Love and (Dis)Possession: Transacting Power Between White Man and Black Woman in Nancy Morejón's Poetry

KC Barrientos

University of South Carolina, United States of America

> The confusion between consent and coercion, feeling and submission, intimacy and domination, and violence and reciprocity constitutes what I term the discourse of seduction. The discourse of seduction obfuscates the primary and extremity of violence in master-slave relations and in the construction of the slave as both property and person. To paraphrase John Forrester, seduction is a meditation on liberty and slavery and will and subjection in the arena of sexuality.
>
> —Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*

Introduction

Blackness in the Americas today is difficult to conceive of apart from colonialism and slavery. While, to an extent, a non-Black body may be perceived as endowed with individuality and agency, considerations of a Black body are often weighted by collective memories of enslavement, possession and consumption by other bodies. Even as we live in a world that claims to have evolved from slavery as a deplorable institution of the past, the neocolonial echoes of African enslavement in the Americas still reverberate through the Black body today in how it is perceived and how it perceives itself. In the same way, one cannot broach a discussion of Black individuality and identity in poetry, such as the writings of Afro-feminist Caribbean writer Nancy Morejón, examined in this essay, without first returning to the beginning where the Black female body enters the consciousness of the New World as property rather than as human—and as a body used to transact the colonizer's power over land, economy, politics and society at large.

The work of contemporary Afro-Cuban poet and essayist Nancy Morejón has been extensively studied for its feminist takes on themes of Afro-Caribbean pride in the wake of the early 20th-century *negrismo* literary movement.[1] The lyrical voice of her poems is also characterized by a certain historicity that looks back to the consciousness of Black femininity from the era of African enslavement in the Caribbean. These

works by Morejón help to conceptualize the Black female body as the site of a colonizer's power and transactions through possession and consumption. However, much like "transaction" implies the exchange of goods or services and currency, I treat the concept of transacted power here as a mutual process. As the colonizer (in this instance, the white male slave owner) exerts his power over the Black woman's body by enslaving it and extracting physical, sexual, and reproductive labor (Bakare-Yusuf 318), so, too, does the Black woman find ways of practicing her discursive power in her situation of limited agency. In Morejón's "Amo a mi amo" (1986), the mutual exertion of power by both the white male body and the Black female body is found in the sexual relationship between the female speaker and her master. I interrogate the nature of pain, violence, and consent in the construction of power in their dynamic in "Amo a mi amo," and I argue that the protagonist's escape at the end of the poem is the beginning of further acts of discursive agency or rebellion as exemplified by the figure of the *cimarrona* (the runaway) in Morejón's "Mujer negra" (1975). In both poems, external power and violence shape the Black female speakers' perceptions of themselves and their bodies' worth; moreover, the women speaking also reenact violence on their abusers and colonizers in order to escape into a space where they may recover power over their bodies and so embark on their journey of self-recognition and acceptance in their Blackness.

Power, Pain, Violence, and Seduction

Simply put, power is most often understood as one being's control over another. How is this power acquired? Where does it originate? Is it ever possible to shift power or eradicate prior power dynamics altogether in order to achieve social change? While it seems intuitive to conclude that power dynamics and imbalance are a fact of existence, the answers to these questions are not that easy, as is apparent from an overview of years of careful thought compiled on the subject of power. Among these thinkers are Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault, who push for a better understanding of power in a postcolonial context. In "Critique of Violence," Benjamin urges us to examine violence alongside power, since one cannot exist without the other. Through Benjamin's cosmovision, violence has both "law-making" and "law-preserving" functions that either produce power, perpetuate existing power dynamics, or both (286). This inseparable relationship between power and violence yields an implacable dynamic of inequality and instability, under which those who ostensibly hold power over other beings believe that that agency is theirs exclusively. Benjamin illustrates law-making violence through the example of capital punishment, which both creates the image of authority of an organized entity over a vast population's behavior, and exacts that

authoritative image to subjugate other bodies present as witnesses. Meanwhile, law-preserving violence can be found in policing situations where bodies are detained or abused not as a measure of justice for breaking a law, but as an arbitrary show of power by one organization over the general population (Benjamin 284). In the context of slavery in the Americas, slavery itself can and should be understood as simultaneously law-making and law-preserving violence that both reproduces and is produced by colonial power. Colonizers enslaved Black and brown bodies because they had asserted the power to do so; reciprocally, the institution of slavery continued to feed and increase its imperial power.

Violence is worth defining here as a concept concomitant with power and central to the discussion of the enslaved Black protagonists of Morejón's poems. Johan Galtung's "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research" is a useful point of departure for the analysis of power, especially as it relates to colonialism and the bodies involved. While Galtung argues that there is never a wholly inclusive or perfect definition of violence, he proposes broadly that "[v]iolence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations" (168). The careful wording of this definition rejects common conceptions of violence limited to physical assault, warfare, and bloodshed. Arguably, physical violence can be identified in almost any situation of possession or abuse. Notwithstanding, Galtung's understanding of violence would also include more invisible instances of the limitation of a being's potential. For example, withholding and controlling one's freedom—through enslavement, indentured servitude, or various types of incarceration—limits a human being's will and potential for individuality and self-actualization, and is therefore a clear case of violence, even when the imprisoned bodies do not bear physical scars of assault.[2] Violence is also present in the daily demand of enslaved bodies to provide free labor. Such labor is not given in fair exchange for basic needs such as food and shelter; rather, access to these resources for survival are a human right, and therefore any type of unpaid labor extracted by force (or threat of force) from a subjugated body is violence against that body itself.

As Saidiya Hartman observes in the introduction to *Scenes of Subjection*, modern audiences of literature and media are desensitized to the everyday nature of violence such that oftentimes, it is only the scenes of whipping, rape, or shackling that register as acts of violence (3-4), while the everyday control over Black bodies' time and wills in the history of enslavement is glossed over. Holding partial responsibility for this simplistic view of power and violence is the success of classic "black history" and "black pain" films such as *12 Years a Slave* (2013)—to name only one title from a slew in a Hollywood genre—where viewers' cinematic experience peaks with the climactic whipping scene designed to stir a voyeuristic horror over Black trauma. Such spectacularized violence often downplays the other equally horrific ways in which bodies can be

subjugated without sustaining scars, beatings, or death. Paying special heed to Hartman's point that any scene of slavery is a scene of subjection, I propose reading the forgotten instances of violence in slavery in Morejón's poems. These are the moments in which the poetic voice might conflate her relationship with her white master with one of love or value; they are the moments where the speaker studies her Black body and may spend a lifetime resisting how ugly and undesirable she has been made to feel by her and her foremothers' history of slavery—moments that are the invisible scars left behind by a manifold and complex violence against Black women's bodies in the Caribbean.

My reference to memory and scars in this context is deliberate. In her polemical book *The Body in Pain*—which has received both praise and criticism in the years since its publication—one of Elaine Scarry's more intuitive, less controversial assertions is that pain, as the product of violence, creates a lasting imprint on the body on which that pain is inflicted, and lives on in the body's memory.[3] "What is remembered in the body is well remembered," she writes, referencing torture as an instrument whose purpose is less to extract information and more to instill fear of the image of irresistible power (113). By underscoring the role of the body in memory, Scarry refers to the possibility of both physical and psychological scars, and she argues that the body that sustains the violence conflates pain with power, even if that body might have power—or agency—of its own, to a limited extent (18). In this sense, the body submits to subjugation as a result of and as an escape from pain.

I have alluded often by now to the notion that violence creates and/or preserves the *image* of power. Power is not as fixed or one-sided as it may seem. Lending useful reflection in this regard, Michel Foucault postulates that power is not exclusively divided between powers or withheld in entirety from one party, such as in the simplistic bifurcation between oppressor and oppressed, ruler and subjects, and so on (though these binary modes of thinking still hold value in identifying power imbalances, especially in the study of hegemony). Rather, power runs in uneven networks between these groups (29). Foucault's theorization would suggest that it is possible to grasp and subvert power in a dynamic that at first seems to be wholly in favor of an oppressor. Hence, an enslaved Black body might identify its own suppressed or limited agency, devise means of subverting the power dynamic with the body of the oppressor—the white master, representative of European colonization of the Americas—and ultimately rebel to reclaim power from the uneven network between their bodies.

It must be made clear that for the subjugated, to subvert power dynamics within an inherently violent institution such as slavery necessarily means to reciprocate violent action. In the first place, violence and the expression of power over others are closely intertwined with the process of asserting one's own identity as a group or nation separate from others (Derrida 117). Speaking of violence and nation-building in the colonial context, Jacques Derrida proposes in "Violence and Metaphysics"

that the formation of the Other (the different, the less human, and therefore the subjugated) is inherent in the search for the Self: "Ego cannot engender alterity within itself without encountering the Other" (117). Consequently, the "Self,"or in this case the nucleus of Eurocentric colonialism, can never have any kind of relationship with the Other except a violent one, in which the identity of the Other must be undermined or negated in order to uphold and preserve the identity of the Self. Law-making and law-preserving violence, therefore, makes and preserves power, which is but one side of the same coin with the assertion of the Self.

While it is not possible for a subjugated body to recast the colonizer as the Other by any systemic or pragmatic means, Frantz Fanon argues that it is possible to recognize and reclaim selfhood and reject the tag of Otherness through reciprocal acts of violence. He speaks not of reproducing slavery on white bodies, but rather of the necessity of violence in wars for independence on a large scale, against a world filled with "atmospheric violence" (*The Wretched of the Earth* 12-13, 30-31). This thinking evokes the Benjaminian concept that pure nonviolence, practically speaking, does not lead to "legal contract" within the current system of law-making and law-preserving violence (288). On a smaller scale, the necessity of violence as resistance under Fanonian and Benjaminian thinking can be seen in marronage—*cimarronaje* in the Hispanic Caribbean, Maroons in the English counterpart—or the phenomenon of Black peoples in the Caribbean escaping from slavery and gathering in the mountains to create a community that can later mount an armed struggle (Miller, "Slavery" 105-106). In the selected poems by Nancy Morejón, *cimarronaje* describes enslaved Afro-Caribbean bodies recognizing their power in a dynamic of subjugation, using their bodies where power has been transacted from white master to Black subject, and subverting the direction of the power network between those bodies to escape by violent means and reestablish the Self.

What are some other ways in which Black enslaved women and *cimarronas* might have demonstrated resistance to the institutional violence against their wills, aside from escape and armed rebellion? Hartman's study of enslaved women in the American South is germane to this subject. In particular, she examines sexual relationships between enslaved women and their masters and argues that the question of will and consent therein—murky at best—demonstrates the insidious nature of violence in slavery:

> We might also consider whether the wanton and indiscriminate uses of the captive body can be made sense of within the heteronormative framing of sexual violation as rape … I attempt to interrogate the legal definition of rape and the limits of the law by looking at issues of will and consent, the relationship between subjectivity and injury, and instances of sexual violence that fall outside the racist and heteronormative framing of rape—that is, the

> sexual exploitation of slave women cloaked as the legitimate use of property and the castration and assault of men. (80-81)

Just as Galtung challenges us to see violence in its less obvious forms, so does Hartman resist common conceptions of rape as intense, physically injurious (and often isolated) assaults. Instead, she underscores the master-slave relationship as one in which it is institutionally impossible for the enslaved woman to consent because her body is treated, for all intents and purposes, as property that can and will be used whether she struggles against the rape or not. Therefore, when we consider enslaved Black women in the Americas, such as the voice of the speaker in Morejón's "Amo a mi amo," it is less fruitful to ask, "Was this woman raped?" and more challenging to inquire, "What does this type of relationship reveal about our understanding of the network of power between master and slave?" Even more pertinent is the question: how might the Black female body in this scenario transact power and subvert the direction of that power in gestures of resistance?

One answer to the latter question is that the enslaved woman, recognizing her entrapment in a system larger than she is, might accept the appearance of a consenting relationship for the immediate benefit of survival. Herein is the conflation of pain and violence with power in the eyes of the subjugated body. Hartman points out that Eurocentric narratives discount the complexity of a Black woman's motives for appearing to consent, and instead deform her character into a trope of Black sinfulness and sexual immorality. Evelyn Hammonds concurs that historically, "Black women's sexuality ... is rendered simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses" (93). Afro-descendant women's sexuality is treated paradoxically such that it is not acknowledged unless it is to conform to the narrative of the "maimed, immoral, black female body" (99). Similarly, Hartman notes that during the rare legal trials of white masters for sexually assaulting a slave woman, blame was assigned to the woman based on the racist myth of her supposed seductive nature—thus sidestepping the question of rape entirely (83). "'Coercion,' 'desire,' 'submission,' and 'complicity' are the circulating terms that come to characterize ... the enslaved female, less than the way in which she is inhabited by sexuality and her body possessed. Simply put, [she] embodied the vested rights of others," rather than the rights of her own body as a human being, says Hartman (83). The contradiction identified by Hammonds and Hartman here is that the Black woman slave loses her humanity in the colonial matrix and therefore her legal ability to consent or suffer rape under the imperial gaze; the human quality of her sexuality is only brought to the fore to justify her usefulness as a sexual and reproductive body, in a simultaneously dehumanizing fashion.

The term Hartman has coined to describe the above paradox, the "discourse of seduction," is one of the central pillars of this analysis of Morejón's work. "The confusion between consent and coercion, feeling

and submission, intimacy and domination, and violence and reciprocity constitutes what I term the discourse of seduction," she concludes (81). The phrase "discourse of seduction" is an apt summary of the complexities of networks of power in female Black enslavement. Through the lens of this discourse of seduction, I reject the simplistic and contradictory views of the Black female body under dominant discourses, and instead read the two poems, "Amo a mi amo" and "Mujer negra," as a (re)humanization of the body of the Afro-Caribbean enslaved woman. The following section will parse the speaker's will and agency in a current or past relationship with a white man and identify how her sexuality serves as a tool of violent resistance to reestablish a sense of self and power.

Seduction and Violence in Morejón's Poems

From the outset, Nancy Morejón's poem "Amo a mi amo" establishes a complex relationship between an Afro-Caribbean woman and a white man that can be aptly described as a discourse of seduction. The title and opening line, "amo a mi amo," are a play on two Spanish homonyms: *amo* as master, or body owning another; and *amo* as the conjugated form of *amar*, to love (Miller, "Transculture, Terror, and the Language of 'Love'" 7). Marylin Miller points out that syntactically speaking, this line is "a circular, consonant and assonant phrase in which the parallel placement of the two terms at the beginning and at the end of the line call attention to their antagonistic or contradictory meanings," especially since love and ownership are not typically perceived as part of a healthy relationship in which both parties are purportedly on an equal footing; and so the implicit oxymoron of this phrase interrogates the mere possibility of true love in a master-slave relationship (7). Indeed, the first stanza of the poem describes the speaker's fondness for the white man with whom she has a relationship and for whom she performs her duties out of care and adoration. She collects firewood for his daily fires (l. 2) and pours metaphorical drops of honey, or sweet nothings, into his ears (l. 5). This she does, she says, because "Amo a mi amo. / ...Amo sus ojos claros. / Mansa cual un cordero / … Amo sus manos" (ll. 1, 3-4, 6). Her initial description of their relationship teems with seeming tenderness, going so far as to compare her master to a gentle lamb who may seem just as harmless as she herself is powerless.

As one might easily surmise, however, the speaker's master is not the guileless lover he seems to her in the beginning. In the first stanza, she says:

> Mi amo muerde y subyuga.
>
> Me cuenta historias sigilosas mientras
>
> abanico todo su cuerpo cundido de llagas y balazos,

de días de sol y guerra de rapiña. […]

Tañó la vihuela y de su garganta salían

coplas sonoras, como nacidas de la garganta de Manrique. (ll. 8-11, 17-18)

My master bites and subjugates.

He tells me stealthy stories while

I fan his whole body pitted with blade and shot wounds,

by days of sun and war of rapine. […]

He plucked the *vihuela* and from his throat came

couplets sonorous as if born from the throat of Manrique.[4]

In the first line quoted above, it is not immediately clear if the Black female speaker is she whom the master bites and subjugates, or if she is referring to his exploits abroad during war. The ambiguity of the line, in light of the specificity of the other surrounding descriptions, would suggest a double meaning that foreshadows the female protagonist's consciousness of the true nature of her lover. Furthermore, in contrast with the white master's initial depiction as a lamb, the act of biting might evoke the canines of a lion, the lamb's counterpart in Christian imagery, and therefore implies an animalistic kind of consumption of the woman's body under his ownership. Evidently, the poetic voice is already aware that her white "lover" is also a predator hunting for his prey. Still, at this stage in the poem she appears to absorb his "secret" stories of pillaging and destruction as a heroic narrative and a display of masculinity to be worshiped. For this reason she fans him from head to toe in a physical manifestation of her adoration of every part of his physical body, and she praises his songs of war as though he had the artistic gift of César Manrique.

The second stanza is one of our first hints that the speaker is aware of various barriers between her and her lover, language and race being the foremost among them. Still eulogizing the body of her master, she declares:

Amo su boca roja, fina,

desde donde van saliendo palabras

que no alcanzo a descifrar

Todavía. Mi lengua para él ya no es la suya.

Y la seda del tiempo hecha trizas. (ll. 20-24)

> I love his red, fine mouth,
>
> from which words come out
>
> which I cannot manage to decipher
>
> yet. My tongue for him is even now not his own.
>
> And the silk of time turned to shreds.[5]

Here a few truths about the nature of their relationship come to light. First, the fact that the speaker's praise of her master centers on the physical is significant: not only is she unable to understand everything that he says to her; there is also an inherent divide between them as master and enslaved, as white man and Black woman, that prevents them from connecting in a more meaningful or transgressive way than a purely physical one. In this sense, she can only admire her master's physique and not the merits of his thoughts or character. Secondly, the ambiguity of the line "mi lengua para él ya no es la suya" recalls the matter of ownership in their relationship. At the same time that the Afro-Caribbean woman and her master do not speak the same language, she also rejects his ownership of her tongue, recognizing that some barriers are too deeply entrenched—indeed, too damaging and violent—to be surmounted. Thus the last line in the stanza, in which the poetic voice refers to the passage and fragmentation of time, evokes the centuries of violence enacted by white colonial bodies against Black subjugated bodies, as the root of all inequality and communication barriers between her and her master today.

Miller analyzes this portion of "Amo a mi amo" as an example of how violent history always informs the evolution of culture in the Americas, particularly when we consider Fernando Ortíz's notion of Cuban culture as a transcultural encounter between the colonizer and the colonized. Morejón herself agrees with Ortíz that Cuba, particularly *afrocubanidad*, is the unique result of the "constant interaction" between cultures since colonial times, and that transcultural identity is distinct from yet reminiscent of its progenitors (Pérez Sarduy 229). As for the violence inherent in Cuban transcultural identity, Miller writes:

> In the space of four pages, then, Ortíz uses a form of *terror* in relation to transculturation in five different instances, along with the notions of destruction, failure, cruelty, brute force, injustice, and pain. Thus, despite insisting on the creative collaboration of oppressor and oppressed groups in the formation of Cuban and other American cultures, Ortíz acknowledges that such a process is frequently violent, and in fact, productive of violence. ("Transculture" 5)

Referencing the notion of terror—which in the critic's terms is an approximation of the link between pain and power that I previously underscored in my discussion of Scarry's work on the body—Miller proposes that Cubanness, or more specifically *afrocubanidad*, is rooted in a dynamic of terror between the oppressor and the oppressed. This language of terror, the language of "love" on the surface, is embedded in the poetic voice of "Amo a mi amo" as she attempts to express her love for her white master but cannot truly escape how "love" has been tainted by the bloody histories of colonization and enslavement between white and Black bodies (5). True love is therefore inscrutable and unidentifiable in the poem where the Black female body has already been Othered and subjugated.

Following the speaker's realization that language and cultural barriers stand between her and her master, she reflects on other instances of his violence against other subjugated bodies. She notes that "[él] da latigazos en las calderas del ingenio, / como si fueran un infierno, el de aquel Señor Dios / de quien me hablaba sin cesar" (ll. 27-29). The fact that the speaker separates herself from those other enslaved bodies that toil under whip and sun in the plantations would suggest either that she is an enslaved woman from a different property, or that her domestic duties limit her to the confines of the master's house. The religious overtone of these verses, where she compares the suffering of her fellow enslaved peoples to that of souls condemned to hell, implies that her position as the master's mistress is a relative paradise. At the same time, she reveals that her master speaks to her ceaselessly of his Christian God and hell. Their relationship has been influenced from the start by a dynamic of punishment and reward. Here in this stanza lies the first hint that the enslaved woman's expression of love cannot truly be called love at all. Not once in the poem is the white master reported to express his love for her; consequently, one can only assume that he has taken advantage of her body to extract from it physical, sexual, reproductive, and emotional labor. In fact, the mention of Christian cosmology of heaven and hell in these lines reflects microcosmically the type of multilayered violence that underpins the institution of slavery, by which whippings and long, relentless days in the fields under the heat of the sun are equated to the tangible suffering by fire in hell, while any other existence on the plantation—whether servicing the master sexually, or cooking the master's meals in the shade of the kitchen—is considered a kind of heaven for which one ought to be thankful. In reality, the mere control of time and identity and the limitation of the potential of Black bodies under slavery, as Galtung would put it, is in and of itself violence and—in Hartman's broader, non-heteronormative language—rape of the Black body.

In the following stanzas of "Amo a mi amo," the lyrical voice grows bolder in identifying the double standards between her white master's lifestyle and her own, and the implications of dehumanization and oppression therein. "¿Por qué vivo en la morada ideal para un murciélago?" she questions; "¿Por qué le sirvo?" (ll. 31-32). Significantly,

she does not ask herself why she loves him. Instead, she recognizes that her relationship with the white man is one of service, and now she questions why she allows herself to be subjugated thus in the first place. By "allow" I do not mean that the speaker, as a representative of and historical actor for other enslaved Afro-Caribbean women like her, shares any part of the blame in her own suffering. Rather, the fact that the poetic voice raises these questions demonstrates that she has identified her own (limited) agency and now intends to exercise whatever force she can access in this uneven network of power to return to a full consciousness of who she is as human, woman, and Afro-descendant. She passionately demands,

> ¿Adónde va en su espléndido coche
>
> tirado por caballos más felices que yo?
>
> Mi amor es como la maleza que cubre la dotación,
>
> única posesión inexpugnable mía. (ll. 33-36)

> Where does he go in his splendid coach
>
> pulled by horses happier than I?
>
> My love is like the undergrowth which covers the estate
>
> the only possession inexpugnably mine.[6]

In a callback to the ambiguous line from the first stanza comparing her master to a predator that devours its prey, now the lyrical voice recognizes how her body is relegated to a lower rung of society than even the beasts that pull her master's carriage or the bats that nest in the caves. She recognizes that her relationship with the white man only serves to dehumanize her in the imperial gaze. At the same time, she dehumanizes her master reciprocally here and throughout the poem, in a similar manner to how the assertion of the Self according to Derridian thinking must create an Other and negate the identity of the Other.

The poetic voice in the quote above also realizes that her "love" is as unvalued as "la maleza que cubre la dotación." David Frye's English translation of this verse and the one that follows is "the weeds that cover the dowry, / the only possession he cannot take from me" (Smith College). This interpretation yields further pertinent observations on the nature of the relationship between the speaker and her master. "La dotación" or her "dowry," according to the English translation, is another hint at the resources or power that the speaker knows she possesses even as her body itself functions as property. The dowry here could either be a literal stash of savings, or it could be the inheritance of an indomitable spirit from her

ancestors—a more likely meaning in my estimation. Moreover, while the original phrasing of "posesión inexpugnable mía" only suggests that this dowry, or this fierce spirit of rebellion, is something that cannot be stolen, the English translation to "the only possession he cannot take from me" assigns the white master to the role of the pillager. The relationship between the enslaved Afro-Caribbean woman and her master, therefore, is one of consumption. The speaker's relationship is but a symptom of the skewed discourse of seduction and manifold rape under slavery.

Notably, the true nature of the relationship between the speaker and the white master in "Amo a mi amo" has garnered a variety of literary interpretations. In comparison with Morejón's earlier published poem "Mujer negra," which I will also analyze, what troubles some critics is the interchangeable use of *amo* as owner and *amo* as love. Focusing on the speaker's declarations of what she loves about her master's body, Claudette Williams argues that the complex emotions of the female speaker in the poem make for a difficult reading of clearcut assault or abuse. In contrast, she writes, the colonizer or master is more clearly defined as a rapist in "Mujer negra," where the language of the poetic voice unequivocally establishes her desire to escape (428-29). Certainly, Williams makes a valid argument that feminine agency does not entirely disappear just because a woman is enslaved (429). In fact, it would be impossible to conceive of rebellion or reciprocal violence if the enslaved woman in question had no agency at all. However, the reading of "Amo a mi amo" that I propose through the lens of Hartman's discourse of seduction does not discount female agency. Instead, I question the possibility of equitable love between white master and enslaved Afro-Caribbean woman in the context of slavery, where white and Black bodies were never on equal footing and therefore consent or even seduction itself are not appropriate terms with which to frame such a sexual relationship as that described in "Amo a mi amo."

The very next stanza illustrates my point that the poetic voice is aware of the power imbalance between her and the master and, in fact, curses the roles he impresses on her body as enslaved and subhuman. From the muslin robe "que ma ha impuesto" (l. 38) to "estos quehaceres para mí en el atardecer sin girasoles" (l. 40), to "esta lengua abigarradamente hostil que no mastico" (l. 41), the lyrical voice declares, "Maldigo" (l. 37). She likewise curses "estos senos de piedra que no pueden siquiera amamantarlo; / este vientre rajado por su látigo inmemorial; este maldito corazón" (ll. 42-44). The speaker has named four of her own body parts where power has been transacted: her tongue, her breasts, her womb, and her heart. In reference to her tongue, rather than lament the fact that she cannot understand the high-browed Spanish of her master, she rejects the necessity to adapt to the linguistic demand and acknowledges that it is but one of many insurmountable barriers between them. Her description of her breasts as stone also nullifies the notion of tender or consenting love; emotionally, there is resistance either on her part or on his. The comparison of her body to stone could also signal a type of dissociation

from herself to remove herself from trauma or to express depression, impotence, or proximity to death. As for the speaker's womb in "Amo a mi amo," this line is arguably the clearest indication that the woman never desired this relationship with her master to begin with. Where before she considered herself fortunate to not be one of the enslaved women being beaten in the fields, now she compares her sexual relationship to an endless whipping of her womb. Serving her master in this way—and possibly bearing him children as well—is a lasting scar of pain and violence on her "maldito corazón."

In the final lines of the poem, the speaker reprises her refrain of "amo a mi amo," but the phrase takes on an entirely novel tone. The poetic voice closes, "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, desollándolo como a una res sin culpa" (ll. 45-47). The phrase "amo a mi amo" no longer stands alone, but is followed in the same line by a contradiction. The appearance of "amo a mi amo" at the beginning of the poem could even be argued to be an incomplete idea, like the first melody in an orchestral piece, while this last "amo a mi amo *pero* todas las noches…" (emphasis added) completes the message of the poet with the answering counterpoint. Finally the poetic voice admits that her encounters with the master have always been in secret (harkening back to the beginning of the poem where she listened to his secret tales of conquest with adoration) and in the middle of the sugar cane fields at night. Her status as sexual servant is not so far removed from that of the slaves who work the plantations by day, for her work, too, takes place in the same dehumanizing space as theirs. Now as she reflects on the "love" she demonstrated to her master, the speaker reacts with a visible form of violence. It is open to our interpretation as readers whether the image of the Afro-Caribbean woman taking up a knife and flaying her master like a piece of meat is only a fantasy or in fact reality; Sanmartín reads this scene as a dream (453). In the same way that she previously compared her owner to a lamb and then to a fanged predator such as a lion, the lyrical voice closes the poem with a final act of dehumanizing the white man as lifeless flesh under the edge of her blade. Here again is the circle of violence, or the reclamation of power from the uneven network between their bodies, by which the enslaved woman takes up arms and destroys her white oppressor as "Other" in order to return to her Self and ultimately regain her freedom and identity.

I contend that the last three lines of "Amo a mi amo" could indicate that the woman in "Amo a mi amo" has indeed killed her master and is about to face the consequences of her rebellion. "Ensordecedores toques de tambor ya no me dejan / oír ni sus quebrantos, ni sus quejas," she says; "Las campanas me llaman…" (ll. 48-50). The drumbeats in the distance, coupled with the tolling bells, might portend her own death, especially since the sound of them overwhelms any other voice she might still hear emanating from her master's body. At the same time, given Morejón's *negrista* and Afro-Antillean poetic influences (Cordones-Cook 33), it is

likely that the drumbeats also refer metaphorically to the rhythms of Afro-Caribbean dance in a declaration of a return to her African roots and of her readiness to face death like a warrior. The crafting of the soundscape in this final stanza relates back to the body discursively. If the speaker before condemned how even her tongue, representative of her ability to speak for herself and to express her culture and identity, was possessed by her white master, then here in the moment of his death the master himself is silenced. Though reciprocal violence such as the woman's attack against her master can never mirror the scale at which slavery and colonization have systemically raped Black bodies, these final three lines with their emphasis on the silence of the white man's tongue offer a bittersweet vengeance to the protagonist and her readers for the violence done to her body for years.

Critics like Williams, Miller, Paula Sanmartín, Juanamaría Cordones-Cook, and Miriam DeCosta-Willis commonly read "Amo a mi amo" together with Morejón's poem from a decade earlier, "Mujer negra," because of the mutual themes of Black female identity and freedom. DeCosta-Willis finds that the two poems complement each other as glimpses into the Black history of Cuba, which is reflective of Morejón's complex role in the literary canon of Cuba as simultaneously poet, historian, intellectual, and artist (108). Indeed, "Mujer negra" can be considered a short historical epic composed of symbols, movements, and geographical locations to signify the progress of the Afro-Cuban woman from slavery to escape to the uncertain present under the Cuban Revolution, in a type of "proceso histórico-mítico" (Davies, "Writing" 42; Cordones-Cook 45). As Sanmartín points out, "Mujer negra" utilizes the "origin myth" storytelling of the Black female speaker's roots to underscore that the struggle for equality and recognition in Cuba has inevitably led to the Cuban Revolution (448), regardless of whether or not the body or voice of the Black woman has a place in that revolution and the positive change it promises.

Like these critics, I also propose a comparative reading of these two poems; however, rather than focusing on the mythical or epic-like narration in "Mujer negra," I trace how power and violence are transacted in the Black woman's body through slavery, and how she reclaims that power and violence to assert herself. While "Amo a mi amo" considers the voice of an enslaved woman in a relationship with her master, "Mujer negra" reflects on her life as a *cimarrona* after escaping. "Amo a mi amo" (1986) was published eleven years after "Mujer negra" (1975) and it is unlikely that she intended the speakers of both poems to be clearly interpreted as the same person. Nonetheless, the historical nature of Morejón's poetics gives us room to look at the speakers of both poems as an archetype of Afro-Cuban womanhood—a single historical actor. Morejón herself confirms that the poetic voice of "Mujer negra" represents a part of the whole of Afro-descendant women's postcolonial experiences in the Caribbean:

> And so, I suddenly had something like a vision of a slave woman in front of me, who was somewhat showing me her life in scenes which I was watching. And then I wrote the poem ["Mujer negra"]. The poem speaks in a first person voice that is not autobiographical. Presumably it is an "I" which is at the same time a "we," as the great American poet Walt Whitman suggested. (Abudu 39)

With this understanding of the poetic voice as a historical actor, I focus my analysis of "Mujer negra" on its approach to a single, representative Black female body and her survival after rape in the poem.

Structurally, "Mujer negra" is divided into seven parts or eight stanzas interrupted by indented one-line verses that mark the speaker's physical movement up the mountain that will become her new hiding place and her home. Critics have well analyzed the function of geography and movement in the poem, particularly how the one-line stanzas of "Me rebelé," "Anduve," "Me sublevé," "Me fui al monte," and "bajé de la Sierra" (ll. 11, 16, 22, 32, 38) mirror the speaker's spiritual and emotional ascent toward a consciousness of herself. Linda Howe notes that the mountains and "la Sierra" are also significant references to the guerrilla warfare of the Cuban Revolution, which will take place centuries after the Black speaker's initial historical experiences in the poem (45). Antonio Tillis calls this geographical and spiritual movement toward knowing oneself a kind of pilgrimage that repeats itself thematically throughout Morejón's poetry:

> In the context of Morejón's poetry, the notion of exile as it relates to the historical pilgrimage of people of African descent in the New World transverses the inception and continuance of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the arrival of the first Africans to the land mass referred to today as Cuba. Separation from the "maternal" produces a cultural rupture in accepted standards of personal and collective governance as language, customs, beliefs, and religious practices become points of cultural contestation. ("Postcolonial Pilgrimage" 2)

Movement and geographical placement are therefore significant in "Mujer negra" as signifiers of the Afro-descendant speaker's resistance to total transculturation—a process that Miller identifies as part violence, part terror. In this regard, Paulette Ramsay draws a connection between *cimarronaje*, or the physical escape of Black slaves, and cultural marronage, or "the psychological level to which African slaves resisted slavery through the preservation of the cultural forms which they brought with them to the New World," which "was as effective as [their] various forms of physical resistance" (32). I will move away from the already existing literature parsing movement and topography in "Mujer negra" and offer, instead, a close reading of the Black female speaker's body in the poem in comparison to the body described in "Amo a mi amo."

In the opening stanza of "Mujer negra," the speaker stands on the coast of Cuba to absorb the sights and smells of the ocean's crashing waves and reflect on how the clouds have been witnesses to her and her ancestors' trans-Atlantic displacement (ll. 1, 4-5). She immediately asserts that she has forgotten neither her "costa perdida" (l. 6), or the coast of West Africa from whence she comes, nor her ancestral tongue. From the beginning it is clear that the lyrical voice of this piece regards her linguistic identity with more certainty than the voice of "Amo a mi amo"; where the latter initially lamented how language was a barrier between her and her white master, the former expresses the value she sees in retaining her *africanidad* by continuing to speak in the mother tongue of her forebears. The speaker's tongue in "Amo a mi amo" may still be possessed on a psychological level—looking to a Eurocentric standard of language and identity—while the speaker in "Mujer negra" demonstrates her tongue to be her own. In the time between her first approach to language and her later growth, the speaker's body necessarily sustained and transacted violence through enslavement, through which both her womb and her psychological identity for a time serviced her master and the colonial ruling class.

In the proceeding verses that foreshadow the motivation for the speaker's rebellion and movement, she recognizes once again, as she did in "Amo a mi amo," how slavery dehumanized her body:

> Y porque trabajé como una bestia,
>
> aquí volví a nacer. [...]
>
> Me rebelé.
>
> Su Merced me compró en una plaza.
>
> Bordé la casaca de Su Merced y un hijo macho le parí.
>
> Mi hijo no tuvo nombre.
>
> Y Su Merced, murió a manos de un impecable *lord* inglés.
>
> Anduve. (ll. 8-9, 11-16)

> And because I work like a dog,
>
> Here is where I was reborn. […]
>
> I rebelled.
>
> His Grace purchased me in a public square.
>
> I embroidered His Grace's cloak and I bore him a son.
>
> My son was given no name.

And His Grace, he died at the hands of an impeccable English lord.

I trudged forward.[7]

At the beginning of the quoted passage, the speaker equates her animalization as an exploited body to the birth of her new consciousness as a slave in Cuba. Although she was brought across the Middle Passage from Africa—either literally, or metaphorically through the bodies of her ancestors—she sets her roots in the Caribbean, and so "aquí volví a nacer," for up to this point she has known no other life except one of labor and dehumanization in the plantations. Part of this dehumanization is the reproductive labor demanded of her body by her master, referred to as "Su Merced"—in a more emotionally distant manner than in "Amo a mi amo"—by which she bears him a nameless, faceless son (ll. 14-15).

The contrast between the descriptions of the relationship between the enslaved woman and her master in "Mujer negra" and "Amo a mi amo" is palpable. The lyrical voice of "Amo a mi amo" employs tender language in the opening stanzas, declaring her adoration for the body of the white man and the parts of him that she does not understand. Meanwhile, the voice of "Mujer negra" indubitably recognizes that her relationship with the white man has been one solely of power and service. Moreover, she mentions that the beginning of their relationship was in the marketplace, where her body was put up for inspection and sale like the beast she now knows she has been treated as for the past several years. With this in mind, it matters less to the speaker that her union with the white man resulted in a son, and more that that son is now property of Su Merced with neither name (that is, individuality or identity) nor freedom. Miller interprets the namelessness of the speaker's son as a sign that he is enslaved, regarded as property, even before he is born ("Slavery" 107), while Tillis suggests that the child's lack of identity is representative of an Afro-Cuban identity crisis that hangs in the in-between of *latinidad* and *africanidad* ("Postcolonial Pilgrimage" 4-5).

Another clear distinction between the two poems is the visibility of violence in "Mujer negra." In much the same way that bearing her master an enslaved son is a twofold violence against her body as mother and woman, the speaker also notes how her master dies a violent death at the hands of an English lord. This detail throws into question whether the speaker of "Amo a mi amo" did in fact kill her master and escape with the blame falling on a rival plantation owner, or if the imagery at the close of the first poem was her fantasy while her marronage was a reality. Whatever the case, the proverbial violent delights and their violent ends come to mind as we consider how the more insidious, institutional violence in "Amo a mi amo" dons a clearer face in "Mujer negra." Here I disagree with Williams' analysis that the two relationships in the poems are different; rather, it is the speakers' attitudes toward them that are distinct. The speaker of "Mujer negra" declares that she was raped by her master, while the speaker of "Amo a mi amo" reflects on the emotional attachment she formed to the white man as a relative salvation in the hell

of slavery. Between the two poems, I see the discourse of seduction at work, with sexual labor being used to perpetuate the image of power of the white male body over the Black female one, and the inherent violence of the relationship negating the possibility of love or consent.

At the same time that her body has received violence, the speaker's body in "Mujer negra" also transacts it to transform it into the impetus of her movement and rebellion. She states,

> Esta es la tierra donde padecí bocabos y azotes. [...]
>
> Por casa tuve un barracón.
>
> Yo misma traje piedras para edificarlo,
>
> pero canté al natural compás de los pájaros nacionales.
>
> Me sublevé. (ll. 17, 20-23)

> This is the land where I was lashed and beaten upside down. […]
>
> I got a slave barracks for a house.
>
> I myself carried the stones to build it,
>
> But I sang in the natural beat of the nation's birds.
>
> I rose in rebellion.[8]

The connection between the land and the whippings she has sustained in line 17 is significant. The lyrical voice previously identified the birth of her consciousness as an enslaved woman in Cuba, and here again she names the Caribbean as the space where she has come to know her body in all its suffering, limitations, and power. The reference to being whipped facedown—*bocabajos*—recognizes how her womb was "protected"so as not to harm her pregnancy at the same time that her body was still subjected to pain and punishment (Miller, "Slavery" 107). Any home that she had during her enslavement, she built herself, a hovel not fit for a human, just like the bat-like dwelling named by the lyrical voice in "Amo a mi amo." Nonetheless, even though the Cuban land bears this trauma and memory of exile for the speaker, and though she finds her identity through the linguistic and cultural expression of her *africanidad*, she cannot imagine taking root in any other space. Gus Puleo writes that the Black woman has paradoxically achieved peace with the tumultuous past and present of her country (425). The complexity of her new transcultural identity—and that of the emotions in Morejón's poetic voice in general—illustrate the discourse of seduction, the nature of power and violence, and the "terror" intrinsic to Caribbean transculturation well (Miller, "Transculture" 7).

Another pertinent point of comparison between "Mujer negra" and "Amo a mi amo" arises in the seventh stanza. Relating herself to the bodies of other Afro-descendants around her, the speaker muses:

> En esta misma tierra toqué la sangre húmeda
>
> y los huesos podridos de muchos otros,
>
> traído a ella, o no, igual que yo.
>
> Ya nunca más imaginé el camino a Guinea.
>
> ¿Era a Guinea? ¿A Benín? ¿Era a Madagascar? ¿O a Cabo Verde?
> (ll. 24-28)

> In this very land I touched the warm blood
>
> and rotten bones of many others like me,
>
> brought here, or not, as I was.
>
> Then I stopped thinking about the way to Guinea forever.
>
> To Guinea or Benin? Was I thinking about Madagascar or Cape
>
> Verde?[9]

The only explicit mention of other bodies in "Amo a mi amo" was to compare the social status of the speaker to that of other enslaved women toiling in the fields, and to consider how her relationship with her master has afforded her that position. The voice of "Mujer negra" sheds this tone of self-distancing and instead finds herself in the blood and bones of those who died before and alongside her in Cuba. The wetness of the blood she touches on the land signals how fresh in her collective memory is the death of her enslaved compatriots. Yet simultaneously, the bones themselves are decomposing, deeply interred in this land that holds both her pain and her power. Whether the bodies to whom these bones belong were brought to the Caribbean from Africa, or were born in this land, the speaker says they are the same as she: displaced psychologically and culturally as much as physically. For this reason, she no longer sets her sights on an idealistic return to Africa—to Guinea, Benin, Madagascar, or Cabo Verde—and instead considers Cuba, in all its complexity of bloodshed and hard-fought freedom, her new motherland.

In the words of the next stanza, "Aquí construí mi mundo. / Me fui al monte. / Mi real independencia fue el palenque" (ll. 31, 33). While the speaker's body has been beaten down by rape, enslavement, dehumanization, and depersonalization in Cuba, here too in Cuba she has

found her community of fellow *cimarrones* who have bonded over the suffering and rebuilding of their bodies. Together they have established a larger body and common identity in their fight for independence. The last stanza likens this initial rebellion and marronage to the struggle of the Cuban people in Morejón's day to reclaim their land from the hegemonic upper class through the Cuban Revolution (ll. 39-48). This final word on the "capitales y usureros" and "generales y burgueses" (ll. 39-40) that now control "nuestros el mar y el cielo" (l. 44) cements the distance that the speaker has placed between her body and that of her former master, and by extension, between her and the bodies of the past- and present-day colonizers. She has found her body through violence and exerted the power of her body through reciprocal violence, to achieve the kind of revolution that, as in Fanon's estimation in *Wretched of the Earth*, can only succeed when launched on the same scale as that of the initial conquest.

As a result of her resistance, the speaker of "Mujer negra" declares that now, "Nuestra es la tierra. / Nuestros el mar y el cielo. / Nuestras la magia y la quimera" (ll. 43-45). She has reclaimed both body and land, and therefore *cubanidad*, through her rebellion against her former masters. In the ending lines of the poem, she describes a new scene: "Iguales míos, aquí los veo bailar / alrededor del árbol que plantamos para el comunismo, / su pródiga madera ya resuena" (ll. 46-48). This kind of language is rooted in mystical imagery which Sanmartín, Davies, and Cordones-Cook call the "historical mythology" narration characterizing Morejón's poetry. Although it may appear that the poetic voice of "Mujer negra" might be praising the Cuban Revolution for its anticolonial sentiment and even likening it to her spirit of rebellion against her masters, she is in fact asserting that it is her violent resistance as an escaped slave that planted the first seeds of the Revolution even centuries before it took place. The ending of the historical "epic" of the Black woman in "Mujer negra" is not that she has found her place among the militant comrades of the Revolution; rather, she has claimed Cuba as her own homeland and trains her eye on the rebels who fight in the mountains, watching them from a short distance and with expectations.

Concluding Remarks

Taking pain and violence and subverting them into a measure of power for the Black female body is the theme common to "Mujer negra" and "Amo a mi amo," but most visible in "Mujer negra" through its revolutionary language. In contrast, "Amo a mi amo" presents the subtleties and emotional complexity of what Morejón imagines would have been the relationship between an enslaved Afro-Caribbean woman and a white man during Cuban slavery. This poem exemplifies what Hartman calls the

"confusion between consent and coercion, feeling and submission, intimacy and domination" in the discourse of seduction. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker frames a relationship of abuse and sexual labor as one of adoration—even of one-sided love—but grows to recognize how her body is in fact being raped in manifold forms and how her psychological identity is colonized. Peering through the lens of the discourse of seduction, I characterize the lyrical voice of "Amo a mi amo" as a dynamic one that unmasks the pain impressed on her body (indelibly marking her memory, as Scarry and succeeding critics in the study of pain would put it) and reclaims it to remember who she is—an Afro-descendant woman of some agency—and to reciprocate violence against her master in order to escape.

It is interesting to view "Amo a mi amo" through the social and gendered hierarchies of Black and white bodies identified by Frantz Fanon in his work. Looking at his post-abolition contemporaneity, Fanon questions the attainability of authentic love between Black woman and white man because of the feelings of inferiority embedded by slavery into the colonial Black being, or *Weltanschauung* (*Black Skin, White Masks* 28-29). Based on this hypothesis, Fanon psychoanalyzes the hypothetical Black woman in a relationship with a white man as a social climber who recognizes to some degree how the intersectionality of her race and gender relegate her to a lower stratum of society apart from her relationship. Acting out the voice of this woman, Fanon writes, "I am white: that is to say that I possess beauty and virtue, which have never been black. I am the color of the daylight…" (31). He goes so far as to declare that when the white man demonstrates or declares "love" for the Black woman, "She had been recognized through her overcompensating [Eurocentric-conforming] behavior. She was no longer the woman who wanted to be white; she was white. She was joining the white world" (41). Certainly I do not argue that the lyrical voice of "Amo a mi amo" wishes to be white in the literal sense. However, the fact that she initially longs to understand his language and his tales of conquest, and she observes the hard manual labor of her fellow enslaved women with abstraction, points to her desire to be white in the sense of power and social status. It is therefore relevant to read the voice of "Amo a mi amo" as a self-aware woman who knows that submitting her body to rape—under the guise of consent that cannot exist under the circumstances—will purchase her a temporary escape from the hard labor of her compatriots. As the poem progresses, however, she understands depth and breadth of the barriers of language, power, and violence that exist between her and her master, as well as how incomplete and false her freedom is as the master's mistress. As a result, she must break her silence and raise the knife against her abuser as the death knell tolls ominously in the distance.

"Mujer negra" weaves together the end of the story of the lyrical voice from "Amo a mi amo" with the collective memory of a Black female *cimarrona* who found herself and rediscovered her body in the mountains after fleeing slavery. Apart from the influence of her former master, the

narratives of reward and punishment that orbited her prior consciousness as an enslaved woman, and the pressure to choose between physically painful labor and rape, the voice of "Mujer negra" offers the mature reflection of a woman who is now certain of who she is. The sureness of the speaker's identity is confirmed by her precise language through which she condemns slavery for reaping her womb for infants already dehumanized from birth, and by her use of the past tense, as in telling an epic history. In contrast, "Amo a mi amo" takes on the present-tense monologue style of the speaker who is yet wondering to herself why she is subjugated and how she can extract her Black body from the powerful grasp of the white colonizer. Yet in both poems, the anti-colonial message of the poet shines through clearly, by which she exhorts readers and especially fellow Afro-Caribbean women to remember their roots in the violence against their enslaved foremothers, and to draw strength and power from it.

Pain in the body is indeed well remembered. Pain exacted by the white colonizer's body on the enslaved body of the Black woman, moreover, is well remembered and transacted into a power of her own. While "Amo a mi amo" and "Mujer negra" have been read as commentaries on the complexities of transcultural identity and as calls to cultural pride in one's *africanidad*, I also read them as companion pieces in their multifaceted portrayal of pain remembered through the Black body and converted into power. They illustrate the poet's real-life observation that triumph over hegemony, such as colonization and enslavement, does not come easily but through reciprocal violence. Though Johann Galtung might question the rhetoric that "personal violence is necessary to abolish structural violence" (181), the stories of Afro-Caribbean women who survived rape and resisted enslavement as depicted in Morejón's two poems are testament to the hard truth that violent rebellion is the key to shifting the uneven networks of power. In consideration of the discourse of seduction, it is not only the Afro-Caribbean woman's position as a colonized body that necessitates the violence of her response, but moreover her race, gender, and class as a completely disenfranchised, enslaved Black woman. And it is through bloodshed, through visible violence and *cimarronaje*, that she can begin to shatter the invisibly violent foundations of her colonial world and unlock the power to wield her own body as a free Black woman.

Notes

1. The Hispanic Caribbean *negrismo* movement of the 1940s-60s, which is contemporaneous with but distinct from the French Caribbean *négritude* movement, saw the rise in publication and oral performance of Afro-Caribbean writers, particularly poets drawing from Yoruba religious inspiration, musical rhythm and sound, and spoken word traditions. Nicolás Guillén (1902-89), while being only one of many in a male-dominated *negrista* canon in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, is generally recognized as the father of the movement for his prolific contributions such as *Motivos de son* (1930), *Sóngoro Cosongo* (1931), *West Indies Ltd.* (1934), *El son entero* (1947), and other anthologies depicting Afro-Caribbean subjects and employing *negrista* literary devices like *jitanjáfora*, or the invention of African-sounding phonemes for the purpose of poetic declamation.

2. While her work largely centers on the discipline of bodies within the United States justice and prison system, it is worth noting the universality of Angela Davis's theory that the relationship between law, detention, and punishment as we know it in Western modernity is founded more on the social construct of needing to segregate and scourge the bodies of perceived Others than it is on factual evidence of successful rehabilitation within prisons (see *Are Prisons Obsolete*? and *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Prisons, Torture, and Empire*). Davis's thought on imprisonment can well support an interrogation of the structures of power and violence between race and class that echo today from institutionalized slavery.

3. Clifford Ommen *et al.* provide a useful summary of the various critiques of Scarry's work, among them the bifurcation between "innocent victim and culpable torturer" (Bernatchez), which is a useful complexity to consider in conjunction with my analysis of the Black woman and her white lover/abuser in "Amo a mi amo" later in this essay.

4. The English translation of this stanza, and the stanzas that follow from "Amo a mi amo," are reproduced from the Jean Andrews translation of the poem. At the time of the 2025 revision of this essay, the David Frye translation which was referenced earlier was no longer publicly available for the reference of the readers. On one hand, I acknowledge that the act of translating what is never fully poetically translatable from one tongue to another—particularly to English, the 'universally spoken' language of

today's imperialist world—may be construed as another instance of colonial violence against voices of color. First, the voice of *africanidad* was subjugated by the Spanish colonial tongue in Morejón's case; second, it has been re-translated into English. Yet on the other hand, for pragmatic reasons and ease of readers' reference, I have included an English translation and sought to reference one I deemed most faithful to the original text. The Andrews translation more or less adheres to a literal interpretation of Morejón's original Spanish.

5. Taken from Andrews' translation of "Amo a mi amo."

6. Taken from Andrews' translation of "Amo a mi amo."

7. The English version of this stanza and the following quotes from "Mujer negra" originate from William Little's translation. Little took certain liberties with his interpretation so as to preserve the spirit of idiomatic expressions, such as translating *trabajar como bestia* as *work like a dog* rather than the verbatim *work like a beast*. I would personally interpret Morejón's line to be a reference to beasts of burden (such as cattle or mules) rather than a dog.

8. Taken from Little's translation of "Mujer negra." Little translates "bocabajos y azotes" as *being beaten upside down*, though when compared against the enslaved Caribbean this is not entirely correct; *bocabajos* and *azotes* more accurately describe the cruel practice of tying or chaining an enslaved person facedown on the ground, spreadeagled to four posts so as to render them immobile for a brutal whipping. While it is not inconceivable that an enslaved person may have literally been beaten hanging upside down—given the patent cruelty of the slave trade—it ought to be noted that *bocabajos y azotes* is a Caribbeanism with a less literal meaning than *upside down*.

9. Taken from Little's translation of "Mujer negra."

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