusion of ethnic minorities strengthened, as Quesada Soto notes, “the stereotype of a white country, racial and cultural homogeneity, on the pattern of a Western civilized

17 Rossi had previously published the novels, *María la noche* (Barcelona: Lumen, 1985) and *La loca de Gandoca* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Universitaria Centroamericana, 1991), as well as a collection of short stories entitled *Situaciones conyugales* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial REI, 1993). Her narrative has earned her various literary awards, such as the Premio Nacional de Novela Aquilero Echeverría in 1985 and 2002. Rossi’s most recent publication is a historical novel titled *La romana indómita* (Mexico City: Planeta, 2016).

18 Quince Duncan and Carlos Meléndez explain that: “El comercio del esclavo negro aligeró un poco la dura carga que quiso hacer caer sobre el indígena, pero fue la base para una situación de crueldad para el africano o sus descendientes. Fueron ellos ante la ley, meras herramientas de trabajo, propiedad absoluta de su dueño. La situación personal cambió, tanto de acuerdo con el trato que el amo le diera, como por el medio en que les tocó vivir, ya rural o urbano”. *El negro en Costa Rica*, San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Costa Rica, 1981. Here p. 33.

19 Miranda, Carolina A. and Paige R. Penland. *Costa Rica*. London: Lonely Planet. 2004, p. 78.

nation”.²⁰ Moreover, the Costa Rican historian Ronald Soto-Quiros explains that the determination of the national oligarchy to distinguish itself clearly from its Central American neighbors was quite evident from early on in the independence period. Thus, based on an alleged European heritage, the notion of uniformity and whiteness became the dominant concept of the nation. Furthermore, and relevant to Rossi’s positioning of her female characters, Harpelle clarifies: “one important group that is always overlooked are the women who arrived in the region as daughters, sister, wives, and mothers of the workers. [...] Nevertheless, thousands of women did make their way to the region”.²¹

In the context of Rossi’s literary works, it is worth remembering, as Rafael Cuevas Molina notes, that all identities are constructed on the basis of a relationship between an ‘I’ and an ‘other’. In fact, Harpelle, referring to the particular case of the Costa Rican national identity, uses a simplified version of that paradigm when he compares the Central Valley with the Afro-Caribbean province of Limón. His version depicts the Costa Rican Atlantic as a unified social entity, whereas Rossi exposes a complex mosaic of *mestizaje* tracing back centuries. The two novels reveal her meticulous study of the history of the Caribbean coast, and they indicate her desire to showcase a multifaceted reality ignored by national, historical and cultural accounts until recently. The novels focus on the ethnically hybrid community of the coastal region and their sub-theme seems to be to “appreciate the multicultural and multiethnic heritage of the Costa Rican people where native, European, African and Asiatic values are a part of the national character”.²² And, as will be demonstrated, drawing on recent theoretical debates, Rossi’s novels high-

20 Quesada Soto, Álvaro, *Uno y los otros...* Here p. 32.

21 Harpelle, Ronald N., *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority*, Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001, p. 13–14. For further information, see Harpelle’s chapter “White Zones. American Enclave Communities of Central America”, in *Blacks & Blackness in Central America. Between Race and Place*, Eds. Gudmundsson and Woulf, 2010. There he explains that “women, when they do appear [in Central American public records], are usually just a footnote in a male-centered story of conquest”, p. 309. In the same publication, see also Mauricio Meléndez Obando’s chapter; “The Slow Ascent of the Marginalized: Afro-Descendants in Costa Rica and Nicaragua”, pp. 334–352.

22 Duncan, Quince, “El afrorealismo, una dimensión nueva de la literatura latinoamericana”, *Anales del Caribe*, 2006; “apreciar el carácter multicultural y multiétnico de la población costarricense donde valores indígenas, europeos, africanos y asiáticos forman parte del carácter nacional”, p. 9.

light the fluid formation of hybrid social identities on the Caribbean coast, as a result of continued cultural renewal where vertical and horizontal cultural heritages coincide and intertwine, and where gender matters.

2 *Limón Blues*

In *Limón Blues* the obvious protagonist appears to be the main male figure, Orlandus Robinson, a black Jamaican who, having arrived in Limón, is on his way to Cahuita – today a village on the coast to the south of Limón – hoping to put his family affairs in order, earn some money and then return to his native Jamaica. Yet, complementing historical writing, the novel not only tells Robinson's personal, 'coming of age' story, but also the history of black Costa Rica. Through a carefully crafted narrative, it offers detailed insight into Costa Rica's historical and socio-economic development, as well as regional and national politics. And it reveals the Atlantic region as a place for the building of a marginalized ethnic identity, where the female characters form the axis of the immigrant community.

While it is true to say that *Limón Blues* revolves around the themes of ethnic identity and nation formation, Rossi's elaborations on the issue of male and female identity are just as crucial. She juxtaposes her male and female characters and makes them represent different stages in the identity-formation of men and women. The men seek rootedness, i.e., a sense of belonging, in the creation of social organizations and the promotion of political awareness. However, their projects fail because they tend to be unrealistic and utopian. In contrast, the women are more directly connected with their cultural surroundings and with practical everyday activities. It is significant that Orlandus' mother, Nanah, is the first female character to appear. She is presented as a direct descendant of the enslaved Caribbean population, a black woman from Kingston, Jamaica, who asks her son to travel to Costa Rica and attend to a plot of land belonging to the family. Nanah is the personification of the African negritude of the region and, associated with Santería, pagan gods, herbs and a mystical relationship with the ancestors,

she appears and reappears in the text as a *leitmotif* which functions as a reminder of the continuous presence of the ‘pure’ black element. She appears as an illustration of Montobbio’s idea that vertical cultural heritage is required for identity construction. Orlandus is her firstborn and she has high hopes for him, which should materialize because he is hard-working, honest and true to his origins (85, 98 and 130). In all his endeavors, which have both fortunate and unfortunate consequences, his mother supports him every step of the way.

Everything changes, however, for the young Orlandus when he meets Leonor – “the minister’s wife” – in Limón.²³ She is older than him and lives in the inland village of Guácimo, where she serves as the managing director of a banana plantation that she has inherited. She is a *mestiza* woman who pursues what she wants, seducing the newly-arrived to satisfy her carnal desires. He attempts to resist her seductive spell – he asks her not to play him (47) –, but cannot and, gradually, Leonor and “her negro”, as she calls him, begin a passionate but, ultimately, impossible love affair. When her husband finds out and condemns her infidelity, she answers back, demanding the same liberty he takes for granted to follow her desires: she points out that his sexual needs and extra-marital affairs, considered as a natural and almost divine right, are no more urgent than hers. Furthermore, she questions the paradigm that her desires are disgraceful and socially unacceptable, while his are acclaimed and accepted. The presence of Leonor in the text serves multiple functions, one being to refer to the evident gender divides; but her character and actions also point to the conflicting interests between races and classes, between white identity, the *mestizo* one, and that of the black and mixed race inhabitants of the region. The reader is reminded that the population of the Atlantic coast has always been multi-racial, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural, and that Leonor’s interests, for example, in African dance and dancers (61), confirm the people’s continuous need for cultural belonging and cultural integration. Here, Rossi can be seen to evoke Fernando Ortiz’s theory of ‘transmutations of cultures’, since, in the novel, she re-

23 Rossi, *Limón Blues*, San José, Costa Rica: Alfaguara, 2002; “la mujer del ministro”, p. 39.

veals the emergence of numerous new identities based on the cultural phenomena of different forms of transculturation.²⁴ Through the novel's main characters and their cross cultural and ethnic intimate relationships, the reader learns that identity formation of the different sub-entities is, due to multiple faces of *mestizaje*, a continuing process. The Caribbean coastal region of Costa Rica is shown as constantly shaping its cultural ambiance in which the principal forces are, as Maalouf puts it, contemporary 'horizontal' external influences, such as the social, political and/or economic conditions, or 'vertical' ones, referring to the decisive African cultural heritage of the Caribbean coast.²⁵

Shortly after breaking off his relationship with Leonor for fear of being killed, Orlandus returns to Jamaica and meets Irene Barrett, a tall slender teacher of mixed race, the daughter of a Jamaican father and a Dominican mother: "She was a *mulatta*. She had green eyes and her long hair in a bun, with some loose curls escaping. Orlandus approached her and cleared his throat. She looked at him. Orlandus smiled and she returned it with a beautiful smile".²⁶ The two "understood each other perfectly from the beginning" and soon developed a relationship of compassion, mutual interest and respect.²⁷ In social terms, Irene is well-placed and enjoys many opportunities and possibilities. Being a teacher is a transferable skill and, thus she has no reservations when offered the opportunity to move to Limón with her new husband. As time goes by, her observations and comments facilitate the reader's fuller understanding of the social conditions and culture of Limón, which differs from the rest of the Caribbean:

The people that lived in Limón were fascinating. They spoke exquisite English, dressed in a spectacular fashion, sang extraordinary tunes and

24 In his theorizing the Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, as exposed in "Del fenómeno social de la 'transculturación' y de su importancia en Cuba", in *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y azúcar*, 1983 [1940], p. 86, coined the concept of 'transculturation'. His purpose was to explain the process, different stages and outcome of cultural contacts among peoples brought together by European Colonial expansion into the Caribbean.

25 See quotation from Montobbio on page 123.

26 Rossi, *Limón Blues*, "Era una mulata. Tenía los ojos verdes y el pelo largo recogido en un moño del que se desprendían rizos sueltos. Orlandus se le acercó y carraspeó. Ella lo miró. Orlandus le sonrió y ella le devolvió una sonrisa preciosa", p. 101.

27 Rossi, *Limón Blues*, "se entendieron divinamente desde el comienzo", p. 102.

practiced secret rituals in places called lodges. Their religion was Protestant and Queen Elizabeth of England was their authority [...]. Their preferred activities were declamation, singing and dancing. Their sports, cricket and horse racing.²⁸

Rossi makes the character of Irene gradually take the central stage and dominate the narrative voice of the text, while Orlandus moves into the background, living in absence and becoming a distant silence. He seeks recognition in political activism and finds refuge within the pro-black movement in Limón. The women support and participate in this same movement, but their goals appear as being more realistic and down-to-earth, focused on what is achievable in everyday life.

While depicting autonomous female protagonists, Rossi's portrayal of Nanah, Leonor and Irene simultaneously confirms dominant clichés and representative roles of women. First we meet the omnipresent mother dedicated to the Santería faith, then the exotic sensual female who facilitates a young man's rite of passage and lastly the attractive but realistic wife, truthful and trustworthy. Yet, the way in which Rossi portrays these women breaks with conventions because each of them manages to create a psychological and social place of her own. Together, they represent a female collective, distinctly different from the masculine one, thus embodying an alternative identity model that quite accurately reflects Montabbio's formulations regarding vertical and horizontal cultural heritage.

3. *Limón Reggae*

In *Limón Reggae*, the reader encounters the same geographical reality, but at a different historical moment and viewed from different perspectives. At the start of the narration, the protagonist, Laura, is a young girl, the daughter of a Lebanese mother and a mulatto

28 Rossi, *Limón Blues*, "En Limón vivía gente fascinante que hablaba un inglés exquisito, se vestía de modo espectacular, cantaba cosas extraordinarias y tenía rituales secretos en unos sitios llamados logias. Eran de religión protestante y su autoridad era la reina Isabel de Inglaterra []. Sus actividades preferidas eran la declamación, el canto y el baile. Sus deportes, el cricket y las carreras de caballos.", p. 397.

father from Limón, but living in the capital, San José. Neither Laura's cultural heritage nor her skin color matches the 'official' image of the homogeneous Costa Rican social identity discussed earlier. She feels out of place in San José and soon moves to Limón, her emotional refuge, where she goes to spend time with her maternal aunt Maroz, an independent woman, proud of her Arab background and a dedicated fighter against the dominant patriarchal system. In an attempt to give Laura a new identity, Maroz renames her with the Arabic name Aisha.²⁹ Her aim is to promote a new self-understanding in the young woman and to liberate her from her parents, exhausted by their attempt to integrate into a community that has always seen them as others.

However, Limón does not offer Laura an ethnic 'locus amoenus'.³⁰ When, through her childhood friend Percival (also known as Ahmad), she, as Aisha, meets a group of black civil-rights advocates, who follow the ideas of Marcus Garvey and the Black Panthers (27),³¹ she is rejected and excluded: "Why youh call har árabe? She plain pañagirl. [...] Porque es más árabe que paña.... [...] Árabe to 'r ass! Más paña que el gallo pinto. Aisha you say? Nobody calls her dat. Does she even speak Arabic? Is she a Muslim?"³² In the context of this localized civil-rights struggle, she is not black enough (in skin color or culture), although she speaks the local English.³³ She shares views with these local activists, engaged in a campaign against mono-ethnic, national perceptions of the citizen, and the Spanish cultural heritage and political domination, but is rejected.

29 Aisha was the name of Prophet Muhammad's second wife.

30 For further information on Laura's 'coming of age', see Chen Sham Jorge's article, "Representación de la infancia en el *Bildungsroman* costarricense: Ana Cristina Rossi y Rima de Vallbona", *La Mujer en la Literatura del Mundo Hispánico*, Westmister, USA: Instituto Literario y Cultural Hispánico, 2005, pp. 307-315.

31 Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) was a Jamaican entrepreneur, publisher and promoter of the Pan-Africanist movements. He founded the Black Star Line, part of the Back-to-Africa movement, which advocated the return of the African diaspora to their ancestral lands. For further information see www.marcusgarvey.com/ [Accessed August 2016].

32 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*, San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Legado, 2007, "¿Habla árabe acaso? ¿Es musulmana?", p. 47.

33 The civil rights movement in Limón is represented by "CoRev": "Todos los de CoRev terminamos el bachillerato pero si queremos ser profesionales tenemos que irnos de aquí. Man! [...] gracias a los compañeros que nos mandan libros y periódicos de Nueva York y California. Estados Unidos es Pig Amerika como dicen los *Panthers* pero es también una fuente de conocimiento y de concientización. Como en los tiempos de Garvey", p. 46.

Aisha discovers that she has no place in this particular struggle: “She is a part of the white supremacy, as Garvey would put it” states Sylvia, one of the CoRev activists.³⁴ Laura/Aisha’s marginalization is a multiple, complex and permanent condition. Her sudden, firsthand discovery of this multiple marginality and lack of belonging leads her to continue searching for a place of her own and to engage in the Central American civil wars. Key parts of the novel revolve around her active involvement in the Salvadoran guerrilla movement and also discuss the armed conflict in Guatemala and Nicaragua, thus reflecting the well-known international involvements, in forms of brigades of fighters, arms trade or US military operations, in the Central American conflicts of the 1980s.³⁵

However, Limón is a part of Laura’s existence and self. It runs through her veins, and its symbolic music; “not rock nor jazz nor calypso nor gospel nor blues, but [...] the desperate and rebellious black music, African music” – el reggae – resonates with her and strengthens her spirit of struggle.³⁶ “Stand up for your rights” and “Do not give up the fight” are phrases that contribute to her identification with a greater cause. She gains confidence that “every little thing is gonna be alright”, and pain and rejection disappear. For some years Laura participates in the armed struggle, but little by little discovers the dishonest intrigues and corruption of power within and outside the guerrilla forces. Furthermore, to her dismay, women’s inferior rank in the movements becomes evident and unacceptable. She questions this reality, opposes gendered marginality and requests answers about the new woman next to the new man (125). Her male superiors within the movement simply respond with: “Ah, those pods of yours, you. Capitalism is the principal enemy. The oppression of women will disappear when men’s oppression disappears. And it is not just talk”.³⁷ Hand in hand with witnessing ever increasing and exaggerated violence, she comes to

34 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*, “Ella es parte de la blancocracia, as Garvey would put it”, p. 48.

35 Chapters 5, 6 and 7 take place outside Costa Rica, predominantly in El Salvador.

36 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*, “no rock ni jazz ni calipso ni gospel ni blues pero [...] una música negra, una música afro, desesperada y rebelde”, p. 107.

37 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*, “Ah, qué vainas las tuyas, vos. El enemigo principal es el capitalismo. La opresión de las mujeres desaparecerá cuando desaparezca también la del hombre. Y no es asunto de lenguaje”, p. 126.

terms with her vanishing sense of belonging and her powerlessness.³⁸ The decisive moment presents itself when:

They came across human scrap that appeared to be her little boy. The soldiers had broken his skull and cut his feet. At first Aisha didn't feel any grief. A cynical and incredulous indifference came over her. Then the numbness. When the military operations reduced they escaped to a cold mountain forest. That's where she collapsed. [] The weight of her loss detracted her. [] She didn't go back.³⁹

Laura decides to withdraw from the guerrillas and return home to her family in Limón: “Hi Mom, Aunt Maroz, I need a hug from both of you, yes, I have come back, flaccid”.⁴⁰ She suffers the consequences of war and explains to her mother: “I'm in pain over so many things. I am in pain because of a child. No Mom, I didn't get married, I didn't give birth to him, he came to me, no, he wasn't pretty, he was ugly [...] when he died at eight he was the size of a four year old”.⁴¹ She is disillusioned, exhausted and depressed. Two years go by until “one day Aisha is back on her feet”.⁴² In Limón she discovers that the discord amongst the hybrid ethnic groups, due to lack of common denominators and linked to centuries of multifaceted subordination, continues to perpetrate marginality. Blacks, Whites, Mulattos, Mestizos, Indians, Chinese, Arabs and other minorities continue living in segregation, suspicious of one another. The different ethnic groups are in the process of redefining themselves: “No, we are not Negros, we are Afro descendants” [...] “No,

38 Acebo Ibáñez, in *Félagsfræði rötfestunnar*, Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2007, discusses the issue of belonging and argues its three basic requirements as including belonging to a group, a system of values and a cause or a role. Acebo emphasizes particularly the need for both sociological and physiological basic conditions for a successful sense of belonging.

39 Rossi, same text, “Encontraron un desecho que parecía ser su hijo diminuto. Los soldados le habían destrozado la cabeza y cortado los pies. Al principio Aisha no sintió dolor. Le cayó una indiferencia sarcástica e incrédula. Después una indiferencia de persona anestesiada. Cuando bajo la actividad del ejército, subieron a un bosque frío. En ese bosque Aisha se desmoronó. [] El peso de la pérdida la lastró. [] No regresó” p. 190.

40 Rossi, same text, “Hola mami, tía Maroz, necesito abrazarlas, sí, me ven llegada, flácida”, p. 191.

41 Rossi, same text, “Me duelen tanto las cosas. Me duele un hijo. No mami, no me he casado, no lo tuve, me llegó, no, no era bonito, era feo, [] cuando murió a sus ocho años tenía el tamaño de un chiquito de cuatro”, p. 191.

42 Rossi, same text, “un día Aisha se levanta”, p. 192.

we are not Limonene. We are Africans”.⁴³ Years have passed and Laura has to learn new terminology, the appropriate identification of the ‘I’ and the ‘other’. “Surprised she discovers that not only does she not know what to call them, she doesn’t know how to have dealings with them, she doesn’t have the courage to talk to them”.⁴⁴ National identity, she discovers, continues to be dominated by the European-*mestizo* idea of ‘the whiter, the better’.

4. Transculturation and identity

In order to gain a better understanding of the racial complexities represented in Rossi’s narrative, where the multiethnic origin of the Costa Rican people is exalted, leading to the formation of a hybrid, collective identity, Kimberlé W. Crenshaw’s formulations regarding ‘intersections’ or axes in identity research become important. In her theorizing she challenges supposed neutrality and demonstrates blindness to the importance of gender, race and class, calling for a study of how different power structures interact in the lives of minorities, and specifically colored women. Crenshaw also calls for a thorough revision of previously established and more traditional theories in social sciences regarding the formation of identity. She emphasizes that the first step needed is the willingness to question power and the multiplicity of underlying assumptions regarding race and gender.⁴⁵ Consequently, Summer Woo does just that, arguing that people of multiracial backgrounds “continually face ambiguities and contradictions when defining their social and personal identity” (2), and goes on to discuss how important it is for multiracial individuals to have positive racial role-models.⁴⁶ Janet

43 Rossi, same text, “No somos negros, somos afrodescendientes” [...] “Nosotros no somos limonenes. Somos africanos”, p. 196–197.

44 Rossi, same text, “Y se da cuenta, sorprendida, de que no solo no sabe cómo nombrarlos, tampoco sabe tratarlos ni se atreve a hablar con ellos”, p. 196.

45 In her book *Critical Race Theory. The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, New York: New Press, 1995, Kimberlé Crenshaw first introduces her criticism of standardized understandings of the social subject, arguing that multiple and prevailing complexities due to origins, race and gender could not be ignored in modern society. For further information see also Crenshaw’s: „Introduction“, in *Canon of American Legal Thought*, Kennedy, David and William W. Fisher III (Eds.), Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

46 Woo, Summer. “The Radical Identity of Asian American/White Children and Experiences of Race”. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, July 31, 2008. <http://www.allacademic.com/> [Accessed August 2016].

González-Mena and Dora Pulido-Tobiassen study the arduous task that adolescents have in forming their identities and explain how these difficulties increase for young people of color, because they must in some way “reconcile the conflicting messages about who they are and their value in a society that grants privileges to people of white skin and devalues people with dark skin”.⁴⁷ Identity formation, González-Mena and Pulido-Tobiassen argue, becomes ever more complex when the individual is multiracial, since multiracial individuals, in addition to having to tolerate racist remarks in the same way as ‘blacks’, suffer other kinds of discrimination. Unlike mono-racial youngsters, those of mixed race are condemned to live at the margins, because “the common uses of racial categories do not take into account a child that is not ‘one’ or ‘the other’, but is ‘both’ and ‘many’”.⁴⁸

It is precisely this ambiguity that characterizes the racial classification of multiracial people which is the core of the social and psychological dilemmas experienced by such individuals. Dominique Michel-Peres has explained that this can cause profound problems for the process of identity formation and says:

Their multi-affiliation increases the complexity of their identity choices because their multi-isms are not partial identities but central to who they are at all times. However, their counterparts in social interactions often deny the totality of their identity validation.⁴⁹

Social pressure to choose and identify with only one of their racial origins can be, as Rossi’s literary works demonstrate, very distressing. Yet this choice becomes inevitable if the person wants to belong

47 González-Mena, Janet and Dora Pulido-Tobiassen, “Apoyando el desarrollo de una identidad sana”. <http://teachingforchange.org/files/022-B.pdf>, 1999; “reconciliar los mensajes conflictivos acerca de quiénes son y su valor en la sociedad que concede privilegios a la gente con piel blanca y devalúa a la gente de piel oscura”, p. 1. [Accessed August 2016].

48 González-Mena and Pulido-Tobiassen, same; “los usos comunes de las categorías raciales no toman en cuenta un niño que no es ‘uno’ o ‘el otro’, sino que es ‘ambos’ o ‘muchos’”, p. 4.

49 Michel-Peres, Dominique, *Understanding the Identity Choices of Multiracial and Multicultural Afro-European and Black Women Living in Germany. Identifying a Model of Strategies and Resources for Empowerment*. Dissertation, 2007. University of München, edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/6489/1/Michel-Peres_Dominique.pdf. Also available on <http://worldcat> [Accessed August 2016]. Here p. 62.

to a certain collective group.⁵⁰ Crystal Bedley has continued along these lines to identify, through several theoretical approaches, the factors that most heavily influence people of multiracial background in their choice or formation of racial identity. Her theorizing focuses on three factors that are particularly influential: 1) family background; 2) the individual's physical appearance; and 3) the social experiences shared by people belonging to a particular racial group.⁵¹

These three factors are central in Rossi's portrayal of Laura's identity formation in *Limón Reggae*. Her 'coming of age' and social experiences confirm Bedley's observations as well as those made by Philip M. Brown. He emphasizes that people of biracial background prefer to interact with members of multiracial minorities rather than with majority groups, because they share similar experiences of ethnic marginality. However, Brown points out that the threat of social rejection is always present, and that multiple racial affiliations may hinder the acceptance of an individual as a stable member of any one group.⁵²

Applying this debate to *Limón Reggae*, it appears that Laura's experiences during childhood in Limón were both happy and reassuring. However, as she grows older her childhood friends become increasingly hostile to and distant from her. Referring to the hostility she meets from the Afro-Caribbean community, Laura reflects: "The Afro world is a secret, think about it, we do not know its truth. They locked it up and will not share the key".⁵³

However, her aunt Maroz explains to her that this unfriendly attitude is an understandable consequence of the injustices and the marginalization that the Afro-Caribbean community has had to put up with from the Costa Rican authorities. Maroz observes:

50 Phinney, Jean S. "Ethnic Identity in Adolescents and Adults. Review of Research", *Readings in Ethnic Psychology*, Routledge, New York: Routledge University, 1998, pp. 73-99. Here p. 81.

51 Bedley, Crystal, "The formation of Multiracial Identities", *Sociological Association*, Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, July 31, 2008, <http://www.mixedracestudies.org/?p=1275>[Accessed August 2016]. Here p. 11.

52 Brown, Philip M., "Biracial Identity and Social Marginality". *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*. 2008. pp. 319-337. Here p. 333.

53 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*: "El mundo Afro es un secreto, piensa, no conocemos su verdad. Lo cerraron con llave y no le darán llave", p. 104.

At first the blacks were loving and confident that the Costa Ricans would see them as equals. But one day they realized that the ‘whites’ considered them undesirable, lower [...] the ‘whites’ did what they could to destroy them. The government banned their employment, so they roamed the streets starving; almost half of them had to leave. When Figueres granted nationality to the ones left (in 1949) it was a very injured, closed, distrustful, and secret community.⁵⁴

Likewise, in *Limón Blues*, Orlandus is precisely someone who has suffered from bad treatment at the hands of the Costa Rican majority society. As he loses faith in his role, the women take center stage: the predominant narrative voice changes and the storytelling becomes theirs. His mother, wife and ex-mistress (the minister’s wife from Guácimo) bring to the forefront the complex processes of identity formation where gender, ethnicity and class cannot be ignored.

In her sociopolitical representation, which mirrors the historiography of the region, Rossi confirms Panesi’s observations about collective memory, which suggest that “literature will always be history’s other archive”.⁵⁵ What official history reveals then, is only partial, and Rossi’s literary representation complements it, filling some of the important gaps. Rossi’s imaginative use of historical, social and demographic developments enhances understanding of how the local community has developed its complex multiethnic and plurilingual identity. In the process of her character’s identity formation, Rossi participates in what Quince Duncan explains as a “reconciliation with a raptured cultural heritage, and assumptions of its Afro-Hispanic ethnicity”,⁵⁶ However, as already discussed,

54 Rossi, same text: “Al principio los negro eran cariñosos y confiaban en que los costarricenses los verían como iguales. Pero un día se dieron cuenta de que los paña los consideraban indeseables, inferiores [...] los paña hicieron lo posible por destruirlos. El gobierno prohibió darles empleo, vagaban por las calles muriéndose de hambre, casi la mitad de ellos se tuvo que ir. Cuando Figueres les dio la nacionalidad (en 1949) a los que quedaban, ya era una comunidad muy herida, desconfiada, cerrada, secreta”, p. 38.

55 Panesi concludes that: “los archivos de la historia siempre están adulterados, o pueden ser destruidos. Se conserven o desaparezcan, la literatura será siempre el otro archivo”, p. 24.

56 Duncan, Quince, “El afrorealismo, una dimensión nueva de la literatura latinoamericana”, *Anales del Caribe*, 2006; “reconciliación con su herencia cultural arrebatada, y asunción de su etnicidad afro hispánica”, p. 19. He further observes that: „los afrorealistas nos llaman a no considerar la diversidad étnica como un peligro para la unidad nacional, sino que corresponde abrazarla como nuestra gran riqueza”, p. 19.

men, according to Rossi's representation, both Orlandus in *Limón Blues* and Ahmed in *Limón Reggae*, appear disoriented, uprooted and lacking role-models. They take an active part in the civil rights movement and try to raise local awareness and political consciousness, but, in doing so, adopt foreign models and follow an external leadership, thus promoting an identity that is alien to their own culture. They are unsuccessful because what they look for is an unattainable utopia instead of something rooted in the reality that surrounds them, which they might be able to influence. Conversely, Rossi shows the female characters to be rooted in their authentic everyday reality and cultural ambiance. They carefully consider their condition, weigh their options and are apparently able to accommodate their individual and collective selves with more flexibility than the men. When required, they demonstrate an ability to remodel their identity, even if the predominant gender patterns practiced elsewhere within the hegemonic 'establishment', where men speak out and women serve with complete dedication, also exists within the Costa Rican marginal world.⁵⁷ Irene, "this biblical queen, his wife, his other half"⁵⁸, according to Orlandus, is left abandoned and in solitude by their marriage. She seeks comfort with a North American, Jewish medical doctor, working temporarily in Limón and, as a result, gives birth to a beautiful blue-eyed daughter, whom she presents to her husband as his. She explains the daughter's looks by referring to their own mixed and partly unknown ethnicity. The daughter, therefore, just as Laura/Aisha in *Limón Raggae*, represents one of the numerous faces of *mestizaje* predominant in the Costa Rican 'other'.⁵⁹

When it comes to the formation of ethnic complexity, and thus identity, the women are not only the bearers of but also the mediators for racially mixed, future generations. The role they play in this regard in Rossi's novel is striking. A good example is when Irene

57 For more see Garðarsdóttir, "Transculturación paulatina: La integración del pueblo negro en la sociedad costarricense." *El Caribe Centroamericano*. Helsinki, Finland: The Renvall Institute, 2005, pp. 138–152, and "La mujer de color: Diáspora globalizadora de la subalternidad". *Serie VII de HAINA*, Gothenburg, Sweden: Gothenburg University. 2007, pp. 171-183.

58 Rossi, *Limón Blues*; "esa reina bíblica su mujer, su par", p. 128.

59 Harpelle, Ronald N., *The West Indians of Costa Rica: Race, Class and the Integration of an Ethnic Minority*. 2001. See also Corticelli, María Rita, *El Caribe Universal: La obra de Antonio Benítez Rojo*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2006.

– a year after her affair with the American doctor – gives birth to Orlandus’ son and makes sure that, despite ethnic diversity, all four of them go on peacefully to share a home which is truly dynamic in socio-cultural terms. The siblings come to embody the tolerance required to live in a contemporary multicultural society marked by the existence of complex combinations of social and individual identities. However, as demonstrated in Rossi’s narrative, the ‘I’ and the ‘other’ continue to be the common markers in the formation of identity. *Mestizaje* appears in Rossi’s texts not as a fixed condition but one that is open to continuous modification, emphasizing the everlasting social and cultural transmutation of the Costa Rican Caribbean community. Therefore, it is no surprise to discover that Orlandus and Irene constantly need to mediate the conflicting demographic situations around them. The identity struggle played out in *Limón Blues* reflects Woo’s theoretical formulations, just as Laura’s identity quest, when viewed in terms of Bedley’s study, can be seen as representing the tasks awaiting future generations.

The tension between micro- and macro-concerns emerges as being the most characteristic feature of Rossi’s texts, and this corresponds to Beatriz Sarlo’s observation that gender and social policies are complementary parts of the same thought and action, and cannot be separated.⁶⁰ As mentioned earlier, in *Limón Blues* Nanah, Leonor and Irene reconfirm clichés about women’s roles: Nanah, as the devoted mother, conductor of Santería faith, serves to represent cultural rootedness; Leonor, as the sensual lover, embodies opportunism; while Irene is the realistic down-to-earth woman who can always be trusted to seek the common good. At the same time, because “the birth of Caribbean culture and identity can’t be limited to a single perspective”,⁶¹ these three female characters also disrupt conventional female paradigms as they create a place of their own where they are physically and mentally independent. Similarly, the female protagonist in *Limón Reggae* represents the continuous struggle of multiracial individuals to determine their own ‘self’. Laura discovers through trial and error a way to survive,

60 Sarlo, Beatriz. “Women, History and Ideology”. *Women’s Writing in Latin America: An Anthology*. Boulder: Westview Press. 1991, p. missing.

61 Corticelli, María Rita. *El Caribe Universal*, p. 25.

combining a range of options and forming an ethnically hybrid and unruly 'I'. She explores alternative and independent identities and becomes confident enough to venture into unknown territories. She assimilates the necessary skills and appropriate knowledge, so that she does not remain in an imaginary utopian sphere, but moves on to an alternative socio-cultural space still under construction. Rossi's female protagonists, therefore, can be seen as both private and public agents who enjoy certain autonomy and an ever increasing confidence in who they are and what they want in life. Irene eventually moves to the capital San José, because she believes that national educational policies need to be challenged. She actively promotes more comprehensive identity integration at a national level and resists following a policy that emphasizes that: "We must peninsularize the colored race".⁶² She opposes the institutionalized system of racial subordination and praises the multicultural and multiethnic character of the people of Costa Rica. Similarly, *Limón Reggae* closes with Laura changing places. She travels to New York City and takes a cab-ride through the city's streets on September 11th, 2001. She listens to Bob Marley confirm that "every little thing is gonna be all right" (291) and ponders the fact that she has not taken up her mother's Arabic surname, nor has she officially adopted her popular and representative nick-name, Aisha.

Rossi's novels confirm the observations I have previously made about contemporary "women writers [that] write from within a society that grants priority and privilege to patriarchal powers [as well as Eurocentric here], while the protagonists resist, provoke and attempt to transgress conventional values and behaviors to become active subjects".⁶³ Rossi's characters can be seen to represent the characteristics of feminine and feminist principles that enable them to survive and even flourish in their present. Her instrumentality in the construction of identity takes center stage in both novels, and

62 Rossi, *Limón Reggae*; „Hay que españolizar a la raza de color”, p. 384.

63 Gardarsdóttir, Hólmfríður, *La Reformulación de la Identidad Genérica en la Narrativa de Mujeres Argentinas al Fin de Siglo XX*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor. 2005; “[...] autoras [que] escriben desde adentro de una sociedad que da prioridad y privilegio al poder patriarcal [y eurocéntrico aquí], mientras las protagonistas se resisten, provocan e intentan transgredir los valores y las conductas convencionales para hacerse sujetos activos”, p. 189.

her protagonists “construct new paradigms for future generations”.⁶⁴ Irene, when observing herself in the mirror, and Laura, when gazing at her own reflection in New York, confirm their self-determination and their acceptance of responsibility for their own personal welfare. Irene observes:

I also have on a nice dress and it suits my figure. I’m tall, I’m delicate as they say in Cuba. My lips are full, my teeth are white and my eyes are catlike. I have a mulatto skin that never grows old. My soul has, however, aged and nowadays I can be irritated, melancholic and wilted. I can feel myself trapped and suffering. But not today ...⁶⁵

In tune with Montobbio’s observations, these women belong to a certain collective community, but one that lacks unity; their shared world-view is that of the marginalized other. Yet, contrary to the men, the women challenge their obstacles. They belong to a regional, collective identity that is, as has been discussed, multiple, sensitive and even weak, where each member is requested to determine his/her own place of belonging, or else live outside, or at the margins of, the pre-established norms.

Therefore, the multiple cultural, ethnic and linguistic mixtures which have emerged over time on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica have led to the construction of a particular and localized social identity and understanding of self. Rossi’s two novels bear testimony to that process, hence their importance. Through her narrative, Rossi confirms Heidegger’s observations about each person being influenced by their particular spatial and temporal situation. She writes Limón, its history and peoples, into the Costa Rican imaginary, thereby confirming that both she and her characters, Orlandus, Irene, Percival/Ahmed and Laura/Aisha, are social constructs. The multiple facets of *mestizaje* revealed in her texts emphasize Caribbean coastal identity not just as diverse but also as continually changing.

⁶⁴ Garðarsdóttir, *ibid.*, „constituyen modelos para las generaciones futuras”, p. 190.

⁶⁵ Rossi, *Limón Blues*, “Yo también llevo un vestido fino que le va a mi figura. Soy alta, soy mórda como dicen en Cuba, tengo la boca generosa y unos dientes muy blancos y los ojos gatunos. Tengo una piel de mulata que jamás envejece. Mi alma sí ha envejecido y ahora puedo estar irritable, melancólica o mustia. Puedo sentirme amarrada o hacerme la sufrida. Pero hoy no...”, p. 394.

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ÚTDRÁTTUR

Miðamerískar sjálfsmyndir við ströndina:
Mörg andlit *mestizaje* í frásögum eftir kostaríska rithöfund-
inn Anacristna Rossi

Greinin beinir sjónum að menningarlegri fjölbreytni á Karíbahafssvæði Mið-Ameríkuríkja. Hún gerir ósýnileika ýmissa minnihlutahópa að sérstöku umtalsefni og þá ekki hvað síst á Karíbahafsströnd Kostaríku. Meginefniviður rannsóknarinnar er sóttur í skáldsögur kostaríska rithöfundarins Anacristina Rossi, *Limón Blues* (2002) og *Limón Reggae* (2007), en báðar gerast skáldsögurnar á umræddum slóðum. Sögurnar “bregða ljósi á fjölsamsettan uppruna íbúa Kostaríku og þar af leiðandi fjölmennarlegan bakgrunn nútíma samfélags”,⁶⁶ ásamt því að rannsaka menningarfærni og sögu landsins. Í greininni er sjónum enn fremur beint að flóknu mótunarferli sjálfsmynda og hvaða áhrif það hefur að tilheyra minni- eða meirihluta. Að lokum er hlutverki bókmennta sem tjáningarmiðils slíkra átaka, velt upp og spurt hvort þær nýtist sem viðspyrna gegn ósýnileika tiltekinna þjóðfélagshópa og útskúfun annarra.

Lykilorð: Bókmenntir, Kostaríka, Anacristina Rossi, fjölmening, sjálfsmyndir

ABSTRACT

Central American Coastal Identity:
Multiple Faces of *Mestizaje* in Narrative by the Costa Rican
novelist Anacristna Rossi

The article discusses the cultural diversity of the Central American Caribbean region and examines the invisibility of the Central American minority populations, with particular attention to the Costa Rican Caribbean coast. The many different aspects of the minority communities are thoroughly portrayed in Anacristina Rossi's latest novels *Limón Blues* (2002) and *Limón Reggae* (2007), which “exalt the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the Costa

66 Duncan, Quince, *Contra el silencio: afro descendientes y racismo en el Caribe continental hispánico*, 2011, p. 211.

Rican people” and examine cultural heritage and history.⁶⁷ The discussion in this article focuses on these two novels and explores the complex issues of identity formation and how literature can function as a medium of expression in the fight against invisibility and exclusion.

Keywords: Literature, Costa Rica, Anacristina Rossi, multiculturalism, identity formation

67 Duncan, Quince, *Contra el silencio: afro descendientes y racismo en el Caribe continental hispánico*, 2011, p. 211.