

## Arnoldo Palacios on his centenary: critical review and research perspectives

## Arnoldo Palacios en su centenario: balance crítico y perspectivas de investigación

## Arnoldo Palacios em seu centenário: balanço crítico e perspectivas de pesquisa

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## **Abstract**

Resolution 0020 of 2024 of the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Knowledge designated 2024 as the centenary of the birth of the writer Arnoldo Palacios, “para celebrar la vida del escritor, intelectual y defensor de la cultura afrocolombiana, pacífica y chocoana» (to celebrate the life of the writer, intellectual, and defender of Afro-Colombian, Pacific, and Chocoan culture.) This article presents a critical review of the research in his work to identify the main analytical trends, theoretical frameworks, and methodological strategies used in diverse studies. Through a critical analysis of the available corpus, four interpretive lines were identified: first, approaches to the historical and social context of his writings; second, perspectives highlighting the Afro-Colombian cultural and ethnic identity represented in his narrative; third, studies on the author’s critical reception in the Colombian intellectual field; and fourth, analyses of the literary style and linguistic techniques of the Chocoan writer. This exercise highlights both the contributions and limitations of the existing literature. It also supports the dissemination of his legacy, emphasizes advances in his critical reception, and encourages new research in his work.

## **Keywords**

**Author:** Latin American literature, Arnoldo Palacios, African American/Afro-Colombian, Colombia, historiographical review

## **Resumen**

La resolución 0020 de 2024 del Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y los Saberes declaró el 2024 como el año del centenario del natalicio del escritor Arnoldo Palacios, “para celebrar la vida del escritor, intelectual y defensor de la cultura afrocolombiana, pacífica y chocoana”. El siguiente artículo presenta un balance bibliográfico de las investigaciones realizadas sobre su obra, con el propósito de identificar las principales tendencias analíticas, marcos teóricos y estrategias metodológicas empleadas en diversos estudios. A partir de una revisión crítica del corpus disponible, se identificaron cuatro líneas interpretativas: los enfoques centrados en el contexto histórico y social de sus escritos; las aproximaciones que destacan la identidad cultural y étnica afrocolombiana representada en su narrativa; los estudios sobre la recepción crítica del autor en el campo intelectual colombiano; y los análisis dedicados al estilo literario y las técnicas lingüísticas del escritor chocoano. Este ejercicio permite evidenciar tanto los aportes como las limitaciones de la producción bibliográfica existente. Además, contribuye a la divulgación de su legado, visibiliza los avances en su recepción crítica y fomenta nuevas investigaciones sobre su obra.

## **Palabras clave**

Literatura Latinoamericana, Arnoldo Palacios, Afroamericano/Afrocolombiano, Colombia, revisión historiográfica

## **Resumo**

A Resolução 0020 de 2024 do Ministério das Culturas, Artes e Saberes declarou 2024 como o ano do centenário de nascimento do escritor Arnoldo Palacios, “para celebrar a vida do escritor, intelectual e defensor da cultura afrocolombiana, pacífica e chocoana”. O artigo a seguir apresenta um balanço bibliográfico das pesquisas realizadas sobre sua obra, com o objetivo de identificar as principais tendências analíticas, referências teóricas e estratégias metodológicas empregadas em diversos estudos. A partir de uma revisão crítica do corpus disponível, foram identificadas quatro linhas interpretativas: os enfoques centrados no contexto histórico e social de seus escritos; as abordagens que destacam a identidade cultural e étnica afrocolombiana representada em sua narrativa; os estudos sobre a recepção crítica do autor no campo intelectual colombiano; e as análises dedicadas ao estilo literário e às técnicas linguísticas do escritor chocoano. Esse exercício permite evidenciar tanto as contribuições quanto as limitações da produção bibliográfica existente. Além disso, contribui para a divulgação de seu legado, dá visibilidade aos avanços em sua recepção crítica e incentiva novas pesquisas sobre sua obra.

## **Palavras-chave**

Literatura Latino-Americana, Arnoldo Palacios, Afro-americano/Afro-colombiano, Colômbia, revisão historiográfica

## **1. Introduction**

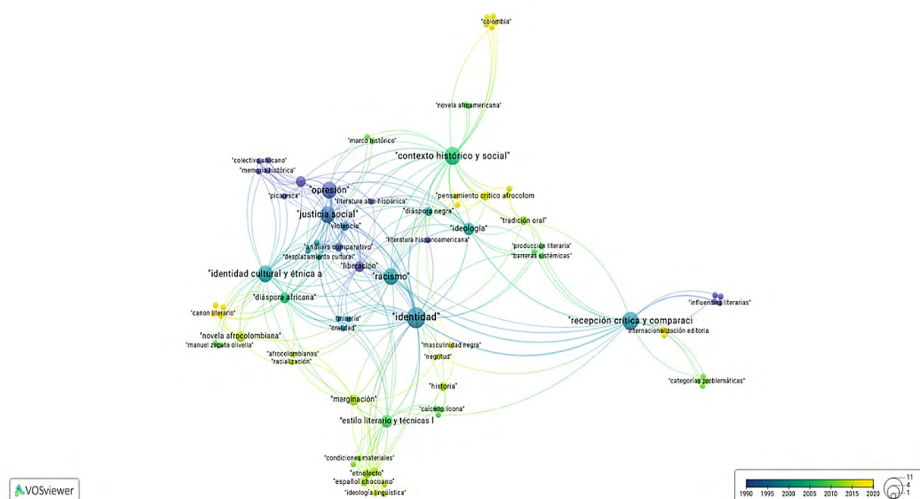
This article examines academic research in the work of Arnolfo Palacios, a Chocóan writer born in 1924. His literary output, comprising at least six titles—most notably the novel *Las estrellas son negras* (The Stars Are Black) represented, at the time, a significant rupture with the silence that Colombian literature had maintained regarding Afro-Colombian identities. Rather than adopting an exclusively denunciatory tone, through his writing and his role as an Afro-Colombian intellectual, Palacios constructed a critical discourse from which he represented the historical conditions, exclusion processes, and social struggles of Black communities in his novels.

This study follows a bibliographic-analytical approach focusing on identifying, systematizing, and evaluating the contributions of different researchers. The research process went through four stages: first, a representative corpus of texts (articles, theses, chapters, and books) was compiled through searches in academic databases and university repositories. Second, the selected studies were organized by theme, and the theoretical approaches, methodologies, and sources used were analyzed. Third, the originality, coherence, and relevance of the contributions in each text were evaluated. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the body of research were identified to determine possible directions for future research in Palacios' legacy.

Four main categories were defined to approach Palacios' work: the historical and social context of his narratives; the representation of Afro-Colombian cultural and ethnic identity; the critical reception of his figure in the literary and academic fields; and the particularities of his literary style and linguistic techniques. These categories emerged inductively from the documentary review and enabled to establish connections, contrasts, and continuities for the academic approach to his work. Therefore, this bibliographic review aims to contribute to a more cohesive understanding of the state of the art and to the projection of new lines of critical research in Palacios' place in Afro-Colombian and Latin American literature.

## **2. Main lines of study and their authors**

This review started by searching databases and academic networks. 60 publications including articles, theses, book chapters, and books were selected for the purpose of this study. The co-occurrences analysis was generated from the keywords and categories below, along with the publication year. To better understand the following map, let us clarify that: first, the size of the nodes is directly related to the number of publications per category and keyword. Second, nodes are grouped according to the quantity of documents they share. Third, longer or shorter lines indicate more or less strong connections respectively between nodes. Finally, the color of the nodes indicates the average year of publication: the darker the color, the older the year.



**Figure n°1:** co-occurrence network created with VOSviewer software.

The initial academic positioning of Arnoldo Palacios's work occurred in the United States in 1970. Studies, mentions, and other references increased in the United States until the 1980s when Colombian authors began to appear. The majority of work topics in the 2000s address identity and social justice. Such revival in the subject of interest here came from the opening of the Biblioteca de Literatura Colombiana (Library of Afro-Colombian Literature) in 2010, a project managed by the Ministerio de Cultura (Ministry of Culture) at the time and the Librería Nacional (National Library). This editorial work allowed for the reissue of the novel *Las estrellas son negras* (The Stars Are Black).

No academic reviews of the Chocóan writer's work exist; moreover, scholarship that significantly contributes to the field of Afro-Colombian literature is also scarce. However, there are some major publications by CLACSO<sup>1</sup> on the study of Black intellectuals in Colombian thought.<sup>2</sup> In this context, it is relevant to conduct a historiographical review to identify the main lines of research examining the work of Arnoldo Palacios, as well as the gaps and future challenges.

This review identified four major trends that have guided research in Palacios: the analysis of his work as a reflection of the historical and social context of Chocó; the

<sup>1</sup> Mosquera, Arnoldo Palacios y otros. "CÉRTEGUI (2009)" in *Descolonizando Mundos: Aportes de Intelectuales Negras y Negros al Pensamiento Social Colombiano* (CLACSO, 2017)

<sup>2</sup> For a biography of Arnoldo Palacios, see: Serrano Hoyos, Carlos Andrés. "Arnoldo de los Santos Palacios Mosquera, biografía crítica". (Master's thesis, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2024); Sterling Posada, Claudia María. "La superación de la adversidad a través de la magia: Arnoldo Palacios o el corazón de la literatura afrodescendiente en Colombia" in *Revista Nova et Vetera*, 3.26 (2017).

representation of Afro-descendant cultural and ethnic identity; the critical reception of his literature, and the review of the author's literary style and linguistic techniques. Such trends and their representative authors are analyzed in this section.

### 3. Historical and social context

This category includes studies on Palacios' output in relation to the historical and social context of Colombia, as well as the recurring themes of poverty, racial discrimination, and social exclusion present in his writings. These texts examine how Palacios portrays and critiques the socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions in his time. Therefore, they provide a critical view of Colombian reality and the struggles of Afro-descendent communities.

Firstly, there is a trend that stands out when studying Palacios' ability to portray the reality of Afro-descendants in a context of poverty, exclusion, and structural racism.<sup>3</sup> His work not only documents the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of Afro-Colombians but also reveals the barriers they face to social mobility and recognition within Colombian society.

One of the studies on racism in Latin American literature is by Antonio Olliz Boid,<sup>4</sup> who analyzes how the novel *Las estrellas son negras* rejects the idea that Irar's marginalization is exclusively a problem of social class and emphasizes that racial discrimination is the main obstacle to his progress in life.<sup>5</sup> Boid contributes the idea of structural racism as an insurmountable barrier in the lives of Afro-Colombians and facilitates the understanding of how racism shapes the protagonist's experience in the novel.

A study complementing Boid's analysis and even emphasizing that structural racism invisibilizes Afro-descendants in literature is that of Coura Ndoye<sup>6</sup> (2017) in *La condition de l'Homme Noir dans la littérature colombienne sous le regard d'Arnoldo Palacios*. In her doctoral thesis, Ndoye traces the evolution of the representation of black men in Colombian literature<sup>7</sup> and highlights that, until the

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<sup>3</sup> Early scholarship that explores how Arnoldo Palacios and other Afro-Colombian authors use their art to confront the political, social, and economic oppression of the marginalized includes the work of Lewis, Marvin: *Treading the Ebony Path: Ideology and Violence in Contemporary Afro-Colombian Prose Fiction*. (University of Missouri Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Olliz Boid, Antonio. "Latin American Literature and the Subject of Racism". *CLA Journal* 57. 3 (2014): 177-84.

<sup>5</sup> Another author who aims to move beyond the marginality of Arnoldo Palacios's characters is: Miranda, Álvaro. "Arnoldo Palacios *Las estrellas son negras*. Una novela más allá de la marginalidad". *Hojas Universitarias* 67 (2012): 133-134.

<sup>6</sup> Ndoye, Coura. *La condition de l'Homme Noir dans la littérature colombienne sous le regard d'Arnoldo Palacios*, (Thèse de doctorat, Paris 10, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Other studies on the representation of Blackness in Colombian literature include: Amis, Barry DeWayne. "The Negro in the Colombian Novel". (Thèse de doctorat, Michigan State University, 1970); Gutiérrez, Mariela. "Arnoldo Palacios y el despertar psicosocial del negro choconano", in *Literatura y cultura: narrativa colombiana del siglo XX. Hibridez y alteridades*. Editado por Jaramillo Jaramillo, María Mercedes, Osorio

late 1940s, it was Afro-descendant writers who began to explicitly address issues of inequality, racism, and discrimination. Her research reveals the historical invisibility of Afro-descendants in Colombian literature and shows that *Las estrellas son negras* is part of a tradition of social vindication and denunciation of such marginalization.

Mara Viveros Vigoya<sup>8</sup> also studies the social mobility of Afro-Colombians from the 18th to the mid-20th century by exploring how certain groups managed to rise through education and work in liberal professions. The particular importance of Viveros Vigoya's contribution lies in that she places Palacios' work within a historical framework of transformation of Afro-Colombian identities by means of highlighting the struggle for recognition and social mobility.

Similarly, other authors establish connections between Palacios' work and other Afro-Colombian novels dealing with marginalization and inequality and place his narrative within a broader context of social exclusion. This is the case of Edwin Arévalo Murcia's<sup>9</sup> (2023) exploration of the representation of peripheral life and the lack of opportunities in Afro-Colombian literature. In his study, he discusses *Las estrellas son negras* alongside two other contemporary novels, which, although not part of the traditional canon of Colombian literature, are fundamental to understanding the dynamics of exclusion experienced by Afro-descendant communities.

In the case of Palacios, Arévalo highlights how the protagonist embodies frustration and resentment towards a system that marginalizes black bodies and impoverishes their territories. By bringing these works into dialogue, the author proposes an intertextual reading emphasizing the historical continuities of inequality and structural racism in Colombia and positions Palacios as a precursor of literature committed to social criticism and the vindication of Afro-Colombian identity.<sup>10</sup>

However, some authors note that Palacios not only represents Afro-descendant marginality, but that his literature also serves as an instrument of political and social denunciation. Among this group of researchers is Óscar Collazos<sup>11</sup> (2011), whose research focuses on Palacios' contribution to the construction of a Colombian cultural identity and shows the writer's commitment to political and social denunciation. In so doing, Collazos places Palacios within the tradition of

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Garces, Maria Betty y Robledo Palomeque, Ángela Inés. (Ministerio de Cultura, 1996). Henao Restrepo, Darío. "La marca de África. La negritud en la novela colombiana», in *Poligramas* 35 (2011): 3-19; Henao Restrepo, Darío. "Improntas africanas: la negredumbre en la novela colombiana», in *CS* 30 (2020): 73-95.

<sup>8</sup> Viveros Vigoya, Mara. "El Oximoron de Las Clases Medias Negras: Movilidad Social e Interseccionalidad En Colombia», in *Afrontar las crisis desde América Latina*, 1st ed., 76-95. transcript Verlag, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Arévalo Murcia, Edwin David. "Palacios, Sánchez Gómez y Robinson Abrahams: una lectura de tres novelas que aportan al caudal de la producción afrocolombiana», en *La Palabra* 45 (2023): 1-17.

<sup>10</sup> For similar arguments see also: Wilson, Carlos Guillermo. "The Role of the Afro-Latino Writer and the Quincentenary (1492-1992)». *Afro-Hispanic Review* 10.3 (1991): 67-71.

<sup>11</sup> Collazos, Óscar. "Las estrellas son negras: un clásico afroamericano». *Poligramas*, 35 (2011): 54-63.

committed literature influenced by the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and highlights his role in the vindication of Afro-Colombian communities.

Francisco Javier Flórez Bolívar's study,<sup>12</sup> *Celebrando y redefiniendo el mestizaje: raza y nación durante la República Liberal, Colombia, 1930-1946* (Celebrating and redefining racial and cultural blending: Race and Nation during the Liberal Republic, Colombia, 1930-1946), analyzes how Afro-descendant intellectuals reconfigured the official discourse on national identity and demonstrates that Afro-Colombian literature not only denounces exclusion but also questions the dominant discourses on race and nation. In this sense, Palacios is part of a broader political and cultural debate, where his novels not only expose marginalization but also participate in the discussion of Afro-descendant identity and representation within the Colombian literary canon.

Paula Vanessa Páez Barreto's study<sup>13</sup> adds to this conversation by broadening the discussion from a political-state perspective.<sup>14</sup> Her analysis of the relationship between the state and the nation indicates that *Las estrellas son negras* exposes the structural exclusion of Afro-Colombians from the government apparatus. Palacios' work reflects inequality and directly criticizes the Colombian state by showing how public policies have perpetuated the marginalization of Black communities. This view promotes the idea that Palacios' literature is both valuable artistic work and an analytical tool against the institutions of power, which adds to the debates on representation and civil rights produced at the time.

However, Palacios' work interpretation has not been without controversy as Mathurin Ongone<sup>15</sup> (2024) shows in his study on the critical and political reception of *Las estrellas son negras*. In his text *Las estrellas son negras: diatriba de la condición socioeconómica de los afrocolombianos* (The Stars Are Black: A Diatribe on the Socioeconomic Condition of Afro-Colombians), Ongone examines the contradictory views of those considering this novel a literary milestone and those criticizing its narrative technique and underlines the debate promoted by figures such as Gabriel García Márquez and Eduardo Zalamea Borda. Some critics believe that Palacios' novel lacks technical refinement, while others regard it as a powerful testimony to exclusion and racism in Colombia. This study encourages the idea that Palacios' work is central to the discussion of Afro-Colombian literature, both for its

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<sup>12</sup> Flórez Bolívar, Francisco Javier. "Celebrando y redefiniendo el mestizaje: raza y nación durante la República Liberal, Colombia, 1930-1946" en *Memorias. Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe* 37 (2019): 93-116; see also: Flórez Bolívar, Francisco Javier. *La vanguardia intelectual y política de la nación. Historia de una intelectualidad negra y mulata en Colombia, 1877-1947* (2023).

<sup>13</sup> Páez Barreto, Paula Vanessa. *Las relaciones entre el estado y la nación en las estrellas son negras* (1949) de *Arnoldo Palacios*, (Tesis de maestría, Universidad Javeriana, 2023).

<sup>14</sup> Another study examining the devastating effects of nation-state formation on Afro-Colombian communities is: Palacios, George. "Las estrellas son negras o los rostros afrocolombianos a mediados del siglo XX en Colombia", en *Revista de Estudios Colombianos* 47 (2016): 86-95.

<sup>15</sup> Ongone, Mathurin. "*Las estrellas son negras: diatriba de la condición socio-económica de los afro-colombianos*", en *Oráfrica: revista de oralidad africana* 3 (2007).



ability to make traditional literary circles uncomfortable and for its function as a space for resistance.

Finally, Carlos Valderrama<sup>16</sup> complements these analyses by tracing the development of Afro-Colombian critical thought and placing Palacios within a network of intellectuals committed to social struggle.<sup>17</sup> Valderrama evinces that Palacios' narrative not only denounces exclusion but also constructs a literary space for resistance, where his characters aim for a radical transformation of their environment. His work is part of an Afro-Colombian intellectual movement connected to other writers and thinkers who have endeavored to redefine Afro identity within literature and national discourse.

Taken together, the studies presented in this category show that Arnoldo Palacios' work has been read as a literary testimony deeply rooted in the historical and social conditions of 20th-century Colombia. His narrative not only documents the exclusion and structural racism that have affected Afro-descendant communities but also stands as a form of political and cultural resistance against the power structures that perpetuate inequality. Through diverse approaches, researchers have recognized Palacios' value as an author committed to his time and community. This line of study allows us to understand that his work transcends the literary to become an analytical tool that challenges both the reader and the social and cultural institutions of the country.

#### 4. Cultural Identity

The studies in this category explore cultural and ethnic identity in the work of Arnoldo Palacios, as well as the African diaspora and cultural resistance to oppression. They analyze how the characters in his fiction and narratives represent Afro-Colombian identity and cultural resistance. These texts stress the importance of cultural authenticity, historical memory, and community practices in constructing identity.

First, there are works on how Afro-descendant identity is preserved and resisted within the context of the black diaspora in Palacios' output. The studies analyzed here explore how Palacios represents cultural survival by using symbols, narratives, and discursive structures that stress the continuity of African identity despite historical oppression. Afro-Colombian literature, in this sense, connects with other Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean traditions, thus forming a corpus of cultural resistance.

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<sup>16</sup> Valderrama Rentería, Carlos Alberto. "El arte literario y la construcción oral del territorio. Pensamiento crítico afrocolombiano", en *Revista colombiana de antropología* 54 (2018): 93-117. Otro texto donde el autor menciona a Arnoldo Palacios como un intelectual comprometido con la causa afrocolombiana es: Valderrama Rentería, Carlos Alberto. "La política intelectual de Helcias Martán Góngora". *Afro-Hispanic Review* 39.2 (2020): 145-57.

<sup>17</sup> Another study that notes Arnoldo Palacios's participation in a cultural exchange network is: Fabre, Michel. "Autour de Maran", in *Présence Africaine* 86 (1973): 165-72.



Among the key authors in this category are Lemuel A. Johnson,<sup>18</sup> “The Dilemma of Presence in Black Diaspora Literature: A Comparativist Reading of Arnoldo Palacios’ *Las estrellas son negras*». In this research, the author analyzes Palacios’ novel in relation to other Afro-descendant literatures, such as those of Nicolás Guillén and Ralph Ellison, by exploring the identity and resistance of Afro-descendants in the diaspora context. Johnson highlights the symbolism of water<sup>19</sup> and the body in Palacios’ work, elements reflecting the presence and transformation of black identity. He also underscores how Palacios inserts fragments of reality, such as news stories and accounts of the mistreatment of Black communities, to strengthen the verisimilitude of his narrative.

Equally relevant is Josaphat Bekunuru Kubayanda’s<sup>20</sup> (1987) contribution, a researcher who explores how Afro-descendant literature opposes colonial domination and seeks to reaffirm African identity in Latin America. In this context, he mentions Arnoldo Palacios as part of a creative collective that use Afrocentric linguistic elements to express cultural resistance. He stresses that Afro-descendant literature introduces new discursive features challenging the dominant canon and that Palacios shares strategies with other works in the Afro-Latin tradition. This article is innovative as it applies the theories of Edward Said and Jacques Deleuze which strengthen the analysis of minority discourse in black literature. Its emphasis on the linguistic aspect provides understanding of how Palacios contributes to a line of cultural resistance, although it would be interesting to explore his impact on Colombian literature in greater depth.

In recent years, the publication of studies on the representation of Afro-descendant characters in fiction has increased as literature allows for the exploration of the experiences, struggles, and strategies of resistance of Afro-descendant people against oppression. In Arnoldo Palacios’ work, Afro-descendant characters reflect the conditions of marginalization in Colombia and are constructed from a perspective affirming their identity, corporeality, and agency within the narrative. In this sense, there is a group of studies aiming to understand how Palacios constructs his characters and how he addresses issues such as subalternity, structural racism, orality, black corporeality, and Afro-Colombian identity. The configuration of these characters and their stories prompt reflection on power structures and the representation of Afro-descendants in literature, especially Colombian literature.

A case in point is Ian I. Smart<sup>21</sup> with his text “The Trickster ‘Pícaro’ in Three Contemporary Afro-Hispanic Novels» This author introduces an approach

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<sup>18</sup> Johnson, Lemuel A. “The Dilemma of Presence in Black Diaspora Literature: A Comparativist Reading of Arnoldo Palacios’ *Las estrellas son negras*», in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 1.1 (1982): 3-10.

<sup>19</sup> There is another study on the symbolism of water, yet alongside hunger: González Valencia, Dolly Neira. “Crecer en el Chocó entre el hambre y el agua: una reflexión desde la narrativa del escritor afrocolombiano Arnoldo Palacios» (Master’s thesis, Universidad Simón Bolívar, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Kubayanda, Josaphat Bekunuru. “Minority Discourse and the African Collective: Some Examples from Latin American and Caribbean Literature», in *Cultural Critique* 6 (1987): 113-30.

<sup>21</sup> Smart, Ian I. “The Trickster ‘Pícaro’ in Three Contemporary Afro-Hispanic Novels», in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 7.1/2/3 (1988): 49-52.

to the representation of Afro-descendant characters in *Las estrellas son negras*, where he connects the figure of the rogue with the trickster of Yoruba religion. His analysis underscores how Irra, the protagonist of Palacios' novel, uses roguery as a strategy of resistance and survival in the face of poverty and racism. This study is relevant because it places Palacios within the Afro-descendant literary tradition and associates his work with Afro-Hispanic literature and African mythology. However, his analysis is more descriptive than argumentative and leaves open the possibility of further exploring the relationship between traditional picaresque literature and Afro-Colombian literature in the future.

Years later, Antonio D. Tillis,<sup>22</sup> in his study "Native Son's Bigger and *Las estrellas son negras*: Irra: Two Post-Colonial Subjects of Literature of the African Diaspora» expands the discussion by applying postcolonial theory to analyze the representation of Afro-descendant characters in Palacios' novel. He compares Irra with Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of Richard Wright's *Native Son* and explores how both characters reflect the experience of the African diaspora and the struggle for identity in societies that have marginalized them.

This study provides a clear conceptual framework, defines African diaspora literature, and explores the impact of colonialism and slavery on character construction. Furthermore, this is the first analysis encouraging the idea of Chocó as a space disconnected from the modern world by reinforcing Palacios' vision of Afro-Colombian marginality.

In other words, whereas Smart analyzes resistance from the perspective of mischief, Tillis inquiries into the power structure that shapes the identity of Afro-descendant characters. Both studies agree that Irra fights against oppression, but Tillis places him within a broader framework of colonialism and displacement. The type of theories used by Tillis allowed studies in the following years to evolve toward more complex approaches that incorporate analyses of Afro-urban otherness, Black corporeality, and the representation of Black women. Each author has added new dimensions to the analysis and explored more deeply the construction of identity and resistance in Afro-Colombian literature.

As an example, let us consider Derly Juliana Rojas Camargo's<sup>23</sup> text "Las estrellas son negras, by Arnoldo Palacios: the formation of the subalternized subject, the emergence and emancipation of the decolonial 'black hero.'», where based on the decolonial approach and the postulates of Antonio Gramsci, she explores how the novel *Las estrellas son negras* shapes the subalternized subject and the decolonial black hero. In addition, she studies works from various disciplines, including Afro-Colombian folklore, history, anthropology, sociology, and literature, to give them

<sup>22</sup> Tillis, Antonio D. "Native Son's Bigger and *Las estrellas son negras*" Irra: Two Post-Colonial Subjects of Literature of the African Diaspora», in *CLA Journal* 46.2 (2002): 207-25.

<sup>23</sup> Rojas Camargo, Derly Juliana. "Las estrellas son negras, de Arnoldo Palacios: la conformación del sujeto subalternizado, el surgimiento y emancipación del "héroe negro» decolonial», (Tesis de maestría, Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, 2018).

greater relevance within the literary cannon. This study is fundamental because it leads to a deeper reading of the resistance and emancipation of Black characters. Furthermore, it broadens the discussion to the intersection of race and class by showing how marginalization is the product of multiple structural factors.

In fact, the above-mentioned aspects were further explored by one of the authors, Yair André Cuenú Mosquera<sup>24</sup>, who studied Palacios' text, *Entre nos, hermano*. The author analyzes Afro-urban representation and the impact of structural racism on the configuration of its protagonist. Therefore, he examines otherness, shows how the protagonist perceives himself in contrast to social perceptions, and reveals the depth of racial discrimination.

Interestingly, the author introduces the concept of Afro-urbanity when he shows how Palacios' literature represents not only rural marginality but also discrimination in urban spaces.<sup>25</sup> Besides, he analyzes how ignorance, innocence, and guilt reinforce racial assessments in the work. Accordingly, he agrees with Rojas Camargo that Palacios' characters face structural barriers that condition their identity and social mobility.

As recently as 2023, an interesting trend inquiring into how Afro-descendants' bodies are represented in Palacios' work was observed. For example, in his research, M'bare N'gom Faye<sup>26</sup> analyzes how black corporeality becomes a space for resistance and vindication in Palacios' novels (*Les mamelles du Chocó*, *Las estrellas son negras*, and *La selva y la Lluvia*) and stresses the importance of this conception. He underlines how orality reinforces the representation of Afro-descendant characters. It is remarkable how the author connects orality with Afro-descendant identity as this demonstrates that the use of the Chocoan sociolect strengthens the characters' authenticity in Palacios' writings.

Similarly, Paula Andrea Hernández Pardo's<sup>27</sup> publication, *Estereotipos y representaciones del cuerpo de la mujer negra en dos obras de la literatura colombiana. De estrellas negras y bocas saladas* (Stereotypes and representations of the black woman's body in two works of Colombian literature. Of black stars and salty mouths) indicates that Palacios' work proposes new narratives that vindicate the identity and corporeality of Afro-descendant women. This study is central as it introduces a

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<sup>24</sup> Cuenú Mosquera, Yair André. "La carga negra, rastreo a la urbanidad afroubanita y el racismo en "entre nos, hermano" (1966) de Arnoldo Palacios» en Jarrín, Humberto, Bautista-Cabrea, Álvaro, Delgado, Hoover (comp.), *Instantáneas al cuento Latinoamericano* (Cali: Universidad Icesi y Universidad del Valle, 2020) 327-392.

<sup>25</sup> For studies on the rhythms of life in urban environments as proposed in the narratives of Arnoldo Palacios and Óscar Collazos, see: Lopera, Marita y Catherin Cardona. "Los ritmos otros de Óscar Collazos y Arnoldo Palacios: una mirada al silencio y el asombro en dos narraciones del Pacífico colombiano», in *Revista de estudios colombianos* 60 (2022): 25-36.

<sup>26</sup> N'gom Faye, M'bare. "Corporalidad, oralidad e identidad en la creación literaria de Arnoldo Palacios», in *Boletín de la Academia Peruana de la Lengua* 74.74 (2023): 11-36.

<sup>27</sup> Hernández Pardo, Paula Andrea. "Estereotipos Y Representaciones Del Cuerpo De La Mujer Negra En Dos Obras De La Literatura Colombiana. De Estrellas Negras Y Bocas Saladas», in *Luciérnaga Comunicación* 15 (2023): 5-19.

gender perspective into Palacios' analysis and shows how Afro-Colombian literature addresses discrimination and resistance among black women. It also underlines the importance of new narratives challenging traditional stereotypes of women. Both studies agree that the representation of the black body is key to constructing identity and resistance.

On the subject of inclusion and the relationship between racial identity and gender, in 2019, Benjamin Johnson's<sup>28</sup> text "Black Masculinity after 'El Negro Gaitán': The Racial and Gender Politics of Arnoldo Palacios's *Las estrellas son negras*» had already shown how the construction of Afro-descendant masculinity in Palacios's work is influenced by racism and political marginalization.

In short, the studies in this category report that Palacios' work has been key to the construction and representation of Afro-Colombian identity in literature. From approaches to the African diaspora, orality, black corporeality, and cultural resistance to more recent perspectives regarding gender analysis and Afro-urbanity, researchers have agreed that Palacios not only portrays the Afro-descendant experience but also vindicates it as a space for agency, memory, and transformation. His characters, marked by marginality, are not passive figures but subjects who resist, question, and reconfigure their identities in the face of power structures. Hence, Palacios' literature is a vehicle for the cultural and political affirmation of Afro-Colombians, and his work continues to be a fundamental reference point for studies on identity, race, gender, and resistance in Latin America.

## 5. Critical reception of Palacios' work

Afro-descendant literature has a complex and diverse development influenced by the historical processes of colonization, slavery, and cultural resistance. Its evolution began in Europe with the emergence of the Negritude Movement in the 1930s, which offered a new perspective on Africa and its descendants in the diaspora. According to Sandra L. Dixon<sup>29</sup>, this drive allowed "artistas de ascendencia africana exaltaron los valores de su cultura mientras criticaban las circunstancias sociales en las que tenían que vivir» (artists of African descent to exalt the values of their culture while criticizing the social circumstances in which they had to live). In this context, Afro-descendants writers endeavored to avoid cultural assimilation by using myths and images of Africa in their work.

In Latin America, Afro-descendant literature acquired its own particularities due to the dehumanizing experience of slavery, which prevented Afro-descendants from writing about themselves for centuries<sup>30</sup> until recently. European intervention

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<sup>28</sup> Johnson, Benjamin S. "Black Masculinity after 'El Negro Gaitán': The Racial and Gender Politics of Arnoldo Palacios's *Las estrellas son negras*», in *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 53.3 (2019): 947-967.

<sup>29</sup> Dixon, Sandra L. Review of *Identifying and Expressing the Self: Recent Studies in Afro-Hispanic and Lusophone Literatures*, by Vera M. Kutzinski, Maria Luisa Nunes, Richard L. Jackson, David Brookshaw, and Marvin A. Lewis. In *Latin American Research Review* 25.2 (1990): 260-66.

<sup>30</sup> Dixon, Sandra L. Review of *Identifying and Expressing the Self: Recent Studies in Afro-Hispanic and*

in Africa destroyed ancestral civilizations and led to a loss of language and culture, which impeded expressing non-European experiences within the colonial system. Despite this, the poets of negritude demonstrated that it was possible to develop a new form of self-expression without relying entirely on European linguistic and literary models to exhibit a clear tendency for Afro-descendant literature struggling to enter the literary canon.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, this category examines how literary criticism has appraised Arnoldo Palacios' works and their contribution to the Afro-Colombian literary movement, thereby assessing their impact on this literary tradition. A significant change has been observed over approximately four decades of research using this critical approach. Early analyses of the authenticity of Afro-descendant literature with Arnoldo Palacios as a key reference, whereas recent studies highlight his role as a manager of intellectual networks and his insertion into the international market. This dialogue between texts reveals not only Palacios' literary richness but also the relevance of his contribution to the consolidation of Afro-Colombian literature.

One of the first authors to conduct comparative studies on the main representatives of Afro-descendant literature was Richard Jackson;<sup>32</sup> throughout his publications, he stressed the importance of differentiating the authentic features of Black literature from that written by white authors about Afro-descendants. In his text "Research on Black Themes in Spanish American Literature: A Bibliographic Guide to Recent Trends", Jackson drew attention to the underrepresentation of Afro-descendant authors in literary studies and emphasized the need to compile anthologies that showcase their contributions to the development of this literary movement.

Even though Jackson recognized the value of works by white authors addressing Afro-descendant themes, he argued that these "reaccionan contra la herencia de la conciencia racial blanca en Hispanoamérica y se convierten en defensores literarios interesados en la redención de las personas negras como miembros del proletariado de este siglo" (react against the legacy of white racial consciousness in Spanish America and become literary advocates interested in the redemption of black people as members of the proletariat of this century).<sup>33</sup> However, he emphasized that the new generation of Afro-descendant scholars was making a crucial effort to explore the concept of Blackness in Latin America and ascertain the level of black consciousness in countries with persistent Afro-descendant communities, despite widespread racial and cultural blending. According

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*Lusophone Literatures*, by Vera M. Kutzinski, Maria Luisa Nunes, Richard L. Jackson, David Brookshaw, and Marvin A. Lewis. In *Latin American Research Review* 25.2 (1990): 261.

<sup>31</sup> Dixon, Sandra L. Review of *Identifying and Expressing the Self: Recent Studies in Afro-Hispanic and Lusophone Literatures*, by Vera M. Kutzinski, Maria Luisa Nunes, Richard L. Jackson, David Brookshaw, and Marvin A. Lewis. In *Latin American Research Review* 25.2 (1990): 261.

<sup>32</sup> Jackson, Richard L. "Research on Black Themes in Spanish American Literature: A Bibliographic Guide to Recent Trends", in *Latin American Research Review* 12.1 (1977): 87-103.

<sup>33</sup> Jackson, Richard L. "Research on Black Themes in Spanish American Literature: A Bibliographic Guide to Recent Trends", in *Latin American Research Review* 12.1 (1977): 89.

to his analysis, the relationship between ethnicity and literature gave the writing of Afro-descendant authors unique characteristics.

Although this study did not specify the stylistic differences of Afro-descendant literature, its critical review served as a starting point for recognizing the existence of authentically Black literature in the Hispanic American sphere. Later, in "The Ethnicity Factor and Afro-Latin American Literature» Jackson<sup>34</sup> analyzed in depth the influence of ethnicity and the authors' own experiences on their literary production. In this work, he states that Arnoldo Palacios, along with other Afro-descendant writers, incorporated the black experience and racial and cultural blending as fundamental elements in Afro-Latin American literature, although adopting the dominant narrative style of their time.

A year later, he published *Black Writers in Latin America*<sup>35</sup>, where he studied the development of black self-awareness by examining the evolution of Afro-descendant literary expression from the time of slavery to the present day. In addition, in the chapter devoted to Arnoldo Palacios, he underlined how his novels, especially *Las estrellas son negras*, manage to impact the reader and raise awareness of social injustices through a raw and realistic style that conveys the harshness of black life in Colombia.

Through this research approach, Jackson aims to decolonize Latin American literature by visibilizing marginalized voices and defending local cultures against foreign influences. In this vein, in 1982, in collaboration with Richard L. Jackson, he published *Literary Blackness and Literary Americanism: Toward an Afro Model for Latin American Literature*,<sup>36</sup>. In his writing, he suggests that blackness and indigenism are reactions of the New World to European dependence and that African-American writers adopted their own style based on the narratives of their own experiences while wondering how to be representative in their own countries. In this regard, Arnoldo Palacios, whose work is characterized by African American authenticity, contributes to a more inclusive and representative literary identity in Colombia.

Whereas Jackson conducted his analysis in the Latin American sphere, Lewis carried out his comparative studies in the Colombian context. He analyzed the work of five Afro-Colombian writers: Arnoldo Palacios, Carlos Arturo Truque, Jorge Artel, and Juan and Manuel Zapata Olivella. Lewis, in *Treading the Ebony Path: Ideology and Violence in Contemporary Afro-Colombian Prose Fiction* (1987), argues that there is a sense of thematic and structural continuity in the literature of the aforementioned Afro-Colombian writers, even though they are temporally and spatially distinct. To support his hypothesis, he adopted an approach integrating formalist, culturalist, and historical-dialectical criticisms. He demonstrates

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, Richard L. "The Ethnicity Factor and Afro-Latin American Literature» In *NS, NorthSouth* 3, 5/6, (1978): 104-18.

<sup>35</sup> Jackson, Richard. *Black Writers in Latin America*. (University of New Mexico Press, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Jackson, Richard A., and Richard L. Jackson. "Literary Blackness and Literary Americanism: Toward an Afro Model for Latin American Literature», in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 1.2 (1982): 5-11.

that violence is a recurring theme<sup>37</sup> and that each author's ethnic and political orientation is crucial for understanding how they express the violent reality they have all witnessed in history. In the case of Palacios, Lewis finds that "la violencia en sus novelas puede ser de dos tipos: violencia vertical y social dirigida contra la sociedad que creó la situación, y violencia horizontal e individual dirigida a un amigo o familiar» (the violence in his novels can be of two types: vertical and social violence directed against the society that created the situation, and horizontal and individual violence directed at a friend or family member).<sup>38</sup>

In light of this, in his recent book, Lewis<sup>39</sup> (2023) broadens his scope of study by analyzing how nature influences cultural construction and ethnic identity in Afro-Colombian literature. In his analysis, he underscores how characters find refuge in nature as a form of resistance in the face of historical oppression. His ecocritical approach<sup>40</sup> stresses the importance of the Afro-descendant worldview in literature by differentiating it from traditional interpretations of Hispanic-American literature.

Placing Palacios within this literary tradition is crucial as it demonstrates how his narrative not only responds to the stylistic traits of the period but also reflects an Afro-Colombian identity that contributes to the development of this literary movement in Latin America. In this sense, Jackson reclaims the value of Palacios' work by emphasizing the way in which his writings are articulated within a body of works that, although diverse in time and space, share a common concern for the representation of Afro-descendant identity and the struggle against marginalization.

Throughout the 20th century, Afro-descendant writers faced multiple obstacles to being recognized within the Latin American literary canon. The historical marginalization of black communities, along with the hegemony of eurocentric literary models, hindered the visibility of their works and legitimization of their contributions to national literature. In this context, the creation of intellectual networks was fundamental for Afro-descendant authors to position their literature and vindicate their identity within the Brazilian cultural panorama.

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<sup>37</sup> Other authors who find a correlation between hunger and aggression include: Carrullo, Silvia G. "La dialéctica hambre-agresión in 'Chambacú: corral de negros'». In *Afro-Hispanic Review* 2.3 (1983): 19-22; Batista, Ángel José. Oralidad, migración y racismo durante la Violencia: La selva y la lluvia de Arnoldo Palacios, una novela afrocolombiana heterogénea e intrahistórica (Thesis, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> Dixon, Sandra L. Review of Identifying and Expressing the Self: Recent Studies in Afro-Hispanic and Lusophone Literatures, by Vera M. Kutzinski, Maria Luisa Nunes, Richard L. Jackson, David Brookshaw, and Marvin A. Lewis. In *Latin American Research Review* 25.2 (1990): 263.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis, Marvin. *Literatura afrocolombiana en sus contextos naturales: Imperialismo ecológico y cimarronaje cultural*. (Programa Editorial Universidad del Valle, 2023).

<sup>40</sup> Other studies implementing this approach to different authors include: del Valle, Mónica María. "Glosa paseada bajo el fuego y la lluvia: cinco lentes para mirar el chocó». *Revista de Literatura, Teoría y Crítica* (2011): 71.



Arnoldo Palacios, along with other Afro-Colombian writers, played a central role in the consolidation of these spaces for exchange and collaboration. Therefore, his work and trajectory, as well as his participation in intellectual circles supporting the study and dissemination of this literary tradition in Brazil, reflect the struggle for the recognition of Afro-descendant literature.

One of the most relevant studies in this field is the article by Peter Rondón Vélez,<sup>41</sup> where the author examines the correspondence between Manuel Zapata Olivella and Laurence Emmanuel Prescott, two prominent intellectuals in the promotion of Africanism in the Caribbean and the Colombian Pacific. In this respect, Rondón Vélez considers Arnoldo Palacios a fundamental figure in Afro-Colombian studies and underlines his relevance to the academic networks promoting the consolidation of the recognition of Black literature in Latin America.

A key aspect of the article is its main source: letters and documents concerning Afro-descendant authors' difficulties in publishing and disseminating their works. These epistolary exchanges revealed the presence of researchers, fellows, and scholars interested in the output of Palacios and other Afro-Colombian authors. Furthermore, it underscores Palacios' pivotal works as a cultural manager that enables the translation of texts and contact with cultural institutions that funded conferences and publications. Rondón Vélez argues that Palacios was not only a writer within the Afro-Colombian scene but also a key figure in the positioning of Black literature within contemporary literary studies.<sup>42</sup>

The analysis of intellectual networks shows that the recognition of Afro-Colombian literature was not an unprompted development but rather the result of the collective effort of writers and academics fighting for their visibility. On this matter, future research could compare their work with that of Afro-Brazilian or Afro-Caribbean intellectuals in order to identify communicative strategies of intellectual and cultural resistance. In this vein, Arnoldo Palacios, in particular, contributed to establishing connections that allowed his own and other Afro-Colombian authors' work to be studied in universities and academic circles outside Colombia. This study corroborates Palacios' pivotal role in the consolidation of Afro-descendant literature.

Consequently, a third trend began: the internationalization of Colombian literature, influenced by various factors including participation in global literary networks, editorial support and works translation. Unlike writers supported by major publishing houses, many Afro-descendant writers have faced difficulties

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<sup>41</sup> Rondón Vélez, Peter. "Correspondencia entre ekobios: hermano 'Loro' y 'el gran putas'. Redes y agencia dedos intelectuales afro-latino-americanos», in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 40.2 (2021): 25-42.

<sup>42</sup> For research on the creation of the category "Afro-Colombian literature" in the literary field, see also: Valero, Silvia. "¿De qué hablamos cuando hablamos de 'literatura afrocolombiana'? o los riesgos de las categorizaciones». *Estudios de Literatura Colombiana* 32 (2013): 15-37; Valero, Silvia. "Introducción. Literatura y afrodescendencia: identidades políticas en la literatura afromlatinoamericana del siglo XXI», en *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana*, 41.81(2013): 9-17. See also: Valero, Silvia. "Representaciones 'afrodiaspóricas' en la literatura afrocolombiana contemporánea: ente naturalización y la ironía». *Vistas al Patio* 7 (2012): 69-86.

positioning themselves in the international market. However, some have managed to enter specialized circuits, thanks to the work of literary agents, translators, and publishers committed to disseminating their work.

Arnoldo Palacios is a remarkable example of this phenomenon because, despite not being supported by major publishing houses, his work has been recognized across borders. His career illustrates how the internationalization of Afro-Colombian literature has depended, to a large extent, on individual efforts and the development of networks facilitating the dissemination of their texts internationally.

One of the most relevant studies on the internationalization of Afro-Colombian literature is the article by Martín Gómez, Paula Andrea Marín, and Margarita Valencia<sup>43</sup>, *La internacionalización de la literatura colombiana* (The Internationalization of Colombian Literature). The particular importance of this work is that it examines the means and agents promoting the arrival of Colombian writers on the international market by reconstructing the routes of dissemination and tracing how they have evolved over time. This article is based on interviews with writers, publishers, and literary agents to understand the role of each actor in the internationalization process. Although it focuses on Colombian literature in general, it addresses the case of Arnoldo Palacios from the perspective of his insertion into the global market thorough the analysis of the strategies and networks contributing to his recognition in the international literary scene.

A major aspect of this study is the importance of translators in the dissemination of the work of marginal authors. Although this topic has been superficially addressed, translation has been a determining factor in enabling writers such as Palacios to reach international audiences. Moreover, the article points out that the inclusion of his work in specialized catalogs has been possible due to the freedom that imprints agents and directors have to curate titles that, by individual choice, might fall outside the reach of the mass audience.

This means that the internationalization of Colombian literature depends not only on the quality of the works but also on the structure of the publishing market and the agents that facilitate their circulation. In the case of Arnoldo Palacios, his entry into the international arena has been characterized by the absence of support from large publishing houses, which has made his dissemination dependent on individual efforts and academic recommendations. Even though this analysis is valuable, a more in-depth documentary and statistical review of the relationship between publishers, publishing houses, and authors is necessary to provide a more structured view of the dissemination process and the real biases that may exist towards Afro-descendant literature.

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<sup>43</sup> Gómez, Martín, Paula Andrea Marín, Margarita Valencia. "La internacionalización de la literatura colombiana», in *Trama & Texturas* 50 (2023): 95-112.

In addition, the article opens the discussion on the publication privileges and the non-literary pursuits authors must engage in to ensure their books reach readers. In this sense, Palacios' work illustrates how Afro-Colombian literature has had to make its way into the international market through informal networks and the interest of publishers and academics committed to its dissemination.

Finally, Christopher Dennis<sup>44</sup> analyzes the current state and future of Afro-Colombian prose fiction underlining the scarcity of young writers in this genre and exploring the reasons behind this trend. By reviewing the works of established writers such as Palacios and Manuel Zapata Olivella, the author examines how economic, social, and cultural barriers have limited the dissemination and recognition of Afro-Colombian literature. Furthermore, the text addresses the impact of racial and cultural blending ideology and constitutional reforms on Afro-Colombian literary perception and production. In relation to Arnoldo Palacios, the text highlights his contribution to literature and his return to Colombia after years of living in France, reaffirming the importance of his work in the context of an Afro-Colombian identity in constant negotiation and redefinition.

In sum, the critical reception of the Chocoan writer's work has shifted from an initial assessment focused on its thematic authenticity and pioneering role in Afro-Colombian literature to a more complex understanding placing him as a key figure in the consolidation of intellectual networks, internationalization of Black literature, and transformation of the Colombian literary canon. Recent studies have broadened the interpretation of Palacios' works by showing that he was not only a writer but also a cultural agent who facilitated the circulation of Afro-Colombian works in international academic and publishing circles.

Furthermore, his career shows that Afro-descendant literature recognition has been gained by collective efforts, collaborative networks, and strategies of resistance against an exclusionary publishing system. From this perspective, Palacios' work has not only been the subject of literary analysis, but also a great example of the struggle for visibility, representation, and cultural justice on a national and international scope.

## **6. Literary style and linguistic techniques**

This category comprises studies on the narrative style distinctive of Afro-descendant literature, the use of language, and the literary techniques implemented by Palacios. Three main trends are identified: first, the analysis of the expressive features characteristic of Afro-Colombian literature; second, the study of language as a marker of identity and social criticism, and third, the exploration of the relationship between the natural environment and narrative construction. These lines of research have enabled the recognition of the aesthetic and technical value of

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<sup>44</sup> Dennis, Christopher. "The Current and Future State of Afro-Colombian Prose Fiction", in *Afro-Hispanic Review* 30.1 (2011): 81-100.

Palacios' work, which helps position it within an innovative literary tradition deeply rooted in the Afro-descendant experience.

The recognition and appreciation of Afro-descendant literary styles in Latin America began to consolidate in the second half of the 20th century as greater interest in marginalized or minority cultural identities and non-eurocentric narratives<sup>45</sup> was shown. This process was influenced by intellectual and social movements aiming to vindicate Afro-descendant communities' contributions to culture and literature.

In Colombia, this recognition was facilitated by the publication of studies challenging hegemonic and eurocentric perspectives, highlighting the aesthetic and symbolic richness of Afro-Colombian works<sup>46</sup>. Since the first decades of the 21st century, Afro-descendant children's literature produced by Afro-descendant authors, organizations, or communities has been distributed nationwide, visibilizing the processes of vindication and acknowledgment of Afro-descendant contributions to Colombian culture.<sup>47</sup>

In this context, Ni Zola Vunda's<sup>48</sup> (1991) text, *Las modalidades expresivas en cuatro novelas colombianas negras* (Expressive Modalities in Four Black Colombian Novels), serves this purpose of revaluing Afro-descendant literature. Thus, it examines the works of Afro-Colombian authors from their internal modes of expression by moving away from the external interpretations that had dominated until then. This approach not only intends to position these works as legitimate art but also contributes to a new critical relationship with Afro-descendant Latin American literature at a time when these voices were beginning to be recognized as an integral part of the literary canon.

In his analysis, Ni Zola Vunda draws attention to a generation of Colombian writers from the mid-20th century and specifically identifies Afro-descendant novelists such as Arnoldo Palacios, Arturo Truque, and Manuel Zapata Olivella. Although less well-known at the time, these authors brought a unique and broader perspective to Colombian narratives. Furthermore, he points out that, despite the limited and mixed reception of these authors' works, they have been the subject of analysis in important university studies in Colombia, the United States, and Spain. However, Zola Ni Vunda notes that there was no an in-depth examination of the textual instances, which motivated him to explore the expressive modalities of these

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<sup>45</sup> Salmerón Castro, Fernando. "Una nueva mirada a la presencia afrodescendiente en México", en *Desacatos* 57 (2018): 203-207.

<sup>46</sup> Oliva, María Elena. "Más acá de la negritud: negrismo y negredumbre como categorías de reconocimiento en la primera mitad del siglo XX latinoamericano", en *Revista CS* 30 (2020): 47-72.

<sup>47</sup> Espinosa Salazar, Astrid Eliana. "Literatura infantil afrodescendiente en Colombia en las dos primeras décadas del siglo XXI. Escuela, identidades, representaciones y reconocimiento". *Claroscuro. Revista del Centro de Estudios sobre Diversidad Cultural* 23 (2024): 1-23.

<sup>48</sup> Vunda, Zola Ni. "Las modalidades expresivas en cuatro novelas colombianas negras" (Thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1991).

novels. This approach allowed him to provide a new insight into the artistic status of these works enhancing their intrinsic value and ability to challenge dominant narratives.

Subsequently, even more comprehensive studies were conducted on one of the distinguishing features of Afro-descendant literature: the use of language. In the case of Arnoldo Palacios, language is not only a narrative technique but also a social and identity differentiator. This particular interest grows in the context of the increasing recognition of Afro-descendant cultural expressions as fundamental elements for understanding Colombia's linguistic and social diversity.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, recent studies have addressed how language in Palacios' work not only builds the characters but also criticizes the social structures that perpetuate the marginalization of Afro-descendants. This approach allows us to explore the linguistic and cultural richness of Chocó owing to the heritage of African languages and other varieties of Spanish. In this regard, Miguel Gutiérrez Maté and Nataly Cancino Cabello's works<sup>49</sup> stand out for their depth and rigor in analyzing the black ethnolect of Chocó as a literary and sociolinguistic resource.

In 2014, these authors published the article "Lo oral, lo rústico y lo 'afro' en la configuración del etnolecto negro del Chocó (Colombia): el valor lingüístico de *Las estrellas son negras* de Arnoldo Palacios» (The oral, the rustic, and the 'Afro' in the configuration of the black ethnolect of Chocó (Colombia): the linguistic value of 'las estrellas son negras' by Arnoldo Palacios.)» They analyze the Chocoan vernacular Spanish through the novel *Las estrellas son negras*. They incorporate the principles of structural and variational linguistics to describe the linguistic characteristics of the language and the way Arnoldo Palacios uses it to build his characters and mark social and racial differences. This approach allows for distinguishing characters based on their geographical origin, social class, and personal aspirations through the linguistic identity markers they display. Thus, the novel becomes a document of considerable linguistic worth by exhibiting a diverse range of linguistic varieties.

However, the authors' thorough analysis reveals that the black ethnolect of Chocó in Palacios' novel is not a direct representation of the sociolinguistic reality but rather a literary construction mediated by the author's linguistic sensibility. In other words, "no existe una correspondencia directa entre los diálogos de *Las estrellas son negras* y el habla real» (there is no direct correspondence between the dialogues in *Las estrellas son negras* and actual speech)». <sup>50</sup> Such characteristic of the novel, according to the authors, can have three possible explanations: first, some linguistic features are not perceived by the writer; second, those linguistic features are difficult to represent in writing, and third, those linguistic traits "simplemente,

<sup>49</sup> Gutiérrez Maté, Miguel y Nataly Cancino Cabello. "Lo oral, lo rústico y lo 'afro' en la configuración del etnolecto negro del Chocó (Colombia): el valor lingüístico de *Las estrellas son negras* de Arnoldo Palacios», in *Romance Philology* 68.2 (2014): 249-83.

<sup>50</sup> Gutiérrez y Cancino 272.

no se presentaban en el Chocó conocido por el autor» (simply did not exist in the Chocó known to the author)». <sup>51</sup>

In a subsequent publication by Gutiérrez Maté and Cancino Cabello <sup>52</sup> in 2017, they extend the scope of their previous study and argue that speech, as a literary resource, not only constructs the identity of the characters, but also criticizes the social structures that perpetuate the marginalization of Afro-descendants.

Finally, a third trend emerged within this category due to the naturalistic style of Palacios' works. It explores the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. In this respect, ecocriticism has become an alternative perspective in literary studies as it enables the analysis of how nature serves not only as a setting but also as an element influencing the lives of the characters by driving their decisions and impulses.

One of the most recent studies is by Andrés Federico Vargas González, <sup>53</sup> who adopts a biocentric ecocritical perspective to analyze *Las estrellas son negras*. The author argues that "el entorno es fundamental en la construcción social y psicológica en la vida del hombre" (the environment is fundamental to the social and psychological construction of human life) <sup>54</sup> which is evident throughout the novel in the way Irra, the protagonist, acts and reacts to the environment in which his story unfolds.

From Vargas' point of view, Palacios' work presents a natural space that determines the fate of his characters, not only because of material deprivation, but also because of how the degraded nature affects their subjectivity. Therefore, Vargas emphasizes that "toda la desgracia de Irra es fruto del mal cuidado del ambiente que otros han dado y que de forma directa ha conducido a los otros entes naturales [...] a un detrimento de sí mismo y a pasar penurias" (Irra's misfortune is entirely the result of environmental mismanagement by others, which has directly led other natural entities (...) to their own detriment and hardship) <sup>55</sup>. The author suggests that while the dominant groups exploit nature for their own benefit, they forget the needs of black men forced to survive in extreme conditions; this reinforces deviant behaviors degrading to human beings such as stealing food or Irra's desperation to sell his dignity and even consider committing criminal acts. <sup>56</sup>

In addition, the author's analysis indicates the link between rural and urban settings as a core element in the narrative structure, which "permite realzar

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<sup>51</sup> Gutiérrez y Cancino 273.

<sup>52</sup> Gutiérrez Maté, Miguel y Nataly Cancino Cabello. "El habla 'afrochocoana' y la condena de ser negro. Etnia, territorio y sociedad según Arnoldo Palacios", in *Hispanófila* 180 (2017): 139-54.

<sup>53</sup> Vargas González, Andrés Federico. *Las estrellas son negras de Arnoldo Palacios en clave ecocrítica*, (Tesis de Pregrado, Universidad Santo Tomás, 2023).

<sup>54</sup> Vargas González 89.

<sup>55</sup> Vargas González 100.

<sup>56</sup> Vargas González 101.

el valor estético de la obra» (enhances the aesthetic value of the work)<sup>57</sup> as the novel presents a mixed nature in which the characters move between these two worlds without finding redemption in either. This prompts the growing social criticism in the work: although the protagonist, Irra, lives in both rural and urban areas trying to escape grinding poverty, the city does not offer Afro-descendant characters favorable opportunities for progress, but is rather an extension of the structural misery that conditions them.

Vargas' analysis is valuable because it introduces a new perspective adopting the interconnection between the environment and human beings, not from an anthropocentric view but from a biocentric one in which nature is as fundamental an actor as human beings. However, one of the limitations of this study is its theoretical approach focusing mainly on William Flores' proposal<sup>58</sup> in Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Modern Latin American Literature.

Even though the above-mentioned approach provides coherence to his argument, the analysis could be more comprehensive by integrating other ecocritical views, such as Afro-descendant cultural ecology. It enhances understanding of the influence of the environment not only on the individual but also on the construction and evolution of culture. Its importance lies in the fact that Afro-descendant culture has shown an ability to adapt to the new environments inhabited post-diaspora, all while preserving ancestral knowledge and practices which are absolutely invaluable to the sustainable management of natural resources.

In this sense, Afro-descendant culture is “caracterizada por unas concepciones biocéntricas, cuyos conocimientos, técnicas y tecnologías aún no han sido subsumidas por el capital, lo cual las convierte en alternativas al antropocentrismo» (characterized by biocentric conceptions, whose knowledge, techniques, and technologies have not yet been subsumed by capital, making them alternatives to anthropocentrism).<sup>59</sup> Adding this perspective would allow us to recognize “las particularidades y características sociales, culturales e históricas de la población afro de nuestro país y de nuestra región» (the social, cultural, and historical particularities and characteristics of the Afro population of our country and our region)<sup>60</sup> and offer a more insightful reading of the relationship between nature and Afro-descendant identity in Palacios' work.

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<sup>57</sup> Vargas González 67.

<sup>58</sup> Flores, William. *Ecocrítica poscolonial y literatura moderna latinoamericana*. Lima: Universidad Mayor de San Marcos, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Rentería Jiménez, Carlos y Claudia Vélez de la Calle. “Comunidades negras y saberes ancestrales ambientales: un análisis desde los principios de la educación popular ambiental para re(pensar) las relaciones sociedad-naturaleza», en *Revista colombiana de educación* 1.81 (2021): 313.

<sup>60</sup> Rentería y Vélez de la Calle 323.



## 7. Conclusions

The nearly sixty texts that this review has brought into dialogue demonstrate that, amid the abundant intellectual production on Afro-descendant and African diaspora literature in Latin America, Palacios's work is still a wide-ranging research topic. Despite his output recognition, most publications focus on *Las estrellas son negras* leaving the richness of his other works unexplored. This gap opens up a crucial opportunity for future studies to broaden the perspective on his literary production and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of his stylistic and thematic evolution.

The 1970s marked a milestone in the critical reception of Palacios' work, especially due to the initiative of American academics. However, special interest in his work aroused among Colombian researchers in 2017 and 2023. They intend to increase his presence in literary and academic spheres. Despite these advances, it is clear that there is still a strong need to consolidate research networks that allow for greater coordination between specialists in Afro-Colombian literature and cultural studies in order to promote the development of interdisciplinary analysis.

The four categories in this review are merely an initial map showing Palacios' work whose study will surely be more intensive thanks to the Resolution 0020 designating 2024 as Arnoldo Palacios' Year in commemoration of his birth. This institutional recognition acts as a catalyst for the dissemination and consolidation of his legacy, as well as the encouragement of research from multiple approaches, such as ecocriticism, gender studies, intertextuality, and Palacios' influence on contemporary writers. Likewise, its impact should not be limited solely to the academic sphere but should extend to cultural managers, librarians, and teachers at all educational levels in the country, who have the potential to multiply access to and appreciation of his work among diverse audiences.

Consequently, Palacios' literature continues to serve as a fertile source of exploration and dialogue. Its considerable potential transcends his most popular works impacting diverse domains of knowledge. His legacy needs a new and wider appreciation that values his contributions to Afro-Colombian literature not only for its aesthetic quality but also for its role in the construction of identity, memory, and Afro-descendant cultural resistance.

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