

**“Black Woman”**  
**Nancy Morejón (2002)**

**Translation by William Little (2012)**

Still I smell the foam of the sea they forced me to cross.  
Night, I cannot recall the night.  
Nor could I even recall the ocean itself.  
But never have I forgotten the first seagull I glimpsed.  
High up, the clouds, like innocent ever-present witnesses.  
Perhaps I've not forgotten my lost coast nor even my ancestral tongue.  
They dropped me here and here I've lived.  
And because I work like a dog,  
Here is where I was reborn.  
And I sought to rely on epic story of the Mandinga after epic story.

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.

This is the land where I was lashed and beaten upside down.  
I paddled along all its rivers.  
Under its sun I sewed, harvested, and ate none of the crops.  
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.

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?

I worked even more.

Then I laid the foundation for my best millenary chant and my hope.  
Here I built my world.

I went to the mountains.

My true independence happened at the stockade<sup>1</sup>  
and I rode with Maceo's cavalry.<sup>2</sup>

Only one century later,  
alongsie my descendants,  
from atop a blue mountain,

I came down from the Sierra

to put an end to capitalists and userers,  
and generals and the petit bourgeois.  
Now I am: only now do we hold and create.  
Nothing is beyond our reach.  
Our land.  
Ours the sea and sky.  
Ours the magic and the amazing dreams.  
My equals, here I see you dance  
around the tree we planted for communism.  
Its generous wood is clearly resounding.

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<sup>1</sup> In the historical context of the present phrase in "Black Woman," there's a sense that the 'stockage' (Spanish: *el palenque*) refers to or alludes to a free slave fort, stockage, or arena. In contemporary Cuba (i.e., late Castro regime), there's a reference to "stockade" (*el palenque*), which clearly refers to freedom. A blog from Eastern Cuba (Oriente) that tries to send Internet messages and photos clandestinely out of Cuba to call attention to oppression in Cuba is called El Palenque; Blog de la Alianza Democrática Oriental (The Post; Blog of the Eastern Democratic Alliance). The following gives an idea of this blog: "Nuestro blog es colectivo por la imposibilidad de que cada uno pueda tener un espacio de debate personal, y quienes escriben lo hacen como un llamado a la gente en el mundo para que conozcan el estado opresivo existente en nuestra isla." (Our blog is communal due to the impossibility for each of us to have a space for individual discussion, and those who write do so as a call to the world's people to recognize the oppressive condition or our island.") Clearly, Nancy Morejón, writing as a strong supporter of the Cuban Revolution, one would think, would be opposed to the the content of El Palenque, but she surely would support the call for freedom. [<http://palenquecubano.wordpress.com/2010/03/25/sobre-palenque-cubano/>]

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Maceo Grajales (1845-1896) was a heroic Cuban military officer who figures among the main leaders in the three 19<sup>th</sup> century Cuban wars of independence from Spain. His father was a Venezuelan farmer and his mother was Afro-Cuban. He was born and raised in the Oriente region of Cuba, an area renowned for being the center of resistance to both Spain and the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista, who was overthrown by Castro and the Cuban Revolution. He died fighting against Spanish forces.