

**BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS:
IMAGES OF COLLECTIVE SUFFERING
IN THE POETRY OF PEDRO MIR**

¡Sangre
que se nos va!
Nicolás Guillén¹

El azúcar de mi tierra
tiene sabores de hiel ...
al sudor que mal se paga
no se puede pedir miel.
Rubén Suro²

Esta tierra de llanto, del hondo llanto
de infinitas lágrimas
Pedro Mir³

The majority of critical studies on the works of the Dominican writer Pedro Mir (1913-1999) call attention at some point to the fact that, despite his lengthy literary career and the high quality of his artistic production that included many genres, this important Caribbean literary figure is still not widely known outside of his native land. Over twenty five years ago Jaime Labastida, for example, in an introduction to a collection of Mir's poetry, posed the following two questions to the reader: "How is it possible that this poet ... is unknown in America? What could explain that his name does not appear beside those of Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda and Nicanor Parra?" (my translation).⁴ Likewise, Robert Márquez had noted a year earlier in his anthology of Latin American revolutionary poetry that Mir "was virtually unknown outside his own country

¹ Nicolás Guillén, "Caña", *Summa Poética*, Luis Íñigo Madrigal, ed., Madrid, Cátedra, 1990; p. 84.

² Rubén Suro, "Juguete de cañaverul", *Antología histórica de la poesía dominicana del Siglo XX*, Franklin Gutiérrez, ed., San Juan, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998; p. 82.

³ Pedro Mir, "Terruño", *Poesías (casi) completas*, Jaime Labastida, ed., México, Siglo XXI, 1994; p. 39.

⁴ Jaime Labastida, "El viaje de Pedro Mir hacia la muchedumbre," *Viaje hacia la muchedumbre*, 2nd ed., by Pedro Mir, México, Siglo XXI, 1975; pp. ix-xiv. "¿Cómo es posible que este poeta . . . sea un desconocido en América? ¿Qué puede explicar que su nombre no aparezca al lado de los de Nicolás Guillén, Pablo Neruda y Nicanor Parra?" It is interesting to note, as Torres-Sailant has pointed out, that Labastida apparently had not found a suitable answer to these pertinent questions since he republished the same introduction, without changes, almost twenty years later in another Mexican edition of Mir's collected poems (*Poesías (casi) completas*, México, Siglo XXI, 1994; pp. 7-12).

until very recently," and he further observed that "his poetry is only now beginning to gain the international recognition it clearly deserves."⁵ What is most surprising about Labastida's questions and the observation by Márquez is that despite the fact that they were made more than a quarter century ago, they are almost equally relevant today. In fact, little has changed concerning Pedro Mir's visibility outside his native country, and even among Caribbeanists he is not nearly as widely known as he should be.

In one of the best studies to date on Pedro Mir and his diverse writings, Silvio Torres-Saillant in his *Caribbean Poetics* (1997) addresses what he refers to as "the oddity of a Dominican who, a literary celebrity at home, should remain little known in the Caribbean and continental Latin America."⁶ But as Torres-Saillant points out, this apparent "oddity" is emblematic of the fate suffered by so many Caribbean writers "given the secondary position accorded to the literature of the islands in general"⁷ (214). Torres-Saillant correctly adds that Mir's lack of international fame is even more typical of the situation of Dominican writers since their works have traditionally been "the least regarded of the literatures of the Hispanophone Antilles."⁸

The relative anonymity of Pedro Mir is especially troubling given that his literary career has spanned over sixty years, he has been awarded his country's National Prize for Literature, and in 1982 he was named National Poet by the Dominican Congress. His importance as "a popular poet of great complexity, technical skill, and intellectual power,"⁹ though undeniable, has not seemed to insure his inclusion in Latin American poetry anthologies, collections of Caribbean literature or histories and encyclopedias of Latin American letters.¹⁰ And though a handful of articles have discussed Mir's poetic masterwork "Hay un país en el mundo" (1949), critics have tended either to gloss over his earlier poems or not to mention them at all.

This essay will attempt to shed some much-deserved light on this ignored

⁵ *Latin American Revolutionary Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, Robert Márquez, ed. New York, Monthly Review Press, 1974; p. 208.

⁶ Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997; p. 214.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* Jean Franco similarly observes that "the fact that Mir's work is less known than these [Neruda, Guillén] has much to do with his place of birth, the Dominican Republic – whose literature still today is far less translated than that of other Caribbean countries." She goes on to note, however, that the poet's relative anonymity also has to do with his long exile from his homeland (xiii-ivx) Jean Franco, "Foreword to the Countersong," in Pedro Mir, *Countersong to Walt Whitman & Other Poems*, Jonathan Cohen and Donald D. Walsh, trad., Washington, D.C., Azul, 1993.

⁹ Márquez, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ In Verity Smith's massive *Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature*, Chicago, Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997, Mir, along with other important literary figures from the Dominican Republic such as Juan Bosch, is only mentioned in passing in the four-page entry "Dominican Republic: 19th and 20th-Century Prose and Poetry"; pp. 263-66.

figure of Dominican letters by focusing on two of Pedro Mir's early poems written the late 1930s. In these foundational works the poet develops a number of themes, ideas, and images that would become the cornerstones of a poetic world view that centers on the past suffering and future hope of the people of his nation. Of these themes and images, the three *leitmotifs* of blood, sweat, and tears (*sangre, sudor, lágrimas*) play an especially important role in the poet's depiction of the collective suffering of the Dominican people. The reader of Mir's verse will immediately note the author's frequent repetition not only of the words themselves, but also of a number of related expressions and images that suggest various forms of pain and anguish that have plagued his native land throughout its modern history. In much of Mir's early poetry, it is precisely these words that imbue his verse with its strong revolutionary undertones and reveal the poet's social and political compromise.

Mir's first poems of social protest—"A la carta que no ha de venir," "Abulia" and "Catorce versos"—were published in a Santo Domingo newspaper in December 1937¹¹ by the Dominican author Juan Bosch, who was at the time the newspaper's literary director. It was during this period, according to Mir, that the country's lamentable social and political situation pulled him away from the imitation of Rubén Darío and other great figures of Latin American *modernismo* into the world of social protest.¹² "A la carta que ha de venir" stands out among the three poems for its abundance of disturbing images, which underscore the young author's burgeoning social compromise. Most notable among these are the repeated references to blood and sweat, which serve as metonyms for the collective suffering of the Dominican people during the early years of the reign of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (1891-1961).

In the poem the speaker envisions and directs his voice to a letter—a public document so to speak—whose contents he hopes will reveal the precarious circumstances of the Dominican peasant laborers who have been exploited by a foreign-controlled sugar industry:

Tráeme el sabor ardiente de la tierra
 Que se vierte en guarapo.
 ¡Sangre de espalda en tormento!
 Tráeme el sudor valiente de la loma
 que al pasar al trapiche,
 después de torturarse pasa al dólar
 o pasa a las metáforas del cuento.
 Tráeme el trajín de la zafra
 que se alivia de miserias.
 Tráeme el rumor del molino

¹¹ *Listín Diario*, Santo Domingo, 19 December, 1937.

¹² Aileen Schmidt-Rodríguez, "Tras el secreto de la creación literaria: Entrevista a Pedro Mir," *Areíto* 10:38 (1984); p. 39.

Tráeme la sangre caliente
del canto campesino...¹³

The most salient feature of these verses is the abundance of poetic imagery that underscores a clear relationship between the country's booming sugar industry and the suffering of the proletariat. The combination of terms related to the harvesting and production of sugar ("guarapo," "trapiche," "zafra," "molino") with words that suggest pain and anguish ("tormento," "sudor," "torturarse," "sangre," "miserias") makes Mir's message especially apparent. It is important to point out that Mir was born in San Pedro de Macorís, which according to César Ayala was the geographic center of sugar production in the Dominican Republic.¹⁴ The poet therefore bore witness to the impact of this largely foreign-owned industry on his country.

In this poem Mir draws a parallel between the sugarcane that spills out its valuable juice (*guarapo*) when crushed in the sugar press, and the laborer who is physically and emotionally drained by the back-breaking work of cutting cane. On a figurative level the workers have much in common with the sugar that is pushed through the "trapiche," since they can also be seen as products of a system that saps them of their essence and then discards them when they have nothing left to offer.

Indeed Mir's poetic image shares much in common with a similar comparison made by the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén in "Caña," one of the best-known poems from his second book *Sóngoro cosongo*.¹⁵ Just as Guillén suggests in the poem's famous final words—"¡Sangre/ que se nos va!"—that harrowing work in the largely American-owned cane fields¹⁶ in Cuba was sapping his country's laborers of their lifeblood, Mir's poem also presents the notion of a people being drained of their energy and essence by the sugar industry. In both works, the word "sangre" is, of course, highly symbolic and it should be understood on multiple levels. Blood is not simply meant to be viewed as a bodily fluid necessary for life, but also as the essence of the individual and of the nation. That is, though the people's blood is certainly seen by both poets as a key to their corporal and physical nature, it also symbolizes their line of descent and their cultural extraction.

In Mir's poem the laborers' sweat also conveys the notion of their

¹³ Pedro Mir, *Poesías (casi) completas*, op. cit., 1994, p. 15.

¹⁴ César J. Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*, Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1999; pp. 102-03.

¹⁵ Nicolás Guillén, *Sóngoro Cosongo*, La Habana, Ucar, García, 1931.

¹⁶ Skidmore and Smith point out that by 1928, American-owned sugar mills in Cuba produced nearly 75 percent of the island's sugar. They further observe that "not only did United States capital take over major ownership of plantations and mills, the United States became by far the largest consumer for Cuba's sugar exports – usually purchasing 75 to 80 percent of the total". Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America*, 4th ed., New York, Oxford University Press, 1997; pp. 267-69.

suffering. Their "sudor valiente" represents the grueling nature of their work in the *cañaverales* where they cut the cane and haul it from the fields, but are barely rewarded for their drudgery. Their sweat and blood are converted into huge profits that they never see. The obvious implication is that while the workers suffer, the North American companies convert the Dominican people's hard work into dollars that the latter will never see. Mir's fellow poet Rubén Suro sums up this national dilemma beautifully in his scathing poem "Juguete de cañaveral" in which he also underscores the great economic inequities created by U.S. domination of the sugar industry:

El azúcar de mi tierra
 tiene colores muy pardos
 ¡las ganancias son del yanqui
 y del nuestro son los fardos

 En cada saco de azúcar
 y en cada cañal de corte
 está la garra de un fúcar
 y está la sombra del Norte (83)

César Ayala underscores the domination of the Dominican Republic's sugar industry by United States-owned companies in his recent work *The American Sugar Kingdom*. He observes that sugar was the Dominican Republic's main export during this period, and the North American companies controlled over 80 percent of that industry.¹⁷

In Mir's poem there is also an implicit criticism of the country's government and its dictator, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo who was largely unconcerned with the lot of the Dominican peasants and laborers, despite the fact that he personally profited greatly from their work in many industries. Mir reflects in this bitter poem how, as Frank Moya Pons puts it, in the era of Trujillo, "[government] was a means of personal aggrandizement rather than an institution of public service."¹⁸ In fact, the dictator's involvement in Dominican industry and his rapidly growing network of monopolies had "made him the richest man in the country by the end of his first presidential term in August 1934."¹⁹ Mir's poem suggests, then, that the cane cutters are also shedding their blood and sweat to fill the pockets of the government, while they continue to live in poverty.

¹⁷ Ayala, *op. cit.*; p. 103.

¹⁸ Frank Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History*, New Rochelle, NY, Hispaniola Books, 1995; p. 360. According to Jan Rogozinski, Trujillo's family quickly amassed "a fortune of more than \$500 million and owned companies controlling 60 percent of the nation's assets and workers" (257). By the time of his death in 1961, his fortune was worth over \$800 million. Jan Rogozinski, *A Brief History of the Caribbean*, 2nd ed, New York, Facts on File, 1999; p. 258.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; p. 360.

As in so many of Mir's later poems, the bleak presentation of the state of the workers is, however, followed by a hint of hope in the image of their burning blood and their song of solidarity—"la sangre caliente / del canto campesino"—both of which suggest a latent desire for rebellion among these oppressed cane cutters whose collective suffering has served to unite them.²⁰

In the poem's second stanza, the speaker does not further develop this latent theme of hope, but rather refocuses his attention on the suffering of his nation as reflected in the lengthy workday of the cane cutters, which is well underway before the sun rises:

Antes que el sol levante
 la loma baja un triunfo de esmeraldas
 un triunfo de sudores
 un triunfo de trabajo,
 la novela de un día por 18 centavos
 la baba fecundante de la yunta
 urgida de garrochas,
 torturada de sangre.
 ¡Hay que llegar al trapiche
 antes que el sol levante!²¹

The speaker focuses on the unbelievable nature of the work, not just because it is harsh and physically taxing, but also because the constant toiling yields so little material benefit for the workers. By referring to their sweat and physical labor as the "novela" of their day-to-day existence, Mir calls attention to what he sees as the inconceivable nature of his country's deplorable reality. To the poet, the notion that in the Dominican Republic—a nation ruled by a multi-millionaire president, full of giant foreign industries, and rich with natural resources—could still be largely populated by landless peasants living in abject poverty seems more like the stuff of fiction. The speaker's disbelief foreshadows one of the powerful metaphors of "Hay un país en el mundo," in which the collective poetic voice repeatedly speaks of the whole Caribbean as an "*inverosímil* archipiélago de azúcar y de alcohol" (my italics).

Mir concludes "A una carta que no ha de venir" by returning his attention to the hypothetical letter of the title: "Tráeme eso: el dolor de nuestra gleba/" he commands, "... y valdrás más que el sello que te lleva/ y serás, más que yo,

²⁰ In his best and most important poem, "Hay un país en el mundo" (1949), Mir makes use of a similar, yet much more obvious, image of the potential power of the proletariat masses to rebel against the government and the oppression of foreign industries: "¡Un dólar!", shouts the plural lyric voice, "Ha aquí el resultado. Un borbotón de sangre./ ... Sangre herida en el viento./ Sangre en el efectivo producto de amargura / ... Qué día vendrá, oculto en la esperanza./ con su canasta llena de iras implacables/ y rostros contraídos y puños y puñales/ ... Busquemos los culpables/ Y entonces caiga el peso infinito de los pueblos/ sobre los hombros de los culpables", *op. cit.*; p. 74.

²¹ *Ibid.*; p. 15.

dominicana!.”²² The idea of collective suffering is especially apparent in the metaphor of a letter, a written document much like the poem that Mir has composed. Both the imagined letter and the poem will serve to expose the painful reality of a country that is being exploited like a worthless clod of land. The speaker insists on the value of recording the truths of his country’s plight in writing, and he seems to suggest that any document that expresses the suffering of the people will be, by virtue of its representation of the collective voice, authentically Dominican.

In “Poema del llanto trigueño” (c. 1940) Mir again focuses his attention on several of his country’s rampant social injustices. In this emotionally charged work, the poet turns to the deplorable working conditions and the personal tragedy of the country’s female textile workers. The poem captures the drastic effects of industrialization on a society in which economic activity had traditionally focused on “the possession of land and agriculture.”²³ Many Dominicans, like the women referred to in the poem, were lured from the country to the city during a period of economic expansion and industrialization, but ended up victims of a corrupt system that exploited the working people and the land for its own benefit.

It is important to note, as Frank Moya Pons has pointed out, that in the 1930s when Trujillo came to power, the Dominican Republic was still “a traditional two-class, provincial, peasant-based ... and poor society.”²⁴ In light of this observation, it is clear that Pedro Mir is suggesting in this poem with Marxist undertones,²⁵ that his country is suffering from and becoming contaminated by a strong capitalist and consumer mentality that has infected the poor workers with hopes of unattainable financial rewards.

The poet’s social and political compromise are made evident in this poem largely through the repetition of images of blood, sweat, and tears, which call attention to the suffering of the working class. The “llanto” of the title suggests not only the shedding of tears but also the poet’s formal lament, in which he reveals the tragedy of his country’s painful and largely failed transition into a capitalist economy. The term “trigueño” roughly translates as “light brown,” but is also a common euphemism used in the Caribbean to refer to a person of African descent. As Alberto Baeza Flores puts it, by giving the tears “color

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Moya Pons, *op. cit.*; p. 358.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; p. 380.

²⁵ Many of Mir’s poems reveal his affinity with Marxism, a philosophy that holds that the masses have traditionally been exploited by the state. In his poems Mir often criticizes capitalist notions and promotes the Marxist ideal of a society without classes. In an article on Mir’s works, Giovanni Di Pietro has commented on Mir’s compromise with Marxism: “Hay una ideología detrás de [su] compromiso: el marxismo ... Mir no es un poeta marxista. Es un marxista que es poeta.” Giovanni Di Pietro, “Pedro Mir, poeta comprometido,” *Cuadernos de poética*, 8-24 (1994); pp. 35-36.

trigueño" Mir is referring to "el dolor criollo, el dolor dominicano—que también es color blanco, color negro y mulato."²⁶

It should be further noted that in the case of the Dominican Republic of the 1930s and 40s, "trigueño" was a word especially loaded with symbolic meaning, given that nearly 80 percent of the country's population at the time was either black or mulatto.²⁷ The poem's title, then, clearly is meant to address the plight not of just a small group of Dominicans, but rather of the majority of the nation's population.²⁸

A number of national ills serve as the backdrop for the poem, but Mir opens with an image taken from country's new-found, but illusory economic growth: attractive new garments hanging from a shop window on the *Calle del Conde*, the principal thoroughfare of the capital and the street of elegant commerce.²⁹

Es la calle del Conde asomada a las vidrieras,
aquí las camisas blancas,
allá las camisas negras,
¡y dondequiera un sudor emocionante en mi tierra!
¡Qué hermosa camisa blanca!
Pero detrás:
 la tragedia,
el monorrítmico son de los pedales sonámbulos,
el secreto fatídico y tenaz de las tijeras.

Es la calle del Conde asomada a las vidrieras,
aquí las pijamas blancas,
allá las pijamas negras,
¡y dondequiera exprimida como una fruta mi tierra!³⁰

The obvious implication of the speaker's lamentation is that despite his country's newfound economic progress under Trujillo, not everyone has been able to improve his/her circumstances. While the middle and upper classes expanded, the fancy garments that hung in the capital's shop windows simply masked the harsh reality of the workers who produced them. As Torres-Saillant puts it, in Mir's poem the clothing's "attractive appearance conceals an ugly drama of underpaid and overworked women."³¹

²⁶ Alberto Baeza Flores, *La poesía dominicana en el siglo XX*, Santiago, UCMM, 1977; p. 261.

²⁷ Torres Saillant, *op. cit.*; p. 47.

²⁸ The poem's original title was "Trigueño," and it was chosen as the only text by Pedro Mir to be included in Jorge Luis Morales' well-known anthology of *negrista* poetry from the Hispanic Caribbean. Jorge Luis Morales, ed., *Poesía afroantillana y negrista*, (1976) 3rd ed, Río Piedras, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000; p.256.

²⁹ Baeza Flores, *op. cit.*; p. 262.

³⁰ Mir, *op. cit.*; p. 20.

³¹ Torres Saillant, *op. cit.*; p. 229. As an interesting side note, it seems fitting to point out that more than fifty years after the publication of "Poema del llanto trigueño," another of the Dominican Republic's popular poets, the musician and composer Juan Luis Guerra, would dedicate one of his

The figure of the exploited worker who is not compensated fairly for his/her labor is indeed a frequently recurring leitmotif in Mir's verse. This archetypal individual is of major importance in his masterwork "Hay un país en el mundo," and is also the focus of "Bolero son," an early poem in which a group of *soneros* is presented as hard-working, underpaid musicians whose labor mainly serves to entertain the upper classes: "seis espaldas que dobla el trabajo, / sudores de ron y sangre ... / paladines del goce de otro / suplicados del ritmo y del hambre" (18).³²

The factory workers in "Poema del llanto trigueño" are victims of a similar circumstance since their labor and the goods they produce—fancy shirts and pajamas—ensure the economic success of the factory owners, but do little to alleviate their own hunger and poverty. Their monotonous work has turned them into automatons of the factory and victims of fateful secret ("secreto fatídico"), that is, that their exhausting work will get them nowhere.

The powerful image of the land being squeezed dry like a fruit underscores, furthermore, that it is not only the women in the textile mills that are being drained of their lifeblood. Indeed the speaker suggests that the entire country has become a victim of oppression and suffering. This notion is repeated in a related but more startling image when the speaker cries out in the next stanza: "¡y dondequiera ordeñada como una vaca mi tierra!" This metaphor of the Dominican Republic as a domestic beast suggests two interesting notions. First, the parallel country/cow suggests a feminine nation that is being sucked dry of its life-giving milk. But the image of the domestic animal also reveals the true nature of the relationship between the factory owners and the workers: that is, that the latter are valued for the product that they produce, but are otherwise of little importance.

The exploitation of the labor force eventually exacts a very high price from the workers: "¡Que cara piyama blanca! / Pero señor, no es la tela, / es la historia del dolor escrita en ella con sangre."³³ This notion of a national tragedy written in the blood of its victims is of central importance to Mir's text. It underscores

most popular songs to a similar theme. In "Rompiendo fuente" from his hit recording *Areito* (1992), the poetic voice also laments the precarious situation of a woman working in the capital's textile industry: "Mi mujer trabaja en zona franca/ borda sueños en mangas de camisa ... / Lleva nueve meses de ilusiones/ con mi amor preñado cada día/ y un bidón de estrellas anunciando/ que ha de ser pronto mujer paría/ ... Mi mujer ordeña la esperanza/ con pañales y almohada de hilo/ y entre corte y tela se disfraza/ como lágrima que cae al río." Juan Luis Guerra, *Areito*, Miami, Karen, 1992, Liner notes; p. 11.

³² Likewise, in "Domini" (1953) the speaker laments the sad state of the Dominican cane cutter who typically lives in misery while the owners of the *centrales* get rich: "[es] Como si / ... tu cañaveral/ y la tierra y el bohío/ fueran todos del central/ y al hambre y los goterones/ de sangre y lágrimas y /sudor agrio, en los terrones / de tu patria, para ti,/ fueran solamente" (95).

³³ Mir, *op. cit.*; p. 20. This notion of Dominican history being written in blood is one that is repeated often in Mir's poems. A similar idea is expressed in "A una carta que no ha de venir," which suggests that the truth of the people can only be expressed through their blood, sweat and suffering.

the idea that despite the high prices paid in foreign markets for the Dominican-made garments, their true cost is the individual suffering and sacrifice that go into their fabrication. The poet here directs his protest at the ignorant consumers who are unaware of and unconcerned with the providence of the items that they purchase.

Both Torres-Saillant³⁴ and Bacza Flores³⁵ have aptly noted that one of the key aspects of "Poema del llanto trigueño" is the poet's presentation of a number of contrasts, most notably the opposition between black and white, first revealed in the shirts and pajamas, but also later when the speaker make reference to white dreams and black truths: "aquí los ensueños blancos/ allá las verdades negras."³⁶ Though I agree with Torres-Saillant's observation that this color symbolism in the poem is "more social than ethnic,"³⁷ it should not be overlooked that this poem was written in an era of Dominican history that was especially rife with racial prejudice and tension that was largely created by Trujillo and his government.

In October 1937, for example, Trujillo, with the expressed plan of "deaffricanizing the country"³⁸ (cited in Knight 225), had ordered the massacre of thousands of black Haitians³⁹ who lived and worked along the Dominican border. In addition to this specific assault on the country's ethnic makeup, the years following the incident were characterized by a lengthy program of "Dominicanization"⁴⁰ that aimed to whiten the country in large part by ridding it of Haitian influence. As Franklin Knight has put it, in an effort to stamp out the African element Trujillo tried throughout his regime to "promote the Dominican Republic as a white Hispanic society"⁴¹ despite the high percentage of blacks and mulattos that made up the population.

The second part of "Poema del llanto trigueño" focuses on the specific circumstances of a *mulata* who comes to the city with hopes of gaining personal and economic freedom through her work in a textile factory. Once there, however, she is exploited both by the factory and by its owner, Niño Rivera, who, taking advantage of her country innocence, rapes and abandons her. In the final stanza of this section the poet presents the dreadful situation of this woman several years later. She has been left alone and destitute, and is still

³⁴ Torres-Saillant, *op. cit.*; p. 230.

³⁵ Bacza, *op. cit.*; p. 263.

³⁶ Mir, *op. cit.*; p. 20.

³⁷ Torres-Saillant, *op. cit.*; p. 230.

³⁸ Franklin Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990; p. 225.

³⁹ Estimates of the number of Haitians killed very greatly. Figures range from 18,000 (Moya Pons, *op. cit.*; p. 368) to 30,000 (Knight, *op. cit.*; p. 225).

⁴⁰ Moya Pons *op. cit.*; p. 369.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; p. 225.

working like a slave in the factory in an effort to provide for herself and her young daughter. Here the "llanto trigueño" comes to represent both this *mulata's* personal lament and the common suffering of the land and its people:

Con llanto de manantiales
destila sangre la tierra.
Dice a su hija que un día
las dejó Niño Rivera,
sin cena para la noche,
sin traje para la escuela,
¡y un ogro le está pagando
con un pan, veinte docenas!⁴²

The powerful metaphor of the land shedding tears and oozing blood clearly alludes to its exploitation, which can be seen as a direct result of the rapid industrialization in the country. Furthermore, this image of blood and tears pouring out of the land recalls the metaphors of the Dominican Republic as a squeezed fruit and a milked cow from the first part of the poem. A parallel is drawn here between the suffering of the land and the people, and Mir seems to imply that the injuries of both are defining characteristics that are deeply engrained in the national fabric.

The personal misfortune of the *mulata* reminds us that the true source of this particular "llanto trigueño" can be found in the many factory owners who take advantage of the women and pay their drudgery with a pittance while they line their pockets with the industry's profits. In the brief third part of the poem, Mir refers back to the scene on the *Calle del Conde* from the opening verses, but here he adds some significant changes: "Es la calle del Conde asomada a la tragedia, / aquí los ensueños blancos, / allá las verdades negras, / ¡y dondequiera un sudor rojo de sangre en mi tierra!"⁴³ The superficial appeal of the new garments is opposed to the white dreams and black truths of the national dilemma. The contrasting shades of the dreams underscores the country's drastic divisions of class and race since it is only the white/light skinned, upper-class factory owners who achieve the collective dream of financial success and personal wellbeing, while the largely colored lower class must face the "black" realities of a corrupt system that benefits so few. The final metaphor of a country sweating blood—"un sudor rojo de sangre en mi tierra"—sums up well the poem's grim depiction of a nation that is being worked to death.

Though "Poema del llanto trigueño" does not seem to exude the revolutionary or rebellious tone found in so many of Mir's poems, it clearly underscores the need for drastic change in a country that is being sapped of its lifeblood by a capitalist mentality that places more importance on profits than

⁴² Mir, *op. cit.*; p. 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*; p. 22.

on the lot of the workers. Like "A la carta que no ha de venir," this poem aims to present a faithful and troubling vision of the Dominican Republic's history of oppression. It is largely through the recurring images of sweat, tears, and bloodshed that we can see what Torres-Saillant refers to as Mir's "concern with the experience of the collective."⁴⁴ In the poems that we have analyzed, the poet's expression of a deep concern for the state of his nation and its people underscore his deep social and political commitment to their cause. Echoing what Barbara Harlow has observed in her book on literature of resistance, Mir's works demonstrate well how the role of poetry as an arena of struggle and a weapon against oppression has traditionally been a critical one. For Mir, like so many other poet's of resistance, his verse serves "both as a force for mobilizing a collective response to ... domination and as a repository for a popular memory and consciousness."⁴⁵

Thomas F. Anderson
Universidad de Notre Dame
Indiana

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⁴⁴ Torres-Saillant, *op. cit.*; p. 227.

⁴⁵ Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature*, New York, Methuen, 1987; p. 34.

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