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## **“'Kalahari' or the Afro-Caribbean Connection: Luis Palés Matos'**

### ***Tuntún de pasa y grifería and Tato Laviera's La Carreta Made a U-Turn***”

*Antonia Domínguez Miguela*

University of Huelva

The history of colonization in Puerto Rico has influenced its development as a nation between two cultures and languages and the relationships that has been established with other Caribbean countries and the United States. Puerto Rico has always been considered a bridge nation between the Caribbean and the North American colossus. The development of national identity in Puerto Rico has implied a series of contradictions which are reflected in its national literature.

Many critics have pointed out that Puerto Rican literature is split between two shores: Puerto Rican literature written by island authors and the more recent Puerto Rican literature written in the United States by the sons and daughters of the different migratory waves along the twentieth century. Puerto Rican literature on the island has been characterized by a number of recurrent themes concerning the definition of cultural and national identity as a way to solve the contradiction of being a Caribbean nation that is still US territory yet culturally and linguistically different. This fact has always been an obstacle to

the consolidation of the bonds with other Caribbean countries like Cuba, for example.

However, after the migration of more than half of the population of Puerto Rico to the United States, Puerto Rican national and cultural identity suffered important transformations on the mainland. The concentration of migrants from different Latin American and especially Caribbean countries on American soil facilitated the development of a sense of community and brotherhood among Caribbean people in the United States. Furthermore, the contact between Caribbean and American traditions found a way of expression in unique cultural products like salsa but also in an emerging US Caribbean literature.

Unfortunately, US Puerto Rican literature has been ignored for a long time in the island, mainly because of their use of English and the particular themes concerning life in the north-eastern barrios. It was a literature at first identified as *nuyoricana* but which has recently spread all over the United States. In the last two decades, the consolidation and recognition of US Puerto Rican authors by the academia has been translated into a growing interest on this literature and the connections with the island and the Caribbean tradition. These bicultural authors show a clear influence from two cultural and literary traditions that needs to be explored.

This essay is an attempt to briefly describe the strong literary connections between the island and the mainland through the work of two distant Puerto Rican poets: Luis Palés Matos (1898-1959) and Tato Laviera (1951--). Both of

them share many concerns regarding national and cultural identity; themes like race and intercultural relations, among others, gain special prominence in their poetry but it is specially remarkable the common use of a poetic language that pays homage to the African-Caribbean component of a hybrid Caribbean people. Because of the time that separates them, it is obvious that Luis Palés Matos is an important literary source for Laviera who recovers Palés Matos' poetic message and language and makes it valuable for the present. Nuyorican poets writing in the seventies and eighties needed to find a language suitable for their distinctive experience and identity as a hybrid people. Furthermore, after encountering racism in the United States because of their varied skin color, they turned back to the island to understand their racial identity.

Luis Palés Matos, admired and criticized by many,<sup>1</sup> is the figure of the poet in search of his own voice. When he finally finds it, it becomes music, colour, rhythm and vitality. His poetic collection *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937) is a masterpiece where he established what was later on defined as *poesía negrista*.<sup>2</sup> In his poetry, there is a conscious attempt to suggest a new poetic language in which the black heritage is present as an example of still to be exploited sources that can express the Caribbean's distinctiveness. He departs

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<sup>1</sup> Aunque su visión no era compartida por muchos de sus contemporáneos, críticos como José Luis González en *El país de cuatro pisos* y Arcadio Díaz Quiñóniz en *El almuerzo en la hierba*, destacan la inclusión de su visión antillana en las letras puertorriqueñas. González considera su poesía como “el progresivo afinamiento de una concepción de la genética nacional” y destaca su papel trasgresor: “La inusitada virulencia de las impugnaciones suscitadas por el ‘negrismo’ de Palés . . . es una prueba adicional de la renuncia cada vez mayor de la élite cultural puertorriqueña a enfrentar el problema de la identidad nacional desde una perspectiva desprejuiciada y realista” (88).

<sup>2</sup> Mónica Mansour in her work *La poesía negrista* traces its origin in Luis Palés Matos' poetry: “La poesía negrista como movimiento literario fue inaugurada hacia 1926 por el puertorriqueño Luis Palés Matos y fue enriquecida por las aportaciones capitales de Nicolás Guillén, Emilio Ballagas, Regino Pedroso, Manuel del Cabral y sus seguidores” (9).

from the standard Spanish that was dominant in poetic productions and embarked in the wonderful project of turning the local and black speech into a poetic language.

Palés Matos recovers and pays homage to the African component of the Puerto Rican people and restores the African-Caribbean cultural tradition as a valuable source of artistic expression of the Caribbean soul. He also departs from traditional modernist poetry towards what has also been defined as *antipoetry*.<sup>3</sup> We can easily understand why Palés Matos was so strongly criticized by the cultural elite if we observe how the idea that national identity resides in the history of the great families which can trace back their origins to Spanish conquistadors is undermined by the inclusion of the mulatto/a as representative of Puerto Rico and subsequently of the Caribbean. In some way, pure lineage, which in Palés Matos' times was encouraged and celebrated as symbol of a romantic concept of the nation, is equally proved unstable and considered a mere illusion. This reaffirmation of racial identity is something that we will find again in the work of Tato Laviera.

*Tuntún de pasa y grifería* is an aesthetic exercise in which the poet tries to suggest the possibility of a new poetic expression using a language of his own where there are not only European and native “ingredients” but also African-Caribbean ones which help to create a poetry based on the Spanish

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<sup>3</sup> See the perceptive analysis of Palés Matos' work as *antipoetry* in “The Poetry and Antipoetry of Luis Palés Matos: From *Canciones* to *Tuntunes*” where he states: “*poesía negra* must be understood in a broader context of the century, playing its part in literature as jazz had patently done in dance and music—and literature. In that dynamic, spontaneous jazz poems were also an antimatter that removes the white mask from an inherently mixed culture. Similarly, in an island that until the late 1950s excluded from public air waves the musical legacy from Africa—*plena, guaracha—poesía antillana* was to Palés a countercultural expression, an antipoetry” (517).

language but with a distinctive African and Caribbean “flavour.” At the same time this renovation of the poetic language suggests the need to recover the qualities from every race that meet in this fantastic amalgamation that is the Caribbean. These are times of oppression and crisis of identity in the Caribbean but especially in Puerto Rico since the establishment of the American power prevents the normal evolution of an emergent *criollo* elite, obsessed with pure lineage and with staying attached to the land of their supposedly Spanish ancestors. The lower classes, though highly aware of racial classification in Puerto Rico, also need to look for strength inside themselves and in their multiracial heritage.

Palés Matos’ creation of a new poetic language is achieved by means of exploiting the musical and productive resources of the Spanish language in order to make it sound distinctively Afro-Caribbean. To find this “distinctive voice” he includes an area-specific vocabulary, exploitation of the productive resources of the language (such as in the formation of new words) and renovation of the set of elements and images used to describe and represent the Caribbean experience. It is obvious that there is a significant Spanish ingredient in the Caribbean but, when trying to read Palés Matos’ poetry we find that it is not only Hispanic, there is something else. Palés Matos attempts to create a new poetic language in which all influences meet to describe the unique Caribbean identity as the product of mixtures. His interest in experimenting with the language possibilities suggests his earlier concerns about poetry. As most avant-garde artists, he tries to find a new language by including some

components that have been missing. This becomes an attempt to break with the academic and intellectual poetry that was trapped in a terrain of universalist hispanism. His poetry tries to present what the Caribbean multiracial situation can contribute in the search for its own voice.

The ideal image of the negro is for Palés Matos an image of the vitality and resources that are still to be discovered inside the people of the Caribbean. With his poetry he is suggesting the richness of influences that meet in these people and he tries to bring to the surface all the qualities hidden inside of them but that they need to acknowledge. A starting point for this process consists of a recovery of those qualities inherent to the “race.” His own fascination for the African heritage makes him take the black race as an example because it is one of the races underrated until that moment. He could as easily have chosen the native Indians but he finds in the Negro the vitality and purity that is of greater help to achieve his goal. This becomes an example of race pride by emphasizing those aspects that make the Negro so distinct and superior to the white: their vitality, their rhythm, their courage, their strength against adverse circumstances and their eroticism.

His poetic language, impregnated by a defiant irony that would be later imitated, represents a new strength coming from one of the many ingredients present in the Caribbean because it is in the negro where he finds what he was looking for: vitality, strength, courage to fight and speak for themselves, liveliness. For the first time the *criollo* stops being the main character of a national literature and the myth of the rural *jibaro* shows a clear decline as

Puerto Rican society becomes more urban and the population moves to the coastal areas where black and mulattos predominated. Therefore, the latter substitute an already disappearing image of the model white Puerto Rican, descendant of Spanish culture.

In many ways, his poetry resembles African-American poetry from the “Harlem renaissance” in the sense that both of them try to recover the negro figure as something to be proud of, a source of strength for future generations by emphasizing these qualities lacking among whites. I personally think that the negro in Caribbean poetry holds a different position and that figure’s function in the poetry of Palés Matos is different from that of African-American poetry. The black population is not an isolated, distinguished group in society (at least not to the same extent that we find in the United States) but it has merged with two other races to become a differentiating element.

Since the combination of Indian and Spanish has resulted in a weak, passive, numb group of people, the negro component is seen as an open door to vitality in that combination. As Arcadio Díaz Quiñones points out “La mulata es, pues, la heroína del drama, síntesis del pueblo y de la tierra a la que pertenece” (90). The mulatta can be seen as an image for the island. Vitality is within her but she just has to use it as Palés Matos is suggesting in “Mulata-Antilla”: “Eres inmensidad libre y sin límites/ eres amor sin trabas y sin prisas;/ en tu vientre conjugan mis dos razas/ sus vitales potencias expansivas” (123). The same idea is repeated in other poems such as “Plena del Menéalo” published in the *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* where

the socio-political issue is more clearly displayed than in *Tuntún de pasa y grifería*:

Mientras bailes no hay quien pueda

cambiarte el alma y la sal.

Ni agapitos por aquí,

ni misteres por allá.

Dale a la popa, mulata

proyecta en la eternidad

ese tumbo de caderas

que es ráfaga de huracán,

y menéalo, menéalo,

de aquí payá, de ayá pacá

menéalo, menéalo,

de aquí payá, de ayá pacá

menéalo, menéalo.

¡Para que rabie el Tío Sam! (Qted. In Quiñónez 92)

Among the main techniques used by Palés Matos to create this new poetic language we have pointed out the introduction of a new vocabulary, apparently (or at least in some primary stages along history) alien to the Spanish language. We have to distinguish two main sources: native and local words and African words. The addition of local vocabulary has as its main function to speak about the islands in their own language, that which existed before the Spaniards came. This can be seen as an attempt to give

predominance to the local over the ever-present burden of the Caribbean's Hispanism. We can find a great number of these words such as “bochinche”, “funche”, “mandrugo”, “mariyanda”, “chango”, “burundanga”, “cocolos”, “fufú”, “ñeque”, “melao”, “malanga”, “ñañigo”, “caratos”, “quimbombo”, “calalú”, “foete”, “gandinga”, “bembe”, “prángana”, “guanabana”, “mamey”. Most of these words make reference to particular objects and places in the Caribbean such as fruits, dances, etc. Though most of the time they are of Caribbean origin, in some instances it is difficult to say if they are of Indian or African origin (due to the early arrival of black population in the island). These words usually appear together with another group of words that make sound-reference to people, places and objects from Africa such as “calabó,” “cocorocó,” “gongos,” “tembandumba,” “baquiné,” “adombe ganga monde,” “Ecué,” “Changó,” “Ogun Badagri,” “balele,” “candombe,” and “carabalí.” The African element is therefore emphasized at the same level as the native one.

It is especially significant how both lexicons are mixed within the poems suggesting this multicultural feature of the Caribbean: “Sombra blanca en el baquiné/ tiene changó, tiene vodú./ Cuando pasa por el bembé/ daña el quimbombó, daña el calalú” (“Lamento” 130). It is worth noting that the previous quotation would be almost incomprehensible for an ordinary Spaniard and this tells us much about Palés Matos' intention: he is defamiliarizing the Spanish language, creating a new language where the common Caribbean people can recognize themselves.

There are more ways in which Palés Matos tries to “Caribbeanize” the

Spanish language. He explores any resource to make his poems sound African-Caribbean. One of these resources is rhythm. He tries to imitate African music and its special syncopated rhythm by distributing stresses along the sentence in such a way that they remind us of drum beats. For example, in this stanza we can see how the last acute stresses combine with the previous ones to set a constant pattern which reminds us of beats that set the rhythm of the song:

Calabó y bambú

Bambú y Calabó

Es el sol de hierro que arde en Tombuctú

Es la danza negra de Fernando Poó

El alma africana que vibrando está

en el ritmo gordo del mariyanda ("Danza Negra" 127)

In the last sentence the stress pattern is quite consistent in the combination of stressed and unstressed syllables suggesting that repetition and at the same time alternation of stress: UU-U-/U-UU-/ -U-U-U-UUU-/ -U-U-UUU-U-/ U-UU-UUU-U-/UU-U-UUU-U-/. It is also worth observing the consistent use of acute accents at the end of every line which helps us set regularity within the apparently irregular syncopated rhythm. Besides, the insistence in the use of plosives and nasals also helps to set the rhythm. The combination and repetition of plosives imitates the drum beats while the nasals give the poem that musical quality so typical of negro songs together with the predominant use of the vowels "u," "o" and "e," the two latter usually stressed:

Por la encendida calle antillana

va Tembandumba de la Qumbamba

-Rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula-

entre dos filas de negras caras.

Ante ella un congo -gongo y maraca-

ritma una conga bomba que bamba. (“Majestad Negra” 138)

The use of these especial rhythmic patterns functions as a breaking-off with the regular patterns common in the canon of Spanish literature. Therefore, we can say that the introduction of these apparently irregular rhythmic patterns of African origin suggests the possibility of renovation and new ways of expression in poetry that can give a more accurate sense of the Caribbean experience. This does not mean that the only way to renovation is in a movement back to Africa but rather it encourages the exploitation of the different heritages to give an original voice to Caribbean poetry. The message is that originality is possible even though this poetry is based on an imposed language (Spanish) to which this heritage is completely alien.

The use of onomatopoeias and jintanjáforas<sup>4</sup> also suggests the possibilities of the creation of new poetic expressions by the new formation of acoustic effects inside the language, as we can see throughout the poems. Some of the onomatopoeias he invents are “tu-cu-tú,” “pru-pru-prú,” “ñam-ñam,” “coquí, cocó, cucú, cacá,” and “tum-cutum.” The jintanjáfora is another way to

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<sup>4</sup> As David Colón defines it, “*Jitanjáfora* is a term for the use of onomatopoeia in Spanish Afro-Caribbean poetry . . . to invoke an aesthetically Africanist sensibility into the poetic expression. ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé! Is sound poetry; although it is a visual presentation, it is of a phonetically induced sign. ¡Mayombe-bombe-mayombé! Does not *look* like African language, but to the *negristas*, it surely sounds like it” (277).

create words with a powerful musical component so that they can be passed off as real words. This may be especially the case with these apparently African nouns: “Mussumba, Tombuctú, Farafanga,” (“Pueblo Negro”) “Manasa, Cumbalo, Bilongo,” “Sosola, Babiro, Bombassa/ Yombofré, Bulón o Babissa (“Candombe”). It is also interesting to notice how word-derivation can also help the poet to transmit that message of innovation, creation of a new poetic language by inventing new words either coming from nowhere or derived from another word. Here are some examples: ñañigo - “ñañiguar”, “culipandear,” “Kalahari,” or “obsede.” We should not forget that his poetry is full of new and striking images that once again suggest the necessity for an innovative way to describe and speak about the Caribbean: “Humean, rojas de calor, las piedras,” “luz rabiosa” (“Pueblo Negro”), “mermelada de oraciones” (“Ñañigo al Cielo”), “hedionda luz amarilla,” “luna podrida” (“Candombe”), “sol de hierro” and “ritmo gordo” (“Danza Negra”).

All these features that we have briefly reviewed are part of that attempt at innovation that Palés Matos is suggesting in *Tuntún de pasa y grifería*. Regarding his ideas about aesthetic renovation and its implications on a more social and political level, the poet comments:

La vida espiritual de nuestras islas . . . exige adecuada expresión de sus artistas y pensadores. Esto no es ya mera necesidad estética, sino imperativo especial de una personalidad que debe protegerse y afirmarse para que se cumpla plenamente su destino histórico. Crear un arte que extraña su propio escenario . . . es sólo crear un espejismo

literario en la indispensable gravedad específica de sustancia humana que le imprime carácter de permanencia. Poeta que se abstrae de su genuino elemento so pretensa aspiración de universalidad y trascendentalismo, es pez fuera del agua, y sólo realizará una poesía académica para uso de intelectuales. El poeta tomará asunto para su arte de su propio ambiente, de la baraja de intereses y pasiones que le rodea, del ritmo vital en que se desenvuelve su pueblo, y estilizándolo a golpes de gracia, de ironía y selección, le quitará pesadez y cotidianismo, que es como romper las estrechas fronteras regionales e intentar fortuna en espacios mas dilatados de universalidad, sin que se quiebre por ello la raíz viva que le sostiene adherido a su tradición y a su pueblo. (Qtd. in Quiñones 93)

Palés Matos' poetry is undoubtedly that breeze of fresh air that Caribbean poetry needed to speak with its own voice. His poetry is that new language born of the daily life but with a new "flavour," a new musicality. The best image of this creation of a new poetic voice can be best embodied in the poem "Kalahari," where the poet comes across a new word that stands for that part of himself and of the whole Caribbean that was hidden inside of him:

No sé por qué mi pensamiento a la deriva  
fondeó en una bahía de claros cocoteros,  
con monos, centenares de monos que trenzaban  
una desordenada cadena de cabriolas.  
¿Por qué ahora la palabra Kalahari?

Ha surgido de pronto, inexplicablemente...

¡Kalahari! ¡Kalahari! ¡Kalahari!

¿De dónde habrá surgido esta palabra

escondida como un insecto en mi memoria;

picada como una mariposa disecada

en la caja de coleópteros de mi memoria,

y ahora viva, insistiendo, revoloteando ciega

contra la luz ofusadora del recuerdo?

¡Kalahari! ¡Kalahari! ¡Kalahari!

Pales Matos is a pioneer in his vision of the mulatto Caribbean. His influence on the work of many Puerto Rican and Caribbean writers is undoubtedly fundamental. His traces are not only present in the work of island authors such as José Luis González, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Ana Lydia Vega, Rosario Ferré and Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá among others, but also many outstanding Puerto Rican authors in the United States like Tato Laviera. His poetry illuminates the most forgotten and invisible aspects of the Caribbean soul whose Negro beats and rhythm penetrate in this way the literature of Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and North America.

His great achievement is to redefine Puerto Rican national identity throughout its Afro-Caribbean character. His "negrismo" is an admirable attempt at rediscovering that other "history" of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean that can be traced back to Africa. His work represents a more real and sincere alternative to official history too much preoccupied with racial and social

prejudices that leave aside one of the most important and distinctive constituents of the Caribbean.

Contemporary authors are much aware of this and pay homage in their works to this vision of Caribbean unity and to the figure of the mulatto/a as the symbol of the defining synthesis of the Puerto Rican and subsequently of the whole Caribbean. This is what we find in works like *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* (1979) by Tato Laviera. The influence of the African-Antillean poetry of Luis Palés Matos goes beyond the borders of the island. Among some Nuyorican poets and especially in Tato Laviera's poetry,<sup>5</sup> we frequently find a conscious attempt to rescue the African rhythms of the mulatto as representative of a racially mixed people with a Caribbean heritage.

Laviera does not look for his Puerto Rican roots in the *jíbaro* or in the national Creole elite but in the popular culture of the island, where the *bomba* and the *plena* were born. They are the precious legacy from his ancestors who struggled to resist submission in the same way Puerto Rican migrants fight against injustice in the United States. Laviera, as Luis Palés had done before, finds in the African component a new source of vitality and creativity, the possibility for something new that fully makes justice to the history of their people.<sup>6</sup> *La Carreta Made a U-Turn*, his first poetic collection, denounces the

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<sup>5</sup> When asked about the influences that may have inclined him to be a writer Laviera responds: “When I was 6, I studied under Juan Boria . . . He recited *canción festiva para ser llorada*, Luis Palés Matos's greatest poem. I think that was very important for me. Years later I wrote a poem, *Don Luis Palés Matos*. . . It's all in “black” language. It took me two years to write it. I wanted it to be the finest black poem in the history of Puerto Rico” (79).

<sup>6</sup> Many critics have already pointed out the influence of Afro-American poetry of the sixties: “There are many elements characteristic of much new Puerto Rican poetry which were clearly drawn from the Afro-American poetry of the period of ‘Black Power’ and the democratic, nationalist organization in the Black community. Such elements include the militant tone of anger and struggle, the declamatory and

miserable situation of Puerto Ricans in El Barrio. However, it is not filled with anger; on the contrary, and most especially in its third section “El Nuevo rumbón,” it becomes a return to the roots of his Afro-Caribbean heritage that is incorporated in the urban setting of El Barrio. In his search, Palés Matos’ poetry becomes the Spanish-language equivalent of what he tries to do in the present and in a different situation. *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* can be considered his most “Caribbean” collection and a first step in his own development as a Puerto Rican poet in the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Tato Laviera’s work stands out as an example of a poetry that recovers the rhythms and speech of the mulattos. The oral quality of the colloquial language penetrates his poetry and the reader “hears” the street language. The rhythm of the poems are created out of repetitions and the use of African rhythms together with pauses that emphasize the thematic and formal variations. The presence of these rhythms can be clearly observed in his collection *La carreta Made a U-Turn* in sections such as “El Arrabal: Nuevo Rumbón,” a musical poem that recovers the sounds and rhythm already present in the poetry of Luis Palés Matos. Music, as a fundamental element of Puerto Rican life in the United States, penetrates the literary production in the mainland becoming symbol of survival and the poetic soul of a people.<sup>8</sup> Again

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musical quality of the presentation, the street imagery of Black youth and culture . . . (Corts et al. 144). However, we want to emphasize the influence that comes directly from the *poesía negrista* inaugurated by Luis Palés Matos as it has been somehow underestimated by the American academia.

<sup>7</sup> In later Works Duch as *Enclave* (1985), *American* (1985) and *Mainstream Ethics* (1988), Laviera develops what Frances A. Aparicio defines as “an ontology of America,” “proposes a reconceptualization of the term America” strating from “a new pan-Latino identity,” (29) and finally embracing many other ethnic groups.

<sup>8</sup> As Feliz Cortes, Angel Falcón and Juan Flores comment “Music served as a cohesive cultural force among the migrants, being a recognized form around which Puerto Ricans gathered in homes, hometown

we find the vocabulary that was introduced by Palés matos such as: “tru cu tú,” “pacutú,” “ñam ñam,” “bamba,” “baramba” (“el Moreno puertorriqueño”), “llamamba quimbembe” (tumbao”). However, Laviera also introduces similar musical vocabulary that has more to do with the present situation of Puerto Ricans in the United States such as “congas,” “conguero,” “soneros,” “merengue,” “salsa,” “salsero,” “mambo,” or rhythms closer to present musical forms like the conga or the salsa with specific rhythmic patterns such as “tatatatá,” “tutututú,” or “tucutupacutú” (“summer congas”).

The oral quality of Laviera’s poems in this last section of the book, where the Spanish predominates, also constitutes an element of cultural rediscovery. As Frances A. Aparicio comments, the words in Spanish “function as ‘conjuros,’ as ways of bringing back an original, primordial reality –Puerto Ricanness” (1980, 149). In Laviera’s poetry also reappear the use of onomatopoeias and jintanjáforas:

What was made by slavery

imposible,

has been made by Africa

wonderfully possible!

To esteem thorns

Of our major roots

were luba mi ce

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clubs and social events. The traditional rhythms became a tool of cultural survival, a carrier of national identity and unity against the opposing conditions” (126)

were luba mi ce

were luba mi ce

ohun ti aro e ko ce ce (42)

As we can notice, Laviera's indebtedness to Palés Matos is fairly explicit in some of his poems where the rhythm resembles that evoked in Palés Mato's poetry as in “el Moreno puertorriqueño,” or “tumbao”:

Tucutú pacutú                      tucutú pacutú

Tucutú pacutú                      tucutú pacutú

.....

pito que pita

yuca que llama

salsa que emprende

llanto que llora

última llamada sin fuego

tumba que le tamba

tumba que la bamba baja

que pacheco se inspira

que ismael la canta

oh! Y el baquiné (49)

The African rhythms are expressed through repetitions, pauses, and recurrent rhythmic patterns. However, this recovery of an African heritage is not uncritical. These roots have evolved in the new land and have suffered severe transformations as we observe in “the Africa in pedro morejón”: “yes.

We preserved what was originally African,/ or have we expanded it? I wonder if we have / committed the sin of clending? But I also hear the Africans love electric guitar (43). Their original language may have become a bastard language called spanglish but Laviera's directly confronts the issue of language as a problem affecting Puerto Ricans, who may seem to be lacking a language:

hablo lo ingles matao  
hablo lo español matao  
no se leer ninguno bien  
so it is, spanglish to matao  
what i digo  
¡Ay, virgin, yo no se hablar! (7)

This new language resembles that new language that “Kalahari” represented for Pales Matos; a new poetic language that more fairly represents the experience of a forgotten part of a people. It is a language of a people that is not Puerto Rican as before and not American either but another hybrid product coming from the Caribbean and mixing with the many cultures of North America.<sup>9</sup> This language is the voice of the common people transmitted through the pan-Antillean rhythm that we found in Palés Matos' poetry which now becomes a powerful bond that extends over the Caribbean to embrace a whole race:

#### A blackness in Spanish

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<sup>9</sup> As Miguel Algarin states in what we can consider the ‘*Nuyorican Manifesto*’ their poetry emerges from a new language that embraces the Caribbean and North America represented in the two languages that form their heritage: “The conflicts are many. Languages are struggling to possess us; English wants to own us completely; Spanish wants to own us completely. We have mixed them both” (90).

A blackness in English

Mixture-met on jam session in central park,

There were no differences in

The sounds emerging from inside (“the salsa of Bethesda fountain” 53)

As an example of a new experience and language *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* also fulfils an important role in the development of US Puerto Rican literature since it becomes a contestation to that other hallmark in the national literature about the Puerto Rican migration, *La Carreta* by René Marques.<sup>10</sup> In this play, Marques describes the experience of migration as a process of cultural loss and individual degradation but Laviera opposes this vision implying that Puerto Rico is not the final destination for the migrant but only the place where they can find and understand the historical roots of the migrations and the problem of a national definition that had been previously imposed by the elite to which René Marques belonged. Laviera’s collection is contradictory as it represents the reaffirmation of the migrant who is there (United States) to stay and also the coming back to the cultural and racial roots so as Juan Flores remarks, “one of the many ironies about *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* is that it is indeed, a return to Puerto Rico” (171).

In this coming back to the past and to the cultural and racial roots, both poets conform a circle that connects Africa, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and the United States. Theirs is a poetry to be heard and felt as the African rhythms

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<sup>10</sup> In an interview Tato Laviera confirms his intention when writing *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* act: “In *La Carreta Made a U-Turn* I bastardized the most sacred Puerto Rican book . . . *Yo también tengo tres secciones*. He began in *la montaña* and continues in San Juan, and then goes to the metropolis. I began in *la montaña* and instead of ending in the Island, I make a U-Turn and go to *el arrabal*, into the streets of Loisaida” (Luis 1028)

extend beyond the Sargasso Sea, a new language that, like "Kalahari" refers to something new but familiar and still within the great Caribbean connection.

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