Outbreak Without Actualization?
Notes on Martin Delany's Idea of Revolution in Blake; or The Huts of America

Iuliu RAȚIU
Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication
Faculty of Economics and Business Administration
Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
iuliu.ratiu@econ.ubbcluj.ro

Whoever says that man is born to freedom utters a sentence that has no meaning.
(Joseph de Maistre)

Abstract

This paper analyzes Martin Delaney's novel Blake; or The Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba (1859, 1861-2) *from the point of view of its main character whose quest for liberating black slaves in Antebellum America to form a diasporic African nation oscillates between his responsibility as a revolutionary hero and his duty as a husband. Deprived of his freedom and then of his wife, Blake seems to be finally ready to reclaim them both, and in doing so to reclaim the two physical bodies, his and his wife's, that define him as a revolutionary subject. Read this way, it seems that Delany's idea of revolution is inscribed by the negation of the body, both personal and conjugal, negation that is perceived as an injury whose undoing can only be performed by a revolutionary move needed to restore the humanity of the personal body and the unity of the conjugal one. By conflating the three narratives of the novel, the slave narrative, the domestic narrative and the revolution narrative, Delany shows a possible way that can sustain, move forward, and finally actualize a revolution. In the end, the family reunion narrative collapses into the revolution narrative to prove that the restoration of the domestic means the actualization of the revolution, thus placing marriage at the center of both private and public life.*

Keywords: *Martin Delaney, nineteenth century American literature, slave narrative, revolution.*

Preliminary Remarks

Negotiating the place that Martin Delany's novel *Blake; or The Huts of America* had, has or should have in the literary tradition of American culture resembles in a way both the editorial odyssey the novel has been through since selected chapters of it were published almost a century and a half ago and the

revolutionary model, present in the novel, whose analysis constitutes the main focus of this paper. Because, as one critic points out, in his novel "Delany brings rebellion to the *point of outbreak without actualizing it*" (emphasis added), I think that this seemingly failed move equally characterizes the novel's supposed incompleteness and the constant negotiation of its value (Sundquist, 1993, p. 184).[1] Thus, "outbreak without actualization" becomes the critical device that will help advance a particular reading of the revolutionary model that Delany represents in his novel.

Two key materializations of the body, the personal and the conjugal, inextricably linked throughout the novel, constitute both the "outbreak" and the "actualization" of Delany's idea of revolution in an effort to bring to literary fruition a political project that animated, to various degrees, *Blake*'s author from the 1850s onwards.[2] Given its negative denotation ("outbreak *without* actualization") and its apparent impossibility, it might seem that it is a negative/impossible subject that performs Delany's revolution. Even though Blake could be, and has been, easily read as "impossible", I argue that his revolutionary subjectivity, far from being impossible, is indeed constituted "negatively".[3] Blake lays a "scheme" and matures a "plan for a general insurrection" only at the end of "more than eighteen years […] of injury done [to him] by degrading him as a slave," when "this man Franks" sells his wife and tries to sell him too at an auction. Doubly attacked as a human being and as a man, deprived of his freedom and then of his wife, Blake seems to be finally ready to reclaim them both, and by doing so to reclaim the two physical bodies, his and his wife's, that define him as a revolutionary subject. Read this way, it seems to me that Delany's idea of revolution is inscribed by the negation of the body, both personal and conjugal, negation that is perceived as an injury whose undoing can only be performed by a

---

[1] Ironically enough, the "incompleteness of the novel" mirrors with an uncanny effect the supposedly deferred revolution once we factor in some editorial politics having to do with the fact that the novel's title is never cited in full length (*Blake; or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*) or with the "Wanted" ad editors felt the need to post in hope of recovering the missing chapters ("Beacon Press would appreciate any information pertaining to their location".)!

[2] Even though there is an almost perfect synonymy between "conjugal", "marital" or "familial", I prefer to use the term "conjugal body" not only, as I will try to explain later, because Delany himself uses it in the combination "conjugal union", but also because I believe, along with other critics, that this particular term designates better a crude reality of American slavery that stipulated that salves, as chattels, were not entitled to any form of contract.

[3] In *The Intricate Knot*, Jean Fagan Yellin calls Blake an *enigma*: "It is not remarkable that he uses a series of names (Henry Holland, Gilbert Hopewell, Jacob) to confuse his enemies, or that when he meets whites he masks himself – although rarely engaging in role-playing, he often remains silent. But is a mystery even to his family and friends." (p. 205)

revolutionary move needed to restore the humanity of the personal body and the unity of the conjugal one.

Similarly, Delany's revolutionary project, both literary and political, again inextricably linked, seems to be constructed in negation, if not in contrast. As Robyn Wiegman points out, modern slavery was made possible by predicating the black and white binary upon the transformation of the "African" into "black" "according to the epistemologies attending vision and their logics of corporeal inscription." (Wiegman, 1995, p. 4) This particular understanding of race relations makes me argue that Delany's political project was nothing less than the transformation of the "black" into "African" and that *Blake; or the Huts of America* is an example of how this transformation might be actualized. Therefore, my reading of the novel will try to show the ways in which Delany imagined a revolution that would portray the black body as a vehicle for the creation of the African nation.

The Imagined Revolution

Martin Delany's life and work are both a consequence of and a cause for his political project, a project whose detailed analysis is beyond the purpose of this paper, but whose intentional gist, I argue, is clearly exposed in the constant intersection and separation of the three narratives that frame *Blake; or the Huts of America.* Unlike other critics who break down Delany's novel only into the slave narrative and the revolutionary narrative, each dedicated to one of the two parts of the novel, I think that these two narratives are each in turn reinforced by a third, the so-called family reconstruction narrative, traditionally conflated into the slave narrative. Therefore, I believe that a fresh look at the novel, purposely (re)configured to accommodate the three narratives is going to better reflect Delany's political project.[4]

When he examines the novel mainly as a narrative of familial reconstruction, Paul Gilroy points out the importance that nationality, citizenship and masculinity played in Delany's political project:

> *He was probably the first black thinker to make the argument that the integrity of the race is primarily the integrity of its male heads of household and secondarily the integrity of the families over which they preside. The model he proposed aligned the*

[4] It is important to note that in a way all these narratives are or become interchangeable. By this I mean that the slave, familial or revolutionary narratives are in fact one and the same because running away or claiming marital rights in front of the master's property rights was always considered an act of rebellion.

> *power of the male head of household in the private sphere with the noble status of the soldier-citizen which complemented it in the public realm.* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 25)

Even though Delany's patriarchal vision is condemnable and some might say he tried his best to provide, literally, room for action to figures like Madame Cordora, I think that Gilroy's reading approximates Delany's political thoughts. The distinction made between the private and the public sphere is, I believe, the distinction Delany makes between nationality and citizenship. Without getting into a detailed legal discussion that would usefully question both the employment and deployment of terms like nationality and citizenship, I would like to suggest that Delany locates nationality within the private and identifies the citizenship within the public. By doing so, he makes it transparently clear in his novel, the family, or, to use his own term, the conjugal union becomes the site of nationality. In the wake of harsh ideological debates about the modern nation-state and the configuration of nationalisms both in Europe and the Americas beginning with the eighteenth century, this is Delany's political response to a question that would align the African nation to all the other nations. Since the modern nation-state relies heavily on identitary fictions like common language, interest, history, geography and most importantly, at least in Europe, ethnicity, Delany's genius in imagining an African nation, which I will discuss in greater detail later, becomes evident not only when he opens up the institution of marriage to unite former slaves or people of different races and classes, but also when the author decides to make personal pain and loss the trigger to set in motion nation-building. Hence, Blake's ability in reconstructing his family becomes the supreme test of citizenship.

If Blake, as it seems, performs well his assigned role of husband, things are much more complicated when it comes for him to act like a citizen-soldier. Definitely, in Delany's description, Blake, even as a Commander in Chief of the Army of Emancipation, is not what might be called a soldier. But this does not mean that he cannot be a good tactician in setting up a guerrilla war. Moreover, either because Delany had a hard time making his characters fight for citizenship, or because he in fact did literally actualize the revolution in the last eight chapters of the novel that had never been recovered, I guess Blake's strength lies in what he intents to do, rather than in what he does not do. Thus, bringing power, war power, as the only means to achieve citizenship speaks volumes for Delany's political ideas. On the one hand, there is Fredrick Douglass's and other abolitionists' idea of integration; on the other hand, there is Delany's idea of separation from a racist political establishment. Whereas, in strict political terms, Douglass favors "peace talks", so to speak, Delany, even though he does not quite engage it, favors war.

In this bellicose context several questions arise. For instance, against whom should Delany, or Blake for that matter, be fighting? How and to what purpose? In some respects, critics believe the answers to these questions are fairly clear. Eric Sundquist and Gregg Crane argue that *Blake*, along with some of Delany's political writings and actions, reflects a political response to critical and questionable, in hindsight, decisions that immediately preceded the Civil War. (Sundquist, 1993, p. 184; Crane, 2002, pp. 148-157) Thus, the compromise laws, including the Fugitive Slave Law from 1850, and Judge Taney's *Dred Scott Decision* from 1857 spelled out a sinister truth that nobody dared to legally engage before, by saying that blacks were inferior, and therefore justly enslaved:

> *Altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduce to slavery for his benefit.* (*Dred Scott v Sandford,* 60 US 383 (1857), at 407 quoted in Williams, 1991, p. 162)

The decision, quoted in the novel both by whites and blacks, made Delany react vehemently and literally want to disassociate from the white race both politically and socially, hence the choice of Cuba for the African nation and insurrection as the only means of getting it. As Sundquist points out, Cuba comes half way through between emigrationists' ideas of colonizing Africa and the setting of an all-black empire in the tropics. Moreover, at that time, Cuba seems to have become a symbolical territory that caught everybody's attention. In the wake of San Domingo, Cuba represented the epitome of any plantation: slaveholders from the South wanted its annexation for economical reasons and for fear of becoming "Africanized", while black intellectuals like Delany saw it as a possible place of resistance and nation-building given the frequent slave uprisings from the early 1840s.

Thus, with a memorable turn of the screw, Delany tries to fictionally implement his political project by replacing the not so tacit consent of Taney's decision with the not so democratic concept of power. As Crane points out, Delany's political move was rather positivistic in order to counteract the failed universalism of the American Constitution. It is only by willingly achieving power, Delany believes, that the African Americans will ever be capable of ending the injuries inflected upon them by an unjust and racist system.

Seen in this way, Delany's political project can be subsumed to a model of bourgeois revolution. Both ideological and economic, a revolution of this type, would undermine the master / salve binary and would bring a capitalist cure to

black underdevelopment. (Peterson, 1992, p. 574) As Peterson points out, Delany's political agenda is a masculine capitalist plot,

> *that preached slave insurrection in the South, a black takeover of Caribbean plantation economies, and the development of black commodity and capitalism on an international scale. The novel fictionalizes a political agenda that Delany had been working out in journalistic form throughout the 1840s and '50s: his call, in the event of a US attempt to annex Cuba, for African Americans to intervene and for enslaved Cubans to revolt; and his promotion of Niger Valley settlements by African-American men who would develop cotton production, capitalize Africa to compete with US cotton production, and encourage the emergence of the black man as capitalist.* (Peterson, 1992, p. 575)

Seen in capitalist terms, Delany's revolution makes perfect sense. For once, we can understand better Blake's double role in the first part of the novel, both as an insurgent and as a field anthropologist dedicated openly to the "inspection of affairs" ("Who owns this place?", "How many slaves has he?", "What allowances have you?", "How late do you work?" etc.). As some critics point out, the first part of the novel literally maps the situation of slavery in antebellum America not only to appeal to the readers' sympathy for the condition of African Americans, but to convince them that their underdevelopment, to use Peterson's word, calls for immediate action. In fact Delany's call foreshadows the uplifting efforts of the postbellum and Reconstruction era in which a degraded race needs to by uplifted. Thus, the capitalist plot becomes part of the social and political revolution that Delany imagines in order to save the race. As Gilroy points out Delany's idea of black survival

> *Depends upon forging a new means to build alliances above and beyond petty issues like language, religion, skin color, and to a lesser extent gender. The best way to create the new metacultural identity which the new black citizenship demands was provided by the abject condition of the slaves and ironically facilitated by the transnational structure of the slave trade itself.* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 28)

Thus, since black survival is at stake, there is no wonder why Delany chooses to employ three concurrent narratives in order to make it work.[5] The slave narrative follows the classical pattern but with a particular, Delany-style, twist. Blake, a "decoyed" slave, runs away not only to become free, but also to set an example for other slaves of the ways in which liberation can be achieved and, most importantly, to reunite with his wife. The fact that Blake only becomes a runaway in an effort to reclaim matrimonial status and ends up doing other things in

[5] However, by the time Blake finds Maggie, arguably the real purpose of his coming to Cuba seems to be forgotten when faced with the "question in political arithmetic": "I have come to Cuba to help free my race." (p. 195)

between speaks volumes for the relationship that Delany envisions between marriage, freedom and political recognition. Similarly, the revolutionary narrative negotiates a metacultural identity all the way from grass-root insurrection to full-blown revolutionary war. Whether the insurrection and the revolution succeed or not becomes irrelevant since Blake, with his interchangeable roles and names, professes continuously what he knows best – he is a sailing master capable of both doing and undoing the slave trade. As he informs Placido, they "must have a vessel at [their] command before [they] make a strike." (Delany, 1970, p. 198).[6] Finally, the family narrative, as corollary of the other two, is used by Delany to both set in motion and contain the revolution. Thus, the conjugal union upon which black survival literally depends becomes the bold political statement Delany wants to make. Moreover, the finality for which Delany uses these three narratives becomes obvious at the end of the first part of the novel, in the chapter "Happy Greeting." (Delany, 1970, pp. 152-7). When the fugitives, Henry, Andy, Ambrose and Ali, arrive in Canada, "da lan' where black folks is free," as Andy exclaims, the narrator is quick in reminding us that even there, "by a systematic course of policy and artifice," the blacks' rights where denied. Still, Canada is better than slavery, so Blake's first care is to purchase "fifty acres of land with improvements suitable, and provide for the schooling of the children until he should otherwise order." For the first time in his narrative, Delany portrays Blake as the head of a real household by making sure that the newly freed slaves are economically secure.

More than that, before leaving them, Blake warns them "you must succeed, as nothing can separate you; your strength depending upon your remaining together." And because this remaining together means matrimony, three couples are happily united in a ceremony that makes the young wives "to vent sobs of sympathy and joy." Very much like the "outbreak without actualization," the sobbing joy summarizes Delany's idea of revolution. The conjugal unions thus performed hint toward a revolution that by the time it gets to be enacted, it has already taken place. By eluding the Provincial regulations (the gentleman mulatto turned clergymen can officiate the marriages exactly because, by not being white and free, but "panting runaway slaves," Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey do not have to require a license and wait for a congregation report in order to get married as the laws would call for) and by alluding to the "sorrowful

[6] Next to Paul Gilroy's research on the Black Atlantic, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's work emphasizes the importance of ships in constituting proletarian revolutions across the Atlantic in their book *The Many-Headed Hydra.*

and hopeless union" of Mammy Judy and Daddy Joe and of Henry and Maggie, the three marriages symbolize the end of oppression:

Daughters of Zion! Awake from thy sadness!
Awake for they foes shall oppress thee no more.
Bright o'er the hills shines the day star of gladness
Arise! For the night of they sorrow is o'er.

As if it were enough to get married or to claim the right of a husband in order to end oppression, Delany's revolutionary move pertains to a strange mix of messianism and original interpretation of the law, in which a Moses-like Blake would lead his people out of bondage in an effort to reunite whit his wife and bring about an African nation as a guarantee of both marital and legal rights.

The fact that Blake cannot leave Canada before overlooking the marriage of the three couples is also relevant for Delany's method of writing the revolution. If, arguably enough, the conjugal union needs to be broken just to be remade into a marriage, the African nation, after it is fully constituted, as I will show later, needs to be put under attack in order to engage the fight for political recognition. Conversely, for a marriage to be celebrated, it needs to subvert the law or at least to show that under given circumstances the law is not binding: because the law was made for white and free citizens, the "panting runaway slaves", being neither white, nor free, can marry one another without having to go through a fully legal procedure. Paradoxically, though, their marriage symbolizes the end of oppression exactly because, by granting them their freedom, it puts them in a position in which their union is law binding. In other words, they do not run to Canada to become free so they could marry; rather, they marry there so they could become free and this represents the shift from the (runaway) body to the (married) citizen.

Therefore, it becomes obvious, I believe, that, as Sundquist points out, Delany's interests do not go only towards revolution, but also towards the founding of a modern black state. (Sundquist, 1993, p. 204) The fact that the body in all its materiality is placed at the center of this project suggests that Delany's idea of revolution envisions the transformation of the black body into the black citizen by way of providing an almost legal template in which the body needs to be saved and then protected by means of conjugal union, within the confines of the family, and by means of the nation, that is, within the family at large. The transformation of the slave into citizen seems to be the only way in which the survival of the race can be successfully achieved.

The Black Body

Prior to his decoying into slavery, Blake was decoyed into producing slavery:

> *When I left my father's house at the age of seventeen, I went to sea on what I believed to be a Spanish man-of-war. I was put as apprentice, stood before the mast, the ship standing east for the Western coast of Africa, as I thought for the Mediterranean. On arriving on the coast, she put into the Bight of Benin near Wydah; was freighted with slaves – her true character being but too well known – when she again put to sea, standing as I thought for Cuba, but instead, put into Key West, where she quickly disposed of her cargo to Americans. My expression of dissatisfaction at being deceived offended the commander, who immediately sold me to a noted trader on the spot – one Colonel Franks, of Mississippi, near Natchez.* (Delany, 1970, p. 193)

This is in a nutshell the summary of the novel, but *in reverse*, as Blake, "the lost boy of Cuba," recounts his story to Placido before laying down the reason for his return, "I have come to Cuba to help free my race; and that which I desire here to do, I've done in another place." (Delany, 1970, p. 195)[7]

It is surprising, to say the least, how convoluted the domestic plot and the revolution plot become in Delany's account of Blake's return to Cuba and, as if, this would not be enough, he needs to tie in the slavery plot as well! But, I argue, this seems to be the only way in which the author is capable of bringing the reclamation of the body, as a principle of his revolution, to the forefront because, in going all the way back from Natchez to Cuba, Blake performs a triple recovery, by reclaiming his personal freedom, restoring his family and "revolutionizing" those bodies he once helped to be enslaved. In this respect, even though one would expect him to move forward, Blake is actually going the other way, thus partially explaining the difficulties Delany had in actualizing the revolution.

But there is no doubt as far as its outbreak is concerned. When Maggie declines the sexual advances of Colonel Franks, in an act of revenge, "the noted trader" sells her, having no consideration for his wife's opposition, nor for anybody else's feelings. This action comes as a blow for Maggie's husband who perceives it yet as another personal injury, after his enslavement, directed, this time at his conjugal body. Thus, injury, once revived and once removed in a vicarious position, inscribes the revolutionary subject determining Henry to pursue a threefold mission: his liberation, reunion with his wife and slave emancipation. The revolution that begins with the annihilation of the domestic lives of the

[7] If, in Foucauldian terms, racism is revolutionary discourse put *in reverse*, then Blake's return to Cuba, as a return to freedom, can be read as Delany's effort of undoing racism.

enslaved can only succeed with the restoration of the domestic at its highest level, that of the nation. In other words, to become sites of liberation both the body and the domestic need to be put in question first and literally destroyed. A look at the configuration and reconfiguration of the body and the domestic will show what it takes to undergo the transformation from a slave to a spouse and from the conjugal union to marriage.

Since as a slave the African American is always already constituted as a subject, when it comes to black subjectivity the majority of critics tend to agree that black subjectivity is a consequence of the body, not particularly because of its color, but, as Robyn Wiegman points out, because of its visibility. Even though in Delany's case visibility plays an important role, there is a shift from color to degradation as a signifier of the black body.[8] As Robert Reid-Pharr suggests, before becoming black and representative, the African American body had to be "'worked' and produced in private," therefore physically degraded and humanly downgraded. (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 117) Moreover, its repression can only be undone by repossession, thus making the body a site of privileged meaning:

> *Delany['s] particular genius was his ability to narrativize the repression of (this) black body while continuing to privilege it as a site of meaning. […] [This is] Delany's attempt to narrate the proper relation of body, community, and subjectivity – one in which the marriage relation is understood to bring together the individuals precisely through ministration to bodies. […] Delany better than almost all his peers was able to imagine a world in which the emphasis was placed squarely on the body, in which a man might literally grab hold of his destiny, his subjectivity, and make something of them, something that could be touched.* (Reid-Pharr, 1999, pp. 116-117)

Seen in this way, the body as destiny brings meaning to Delany's idea of revolution centered on the survival of the body. Tortured, as it happens to Maggie turned Lotty in Cuba, and even killed, as is the case with the Rube, the young boy whipped to death by Captain Grason to test Judge Ballard Southern transformation, the black body can only survive if a man grabs hold of his destiny and understands that, no matter how personal, that destiny needs to have collective representation.

The logics of pain and Nietzschean resentment that Wendy Brown talks about in her essay "Wounded Attachments" referring to the current, post civil rights debates about the cultural aspects of identity politics are also relevant here to show how *Blake* can negotiate the predicament of a body that can only attain

[8] When Blake interrogates some young women if they would rather work in the gin or in the field, they "prefer" the field "Case den da wouldn't be so many wite plantehs come an' look at us, like we was a show!" (p. 77) To say the least, this answer represents an almost perfect combination of visibility, color, and degradation!

political recognition through the ministration of other bodies in marriage. Because "no state legislature ever seriously entertained the thought of encroaching upon the master's rights by legalizing slave marriages," Blake's odyssey of recovering his wife becomes also a quest for a political system that would recognize their union. (Stampp, 1956, p. 198) As Reid-Pharr notes, Delany's understanding that

> *the black man must run in order to establish himself as a modern subject stems from a more basic belief that black subjectivity must not come at the expense of normative modes of black corporeality. One had always to drag one's body along on any foray into civic life.* (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 115)

Delany makes Blake aware that his civic life depends on his marital life, so when he decides to run away in a typical slave narrative, Blake needs to break the normative modes of black corporeality. Canada or a Northern state are not enough for him since, wifeless, he is not yet free. The new reconfiguration of his subjectivity needs to incorporate his wife too, so after he overlooks the marriages of Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey, he institutes himself as the head of the newfound household by giving orders of how to live and work and take care of each other.

Moreover, when he advises them to stay together he prefigures his efforts of bringing together, at a much larger scale, the bigger family of the African nation in Cuba. Hoping to find his wife there or the avenge her death, he transforms himself into a citizen-soldier, "By the instincts of husband, I'll have her if living! If dead, by impulses of a Heaven-inspired soul, I'll avenge her loss unto death!" (Delany, 1970, p. 157) Husband and warrior, the new black body mirrors, in all legitimacy, the interests and affairs of the whites, as critics point out, in an effort to reconstruct himself into a bourgeois subject. Like the slaveholders and the slave traders at the beginning of the novel, Blake knows that "self-interest" comes before the "general affairs of the government":

> *They were few in number, and appeared little concerned about the affairs of the general government. Though men of intelligence, their time and attention appeared to be entirely absorbed in an adventure of self-interest.* (Delany, 1970, p. 3)

Ironically, the refitting of the ship, that causes the first meeting of the American and Cuban interests, can be read also as the "refitting" of the black body. The name change and the refurbishing signal exactly the interests of the whites, the "Merchantman" turned "Vulture" symbolizes the shift from the understanding of the black body from object of trade to object of prey, consequently making the attacks and injuries on the bodies more powerful and thus forcing Blake to take action against annihilation.

Once again, Delany's radical political project is made clear. More than anything, Delany envisions a black capitalist state by promoting complete emancipation and economic independence. The foundation of such an African nation would be a three step process: slave insurgency in the Southern part of the United States, the undermining of the slave trade, and the establishing of a black state in Cuba able to compete economically and politically with other states. For this, in the novel, Delany made Blake, as a possible leader of the would be state, pursue his very personal interest of recovering his wife and gaining his freedom, while at the same time preparing him and other for the final endeavor, that of the creation of a general government that would overlook the transformation of Cuba from a plantation to an economically viable state.

Before tackling the political negotiation of the African nation, in which as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Delany proposed the transformation of the "black" into "African" in order to accommodate citizens of different classes, colors and religions, let me point out once again the importance that the black body and marriage played in the realization of Delany's political goals. As Reid-Pharr, often mentioned in this part of the paper, suggests

> *Delany's aesthetic [is] drawn from two distinct philosophies of corporeal existence in which, on the one hand, violence stands against the body in order to enact a fantastic universe, a world outside the world, while on the other, it works to maintain prior social distinctions, particular distinctions between bodies.* (Reid-Pharr, 1999, p. 114)

In my reading of this quote, in aesthetic terms that hardly represent the crude and inhuman reality of the black body, Delany locates violence as the site that enacts a fantastic universe outside the world, but also helps bring this universe inside the world for political recognition. As a Moses-like figure, Blake outdoes the other Moses-like figures (like Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner) and Moses himself by being allowed to finally step into the "Promised Land". Very much like Toussaint L'Ouverture knew, Blake knows better than "standing still and seeing the salvation." Once he realizes that his salvation depends on himself and on his ability in reuniting with his wife, Blake starts so spread the word around and fulfills his duty of husband and soldier citizen in order to bring an African nation to fruition.

Only in the end it becomes obvious that Delany's use of the black body to advance conjugal unity is representative for the author's intention of locating the family at the center of a bourgeois construction of black subjectivity. Disembodied, raped, tortured and killed, the black body is actualized inside marriage, only to become disembodied again within the larger construct of the

nation. If once found and recovered, the black body can disappear, as it happens with Lotty transformed Maggie again, only to be then summoned again, through violence, in order to fight for political recognition, as it happens to both Placido and Ambrocina Cordora when they are attacked on the street. But how is the national black subjectivity constructed?

The African Nation

I argue that marriage, as opposed to or as a consequence of conjugal union, a certain type of religion ("No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but he who owns us as his children will we serve" (Delany, 1970, pp. 258)) and African / Ethiopian, as opposed to "black", are the main ingredients of Delany's African nation and the main pillars of constructing the national black subjectivity whose main political purpose, in Blake's words, was "war upon the whites." But even though the war does not seem to go beyond its declarative intentions, its undertones reveal a clear economic stance. Although economics seems to be the whites' main concern in the novel, Delany makes it clear that money, therefore capital, is the only factor that can bring freedom and political recognition. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Blake saved and "borrowed" enough money from Colonel Franks to be able to buy land for the fugitives, supposedly buy his wife from her masters or buy the ferryman's horses and kill them so his followers can lose his trace. Moreover, "the unmistaking evidence of a shining gold eagle" seems to be as good as any pass that will allow him to move from state to state. It goes, then, without saying, that from the start Delany considers economic independence as a premise on which he can safely build his idea of the nation around marriage, religion and Africanism.

Similarly, marriage, like money, becomes a premise and a vehicle for nation building. After Delany dedicates almost forty chapters to Blake's quest for his wife, once the couple is reunited, Maggie is disposed of in a matter of several pages. Careful to entrust his money to the safekeeping of his wife, before sailing to Africa, Blake also makes sure to place her in his father's house, but introduces her "as the wife of an old friend."[9] In a roundabout way, by constantly bringing

[9] Because the situation of Blake's father, a tobacco manufacturer and member of the Grand Council, remains unclear throughout the novel, the fact that Blake entrusts his wife with his money and then takes her to his father's house is full of irony and double entendres. On the one hand, I think this situation is representative for the interdependence between American slave traders and Cuban manufacturers in which, as from one father to the other, Franks is literally paying Blacus Senior for once enslaving his son; on the other hand, since Blake will never reveal his or his wife's real identity to his father, the situation becomes important for Delany to show that, by uniting the

marriage to the forefront to then leaving it slip back, Delany is emphasizing the role that marriage should have in the political realm. As I mentioned earlier, for Charles and Polly, Andy and Clara, Eli and Ailcey marriage was a legal way for freedom. But also, in the case of Gofer Gondolier and Abyssa Soudan and General Juan Montego and Madame Cordora, the unity of marriage becomes the warrant of their political ability:

> *The consummation of conjugal union is the best security for political relations, and he who is incapable of negotiating to promote his own personal advancement might not be trustworthy as the agent of other's interest; and the fitness for individuals for positions of public import, may not be misjudged by their doings in the private affairs of life.* (Delany, 1970, p. 274)

At the intersection of personal advancement and collective interests, marriage collapses the distinction between private and public for the sake of citizenship. As Gilroy, quoted earlier, suggests the soldier-citizen proves his worth as head of the household. That is why, separated from his wife, Blake needs to recover her in order to engage political fight. Moreover, in Delany's understanding, marriage is the prerequisite of the "great and desirable end to be attained," which is the revolution that never comes. Or, perhaps, marriage is the revolution in which case Blake's need to find his wife and the possibility of both slave and aristocrat of marring at the same time become clear political statements for a national union in which language, religion, class and skin color should bear no relevance.

In addition to marriage, religion plays an equal role in the negotiation of the new nation. The shift from false preaching to revolutionary slogans and the transformation of the slave into Messiah characterizes the tension between the religion of the salve owners used to further oppress the slaves and the religion of the new black nation. In a way, the creation of a new marital paradigm through the transformation of the conjugal union into marriage mirrors the reconfiguration of a religious sentiment that favors action over contemplation. Blake's dissatisfaction with religion is never made clearer than in the arguments he has with his in laws over the action he should take to counter Franks's decision to sell his wife, "I once did believe in religion, but now I have no confidence in it. My faith has been wrecked on the stony hearts of such pretended Christians as Stephen Franks, while passing through the stormy sea of trouble and oppression." "Standing still and seeing the salvation" does not work for Blake anymore because

two households, Blake is capable of making a better one managing in the end to have husband, wife and child together.

> *"Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation." So you see, Daddy Joe, that this is very different to standing still. [...] I tell you once and for all, Daddy Joe, that I'm not only "losing" but I have altogether lost my faith in the religion of my oppressors.* (Delany, 1970, pp. 18, 21)

Because the way in which ever since before Delany and long after James Baldwin critics and intellectuals have constantly discussed the relationship between the religion of the oppressors and the oppressed seems secondary for the purpose of this paper, I would like to concentrate in what follows on the specific touch that religion got when discussed in the Grand Council. By doing this, I am not overlooking Delany's travail in imagining a slave insurrection shaped in accordance with a messianic pattern in which, very much like Moses, Blake brings his people out of bondage and very much like Christ wants to have them reborn into respected citizens; rather, instead on concentrating on religion as it is perceived and modified on the way the "Promised Land", I am more interested in what happens once in the "Promised Land". Furthermore, I consider that Delany imagined the proceedings of the Grand Council in tone with the proceedings of the Continental Congress that declared the independence of the thirteen colonies in 1776. Without going into further details that might support a certain resemblance between the two bodies let me just point out a major difference: while the real body successfully managed in drafting and proclaiming a declaration of independence, the imagined constituent body only succeeded in declaring a war that did not get to be fought. Other than that, the itinerant council, meeting both in Madame Cordora's attic and drawing rooms as well as in Carolus Blacus's house, is a good example of representative democracy and helps us understand Delany's philosophy of the African nation.

But there's textual evidence to support the resemblance of the Grand Council to another historical political constituency much closer to Delany's political project. When the Council meets for the second time, its secretary Placido compares their assembly to that of Santo Domingo, "The like of tonight's gathering, save in a neighboring island years before any of us had an existence, in this region is without a parallel." (Delany, 1970, p. 257) By directly referencing Santo Domingo and indirectly referring to United States, as I argue, Delany portrays a political body that would outdo both and give representation to all, as it did not happen before. Thus, it comes as no surprise that religion is the first thing the members of the Grand Council get to discuss once they are constituted.

At Madame Cordora's asking got an explanation concerning the doctrines of the "Romish Church" and other formalities that might objectionable, Blake "set[s] the matter right:"

> *I, first a Catholic, and my wife bred as such, are both Baptists; Abyssa Soudan, once a pagan, was in her own native land converted to the Methodist or Wesleyan belief; Madame Sabastina and family are Episcopalians; Camina, from long residence out of the colony, a Presbyterian, and Placido is a believer in the Swedenborgian doctrines. We have all agreed to know no sects, no denomination, and but one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior as an intercessor for our sins; but one God, who is and must be our acknowledged common father. No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but He who owns us as his children will we serve. The whites accept of nothing but that which promotes their interests and happiness, socially, politically and religiously. They would discard a religion, tear down a church, overthrow a government, or desert a country, which did not enhance their freedom.* (Delany, 1970, p. 258)

Because every time they want to make an argument, the members of the Council tend to advance their points in speeches, it is revelatory to understand the pattern that Delany wants them to follow. There seems to always be a three steps paradigm. First, as the case is here, the speaker tries to give voice to everybody present, so that each constituent party (irrespective of color, of course except for whites, class, or gender) feels like they are represented. Baptists, Catholics, pagans, Methodists etc. are all summoned up only to be molded then into an all-encompassing common-sense denomination. Finally, in the third step, there is always a reference to whites, that would legitimize the newly formed body. The keyword, here like everywhere else, is self-interest, which once reclaimed from the whites is then employed as the moving forward principle of the new congregation. Thus, they feel empowered to "tear down a church, overthrow a government, or desert a country, which did not enhance their freedom." Moreover, because they are many and the whites are few, they are entitled to found a new church that would degrade them no more, as it happened when Henry was auctioned inside the church, to establish a new government that would represent them, and to desert a country and initiate a new one.

The same move is clearly distinct when yet again Madame Cordora questions Placido's assertion they are all Ethiopians and the answer comes as no surprise: "I hold that colored persons, whatever the complexion, can only obtain an equality with the whites by the descendants of Africa of unmixed blood." Still unconvinced, Madame Cordora asks further clarifications: "That is a positive admission that the mixed bloods are inferior to the pure-blooded descendants of

Africa." To sort this dilemma and to accommodate a common ground between the white and black divide, Delany has Placido follow his argument:

> *The whites assert the natural inferiority of the African as a race: upon this they premise their objections, not only to blacks, but all who have any affinity with them. You see this position taken by the high Court of America, which declares that persons having African blood in their veins have no rights that white men are bound to respect. Now how are the mixed bloods ever to rise? The thing is plain; it requires no explanation. The instant that an equality of the blacks with the whites is admitted, we being the descendants of the two, must be acknowledged the equals of both. Is not this clear?* (Delany, 1970, p. 261)

This explanation of a plain course of action, the blacks' emancipation, ironically turns the Taney's *Dred Scott* decision against itself. By fighting for equality, Delany considers that the political result, the African capitalist nation would eventually be capable of conferring every right to its citizens. As Blake argues, the black and those who have any affinity with them need to act for themselves to prove, as Placido suggests,

> *Not only that the African race is now the principal producer of the greater part of the luxuries of enlightened countries, as various fruits, rice, sugar, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, spices, and tobacco; but that in Africa their native land, they are among the most industrious people in the world, highly cultivating the lands, and that ere long their country must hold the balance of commercial power by supplying as they now do as foreign bondmen in strange lands, the greatest staple commodities in demand, as rice, coffee, sugar, and especially cotton, from their own native shores, the most extensive native territory, climate soil, and greatest number of (almost the only natural produces) inhabitants in the universe; and that race and country will at once rise to the first magnitude in estimation of the greatest nations on earth, from their dependence upon them for the great staples from which is derived their national wealth.* (Delany, 1970, pp. 261-2)

Even though some critics read in passages like this long quote Delany's emigrationist policy, I tend to agree to Paul Gilroy that this Pan-African verve denotes more than that. In fact, Delany's novel is one of the first best-supported arguments favoring the black Atlantic, in which the author used preponderantly economic reasons for the creation of an African nation. Delany's capitalist nationalist discourse, thus, heavily relies on the wealth the African nation could have, had it not been for other nations to exploit this wealth by using its members as "bondmen in strange lands."

This effort of engineering an African nation, across the Atlantic, a nation that would counteract the white dominance is Delany's effort of saving the black race. Because, in line with his political thinking, emancipation was not enough, Delany

tried his best in proving in his novel a possible way of achieving his goals. The new black nation would not only challenge the white domination from an economic point of view but would entirely shift the understanding of race in an almost essentialist endeavor of unmaking the "black" and reclaiming the "African". As Robyn Wiegman points out the slaveholders managed to legitimize slavery by contrasting their whiteness to the blackness of the African bodies they smuggled and coerced into oppression. When all the African people, irrespective of their native language, social class, or land of origin, became "black", mockingly referencing the United States' base line "E Pluribus Unum", they were already enslaved. In contrast, Delany envisions an African nation that would reclaim its diversity and reclaim its unity in a multicultural and transnational manner. One becomes many again exactly because, in places like Cuba, they are the many. This is also Blake's feeling when he realizes that he needs his wife's body in order to constitute himself inside a conjugal body that would guarantee his freedom and power of action. Similarly, he realizes that he cannot literally be free without the others who are degraded and enslaved. Consequently, Delany doubles the family narrative with a revolutionary narrative in order to present the importance that family, especially marriage, has in the configuration of the new nation. Matters of religion and political representation, then, become the best arguments that would legitimize a revolutionary war as the foundation of the new nation. The fact that the war is always deferred plays little importance here because, as it has been argued so far, the revolution, always imminent and contained inside the marital unit and political representation of the Grand Council, reaches its goals by mere evidence. It is as if, once they found it in their better self-interest to organize themselves, religiously, politically, and economically, the members of the Grand Council, as representatives of the African nation, already became a force that would have been hard to reckon with. Their sheer numerical power ("we're many on this island and they are few") puts the actualization of the revolution within reach!

Final Remarks

If the actualization of revolution is within reach, then Sundquist's phrase – "Delany brings rebellion to the point of outbreak without actualizing it" – quoted at the beginning of this paper seems to bear relevance to the saying that the road to victory is more important than the victory itself. Therefore, if Delany's revolution succeeded or not, plays little importance for the conclusions of this paper. Borrowing some features from his character, whom many critics say is Delany's literary self-portrait, the author of *Blake* resembles Moses who showed his people

the way out of bondage, guided them through the desert, and accompanied them to the "Promised Land", whose entrance he was denied. Similarly, it can be argued that his revolution falls into the pattern of Exodus, by pulling slaves out of oppression, showing them how to fight, and then leaving them on their own to actualize it by entering the "Promised Land". Thus, I believe, that irrespective of its goals, the means of revolution and the ways in which they help its resolution are the best place to look for if we want to understand Delany's political project as this has been laid down in *Blake*. Using the black body, personal and conjugal, as the vehicle for actualizing revolution is Delany's most original idea.

Given the time and political conditions in which Delany wrote his novel and factoring in his emigrationist policy, the goals of Delany's revolution are easily discernible. On the one hand, he aims at the construction of a black subjectivity as much as possible disassociated with slavery, while on the other he literally envisions an African nation that would undo the harms and consequences of slave trade. A separationist, much unlike Fredrick Douglass with whom he worked at the beginning of their activism, Delany was the proponent of a black capitalist state that would equal and challenge the white state. A firm believer in self-interest and self-reliance, Delany called for an economic, legal and nationalist war that as Carla Peterson points out, would put an end to black underdevelopment. Others also argue for the understanding of Delany's politics as geared toward the survival and regeneration of the black race. Therefore, the foundation of a black state, in a three-step process, would accomplish all of these goals. As the novel suggest, a slave insurrection in the South would lead the way for the creation of a Pan African state in Cuba, thus transforming the plantation into a real wealth-producing bourgeois enterprise.

If the goals are clear, the means of achieving them are less so. On the one hand, either way one looks at it, Delany's novel seems almost strategic in showing the way, but never quite getting there; on the other hand, because the novel falls short of presenting the outcome of the revolution it portrays, various critics felt the need, like I just did laying down the goals Delany wants to achieve, to concentrate more on a probable outcome of the revolution, sacrificing the means for the ends. Being understood that the novel is complex, unevenly written, exposing the conditions of slavery in antebellum America, a capitalist black state would uplift the race, marriage and religion are important, most critics seem to have been more concerned with the *why*, and for good reason, the revolution was needed. While I do not disagree with any of the critical remarks mentioned in this paper, I was more interested in understanding if there is the *how*, an instrumental instance that

would incorporate the *why*s. Perhaps this is not the best terminology to refer to a literary work and this paper might not have found the proper way of dealing with such a subject matter, but what I tried me best to prove was the connection that I believe Delany made between the injured body and the possible actualization of the revolution. Whether or not Delany placed the black body, in all its materiality, at the center of the novel and, most importantly, constructed the revolution around this body, personal, conjugal, and political is not clear, but there is enough evidence to prove that marriage, which is one of the sites where the body is realized, is an important vehicle in advancing Delany's political project. Moreover, by conflating the three narratives of the novel, the slave narrative, the domestic narrative and the revolution narrative, Delany shows a possible way that can sustain, move forward, and finally actualize a revolution. In other words, I believe that bodily injury inscribes the revolutionary subject in the sense that Blake starts an insurrection only after his conjugal body was jeopardized. Equally important, the family reunion narrative collapses into the revolution narrative to prove that the restoration of the domestic means the actualization of the revolution, thus placing marriage at the center of both private and public life. In the end, the new private and public lives are reconfigured outside and against the white master's touch. And this black family and this black nation are the realization of Delany's idea of revolution.e.

References:

1. Crane, G. D. (2002). *Race, Citizenship, and Law in America*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
2. Delany, M. R. (1970). *Blake; or The Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba*. Floyd J. Miller (Ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.
3. Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic, Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
4. Peterson, C. L. (1992). Capitalism, Black (Under)development, and the Production of the African-American Novel in the 1850s. *American Literary History*, *4*(4), Winter.
5. Reid-Pharr, R. (1999). *Conjugal Union, The Body, The House, and the Black American*. New York: Oxford UP.
6. Stampp, K. (1956). *The Peculiar Institution*. New York: Knopf.
7. Sundquist, E. J. (1993). *To Wake the Nations, Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.

8. Wiegman, R. (1995). *American Anatomies, Theorizing Race and Gender*. Durham: Duke UP.
9. Williams, P. (1991). *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Cambridge: Harvard UP.
10. Yellin, J. F. (1972). *The Intricate Knot: Black Figures in American Literature, 1776-1863*. New York: New York UP.