

Nancy Morejón as a Cultural and Gender Mediator

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Culture and gender are seen as both expressions and characteristics of certain groups and societies; both of these concepts could easily be linked when studying behavior and identity influence in Literature. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 paved the way for numerous Cuban writers in matter of societal, political and educational matters. These Cuban writers benefited from the great opportunities of education and the new laws addressing discrimination and gender status and began to develop a mindset and literature abundant in Afro Cuban tradition, gender empowerment and a nationalist tone.

An example of these offsprings of the revolution is the renowned poet, essayist, and translator Nancy Morejon. She as a writer could address topics from a direct point of view coming from her experience living as an Afro Cuban woman, making her a mediator and spokesperson of the Afro Cuban identity and also of the Cuban woman, during the Post-Revolution Cuba and until the present day. Nicolas Guillen, fellow writer and mentor of Nancy Morejon, once stated that Nancy's literature was "as black as her skin", expressing her devotion to her Afro Cuban identity.

What makes Nancy a beacon of light within the Afro Cuban literature is the simplicity and oneness of her person and her work, which is very easy to identify with, while also causing an impact on the reader. Whether it's in her poems, essays or other scripts, Nancy Morejon can easily convey the concept of race and gender within the Cuban environment, which makes her a solid writer of diverse topics. An example of this is the poem "Mujer Negra",

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first published in 1975, after a dream that Nancy had about a woman that stared at her in her sleep begging for freedom, which intrigued her until she found the source for it, as Nancy stated in her Poetics analysis “la negra regresó y me dictó el poema” (which translates as “the black woman came back and dictated the poem to me”).

In "Mujer Negra", Nancy wrote about the experience of the slave trade as a woman. This poem can be interpreted as the direct experience of an African woman coming to the new world, while experiencing the horrors of slavery and possible assault, but there is also the undertone of black identity when she speaks of her ancestry and her native language. In this poem the line “acaso no he olvidado ni mi costa perdí a mi lengua ancestral” (translated as “perhaps I have neither forgotten nor lost my coast to my ancestral language”) highlights the theme in her poem, where she battled with its direction because "Mujer Negra" wasn't only about the sole experience of that woman but it was also intertwined with the experience of Nancy in the Cuba of the 70s (Morejon 1995).

A complement for "Mujer Negra" is the poem "Amo a Mi Amo", which portrays the other side of the coin, being more introspective and analytical of the female mind. Both of these poems are important to Nancy as she stated in an interview done by BOMB Magazine; because "Mujer Negra" poses as a global and epic account of slavery written almost in a dreamlike state and "Amo a Mi Amo" brings the opposite sense, analyzing the internal struggle of women as slaves. What makes these poems relevant not only in the black community 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. —Nancy Morejon 22 but also to gender issues is that Nancy declares “I do not know of any work where such woman is reflected or at least historical experience of slavery or even the violation of civil rights or women’s sexuality is analyzed”. Nancy wrote "Amo a Mi Amo" as an acknowledgement of "Mujer Negra", both of them focusing on the struggles of black women but being more influenced by the feminine psychology in the later poem. "Amo a Mi Amo" acts as a complex view of the female sexuality and rape culture; this poem explores the sexual relationship of a slave and her master. The woman at first describes her love for her ‘perfect’ master of blue eyes, but as the poem goes on the tone of it changes to one of resentment and discomfort in this relationship leading her to murder her master.

This poem is also essential because it addresses the sentimentalism and fragility of the black woman, which is a side of the black woman that is difficult to encounter in the works of literature. While the female theme is influential in her works, Nancy Morejon also broadly explores the subject of black culture and Afro Cuban identity, an example of it

being the poems "Negro and Los Ojos de Elegua." "Negro" is a description of a black male that is criticized for his appearance and origins, seen as part of the devil's work, all of this while watching him die at the gallows.

The subject of this poem tries to scrutinize the perception of the black man as a threat to society and the fear of African spirits coming from the Palo religion (palos de monte). The subject of religion and spirits is also seen in "Los Ojos de Elegua", where Nancy describes the apparition of Elegua to her and how he manifests himself as a warrior of a fiery chest. Elegua is an Orisha, a representation of God worshiped by Afro Antillean religions such as Santeria, Candombie and Oyotunji, which are important parts of the Afro Cuban tradition and culture.

This poem also mentions Olofi, another Orisha from the Afro Antillean beliefs. It is important to mention these kinds of characters and themes because of the influence that they have within the Afro Cuban culture and how the rest of the world perceives them. Nancy Morejon acts as a spokesperson of this cultural tradition through her works and her personality, representing it into her interviews, visual representations of her literature and other mediums. The cultural and gender perspective of Nancy Morejon has cleared the path for me to understand more about the complexity of black race and womanhood, but it has been very simple for me to correlate what Nancy writes with the culture of Panama as well.

Panama is also a country where there is an abundant population of Afro descendants with similar beliefs, sentiments and traditions. The work of Nancy, while being inspired by Afro Cuban identity and the love for her country, can also be relatable to the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean. The influence of Afro Antillean folk is palpable in areas of Panama such as Colon and Bocas del Toro and even in the city of Panama where thousands of Cubans reside.

In Panama, the use of poetics as a cultural and gender liberator is difficult to find, but there are still authors that strive for that freedom of character and gender, such as Consuelo Tomas with her poem *El Negro en el Cabaret* and Bertalicia Peralta with *La Unica Mujer*. Both of these poems, while being different from Nancy's style, keep the same themes of womanhood and blackness. Exploring gender and cultural themes of a specific culture, such as the Afro Cuban culture, has proven to be very challenging to synthesize into a short essay. Even after I narrowed it down to only one author, I feel as if my words and interpretations do not do justice to what Nancy Morejon wished to convey in her literary works and her life as a Revolutionary writer.

Nancy Morejon has proven herself to be a voice of the Black Revolutionary Cuba, interested in developing a social purpose that could be transmitted through her poems, just like her mentor Nicolas Guillen did in his works. Nancy has stated that “The originality that can be perceived in my poetry derives, I think, 22 from my condition as a woman and from my condition as a black.” Nancy’s vision of the world, as she said in an interview, is deeply affected by her three conditions: being black, Cuban and a woman; which in her opinion, cannot be separated from each other.

Nancy proves to be a versatile woman that is able to voice the concerns and feelings of a culture, a nationality and a gender, which is not an easy task. But for Nancy, as she says, “Poetry comes easy to me, like a bird”. This demonstrates that Nancy in her simplicity can still write about complex themes regarding race, culture and gender liberation, while also staying true to her own Black and female identity and also the deep influence that Nationalism and the Cuban Revolution had in her works throughout. This makes her not only an outstanding writer but also the voice and mediator of a diverse platform conformed of the Afro Cuban culture and the female gender in today’s society.

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