

Sociocriticism

XXXVI-1 | 2022

Diasporas/ diasporisations noires

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🔗 <http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/sociocriticism/3148>

Electronic reference

Quince Duncan, « From Gradualism to Afrorealism in Latin America », *Sociocriticism* [Online], XXXVI-1 | 2022, Online since 15 juillet 2022, connection on 25 mai 2023. URL : <http://interfas.univ-tlse2.fr/sociocriticism/3148>

From Gradualism to Afrorealism in Latin America

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OUTLINE

Integrationist gradualism
Afrorealism by Nicolás Guillén

TEXT

- 1 As a general rule, Afro-Latin American studies tend to ignore the struggle and thinking of Africans and their descendants. Research is limited to analyzing European domination and exploitation, leaving aside the African? struggles of resistance and liberation. Nevertheless, these forms of resistance have been very diverse.
- 2 From their uprooting from African territory, the enslaved tried various strategies: self-immolation (suicide); uprising on the slave ships; plantation insurrections; passive resistance such as breaking tools or letting cattle loose; negotiations such as manumission, maroon cultural resistance; intellectual resistance; the top form of struggle: armed resistance, and assimilation and integration. Beyond doubt Africans and their diaspora, did not consider themselves defenseless victims, an attitude that enabled them to create thought and institutions for their purposes.
- 3 Africans and their descendants continued their struggle en-route, by self-immolation, throwing themselves outboard, or by means of insurrections. And in the plantations and mines of America, they prolonged the struggle. By 1553 there were many well documented heroic efforts: Alonso de Illescas, in Esmeraldas, Ecuador; Benkos Biojo in Colombia, in 1608 Yanga in Mexico, in 1770, Bonnie in the Guianas, and in Jamaica, a woman, Queen Nanny led the successful revolt of the “maroons”.
- 4 African Diaspora people even managed to organize maroon states, such as St. Vincent, in the Caribbean where a new Afro-indigenous

ethnic group emerged circa 1635: the Black Carib nation later termed Garífuna that lasted over a hundred years. And down south, in Brazil, the Republic of Palmares was organized in 1605 -a modern state, and the first independent state in the Americas. This maroon state, which was the size of Portugal, maintained its independence for almost 67 years.

- 5 The top achievement was that of Haiti -an enslaved nation that declared freedom. The heroic Haitian deed destroyed some of the fundamental myths of European doctrinaire racism, such as the alleged absolute superiority of Europeans. This idea, rooted in the europhilia (an alienated reverence for everything European) of the Latin America ruling classes, combined with endophobia (rejection of their own culture) was smashed to pieces. Afro-descendants themselves saw in Haiti the recovery of their identity and pride. Toussant had successfully confronted the three main European powers of the time: the Spanish and the British Empires, Napoleon's France - and defeated all three of them. Additionally, Haiti gave military assistance and arms to Simón Bolívar, the South American liberator. The Haitians demonstrated that colonial powers were not invincible.
- 6 On the other hand, Afro-descendants in Latin America fought upfront in the wars of independence. It should suffice to mention José María Morelos, who issued the decree of November 17, 1810, in Mexico abolishing castes and slavery; or the case of María Remedios del Valle, the Afro-Argentine who actively participated in the Andalusian Battalion in the fight against the English invasion and then, was reluctantly incorporated into the army of General Belgrano, contributing to the process of independence of the Viceroyalty of La Plata. Her struggles earned her the title of Mother of the Nation spontaneously assigned by the troops. (Yao, 2009).
- 7 But as the enthusiasm with independence was vanishing, Latin American elites decided to create White nations. The project of a democratic state, with the participation of all groups, began to fade rapidly. The dream of Miguel Hidalgo (1810) and José María Morelos (1813), who had decreed the freedom of slaves, the abolition of the caste system and equality for all who would be there-on termed "Americans" was gradually forgotten.

- 8 The four fathers were aware of the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of Latin American people. Simón Bolívar, speaking at the Congress of Angostura, pointed out that the nations to be created were a mixture of Africa and America, since the Spaniards themselves had African blood. According to Bolívar, “The European has been mixed with the Native American and the African, and the latter has been mixed with the Indian and with the European”. Symbolizing the matter, he went on to state that all were born from the bosom of the same mother, even when “our fathers, different in origin and in blood, are foreigners, and all differ visibly in the epidermis; this dissimilarity brings a challenge of the greatest transcendence” (Simón Bolívar, Congreso de Angostura).
- 9 Taking into account the active participation of Afro Descendants in the independence process, one would imagine them as free and fully integrated citizens into the emerging national societies. However, very soon it became clear that that would not happen. On the contrary, the leaders opted to create “White nations”, under the assumption that civilization and progress were only possible among White populations.
- 10 The truth is that the project of a multiethnic egalitarian nation to be built, according to Bolívar, stumbled against historical reality. At the international level, the Latin American elite excluded Haiti from the process, despite the support received during the wars of independence. On the internal level, José de San Martín, warned in relation to his attempt to form a unified national army: the only inconvenience occurred in effort to form a unified national army is the impossibility of bringing together in one body the various castes of Whites and browns (Anglarill, 1994).
- 11 In the context of the newly created national states, Afro-descendants tried to incorporate and work from within the political parties, choosing their party affiliation according to the positions that the different political groups assumed around issues such as slavery and racism. This phenomenon was repeated throughout Latin America. But this strategy faced strong opposition. Psychiatrist José Ingenieros, one of the leading ideologists of the times had this to say: Men of color should not be politically and legally our equals; they are inept

at exercising civilian capacity and should not be considered persons in the legal sense (*Las razas inferiores*, 1906).

Integrationist gradualism

- 12 The words of the African-American intellectual William Sanders Scarborough, (1921) clearly defined the mentality of integrationist gradualism:

My advice to people of color would be to emerge gradually but invincibly. I would tell them to make such intellectual and moral progress, and such progress in their conduct, that other people cannot but appreciate them.”

(*London Times*, London, Sept. 1921)

- 13 In Cuba, the ideology of Gustavo Urrutia corresponds to the integrationist gradualism of his time. He had done well in post-colonial Havana, and was in a comfortable position at the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century. His economic position was the result of his work, but he also had had the sponsorship of outstanding White people. His argument was: “I managed to surpass myself and therefore, how come others cannot do the same?”. He lambasted other Cuban ideologists, that were claiming a space in society for Black people, arguing that the social and economic system was detrimental to their aspirations.

- 14 Writer Tomás Fernández Robaina, quotes the fragment of an article by Cuban general Generoso Campos Marquetti, who in 1902 described the situation of Afro-Cubans translated as follows:

All the offices are still in the same state, the colored ones are still requested for porters, for coachmen, for servants or for tiny positions, the same in the mail as in customs. The prison is still divided into Black and White, and the artillery corps also divided (...) When a foreign representative comes to the Palace, neither in the rural guard nor in the artillery that escorts him, they form any man of color.

(Fernández Robaina, 2007, p. 81)

- 15 Urrutia managed to publish a series of articles entitled “Ideals of a Race” in the *Diario de la Marina*, an important Cuban newspaper.

These articles called for the cooperation of White people of higher culture, intelligence and prestige, to publicly denounce the marginalization of Afro-descendants, a fact that he considered circumstantial. Fernández Robaina synthesizes Urrutia's thought by saying that "he considered that the negro should develop socially and economically and that only by achieving that development as a collectivity could he obtain full recognition and the enjoyment of his rights." (Fernández Robaina, 2007, p. 44).

- 16 It is useful for the present line of thought to reiterate that the attempt of Afro-descendants to have a full participation in the emerging political parties, was a fiasco throughout the Continent. The nascent nation-states not only raised the flag of White nations, but precisely to consolidate the identity to which they aspired, made Black people and communities invisible, excluded them from economic power and limited their participation. The founders of these National States were well convinced of the alleged inferiority of the Black race and therefore agreed with the idea of their own racial superiority. According to Francisco Cruz, Director of Statistics of Honduras, Blacks had smaller skulls than other races, a fact that made them more exposed to idiotism than madness (Francisco Cruz, 1820-1895, cited by Devés Valdez, 2000).
- 17 In the context of these national States, Afro Descendants took an active part in the effort to set up the new social order. In many instances, ties with one party or another was the rule, usually owing to the stand taken by those parties in relation to the rights of the Black populations. Such were the cases of Partido Liberal in Colombia, that favored the abolishment of slavery; the support given by Afro Argentines to General Juan Manuel de Rosas, who, notwithstanding his philo-slavist past, supported the Black communities and their culture and resorted to a series of manipulations to stay in power with their support; and in recent years, the support of the Afro Caribbean population of Limon, Costa Rica, to the Liberation Party because its founder, José Figueres Ferrer abolished laws that discriminated against them at the end of the 1940s.
- 18 Independence then, did not lead to freedom and equality. The "raise your color" ideology inherited from the colonial caste-class system unrelentingly had the sway of the day. The Mestizo elite and the

White minority continued enforcing their adopted Eurocentric identity – Europhilia, ethnophobia and endophobia included. Clear skin mestizos were incorporated into the White elite. Traditional Indigenous civilizations were idealized, as showcases, in an effort to equate ancient Greco-Roman civilization. But the descendants of the Aztecs, Maya, Toltec, and Incas, were marginalized, excluded from power and economical structures.

- 19 Afro Descendant communities were also excluded and rendered invisible. Minority elite Afro Descendants were assimilated, under the continuing “bleaching” ideology inherited from colonial days. Racial mixing intensified, as the elite continued to claim a place in the international White community –a seat that was constantly denied, as observable in the following citation of William Walker, a U.S. filibuster that invaded Central America in 1856 with the intention to set up a slave State throughout the region. According to Walker, Central Americans constituted a “a mixed and degenerated race, disguised as White”. He went so far as to affirm that stable relations between the “pure and White” superior American race, with the mixed Indo-Spanish inferior race, as it exists in Mexico and Central America was impossible. (Quoted by Leopoldo Zea, *Journal Universum*, Año 12-1997).
- 20 Throughout the region, limited democracies were established, followed by dictatorships supported by the U.S. government. In Argentina the Black population sided with one of the factions in conflict, led by President Rosas, a move that triggered retaliation on the part of Rosas’s opposition. In Cuba, Juan Francisco Manzano, the first published Afro Latin American writer, participated in the struggle for abolition. Falsely accused by the colonial Cuban government (Cuba was under Spanish rule until 1902) barely escaped death, and had to give up writing. Ethnic differences were considered contrary to national unity. As a result, factions of Afro Descendants, considering that they had been betrayed by their *criollos* counterpart, with whom they had waged war against the Spanish colonial power, set up political entities to enhance their struggle against continuing oppression. The most outstanding cases were those of Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) in Cuba and A Frente Negra Brasileira (FBN) in Brazil and Partido Auténtico Negro of Uruguay. These efforts were rapidly suppressed by the system.

- 21 The Independent Party of Color was founded by the Afro-Cuban Evaristo Estenoz, as a reaction to the fact that in the by-elections held on August 1, 1908 none of the Black people who ran for the two dominant parties (Liberals and Conservatives) were elected. A few days later, Estenoz, a veteran of the Liberation Army, called a meeting in Havana inspired by José Martí's slogan of having a "Republic with all and for the good of all." The diagnosis of the situation of the Afro-descendant population, made by themselves, not only coincided with the aforementioned perspective of General Generoso Campos Marquetti, but also gives us an intra-centric perspective of greater depth:

The men of color who militate in the political parties, have not had, do not have, nor will they have, co-religionists in them, other than in cases where a street demonstration is projected, so that Blacks are the bearers of the candles; so that they form the numerous nuclei that applaud at the rallies, so that they are the determined and enthusiastic propagandists of the candidates nominated by the party, so that they are the free and diligent agents on election day, and to achieve such cooperation, it is enough that only two or three names of dark-skinned individuals appear in the party's candidacy, postulated for the humblest of the positions.

(Fernández Robaina, 2007, p. 61)

- 22 From that meeting was born the Independent Party of Color, led by Estenoz himself as president and Gregorio Turin as secretary, also an army officer. The slogan was clear: freedom is not requested, it is not begged for, it is conquered and the right is exercised by those who have it.
- 23 The ideology of the PIC contained revolutionary ideas of the time. As loyal ex-combatants of the Cuban independence, they showed concern for the exiles, those who had had to flee Cuba or who were expelled as a result of the war. The request for the repatriation of exiles on behalf of the State, without distinction of race, is consistent with their struggles. But in addition, they asked for free and compulsory education, including university education; they also called for a policy of non-selective immigration, confronting the attempts of the new national state to whitewash the country by importing European population and excluding people from other racial groups. They also included in their petitions an agrarian reform based on state lands; the

regulation of child labor, occupational accident insurance, labor courts; they also demanded that trials be conducted with racially mixed juries and opposed the death penalty. And in their struggle against the invisibility of Afro-descendants that constituted the Cuban majority, they requested the appointment of Afro-Cubans in the diplomatic service.

- 24 After its legalization, the PIC quickly achieved great popularity among the Cuban population. In fact, the great mass of workers saw in their ideology the vindication of their own aspirations. This brought a swift response from the ruling elite. Liberal Senator Martín Morúa Delgado in February 1910 proposed an amendment to the electoral law to suppress the PIC. He argued that it was against the Constitution to organize “exclusive political groups or parties on the basis of race, wealth, professional title or birth.” Morúa Delgado, the first Afro-Cuban senator, the son of a Spanish father and a Black mother, considered that mulatto population was superior to the Black population.
- 25 The proposal was approved by the Senate and ratified by the House of Representatives a few months later. The government of President José Miguel Gómez took advantage of the law to unleash a fierce persecution against the militants of the Party, imprisoning them with various accusations and outlawing the Party. However, the PIC continued its struggle, now focused on the elimination of the law that outlawed them.
- 26 Militant ex-combatants as they were, the members of the PIC decided to hold a march brandishing their weapons. This served to justify the reaction of the authorities, who called the armed protest an “uprising” and unleashed a military response. The PIC militants could not contain the army. In the following two months, more than three thousand Black and mestizo people were massacred for their relationship with the PIC. Generals Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet who led the fight were captured and killed. By June 1912, the Black insurrection had ceased, putting an end to the effort of Cuban Afro-descendants to seek an autonomous solution to their situation (Fernández Robaina, 2007, p. 93).
- 27 A Frente Negra Brasileira (FBN), was established in 1931 by a group of Afro Brazilians. The objective of FBN was to create awareness among the Black population, to boost up and highlight their intellectual,

artistic, professional and physical capacities. In that direction, the Frente would develop programs to grant economic, social and legal protection and defense to “la Gente Negra” – the Black population. FBN was well received and supported by the urban Black populations of southern Brazil, but in 1936 Getulio Vargas, the incoming dictator, banned all political parties, putting an end to this effort.

- 28 The third case is that of the Partido Auténtico Negro, organized to fight for the vindication of the rights of the afro Uruguayan collective. It was founded in 1936 by Elmo Cabral, Ventura Barrios, Pilar Barrios and Salvador Betervide. The party’s program included the denunciation of occupational discrimination, uniting efforts with the most disadvantaged sectors of society, the support of initiatives that would benefit the country at large and the achievement of parliamentary representation. Unfortunately, the party was divided by prejudices of some sectors against one of their leaders who, owing to his social position was not considered as an authentic representative of the interests of the Afro collectivity. As a result of internal disagreements, the Party was dissolved in 1944.

Aforrealism by Nicolás Guillén

- 29 As mentioned before, as the euphoria of independence faded, the Latin American elite found themselves at the end of the 19th century faced with a reality difficult to accept: the growing loss of comparative advantages in the international markets, compared to the open and rapid development of their neighbors to the North. To justify their failure the Latin American elite came up with a self-satisfying excuse, a social Darwinist racist argument, based on three basic principles: europhilia, ethnophobia and endophobia.
- 30 Euro-centrism was expressed in the form of an unconcealed cult to Europe. The term europhilia is applicable as a marker of a process of European identity assumed by the Creole Mestizo and White Latinos. They fought for political and economic independence and finally expelled the Spanish. However, once this objective was achieved, they assumed the identity of the conqueror idealizing France and, although to a lesser degree, embracing Spain or Portugal as the Mother Countries. The Latin American elite, disavowing their reality as a mixed people, defined themselves as White and European. They then

incorporated into this category the vast majority of Mestizos, including Afro-Mestizos provided that they had enough obvious “white” phenotypic features.

- 31 A revealing example of europhilia is that of writer Ventura Garcia Calderon who praised Paris as follows: “In accordance with your civilized parks that obey an occult geometry, I want to purify (my) barbaric soul every morning.” (Cantilenas 17, cited by Schwartz, 1999, p. 15).
- 32 The second characteristic of Latin American racism is ethnophobia. The Latin American elite, in its desire to put an end to all vestiges of the castes, again resorted to social Darwinism. Ethnic diversity was denounced as a threat to national unity. A great fear of diversity developed, leading to overt phobia. In fact, social Darwinism, in its Creole version updated by Juan Domingo Sarmiento, stated that Native American and Black ethnic groups were incapable of progress. The solution was to promote mass European immigration, and in many cases genocide of the local populations.
- 33 Juan Bautista Alberdi, one of the prominent theorists during the construction phase of the national states, alleged that in “America anything that is not European is barbarian.” (Anglarill, 1994).
- 34 Gradualism came to a dead end in Latin America and the Caribbean. Autonomism had no chance. The dominating world view was that of White superiority, with no place for the Blacks in the socio-political structure. Authors such as Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959) dedicated a great part of their literary creation to stereotyping the Black population. This Puerto Rican writer is the propeller of an Afro-phobic “negrismo” full of rampant anti-African racist vision. For example, in the poem “Majestad Negra” we find the following: “By the lit Antillean street goes Tembandumba de la Quimbamba rumba, macumba, can-dombe, barnbula between two rows of Black faces. Before her a congo – gongo and maracaritma a conga bomba that bamba” (Fragment).
- 35 None of these expressions make sense. His vision of the Caribbean, as he himself confesses, is “to be mourned.” His ethnophobic view is more than evident, as seen in the following stanzas: “Martinique in the kitchen and Guadeloupe in the living room. Martinique makes the soup and Guadeloupe the bed.” On the Lesser Antilles he proclaims:

“innocent marmosets, dance on the ball of a wind that the wide hurricane gulf”, with which he lowers them to the category of primates. And he describes St. Kits as “the baby, the fool of the region. Fishing tender cyclones entertaining ignorance”. In these quotes, his vision of the world is outlined, impregnated with ideas of doctrinal racism (Palés Matos, *Canción festiva para ser llorada*, fragments).

- 36 But where he mostly completes his Afro-phobic vision, is in the poem Ñam-ñam. Here he dabbles on the subject of Africa, calling Africans cannibals. According to Palés Matos, Blacks delight in eating the flesh of White missionaries and explorers. “Nigricia” as his disrespectable term for Africa, is all ñam-ñam. Asia dreams up a Nirvana, America dances Jazz, Europe plays and theorizes, but Africa groans greedily ñam-ñam. (Palés Matos, *Ñam-ñam*, fragment).
- 37 The comparison is clear: Asia is in search of spiritual elevation (Nirvana); America dances jazz (he omitted to mention who created jazz); Europe is concerned with play and philosophy, but Africa growls while eating human flesh; silently chewing its dinner of explorers and missionaries.
- 38 In open contrast, a new current of Black thought emerged in Cuba. With his book *Motivos de Son* author Nicolás Guillen inaugurated this novel vision, without naming it, but articulating it in such a way that over the years it would be embraced as a guideline for Latin American Afro-descendant writers. In fact, contemporary to gradualist and autonomist thinkers, the Cuban author was undoubtedly aware of the resistance on the Mother Land, on the slave ships, in the maroon communities and so, distanced himself from gradualism and the attempts at political autonomism, and presented a well-articulated frame –an intellectual vision consequential to the new times.
- 39 I do not have a term from the author himself, so I coined, “Afrorealism” (Duncan, *Un Señor de Chocolate*, 1996) to distinguish this current of thought clearly non-conforming to the Latin American “mainstream” literature and racial stereotypes. Authors following the path laid out by Guillen, differ in their use of traditional Western myths and symbols. With *Motivos del Son*, African rhythm and terminology ceased to appear as decorative elements of Latin American literature, finding their real meaning in and for the Afro-descendant com-

- munity. It is an “epistemological” break away from the classical Eurocentric scheme.
- 40 This current, although it contains elements that can be considered related to “realismo mágico” (*magical realism*) very definitely places emphasis on the use of ancestral elements and experiences of the African community in diaspora.
- 41 In Guillén’s Afrorealism there are at least six basic characteristics clearly identifiable: an effort to restore the African diasporan voice using Afro-centric terminology; an effort to vindicate African symbolic memory; an informed and critical restructuring of the historical memory of the African diaspora; the reaffirmation of the concept of ancestral community; the adoption of an intra-centric perspective; the search for and proclamation of African American Identity; the recurrence of an Afrocentric vision of reality.
- 42 Unlike the “negrista” authors, such as Luis Palés Matos, that uses supposedly “African” terms for purely sound effects, or to express their racist views, Guillén’s poetics makes sense. “Mayombe bombe mayombé” is not just rhythm or onomatopoeia. “Sensamayá” (the snake) is the time of anguish of our Afro-descendants, who must be killed by the recovery of the drum (bombe) and must be destroyed by the deanery of our ancestry (Mayombe). “¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé!/You hit him with the axe, and he dies:/ hit him now!
- 43 The use of these words by Guillén constitutes an act of poetic subversion that will later be assumed by a number of Afro-Latin American poetic voices and storytellers. The Eurocentric paradigm has been broken. Afrorealism enhances the voice of Georgina Herrera, an Afro-Cuban who calmly extracts her “obosi” and “abolá” from the ancestral memory and gives it a new meaning (Herrera, *Ubi Sedi*). And years later, another Afro-Cuban, Nancy Morejón, will invite us with all property to understand the magic of Yemaya living in us.
- 44 The language is neither African nor Hispanic. It is Afro-Latin American.
- 45 Afrorealistic poets and storytellers proclaim themselves heralds of reconciliation with their snatched cultural heritage, willing to assume their Afro-Hispanic ethnicity. In Guillén this is an act of the greatest magnitude. The new symbology, the one that will inspire the Guille-

nean work, comes from the African memory: “Yoruba I am, I am lucumí/mandinga, congo, carabalí.”

- 46 Guillén, breaking with the paradigm, opened an escape valve throughout Latin America, and the vindicating chorus of African symbolic memory rises: Manuel Zapata Olivella, the Afro-Colombian master, includes as a preface to his novel *Changó, el Gran Putas* his poem about the Muntu in America. Costa Rican Duncan introduced his concept of Samanfo, Ashanti heritage, and from there on *who at night visits the poets will not be the muses, but the griots*, as confessed by Beatriz Santos the Uruguayan Afro poet.
- 47 The third observable element in the work of Nicolás Guillén is the titanic effort to restructure the historical memory of African-ness in the diaspora. It is a restructuring that is no longer based on the aesthetic idealism of “negritude”, but on research. Historical memory under reconstruction is an informed memory. In this sense, it is oriented on the one hand to raise the level of historical consciousness and on the other hand to demystify it from the great chain of denials, myths, omissions, victimhood, and blatant lies that constitute the official history taught in our educational centers. It is also critical and a self-critical history, which seeks to humanize and digest the facts.
- 48 In *Malambo*, for example, the novel by Afro-Peruvian Lucia Charún Illescas, there is a realistic depiction of an African protagonist of the slave trade who falls into his own trap and ends up enslaved by the Europeans. Duncan’s novel *Un Mensaje de Rosa*, narrates the adventures of an Afro-Portuguese trafficker. It tells the details of the life of a Black Spanish woman who is trapped in the dynamics of Havana, returns to life and materializes in a fictional way as Benkos Biojo (1603) the builder on Colombian soil of the first free territory of America; Yanga returns to life (1608) building without slavery an autonomous territory in Mexico; and reconstructs his deed, Zumbi de los Palmares (1713) at the head of an independent state in Colonial Brazil, which resisted for 67 years. Afrorealism is therefore a literary current that stems not solely from emotions, but also from informed and critical reasoning.
- 49 The fourth element that we observe in the poetics of Nicolás Guillén, is the reaffirmation of the concept of ancestral community. It is what

has been called in another context, “universal Black consciousness”, which was postulated by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s as well:

All men are created equal and have the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that is why we, the duly elected representatives of the Black peoples of the world, invoking the help of the just and Almighty God, declare all men, women and children of our blood throughout the world, free people, and we claim them as free citizens of Africa, the Homeland of all Blacks.

(Declaration of the Rights of the Black Peoples of the World. Article 1. August 31, 1920.)

- 50 But in Guillén’s poetics, the recovery of the ancestral community does not eliminate the Cuban-ness. In the words of Nancy Morejón, “it is clear that in the *Motivos del Son* there is a treatment of race as a cultural concept and as an ethical value. (...) It is not Black as an insulating element but as an integral element. Race is going to be tied later to the idea of the ancestor.” (Morejón, 1972). And in that context, Afro-realist authors surpass the level of caricature to build true characters. Later, the Afro-Dominican Blas Jiménez in a true ethnophilic symphony embraces diversity and miscegenation in a positive sense, singing in “*El Nativo*” Poem 4 as follows: “New Indians, of different mixtures / Mulatto Indians / of African color”. And at the end of the poem, he also honors those Blacks who did not arrive directly from Africa but were in servitude or were freemen in pre-colonial Spain: “since the times of Castile and Aragon / the mother of the Black stuck to the stove”.
- 51 The fifth characteristic of Afrorealist writers is their adoption of an intra-centric perspective. The voice that narrates does so from within the community. This makes it possible to confront internal conflicts, the product of the experience of uprooting, enslavement, caste and doctrinal racism. It allows an internal confrontation of the particularities of Black endophobia, but, at the same time, detaching from racist and biased voices. In the poem “*Motivos de Son*”, Guillén’s poetic voice addresses the issue. Someone called him Black “*pa que me fajara yo*”. The point is that the one who shouted Black at him as an insult, was also of African descent. Therefore, his grandmother is quoted:

Tan blanco como te ve
y tu abuela sé quién é.
¡Sácala de la cosina:
Mamá Iné!
Mamá Iné, tú bien lo sabe;
Mamá Iné, Yo bien lo sé;
Mamá Iné, te dise nieto,.

*As White as you seem
I know your grand-mah
Get her out of the kitchen!
Mamá Iné
You know it
And I do
Mamá Iné calls you grandson.
(Guillén, Motivo de son, fragmento)*

- 52 The intra perspective thus allows discussion within the community. The Afro-Uruguayan Cristina Cabral confronts the Black man: “Black Man / if you are just looking for / a woman who warms / your food and your bed”, she accuses him of being blind by a White veil. Cristina introduces her vision of the woman of the ancestral community:

Soy resistencia y memoria.
Construí el camino del amo
Así como el de la libertad
Morí en la Casa Grande
Igual que en la Senzala.
Dejé el ingenio y descalza
Me hice cimarrona

*I am resistance and memory.
I built the way of the master
As well as that of freedom
I died in the Casa Grande
Same as in the Senzala.
I left the cane field and barefooted
And became a maroon
(Cabral, “Memoria y Resistencia”, fragmento).*

53 And it ends with the accusing finger, with a claim that is only possible from within: “You are still not there!”

54 The poetic voice of the Costa Rican Shirley Campbell, rebukes “Carlos” a non-Black friend who is beginning to understand. She tries to make him see that his skin is different from hers, and that her history is diverse. The poetic voice recognizes that the world looks different from within and dares to affirm:

Que el tiempo es desigual
que las pieles tienen matices
y que el amanecer
pinta distinto
desde estos ojos

*That time is unequal
that the skins have shades
and that dawn
looks different
from these eyes
(Poema XII Campbell 88).*

55 That internal conflict is not only social. It occurs in the inner self of the Black woman. Such drama is perceived in the work of Nancy Morejón. Her approach has nothing to do with that of Alberto Ordoñez Argüello, a Latin American mestizo poet, who had his own version of Negrism. His Black personae is a Black woman in utter anguish, begging God that her son would be born White as snow (Ordoñez Argüello, “Oración de Negra”). There is no such plea in Morejón’s intracentric vision. Her “Black Woman” confesses her love-hate relationship with her “master”, confessing dichotomous love:

Amo a mi amo, pero todas las noches,
cuando atravieso la vereda florida hacia el cañaveral
donde a hurtadillas hemos hecho el amor,
me veo cuchillo en mano, desollándole como a una res
sin culpa.

*I love my master, but every night,
when I cross the flowery path to the reedbed*

*where we have sneaked to make love,
I see myself knife in hand, skinning him guiltlessly as a beast.
(Mujer Negra, fragmento)*

- 56 This existential ambiguity, gives rise to the claim of the community, in the poetic voice of the Panamanian Gerardo Maloney who in *Juega Vivo* claims the Black far from perfect Bryan as leader,

*porque encarna nuestra historia
con las trampas, los engaños
la astucia y la malicia
que se aplican por lecciones
en el transcurso de esta vida.*

*because he embodies our history
with its traps, deceptions
cunning and malice
that are applied as lessons
in the course of this life.
(Juega vivo, fragmento)*

- 57 This new significance transcends both literary and political perspectives, to become existential.

- 58 Afro-realist writers, strongly proclaim their African-American identity. They claim to be protagonists of the nation and culture and claim their space. They recognize themselves as part of the ancestral community, but that claim is but one of the expressions of mestizo America, in which those who are not genetically are culturally so. We must assume reality, penetrate the shadows of history, separate the grain and the chaff.

*Sombras que sólo yo veo,
me escoltan mis dos abuelos (...)
tambor de cuero y madera:
mi abuelo negro (...)
gris armadura guerrera:
mi abuelo blanco*

*Shadows that only I see,
I am escorted by my two grandparents (...)
Leather and wooden drum: my Black grandfather (...)
grey warrior armor:
my White grandfather
(Guillén, “Balada de los dos abuelos”, fragmento)*

- 59 The Afro-realists with Guillén, show their shield with a baobab, a rhinoceros and a spear, and without denying the gray warrior armor of the White grandfather, they affirm themselves proud protagonists of the ancestral community. “From now on I will call myself African”, Blas Jiménez shouted in his collection of poems, as if to emphasize that the Dominican nation was also built by “us”, those of African heritage. But that recognition is not made without protest, it is not assumed without raising the cry of historical deterioration: the Panamanian Cubena, protests and asserts himself angrily: “What a misfortune, Ashanti I am and they call me Carlos” and chooses as a literary name “Cubena”, which in the Ashanti tradition, means male born on Tuesday.
- 60 Afrorealism is a political stand; a proposal for demystification, against the Eurocentric chain of denials, myths, omissions, victimhood, and blatant lies that constitute official history; a claim that people of African descent constitute an integral part of the Latin American communities, and as such, are full-pledged citizens, co-builders of these national states, having a clear understanding of multicultural identity: “I am”, Guillén emphasizes,

*también el nieto,
biznieto,
tataranieto de un esclavo.
(Que se avergüence el amo)*

*also the grandson,
Great grandson
And the great-great-grandson of a slave.
(Shame on the master)*

- 61 And as such, he assumes his identity: Who am I?

¿Nicolás Yelofe, maybe?
¿Or Nicolás Bakongo?
¿Or could it be Guillén Banguila?
(Guillén, “El Apellido”, fragmento).

62 The riddle is solved, in Son 16:

Yoruba soy, lloro en yoruba
lucumí.
Como soy un yoruba de Cuba,
quiero que hasta Cuba suba mi llanto yoruba;
que suba el alegre llanto yoruba
que sale de mí.
(...)
y cuando no soy yoruba,
soy congo, mandinga, carabalí.

*Yoruba I am, I
cry in Yoruba-lucumí.
Since I am a Yoruba from Cuba,
I want my Yoruba cry to rise to Cuba;
the joyful Yoruba cry that comes from me.
(...) and when I am not Yoruba,
I am Congolese, Mandinga, Carabalí
(Guillén, “Son 16”, fragmento).*

63 So then, as claimed by Jorge Artel, the Afro-Colombian poet:

No importa que seas nieto de chibchas,
españoles, caribes o tarascos
si algunos se convierten en los tráfugas,
si algunos se evaden de su humano destino,
nosotros tenemos que encontrarnos,
intuir, en la vibración de nuestro pecho,
la única emoción ancha y profunda,
definitiva y eterna:
somos una conciencia en América

*It doesn't matter if you are the grandson of chibchas,
Spanish, Carib or Tarascan*

Or if some becomes fugitives,
if some evades their human destiny,
we have to reconcile,
search in the vibration of our chest,
the only wide and deep emotion,
definitive and eternal:
we are a conscience in America
(Jorge Artel, "Poemas sin odios ni temores", fragmentos).

- 64 Afrorealistic thought is compelling. No more willingness to follow gradualism or political autonomism: Afrorealism is the compelling claim to political rights and identity now.

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ABSTRACTS

English

In the process of their kidnapping and enslavement, Africans and their descendants continued their struggle en-route, by self-immolation, throwing themselves outboard, or by means of insurrections. And in the plantations and mines of America, they resorted to political and cultural maroonage.

During the quest for independence, they continued their dignified struggle for survival and freedom and later in the context of the newly formed Latin American republics, as they were subjected to the aftermath of slavery and growing racism, they resorted to diverse forms of physical, political, cultural and religious resistance – adopting the idea of gradual recognition and full integration as citizens. But as gradualism failed, they formed autonomous political parties, a strategy that was violently suppressed.

The resistance and struggle has evolved in the intellectual field. Nicolás Guillén, the Cuban poet (1902-1989), proposed in the 1920s a new viewpoint to restore the African diasporic voice, using Afro-centric terminology; vindicate African symbolic memory; reaffirming the concept of an ancestral community; adopting an intra-centric perspective and a systematic search for, and proclamation of African Latin American identity. This proposal, evident in Guillén's poetry, has been identified and termed Afrorealism. Many Afro-Descendant writers throughout Latin America, have adopted Guillén's Afrorealism, giving the African Diaspora in Latin America, a new perspective in their continuing struggle for an egalitarian recognition and participation in their respective countries.

Français

Alors même qu'ils étaient enlevés et réduits en esclavage, les Africains et leurs descendants ont poursuivi leur lutte lors de leur déportation, en s'immolant, en se jetant à la mer ou en organisant des insurrections. Dans les plantations et les mines d'Amérique, ils ont eu recours au marronnage politique et culturel.

Lors de leur combat pour l'émancipation, ils ont poursuivi leur digne lutte pour la survie et la liberté et, plus tard, dans le contexte des nouvelles républiques latino-américaines, alors qu'ils étaient soumis aux suites de l'esclavage et au racisme croissant, ils ont eu recours à diverses formes de résistance physique, politique, culturelle et religieuse – adoptant l'idée d'une reconnaissance graduelle et d'une intégration complète en tant que citoyens. Mais comme le gradualisme a échoué, ils ont formé des partis politiques autonomes, une stratégie qui a été violemment réprimée.

La résistance et la lutte ont évolué dans le domaine intellectuel. Le poète cubain Nicolás Guillén a proposé dans les années 1920 une nouvelle manière de restaurer la voix de la diaspora africaine, en utilisant une terminologie afro-centrique ; en revendiquant la mémoire symbolique africaine ; en réaffirmant le concept de communauté ancestrale ; en adoptant une perspective intra-centrique et une recherche et une proclamation systématiques de l'identité afro-latino-américaine. Cette proposition, évidente dans la poésie de Guillén, a été identifiée et qualifiée d'afro-réalisme. De nombreux écrivains afro-descendants d'Amérique latine ont adopté l'afro-réalisme de Guillén, donnant à la diaspora africaine d'Amérique latine une nouvelle perspective dans leur lutte permanente pour une reconnaissance et une participation égalitaires dans leurs pays respectifs.

Español

En el proceso de su secuestro y esclavitud, los africanos y sus descendientes continuaron su lucha durante su deportación, por autoinmolación, arrojándose fuera de borda o por medio de insurrecciones. Y en las plantaciones y minas de América, recurrieron al cimarronaje político y cultural.

Durante la búsqueda de la independencia, continuaron su lucha digna por la supervivencia y la libertad y más tarde, en el contexto de las repúblicas latinoamericanas recién formadas, al ser sometidos a las secuelas de la esclavitud y el creciente racismo, recurrieron a diversas formas de resistencia física, política, cultural y religiosa, adoptando la idea del reconocimiento gradual y la plena integración como ciudadanos. Pero a medida que el gradualismo fracasó, formaron partidos políticos autónomos, una estrategia que fue violentamente reprimida.

La resistencia y la lucha han evolucionado en el campo intelectual. Nicolás Guillén, el poeta cubano (1902-1989), propuso en la década de 1920 un nuevo punto de vista para restaurar la voz de la diáspora africana, utilizando terminología afrocéntrica; reivindicando la memoria simbólica africana; reafirmando el concepto de comunidad ancestral; adoptando una perspectiva intracéntrica y una búsqueda sistemática y proclamación de la identidad

afroamericana. Esta propuesta, evidente en la poesía de Guillén, ha sido identificada y denominada afrorrealismo. Muchos escritores afrodescendientes en toda América Latina han adoptado el afrorrealismo de Guillén, dando a la diáspora africana en América Latina una nueva perspectiva en su continua lucha por un reconocimiento y una participación igualitaria en sus respectivos países.

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Mots-clés

littérature noire, afroréalisme, Nicolas Guillén, Duncan, afrolatino

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black literature, afrorealism, Nicolas Guillén, Duncan, afrolatino

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literatura negra, afrorrealismo, Nicolas Guillén, Duncan, afrolatino

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