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PART II

Interventions: Champurria poetics
(Dance) Steps to return your side: Mapuche migration and joy

Martín Llancaman
Recollecting and narrating, strolling down memory lane and having *nútxamkan* – that is, recounting one’s own or one’s family’s lived experience – is one of the most valued activities of Mapuche life. Memory traverses spaces and margins – latent or dreamed – be they experienced first-hand or second-hand through a mother, a grandfather or a brother. To narrate is also to define oneself. To be able to tell of a place and how its spaces appear to us – a river, a *txayenko*, a field, a *menoko*, a *ngillatuwe* – is to say something about oneself: where the family comes from; where the grandmothers and aunts live; who the neighbours were and which roads led to each house; what the responsibility or commitment of each family within the community was; where they would sit at the table. These would then be the questions that order life, and in one way or another, make clear to others an origin and a trajectory.

However, the Mapuche experience of the twentieth century extended beyond the limits and fences that the colonising enterprise of the late nineteenth century imposed on the reservations. In other words, it reached beyond the spaces of the community, its *gillatuwe*, its rivers and hills. With the land exhausted, and the remnants of the old territory overpopulated, migration became the new feature from 1900 to the present. Comings and goings drew new cartographies that, on one hand, asserted the differences between the countryside and the city, and on the other, gave way to new forms of life, nourished by this continuous migration. Such migration saw Santiago as one of the main poles attracting the Mapuche population. There, they survived, re-articulated and, somehow, flooded the old, small, colonial metropolis. This experience requires ‘thinking of these spaces in a hybrid, complex way, with cultural borrowings and journeys from one side to the other. We must imagine, in short, porous borders between the spaces of the coloniser and the colonised’ (Alvarado Lincopi 2015: 110).

Moving through these borders, bringing back to the present the story of why migration was necessary and even forced, can often become a gateway to pain. It is not surprising that in telling the stories of Mapuche families who inhabited the city at different times, one frequently encounters the casualisation of labour, abuse and discrimination. Torn between survival, exploitation and mutual support networks, one generation after another had to negotiate over and over again their relationship with the colonial city:

They arrived alone. They were single, paired, married; they were incredibly young when they arrived. They made radical decisions at one point in their lives: to leave, to leave without knowing whether they will ever be able to go back, to leave to help the family, to leave to soon return, to leave to forget. (Antileo Baeza, Alvarado Lincopi 2017: 93)
However, oblivion and silence are not the only ways to understand the practices of inhabiting these new spaces. A strong political and social activism emerged early on in Santiago, such as in the founding of the Galvarino Society in 1932 or the long trajectories of leaders in the bakers’ and housekeepers’ unions, as again documented by Enrique Antileo Baeza and Claudio Alvarado Lincopi (2018). Moreover, it is important to recognise that these forms of coming together were not univocal; rather, they were traversed by different trajectories and emotions. Alongside the trade union movement and the first Mapuche organisations, other kinds of gathering, much more spontaneous and dynamic, took place in parks, diners and dancehalls; places of ‘shelter, romance and meeting’, and other forms of gathering that should also be considered part of social and political processes characterising individual and collective trajectories in the waria (Antileo Baeza, Alvarado Lincopi 2018: 130).

Toasting glasses of chicha clinking, tropical rhythms heard for the first time, coloured light bulbs, Sunday strolls in the Quinta Normal Park, gente morena (people of colour) dancing in old dark houses on Matucana Avenue, it is from these rhythms and lights, from those dance halls and meadows, that I ask myself a simple question: how do we understand ourselves from joy? How did we live through that past, on the flip side of a coin that so often sealed our fate by showing us the face of suffering?

To seek an understanding from a place of joy is to allow for a question rarely addressed by history and perhaps even less by philosophy. The actions and political or military decisions of heroes and revolutionaries – overwhelmingly male – fill the pages of chronicles and archives. The abyss in the face of death, domination and violence, the question for the gods, the efficiency of economies and passionate suffering all exhaust dialogues, treatises, essays and articles from old Plato to Byung-Chul Han. Joy and Sunday loves are territories seldom explored: their innate multiplicity and polynomial meanings refuse scrutiny, the abstraction of signifiers, and any explanatory schematisation that philosophical or historical analysis so often require. Music, love and joy are a broken glass, whose wine bleeds drop by drop and, once drunk, is refilled again by the constant repetition of our stories.1

‘EL PASEO DE LOS INDIOS’ (INDIANS’ WALK)

Between the streets of Portales and Santo Domingo and bordering Matucana Avenue lies the Quinta Normal Park. Created in 1842 as Quinta Normal

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1 Paraphrase of the lyrics of La copa rota, a song composed by the Puerto Rican Benito de Jesús (Trío Vegabajeño) in 1966, and popularised by the Mexican Vicente Fernández in the 1967 album La voz que usted esperaba. Another version which is particularly appreciated is that of José Feliciano, also from Puerto Rico.
### Estension total—Estensiones parciales según la destinacion

La estension total de la Quinta Normal es de 134 hectáreas, 27 áreas de 14 metros cuadrados más o menos, que se descompone como sigue:

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<td>Jardín de concurso anual de animales</td>
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<td>Cercas, canales, etc.</td>
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<td>Canales, avenidas, plazas, etc.</td>
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Superficie total de la Quinta Normal: 129
Observatorio Astronómico: 1
Jardín Botánico: 2

Estension total: 134
de Agricultura, it was originally set aside for the study and preservation of seeds, plants and domestic animals that were of interest for the modernisation of agriculture and livestock in Chile. In total, 135 hectares were carefully allocated, fenced and measured. Our first image of the Quinta Normal is thus of a scientific site for studying variables, controlling and searching for constants. In that sense, the Quinta is yet another place where the old opposition between man and nature is put into practice; the objective to be achieved: the domination and domestication of the natural and multiple, for the republican triumph of the ‘white’ man’s civilisation.

Here, I shall allow myself an *excursus*. I write ‘white’ in inverted commas because it is not the white marble of neoclassical France that it would like to be but is, curiously, a Creole white, coloured in its skin more than it would like to admit by the soot of the Indian stove, by the Mapuche ñogol. This republican white has the appearance of the limestone quarried from the Cerro Blanco—formerly called Wechuraba—and perhaps that is why the whiteness of the rock appears to the Chileans as tarnished, overly trodden by barefoot *werken* and *chasquis* on their climb as lookouts. It is the same stone from which La Moneda (presidential palace and government headquarters) was built; a stone darkened by the fat from hot, creaking pots, used to prepare food for centuries for ceremonies on the hill. I imagine that it was to cleanse it of these rituals and impurities that Inés de Suárez built a Catholic hermitage on the hill (later the church *La Viñita*), in an attempt to exorcise the smoke from so many pots and animal flesh with the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist and its white Communion bread made of wheat.

Back to the Quinta.

As I was saying, mastering the thorny and irreverent nature of the Quinta Normal was, for the Chile under construction that gave rise to it, a technical necessity and a civilising mission. This idea was conveyed in the inaugural speech of the Sociedad Promotora de Agricultura, the association that for decades administered the study grounds of the Quinta Normal:

> We shall occupy ourselves exclusively with the most important aspects, which are the soul of agriculture. That is, to remove the obstacles which hinder its full speed: to destroy these boundaries, to promote the progress of agriculture, to foster it, to protect it and to reward achievements. An active and indispensable motor is lacking to put the dull, seasonal agriculture of Chile into action: everyone knows and everyone feels the need; everyone longs to get out of the narrow circle traced by the old system of decrepit routine. Must a land

2 Hill north the Mapocho River, part of the mountain range of the San Cristóbal Hill, that was used as quarry from the eighteenth until the twentieth century.

3 *La Viñita* church and the *Cerro Blanco*: https://goo.gl/maps/EaY6dbqVgxGECVRA.
such as Chile […] – which can be compared, with no impudence, to that beautiful country called the garden of Europe, a country where the republican institutions and the good sense of its inhabitants (in short, everything) contributes to the fostering of its forward movement and encouragement of its progress – remain lifeless? No, gentlemen. It would be an offence to the Creator not to accept the gifts that He has so liberally granted us; it would be to despise and to destroy the holy ends of our mission on earth: it would be, finally, to violate our most sacred duties. (Sada 1852: 1–2)

This inaugural speech can be read as a baptism for the Quinta: progress versus backwardness is its initial foundation, and to remain in an era of seasonal agriculture is to remain lifeless. The entanglement between republicanism, enlightened modernity and anthropology anchored in theological grounds is in plain sight.

However, the twentieth century slowly brought change to the western sector of the city. For migrants from the south, on trains, arriving in the Central Station, Matucana Avenue (on which the park was located) and Exposición Avenue soon became the first homes of the Mapuche diaspora. Both in Exposición – south of the Alameda – and at the intersection of the avenues San Pablo and Matucana, where the San Camilo bakery still stands today, the emerging bread industry provided shelter and food in exchange for the sweat, labour and fatigue of 14–18 working hours a day (Alvarado Lincopi 2017). There, those without a family or a home to go back to, the so-called ‘huachos’, came to live above, or in houses annexed to, the factory. In exchange for those forced labourers, Matucana Avenue and the Central Station returned a different kind of worker to the south: a bustling contingent of normalista teachers educated at the Escuela Normal Superior, also called Escuela de Preceptores de Santiago, located on Chacabuco Street, one block from the Quinta Normal Park.

Why the adjective ‘normal’? Precisely because it was these teachers who were responsible for shaping the public education project that the Chilean state pursued from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. Both male and female preceptors would repeat in the emerging Chilean schools – including those in Mapuche territory – a uniform account of history, a Universalist model of customs and institutions, a strict separation of roles according to gender and class, and finally, the obliteration of any cultural difference.

Amid this eagerness for norms and normality, young students and young bakers would cross paths in the wide street. Both groups would walk past
a hardware store, one of those that displayed rolls of wire, steely and shiny, ready to be loaded onto the train to the south. Everything would go south: the wire to fence the land and the would-be preceptors to fence minds and discipline bodies. Then, walking eastwards, young Mapuche women would be found trying to find employment in an upper-class house in Barrio Yungay or the aristocratic mansions on the thoroughfares of Cumming and Brasil. Decades later, that journey for domestic work would continue its course eastwards, first through Providencia, then through Las Condes, and today through Vitacura and Lo Barnechea.

Over time, the whole area that once was a country estate and then a research site was gradually populated and urbanised. Along with the increase in population, the Quinta itself was changing: the area set aside as a public park was expanded and a zoo encouraged the curiosity of weekend strollers. As the first decades of the twentieth century went by, the place became popular and a favourite place for Mapuche youth to stroll around on their rare days off. The former scientific site became a park, and the park began to be called the ‘paseo de los indios’. There, every other Sunday afternoon, live-in housemaids used to spend their half-day off. If lucky, the Mapuche breadmakers, dressed in their one impeccable tailor-made suit ordered in Ahumada or Carmen streets, could also spend their Sunday afternoons there.

In this setting, they came under observation when the scientific impulse, somewhat tired of botany and zoology, turned to racialised human beings and their behaviours through anthropology. By 1961, the anthropologist Carlos Munizaga published his field observations and reasoning under the title *Transitional Structures in the Migration of Today’s Araucanians to the City of Santiago de Chile*. A text of two-fold interest, his work documents the use of the park (and other sites) by the Mapuche population at the beginning of the 1960s and, at the same time, reveals how anthropology tried to interpret the generation of our grandparents.

We were able to observe that, mainly, the Mapuche walked in mixed groups of 3 people or, at most, 5. We also observed groups of men only, and some isolated individuals (preferably men) [...] In addition to the above observations, we also saw couples (men and women), apparently in sentimental relationships. One of these couples was walking around hand in hand. The general non-verbal behaviour could be characterised as ‘calm’, slow, lacking exaggerated gesticulations [...] Basically, the Mapuche were walking around, and I overheard a girl saying to her male partner, ‘So much walking! I’m tired’, to which he replied: ‘Yes, here you have to walk, walk, walk, and walk. Nothing more.’ However, my indigenous informant, R.C., has informed me that in spring and summer, when the weather is good, the Mapuche sit or lie down in the meadows. (Munizaga 1961: 32)

What does Munizaga tell us that we haven’t been already told over a warm mate? Not too much. The anthropologist gives an account of how the
Mapuche in those years used the park as a place for socialising. Under the label ‘informal urban mechanisms’, Munizaga introduces the concept of ‘ethnic consciousness’ occurring without explicit arrangements (Munizaga 1961: 28). This was a stilted, over-elaborate way of affirming that in the often-hostile city, we sought, again and again, to relate to those who were our brothers and sisters and our relatives. It was the academic way of saying that we shared moments of joy with those who were our peers, fellows in our feelings, in our longing for the south and in our ways of laughing.

Of those times, what is left in Quinta Normal? Of the buildings, only the monumental ones, such as the National Museum of Natural History, remain. Of the plants and natural life, a certain part has survived. However, there is a legacy of the Quinta that flows through its own history: the force of subversion that each new occupant installs in it. The park was first a place of study and learned culture, which the Mapuche completely subverted. Their presence turned it into a place for strolling; their leisurely walks and their joy transformed this cultured site into a popular haunt. The Mapuche will use the Quinta in their own way, for a hidden game of palin or to name herbs and bushes with the words by which they know them. That memory of subversion remains, though, with the passing of the decades, it continues now in the gatherings of other migrant groups from different parts of the continent; Peruvians, Otavaleños and Haitians. Irreverent to the occasional attempts of the sanitation-conscious city councillors to ‘whiten’ the park, the apocryphal heirs of the Quinta will maintain again and again its inverted order as a place of joy, romance, food and popular music.

**Music for a night of happiness**

It is a short distance from the Quinta Normal Park to the intersection where the avenues San Pablo and Matucana meet. Fifty years ago, that corner was the epicentre of the capital’s working-class nightlife. Without being exclusively for Mapuche people, the venues were filed with faces of colour (morenas) in the best clothes they could afford. As the poet Aniñir said, they were ‘the grandchildren of Lautaro taking the bus’, but at this time on a Saturday night, far from the masters and their orders. The space of the fiesta is a place for peers, and again, for temporary subversion. However, unlike controlled spaces in broad daylight, the darkness of the jamboree, barely illuminated by coloured bulbs, offers a more subtle and intimate subversion: that of the individual confronted with the label of their colour and its implications of their stay in the city.

Can we be the same person, after we leave our place of origin and slip out of community norms? There, the social position and the role to be played were determined by the history of the lof, by the küpalme of the
family and by a precarious economy that repeated cycles of need and misfortune. Here, away from the elders, the subject can for the first time, and in an unprecedented way, determine themselves. The fiction of the individual inhabitant of the metropolis is then benevolently overlapping with the story of the migrant indefatigably transitioning between the reduction and the colonial city.

In the affirmation of the self, the subject appropriates precarious symbols that correspond to the new language that surrounds them. The garments chosen for that night at Matucana and San Pablo were an impeccable blue suit and a white shirt bought in a tailor’s shop at 42 Ahumada Street, though unlike the suit worn by the employer (the Spanish businessman or the Italian merchant), the worker’s suit was not made of silk, but of cotton and polyester. The women, for their part, would take ideas for a new hairstyle from Paula magazine; perhaps a ‘perm’ that could curl that unruly thick black hair, once and for all. A Pepsi Cola held in the hand completes the portrait of the men and women who entered the doors of ‘El Frontón’, one of the old mansions that used to host the parties in the 1960s.

Mapuche clothing is generally good-looking, with a new and very clean appearance. The prevailing colours in women’s clothing are green, red and deep blue. The men wear blue suits, white shirts and black shoes. Many indigenous women gather at the bottom of the stairs as if asking to be invited by someone to join the gathering. The men look towards the women seated at the tables in the hope of dancing with them. (Munizaga 1961: 38)

In a way, the new experiences in the city are occasions for ‘whitening’. Caught between the contempt of the upper class and the uneasy suspicion of the Chilean working class (quick to point out someone’s status as an ‘Indian’ in the poblaciones), Mapuche become skilful artists who, to find a place for themselves, are attentive in accepting all that the capital offers and any occasion for recreation, such as a football tournament, a birthday with relatives, or a Saturday night out: ‘wonderful ways to bend exclusion and racial hatred and position oneself in urban life. Enjoying instead of lowering one’s face, that common image of the Indian with his head down. Enjoying before crying’ (Antileo Baeza, Alvarado Lincopi 2017: 152).

What’s more, this pursuit of joy fortuitously tends to soften the initial intention of ‘whitening’ and safeguarding. Colour, an impeccable suit, hairstyles, drinks, a silver ring perhaps, and fashionable music are too much abundance for a farce. No, Mapuche dressing in the Wigka code is not a parody: it is a performance. Its execution requires discipline, careful observation and understanding of the society in which one is inserted and of the power that governs it. Above all, it requires respect and dignity. On these nights out, there is a certain pride in knowing that one can be satisfied with oneself. Overall, it is the abundance of these gestures which ends up shifting
the balance closer to the homeland, to the connection with family history and communal learning. To give generously and to receive in equal measure is almost a duty; to show off one’s best clothes in this new kind of secular rite is a commitment wanting to look good. To be acknowledged by the other Mapuche in the hall. That is also what it is about.

Nietzsche used the term ‘overabundance of life’ to signify the prevalence of strong impulses – desire, dance, music, power, war – in the face of the lie told by religion, art and metaphysics calling for humility, servitude, moderation and abstraction. In this sense, the Mapuche concept of abundance connects with what is most concrete in nature: the enjoyment of good food and its abundance. It is the search for a joyful and good life. In other words, it is küme mogen. For such a life, each migrant generation has enthusiastically taken up the task. Thus, those formerly quiet newcomers flooded the colonial city, transforming it in their pursuit of a better life. They were present in the many networks which the working-classes forged for themselves and their peers as leaders of bakers’ unions, leaders and founders of the maids’ unions, activists for land occupations and informal settlements, neighbourhood pastors, footballers and founders of neighbourhood committees.

For such feverishness and migrant intensity, a night at El Frontón could only have one main sound: cumbia. Emerging in an Afro-Colombian mould from the Caribbean coast of Colombia, and soon in a powerful intersection with the ‘Indian’ in the mountains, cumbia has been a cross-border, popular and diverse sound since its inception. With its instruments and cadence, it signals occasions for encounter and participation:

The expansion of coffee cultivation of the mid-19th century, within the framework of liberal domination, produced an intense population migration towards the Atlantic coast of freed slaves, indigenous people and mestizos from the interior […] All of them converged with whites, creoles, blacks and mulattos […] intensifying the processes of syncretism and mestizaje between diverse socio-cultural traditions that were already taking place in the lower strata of colonial Colombian society. This confluence would give shape to the emergence of cumbia as a popular genre of the Atlantic coast. (Ardito 2007: 81)

In the cumbia that arrived in Santiago – danced in sheds and parties – there was still that popular force expressed through the ‘gallop’, the predominant rhythmic characteristic of cumbia. However, it was no longer the Colombian coastal version that was heard through a set of speakers and record players, but rather a more elaborate and salon-like expression, encouraged by the strong music industry that internationalised Central American music. From
the towns of the Atlantic coast to the capital cities of Chile and Argentina, the journey of *cumbia* represents a history of migration in itself: the original street music was recorded by Antonio Fuentes, founder of Discos Fuentes in 1934. Colombians such as Luis Carlos Meyer and Lucho Bermúdez brought it from the coast to the capital, Bogotá, but it was transformed under the ‘*conjunto*’ or ‘*orquesta*’ model. In the 1930s and 1940s, the orchestral model became successful and joined other Afro-Latin American rhythms, such as *salsa*, *son*, *nueva* and *cha-cha-cha*, which were already triumphing in the United States, in an era that exoticised differences. In Chile, this diverse ensemble was labelled ‘Caribbean’, ‘Cuban’ and later ‘tropical’. Radio programmes like ‘Discomanía’ – hosted by Ricardo García from 1955 onwards – and the consolidation of local bands such as Orquesta Huambaly (1954), Cubanacán (1954) and Sonora Palacios (1962) would forever install the colour and sound of *cumbia* and the Caribbean in Chile’s social imaginary.

Curiously, this migrant itinerary of *cumbia* would have been impossible without a good dose of ‘whitening’ to free it just enough from the suspicion of the dominant classes; in order to cross every border, *cumbia* has been dressed up, first by swapping ‘the clothing of musicians and singers – previously peasant-inspired – for black-tie outfits’. As that was not enough, it also changed its themes: from the original lamenting address to ‘lyrics with sexual and festive content, the replacement of the *gaita* with the clarinet […] and the substitution of the drum ensemble with Afro-Cuban percussions – such as *timbales*, *congas* and *bongos*’ (Ardito 2007: 85). In Chile, the paradox of this whitening is that time and again, in each reinvention, *cumbia* returns to its popular roots. Whether in the ‘*cumbia sound*’ of the late 1990s, the ‘*cumbia ranchera*’ widely favoured in the south, or even in the so-called ‘new Chilean *cumbia*’ originating in the early 2000s (and becoming mainstream around 2010), class judgement returns at every turn, but also popular gathering and recreation. *Cumbia* recognises its equals and equalises those who recognise each other.

Now that I’ve put the soundtrack on, I will go back to the dancers. They are young and have known the radio in their workplaces. They haven’t seen a saxophone or *timbales*, they haven’t seen Caribbean music shows on television, and they don’t even have the now-common image of a group of two or three dancers repeating the steps of a typical choreography. They did not see anything of the sort in the ‘El Frontón’,

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5 A notable case of this is the success of the Lecuona Cuban Boys, an orchestra of Cuban musicians who performed permanently in the USA and had a long tour of post-war Europe. They toured Chile in 1942.
as music there wasn’t live. How can you dance to a sound of which you have no visual record or experience, other than that provided by the dancers and by the sound-waves incessantly reproduced through the loudspeakers?

The answer is simple but its implications are wide-ranging. The participants turn to the memory of their own body, rather than to any other figure that the Caribbean rhythm might suggest. In this respect, Munizaga reproduces his informant’s account: ‘Sometimes some Mapuche, recently arrived, dance like in the gillatun. (Question: How is that?) They dance like in the south. Sometimes the others laugh and say that these newcomers are dancing in Mapuche. After a while, they change’ (Munizaga 1961: 39).

In this brief explanation, I believe that we are faced with the experience of a subject immersed in ‘modernity’, not only at work, but also during recreation and leisure. Allow me to explain myself. The recorded music that the Mapuche listened to was produced by a record industry, a small piece of art in an era of technical reproducibility, as Walter Benjamin would put it. However, the Mapuche music of that time and this new experience of reproducible sound were worlds apart. In the community, sound appears organic and associated with specific moments: a gillatun, the joy of an abundant harvest or the change of a machi’s rewe; in Benjamin’s words, it has its ‘aura’, its ritual sense of the here and now. In the phenomenon of modernity, by contrast, music exists as detached from any time or occasion; it is composed in the studio under careful control; it will be broadcast without variation on any Saturday night or any evening of ‘Discomanía’. In such a scheme, music no longer belongs to the community that is an irreplaceable witness of its moment. It is now a kind of common knowledge, for which belonging to a group is not needed. In other words: ‘the reproductive technique detaches the reproduced from the realm of tradition. By multiplying reproductions, it puts its massive presence in the place of an unrepeatable presence’ (Benjamin 1989: 3).

To a certain extent, it is this massiveness that turns the Mapuche, lost in a boliche on Matucana Avenue into an inhabitant of the city: through music, one becomes part of it. Although the meaning of becoming a ‘Santiaguino’ is diffuse and somehow empty, one now masters a code and a language, which is of this new territory. If the latter – knowing a language and its relation to the territory – is, from a Mapuche point of view, the possible way of belonging, then the Mapuche do enter the city, but they do so with their own way of understanding what belonging means. One is an inhabitant of the city, and to be an inhabitant it is essential to continue being Mapuche. In colloquial terms, I would say that even in being modern, we truly are Indians.

As young Mapuche do not yet know how to dance in an urban way, it is in this fracture that the unthinkable happens and the newcomers end up
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dancing the migrant *cumbia* as if it were *purun*. How the Mapuche appropriate the city is perhaps the most interesting fact for me. They do it with flexibility and at the same time through their own patterns, learned from their parents and grandparents. In a certain way, they will never be able to ‘whiten’ themselves, no matter how much they try, partly because colonial society marks a limit for them, even if from time to time they are able to cross it. But ‘whitening’ will, above all, prove impossible because they will continue to tell their stories, to live in the city and to hear the music from their attentive ears of colour that are familiar with the sounds of the countryside. To be able to speak and sing, they will narrate their diasporic life from that unruly tongue and that stubborn accent marked by its *tr* and *sl* and which makes the sound of the Spanish *v* difficult to reproduce. Oh, language, that non-transferable trace by which one is marked, and with which one marks everything one knows!