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Rara Avis: Nancy Morejón's *Lengua de pájaro* in the Cuban 1960s

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Nancy Morejón (1944–) is a Cuban poet, translator, and essayist of national and international acclaim and yet her singular publication in the genre of *testimonio* remains nearly unknown. *Lengua de pájaro: Comentarios reales*, coauthored with the historian Carmen Gonce and published by Ciencias Sociales in 1971, has received almost no critical attention.[1] A second edition in 2002, coinciding with Morejón's receipt of Cuba's "Premio Nacional de Literatura," went similarly unnoticed.[2] Morejón herself has remarked that *Lengua* is a work "of which little has been said."[3] Our interest in this text, however, is not merely to rectify an absence, but to reflect on the complex processes of inclusion and exclusion that defined Cuba's cultural sphere in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The silence surrounding this text is itself of interest.[4] We will make the case that the stories collected in *Lengua* are a veiled intervention on official Revolutionary narratives, not least of which the claim that since 1962 "discrimination on the basis of race and sex [had been] eliminated."[5] In addition we read *Lengua* in light of the emergence of testimonio during these same

[1] Nancy Morejón and Carmen Gonce, *Lengua de pájaro: Comentarios reales; Monografía histórica* (Ciencias Sociales, 1971). Hereafter cited in the text.
[2] Nancy Morejón and Carmen Gonce, *Lengua de pájaro: Comentarios reales* (Oriente, 2002).
[3] "Es un libro del cual se ha hablado poco"; "En los sitios de Nancy Morejón," interview with María Grant, *Opus Habana* 6, no. 1 (1999): 20.
[4] In fact there is just one exclusive study: María del Carmen Sillato, "Oralidad y memoria colectiva en *Lengua de pájaro: Comentarios reales* de Nancy Morejón y Carmen Gonce," *Revista iberoamericana* 77, no. 235 (2011): 557–75.
[5] Fidel Castro, "Segunda Asamblea Nacional del Pueblo de Cuba," 4 February 1962, www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1962/esp/f040262e.html.

years, noting the text's subtle reflections on the genre's increasing consolidation as *the* form to meet the symbolic demands of the Revolution.

Morejón and Gonce's text was published only a few years after Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966), which had explicitly excluded female voices in its introduction in favor of the exemplary case of the Independence War hero Estebán Montejo.[6] It also closely followed his seminal essay "La novela-testimonio: Socio-literatura," whose call for new "foundational works" for the Americas is cited in *Lengua*'s first pages.[7] In fact the simultaneity is even greater as the ethnographic field work for the book was carried out in 1969 as the cover of the 1st edition notes. *Lengua* therefore predates the proliferation of testimonial texts that followed the creation of the Casa de las Américas prize for testimonio in 1970.[8] It anticipates the genre's rise in Cuba, and the vision of a Latin Americanism defined on Havana's terms that followed. It also initiated a long period of silence for Morejón.

Throughout most of the 1970s Morejón published no poetry. As she is primarily known as a poet, criticism has framed this period as a twelve-year silence, from *Richard trajo su flauta y otros argumentos* (Richard brought his flute and other plots) (1967) to *Parajes de una época* (Settings of an era) (1979). During this time Morejón was far from idle. In addition to publishing *Lengua* she edited and introduced the academic collection *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (Collection of texts on Nicolás Guillén) (1974) and even released one of her best-known poems,

[6] Barnet describes listening to the story of a formerly enslaved woman before finding Montejo: "The woman had been a slave. She was also a *santera* and a spiritualist. We forgot about the old woman and a few days later we went to the Veterans Residence" ("La mujer había sido esclava. Era, además, santera y espiritista. . . . Olvidamos a la anciana y a los pocos días nos dirigimos al Hogar del Veterano, donde estaba albergado Estebán Montejo." Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Galerna 1968), 5; Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, trans. W. Nick Hill (Curbstone, 1994). In contrast, *Lengua* foregrounds the testimonies of Black women.

[7] Barnet, "La novela-testimonio: Socio-literatura," *Unión* 6, no. 4 (1969): 9–12. Portions of which were translated by Paul Bundy and published as "The Documentary Novel" (Council on International Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1979).

[8] It is worth recalling that testimonio did not emerge in a vacuum and texts that combined reportage, essay, ethnography, and fiction had a wide impact in the years prior. *Juan Pérez Jolote* (1952) by Ricardo Pozas, *Operación masacre* (1957) by Rodolfo Walsh, and *Los hijos de Sánchez* (1961) by Oscar Lewis are a few widely disseminated examples.

"Mujer negra" (Black woman), which appeared in *Casa de las Américas* magazine in 1975.[9] Regarding these years without verse, Morejón said in a recent interview,

> However, those twelve years were years in which it wasn't possible for me to publish poetry, owing to a period of uncertainty stemming from incidents that were unleashed in connection with the Padilla Affair. The real reasons remain a mystery to me that I have not tried to unravel. They are part of what is known as the five-year period that some call the Gray Period [*Quinquenio gris*], others, black. During that time, I also wrote in the testimonio genre and published, in 1971, with a historian colleague, an innovative text called *Lengua de pájaro*, which was the result of a residency in northern Holguín, in a small mining town on the coast called Nicaro. It was, in fact, the local history of the nickel industry.[10]

Though Morejón claims ignorance as to the reasons for her blacklisting, it is likely inseparable from her affiliation with the intellectual group around the publishing house El Puente (The bridge) and the events surrounding the Havana Cultural Congress in 1968. There, Morejón and other Afro-

[9] "Mujer negra" appeared first in *Casa* and was later included in *Parajes*. Tracing the contribution of Afro-descendant women from national independence through the revolutionary era, it is one of her best-known and most-studied poems. A similar revisionist streak runs through Morejón's framing of Guillén in *Recopilación.* Her introductory essay emphasizes the inadequacies of previous criticism, defining prerevolutionary critics as "maniquean . . . permeated with 'criollismo,' cultural colonialism, and class positioning [that] continue to invalidate and disorient" ("maniquea . . . permead[os] de 'criollismo', colonización cultural y posiciones de clase [que] invalidan y desorientan todavía"), 7. Nancy Morejón, *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (Casa de las Américas, 1974), 7. In contrast, she presents Guillén as a proper and exemplary Cuban revolutionary, yet subtly shifts the meaning of this propriety by situating him in a Caribbean "anthropological geography" where Cubanness is best understood in dialogue with authors like Jacques Roumain, Aimé Césaire, and Langston Hughes (*Recopilación*, 15).

[10] "No obstante, esos doce años fueron años en donde no me fue posible publicar poemas, debido a una etapa incierta como resultado de los episodios que se desencadenaron a propósito del Caso Padilla. Las verdaderas razones siguen siendo un misterio que no he intentado descubrir. Forman parte de lo que se conoce como el Quinquenio que unos llamaron gris; otros, negro. Por esa época cultivé también el testimonio y publiqué con una colega historiadora una novedad que fue, en 1971, *Lengua de pájaro*, resultado de una residencia en el norte de Holguín, en un pequeño pueblo minero, de la costa, llamado Nicaro. En realidad era la historia local de la industria del níquel"; Vanessa Pérez-Rosario and Nancy Morejón, "Mas yo resto: Entrevista con Nancy Morejón," *Small Axe*, no. 65 (July 2021): 144.

Cuban intellectuals had attempted to question the official narrative that the Revolution had eradicated racial inequality. These intellectuals suffered various forms of reprisals as a result of the "unintentional dissidence" that had led to their being summoned to a meeting with Education Minister José Llanusa Gobel, when he became aware that they might announce their intention to take up the racial question in Cuba in front of an international audience.[11] Preceding and in parallel with the Congress many former authors published by El Puente had continued to meet in study and discussion groups on the "question of Black Power. . . . On the one hand as a way of claiming a personal racial identity and, on the other, at the level of symbolism, as a means of demanding recognition as a group."[12] Llanusa's refusal to allow any conference talk by members of the group has been referred to as the "Manifiesto Negro" affair.[13] According to other circle members, this description was itself a way of delegitimizing the broader ongoing discussions of racial questions in Cuba: "The manifesto focused on the question of the traps of *mulatez*, on equity. We considered it false to affirm that the ideas of Negritude had entered Cuba in the 1940s. . . . The so-called 'Black Manifesto' wasn't any such thing. . . . It was a paper for the Congress."[14] In spite of the retrospective desire to downplay the connotations of a manifesto, intellectuals knew that addressing these questions was dangerous. Many of the important literary polemics in the 1960s

[11] Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959–1971* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 36, 273. Anne Garland Mahler has singled out internationalism as an area that crystallized contradictions. The Tricontinental was cast as an exemplary "vision of a non-racially determined subaltern resistance," but the same principles were perceived as problematic when employed by "black Cuban intellectuals to shine a light on the Cuban Revolution's duplicitous racial politics." Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Duke University Press, 2018), 164.

[12] "al rótulo de Black Power . . . por un lado, [como] forma de indicar una pertenencia racial, y por otra parte [como] modo simbólico de llamar la atención visibilizarnos como grupo"; Juan Benemilis, quoted in Alberto Abreu, "Cuba: Una encrucijada entre las viejas y las nuevas epistemologías raciales," *Cuban Studies* 48, no. 1 (2019): 68.

[13] Another probable consequence of the incident was the canceled publication of C. L. R James's *The Black Jacobins*: "The translation of *The Black Jacobins* that initially was slated to be in readers' hands for the Cultural Congress was published in 2008" ("La traducción de *Los Jacobinos negros*, que inicialmente debió estar en manos de los lectores para el Congreso Cultural de La Habana, se publicó en 2008"); Ileana Sanz, Nancy Morejón, and Lourdes Arencibia, "Foro: Cuba traduce el Caribe," *Tusaaji: A Translation Review* 3, no. 1 (2014): 98.

[14] "El manifiesto se centraba en cuestiones relativas a las trampas de la mulatez, la equidad. Estimábamos falsa la afirmación de que en Cuba habían entrado las ideas del movimiento de la negritud en la década del cuarenta. [...] El llamado Manifiesto Negro nunca fue tal cosa. . . . Fue una ponencia al Congreso"; Tomás González, quoted in Abreu, "Cuba: Una encrucijada," 57.

had both race and internationalism as their backdrop. Whether in "The *PM* affair," with the film's depiction of nonrevolutionary Afro-Cuban popular culture, the withdrawal from bookstores of Walterio Carbonell's *Como surgió la cultural nacional*, with its Africa-centered rebuttal of criollo historiography, both in 1961; the closing of El Puente*,* in part because of guest Allen Ginsberg's expulsion from Cuba in 1965; or even the discontinuation of *Pensamiento crítico* in 1970 for its inclusion of Western Marxist texts considered "ideological diversionism" by Raúl Castro, both race and internationalism were consistent areas of political sensitivity.[15]

In this light, the central subject of *Lengua*, "the local history of the nickel industry," so distant from Morejón's work up until then, and so in keeping with the long socialist-realist tradition of odes to industry, raises the possibility that the book itself was some sort of punishment or project of rehabilitation. The trip to Nicaro occurs in February 1968, in other words, directly after the Cultural Congress. Similarly the book's acknowledgments indicate that this was an assignment paid for and arranged by the Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (National Union of Cuban Writers and Artists), the official revolutionary writers union, for which Morejón was working at the time. And yet, as we will attempt to elucidate, this forgotten text contains an implicit continued exploration of the suppressed racial question in Cuba. *Lengua*, both within an institutional revolutionary cultural paradigm and outside of it, functions both as an account of heroic workers and guerrillas and as a subtle exposition and analysis of Cuba's unresolved racial issues.

[15] Alejandro de La Fuente outlines this lack of debate in *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001) writing, "The lack of political debate about race and racism facilitated the survival and reproduction of the very racist stereotypes that the Revolutionary leadership claimed to oppose" (295). Historiography in Cuba has been equally circumspect. Tomás Robaina's *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958: Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (Ciencias Sociales, 1994)*,* broke a long silence, while also signaling that even in the 1990s the analysis of racial discrimination was best limited to the pre-Revolution period. Roberto Zurbano's 2006 essay "El triángulo invisible del siglo XX cubano: Raza, literatura, y nación," *Temas*, no. 46 (April–June 2006), 111, reaffirms this reality in the literary field: "No es usual abordar las problemáticas raciales en el dinámico campo literario cubano" ("It is unusual to address racial problematics in the dynamic Cuban literary field").

A Singular History

In the section titled “Los testimonios,” the authors describe their methodology in detail—an indispensable element of the testimonio genre at the time. Here we read, “We came to Nicaro almost by chance in February 1968 to engage in a sort of cultural activism. In order to better serve the recreational-cultural needs of the community we needed to first do a brief classical sociological survey.”[16] There is a carefree, perhaps even ironic tone in this declaration of intentions. The academics arrive “almost,” as if, by chance. They are there “to engage in a sort of cultural activism.” They are not there to write a book. According to their account, the book’s necessity emerged only gradually, circumstantially, a consequence of the truly “singular histories” of their informants that demanded publication.

Apart from the testimonies collected, *Lengua* incorporates a series of official documents in its introductory section that frame Nicaro’s colonial and neocolonial history as a microcosm of Cuba. The 1971 edition includes over 100 pages of all manner of documentation, material not included in the 2002 version. This dossier ranges from information on nickel’s scientific properties, factory production figures, descriptions of working conditions, and communications from both sides of the guerrilla war fought in the area at the end of the 1950s. These extensive raw materials conclude with various interesting visuals: a copy of a letter signed by Fidel communicating the promotion of his brother Raúl to the rank of “Comandante,” a bond issued by the 26th of July Movement, a map of the Rebel Army’s movements in Oriente province, and finally five unsigned photographs in black and white of the nickel plant in Nicaro. The photos of the factory reinforce the inhumanity of the place, a direct contrast to the unbridled nature, “the infinite uninhabited cays and mangroves” (11) that the text describes as the first impression that meets the traveler arriving by

[16] “A Nicaro llegamos casi por azar a ejercer una suerte de activismo cultural en febrero de 1968. Para satisfacer las necesidades recreativo-culturales de aquella comunidad debíamos realizar, previamente, una breve—clásica—encuesta sociológica”; Morejón and Gonce, *Lengua de pájaro*, 24. Hereafter cited in the text.

air. Considering the fledgling nature of testimonio at the time, it is not unreasonable to consider this inclusion, this tacking on of heterogeneous and disjointed documentation, as an attempted concession to the demands of a factual and impersonal narrative style otherwise absent from the text as a whole. As we shall see, *Lengua* does not focus on analyzing the factors of production in Nicaro. Rather, the book uses the factory as a pretext that stands in for a wider Cuban social panorama defined by class relations, but also by historical exclusions tied to race and gender. These are shown as sometimes occurring as a result of "American-style" capitalist development, but they are also governed by a logic of their own that escapes a Marxist view of history.

Lengua also includes intertexts. Specifically, it incorporates a series of footnoted quotations from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and Che Guevara's *Obra revolucionaria*. While the presence of Guevara, recently deceased and always associated with a strong policy of industrialization, is no surprise, the intertexts from Fanon are suggestive, as they are relevant to the tensions between the Revolution's narrative of racial equality and the desire of the study groups close to El Puente to underline the persistence of inequality. While Afro-Cuban attempts to initiate a dialogue on these questions had been silenced at the Cultural Congress, references to the work of Fanon and to his critique of classical Marxism on this question were constant and explicit among non-Cuban internationalist attendees. This only intensified the circulation and discussion of his work in Cuba.[17] *Lengua* includes an explicit mention of Fanon in the second section, "Life in Nicaro (1952–1956)," under the subhead "Las familias establecidas" (The established families). When one of the informant's remarks that "Nicaro was *something very*

[17] See Jackqueline Frost and Jorge E. Lefevre Tavárez, "Tragedy of the Possible: Aimé Césaire in Cuba, 1968," *Historical Materialism* 28, no. 2 (2020): 39; and Devyn Spence Benson, "Redefining Mestizaje: How Trans-Caribbean Exchanges Solidified Black Consciousness in Cuba," *Small Axe*, no. 65 (July 2021): 99–100. For Morejón, Guevara's impact on making Fanon well known in Cuba was influential: "Guevara had *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skins, White Masks* published by a small Havana house in the early 1960s. Reading them left an indelible mark on me, and it was only then that I decided to devote my bachelor's thesis to Aimé Césaire" ("Guevara hizo traducir y publicar en una pequeña editorial habanera *Los condenados de la tierra* y *Piel negra, máscaras blancas* . . . a principios de los años sesenta. Esa lectura me marcó para siempre y solo entonces decidí dedicar el tema de mi tesis de grado a Aimé Césaire"); Sanz, Morejón, and Arencibia, "Foro," 92.

floating" (130; italics in original), the authors cite the first pages of *The Wretched of the Earth*, where Fanon lays out the compartmentalization of the colonial world and the desire of the colonized to, if only once, occupy the place of the colonizer. Similarly, the schematic division of Nicaro, in this case into three sectors or barrios, is a recurring theme in the voices of *Lengua*'s informants:

> Nicaro was divided in three barrios: La Pasa was the poorest. That's where I lived because I was one of the poor. El Dos was for the foremen, and things like that and this other part that was for the engineers; and Cabal, where the Americans lived.[18] In Cabal there was no entry after six, not even to walk through, because the gentlemen didn't want us walking. They were the owners and the bosses in Nicaro. "You're not allowed in." And since they were the owners and they had a group of flunkies who accepted it all, no one was allowed in. And they would throw out anyone. (148)[19]

These stories of segregation in Nicaro are backed by an explicit, even ostentatious, turn to Fanon: "We have interrupted the discourse of the three informants with quotes from *The Wretched of the Earth*, because no judgment of our own could better summarize or denounce the phenomena one finds hidden in semicolonial societies studied so masterfully by Frantz Fanon" (31).[20] The style of

[18] It is interesting that this description is nearly identical to the opening voiceover to Fausto Canel's film *Desarraigo* (1965). The film adds an explicitly gendered aspect to social stratification: "They were known as the barrio de 'las dames,' the barrio of 'las señoras' and the barrio of women." This coincidence also suggests that Nicaro as a destination deserving of cultural representation was not something Morejón and Gonce had simply come upon by chance.

[19] "Nicaro estaba dividido en tres barrios: La Pasa que era el barrio más pobre, yo viví en ese porque yo era uno de los pobres; el Dos que era de los capataces y esas cosas y esta otra parte que eran los ingenieros, y Cabal donde vivían los americanos. Allí en Cabal después de las seis de la tarde no se podía entrar, ni caminar por ahí, porque los señores no querían que camináramos. Ellos eran dueños y jefes en Nicaro. "No puede pasar" y como ellos eran los dueños y tenían un grupo de esbirros que todo lo aceptaban, pues no pasaba nadie. Y botaban a cualquiera."

[20] "Hemos querido interrumpir el discurso de los tres informantes con citas tomadas de 'Los condenados de la Tierra,' porque ningún criterio nuestro podría resumir mejor, ni podría denunciar, esos fenómenos que se encuentran ocultos en las sociedades semicoloniales, tan magistralmente estudiadas por Franz Fanon."

this interruption isn't all that different from the use of intertitles in the experimental documentaries of the period by filmmakers like Sara Gómez or Nicolás Guillén Landrián.[21] Here the use of Fanon, noted defender of the *Lumpenproletariat* as revolutionary force, signals at a racialized nature to inequality that the informants have not explicitly named. What would otherwise be a schematic narrative of class exploitation becomes, with this introduction of Fanon as towering figure, an open question as to who exactly might be able to deepen the social revolution necessitated by such a structure.

In the first two sections of *Lengua*, devoted to the years before the Revolution, the question of race comes up in terms of social exclusion and poverty, while the final section takes on the epic style typical of testimonial literature about guerrilla warfare. Even in the above example there is no explicit reference to race in outlining the divisions between neighborhoods. The informant only refers to a privileged sector of the working class, "the foremen and things like that." Nevertheless, the racial question is made explicit many times. A list of informants in the appendix includes the name, age, sex, and profession of each, as well as their race. Similarly, an introductory section titled "La población" (The population) lays out Nicaro's demographics. Unsurprisingly this description strongly emphasizes the division between US citizens and Cubans, but it also notes the area's White majority as well as the prevalence of the Pan-Caribbean backgrounds of many Black residents:

[21] The intertitles in Guillén Landrian's *Coffea Arábiga* (1968), for instance, ironically signal the presence of exploitation of Afro-descendants in places usually excluded from criollo history. The inclusion of the incredulous intertitles "¡¿Los negros?!," responded to by two more intertitles reading "Sí" and "Los negros," creates an imaginary dialogue between viewer and narrator that stresses that what is being said is also something that cannot be said. This unthinkability, in this case of Black labor not just with sugar but with coffee, is followed by scenes of Afro-Cuban dancing in a present-day revolutionary context, underlining the links between unacknowledged past exploitation and continued cultural existence.

> There is no evidence of mixing between North Americans and Cubans because the North Americans who established themselves there didn't integrate with the native population. Nonetheless among Nicaro's current population there is an abundance of the white race with very defined features—for example, blue eyes or green ones, very straight hair, in most cases either blonde or light chestnut. The mulatto with frizzy hair, known as *trigueño* in Oriente Province, is also abundant. In parallel, we find a numerous group of Black descendants of Jamaican and Haitian immigrants, the so-called *Pichones* (young pigeons), integral components of Cuban nationality. Countless surnames like James, Howell, Rochet, Sanamé, and Silot make that lineage apparent. No specific cultural trait defines Nicaro beyond the condition of a society constituted by an influx, by that universal phenomenon known as *aglomeración* [conglomeration] characteristic of the capitalist process of industrialization.[22] (22; italics ours)

The nation as a multiracial nation, even a multinational nation, that this passage presumes to map, has a double function. In contrast with the final line's economistic definition of Nicaro, the classificatory and genealogical character of the description focuses on cultural complexity (a highly racialized complexity) as far more germane. A properly "revolutionary" text should subordinate the racial to the economic. All the more so in a company town like Nicaro, where the economy has been the melting pot in which Nicolás Guillén's notion of "color cubano" was presumably forged.

[22] "No hay ninguna evidencia de mezcla norteamericana y cubana, porque los norteamericanos que allí se establecieron no se integraron a la población nativa. No obstante dentro de la población actual de Nicaro abunda la raza blanca con rasgos muy definidos; por ejemplo, ojos azules y verdes, pelo muy lacio, en la mayoría de los casos rubio o castaño claro. También abunda el mulato, denominado 'trigueño' en Oriente, de pelo ensortijado. Paralelamente, encontramos a un numeroso grupo de negros descendientes de inmigrantes jamaicanos y haitianos, los llamados 'pichones,' integrantes activos de la nacionalidad cubana. Innumerables apellidos como James, Howell, Rochet, Sanamé y Silot hacen patente esta descendencia. No existe un rasgo cultural preciso que defina a Nicaro, más que el de la condición de sociedad constituida mediante el influjo de este fenómeno universal conocido como aglomeración, característico del proceso capitalista de industrialización."

Nevertheless, what the authors present is an abundance of White workers (and informants) joined with a multicultural lumpen. The "traps of *la mulatez*," the notion of a realized synthesis born of the uniform experiences of the working class, is far from clear, and the orthodox reading of the town as a local example of the universal phases of capitalist development seems almost tacked on.

It is clear that a history of racial discrimination was never far from Nicaro's formation. Certain spaces were reserved for Whites: offices, social clubs, swimming pools. In the section titled "Las oficinas" (The offices) this discrimination is presented as a de facto reality that did not depend on the law:

> The offices were made up of people of just one race: the Caucasian one. Men with dark skin under the illusion that because of their integrity or education they might sit in front of a typewriter or organize the bundles of files realized as soon as they stuck their heads in either of the two vast offices that if they were to work in Lengua de Pájaro they would have to dig trenches or grip the heavy forged-iron beams or wield the powerful air hammers.[23] (91)

People living in the "La Pasa" neighborhood were excluded from the club pool not only because they were unable to pay the monthly fee but because, as one of the informants, thinking back on his childhood, puts it, "Even if one was willing to go hungry to pay the fee to belong to the Club it was impossible; they wouldn't let you in, you also had to be white" (122–23).[24] Testimonies like this

[23] "Estas estaban compuestas por personas de una sola raza: la caucásica. Los hombres de piel oscura que se forjaron la ilusión que por su probidad o preparación intelectual podían sentarse allí, ante una máquina de escribir o poner en orden los rimeros de legajos, en cuanto asomaron la cabeza a cualquiera de las dos extensas oficinas, se dieron cuenta de que si habían de trabajar en Lengua de pájaro, tenían que cavar zanjas o asirse a las pesadas vigas de hierro forjado o manejar los poderosos martillos de aire."
[24] "Si a uno de La Pasa le daba la gana de pasar hambre y pagar la mensualidad para pertenecer al club, no podía, no lo admitían, tenía que ser, además, blanco."

echo the official revolutionary interpretation of the republican era: false “racial democracy” with a similarly false prosperity, perfectly incarnated in a place like Nicaro. The town’s vitality and development only represented prosperity for a select few. The book’s cover tells this story: a cartoon of a boss in suit and tie seated on top of the Nicaro cay, in his left hand a miniature Cuban flag, in his right a giant US one. The point is clear: Nicaro was emblematic of the neocolonial regime. Given that the theme of racial inequality is limited to testimonies on the prerevolutionary period, the critical approach seems for the most part to confirm the official narrative of the Revolution as a unifying national force opposed to the stratified past. Yet as we have seen, even in its discussion of this period, *Lengua* hints at cracks in the official narrative. The presentation of Nicaro’s origins and the stories of some of its residents will cast more doubt on the extent to which the text truly is a revolutionary homily.

A Wide Spectrum of Voices

Lengua is by no means a flat recounting of industrial exploitation and proletarian resistance. It is far stranger, taking its reader to the unexplored places and “singular” histories of a remote backwater. The description of how the town was founded is a good example. If we start from the assumption that one of the things that makes Nicaro so ideal to narrate neocolonialism is its recent origins, its development as a dependency for resource extraction to the United States, *Lengua* complicates that story.

Morejón and Gonce’s version presents the beginnings of Nicaro within the frame of colonial narrations’ encounter with unspoiled wilderness: “When the first immigrants arrived to work, *la lengua* (the strip of land) was separated from the world by jungles and swamps. It was empty with

the exception of a single inhabitant who raised pigs in the tropical underbrush" (17).[25] The stereotypical story continues when the settlers eventually lose these lands to a Yankee monopoly. The rehearsal of a narrative of uneven and dependent Latin American development is clear. Yet even in this typical origin story it is interesting that the wilderness was not in fact empty. A possible Maroon precedes even the first Cuban peasant settlers. This detail is typical of *Lengua*'s attention to the presence of lumpen elements normally written out of history. Here they remain, hidden in plain sight of a narrative that at first glance focuses on imperial exploitation. Similarly, the name "Lengua de Pájaro," beyond being a mere geographic descriptor, suggests a framing of a classic Latin American dichotomy between *lengua-civilización* and *mudez-naturaleza* (language-civilization vs. muteness-nature). This place however is onomastically not mute. It has its own tongue of birdsong that gave it its name, even before the arrival of civilizing development. The narrative begins before the area was delimited as a property for sale listed in *The New York Times*, by then as a properly neocolonial agglomeration, "a finished town . . . [of] more than 400 houses and amenities and services for 3,000 people" (19).[26] The point here is that Nicaro in this text is not just a factory of a key industry and its workers; it is also an archipelago known in vox populi as "Lengua de Pájaro." What is implied is a certain genius loci, aviary and tropical, that predates and coexists with the history of economic exploitation.[27]

Soon after we learn that even the official name of Nicaro is the product of a misunderstanding. During the prospecting process a foreign technician transcribed the name of the "Micara" hills incorrectly (20). "Nicaro" is the product of yet another English speaker's mistake

[25] "Cuando los primeros inmigrantes llegaron para trabajar, la lengua [de tierra] estaba separada del mundo por selvas y pantanos. Se encontraba desierta a excepción de un habitante que criaba cerdos en la maleza tropical."
[26] "un pueblo completo . . . [de] más de 400 casas con comodidades y servicios para unas 3000 personas."
[27] One might conjecture that given the persecution of homosexuals at the time, choosing the title "Lengua de Pájaro" and not, for example, "Nicaro: Tierra del niquel" (Nicaro: Land of Nickel) was itself a sort of ironic wink. The pejorative slang "pájaro" used for gays in Cuba might be a sort of playful reference to the kind of work that a potentially "problematic" poet could be expected to produce.

never corrected. With this in mind, the choice to return to the commonly used “Lengua de Pájaro” is a way of rectifying the blind indifference of the colonial eye. The erroneous naming is all the more problematic given that the actual prospecting and the technical knowledge that made the area suitable for mining was carried out by the Krupp company from Nazi Germany in 1938 (18). This fact is doubly significant for the narration as well, it ties capital in this case to its most abhorrent ideological form. The implication solidifies the official narrative: in Nicaro US investment used Nazi technology to reclassify and expropriate Cuban territory. For rhetorical purposes it matters little that the desire for cheap nickel that motivated the mine’s opening was to serve US war efforts against the Third Reich.

The inclusion of all these facts gathered in the archives of New York newspapers demonstrates that the textual strategy here goes well beyond the unmediated immediacy of oral histories. To create *Lengua* the authors used a variety of sources and writings beyond those mentioned previously as part of the appendix. The factuality of the data in the appendix is in fact interpellated by these preexisting popular sources about Nicaro that *Lengua* recovers. This is important in the first place because the presence of rescued writings underlines that the authors did not arrive in a cultural vacuum. In their “obsession with bringing together the collective memory of Nicaro” they used much more than a tape recorder (28).[28] In this respect, the two subtitles of the original edition—*Comentarios reales: Monografía histórica* (Real commentaries: Historical monograph)—the second of which was eliminated from the 2002 reissue—describe the scope of the project and differentiate it from contemporary testimonial works whose veracity depended exclusively on recovering voices rather than on documentation. *Lengua* puts History with a capital

[28] “obsesión por configurar la memoria colectiva de Nicaro.”

H in constant tension with *historias* (stories). As we shall see, it foregrounds the complex relationship between writing and orality in order to attend to histories that had been silenced.

The title itself is an homage to a never-published account. “Lengua de Pájaro” was the title of a chronicle written by an Afro-Cuban Protestant pastor named Francisco Maché. His story serves as a counterpoint to the White informants, an overwhelming majority (twenty-four of twenty-eight) of those included, according to the authors’ figures (351–54). The history of Nicaro is not just that of the development of an industry but also that of “a Black pastor whose life was filled with adventures back in the old days of the cay, back in the first years of the irrational peninsula” (28).[29] His anecdotes, labeled here as from “the old days” in more “irrational” times, cannot be verified. They are adventures that do not fit into the historical schema of development and exploitation. Their inclusion is in this sense a historiographical and testimonial “impurity,” an inclusion of a marginal voice that cannot be marshaled to a Revolutionary political narrative. It is telling that such an inclusion necessitates the reference to Barnet’s authoritative voice for legitimacy: that “works of testimonio should go hand in hand” with fiction so as to recover and examine “Latin America’s entangled reality.”[30]

Another unexpected recovery is the decision to dedicate *Lengua*’s first chapter to a Martinican healer and brothel owner, “La Madama.” Her story is returned to repeatedly as the focal point that weaves several testimonies together. This first section of the book, titled “La Nomadía, 1941–1947” (Nomadism), details the early days of the settlement when “La Madama” was far from a marginal figure but possessed considerable power. She is described as owner of her own key, “El Cayo La Madama” (Key Madame), from which she steers the fates of many in the consolidation of Nicaro as a boomtown. The focus on this seemingly peripheral figure, presented as a sort of

[29] “un pastor negro que corrió aventuras en el antiguo cayo, en los primeros años de la irracional península.”
[30] “Las obras de testimonio deben ir de la mano” de la ficción para rescatar y escudriñar “la enmarañada realidad latinoamericana”; Barnet, “La novela-testimonio,” 35.

informal governor from her seat on this adjacent island, subtly readjusts the assumptions of political economic history. Starting with a brothel, a brothel that is key to the economic fate of "Lengua," also puts the highly sensitive subject of prostitution centerstage. As with Pastor Maché, we are presented with a narrative of foundation where the factual and the mythical are inseparable, part of the same "entangled reality." How far is this from the contemporaneous effort of Boom authors to rewrite foundational fictions as failures of romance?[31] As with Mario Vargas Llosa's *La casa verde* (1966), *Lengua* transports us to the origins of the nation as brothel-nation.

The foregrounding of "La Madama" is supported by the text's interest in the silenced stories of other Caribbean immigrants. These so-called Pichones, a "numerous group of Black descendants of Jamaicans and Haitians, integral components of Cuban nationality," are also an integral part of local history (22).[32] Their inclusion reflects a version of Cuban history told firmly within Afro-Caribbean parameters. This phrase "integral components of Cuban nationality" is a strong corrective to even progressive elements of the revolutionary cultural establishment like filmmaker Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, whose film *Cumbite* (1964) had represented Cuban descendants of Haitian immigrants as if they were simply Haitians.[33] This is in complete contrast to the reduction of Afro-Cuban culture to mere folklore, an atavistic piece of national culture to be preserved, denounced by members of the "Manifiesto Negro" group: "cultural blackmail that transformed Black popular culture into a reflection of cultural degradation."[34] In *Lengua*, Black voices are central not just as informants but as creative protagonists of History. A strictly industrial or worker-focused

[31] Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 27.
[32] "numeroso grupo de negros, descendientes de inmigrantes jamaicanos y haitianos, integrantes activos de la nacionalidad cubana."
[33] See Justo Planas, "Cuerpos trocados en el cine de Tomás Gutiérrez Alea," *Hypermedia*, 9 January 2020, hypermediamagazine.com/arte/cine/tomas-gutierrez-alea-cine.
[34] "chantajes culturales que transformaron la cultura popular negra en procesos de degradación cultural"; Abreu, "Cuba: Una encrucijada," 58.

narrative would have had little room for characters like Pastor Maché or “La Madama.” In *Lengua* they are not only present but synonymous with the history of modernization.

This interpellation of historiographical givens is best demonstrated in the testimony of a man named Primitivo Silot. His section has the evocative name: “El pleito por las tierras: *Homenaje a Primitivo Silot*” (The lawsuit for the lands: *An homage to Primitivo Silot*). Introduced as a man with a “mentalidad mágica” (magic mentality; 18) incapable of imagining the dastardly transactions being plotted in New York that would define Nicaro’s economic history, Silot, we progressively learn, is a well-informed and capable fighter whose skill at managing legal documents and processes has allowed him to defend his rights more than once. Silot’s story is narrated in the first person and filled with convoluted twists and turns. He has been here since the beginning, since before the arrival of the Americans, and he claims that the lands were not exactly unclaimed wilderness: “All the land here belonged to the Cuban state. There were no divided properties. We went and literally got the title deeds made” (106).[35] These deeds, his property, he got by successfully outmaneuvering two large companies, “Cayo Mambí" and “La Snare” (65). In spite of such notable efforts, it is ultimately local enemies, his neighbors “the Vargases of Arroyo Blanco,” who get him kicked off his land. In total contrast with the idea of a “primitive” occupation by *campesinos* unaware of the means of legal property transfers, Silot underlines that the only squatter here without rights to the land was the United Fruit Company (“la Yunai”): “We saw all those papers— . . . This wasn’t property of the Yunai. The Yunai just came and took it” (66–67).[36]

This talent for sifting through documents, however, did Silot little good. When the factory arrived he was unable to get a job “organizing the bundles of documents” that accumulated there on account of his race (91).[37] As he narrates his various legal squabbles regarding property rights,

[35] “Todo esto era tierra del estado cubano. Esto no tenía propiedades. Nosotros sacamos la escritura literalmente.”
[36] “Que nosotros vimos todos esos papeles— . . . Esto no era propiedad de la Yunai. La Yunai, ella, lo cogió.”
[37] “Poner en orden los rimeros de legajos.”

it becomes apparent that he has gone through testaments and deeds that go all the way back to the colonial era. This personal search in fact coincides with emblematic figures in Cuban history writ large like Conde Mompó, father of the famous travel writer la Condesa de Merlin (104). In making a point of these overlaps, Silot seems keen to show that his own personal story intersects with a wider national history. In regard to recent history, the now aged Afro-Cuban man narrates the projects of expropriation under the Republic, where citizens' rights to land were ignored in favor of a developmentalism framed as beneficial to the nation.[38] Silot's rights were destined to be dead letter in relation to the Republican developmental imperative. The text makes no mention of measures taken to correct his situation since the triumph of the Revolution.

The mishmash of proper names, streams, and property markers that pepper Silot's research reinforces the authors' portrait of a figure whose story is as contradictory as the collection of documents he is determined to put in order. His narration ends with his defiance of a court order so he can keep trying to build a life in the backwoods: "The following day I had to go to Mayarí to make a court appearance, but when I came up from Mayarí, I went into the backwoods again and started to cut trees to make a house down there" (114).[39] The marronage continues. What is key is *Lengua*'s illustration that this is in no way a product of irrationality. Silot is well versed and documented regarding his rights, much in contrast with the irrational and inconsistent application of the law by the institutions he has dealt with. If the text preserves his manner of storytelling, repetitive, contradictory, and convoluted, it does so in order to not instrumentalize the facts of his case for the purpose of a simplistic political point. On the contrary, the authors' inclusion of these

[38] The battle between state development and existing property rights and *encomiendas* belonging to Afro-Cubans both individually and collectively has a long history. See Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and David A. Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty, and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Duke University Press, 2014).

[39] "Al otro día me tuve que ir a Mayarí a presentarme, pero cuando vine de allá de Mayarí, me metí pal monte y empecé a cortar palo y [*sic*] hice una casa allá abajo."

roundabout narrations, “the expressions, the intonations, the nontransferable language,” act as a sort of “noise,” an inevitable interference, without which the political economy of Nicaro’s development cannot be understood (26–27).[40]

The presentation of Silot and his lawsuits as an emblematic subject in the book’s introduction suggests that he exemplifies the battles over the written word that also framed the genesis of *Lengua*. What does it mean to recover a series of histories of Afro-Cuban exclusion within the project of a female Afro-Cuban author sent to compile the stories of mostly White workers? Here in the teething phase of testimonio as a genre, Morejón and Gonce frame the questions that would become central to subsequent academic debates: the relationship between orality and the written word, documentation versus fictionalization, and, most important, the question of whether the new genre can truly give a voice to the subaltern subject it purports to center/represent. *Lengua*’s subjects are far from the representativity incarnated in Estebán Montejo. The singular and emblematic subject of a book initially presented as *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave* is in Barnet’s account supposedly present in *each and every one* of the fights for liberty of Cuba’s last hundred years. It is true that *Lengua*’s primary focus is on workers in a key sector, a “working class aristocracy” exploited by foreign capital. These stories of “Las familias establecidas” (The established families), as the title of the second chapter puts it, schematically fulfill the project of coloring in an official history of the Revolution. However, by including a wide spectrum of voices, including those who “shouldn’t be there,” the Afro-Cuban subjects discussed above, but also the factory’s private security force, referred to as “the henchmen” by other informants, *Lengua* refuses to offer a portrait of exemplarity. There is no Montejo in whom to

[40] “los giros, las entonaciones, ese lenguaje intransferible.”

crystallize the struggle of all Cubans. What is made evident instead is a whole power structure based on stratification.

Complexities and Nuances Within the Official Story

The final section of *Lengua*, at first blush the densest and least entertaining, takes the reader through the scenes of the armed struggle against Fulgencio Batista. Nicaro again emerges as a central site of national destiny. Here Raúl Castro and Vilma Espín are seen as they do battle with Jesús Sosa Blanco, "The Torturer of Oriente Province," whose acts of war are narrated in great detail. Sosa Blanco is an integral component of the revolutionary story insofar as his trial was the highest-profile of the public tribunals held at Havana's Coliseum Sports Center in 1959. These trials were transmitted around the world through newsreels. His conviction and sentencing to death by firing squad were a foundational moment, not only for the image of the Revolution, criticized for the first time by international liberalism, but also for its narrative of redemption: the Revolution as necessarily pitiless in light of its opponents' manifest evil. The last section of *Lengua* reaffirms this narrative dramatizing its convergence with the local and particular history of Nicaro, but in doing so it also leaves a series of open questions.

The narration centers principal figures from the 26th of July Movement. Their heroic actions decide the battle. "Déborah," Espin's nom de guerre, is decisive in coordinating the evasive actions of the guerrilla (196). Cattle are rustled on direct orders from Raúl (257). And as if to make abundantly clear the schematic good-versus-evil dramaturgy, this cattle is stolen from no less than Julio Lobo, Cuba's richest man and intransigent representative of the *sacarocracia* (the sugarocracy). Raúl shows heroic restraint when he heeds the warning of the factory's American director to avoid a battle with potentially catastrophic results: "Sosa Blanco was coming and a large squadron was also coming down the line. And on the other side of the docks there were a ton of

us. That's when the American called Raúl and told him that that fight couldn't happen on account of the ammonium tanks and that the whole town would die. We made a countermarch and headed back up into the Sierra again" (332).[41] Despite the rebel forces' anti-imperialism, supporting acts of industrial sabotage and kidnapping American employees, this anecdote confirms Raúl as nevertheless a practitioner of just war. He is willing to listen, even to his class enemy, in the name of the common good.

His opposite number is the increasingly bloodthirsty Sosa Blanco, whose lack of scruples are noted as exceptional among a corps of army officers in the main indifferent and demoralized (301). This framing is not an authorial imposition but rather is repeated by each testimony. Batista's army was a force with no connection to popular will: "The only thing that they cared about was setting up shop to hurt people, drink, and get a taste of corruption. That was the army life" (196).[42] Even among people with doubtful past loyalties the desire to separate oneself from the army is clear: "*We guardajurados* [gendarmes] *didn't have anything to do with the army*" (221; italics in original).[43] The army is presented as anathema to the nation, and the testimonies evince unanimous support for the rebels: "What there was, was a million rebels" (196).[44] Their victory is presented thus as a fait accompli, an inevitable national destiny. *Lengua* makes sure to round off this impression by recounting the euphoria in Nicaro at the arrival of Fidel's little brother and his soon-to-be wife as the moment that confirmed victory (322).

This emphasis on filiation suggests that this section is in some way motivated, a way of shoring up support for a less-celebrated part of the upper echelons of power. Might this be a sort of

[41] "Venía Sosa Blanco y venía también un escuadrón grande por la línea. Y del otro lado del muelle había de nosotros cantidá. Fue cuando el americano llamó a Raúl y le dijo que esa pelea no podía ser por los tanques de amoníaco y se iba a morir el pueblo. Vino una contramarcha y nos recogimos pa la Sierra otra vez."
[42] "Lo único que les interesaba a ellos era fundar gao, hacer daño, beber y andar en la corrupción. Esa era la vida del ejército."
[43] "*Los guardajurados no teníamos nada que ver con el ejército*."
[44] "Lo que hay es un millón de rebeldes."

new canonization, an attempt to replace the recently deceased Che in revolutionary iconography? The text covers Raúl's movements in great detail. His comings and goings appear on detailed maps and even in a photocopy of Fidel's letter laying out Raúl's precise area of command: "from the town limits of Mayarí to those of Baracoa" (467).[45] Might this emphasis on a very particular and somewhat obscure sphere of action be a way of replicating the strong association of Guevara and Santa Clara in revolutionary history? In any case, this third section is peppered with footnotes citing *Obra revolucionaria*.

From this perspective, *Lengua* proposes an official history, but one told from a new angle. And yet the text also alludes to certain complexities, certain details that do not fit. One testimony tells that rather than being a no-holds-barred war there were almost no battles. This is far from the version of the armed struggle expounded in *Bohemia*, with its famous figure of 20,000 dead. The gunshots heard by the witnesses in *Lengua* are just Sosa Blanco killing cattle. The supposed scorched earth campaign did little more than keep the rebels from eating red meat (314). Another complexity is that Sosa Blanco's forces were "one great colored army . . . . One could say 100 percent colored" (318).[46] This is a curious fact in a narrative of the people's unity against Batista, and it is neither commented upon nor refuted. Another detail does elicit authorial correction. When one informant claims that it was not Sosa Blanco who burned down a small village near Nicaro called Levisa (339), the text inserts a clarifying note that refers readers to "the famous tribunals in Havana," reassuring them of Sosa Blanco's guilt. The inclusion of this "error," together with the editorializing addendum, is a significant rhetorical move. Why not simply leave incorrect

[45] "desde el término municipal de Mayarí al de Baracoa."
[46] "un ejército grande de color . . . . Se puede decir el cien por cien de color." This fact contrasts sharply with the War of Independence, a war that the Revolution was keen to enlist in its teleology through the project "100 años de lucha: 1868–1968" (100 years of struggle, 1868–1968). Montejo himself had participated in that project recreating his actions during the War of Independence in the film *Hombres de Mal Tiempo* (1968) by the Argentine director Alejandro Saderman. While Martí's famous and much debated idea that "race doesn't exist" was based on the experience of common fate forged under arms in the anticolonial struggle (Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba,* 126–27), the elimination of racial distinctions was more difficult to claim in the case of the guerrilla.

information out? Referring the reader to trials from ten years earlier, trials denounced by the condemned as a “Roman circus,” might be a way of indicating the necessity of maintaining narrations within an accepted revolutionary schema, perhaps even within this very text. Seen through this prism, the academic wonder at the text’s unanimity, “the constant ratification that each informant makes of what has been set forth by those that preceded them” is perhaps not a product of remarkable unity but is altogether more ambiguous.[47]

The Inevitable Questions

The principle critical text on *Lengua* produces more questions than answers. “Oralidad y memoria colectiva en *Lengua de pájaro*” (Orality and collective memory in *Lengua de pájaro*) by María del Carmen Sillato inscribes *Lengua* in an acritical and decontextualized version of the testimonio canon that took shape in the 1980s and 1990s. Sillato sees the work as a well-realized revolutionary panegyric. In her account, there is no room for doubt that rescuing Cuba’s history was the most urgent cultural activity at the time, but it avoids the inevitable questions: If Morejón’s text fit so well with the dominant cultural paradigm, why did it pass entirely without notice? Why has it remained so obscure?

In addressing the question of race, giving ample space to invisibilized and nonheroic subjects, it would seem that Morejón was attempting to deploy the testimonio genre as a means of bringing to light aspects of her silenced poetic voice. Despite the programmatic nature of the text, these subjects do not lend themselves to rote instrumentalization. The insistence on representing Cuba within a Pan-Caribbean continuum as well as the personal importance of the project are evident in recent interviews with the author:

[47] “la ratificación constante que cada informante hace de lo expuesto por el/los anterior(es)”; Sillato, “Oralidad y memoria colectiva,” 562.

> Now outside of Cuba I have a sort of—I don't know if it's an ancestral recurrence—historical syndrome with the Francophone Caribbean. When I arrive in Martinique or Guadeloupe or even French Guyana, which can be so different, I notice something very special, an emotion, something very particular that happens to me. I think that it's linked with *Lengua de pájaro* . . . , a book that very little has been said about. It begins with the testimony of a Martinican residing in Nicaro. I had discovered this character La Madama, written my university thesis on Aimé Césaire, and picked out Martinique and that universe as something really visceral. It's interesting how Guillén has a lovely poem dedicated to Guadeloupe, and that it was in Guadeloupe that Carpentier's plane broke down on his way to Europe—or vice versa—and that there he discovers the character Victor Hughes and with him the plot of *El siglo de las luces* (*Explosion in a Cathedral*).[48]

This reference to Carpentier backs up Morejón's decision in *Lengua* to rewrite a decidedly Cuban history inflected with the influence of the wider Caribbean. A revision of origins, or better put, a revision of the narration of origins, is just as present in this book "that very little has been said about" as in Carpentier's canonical allegory of the Revolution. However, in *Lengua*, unlike in *El siglo de las luces*, Caribbean contiguity, the commonality between islands, is deployed not to exalt Cuban and revolutionary singularity but instead to complicate and demythologize it.

[48] "Ahora, fuera de Cuba, yo te diría que tengo una especie—no sé si es una recurrencia ancestral—de síndrome histórico con el Caribe francófono. Es decir, cuando llego a Martinica, a Guadalupe o incluso a Guayana francesa—que puede ser tan diferente—, aprecio una cosa muy especial, una emoción, algo muy particular que me ocurre. Creo que ello está vinculado con *Lengua de pájaro* . . . , un libro del cual se ha hablado poco. Se inicia con el testimonio de una martiniqueña residente en Nicaro. Para entonces había descubierto el personaje de la Madama, hecho mi tesis universitaria sobre Aimé Césaire, y escogido Martinica y aquel universo como algo realmente visceral. Es interesante cómo Guillén tiene un bello poema dedicado a Guadalupe, cómo en Guadalupe también se varó el avión en que iba Carpentier hacia Europa—o viceversa—y allí descubre el personaje de Víctor Hughes, así como el argumento de *El Siglo de las Luces*." Morejón, "En los sitios de Nancy Morejón," 20.

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