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# Nancy Morejón, Nicolás Guillén, and the Still-Necessary Marronage in Contemporary Cuba

**Odette Casamayor-Cisneros**

Translated from the Spanish by Antonio López and the author

And when you waken from your dream,  
your lineage continued,  
Shake yourself off, hit, bite, and kill, you too,  
for you now fly and live in your rightful place  
—Nancy Morejón, “Hablando con una culebra” (Talking to a snake)

The profusion of criticism on Nancy Morejón has dealt with her poetry more than her essayistic works, even if, as a part of the latter, *Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén* (Nation and *mestizaje* in Nicolás Guillén) is a key work for understanding the totality of her production.

This book examines the nationalist thought of Nicolás Guillén, from his exaltation of Cuban Africanness in the 1920s to arriving at the racially hybrid understanding of the nation, which he would increasingly identify with the global proletariat, destined for liberation through the revolution of 1959.

Published in 1982, two years after receiving an award from the Cuban Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC), at a time that solidifies the valorization of blackness in the composition of the nation and reaffirms an inseparable and foundational relationship between the nation and *mestizaje*—“two sides of the same coin, cause and effect”<sup>1</sup>—*Nación y mestizaje* sealed Morejón’s inclusion among the *intelligentsia* aligned with revolutionary ideology. The publication of the book coincided with the end of the publishing silence imposed by the authorities on her poetry between 1967 and 1979. At that time, the Revolution—declared socialist in 1961—was increasingly conforming to the Soviet doctrine, and Morejón suffered reprisals for having been a part of the El Puente group, dissolved in 1965. Nevertheless, during those years she continued writing essays for print outlets and an ethnohistorical monograph of testimonies about Nicaro, an important nickel extraction and processing center, with the historian Carmen Gonce (*Lengua de pájaro* [Bird’s tongue], published in 1971). After producing *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (A compilation of texts on Nicolás Guillén) in 1972 and then *Nación y mestizaje* in 1982, she was officially recognized and her poems were published once again. In 2001, finally, Nancy Morejón won the National Prize for Literature.

## Marronage and Intersectionality in Nancy Morejón: Intimate Perspectives

In essays and interviews, Morejón repeats elegiac phrases about Guillén, officially named National Poet of Cuba, particularly celebrating the coherence between his artistic and political vanguardism. It is also rare the essay or interview in which the writer

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<sup>1</sup> “Caras de una misma moneda, causa y efecto”; Nancy Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1982), 325.

does not express her total adherence to the Cuban Revolution—even if some criticisms of the persistence of socioeconomic and racial inequalities make their way into her poetry from the 1990s onward.<sup>2</sup>

These positions have attracted the continuous attention of scholars of her work, with the prevailing tendency of examining a certain omnipresent creative tension between idea and image, revolutionary spirit and lyrical spirit,<sup>3</sup> and the fluctuating ambivalence between political commitment and poetic hermeticism.<sup>4</sup> Such tensions and ambivalences are frequently associated with possible survival strategies developed by the writer to make a place for herself in the Cuban intellectual panorama.<sup>5</sup>

But, in my opinion, revolutionary loyalty, on the one hand, and lyrical expression, on the other, are not opposed; nor is Marxism the preference over racial and feminist recognition. Rather than ambivalence, I see a powerful complexity, one consistent with Morejón's experience as a black intellectual woman belonging to a working-class family in which Marxist ideas were already circulating before the triumph of the Revolution, which she encountered at the age of fourteen. I propose, then, an intersectional reading of her poetic work and critical thought in unison: the understanding of the "originality" to which Morejón herself refers when describing her writing, conditioned by her experience as a black woman in contemporary Cuba.<sup>6</sup> She furthermore considers these conditions as organically inseparable: "In my poems, I have wanted to be what I thought I was. I am not more of a black person than a woman; I am not more of a woman than a Cuban; I am not more of a black person than a Cuban. I am a brief combustion of those factors."<sup>7</sup>

The Havana in which Morejón was born and raised defines her expression. It is the neighborhood of Los Sitios—remembered by Morejón as "essentially popular"—whose people and music mark out rhythm, voice, and silence in her writing.<sup>8</sup> She found literary passion in her childhood home; it came from her parents—her mother, a seamstress and cigar factory destemmer; her father, a sailor and stevedore—both active unionists and militants in the first Communist Party.<sup>9</sup> Beginning from these conditions, combining them in her creative act, Morejón has become, as William Luis rightly emphasizes, the only black Cuban woman writer who has achieved true notoriety in and outside the island.<sup>10</sup>

This space has not been offered to her out of kindness; she conquered it, asserting a Maroon lineage that she recognizes time and again in her work. Returning to the path of her enslaved ancestors who, upon escaping the plantation, reinvented themselves in the wildness as free subjects, breaking along the way with an identification as black that has meaning only within the society that created it, Morejón blurred the boundaries of the order that had been socially traced out for her, based on her race and social class and, identifying herself as a black revolutionary Cuban poetess, sculpted her own image. Morejón and—as I will show later—the black feminine characters who populate her poetics, define themselves and choose their position in Cuban history and society, valorizing an agency traditionally denied. This is what Morejón's marronage consists of, which I define as epistemological insofar as it results in a rupture with the prevailing way of interpreting the reality of the black woman in the Cuban imaginary and society, opening new avenues toward her knowledge and representation.

My own work as a Havana writer and essayist owes much to Morejón's marronage. She found, even within her fervent support for the Revolution, subtle ways to promote racial discussions and simultaneously celebrate her African heritage and womanhood. I figure among the black women intellectuals who, as Flora González Mandri notes, are able to discuss issues of gender and race more openly in Cuba today because of the paths that have been cleared by Morejón.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Juanamaría Cordones-Cook, *Soltando amarras y memorias: Mundo y poesía de Nancy Morejón* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 2013), 86–89.

<sup>3</sup> See Miriam DeCosta-Willis, "Introduction: Coming Freely Like a Bird—the Poet's Song," in Miriam DeCosta-Willis, ed., *Singular Like a Bird: The Art of Nancy Morejón* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Linda S. Howe, "The Fluid Iconography of the Cuban Spirit in Nancy Morejón's Poetry," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 15, no. 1 (1996): 32.

<sup>5</sup> See Flora González Mandri, *Guarding Cultural Memory: Afro-Cuban Women in Literature and the Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 66.

<sup>6</sup> "Originalidad"; Nancy Morejón, "Las poéticas de Nancy Morejón," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 15, no. 1 (1996): 7.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Morejón, quoted in Sapphire, "Nancy Morejón," trans. Jason Weiss, *Bomb*, no. 78 (Winter 2002), [bombmagazine.org/articles/nancy-morejón](http://bombmagazine.org/articles/nancy-morejón).

<sup>8</sup> "Esencialmente popular"; Judy Maloof, "Nancy Morejón," *Hispanamérica* (April 1996): 50; see 50–52.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>10</sup> See William Luis, "Race, Poetry, and Revolution in the Works of Nancy Morejón," in DeCosta-Willis, *Singular Like a Bird*, 83.

<sup>11</sup> See González Mandri, *Guarding Cultural Memory*, 65.

I stand close to Morejón, then, even if I do not fully agree with her ideological positions. In “Hablando con una culebra” (Talking with a snake) I recognize myself in her lineage that she recounts when conversing with a snake that she compares with her mother, Angélica Domínguez—a snake stalked and abused but always skilled at slipping away from its enemies and persisting, transmuted, until the present, where it is now an agent who returns the blow and knows itself as the owner of its space and time.<sup>12</sup> If this work is indeed reminiscent of Guillén’s poem “Sensemayá, canto para matar a una culebra” (*Sensemayá*, I sing to kill a snake),<sup>13</sup> I, in addition, read it as a response loaded with agency that contradicts and “kills” Guillén’s poem—like the serpent of Morejón’s poem. Guillén conceived a song with instructions to eliminate the elusive serpent, a goal that is achieved in its final lines; Morejón instead brings us a resurrected and insurrectionary snake, despite the insistence on making it disappear. It will, as Guillén sings, be trampled and killed; but, Morejón adds, it too will kill in its own right.

## The Revolution in Nancy Morejón

For Morejón, the revolutionary triumph constitutes, as she has declared, an internal explosion rather than an external event, which has made her deny feeling impacted by the Revolution, while confessing to, at the same time, not being able to explain her personal and literary life without its presence.<sup>14</sup>

Understanding this circumstance requires an unprejudiced intersectional approach, combined with the analysis of the Revolution from an existential perspective—which is the one I consistently privilege in my research.<sup>15</sup> I thus go beyond ideological determinism, using the ontological approach of the revolutionary subject deployed by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution*, prioritizing investigation surrounding the reasons that irresistibly drag the modern subject to make revolutions and, violently, create what is new.<sup>16</sup>

For Morejón, born in 1944, the year 1959 meant standing on a threshold, open to radical changes hitherto unknown, felt in body and spirit, and at the same time affecting the society in which that adolescent body and spirit were located. In a trance were a whole country and in particular a generation of artists that would be the first to start publishing after the revolutionary triumph. On the one side, there were Morejón and her companions in El Puente, all of humble origin and in some cases truly poor, many of them women, blacks, homosexuals who did not hide their sexual preferences—an exceptional membership, since Cuban literary groups were generally made up of middle- and upper-class white men. What is truly significant, though, is that these authors recreated the conflicts inherent to their socioeconomic backgrounds, and that in identifying themselves as revolutionaries—even if political commitment was not explicit in all their works—they conceived of their work as a legitimate form of making revolution.<sup>17</sup> On the other side, there were young writers, also born in the 1940s, mostly white men who recreated the revolutionary outbreak from the opposite pole of expression. Recognized promoters of the so-called literature of violence, they privileged revolutionary testimony, which they associated with immediacy and the abolition of aesthetic distance, in synergy with the atmosphere of heightened epicness then prevailing in the island.<sup>18</sup> The battle of the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the missile crisis a year later, and the resistance to other counterrevolutionary attacks framed this period with an understanding of existence as confrontation and heroism. In contrast, if in El Puente a certain colloquialism, naturalism, and even literary testimony were cultivated, it was from positions less urged of epic action: an “revolutionary existentialism” prevailing within a climate of aesthetic heterogeneity.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the weapons

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<sup>12</sup> See Nancy Morejón, “Hablando con una culebra,” in *Cuerda veloz* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2002), 107. I quote from this poem in the epigraph to this essay (“Y cuando despiertes de tu sueño, / continuada tu estirpe, / Sacúdete, pega, muerde y mata tú también / que ya vuelas y vives en tu justo lugar”).

<sup>13</sup> See Luis, “Race, Poetry, and Revolution,” 95.

<sup>14</sup> See Gabriel A. Abudu, “Nancy Morejón: An Interview,” in DeCosta-Willis, *Singular Like a Bird*, 38.

<sup>15</sup> See Odette Casamayor, *Utopía, distopía e ingravidez: Reconfiguraciones cosmológicas en la narrativa postsoviética cubana* (Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2013), 33.

<sup>16</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 37.

<sup>17</sup> See Roberto Zurbarano, “Re-pasar El Puente,” *La Gaceta de Cuba*, no. 4 (July–August 2005): 3.

<sup>18</sup> See Víctor Casaus, “El género testimonio y el cine cubano,” in Ambrosio Fornet, ed., *Cine, literatura y sociedad* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1982), 91.

<sup>19</sup> “Existencialismo revolucionario”; María Isabel Alfonso, “‘Existencialismo revolucionario’ y estética de el puente: Hacia una revisión del compromise,” in *Ediciones El Puente y los vacíos del canon literario cubano: Dinámicas culturales posrevolucionarias* (Xalapa, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 2016), 79–99.

chosen by the proponents of the literature of violence, led by the novelist Jesús Díaz and backed by cultural authorities, were ideological. They were used to harass their contemporaries in *El Puente*, achieving its dissolution.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these devastating attacks that marked Morejón to the point of, more than thirty years later, her confessing to having a certain fear of speaking in public, her ideological conviction in the end did not diminish.<sup>21</sup> Where would she find support to maintain her adherence to a system that for more than a decade had intellectually marginalized her? It is important here to remember that she did not see herself as being incorporated into the revolutionary process but rather as a legitimate actor within it, and such certainty possibly kept her from feeling left out when censorship landed on her. For Morejón, it was not simply a generational enthusiasm brought about by the synchronicity between her adolescence and the advent of the Revolution; it is also necessary to consider that her class consciousness had been instilled in her for years by her working-class parents and seasoned by contacts with notable communist leaders who regularly visited her home.<sup>22</sup>

### Africanness, Mestizaje, Nationalism, and Revolution: Morejón Reading Guillén

It was also in the domestic realm that Morejón discovered the thought of Nicolás Guillén, whom she says she came to not through literature but through the mediation of her father.<sup>23</sup> But the closeness was accelerated years later, when Guillén invited her to work at the UNEAC, where he was president since its foundation in 1961. Later, the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti, who was the director of the Center for Literary Research at the Casa de las Américas, assigned her the preparation of *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén*. Guillén had already left his literary archive in the care of Morejón.

It is particularly when interpreting Cuban racial and cultural identification that Morejón shows herself as an undeniable disciple of Nicolás Guillén. Following in his footsteps, she considers Africanness not as a diasporic element or metaphysical recurrence but rather as a “transculturated essence.”<sup>24</sup> Going over the theoretical foundations of the notion of mestizaje promoted by Guillén, Morejón departs from the analysis of the concept of transculturation coined by Fernando Ortiz in 1940, which he describes as the “constant interaction, the transmutation of two or more cultural components whose unconscious purpose creates a third cultural combination[,] . . . new and independent.”<sup>25</sup> But she remembers that almost a decade earlier, in 1931, Guillén foresaw the advent of “Cuban color,” emphasizing the cultural character of national mestizaje over the racial one.<sup>26</sup> This strategy solidifies an idea of nation that, based on a common hybrid culture, unifies Cubans regardless of the ethnic origin to which their phenotypic traits seem to refer. An idea of the nation that, since the nineteenth century, has been advanced by independence ideologues such as José Martí and Juan Gualberto Gómez.

Morejón’s interpretation of mestizaje in Guillén finds legitimacy within this continuity with nineteenth-century independence thinking. Such legitimacy, in turn, is used to reinforce the ideological postulates of the 1959 revolution. “A Cuban, though he appears racially to be Yoruba or Catalan, responds to the nature of his nationality,” Morejón writes in *Nación y mestizaje*. “Above any contingency, he is, feels, and proclaims himself with pride as Cuban.”<sup>27</sup> In the early 1980s, her affirmation reinforces the revolutionary political project aimed at sealing national cohesion, essential for the survival of the new system, as Fidel Castro had announced it since March 1959: “We are a small country that needs each other, we need everyone’s effort, and now are we going

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<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the history of *El Puente*, see Jesús J. Barquet, ed., *Ediciones El Puente en La Habana de los años sesenta* (Chihuahua, Mexico: Azar, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> See Nancy Morejón, quoted in María Grant, “En los sitios de Nancy Morejón,” interview, *Opus Habana* 6, no. 1 (2002): 18–19.

<sup>22</sup> See Ciro Bianchi Ross, *Asedio a Lezama Lima y otras entrevistas* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2009), 330.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> “Esencia transculturada”; Nancy Morejón, “Cuba y su profunda africanía,” in *Ensayos* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2005), 179. See also Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 326.

<sup>25</sup> “Interacción constante, la transmutación de dos o más componentes culturales cuya finalidad inconsciente crea un tercer conjunto cultural[,] . . . nuevo e independiente”; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> “Color cubano”; Nicolás Guillén, “Prólogo a *Sóngoro cosongo*,” in *Obra poética: 1922–1958*, vol. 1 of *Obra poética* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2002), 92.

<sup>27</sup> “Un cubano, aunque pareciese racialmente un yoruba o un catalán, responde al carácter de su nacionalidad. Por encima de cualquier contingencia es, se siente y se proclama con orgullo: cubano”; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 31.

to divide ourselves into blacks and whites? . . . What would that do if not to weaken the nation, weaken Cuba?"<sup>28</sup> Morejón's position is unequivocal: she situates the nation and *mestizaje* as "Inseparable categories when defining our national identity with a revolutionary and contemporary meaning," ensuring that "for Guillén, these two poles converge into one and, from its best meaning, a class dialectic emerges."<sup>29</sup>

To define the nation as indissolubly hybrid had also been instrumental in the fight against racial segregation conducted by Guillén since his first journalistic works, when he was already advancing a project of the nation in which an indispensable racial fusion was only achievable through class struggle. The condition of class thus prevails over race when Guillén affirmed that "the black threat" constituted a specter used by "the master" to more easily divide and oppress the working class: "So-called racial problems are no more than a form, an 'air vent' of the class struggle."<sup>30</sup>

The Cuban ethnic-cultural *mestizaje* that for Guillén constituted a hieroglyph impossible to unravel is for Morejón an "irreversible combustion";<sup>31</sup> she also links this conclusiveness to the revolutionary triumph, promoting the view of Guillén's ideas as prophetic. At the same time, from this perspective, the Revolution is defined as the definitive concretization of such prophecies, a final answer.

Morejón grounds *Nación y mestizaje* in the Leninist thesis on national culture, which is consistent not only with her ideology but with the positions held by Guillén since he became active in the Communist Party in 1937.<sup>32</sup> Peculiar, though, is her interpretation of nationalism, in which Guillén is hailed as a "protean standard-bearer for the entire cultural legacy of the world."<sup>33</sup> She thus emphasizes the universal dimension under which Guillén conceived of the national question, turning, in order to illustrate it, to extensive quotations taken from his essays. Extending her gesture, I also offer another example, this one taken from a prose poem that Guillén dedicated to Morejón in 1972: "I think her poetry is black like her skin. . . . It is also Cuban[,] . . . with the root buried very deep until it comes out on the other side of the planet, where it can be seen only the moment the Earth stops so the cosmonauts can photograph it."<sup>34</sup>

These phrases in which Guillén celebrates the Africanness at once Cuban and universal perceived by him in the poetry of his disciple are consistent with his nationalist theorizing. I take advantage of them now to introduce other factors—differentiators, rather—that I consider important to highlight in the relationship between the two poets.

## Glances upon the Black Woman: When Morejón Evasively Distances Herself from Guillén

True to his custom, Guillén sings the physical attributes of the black woman who is Nancy Morejón. Not stopping at the color of her skin, his gaze continues, revealing "her big eyes, very large and as if astonished at her innocence; the brief and guilty breasts." Just before, he compared her to "a nervous antelope" out of "the unpublished drawings of Walt Disney." Guillén the patriarch reduces the poetess to a caricature. Entranced by "her smile, her dark flesh, her African head," Guillén describes a Nancy Morejón who seems to embody the protagonist of his poem "Mujer nueva" (New woman) from 1930.<sup>35</sup> The poem's character is a black woman of inescapable, erotizing vitality, whose body destined for dance and sex is depicted based on botanical and zoological associations.

<sup>28</sup> "¿Somos un pueblo pequeño que necesitamos unos de otros, necesitamos el esfuerzo de todos y vamos a dividirnos ahora en blancos y negros? . . . ¿Eso para qué serviría sino para debilitar a la nación, para debilitar a Cuba?"; Fidel Castro, quoted in Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba (1902–1958)* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 1994), 185.

<sup>29</sup> "Categorías inseparables a la hora de definir nuestra identidad nacional con sentido revolucionario y contemporáneo"; "para Guillén, estos dos polos convergen en uno solo y de su acepción más correcta se desprende una dialéctica de clases"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 102–3.

<sup>30</sup> "El peligro negro"; "el amo"; "Los llamados problemas raciales no son más que una forma, un 'respiradero' de la lucha de clases"; Nicolás Guillén, "El camino de Harlem," in *Prosa de prisa*, vol. 1 (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 1968), 6.

<sup>31</sup> "Combustión irreversible"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 327. See Guillén, "Prólogo a *Sóngoro cosongo*," 92.

<sup>32</sup> Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 104.

<sup>33</sup> "Proteico abanderado de todo el legado cultural del mundo"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> "Pienso que su poesía es negra como su piel. . . . Es también cubana[,] . . . con la raíz enterrada muy hondo hasta salir por el otro lado del planeta, donde se la puede ver sólo el instante en que la Tierra se detiene para que la retraten los cosmonautas"; Nicolás Guillén, "Nancy," in *Obra poética: 1958–1985*, vol. 2 of *Obra poética* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2002), 262.

<sup>35</sup> "Los ojos grandes, grandísimos y como asombrados en su inocencia; los senos breves y culpables"; "un nervioso antílope"; "los dibujos inéditos de Walt Disney"; "su sonrisa, su carne oscura, su cabeza africana"; *ibid.*

That he would praise the newness and telluric force of the black woman, traditionally vilified in Cuban culture and society, is the argument used by those defending these images of Guillén. Among them is Morejón herself, for her gaze does not question, at least not directly, the poet.

In this way, Morejón would come to attack “the failed poems of negrismo,” criticizing the abuse of similes in which recourse is sought in the “nexus with fruits, . . . in volcanic, *equatorial*, hurricane nature.”<sup>36</sup> But are not black women put on display in this way in Guillén’s verses? Surprisingly, the lines that open Guillén’s poem “Mujer nueva”—“with the *equatorial* circle / wrapped around the waist like a small world”<sup>37</sup>—do not deter Morejón from excluding the poet from the group of authors she is passing judgement on, even considering his work alien to the “racist and sexist paraphernalia” and “outside the distortions and stereotypes of negrista poetry.”<sup>38</sup> More contradictory still is the fact that she supports her argument using some of the words used by the poet to describe the black woman—*volcanic, equatorial, hurricane*—while emphasizing that Guillén’s eroticism is “respectful,” constituting “a vindicating manifesto of black beauty as aesthetic value.”<sup>39</sup> She nevertheless concludes her analysis by quoting from Guillén’s “Madrigal”:

Your belly knows more than your head  
and as much as your thighs.  
That  
is the strong grace  
of your naked body.

(Tu vientre sabe más que tu cabeza  
y tanto como tus muslos.  
Esa  
es la fuerte gracia  
de tu cuerpo desnudo.)<sup>40</sup>

Guillén’s words, and Morejón’s choice to quote them, were at least as shocking then, obviously, as “When you think with your thighs [*sic*], . . . you *don’t speak*,” resulting in the expression of the black woman denied.<sup>41</sup>

The confrontation is not out in the open, but even subtly it is evident how much Morejón diverges from the patriarchal perspective of her mentor. Hints of this evasive confrontation appear in her poem “Persona” (Person), in which Juanamaría Cordones-Cook has noted an intertextuality with two poems in Guillén’s *Sóngoro cosongo*.<sup>42</sup> The verses of “Persona” slide between discursive memory and the memory of flesh, between the present and history, popular culture and stereotype; Morejón recognizes herself in the tortured slave and the anonymous mistress of a white master. Her gaze also comes up against “Antonio’s wife; / ‘the little neighbor across the way,’ on a formless street; / ‘the mother—black Paula Valdés.’”<sup>43</sup> Popular symbols of the Cuban woman, the first two come from the famous *son* by Miguel Matamoros, “La mujer de Antonio” (Antonio’s wife), that served as Guillén’s inspiration for his poem “Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio” (The kidnapping of Antonio’s wife), in which the patriarchal

<sup>36</sup> “Los malogrados poemas del negrismo”; “nexo con frutas, . . . a la naturaleza volcánica, ecuatorial, huracanada”; Nancy Morejón, “Imago y escritura de la mujer en el Caribe,” in *Ensayos*, 147 (emphasis mine).

<sup>37</sup> “Con el círculo ecuatorial / ceñido a la cintura como a un pequeño mundo”; Nicolás Guillén, “Mujer nueva,” in *Obra poética: 1922–1958*, 97 (emphasis mine).

<sup>38</sup> “La parafernalia racista y sexista”; “fuera de los desenfoces y de los estereotipos de la poesía negrista”; Morejón, “Imago,” 149.

<sup>39</sup> “Respetuoso”; “un manifiesto de reivindicación de la belleza negra como valor estético”; *ibid.* 150.

<sup>40</sup> Nicolás Guillén, “Madrigal,” quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Vera M. Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 177.

<sup>42</sup> See Cordones-Cook, *Soltando amarras y memorias*, 176.

<sup>43</sup> “La mujer de Antonio; / ‘la vecinita de enfrente,’ de una calle sin formas; / ‘la madre—negra Paula Valdés’”; Nancy Morejón, “Persona,” in *La Quinta de los Molinos* (Havana: Letras Cubanas, 2000), 34.

voice sings,

I'm going to drink you in one gulp,  
like a glass of rum;  
I'm going to pour you into a glass  
of *son*,  
*prieta* [brown one], burned in yourself,  
waist of my song.

(Te voy a beber de un trago,  
como una copa de ron;  
te voy a echar en la copa  
de un son,  
prieta, quemada en ti misma,  
cintura de mi canción.)<sup>44</sup>

In "Persona" Morejón connects with all these women of the past and present, history and legend, even though the affinity is not subject to argument but abysmally felt in the flesh, in muscles and bones, and expressed in the swinging and swaying of questions that give rhythm to the poem:

In which muscle of hers is my face drawn,  
.....  
What remains in me of that woman?  
What unites us both? Separates us?  
.....  
Who are these women who look so much like me,  
not just because of the colors of their bodies . . . ?

(¿En cuál músculo suyo se dibuja mi rostro,  
.....  
¿Qué permanece en mí de esa mujer?  
¿Qué nos une a las dos? ¿Qué nos separa?  
.....  
¿Quiénes son éstas que se parecen tanto a mí,  
no sólo por los colores de sus cuerpos . . . ?)<sup>45</sup>

The same continuity brings her body close to that of the prostitute who currently

rents taxis on the night of the jaguars,  
.....  
after having been hunted  
and skinned

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<sup>44</sup> Nicolás Guillén, "Secuestro de la mujer de Antonio," in *Obra poética: 1922-1958*, 104.

<sup>45</sup> Morejón, "Persona," 34-35.

and resold  
by the Quinta de los Molinos  
and the docks of the port.

(alquila taxis en la noche de los jaguares,  
.....  
después de haber sido cazada  
y esquilmada  
y revendida  
por la Quinta de los Molinos  
y los embarcaderos del puerto.)<sup>46</sup>

The transaction alluded to, however, could also be the one that, centuries ago, included stocks, shackles, the red-hot brand of the master on the skin.

But the identification is not complete, and from the beginning Morejón asks,  
Which of these women am I?  
Or am I not the one who is speaking  
behind the bars of a window without style  
that opens on the fullness of all these centuries?

(¿Cuál de estas mujeres soy yo?  
¿O no soy yo la que está hablando  
tras los barrotes de una ventana sin estilo  
que da a la plenitud de todos estos siglos?)<sup>47</sup>

There is more than an identity constructed from a common history, phenotypic traits, or enduring stereotypes. The caricature fades, and the author senses that there is an urgent depth, which she expresses through the silence always “speaking” behind her words. “Who is that woman / who is in all of us fleeing from us, / fleeing her enigma and her long origin[?],” Morejón insists.<sup>48</sup>

The black woman, in Morejón’s poetics, is an agential enigma projected from a position very different from Guillén’s, something that has been recognized by Morejón herself. Even when removing Guillén from the circle of criticized *negrista* writers, Morejón declares that in his poems there remains the gaze of the other upon the black woman.<sup>49</sup> At the same time that she characterizes her famous “Mujer negra” (Black woman) as a “debtor” to Guillén’s black poems, Morejón underscores how her work is distinguished by “the feminine perspective, which was impossible to find in [Guillén] or in any other white, black, or mulatto poet from the Antilles.”<sup>50</sup>

“Mujer negra” is an obligatory stop in analyses of Morejón’s work, and its critics agree in highlighting the agency granted to its character, who embodies both the extreme violence of enslavement and the Maroon rebellion that transports her from colonial times to the guerrilla in the Sierra Maestra. With the Revolution, in which the black woman described by Morejón acts—she is not a mere passive character—true liberation, in her opinion, is achieved. This poem, perhaps the one in Morejón’s oeuvre

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> “¿Quién es esa mujer / que está en todas nosotras huyendo de nosotras, / huyendo de su enigma y de su largo origen[?]”; *ibid.*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> See Morejón, “Imago,” 149.

<sup>50</sup> “Deudor”; “la perspectiva femenina, la cual era imposible encontrar en [Guillén] o en cualquier otro poeta blanco, negro o mulato de las Antillas”; *ibid.*



that has gained the greatest fame, is considered by the author solely as an expression of her experience as a black Cuban woman within and in favor of the Revolution.<sup>51</sup> These features define Morejón's intersectionality, which also determines the fact that her protagonists cannot in any way remain inactive but rather must serve as creative agents of the Revolution; they thus reflect the experience of their author who, as I have already argued, did not consider herself influenced by the Revolution because it was a part of her everyday family experience.

The transhistorical spirit inspiring her vision of the black woman can be understood from the very process of the conception of her poems. Referring to "Mujer negra," Morejón acknowledges its epicness: "There is a plural history, epic if you will, from the transplantation of slaves from the African coasts to the time of greatest upheaval of the Cuban revolutionary process right in the middle of the seventies."<sup>52</sup> She explains that, even if the poem was not outlined or "planned"<sup>53</sup>—"Mujer negra," Morejón claims, was inspired by a vision in a dream of a black woman looking into her window who then, when she woke up, dictated the poem to her<sup>54</sup>—creating the poem constituted "a cry of [her] consciousness hurt in two ways: one, by way of the family with [her] two grandmothers and the many other women from [her] social surroundings; another, by way of reading . . . the many pages on black men and black women that were published at that time in the Western hemisphere."<sup>55</sup>

The link established here by Morejón between her concrete experience as a black Cuban woman and revolutionary, the ancestral experiences of her grandmothers, the experiences of other Cuban women, and finally those of the entire Afro-diaspora in the Americas coincides with the one sustained in the work of another great Afro Latin American writer, the Brazilian Conceição Evaristo. As is the case with Morejón, in order to properly interpret Evaristo's expression, it is necessary to keep an intersectional perspective that allows us to assess the importance of the determinations of the sociopolitical, economics, gender, sexuality, and race in her writing. On top of her personal experience, Evaristo is aware of the presence in her poetics of ancestral voices and those of her present community, even creating a term to conceptualize it: *escrevivência*. Formed by the Portuguese words *escrever* and *vivência*, it involves writing experience—from experience and with experience. *Escrevivência* also has an inescapable political function as a weapon of denunciation and a promise of continuity and emancipation.<sup>56</sup>

The Revolution is made by "simple black women," says Morejón in "Mujeres nuevas" (New women), another of her poems in dissonant conversation with Guillén, while paying little attention here and in her other poetry to the bearded white men usually associated with revolutionary heroism.<sup>57</sup> Morejón proposes a rethinking of the history and conception of the nation through a narrative repositioning that takes as its starting point the subject systemically marginalized and alienated from the processes of the construction of official History. She exalts the spirituality and agency of black women to finally place them, as model characters, in a Marxist-Leninist and anti-imperialist army. Black women are the heroines of a national epic that even becomes transnational, and such heroism is owing only to themselves, their roots being explicitly linked to Africa and the emancipatory agency of the runaway slave. "My real independence was the runaway slave community," reaffirms Morejón in "Mujer negra,"<sup>58</sup> moving away from the Eurocentric nationalist discourse that stubbornly relies on ideas inspired by those advanced by José Martí that, while insisting on the need for racial equality to build an independent nation, propagated the passive image of blacks, liberated by benevolent white masters who made them take part in the deeds of the independence movement.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Bianchi Ross, *Asedio a Lezama Lima*, 325.

<sup>52</sup> "Hay una historia plural, épica si se quiere, desde el trasplante de los esclavos desde las costas africanas hasta la época de mayor convulsión del proceso revolucionario cubano en la justa mitad de los años setenta"; Morejón, "Imago," 151.

<sup>53</sup> "Planificadamente"; *ibid.*, 150.

<sup>54</sup> See Nancy Morejón, "Cosmopoética," in *Ensayos*, 309.

<sup>55</sup> "Un grito de [su] conciencia lastimada por dos vías: una, por la vía familiar de [sus] dos abuelas y de otras muchas mujeres de [su] entorno social; otra, por la vía de las lecturas . . . de cuanta página sobre negros y negras se hubiese publicado por aquel entonces en el hemisferio occidental"; Morejón, "Imago," 150.

<sup>56</sup> Ivana Dorali, "Conceição Evaristo: Imortalidade além de um título," *Periferias*, no. 2 (July 2018), [revistaperiferias.org/materia/conceicao-evaristo-imortalidade-alem-de-um-titulo/](http://revistaperiferias.org/materia/conceicao-evaristo-imortalidade-alem-de-um-titulo/).

<sup>57</sup> "Simples mujeres negras"; Nancy Morejón, "Mujeres nuevas," in Dennis Maloney, ed., *With Eyes and Soul: Images of Cuba*, trans. Pamela Carmel and David Frye, bilingual ed. (Buffalo, NY: White Pine, 2004), 56.

<sup>58</sup> "Mi real independencia fue el Palenque"; Morejón, "Mujer negra," en *Cuerda veloz*, 114.

<sup>59</sup> On the racial perspective of José Martí, see Jorge Camacho, *Miedo negro, poder blanco en la Cuba colonial* (Madrid: Vervuert, 2015); Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898*

Morejón, by contrast, introduces black subjects not enjoined to adhere to the Revolution because they had already embodied it long before, as runaway slaves. The black is not the child of the Revolution, as Martí suggests when he writes that the former should embrace the Revolution “like a mother.”<sup>60</sup> It is the Revolution that, under Morejón’s interpretation, finds antecedents in marronage.

Even if Morejón and Guillén coincide in reevaluating black agency and *mestizaje* in the genesis of the nation, there are notable divergences in their conceptions of *mestiza* Cubanness, possibly conditioned by gender: festive airs prevail in Guillén, while Morejón emphasizes implicit violence, particularly when referring to racial *mestizaje*. While in Guillén’s “Un son para niños antillanos” (A son for Antillean children) the white man who rides in the prow and the black woman who remains in the stern are romantically joined, producing the much celebrated *mestizaje*,<sup>61</sup> for the protagonist of “Amo a mi amo” (I love my master)—another of Morejón’s most famous poems—it is the character’s condition of enslavement that forces her to be the lover of a master, whom, toward the end of the poem, she wishes to flay “Guiltlessly like cattle.”<sup>62</sup>

The representation of *mestizaje* in Guillén illustrates Vera Kutzinski’s critique that his poems camouflage the body of the black woman behind that of the *mulata*; in that way, the reality of the black woman is thus excluded from the “poetically representable” because it constitutes “embarrassing evidence of racial and sexual violence that, if acknowledged, would chip away at the pillars of poetic authority on which Cuban nationalism rests so comfortably.”<sup>63</sup> This nationalism needs to maintain the illusion of a harmony achieved; thus, for *mestizaje*’s happy solution to be sustained, the violence inherent in the process of the creation of the *mestizo* subject—the rape of the enslaved black woman or, at best, her sexual commodification—must be hidden from the foundational narrative. Black women thus disappear, and only their grotesque stereotypes remain: barely the body of “the other,” emptied of humanity. It is a process of identity formation that remains in force and is common to all American societies, clearly described in the United States by Hortense Spillers, for example, when she recognizes, “I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. . . . I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.”<sup>64</sup>

The slave protagonist is but an object at the beginning of the poem “Amo a mi amo,” which Morejón opens with the same disconcerting statement that is the title—“I love my master.” It is oxymoronic, for a slave is not a person and is therefore not given the ability to have her own feelings and agency. She cannot love (just as she cannot hate); she has no power over her body, and autonomous action is forbidden to her. Yet the protagonist does more than begin with an assertion of her emotions; as her lines progress, she manifests her agency, progressively liberating herself.

The sexual possession of the enslaved subject is neither peaceful nor harmonious, as the hegemonic narratives of *mestizaje* in the Americas would have us believe. It is this violence that leads Morejón’s protagonist to inquire into the nature of her “love.” She understands it is not love, but servitude, when she asks herself, “Why do I serve him?” But she also discovers that she possesses weapons no less effective for being secret within that supposed “love”: “My love is like the brush covering the plantation, / my only impregnable possession.”<sup>65</sup> The wildness is as closed to the master as is an emancipatory promise to the fugitive slave. It becomes evident to the protagonist that, thanks to the intimate relationship she maintains with the master, she is able to enact liberation. An unsuspected power remains in the dispossessed body. This power, in Morejón’s poetry, enables the enslaved and raped women to emancipate themselves, to build their own history and narrative.

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(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Francisco Morán, *Martí, la justicia infinita: Notas sobre ética y otredad en la escritura martiana (1875–1894)* (Madrid: Verbum, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> “Como a una madre”; José Martí, “El plato de lentejas,” in *Obras completas*, volume 3 (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963), 26.

<sup>61</sup> Nicolás Guillén, “Un son para niños antillanos,” in *Obra poética: 1922–1958*, 206.

<sup>62</sup> “Como a una res sin culpa”; Nancy Morejón, “Amo a mi amo,” en *Cuerda veloz*, 112.

<sup>63</sup> Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets*, 173.

<sup>64</sup> Hortense T. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 65.

<sup>65</sup> “¿Por qué le sirvo?”; “Mi amor es como la maleza que cubre la dotación, / única posesión inexpugnable mía”; Morejón, “Amo a mi amo,” 112.

In contrast, in Guillén's poems these characters appear instead as ahistorical, disconnected from the plantation system that generates the sexual stereotypes that nullify them throughout the history of the Cuban nation. While the behavior of the black man is connected by Guillén to the hegemonic system, first based in slavery and then neocoloniality, the excessive, chaotic sexuality that the poet attributes to black women and *mulatas* is never challenged but always assumed as a natural, incontestable fact.

## Epistemological Critique of Guillén's and Morejón's Concept of the Mestizo Nation

Beyond these differences brought to light by intersectional analysis, I return to the theory of national mestizaje in general terms shared by Guillén and Morejón to analyze it as a constitutive piece of a synthetic nationalism, in which the nation is conceived as a unique site where all possible distinctions are fused. From this perspective, mestizaje constitutes a national and poetic essence, while the nation is enthroned as identificatory core even as it delivers Cuban universality.

Such essentiality and universalist aspiration keep the theory of national mestizaje anchored to the modern humanist project. Neither Marxist devotion, anti-imperialist zeal, nor the forceful antiracism professed by both poets automatically leads to the deconstruction of the hegemonic epistemology that sustains and is sustained by the system that, simultaneously, they are fighting ideologically and politically. This is understandable, if one examines the motive underlying Guillén's and Morejón's synthetic and conclusive gesture of presenting, as complements of the Cuban makeup, the black and white, African and European. We thus find how efforts to crystallize national identity by making the constitutive processes of what is called "Cubanness" understandable under dominant knowledge are ultimately animated by the search for an inscription in the cosmos organized under hegemonic epistemology, in which the concepts of nation and universality are essential.

Likewise, it is useful to approach the discussion that Morejón initiates in *Nación y mestizaje* around the use of the terms *black*, *African*, and *black cultures*; she also accords Cuba a presumed Caribbean exceptionality—based on the preponderance of its population considered to be white. She goes on to write that, in the island, "blackness could not be seen in terms of itself, of its own nature, but rather in terms of its complement, whiteness."<sup>66</sup> While these words exude a sweet harmony, one laments the deproblematization they imply, for they obliterate the intrinsic imbalance of that relationship, in which Eurocentric hegemony makes an effectively fair complementarity impossible.

Under these conditions, the yearned-for national synthesis should not get ahead of the utopian state. This is the state to which, in a way, Morejón refers when she writes, "Guillén . . . sublimates, to the point of bringing it to reality, his dream of making a nation along the lines of his (ethnic and cultural) mestizaje."<sup>67</sup> But this utopia is, in Morejón's opinion, accomplished with the triumph of the revolution in 1959. For Morejón, Guillén turns demiurgic by "joining up" the Hispanic and African aspects of his culture—a utopia he outlines in "Balada de los dos abuelos" (Ballad of the two grandfathers), a poem he himself would reproach for a certain idealism. But Morejón disproves him, finding in his black and white grandfathers the propitiatory "symbols" of the synthesis: "What is transcendental in him is to say 'I put them together,'" she concludes;<sup>68</sup> and the recognition of this transcendence, together with the other gestures she enacts to describe Guillén's endeavor, circumscribe that endeavor's approach to modern experience, keeping it within the Eurocentric epistemological realm.

The limitation to the "dialectical and positivist discourse of modernity" is revealed by Antonio Benítez-Rojo when he criticizes Guillén's proposed synthesis for its inability to interpret mestizaje "as a bundle of different and coexisting dynamics."<sup>69</sup> Resonating in this argument is a deconstructive spirit that connects with Édouard Glissant, toward whom Morejón would in fact turn

<sup>66</sup> "Lo negro no podía verse en función de sí mismo, de su propia naturaleza, sino en función de su complemento, lo blanco"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> "Guillén . . . sublima, hasta llevarlo a la realidad, su sueño de hacer una nación a la medida de su mestizaje (étnico y cultural)"; *ibid.*, 149.

<sup>68</sup> "Símbolos"; "Lo trascendental en él es decir 'Yo los junto'"; *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> "Discurso dialéctico y positivista de la modernidad"; "como un haz de dinámicas diferentes y coexistentes"; Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *La isla que se repite* (Barcelona: Casiopea, 1998), 156.

her inquisitive gaze in pursuit of defining the Caribbean, feeling out paths that go beyond the strictly modern synthesizing solution proposed by her mentor. Even though the interpretation of Glissant that Morejón offers in her essays does not dwell much on the divergence and indefiniteness intrinsic to the antisystemic processes he describes in his theories of Relation and Chaos-world, she comes to celebrate the profound rupture between his theories and the *négritude* launched by Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Damas in the 1930s, in view of how it paves the way for an epistemological liberation for the Caribbean. Still, she recognizes the genealogy in which Glissant's deconstructive position is established, considering his work the "daughter" of Césaire's.<sup>70</sup>

Morejón is a deep expert on Césaire's work; her 1966 dissertation for a degree in French at the University of Havana was on the Martinican poet. A decade later, returning to her study, Morejón focused on Césaire's position before the national question, which is not surprising because such an issue was crucial in Césaire. He was a sharp critic of colonialism in his 1939 *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*) and other texts; served as mayor of Fort-de-France in 1946 and was deputy of the French Communist Party—which he left in 1956—and of the National Assembly; and was a promoter of the administrative assimilation of Guadeloupe and Martinique as French departments. Morejón thus criticizes, in *Nación y mestizaje*, Césaire's "evasion" of the national, claiming that the nation represents for him not "roots but uprooting" and that he seeks his identity "in the vast African continent without distinction of tribe or nation."<sup>71</sup>

But is such an "evasion" of the national the true failure of Césaire's *négritude*? Is the demand to consider the nation as matrix really so indispensable? Curiously, the essentiality of the nationalism raised by Morejón conditions her rejection of an Africanist identification that, from a position that is also essentialist, makes possible a transnational interpretation of the Caribbean experience. For this reason, while appreciating Césaire's "inestimable American vocation" and "the exaltation of the entire African heritage," she points out, as one of his great conflicts, "his lack of appreciation for what the nation signifies and is in the contemporary world."<sup>72</sup> Comparing Césaire with Guillén, for whom the nation is "certainty,"<sup>73</sup> Morejón laments "[the] apathy, [the] misfortune, [the] pessimism" that from her point of view prevents Césaire from "addressing, in its exact category, the cultural complex that makes up the Martinican nation."<sup>74</sup> The theories of both poets, however, coincide in the search for identitarian formulations aimed at achieving universality. But whereas Césaire's essentially Afro-descendant anticolonialism proposes the depurative extraction of blackness from the Antillean national configuration in order, hence refined, to achieve the Africanist universal dimension of his people, Guillén followed a different path—the recovery of blackness to place it within the synthesis of the nation.

Morejón attributes the differences between the two poets to the contexts from which their thought emerges. Guillén's Cuba was a republic, even if de facto it remained dependent on the United States. For him, full sovereignty was the goal, an objective of the struggle, possibility. In Césaire's Martinique, a French territory, the idea of a fully autonomous nation seemed less feasible.<sup>75</sup> Feeling without a homeland leads, according to Morejón, to the process of building an "imaginary geography" that propels his approach to Africa, conceived in her opinion "as a philosophical entelechy and not in the shock or impact of that heritage on Martinican soil."<sup>76</sup>

The critic pairs the mystification of Africanness with an emphasis on the differentiation between Africans and Afro-descendants in the Americas; among the latter, in addition, Morejón points out national specificities. Thus, alternating her gaze between the Antilles and Cuba, she highlights, as mentioned above, a certain exceptionalism granted by the weight of Hispanicness

<sup>70</sup> "Hija"; Nancy Morejón, "Aproximación a una poética del Caribe," in *Ensayos*, 117–18.

<sup>71</sup> "Evasión"; "arraigo sino desarraigo"; "en todo el vasto continente africano sin distinción de tribu o nación"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 137–38.

<sup>72</sup> "Inestimable vocación americana"; "la exaltación de toda la herencia Africana"; "su falta de apreciación de lo que significa y es la nación en el mundo contemporáneo"; *ibid.*, 139.

<sup>73</sup> "Certidumbre"; Morejón, "Aproximación," 111.

<sup>74</sup> "[La] apatía, [el] infortunio, [el] pesimismo"; "abordar, en su exacta categoría, el complejo cultural que conforma la nación martiniqueña"; Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje*, 139.

<sup>75</sup> See *ibid.*, 140.

<sup>76</sup> "Geografía imaginaria"; "como entelequia filosófica y no en el choque o impacto de esa herencia en suelo martiniqueño"; *ibid.*, 141.

in Cuba, and she pauses to analyze Guillén's use of Spanish language and poetics. Precisely before the poetic language of his 1930 *Motivos de son* (Reasons for *son*), Morejón reminds us that "what Guillén proposes—and finds—is the act of shaping the Spanish language . . . to the cadence and idiosyncrasy of a popular rhythm . . . : the *son*."<sup>77</sup> It is then a question of shaping (*amoldar*) Cubanness under the Spanish language—a process of indisputable modernity. "The miracle had been fulfilled in the language of the colonizer, which is ours," she continues. "Why didn't Guillén write his motifs in Lucumí? How was he going to do it if, curiously, our process of transculturation left the language of the conqueror almost intact? Guillén knew how to turn that weapon against itself."<sup>78</sup> The elegant subversion of Guillén's use of Spanish is undeniable, but I cannot convince myself that this weapon has been turned completely against the colonizing empire. The inevitable use of Spanish is perceived by Morejón as being not a result of colonizing violence but rather a sign of cordial hodgepodge. To view as "curious" the fact that transculturation in Cuba has not disfigured the Spanish language is to forget the function of language as an instrument of colonization.

Returning to Morejón's reflections on Césaire and his distance from the conception of the nation as understood by Guillén, other questions arise: Could not the "evasion" of nationalism practiced by Césaire—the proclamation of "his Antilleanness, before his condition as Martinican; his neo-Africanism before his condition as a Martinican"—have opened up opportunities for other forms, less essentialist, of thinking about the nation? Why not accept uprooting as a force as productive as rooting? Why does Morejón profess such an aversion to the "ungraspable" nation she reads in Césaire, who "becoming the other, would invent a new [nation] and another geography, wandering in otherness"?<sup>79</sup> The answers can perhaps be elucidated when Morejón affirms that her sense of belonging to Cuban culture induces her to defend it "above any other reason or sentiment."<sup>80</sup> Recognizing herself as belonging to a unit—the family, the nation, the Revolution—seems essential for Morejón. It anchors her, preserving her from disappearance. This is how she avoids the danger of vagueness, indefiniteness, the "otherness" she rejects. Morejón does not want to be the "other," but neither does she manage to deconstruct the fallacy of otherness; all her fervor is poured into total integration.

## The Still-Necessary Marronage: Mestizaje, Nation, and Racialization in Contemporary Cuba

With its airs of triumphant harmony, the presumed Hispanic-African complementarity implicit in the national mestizaje evades the discussion around the survival of white supremacy in the Cuban present and the Cuban imaginary, in and outside the island. The synthetic solution was a mirage whose realization seemed possible to many in the frenzy of the first days of the Revolution; those were the years in which the young Nancy Morejón made her debut as an adolescent, hopeful poet, boiling with the infinite possibilities for Cubanness that the newly created Revolution also envisioned. Today's Cuba, where racial inequality persists, does not correspond to the perfect unity imagined by Guillén and Morejón. Nevertheless, even if in 2002 she confessed that racial prejudices have been defeated but not eradicated, she does not manage to extend direct and constant criticism of racism and racial prejudice to current life in Cuba.<sup>81</sup>

Unfinished, the paths of a still-necessary marronage remain open to the future. We have been brought this far by Nicolás Guillén and Nancy Morejón, and by those before and alongside and after them, an irrepressible cohort of ancestors, our heroes. It is therefore necessary to keep going, insisting on a Cuban existence that transcends the established theories of mestizaje, harmonious synthesis, and the single, monolithic nation. Like the indefatigable snake, advancing, shaking itself off, striking, and killing, . . . we should do it, as well.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> "Lo que Guillén se propone—y encuentra—es el amoldar a la lengua española . . . la cadencia y la idiosincrasia de un ritmo popular . . . : el *son*"; *ibid.*, 61–62.

<sup>78</sup> "El milagro se había cumplido en la lengua del colonizador, que es la nuestra. ¿Por qué Guillén no escribió sus motivos en lucumí? ¿Cómo iba a hacerlo si, curiosamente, nuestro proceso de transculturación dejó casi intacta la lengua del conquistador? Guillén supo virar esa arma contra sí misma"; *ibid.*, 63.

<sup>79</sup> "Su antillanidad, antes que su condición de martiniqueño; su neoafricanismo antes que su condición de martiniqueño"; "inasible"; "volverse otro, inventase una nueva [nación] y otra geografía, vagar en la otredad"; *ibid.*, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Morejón, quoted in Sapphire, "Nancy Morejón."

<sup>81</sup> "I can tell you that, in this sense, racial prejudice is defeated but not dead"; *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> See Morejón, "Hablando con una culebra," 107.

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