

# Ancestral Memories, Ritual Archives and the Anatomisation of *Yorubaisms* in Nicolás Guillén's Poetics

**Emmanuel Adeniyi**

## Summary

In view of the valorisation of Yorùbá cultural elements in the poetry of the Atlantic Yorùbá poets, it has been observed that the poets often use enormous continental Yorùbá cultural resources in their creative explorations. This is achieved through the retentive agencies of oral traditions, history and instinct employed by the poets to assert their Yorùbá cultural heritage and create a unique identity for themselves amidst the labyrinth of American rainbow cultures. Identity creation and affirmation becomes important to them, considering the conflict of identities or double consciousness that the peculiar multicultural Atlantic space has fostered on the American Yorùbá and other African Diasporas in the New World. To this end, this article examines the preponderance of Yorùbá cultural elements (*Yorubaisms*) in Nicolás Guillén's collections: *Yoruba from Cuba* and *Man-making Words* to asseverate how his unconscious explores the elements for identity (re)creation, portrayal of transatlantic slavery and propagation of his *mulatez* integrationist philosophy. The examination is expedient in order to anatomise the cultural configurations of the Americas and identify those unique continental Yorùbá cultural influences there. The article is mainly anchored in Jungian collective unconscious or racial memory to expound peculiar repressed cultural information which finds expression in Guillén's poems.

## Opsomming

In die lig van die valorisering van Joroeba- kulturele elemente in die poësie van die Atlantiese Joroeba-digters, is daar opgemerk dat hierdie digters dikwels enorme kontinentale Joroeba-kulturele hulpbronne gebruik in hul kreatiewe ondersoeke. Dit word bewerkstellig deur die inhoudende werkings van mondelinge tradisies, geskiedenis en instink wat deur die digters ingespan word om hul Joroeba-kultuurerfenis te laat geld en vir hulself 'n unieke identiteit te skep in die doolhof van Amerikaanse reënboogkulture. Identiteitskepping en -bevestiging word vir hulle belangrik wanneer die teenstrydige identiteite of dubbele bewustheid wat die eienaardige multikulturele Atlantiese ruimte in die Amerikaanse Joroeba- en ander Afrika-diasporas in die Nuwe Wêreld bevorder het, in ag geneem word. Vir dié doel bestudeer hierdie artikel die oorheersing van Joroeba-kulturele elemente (*Joroebaïsmes*) in Nicolás Guillén se versamelings: Joroeba van Kuba en Mensmakende woorde om te verklaar hoe sy onbewuste die elemente vir identiteit(her)skepping, uitbeelding van transatlantiese slawerny en uitbreiding van sy *mulatez*

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integrasionis-filosofie ondersoek. Die studie is geskik om die kulturele groeperings van die Amerikas te anatomiseer en die unieke kontinentale Joroeba-kulturele invloede wat daar werksaam is, te identifiseer. Die artikel is hoofsaaklik geanker in Jungiaanse kollektiewe onbewuste of rassegeheue, om buitengewone, onderdrukte kulturele inligting wat tot uitdrukking kom in Guillén se digkuns, te verklaar.

## Introduction

Individual Atlantic Yorùbá<sup>1</sup> creative writers have always employed the medium of poetry to preserve, recreate, project and assert the aesthetics of the (Atlantic) Yorùbá culture as well as its marriage with other cultures in the New World. Poetry, therefore, becomes a preservative tool in the hands of many Atlantic Yorùbá writers to “perceive and preserve life [...] capturing the essence as well as the delicate nuances of everyday objects, thoughts, and feelings through the language of their experience” (Hopkins 1987: 177). The *delicate nuances of everyday objects, thoughts and feelings* in the minds of the Atlantic Yorùbá poets revolve around the immanence of Yorùbá cultural elements (*Yorubaisms*) in the New World and their portrayal in poetry. The “literary textualisation” (Smith 1987: 181) of these elements is revealing, because it creates factuality about the dominant status of the continental Yorùbá cultural elements in the Americas. Dzidzienyo (1976), Verger (1978), Ogen (2008) and scholars such as William Bascom, Melville Herskovits, Nina Rodriguez, Kim Butler, Wande Abimbola, Toyin Falola have, at different times, expressed this fact in their writings. What is, therefore, of interest is the degree of portrayal of these *Yorubaisms* in poetry, the question of whether some aspects of the culture are given more prominence than others in poetry, unlike what is obtained in other genres of literature, and ultimately the agencies of their retention and/or mutation in poetry. On Yorùbá cultural elements in the Atlantic Yorùbá poetry, cultural significations and cryptic codes – such as incantations, names, deities, preternatural essences, poltergeists, paranormal beliefs, rituals and cultural practices that shape Yorùbá cosmology and ontology – resonate through the poetry. The foregoing cultural significations are retooled by many Atlantic Yorùbá poets to lend credence to the recurring motifs of cultural hybridity, *mestizaje* or *mulatez* integrationist ideology, syncretism, identity issue, culture contacts and resolution of racial tension.

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1. The “Atlantic Yorùbá” is a neologism referring to the descendants of Yorùbá slaves carted off from Africa to the Americas during the four-century-old Atlantic triangular slave trade and a number of affiliated Yorùbá people in the New World who do not have any biological or ancestral link with the continental Yorùbá but worship pantheon of Yorùbá *òrìṣà* (deities) and regard themselves as cultural Yorùbá by virtue of their immersion in Yorùbá cultural practices.

## Linking Ancestral Memory, Ritual Archives with Jungian Collective Unconscious

The term “Ancestral or Genetic Memories” is used as a parallel of Jungian racial memory to refer to feelings, thoughts, behavioural practices and cultural information acquired from one’s ancestors, which serve as instincts or archetypes in the collective unconscious.<sup>2</sup> By dominating the collective unconscious, it implies that they influence the actions of a people either implicitly or explicitly. Watts (1997), for instance, sees the phenomenon as “the biological memory traces that we are born with, the living record of our ancestors, handed on to us in the DNA strings we inherit via our parents” (2). To further emphasise it, the African ancestral memory can be described as a sum total of cultural information, thought system, worldview, behavioural practices or peculiarities that uniquely define the African person to which an average African latches onto implicitly or explicitly for self-definition and identity creation. It is a perceptive tool employed to define, organise, interpret and understand one’s environment or conditions. It is also the body of knowledge, reservoir of experiences, records and information traceable to one’s ancestors, handed over to one at birth which is warehoused in one’s unconscious and influences one’s actions, albeit without any conscious awareness. Ancestral memory is also hypothesised as an auxiliary conception of Maurice Halbwachs’ “Collective Memory” which ingeminates the social context and relevance of experiences of individuals in a cultural group, since the memory “provides a [...] framework for a meaningful interpretation of individual experiences” (Quy 2011: 244). It is also related to “Cultural Memory” that presents the binary argument on whether it is the past that influences the present or the present that influences the past. It is, however, maintained that the past has a great influence on the present realities, as those record of events which are warehoused in the memory can unconsciously shape the direction of the present and future.

The term “Ritual archives”,<sup>3</sup> according to Falola (2016), refers to “the conglomeration of words, texts, ideas, symbols, shrines, images, performances, and, indeed, objects that document and speak to those religious experiences and practices that allow us to understand the African world through various bodies of philosophies, literatures, languages, histories”.<sup>4</sup> He (Falola) also believes that the concept implies the “body of knowledge that contains enormous data about natural and supernatural agents, ancestors, good and bad

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2. See: [https://www.vice.com/en\\_au/article/genetic-memory](https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/genetic-memory).

3. This term is credited to Toyin Falola (2016).

4. Same as above.

witches, life, death, and a number of information on names, places, shrines, incantations, invocations, and the entire cosmos of all the deities and their living subjects among human and non-human species”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, ritual archives are ancestral legacies, indigenous knowledge and epistemology that constitute or shape knowledge about visible and invisible worlds (Falola 2016). This body of knowledge is warehoused in oral traditions, history, customs, religious beliefs and other cultural practices of a people (Falola 2016). They imply a depository of cultural traditions, lore, customs, rituals, cosmology, epistemology, and other material and non-material aspects of culture that are embodied in people and used to define them or chart a course for their development (Falola 2016). Since collective unconscious underscores “repository of ‘racial memory’ [...] primordial images and patterns of experience” (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 323) that are cross-cultural, the conceptual models of ancestral/generic or cultural and collective memories as well as ritual archives serve as components or archetypes housed in the collective unconscious. They jointly facilitate the perception of the world in a certain way by humanity; consequently, the concepts aid the appreciation of the world from the *Weltanschauung* of the Atlantic Yorùbá.

### **“White and Black Grandfathers” and the Celebration of *Metisse* Identity**

Nicolás Guillén’s *Yoruba from Cuba*, for instance, features poems that index the immanence of *Yorubaisms* conspicuously. While Guillén may have done this to assert his Yorubanness or Yorùbá ancestral heritage, or possibly to indicate the heavy influence of Yorùbá cultural practices in Cuba on him, the renowned poet ends up projecting *Yorubaisms* in his poetry. Doing this has equally enabled him to preserve, recreate and celebrate the marriage of certain aspects of Yorùbá culture in the Americas with other Atlantic cultures. In “Ballad of the Two Grandfathers”, Guillén writes about “Shadows” that only he can see. He uses the poem to celebrate his “dual”, “miscegenised” identity, as one part of him is traceable to a White grandfather and the other to a Black grandfather. The two ancestries are conflated in him and are embodied by the persona of the poem who probably is Guillén himself. The “Shadows” are a metaphor of two races whose contact was negotiated through the trans-Atlantic slavery. The slavery is a narrative of domination, dispossession and subjugation of one race by another. In the mind of the poem’s persona, one grandfather (race) is more sophisticated than the other and this is typified in the respective expressions used to indicate the (war) technologies of the two races. One grandfather (White) is regaled in “a warrior’s grey armour” with “[a] ruff round his broad neck” and “pupils of antarctic glass” (Guillén 2010:

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5. Same as above.

27), while the other grandfather (Black) is a study in underdevelopment, technology imbalance, suffering and deprivation. He is in possession of “A bone-point spear / wood and hide drum [...] bare feet, hardened body” (Guillén 2010: 27). The capture and eventual sale of Africans while trans-Atlantic slave trade lasted possibly signifies the sophistication of the Caucasians’ war technology over the war civilisation and technique of the Black race.

### On the Evils of Trans-Atlantic Slavery

To further underscore the motif of trans-Atlantic slavery in the poem, Guillén draws attention to the suffering of those uprooted from their cultures and carted off to a new environment. In its historicity of the slavery, the poem makes a distinction between languages used by the two grandfathers during their transition on the seas to the New World. Their languages further reveal their captor and victim statuses. While the Black grandfather complains of “dying” (Guillén 2010: 27) apparently due to exhaustion and dehumanising conditions he is subjected to while on the seas, the White grandfather complains of tiredness: “I tire!” (Guillén 2010: 27). Tiredness is an emotional expression of fatigue, weariness or exhaustion; just as the gerund, “dying”, signifies the process of losing one’s life, or suffering the loss of one’s humanity. The White grandfather is fatigued having shuttled between Africa and the Americas several times capturing and shipping hundreds of thousands of able-bodied Africans to the New World. His tiredness is borne out of his inordinate penchant for materialism; hence he cares less about the numerous jungles that dot the landscape of Africa, its “Swarthy alligator waters” (Guillén 2010: 27) and its inclement tropical weather. The poem is worth quoting:

Africa of the humid jungles,  
pounding and drumming gongs ...  
“I am dying!”  
(says black grandfather.)  
Swarthy alligator waters,  
Green coconut mornings ...  
“I tire!”  
(says white grandfather.)  
Ships of bitter wind,  
galleon burning for gold ...  
“I am dying!”  
(says black grandfather.)  
Coastlines of virgin necks  
beguiled in glass beads ...!  
“I tire!”  
(says white grandfather.)

Pure circle of sun,  
caught in the Tropic's ring;  
clear round moon  
over the sleeping apes!  
So many ships, so many ships!  
So many Blacks, so many Blacks!  
Such a splendour of sugarcane!  
Such vigour in the slave-driver's whip!  
Stone of tears and blood,  
half-open eyes and veins,  
empty dawns,  
plantation sunsets,  
and one strong loud voice,  
cracking the silence.  
So many ships, so many ships!  
So many Blacks!

(Guillén 2010: 27, 29)

The Black grandfather is, however, tottering under the weight of pains and impending death. He is an archetype of suffering, retrogression and deprivation. The image of Black grandfather in the poem bears intertextuality with the portrayal of the poor or the dregs in England's Romantic period as poeticised by Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Song to the Men of England". The Black grandfather is the ancestor of "[s]o many Blacks" (Guillén 2010: 29) conveyed to the New World by "[s]o many ships" (Guillén 2010: 29). His descendants are parallels of Shelley's "Men of England", who "plough / For the lords who lay ye low? / Wherefore weave with toil and care / The rich robes your tyrants wear?" The seed they sow "another reaps; / The wealth ye find, another keeps; / The robes ye weave, another wears; / The arms ye forge, another bears" (Miller & Greenberg 1981: 268-269).<sup>6</sup> The "Men of England" is a metaphor for the degrading condition of the English working class, the way the Black grandfather indexes Black slaves in the Americas. The poem utilises the agency of history to present the cruelty, wickedness of humans to humans and the helplessness of the English proletariat in the face of tyranny, just as Guillén's persona, "the black grandfather", his descendants, and so many other Blacks shipped to the Americas are portrayed as the victims of circumstances beyond their control.

In view of its musicality, onomatopoeic words and *diegesis*<sup>6</sup> on the theme of trans-Atlantic slavery, coupled with the pains of African slaves on their masters' plantations in the Americas; the poem employs the techniques of literary ballad to narrate the rude incursion of Europeans – as typified by the White grandfather – into the African continent as well as the capture, shipping of Blacks, and their enslavement in the New World. Literary ballad is a "narrative poem written in deliberate imitation of the form, language, and

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6. A historical narrative.

spirit of the traditional ballad” (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 24), while traditional ballad is a “song [...] transmitted orally [...] which tells a story” (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 23). As a literary ballad, it makes use of “set formulas”, such as, “stock-descriptive phrases”, “refrain” and “incremental repetition” (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 23). These set formulas function as mental cues that assist the “singer to remember the course of the song” (Abrams & Harpham 2012: 23). Some of the *stock-descriptive phrases* in the poem include: “A bone-point spear” (Guillén 2010: 27), “bare feet” (Guillén 2010: 27), “hardened body” (Guillén 2010: 27), “antarctic glass” (Guillén 2010: 27), “white grandfather” (Guillén 2010: 27), “black grandfather” (Guillén 2010: 27), “slave-driver’s whip” (Guillén 2010: 29), “half-open eyes and veins (Guillén 2010: 29)”, and many more. Similarly, the refrains: “Shadows that only I can see, / guarded by my two grandfathers” (Guillén 2010: 27, 29) and “Federico! Facundo!” (Guillén 2010: 29) contribute to the rhythmic pattern or musicality of the poem and emphasise the major thrust of the poesy – syncretism and the *metisse* or mulatto status of the poem’s persona. The use of incremental repetition in the poem is typified by the repetition of lines, such as: “I am dying!” (Guillén 2010: 27), “I tire!” (Guillén 2010: 27), “So many ships: so many ships!” (Guillén 2010: 29), “So many Blacks, so many Blacks” (Guillén 2010: 29), “two men of equal size” (Guillén 2010: 29), “they dream, weep, sing” (Guillén 2010: 29). The repetition aids remembrance of vital parts of the poem and equally enhances the poem’s musicality. There is power in repetition. Besides, the repetition of those stock phrases is for emphasis. They are used to draw attention to the pitiable condition of the Black race. The poet-persona may have repeated those phrases to also emphasise the sufferings of slaves with a view to creating pathos in the readers. Though the poem narrates the suffering of African slaves in the New World and the loathsome trade in humans perpetrated by European slave merchants, its major thrust is the valorisation of beauty and advantages that miscegenation has conferred on the poet-persona. Rather than seeing his dual ancestry as a curse or bemoan his mulatto/*metisse* identity, the poem’s persona celebrates the reconciliation of age-long racial animosity between Whites and Blacks. “Don Federico” and “Taita Facundo”, two names referring to a European slave owner/master and a respectable Black man/slave respectively, are portrayed in the poem embracing each other – the move that is indicative of forgiveness, reconciliation and friendship:

“Federico!  
Facundo!” They embrace.  
They both sigh. They both  
raise their strong heads;  
two men of equal size,  
under the lofty stars;  
two men of equal size,  
they shout, dream, weep, sing.

They dream, weep, sing.  
 They weep, sing.  
 They sing!

(Guillén 2010: 29)

The poem's persona sees in himself the reconciliation of anger that Blacks in the New World possibly bear against the White race. He, therefore, becomes the symbol of meliorism. He cannot deny his European ancestry; neither can he look down on his African side. He sees the seeming contradiction as a means to negotiate reconciliation and advocate (world) peace. With reconciliation, the pains of slavery and dispossession of one race by another is assuaged by "two men of equal size" (Guillén 2010: 29) who prefer to do away with their racial differences and wipe away their pent-up animosities with their tears and songs of reconciliation. The ballad, therefore, assumes the status of a reconciliatory song. On the refrain of the poem: "Shadows that only I can see" (Guillén 2010: 29), it is imperative to ask how the persona remembers or recollects the "Shadows" or what possibly brings the "Shadows" to his memory, mental or visual perception. As portrayed in the poem, "Shadows" are adumbrations or mystical representations of two distinctive worlds, figures and races. The "Shadows" outline their racial features, phenotypes or biological distinctiveness, civilisations and fate. These shadows are agents of identity and fate. They are a catalogue of racial experiences of both Blacks and Whites, as well as their asymmetric relations in the Americas. Rather than serving as instruments of racism, the shadows are used by the persona to reify the conflation or confluence of racial and cultural views in him in order to emphasise his *mestizaje*/miscegenised identity. It is germane to probe into factors that trigger the remembrance of these shadows in the persona. Similarly, it is imperative to find out if the recalling of the memory is a deliberate or unpremeditated attempt to explore the memory or instinct that accommodates the experiences and pains of slavery. While the mechanism of bringing these memories into remembrance may be traced to Involuntary Explicit Memory (IEM),<sup>7</sup> it is also possible that the memories may have been recalled intentionally by the persona or the poet as a deliberate means of underscoring his hybridised or mulatto identity. What is of interest here is what the persona sees and/or recalls. Since the poet-persona is the only one who sees the shadows "guarded by his two grandfathers" (Guillén 2010: 29), he is making a tacit reference to the past, history and reflections as represented by his "grandfathers". The grandfathers are purveyors or guardians of the shadows and since he shares both the

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7. IEM refers to those memories that "come to mind with no preceding retrieval attempt and are subjectively experienced as being repetitive" (Berntsen & Rubin 2008: 449). The reason for this is because most of the contents of the memory may have been unintentionally recalled from the unconscious with the aid of mental/visual or linguistic cues.



European and African biological features, the mixed shadows (history, experiences, pains, slavery, inhumanity, victory, freedom and wickedness) that the grandfathers embody are stored in his memory. The “shadows” are what (Watts 1997: 2) calls “biological memory traces” or “the living record” of his ancestors that he is born with. The thought of his European biological features brings up in him the memory of inhumanity, wickedness, mercantilism/imperialism, while his African features remind him of dispossession, subjugation and deprivation perpetrated against the Black race. The two features possibly constitute a binary opposition in him and run riot against each other. There is, therefore, a need to mediate between them and bring about true reconciliation. The point is that both the voluntary and involuntary recollections of memory and its contents may apply here. The persona merely explores his ancestral history and instincts to address his dual racial identity which he employs to advocate racial harmony and reconciliation of the past wrongs. As an integrationist, Guillén uses his creative impulse to carve out, from a multicultural space, a closely knit world which, irrespective of its racial configurations, parades a people who are ready to fuse and maintain identical outlook.

### **Yorùbá Oral Arts and “Religious-Character Archetypes” in Guillén’s Poetry**

One of the Yorùbá religious-character archetypes that recur in Atlantic Yorùbá myths, especially in Cuba, is *Şàngó*. Myths narrating the boldness and intransigence of the god-man abound in the New World. Other Yorùbá religious-character archetypes in the unconscious and myths of the Atlantic Yorùbá include *òrìşà* – such as *Şàngó*, *Ògún*, *Ọşun*, *Yemoja* – who are represented as Heroes/Heroines; *Olódùmarè*, *Ọbàtálá* as Wiseman; *Èşù* as Villain, Jester or anti-Hero. In “Ballad of the Guije”, Guillén explores the Atlantic Yorùbá folktale on *Şàngó* (the Yorùbá god of thunder) to teach, instruct and entertain. Though the verse is conceived as a divination poem by Ortiz-Carboneres (2010), it reads much like a creative reinterpretation of *pataki*<sup>8</sup> to teach children the virtue of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. The poem teaches about a goblin, a gnome or an ogre – a fearful creature whose apprehension is captured in the refrain of the ballad: “Neque, go away neque / Guije, go away guije!” (Guillén 2010: 33). Guije eats children at will. The gnome(s), whom the persona in the poem refers to as a “bogey-man” (Guillén 2010: 31), “dwarfs with huge navels” (Guillén 2010: 31), and “neque” (Guillén 2010: 31) is/are a parallel of children-eating ogre in African ogre tales. The persona in the poem reflects on “Chango” (Guillén 2010: 33) as a child, as well as his intransigence. Chango must probably have

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8. The Atlantic Yorùbá folktales, myth, history

been warned about the power of the creature to eat children, but being who he is, he possibly ignores the warning and pays dearly for it, as Neque or Guije drags him under water:

But Chango didn't want that.  
A hand came from the water  
to drag him under.  
He split in two his skull,  
tore out his huge eyes,  
pulled out his white teeth,  
tied his legs into one knot  
and his arms into another.

(Guillén 2010: 33)

Being a ballad, the poem is meant to be sung or chanted to appease the gnome from causing havoc. As a powerful creature, Guije wields enormous powers to destroy and stymie the dream and hope of humans. Since humans do not have power over it (the ogre), it becomes expedient of them to appeal to it. Besides, the creature needs to be appeased, considering the level of havoc it has caused:

The river's murky waters  
are deep and full of corpses;  
turtle shells,  
heads of black children.  
By night the river flings out  
its arms, and tears the silence  
with its claws, claws  
of a frantic crocodile.  
Beneath the scream of the stars,  
beneath a burning moon,  
the river howls amongst the stones  
and with invisible fingers,  
shakes the bow of the bridge  
and strangles travellers.

(Guillén 2010: 31)

With the thread of incantation that runs through the ballad, it (ballad) parallels the use of incantation by the continental Yorùbá in oral poetry as well as the poetic pattern of chants in Ifá divination. Furthermore, the resonance of divination in the poem is a similitude of the continental Yorùbá epistemology underlying the presence of preternatural forces and paranormal essences that cohabit and commingle with the living. Through the voice of the persona, it is revealed how the supernatural creatures that inhabit water bodies eat children in droves:

Dwarfs with huge navels

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people the troubled waters;  
their short legs twisted;  
their huge ears, alert.  
They are about to eat my child,  
with his pure and black flesh,  
and to drink his blood,  
and suck on his veins,  
and close his eyes,  
his great eyes of pearl!  
Run, the bogey-man will get you,  
run before he comes!  
My little boy, my little one,  
may your lucky charm protect you ....

(Guillén 2010: 31)

The waters index the Atlantic space, and the act of eating children by an ogre is a metaphor of how the space swallows up African slaves and their descendants indiscriminately. Jorge Amado's *Sea of Death* captures this metaphor succinctly, considering how poor Afro-Brazilian fishermen and other people die at sea with their dreams, hopes and aspirations unfulfilled. In his narrative, Amado believes that Yemaya, the Yorùbá goddess of the sea, who is metaphorically believed to be the wife-mother of all fishermen and seafaring men, often comes at the appointed time to take the fishermen away. In other words, the ogre and the waters become a cosmic force or preternatural essence that *eats up* dreams, aspirations and prevents them from fulfilment. To live in the realisation of one's dream, it is necessary to steer clear of Neque or Guije, or better still appease him not to *eat up* one's dream. However, Chango chooses to ignore warnings. In doing so, he becomes an archetype of intransigence and victimisation. The foregoing further lends credence to the portrayal of Šàngó among the Atlantic Yorùbá as partly a controversial figure. If he does not snatch another person's wife, he is involved in another act that ends up casting aspersion on his personality. With his portrayal, he becomes an archetype of anarchy, defiance or obstreperousness. The persona, however, laments the neglect of his warnings and the death of the child (Chango):

My little boy, my little one,  
with wide smiling lips,  
my grief goes on dreaming  
in the depths of your river  
with your sweet dry veins  
and your dampened heart...  
Neque, go away neque!  
Guije, go away guije!  
My little boy, my little one,  
all I told you came true!

(Guillén 2010: 33)

As a literary ballad surfeited with stock phrases, refrains and incremental repetitions, the poem is a proof of how verbal arts or oral resources transit from orality to textuality. It also indicates how creative writers dig their hands into oral resources to enrich their creative works. What Guillén has done with the ballad is to recreate an Atlantic *pataki* on Şàngó as a Yorùbá religious-character archetype and weave an ogre tale around his (Şàngó's) story to show the consequences of (his) intransigence. Unlike "Ballad of the Two Grandfathers", Guillén uses a combination of incantation – an oral resource that uses recitation of words believed to have magical effects and, at the same time, possesses intrinsic literary qualities (Akporobaro 2005: 53), and ogre tale<sup>9</sup> – as a vehicle or an agency to instruct (children) about the inherent danger of disobedience.

In another poem, "Sensemaya", Guillén uses chants as a verbal art to enrich his composition. Sensemaya refers to a chant in Palo Mayombe.<sup>10</sup> The chant, according to Zambrano (2014: 3), "poeticizes an Afro-Caribbean snake dance rite conducted by the practitioners of the Palo Monte Mayombe religion". Palo Mayombe is an African-based religion in the New World. Just like Santería, Candomblé and other African (Yorùbá -based) religions in the Americas, it syncretises Yorùbá gods with other African deities, especially those imported to the New World from "the Central African Bakongo and other Bantu cultures (primarily in the Congo, Cameroon, and Angola)" (Zambrano 2014: 3). Murrel (2010) and Zambrano (2014) describe Palo Mayombe as a popular creole religion among the Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas. Murrel (2010) believes it is a religion that:

operates in concordance with nature, and it places strong emphasis on the individual's relationship to ancestral and nature spirits and its practitioners. The Palo mayombero specialize [*sic*] in infusing natural objects with spiritual entities to aid or empower humans to negotiate the problems and challenges of life [...] Palo Monte is often referred to as Reglas Congas (Kongo religions) and has accrued more symbolic names than one wishes to count; however, these locutions share a common historical creole African-Spanish signification of an African spirituality. *Palo* and *monte* are creole-Cuban creations that have a distinct connection to the religious import of trees for the Bakongo people. *Palo* is a Portuguese and Spanish word for tree, while *Mayombe* is forest area in the Central African Kongo region. The *Mayombe* forest serves as a sacred space where courts, debates, marriages, and initiations are held; thus, *Palo* practitioners augur the religion's dual Kongo and Cuban spiritual reality.

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9. A fairy tale or sub-genre of folktales that uses fantasy, man-eating characters

10. Palo Mayombe is a Congo-based (Las Reglas de Congo) syncretic religion in Cuba that venerates spiritism and anthropomorphises inanimate objects.

Though more of a Bantu-speaking people's religion in the Americas, it contains conspicuous Yorùbá cultural elements which further confirm the overarching influence of the Atlantic Yorùbá culture on others in the New World. One aspect that indicates the infusion of *Yorubaisms* with Palo Mayombe is the veneration of Yorùbá goddess, Yemoja (Ortiz-Carboneres 2010). The goddess is also worshipped the way Santeria, Candomblé, Umbanda, Voodoo or Macumba faithful worship her. The use of Yorùbá membranophones, which Kubayanda (1990: 105) identifies as *bàtá* and *iyá-ilù* drums in the religion, similarly shows the preponderance of Yorùbá cultural elements in Palo Mayombe and the invocatory tone of the poem which the drums help to set. *Bàtá* and *iyá-ilù* are special drums among the continental Yorùbá that are used in praise poetry and in performing invocation to deities (Sotunsa 2009). Apart from these drums, *dùndún* and *bèmbé* are commonly used by the people. Sotunsa (2009), for instance, posits that *bàtá* drum is associated with *Şàngó*, and that it possesses spiritual powers that calm the nerves of the god when angry, because “whenever there is a thunder storm, the *bata* drum could be used to perform invocations and entreaties to abate the storm. This is indicative of *bata*'s influence [on] *Sango*, as it can appease the wrath of the angry god” (116). On the use of *iyá-ilù*, Sotunsa (2009) believes that the drum also “serves the function of invocation for [the] deity” (117). According to her, *iyá-ilù* is played:

After the *dundun* or *bata* ensemble plays the rhythm over and over again, the *Iya-ilu* then introduces texts, in speech or song mode, which are relevant to the worship of the particular god for whom the performance is carried out. The fixed rhythm constitutes a subtext which is a significating code for establishing the identity of the deity it signifies. [...] Since the rhythms are usually invocatory in nature, there exists the probability of members of the audience, or sometimes the performers becoming possessed by the spirit(s) of the deity being invoked, especially when the performance reaches its peak.

(117)

Being a “dance ritual” or snake dance rite (Zambrano 2014: 4), “Sensemaya” is performed to the accompaniment of Yorùbá drums. It is also a type of poetry which Banti and Giannattasio (2004) call “choreutic”, since it is “associated [with] a particular dance [and common among] several non-Western societies” (313). Snake in the poem indexes an enemy. This enemy – though to Zambrano (2014: 4) is “the sacred Infinite” or a *cryptid* representing the snake, whose killing “symbolizes renewal, fertility, growth, and wisdom” – possesses cosmic powers to see beyond the perceptible, because it has “eyes of glass” (Guillén 2010: 35). Besides, it is dangerously mobile, despite its lack of perceptible feet, and it can bite and escape, hence the urgency required to “strike it with an axe” (Guillén 2010: 35) rather than kicking it with a mere foot. In essence, the poem reads much like a war chant that must precede a ritual often performed by African warriors before

confronting their adversaries or going to war. The snake signifies a mortal enemy, a dangerous creature which can attack, bite and kill its enemies. Performing a mock ritual on a snake by the warriors is another way of securing (spiritual) victory over the enemy before the real war is fought. The poem – which can be said to have two parts: the call for the killing of the snake, indicating a call to war and attack, and the death of the snake, indicating victory over the adversaries – fuses chants with rituals to invoke magical powers that will ensure the spiritual death of enemies or weaken them prior to their attack. The attacking part of the poem foregrounds the deadly potentials of the snake and similarly provides justification for its attack:

The small snake has eyes of glass;  
the small snake comes, curls round a stick;  
with its eyes of glass,  
around a stick,  
with its eyes of glass.

The small snake walks with no feet;  
the small snake hides in the grass;  
walking it hides in the grass,  
walking with no feet.

You strike it with an axe and it dies:  
strike it now!  
Don't kick it with your foot, for it bites,  
don't kick it with your foot, it will escape!

(Guillén 2010: 35)

The second part of the poem, on the other hand, presents the (spiritual) victory recorded over the snake-enemy, having been rendered dead and immobile. This part of the poem appears to have been couched in a mocking tone to possibly indicate the mock victory of the ritual performers over their enemies:

The dead snake can't eat,  
the dead snake can't hiss,  
can't walk,  
can't run.

The dead snake can't see  
the dead snake can't drink,  
can't breathe,  
can't bite.

¡Mayombe – bombe – mayombé!  
*Sensemaya, the serpent* [...]  
¡Mayombe – bombe – mayombé!  
*Sensemaya, is not moving* [...]

¡Mayombe – bombe – mayombé!  
*Sensemaya, the serpent [...]*

¡Mayombe – bombe – mayombé!  
*Sensemaya, he is dead!*

(Guillén 2010: 35)

Though Zambrano (2014) interprets the poem as an indication of life renewal, since snakes are fond of changing their skins, while Ellis (1983) locates the poem within the postcolonial interplay of imperialism,<sup>11</sup> domination, dispossession and struggle for freedom in the Americas, especially among the imperialists and African diasporas; it is not out of place to explore other meanings the poem may have. Considering the warlike nature of the Bantu-speaking people in Africa and the universal emblem (archetype) of snake as a dangerous creature, as well as the popularity of snake as a totemic object among many African ethnic groups, the poem may be said to have lent itself to another interpretation different from the ones offered by Ellis (1983) and Zambrano (2014). The mortal enmity that the snake metaphorises and the irresistible desire of Guillén's persona to kill it is almost the same with what the persona in David Herbert Lawrence's "Snake" experiences. The persona sees a black snake at his water-trough on a hot day. Though he fears and admires it, a voice reminds him to kill the snake. The enmity he bears the reptile is stirred up by his inner voice reminding him of what is naturally expected of him:

The voice of my education said to me  
 He must be killed,  
 For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man  
 You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.  
 (Miller & Greenberg 1981: 226)

### White-Black Racial Asymmetry

In "Guadeloupe, W.I", Guillén dwells on racial asymmetry among the Blacks, Asians (the Arabs) and Whites in West Indies and, by extension, the Americas. The thrust of the poem has a universal signification depicting the old order that ensures the hegemony of the Whites (Caucasians) over other races. The White racial supremacist theory has been on from time immemorial. Lucien Levy-Bruhl's "Theory of Primitive Mentality", for instance, pigeonholes African mind-set as primitive that cannot address

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11. See (Zambrano 2014: 4).

contradictions,<sup>12</sup> while Joseph Arthur Comte de Gobineau's Aryan Race Theory<sup>13</sup> places the Black race at the lowest rung of the race hierarchy constructed by the racist theorist. His belief is that Blacks are incapable of taking intelligent decisions, but possess physical strength. Guillén's poem is, therefore, a satirical piece that impugns these theories on racial inequality. It also draws attention to the drudgery of Blacks in a world somewhat perceived anti-Black:

The Blacks, working  
near the ship. The Arabs, selling,  
the French, strolling and relaxing,  
and the sun, blazing ....

The ship weighs anchor, ploughing  
the impassive waters with foaming clamour.  
The Blacks stay behind working,  
the Arabs selling,  
the French strolling and relaxing  
and the sun, blazing ....

(Guillén 2010: 49)

In "Son Number 6", Guillén uses the leitmotif of syncretism to affirm his Yorùbá (African) identity. Being a "Son", that is, Cuban popular dance music; the poem is infused with rhythmic patterns and repetitions which help to emphasise the persona's conscious awareness of his Yorubaness. Apart from its rhythm and repetition, the poem balances its musicality with the tropes of double consciousness, the in-betweenness and mulatto (confused) identity of the persona – who sometimes sees himself as either Yorùbá, Carabali or Madingo. Being the poem from which the title of his first anthology (*Yoruba from Cuba*) derives its name, the poem captures the mental condition of many people in the Americas regarding their double identity. The identity problem creates in them the consciousness of viewing the world or perceiving their

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12. In his book, *How Natives Think* (1926), Lucien Levy-Bruhl bifurcates human mind into Western and Primitive. Primitive mind-set, he believes, does not address contradictions, does not differentiate between supernatural and reality, but uses "mystical participation" to manipulate the world. He believes that the Western mind uses speculation and logic.
  13. In *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1915), Arthur de Gobineau constructs a racial hierarchy comprising the Whites, the Yellow and the Blacks. He places the "Blacks" on the lower rung of the hierarchy with the belief that they are physically strong, but lack intellection or cerebration, while the "Yellow" race is both physically and intellectually mediocre. At the top of the hierarchy is the "White" race with positive qualities attributed to them.



environment and themselves from two or more antagonistic cultures (Tyson 1999). According to the persona:

I'm Yoruba, crying out Yoruba  
Lucumi.  
Since I'm Yoruba from Cuba,  
I want my lament of Yoruba to touch Cuba  
the joyful weeping Yoruba  
that comes out of me.

(Guillén 2010: 67)

The above quote is a reflection of the steeped awareness that the persona has about his Yorùbá ancestry or identity. What is Yorùbá in him may not be his skin pigmentation, it may not be the Yorùbá tongue which is lost to him, though he constantly makes efforts to relearn it, his Yorùbá identity may equally not be about his cognate knowledge of Yorùbá cultural practices. What is Yorùbá in him is internal and psychological; it is couched or expressed through his emotions. It is a sum total of ancestral information and ritual practices passed across to him by virtue of one of his ancestors being of Yorùbá ethnic stock or an Atlantic Yorùbá. The persona, however, experiences double consciousness about his identity as he says in the second stanza of the poem:

I'm Yoruba,  
I keep singing  
and crying.  
When not Yoruba  
I am Congo, Mandiga or Carabali.

(Guillén 2010: 67)

Guillén also uses the poem to celebrate the syncretic nature of the New World and its multiplex cultural configurations. With this understanding, the Americas become a contact zone, a culture confluence and a melting pot for the mixing of cultures. It is, therefore, the epicentre of syncretism. To Guillén, rather than advocating racial discrimination or race hate, it is better for the races or cultures in the New World to come together as one, since:

[...] We've come together from far away,  
young ones and old,  
Blacks and Whites, moving together;  
one is a leader, the other a follower,  
all moving together;  
San Berenito and one who's obeying  
all moving together;  
Blacks and Whites from far away,  
all moving together;

JLS/TLW

Santa Maria and one who's obeying  
all moving together;  
all pulling together, Santa Maria,

San Berenito, all pulling together,  
all moving together [...].

(Guillén 2010: 69)

### Guillén's Mulatez Poetics

The last lines of the poem, "Son Number 6", which appear to be the summation or the crux of Guillén's message in his first collection, heighten the call for unity among the people in the Americas. With the concluding lines, he makes a clarion call urging the people in the New World to unite and avoid racism:

Come out Mulatto,  
walk on free,  
tell the white man he can't leave...  
Nobody breaks away from here;  
look and don't stop,  
listen and don't wait  
drink and don't stop,  
eat and don't wait  
live and don't hold back  
our people's 'son' will never end!

(Guillén 2010: 69)

The same trope of cultural syncretism runs through "Poem with Children" – a dramatic verse that attempts to educate children from different races on the need to eschew race hate and violence. It is more like a drama piece, considering its use of dramatic elements of stage direction, characterisation and dialogue. The structure of the poem, similarly, makes it look like a drama piece or better still a dramatic poetry. The "stage direction" in the poem sets the tone for racial harmony that should subsist in the Americas: "*A homely sitting room. The mother, a white woman and her son. A black boy, a Chinese boy, a Jewish boy who are visiting. All of them are about 12 years old. The mother is sitting doing some needlework while next to her the children are playing with toy lead soldiers*" (Guillén 2010: 73).<sup>14</sup>

However, the boys begin to display racial hatred towards one another, the moment they start noticing differences in their epidermis or phenotypes based on the information fed to them by the outside world. This information must

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14. Italics original.

have slipped into their unconscious which later dictates or informs their subsequent actions:

BLACK BOY. Yes man; men are different. Some are big, like he says, others are small. Some are black and others white, and others yellow (*pointing to the Chinese*) like him .... In the class the other day my teacher said that there are more Whites than Blacks ... That really hurt me! ....

JEWISH BOY. Yes .... And a German who has a drug store in Compostela Street called me a pig and said that all the people of my race should be killed. I don't know him and I never did him any harm. Neither did my father or my mother ... he was really nasty!...

CHINESE BOY. My teacher told me too that the yellow race was inferior to the white .... That the white is the best ...

THE SON. Yes, I read that in my book: a geography book. But my mum says it's all a lie; that all people and all children are the same. I don't see how that is possible: well my skin is one colour and yours (*to the Chinese*) is different, and yours (*to the black*), is different and yours (*to the Jew*). Well, how about that ..., you are white like me!

JEWISH BOY. That's true: but they say that my nose is ... I don't know ... a bit long, and because of that I am not as good as other people with shorter noses. Really confusing! I have seen men and other boys around here who have long noses too and no one says anything to them ....

CHINESE BOY. Because they are Cubans!

BLACK BOY. (*Addressing the Chinese boy*) Yes, and so are you, but your eyes are slanted ....

CHINESE BOY. Because my father was Chinese, stupid!

BLACK BOY. Then you are not Cuban! And don't call me stupid! Go back to Canton!

CHINESE BOY. And you nigger, go back to Africa.

THE SON. Don't shout, mum will come and tell us off!

JEWISH BOY. Didn't you hear this black kid called [*sic*] him Chinese?

BLACK BOY. Shut up you Jewish pig, son of a shoemaker and your family ...!

JEWISH BOY. And you, you lump of coal, and you, ape, you ....

(*They all start fighting noisily. The Mother comes in running.*)

(Guillén 2010: 77, 79)

The seed of racial discord is sown in the children very early in life and they manifest it by emphasising their racial differences and using *ethnophaulisms* to ridicule their different phenotypes. Guillén's aim in this poem is to disabuse the minds of children or make them unlearn those racial slurs which are bottled up in their psyches and often used as prejudices stereotyping persons outside their races. Guillén achieves this aim through THE MOTHER who tells the boys that they are all the same and that "who[ever] divides children, / also divides men!" (Guillén 2010: 83). According to her:

Blood is an immense sea  
that bathes all the beaches [...]  
Blood bathes the body,  
of a black with black skin;  
the same blood, that runs,  
boils under white skin.

Yellow flesh,  
When veins burst  
Bleeds with the same red blood  
That all veins bleed.

(Guillén 2010: 81, 83)

The poet-persona creates a positive impression in the children, as he teaches about the essence of unity among different racial groups in Cuba and the entire Atlantic space in general. Rather than outlining racial distinctions, the poet-persona emphasises humanity among all races and uses that as a basis to negotiate inter-racial or inter-cultural harmony and peace.

In Guillén's other anthology, *Man-making Words*, the poet brings up the issues of trans-Atlantic slavery, his African ancestry, the precarious fate of Negroes in the Americas, his mulatto identity and double consciousness. In "Ancestry", he uses sarcasm to taunt Fabio, a likely metaphor for a White Cuban or White man whose grandpa he calls an "archangel with slaves" (Guillén 1972: 65). The foregoing is sarcastic and ironic, as no saint whose sense of morality is untainted will use humans as animals of burden on plantations. The poem is conversational and reads much like a riposte to an earlier claim made by someone else on the purity or sainthood of his ancestors, and demonisation of another person's grandfather:

Fabio, from what you say,  
your grandpa was an archangel with his slaves.  
My grandpa, on the other hand,  
was a demon with his masters.  
Yours died cudgelled.  
Mine they hanged.

(Guillén 1972: 65)

Through sarcasm, the poet-persona points to death as a leveller that has claimed the grandpas – the wealthy slave owner and the poor grandpa condemned by fate to a life of servitude and toil. While one is fustigated or clubbed to death (cudgelled), the other is hanged. Both die a painful death; there is no difference in the nature of their deaths. The poem is probably used to deflate the ego of Fabio, who indexes a White man, about his racial or ancestral purity, while, at the same time, point to the aspersion often cast on the ancestry of the poem's persona who obviously is a descendant of a slave grandpa. His poem, "A Negro Sings in New York City", further confirms

Guillén as a meliorist or an integrationist poet who seeks to end racism and all its manifestations in the Americas through his creative explorations. A Negro sings in the poem and his hymn/song is “against Jim Crow. / The song of peace and peace again” (Guillén 1972: 67). The Negro has accepted his fate in the Americas. He bears in his consciousness the hostile environment where he finds himself, but believes that he can negotiate peace and engender peaceful race relations with a right attitude and songs of peace. Similarly, in “My Last Name”, Guillén spotlights his confused identity and double consciousness. He perceives life from the standpoint of someone with a double vision as a result of his identity crisis. Name speaks to identity issue, but Guillén raises doubts about the originality and correctness of his name-identity:

Ever since school  
and even before ... Since the dawn, when I was  
barely a patch of sleep and wailing,  
since then  
I have been told my name. A password  
that I might speak with stars.  
Your name is, you shall be called ...  
And then they handed me  
this you see here written on my card,  
this I put at the foot of all poems:  
thirteen letters  
that I carry on my shoulders through the street,  
that are with me always, no matter where I go.  
Are you sure it is my name?  
Have you got all my particulars? [...]

(Guillén 1972: 73)

Guillén’s doubt about his identity is deep-seated. He probably desires recognition of his African ancestry which may have been overshadowed by his Spanish (European) side, hence his posers:

Does all my skin [...]  
Does all my skin come from that Spanish Marble?  
My frightening voice too,  
the harsh cry in my throat?  
Are all my bones from there?  
My roots and the roots  
of my roots and also  
these dark branches swayed by dreams  
and these flowers blooming on my forehead  
and this sap embittering my bark?  
Are you certain? [...]

(Guillén 1972: 73, 75)

The poem, which is divided into three parts, catalogues Guillén's agitation about his identity and the internal conflict that it has created in him. His experience is similar to that of many people in the Americas, especially individuals who are products of miscegenation. They have a fragmented identity, and that often creates doubt in them as to who they are or what part of them best defines them. Considering the tone of the poem, the poet-persona is addressing an imaginary persona whom he sarcastically addresses as "noble people" (Guillén 1972: 75), but notorious for stealing "from a poor, defenseless Black" (Guillén 1972: 75). The locution, *noble people*, bears a reference to Europeans that perpetrated trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is also a taunting expression aimed at impugning the self-acclaimed purity or supremacy of Europeans (Caucasians) over other races. Their supremacist and racial purity raises a lot of moral questions in view of their active involvement in slave trading, the use of humans as animals of burden on plantations and brutal killings of many slaves, the rude invasion of a people's socio-cultural spaces and the disruption that that invasion has caused. The memory of this pent-up information against a people can only rear individuals with highly fragmented or distorted identity or people who will continue to ask existential questions about who they are and the purpose of their existence. Guillén captures this better in a conversational manner:

Well then, I ask you now:  
Don't you see these drums in my eyes?  
Don't you see these drums, tightened and  
beaten with two dried-up tears?  
Don't I have, perhaps,  
a nocturnal grandfather  
with a great black scar  
(darker still than his skin)  
a great scar made by a whip?  
Have I not, then,  
a grandfather who's Mandingo, Dahoman, Congolese?  
What is his name? Oh, yes, give me his name!  
Andres? Francisco? Amable?  
How have you always said  
Francisco in Dahoman?  
In Mandingo, how do you say Amable?  
No? Were they, then, other names?  
The last name then!  
Do you know my other last name, the one that comes  
to me from that enormous land, the captured,  
bloody last name, that came across the sea  
in chains, which came in chains across the sea.

(Guillén 1972: 75)

The leitmotif of trans-Atlantic slavery still runs through his poem, “I Came on a Slaveship”. The poem is better described as a memorial intended to preserve the inglorious uprooting of innocent people from their African matrix. The uprooting banished them to a completely hostile environment where they were condemned to a life of toil and hard labour by self-seeking Europeans whom Aimé Césaire (1955) calls “the adventurer and the pirate” (2) and “the gold digger” (2). The poem indicates how important historic events which are stored up in a people’s unconscious are hard to forget. Guillén leverages on the history of slavery to recreate the Great Passage of African slaves and their maltreatment upon arrival in the New World:

I came on a slaveship.  
They brought me.  
Cane, lash, and plantation.  
A sun of steel.  
Swear like a caramel.  
Foot in the stocks.

Aponte, smiling, spoke to me  
I said: “Count on me!”  
Oh death! Afterwards silence.  
Shadows after.  
A long violent sleep!  
A harsh sleep.  
[...]

O’Donnell. His dry fist.  
Lash and more lash.  
The constables and the fear.  
Lash and more lash.  
My body blood and ink.  
Lash and more lash.  
[...]

I see Menendez stretched out.  
Immobile, tense.  
The open lung bubbles.  
The chest burns.  
His eyes see, are seeing.  
The corpse lives.

(Guillén 1972: 185, 187)

Guillén’s poetics portrays him as a writer whose works derive tremendously from those peculiar experiences around him. He feasts on happenings around him as “raw materials” for his poetry. This explains the enormity of issues bordering on racism, identity crisis, syncretism, mulatto/miscegenation, African heritage, trans-Atlantic slavery, the vaunted White supremacist claim

and many other tropes that his poetics is woven around. Though a number of his poems address other issues, such as elegies to lost friends, loved ones; the bulk of Guillén's work can be said to be on his African identity and patrimony. His poetics, similarly, explores the resources offered by history, verbal arts, instincts and ancestral memories to project dominant tropes that define his writings. He sometimes affirms and, at the same time, doubts his Yorùbá identity – since he equally believes he may or may not have Carabali, Mandigo and Congolese (Bantu) blood in him. However, in some of his poems – where he dwells on African cultural elements – Guillén has mostly done so using the thread links of Yorùbá cultural elements to weave his poetic thoughts together. The dilemma of Guillén is the dilemma of every Atlantic Yorùbá person. Though many may not admit it – who they are or the question of their original identity has remained a thorny issue. What has been observed is that many descendants of African slaves in the Americas prefer to use Yorùbá identity to define themselves.<sup>15</sup> It offers them a convenient platform to assert their personhood since Yorùbá culture is a dominant one in the New World. Besides, since the culture appears to have “swallowed” many other African diaspora cultures, it becomes easy for them to describe themselves as Yorùbá in the Americas, just as Guillén calls himself a “Yoruba from Cuba”.

## Conclusion

The poet uses four retentive mechanisms to retain and project Yorùbá cultural elements in his poetics. One of such mechanisms is oral traditions. In his poems, he uses verbal arts, such as incantations, chants, ogre tales, myths, folktales and divination to retain or preserve these traits in his memory and that of others. It can equally be said that he uses this mechanism as a means to preserve these cultural traits in the collective memory of the Atlantic Yorùbá by withdrawing them from his personal unconscious or his ancestral memory where they are housed to be used in his poetry. Since these resources

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15. A good example is Yejide Orunmila, the President of African National Women's Organisation (ANWO), who said that her father was from Grenada and her mother from Jamaica and that from oral history, her father said his ancestors were Igbo. But Yejide, whose original name is Aisha, said she did not want to have anything to do with Arabic or Christian names, and decided to rename herself, because she wanted something that is strategically African. According to her, “I looked up African names from the section of African where I believe my fore parents were from. I saw that Yejide sounded beautiful, looked beautiful, with beautiful meanings and I chose it. I have been studying Ifá, and I thought that Ọ̀rúnmìlà is something I'd like to be identified with me.” Source: A radio interview on Inspiration FM, Ibadan, anchored by Edmund Obilo in 2017. Quite a number of people in the Americas identify themselves through Yorùbá names, religion and other cultural elements.



enjoy fluidity and are susceptible to verbal variations, each interpretation or exploration given the oral resources is unique, and serves as an addition to other interpretations on those oral resources already warehoused in the memory. In other words, the retention of oral resources used by Guillén follows a two-way pattern: the withdrawal of stored materials to be *processed* through creative writings and the permanence that creative exploration of the withdrawn resources confers on them. Apart from oral traditions, other mechanisms that Guillén also uses include history, songs and instinct. Song is a mnemonic strategy. Song combines rhythm with lyrics and repetition. Besides, most songs and their lyrics bear the imprints of history which may have been consciously or unconsciously called up and rendered as songs. For instance, in one of his poems, he presents a persona rendering an appealing chant to a goblin to preserve the life of his/her child. Through Cuban *son* – a dance music with a syncretised Yorùbá musical rhythm, and the use of Yorùbá drums (*bàtá*) and (*ìyá-ìlù*) in Palo Mayombe – Guillén has demonstrated how songs can be used to store or retain cultural elements in the memory. When history is (re)narrated, it is perpetuated; besides, it is easy to remember. Most of the historical events in his poetry have undergone mental repetition and, therefore, perpetuated in his memory. He also uses instinct. Instinct is an unconscious phenomenon that enables writers to involuntarily recall what is repressed in their personal unconscious. While instinct also functions as a retrieval mechanism, it facilitates the remembrance of many happenings, albeit involuntarily. The mutative condition of Yorùbá cultural elements is not as pronounced as in the retentive mechanisms used by the poet. The inability to explore the changes the cultural traits have undergone may not be unconnected with the genre of poetry as a laconic, apothegmatic literary communication. With its economy of words, the genre may have imposed a great constraint on the poet to dwell on that important aspect of culture change mode. Furthermore, the poetic interest of Guillén may not be on the transpositions of the aspects of the culture. However, certain changes that have affected the culture are noticed in some of his poems. Few are a corollary of linguistic manipulations, while others are as a result of syncretism or cultural hybridity and the poet's creative manipulations. On the linguistic plane, the orthography of the name of the Yorùbá god of thunder, Şàngó, is rendered "Chango" in "Ballad of the Guije". This is apparently due to the influence of Spanish on the Atlantic Yorùbá culture in Cuba. The change imposed on the culture through syncretism is noticed in the worship of the Yorùbá goddess of the sea, Yemoja, in Palo Mayombe. Furthermore, it is a mere creative manipulation to talk about the childhood of Şàngó. Though regarded as the fourth *Alààfin* of Òyó among the continental Yorùbá (Akanmode 2016), little is known about his childhood. This manipulation is also noticed in Pepe Carril's *Shango de Ima: Yoruba Mystery Play*, where the playwright dramatises the birth, childhood and the parenthood of the god-man.

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**Emmanuel Adeniyi**

Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria  
 ayomercy2011@gmail.com