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Maya Janeen Berry  
2016

**The Dissertation Committee for Maya Janeen Berry Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Afro-Cuban movement(s):  
Performing Autonomy in “updating” Havana**

**Committee:**

---

Edmund T. Gordon, Supervisor

---

Charles R. Hale

---

Robin D. Moore

---

Deborah Paredez

---

Julie Skurski

---

Christen A. Smith

**Afro-Cuban Movement(s):  
Performing Autonomy in “updating” Havana**

**by**

**Maya Janeen Berry, B.A.; M.A.**

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## **Dedication**

Moyuba Olofi

Moyuba Olodumare

Moyuba Eggun

...

Ibaye Valentín Márquez Quiñones Ibaye

...

Ibaye Alfonso Berry Ibaye

Ibaye Marcos “Tita” Llerena Ibaye

Ibaye Carmen “Abuela” Ayala Ibaye

Ibaye Jonnie Booker Ibaye

Ibaye Carl Bryan, Jr. Ibaye

...

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Recently, I was asked how it felt to have my dream come true: I am graduating with doctoral a degree in Anthropology and will soon be a professor. The question was unsettling in a strange way. I don't feel like my dream has come true because I earnestly never aspired to these professional goals as ends in and of themselves. The steps I have taken thus far were made with equal parts fear and dedication, wonderment and conviction, grounded in the assurance that only faith provides: faith in my ability to sense the contours of a path I was being led to follow. Although this moment is not a dream come true, per se, it is indeed a momentous milestone and public marker that my steps were not taken in vain. I am living a dream that I may have not had the individual foresight to imagine, but was able to nevertheless realize, due to the many overlapping institutions, people, and communities that supported me along the way. I honor this opportunity to express my appreciation in words.

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**Afro-Cuban movement(s):  
Performing Autonomy in “updating” Havana**

Maya Janeen Berry, PhD

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Edmund T. Gordon

This dissertation is an ethnography of how Afro-Cubans are enacting coordinated movement toward more desirable futures as they face increased marginalization due to Cuba’s current political economic reforms. Yoruba Andabo —a group of dancers, percussionists, and singers— take center stage in this project, as a case study to examine the unexpected ways that Afro-Cubans are practicing collective agency, going against the logics of more conventional registers of black identity politics. I use *La Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de América Latina y el Caribe- Capítulo Cuba* (ARAC), as an analytical counterpoint to represent a more conventional pursuit of sociopolitical gains by black identity politics in Cuba today. Of central interest is how the sacred figures within cultural politics, to gain greater sociopolitical and economic autonomy, and how gender operates within their political imaginaries, using a critical race, feminist and performance-oriented lens. The ethnography makes the case for different ways of performing black autonomy in Cuba correlating to particular metrics of politics drawn from collective memories of group struggle. These different forms of self-organization correspond to distinct spheres of influence and distinct limits on their collective reach and agency. Furthermore, the research demonstrates the utility of performance studies for furthering the

understanding of social processes by making visible the political horizon of black identity politics in embodied motion. This analysis of black collective agency in the face of political economic marginalization speaks directly to the importance of local practices of self-determination as sources of knowledge production about the limits of cultural politics endorsed by the state, the sacred and gendered valences of black identity politics, and the impact of national development on black lives.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*¡Mueve el omóplato!* (Move your shoulder blades!)

During our bi-weekly orisha dance lessons, Jennyselt would regularly chastise me for not executing the steady pulse of my shoulder blades. Either I would do it incorrectly or not at all. This pulse in one's torso is an essential element of the dance technique for all orisha. I would retain the foot patterns pretty easily and the arms were soon to follow. She would get frustrated that I would catch on to the ostensibly more complicated moves requiring the coordination of my limbs, but I would fail to retain this most essential element of rhythmic contraction-release in the back. The targeted movements in the back muscles are reflected in the subtle projection of the chest outward and inward with equally constant rhythm, keeping with the tempo of the music. Engraving this embodied gesture into my muscle memory was mentally exhausting during the learning process ...and incredibly frustrating. The insistence on relentless pulsing in the torso, independent of what the legs and arms are called to execute, is an incredibly sophisticated act of syncopation.

The shoulder blades are commonly the first thing to disclose divine presence in the body. It's typically the first gestures made by a body in the process of being mounted by an orisha in ceremony. The rhythmic contraction-release of the muscles between one's shoulder blades can be likened to the kind of muscle activation required by a bird to flap its wings. One can recall the vibrations created by the frantic wing slaps of a bird with bound feet, how they intensify the ceremonial moment of sacrifice. When performing orisha dance on stage, a steady pulse of the shoulder blades is required at all times, even as you mimic how the orisha would normally walk in person form. As a performer, that movement must be rehearsed to appear as natural as breathing.

Learning this polyrhythmic dance technique required me to enact a precisely orchestrated symphony of rhythms. One has to coordinate feet, knees, arms, head, shoulders, and props simultaneously, in ways that precisely compliment the narrative progression of percussion and song. In class with Jenny there would be ephemeral moments when I would have better success in achieving complete coordination in my movements, and even endeavor into emoting the personality that corresponded to the historical narrative of the orisha. However, one's virtuosity as an orisha dancer lies in the ability to be consistent throughout, so that the audience believes that you are truly a representation incarnate of divinity, universal energies and circumstances found in nature. The pulse needs to be perpetual. It requires a sustained activation of one's heart space. The key is to develop a perceptible range of muscle flexibility in one's back so that you can contract and release with timed precision without any muscular tension. Beyond the sophisticated coordination with all of the other danced elements required to fulfill the representation of the divinity, perhaps the biggest challenge for me lay in the shoulder blade pulses' unceasing expressiveness. One's torso has to be completely expressive; malleable enough to communicate a range of emotion by itself although it is only one part in a symphony of full body movement.

*¡En el torso no estas haciendo nada!* (You aren't doing anything in your torso!)

I repeatedly failed for over a year. This articulation of the body is so counter to all of my previous dance training, that I could not call on my years as a professional dancer to help me. I had to completely re-make who I was as a dancer and who I knew myself to be as a person over the course of my fieldwork.

Jenny's corrections wavered between aggression and exasperation. Every class she would test me by putting on a recording of orisha music and make me dance the whole song through to the end, employing the repertoire she taught me. I had to respond

appropriately in dance to the instrumental conversation between drum and song, executing smooth transitions between rhythms, changing not only the steps but the dynamism of my performance according to the particular story the song recounted, etc. Usually the sonic landscape was broken up by her screams of disapproval. Until one day, she was silent. My sense-perception were completely immersed in the moment. I had finally clarified my body's capacity for social meaning-making that the dance enables. Jenny's silence and affirming gaze spoke louder than words.

I can't say I remember the exact moment when the breakthrough came. What began as conscious and forced muscle contraction became a lubricated internal massage of the spine that connected me into a particular lineage. I believe that participation as an observant dancer in the audience at Yoruba Andabo's shows enabled me to grasp a social meaning from something that otherwise felt like an individual physical struggle. By socially remembering our ancestors through our bodies, the steady motion of the shoulder blades became a vital heartbeat, pumping vital energy beyond walls that enclosed us a pulsing pool of wisdom feeding into a throbbing sea.

\* \* \* \*

This dissertation is an ethnography of how Afro-Cubans are enacting coordinated movement toward more desirable futures as they face increased marginalization due to Cuba's current political economic reforms. Yoruba Andabo —a group of dancers, percussionists, and singers— take center stage in this project, as a case study to examine the unexpected ways that Afro-Cubans are practicing collective agency, going against the

logics of more conventional registers of black identity politics. I use *La Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de América Latina y el Caribe- Capítulo Cuba* (ARAC), as an analytical counterpoint to represent a more conventional pursuit of sociopolitical gains by black identity politics in Cuba today. Of central interest is how the sacred figures within cultural politics, to gain greater sociopolitical and economic autonomy, and how gender operates within their political imaginaries, using a critical race, feminist and performance-oriented lens.

The ethnography makes the case for different ways of performing black autonomy in Cuba correlating to particular metrics of politics drawn from collective memories of group struggle. These different forms of self-organization correspond to distinct spheres of influence and distinct limits on their collective reach and agency. Furthermore, the research demonstrates the utility of performance studies for furthering the understanding of social processes by making visible the political horizon of black identity politics in embodied motion.

This analysis of black collective agency in the face of political economic marginalization speaks directly to the importance of local practices of self-determination as sources of knowledge production about the limits of cultural politics endorsed by the state, the sacred and gendered valences of black identity politics, and the impact of national development on black lives.

## **I. SITUATING *LA ACTUALIZACIÓN* (“THE UPDATE”) *DEL MODELO ECONÓMICO*: RACE, GENDER, NATION & THE SACRED**

This dissertation project emerged during a historic political economic shift in Cuba. It marks the latest shift in a series of political economic and social reforms since the onset of the severe economic crisis circa 1990, referred to as the era of “late-Socialism”. The

collapse of the Soviet Bloc catapulted the island into the “Special Period”<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the Cuban Revolutionary government has instituted top-down strategic measures of economic austerity and leniency. These reforms have come attendant with ideological reckonings and compromises that have affected legal norms, state bureaucracy, social life, and cultural production on the island (Hernandez-Reguant, 2010). The creation of a mixed (peso-dollar) economy— including certain allowances for private market activity, capitalist ventures, and controlled foreign investment— was part of the state strategy to keep the Cuban economy afloat while safeguarding the socialist system. While there is more or less consensus around the year of the Special Period’s onset, the date of its expiration (if it has indeed ended) is still an ongoing social debate depending on one’s current relationship to conditions of material scarcity and access to foreign currency. I situate my project within this “late-Socialist” or post-Soviet Cuba era of urgent, continuous economic reform.

Within a linear temporal framework of historical progression, the impact of these reforms can be viewed as both advancements forward and regressions backward. What remains clear from the standpoint of Afro-Cuban (black and *mulato*) collective experience, is that over time the Revolutionary triumph in 1959 brought contradictory socio-economic gains in the name of national unity and socialism. These ideals have gained fluctuating embodied meaning through the racialized experiences of moving within, around, and through each cycle of Revolutionary struggle. These ideals have accrued semiotic density from movements past, including those taken as Cuba, a racial slavery-based society, first formed its national identity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The constant outside threats upon

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<sup>1</sup> The Special Period in Time of Peace marks an extended period of economic crisis largely due to the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and by the extension the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance whose multilateral trade agreements prevented economic reliance on the United States and Western Europe. In Cuba, the Special Period was characterized by severe shortages of petroleum, food, and medicine. During the period of 1990 to 1993 Cuba lost over 80% of its foreign trade and 30% of its GDP, spurring sweeping unemployment (Mesa-Lago, 1998).

Cuba's national sovereignty (namely on the part of U.S. imperial interests) created a permanent audience for Cuba's internal negotiations between race and nation. For the descendants of the enslaved today, the social memory of transformative racial desegregation, access to universal education, universal healthcare, and black social mobility since 1959 is held in tandem with the co-existence of exclusionary private markets, ongoing forms of racial disparities and social stratification, and the hegemonic reproduction of anti-black racism (De la Fuente, 2001; Morales Dominquez, 2007; Spence Benson, 2016). The types of racialized subjectivities produced in the process of continuous nation-state reformation since 1959, under scrutinizing spectatorship, calls for important historical perspective offered by remembering the struggles waged during Cuba's founding as a republic. Close attention to the forms of coordinated movement performed by black subjects throughout history suggest concentric rather than linear motion, gesturing outward toward hemispheric political structures and dynamics under which members of the African Diaspora make and remake themselves.

The same year I entered into the graduate program in Anthropology (2010), the Cuban state, characterized by centralized control and a planned economy, actively began implementing policies to push its citizens into an expanding but precarious private sector, part of which has stimulated a newly emerging (white) middle-class. The state's decision to adopt such economic reforms have shrunken the public sector in the name of national development by: pushing "unnecessary workers" to the private sphere (Frank, 2010), bringing black market activity into legal and regulated channels, and making foreign investment a national priority. Cuba's larger goal of nation-building is meant to justify the simultaneous cutbacks on government rations and other public services. The new economic reforms have moved resources away from the already diminished state safety net for equal life chances amongst Cubans (due to the U.S trade embargo), and mark a noteworthy shift

in the leftist Revolutionary project toward a market society (“The Chinese Model”)<sup>2</sup>, competing with the previously established rhetoric of public welfare as a state duty. This poses a structural problem for Cuba’s black population, who has historically been the most dependent on the state’s universal social programs and “informal” exchange for survival due to the lower indices of remittances from abroad. After the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Cuban Communist Party, the state began to produce a discourse around the reforms that positioned the measures taken as inevitable for bringing Cuba into the current era. In the *Lineamientos del actualizacion de la política económica y social del partido de la revolución* (The Guidelines) (2011) published by the Cuban Communist Party (CCP), the reforms are referred to as an “*actualización*” (updating) or “*perfeccionamiento*” (perfecting) of the political economy. As a researcher of race and black representation in Cuba, I was concerned with how Afro-Cubans, those who ostensibly had the most to gain from the 1959 revolution, were imagining political possibility and developing strategies to fulfill life projects as Cuba “updates” its political economy.

These policies are implemented within a longstanding nationalist ideology based a rhetoric of racial fraternity, and racelessness that was necessary at a particular moment in the history of Cuban nationalism (between 1868 and 1898), when white anticolonial insurgents sought to forge a sense of patriotism from a multi-racial populous with a black majority under a white heteropatriarchal social order (Ferrer, 1998). Cuba was conceived as a nation within a social milieu that naturalized a social order of racial and gender inequality. Spanish colonialism in the Caribbean—among the most brutal colonial systems in Latin America— was undergirded by a logic of white heteropatriarchy. This logic instituted a violent division of labor along racial lines, a hegemonic patriarchal

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<sup>2</sup> For a comparative analysis of the East Asian path of development versus the Euro-American capitalist system, see Giovanni Arrighi’s *Adam Smith in Beijing* (Arrighi, 2007; Chase-Dunn, 2008).

differentiation of gender, and a compulsory disciplining of heteronormativity that institutionalized the rape of black women to extract capital from their wombs. The product of these acts of rape, Creole *mulatos* (mixed-race people), were absorbed into a spectrum system of hierarchal racial categorization instituted by the white-elite, like in other countries in Latin America (Wade, 1995; Wade, 1997). On the one hand, the spectrum of racial categorization created the possibility for racial flexibility and social mobility not existent within the U.S. slave systems. On the other hand, the spectrum of racial categories simultaneously served to consolidate white dominance by creating social divisions amongst non-whites, ensuring a fractured class base, while maintaining whiteness and blackness stable at opposite poles of power and privilege (Andrews, 2004).

Cognizant of the undeniable military asset that blacks represented, insurgent white planter elites in Oriente, although reluctantly, freed their slaves in exchange for their enlistment in the Liberation Army, promising full citizenship in the new nation. As many as 75% of the soldiers in the Liberation Army were black or *mulato*, and were represented even in the highest echelons of military hierarchy after proving their skill and bravery in battle. Spain also granted freedom to the enslaved as part of their recruitment to fight on their side. As a result, most of enslaved people in Cuba gained freedom by fighting in the Wars for Cuban Independence, greatly accelerating eventual legal abolition in 1886. As Moore writes, “By accepting AfroCubans as soldiers, they [white insurgents] had implicitly accepted them as equal members of the free Cuban Republic they intended to create” (1997, p. 23) .The military basis upon which Cuban independence would be won, indebted to black manpower, forever challenged the political purchase of exclusionary constructions of white national identity.

Colonial loyalists in Cuba feared that granting slaves citizenship status would incite a “race war”, referencing the Haitian Revolution (the first successful slave uprising in the

modern era that led to the founding of a sovereign state led by non-whites) as precedent. In Cuba, “*miedo al negro*” (negrophobia)<sup>3</sup> was rooted in an investment in the protection of white supremacist racial hierarchy against another successful slave revolt capable of leading to the formation of a black republic (Kutzinski, 1993; Helg, 1995). Thus the maintenance of racial slavery was justified in the name of maintaining social order, thereby delegitimizing the patriotic effort. The pro-independence movement had to counteract the prevailing white fear of a black republic by proposing an alternative thesis for social evolution via sovereignty.

Rather than argue for racial democracy through miscegenation, like in writings of other Latin American political thinkers like José Vasconcelos (1948 [1925]) and Gilberto Freyre (1946), Cuba’s founding father, José Martí, put forth a notion of racial fraternity, achieved through military sacrifice for country. To this end, he and other writers of his ilk crafted a notion of an “ideal black insurgent, one who rose above others in acts of selfless and raceless patriotism...His rebelliousness was thus cast as an extension of his master’s will and not as the result of personal initiative or political conviction” (Ferrer, 1998, p. 235). The thesis popularized by José Martí, was that the act of men fighting side by side for national independence would dissolve the salience of racial categorization and eliminate the “race problem” along with it.

Thus, finding a solution to the “race problem” held the key for legitimacy as a nation. The white minority’s project of silencing race was an antidote for challenges against their viability to lead a sovereign nation among the Family of Nations, due to the majority

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<sup>3</sup> The term “*miedo al negro*”, refers to the term used amongst scholars of racism in Cuba for “negrophobia”, a concept coined by Martinique-born psychologist, Franz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* ([1952] 1967). Fanon’s famous psychoanalysis of the effects of colonialism defined negrophobia as a neurosis characterized by the anxious fear and contempt of black people and black culture. Fanon’s work has been influential in anticolonial and national liberation movements worldwide, and instrumental in shaping postcolonial studies, particularly critical race theory of the African Diaspora.

population of African descent's drag on modern civility. "Racial fraternity", secured through masculine acts of noble valor by white and black men fighting side by side, provided a persuasive thesis in support of the viability of their national project. The discourse of racial transcendence through the act of nation-building was constructed as an anticolonial argument that created an interpretive framework to explain any mention of race as unpatriotic. However, this silencing of the salience of race co-existed with the continued adherence to colonial racial logics in practice, including the reproduction of anti-blackness and the unequal distribution of power along racial lines (Helg, 1995; Ferrer, 1999).

The pragmatic political merit of brotherhood between whites and blacks entailed an ideological reshaping of colonial codes of masculinity. Today, this notion of idealized Cuban masculinity is represented by the two main figures of national independence: José Martí and Antonio Maceo. Martí is known as the intellectual (the brains) of the revolution, while Maceo, the second-in-command of the Cuban Army of Independence, a *mulato*, is known as the brawns. Cuba's ruling class has consistently promoted the national imaginary of these two men as pedagogical examples of racial brotherhood. However, implicit in the national image of racial alliance is a division of labor and distribution of power shared between men of honor.



Figure 1: Día de los Maestros, Nuevo Vedado, La Habana, 2013.

The discursive construction of a free and valiant, yet passive and loyal black citizen imposed by white Cuban patriots was challenged by the rise of black political activism for racial justice. The evidence of a robust black public sphere both before, during, and after the struggle for Cuban national independence has been well documented by historians (Fernandez Robaina, 1994; Helg, 1995; Brock & Castaneda Fuertes, 1998; De la Fuente, 2001; Guridy, 2010; Pappademos, 2011). This black public sphere consisted of mutual aid societies, recreational and instructional societies, schools, and newspapers. Even though the *sociedades de color* reified class and color distinctions between blacks and *mulatos* (mixed-race people) and promoted Euro-centric norms of sociality<sup>4</sup>, they also nourished an autonomous political standpoint from which to wage race-based claims for justice. Historian Frank Guridy documents the far reach of the black public sphere after Cuban Independence, tracing transnational networks of cultural exchange between Afrodescended

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<sup>4</sup> See Robin Moore's *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997) for a description of the exclusionary cultural activities of the different *sociedades de color* according to class status. For example, the Club Atenas catered to Havana's black elite, while the less exclusive Union Fraternal catered to middle-class Afro-Cubans. In general, these institutions prompted European-influenced genres of music and encouraged involvement in Western cultural consumption, while forbidding use of drums and other more African-based cultural expression (39).

people in the U.S. and Cuba “in the shadow of Empire and Jim Crow” (2010). He argues that Afro-Cubans forged a sense of diasporic belonging through mutual support, cooperation, and intellectual and cultural exchange with their counterparts abroad who were also fashioning a path of racial uplift from a shared history of enslavement and continued oppression. The activities of these black and *mulato* institutions, in short, created the basis for black civil rights on the island, posing a direct challenge to the hegemonic position of silence regarding race in Cuba. Yet, according to Martí’s declaration in his famous essay “Mi Raza” (1893), “The Negro who proclaims his race...justifies and provokes the white racist” (Martí, 1963). Hence, within Cuban political culture, the language of nationalism became the most viable means for activists of color to challenge the pervasive anti-black racism of their compatriots. Ferrer succinctly lays out the dilemma that Cuban nationalism posed for citizens of African descent:

Thus, the particular history of Cuban nationalism and its relationship to race at the end of the century meant that Cuban identity came to be defined simultaneously as a repudiation of racism that encouraged black political activity and as a rejection of the racial labels that allowed for that activity (1998, p. 244)

At different points in Cuba’s history, the rhetoric of racial transcendence via nationalism, the rejection of racial labels, and the insistence on race without political valence —aka. “colorblindness”— has been leveraged defensively against perceived enemies (both internal and external) to further the project of nation-building. Therefore, rather than serving as proof of Cuban nationalism’s ability to ever transcend race in practice, the hegemonic silencing of racial identification within Cuba’s revolutionary campaigns thereafter— namely that of the 1959 Revolution— speaks to the enduring nature of the fraught conditions for black self-making during moments of nation-building.

As referenced earlier, the stakes for controlling the narrative around race were quite high considering the racial demographic make-up of the island. Having a black majority

nation had strong consequences not only for the delineation of the Cuban citizenry, but the definition of Cuban culture as well. The strong presence of African-based expressive culture is a result of the intense importation of slave labor until relatively late in modern history, and the formation of *cabildos de nación* during slavery. After the Haitian Revolution, Cuba took up the mantle as the main producer of sugar, making it one of the wealthiest parts of the Spanish Empire and resulting in the trafficking of approximately 1 million enslaved Africans. This resulted in a rapid demographic “blackening” of the island (particularly from 1800-1850). Expressive culture on the island included rich religious practices, sacred song and dance, and musical genres and dance forms derived from the syncretization of different African ethnic groups or “nations” (i.e. Yoruba, Igbo, Bantu-Kongo). *Cabildos de nación* were cultural hubs where ethnic identity was reproduced during slavery, named after the ethnic “nation” (or people) from which they came. In the *cabildos*, Africans and their creole progeny were able to transmit language, ritual knowledge, music, etc., forming the basis of a distinct Afro-Cuban or black cultural identity over time. The black mutual aid societies (mentioned earlier) were institutions that served a similar social and cultural purpose as *cabildos* for freedwomen and men once off the plantation. The Spanish and slave owning whites encouraged the maintenance of African ethnic affiliation amongst the enslaved population to ensure a sense of internal division and prevent cross-ethnic solidarity and mass revolt (Barcia Zequeira, Rodriguez Reyes, & Niebla Delgado, 2012). However, Afro-Cuban cultural expression was also seen as primitive threat to the modern nation-state, an enemy within, that needed to be carefully controlled.

Today, “*afro-religiosidad*” in Cuba most commonly refers to the syncretic Afro-Atlantic religious systems practiced in the *cabildos*, specifically the Yoruba-based, Lucumí faith system (called *Regla de Ocha* or *Santería*), the Kongo-Based Palo Monte tradition,

and Abakuá sacred fraternities derived from the Cross River Region in modern day Nigeria/Cameroon (which Cubans call Carabalí). These expressive cultural forms, popular amongst the black working-class, were also the precursors of the present-day traditional rumba. Ethnomusicologist, Robin Moore (1997) explains that there is relatively little in the historical record about the choreography and musical characteristics of these earlier forms of slave culture, due to their marginalization within Cuban scholarship of the time. Cuban intellectuals were more invested in the disavowal of what was deemed as cultural drags on the construction of modern Cuban national identity.

The repression of African-derived culture, both musical and religious (inextricable in embodied forms of worship), coincided with the emergence of Afro-Cuban dance orchestras who gained popularity amongst white audiences. In his important book, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and the Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (1997), Moore gives intricate historical description of how the incorporation of free blacks and *mulatos* into white society as professional artists was enabled by the stigma against the musical profession as a form of servitude fit for former slaves<sup>5</sup>. This racial division of labor in the arts accounts for the overrepresentation of Afro-Cubans in performance ensembles during the colonial period. The naturalized the association between blacks and the performing arts persists even today. However, the official inclusion of Afro-Cubans and their cultural production within the bounds of Cuban national identity entailed a necessary de-Africanization and secularization of their cultural expression.

Although a more detailed cultural history of Cuba leading up to the 1959 Revolution is warranted, for the purpose of this dissertation, I will limit myself to a brief discussion of some of the key historical trends that situate the present day practice,

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<sup>5</sup> The *moreno-pardo* (black-mulatto) distinction maintained by the Spanish military, the avenues through which Afro-Cuban musicians were typically trained, carried over into their professional trajectories as musicians belonging to either black or *mulato* bands (Moore R. , 1997, p. 19).

production and consumption of rumba in Cuba. In particular, I will highlight the historical basis for the hegemonic anti-black stigma against rumberos today, rooted in white anxiety about the racial terms of Cuban nationalism. Moore provides a paradigmatic quote from an observer of *danzón*: a ballroom dance genre brought to Cuba via Haiti primarily derived from European traditions, first popularized by black middle-class *sociedades de color* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The popularization of *danzón* caused much controversy due to its strong semiotic association with people of African, and specifically Haitian, descent. The quote follows, “We began with the *danza*, then the *danzón*...soon it will be rumba, and, as is only, natural we’ll all end up dancing like *ñáñigos*” (Moore R. , 1997, p. 24). The speaker voices the mainstream middle-class sentiment at the time, for whom rumba represented the onset of social degeneration largely due to its proximity to the African-based sacred practice (“as is natural we’ll all end up dancing like *ñáñigos*”). The figure of the dancing *ñáñigo* — a member of the Abakuá sacred brotherhood— was an unmistakably racialized synecdoche for the sum total of white fears and anxieties based in enduring white nationalist constructions of modern citizenship. Abakuá masculinity, in particular, represents the antithesis of Martí’s “ideal black insurgent”, characterized by selfless morality and raceless patriotism<sup>6</sup>. Rumba’s danger lies in its semiotic rootedness in the forms of embodied worship practiced by the paradigmatic antithesis of the citizen, the slave. The practice of intimate communion with non-western philosophical and ideological forces, in essence, further racialized the dancing body in worship as black.

The slipperiness between arts and racialized sacred music, makes black performance always a potential threat if not contained and disciplined through European norms of bodily socialization. Herein lies the core stigma against the performance of

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of Abakua masculinity’s threat to the nation-state will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3 when analyzing Yoruba Andabo’s performance of “Protesta Carabalí”.

embodied worship. It is a behavioral vector of an alternate epistemology rooted in embodied claims to incorporate African ancestry. Racial inclusion into the national body-politic hinged on black surrender of affective ties of racial belonging in exchange for full loyalty to the state. Thus forms of movement that were blackened through the process of racial slavery embodied the enduring latent fear of black betrayal of the terms upon which they were granted inclusion into the nation. As suggested by the abovementioned quote, the *rumbero* (rumba dancer, musician, participant), positioned as a thin front for occult *ñáñigo* affiliation, epitomizes the unruly, always already suspect racialized body-politic that stubbornly resists complete social assimilation in the white hegemonic construction of raceless *cubanidad*.

The repeated cycle of mainstream Cuban societies' initial rejection of syncretic Afro-Cuban culture, followed by modified national appropriation of the very same forms of cultural expression, reappears at decisive points in Cuba's history when national unity is needed to recuperate the economic and political stability of the state. One vital historical reference for the cycle of Afro-Cuban cultural appropriation was seen at the onset of the 1959 Revolution. The kind of national appropriation of rumba happening in Cuba today is best understood in relationship to the *Afrocubanismo* movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Moore's *Nationalizing Blackness* (1997) provides detailed historical analysis of the *Afrocubanismo* movement in relation to the volatile social conditions exacerbated by antagonistic foreign relations with the United States.

Ultimately, a qualified acceptance of black expression was the only recourse of intellectuals and performers desirous of creating ideological unity in a country so heavily influenced by Africa...Mainstream Cuban audiences came to accept representation of blackness in popular culture for a time, but only blackness presented from a certain perspective, using particular stereotypes and limited to well-defined aesthetic conventions. (p. 220)

These cultural cycles are propelled by dual simultaneous middle-class readings of Afro-Cuban culture as both backward (“*atraso*”) primitive and distinctively Cuban (Moore R. , 1997). These two semiotic associations operate in a dialectical relationship to create a contradictory space for Afro-Cuban cultural expression on the national stage. In sum, that which is categorized under the common sense signifier of “Cuban culture” refers to the process of navigating these contradictory (or complementary) libidinal attachments and social forces amidst conditions of racial and class inequality, rather than some already given cultural content uniformly filling the geo-political boundaries of the island.

After the 1959 Revolution, the once thriving black public sphere was disbanded and black religious practice was folkloricized. The black public sphere became obsolete when the state founded *organizaciones de masa* (mass organizations)<sup>7</sup>, centralizing civil society under the Revolutionary project. The 1959 Revolutionary government wrote nationalist color-blind ideology into the law, rendering race-based organizations illegal in Cuba on the grounds of undoing racial segregation on the island that had been sedimented during the period of U.S. influence over the Cuban republic. Fidel Castro’s bold act of desegregation was understood as an anti-imperial doing, making Martí’s long deferred dream of true racelessness under nationhood a reality. After the revolution, racial identification was seen as a vestige of the colonial past. Fidel Castro made several speeches just months after the government coup saying that racism in Cuba had been solved (Public Address, International Workers Day, 1960). Black institutions were deemed anachronistic to the new era of Revolutionary nationhood. While historic efforts were made that improved quality of life for blacks in terms of health, education, gender equity, and social mobility, it also made it counterrevolutionary to bring up race. Thus, just like black

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of mass organizations: Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), La Unión de Pioneros de José Martí (UPJM), Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC), Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR), Federación de Estudiantes de la Universidad de la Habana (FEU).

activism was silenced by Cuban political culture pre-1959, the militant color-blind 1959 revolutionary project stunted the robust tradition of black self-organization. This severely weakened the moral foothold and civic space for race-based grievances about ongoing structural racism and racial discrimination (referred to in Cuban academic circles as “*el tema racial*”) in the Revolution.

The Revolutionary government adopted the ethos of the earlier *Afrocubanismo* movement (1920s-1940s), promoting spectacles of “nationalized blackness” (Moore 1997). This form of homage to Cuba’s “African roots” delimited blackness to its cultural valance. In effect, it decoupled black identity from a notion of a specific experience of a structural socio-economic position within the polity and tied to a sense of ancestral group belonging forged through struggle against racial slavery and anti-blackness more generally. The decontextualized, non-structural understanding of blackness primed black culture for symbolic appropriation as a key ingredient of creole, anti-imperialist national identity. The “nationalization” of blackness within the context of a militantly color-blind and atheist revolutionary project greatly impacted the contours of black self-making<sup>8</sup>, establishing a strong relationship between black embodiment of revolutionary respectability as contingent upon the disavowal of the sacred regarded as a vestige of primitive Africanness. The secularization of Afro-Cuban culture was a necessary prerequisite for its assimilation as national folklore.

When the Fidel Castro officially pronounced a Marxist-Leninist philosophy in 1961, Cubans who identified as religious were not allowed admittance into the Cuban

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<sup>8</sup> By “black self-making” I refer to Jafari Allen’s work. Specifically, his ethnography, *Venceremos?: the erotics of black self-making in Cuba*, he defines erotic black self-making as: complexly articulated subjectivities that are on the one hand constructed materially by the desires of the powerful, and on the other hand, re(made) by the material and erotic desires of individuals and collectives. He states that self-making is propelled by these forms of consciousness and politics that run counter to the hegemonic common sense or the hegemonic structures of power that deny and diminish black life.

Communist Party which guided the one-party state. This held serious consequences for basic aspects of social life, cutting them off from housing, education, and professional opportunities. To identify as black and to practice religion was seen as not only anachronous but counterrevolutionary (Ayorinde, 2004). Although all religious practice was shunned, Afro-religious practice was criminalized and persecuted in particularly violent ways. Along with homosexuality it was considered a sickness, a disease that needed to be wiped out from the social body. The centrality of embodied expression in these practices marked them as primitive, and inappropriate for the “New Cuba” being formed based on reason and science. The “New Man” Che Guevara imagined had no racial affiliation, no religious belief, and no class. These racialized ethno-religious practices were a blatant reminder of all of the things that Cuba was moving forward, away from.

As in other parts of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, “folklore”, colloquially synonymous with “black or African-derived culture”, was used to organize and occlude social inequality in Cuba through state-sanctioned systems of cultural production for both foreign and national consumption to silence the ongoing “problem of blackness” within the nation (Hagedorn, 2001; Rivero, 2005)<sup>9</sup>. Hagedorn defines Cuban folklore as “the religious performance traditions of those people of African heritage who were brought to the island during almost four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade”, also used to refer to “the apparently secular performance of traditions of Cuba’s communities of African heritage” (2001, p. 4). Ethno-religious traditions were selectively integrated into a palatable, secularized form for the stage. The black working-class was seen as one of the primary beneficiaries of the revolution’s universal social programs, and so their dances on the national stage were important symbols of how the once denigrated African “roots” of

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<sup>9</sup>The silencing of public critique about racism is exemplified during the period of severe censorship and repression referred to as the “*El Quinquenio Gris*” (1971-1976), when Afro-Cuban religions and religious practitioners were specifically targeted and suppressed.

*cubanía* (Cuban identity) were finally being valorized by the state, but in strictly secularized forms (Guerra R. , 1989).

The Revolution's architects called upon the folkloric artists to represent the central figure of the revolutionary project as emblematic of the working-class masses, and with that rumba was enlisted as a potent symbol of national identity (Daniel, 1991; Daniel, 1995). This was especially important within Cuba's military campaigns in African liberation movements in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Yet even as African derived religion and rumba was recognized as an emblem of *cubanía*, it was embedded within a historical legacy of the stigmatization and criminalization of *religiosos* and *rumberos* (mentioned earlier).

Black dancing bodies were official symbols of anti-imperialist pride, even while the state demonized Afro-Cuban religious practitioners and maintained a hegemonic discourse of social evolution institutionalized during Latin American nation-state formation (Moore R. , 1997; Berry, 2010). The political economic shift to tourism as the main source of national revenue due to the fall of the Soviet Bloc coincided with the change in the constitution in 1991 from being an officially atheist state to being an officially secular state. Afro-Cuban cultural tourism opened up possibilities for the state economically (Ayorinde, 2004). With the advent of "*santurismo*"—a tourist market catering to foreigners who wish to learn about and even initiate into afro-religiosity for inflated fees (Hagedorn, 2001; Argyriadis, 2008)—Afro-religious practice became a feasible way to improve one's economic situation during the dire Special Period conditions. The preservation of "folklore" has been of national interest both ideologically and economically, and with that, the performance of racial democracy that black dancing folkloric bodies permit.

Ironically, for Afro-Cuban practitioners, artistic and religious expression is one of the few sanctioned mediums for articulating black cultural difference and practicing forms of self-organization that have concrete economic import. However afro-religious

practitioners still have to negotiate their performance of religious subjectivity via cautious openness about their faith in public workplaces. Therefore, the study of what is produced through the Afro-religious repertoire is important to any study of black self-making in Cuba, but it cannot be separated from an ongoing contested relationship between the terms of black subjecthood and black collectivity within the Cuban nation-state.

Today's economic reforms are staging yet another moment in Cuban nation-building that cannot be understood outside the gendered and classed scripts of raceless citizenship instituted throughout Cuba's history since its very ideological formation as a nation. In today's social climate of increased market-driven racialized class inequality, the *rumbero* is both the representation the "humble masses" within an anti-colonial performance of nation and the popular figure that functions as a symbolic receptacle for all anti-black discourses about the black lower-class. Outside of official state discourse, the stereotypes commonly ascribed to *rumberos* in everyday lexicon are: "*marginales*"<sup>10</sup>, "*negros de bajo mundo*" (lower-class blacks), "*sucios*" (dirty), "*guapos*"<sup>11</sup>, "*alcohólicos*" (alcoholics), "*ambientales*" (trouble-makers), "*drogadictos*" (drug addicts), "*negros sin zapatos*" (shoe-less blacks). Rumba is still, by and large, seen as "*una cosa de negros*" (a black thing) (Bodenheimer R. M., 2013). The not-so-veiled anti-black sentiment expressed through disparaging remarks about *rumberos* is prevalent and axiomatic. The stigma is felt by not only *rumberos*, but Afro-Cubans in general who are negatively impacted by the black body's discursive association with the markedly classed anti-black meanings attributed to *rumbero*-blackness. Rumba, Afro-religiosity, blackness, and poverty are so

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<sup>10</sup> "marginality" is an umbrella term that is used to refer to poverty, delinquency, hedonistic, and anti-social behavior closely associated with the rumba ambience.

<sup>11</sup> The term *guapo* in Cuban slang means "tough guy" whose toughness is cultivated in the streets. A *guapo* is associated with the performance of hyper masculinity that is easily prone to violence. The racialized application of the term to black males, highlighting their behavior as unruly and potentially dangerous, makes "thug" an approximate equivalent within contemporary U.S. popular jargon.

closely associated that to be a *rumbero* discursively implies that one is a black (or “mulato”) practitioner of African-based religion who lives in a solar (urban tenement building). This fuels a feedback loop that stigmatizes each interrelated attribute. In effect, *el rumbero* functions as a “controlling image” (Collins, 2000) to naturalize or justify the inability of Afro-Cubans to embody true respectability which is defined through hardworking (deserving), atheist (modern) whiteness (civilization). In other words, within mainstream popular discourse in Cuba each component of folkloric identity becomes a synecdoche for blackness as a whole, within a context of not-always-so-veiled anti-blackness. Understandably, Afro-Cuban activists see as one of their main challenges to entail the project of distancing themselves (and their bodies) from the symbolic burden of representation that confines blackness to its negative folkloric rendering concentrated in *rumbero* practices of sociality.

## **II. MOVEMENT(S): CHOREOGRAPHING THE BODY-POLITIC**

This dissertation demonstrates that the new period of national reformation, permeated by unequal ability to accumulate wealth, is the very thing being grappled with by Afro-Cubans today through the ways in which they perform autonomy from the state in racialized ways. My central interlocking research questions emerged from extended ethnographic immersion into these practices of self-organization. They are: How are Afro-Cubans, those who ostensibly had the most to gain from the 1959 revolution, imagining political possibilities as Cuba “updates” itself? What can the strategies developed by racialized subjects outside state institutions teach us about the limits of cultural politics endorsed by the nation-state? How is racialized gender rehearsed to further collective

political aims? And: Why do Afro-Cubans choose one approach to advancement over others?

One of the overarching theoretical arguments of my dissertation is that the lived experience of political economy, and its contestation, is more fully grasped when embodiment is put at the center of the analysis. Ideologies of race (or racelessness, rather, in the Cuban case) and gender are constituted in and through discourses about how ideal citizenship is embodied. The nation-state reproduces its power via the governmentality of the senses; seizing monopoly over how bodies are to be perceived and how their behaviors are rendered intelligible. The state's disciplining apparatus establishes a script for what is supposed to transpire within its bounds. This is intimately tied to how movements— social and corporal— are imagined, devised, and carried out by citizen-subjects.

Similar to the cultural campaigns of the earlier years of the revolution, the new policies today work together with the longstanding nationalist ideology to shape the perception of certain forms of collective movement. Today, the fact that Cubans of African descent are systematically least able to insert themselves formally into the emerging economy for lack of resources, access to business education, accumulated wealth, adequate material conditions, and the foreign networks necessary to launch new private businesses is obscured. Meanwhile, their artistic talents are hailed as prime folkloric tourist attractions. For Afrodescendants, then, the pursuit of social mobility within an “updated” economic model is negotiated within a socio-cultural milieu that stigmatizes black collective political action while supporting the folklorization of blackness through secularized spectacle.

On the one hand, the current state of affairs in Cuba opens up discursive space for the formerly taboo notion of “autogestión” (worker self-management) and self-determination outside the state. On the other hand, it steers those without material resources toward the cultural tourism and sex industry within the tourist sector where their

intangible cultural resources can be most easily exchanged for foreign hard currency. Either way the mandate is clear: the old system had to be perfected, updated. The updated system relies on a neoliberal logics of individual responsibility, entrepreneurship, and professionalism as the key ingredients for personal success.

Thus, the onset of my doctoral fieldwork coincided with the inception of numerous new initiatives on the island both from the top-down and from the bottom-up. I saw the blossoming of “*cuenta propia*” (small private business ownership) and of drastically fewer worker cooperatives (i.e. in the transportation and agricultural industries). People were eager to explore new ways of organizing their labor to have more control over their destiny and working conditions. The primacy put toward “professionalism” also provided a legal pathway to racialized employment discrimination. Now that Cubans were legally allowed to hire employees directly for their private businesses, job advertisements explicitly stated that they are only looking to hire white employees for their professional establishment. I also saw the seeds of gentrification caused by real estate reforms which turned housing from a public good to a commodity. These legalized forms of racial discrimination meant the emergence of new challenges needing new formulations for social justice.

Instead of addressing the unequal ability to “*pinchar*” (hustle) through legal channels and succeed, the Cuban state is calling on its citizens to let go of “laziness” and the inefficiencies enabled by the prior system. These new discourses are seen in The Guidelines pronounced by the CCP and reflected in the state newspaper articles (Trabajo por cuenta propia 2010). It is the individual responsibility of citizens to update themselves, from the inside out, in order for the national development plan to succeed. The Guidelines were echoed in the common refrains I’d hear in Cuban street slang during my fieldwork: “*pon’te pa lo tuyo!*” (get yours, or do you) and “*hay que pinchar!*” (you gotta hustle).

Accordingly, the implementation of the political economic reforms evokes a resocialization of the body-politic of the nation-state *and* the corporal bodies of Cuban citizens. There is a national demand for bodies that are capable of moving their limbs more rapidly, more “professionally”, to facilitate the exchange of foreign capital inhibited by the languid (“*informal*”) comportment described to have been enabled by the prior economic plan. The reforms express an imperative that Cuban “muscle memory” must be made anew through a new socialization of the body achieved through increased engagement in private market activity. This re-orientation of the body comes attendant with a re-orientation of the revolutionary ethos, producing a particular affective drive toward progress, upwardly conceived.

Hence, I continually return to “movement” and the body as the foundational unit of social movements, and a site of subject formation. Movement(s) intentionally slips between evoking gestures made by the corporal body and the “body-politic” (Harvey 1999) , an organized group of citizens, showing how the performance of one is intrinsically tied to the other. “Movement” gives discursive space to bring embodied forms of creative agency into this discussion in a way that productively widens our understanding of micro-politics in the contemporary Cuban context so that we may behold performative acts as political acts of agency “spoken with the whole body” (Merlene Nurbese Philip cited in McKittrick, 2006, xxvii).

Black feminist anthropologist Aimee Meredith Cox, also a professional dancer, has found the utilization of hermeneutical frames from dance to be critical for understanding of practices of agency within constraint. In her ethnography *Shapeshifters: Black Girls and the Choreography of Citizenship* (2015) she states:

Choreography is concerned in a very fundamental sense with the ordering of bodies in space. Choreography is shapeshifting made visible. Choreography is embodied meaning making, physical storytelling, affective physicality, and the intellectualized response to the question of how movement might narrate texts that are otherwise not rendered legible?...Choreography in its most radical sense, can disrupt and discredit normative reading practices....Choreography suggests that there is a map for movement or plan for how the body interacts with its environment, but it also suggests that by the body's placement in a space, the nature of that space changes. (Cox 2015, 28-29)

I emphasize that the choreography made visible by Afro-Cuban movement(s) today must navigate the particular political economic *mise en scène* in which they become legible. The current stage of the Cuban revolution is structured by the acceleration of economic reforms instituted to “update” the social order in ways that reify white heteropatriarchy in all too familiar ways in anticipation of a renewed engagement with the imperial power to the North.

The Cuban government made a comparable call for its citizens to take up a prescribed script for personal self-making, as part of plan for desired social transformation, during the cultural campaigns following the overturn of the Batista government in 1959. When Ché Guevara famously laid out a template for revolutionary self-making in the figure of the “New Man”. The central figure of the revolution would be a man without class position, racial categorization, nor religious affiliation; a man driven by morals rather than material incentives; a man whose work ethic was propelled forward by revolutionary discipline. However, the “new man” required for the “updating” political economy is not the one that Ché envisioned. The New Man 2.0 is an entrepreneur who is not dependent on government rations and able to relieve the state of the burden of his welfare.

Those that aren't successfully “updating” with the Revolution present a real political dilemma for Cuba given the contemporaneous international demand to acknowledge citizens' of African descent as a distinct group that suffers race-specific civil

injuries, and redress anti-black racism in the Americas. In observance of the 2011 UN-declared Year of the Afrodescendant, Cuba pledged that its cultural institutions would devise a “plan of action” addressing the “*tema racial*” (race issue). This later resulted in rumba being named national patrimony by the Cuban Ministry of Culture in 2012. The market-oriented reforms and the public praise of rumba converge in a fraught way for the Afro-Cuban subject who is caught between the Cuban state’s negotiations of conflicting international demands. On the one hand, the state feels impelled by global market forces, political pressures, and the failures of its own economic model to institute economic policies to increase “development”. While on the other hand, international public opinion (via the UN) is calling upon all nation-states to recognize anti-black racism in their societies, whose systematic discrimination is inevitably reinforced by the very market-oriented policies that are adopted in the name of development. Therefore, in order to legitimize itself as socialist (promoting distributive justice over capital accumulation), the Cuban state —perhaps now more than ever— must find a way to deal with its black poor. Rumba being named national patrimony in 2012 shows that blackness is still being publically incorporated in the current national project in strategically folkloric terms and that *el rumbero*, as a folkloric (read: black) dancing body, is still the state’s popular figure of choice to make a statement about the place of blackness within the revolution. The “rebirth of rumba” prompted by its new patrimonial status comes at a time when social inequality is on the verge of explosion.

The strategy of cultural politics endorsed by the nation-state, hailing nationalized blackness, silences concerns around the correlation between the intensification of market logic and the exacerbation of the racial wealth divide and racism. And so, Afro-Cubans are faced with their inability to become the New Man 2.0— not in the way the state has prescribed. Thus, Afro-Cubans who remain employed through informal (“black market”)

channels are categorized as part of the lazy sector of unemployed citizens who choose to remain stuck in the past. The imperative to *be a man* (2.0) by taking up the call to develop the nation through entrepreneurial pursuits, is compounded by the social naturalization of patriarchy. In essence, the current political economic juncture in which my ethnography is situated pushes me to explore the extent to which the structural racism sanctioned by the market-oriented development project may be producing a crisis for black embodiment of the new idealized masculinity<sup>12</sup>. This query makes notions of gender performance a key thread of analytical inquiry in my study of black self-organization today.

By placing concerted attention on practices of self-organization, I trace how Afro-Cubans choreograph a body-politic amidst and across the hegemonic ordering of their bodies in space. In a nutshell, my dissertation seeks to understand the ways black collectives move on the current stage using two case studies which represent enactments of agency in different social spheres at this juncture.

### **III. TRACING AFRO-CUBAN MOVEMENTS IN COUNTERPOINT FROM PRE-1959 POLITICAL CULTURE**

My study of Afro-Cuban movement(s) revolves around two case studies: one is a group of *rumberos*, called Yoruba Andabo, established decades before the reforms. They are dancers, singers, and percussionists who are licensed to perform “folklore”. However, the primary patrons and avid followers of their group are other members of the Afro-Cuban religious community, rather than foreign consumers of “santurismo” (described above). The other is a newly founded network of Cuban activist-intellectuals, a product of at least

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<sup>12</sup> This line of questioning shows a progression from previous theorizations of how market expansion has impacted the valuations of racialized gender at earlier points in “late Socialist” Cuba. For instance, in “Havana’s Timba: A Macho Sound for Black Sex” (2006), Ariana Hernandez-Reguant argues that the economic crisis of the “Special Period” positively impacted the social currency assigned to a particular performance of black masculinity that was marketable within the booming Timba music industry.

two decades of momentum from local organizing and knowledge production<sup>13</sup>. Copious publications have resulted from the individual and collective efforts of the latter<sup>14</sup>. The activist-intellectuals' bottom-up agency amidst conditions of precarity, constraint, and tenuous possibility, has raised important awareness and recognition of racism in Cuba by Cuban authorities and the international public. Siphoning legitimacy from the international meetings in Latin America in honor of the UN declared Year of the Afrodescendant in 2011<sup>15</sup>, these activist-intellectuals formed an explicitly anti-racist network, called *La Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de América Latina y el Caribe- Capítulo Cuba* (also referred to by their acronyms ARAC, ARAC-Cuba, or ARAAC<sup>16</sup>) which seeks to strategically influence the policy of state institutions to combat the problem of racism in Cuban culture and society. I position ARAC-Cuba as an analytical counterpoint to the former group, Yoruba Andabo, which takes center stage in this written work.

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<sup>13</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente (2008; 2012) provides an excellent review of the kinds of debates that have emerged from the local organizing and knowledge production by key Afro-Cuban actors since the 1990s. The local groups include but are not limited to *La Cofradía de la Negritud*, *Color Cubano*, *Red Barrial Afrodescendiente*, *Comité Ciudadano por la Integración Racial (CIR)*, and *Afrocubanas*.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the numerous articles, book-length publications include Tomas Fernandez Robaina, *El negro en Cuba: 1902-1958* (1994) ; Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba* (2000); Esteban Morales Domínguez, *Desafíos de la problemática racial en Cuba* (2007); Daysi Rubiera Castillo and Inés María Martiatu Terry, *Afrocubanas: historia, pensamiento y prácticas culturales* (2011); Gisela Arandia Covarrubias, *Población afrodescendiente cubana actual* (2012) to only name a small few. A documentary titled, *La Raza* (Corvalán, 2008) featuring many active members of this movement has also been an important teaching tool used for spurring public dialogue on the issue. Webspaces like [www.AfroCubaWeb.com](http://www.AfroCubaWeb.com) and <http://negracubanateniaqueser.com/> have been important mechanisms for knowledge transmission and exchange around the topics of race, racism, and anti-racist activism, and promotion of current events and activities within this movement.

<sup>15</sup> The longstanding Cold War dispute between the U.S. and Cuban government, aggravated by U.S. covert attempts to overthrow the Cuban government, has made it necessary for Cuban anti-racist activists to build ties with Latin American Afrodescendant movements. With the U.S. positioned as enemy #1, Cuban anti-racist activists risk being accused of operating with counterrevolutionary motives to “divide the country” by drawing attention to racial difference as a way of undermining national unity. It is largely accepted that “U.S.-styles” of black freedom struggles are antithetical to the Cuban case due to the two countries distinct political and social dynamics and histories. Therefore, drawing explicit parallels to U.S. black political formations or social campaigns are deemed politically suspect from the outset.

<sup>16</sup> I will heretofore refer to them by either acronym interchangeably.

I was introduced to Yoruba Andabo by a mutual friend of the artistic director, Geovani del Pino. When I formally approached him to ask for his consent to conduct a study on the group, he said that he was averse to foreign researchers, but would grant me permission for four reasons: because I'm young, I'm black, I'm religious<sup>17</sup>, and on top of that, we have a mutual friend from the U.S. who is very dear to him. These four reasons give a clear indication of what factors he sees as most relevant in guiding the course of the group.

The ethnographic data I collected is consistent in showing that Yoruba Andabo performs a unique form of black political agency based in Afro-Cuban religious ethos, sustained by community-based socio-spiritual and economic networks, and largely concerned with passing on this tradition to the next generation. However, this particular form of consciousness emanating from the afro-religious urban working class<sup>18</sup> finds itself in a paradoxical relationship with the dominant ideological thrust of what participants are calling the “New Afro-Cuban movement” (De la Fuente, 2012)<sup>19</sup>. The “New Afro-Cuban Movements” takes issue with the state-promoted fetishized folklorization of blackness and Afro-Cuban religiosity and the commoditization of those folkloric markers of cubanidad (Cuban identity) from which the state profits. The intellectual figures instead propose that race-based education reform and class-based affirmative action hold the key to combating structural racism and diminished black life chances (Morales 2011, Zurbano 2014).

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<sup>17</sup> In the Cuban context, “*religioso*” means one who is a practitioner of Afro-Cuban religiosity.

<sup>18</sup> It is important to note that my employment of the term “working-class” does not map on neatly to measures of income levels. My understanding of class in the Cuban context signals a social category that is based in part on education, professional status, kind of occupation, and in many cases performed behavior. These components position the person in terms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), compounded by their monetary income and (lack of) accumulated wealth.

<sup>19</sup> I will heretofore use the term “New Afro-Cuban movement” to signal not only those individuals living on the island, but the Cuban and non-Cuban scholars abroad who study the movement and partake in the ongoing dialogue of ideas around racism and anti-racist struggle in Cuba.

I was lucky enough to bear witness to the first year of ARAC's inception. I had established a relationship with one of the group's founders on a prior trip to Cuba when I attended a monthly meeting of the *Cofradía of the Negritude*<sup>20</sup> during a summer trip to Cuba in 2011 as I was refining my research topic. Gisela was the only female directorate of the *Cofradía*. I marveled at her ability to command the floor and put forth feminist critiques in a palpably macho arena. When I moved to Cuba for fieldwork, she personally invited me to attend ARAC's meetings. Her mentorship positioned me to see the phenomenon of how a group constructs its political identity and the particular kinds of conditions it faced in the process of becoming.

During that period, I also participated in the first-ever course on race at the University of Havana (2012-2013), entitled "*La racialidad en Cuba actual*", co-taught by professors in the Biology Department and the preeminent Cuban scholars on race and racism in Cuba. The participants in the course were part The New Afro Cuban Movement. A common refrain at the end of a function (typically in the form of a panel) organized by ARAC in honor of the International Day Against Racism or at the end of the graduate course at the University of Havana, was "*Tenemos que llevarlo a la comunidad!* (We have to bring this to the community!)". The statement would be followed by resounding applause and nods of agreement demonstrating a common belief that if "the community" only knew what the experts on race knew, then they would finally accrue enough momentum within the "*sociedad civil emergente*"<sup>21</sup> to influence the state so that it may

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<sup>20</sup> *La Cofradía of the Negritude* a black civic organization founded in 1998, created to work against some of the most negative effects of the Special Period on race relations, particularly a growing income gap according to race and the lack of good employment opportunities for blacks in the most desirable sectors of the national economy. They have demanded official action on these issues, approaching the National Assembly to request a parliamentary debate on racism and the creation of a state institution charged with the implementation of a national policy against racism.

<sup>21</sup> When asked to reflect upon the state of Cuban civil society ARAAC-Cuba members shared that after the triumph of 1959, (many elements of) civil society ceased to exist in a real way. Most private associations were disbanded and replaced with mass organizations that are technically non-governmental, but in practice

better achieve its socialist ideals. Yet alas, “the community” was sadly ignorant, unaware or unable to identify the cause of their suffering, duped by their own ascription to folkloric archetypes and internalized racism, testament to the power of white cultural hegemony within Cuban society. This movement asserted that the “conscientization” of the black working class was needed in order for them to see the value in the proposals set forth by the experts and join the anti-racist mobilization.

What became immediately salient was the way in which ARAC’s body-politic was confronted at every juncture by the limitations of a pre-established paradigm of black activism that determined the shape and direction of its movement. This included their preconceived notions of black identity politics (state-oriented, reformist) and how outsiders perceived them as being socially divisive. The simple fact that a group of black people were meeting regularly and independently from the state to discuss race-based grievances made their white colleagues uncomfortable. They were explicitly accused of being “racistas al revés” (reverse racists), and had to strategically seek institutional backing and recruit white members who they saw as allies to win social and political favor. Given the privilege I had to see these explicit discussions about/negotiations around what was possible vis a vis what was permissible or political viable was very pedagogical for my thinking about black political culture. Seeing this process of group formation helped to make visible the strategies that are developed by black subjects to safely move within a limited frame of possibility.

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these mass organizations engage in “directed (top-down) activism”; responding to state mandates that ostensibly speak for “the people” instead of responding to the needs of the community. Ironically, the notion that private citizens can/should relate to the state outside of the established state-initiated mass organizations, and that the state should respect “private interests” and the right of citizens to formulate their own solutions to their everyday problems, are emerging concepts that are gaining more traction as the Revolution encourages more market expansion. This growing field of action, with roots before the Revolution that are re-emerging in the present day is referred to as the “*sociedad civil emergente*”.

I kept this reference in my mind when simultaneously conducting participant observation with Yoruba Andabo who had already achieved institutional acceptance over more than 30 years of professional status within the Ministry of Culture<sup>22</sup>. This meant that their public performance was well rehearsed by the time I became involved. What caught my attention was the mutual awareness of the stakes of challenging the social grammar of a racial state (Goldberg, 2001)<sup>23</sup>. In the case of Cuba, a country profoundly shaped by a national ideology of racelessness and racial fraternity promoted by Cuban Revolutionary patriot José Martí (Ferrer, 1998; Guerra L. , 2005), this meant a constant confrontation between their own lived experience of racial difference against the hegemonic belief in the transcendence of race under nationalism.

Both groups exhibited the adoption of internal and external disciplining measures to manage the dominant social script of black identification as national excess. Like a dancer that slowly internalizes the lessons from innumerable critiques from the choreographer during rehearsal, the groups' movements were made while simultaneously negotiating how their body-politic was being perceived when it rubbed up against the given social order. The nimbleness required in these processes of group maintenance on the one hand (Yoruba Andabo), and group becoming on the other (ARAC), made them compelling case studies to understand contemporary black self-making on a national level.

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<sup>22</sup> Another group comparable to Yoruba Andabo in terms of their degree of state recognition and institutional backing is Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, based in the province of Matanzas. Both groups acquired this status of recognition in part due to being considered "reliable" in the eyes of the state, thus making them worthy of certain benefits like income subsidies (discussed further in Chapter 4), international travel, and license to work in more mainstream venues. Their stamp of "reliability" highlights, rather than negates, the pervasive racialized stigma of "unreliability" and general "unruliness" to which rumberos are socially assigned. Rumberos are, in a sense, interpellated as performers of racialized behavior. These are the very behavioral stigmas of the black urban working-class that Yoruba Andabo seeks to challenge in their performance of respectability. Yoruba Andabo's strategies to counter the stigmatization of rumba's racialized behavior is discussed further in Chapter 5.

<sup>23</sup> I use the term racial state here to reference critical race theorists' argument for how race was integral to modern nation-state formation.

Research done by political historians, art historians, and historical anthropologists are key for making sense of: the enactments of both groups, why they assume different paths in contradistinction to each other, and the events to which they make reference in their daily motions. Historian Melina Pappademos' book, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (2011), provides a necessary historical framework to understand the political environment within which black collective agency takes place offered by looking closely at the trends in the black public sphere during the Cuban Republic. Rather than see an allegiance to mainstream politics as a purely ideological allegiance to racelessness and earnest faith in the representative democracy of the times, she gives historical evidence to suggest that certain courses of action were pragmatic maneuvers to gain resources which were limited for black people. In creating this historiography, she also makes an important argument against the idea that political coalitions were motivated out of a shared racial consciousness or investment in "black community" either. Instead, she asserts, that the public *performance* of a "unified, racially conscious 'black community'" was a useful political symbol that enabled the machinations of black politicians and "club men" (blacks of relative socioeconomic privilege, members of the respected *Sociedades de Color*) in the formal political arena from which they were denied their "rightful share"<sup>24</sup>. Furthermore, those machinations were pursued via the adoption of an embodied repertoire that spoke to/against racist, hegemonic constructions of Africa and "*el miedo al negro*". Pappademos' book centers on the experiences of black activists in the formal political arena and "club men" who built political authority and won resources through pragmatic and strategic alliances with the white-Republican power structure, but also features Africanist religious

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<sup>24</sup> "In the public sphere, black activist did craft a unified, racially conscious 'black community.' Yet that community was largely symbolic." (Pappademos, 2011, pp. 8-9)

organizations who contended with Cuban nationalism in order to achieve group sovereignty and practice self-determination on their own ethno-cultural terms. These two approaches to black political activism correlate to the two kinds of performances of social memory expressed by the case studies I analyze: the performance by ARAC is committed to getting a “fair share” in the formal political arena, while the performance by Yoruba Andabo is invested in sustaining corporate ethno-religious community projects.

I will show how the way in which ARAC and Yoruba Andabo perform in scenarios of black autonomy today is structured by these particular genealogies, diverging and converging in critical ways. The present day national juncture is best understood within the frame of these historical legacies of black social choreography. The groups summon accumulated embodied knowledge from those they see as deceased political kin to negotiate analogous scenarios of unequal power in the present. Understanding the current performance as a present iteration of a larger genealogical movement of black self-organization gives critical insight (although incomplete) as to how this event is situated into the contemporary context, and the political, sacred, and gendered valences that it imbues today.

I included both groups in my study because I see the utility in looking at a range of practices of black self-organization together to lend fuller understanding to how Afro-Cubans are imaging political possibility at this particular moment in Cuba’s history. Rather than using comparison between the groups as a resting point in my analysis, I wanted to bring forth what both groups reveal about how black folks are self-organizing, moving, in the current political economic context.

I use counterpoint as an analytical approach that keeps multiple formations in the same field of view. Counterpoint is a choreographic device where you have a person, or group of people, on say downstage left doing a particular phrase of movement, while you

have another person or group of people on upstage right doing a different phrase. “Phrase”, in dance terminology, refers to a planned sequence of gestures. Although these two groups of people are executing different phrases of movement in different places on stage, both happen simultaneously and therefore constitute a single choreographic unit in the space-time of the performance. Choreographers employ this device because something else is perceived about both dances when they are executed in the same field of view, that would not have been apparent if done one after the other.

Observing difference in simultaneity, using counterpoint, allows other questions to emerge, such as: How much distance is there between them? [How are different groups imagining political possibility differently?] Perhaps at certain points the distance between them is greater than at others. Why *aren't* they dancing together? [Why do people choose one form of collective pursuit over the other?] Likewise, we begin to notice those fleeting moments between seemingly disparate formations, when gestures echo each other or reference each other. [Specifically, these resonances occurred around the expression of racial belonging, the rehearsal of gender, and the sacred]. These moments [themes], all the sudden, become apparent and their repetition or duration hold new meaning, fundamentally altering the way the space around the dancers is perceived.

Both groups are based in Havana, however they do not associate with one another directly. Logistically, what this amounted to for me during my fieldwork was a lot of running back and forth across the physical landscape of the city of Havana, to participate in the goings on of each group. The distance between the two entities was registered in my body in several ways: costume changes in order to be considered appropriately dressed at different kinds of happenings (i.e. academic classes, meetings, gigs, ceremonies); figuring out how to get between sites on different sides of the city, waiting for different forms of public transportation to arrive. I argue that what brings the two groups together is not solely

my idiosyncratic relationship to both, but the way in which their counterpoint makes new phenomenon apparent about the current moment.

The movements of each group in counterpoint point to four themes that interlock to form the analytical backbone of the dissertation: 1) racial belonging, 2) the sacred, 3) gender, and 4) the libidinal economy of the nation-state.

#### 1) racial belonging

The choreographies of these black collectives tell us tell us about the constraints on expressing racial or African diasporic belonging in Cuban public space. By African diasporic, I refer to a shared experience of resistance to structures of white hegemony by people who have been racialized as black which is central to a people's sense of group belonging. Since the abolition of slavery in 1886, white hegemony's legacy in Cuba has been most clearly expressed in the in hegemonic silencing of racial grievances along with racial identification, effectively impeding recognition of the reproduction of anti-black racism and thus undermining the political basis for racial redress. Although each group is very different in nature —performing autonomy from the state in distinct political fields— they are similarly characterized by a racialized group identity that has been forged in sustained struggle against white hegemony's legacy in Cuban nationalism.

#### 2) the sacred

The movements of these Afro-Cuban collectives are inextricably in dialogue with the sacred. The groups' references to or distancing from sacred repertoires of meaning help us think about the relationship between notions of respectability and secular liberalism. In other words, through their performances for the state, one gleans that the dominant norms of "propriety" are contingent upon a black subject's performed distance from sacred subjectivity. This conceptual division —sacred/secular— is a product of modernity, institutionalized to centralize power under the state. When I follow their movement(s), the

way in which white-European cultural hegemony still structures the Cuban public sphere (even after the onset of “religious freedom” in the 1990s) is made legible. Thus, Afro-Cuban movement(s) respond to both sacred and secular imperatives, and make use of both sacred and secular ideological repertoires as resources to interpret their actions while navigating unequal conditions of power.

### 3) gender

Social memories, the way collectives remember “who we are”, makes visible the way in which racialized gender performance is morally configured and historically situated. Forms of black self-organization are structured by specific genealogies of resistance to the state, constructed to reaffirm whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality as the central vantage point from which to discern the world. The social memory of this resistance is actively re-membered through a reiteration of historically situated roles in relation to their object of resistance. This imperative to perform according to hegemonic notions of gender is heightened during this context of political economic reform that valorizes the neoliberal individual-citizen-subject-consumer.

### 4) libidinal economy of the nation-state

This theme refers to a body of literature that theorizes how emotion (affect) and desire (libido) are organized, assigned value, and exchanged within difference to reproduce a particular social arrangement within the nation-state. Here, I will briefly discuss two theorists who have encouraged my thinking about these concepts in relation to political economy, as a cursory introduction to that which will be further developed through my analysis of concrete ethnographic examples: they are critical queer and race feminist, Sarah Ahmed (2004, 2013), and critical race theorist, Frank B. Wilderson (Wilderson 2010). This literature tries to address how feelings of pleasure, affection, attraction, desire, and likewise, repulsion, anxiety, phobia, hate are organized and directed to produce social

subjectivity in the reproduction of hegemonic systems of power and distribution of resources. Ahmed describes how the animating forces of emotion work as forms of capital that are exchanged and accrue value in their circulation, generating hegemonic feelings that govern how Others are measured in relation. Wilderson provides an explanation for how these libidinal systems of valuation, exchange, and accumulation function with respect to racial formation and anti-blackness, in particular, to sustain a condition of white hegemony within the modern nation-state. For both Ahmed and Wilderson, discourse and the body are critical sites where these animating forces gain materiality, recognition, and fixedness. This economy of emotion and desire creates pathways for bodies to become aligned with some over others, and dictate modes of living.

In short, I understand theories of libidinal and affective economies to be engaged with how “structures of feeling” (Williams 1978), in turn, structure feelings. They address the political implications of that which circulates at, ostensibly, the most personal level of psychic experience. The sense of stability granted to the inherently instable structure of power of the modern nation-state (and its attendant governmentality of citizen-subjects) operationalizes this embodied realm of the political economy.

In addition to the aforementioned theorists, black feminist and queer theoretical engagement with this field of analysis has been critical for thinking through possible interventions on this seemingly closed system. Audre Lorde’s famous essay, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”, speaks of the libidinal economy as both a dilemma for black women in particular, but also a potential site of resistance:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various

sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change (Lorde 1984)

In relation to blackness in Cuba specifically, anthropologist Jafari Allen has extended Lorde's theory of the erotics to define erotic black self-making as "complexly articulated subjectivities that are on the one hand constructed materially by the desires of the powerful, and on the other hand, re(made) by the material and erotic desires of individuals and collectives" (2011, 5). This line of thinking helps me to locate how hegemonic processes that enable racial hierarchy gain traction through the body, but also leave room analytically for how strategic libidinal investments in the body, expressed through collective movement, can both enable and intervene on the social circulation of white heteropatriarchal will to power.

Taken as a composite whole, the dissertation addresses the racialized, gendered, and sacred meanings that are mutually entailed in black performances of autonomy vis-a-vis the Cuban nation-state and how they affect the kinds of subjectivities produced in the doing. These reiterative acts create the semblance of uninterrupted continuity from across space and time, while also being actively adapted to fit the immediate demands of the present. The performance of autonomy analyzed in this dissertation at times uphold the racial, liberal, heteropatriarchal common sense of the modern nation-state while countering these very same logics in others. This renders the movement(s) of black body-politics in Cuba both historical and timely, both strategically compliant and tactically resistant, both familiar and new. The dissertation makes legible how the practices of each collective comment on the choreography —design for the way bodies are ordered in space— of the national development project as they creatively move within and beyond its bounds. It is the often contradictory and complex nature of these body-politics that linger so vibrantly

in my sense-memory after many months of distance. I strive in my analysis to make that friction apparent rather than downplay their inherent messiness.

Put succinctly, I look at practices of black self-organization as performances of autonomy that tell us about the limits of agency available within the nation-state, and the racialized, gendered, and sacred meanings transmitted in those moments.

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing black collective action *as performance* is an analytic method from performance studies. I use performance theory as a key component of my theoretical framework to make legible that which is enacted in both textual and embodied registers within black politics. After over 10 years of travelling to Cuba, I have found that some of the most potent information conveyed in conversations has been that which is communicated nonverbally. This is particularly true when addressing taboo or stigmatized topics such as racism in an officially racism-free society. For instance, when referring to anecdotal incidences of racism in Cuba, the speakers will often use their index finger to brush the skin of their forearm to indicate that the race of the person holds an explanatory function in understanding the sequence of events. This gesture is usually followed by “*ya tu sabes*” (you already know), performatively triggering the shared repertoire of knowledge about racial meaning in Cuba<sup>25</sup>. Gestures, such as these, are intentionally quick and ephemeral, leaving no trace. Yet they serve as a key register of interpersonal meaning-making around racial common sense. The everyday salience of the nonverbal register for talking about that which should not technically hold meaning makes performance theory a natural resource for interpreting my ethnographic material.

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<sup>25</sup> A similar gestural indication is given to indicate the person of mention is a state agent. This is communicated by tapping the index and middle finger on one’s left shoulder. A left ear tug indicates “El Comandante” Fidel Castro himself.

By taking performance seriously within my ethnography, thinking about particular vignettes of black self-organization as scenarios (like in a theatrical play), I make two critical interventions: 1) I critically consider the hidden social scripts that choreograph practices of autonomy and produce meaning about the horizon of black political imaginations; 2) I “flesh out” overlooked or undervalued forms of bottom-up cultural politics that engage the sacred as a key political and economic resource at this particular historical juncture in contemporary Havana.

Christen Smith (2008) provides a successful model for how to make use of performance theory effectively within the discipline of anthropology in order to study blackness and racial formation in Latin America. She opens by stating,

Performance, performativity and enactment have everything to do with the global politics of racial formation (Elam 2001). This is particularly the case within the context of Brazil, where the myth of racial democracy makes race incoherent at times, confounding the ability to confront and denounce racism.... the lived experience of blackness is continuously reified through the performance of racism in the everyday. These moments of encounter make blackness legible. (1)

Although, my ethnography does not focus on moments of racism per se—not in the sense of violent enactments of racial hierarchy through the scenario of police violence—I too assert that racial meaning and political imagination is apprehended through the embodied practices of racialized groups. To once again borrow a dance metaphor, my dissertation asserts that the ways in which racialized groups navigate public space tell us about the invisibilized obstacles they strategically circumvent on their course by operationalizing years of technical training, even when giving the appearance of effortless grace.

When taking performance as a site of analysis, both the actors and the spectator are implicated in the frame. My dissertation centers performances where the spectator is not always necessarily an “outsider” (white) audience. In fact, I ask what is produced when

black people perform for themselves in a hegemonic, “raceless” nation-state? What are the scripts that are adhered to and/or challenged in those moments of collective agency?

Like Smith, I employ Diana Taylor’s concept of “the scenario” as a heuristic system that allows the reader to learn something else, see hidden narratives, and notice critical moves of agency within a limited range of possible action that produce meaning. Scenarios transmit repertoires of meaning that escapes discursive representation (Taylor 2003). As such, I take seriously the embodied register, which Taylor calls “*lo performático*”: gesture, orality, movement, dance, attitude, sound, behavior, and tone. This assertion radically shifts what can be regarded as a primary source and what can be considered an appropriate canon of empirical evidence in the social sciences. By reading collective action as “performances as of black autonomy”, it opens up analytic possibilities, allowing me to factor in and give equal weight to what is happening both in discursive and embodied registers, by both the performers and the spectators.

I also refer to Diana Taylor’s thesis that social memory is transmitted through scenarios that structure particular genres of collective action in the present (Taylor, 2003). A scenario entails scripts that are made evident in the live performance through the bodies of the actors, yet refer to a prior shared understanding of what is supposed to transpire. In other words, actors are responding to cues that they have internalized that appeal to the shared understanding of the audience. This semiotic interplay between script, actor, and audience member allows the performance to be intelligible within the social grammar. I show how the strategic actions of the collectives I study are informed by narrative, plot, milieu/location, corporal behavior, gestures, attitudes, tones not fully reducible to language, as well as social memory, asymmetrical relations of power, and the sacred.

Although I frame particular practices of black self-organization as “performances”, performance analysis alone would have been insufficient. The methodology of sustained

participant observation from anthropology (conducted over 18 months) was vital for understanding the movements I witnessed. For instance, I was able to perceive critical moments of restraint due to extended participant observation with the groups “off stage” (meaning beyond the spatial-temporal parameters of the delineated act of virtuosity). Extended observation off-stage enabled me to perceive when patterns of behavior were broken, and the meaning produced by divergences from socially established scripts in relationship to the setting of their occurrence and who was watching. This long-term participation in the day-to-day happenings of the groups equipped me with vital points of reference to appreciate moments of embodied restraint —absent (or non-) gestures — and moments of rupture as deliberate rather than self-evident.

Furthermore, my employment of performance theory does not imply that racialized subjects have complete agency over their racial performativity or the way in which their body is interpellated by state power. Instead, racial performance in modernity is compulsory and has serious stakes, risks, consequences, and affects, the salience of which cannot be underestimated for societies like Cuba that carry the legacy of racial slavery in the Americas. While asserting that ruptures within performance can bring about shifts in the collective political imagination, I am careful to not suggest that structural oppression disappears or can be transcended. Rather, I want to emphasize that practices of subjugation and contestation are naturalized through performative reiterated acts. The concept of racial performativity aims to address that aspect of race that *is* “a doing”, and engage what the construction of race does at the level of embodied experience in everyday interaction to mobilize the imagination of Blackness in particular ways (Muñoz, 2006). Thus, a performance theory lens provides a theoretical framework that calls me to take seriously how the prevailing colonial-heteropatriarchal structure is naturalized through iteration; repetitive acts of violence (epistemic, physical, and symbolic) that create a semblance of

continuity and forge a common sense (hegemony). In pursuing this line of inquiry, I identify when these patterns of iteration are queered through critical acts of resistance<sup>26</sup>. Put plainly, the dissertation documents the meaning transmitted ephemeral acts, such as the index finger's brush against a forearm, that leave no trace on the record of dozens of hours of audio archival files from my interviews with research subjects.

My investment in performance theory comes from the belief that a performance lens is uniquely useful for making calling attention to different forms of collective resistance across multiple registers of signification. I situate my work within other black feminist critiques of formal, state-oriented *Politics* who are pushing for further interrogation of political agency in different registers (Alexander 2005, Cohen 2004, Cox 2015, McKittrick 2006).

### **Black feminism(s): Bringing the Sacred into Intersectionality**

My black feminist approach is deeply influenced by the work of Katherine McKittrick for her analysis of how space is socially produced through the racial-sexual body, and M. Jaqui Alexander for her exploration of what she calls “spirit-based politics” as a response to the nation-state as a vessel for colonial, white heteropatriarchy. These black feminist scholars have charted an important way to forge a black feminist praxis of scholarship both in and beyond the black female body as an object of analysis. I use McKittrick and Alexander together to argue that the sexualization and racialization of subjectivity within the nation-state is tied to modernity's boundary maintenance between the sacred and secular, in order to create a territorial sphere of heteropatriarchal domination. Black political action within civil society has been structured by the white

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<sup>26</sup> Here I use queer not in the romantic sense of same-sex loving, but as a practice engaged in by enslaved Africans and their descendants, of resistance to the commodification and stigmatization of their bodies “by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on the [slave] ships” (Tinsley 2008, 192).

heteropatriarchal particular script, shaping how people operate within the nation-state in the “war of position” (Gramsci 1978) with dominant power. While race, class, gender, and sexuality are widely understood to be about power, I insist, that the sacred, too is about power: the power to enact change upon one’s lived experience in the present through the recruitment of divine wisdom<sup>27</sup>.

Black feminism offers a critical difference in the way to consider movement(s) toward more desirable futures. Intersectionality, the hallmark of black feminist thought, suggests a synthetic notion of standpoint experience that can’t be reduced to its parts. It forces us to engage with a mode of analysis that refuses to fragment and rather incessantly seeks connections. Intersectionality, as a mode of black feminist analysis, is inextricably connected to a political movement for liberation (The Combahee River Collective, 1977; Lorde, 1984). Academia has commodified the tripartite canon of intersectionality —race, class, gender— as an ends in and of itself rather than a means for deepening the efficacy of movements to combat the capitalist white-hetero patriarchal system. Some have seen intersectionality as a resting point, subsumed within corporatized multiculturalism. Black feminist scholarship is, thus, reduced to the inclusion of working-class black women’s experience into the study of sociocultural phenomenon, and framed as a project of bringing that which has been marginalized to the center.

Instead, I locate my black feminist approach within black feminism’s emphasis on the connectedness of multiple axis of power which include the nation-state, sexuality, and, most recently, the sacred (McKittrick, Alexander), so as to critique how heteronormativity, patriarchy, Euro-western cultural hegemony and capitalism work together to diminish black life. M. Jaqui Alexander (2005) has argued that this particular intersectional

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<sup>27</sup> See Andrew Apter’s *Black Critics & Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (1992).

framework is central to understanding the creation of Caribbean nation-states. Modern Caribbeanness hinged upon the reproduction of interlocking oppressions created by the division of labor and distribution of power along lines of race and sex<sup>28</sup>. Within Critical Race Theory, intersectionality challenges the assumptions of universality that edify the social order. It provides an analytical framework to destabilize the idealized notion of a universal rights-bearer of justice. It asserts that if we are aware of the boxes that we operate in, we can better think of alternative strategies to exceed/escape them. If paired with a critical race critique, performance theory can productively further black feminist praxis to help us observe the multiple ways in which scripts choreograph the body to uphold the capitalist white hetero-patriarchal structure, even in performances of autonomy from it.

Thus, my dissertation applies black feminist intersectional theoretics to a concrete ethnographic case, showing the connection between subjectivity and sociality (Alexander) by describing/analyzing how political ideology/principles are performed in the self-organization strategies of Afro-Cuban collectives. I wish to interrogate how the performances of Afro-Cuban collectives are co-choreographed by a particular social construction of racialized-classed-sexualized gender which, in turn, points to a particular political imaginary. They participate in the reproduction of an uneven political economic arrangement within the nation-state even while resisting that arrangement in critical ways. In other words, I will analyze how autonomy is performed and what kinds of racialized gender subjectivities and political imaginaries are produced in the doing of black identity politics. I include the sacred as a critical axis of experience and a repertoire for meaning making, to argue that both the sacred and the secular intersect and mutually shape black self-making through organized movement(s) in Cuba. Thus, I take into account how

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<sup>28</sup> See also Kamala Kempadoo's *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (2004).

religious-guided modes of knowing/being influence black collective performance and subject formation and thus must figure into my intersectional analysis of Afro-Cuban movement(s). My dissertation ponders how the moves we take in negotiating an uneven distribution of power fundamentally scripts how we embody blackness and how we pursue collective self-determination from that position. The way that black folk perform in their negotiation of these social, economic, and political structures of oppression also operate alongside and across the secular modern episteme<sup>29</sup>.

Thus, my black feminist performance-oriented lens helps me to 1) de-naturalize this secular-hetero-masculinist bent in scholarship around political action by rendering embodied forms of iteration intelligible, 2) identify when and how racialized gender is rehearsed and reified in everyday interaction, and 3) acknowledge the ever-present potential of, not changing the way our bodies are raced, but performing other ways of being in our raced-bodies that can point toward openings for rupture, while taking into consideration the limited range of viable action. For this, I use a black feminist reading practices to analyze performances against the grain (Bennett and Dickerson 2001, Brooks 2006, Brown 2008, Hill 1993, hooks 1999, Jones 2005, McKittrick 2006, Rivero 2005), revealing new insights about the tactics black people deploy for self-making in contemporary Cuba.

## **V. THE DANCE OF DOING RESEARCH**

Doing participant observation within counterpoint means being nimble at corporal code-switching. I engaged in corporal code-switching between different modes of sociability and norms of respectability that correlated to the distinct expressions of black

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<sup>29</sup> “Black women’s geographies then, signal alternative patterns that work alongside and across traditional geographies” (McKittrick, 2006, xiv)

identity politics each entity was moving to. Therefore, both the design of my project and the ethnographic practice was influenced by my professional training as a dancer.

Cox describes the demands on the body in dance training that constitute my muscle memory,

In the world of concert dance, choreography was something that, as paid dancers we had to learn and master, using our bodies to express the intent and feeling a choreography embedded in a sequence of steps. Being able to pull this off required a combination of virtuosity in physical technique and affective manipulation— or, in other words, the ability to execute the steps and execute them with feeling. (Cox 2015, 29)

The skill Cox references is called “kinesthesia” or proprioception, a sensitive awareness of one’s body and movement that enables one to sense and adapt to different physical and affective imperatives. This professional training served as preparation for my ethnographic methodologies in general, making me more attune to the corporeal gestures, behaviors, and acts that were part of the everyday workings and political assertions of the two collectives I studied. Intensive study of Afro-Cuban dance before and during fieldwork, with the dance director of Yoruba Andabo, enhanced my own embodied hermeneutics and gave me insight about the sacred repertoire of meaning that both groups reference. Thus, movement was both a method and an object of study. This methodological approach has been shaped by black feminist anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and Yvonne Daniel, who argue for the efficacy of the body as a hermeneutical tool based on their study of African diasporic religiosity and their own incorporation of the attendant artistic practices of those traditions (Hurston, 2008 [1935]; Dunham, 1969; Daniel, 2005).

I strive for my kinesthetic training to be felt on the page in my writing. If writing acts as a representation of a thought process, then it is evident to the reader that I am thinking through corporality. As discussed earlier, movement and choreography are not

just metaphors, but point to a particular way of understanding social action and social arrangement that centers the body as a central site of subject formation and social meaning-making, rather than a secondary appendage to reason, logic, and thought, associated with the brain. Under Euro-Western cognitive frames, dance — embodied epistemologies and forms of expression— gets gendered as female, and relegated to the inferior pole of the Cartesian mind-body binary split. This line of thought follows in the Habermasian understanding of the public sphere as a linguistically constituted sphere of rational debate, making political participation equal to discursive participation; “it is communication governed by rational, communicatively achieved argument and negotiation” that constitutes political engagement (Kulynych, 1997, p. 320). Thinking through the body entails a concern with not only the nature of corporal movement (i.e. effort quality, flow, weight), but also dramaturgy and choreographic phrasing: the (visual) “shape” and progression of movement, kinespheric levels and body placement. I also highlight the social function of tempo (meter, rhythm, syncopation) and density (multimodal layering, intensity) as tools strategically employed to modify a social setting and guide collective experience. Furthermore, my analysis of movement(s) shows that improvisation, cannot be reduced to simply cathartic spontaneity, but is situated within a specific repertoire, genre, and style which gives the departure from the predetermined social meaning. Conscious consideration of these performance elements helped me to piece together an interpretation of the mechanics of collective subjectivity that I argue, only a dancer could write.

Other aspects of my life experience has also influenced my ethnography in vital ways. My quest to understanding my family’s history and my own identity has motivated a prolonged engagement with the island since 2004 when I first travelled to Cuba through a dance program. As a black woman and third-generation Afro-Cuban-American, I have been able to incrementally gain the *confianza* of research participants through annual or bi-

annual return visits. As a great granddaughter of Afro-Cuban tobacco factory workers whose lives centered around black mutual aid societies in Havana, Tampa (Florida), and the Bronx (New York), I have utilized my special insight into the history of diasporic practices of self-organization and identity politics in my work. My decade of experiences travelling to Cuba, each time extending and deepening my personal, academic, and artistic networks, enabled me to forge a multi-faceted understanding of contemporary lived experience.

I have come to fundamentally believe that the act of doing fieldwork in Cuba is different for black women (especially those who “pass” as Cuban) due to the inevitably violent way in which white heteropatriarchy situates us in the social order. This positionality renders us physically vulnerable in ways that are different than our white colleagues. This violence is only intensified when we travel across borders (be they geographic, class, etc) because our bodies are compulsively reinscribed in ways that devalue our lives. The methods of mitigating such conditions for black women often compel them to seek refuge in marginalized spaces, which further invisibilize and marginalize our selves, making us vulnerable to other forms of violence. Due to my own racialized gender, I was not safe in the middle-class neighborhood of Vedado. Being constantly interpellated by white (Cuban or foreign) heteropatriachal desire was physically dangerous and psychologically straining. Although residence in Vedado was more conveniently located in terms of proximity to educational institutions and hotels to access the internet, that proximity to whiteness came at a cost. Therefore, my immersion into working-class black social life during my fieldwork, living in a “*barrio complicado*” (da ‘hood), and researching black collectives, was motivated by both academic interest and self-interest.

Centro Habana is the most densely populated borough in the capital (primarily of people of African descent) and also the borough with the poorest living conditions. Rundown buildings collapse every week upon families who do not have the economic means to maintain their homes. Cayo Hueso (the area where I lived) in particular, is the neighborhood with the most *solares* (rundown tenement blocks or slums) in Havana, with approximately 250 in only a half-mile radius. On the one hand, living in poor living conditions among people who looked like me gave me the safety of not being hypervisible. Nonetheless, navigating heteropatriarchy as a young single woman in black spaces also made my refuge a precarious one, making me reliant on male patronage despite being financially independent.

However, my ability to pick up and leave an unfavorable situation for a more desirable one was also what distinguished me from other Afro-Cuban women for whom I “passed”. My access to mobility granted me the safety of knowing that my money could afford me options that the other women in Centro Habana did not have. The housing shortage in Havana disproportionately affects the black population, whereas white families in Vedado typically have rooms to spare to rent to foreigners. In black, working class households it is especially common to have three generations living in the same two-bedroom, crumbling apartment. More dwelling space is created by building subdivisions, creating internal attics, called *barbacoas*. However, the privilege that comes with being a North American graduate student funded by a prestigious foundation should not be underestimated. Although I was lived in a *barbacoa*, I could afford to live there by myself. My financial independence marked me in an important way, given the expectations for black women’s racialized gender performance within black sociality. This brought on different negotiations of interpersonal relationships with men in the neighborhood as well as with my research subjects. My sense of proprioception, constantly aware of one’s body

and movement in space, made me constantly conscious of my vulnerability and the stakes of different kinds of performance failure.

Being a dancer, a direct descendant of working-class Afro-Cubans, a black woman, and a North American academic all had important influences on my ethnographic praxis. My long-term relationships with Afro-Cubans in different social circles, paired with my living in a predominantly black, working-class neighborhood during my doctoral fieldwork, significantly helped me to better situate my own experiences in Havana, the experiences of my research participants, and their perceptions of one another. This longstanding relationship with the island has instilled a sense of accountability to my research subjects who strive to collectively move forward within changing political economic landscapes with dignity, and for whom the “normalization of relations” signifies ambivalent progress.

## **VI. OUTLINE OF THE STUDY**

This study can shed light on how the afro-religious poor’s lack of mass involvement in organized antiracist groups may not be attributed to political apathy or complacency, but rather the enactment of a different kind of political agency. My dissertation examines the choreography of Afro-Cuban movement(s) in “updating” Havana, as a negotiation between sacred and secular repertoires of signification. I center the work of Yoruba Andabo (a popular traditional performance group) and their followers of the afro-religious urban poor. They serve as a window into how this body-politic is pursuing more desirable futures in the face of the current market-oriented reforms framed by the state as a needed “update” to the political economy. I enlist ARAC (network of activist-intellectuals) as an analytical counterpoint to represent more a more conventional approach to black identity politics in Cuba. Together Yoruba Andabo and ARAC represent a range of approaches to collective

agency in contemporary Cuban society available to Afro-descendants in the current political economic landscape, and contextualize my theoretical provocations regarding forms of non-state oriented political praxis that nonetheless address anti-racist concerns. As part of my black feminist approach, throughout my dissertation, I emphasize how race, gender, nation, and the sacred/secular are choreographed, rehearsed, and ruptured through the black body-politic.

In the following two chapters, I elaborate the historical contextualization for the dissertation through an analysis of performances of social memory by ARAC (**Chapter Two**) and YA (**Chapter Three**), respectively. I frame ARAC's press conference and YA's signature Abakuá-rumba number, "*Protesta Carabali*", as "scenarios" that both evoke the memory of pre-1959 black collective agency, precisely during the period of Cuba's formation as a Republic after colonial rule. By placing concerted attention to ways in which two groups publically re-member their respective origins in public space, as part of the same "choreographic unity", I trace the particular scripts around race, the sacred, and gender that structure genealogies of black self-organization in Cuba. The selective nature of social memory speaks directly to how "genealogies of performance" are formed. Joseph Roach (1996) defines genealogies of performance as cultural performances that are transmitted over time by the act of re-membering under conditions/scenarios of structural constraint. I privilege social memory to foreground an understanding of how these groups see themselves as part of the past, and thus how their collective sense of the past both informs their actions in the present, as well as informs their vision of the future. The embodied elements involved in the historical "staging" that each groups enacts will en flesh my performance analysis. I highlight the way in which ideologies around race, the sacred, gender, and sexuality are transmitted in the evocation of the social memory of collective struggle, and I will assess what that brings to bear on the political subjectivities rehearsed

by the groups of study. In **Chapter Three**, I conclude that the ways in which both groups respectively recount the history of the nation in relation to their group lineage, through these paradigmatic “scenarios of black autonomy”, re-produces a particular body-politic that genders (masculinizes) the moral configuration of black politics. These “genealogies of performance” shed light on the contours of black subjectivities during seminal (patriarchal) moments of national development, and how they contend with the dominant narratives of Cuban history at this present stage of nation-building.

In **Chapter Four**, I highlight Yoruba Andabo’s economic tactics and performance strategies both within and beyond the category of “folklore”, as critical movements of syncopation. This chapter puts a special focus on rumba, arguing that the shifting political economy is embodied in rumba performance across sacred and secular markets. I highlight the salience of Afro-religious networks for self-making, showing how politics can be performed differently, in a different political register and in different spaces than Politics is traditionally conceived. I describe Yoruba Andabo’s micro-gestures between economies as a syncopation of the accelerating capitalist metrics of power. I put forth that sacred ideological repertoires are salient for how the afro-religious poor make sense of this new economic era, entailing culturally-specific understandings of “development”.

**Chapter Five** is a performance analysis of a vignette from a Yoruba Andabo performance in a secular venue, a proscenium theater. I argue that the performative effect of Yoruba Andabo’s unique interpretation of “folkore” reveals the importance of secular liberalism to the appraisal of black respectability for both the artists and their communities. This chapter details how sacred-secular affective boundary maintenance is upheld and subverted through creative discursive and nonverbal strategies, maximizing their agency. The way in which gendered-sexualized racial subjectivities are rehearsed and ruptured through sacred and secular repertoires in black spaces of “leisure” is examined in relation

to anti-black stigmas to which their bodies are bound. I theorize how these forms of crossing effectively point to critical black political potentialities.

Finally, in **Chapter Six**, I discuss conclusions I have drawn regarding the themes of racial belonging, gender, the sacred, and the libidinal economy of the nation-state. I will explore how the performance-oriented lens I have taken can move us toward a different understanding of the ways in which Afro-Cuban movement(s) are being pursued in Cuba, why black folk may choose one form of black identity politics over another, and what it tells us about the horizon of black political imagination(s) at this juncture in history.

## Chapter Two: Reading Black Genealogies of Autonomy through Performances of Social Memory

### I. INTRODUCTION

This chapter and the one that follows serve as the historical contextualization for the dissertation. I do this by looking at the ways in which history is publically re-membered by *La Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de America Latina y el Caribe- Capítulo Cuba* (ARAC) and Yoruba Andabo to make meaning in the present. In this chapter, I analyze ARAC's press conference staged on May 20, 2013 at the *Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*. The event constituted ARAC's public launch for the Cuban mass media. At the press conference, the group situated their genesis within the history of black political struggle in Cuba and abroad. The chapter that follows (Chapter Three) is an analysis of the performance of a particular Yoruba Andabo song, "Protesta Carabalí", at their longest running Saturday showcase in a nightclub in Havana. The song does similar historicizing work as ARAC's press conference. "Protesta Carabalí" recounts the history of the Carabalí people in Cuba, an ethno-religious group to which the founding members of Yoruba Andabo belonged, thereby constituting an important part of their group identity. Although taking place in very distinct spheres of action—one at the National Library, the other at a nightclub— I analyze these ethnographic vignettes as "scenarios of black autonomy" *in counterpoint* to engage questions around the main four analytical themes of the dissertation: racial/African diasporic belonging, the sacred, gender, and libidinal economy. The social memory of group history performed in these ethnographic vignettes bring those core concepts to the fore. As elaborated in the introduction to the dissertation, I use counterpoint in the dance compositional sense (borrowed from music composition), to refer to when two (or more) choreographic fragments performed by different people with different use of space and time are executed together and thus, pertain to a single

choreographic unity. I argue that the themes of racial belonging, the sacred, gender, and libidinal economy of the nation-state are pertinent for understanding how these collective remember themselves within the historical past, and how that understanding of history informs the way each group strategically moves within the current political economic moment.

Thus, the way ARAC performs the social memory of black political activism conveyed at The José Martí National Library gives insight into the conditions that structure their movement in Cuban civil society. The National Library, located in the *Plaza de la Revolución* is a fundamentally national space, making it a prime site of consolidation for all of the discourses around nation-building that ARAC members must speak to. The venue and the genre of the performance (a press conference) are critical because they determine “what can conceivably transpire there” and how it is *supposed* to transpire, revealing implicit shared knowledge in as much as people “stick to the script.” The structure and script of the scenario will be sketched through both discursive and embodied analysis based on audio recording, photos, video, the written transcript, interviews with ARAC members, and media representation of the event. First, I present the main actors.

#### **PRESENTING LA ARTICULACIÓN REGIONAL AFRODESCENDIENTE DE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE- CAPÍTULO CUBA (ARAC)**

ARAC–Cuba is a new initiative within Cuban civil society to advance anti-racist politics and foment a critical consciousness around racism, racial discrimination, white cultural hegemony, and black identity in the popular masses. Although “new” as an entity, it is the product of years of organizing and knowledge production by Cuban anti-racist activist-intellectuals who have advocated for serious dialogue about the “*tema racial*” in Cuba since at least the 1990s. The Cuban Ministry of Culture granted ARAC support (or rather, permission to exist) leveraged by the international legitimacy given to

Afrodescendant struggles by the United Nations in 2011. Those involved recognized that they would need a sum bigger than its parts to achieve their mission to enable the debate on racism to influence state institutions and public policy, and mobilize the masses around a “*conciencia racial*” (racial consciousness). Consciousness was a central concern to counter the hegemonic national ideology of racelessness (color-blindness) that silences discussion of ongoing racial discrimination and racism in Cuban society. ARAC’s mission posits a corrective vision that challenges the state’s color-blind stance while staying within the political bounds of the 1959 Revolution.

ARAC’s constituents are predominately academics, professionals, writers, artists, institutional administrators, and community activists who take the “*tema racial*” (race issue) as a central object of inquiry in their work. The majority are Afro-Cubans of relative privilege, educated in the Revolution’s “Golden Epoch” (80’s), a time when blacks were indeed able to experience a level of social mobility through education and social programs. Although each member continued to pursue individual projects, in September of 2012 they joined together with ARAC representatives from six countries<sup>30</sup> to formulate a vision for building a cohesive national network.

ARAC members spend subsequent long meetings in the Fall, lasting three to four hours each, painstakingly brainstorming, strategizing, and making proposals to flesh out how to implement what was discussed. They created several working groups that each designed concrete projects. They knew that they had to make a public announcement to ease anxieties that already circulated in the bureaucratic rumor mill caused by the repeated assembly of black people who were talking about “*el tema racial*” in private. The members felt burdened by what they called the “*miedo al negro politico*”, referring to the fear or

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<sup>30</sup> Colombia, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Ecuador, Brasil

phobia that whites hold of black self-determination. As discussed in the Introduction, this social phenomenon in Cuba traces historically to the period immediately following the Haitian Revolution when Cuba became the lead producer of sugar in the Americas. The white creole plantation class feared that a similar revolt would result in violent upheaval of the social order from which whites systematically benefited resulting in preemptive acts of white terrorism (Helg 1995). The concept of “*miedo al negro*” (negrophobia) continues to hold an explanatory function for the way social fears are legitimized that render black self-organization suspect in general, criminalize the black male body in particular, and justify reactionary acts of social policing (Jarrosay Bosque and Villalon Fernandez 2014). Given the fear of being feared, ARAC had to “come out”, to set the record straight about who they were and the nature of their motives. The fear ARAC members felt was especially palpable after the demotion of one of their members, Zurbano, at his place of employment in December, for writing an article on the topic of race in the New York Times that caused a national scandal<sup>31</sup>. This scandal brought international attention to the anti-racist movement in Cuba and was a decisive moment for ARAC-affiliates. I argue that the uncertainty regarding the extent of the potential Communist Party backlash against other members due to their direct affiliation with ARAC or involvement in the anti-racist movement in general spurred defensive acts of disidentification with Zurbano through public critiques of him and his article. The internal split within the network resulting from this scandal consolidated feelings of belonging and purpose amongst those that on an individual basis publically supported both Zurbano’s arguments and/or collectively supported his civic right to freedom of speech.

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<sup>31</sup> see Afro-Hispanic Review, Volume 33, No. 1, Spring 2014, Special issue on “El Caso Zurbano” for a collection of the principal documents in defense and in support of Zurbano’s NYT article.

To much angst, The Cuban Chapter of the *Articulación Regional Afrodescendiente de America Latina y el Caribe* officially “came out” to the Cuban public at a press conference at the Biblioteca Nacional on the anniversary of the armed revolt of the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) committed on May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1912. The date of the press release commemorated the historical act of black self-determination in the public sphere which spurred the bloodiest reactionary massacre of blacks in the history of the Cuban Republic. I view the press conference as a poetic metaphor for both the recent public attack against their member’s reputation and representative of the enduring stakes of transgressing the hegemonic norms of Cuban political culture.

## II. ARAC’S PRESS CONFERENCE AS PERFORMANCE

We can understand the press conference on May 20<sup>th</sup> as a performance—an act of cultural transmission of repertoires of suitable ideas, gestures, tones, attire—that are passed down through these scenarios of black autonomy. As in every live event, there is the ever present potential of the unforeseen and unanticipated. Threat of “failure” is one of the hallmark indications of performance, denoting a state of what Victor Turner has called liminality (Turner 1986). Thus, the skill of the performer is measured according their capacity to harness the boundless potentiality of the moment and steer one’s actions to fall within the range of prescribed action for the given scenario. Scripts typically have both directions for speech and commands for action in order to regulate the total semiotic design of the event.

The members of ARAC shared an understanding of the stakes of this particular performance; it was their chance to win public legitimacy in what they call a “*sociedad civil emergente*.”<sup>32</sup> They had to remember carefully and deliberately. There was little room

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<sup>32</sup> See Introduction, page 27 for my definition of this term.

for error given the mounting specter of fear surrounding them. The announcement about the press conference was understood as a nonverbal cue for members of ARAC to standby and await their moment to fulfill their specified roles in the scenario. "Standby" indicates that an action is imminent and, in response, those that will perform the action acknowledge readiness to perform the action. The contentious history of black activism in the Republic has provided a ready script for such scenarios of black agency.

Early on in the Republican era blacks were conscious of the fallacy of racial democracy in "*Cuba Libre*", and in 1908 formed the first race-based political party in the western hemisphere (outside of Haiti), *El Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC). The PIC, led by Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet, was primarily composed of former war veterans who felt betrayed by the revolution for which they fought. The 1903 Platt Amendment stipulated U.S. control if Cuba demonstrated that it was at any point unfit to maintain peace under self-rule. Thus, the white ruling class were threatened by the idea of U.S. invasion at any sign of social unrest in a country that was heavily populated by formerly enslaved Africans, free blacks, and their direct descendants. Although winning the war on a platform of racial equality, white Cuban elites sought to establish a white racial state in practice, monopolizing power under whiteness (Pappademos 2011). The PIC and their demand for black political representation posed a threat to the distribution of power on the island favored by the white ruling class where blacks were useful political tool, functioning as a voting block to support white politicians (Pappademos 2011). The black male vote determined electoral outcomes in the new Cuban Republic. Therefore, the official rhetoric of racial equality and black participation in republican democracy was countered with the practice of white racial hegemony, excluding non-whites from parity in access to social and economic resources. The ideology of Cuban nationalism was effectively used to mask the systemic perpetuation of a racial hierarchy. When Estenoz, Ivonnet, and other black

military veterans decided to join together in 1908 as the *Partido Independiente de Color* to demand their equal share of opportunities and participation in the political process, the Cuban senate passed the Morúa Law in 1910 which prevented the formation of political parties based on racial identity. “In essence law makers sought to prevent not black votes but black (and alternative) political mobilization” (Pappademos 2011, 4). In order to protest the new republic’s failure to adhere to Marti's vision of racial fraternity, and to call an end to the Morúa Law, the PIC planned an armed demonstration for May 20, 1912. The press and scholarly studies demonized and ridiculed black people in their coverage, appealing to negrophobia and prevailing notions of black racial inferiority. However, the PIC refused to disband. The Cuban political elite immediately called the movement a “race war”, to be squelched by any and all means necessary, recruiting state-backed racial terror to come in where ideology left off. “*El miedo al negro (politico)*” culminated in the massacre of tens of thousands of Afrodescendants in 1912 across the island. Both party members and black civilians were seen as national threats to the social order. The massacre was organized by the state army but ordinary civilians were encouraged and incited to “stand their ground” and “do their part” for their country, resulting in the cold-blooded murder of blacks, whether proven to have affiliations with the PIC or not (Helg 1995). And so began the bloody massacre of PIC members and black civilians waged by the Cuban Army and white civilian militia while the U.S. government looked on with paternalistic approval.

The murder of Estenoz by the Cuban Army at point blank range in the back of his head on the orders of the presiding president Manuel Gomez marked a turning point in the “*Guerrita de 1912*”. The decline of the uprising was marked by a picture of Estenoz’ naked corpse on an examining table surrounded by Cuban Army officers, a physician’s hands showcasing the large bullet wound in the back of his skull. The brain of the uprising was literally blown out, its gaping hole presented as evidence of the movement’s decline. The

officers standing above the body are staring directly into the camera with a piercing gaze, meeting the eyes of any black person who picked up a newspaper and apprehended the photo. One officer in the center lays his hand on the stomach of the corpse, resting on the clumsily sewn up chest cavity. The officer, a synecdoche for white masculinity affirmed, lays claim to the spoils of the manhunt. Another white officer's hand is clutched seemingly over Evaristo's genitalia, limp.

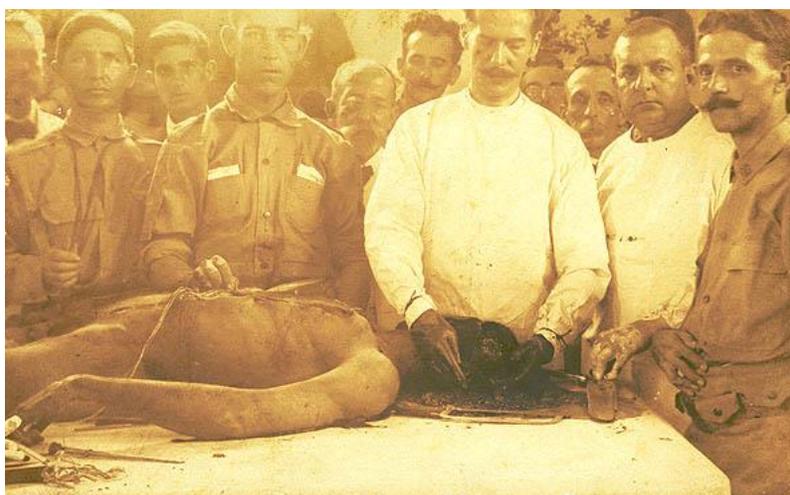


Figure 2: Evaristo Estenoz, autopsy 1912

This bloody image of white military dominance over a dismembered black male body was reproduced and disseminated across all the major Cuban newspapers. Perhaps counter balancing the feeling of white masculine fragility that lingered after the end of the war (Ferrer 1999)<sup>33</sup>. The “spectacle of black death” (Hartman 1997) had the performative function of black emasculation. The symbolic impotence of black male political actors confirmed the impossibility of autonomous black-standpoint political initiatives. Evaristo’s limp member made a gruesome visual mockery of black attempts to earn equal

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<sup>33</sup> see mention of Ada Ferrer’s book, *Insurgent Cuba* (1999) about how the terms of authority were redrawn by the white elite in Cuba to discount black men from public office, p. 20 in Pappademos

citizenship through education and intellect. The image was a clear warning to all other black Cubans who harbored the desire to organize politically independently from the mainstream parties in the future. It also visually legitimated such violent acts against black bodies committed by white civilians who felt threatened by the free status of blacks, emboldening their “*miedo al negro*”. As a newcomer to the “family of nations”, the massacre of black political aspiration through the public spectacle of black emasculation pronounced Cuba’s capacity to self-govern, projecting a clear national consensus about the anti-black terms of public order under “political modernity” (Pappademos 2011).

The elements needed for the most “felicitous” (Austin 1962) performance by ARAC was, in a sense, rehearsed extensively by those black civic actors in the past who they see as their political kin. The trial and error of the PIC inscribed the bounds of viable speech and action in ARAC’s collective memory, attentive to the fragility of black masculinity in the political sphere. The set design, a conference room in the national library populated by the black and white photographic image of the Evaristo Estenoz, provided an immediate mnemonic device for the present actors in the scenario, reminding them of the stakes in sticking to a strategically devised script so as to mitigate “*el miedo al negro (politico)*”. Having the image of Evaristo Estenoz on the table in front of every person present at the event performed a collapse of time on May 20<sup>th</sup> 2013, making the memory of PIC both performatively and physically present. *Ibaye Ibaye Tonu*.

**“The press conference:” ARAC presents itself to the Cuban press**



Figure 3: Conference Room, José Martí National Library, May 20, 2012

There is an air of tension on the second floor of the Biblioteca Nacional on Monday, May 20, 2013. People mill outside in the hallway, pacing...greeting...pacing before trickling into the conference room. Chairs line the edge of a long mahogany rectangular conference table. Pewter green leather bound chairs surround the table. Another circle of the same pewter green leather bound chairs line the perimeter of the room facing in, forming two concentric ovals. The table is set with copies of a commemorative journal published by UNEAC of Santiago de Cuba, celebrating “*100 años del alzamiento de los independientes de color*” published the year before (2012) with a large picture of Evaristo Estenoz dominating the cover. Every chair around the perimeter of the room has the journal placed on the seat, forcing the occupier to pick up the journal in order to be seated. Estenoz’ black and white image is an unavoidable presence, presiding over the event. The commemorative journal situates the moment within a particular history of state-sanctioned racial violence that is conveniently forgotten in the country’s official history, yet looms as a foreboding shadow in ARAC’s social memory of racial terror, haunting their proposal of race-based collective action. By placing the uprising of the PIC, quite literally, on the table, ARAC calls on the Cuban press to remember.



Figure 4: UNEAC Santiago de Cuba, Commemorative Journal

The tragic fate of the PIC is a piercing reminder of the risks involved for black Cubans who aspire to mobilize along racial lines for equality. However, the cover image of the commemorative journal did not portray the day of Evaristo's brutal murder at the moment of the movement's forced decline. Instead the table displayed a replication of dignified studio photo of Evaristo in formal wear: high, stiff white collar, and black tie tucked into a three-piece suit, every button fastened. He stands erect, with his gaze looking beyond the horizon to the left shoulder of the cameraman, eyes looking symbolically outward toward a vision of a better future. His right arm rests artificially on the back of a Victorian style wicker chair, a coveted American import that gained popularity in Cuba's elite social circles at that time. Evaristo places no visible weight on the piece of furniture, a sign of poise and refinement, an embodied metaphor for racial uplift. His left hand is tucked behind his back, in a position of gallantry, fluent in the performance repertoire of idealized white masculinity. In this image, Evaristo embodies the pinnacle of black respectability and political agency. However, for Afro-Cubans who dedicate their work to "*el tema racial*", this image is inherently tragic. It foreshadows this black leader's inevitable reduction to bloody, naked, gaping flesh. Black performance theorist Fred Moten

talks about “the tragic” as an elemental characteristic of the aesthetics of the black radical tradition, “never wholly abstract; it is always in relation to quite particular and material loss” (Moten 2003, 94). Both images overlay in the social memory of Afro-Cuban activists present, creating a unique field of shared perception and melancholy.

I interpret the replication and proliferation of Evaristo’s gallant image that day, on every chair and place setting at the press conference, as a sobering reminder of the stakes involved in any public performance of black self-determination in Cuban civil society. The image performed what Moten calls “second iconicity”, “semioticity or the fullness of the sign” (92) generating other meanings beyond the immediate correlative meaning. This semioticity is uniquely perceptible to black subjects as a result of the social memory of anti-black terror, inscribing particular imprints on the senses. In this scenario of black autonomy, erect Evaristo is a visual reminder of the cues to normative gender performance that were central to the shaping of black activism within the nation-state. I argue that the tragic fullness of that visual sign is perceptible to the members of ARAC in a way that differ from others present. As the epitome of respectable black masculinity in the public sphere, erect Evaristo is yet another mnemonic trigger of the tragic fate the political descendants of the PIC seek to evade this time. Evaristo’s visual presence in the conference room of the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí generates an affective response to the unseen image of his murder 101 years prior. ARAC members embody the affective tension of seeing the unseen in public, invoking pre-performance jitters. The felt awareness of the stakes of performing black respectability carries the patina of the tragic.

At one head of the long mahogany table, five bottles of cold “Ciego Montero”-brand water (“*lo bueno del shopin*”<sup>34</sup>) form a semi-circle in front of five chairs. An empty

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<sup>34</sup> Trans. “The good kind, from the hard currency store”.

glass is paired with each bottle, awaiting fill. In the center of the semi-circle of water, a table top microphone stands in preparation. After assuring that all or most of the invited had arrived, the five representatives who would make the formal presentation finally take their seat in front of the water bottles. Two members of the Political Team: Roberto Zurbano and Lidia Turner; and 2 members of the Executive Team: Aries Morales and Tomas Fernandez Robaina, and the coordinator, Gisela Morales. Journalists from different Cuban periodicals, the president of the Cuban Book Institute and the director of the National Library occupy the remaining chairs at the table. Members of ARAC fill the seats at the outer rim of the room. Their presence was an act of support but also an act of accountability for those that were seated at the head of the table, representing their collective cause.



Figure 5: ARAC Press conference



GISELA:  
*muchas gracias/ thank you* (Speaker B) \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(transitional words to speaker C)

[And so on...]

**Transcript with Liner Notes:**

GISELA

*ARA C está encabezada por una dirección colectiva que voy a nombrar a continuación...*

ARAC is led by collective leadership that I will soon name.

Gisela pronounces first and foremost that ARAC is run collectively. Pronouncing the collective nature of the group is not to be overlooked. The new space opened up for “autogestión” (self-management) has provided discursive leeway for such initiatives outside state mandates. The collective nature of the group is strategic so that no one person can be singled out as the leader. This would make them vulnerable to personal attacks that could discredit the group as a whole.

*Nos acompañan Zuleica Romay. Presidenta del Instituto Cubano del Libro y*

*El Dr. Eduardo Torres – Cuevas. Director de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí....*

*El panel de esta mañana está conformado por:*

*Aries Morales. Lic. En Filología, especialista de la Fundación Nicolás Guillén.*

*Lidia Turner. Presidenta de honor de la Asociación de pedagogos de Cuba. Es un honor para nosotros con ella en el equipo porque es una persona que todos conocemos tiene una enorme experiencia en los temas de la educación en Cuba y se ha dedicado a formar a muchas generaciones de cubanas y cubanos.*

*Roberto Zurbano, escritor, ensayista, miembro de la Casa de las Américas.*

*Tomás Fernández Robaina. Historiador, escritor. Especialista de la Biblioteca Nacional. Una de las personas que más ha trabajado en este sentido el tema racial en Cuba y en particular la historia de PIC.*

*Todas y todos activistas del tema racial en Cuba.*

We are joined by Zuleica Romay. President of the Cuban Book Institute

Dr. Eduardo Torres-Cuevas. Director of the National José Martí Library...

The panel this morning is formed by:

Aries Morales, Bachelor of Philology, specialist of the Nicolás Guillén Foundation

Lidia Turner, Honorary President of the Association of Pedagogues of Cuba. It's an honor to have her with us in the team because she is a person that we all know has great experience in education in Cuba and has taught lots of generations of Cuban men and women.

Roberto Zurbano, writer, essayist, member of the Casa de las Americas.

Tomás Fernández Robaina. Historian, writer. Specialist of the National Library. One of the people who have worked the most in that sense on race in Cuba and in particular the history of the PIC.

Everyone [man and woman] are activists of the race issue in Cuba.

She introduces the speakers, with their name and their affiliation to Cuban institutions. However, the “*aval*” (support) of the Cuban Book Institute was critical for the group's formation. This public support from Zuleica Romay anchors group under the auspices of one of the nation's most prestigious institutions who, is opportunely led by a black woman who has repute within the Cuban Ministry of Culture. The currency of her social capital is lent to the group, offering an important shield of protection against any potential accusations of counter-revolutionary intent.

Also the visible participation of Aries Morales, a white woman who works at the Instituto Nicolás Guillén, also has a strategic semiotic role to play. Having prominent white Cubans visible at all ARAC functions grants the group its legality under revolutionary law. This is reminiscent of the practice during the early republican period, when patriotic military valor garnered merit for political authority (although not reciprocally attributed to the large proportion of blacks who served in the military). Gisela's presentations of these public sector workers offer proof of ARAC's patriotic commitment, demonstrating decades of collective service to revolutionary intellectual institutions. The speakers chosen to represent the group leverage their individual legitimacy to render the group acceptable as a political entity from which to speak as a collective. So what begins as a formality, is a very sophisticated defensive strategy learned from the tragic annihilation of the group they pay tribute to, The PIC, and from which they trace their lineage.

*Quiero invitar a Tomasito Fernández Robaina para nos hable en este día de una evocación de la fecha de este 20 de mayo, y del Alzamiento del Partido de los Independientes de Color.*

I want to invite Tomasito Fernández Robaina to speak to us about this day, the recollection of the date of this 20<sup>th</sup> of May, and the uprising of the Independents of Color Party

#### TOMASITO

Given the nature of Tomasito's introduction, I anticipate that he will literally call forth the history of state-sanctioned racial terror that ARAC collectively remembers on this day. After all, Tomasito is one of the foremost scholars on the PIC in the country. ARAC members speak often of the PIC in their meetings. This is Tomasito's chance to imprint this memory on the members of the contemporary press so that the weight of that memory, which has imprinted the lives of black activists so strongly in Cuba, could be more broadly appreciated more. Tomasito has given fascinating lectures on the topic of the PIC in

academic circles and at his open classes at the library he holds. However, I learn that context is key to understanding the script he now follows.

In the retelling of history in this scenario, the Director of the National Library (Tomasito's boss) and the mainstream Cuban press bear witness. Tomasito engages in selective transmission. Repertoires of knowledge are publically remembered strategically.

*Teniendo frente mí tener delante al gran historiador Eduardo Torres- Cuevas, obviamente tengo que ponerme nervioso porque llamándome historiador... yo soy simplemente un hombre de pueblo, un aprendiz, al que la revolución ha llevado enorme interés.*

Having the great historian, Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, in front of me, obviously I have to be nervous because calling myself historian...I am simply a man of the people, an apprentice, that the revolution has brought enormous interest.

Tomasito admits off the bat that he is nervous to have a great person in front of him, referring to his boss. He makes a distinction between his boss and himself, a "humble man of the people", "an apprentice" (by comparison). Then he acknowledges that the popular reference for May 20<sup>th</sup> is Cuba's Day of Independence from Spain, "but for us who are in the fight against racism [May 20<sup>th</sup>] is also the day of protest of the Morúa law". I understand his proclamation of deference not as a flippant affectation, but as a calculated discursive move to establish the nobility of his character in this scenario. Describing black social actors as "humble and tranquil" have historically been the necessary validation to assure white political leaders that they posed no threat. Tomasito is an internationally-recognized scholar of Afro-Cuban history, having written numerous books on the topic of the PIC, but his self-identification as an apprentice to the National Library's director, and a "humble man of the people", was a necessary preface to set the tone of his oration to follow about the importance of memory of the PIC in the present moment. This self-minimizing self-identification was a performative technique to counterbalance the social audacity of bringing the first black political party in the Americas, quite literally, to the table.

*Pienso que el tema de los independientes de color fue durante mucho tiempo uno de los temas menos conocidos, más ocultos de la historia de Cuba, gracias a Serafín Portuondo fue que se abrió de una forma muy objetiva, de entrar a conocer quiénes eran los independientes de Color aunque anteriormente habían existido otros libros que habían abordado el tema.*

*Y por lo tanto pienso que para mí la significación de este 20 de mayo es que estamos inaugurando la organización de ARAC justamente en esta fecha tan significativa para todos los que luchamos por el rescate de nuestra historia. Pienso que no voy a hablar de los independientes de Color, sino nada más señalar, vincular que este 20 de mayo decidido realizar esta conferencia de prensa porque pienso que hemos estado en un momento que quizás no lo apreciemos porque estamos muy cerca de los hechos pero pienso que estamos en una fecha muy significativa y es un hecho muy importante...*

I think that the subject of the Independents of Color was for much time, one of the least known, most hidden in the history of Cuba. Thanks to Serafín Portuondo it was opened up in a more objective way, and the Independents of Color came into the be known although before then they existed in other books that took on the subject.

Thus, I think that for me the meaning of this 20<sup>th</sup> of May is that we are inaugurating the organization of ARAC exactly on this date that is so meaningful to all who fight for the recovery of our history. I think that I won't talk about the Independents of Color, rather I will just point out, link that this 20<sup>th</sup> of may we decided to do this press conference because I think that we have been in a state, a moment, that maybe we don't appreciate because we are so close to the acts but I think that we are [doing this] on a very meaningful date it's a very important act...

In this speech, he exercises selective memory, based on calculations he is making in the moment about how much he can veer from the rehearsed script. Silencing the P of PIC, as in referring to the Partido Independiente de Color as simply “Los Independientes de Color” means that the particular *political* nature of their formation remains an absented presence. The fact that they were an actual political party is not reflected in the headline on the commemorative journal [“100 years since the uprising of the Independents of Color] nor in his speech about the significance of the group that the journal features. He doesn't speak to the conditions that caused the Political Party to form, the nature of their struggle, or the

way they were disbanded. “... *no voy a hablar de los independientes de color*”. This prevents him from making any explicit parallels to the present day conditions that scheduling the press conference on that day was supposed to highlight. He mentions that the 20<sup>th</sup> of May has significance, a significance hidden from an “us”. The continued performance of passivity and elision extends to his sentence structure: omitting exactly who or what is doing the hiding from “us”, and what meaning that history holds that would be necessary to invoke today. The nature of the anniversary is left open to interpretation. The commemoration is both called upon and cloaked by omission. Tomasito mentions the “objectivity” of an author who wrote a book about the PIC, pointing the audience toward a historiography that presumably aligns with his own. But the “*historia oculta*” is never told. On the one hand, Tomas is on a mission to “recover our history”, but that recovery is only partially executed by “*no [...]hablar de los independientes de color*”. I interpret Tomasito’s speech, the first presentation of the group, as testing the range of discursive leeway allowed in the scenario. He opts to state that there is a connection between May 20<sup>th</sup> 1912 and that present day, yet without actually naming what the connection is. One must presumably read the book he mentions and *sacar tus propios conclusiones* (come to your own conclusions). The photograph and the heading (“uprising”) on the commemorative journal must do the work to fill in the gaps that do not appear on the audio transcript of the press conference.

One can see this as an incomplete mimesis of a restoration or “recovery of history”. Tomasito alludes to the notion of “historical recovery” but does not do on to perform the recovery himself. Instead, the audience is called upon to do the work to complete the semiotic loop for themselves. What results is a discursively coded retelling of a historical memory that only has full semiotic coherence for the community who already remembers,

to which he belongs. The “us” of ARAC, those who already know the history he alludes to in the first place, are called upon to publically remember together in private.

I argue that his coded or incomplete speech is a boundary making act, a performance of group identity that defines “us”. In a dialectical relationship with the cover image on the commemorative journal, Tomasito delineates a border between the people present at the press conference, demarcating between those that see the gaping hole in Evaristo’s head naked on the autopsy table and those who just see the gallant black man in a suit in front of them. The members of ARAC publically remember the history of racial terror collectively, yet they effectively remember under the safety cloak of un-uttered memory. Thus, the hidden history of the massacre of May 20<sup>th</sup> never appears on the official record. It remains the unheard music in the background of Cuba’s history, still. For those who already remember, they are motioned to collectively remember again, this time in the venue of the National Library dedicated to José Martí. Martí; the adored apostle of Cuban nationalism, and the author and architect of the very philosophy of raceless equality under nationalism that the PIC dared to critique in their time as empty rhetoric. In some sense, the [...]IC was born in response to the way Martiano thought silenced any acknowledgment of race-based claims to injustice in the new republic, prompting them to form their own party to advocate on their behalf. One-hundred and one years later, the [...]IC is both present and absent, uttered and silenced, remembered by some and still forgotten by many.

Tomasito seems to be flustered by the controversial nature of the memory of racial terror and its import on the “us” present. He later changes his tone from self-effacing to assertive and then swiftly back to adulatory, giving off jittery indecisiveness about the best way to position himself the moment. Moving away from the messiness of trying to narrate the meaning of the May 20<sup>th</sup> 1912 in a non-threatening way to white Cuban sensibility, he chastises Cuba for not advancing on racism, and then quickly shifts to lauding today’s press

conference as proof that Cuba *is* advancing. His assertion that Cuba is advancing with regard to the battle against racism is what J.L. Austin calls a “speech act” (Austin 1962). He is attempting to execute words that “do things”, making social advancement manifest with a performative utterance<sup>36</sup>. But the other performance elements—self-minimization, evasive speech, abrupt shifts in tone, etc.— reveal that the success of this performance is contingent and the present conditions are precarious. The felicitousness (the ability to bring about the action declared) of the utterance is contingent upon the audience’s reception of the words, the signs they assign to Tomasito’s signifiers. Cuba’s advancement with regard to allowing a public platform for anti-racist organizing will depend greatly on the reception of the performance by the Cuban press today.

#### GISELA

*Muchas gracias, Tomasito, justamente en este 20 de mayo en el que estamos recordando este hecho tan poco conocido de la historia de Cuba, en esta presentación de ARAC le voy a dar la palabra a Roberto Zurbano, porque ARAC es también heredero de estas luchas.*

Many thanks, Tomasito, precisely on this 20th of May we are remembering this so little known act in the history of Cuba, on this presentation of ARAC. I will give the word to Roberto Zurbano, because ARAC is also an inheritor of these struggles.

#### ZURBANO

Roberto Zurbano’s words bring the discussion from the national to the diasporic, signaling ARAC’s connection to precursors both inside and outside of the geographic

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<sup>36</sup> J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things With Words* (1962) indicates that speech acts can be regarded as “felicitous” or “infelicitous”, according to certain governing social rules. In order to be regarded as felicitous, the social convention must exist and be accepted. Meaning, it must abide by a shared norm. The success of the performative utterance is evidenced in the way people act accordingly. If they are consistent with the assertion, then the utterance was “true”. In sum, the actions after the speech act must be consistent with the claim to be performative.

bounds of the nation-state. In doing so, he signals precedent for the political acceptance of groups like theirs within other Latin American leftist nations.

*ARAC es un espacio de integración en Cuba. Es un espacio que articula todos los esfuerzos de personas, de grupos, de instituciones. ARAC es un espacio de la sociedad civil cubana para luchar contra el racismo en un nuevo contexto no solamente económico, sino social, económico, ideológico que se vive hoy en Cuba.*

*Los antecedentes regionales y continentales de ARAC tienen que ver con muchas reuniones importantes que se han hecho en Venezuela, en Caracas, en Cuba también en el centro Juan Marinello hace ya dos años, en Ecuador, en Otavalo, allí hubo participación cubana también por parte de un vicepresidente del Consejo de Estado que fue en compañero Esteban Lazo y de un documento muy importante de San Salvador de Bahía. Ahí participaron varios compañeros cubanos y también Abel Prieto presidió este grupo, estuvieron Zuleica Romay, Heriberto Feraudy, Esteban Morales, yo estuve también y allí apareció una conversación muy interesante con varios líderes de los movimientos negros en América Latina. Porque el movimiento negro en América Latina y en algunos países del Caribe se han convertido en movimientos sociales de una gran connotación, de una gran repercusión popular y que han sido reconocidos en sus propios países.*

ARAC is a space of inclusion in Cuba. It is a space that connects all of the forces of people, groups, and institutions. ARAC is a space in Cuban civil society to fight against racism in a new context, not only economic, but social, economic, ideological that one lives in today in Cuba.

The regional and continental precedents of ARAC have to do with lots of important meetings that were had in Venezuela, Caracas, in Cuba also at the Juan Marinello Center two years ago, in Ecuador, in Otavalo. There, there was also Cuban participation on the part of the Vice-president of the State Board in Esteban Lazo and a very important document in San Salvador de Bahia. There, several Cuban comrades participated and also Abel Prieto presided over the group. Zuleica Romay, Heriberto Feraudy, and Esteban Morales were there, I was there too, and there, a very interesting conversation emerged with various leaders of the black movements in Latin America. Because the black movement in Latin America and in some countries of the Caribbean have turned into social movements of great connotation, with a great popular impact and that have been recognized by their own countries.

Zurbano inserts a diasporic frame into the discussion, honoring regional ancestors as kin. He names major political allies and trade partners upon which Cuba's economy depends: Venezuela (Cuba's main ally and trade partner); Ecuador (another leftist run government); Brazil (major trade partner), linking what ARAC is doing in Cuba to what is being done in the Latin American nations Cuba favors. Name dropping important Cuban political figures who were in attendance—Esteban Lazo, Abel Prieto, etc— discursively creates a sense of solidarity between these important men and ARAC, despite the fact that in person they haven't played any direct role in the formation of the group. Narrated in this way, the formation of ARAC can be better received as a sanctioned local response to the direct demand from people in the region for Cuba to become active in the regional-wide black social movement. Zurbano's narration displaces the centrality of the individual people physically in attendance that day at the National Library. This plays a similar rhetorical function as Gisela's opening words, emphasizing collective self-management and decentering individual leadership outside of the high-profile Cuban figures he highlights.

Perhaps most importantly, Zurbano deliberately states that black movements have been recognized and given political legitimacy in those countries. Without sharing any background about the nature of the local struggles over time, we are led to believe that the process of recognition and legitimacy has been smooth, complete, and uniformly welcomed by the states in question. Similar to Tomasito, Zurbano utters a "a speech act" in hopes of forging a precedent for Cuba to receive ARAC's work in a similar way as their economic and political allies have received kin civic formations.

Furthermore, Zurbano puts emphasis on inclusive phrases like "espacio de integración", "membresía rica abierta", "consensus", "diversidad". These terms implicitly address any suspicion that ARAC is a "black-only" group. It is an anti-racist group without a race-based membership that has already been in harmonic existence for some time. The

term “espacio” (space) is key here. Rather than see themselves as an “organization” in the legal sense of the word, ARAC declares itself a “space” for people who share anti-racist principles to collaborate and support each other in exercising their civil right to “perfeccionar” (perfect) the Revolutionary project. In ARAC they have been adamant about this particular self-categorization. In fact, they are not officially registered under the Law of Association. When I asked about the motive behind that decision in focus groups and individual interviews, several kinds of explanations emerged. Some said that the word “space” was less threatening to white outsiders: “*Porque se van a decir, ‘están formando una organización de negros!’*, y después, ya tú sabes, se ponen nerviosos. (Because they will say, ‘they are forming a black organization!’, and then, you already know, they get nervous).” Whereas others say that remaining amorphous is politically strategic, making them less vulnerable to sabotage from outside forces. Their quasi-unofficial nature allows them to circumvent—among other things—the law that forbids race-based associations, put in place in order to dismantle the racial segregation prior to 1959. Still others attest that creating a space is the result of a conscious commitment to not abide by the normative way that state has set out for organizing its citizens in civil society. Namely, they would have to abide by government standards of practice (this involves: government approval of its agenda and internal structure, government say over how it should function, having to report regularly to the state on the goings-on of the group, etc). In other words, remaining unofficial grants ARAC its autonomy. It is a conscious experimentation with nonconformity to the status quo, mediated by its adherence to a particular script for civil engagement in the public sphere.

*Se trata de integrarnos blancos, negros, jóvenes, viejos, mujeres, hombres, capitalinos, gente de provincias, cubanos, incluso, no cubanos en un espacio de integración, de discusión de debate de reivindicación, de respeto, de reconocimiento de las fuerzas revolucionarias cubanas, de las fuerzas anti*

*conservadoras, anti racistas que se están desatando en Cuba con todos estos cambios.*

*Hay peligros, ya sabemos que el resurgimiento del racismo en Cuba es una realidad y **que tenemos el contexto adecuado como para hacer la crítica, ejercer la crítica y buscar nuevas medidas.**(emphasis mine)*

It has to do with integrating whites, blacks, young people, old people, women, men, people from the capital, people from the provinces, Cubans, and even non-Cubans, in a space of inclusion, of discussion and debate, of reclamation, of respect, of acknowledgement of the revolutionary Cuban forces, of the anti[revolutionary] conservatory forces, the antiracist [forces] that are starting to come undone in Cuba with all of the changes.

There are dangers, we already know the resurgence of racism in Cuba is a reality, and **we have the adequate context to make critiques, exert critiques** and look for new measures [emphasis mine]

“*Tenemos el contexto adecuado para hacer la critica* (We have the adequate context to make critiques)” is a bold speech act by Zurbano, who a few months prior was punished for speaking critically of Cuba in the NYTimes<sup>37</sup>. The case he is making for ARAC’s legitimacy as a civic entity is also tied to his own.

#### GISELA

When Gisela performs the task of transitioning from Zurbano to the next speaker, she widens the scope of solidarity even larger, to a global scale by bringing in the United Nation’s 2001 Durban World Conference Against Racism and Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. She takes advantage of the occasion to publicly name ARAC as a direct “heir” to the UN event that “*nuestro Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro*

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<sup>37</sup> For those that follow the scholarship on racism in Cuba, his article was in line with the intellectual current of other anti-racist activist, but the location of his publication and the un-authorized modified title made the article polemic. See Afro-Hispanic Review Journal, Volume 33, No.1 (Spring 2014) Special Issue on “El Caso Zurbano” for a compilation of writings about the scandal.

(our Commander in Chief Fidel Castro)” attended. This performatively locates the group within the bounds of revolutionary respectability while also reinforcing their inalienable right espouse to extra-national affiliation.

*Muchas gracias a Zurbano ...yo quisiera señalar también que desde el punto de vista metodológico el paradigma que significó la Conferencia mundial contra el racismo en Durban de la cual también ARAC es heredera. En el sentido de que convocó a todos los países del mundo, Cuba tuvo el honor de participar con una delegación que fue presidida por nuestro Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro y Cuba tiene en ese sentido un lugar importante en la lucha contra el racismo.*

Many thanks Zurbano... I would like to also signal that from a methodological perspective, the paradigmatic world conference against racism in Durban, which ARAC is also an heir. In the sense that [the conference] convened all of the countries of the world, Cuba had the honor of participating with a delegation that was presided over by our Commander in Chief Fidel Castro and Cuba has in this sense an important place in the fight against racism.

As “heir” of that 2001 event South Africa ARAC casts a wider net of belonging, extending beyond the place and time of the nation. As a worldwide conference dedicated to addressing racism, Durban gives further precedent of a successful public discussion of institutional racism that was politically validated by the presence of Revolutionary Cuba’s moral compass, “*Nuestro Comandante* (Our Commander)”, Fidel Castro. Gisela’s narrative lends ARAC to be understood as a direct mandate by “*Nuestro Comandante*” himself to the Cuban people, made unbeknownst to the Cuban general public. The rhetorical kinship map drawn for the press is temporal, geographic, and ideological. Each brief five-minute presentation draws the lines of belonging and acceptance larger and longer to faraway places that are made near and respectable. After making such a big geographic leap to South Africa, Gisela brings the conversation back to the national scale, assuring the public that they don’t intend to copy and paste foreign solutions to racism, preempting a common critique made of anti-racist activists in Cuba, particularly those that are in intellectual dialogue with U.S. black liberation movements.

*Es importante señalar que ARAC se inserta en ese mecanismo en el que estamos intentando incentivar políticas que sean propias y metodologías propias para trabajar el tema de la racialidad, desde la construcción colectiva, desde todos los sectores sociales, con todas y todos.*

It is important to signal that ARAC is inserting into a mechanism that tries to incentivize our own policies and our own methodologies to work the issue of racialism, constructively, in all of the social sectors and with everyone [man and woman].

### ARIES

Aries, the only white person on the panel, is designated to talk about membership. When one takes into account that historically in Cuba black political agency had to be legitimated by whites (Pappademos 2011, 108), one can appreciate Aries' critical role and iconic function in the performance that day. As a white woman she represents ideal femininity, for whose protection is of national concern within colonial heteropatriarchal constructions of citizen-subjecthood. Her iconic purity and innocence, socially assigned to her through colonial logics, is leveraged for ARAC's cause appealing to the white citizens in the audience.

In alignment with her iconic function, Aries' discourse recuperates the discussion of ARAC's affiliation back to national frame: "Cuba país". She hails citizenship as the uniting axis of identification between all "*cubanas y cubanos*". It is noteworthy that she never explicitly names white Cubans as a social category. At every opportunity she leaves white racial identity unmarked, thereby sheltering uncomfortable feelings of white guilt from the discussion of race and racism. One can speculate that perhaps the call for White-Cuban participation in the movement in particular was implied by the fact that *she* was saying "*cubanos y cubanas*". Interestingly, the unmarked nature of whiteness and the protection of white feelings of guilt from complicity contrasts with the repetitive marking of gender in her speech. She consciously refuses to employ the masculine gender to stand

in for all Cuban people, defying Spanish linguistic conventions which subsumes the feminine within the masculine body-politic. Saying both gender modifiers [“*cubanas y cubanos*”], each time she references the Cuban people, is a feminist rhetorical device that is not lost on Spanish-speaking listeners. The conscious alignment of her feminist politics with her spoken rhetoric makes the disjuncture of those two elements more evident with regards to her presumed “*conciencia racial*”. Even as a presumably dedicated white anti-racist activist-intellectual, drawing direct attention toward racial difference amongst citizenry (and the white racial sector of the population in particular) is performatively beyond cognition. The limits of consciousness, or its expression in speech, maps the counters of sanctioned discursive/political space conceivable for gender equality in comparison to the narrowness of discursive/political space for racial equality in Cuba. Aries’ free acknowledgement of gender difference over whiteness is demonstrated further by her mention of “*la mujer y el hombre negro en Cuba*” in relation to the colonial period. However, whiteness or white Cuban identity as a social category, in the colonial period or in the present, are never acknowledged.

Aries’ contribution reinscribes the national teleological narrative of *mestizo* citizen-subject formation that protects whiteness and white privilege from scrutiny by occluding its existence, thereby occluding the continued centrality of its unmarking to the reproduction of racism under Cuban *mestizaje*. Whiteness is the absented presence in the fight against racism, whose specific structural relationship to reproducing systemic racism remains unnamed. National unity, in as much as it protects whiteness, proves paramount. Aries models a non-threatening way for white Cubans to insert themselves into movement for the elimination of racial discrimination because by following this national ideological paradigm. The fight against racial discrimination is conceived as project for the good of all men and women on equal terms as Cuban citizens. Aries’ iconic presence as a White-Cuban

legitimizes ARAC's cause as one invested in the advancement of not blacks, but the Cuban nation: "*Cuba país*".

#### GISELA

*Muchas gracias Aries. En este proceso de alianzas y de trabajo nacional es importante destacar el rol de la asamblea que es ARAC a la pretendemos convocar a todos los cubanos y cubanas.*

*Es un placer para mí es un enorme placer en esta mañana presentar a la profesora Lidia Turner que ha participado en la formación de muchas personas en Cuba y que es como una madre para todos nosotros.*

Many thanks Aries. In this process of alliances and of national work, it is important to emphasize the role of the assembly, where ARAC tries to convene all Cubans [men and women].

It's a pleasure for me, an enormous pleasure this morning to present professor Lidia Turner who has participated in the training of many people in Cuba and who is like a mother to all of us.

Gisela transitions to introduce Lidia Tuner as "the mother to all of us", hailing a particular relationship to the figure of the black maternal. This speech act recruits an affective register of maternal tenderness with which to receive her words. This appeals to colonial notions of the black *nodriza* (wet-nurse) who nourished Cuba's national heroes and in particular the iconic figure of Mariana Grajales (black mother of General Antonio Maceo), known as "*la madre de la patria* (the mother of the fatherland)" in Cuba. Gisela's appeal to the retroactive assignment of esteemed value given to black women for their ability to mother the great men of the nation, locates the next speaker within white heteropatriarchal terms of black feminine respectability shaped by Cuba's colonial history.

#### LIDIA

*...he estado recordando un periódico del año 1959 que salió en uno de los titulares, decía algo así: la eliminación de la discriminación racial es el problema más difícil y complejo que esta revolución tendrá que afrontar, no*

*decía de los más, sino el más, creo que tenía razón porque es un problema que tiene sus raíces donde todos conocemos y porque es un problema que persiste en muchas sociedades.*

*Porqué hablo de esto, me parece que es importante, y siempre que hacemos estos análisis tenemos que valorar conceptos que son indispensables como es racismo, como es discriminación y como es prejuicio, para ponernos todos a jugar en aras de resolver...*

...I've been remembering a newspaper from the year 1959, in one of its headlines, it said something like: the elimination of racial discrimination is the most difficult and complex problem of this revolution will have to face. It did not say one of the most, rather the most. I think it was right because it's a problem that has its roots in where we all know and because it is a problem that persists in many societies.

Why it said so, I believe is important and whenever we do this analysis we have to value concepts that are indispensable like racism, discrimination, and prejudice, to begin to play in the ball park of resolving them.

Lidia Turner makes reference to a newspaper article in 1959 which said that racism was the most not one of the most but “the most difficult and complex problems to solve... because it has its roots in what we all know”. Again, the strategy of hailing a presumed shared understanding of the past allows the speaker to evade explicit articulation of that which is taboo (just like Tomasito in reference to the PIC). Here, the taboo subject is the institutional memory of racial slavery which enables the endurance of racial hierarchy in the present favoring whiteness. However, the presumption of a consensus around an understanding of that history and its relationship to the present goes directly against ARAC's leading argument (made by Tomasito) about the persistence of racial bias in the way Cuban history is officially taught. In fact, the central claim that impels ARAC's formation is that “we” (the Cuban people) do *not* all know, nor are we all equally invested in knowing, how to dismantle white hegemony in Cuba. This repetitive appeal to an already given uniform understanding of the past results in open interpretation by the audience, permitting the continued unmarking of the white complicity in the reproduction of racism.

I argue that this occurs because performances of black autonomy that perform for a state audience is haunted by the memory of racial terror endorsed by the very state apparatus they address. ARAC members actively remember the direct outcomes of their political ancestors' attempts to challenge the social order in their present attempts to do the same. The protection of white guilt is also a defense mechanism against the backlash of white fear/negrophobia/"miedo al negro".

Lidia, offers definition of the terms racism, racial discrimination, and prejudice. The fact that the definition of these terms would come as the press conferences comes to a close, well after their extensive use by the other members seems like a counterintuitive order of operations. However, the chosen order of the presentations reveal that even before ARAC can discuss what they mean by racism, they see it necessary to first establish their legitimate grounds to broach the topic. Therefore, the order of the topics in their script also hold meaning, underscoring the orienting force of white-made-national fears around legitimacy in this performance of black autonomy.

Lidia defines racism as an ideology, discrimination as actions, and prejudice as subjective/individual thoughts. She explains that the roots of prejudice are personal, so proper education is vital to reform subjective thoughts that may lead to discriminatory acts. The assumption is that racist thoughts can be replaced or unlearned through proper education. Lidia, formally trained as a pedagogue, presents the fight against racism within a familiar Cuban model of an education campaign, educating people out of thoughts that lead to acts of discrimination. Lidia positions ARAC as in dialogue with Cuban institutions so that they may better dispense of information that counteracts racial prejudice. They propose to work closely with the mass media and schools given that they are the country's primary engines for teaching/providing ideas/thoughts to the people. The home is also identified as a key site of education where ideas from the mass media and schools are

reinforced. More could be said about the pedagogical philosophy entailed in this re-education campaign, however for now it suffices to say that this approach appeals to the very top-down “banking method” (Freire 1970) of learning that ARAC elsewhere critiques.

Lidia shares that ARAC’s strategy will be to provide these state institutions with new thoughts about the contributions of Africa and the Caribbean specifically, thereby expanding people’s awareness. However, Europe and the Cuban state’s contributions to the reproduction of white hegemony is not voiced as necessary sites for re-education. Instead, what is proposed is the addition of supplementary information to fill the gaps of an incomplete history; incomplete “because it has its roots in what we all know”. Furthermore, Lidia does not specify what the nature of the contributions shared about Africa and the Caribbean will be. Again, her careful strategy of rhetorical unmarking and marking is consistent with the rest of the ARAC cast. Thus Lidia, “*la madre de todos*”, assures her children that racism can be fought over time through dialogue with key institutions, leading them to carry out supplementary reforms that will naturally lead to personal self-correction of discriminatory thoughts and actions.

By framing the root cause of racism as a problem of naïve ignorance on the part of the public, ARAC leaves unchallenged the issue of power and the possessive investment in unmarked race privilege. Instead the message is that if only the “*cubanas y Cubanos* (Cuban men and women)” knew more about the contributions of all Cubans and of all people in the world, anti-black prejudices would disappear, discrimination would cease to happen, and racism would dissolve. In essence, what they present to the Cuban press differs greatly from conversations had in their meetings amongst black ARAC members about generating critical anti-racist consciousness for all Cubans, and targeting blacks specifically to cultivate self-esteem and a sense of pride in black group identification. It also contradicts pointed observations made by the group about the ineffectiveness of the

state's approach to social change through government mandates. They describe the results of the state's anti-discrimination efforts as disingenuous and superficial. However, the difference between the theory of change they critique and their theory of change as proposed to the press is arguably negligible. ARAC performs strategic conformist modifications to their political vision within the terms of what they know to be political viable to a state audience, leveraging recognizable colonial tropes, leaving whiteness unmarked, protecting white emotions, and appealing to nationalist ideology.

#### GISELA

*Muchas gracias a la profesora Lidia....*

Many thanks to professor Lidia...

As a performance, the press conference thus far is going smoothly and according to script. ARAC has presumably gained the legitimacy it required to put forth a reformist agenda to challenge racism in Cuba. Cuban national identity is upheld as the body-politic of import. Black political agency is rendered unthreatening and thus safe from white backlash. Taboo topics are avoided or merely alluded to without being defined. Speeches are concise and delivered with civil composure. ARAC members are seated upright in their pewter green chairs at the long mahogany table. Water remains in their glasses, although now with a pool of sweat collected around the base. They now close with concrete action items for the press to promote in their circulation.

*La acción es un elemento fundamental de nuestro trabajo, para eso quiero invitar a Tomás Fernández Robaina para que nos hable de algunas acciones que vamos a promover.*

Action is a fundamental element of our work. For that I want to invite Tomas Fernandez Robaina in order to talk about some actions that we will promote.

## TOMASITO

Tomas is called to promote the series of public events they have programmed for the rest of the year, providing ways for people to participate and join the movement. Upon hearing his name announced, Tomas appears flustered. He seems less careful this time, lacking the same awareness of his corporal body in space. As he takes the microphone, he clumsily knocks it into the glass in front of him. The clink of the glass against the metal microphone echoes in the silent hall, disrupting the sonic landscape. Tomas proceeds to apparently go off-script. Breath by breath, the conventions established by the collective performance thus far are gradually broken one by one. The poised press conference ruptures.

*A mí me parece que es muy importante el accionar, y en este sentido ARAC se propone básicamente llevar una serie de acciones a nivel académico, pero básicamente a nivel comunitario porque necesitamos que la masa que está más alejada de los medios académicos de este conocimientos conozca la herencia de **nuestros ancestros**, conozca todas las realidades que la historiografía burguesa históricamente ha ocultado.*

It seems to me that action is very important, and in that sense ARAC is proposing to basically lead a series of actions at the academic level, but basically at the community level, because we need the masses, those that are most distant from academic mediums in these understandings to know the legacy of **our ancestors**, to know the realities of what the bourgeois historiography has historically hidden.

The terms of “we” suddenly shift. Tomas names “*our* ancestors” (his emphasis) and the uneducated masses. The “we” of “*cubanos y cubanas* (Cuban men and women)” breaks down, signaling those of African ancestry in particular as having a distinct stake in the movement’s re-education process. His gesticulations knock the almost empty glass of water in front of him causing it to tip over, spilling the rest of its contents. He quickly moves the commemorative journal out of harm’s way and continues his thought. However,

the clinks and clanks of the falling glass and its resetting adds to Tomasito's already flustered state. The other panelists are absolutely motionless, perhaps compensating for the sudden flurry of erratic movement coming from their *compañero*. Their stillness is contrasted by the expanding pool of water on the still mahogany surface. A white napkin is placed in the middle of pool, immediately absorbed. Tomas begins an unscripted, yet well-rehearsed, slow build to a tirade. Tomas enacts a sophisticated choreographic routine of dramaturgic intensity mastered through years of participating in different academic venues where he counters the hegemonic discourse, by moving against the grain<sup>38</sup>.

Tomasito's repetitive use of a racialized "we" signals a black body politic, and one of critical scale. He calls the official history of Cuba under the Revolution "bourgeois" and implies that a different historical narrative written from a different race-class position is not only hidden from the general public (as Lidia implies), but intentionally hidden from "us", the black poor. By marking the perpetual link between race and class, he implicates those who are outside of the "us", those in state power, as protecting a white bourgeois class-interest. [Clink!] The room is tense. Instead of continuing the narrative Lidia laid out (of dialogue with academic institutions to deposit knowledge into everyone equally) he asserts that ARAC's re-education events will be grounded in the community, vitalizing popular knowledge. [Clink! Clink!] Tomasito's glass cannot seem to evade his trembling hands. His apparent lack of kinespheric awareness evokes an improvisational quality to his

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<sup>38</sup> The National Library has been one such venue where Tomasito has repeatedly subverted the hegemonic purpose of national institutions. He has taught public community classes on black history at the National Library for years. These classes have nurtured the political consciousness of many black artists and activists, particularly in the Cuban hip-hop scene. Participants remark on the issues, treatment, and problems that resulted from having people from "the streets" enter the library for Tomasito's classes. The famous Cuban rap duo Obsesión attributes the critical historical lens they rap about in their song, "Calle G" (López Cabrera & Rodríguez Mola, 2011) to Tomasito's classes at the National Library. The song discusses the statue erected to former Cuban President Jose Miguel Gomez, who presided over the massacre of May 20<sup>th</sup> 1912. The song calls for the statue's removal to shed light on the ways in which racism is perpetuated in contemporary Cuba with the complicity of those in power.

delivery; off the cuff. In contemporary Cuba, grassroots efforts are deemed vulnerable to counterrevolutionary misguidance. Non-commerce oriented independent social initiatives of this nature are thus taboo and require state approval. Tomas trembles with reason.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, Tomas continues to make discursive and embodied modifications to the script ascribed to by ARAC up until that point, amplifying the divergence in physical and sonic scale.

*...pero estos cursos libres, estos cursos de postgrado tienen que tener realmente un enfoque nuevo porque **hasta ahora todo lo que nos enseñan en la escuela, es una educación eurocéntrica.** Entonces no hacemos NADA si empezamos a dar cursos, o empezamos a hablar de educación y seguimos con los mismos **cánones eurocéntricos** que son los que han sembrado la la la la semilla del racismo... y entre estas nuevas cosas que **tenemos que hacer es hacer una nueva relectura de la historia de Cuba.***

...but these free courses, these graduate courses really have to have a new approach because **until now all that they teach us in school is a Eurocentric education.** So we aren't doing ANYTHING if we start to give courses, or begin to talk about education and then continue with the same **Eurocentric canons** that are the ones that planted the the the the seed of racism... and between the new things that **we have to do is a new re-reading of the history of Cuba.**

The volume of his voice resounds louder in the conference room without bringing his mouth closer to the microphone. He is yelling in the National Library, a space where (near) silent decorum is enforced. “...no hacemos NADA (we aren't doing ANYTHING)”...the subtle shift in vocal timbre and the stuttered cadence of his words add to the unsettling sonic atmosphere initiated by the clinking glass. White cultural hegemony is explicitly the target of Tomasito's diatribe, and he names it as a continued trait of those in power, marking continuity between the stronghold of white cultural hegemony on Cuban society then and now [CLANK!]. Contrary to Lidia's speech, which implied that a lack of

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<sup>39</sup> The following year, Tomas was publically accused by a high ranking state official of being a dissident for suggesting a similar non-state initiated community-based action at an event in honor of the International Day Against Racial Discrimination at the UN Section in Havana. An attack on an intellectual's revolutionary integrity is a particular dangerous one and can lead to professional repercussions.

information about the contributions of Africa and people of African descent was at fault, Tomasito explicitly names the underlying white political lens with which history is told.

Perhaps sensing that his five-minute time slot is expiring, he goes back to the script, marked by a return to composed speech. In a talking (rather than yelling) tone, he announces several events that people can attend and the slew of Cuban historical institutions that have already given their support, regaining an agreeable rather than confrontational position toward Cuban education institutions... The performance begins to resume its familiar, steady cadence.

*...y entre estas nuevas cosas que tenemos que hacer es hacer una nueva relectura de la historia de Cuba. Es cierto que todos luchamos y esa es la meta de todos nosotros. Que a nadie le quepa la duda que todos los que luchamos somos cubanos, pero **la historia evidencia que hay cubanos negros, cubanos blancos y cubanos mulatos** y que aunque históricamente desde la constitución de 1901 decía que todos éramos iguales ante las leyes, todo el mundo sabe que la constitución nunca evidenció eso en la realidad.*

*Todo el mundo dice pero no pero tenemos que enfocarlo como cubanos: **el movimiento negro de Cuba** ha siempre luchado por la cubanidad, no por una república negra. Una de las cosas que yo siempre insisto sobre el PIC...*

...and among these new things that we have to do is do a new re-reading of the history of Cuba. It is true that all fight and that is the goal of all of us. Don't let anyone doubt that all of us who fight are Cubans, **but the history shows us that there are black Cubans, white Cubans, mixed-race Cubans**, and although historically since 1901, the Constitution said that all of us were equal in the eyes of the law, everyone knows that the constitution never made that happen in reality.

Everyone in the world says but no, but we have to approach it as Cubans: **the black movement in Cuba** has always been fighting for Cuban identity, not for a black republic. One of the things that I always insist on [when talking] about the PIC...

The composed reprieve proves all too brief. His speech reverts back to a more rapid pace, taking on the cadence of a heated righteous diatribe of a scorned lover wronged for the last time. After years of absorbing insult after injury, they deliberately calculate the perfect

moment to call for redress for their injuries. Perhaps they subdue their rage for years out of loyal commitment to the idea of love's strength to withstand all. However, one day over spilled coffee, the anger finally unleashes. What seems like a sporadic catharsis, is actually an artfully delivered, sophisticated intervention of oratory virtuosity.

Tomas bravely speaks truth to power. [Clink] He yells that a re-reading of Cuban history is in order. He continues, "To say we are all Cubans is obvious, but that we need to recognize that there are black Cubans, white Cubans, and mulatos (mixed race) Cubans". In debunking the false notion of equality under citizenship he undoes the rhetorical work done by Aries prior. He states that there hasn't truly been a racial democracy since the 1901 constitution that brought democracy to Cuba, and although he acknowledges the existence of a mixed-race population, he refers to their political movement as unequivocally "black". His energy rises to a boil that lifts him from his seat. He stands afoot to give enough from for his arms to fully express the emphasis of his words. Tomas is short in stature. Standing he is just above the eye level of his boss across the table; yet he assumes the posture of an apprentice no more. From this higher vantage he finally returns to the subject of the PIC. This time he explicitly articulates that which he left unspoken at the press conference's opening: the relationship between the PIC and today's date: their shared fight to exist in Cuban political culture. As if finally setting the record straight, he responds to attacks that he anticipates based on the accumulation of discourses waged against both the PIC in their time and against him in other occasions. Although short in stature, he stands tall with the commemorative journal in one hand, raised up for all to see. The picture of Estenoz in Tomasito's hand towers over everyone in the seated room. Tomas delivers a final rebuttal, one that Estenoz was never afforded.

*...es que el programa del PIC no quería una república para negros, sino una república para todos los cubanos, todas las leyes y todos los beneficios que ellos*

*estaban pidiendo no eran para los negros eran para todos los cubanos y justamente la nueva relectura que tenemos que hacer es que **los grandes ideólogos cubanos del siglo XIX cuando soñaron la nacionalidad cubana, la soñaron como una nacionalidad blanca**, sin embargo otro momento importante es la Protesta de Baraguá donde los que se oponen al Pacto del Zanjón y quienes son blancos, negros y mulatos presididos por **Antonio Maceo** y **nunca se ha planteado una nacionalidad negra y por eso nosotros no estamos luchando ...** porque a veces se nos acusa de que queremos ... no estamos luchando por una negritud política, estamos luchando porque seamos todos cubanos, pero cubanos con el reconocimiento del blanco, del negro y del mulato y para eso tenemos que luchar y no tenerle miedo.*

...the program of the PIC didn't want a republic for blacks, rather a republic for all Cubans, all the laws and all the benefits, that they were asking for weren't for blacks, they were for all Cubans and specifically the new re-reading that we have to do is for **the great Cuban ideologues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century dreamed of white nationalism**, nevertheless another important moment is the Protesta de Baraguá when those that opposed the Pacto de Zanjón and who were white, black and mixed race presided over by **Antonio Maceo** and **never did they put forth a black nationality and that is what we are fighting for...** Because sometimes we get accused of wanting...we are not fighting for a black politics, we are fighting because we are all Cubans, but Cubans with the recognition of being white, black and mixed race, and that is why we have to fight and not be scared of that.

The shift in scenic space due to Tomasito's passionate move upward from his seat at the table breaks the established posture of civil communication, punctuated by the change in focal point now drawn to the tragic image of Estenoz above their heads. The spatial rupture is paired with a temporal one; both in the sense that he well exceeds his five-minute allotment and in the sense that he thrusts the audience into an unanticipated historical digression. He proceeds to go back and forth in time making biting critiques of the Cuban state at different points in the past, jumping from 1908 (PIC's formation) back to 1901 (Constitution), then farther back to 1878 (*Protesta de Baraguá* presided over by General Antonio Maceo). As he reaches farther backward in time, the rhythm of his speech accelerates. He is making "drive-by" references to historical events that are spewed with biting symbolic force. The press is catapulted into a history lesson that models the kind of

“new re-reading” of history that Tomasito calls for, reminiscent of the community classes on Afro-Cuban history that he has repeatedly offered despite institutional objection. Tomasito ushers the press through a historical sprint. ARAC and the black movement accumulate more historical kin along the way. The delivery of the chronology is a battery that intensifies, building his argument at each historical site. The *Protesta de Baraguá*: the famous order of disobedience given by Antonio Maceo, the mulato second in command of the Independence Army, rejecting the peace treaty with Spain (*Pacto de Zanjón*); a decisive turning point in the War of Independence. Maceo went against the orders of the creole leaders of the Independence Army who were ready to cede to peace without winning the full terms of equality upon which they had fought for. The *Protesta de Baraguá* is a national symbol of Cuba’s fighting spirit, but here it represents Maceo’s principled refusal to back down to the will of his white *compañeros de lucha*. The memory of Antonio Maceo is called upon to highlight the righteousness of his cause, making a direct contrast between him and the “*grandes ideólogos cubanos del siglo XIX* (great Cuban ideologues of the 19<sup>th</sup> century)”, like the iconic Cuban apostle José Martí, that the National Library commemorates.

The battery of historical symbolism ends squarely in the present, allowing his indictments of the past to bear a critique of the present struggle taking place today. He takes the great revolutionary thinkers off their pedestal — “Tumbalo!” (like Obsesión sings in their song “Calle G” on the same topic (2011))— and smashes the image of the great apostle of the nation and his peers; “*cuando soñaron la nacionalidad cubana, la soñaron como una nacionalidad blanca* (when they dream of the Cuban nationality, they dreamed of a white nationalism)”. Instead he appeals to symbolic weight of Maceo, “the Bronze Titan” to garner respect for ARAC’s race-based claims to situated knowledge. Maceo is

allotted mainstream respect retroactively for his historic insubordination. Tomas' hands fly, his voice trembles, and his diatribe turns into an audacious yet fragile, pleading cry.

I argue that Tomas' anxious defense reveals that the weight of the shared memory of racial terror generates an affective layer of paranoia hidden from public view that ARAC collectively masks in exchange for respectability. ARAC responds to an institutionalized social script that stigmatizes race-based political activism out of fear of Black Nationalism as it stigmatizes the expression of black rage. When Tomas agentively flips the script (so to speak) he makes visible the strategic purpose of the press conference, a necessary measure aimed to mitigate the fear of racial nationalism (Pappademos 2011, 58). This fear is historically rooted in a protection of white nationalism threatened by the formation of the PIC, ARAC's political ancestors.

*Y siempre tenemos esa paranoia porque si se dice o no se dice y justamente todo lo hacemos por la cubanidad, por nuestra Cuba, pero señalando de que históricamente ha habido...*

*Y no es solamente en la lucha contra el racismo – y perdonen que me haya extendido – porque no hacemos nada con crear un hombre antirracista y que sea homofóbico o anti religioso. He dicho. Muy buenas tardes...buenas noches*

[...duration approx. 11min]

**And we always have this paranoia because if one says this or if one says that and just as everything we do is for Cuban identity, for our Cuba, but pointing out that historically there has been....**

And not only in the fight against racism— and pardon me if I have overextended myself— because we aren't doing anything by believing that a man is anti-racist that is homophobic and anti-religious. I've spoken. Good afternoon... Good night.

He names the feelings in the room, fear on the part of the press and the performers, around what it means to fight racism after a winning a Revolution. Similar to their ancestors in 1912, the black movement today strives for acceptance at a time when the Cuban state

bargains to prove its legitimacy among the “family of nations” while striving for economic development. He verbally acknowledges both their own paranoia and the fact that he has personally broken numerous social contracts that the performance mandated through his words and through his actions. He returns to nationalism as an act of saving grace. “Everything we do is for Cuba, *our Cuba*”, the Cuba that “we” fought for from the beginning. Yet, he loses his train of thought...

In one last attempt to regain favor after his breach of script, he verbally acknowledges that he is “out of order”. “*Perdonen que me haya extendido* (pardon me if I have overextended myself)”. He asks for forgiveness for breaking the agreed upon temporal allotment due to his unscripted improvisation. However, the apology appears affectatious, perfunctory at best, after making such a sophisticated, artful, and bold intervention. Just before getting cut off, almost as if to deliver the closing points on a list of grievances, he tags on homophobia and militant atheism as intersecting oppressions that, in his view, are part of the same fight for justice as antiracism. As a self-identified black, openly gay and religious man, he insinuates his own positioned investment in dismantling these intersecting oppressions. He appears to be broken open, taken over by raw emotion. As the mic is pulled away, he ends his oration with the refrain typically used by judges as they give a final verdict, “*He dicho* (I’ve spoken; [case closed])”. His delivery of the concluding phrase is seemingly frazzled and awkward. Tomas’ final words fall like a heavy wooden mallet clumsily knocked against the table. Just as the microphone is taken from his grasp, he fumbles for his chair to catch his descending body. He expresses temporal confusion, recovering from the whirlwind collapse of history, “*muy buenas tardes...buenas noches...*” It is 9:53 am. The question and answer portion proceeds...

END SCENE.

This was the public inauguration of ARAC to the members of the Cuban mass media. The quality of their performance was critical for assuring their acceptance into public discourse as an entity. Tomas' intervention was a climax in the dramaturgical design of the performance. Tomas sophisticated performance fits within the dominant interpretive framework for stereotypically queer subjectivity, rupturing the hegemonic "flat" script in (in dramaturgical terms). The typical dramaturgical style of this genre of a press conference does not vary in intensity otherwise caused by a climax. The objective of a press conferences is to inform the public of factoids, facilitated by the structural convention of uniformity. Information is supposed to be conveyed in the same official tone as a written memo. Therefore, this genre of performance typically consists of a linear, unfluctuating energetic sequence<sup>40</sup>. Ostensibly, the corporal presence of the live event should not convey an added layer of meaning than a memo would capture. Generally, the live presence of the speakers simply fulfills their social function.

Tomasitos' deviation (or choreographic variation from the theme) from the normative design changes the categorical nature of the structure<sup>41</sup>. The introduction of the contrasting element in a performance ultimately changes the delivery and reception of that which follows, even when the initial theme is resumed<sup>42</sup>. Tomas' intervention moved the press conference away from the conventions of its intended performance genre, unsettling that which is supposed to transpire in that venue. The dramaturgic shift was intensified by the fact that the only openly gay and religious member of the ARAC representatives was

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<sup>40</sup> In musical-choreographic terms it would be represented by A, A, A, A, A.

<sup>41</sup> In theatrical terms it would be described as having an introduction, development, climax, and denouement; thus fitting into a classical theatrical structure. In musical-choreographic terms it might be represented as A, A, A, A, B, A', A': denoting A as the baseline and B as a contrasting element.

<sup>42</sup> The apparition of B changes the scope of the range of possible action in the space. After the senses experience B, A is perceived as a contrast to B, rendering the once familiar, strange.

the one who performed it. These attributes enclose his individual virtuosity and bravery into a hegemonic heteronormative and secular appraisal of unfit citizenship. The body-politic he represented was laid bare for scrutiny on those terms, perhaps subverting their initial claims to normative markers of legitimacy.

In this sense, I invert the negative ascriptions to queerness (also assigned to sacred subjectivity) to reclaim Tomasito's emotionally charged "outburst" as a radical queering of the press conference, a talented choreographic response to the pregnant moment. For those whose identities disrupt the white heteropatriarchal order, accommodation to normative performance of the (secular, raceless) self in public space is a vital tool for self-protection. For those whose identities are marginalized along multiple axis of oppression, normative performance is violently enforced in the public sphere. Transgression can incur significant material, affective, and even physical, repercussion. The stakes are high and the consequences depend largely on the location of the stage, the audience present, and the nature of the ideological script challenged. When a black, openly gay, openly religious subject gets read as "too emotional" in the overdetermined institutional space of national knowledge production, the rupture marks the senses in ways that leave a lasting trace. Here I propose radical queering, not in the romantic sense of same-sex loving, but as a practice engaged in by enslaved Africans and their descendants, of resistance to the commodification and stigmatization of their bodies "by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on the [slave] ships" (Tinsley 2008, 192). I argue that Tomasito's choreographic audacity to flip the script and go against the hegemonic grain was motivated by a feeling for ARAC's political kin and a love of ancestry that is rooted in a sacred accountability to remember. This radical act of queer agency can be neatly eclipsed by and folded into hegemonic interpretive frameworks that deem his body as civically unfit on multiple levels, prone to "improper outbursts".

When I met with members following the press conference at my apartment to exchange my audio recording of the event for the written transcription that was taken, they admitted that their nerves had been high. They relied on their projection of poise and control to harness any internal insecurities about the possibility of collective failure. When I asked about Tomasito's intervention near the end of the presentation one member burst out laughing, "Ay, *se fue pa'l monte! Tomasito se fue pa'l monte*" (Oh, Tomasito went to the mountain/bush!). The others smirked knowingly. The concise statement was rich with symbolism. The nickname used by his peers, "Tomasito", draws loving attention to his small stature, but also operates as a pun on his sexuality. Silence followed. "Ay...*Tomasito se fue pa'l monte!*", said it all, laden with both admiration and distress. Tomasito was the one who dared to boldly go against white heteropatriarchal convention.

"*El monte*" (the mountain/bush) in Cuba is a potent site of symbolic reference. Known as a place of wilderness, it harkens the rugged, green landscape of the Sierra Maestra mountain range where the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement, the vanguard revolutionary organization led by Fidel Castro, strategized their attack on the Moncada Barracks. It is a semiotic landscape that imbues irreverent, insurgent growth. As such a widespread political metaphor, likening Tomasito's intervention to the space of "*el monte*" is noteworthy and key to appreciating the degree of choreographic departure — both affectively and symbolically— from that which is supposed to take place in the state institution of the José Martí National Library. The space of the National Library is in many ways socially defined by its diametrical opposition to "the bush". It is a space of civility and refinement. Knowledge dedicated to rendering the nation coherent is guarded within its walls, reinforcing the authority of the texts it protects by excluding others. It is a social institution where citizens are charged with the preservation of the nation's story and ensuring that the historical precedents that legitimize the current state remain intact. Although it is possible

to read against the grain for other histories and form other knowledges (as Tomasito continually does in his community classes) the larger social function of the institution endures.

The choice of imagery to talk about “Tomisito’s” performance at the press conference— flight into the wilderness— is a symbolically potent figurative space in the Cuban racial imaginary. Africa’s primitiveness, is in part defined by its diametric opposition to the benchmark of European civilization assigned to whiteness. This racialized connotation of “the bush” holds particular meaning for ARAC members as political descendants of the PIC. Amongst the founders of the Cuban republic, “the forest” and “the rural” were evoked as metaphors for that which has not yet attained the level of civilization associated with the ideal citizen-subject. Proto-ideal subjectivity was personified by the black population, embodying nature as opposed to culture, primitive instinct as opposed to reason, emotion and brute strength as opposed to intelligence. During the historic uprising of May 20<sup>th</sup> 1912, PIC members were portrayed as subhuman by their association with the forested outpost whence they launched their revolt. The black bloodshed ordered by the state acted as a metaphorical chopping down of overgrown, untamed vegetation that could overrun the country if not removed at their base.

For the honor and glory of [reclaiming the homeland] there are no great dangers; the enemy now moves in the thickening of the forest, attacking by surprise, avoiding [our] combatants; but, if there was danger [our] dignified and heroic people, who do not know how to tolerate threats to their honor now as always, now more than ever will face with impetuous serenity those who, in Cuba’s rural country side between steaming piles of waste will with their own blood dye the strips and triangle of [our]homeland’s flag. (José Miguel Gómez, open letter to the “People of Cuba”. June 6, 1912 published in the *Gaceta Oficial*, June 7, 1912, cited in Pappademos, 57)

When president Gomez’s words are put in tandem with the historical context of that bloody summer incited by the PIC’s unsanctioned political agency, “*se fue pa’l monte!*” functions

as a reference to Gomez' perception of dangerous civil excess assigned to "enemy" black bodies who resist civil order. In this case the members of Cuban press are the "dignified and heroic" people of Cuba who were struck by a surprise attack by a forest-dwelling force.

Hegemony's inherent instability makes the logged territory of the polity always vulnerable to nature's re-encroachment. Therefore, a breach in the established code of civil participation in the newly sovereign nation was brutally policed. As discussed in the Introduction both the dissertation and this chapter, during the Republican era, the political sphere was, in practice, a white territory. Black votes were necessary to further the careers of white political players who were considered the rightful custodians of national honor. Whites were considered the proper leaders of the modern political sphere, uniquely capable of negotiating as political counterparts with the leaders of the rest of the "family of nations". Blacks played a vital yet always supporting role. The success of the nation's performance of political modernity hinged upon the maintenance of this this racial division of power. The public, bloody act of "reclaiming the homeland" through the massacre of black people speaks to the patriotic founders' "possessive investment in Whiteness" (Lipsitz 1998). When the PIC asserted unsanctioned political agency, breaching the national script for black political participation by trying to provide a vehicle for blacks to advocate for themselves, this deviation was an excess that needed to be tamed, chopped down, publically and decisively. Analogously, Tomasito's performative breach of the shared script for how to address the public about race, marked the act as wild in a way that carried this historically weighted genealogy of meaning. His biting rebuttal on Estenoz' behalf embodied the enduring hold of the tragic past unseen in the present otherwise unmarked.

This reading is complicated by the coexisting discourse around "*el monte*" within Afro-Cuban religiosity. The lush, rugged mountain is the domain of Oggun in Yoruba

Lucumí/Regla de Ocha system of faith. Oggun is represented by green and black to symbolize both the forest on the mountain's surface and the iron found in the rocks. Gendered as masculine, he is a warrior orisha associated with weapons (especially the machete), strength, and also tools that are used in labor. "*Se fue pa'l monte*" is a phrase that is semiotically connected to Oggun, known to be a bitter recluse who feels most at peace in the forest, away from civilization. A well-known Yoruba patakí (parable)<sup>43</sup> speaks of Oggun's solitary retreat to his home, the wilderness. As the story was told to me, after human life was created and the built environment was beginning to flourish in sophistication, the village people were in need of Oggun's unique skills as a blacksmith and tools for construction. The people's drive for development was insatiable and the more he worked, the more he was needed for further settlement and technological advancement. One day Oggun flees to the mountain and refuses to come back down. Since humans desperately needed his labor to sustain civilization, but were too weak and afraid to disturb him, different orishas were sent to make attempts to bring him down from the mountain. Each attempt was unsuccessful. His recalcitrant distrust of mankind was unmoving. Finally, they sent Oshun, the orisha of sweet waters, gendered as feminine. She seduces him to follow her down the mountain using her feminine wiles: sultry dance, melodic song, and the sweetness of honey... I've heard the moral of this story interpreted in different ways depending on the narrator, who the narration is for, and in what life situation they seek guidance for. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I draw attention to Oggun's structural position as both instrumental to furthering human civilization and a slave to it. Human projects are dependent on the power of his vital capacity for locomotion. Yet, his defining positive attributes are deemed savage when not in service of human will. This

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<sup>43</sup> The term patakín or patakí, is Yoruba word that refers to religious parables that are meant to offer advice on how to deal with life's uncertainties and problems. Patakís are typically passed on in the context of spiritual divination.

critical structural position as the conductor of advancement upon which human life flourishes makes him both intensely desired and feared. In this sense, Oggun can keenly represent the structural position of the enslaved black population that the white slavers and patriots both needed yet feared.

Tomasito's metaphoric act of marronage to the mountain during the press conference references this decisive abandonment of civilization in pursuit of a more self-fulfilling calling "home". His public deviation from the hegemonic script of conduct was read as an impetuous primitive regression, retrograding in both time and space backwards from modern/civilization to the primitive/wilderness. Tomasito as Oggun doubly ruptures the performance of black respectability. According to the conventions of the modern nation-state, belonging in the polity warrants an excision of sacred hermeneutics so as to consolidate power under the state. The mountainous interruption of the otherwise level performance enacted by unharnessed feeling for ancestors jettisons the interpretation of his act into realm of the sacred. Furthermore, within afro-religious discourse, susceptibility to spirit possession—when the divine force takes control over one's body—is a sign of weakness often associated with queer masculinity (Beliso-De Jesus 2013). Thus, understandings of normative racialized gender and sexuality serve as operative interpretive frames for ARAC members to understand Tomasito's deviation from black respectability as a moment of psychic weakness natural to his queerness. However, I propose a recuperation of his departure as an act of marronage, embodying a radically queer political movement towards a place where *we* can call home. In sum, I argue that in this ethnographic context, "going to the mountain" gets inscribed as signaling primitive excess that encroaches upon the secular-rational "civil" way of doing politics. Yet, by acknowledging the excess as an act of virtuosic choreography, Tomasito's intervention can

also be understood as operating within a black radical aesthetic (Moten, 2003), jettisoning ARAC's press conference into a queering of white national space<sup>44</sup>.

ARAC was counting on a virtuosic performance of viable black agency to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the state. Structured by the social memory of performances in the past, they tried to incorporate a race-based critique that conformed to the hegemonic norms of political discourse and body socialization. Legitimacy was pursued by leveraging recognizable colonial tropes, leaving whiteness unmarked, defensively protecting themselves from negrophobia, and making calculated moves to excess. Melina Pappademos (2011) gives a rich historical account of the ways in which patronage relations in the republic structured racial consciousness and political activism, determining what was a viable course of action (Pappademos 2011, 42). I draw from Diana Taylor's concept of "scenario" to flesh out how historically grounded notions of political viability are transmitted in the present through the black body-politic.

Most central to our understanding of the press conference is that performances for the state do not invite improvisation, yet are always adaptable. Taylor states that scenarios "bear the weight of accumulative repeats" which have set up the range of possibilities for action (28). As meaning-making paradigms, they structure our ability to discriminate between sanctioned and unsanctioned actions governed by both spoken and implicit norms. Scenarios present opportunities for spectators and actors to either uphold or subvert the script. This means that what is understood as "possible", "viable", or "appropriate" in political scenarios are determined overtime by continuous iterations. Each iteration allows for degrees of agency as actors vie for optimal outcomes within social relations.

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<sup>44</sup> If we follow the logic of the Pataki, the antidote to Tomasito's retreat would be to wage strategic war of seduction fueled by libidinal desire, as only desire can reason with such irrational faculties. How might this religious reference suggest a heteronormative disciplining of this black queer man into "proper" secular behavior through heteronormativity?

Ultimately, the “success” of the performance is measured in relation to how well the actor is able to maintain coherence within the structure of shared understanding that make desired outcomes possible. Thereby, the scenario is both a site of discipline for the internal will, and a site of rupture and creativity continuously made anew with every reactivation.

ARAC members were aware that they were situated in the next iteration of a past scenario when rumors began to circulate that they were “reverse racists” soon after their first meetings. In this ethnographic case, sociopolitical elements aligned in familiar ways that triggered their shared memory of collective trauma, calling them to assume roles rehearsed for optimal social outcomes. I argue that the tragic history of their political ancestors’ failed performance in the past (resulting in Evaristo’s limp corpse publically displayed with his brains blown out) caused a distinct collective perception of shared signs, unique to their group. As a body-politic that grounds its identity in black political struggle, ARAC members collectively participate in a unique symbolic economy of exchange that is linked to a particular racialized epistemological project. When publically re-membering in institutional spaces of white hegemony, this embodied memory collapses time in such a way that makes slippage into unsanctioned repertoires of performance and registers of affect an ever present risk. The “second iconicity” of Evaristo’s gallant image reminds us that when performances of agency are enacted by bodies that are always already hypervisible to scrutiny under the white heteropatriarchal gaze of the nation-state, the stakes for failure typically correlate to some material loss.

### **III. TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2013: IN THE PRESS**

8:10 am NTV [2 minutes]

Headline: “*Cuba Intenta Sacudir todo lastro de perjuicio racial*” (Cuba Tries to Shake off Any Weight of Racial Prejudice)

Stock video of hustle and bustle of the Havana during commute: people get on/off public buses, cross the street.

[No pictures or video from the press conference]

Quote by President of the Cuban Book Institute acknowledging the advancements of the revolution in several areas, saying that Cuba is now trying to eliminate any other trace of mistreatment or differentiation based on skin color.

[No mention of ARAC and nor to the definition of terms presented]

...

Next headline is about Angola

...

At the end of the news program the highlights from the featured stories at the end did not include the ARAC. Instead it included a meeting of government officials with the members of the Cuban Yoruba Association. Actual images from that event were shown.

We rely on the archive to make meaning of the past. Yet even when housed in the National Library itself, the event appeared to leave no material trace for the general Cuban public. The morning news reported that Cuba was shaking off the weight of racism from its past. The vague pronouncement is framed as a program devised by state, whose details are never divulged. The news broadcast reaffirms the paternalistic benevolence of the state, presiding over a cityscape of Cubans of all colors who go about their lives unaware of how privileged they are to live in such racial harmony. No representative of ARAC is quoted or mentioned. ARAC's program of events for the year are never promoted and the picture of Estenoz is never shown. In two minutes of non-coverage, there is a total erasure of non-state black collective agency.

ARAC's press conference unveiled a public re-reading of history, and a re-mapping of group belonging and political kin. They traced their genealogy to the valiant efforts of the PIC<sup>45</sup> and affirmed bonds of solidarity with diasporic struggles for justice across Latin

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<sup>45</sup> First race-based political party in the Americas, founded in Cuba in 1908 by Afro-Cuban veterans of the Cuban War of Independence. Led an armed revolt in 1912...ended in a massacre of thousands of blacks by the Cuban army and white civilians....

America and the world. Nevertheless, they asserted that their new space for experimentation in civic action was firmly rooted in Cuban patriotism. By advocating for a particular understanding of national history, ARAC argued for sanctioned space for anti-racist politics within the bounds of the Revolutionary project. They performed a sophisticated negotiation of viable scripts and ideological repertoires. The press conference was marked by calculated risk and precarious restraint made visible through the bodies of the performers. In staging their public self-announcement on that historic day of state violence against black bodies, they asserted themselves as recovering elements of a silenced political tradition to generate a conscious identification with pre-1959 referents of black self-organization and collective agency. Their presence gave continuity to that legacy of struggle, however, like their forefather, ARAC also inherits erasure from mainstream consciousness. This time the Cuban press committed erasure through sheer absence as opposed to featured bloody presence.

The non-happening of the ARAC press coverage leaves me with more questions than answers. Did the press conference ever happen if it left no trace in the news? Were the cameramen and journalists just phantoms, only fully present in the minds of ARAC members, like the ghost of Evaristo Estenoz himself? Will the memory of the live event leave an impression on the senses of those present outside the group? Was the press conference successful (aka “felicitous”) on ARAC’s own terms? Is their erasure as an autonomous body-politic a result of a “felicitous” appeal to nationalist repertoires through effective leveraging of the familiar and permissible? Or was their ultimate non-coverage a backlash for Tomasio’s deviation from established norms of black respectability in the political sphere? Is the erasure of black collective agency the only viable possibility for a “successful performance of autonomy” in contemporary Cuban political culture as well?

This ethnographic case study suggests that when black body-politics orient their performance toward the state, the desire for gaining legitimacy is both primary and always elusive. Legitimacy for black political agency is a desire that challenges the libidinal economy of a society that hinges upon black labor and fears black political agency when not yoked to the hegemonic nation-building project. That which on the one hand defines their construction of ideal black political subjecthood, morally-configured insubordinate masculinity, is also the cause of their downfall. Like the story of Ogun, accepting his agentive flight would compromise the progression of civilization as we know it. When asked to reflect upon the state of Cuban civil society ARAC-Cuba members shared that after the triumph of 1959, (many elements of) civil society ceased to exist in a real way. Most private associations were disbanded and replaced with mass organizations<sup>46</sup> that are technically non-governmental, but not really. These mass organizations engage in “directed (top-down) activism”; instead of responding to the needs of the community, they respond to state mandates that ostensibly speak for “the people”. Ironically, the notion that private citizens can/should relate to the state outside of the established state-initiated mass organizations, and that the state should respect “private interests”, is an emerging concept that is gaining more traction as the Revolution encourages more market expansion, however it has yet to extend to race-based collective action.

I asked Gisela how she felt after. “Relieved that it’s over”, she said. However, the ARAC press conference-that-never-was, even in its vanishing, teaches us that the social memory of live events that may disappear from the archive live other lives. Like in the chapter to follow, I privilege social memory to foreground an understanding of how the

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<sup>46</sup> El Comité por la Defensa de la Revolución (CDR), La Federación de Mujeres Cubanas (FMC), La Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP), La Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC), La Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), La Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios (FEU), La Organización de Pioneros José Martí (OPJM), Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana (ACRC), and last but not least, El Partido Comunista de Cuba (PCC).

way in which these groups configure their group genealogy orients their performance in the present, as well as informs their vision of viability in the future. Just like the memory of the PIC and Evaristo, limp on the examining table, what happened at the mahogany table in the National Library will hold meaning for those who performed together. Choreography built on recognizable colonial gendered tropes, unmarked whiteness, safeguarded white emotions, and appeal to hegemonic national ideologies did not give any guarantees. As they perfect their roles in the scenario of black autonomy, more rehearsal is needed. The memory of this press conference will bear on the future as ARAC continues to learn from their movement, while either strategically deploying or restraining the ever-threatening will to flight.

## Chapter Three: *Protesta Carabali*: Afro-Cuban Movement(s) in Counterpoint

### I. INTRODUCTION

Yoruba Andabo's "genealogy of performance" will be gathered from the performance of a particular song, "Protesta Carabali", at their longest running Saturday showcase in a nightclub in Havana. Joseph Roach (1996) defines genealogies of performance as cultural performances that are transmitted over time by the act of remembering under conditions/scenarios of structural constraint. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (2011 [1984]), De Certeau defines "tactics" as "maneuvers" of the weak to gain momentary advantage over the strong by using pre-existing objects in ways other than their intended purpose. I bring these two theories together to think through how the song's performance maneuvers within the constraints of national repertoires of signification. De Certeau's attention to everyday practice instructively shows that what might appear as adherence to order might be subversion in practice, "anti-discipline". Again he implores us to attune our senses to be attentive to practices themselves. This practice-based hermeneutics is useful for analyzing the performativity of that which appears self-evident representation.

This method of interpreting Yoruba Andabo's genealogy is especially pertinent because the song is part of the group's "ciclo Abakuá" (Abakuá repertory). The founders of Yoruba Andabo were/are initiates in the Abakuá all-male African secret societies. These initiation societies are based on certain core values 1- an extra-national allegiance, 2- knowledge of self and history that predates the slavery, 3- corporate mutual aid, and 4- sovereignty and self-governance. They ceremoniously use theater, song, gesture, and symbols to convey the history of their people clandestinely amongst initiates. For the descendants of enslaved Africans from the Cross River region of modern day southeastern

Nigeria and Eastern Cameroon, known as Calabar<sup>47</sup>, these societies were important spaces to practice autonomy from the governing structures in the New World. At every point in the history of Cuba, be it during Spanish colonial rule, republicanism and revolutionary Cuba, the state has sought to bind Africans and their descendants, who maintained ethnic diasporic loyalties, to a statist political community. The Spanish crown made the Abakuá societies officially illegal in 1875 to consolidate control over its territory. The Abakuá have had an especially fraught relationship with the Cuban nation-state due to its extra-national ethnic corporatism and espousal of self-governance and sovereignty. Abakuá continue to be criminalized in the present day. Hegemonic criminalization of black masculinity compounds with the Abakuá reputation for unlawfulness vis-a-vis the statist political order. Thus, this chapter, like the previous chapter, engages the way in which black sovereignty is marked as unlawful within the terms of modern political viability and social order in Cuba, and how racialized gender performance thus becomes a site of discipline and subversion.

### **Presenting Yoruba Andabo**

Yoruba Andabo is a popular traditional performance group that is constituted exclusively by practitioners of various Afro-religious systems of faith practiced in Cuba.<sup>48</sup> The members trace their formation as a musical group to the Port of Havana in the 1940s. At that time, the black port workers gathered informally to play rumba during their breaks using improvised instruments such as wooden crates and spoons. They alternated roles as singers, percussionists, and dancers. After the 1959 revolution, the government began promoting amateur groups in the workplace to compete in regional “*Festivales de los*

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<sup>47</sup> named after the Calabar ethnic group indigenous to that region

<sup>48</sup> i.e. Lucumi (Regla de Ocha), Palo Moyombe, Abakua, Espiritismo.

*Aficionados*”, to raise the spirits and enthusiasm of the workers. The Port Federation founded *Grupo Martimio Portuario*. “*En aquel tiempo hacíamos festivales sexagonales [de barrio], festivales nacionales y provinciales...El sexagonal pasaba por provincial y provincial pasaba por nacional. Porque tenía que ganar el sexagonal, ganar el provincial para pasar a nacional.* (In that time we did neighborhood festivals, national festivals, and provincials... The [winner of the] neighborhood [festival] passed to the provincial and the provincial passed to the national)” (Cardenas 2014). *Grupo Maritimo Potuario* proceeded to win first place in every annual competition from 1961 until they ended the festivals in 1965.

The very formation of *Yoruba Andabo*, started by dockworkers in the Port of Havana in the 1940s, points to the longstanding confluence of commerce, the sacred, and black cultural performance.

In Cuba as in Africa, Abakuá was an urban-based religion closely tied to seaports and oceangoing commerce. Known in Africa as the Leopard cult, it had flourished in the 1700s and early 1800s in the slave trading ports of the Calabar coasts, in Niger and Cross River deltas... In Cuba as in Africa, the system of lodges and the high cost of initiation gave Abakuá a character that was as much political and economic as religious. The very name of the Cuban lodges—*potencias*, or ‘powers’— is significant; and indeed the lodges sought, and acquired considerable political and economic power within the Afro-Cuban community. ....As soon as they came into existence [in Cuba] they moved to acquire control over the hiring of stevedores and dockworkers in the Port of Havana (Andrews 2004, 72).

One of the ways they acquired control over the hiring of stevedores and dockworkers was by initiation of white men into Abakuá lodges to extend political influence of the initiates (Miller 2009). The religious rank of black men enabled them to leverage their influence in a white dominated public sphere. The founding member, Chan, explains,

*El mundo Abakuá determinaba mucho en la Puerta de Habana. Eran capataces, jefes de portillas, jefes de barcos... Eran blancos. La mayoría eran blancos. Los negros ayudaron a los blancos. Los blancos ayudaron a los negros. Intercambiaron criterios. ...muchos antes de la revolución... y dominaban esto [El puerto]. Por eso que en los puertos de la Habana, los dirigentes se hacían Abakuá todos...El Abakuá en sí, se puede decir que es internacional. Porque tú sabes que viene del Calabar de Nigeria. Hasta hoy por hoy los Abakuá de Nigeria quieren tener contacto con los Abakuás de Cuba. (Cardenas 2014) .*

The Abakuá world determined a lot in the Port of Havana. They were foreman, head of portillas, head of ships... They were white. The majority were white. The blacks helped the whites. The whites helped the blacks. We exchanged judgements...way before the revolution... and they dominated this [the Port]. That is why in the ports of Havana, the leaders made everyone Abakuá...The Abakuá in itself, you can say that its international. Because you know that it comes from Calabar of Nigeria. Up until today, the Abakuá of Nigeria want to have contact with the Abakuás [initiates] of Cuba.

As was done during the 1700's and early 1800's in the Calabar coasts, Abakuá established strategic, lucrative allegiances with white men. Miller explains how the acceleration of the slave trade caused conflict between rival Abakuá lodges supplying slaves to traders, leading the Abakuá themselves to be captured into slavery (Miller 2009). When in Cuba, Abakuá secured employment once again in the seaports, a key sector of the Cuban economy tied to oceangoing commerce, by initiating white men into the secret societies. Indeed, Abakuá lodges were the first integrated institutions in Cuba, known to have desegregated on their own well before the 1959 Revolution for this reason. However, understanding the political machinations necessary at the time for pursuing black self-making and cultural sovereignty is key for contextualizing this phenomenon amidst the circulation of ideologies of racial democracy. These interracial relations did evidence the transcendence of racial significance, nor did it replace the salience of ethnic identification as Calabar people.

Despite the occupational-oriented pretext for their formation, *Grupo Maritimio Portuario* was often invited to play at religious ceremonies in their neighborhoods for their friends and family. In fact, the first drums they used in performance were the consecrated

*cajones*[box drums] owned by one of their members, Pancho Quinto, to play at *misas espirituales* (spiritual mass or séance) patroned by members of his religious community. The professional name of the group was later taken from the words written on the front of the drums, “*Yoruba Andabo de Pancho Quinto*”<sup>49</sup>

One day they were playing at a religious birthday party of a friend in 1985. Eloy Machado, a well-known poet and Abakuá member was organizing weekly showcase at the UNEAC (Union Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) and asked them to play there every Sunday. One Sunday Pablo Milanes, a famous Afro-Cuban trova singer came to see them and asked them to open for him that Sunday at a concert at the prestigious Karl Marx Theatre. He asked Geovanni what their name was. At a loss for words, Geovanni looks at the words on the *cajones* they were playing at the time, the ones used for spiritual ceremonies, and blurted, “Yoruba Andabo”. That Sunday they showed up at the Karl Marx theater dressed in all white, having no costumes that would be suitable for the stage. The audience at the Karl Marx Theater enjoyed them so much that one song turned into two, etc. Their professional careers as artists begun from that point on.

When I probed about the presence of women in the group they would state that women were always involved from the beginning, naming Mercedita Valdez (the famous principal singer for the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional), however their group identity was very much tied to the Abakuá forefathers who worked at the Port. In the more recent past, women are cited as being signature members, particularly singers and dancers of repute, but not foundational to the group’s identity. Thus, I analyze Yoruba Andabo’s genealogy of performance through “Protesta Carabalí”, a song that draws from the Abakuá repertoire of signification to transmit history.

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<sup>49</sup> interview with Geovanni del Pino, Feb 5, 2013

Ivor Miller's book, *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (2009) refers to Abakuá art as "kaleidoscopic" in nature, revealing multiple layers of hidden meanings that are transmitted through the overlapping mediums (sonic, verbal, imagery, gesture) cloaking messages in a series of semiotic webs (154). Within African secret societies, initiates incrementally teach knowledge of history in ceremony, giving the initiate increasingly greater understanding of the web of coded meaning over time. Yoruba Andabo carries over this form of sacred pedagogy to their performance of "Protesta Carabalí" in a secular setting.

I am not an Abakuá initiate and therefore cannot possess the key that unlocks the code to the secret wisdom referenced in the performance. However, the analytical tools of performance theory together paired with ethnography are helpful for 1) apprehending webs of meanings through close attention to the interplay between different elements of *lo performático*<sup>50</sup> (sound, words, imagery, rhythm, gesture) and 2) identifying agency within scripted behavior inside a culturally-specific semiotic field. In conjunction with secondary sources about Abakuá culture and history, and interviews I conducted with Yoruba Andabo members, I will piece together an analysis of what this song may be doing when it's performed by Yoruba Andabo for their loyal black urban working-class audience in secular venues like Cabaret Las Vegas in Havana.

## **II. YORUBA ANDABO'S ABAKUA TAKE ON RUMBA**

On Saturday at around 4:30pm people are already starting to line up on Avenida Infanta near the Malecón. The locale is named Cabaret Las Vegas. It's a place that is known for its drag shows at night. The marquis is filled with pictures of performers in thickly coated

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<sup>50</sup> As discussed in the Introductory Chapter on p. 38, Taylor defines "*lo performático*" as the embodied register that escapes discursive representation: i.e. gesture, orality, movement, dance, attitude, sound, behavior, and tone.

make-up and extravagant costumes. However, this crowd has assembled for the matinee performance by Yoruba Andabo at 6pm. The place gets filled to capacity quickly and so their serious followers know to get there early. Yoruba Andabo members slowly trickle in one by one...

### **Reading National History Through Carabali Social Memory**

“Protesta Carabali”, opens with a very traditional rumba-guaguancó rhythmic structure, with clave sticks hitting in 6/8 time-line pattern<sup>51</sup>. Miller states that this asymmetrical metric-backbone of the music is a direct link to the music’s African roots. In a similar fashion, other scholars have referred to the clave rhythmic structure to be the “spinal cord” of Cuban music, signaling the vital role of this rhythm to connect all the other parts of the performance together (Jottar 2009). These anatomical metaphors underscore the predominant understanding of *clave* as empirical evidence of Cuban culture’s link to Africa. Rumba guaguancó symbolically represents the epitome of “*cubanía*”, a musical genre that is the result of a blend of primarily African Bantu-Kongo rhythms with Spanish vocal stylings, known as indigenous to the island. In classical Cuban rumba form, the clave is layered with the vocals of the lead singer. The opening vocal stylings of the lead singer is called *La diana*. Ethnomusicologist Rebecca Boddenheimer describes “*La diana*” as when “the lead singer uses melodic vocables to establish the song’s tonal center” (2010, 2). The opening is followed by a 14-line verse sung by the chorus, while the lead singer interjects more melodic vocables alternating after one or two or three lines. The repeated interjections of *la diana* has the effect of ensuring that the pace of the song does not accelerate. This establishes a “cool” cadence that scholars of art and philosophy from the Calabar region describe as a social ideal. “Coolness”, showing obedience and generosity,

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<sup>51</sup> Both the rhythm and the instrument on which the rhythm is played, two hardwood sticks, is called clave. The clave rhythm can also be clapped with one’s hands. Ivor miller calls clave a “time-line pattern” (156), “the metric backbone of the music”.

oriented both the social relations and the cultural production of the Calabar people (Thompson 1984, 230-231) . See appendix for complete lyrics of the song.

### **“Protesta Carabali” at Cabaret Las Vegas<sup>52</sup>**

The first verse of “Protesta Carabali” is a preamble for the rest of the song. In harmony, singers announce that they will go deep into the history of Cuba’s “*luchas*” (battles, fights) for independence, so that you (the audience) can respect them. Then they list the years of three battles that act as signposts, going in chronological order: “La Demajagua in [18]68”, then “the Independence in [18]’95”, followed by “the triumph of [19]’59. The first historical reference marks the battle that sparked the fight for Cuban independence from Spain, called the Ten Years War. As the story goes, On October 10, 1968, a Cuban-born wealthy sugar mill owner, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, freed his slaves on his sugar mill, called the *La Demajagua*, to fight against the Spanish army. This was the battle that began the war to follow. Accordingly, the second historical reference points to “The Independence of 1895”. The year 1895 marks the beginning of the War Cuban War of Independence. Cuba was officially recognized as a sovereign nation three years later, although the terms of its sovereignty were largely dictated by the U.S. For supporters of Fidel’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement revolution, it is understood that in 1898, Cuba’s dream of true independence was deferred until the “triumph of ‘59”.

When Yoruba Andabo performs this song at Cabaret Las Vegas, the audience is made up of Cubans educated in the Revolution. For people that have spent their grade school years memorizing the official Cuban history, this chronology is slightly off-kilter. On the one hand, it is congruent with the masculinist way that history is classically told,

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<sup>52</sup> LINK TO AUDIO CLIP HERE [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xdil79\\_yoruba-andabo-protesta-carabali\\_music](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xdil79_yoruba-andabo-protesta-carabali_music)

centering on battle acts made by now deified national heroes, rather than forms of everyday resistance that lay the necessary groundwork to sustain mass struggles. On the other hand, the first two historical references reveal a pattern of drawing attention to the launch of prolonged struggle, putting a slight twist on the masculinist historical narrative of defeat and conquest. Focusing on the year that the battles began rather than the year they were won positions the struggle itself as the focal point. As opposed to hailing the moment of final victory, “Protesta Carabalí” commemorates the process of sustained opposition. However, the pattern established by the first two mentions of “*luchas*” ostensibly breaks when they sing the third reference; “The Triumph of 59”. As mentioned above, in Cuba, the 1959 Revolution is discursively constructed as the culmination of all previous wars for true independence from imperialism. With that, one can either presume that there was no pattern to begin with, or one can glean that the song is also framing January 1, 1959 as a moment that marks yet another prolonged struggle.

The title of the song—Carabalí Protest (in English)—holds the key for interpreting what I argue may be historiographic sarcasm. The off-kilter historiography at the song’s opening signals us to look deeper into the history of the Carabalí people and the role they played in the Cuban nation during these periods of struggle: ongoing from ’68 through to the present day. Both Ivor Miller and Melina Pappademos in her book, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Pappademos 2011) provide rich historical documentation and interpretation of how this particular ethnic group figured within the formation of the Cuban nation through the lens of how the state persecuted Calabar organizations from colonial times up until the present day. Pappademos refers to Abakuá societies as part of the lineage of Africanist civic organizations occupied by blacks who chose to pursue a more expansive political vision for themselves in the new republic. This approach to black self-making in Cuba consisted of maintaining an allegiance to a diasporic

consciousness with distinctly ethnic sensibilities (Yoruba, Calabar, Kongo, etc), while also contending with Cuban nationalism.

Allegiance to an Africanist political community was at odds with the construction of a modern, homogenous, and ostensibly raceless nation, making them the object of state-sponsored attacks. These Calabar societies signified a threat to the totalizing control of white supremacy over Africans and their descendants, due to the unassimilable nature of the principles that were transmitted through Abakuá tradition: extra-national belonging, knowledge of self pre-enslavement, corporate mutual aid, and self-governance. The dates in the song's chronology list the moments when blacks were given a pathway to enter into the national body-politic, but on the condition that their political allegiance to Cuba overruled their ethnic allegiances to other "nations" or racial loyalties. Historians attribute this as the core cause of why both the colonial and republican state were threatened by this particular ethnic group and persecuted them as result.

Despite their persecution, Abakuá members supported the independence effort because of their commitment to the shared principle of sovereignty, as well as their ethnic bonds of solidarity with the "Mambí" guerilla soldiers of the National Liberation Army who were predominately constituted by Africans and Afrodescendants. Although the Abakuá were located in the major port cities of the east (Havana & Matanzas), somewhat isolated from the battle field in the West, they played a key role in the independence movement. Historians document that Abakuá served as undercover bodyguards to Antonio Maceo, the Second General in Command, when he attended meetings in the capital.

It may be tempting to suggest that these narratives are a recent invention, related to a contemporary desire to link Abakuá with patriotism" however, in the 1950s Cabrera nyannigos served in the independence movement and there are consistent narratives about the collusion of abakua, kongo warriors, and freemasons in the rebel army.(Miller,148)

Contemporary Abakuá continue to recite these stories, reflecting a desire that the activities of their 19<sup>th</sup> century ancestors be recognized as integral to the official narratives of the birth of the Cuban nation (Miller, 149).

This history makes a stronger case for why Yoruba Andabo marks the onset of “Maceo’s War” in their chronology (1885) rather May 20, 1902, when Cuba officially won independent statehood and celebrated the inauguration of its own constitution. The song brings our attention to the time when Maceo, a man who they recognized as kin via sacred and ethnic ties, lead the struggle *in spite of* the white Creole leadership’s commands to settle and compromise the principle of total racial equality in exchange for peace. Maceo’s insubordination speaks to the incommensurability of black enslavement to their vision of independence. For the Abakuá, Maceo symbolized the brute strength of a warrior blessed by an African system of faith and firm allegiance to a moral code compatible with Abakuá principles. The song demands that you [the audience] respect the warrior spirit demonstrated at these decisive junctures by black men, alongside but also in spite of their white counterparts. Although the lyrics ostensibly narrate the history of “Cuba-país”, the coded performativity of the lyrics showcase the virtuosity of black, Kongo/Carabalí-inflected masculinity in making of the nation.

The performance of “Protesta Carabalí” recalls, reaffirms, and reproduces this particular genealogy of racialized gender performance. This particular construction of black masculinity proved necessary to the formation of the nation-state, but is also inassimilable within it. In Revolutionary Cuba, the criminalization of Abakuá members has extended far beyond the official re-legalization of religion in 1992. Despite the renaissance of public devotion by afro-religious practitioners of Regla de Ocha, Espiritismo, and even Palo, Abakuá fraternities are still stigmatized as sites that engender antisocial forms of black masculinity. These sites of presumably antisocial black masculine achievement are

associated with spaces danger (“*el ambiente*”), gangs and criminal activity, termed “*guapería*” in Cuban parlance. In this social milieu of “*ambiente*”, Abakuá-sacred masculine energy is racialized as black. This social blackness is indivisible from white hegemonic semiotic constructions of racial hierarchy that tie blackness to the criminal, excessive, unruly, and outside the bounds of civic propriety. The particular gendered racialization of Abakuá renders the genealogy that Yoruba Andabo signify in their song as an “anti-discipline” maneuver, a positive investment in affect categorized pejoratively as “*guapo*” by the dominant society. They mark Carabalí men as possessing the affective drive central to the nation’s becoming yet hidden on the battlefields of independence, never to assume prominent positions of political authority after triumph. The song lingers in the process of sustained struggle to showcase black political agency that Abakuá represent, tied up with essentialized notions of racialized gender. This embodiment of Abakuá affect, transmitted through performance, inherently poses a threat to the hegemonic modern order. Abakuá in Cuba today must constantly negotiate their place within the nation-state by balancing their sacred performance of Abakuá-masculinity (one that affirms full self-hood before the modern nation-state) with the social norms of ideal modern, Cuban citizenship, where ethnic/racial group loyalties must always be subordinate to affiliation with the state.

When the history of Carabalí struggle is put to the fore, the internal logic of the historiography becomes more clear and other instances of semiotic play come to light. For instance, the first verse ends with “*todos los pueblos sufridos*” rather than the common refrain that expresses the rhetoric of Cuban nationalism, “*todo el pueblo unido*”. “*Los pueblos sufridos*” denotes a subtle line marking difference within the “Cuba país” rather than unification under homogeneity. Instead it affirms a multiplicity of African-based ethnic identities united within Cuba due to their structural position of suffering as blacks

under white hegemony, those whose full liberation remains a dream deferred and thus are still engaged in struggle.

These musical riffs off of the hegemonic narrative about Cuban nationalism happens first discursively through the play on the historic dates of struggle and then followed by the subtle surrogation of rhyming words. The adjectives, “*honestos, rebeldes, guerrilleros...*” speak back to the stigmatized reputation of Abakuá by the Cuban mainstream, foregrounding their strong internal code of ethics (“*honestos*”). Lino D’ou, a lieutenant colonel of the Mambí army and Abakuá initiate, said that the Abakuá “advocate for the respect and consideration of an African institution whose morality and altruism have nothing to learn from Masonry, for example, nor from any religion” (Miller, 150). This bold assertion is echoed in the lyrics which proudly affirm their more subversive attributes (“*rebeldes*”, “*guerrilleros*”); traits that are sanctioned when leveraged for state battles. Although interlaced by *dianas*— the familiar melodic serenade signifying *cubania*— the audacity of this pronouncement in the present day strikes the senses. This subtle semiotic play around where the patriotism of the song truly lies, radically queers what can easily appear as a straightforward spectacle of “*guapo*” black machismo.

The radical queering becomes more prominent in the second verse when the rhythm changes from a guaguancó structure to an Abakuá clave. Without missing a beat Geovanni lowers his hands to the ground, smoothly replacing one wooden clave stick with a cowbell that lays waiting behind his feet. While keeping the 6/8 rhythm, his surrogation of a single instrument changes the timbre of the time-line pattern from a hollow knocking to a metallic clanging. On this cue, the quinto<sup>53</sup> drum player tilts the conga drum from the upright position to diagonal tilt. He balances the bottom edge of the drum on the floor while

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<sup>53</sup> Also called salidor/Segundo-medio

resting the body on his right thigh, secured in place by his left thigh. Not only is the rhythmic shift felt in the body, but there is a rupture to the classic guaguancó rumba format. Instead of the person who sung *la diana* emerging as the soloist (as done in traditional Cuban rumba form), Chan, a member of the chorus breaks from the line, unattaches his microphone from the row of stands, and charismatically moves to center stage. Chan, a founder and high-ranking Abakuase himself, takes over the role of lead singer, and the former *diana*-er files in as part of the chorus.

Chan announces his arrival as leader by sounding out a prolonged “Ya-yoooo!”, before carrying on the solo verse. This interjection of Abakuá “*dialecto*” punctuates the new rhythmic state, indicating a new energetic presence, breaking from the sweet, tempering *dianas*. The Abakuá presence is now sonically pronounced shifting the secular space. The verse Chan sings at first is in Spanish. It talks about Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a Cuban-born Spanish planter who declared war against Spain in 1968, famously freeing his slaves at his sugar mill, called *La Demajagua*, in order to join the war effort. The subject of this verse correlates to the first historical reference, filling in more detail from the preliminary chronological sketch. In place of *dianas*, Chan intersperses his storytelling with Abakuá dance, breaking from the disembodied, still choral posture of singing that he once adhered to behind the line of microphone stands. The smooth, charismatic grace of his short dance flurries, woven in and out, play counterpoint to the spoken narrative about the white creole planter’s life. He traverses the stage back and forth, suddenly breaking into graceful spurts of dance, executing virtuosic shift in embodied effort quality, perhaps prepping the space or testing its readiness for what is to come. The biography of Manuel de Céspedes ends by Chan singing quizzingly, “¿Ese hecho cómo se llamó?” (What was the name of that historical act?). Instead of the chorus answering the question in response, the chorus repeats the question, throwing it back to Chan in the same fashion, “¿Ese hecho

*cómo se llamó?”*. Chan, then answers his own question, “*Ese hecho se llamó El grito de Yara*” (That act was called the Scream of Yara)”. The chorus amplifies Chan’s words with repetition. Although Carlos Manuel de Céspedes is the ostensible protagonist of the verse’s lyrics, Chan’s charismatic bodily presence overshadows. Chan’s corporal flurries of graceful dance improvisation cite distinctly Abakuá gesture, underscoring the distinctly Carabalí rhythm. His body competes for sensorial focus over the Spanish lyrics and wins with ease. The call for people to remember the scream that freed the slaves into battle on *La Demajagua* about 150 years ago echoes from Chan to the chorus, metaphorically catalyzing another call to action in the present moment.

The third, final, and longest section, the montuno (repetitive call and response section), is sung by Chan completely in Abakuá coded “*dialecto*”. This is also the section where the dance and audience participation is foregrounded. Suddenly the tempo and the temperature of the music rises and is felt in the body. However, with Chan at the lead, we feel that we are in safe, capable hands. Perhaps the rest of the song fills in the biographical details of other historical figures. Who they are and how they are remembered, a non-initiate cannot know. The Abakuá made great efforts to code their language to hide their knowledge from outsiders, including other Calabar Africans and people of Calabar-descent who were not initiates. However, the unique interplay between audience and performers in this section (quite distinct from the other songs in their repertoire) offers rich ethnographic data to ponder what social meaning is being produced in the space of the performance of this song in a secular context. Later on to follow, I share more insights from the interviews with Yoruba Andabo members about the song. Cursorily, I argue that rather than simply reflect the dominant narrative of Cuban history, “Protesta Carabalí” speaks back to it through very strategic layering of performatic techniques, both discursive and embodied, signifying a history of Cuba akimbo.

## Performance as Pedagogy

Western logocentrism proves a great handicap when trying to make meaning out of this Abakuá-based performance event. Even though the song is sung publically, only those who are initiates understand the lyrics' coded liturgical meaning. This secret code is sacred, not to be compromised on any grounds. For instance, the members of Yoruba Andabo who are not Abakuá initiates are not taught the secret meaning of the lyrics they sing or the rhythms they play, much less what their confluence achieves in a ritual setting.

*LA: No sé qué significa [la canción abakuá]. La lengua de liturgia no se... Me imagino que sea una invocación a las diferentes potencias que existen... como una reedificación, pero no sé qué significa. Como tal es la música, no hacemos nada religioso. Nos dicen el ritmo y ya...*

*MB: ¿Hay una transmisión igual del mensaje, aun si tú no sabe lo que quiere decir?*

*LA: Eso pasa. Y sí, Chan sabe lo que es (Aguilar 2013)*

LA: I don't know what [the abakua song] means. I don't know the liturgical tongue... I imagine that it may be an invocation to the different powers that exist... like a reedification, but I don't know what it means. As such its music, we don't do anything religious. They tell us the rhythm and that's it...

MB: Is there an equal transmission of the message, even if you don't know what it means?

LA: That happens. And yes, Chan knows what it is.

Despite not knowing the liturgical significance, there is a firm understanding that their performance is communicating something specific and pre-established, guaranteed by Chan's total orchestration.

*Esa enseñanza aquí no se da. Folklóricamente puede cantar cualquiera. Por aquí no se dice que tiene que decir las voces, que tiene que decir los toques, no, no, no... Tal vez si él que va a cantar es Abakuá, sí. Pero si él que va a cantar no*

*pertenece a esa religión, no tiene por qué saber que tiene que decir una cosa y que tiene que decir la otra. (Hernandez Padron 2013)*

That teaching is not given. Folklorically, you can sing anything. Over here they don't say what the vocals mean, what the rhythms mean, no, no, no... Perhaps if the person singing is Abakuá, yes. But if the person singing does not belong to that religion, they don't shouldn't any reason to know what one thing or the other means.

It becomes clear that for those who perform these traditions professionally, “folkloric” comes to mean secular, and secular comes to mean that their engagement with the song does not rely on the religious signification of the words. “Folkloric”, in this sense used by a Yoruba Andabo member above, does not signify an atavistic tradition bound for extinction. Secularity implies that the semiotic exchange exceeds, or isn't wholly prescribed by, the sacred system of ritual knowledge acquired through initiation. Folkloric means that those who haven't been “ordained” enter into the semiotic process of exchange with rhythms, symbols, gestures, sounds that would otherwise be foreclosed to them. What distinguishes secular symbolic economy is that, exchange does not pass through words. Nevertheless, secular meaning-making is occurring socially in the context where the believers/practitioners exercise a hegemonic power, narrowing the breadth of semiotic responses available to non-initiates. This being the case, the interpretation, albeit “folkloric” isn't individualistic, endlessly contingent, or ahistorical. The range of interpretive responses within the semiotic process is still tightly bound, by a pre-established sacred “grammar”. I presume that is why non-initiated members prefer to not state an interpretation at all [*yo no sé qué significa*” (I don't know what it means)], rather than readily offer a personal interpretation that may be “incorrect” (sacrilegious) by Abakuá terms.

Thus, the Carabalí meaning, reigns supreme, choreographing both discursive and meaning-making. For instance, only initiated members from the audience step out from the

audience area and dance center-stage during the *montuno* section after the professional dancers have finished their routine. Even if the liturgical, discursive meaning of the lyrics are not understood, there is a shared understanding that the meaning of the words still prescribes to what extent, and on what basis, one can exercise agency during the performance.

The fact that this song was created to be performed in secular, mixed-gender contexts means that this partial understanding is choreographed to have purpose on different terms than in ritual. The public's consensual submission to Carabalí terms of spectatorship by a wider audience, enacts an embodied political project. I propose that "Protesta Carabalí" fomenta a positive re-investment in racialized collective group identity, while commenting on the subjugated place of that idea within the nation. A textual analysis of the lyrics will only offer a partial understanding for the secular meaning that is specific to this context of black sociality. The interpretive framework accessible to the wider black urban working-class audience is heavily shaped by the Abakuá sacred "grammar." Similar to a ritual context, prescribed meanings are edified in the moment of embodied intersubjective exchange taking place between members of the black urban working-class during the performance. As I have begun to demonstrate already, although words can provide helpful clues, rather than letting the lyrics themselves automatically monopolize the meaning-making of the song, the confluence of the performatic elements as a whole must be taken into account in order to decipher the situated social meaning being produced between both Abakuá initiates and non-initiates, men and women, during the live event for the Yoruba Andabo and their followers.

Visual culture theorists who interrogate the mechanics of audience reception within the ocular epistemic regime interrogate the notion of "getting it" (arriving at the intended

meaning) through observation. They argue that the performativity of the image relies on the pre-establishment of a social grammar for understanding through shared meaning. Rather than see meaning as originating in the performer to be received by the spectator, performance theorists insist that the audience co-creates the meaning in the moment of iteration. Theories of spectatorship rely heavily on psychoanalysis, primarily Lacanian thought, for his meditations on how one becomes conscious of oneself as a perceiving being (Lacan 1979 [1949]). This process of coming into consciousness enables the production of a social being. In other words, looking at an “other” actually does work on the self and creates subjectivity. This scholarship necessarily pulls heavily from semiotics and linguistics for their attention to the intersubjective exchange of signs, meaning acquisition, and the implications for sociality (Barthes 1982 [1970]). In *Empire of Signs* (1982[1970]), Barthes demonstrates a way of reading an “other” culture as a text through the piecing together of bits of unfamiliar, idiosyncratic information. He argues that one consciously imposes meaning on the spectacle in order to construct logical relations. By finding a way to assimilate semiotic otherness into an internal sense of logic, one ensures the stability of the self.

I engage this theory of reception and extend it to move beyond the ocular, and its attendant interpretive metaphor of reading a text, to flesh out how performance, a fundamentally embodied process of meaning making, actively influences subject formation and as a result group-identity. Deleuze and Guattari speak to how using the body outside of the labor system devised by the state (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), driven by alternative desires, can have political affects. I argue that beyond what is available textually, the audience and the performers are acting in accordance with a distinctly diasporic repertoire of gesture, tone, rhythm, call & response, and bodily cadence from a historically situated genealogy of black performance that guides a differential mode of being-in-the-body. This

embodied transmission produces an alternative kind of black subject which runs up against the dominant construction of *Cubanidad*.

“Protesta Carabalí” triggers alternative intersubjective desires though this kinesthetic play between bodies. When the practices employed in the embodied realm are considered, new meanings can be gleaned. The genealogy of performance recruited in this scenario of black autonomy is firmly situated within a particular sacred epistemological framework that, when taken seriously, allows us to appreciate performance as, what Alexander calls, a “pedagogy of crossing” (Alexander 2005). Crossing the epistemic divide, destabilizing existing practices of knowing between sacred-secular/mind-body, is a tool for discovering new ways of being in our bodies and new forms of collective living. Performance becomes a central, rather than a peripheral mode within which history is transmitted through the body, shaping both the subject and a body-politic in its doing.

Although much could be said about the performative elements of “Protesta Carabalí” drawn from sacred ritual, I will, for now highlight two distinguishing elements: the predominant call & response format and the incremental temporal intensification. “Responsorial chants” (call & response) are structured so that those who chant can display/demonstrate their knowledge of their rich cultural history, challenging the others to respond appropriately. The acceleration in tempo raises the stakes for swift and accurate response. This is characteristic of the culture of playful debate that forges bonds of solidarity within the Abakuá lodges, ensuring that everyone maintains their collective memory at peak performance. Miller explains that one of the colloquial terms used to refer to Abakuá lodges, “*juegos*” (games), underscore the team-oriented cooperative form in which their mystic bonds are solidified (164). This form of testing the accrual of a body of

knowledge about the history of their people on their own terms delineates their body-politic from the that of the Cuban nation-state.

“Moruá Yuánsa is the title given the chanter in Cuban Abakuá ceremonies. In ceremony, the Moruá is the keeper of records, whose chants act as mnemonic devices for historical and geographical information” (Miller, 8-9). One might be able to decipher the word “Moruá” repeated by Chan periodically in the song, but without knowing the secret ceremonial language, the sounds of the word have no specific liturgical meaning. Thus, to a secular audience, the meaning of Moruá is conveyed in the *montuno* section of the song primarily by fulfilling the ceremonial role of responsorial chanting itself. As discussed earlier, the traditional Cuban rumba song structure designates that the one who establishes the tonal center in *la diana* act as lead singer throughout the song. This is overruled by Chan’s sacred designation as “Moruá Yuánsa”. Given that even in the secular setting, the *practice* of the Moruá is fulfilled by the person in the group who is ordained to perform that role in ceremony (Chan) this means that the sacred grammar is still “at play”. Non-initiated audience members respond with the appropriate words which they have learned incrementally by witnessing and participating in Yoruba Andabo’s performance of this song over and over again over time. Chan’s chants, with their distinct libidinal charge, are mnemonic devices that trigger the liturgically-appropriate response from the audience, even without their necessarily knowing the textual signification of the sounds they utter. Although stripped of their linguistic significance, the words do not lose their meaning. Rather, the words assume an equally potent affective charge that mark the senses. Reiterative participation in the performance of “Protesta Carabalí” reinforces the felt currency of a particular body-politic around the song, resulting in a Carabalí-inflected process of body socialization. In Abakuá ritual, art is used pedagogically as a method of transmitting knowledge incrementally through the body to prepare the next generation for

leadership (Miller,4). I argue that the same sacred pedagogical practice is operative in the secular context, incrementally shaping an audience's collective subjectivity, tied to Abakuá political desire.

The acceleration of the tempo "heats" the energy, intensifying the thrust of the semiotic exchange. For example, the sonic vibrations paired with the incremental acceleration of the tempo enter the body and reverberate through the interiority of the engaged listener, bringing them deeply into their physical bodies in way that is unique and distinct from the vibration of *la diana*. Likewise, when the tempo changes, the body movements are modified accordingly ushering the audience into a different spatiality. The temporal shift demands a shift in felt space, rendering the kinsphere thinner and less resistant/more pliant to quicker movements through space, permitting ease of travel.

Travel is a key element in Abakuá performance. Miller describes Abakuá performance as both cartography and genealogy, permitting geographic and temporal travel. The ability to travel to other places and times that run counter to the hegemonic linear narrative of the nation resonates with McKittrick's engagement with Merlene Nurbese Philip's notion of "a public genealogy of resistance...[entailing] histories, names and places of black pain, language and opposition which are *spoken with the whole body* and present to the world other geography, other rhythms, other times, other spaces" (xvii). Likewise, Chan's "calls" in Abakuá coded dialect summon forth a potent affirmation of diasporic belonging that reverberates off of occluded histories, names, and places of black pain that rise to the felt consciousness of bodies present. For the initiates present at Cabaret Las Vegas, engagement in Moruá responsorial chant creates a vehicle for travel across the Atlantic. This *routed* socialization of the body reenacts a specific sequence of historical events through gesture, re-edifying a sense of collective origin that predates the Cuban nation-state.

For non-initiates, Chan enacts an equally distinct diasporic point of reference for subject formation and group belonging. The intersubjective relations edified in Caberet Las Vegas override ritual difference within the audience members. Although one's sacred ordainment permits an added level of symbolic exchange, both initiates and non-initiates partake in a shared economy of signs in the live moment of performance. Both semiotic processes produce a "structure of feeling" that reifies/re-edifies a distinctly black relationship to the nation-state. Here, instead of evoking the hegemonic definition of black as attached to social stigma and inferiority, I refer to blackness in the Hallian sense, "marked by a counternarrative to the hegemonic order" (Hall 1993). The sacred-secular dynamic of the performance is united by mutual engagement in sacred-based practice in a secular, public state-run venue. Thus, the participants boldly embody the structural tension between sovereign black life and the modern nation-state in their prescribed counter-orientation of their body's assemblage in movement. In this sense, responsorial chants and acceleration of tempo ignite a potently intersubjective process of forging a counterhegemonic, shared understanding about the history of a sovereign people in Cuba. This alternate understanding of space, history, time, and human relation is transmitted through a socialization of a black body-politic structured through the sacred.

### **The Libidinal Economy of Gendered Assemblages**

The *montuno* section of the song brings the title, "Protesta Carabalí", into full effect, securing the maintenance of an extra-national feeling of belonging that is felt not just sentimentally, but in the body, kinesthetically arranged around Abakuá libidinal economy<sup>54</sup>. However, the body is not neutral in this process of racialization; it is a sternly gendered and sexualized one. The Abakuá rhythm, referred to as the "time-line pattern"

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<sup>54</sup> See Introduction to dissertation for an elaboration of libidinal economy

(Miller 2009), is a gendered regulatory regime (Foucault 1981). The Abakuá socialization of viable embodied response unequivocally privileges male subjects. This privilege extends even to un-initiated males, granting their sanctioned kinespheric exploration not extended to the female gendered body. The Abakuá rhythms, although played on unconsecrated drums by un-initiated musicians, nevertheless tap into the (racialized) gendering social function of Abakuá secret societies, to produce ideal (black) masculinity. Full inclusion is predicated on the body's (perceived) maleness and (perceived) heterosexuality as the first of many prerequisites that correlate to the recognized social function of moral masculinity<sup>55</sup>.

Again, borrowing from scholars of visibility, Berger (1972) and Mulvey (1999 [1975]) engage the politics embedded in the iteration of performance as a way of disciplining the audience into a particular mode of reception.<sup>56</sup> Diana Taylor echoes this in her adoption of De Certeau's "scenario", citing that scenarios can discipline us as spectators to *not* intervene (Taylor 2003). In this scenario of black autonomy in Cabaret Las Vegas, literally, only those who perform Abakuá-idealized black masculinity in their daily lives are eligible to exercise the agency to showcase their individual talent through the repertoire of Abakuá-coded gesture. The dance is, in a sense, part of an authenticating feedback loop that socially reifies the performance of proper masculinity as "felicitous". The stringent nature of this heteropatriarchal rule is reified to the point where Abakuá choreography come to represent morally-configured black masculinity par excellence. The black body-politic performatively validates this particular construction of racialized gender in these scenarios of Abakuá-based performance, creating a religiously-determined black homosocial milieu

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<sup>55</sup> i.e. to be a good son, a good father, a good husband, a good protector of territory, etc.

<sup>56</sup> Berger examines this in relation to visual culture more broadly, and Mulvey in relation to film specifically.

of hypermasculinity in the midst of a public, secular, mixed-gender (and mixed-race) setting.

In Abakuá ritual, the dance of the ñañigo (ceremonial Abakuá dancer) takes on the identity of a masked spirit (*ireme*). His dance is driven by a dialogue between the drummer and the spirit. The drum is liturgically understood as female; the skin of the drum represents the skin of a Carabalí princess, Sikán. According to Abakuá belief, God/Tanze was anthropomorphized into a Fish that was unintentionally caught in a shallow calabash by Sikán, collecting water from the river. By putting the calabash on her head the woman became cosmically linked with Tanze, causing her to die along with the fish unable to survive outside of water. In the song, Chan repeats “Iya, Iya Iya... Iya eeeObon Tansi Iya kondondo” [the Fish, Lord Tansi the great Fish!<sup>57</sup>], referencing this narrative. In Cuba, “Iya” is the Mother, cosmically joined with the sacred Fish, the foundation (*fundamento*), in a single entity. According to Abakuá history, devote followers were desperate to bring back Tanze’s voice (The Voice). Knowing the divine unification of the woman to God, Sikan’s skin was used to cover the calabash, forming a drum. Her body became the maternal vessel through which the Voice could resound once again. Although scholars of Cross-River society and history presume that Sikán was probably a high-ranking member of an all-female Nnimm society that exercised its own sovereignty and self-governance, here the feminine is solely represented by the maternal drum that beckons the power of The Voice to its male devoted followers.

Although made physically absent in Abakuá danced ritual, the feminine is the foundation (*fundamento*) of the Abakuá faith. Her epidermis, is what makes divine

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<sup>57</sup> Tanzi or Ekue is the divine fish; Kondo is greatness. (see Ivor Miller p. 209-210). Kondondó references the word “Ekondo” which usually means domain, earth, etc. “Ekondo Ekondo is the universe...the inhabitants of the earth collectively; the nations” (see Ivor Miller p. 210)

resonance possible. The conversation between drummer and dancer, is mediated by the metaphoric feminine flesh. Her flesh exercises no agency, yet it is through her taught epidermis that God's voice is made audible. The hollow, resonant body of the drum, vibrating upon steady impact, drives the libidinal force of the dance. With every smack of the skin, the feminine is reconstituted as vitally central in an asymmetrical balance that is sustained by the collective response to the Moruá's ever accumulating calls for response.

The Abakuá theater of sensuality is a danced rehearsal of Calabar history made present through the body in motion. The dancers develop an improvisational choreographic phrase based on pre-set Abakuá gestures as a motif. Feline animality is displayed as a form of moral intimidation (Thompson 1984, 228). The Leopard symbolizes masculine prowess in war, moving with perfect elegance and strength. The "perfection" is achieved through what is called in dance technical terms as "effort economy", characterized by a way of moving in which expenditure of energy is optimized by using only the parts of the body needed and relaxing the rest<sup>58</sup>. The intricate mastery of simultaneous muscle control and release exudes the metaphor of masculine accomplishment through seemingly effortless domination. Like the ñañigos in ceremony, Yoruba Andabo dancers' checkered [leopard-like] costume pattern tells the audience where the power of the dancer is coming from (Thompson 1984, 262). This embodied dialectic exchange between the drummer and dancer is a "play" in the sense that it is characterized by improvisation on a theme within certain rules of engagement with the singer/Morua. Masculinity is on display (and under scrutiny) in the "play" mediated by the feline in gesture and the feminine drum instrument<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.contemporary-dance.org/dance-terms.html>

<sup>59</sup> See Yvonne Daniel's *Dancing Wisdom* (2005, 135-137) for thick description of Abakuá dance.

The “play” at Cabaret Las Vegas between the professional male dancers, Vladimir<sup>60</sup> and Lázaro (non-initiates), Chan (the akpwón/initiate), and the drummers (non-initiates) is catalyzed by the accelerated clave. The bells around their waists play counterpoint to the steady metallic clanging of the cowbell’s accelerated clave rhythm. The end of their choreographic phrase triggers/ignites the added performance of ñañigo/*ireme* masculinity by Abakuá men present in the performance venue. In the case of religious initiates, this “play” could be a re-ignition of a self that was consecrated through Abakuá ritual. For non-initiates it can be the embodiment of a particular performance of black masculinity that is affirmed by its association with this sacred form of diasporic black subjectivity. The subject’s proprioception as a sacred Carabalí-self renders the person timeless. An Abakuá saying, “The man dies, but the Abakuá, no” speaks directly to this notion of “performance genealogy” re-membered over time, collapsing past and present selfhood in locomotion. When the body assumes this sacred choreography, they are thrust into a different sense of being-in-their-body linked to a racialized political consciousness that intervenes on the temporality and spatiality of the Cuban nation-state. The Abakua phrase, “My body is in Cuba, but my mind is in Africa” (Pappademos,37), expresses how this counter-choreography routes the body toward an imagined “Africa”.

Here it is important to appreciate this embodied social phenomenon as historically tied to macro-political processes, rather than solely attributable to the realm of generalized “African tradition” as somehow constructed outside history. The fact that this form of gendered body socialization comes to define Calabar ethnic identity as a whole is connected to the fact that other Calabar institutions, particularly all-female Calabar institutions, called Nnimm societies (Thompson 1984), were not reconstituted on Cuban

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<sup>60</sup> Whose is abakua.

territory. The absence of Nnimm or Nimm-like historical referents cannot be understood in isolation from the structures of heteropatriarchy that governed the construction of the modern New World order as we know it. The presence of Nnimm societies, and innumerable variants of others whose name we do not know, may have produced supplementary understandings of idealized gender and sexuality and other ways to assemble the social that would have counterbalanced the way in which Abakuá societies enable the reproduction of heteropatriarchy. Thus, the cultural hegemony of Abakuá societies within this black space of autonomy is, to a non-negligible degree, complicit with colonial heteropatriarchal desire to affirm the masculine gender as the designated political actor. Without the co-presence of Nnimm ritual legacy, hetero-patriarchy is rehearsed in the Abakuá theatre of sensuality on the gendered-as-feminine body of the drum, standing in for Calabar sociality as a whole. In “Protesta Carabali”, the reification of heteropatriarchal masculinity’s association with ultimate strength and moral power is cultivated through a repertoire of embodied grace predicated on the passive utility of the feminine.

The other colloquial term for Abakuá lodges, “*potencias*” (powers, territory), underscores this complex relationship between gender and politic ideology being enacted in this performance. Women are typically relegated to the outside patio of Abakuá *potencias* during ceremonies, thus delineating the territory of homosocial ritual as sacred. Although Yvonne Daniel notes that women do have a more complex ceremonial role within the male organizations, they are “not generally discussed”.

Although it is not readily discussed, women and families can dance portions of the secret society music/dance tradition, and a few women hold important ceremonial roles within the male organization...In separate formations, but without the masked spirit of *iremes*, women dance and sing their complimentary Carabali patterns, called Brikamo, lunging intermittently within the traveling

rhythmic dance pattern, and brushing their bodies with sweeping, cleansing gestures. (Daniel 2005, 137)

In my fieldwork I never encountered verbal reference to any protagonist feminine role. This is a much needed avenue for further research indeed. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, I am interested in what political conditions enable these aspects of Carabalí culture to be omitted or de-emphasized within social memory over time. I am particularly interested in how notions of sacred “African tradition” validate the very constructions of black masculinity that are stigmatized in dominant Cuban society. I am concerned with the kinds of body assemblages that get enabled by the omission of other forms of body-socialization over time and space. In short, I want to call attention to the ways in which the body-politic is disciplined to move according to gendered expectations of viable collective action.

The unrelenting sonic chain of the 6/8 asymmetrical meter, what Ivor Miller calls an “umbilical cord to Africa”, is perhaps a metaphor for the unequal yet intrinsically relational gendering acts, forever connecting the Calabar-inflected body-politic to its legendary sovereign territory across the Atlantic. Without the Carabalí social rituals for female erotic autonomy, Protesta Carabalí’s dance allows for masculine-centered sensual self-enhancement, confirming a vision of mastery assigned to masculine homosocial dominance. The libidinal economy of the performance echoes macro-processes of power that rewards heteropatriarchal political-economic arrangements (Alexander 2005). The Calabar-body politic in this performance of black autonomy, is contoured by a ritual logic of gendered order. Its coherence within the nation-state on those terms gives it currency as a nation, a people, in struggle against white hegemony.

“Protesta Carabali” is doing gendering work on both men and women, disciplining bodies into an ordered way of occupying the space according to their sex. Although the

cultivation of hyper-masculinity is ostensibly the main event, women are actively being disciplined to respond corporally in a predetermined way as well. The work being done on the feminine is vital and instrumental for the maintenance of the performance. Women are choreographed to physically “not take up space” in “the game”, in the same way that they are relegated outside to the patio of the Abakuá “*juegos/potencias*” (lodges), enabling the delineation of masculine territory. In ceremony, their presence is made silent in the absenting of their physical body so that the Voice can resound uninterrupted through the metaphorical feminine body of the drum<sup>61</sup>. The drum-beats represent the convergence of feminine and masculine, putting their (hetero)sexual labor to work for corporate group ends. In other words, without the feminine-maternal, the masculine would be unintelligible, God would be mute, and the Abakuá men Voice-less.

During “Protesta Carabali”, even when responding in-kind to the chant of Chan (as Moruá), women obediently assume a corporally silent, supportive role so as to not detract from the main focus on the masculine body’s prowess. The women present in Cabaret Las Vegas bear witness to the performance of black masculinity, giving praise and appraisal of mastery. Women are never to cross the heteronormative boundary of gender performance and take the stage. The self-restraint expressed as corporeal silence<sup>62</sup> of the body sexed as female is striking in direct relation to the contrast of what Thompson calls, “manful self-assertion” (252) assumed by those of bodies sexed as male. In a sense, femininity is measured in relation to her body’s performance of restraint and non-enunciation in the

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<sup>61</sup> Perhaps the women’s role as silent drum is a genealogical transmission from the silent feather drums used in all-female Calabar societies (Nnimm) that Sikán was believed to belong to, a Cross River Region tradition that did not survive the middle-passage (see (Thompson 1984, 236).

<sup>62</sup> For a discussion of the reoccurring theme of silence and femininity in this cultural practice see Robert Farris Thompson (1984), p. 236.

Abakuá portion of the song. Whether one occupies the body executing a long feline lunge or the body bearing silent witness to the lunges, both are mutual gendering acts.

However, the necessary silence ascribed to the feminine doesn't fully explain the introjection of "*alli na'mas!*" by Regla, the female member of the chorus, after Chan delivers a preparatory line in *dialecto* for the montuno section. The lyrics would read:

Solista/Chan: Jeyei, jeyei, jeyi, jeyei, jeyei Moruá

Regla: allí na'ma!

Her solo voice doesn't appear in the commercial recording of the song, nor is it reflected in the written transcript (see Appendix). However, when performed live, Regla delivers this solo exaltation in loud spoken voice without fail at precisely the same moment every time. "*Alli na'mas*" (roughly translated colloquially as "that's it") is a common colloquial expression used to mark the pinnacle of aesthetic mastery by a performer. Based on interviews with group members, I learned that every song is meticulously rehearsed and variation from that which was instituted in rehearsal is frowned upon, except during predetermined sections of planned improvisation. In other words, Regla would not sing this line if it hadn't been planned and approved by Geovanni (who directs the vocals) and Chan (the Abakuá expert). However, the orchestrated illusion of impulsive response by the feminine voice is of note, especially considering the strict policing of gender performance in the sacred-secular Abakuá space. I suggest that rather than embodying a moment of rupture where we can witness female agency, the exclamation reinforces the limit of feminine protagonism: *hasta allí*. The approved, not improvised, "*alli na'mas!*" perhaps gives a seal of feminine praise to the masculine vocal virtuosity of the caller as he commences to lead the song in complete Abakuá dialect. In other words, the feminine voice is heard in as much as it affirms the positive appraisal of masculine prowess. To publically

avow masculine mastery is the extent of the feminine role in the montuno section, consenting to patriarchal leadership.

One of the male dancers who performs the Abakuá choreography explained in an interview how the maternal figure is situated within Abakuá society and Afro-religious sociality writ large which gives added meaning to the function of the performance of feminine endorsement.

*La madre de la familia, vuelvo a decir, es lo más grande, porque sin la madre no te puede bautizar en la iglesia, no te puede hacer ocha, no te puede hacer abakua, no te puede hacer palero. No te puede hacer cualquier manifestación religiosa. La familia. La madre. Porque para entrar en todas esas manifestaciones religiosas tiene que estar bautizado, y sin el consentimiento de tu mamá, no te permite en esa casa. Entonces la madre, para mí, es lo más grande que hay. Tu va a cada religión y dicen que pide permiso de tu mamá. Tanto del cuarto de santo, tanto cuando sale del Abakuá, ifá, cualquier religión. Dice, pídele la bendición de su mamá. Porque si tu mamá no te pare ni chango, ni orula, ni nadie te puede recibir. Así que lo más grande es la madre. Eso es vida. (Quevedo Armenteras 2013)*

The mother of the family, I repeat, is the greatest, because without the mother you can't get yourself baptized in the church, you can't get yourself made ocha, you can't get yourself initiated Abakuá, you can't get yourself initiated as a palero. You can't get made in any kind of religious manifestation. The family. The mother. Because to enter into those religious manifestations you have to be baptized, and without the consent of your mother, they don't permit you entrance to the [religious] house. So the mother, for me, is the greatest there is. You go to each religion and they tell you to ask permission from your mother. Both in the *cuarto de santo* and when you come out of the Abakuá, ifá, whatever religion. They say, ask for the blessing of your mother. Because if your mother did not give birth to you, neither change nor orula or anyone can receive you. So the greatest [person] is the mother. That is life.

Vladimir's words support this notion of the (black) feminine body as a maternal vessel, the means through which the continued cultivation of the Abakuá men, and the Afro-religious community writ large, is made possible in Cuba. Rather than having inherent value in and of herself, her procreative utility renders her valuable, simultaneously affirming the

heterosexual drive to populate the body-politic with ideal men. However, the necessity of her consent to proceed entails a degree of agency that perhaps is not represented in the “Protesta Carabali” performance. Her political agency to permit or prohibit the cultivation of people doesn’t get re-membered in the nightclub, just as the Nimm institutions of feminine self-enhancement and erotic autonomy are socially forgotten.

“Protesta Carabali” is a rumba fused with Abakuá-desire that declares itself a history of protest. Its lyrics in Spanish relay the Cuban battles of independence and white Creole leadership. However, the akimbo way in which Cuban nationalism is overlaid by sacred Abakuá social memory does a particular kind of performative community-building work for the black audience, evoking the presence of historical figures of black male bravado as a defiant counterpoint to white hegemony. The corporal absence of feminine agency outside her use-value by men remains un-re-membered in this homosocially queer history of rebellious men.

Yoruba Andabo’s vindicationist Abakuá performance in public space can be described as a masculine “power-play”, incrementally etching a religiously-contoured body-politic through intersubjective relation to both discursive and embodied signs. In Abakuá secret societies, aesthetics is one of the primary forms of transmission for philosophical thought to the next generation. Abakuá ceremonies use theater to reenact history and in-the-doing they impart historical memory through the body and bring their meaning to the present (4). Along with facilitating a palpable sense of diasporic belonging, Yoruba Andabo makes palpable the coevelness of heteropatriarchy and claims to sovereignty in modernity.

## Performers' Interpretations

The intense embodied response from the audience every time “Protesta Carabali” was played was striking every time I bore witness to Yoruba Andabo’s weekly Saturday gig in Cabaret Las Vegas. I became captivated and intrigued by the dramaturgic progression in their set (from classic rumba-guaguancó to a transformative Abakuá montuno) and the performative effect of such a transformation on the body-politic. I was interested in understanding how the group members themselves interpreted their role in the production and the significance of the song as a whole.

In an interview with the director, Geovani del Pino, he explained that one of the missions of the group was to demonstrate not only rumba’s centrality within Cuban music, but also rumba’s connection to the Abakuá religious fraternity:

*Eso lo hizo un amigo de nosotros. Lo hizo Reinaldo Brito ya fallecido. Él fue que hizo ese número. Y nosotros lo que quisimos llevar al disco porque nos interesaba mucho demostrar la influencia de la música Abakuá dentro de la rumba, y es un número que comienza con rumba, con el guaguancó. Y con la misma clave, salta al Abakuá, sin ningún tipo de problema. Y eso es muy interesante demostrar. Eso demuestra la importancia de la Abakuá dentro de la....y por eso que nos sirve. Con independencia de la letra que tiene, [que es] muy interesante, habla de la liberación de los esclavos, habla de Manuel de Céspedes...con independencia de eso...[musicalmente también tiene mucha interés]. Si para nosotros lo que es importante es que la música, demostrar la influencia que tuvo el Abakuá dentro de la rumba. Dentro del complejo de la rumba. Para nosotros eso es la más importante de ese número. Fuimos los primeros hacer un número así. Empezar con rumba y terminar con Abakuá. (Del Pino 2014)*

A friend of ours did it [wrote the song]. The deceased Reinaldo Brito did it. It was we he that made this number. And what we wanted to bring it to the album because we were very interested in demonstrating the influence of the Abakuá music within the rumba, and it’s a number that starts with rumba, with the guaguancó. And with the same *clave*, jumps to Abakuá, without any problem. And that is very interesting to show. That demonstrates the importance of Abakuá within the [rumba]....and that’s why it useful to us. Apart from the lyrics it has, [which is] very interesting, it talks about the liberation of the slaves, it talks about Manuel de Céspedes...apart from that...[musically it also has lost of appeal]. If for us what is important is the music, demonstrating the influence that the Abakuá

had within the rumba. Within the complex of the rumba. For us that's the most important thing about this number. We were the first to do a number like that. Begin with rumba and end with Abakuá.

Three things are important to mark within Geovani's explanation in relation to the performance analysis I have laid out thus far: 1) the de-emphasis on the lyrics of the song, 2) the emphasis on the musicality, specifically the rhythmic transition from rumba-guaguancó to Abakuá, and 3) the foregrounding of a vindicationist project. The first point corroborates the notion that the logocentric interpretation of the song is perhaps the least salient when grasping where the participants place the weight of the song's meaning within this situated social context. The second point underscores the importance of the sonic and rhythmic elements to say something about the Abakuá influence on Cuba's national patrimony. This statement about the unrecognized centrality of Abakuá within rumba adds another layer of meaning to Yoruba Andabo's broader message with regard to "setting the record straight" about rumba and influential role of Abakuá within the Cuban music genre.

In my interviews with all of the members and in interviews they have done with journalists prior, they continually communicate that without rumba the other genres of music known as distinctively Cuban would not exist: i.e. salsa, son. They see their group as "defending" the dignity of rumba that has been "*marginado*" (marginalized) from the Cuban mainstream. However, I gained a sense of the political connotation of this musical vindicationist stance over time spent with the group away from their shows.

One afternoon at Geovanni's house while doing my first series of one-by-one interviews with the group members, Geovanni put on a DVD for the members to watch while they waited their turn. The DVD was about racism in Cuba called, "La Raza" (Zurbano, et al. 2008), an independent film featuring some of the most high-profile black activist-scholars on the topic. I was familiar with the documentary because it is used as a teaching tool within activist circles, and features many ARAC members. The film speaks

directly about white cultural hegemony and racism in Cuba. The fact that Geovanni not only had the movie in his possession, but wanted to share it with his group members to start a conversation about racism, shows that he not only holds a race-based analysis of inequality, but also sees its relevance to the work of their group as a whole. Group members would sometimes recall the movie in our interviews and subsequent conversations when explaining their own marginalization, revealing a shared understanding about the racialized nature of the discrimination they face as artists. However, in published interviews done by journalists, the word “race” is markedly absent from Geovanni’s vocabulary. Instead, he avidly marks the inequality and discrimination against *rumba* and *rumberos*.

This suggests that Geovanni is careful about being publically associated with racial discourse, although race may be an operative framework internally for understanding his social reality. This strategic public unmarking of race by racialized subjects resonates with the performance strategy of ARAC. The perceived limits of viable speech in public discourse carries over from the national project of racelessness founded in the Republican period. Speaking directly about race was threatening to the white creole political leadership and therefore not a viable approach for black public expression or political struggle (Pappademos 2011). Yoruba Andabo exhibits a prime example of how black people consciously choose to articulate race-based claims publically in cultural terms to avoid backlash that would compromise their precarious standing within the bounds of Cuban respectability. Geovanni and his members are conscious of the racial nature of rumba’s marginalization by the Cuban mainstream. Rumba music and rumbero identity is a way of talking about the history and legacy of racial discrimination in Cuba, black identity and black pride, within a more socially acceptable discourse around music.

With this lens, Geovanni’s explanation of Yoruba Andabo’s investment in demonstrating Cuban music’s indebtedness to Abakuá is also a metaphor for talking about

Cuba's indebtedness to its marginalized black subjects. Moreover, the song advocates for that which has been rendered abject/unassimilable within Cuban identity, Abakuá sovereignty, as the unsung hero to which Cuba owes its independence. Thus, the aesthetic project the director emphasizes cannot be appreciated within a vacuum or on purely the level of artistic value or musical virtuosity. The political valence of the sonic progression in "Protesta Carabalí" —beginning with rumba and ending with Abakuá— can be appreciated when the ongoing history of state persecution against Abakuá practitioners is taken into account. Hence the cultural politics of working class men collectively dancing along to the song, and affirming proud, self-governing, morally-configured black masculinity in public, gains political significance as well. Although Geovanni de-emphasizes the lyrics, he places central focus on the moment of rhythmic transition from the rumba clave to the Abakua clave. It happens seamlessly, "*sin ningún tipo de problema*" (without a problem) and corresponds to when the singers pronounce the words "*guerrilleros*" (warriors). The word "warriors" mimics the intimidating militancy characterized by Abakuá-masculinity, sounded by the metallic clave on the cowbell.

I argue that Yoruba Andabo's sonic intervention performs an investment in particular moments of Cuba's national history to tell a particular story about black men as both African *and* black in Cuba's present. Although the lyrics in Spanish may portray a Cuban nationalist commitment centering a white forefather, taken as a whole the performance evokes the state's indebtedness to Abakuá moral uprightness, strength, and valor. "Protesta Carabalí" performs a historical narrative that displays an intricate play between text and embodiment to comment on the present moment. Drawing from the Abakuá tradition of coded aesthetic mastery, spectacle does more than simply recount history. It talks back to the national history, bringing a revisionist ethno-nationalist investment in the history of black people in Cuba. As Chan is the only current Abakuá

initiate in the group, the meaning of the song, to a large degree, is understood through embodiment rather than through text. Although hidden in their print media coverage or their lyrics, the presence of race's absented salience is powerfully felt in the live event.

While Geovanni interprets the song as expressing a historically based vindicationist desire in musical terms, others describe the greater social meaning as an homage to ancestry. For instance, Chan shared that the origin of Yoruba Andabo's commitment to the Abakuá tradition in rumba as an obligation to maintain the legacy of their ancestors.

*Los grupos que están renaciendo ahora son grupos jóvenes, pero asociados por viejos, y entonces la cadena no se rompe... Porque mis hijos ahora, ya yo desaparezco, pero dios lo quiere, pero tengo mis hijos y van naciendo y van naciendo, mis nietos. Y entonces no pueden de caer. No pueden caer. Tienen que mantener.* (Cardenas 2014)

The groups that are being reborn now are young groups, put they are affiliated with old men, and so the chain is not broken... Because now my children, when I disappear, for god wants it, but I have my children and they will birth and birth my grandchildren. And so they can't fall [out]. They can't fall [out]. They have to keep it up.

He goes on to say that his mother, father, and grandmother were also rumberos and they lived in the “Solar de África”, a name he emphasized with pride. As mentioned earlier, Chan is the only current Abakuá-initated member of the group. His mother belonged to a black “*coros de clave*” (formed in response to the forced transformation of *cabildos de nación* after national independence), and his father was Abakuá. and his son as well. He and his son (also Abakuá) continue his family's connection to autonomous black musico-religious institutions (“described as urban palenques”<sup>63</sup>), continuing the genealogy of collective performance founded upon Africanist strategies of self-governance surviving

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<sup>63</sup> See Miller (2009)

alongside/within dominant society. The principles of sovereignty and self-governance are inextricably tied to a notion of the sacred, as a religious calling and an ancestral obligation.

When talking about the song, Chan goes back to the formation of the group during the *aficionado* movement in the 1960s, connected to the *Federación Obrera Marítima Local del Puerto de la Habana*. He worked in the Port of Havana since he was a child in the late 1940s. In interviews with Yoruba Andabo members, they recount the history of their group's rise to professional stardom much like how they tell the history of the nation, punctuated by the acts of "big men". Starting with the "*Hombres que se respetaban. Religiosos. Abakuáses,*" who played in the ports.

Yoruba Andabo's production assistant's interpretation of "Protesta Carabali" underscores how a particular construction of black "*hombria*" (manliness/masculinity), is foregrounded. His account merits a close reading because it speaks to larger argument around how performance renders palpable "absented presences" (McKittrick 2006) from Cuban history, in a way that comments on the nation-state. Furthermore, he references how this vindictionist historical commentary rehearses a certain form of racialized gender for the black community that is shaped by a particular "genealogy of performance".

*Eso es la historia de Cuba! Qué vamos a negar?! Mira como los abakuas están contando la historia de Cuba. "Ese hecho, como se llamó a...Ese hecho, como se llamó a..ooyooyoo." Está hablando de la Managua. Se está hablando de Maceo, un general Mambí NEGRO por demás, fue muy guapo. Y defendió a cuba con su sangre. Fue herido más de 10 veces en combate. Maceo; que fue uno de los mejores. Que tenía tanta fuerza en la brazo como en su oratorio. Y allí se habla...como le va a proponer, Martínez Campo, va a proponer a Maceo, una tregua, un descanso, una tara oscura y Maceo respondió, "No nos entendemos."*

*"Cómo? Pero general [Maceo].."*

*"No nos entendemos. No más tenemos que hablar."*

*A un general Martínez Campo, encomendando. Pero tenía que hablar con Maceo. Para hablar con Maceo tenía que ser una gente exquisita, y los españoles*

*escogieron al general Martínez Campo. Y Maceo acepto la reunión y después de mucho conversar, entre enemigos en los protocolos conversen bien, al final lo que proponía Martínez campo fue una rendición oculta. Y cuando se dio cuenta de que se estaba proponiendo el, le dijo, “si en esto consiste, no nos entendemos.”*

*“Pero, mira general!”*

*“No nos entendemos.”*

*Y eso es la canción.*

*Hoy en la letra, la Abakuá en el Managua...como en el campo se reúnen...y todo eso...Y Maceo dijo, “el es blanco, yo soy negro...pero como es firmar el pacto de Zanjón? llévese eso. A mi no sirve. Pero mire, no nos entendemos.”*

*Que arreglo de humanidad! Eso es lo que explica la canción. Mira como el Abakuá está cantando la historia. Entonces al fin del cuento, el Abakuá es parte de la historia del país.*

*MB: Entonces, da buena imagen del Abakuá.*

*Si! El Abakuá surge allá. Surge en aquella época allá había negros cimarrones, metidos allí en el bosque, vivía, se defendía y no tenían miedo, dentro del bosque solo. No tenían miedo. Un cimarrón revirado contra todo y vivía.*

*La Abakuá fue prohibida en Cuba por un tiempo. ...*

*El triunfo de la revolución en Cuba vierto, paralizo, abandono muchas cosas. ...después con el transcurso del tiempo ha ido liberando, digamos 10-15 años paraca. ...pero de la entrada llego, pienso para poner un orden, el Abakuá no, esto no, esto no... Y los jefes de juegos de casas tuvieron que hablar y explicar...eran negros muy educados, que defendemos una sola cosa, la hermandad entre los hombres. Hombres hecho y derechos. Hombres a todas pruebas. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

This is the history of Cuba! What are we going to deny?! Look how the Abakuá are telling the history of Cuba. “Ese hecho, como se llamó a...Ese hecho, como se llamó a..ooyooyoo.” It’s talking about the Managua. Its talking about Maceo, a BLACK Mambi<sup>64</sup> on top of that, he was very *guapo*. And he defended Cuba with his blood. He was injured more than 10 times in combat. Maceo: who was one of the greatest’s. He had as much strength in his arms as he did in his oration. And

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<sup>64</sup> Refers to guerrilla Cuban independence soldiers. They represent the highest revolutionary ideals of self-sacrifice and valor in the patriotic effort embodied by the former enslaved who joined the Cuban Liberation Army.

that's what it [the song] says. How could he, Martinez Campo, propose a truce to Maceo, a rest, a dark blemish, and Maceo responded, "we don't understand each other".

"What? But general [Maceo]..."

"We don't understand each other. There isn't anything else to talk about."

General Martinez Campo, [was] entrusted with the command. But he [Martinez Campo] had to talk with Maceo. In order to talk with Maceo you had to be equisite, and the Spanish chose general Martinez Campo. And Maceo accepted the meeting and after much conversation, between enemies in the protocols they conversed well, and at the end what Martinez proposed was a masked defeat. And when he [Maceo] realized what Martinez was proposing he said to him, "if that is what it consists of, we don't understand each other."

"But look, General!"

"We don't understand each other"

And that is the song.

Today, in the lyrics, the Abakua in the Managua... like in the countryside they met... and all that.. And Maceo said, "he is white, I am black, but what is this signing the Pact of Zanjon? Take that away. It's of no use to me. Look; we don't understand each other."

What an arrangement of humanity! That is what the song explains. Look how the Abakuá are singing the history. So at the end of the day the Abakua are part of the history of the country.

MB: So, it gives the Abakuá a good image.

Yes! It emerges from that epoch, there there were maroon blacks, hidden there in the forest, they lived, and they defended [themselves] and they weren't afraid, in the forest. They weren't afraid. A crazy wild maroon against everything and he lived.

The Abakuá were prohibited in Cuba for a while...

The triumph of the revolution in Cuba shed, paralyzed, and abandoned many things... later with the pass of time they loosened up a bit, we could say 10-15 years ago... but upon entering it came to, I think, to bring order, it said no to Abakuá, no to this, no to that...and the heads of the lodges had to talk and explain. They were very educated black men that defended one thing only,

brotherhood among men. Real and bonafide men. Real men under any kind of test.

For the speaker (Valentín— *Ibaye*—), the song is about General Antonio Maceo’s militant, act of insubordination both Spain and to the white creole leaders who are revered as the official custodians of the Cuban nation. He connects that act of defiance against white political order to both the insubordination of maroon communities during slavery and the Abakuá brotherhoods. This dignified insubordination to state power is hailed as continuing to the present day. Although neither maroon communities nor Maceo are explicitly mentioned in the lyrics, from his perspective they, along with the Abakuá, are the protagonists of the song. The signature phrase he assigned to Maceo in his testimony, “*No nos entendemos* (We don’t understand each other)”, does not appear in the song lyrics either, however that is the phrase that, for him, encapsulates the semiotic thrust of the song. In his rendition of Maceo’s bravery, he emphasizes that as a “Mambí *BLACK* man” (emphasis in the original). His Abakua-esque “manful self-assertion” was politically daring and subversive. This posture is explained as rooted in a strong foundation of self-respect, dignity and pride that he connects to sovereign black institutions, be it palenques or Abakuá juegos/potencias. These are the social spaces where black men cultivate *hombria* capable of countering the hegemonic power white supremacy. “*No nos entendemos*” symbolizes Maceo’s defiant assertion of an incommensurable black worldview, challenging the mutual agreement arrived at between the creole and Spanish generals facilitated by white racial solidarity. The placement of emphasis on Maceo’s critical role in Cuban history, representing a refusal to adopt the terms of the Spanish crown in any way that compromised his political vision for total black freedom, echoes the absented press conference of ARAC — *se fue pa’l monte*— only using other words. *No nos entendemos* identifies a

fundamental conflict between black and white competing political visions of just/moral order.

Valentin connects this ideological clash between the competing visions of moral/just social order in the present day. He makes this connection by referring to how the Abakuá have been persecuted since the “triumph of the revolution” when the revolutionary leaders criminalized their societies. “*El Abakuá no, esto no, esto no...*”, refers to institutionalized forms racial discrimination within the Revolution under the pretext of re-establishing order: disbanding black civic organizations, stigmatizing Afro-religious worship, silencing claims of racism, etc. Valentin’s critical read of “the triumph” mirrors the effect of the akimbo chronology in the lyrics, re-signifying 1959 as a new moment of prolonged black struggle rather than a culmination of freedom. Pappademos’ text serves as a keen reminder that even during the postwar climate after Cuba’s independence from Spain, “blacks were aware of the wealth that their labor had generated and, by extension, their singular importance to the colonial economy....African descendants argued that Cuba was indebted to them for the decisive role they had played in Cuba’s anticolonial insurgency” (Pappademos, 97). According to Valentin’s interpretation of the performance, this body of knowledge is given flesh in the song. “*Qué vamos a negar?!*” (What are we going to deny?!). The black-standpoint historical wisdom Valentin cites runs counter to the 1959 revolutionary discourse that purports that blacks should feel indebted to the revolution for the gains of rights and privileges they were (benevolently) given. “Protesta Carabalí” is a counterhegemonic narrative of black valor, strength, and acumen for which the nation is indebted. This counter hegemonic narrative is kept alive through the embodiment of Yoruba Andabo’s social memory at Cabaret Las Vegas.

“*No nos entendemos* (We don’t understand each other)” is the recurring message that echoes through Valentin’s explanation. The black radical refusal of accommodation to

white hegemonic interpretation of “order” achieves palpable resonance within their performance as bodies assemble according to sacred choreography. This resonance is achieved through the passivity of the feminine body; a body equally absent in Valentin’s explanation. The corporate defense of black masculinity vis-à-vis white heteropatriarchy sheds light on the contours of the political imaginary imbued by “Protesta Carabalí”.

At the end of our interview the producer tells me, “*Pon eso subrayado*” (Underline this): “*Yoruba Andabo es un proyecto artístico que todos los días siembra su historia y hace su historia*” (Yoruba Andabo is an artistic project that plants its history and makes its history every day). The “power-play” being performed is an active workshop where the group members themselves work through the irresolute place of black sovereignty, dignity, and pride within the Cuban nation by planting the seeds of history and cultivating the growth of “*hombres, hecho y derecho*”, prepared for leadership. The cultivation of race-positive rumbero-blackness speaks to an alternative kind of black political imaginary than the one rehearsed by ARAC. Yet they both constitute a choreographic unity, as they both try to navigate the felt weight of their history in the present. Given the official historical record, how does the performance of black autonomy rehearsed during the song figure in today’s current historical juncture?

### **III. WHEN? WHERE? WHY?: CONTEMPORARY VALENCE**

In closing, I bring up another circulating version of “Protesta Carabalí” performed by a Roman Diaz, a former Yoruba Andabo member now living in NYC, USA. This interjection is not as aside, but instead emphasizes that the live performance provides a scenario that is capable of adapting to the needs of the performers in the context of their lived realities. Although having the same title and sharing the same lyrics, the meanings of

the two “Protestas” are quite different. As a specialist in linguistics, Ivor L. Miller does a helpful analysis of the NYC arrangement of the song, breaking down the structure solely according to the lyrics. He states that the song was “conceived as a conversation among three parties who joined together to fight in Wars of Independence”. The three parties each belong to an initiation society: the Kongo leader, a Tata Nkisi; the Spanish creole, a Freemason; and the Carabalí Abakuá,. He says, “the three representatives are ‘cruzando bastones’ (crossing staffs) to join in common cause” (171). The arrangement he refers to is not the same as the one performed by Yoruba Andabo during my fieldwork. The version Yoruba Andabo sings surrogates the message of three parties working toward a common goal with one of prolonged struggle. Instead they cite three important battles that, for them, punctuate this ongoing fight for independence. Therefore, the arrangement that Yoruba Andabo chooses to sing should not be taken for granted as self-evident. I insist that it should be seen as a conscious choice to evoke a particular understanding of history and make that meaning felt in the present. Instead of seeing folklore as a regurgitation of static cultural artifacts, Yoruba Andabo remind us to think about what is getting called on? where? when? and why?

In our first formal interview, Chan talked about how for a time during Yoruba Andabo’s professional career they were forced to stop playing Abakuá music in public. The reason they decided to resume the Abakuá songs as part of their public repertoire now is unclear. The expressed reasons for why they were discontinued in the first place, however, are more or less consistent. Chan and others explain that the prohibition on Abakuá songs was in direct relation to the negative view of Abakuá by the white dominant culture<sup>65</sup>. Their explanations reveal that the harsh stigma against the Carabalí brotherhood

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<sup>65</sup> Some in the group attributed the ban to anti-black complaints from residents of the middle-class Vedado neighborhood where they played their first regular weekly showcase at the Union de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC) from the mid-80s through to the 90s (with two years of discontinuation from 1987-

is analogous to the “*miedo al negro*” attached to black political agency (discussed in the Chapters One and Two). Abakuá masculinity epitomized all of the social anxieties about black masculinity unyoked:

*Porque a veces tu pones una rumba y pone un ritmo Abakuá y la gente... Coge pánico, miedo.... Pero es una manifestación danzario tanto... es muy buena. Es muy linda porque nadie sabe la transmisión esa, el que la baila, el que la canta, el que la toca. Y entonces son cosas, muy lindas, muy complicadas. (Quevedo Armenteras 2013)*

*Eso tiene que ver con el país. La política. Un poco en contra de este tipo de manifestaciones. El Abakuá está concebido para ser buen marido para tu mujer, buen padre para tus hijos, buen hijo para tus padres... Bueno, es una familiaridad que se ha desvirtuado... En verdad que hubo una prohibición... Para mucha gente hablar de Abakuá fue algo malo, ‘no, porque los Abakuá son asesinos, porque se maten, porque si esto., que si la roban.’ Era así. Que hayan abakuacitos o abakuaces descariados no quiere decir que lo Abakuá es descariado. Entonces, el Abakuá fue prohibido. Al Abakuá fue considerado como sangra mala, asesino... esto. y no es así. El Abakuá es un concepto muy lindo... (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

Because sometimes you put on a rumba and put on an Abakua rhythm and the people... they get panicked, scared.... But it’s a dance manifestation just like... It’s very good. It is very beautiful because no one knows the transmission it has, the one who dances it, the one who sings it, the one who plays it. And so there are very pretty, very complicated things.

That has to do with the country. Politics [that are] somewhat against these types of manifestations. The Abakuá is created to be a good husband for your wife, a good father for your children, a good son for your parents... Goodness; it’s a understanding that is being devalued... In truth, there was a prohibition... For many people, to speak of Abakuá was something bad. “No, because the Abakuá are murderers, because they kill, because this [or that].. they steal”. That’s the way it was. The fact that there are little Abakuá members or Abakua members that are insolent doesn’t mean that to be Abakuá is to be insolent. So the Abakuá were prohibited. Abakuá were conceived as having bad blood, assassins... this [or that]. And that’s not how it [really] is. The Abakuá is a very beautiful concept.

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1989). The residents complained that their music was a disturbance to the tranquility of the neighborhood, which Yoruba Andabo members understood to be thinly veiled racial attacks. Others said it was a direct mandate from the top-down targeting Abakuá cultural production because of the unlawful social conduct it incited.

The main current of the explanatory narrative framed the issue of prohibition as being one around the perception of the audience's conduct during Abakuá songs as violent, threatening, and showing a lack of "*educación*" (etiquette). This echoes the dominant stigma assigned to black masculinity as being excessively aggressive, unruly, dangerous, violent, etc. I argued earlier that the terms of "impropriety" are related to the political threat that Abakua fraternities posed and continue to pose to the consolidation of power under the state.

The fact that negative "controlling images" (Collins 2000)<sup>66</sup> of black masculinity are condensed in the ñañigo/Abakuá figure establishes a connecting thread between black self-determination and "antisociality". Hence, the disturbance to the peaceful order must be quelled by disciplining the black male body, particularly its embodiment of Abakuá-masculinity. The stigma against the Abakuá today has everything to do with the fear of the potential of what the rehearsal of that embodied ideology could produce to disrupt the political hegemony within an updating Cuba. Therefore, Yoruba Andabo's insistence on reincorporating Abakuá into their public repertoire *now* is noteworthy and serves as the foundation for my line of questioning regarding the contemporary valence of the performance.

Cuba finds itself, once again, squarely situated in a scenario where the imperative to prove modernization is paramount. The nation-state is making itself anew, vying for a place within a larger "Family of Nations" extending far beyond the socialist block. It once

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<sup>66</sup> The term "controlling image" is taken from Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000). Controlling images are images based on stereotypes of black womanhood "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" so as "to justify Black women's oppression" (69). Although the term was created to describe black women's experience, it can also be applied to speak of how the dominant culture disempowers subordinate groups.

again is proving its modernity under the close gaze of the U.S., a foreign power that projects particular desires for how the nation will perform internally. The market-oriented reforms that the Cuban state is adopting are disproportionately affecting the black population's ability to thrive economically. I speculate that Yoruba Andabo's choice to leverage their national and international acclaim —facilitated by the symbolic role of "el rumbero" in the perpetuation of the myth of national racial transcendence under Cuban nationalism —grants them an opportune public platform for Abakua performance. This platform might serve as a political counter-demonstration (a "show") of a particular form of racialized gender politics for the Afro-religious community at critical time when new forms of commercial self-management are being experimented within civil society. In other words, Yoruba Andabo's avid defense of the importance of Abakuá within rumba cannot be understood in isolation from the increasing salience of alternate models of self-management for the black urban poor, in a moment when the nation-state's plan for making itself anew does not foster black well-being.

This argument crystalizes when one considers where "Protesta Carabalí" is or isn't performed, signaling that intentional choices are being made as to where and for whom the performance can/should take place. The "proper" place for "Protesta Carabalí" reveals that there is an intended audience that the song's message is directed towards. Where they choose to perform it, and the resonance of the performance in that venue is different according to the demographic. For instance, "Protesta Carabalí" is not performed at Cuban government functions or functions that are nationally televised, where there is a primarily mainstream white or dignitary audience. At those functions they perform traditional rumbas, whose lyrics are often adapted from folk musicians (*nueva trova*). *Guantanamera, guajira guantanamera....* I argue that in these instances, they are aware of their commissioned role of appealing to the white Cuban mainstream by reproducing a bucolic

image of national pastime. At these performances they assert a firm allegiance to the revolutionary nation-state, acknowledging that it created the conditions for them to work as professional artists and gain mainstream recognition. They explicitly recognize the fact that their professional success would not have been possible for popular traditional artists at any other point in history. However, the platform given to *rumberos* on the national stage is not one that is taken at face value either. The performance of the narrative of grateful, happy black working-class is co-created with and for a particular audience that projects that desire on their bodies. Fulfilling that role has a currency that is exchanged for social standing, job opportunities, and political favor.

Conversely, “Protesta Carabalí” is performed in their weekly nightclub showcase at Cabaret Las Vegas that is patroned by an almost exclusively black working-class, religious audience. These performances of “Protesta Carabalí” promote a distinctly different political desire, expressed through a reinforced allegiance to a diasporic body-politic. Valentin reflects on a recent performance Yoruba Andabo did in Marianao for a black, religious audience:

*Se tocó en el anfiteatro en Marianao. Mariano es un pueblo donde hay zonas netamente religiosas para los yorubas y para el Abakuá. Aquello estaba lleno. Miles y miles de gente ven para [escuchar] cantar Chan el Abakuá! Chan se ha convertido en una tripula en el mundo, te digo en el mundo, los Abakuá que viven fuera de este país, desde que lo ven, se vuelven loco. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

The group played in the amphitheater of Marianao. Marianao is neighborhood with clearly religious zones for the Yoruba and the Abakuá. That thing was full. Thousands and thousands of people come to [hear] Chan sing in Abakuá! Chan has become a man in the world, and I say the world, the Abakuá that live in outside of this country, from the time they see him, they go crazy.

I remember that after that performance Valentin spoke of, the group performed at an Abakuá lodge in the same neighborhood. These performances mark the group’s capacity

to serve sacred and secular functions fluidly, and in ways that are not constricted to the static folkloric representations of blackness that the state finds useful for propping up its vision of social order. Yoruba Andabo's connection to Abakuá lodges affirms a genealogy of performance within working-class black communities that cultivates forms of alternative black self-making and corporate welfare that rub up against the projection of the nation-state as benevolent benefactor of black freedom or rightful judge of propriety.

Pappademos reminds us that the African religious *sociedades* in the Republican era were seen by their members as a direct continuation of the African ethnic *cabildos* from the colonial period.

[T]hey created political communities premised on Africanist cultural practices, which drew on imaginings alternative to the nationalisms envisioned by Jose Marti, Juan Gualberto Gomez, and others. They adopted elements of dominant nationalist discourse while also addressing national politics in highly complex ways. (Pappademos 2011, 113)

This explains why the text of a song called "Protesta Carabalí", ostensibly affirming a Carabalí standpoint politics, would begin by appealing to the narrative of Cuban nationalism centering white male protagonists in their lyrics. Right away we are faced with a counterpoint between dual Carabalí and Cuban identification that are held in strategic balance. Pappademos talks about how this current of political formation by Africanist blacks was held by people who were less invested in gaining resources through the state, and were more concerned with maintaining a space within which to reproduce their own cultural resources within the new republic. It represented an important alternative to the political mainstream waters within which the *Partido Independiente de Color* tried to wade.

As Ivor Miller says in *Voice of the Leopard: African Secret Societies and Cuba* (2009), Abakuá practice conveys both history and politics, because it insists that the history

of people of African descent begins before their enslavement in Cuba. The very fact of remembering a pre-nation-state referent for understanding black subjecthood in Cuba is a departure from the ideology of racelessness and homogenized unity under Cuban nationalism. I argue further that promoting Abakuá tradition at this juncture in Cuba's history, to a wider black public, has another layer of meaning. It advocates the dignity of the African diasporic tradition of autonomy to a larger audience that the Abakuá institutions have strategically and defiantly kept alive in the New World.

*Pero hay quien coge Abakuá para resolver de problema. Eso es un problema. Pero los Abakuá merece, lo Abakuá es algo querido por muchos hombres de respeto y una gran humanidad.”* (Marquez Quiñones 2013).

But there are people who become Abakuá to resolve problems. That is an issue. But the Abakuá are deserving, the Abakuá is something loved by many respectable men with great humanity.

Near the end of my fieldwork I was able to witness a performance of Protesta Carabalí where the role of Morúa was sung by Jorge Luis, a non-Abakuá initiate. This was quite profound considering the strict nature of the sacred Abakuá tradition. To give the role of chanter to a non-initiate required that he be entrusted with the knowledge to carry out the performatic demands of the role. This is a significant departure from— or rather, play on— a secular performance that nonetheless adheres to the rules of the sacred ritual. Jorge Luis was candid in an interview with me, saying that he doesn't know what the lyrics he sang meant. His explanation for why he doesn't need to know the liturgical meaning sheds light on what being a “folkloric” artist means today for folkloric artists themselves.

*...Hacemos Abakuá, pero no tocamos con un tambor de Abakuá consagrado. Lo que hacemos es folklore.... Tranquilo. Cuando te dice que te puedes cantar, es que puedes que cantar. Pero no tienes que saber el significado... Entonces hay personas que son Abakuá. Y cuando se oye la canción se motiva. Por ejemplo, cuando hacen un canto de Ifa, hay personas que tienen ifa que le gustan, porque*

*están escuchando su música en ese momento folklórica también le gusta. Ellos sí saben lo que están diciendo y a veces tú mismo no sabes lo que estás diciendo. No hay que saber lo que significa una canción para poder cantarla. Porque se sobreentiende de que la letra de la canción lo buscamos una persona que entienda la canción por supuesto. Pero como busca una cosa folklórica, entonces tú le puede enseñar a otro que no sea Abakuá. (Hernandez Padron 2013)*

We do Abakua, but we don't play at a sacred Abakua ceremony. What we do is folklore... Be calm. When they [Abakuá] say that you can sing [it], it's because you can sing [it]. But you don't have to know the meaning... So there are Abakuá people. And when they hear the song, they get amped. For example, when we do an Ifa song, there are people that like Ifa that like it, because they are listening to music that is folkloric in this instance that they also like. They know what its saying and sometimes even if you don't know what you are saying. You don't have to know what the song means to be able to sing it. Because it understood that we look for the person who understands the song to grasp the lyrics of the song, of course. But since one is going for a folkloric thing, then you can teach it to someone who may not be Abakuá.

Here Jorge Luis references the same performative effect of Yoruba Andabo's government functions. The audience will project their desire and co-create the song's meaning for them in the moment of semiotic exchange. Jorge Luis shares that the performance of the song doesn't require that he himself know the liturgical meaning, because the lyrics themselves will have meaning for those in the audience who are initiates. Playing sacred music without consecrated drums frees up the utility of the songs in ways that allow them to mean something to a wider audience. I argue that the wider audience in today's Cuba may project a pressing desire for new models of black self-affirmation, and understand the performance to be speaking to them on those terms.

The ethnography suggests that the ability for non-initiated black male audience members to embody Abakuá desire emerges from a "structure of feeling" around blackness as a political imperative, not just purely ethnic ancestry. Even if the audience members are un-initiated and therefore don't understand the liturgical meaning of the words, they can still take part in, and intersubjectively develop an intimate corporal relationship with this

historically-anchored form of sociality. At a time when Afro-Cubans are unable to access the formal avenues for practicing modern Cuban citizenship, the social memory of dignified corporate self-organization is transmitted through the body. The predominately black, urban, working-class, religious audience at Cabaret Las Vegas can rehearse an alternative social arrangement — *otro arreglo de humanidad*—in their political imaginary, like in ceremony, where they can demonstrate intellectual prowess (in a society with few avenues for social advancement)(Miller 2009, 30).For both Abakuá initiates and non-initiates, the “Protesta Carabali” produces an alternate milieu/space in which to cultivate and rehearse a sense of affirming self-hood that is distinctively black. It produces a counter-narrative to the dominant order (Hall 1993) that includes but also goes beyond the expression of ethnic ties.

Prescribed choreography guides the body-politic into alternate assemblages for collective living amidst harsh life-chances.

*Cuando fundaron a Yoruba Andabo era [Grupo] Marítimo Portuario. Trabajan en los muelles, pero eran hombres que se respetaban. Unos porque eran compadres, otros porque eran santeros o babalawos, santeros religiosos. Y aparte era Abakuá....para que la gente se respete. Entonces la juventud que está ahora tiene que comportarse bien. Pero aparte, el trabajo se respeta. Y respeto conlleva a mejores en la vida. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

When they founded Yoruba Andabo, it was Grupo Marítimo Portuario. They worked in the docks, but were men that were respected. Some because they were mates, others because they were santeros or babalawos, religious santeros... And also they were Abakuá...for the respectable people. So the youth today needs to behave well. Because besides, one must respect labor. And that respect brings betterness to life.

Rendering young black males hypervisible in a profoundly affirming way amongst their community in a moment of economic uncertainty is profoundly seductive, appealing to the desire for dignified self-making and “manful assertion”. Given Valentin’s description of the core message of the song for him, “*No nos entendemos*”, I interpret his call to the youth

to “behave well” to not mean an adoption of a submissive posture toward state power. Instead, the way to gain respect within white heteropatriarchal society is to take the example given by black male figures in history to defend corporate group interests by upholding a moral masculinity guided by sacred worldview.

Instead of seeing the song as a history of Cuban protest, the song is about a history of protest in Cuba by a diasporic people for a dignified black subjectivity on its own terms, hidden in plain view for those who desire to see it. This case study engages the politics of visibility and play, allowing meaning to evade apprehension even when on display, and also render other resonances to be felt without words. The spectator is the one who completes the semiotic circle. Following this particular genealogy of black autonomy shaped profoundly by state persecution, teachings should always be coded, never to be articulated clearly. As Pappademos says, perhaps because they were forced to go underground, the Abakua were protected and persist today, as opposed to the other forms of association which were disbanded when they were deemed no longer useful for the state’s purposes of grooming the black masses into modernity. Here, I find De Certeau’s theory of “anti-discipline” useful for describing the subversive potential within the seemingly co-opted category of folkloric performance in Cuba. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (De Certeau 2011 [1984]), he opens up space to valorize that which does not cohere with previous theoretical foundations. De Certeau is key for understanding how people can simultaneously work within a system and resist it in practice. “Protesta Carabalí” calls for us to break free from the dichotomous thinking that aims to totalize/overdetermine the subjective nuances that compose lived experience for the comfort of an imagined rationalization about the role of rumberos as folkloric pawns within Cuba’s imperative for national cultural production.

*"Si por siempre he podido olvidar  
Siendo libre la sangre [de] mi abuelo  
Los trabajo que pase por ella  
Eso nunca lo puedo olvidar  
Africa, Africa, Africa,  
La tambora me hace recordar.*

[If I have forever forgotten being free,  
It is the blood of my grandfather, my blood  
The work endured,  
That I will never be able to forget  
Africa, Africa, Africa.  
**The drum makes me remember”**

prayer, Carabalí Isuama Society of Santiago de Cuba<sup>67</sup>

#### **IV: CONCLUSION: AFRO-CUBAN MOVEMENTS IN COUNTERPOINT**

Uncannily, the time period during which Cuba gained its independence from Spain crystalizes the choreographic unity of the performances of autonomy assumed by ARAC and YA. I now will turn to the relation nature of the performances in respectively distinct social spheres, geared toward distinct audiences. The historical record shows that even though African descendants took divergent strategies to bargain for social acceptance from the dominant culture, they were persecuted in similar ways for their inescapable association with each other by the dominant society. For instance, even though the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) espoused anti-Africanist beliefs, adhering to the dominant norms of respectability in exchange for political representation, the circulation of vicious depictions of blacks in the Cuban press as —as savages, rapists, and murderers— immediately after the uprising of the PIC inevitably discursively linked them to the Abakuá fraternities. The inescapable association between upwardly-aspiring black politicians and

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<sup>67</sup> Pappademos (2011), p. 119

cultural primitivism in turn justified the persecution Africanist societies, like the Abakuá, who were believed to socially reproduce the “backwards” attributes that inherently lingered in black political parties (Pappademos 2011, 109). Analogously, Africanist systems of belief and customs were seen as inherent political threats to the state’s consolidation of power over the black working-class, making their claims to cultural difference structurally unassimilable within nationalism and therefore criminal. In other words, whether black body-politics were constructed around explicitly Africanist/religious/cultural or explicitly black/modern/political terms, their expressed distinctions were ultimately muted under the state’s white hegemonic gaze.

Two years after dancing and street festivities were outlawed, in the wane of the republic’s inaugural festivities, Havana police raided a group of men gather(ed?) in ritual celebration in a working-class neighborhood at the city’s outskirts. Both police and reporters labeled the men ñañigos (a pejorative term....). The police confiscated the ritual objects, arrested the group’s leaders, and charged them with illicit association....At times, police also raided privileged black societies, whose cultural practices were ostensibly less threatening yet whose racial status alone seemed to suggest illicit activity (Pappademos 2011, 117).

Despite black subjects sophisticated attempts to differentiate their group identities to gain viability on their own terms, they ultimately incited similar social fears and thus shared similar backlash. Therefore, the racial stigmatization of Africanist approaches to black selfhood was used to discipline the performance of black secular societies writ large, and vice versa, causing a wedge between the two genealogies of performance that persists between Yoruba Andabo and ARAC in the present day.

The two case studies of “scenarios of black autonomy” addressed in this and the previous chapter— ARAC’s press conference and Yoruba Andabo’s “Protesta Carabali” — offer a complex and nuanced window into what moves are required to be Afro-Cuban in an updating revolution, and why they move in (false) separation. Here, I use the term

“Afro-Cuban” very intentionally to signal the unresolved tension around the legacy of the structural positionality and political role of African descendants within the Cuban nation-state. This tension has definitively marked their lives, memories, and identities as one of/in struggle against the nation-state’s libidinal imperatives in different registers. Likewise, the social memory of this difference is actively embodied in struggle both against and within the terms of white hegemony’s disciplining of their bodies. The movements of each group demonstrate relational choreographic approaches to navigating shared ideological scripts and structures of power in distinct public spheres. Using counterpoint to observe their difference in simultaneity serves as an analytical frame to decipher the contours of the present political economic scenario for black self-making in Havana at this particular moment in history.

At the press conference, ARAC presented a particular history of the nation in conjunction with a story about the formation of their group. Their chosen date for the press conference— May 20<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the uprising of the PIC— emphasizes the importance of the social memory of black collective self-determination and fear of white terror as dual forces that mutually shape their body-politic. Announcing the group’s existence on May 20th was an attempt to locate itself in relation to an obscured history of the black political culture, while also firmly situating their political imaginary within the bounds of nationalist ideology. Hence, their movements entailed the conscious attempt to assert black political agency vis-à-vis the Cuban state while mitigating its backlash. ARAC’s movement in the present essentially re-members history, testing the bounds of political viability within a hegemonic milieu of raceless secular modernism and heteropatriarchy. The group’s choreography demonstrates a shared knowledge of the terms of the scenario, and the stakes of “failing” or “going off script”. They recruit a repertoire

of black respectability to orient their movements while leveraging colonial gendered racial tropes and unmarking whiteness. This movement rehearses for “felicitous” framings of anti-racist politics within the bounds of the national revolutionary project. One can only speculate as to whether the assimilability/solubility of the performance within nationalist rhetoric is what ultimately enabled the absence of ARAC’s presence from the public record, or if it is the radical deviation/flight from the script that caused its erasure. Regardless, the case underscores the enduring threat posed by counterhegemonic crossings, moments of unyoked force that only gain coherence within sacred registers of agency.

Like ARAC, YA’s performance also evokes a situated relationship to the pre-1959 national past, however it is rooted firmly in Africa as the point of origin. They stake claim to a history of corporate self-determination before, during, and after the formation of Cuban nation-state while contributing to its progression in vital ways. In “Protesta Carabalí”, the Cuban nation is remembered as contingent upon the valiant efforts and ancestral strength of sacred black masculinity. The performance keeps alive the memory of practices of sacred autonomy that withstood colonial and republican desire for their disappearance when unyoked from the greater nation-building project. The kinesthetic imprint of the choreography nurtures a vibrant legacy of political consciousness in the working-class, black audience who resists their gendered racial stigmatization. The song creates a performative space where the black body-politic socializes a positive investment in morally configured heteropatriarchal masculinity. Although performed publically, the kaleidoscopic aesthetic code remains hidden from the hegemonic mechanism of the nation-state that seeks to erase Abakuá presence in society as a synecdoche for black autonomy. Sacred tactics of semiotic subversion reign supreme, rendering embodied meanings that are differentially shared yet equally adhered to. Ultimately, the selective re-membering

sanctifies collective movement that subverts hegemonic logics of racial hierarchy while also re-activating hegemonic logics of patriarchy.

Tracing the genealogies of these two groups through their respective social memories reveals a dynamic counterpoint, not only between black collectivity and the Cuban nation-state but, between two different strategies of collective movement available to black folk in contemporary Havana. Previous sections detail the distinct way each group moves (in terms of space, time, imagery, discourse, sound, and embodiment) and how these movements represent two different approaches to black self-making prior to 1959. I will now proceed to briefly highlight how their performances converge and resonate with each other, lending them to be analyzed as part of the same “choreographic unity” of black self-making in contemporary Cuba.

The fact that they both draw from knowledge about how their political ancestor’s performed on the national stage during Cuba’s national formation, supports my larger argument that the scenarios for black autonomy in the present are analogous to that during the period of nation-building. Cuba’s current process of national (re)formation is also marked by the specter of foreign invasion, both solicited (tourism) and unsolicited (political influence). Where the two groups’ choreographic fragments converge represent four reoccurring themes that mark a shared relationship with larger structures that are negotiated by both groups, irrespective of the particular genre of performance or mediums within which they choose to express themselves. These findings push forward the main analytical thrust of the dissertation: public racial belonging, the sacred, gender, and the libidinal economy of the nation-state. This performance-oriented analysis allows us to talk about larger characteristics of black self-making at this juncture.

## **Negotiating Afro-diasporic belonging in public space**

Both groups strategically evoke the memory of pre-1959 Afro-diasporic black collective agency to make meaning in the present. Nationalist ideology institutionalized during the fight for Cuban Independence, promoted the notion that affective belonging and desire should be detached from ancestry and dislocated from the lived experience of shared structural oppressions and practices of political redress and collective well-being. Instead the Cuban patriots put forth that affective belonging be consolidated under loyalty to the nation. The national imaginary was constructed to reproduce white cultural hegemony as part of the proper modern order. According to the logic of the nation-state, black or Afro-diasporic centered political loyalties were considered remnants of primitive vestiges that were a drag on the polity. As has been the case since the Cuban republic, every pronouncement of black collective belonging has to contend with the state's desire to centralize the affective economy around itself. In the performances of ARAC and Yoruba Andabo, the discursive and embodied hailing of diasporic collectivity in the past was utilized as evidence to legitimize the merit of their extra-national group entity in the present, whether on explicitly political or explicitly cultural terms. This afro-diasporic belonging is necessarily counterbalanced by the demonstration of fluency in the discourse of (if not primary investment in) the nation-building project.

In both cases, the assertion of extra-national group belonging includes, but is not limited to, notions of filial relation, although articulated in terms of ancestry. Based on the situated case studies, I understand ancestry to refer to feelings of affinity toward a particular body-politic, due to a coevalness of their structural relationship to the nation-state. However, due to the fact that the social memory being hailed was specifically African diasporic/black ancestral memory (counter-narrative to the dominant order, (Hall 1993)), the performance has the capacity to produce differential affective charges intersubjectively.

As such, it produces different understandings of the same set of semiotic signifiers (“second iconicity”) depending on the spectator’s structural relationship to the nation-state and the spectator’s own investment in the nation-building project (Moten 2003). The “in-group” meaning is not rendered transparent or evident to an outsider, allowing strategic places of entry and exit to/from a parallel narrative about national unity.

Instead of hailing a particular body-politic as “kin” based on essentialist notions of race or cultural belonging, I observed that lines of ancestry are drawn in relation to the kinds of historically-situated movements (strategies of self-making) that the performer of that cultural memory traces as kin in the present. Both ARAC’s and YA’s performances’ virtuosity lie in their ability to manage the production of dynamic multiple meanings simultaneously, speaking both to and against black/nationalism. In so doing, the performances reinforce and mitigate divergent feelings of racial and national group belonging, reinforcing an “us” even as they perform for many. In other words, these public performances of autonomy carefully attend to their reception by an “other” in ways that are choreographed by the repertoires of the political communities they hail as kin during Cuba’s formation as a nation-state.

To shed light on this phenomenon, one may look to W.E.B Du Bois’ notion of “double consciousness” (Du Bois 1989 [1903]) , an irreconcilable feeling of two-ness or double-conceptions of the self that explains black livelihood and psycho-social divisions within American society. However, rather than locate the “competing duality” in the mind, I argue that the group-identities themselves are produced intersubjectively in the way different bodies differentially embody the same signs, producing varied affective meanings, including but not limited to race (such as nationality, political community, and culture). The way one embodies the sign is contingent on a notion of ancestry that links your body to others in time and place, producing a collapse in space-time. The virtuosity

of the performances themselves is exhibited through a particular genealogy of performance that is able to negotiate the dual demands of heterogeneous audiences (constituted by both in-group and outgroup members) within the conventions of the particular performance genre of choice, be it formal press conference or rumba entertainment. The in-group identity that both ARAC and YA affirm in these moments constitutes a diasporic black identity that is being mobilized/called to action in collective movement toward a more desired collective future.

### **Sacred ruptures**

The two approaches to black political performance—one committed to getting a “fair share” in the formal political arena, the other invested in sustaining corporate ethno-religious community projects—are always in silent conversation with each other. Both entail notions about idealized or proper performance of black respectability in Cuban society. The sometimes tension, sometimes slippages, between these two approaches is punctuated by the sacred. I find it significant that the moment of unscripted rupture in the press conference was marked by a reference to the sacred (“*se fue pa’l monte*”), indicating a divine breach of civility. The sacred breach is characterized by an election to seek refuge in ways of being that de-prioritize national development imperatives. The sacred, thus, stands in as a receptacle of ideas and practices around black self-determination. It is uncanny that the moment of rupture at the press conference was also accompanied by a sonic rupture, amplifying the dramaturgic shift in the event. The sudden series of clinking glass against the metal of the microphone is reminiscent of the shift in the timbre of the clave in “Protesta Carabali” (when Geovanni transitions from tapping the hollow wood-on-wood clave-rhythm pattern the hitting the sharp pang of the Abakuá wood-on-cowbell). Both sonic changes impel a shift in body arrangement and motion. The consequent

kinesthetic shift is felt in the interiority of those present, denoting entrance into a new temporal space, a space of ancestral significance. To center ancestry is to assert a transporal political critique about the salience of the past in the present and the need to be accountable to the dead in a profound sense. Forgetting signifies not just the death of one's kin, but the death of their political desire. The bodies of the living become the vessels for the ancestors to continue their work in the material plane. These sacred elements make the press conference and the song uncannily resonate with one another both sonically and ideologically.

Similarly, in "Protesta Carabalí" the defense of Abakuá dignity responds to the critique waged by Euro-Western hegemonic notions that preclude not only a necessary separation between the sacred and the secular, but a necessary submission to statist order. Within afro-religious epistemological frameworks, to be forgotten signifies death (Menéndez , 2008). Publicly re-membering "*hombres que se respetaban*", can be seen as an affront to the notion that one must structure their performance of respectability in opposition to African-centered cultural, political, and social mores, in order to attain dignified self-hood in modernity. In this way, we can see that the counterpart black political community is always already the absented-presence (or presented-absence) (McKittrick 2006) at every performance of black autonomy. The absented presence of the counterpoint choreography is felt through discourses around the sacred as primitive excess or noble compass, vying for legitimacy. Therefore, every performance by Yoruba Andabo or ARAC is also a counter-performance against the other genealogical approaches to constructing dignified black subjectivity within the Cuban nation-state.

## **Gendering moral configurations of black politics**

I have already discussed how both groups narrate their ancestry alongside a simultaneous genealogy of the nation, performed through respective notions of respectability. However, it is critical to denaturalize that fact that the chosen protagonists of both social memories are exclusively black men and the form of political action that are included in the remembered history of black activism are all state-oriented and oppositional in nature. ARAC centered their performance on the PIC, a black political party who waged an armed revolt against their dissolution by the state, represented by a picture of Evaristo Estenoz. Whereas, YA centers their social memory on the Abakuá, an all-male secret society who are remembered as strong and militantly moral. In addition to their respective historical figures, Antonio Maceo's memory is decisively employed to underscore the relevance of both groups' work in the present day. The way in which Maceo is remembered in the dominant history to support a narrative of "racial fraternity" makes Maceo a key symbolic resource.<sup>68</sup> Maceo's righteous insubordination is hailed as iconic of each group's ethos and, in turn, his success is attributed to the embodiment of an ideal notion of black masculinity, capable of challenging white male authority. The gendered way in which black political protagonism is remembered lifts up similar performances of masculinity in the present as central to the collective projects they endorse. This gendering of the moral configuration of black politics structures the political imaginaries of both groups.

I argue that the performance practices within ARAC and YA mutually reinforce a certain social construction of black masculinity that is salient in this current moment in history when hegemonic notions of black masculinity is perhaps threatened by the

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<sup>68</sup> I discuss the symbolic weight of Maceo within the nationalist imaginary of racial fraternity in Chapter One. The narrative of white brains and black brawns working together amicably has been used to mitigate black discontent with the unequal terms of their citizenship status in the republic.

increased inability of black men to fulfill the traditional “male role” that is central to the maintenance of Cuban “machista” culture due to structural racism within a market-oriented development project. Although ARAC and YA perform in different aesthetic registers (secular and sacred, respectively), they point to perhaps a shared sense of need across theories of social change to shore up the memory of black *macho* prowess, requiring an attendant shaping of black femininity. Therefore, although women are not the focus of the social memories per se, the very absence/forgetting of women does a particular gendering work, structuring the way in which these communities perceive the proper role of women in the movement. Herein lies the dire stakes for communities that theorize those forgotten as dead. Through the reiterative movements of Afro-Cuban collectives, the strength-vitality-centrality-proficiency-respectability-heterosexuality of black men are both challenged and reassured amidst conditions of structural (political & economic-material) constraint.

I take up critical feminist critiques of political science to argue that the white masculinist nature of political science as an academic discipline contributes to determine who is recognized (and thus remembered) as political actors of greatest importance (Cohen, Jones, & Tronto, 1997).<sup>69</sup> Political activism (capital P) is typically identified according to how activity measures up to a particular genre of masculinist political performance. The white heteropatriarchal structure has conditioned those actions which directly confront/challenge the rule of white men to be rendered hypervisible in our social memory. Thus, acts of confrontational battle are the forms of resistance that get remembered as most salient in the identity formation of these black body-politics. In other words, the social memory of black activism by both groups has everything to do with the investment of white

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<sup>69</sup> Katherine McKittrick (2006) makes an analogous argument with regard to geography.

heteropatriarchy in keeping a close eye on the ways in which the power/rule of white men (consolidate in the state) is challenged. Furthermore, the way that both groups remember activism in the past guides the political imaginary of their contemporary movement(s). Thus, their social memory prefigures a certain gendered view of politics that obscures the forms of political activity that black women engage/d in.

In making this assertion, I do not mean to suggest that both black and white men have equal relationship to heteropatriarchy as an instrument of state power. The cultivation of black male bravado is commodified within the sexual economy of Cuba and works to reify a social milieu that reifies homophobic understandings of masculinity. The rehearsal of violent, aggressive, sexist forms of performance encourages black males to participate in a masculine performance that also serves to reinforce their oppression (Schnyder 2012).

Alexander expands on how heteropatriarchy in the Caribbean has served a vital function within the political economy of the global market to render their territories permeable to foreign/imperial desires of penetration and extraction (2005) . This process relied, in large part, on the normalization of institutional rape of black women to produce capital from their wombs. The dispossession of black women's erotic autonomy, was foundational to the perpetuation of the system. There is an argument to be made about how the reconstitution and continued practice of African ethnic customs and institutions was largely enabled by the degree to which they fit within the heteropatriarchal ideologies in forced circulation. This assertion can, perhaps, be disproved with examples from other women-centered and gender fluid Afro-religious practices that are operative in the Americas<sup>70</sup>. However, I argue that those women-centered organizational memories are not

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<sup>70</sup> The practice of organizing Candomblé houses around Madres de Santo in Brazil, for example, comes to mind as an important counter example.

collectively recalled within the groups I researched in their hailing of political kin and therefore do not play a decisive role in the structuring of their collective movements.

Many Cuba scholars have written about the ways in which hegemonic norms of race, gender, and sexuality had a key role in underwriting the nation-building process (Coronil 1995 [1947], Beliso-De Jesus 2013, Kutzinski 1993). Both men and women, black and white, had a role in propelling the economic structure forward. Ortiz naturalized gender by “us[ing] common values associated with feminine and masculine as standards of valorization...metaphorical constructs condens[ing] a multiplicity of meanings (Coronil 1995 [1947], xxii)” related to their biological constitution and their role in capitalist system of production. In other words, Cuba was conceived due to a violent division of labor along racial lines and differentiation of gender which is naturalized using metaphors of natural order. The performance of black autonomy I cite fit within this heteropatriachal national logic in ways that demonstrate the historical situatedness of their forms of embodiment rather than pointing to essentialist explanatory models of “innate black” ways of doing/being.

In other words, within the body-politics I describe, black men become viewed as the worthiest brokers for power with their white brothers due to the fact that gender differentiation and heterosexualization are seen as axiomatic in modern nation-state and the dominant ideology of “racial fraternity” render men as the central figures of politics. Black women and black feminist agendas are seen as tangents away from or marginal additions to this proud masculinist legacy of struggle. So this notion that women’s participation and protagonism are new additions rather than necessarily central to their history is constructed, in part, through these “gendering acts” of social memory.

## **Queering the libidinal economy of the nation-state**

Given Alexander's proposition that the nation-state is inherently a vessel of white heteropatriarchy, then deviations from that hegemonic script can be read as queer within the libidinal economy of Cuba. Here I use queer not in the romantic/same-sex loving sense, but a practice engaged in by enslaved Africans and their descendants, of resistance to the commodification and stigmatization of their bodies "by *feeling* and *feeling for* their co-occupants on the [slave] ships" (Tinsley 2008, 192). The emblematic refrains of both performances— "*se fue pa'l monte*" (he went to the mountain) referring to Tomasito's outburst during the press conference) and "*no nos entendemos*" (we don't understand each other) referring to Maceo's radical refusal of peace on unequal racial grounds— signify a desire that runs counter to the hegemonic desire of the secular-modern nation-state. It is fitting that the phrase from ARAC's performance references a moment of radical refusal in the sacred realm, whereas the phrase from YA's performance references a secular moment of radical refusal. Both performances engage in crossing to comment on the politics of autonomy, necessarily blurring the separations imposed by modern secular liberalism.

This intersection marks the place of black queer desire, in that they counter the hegemonic logic of the state to appease/cater to the erotics of nation-building. Hegemonic white heteropatriarchy is structured to desire a political economic arrangement that lends to its own self-enhancement, monopolizing power and privilege, by controlling the hermeneutic framework with which to determine social order. The sacred provides an alternative hermeneutics with which to understand "order" based on a distinct moral configuration driven by different intensities of desire. This desire runs counter to, and is therefore incoherent vis-a-vis the dominant conception of social order. This assertion supports my larger argument about how Afro-Cuban movements, in their process of

resisting multiple oppressions, experienced as a result of their structural positionality within the nation-state, are inextricably in dialogue with each other.

**Closing: in dialogue with nation-building during Cuba's current impasse.**

Both groups are recovering selected elements from a silenced black past to generate a consciousness identification with pre-1959-revolutionary referents that center black self-organization and collective agency. Embodying those memories, within distinct but connected performatic techniques, give strategic continuity to particular genealogies of struggle enacted through performance. Both groups express an enormous loyalty to the 1959 revolution but this loyalty doesn't suggest that their political imaginaries and desires are restricted to the bounds of the nation-state. Rather, both groups employ the discourses of the nation-state to say something about the way the nation was conceived, commenting on black experience in the present scenario of nation-building. Thus, I argue that the performatic elements emerging from these spaces of black self-making respond to not only systemic problems that face the diaspora on a global scale, but the particular socio-economic and political configuration that mark the Cuban Revolution's current impasse. The particular historically-configured body-politics that ARAC and YA affirm in these moments—one committed to getting a "fair share" in the formal political arena, while the other invested in sustaining corporate ethno-religious community projects—constitute the kinds of black subjectivities that are being mobilized/called to action in collective movement toward a more desired future. Although staged in distant locales, in different genres, to different audiences, both are tied by their mutual threat to the inequitable design of national development.

In summation, Chapters Two and Three address the political choreography of different Afro-Cuban body-politics expressed within the context of the new political economic reforms, how gender is rehearsed to further their political gains and why, and the historical reasons for why Afro-Cubans may choose one form of politics over the other and their present day manifestations. The following chapter will take a close look at how Yoruba Andabo's practices of self-organization are employed to gain greater economic autonomy across secular and sacred markets.

## Chapter Four: *Salvándose*: performing autonomy across sacred & secular markets

### I. INTRODUCTION

Instead of positing professional artists of Afro-Cuban religious and popular traditions as peripheral to the debate on Cuba's political economy and the contested place of blackness within it, I argue that rumba itself produces a space where political economy is lived and embodied in its performance. Political economists studying the Cuban reforms overlook these particular forms of community-based practices of collective agency (e.g. Morris 2014), while music scholars have yet to fully explore the political economic salience of the performance of Afro-Cuban traditional popular culture beyond tourism and state-sponsored spectacle (Angert 2007-04-05, R. M. Bodenheimer 2013, R. D. Moore 1995, Daniel 1991).<sup>71</sup> The analytical weight assigned to the secularized folkloric stage in the existing literature on rumba, centering on its commodification via tourism ("cultural *jineterismo*"<sup>72</sup>) and its appropriation via the state (folklore), implies that 1) those forms of labor are adopted uncritically as passive loyal subjects to the state, and 2) secular performance is the sole realm for the commodification and consumption of Afro-Cuban cultural heritage post-1959 in general, and post-Special Period in particular. Attention to Yoruba Andabo's strategies of creatively navigating the transforming economic terrain instituted by the reforms will offer an on-the-ground understanding of how this group's performance of autonomy contends with Cuba's political economy.

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<sup>71</sup> Important exceptions include Katherine Hagedorn's *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (2001) which describes the transformation of the form for a secular audience and Chapter 7, "Ay, Dios Ampárame: Sacred Music and Revolution" in Robin Moore's *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (2006), dedicated to describing how religious music was affected by policy during the revolution, including religious references made in commercial recordings and national folklore ensembles as evidence.

<sup>72</sup> In Cuba, "*jineterismo*" is a category of illegal or semi-legal economic activities related to tourism in Cuba. Some activities include prostitution, pimping, and other forms of hustling.

Afro-Cuban artists of popular religious and traditional culture have a long history of nimbly moving between the varying networks of exchange that exist in Cuba<sup>73</sup>. Each are organized by a different set of ethics/logics of trade for different purposes. For the purpose of this chapter, I am dividing these economies into two conceptual categories: the secular market and the sacred market. The secular market consists of the subsidized economy and the “new” or emergent economy (“*sector económico emergente*”). The subsidized economy is that which provides the means through which the state promotes its socialist welfare, administered in the *moneda nacional* (MN) currency. The “new” or emerging economy comprises the tourist sector developed as a measure to resuscitate the national economy during the economic crisis brought about by the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s primary trade partner at the time. It also refers to the expanded private sector of small business and joint-ventures instituted by the recent market-oriented economic reforms. This economy is designed to attract foreign capital, and thus typically circulates *pesos convertibles* (CUC) currency<sup>74</sup>. Whereas what I am calling the sacred market consists of the afro-religious<sup>75</sup> economy as well as the affective economy<sup>76</sup> governed by the divine cosmology to which practitioners adhere. The religious economy refers to the informal or “black market” exchange of capital within the Afro-religious community to purchase and sell goods, services, and expertise for the purpose of carrying out religiously

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<sup>73</sup> The “dual economy” system in Cuba has been defined as a schism between “the traditional socialist peso-based component and the internationalized dollar-oriented and marketized component” (Ritter 1995). For a discussion within the field of economics of how the quality of life of Afro-Cubans has been affected by the post-1993 economic reforms of the Special Period, see Sarah A. Blue’s “The Erosion of Racial Equality in the Context of Cuba's Dual Economy” in *Latin American Politics and Society*, 2007, 49: 35–68.

<sup>74</sup> The CUC has a roughly 1-1 exchange rate with the US Dollar (USD)

<sup>75</sup> “*Afro-religiosidad*” most commonly refers to the Afro-Atlantic religious practices of the Yoruba-based faith system (called *Regla de Ocha* or *Santería*), but also refers to the Kongo-Based Palo Monte tradition Abakua religious fraternities derived from the Ekpe people of the Cross River Region in Nigeria.

<sup>76</sup> The notion of “affective economies” is taken from Sara Ahmed (2004). She uses this concept to describe the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs. She discusses how emotions work to align certain subjects with some bodies, signs, and against others.

ordained ceremonies. In this context, I use the term affective economy to refer to the reciprocal affective exchange between people and divine spirits/energetic forces. In this political economy of emotions, affective responses to certain signs are codified and given a monetary and moral value that is commonly understood and exchanged amongst practitioners. This affective economy delineates the boundaries between “us” and “them”, binding practitioners into a sense of community. The mobilization of emotion, in effect, animates a shared racialized subjectivity, *el religioso*. The sacred market is understood as informal in that the money exchanged isn’t accounted for in the national indices. It is both pervasive and invisible. Evidence of the robustness of this economy is pervasive throughout city streets and in homes: *iyawos* (people undertaking initiation) dressed in all white are commonplace on city streets, street corners display the rests of *ebbo* (sacrifices) from the night before, alters are an expected part of home interior design (particularly in the homes of black families). Thus, on the one hand, the traces of this economy are part of the built landscape of the nation. On the other hand, this economy is invisible to economists’ metric systems. Although I have separated the economy into two conceptual categories, the secular and the sacred markets do not operate in discrete isolation. For instance, the secular market is also comprised of informal (“black market” or underground) mechanisms of capital exchange, and *religiosos* typically use it as means to accrue savings to be invested in the sacred market to fulfill religious pursuits.

By looking at the socio-economic and performative registers in tandem, I seek to reveal how this new economic era affects practices of black self-making and self-organization through Yoruba Andabo’s movement within and across these sacred and secular networks of economic and affective exchange. For Afrodescendants in Cuba today, the pursuit of social mobility via the emergent economy is negotiated within a socio-

cultural milieu that supports the folklorization<sup>77</sup> of blackness through secularized spectacle, steering those without material resources toward the music and entertainment industry where their intangible cultural resources can be most easily exchanged for foreign hard currency. Since the Revolution, Afro-Cuban traditional popular artists have been choreographed by the state to depict a racial utopia (Ayorinde 2004, Berry 2010, Hagedorn 2001). As art-workers in the formal economy, the state expects black bodies to produce cultural authenticity in their performance of bucolic “primitive pastimes”, maintaining the island’s vital tourist appeal and providing a convenient folkloric commodity to meet the increased demand of a revitalized foreign market.

Folklorization is a process in which folk cultural expressions become treated as relics to be preserved under the premise of their eventual disappearance within the context of modern society. Upon their institutionalization, traditions are decontextualized and staged as folklore. The term “folklore” in Cuba was introduced by famous Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to refer to Afro-Cuban expressive culture. His prolific publications (particularly his early work) projected a view of Afro-Cuban culture as “degenerate” and “atavistic”, giving academic legitimacy to the racist ideologies characteristic of white elites during that period<sup>78</sup>. Hailed as the founder of Afro-Cuban studies, Ortiz’s work paved the way for the government-sponsored institutionalization of culture since the 1959 Revolution. In the state’s staged representations, the physicality of the body is exhibited and accentuated in ways that support a Eurocentric association of black people with a notion of a primitive past that is bound for extinction. This distortion of intangible cultural heritage driven by a Eurocentric

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<sup>77</sup> UNESCO defines folklorization as “re-styling the expressions of ICH [Intangible Cultural Heritage] so that they become less complex aesthetically and semantically” (Seitel 2002).

<sup>78</sup> For analysis of the racist depiction of lower-class black expressive culture by Fernando Ortiz, particularly in his early work, see Robin Moore, “Representations of Afro-Cuban Expressive Culture in the writings of Fernando Ortiz”, *Latin American Music Review*, 32-54 (1994).

logic of evolution on a national scale renders the living bearers of popular culture exotic Others and reinforce notions of the dominant “high” culture as more rational and elite by comparison. The way that the state has historically recruited black performers to participate in the folkloricization of Afro-Cuban religiosity has been studied and critiqued at length in the literature on racism in Cuba<sup>79</sup>. Alejandro de la Fuente’s important articles on the progression of the debates and agendas of “The New Afro-Cuban Movement” since the Special Period attest to how the folkloricization of Afro-Cuban religiosity has become one of the shared points of grievance expressed by this intellectual group (De la Fuente 2008, De la Fuente 2012)<sup>80</sup>.

However, instead of deeming the space of secular “folkloric” performance as solely a state mechanism to propagate a stereotypical portrayal of blackness— primitive black bodies gathered in a drunken state of ecstatic delirium that reify profitable notions of an aimlessly jovial black population who are content to dance for tourists and white Cubans alike— I suggest that the space of autonomy and well-being created by Yoruba Andabo’s participation as “*folklóricos*” could also gesture toward a belief in the realization of a more liberatory black self-subsistence than the state’s economic engineering can provide. Stuart Hall reminds us in his now canonical text, “What is ‘black’ about black popular culture?” that,

By definition, black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a site of strategic contestation. But it can never be simplified or explained in terms of the simple binary oppositions that are habitually used to map it out: high and low; resistance versus incorporation; authentic versus unauthentic; opposition versus homogenization (Hall 1993, 108).

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<sup>79</sup> For an excellent study on folklorization in Cuba see Katherine J. Hagedorn’s *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (2001) and chapter 6 “Afro-Cuban Folklore in a Raceless Society” in Robin Moore’s *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (2006).

<sup>80</sup> I will heretofore use the term “New Afro-Cuban movement” to signal not only those individuals living on the island, but the Cuban and non-Cuban scholars abroad who study the movement and partake in the ongoing dialogue of ideas around racism and anti-racist struggle in Cuba.

On any given day Yoruba Andabo can be seen performing at a government function, a state-run nightclub, or at religious ceremonies in *casa-templos* in Havana's most impoverished neighborhoods fulfilling musical services (for pay) within ritual for direct community benefit. This makes Yoruba Andabo stand out amongst other professional performance groups in Cuba because of their ability to straddle multiple spheres of economic activity simultaneously (as opposed to *El Conjunto Folklórico Nacional*, for example, who strictly perform at events sponsored by the government), making them agents of strategic contestation against and cooperation with their own folklorization. Yoruba Andabo indeed responds in one sense to the state goal of promoting "folklore" while silencing discussion of white privilege and non-tokenizing black cultural difference. However, on closer examination, Yoruba Andabo also complicates and undermines folklore's state-designated function.

I put a special focus on Yoruba Andabo to make the case that politics can be performed differently, even within folkloric repertoires. This form of agency is enacted in different political registers and economic spaces than Politics is traditionally conceived. Like McKittrick, "an important aspect of my argument is the illumination of the seeable and unseeable—black subjects hidden and on display" (xxx). Yoruba Andabo is a prime example of black dancing bodies that are both on display in full view of the state while their political acts remain hidden, "absented presences", due to the secularized conceptualization of politics. This chapter seeks to make the salience of those gestures legible to an outside audience.

In Afro-Cuban religious discourse, practitioners use the verb "*salvarse*" (to save oneself), to describe the work that they do in their communities. "*Yo te salvo a ti, y tú me salvas a mí*" (I save you, you save me), is a common refrain that reflects a deeply imbedded ethic of mutual aid for collective well-being rehearsed in religious practice and performed

in other forms of community life. The Afro-Atlantic religious ethos sustains the belief in the ability of people with common interests to “save themselves” through religious labor. I claim that this form of autonomy, having economic, socio-spiritual, and ideological valence, modeled by Yoruba Andabo is particularly pertinent in the current historical moment of a shift in Cuba’s economic model that engenders increased inequality along racialized class lines.

In this chapter, I explore how Yoruba Andabo deploys Afro-Cuban traditional popular culture within and across sacred and secular markets to perform an affirming black cultural difference, supporting an alternative political space where autonomous material sustenance and socio-spiritual sustenance is secured: *salvándose* (saving themselves). I argue that the practice of *salvándose* amongst the Afro-religious urban working-class<sup>81</sup> in Havana’s most marginalized neighborhoods points to an embodied cultivation and transmission of an alternative political consciousness emerging within a context of great political economic change on a national scale.

## **II: WORKING THE SECULAR MARKET**

Yoruba Andabo gained membership to the *Empresa de Música Popular* (Popular Music Agency) in 1990. In order to work professionally as an artist in Cuba, one must belong to one of the state arts agencies, which writes all contracts and administers payment (after taking off a significant percentage). The legal backing of the *Empresa* allows Yoruba Andabo to seek out professional for-profit gigs in state-run cabarets and nightclubs. However, the financial pay-off for these types of shows are relatively meager considering

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<sup>81</sup> It is important to note that my employment of the term “working-class” does not map on neatly to measures of income levels. My understanding of class in the Cuban context signals a social category that is based in part on education, professional status, kind of occupation, and in many cases performed behavior. These components position the person in terms of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), compounded by monetary income and (lack of) accumulated wealth.

the fixed nature of their subsidized status despite rising cost of living. Due to this special status in the agency as a “subsidized group”<sup>82</sup> (a ranking that is selectively granted and no longer being issued) the members are guaranteed a small monthly stipend (less than \$20), provided that they maintain a regular work schedule, no matter how many shows they perform that month. However, this ranking also obliges the group to make themselves available whenever the state summons them to perform at state-sponsored functions. Yoruba Andabo is often summoned for these appearances at the last minute, sometimes only the day before or even hours before the event, signaling that the decision to include them on the program was either an after-thought or that their compliance is always already presumed therefore making it unnecessary to give them advance notice.

For Yoruba Andabo, their elevated status within the agency comes with a level of official recognition leading them to be called upon constantly, in most cases, as the sole representation of the rumba performance genre at official functions to represent the inclusion of “*el pueblo humilde*” within the Revolution (De la Hoz 2014). For example, Yoruba Andabo was chosen as the exemplary folkloric music group to join the other salsa, timba, and trova groups at “El Concierto por los Cinco” at the Escalinata of the University of Havana on March 1, 2014. The program was designed to represent the full spectrum of Cuban music on an occasion that served to represent the nation’s welcome back to Fernando González (one of the “Cuban 5” released from prison in the U.S.) and protest the ongoing imprisonment of the three remaining men serving sentences for espionage charges. *El Granma* (national newspaper) article covering the public event clearly describes Yoruba Andabo differently than the other groups, emphasizing their symbolic value rather than

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<sup>82</sup> Select groups have been given subsidized status by the state music agencies as a recognition of years of existence, professionalism, and prestige. Yoruba Andabo became subsidized in the late 90’s/early 2000s. The subsidy for *Yoruba Andabo* amounts to a 400MN (\$16.67) monthly salary on average, with amounts varying according to rank in the group.

their talent or skill per se<sup>83</sup>. This also reifies the essentialized association between blackness and the performing arts, as something natural to black bodies, in contradistinction to the rational world of science and logic. Therefore black virtuosity in music and dance is read as effortless bodily-expression (“what black bodies do”) rather than the product of rehearsal and dedication to honing a skill. At government gatherings such as this one, Yoruba Andabo typically performs rumba versions of well-known old Cuban folk songs made famous by white troubadours. Songs like “La Guantanamera” (famous Cuban patriotic song) and “El Necio” (by Silvio Rodriguez, famous singer of *nueva trova*). For the State, having black bodies performing creative rumba renditions of Cuban classics demonstrates the “diversity” and “inclusivity” of the classless national imaginary.



Figures 6 & 7: Concierto por los Cinco, March 1, 2014.

Yoruba Andabo members recognize that being asked to perform at a state-sponsored gigs implies only a symbolic level of respect for their talent and professionalism as the “best representatives” of their genre that is largely reduced to tokenism without much

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<sup>83</sup> See “*El canto de la Patria es nuestro canto: desde la escalinata con los cinco*”, *El Granma*, 3 de marzo 2014).

real benefit of note. In practice these government gigs feel like onerous, if not exploitive, obligations for which they receive little to no material compensation. They involve travel, time, and energy that takes them away from attaining paid work in their communities. The group is contractually obligated to be on beck and call for the state at all times, despite the fact that their roughly \$20 state-salary does not provide them with nearly enough money to meet their basic needs and the needs of their families. In real terms, instead of reflecting black folk's condition of belonging and prosperity in the nation-state, the state-sponsored shows represent the continued ways in which it exercises an entitlement to profit (both symbolically and materially) from black laboring bodies without regard for how they will be able to reach equitable levels of well-being to their white counterparts.

In this sense, Yoruba Andabo then become accomplices in the symbolic portrayal of black inclusivity while the actual terms of their labor agreement with the state and their high-level of activity in the sacred market tell a different story. Their continual presence at state-sponsored events as state-subsidized black artists masks the added extra-official labor that the artists must perform in their religious community in order to sustain themselves in real terms. Although participation in religious ritual is expected of all devotees of Afro-Cuban religions, there is also a real necessity amongst the working class to supplement income through religious labor to earn a living wage. YA's frequent presence at state orchestrated events hides the fact that the state agency they belong to does not secure paid gigs for their artists that would allow the artists to earn dignified wages, which is even more critical in today's "updated" Cuba as the cost of living rises and subsidies decrease seemingly more and more as the private sphere grows.

One key way Yoruba Andabo assures their exposure to potential religious clientele is by keeping the entrance fee of their shows in state-run nightclubs at a rate that is more affordable to the black working class. Nightlife venues have incrementally raised the prices

of their entrance fees in order to maximize profit for themselves and the government *Empresas*, to capitalize on the expendable income of foreigners and Cubans with access to foreign dollars. The expanding private sector has increased the potential for more money to be absorbed into the state via conspicuous consumption. However, Yoruba Andabo refuses contracts with venues that stipulate high entrance fees so that their community will not be priced out of attending their shows. Yoruba Andabo's manager, Gilberto, recounts one such negotiation with a venue:

*El lugar a veces ha querido subir el cover. Y nos sentamos, yo con el director, y le dice "Mira, el lugar quiere subir el cover". Y el director me ha dicho "No, se mantiene así"... Y voy allí, le digo "Se mantiene [al mismo precio] o nos vamos." "NO! No se vayan!" [dicen]. "Se mantiene entonces." (William Ramos 2014)*

There have been times when the locale as tried to raise the cover price. And I've sat with the director and tell him, "Look, they want to raise the cover". And the director says, "No, it stays the same".. And then I go back there and I say, 'It stays [at the same price] or we walk'. "NO! don't go!"[, they say]. "Okay, so it stays, then".

By giving a firm ultimatum, they are exercising agency over the extent to which their bodies will be exploited for state gain at the expense of the community they serve informally.

This stance also holds an implicit critique of the drive of capitalist accumulation that is reflected in policy decisions at a macro level that are affecting the way Cuban culture is produced and marketed on the ground once it demonstrates the capacity to attract surplus value. These policy decisions to increase profit margins have led to the decline of popular consumption of salsa music by working class Cubans who can no longer afford to see their favorite bands in national currency (MN) in the subsidized economy. Cuba's dual currency assigns higher prices to foreigners in hard currency (CUC) and lower prices to locals in MN. This system leads establishments to favor foreign clientele over Cubans. Gilberto cites

this exclusionary phenomena that follows Cuban musical groups that achieve international fame.

*No pueden poner un precio alto a la gente que no tienen un pello. Habrá que esperar un tiempo para que Yoruba Andabo toque en una Plaza Abierta para ver su grupo favorito, como Los Van Van. En la Casa de la Música [ver a Los Van Van] es \$20 CUC. Y tu dice, “no puedo, porque el salario no me da”. (Gilberto William Ramos, April 2, 2014)*

You can't set a high price for people who don't have zilch. They'd have to wait a while until Yoruba Andabo plays at an Open Space event to see their favorite group, like Los Van Van. At Casa de la Música [to see Los Van Van] it's \$20 CUC. And you say, "I can't go because my salary doesn't permit me".

Those that can and do afford to spend \$20 on entertainment are the tourists, (largely white) Cubans affiliated with the tourist sector (either formally or informally), and the new (largely white) Cuban elite who are successful in the private sector. Yoruba Andabo's following is primarily devout practitioners of Afro-Cuban religiosity from the urban working-class but the group has acquired a certain degree of international exposure in recent years after being nominated for Latin Grammy in 2006 in the Folk category for their CD "Rumba en La Habana Con...", and tours abroad<sup>84</sup>. Economic pressures at home have made touring abroad an increasingly important goal for the group. As such they have travelled to several countries in South America, North America, and Europe, and have participated in the international market for folkloric music in cities such as New York, Caracas, and Toronto. These achievements make their performances a prime target for domestic price inflation.

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<sup>84</sup> The group aspires to gain more foreign performance opportunities as a way to build their prestige, tap into the international folkloric market, and open up possibilities to teach master classes/workshops to foreigners in tandem with their performances abroad. However, they do not wish that any success abroad negatively affect the ability of their community to attend their performances on the island.

Furthermore, aware that their subsidized status caps the amount of return they can expect to get in salary, Geovanni has decided that it is neither in his groups' nor his community's best interest to perform in shows with exorbitant cover fees. This decision has indeed controlled the demographic of loyal audience at YA's domestic shows in state-run nightclub venues.

*A mí no me interesa subir los precios. Porque me interese que todo el público tiene acceso. Que todo tipo de público tiene acceso. Si sube mucho el precio entonces va un público determinado. Él que tiene más es el que puede ir, él que tiene menos no puede ir. Entiende? Y siempre me ha interesado que vaya público. Que todos tienen acceso a podernos ver. Aparte somos subvencionados. Entonces en definitiva... (Geovani Del Pino 2014)*

I'm not interested in raising the prices. Because what I want is for everyone to have access. That all types of audience have access. If you raise the price a lot then only a certain audience comes. He who has more is he who can go, he who has less can't go. Understand? And I've always wanted audience to go. That everyone has access to see us. Besides we are subsidized, So ultimately...

Geovani's voice trails off leaving a suspensive elipsis to fill in the weighted silence known to populate Cuban speech. I interpret Geovani's silence to mean that there is a limit to which his collusion with his own folkloricization is no longer strategic for the collective group interests of his community. I can attest through sustained participant observation at Yoruba Andabo's regular weekly performances in state-run nightclubs (i.e. Cabaret Las Vegas, Las Palmeras, Palacio de la Rumba), that the audience was either exclusively or predominately black and *mulato*. One could see perhaps a few foreigners on any given night, but it was unequivocally by and for "*gente de color*". Geovani has been vocal in interviews with the Cuban press about not pandering to tourists by giving preferential status to a foreign audience.



Figure 8: Cabaret Las Vegas.

*El problema es que desgraciadamente es el turismo y nos olvidamos del cubano. Y le damos prioridad al turismo en las Casas de la Música, y hacemos un festival tal y le damos más importancia al turista que viene que al cubano que va a participar... Yo toco para los cubanos. Si llega un extranjero, llegó, pagó su entrada y entró. Y no le doy prioridad a él. Y no lo siento a él delante y a ti detrás. El que llegó primero se sentó delante y para eso hay que llegar primero, porque yo no paro a ningún cubano para que se sienta un extranjero. (La Calle del Medio 2009)*

The problem is unfortunately tourism and we forget about the Cuban. And we give priority to tourism in the Casas de la Musica, and we do such a festival and we give more importance to the tourist that comes over the Cuban who comes to participate... I play for Cubans. If a foreigner comes and pays the entrance fee, I do not give priority to him. I do not sit him in front and you [a Cuban] behind. The person who comes first gets seated in front, and so one has to get there early, because I will not make any Cuban stand so that a foreigner can sit.

Del Pino attests that the local Cuban is the target audience for their performances in Cuba, not the tourist market. Del Pino's statement speaks to the company's political stance in regard to how they position themselves in relation to Cuba's tourist market, where blackness has been nationalized (R. Moore 1997), designed to accrue the highest amount of capital from its "black dancing bodies" (Gottschild 2003).

Although the groups' subsidized status symbolically reifies the national imaginary of a benevolent state, the terms of the agreement do not blind them to how they can be

manipulated by that state in ways that do not align with their principles, leading to self-dispossession of their bodies as cultural resources. Yoruba Andabo strategically remains in cooperation with the state, but they exercise a degree of agency within the arrangement. Their grounding in the working-class community helps them to maintain enough critical distance to astutely assess how top-down business decisions ultimately benefit the state more than it would themselves or their loved ones, and advocate on their behalf. Increasing entrances fees is the line in the sand between the state's insatiable drive to exploit the labor of black bodies as "national folklore" and ultimately sacrifice their integrity as priests, godparents, and godchildren of black working class devotees who they serve in the religious market. As if to say, "*Hasta alli, na'ma. Está bueno ya,*" Yoruba Andabo carves out a space of autonomy within the state's design for the cultural production of "nationalized blackness" (R. Moore 1997).

The group also has a marginal participation in the growing state-sanctioned/formal private sector, but are not able to compete in that arena against those Cubans with more technological resources. One can purchase a CD and DVD of their music from the now licensed "cuenta propistas" (small-business) authorized under the profession of "*comprador/vendedor de discos*" (Trabajo por cuenta propia 2010), however they have found it impossible to secure control over the rights to any of the profits. Their CDs can be found in the growing number of "*merolico*"<sup>85</sup> stands throughout the city that sell all kinds of bootleg entertainment for \$1CUC. The circulation of their music in the private market has brought them some social currency. All of the members testify that the release of their DVD "Rumba en la Habana" (dir. José Luis Lobato) in 2005 exponentially increased their publicity, making them a household name beyond their immediate religious networks,

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<sup>85</sup> *Merolico* officially means "street vendor" in Spanish, but has been used in Cuba to refer to people who sold goods in the black market during the Special Period and who are now licensed vendors under the slew of self-employed professions authorized in 2010.

reaching all over the island and even abroad. In the words of Chan, “*Ese DVD dio una fuerza a Yoruba Andabo* (That DVD gave Yoruba Andabo strength/popularity)” (Cardenas 2014). Still, the benefit they gain through marketing is weighed against the frustration and insult they feel due to their inability secure any of the proceeds from the sales in a completely unregulated legal market of pirated music, where the artist’s labor is abstracted and overridden by the entrepreneurs right to extract profit. The *cuenta propistas* who legally sell pirated media have computers, equipment, and supplies (most likely brought into the country through family abroad) that permits them to reproduce discs at a fast rate, download new media, package and sell all in-house (literally, in their place of residence), securing a continual source of income. By operating as family businesses, they have very little overhead enabling them to comfortably sustain the middle-class lifestyle that the reforms have ostensibly “opened up” for everyone. Whereas Yoruba Andabo members are lucky if they can sell one or two CDs after a show for \$5. Yoruba Andabo must essentially compete “in the free market” against their mass-reproduced selves. This battle has proven futile, and therefore dividends from their music’s circulation in the emerging private sector is not relied upon for their livelihood.

The laws of the private sector are not beholden to the principle of respect for provenance and source affirmed in every opening prayer —*moyuba olofi, moyuba olodumare, moyuba eggun*<sup>86</sup>—like in the sacred sphere. Despite state discourse that depicts the private sector as holding the promise to prosperity, for this performance group, the key to their survival remains in doing religious work. Thus, their simultaneous presence in and distance from the “emerging market” parallels their participation in and removal from the secularized exploitation of black cultural production. Their performance practice

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<sup>86</sup> Translates roughly as “I give praise to that aspect of God we cannot comprehend, I give praise to that aspect of God we can comprehend, I give praise to the ancestors...”

demonstrates an investment in a discerning “consumer base” that shares the ethno-religious values which validate their claim to authenticity in way that can’t displace their claim to ownership over their labor. In the sacred market, it’s their embodied presence that is needed to do the work. Their bodies are needed, not as products, but as producers, architects of an alternate space of possibility, and vectors of *ase*<sup>87</sup>. Ochun would not accept a burned CD as an offering. Okana: NO. The ability of the community to *salvase* and the sustainability of the performers are concomitant. This distinction in the consumption of their labor holds weight for the group materially, ideologically, and spiritually. Thus, their engagement in the state’s formal economy does not override their loyalty to their afro-religious community base. These dual market desires are held in tandem and an appropriate balance is strived for as they experience increased demand by the state to support its projection of racial democracy as class stratification increases.



Figure 9: Yerilu singing with Yoruba Andabo, Cabaret Las Vegas, April 27, 2013

To illustrate this quest for balance between secular and sacred desires, I’ll take a closer look at the case of Yerilu, one of the lead singers in the group. Yerilu left her position as singer in the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional (CFN), the government’s official folkloric

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<sup>87</sup> The-power-to-make-things-happen (Thompson 1984)

company, to join Yoruba Andabo just a few months before our interview. “When I joined CFN I started to stop feeling. In CFN they always ask you to do the same thing. The monotony depressed me. And I realized that I wasn’t advancing.” (Lugo Valdespino 2013) In addition to the tightly choreographed monotony of tourist performances, the demanding schedule imposed by working for the National Folkloric Company prevented her from singing at religious ceremonies in her community. The final straw for her was Eleggua’s message in her *Itá* on the anniversary of her initiation<sup>88</sup>. Eleggua said that she would never sing again if she did not fulfill her religious duties as an *akpwón*<sup>89</sup>. From then on, she began prioritizing ceremonial work over government work. Joining Yoruba Andabo was part of that decision. Yoruba Andabo has an almost entirely religious audience which spans across the sacred and secular markets, and so Yerilu attests to being able to perform in a way that allows her to develop her virtuosity as an *akpwón*, and thus fulfill her religious obligation to Orisha. Eleggua’s message to Yerilu was a reminder that above all, Orisha have the power to open her paths and close them, bestowed with the power to *salvarle*. The social capital granted from being a tokenized figure in the National Folkloric Company, divorced from the logic of ritual order, could not offer her any such guarantee.

Artists, like Yerilu, have also found that giving private lessons (“*clases particulares*”) is a way to accrue more income “off the books”, leveraging their prestige from membership in state-sponsored folkloric groups. This has been a long-standing practice by folkloric artists long before the recent monumental reforms expanded the economy’s private sector, authorizing “Folkloric dance artists” for self-employment. The

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<sup>88</sup> Eleggua is an orisha, divine energy, in the Yoruba cosmology. An “Ita” is a form of communicating with orisha through the use of diloggun (cowry shells). These readings provide information that guide the practitioners in the course of their life. The day that celebrates the anniversary of one’s initiation is called “*cumpleaños de santo*” in Spanish.

<sup>89</sup> The term “akpwon” comes from the specifically Yoruba religious context but is applied to the person (male or female) who fulfills this role across the different genres of Afro-Cuban music, including rumba.

new policy set the scene for a re-articulation of the black dancing body as commodity in the “free market”. However, due to the well-established practice of giving private lessons to foreigners through informal networks, I found that Afro-Cuban folkloric artists have not gone through the measures to obtain an official license by the government to legalize this avenue of labor. I had been taking private lessons with the dance director of Yoruba Andabo<sup>90</sup> for years before the reform was instituted and she attested to not feeling the need to get licensed for a profession she was already performing with great success. Other artists I spoke with also communicated that to get a license for this aspect of their work would only benefit the state, making the artists liable to pay taxes on their revenue and open them up for government oversight and regulation. In other words, these artists exercise a critical distance from the space allotted for them in the formal “private market”. Contrary to the rhetoric around the reforms as holding the key for mass social mobility/prosperity, there is a shared understanding amongst Afro-Cuban folkloric artists that the state-directed avenues of self-employment (*cuenta propismo*) in this new era does not necessarily provide increased capacity for their self-making. Victor Fowler, prized Afro-Cuban literary & cultural critic, echoes this assessment when he stated in a personal interview,

*[E]l gobierno necesita gente que crea en los cambios... pero [el gobierno] no lo pueden lograr. No pueden porque [los negros] no crean en los cambios y no crean con razón. Porque los cambios no son para ellos. Para quiénes son los cambios? Pa[ra] Miramar.*

...[T]he government needs people who believe in the changes....But [the government] will not be able to achieve that. The [blacks] can't because they don't believe in the changes and they don't believe them for good reason. Because the changes are not for them. For whom are the changes? For Miramar<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>90</sup> This artist left Yoruba Andabo shortly after my fieldwork ended to support the development of a new rumba group.

<sup>91</sup> Miramar is known as the wealthiest neighborhood in Havana, typically where state officials and foreign diplomats live. In popular discourse it is synonymous with the white upper-class. From Interview with Victor Fowler 7 April 2014 , approx. 40:00

The new state discourse around efficiency, productivity, self-sufficiency, and private consumption occludes an underlying social conditioning whose salience for black folk in particular cannot be ignored.

*El corazón del problema es la construcción de una clase media cubana... y quiénes van a ser la clase media cubana?...El problema real real es que están formando una pirámide social y el problema es quiénes van a poder estar arriba? Qué va a pasar a la sociedad cubana en términos de movilidad social? Quiénes pueden aspirar a ser clase media en Cuba? ...Los negros?... Entonces te da cuenta que los negros no van a poder aspirar a ser parte de ese clase media. Y entonces se jodieron los negros. Y allí es donde está la parte grave, grave, grave.... Y eso es un componente negativo horrible, incluso para lo que el gobierno necesitaría.*

The heart of the problem is the construction of a Cuban middle class...and who will be in that Cuban middle class?...The real *real* problem is that they are forming a social pyramid and the issue is who are going to be able to be at the top? What will happen to Cuban society in terms of social mobility? Who can aspire to be middle class in Cuba?...Blacks?...[shaking his head in the negative]...So you realize that blacks won't be able to aspire to be middle class. So they fucked over the blacks. And that is the gravely *gravely* serious part... And that is a horrible negative component, including for what the government needs.

The belief in Cuba's racial democracy is a necessary prerequisite for blacks to believe in the promise of the state-sanctioned/formal private sector to usher the Cuban people as a unified whole into "more perfect" Cuba. Afro-Cuban folkloric artists have a key role in this equation, both to present a fictive picture of racial democracy to Cubans themselves and to attract foreign capital by selling their cultural resources as a national commodity. Although Yoruba Andabo benefits from the social capital granted them due to being a state sponsored group, by refusing to get licensed for their services rendered privately, these Afro-Cuban artists express their discernment as cultural actors and proprietors of their collective ancestral knowledge. They resist the notion of the state's right to legitimate or broker the cultural resources of their community. In doing so, they refuse to perform

wholesale accommodation to a nation-building project that will not offer a fair return on the investment of its black urban poor.

However, the lack of state-regulation around *clases particulares* given by Afro-Cuban folkloric artists does not mean that this avenue of labor is unregulated internally. The content and price of private lessons given to foreigners is ultimately up to the discretion of the artist. However, the artist must weigh the buying power of the student against the religious rules and regulations around what is appropriate to teach to an outsider. The artist must make moral aesthetic decisions that will affect both their secular reputation as a skilled teacher and their sacred reputation as a devout priest. In a sense, *clases particulares* are where the demands/desires of the sacred market and secular market meet, and the two must be negotiated on a case by case, moment to moment, basis by the teaching artist.

In the case of Jennyselt (“Jenny”), the (then) dance director of Yoruba Andabo, she must make decisions about what information is appropriate for whom when teaching private orisha dance classes: what to teach, when to give a correction, and how to explain the basis upon which the correction was given.

“*Esto no es bailar por bailar!* (This is not dancing for dance sake!)”, Jenny yells. I knew then and there that I had once again missed the call of the-Iya-drum that announced an upcoming change in the rhythm. A rhythm change brings with it a transition in the entire complex, from song to foot pattern to facial expression. I was supposed to respond seamlessly in my body when that moment came. By the time I noticed, it was a beat too late.irate, she abruptly stops the music, crosses her arms and gives me a sharp look of disapproval. The shift must happen simultaneously for the message to transmit clearly and powerfully. There is no room for error in Jennyselt’s class. As a priestess and a professional dancer, she takes synchrony seriously. Bulging eyes will it to be so.

As a student of Jenny for over 5 years, her reputation as a teacher hinged on my performance of virtuosity as a dancer in the sacred orisha form. However, her reputation as a priestess required that I not learn certain aspects of the dance in her private classes.

She would remedy this by ordering me to get deeper involved in religious practice and attend religious ceremonies as often as possible: “*Vete al foco!* (Go to the focal point!)”. Directing me toward the religious community allowed her to maintain adherence to religious norms that certain knowledge could only be accrued in religious practices. She would at times invite me to religious ceremonies, where I could deepen my knowledge for my own development as an omo-orisha<sup>92</sup>, which would inevitably benefit my performance as an orisha dancer. Advanced artistic study, for Jenny, requires a different level of commitment and time investment than the monetary transaction in the pay-for-service model of private classes should entail. Jenny would get annoyed by foreigners that wanted to receive religious knowledge during their private dance lessons. “Everyone wants everything handed to them now a days,” she would complain. She made it clear to me that if I wanted to develop to an advanced level in orisha dance technique, that I would have to learn like she did, partaking in religious activity. Her aversion to what she perceived as western entitlement to accrue information instantaneously made it difficult for me to conduct formal interviews with her. Because our relationship began as a purely artistic one years prior to my graduate training in anthropology, she still viewed me as first and foremost her dance student, rather than as a social scientist trying to understand her own interpretations of her acts as much as the acts themselves. As her long-time dance student, my inquiry was read as an attempt to use her as a shortcut to get answers to things I should learn through lived experience at my level of artistic training.<sup>93</sup> She maintained that my increased involvement in religious practice would eventually bring clarity to any questions that might remain after our dance classes together. Likewise, she scolded other dance

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<sup>92</sup> Child of orisha or Yoruba practitioner

<sup>93</sup> She once avoided me for a week just so she wouldn't have to do an interview. Once I told her that it would just be a private dance class, she suddenly re-appeared.

teachers who allowed their private artistic classes to become sites of religious instruction, casting doubt on their piousness by choosing customer service over loyalty to religious secrecy. Hence, her stance around how to teach the art of orisha dance is political, reflecting a consciousness around the commodification of black ancestral knowledge through the folkloric arts and marking the limits of her participation in that process with her students.



Figure 10: Yoruba Andabo at Cabaret las Vegas, April 27, 2013

Yoruba Andabo percussionist, Lekiam Aguilar, expresses his awareness of how market pressures are directing religious musicians to commercialize more of their “cultural property” for outsiders. He is critical of the deleterious impact it is having on the Afro-Cuban community due to the religion’s vital role in sustaining community well-being amidst historic material hardship.

*En este momento en el mundo, estamos en una situación en que la economía mundial está en mucho inbalance. Y muchas personas se han relevados secretos por razones económicas. El sueño por la cultura afrocubana es que no se pierde, y que no pierde su vitalidad, y que exista gente que la defiendan. Nosotros las personas de color hemos sufrido mucho para lograr lo que tenemos, y tenemos que cuidar lo que hemos logrado hasta ahora. El sueño es que la música de Yoruba Andabo se extienda por otras dimensiones y que el salud del grupo perdure. (Lekiam Aguilar [percussionist], 2013)*

At this current moment in the world, we are in a situation where the world economy is in much imbalance. And people have sold secrets for economic reasons... The dream for Afro-Cuban culture is that it not get lost, and that it doesn't lose vitality, and that people continue to defend it. We people of color [black and mixed-race] have suffered a lot to achieve what we have, and we have to take care of what we have achieved up until now... The dream is that the music of *Yoruba Andabo* will extend to other dimensions and that the health of the group will last.

Consistent with the afro-religious ethos, Lekiam articulates this political critique of macro-economic systems within the discourse of religious principles. He assesses the economy in terms of equilibrium and health, signaling the dangers that inequity can have on the collective welfare of “*gente de color*”. He then situates the work of Yoruba Andabo as aiming to address this suffering by maintaining the integrity of the tradition and employing it to serve collective group interests. The recruitment of music to mediate against the harmful forces assailing his community is perceived as countering the exploitation of their cultural resources according to the ideological framework of afro-religious cosmology. However, the exchange value for the transmission of both religious wisdom and aesthetic skill creates a tricky dance between group self-exploitation and self-sustainability.

The grievance of the “The New Afro-Cuban Movement” against the folkloric entertainment industry reminds us that the meanings assigned to the ways in which black subjects creatively move within their limited field of agency is inextricably attached to how black bodies are positioned within a historically-situated semiotic field and how black flesh is ultimately held captive by its own representation<sup>94</sup>. I hope that this research serves to open up more conversation about the possibility of black artists to engage in resistant movement(s) within the overdetermined terms of the folklore genre and what it means

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<sup>94</sup> See Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeus Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (2014) for further exploration of black feminist theories of flesh and black representation.

politically for black people to perform for themselves amidst structures that are not of their choosing.

### III: WORKING THE SACRED MARKET

*Nosotros tocamos la música sacra pero no la llevamos a la escena. Lo que llevamos a la escena es nuestro folklore. Lo sacro queda por la actividad religiosa.* (Geovanni del Pino, April 19 2013)

We play the sacred music but we don't put it on the stage. What we put on stage is our folklore. The sacred we leave for the religious party.



Figure 11: Rumba para Ochún, April 12, 2014, Centro Habana

#### *Una rumba pa' ochún*

Family and friends are gathered in a home near the malecón in Centro Habana. The musicians are exiting the alter room where they have just finished the oru al trono<sup>95</sup>. Ochún has been brought to the earth and reminded of her life so that she may join the celebration to follow. Ochun's son is fulfilling his yearly promise to her, to host a rumba in her honor, giving thanks for all of the blessings she has given him that year, and so she may continue to do so. He pulls out a \$20 and touches it to his forehead then kisses it before placing the bill in the jícara at the foot of the congas. His sister joins him directly in front of the musicians and they mark the rhythm with their feet, exchanging knowing glances and smiles. The pulse soon cascades up to the hips, then shoulders, and runs off

<sup>95</sup> The ritual execution of liturgical rhythms and songs in a specific order that open a ceremony to propitiate the divinities. "Oru" derives from the Yoruba word "oro" meaning conversation or word.

their fingertips, flicking the energy back to the drums. It is a mood of solemn jubilation. Stillness is chastised. Every body present, young and old, must work to make the event a success. The sounds resound out the window, and into the street on this sunny Sunday afternoon. Everyone in earshot is a witness to this pledge fulfilled. The vibration of the drums ricochet down the corridor, reverberating against crumbling cement walls until they finally reach the vast Bay of Havana. For three hours the community diligently responds to calls of the akpwón in body, in voice, and in spirit. More and more rum is poured as the sweat drips down steady moving bodies, evidence of their labor.

This section explores how Yoruba Andabo deploys rumba within the local Afro-religious community to serve at ceremonial functions, constituting an alternative sacred market in which to secure material and socio-spiritual sustenance for themselves: *salvándose*. This analytical move both takes up the example offered by black feminist theories who chart the embodied space of the sacred for other epistemological mappings of resistance within a situated ethnographic context, and also consciously mirrors the theoretical gestures embedded in the labor of my research subjects who privilege their movement(s) with other Afro-religious practitioners as being the most salient and influential for the pursuit of their collective life projects.



Figure 12: Jorge Luis, akpwón , singing to throne for Oshun, April 12, 2014, Centro Habana,

“*Rumba religioso*” has been documented by scholars of rumba as a variant from the secular norm (R. M. Bodenheimer 2010, Van Nispin 2003, Daniel 1991). Due to the relatively lower incidence of rumba in religious contexts, when compared to the regularity of its secular iteration in state venues, “rumba religioso” has not been treated as a central object of analysis within rumba scholarship<sup>96</sup>. Rumba is an Afro-Cuban performance complex [dance/music/event] that has both sacred and secular modalities, heavily influenced by music and dance traditions from the Bantu-derived Palo Monte traditions, the Calabar-derived Abakuá tradition, and the Yoruba-derived Regla de Ocha/Santería tradition (Daniel 1991, R. M. Bodenheimer 2010)<sup>97</sup>. The strength of Yoruba Andabo’s aesthetic display of these ethno-religious repertoires makes them highly coveted actors for the various Afro-religious ceremonies and religious after-parties held by devotees in Havana, particularly within Yoruba-based religious contexts. Rumba music, in particular, is most often enlisted for *veladas de santo*, *cumpleaños de santo*, and religious “after-parties”, but the members of Yoruba Andabo are equally skilled in performing for any religious occasion (including *tambor de fundamento*, Abakuá *plantes*, güiros or spiritual *cajones*), giving them increased sacred marketability. Ethnomusicologist Rebecca Bodenheimer attests in her dissertation on contemporary rumba performance that “rumba occupies an interstitial space between Afro-Cuban popular/secular and folkloric/religious music” facilitating its fusions with musical practices within the secular and sacred sphere

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<sup>96</sup> Regional differences in religious practice may also play a significant role in the prevalence (or lack thereof) of rumba religioso in the literature on rumba. Rebecca Bodenheimer’s dissertation (2010) gives a historical analysis of when Afro-Cuban sacred music was incorporated into secular rumba performance practice in Havana and Matanzas. Berta Jottar’s article about the incorporation of abakuá spiritual sound into secular rumba performance in NYC by later waves of Cuban migrants (Jottar 2009).

<sup>97</sup> The philosophical, religious, and cultural aspects of these African ethnicities were reproduced, transmitted, and syncretized within *cabildos de nación*, ethnicity-based mutual aid societies organized during the Spanish colonial regime as a mechanism of social control. For more information on the connection between cabildos de nación and contemporary religious organizational practices see *De cabildos de nación a las casas de santo* (2012) by Barcia Zequeira, Rodríguez Reyes and Niebla Delgado.

(2010, 3). Rumba performance within the sacred market can be appreciated as a means of affirming black identity maintenance that promotes a distinctly Afro-religious ethos and enables community subsistence in a society where the national project promotes a hegemonic ideology of color-blindness. Yoruba Andabo is a paradigmatic example of how collectives within the black urban poor self-organize to exercise creative agency directed toward achieving well-being in the present that the state does not provide.

Members of the religious community contract members of *Yoruba Andabo* as professional musicians to play at their ceremonies because they are recognized as experts in the sacred liturgical repertoire. They acquired their expertise as a direct outcome of their personal involvement in religious life as practitioners themselves. The members of the group have earned respect individually in their communities based on each of their years of experience in and knowledge of religious liturgy, and the reputable training and spiritual advisement given to their “*ahijados* (godchildren)”. For instance, Chan, a founding member, is a highly respected *ñañigo*<sup>98</sup>, and all of the members of Yoruba Andabo are *espiritistas*<sup>99</sup>, “crowned” priests in the Ifa-Orisha tradition<sup>100</sup>, and/or *paleros*<sup>101</sup> (some occupying positions of the highest seniority and repute), who have initiated godchildren into the various Afro-religious traditions to which they ascribe. The degree of social capital assigned to professional artists within a religious context is tied to the serious stakes of the ritual.

*Cuando tú toques en una casa religiosa...las personas lo están haciendo con una fe muy grande para resolver el problema en ese momento. En el campo religioso va a atender a una persona religiosa por x motivo...[La artista] tiene que estar bien claro de lo que estás haciendo porque estás jugando con la vida de la persona.*

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<sup>98</sup> Abakuá member

<sup>99</sup> Practitioner of *Espiritismo*

<sup>100</sup> Including their one white member.

<sup>101</sup> Practitioner of Kongo-based Palo Monte religion

If you are playing in a religious house the people hosting the religious party are doing it with a lot of faith to resolve the issue at hand. In the religious camp, you have to treat a religious person for x motive... [The artist] has to be very clear because you are playing with the life of that person. (Jorge Luis Hernandez, April 23, 2013)

The ability to affect human life through spectacle speaks to the Pan-Yoruba belief in what performance theorist Margaret Drewal calls, “the creative capacity to shape the world” during the fleeting period of time in which ritual manifests (Drewal 1990). Drewal uses this ideological framework to explain the central place of spectacle within ritual amongst the Yoruba people of Nigeria who maintain their indigenous practice, but can extend to the descendants of Yoruba people in Cuba today. I situate this ideological framework as the cultural basis upon which the afro-religious affective economy is animated during ritual. This economy of emotion not only animates a sense of bodily alignment between practitioners edifying a sense of group identity, but also is believed by those practitioners to enable meaningful transaction with divine energies in exchange for more concrete, pressing gains<sup>102</sup>. This can explain why the role of the religious artist is considered so vital and worth considerable sacrifice and financial savings. This skill cannot be accrued through channels of formal education, nor can its rewards be accounted for or understood within the dominant secular social milieu. Instead, Yoruba Andabo member’s successful careers as ritual artists is the result of a generational education process tied to the maintenance of an alternative Afro-Cuban worldview based in the religious home (*casa-templo* or *ilé*) with the explicit aim of resolving urgent issues affecting the lives of community members.

The artistic services performed by Yoruba Andabo members in the sacred market are indeed commercialized (in a fee-for-service model) and foster a climate of pleasure and

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<sup>102</sup> For an extended discussion of the relationship between the material world and the spirit world in Ifa-Orisha faith system see Lázara Menéndez’ , “Kinkamaché to gbogbo oricha. Folé owó, folé ayé, folé ache” Kinkamaché to gbogbo oricha. Folé owó, folé ayé, folé aché, *América Latina y el Caribe. Territorios religiosos y desafíos para el diálogo*, 2008.

diversion. However, instead of enlisting rumba to add value to the national cultural tourism industry, their involvement in the secular market gives them a certain cache in the sacred market which is exchanged for higher payment for the same ritual musical service. These performances are the nuclei that brings together Afro-religious practitioners across generations, where techniques of intragroup subsistence are rehearsed and ways of bodily socialization and alignment are edified. The ritual confluence of drum, song, and dance is the fundamental motive for the community to come together because the synchrony of these artistic elements are the chief means through which one establishes communication with the divine, in/through the body in movement: *salvándose*. The ceremony is part of a reciprocal system between the living and the spirit world that in turn sets off a commercial chain that reverberates through the religious community. At these ceremonies performers can typically earn anywhere from \$20-\$50. Ceremonies are so frequent and common place that it is not uncommon for three to five (or more) ceremonies to be taking place in any given week in any of the predominantly black, working class neighborhoods in Havana. Additionally, there is opportunity for religious service workers (who provide the manual labor and specialized knowledge required to carry out a ceremony) to make as much or more in one week than they would in one month working for a state agency where the average salary is \$15-20 a month. Having a religious income grants them the ability to meet their basic material needs and put some money aside for when they are called upon to host a ceremony for their own personal motives. Sponsoring a ceremony entails great expenses requiring considerable savings accumulated through financial strain, sacrifice, and even extra-legal transactions. However, the fulfillment of one's personal spiritual needs or resolution of one's immediate life problems (typically health, employment, family crisis) in effect contribute to the financial maintenance of the community-network, thus continuing the cycle of reciprocity. In this sense, the performance of the (social/collective

and corporal/individual) body is choreographed through a series of reciprocal acts to achieve pre-determined goals, both affective (qualitative) and material (quantitative).

The high demand for religious artists caused by the high frequency of ceremonial activity in their community is paired with the high prestige of Yoruba Andabo locally, nationally, and internationally as a result of their acclaimed folklore performances in secular venues both in Cuba and abroad (as discussed in previous section on their involvement in the formal economy). These conditions lend considerable benefits to the artists.

*Hay personas religiosas, y tienen la necesidad de dar una fiesta en su casa religiosa tanto un tambor de fundamento o como una rumba como un cajón pa' eggun. Van a buscar el mejor grupo que hay. A Yoruba Andabo. Porque nosotros estamos vinculado con la religión directamente. Porque esas personas que nos contratan para hacer esas actividades tienen sentimiento religioso, pero busquen el apoyo de ser más religioso, buscando Yoruba Andabo. "Van tocar en el cumpleaños de fulana? sabes quién me va a tocar? Yoruba Andabo! El mejor grupo que hay aquí!"*

There are religiosos that have the need to give a religious party in their house, like a tambor or a rumba, etc... and they are going to find the best group [to play at their party]: Yoruba Andabo. Because we are linked with the religion directly. Because that person that contracts us has a religious sentiment, and looks for the support to be more religious in Yoruba Andabo. [And they brag], "You know who is going to play at the religious party of so and so? You know who is going to play for me? Yoruba Andabo, the best group around!" ("Chan" Cardenas [lead vocalist & founder], 2013)

Their social capital in the Afro-religious realm deems them trustworthy, skilled artists with "the creative capacity to shape the world" in ritual. Furthermore, their record of international travel grants them added local prestige: travel being an especially rare privilege for working class Afro-Cubans who do not have family abroad<sup>103</sup>. This prestige

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<sup>103</sup> So far the group as traveled to several countries South America, North America, and Europe. The group aspires to gain more foreign performance opportunities as a way to build on their prestige and also open up possibilities to attract foreign currency in the international folkloric market by teaching classes and workshops in tandem with their performances.

is compensated by being able to charge a higher ceremonial fee. The aura of fame Yoruba Andabo accrues by having performed on the national stage and abroad doesn't just bestow them with symbolic prestige, but that prestige is compensated materially. In short, they are able to make a considerably higher amount of money for playing the same ceremony than another religious performance group would earn; almost a third more<sup>104</sup>. Although hiring Yoruba Andabo requires more financial resources, *casa-templos* (iles) aspire to contract Yoruba Andabo to play at their ceremonies because they are seen as the best in their field in terms of technical skill as artists and religious know-how as priests skilled in inspiring the most opportune affective conditions for spiritual exchange with divinity. The animation of the religious community depends on a robust affective economy, which Yoruba Andabo guarantees. In a sense, Yoruba Andabo's mainstream success underwrites their religious prestige forming an authenticating feedback loop between secular and sacred labor<sup>105</sup>. In other words, Yoruba Andabo's savvy negotiation of the particular professional demands put on folkloric groups when navigating the display of their religiously rooted art forms as folklore on the secular stage, both nationally and internationally, enhances the aura of their sacred virtuosity. Hence, their secular virtuosity is exchanged for capital in the sacred market (rather than the other way around). *Yoruba Andabo's* busy ceremonial schedule, due to their increasing popularity, has allowed the group to achieve a certain level of economic self-sufficiency despite the meager salary given to state-subsidized performance groups.

To hire Yoruba Andabo, community members contact one member of the group on an individual basis, instead of going through the group's manager. The group members do

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<sup>104</sup> Based on anecdotal reports I acquired from group members and the group manager.

<sup>105</sup> See Cornell West's *Prophetic Fragments*: Chapter "On Afro-American Popular Music: From Bepop to Rap" where he describes the opposite relationship between commercialization and black popular music.

not report or give any percentage of the earnings to the director or to the *Empresa de Música Popular* for these services rendered. As *omo orisha* (children of orisha) or devotees of other African religions, Yoruba Andabo members insist that they have a right to engage in this category of “unofficial (unauthorized) business”, as would any Cuban citizen exercising their right to religious freedom. Community members are able to easily access Yoruba Andabo members because they live and practice the religion in, often times, the same neighborhoods. Therefore, they are mutually immersed in the same community-based networks created through blood-family or “*familia de piedra*” (religious-family) affiliation and engage in recurring affective exchange during ritual. The artist (typically an *akpwon*, but not exclusively) negotiates the deal/compensation for the specific musical needs of the ceremony with the community-member in a verbal contract. Then, based on the budget and ceremonial needs, that member of Yoruba Andabo will ask other members of the group on an individual basis to join him/her in fulfilling this service, and is responsible for administering the division of payment to those who participate. Typically, Yoruba Andabo members themselves will even contract their fellow professional group members to play at the ceremonies of their own religious houses.

The group is able to satisfy the diverse needs of the sacred market by splitting their 16-member group into smaller groups. All of the drummers are able to play all of the necessary ceremonial instruments, and sing as well, facilitating nimble re-organization of the division of labor. As the director of percussion explains, “Here at YA no one has a fixed instrument. Everyone rotates. So that if someone is missing, anyone can always fill in .” (Acosta 2013). There are at least four members who are capable of fulfilling the important role of *akpwon* (caller of chants), and so technically they have the capacity to play ceremonies at four places at once by splitting up. In fact, many times the negotiator will be the only Yoruba Andabo member present. The group will most commonly be composed of

a mix of some Yoruba Andabo members and other professional community-based religious artists —considered “amateur” (*aficionado*) by Cuban state categorization—that the negotiator knows personally from their *ilé* (*casa templo* or religious house). The composition of the artists who serve at the ceremony is completely up to the negotiator’s discretion. As Valentín explains,

*...[C]uando todo el mundo vea a Jorge Luis [en un tambor], dice “Yoruba Andabo”. Pero cuando venga Ronald ese, dice “Yoruba Andabo”. Cuando venga Chan en Regla cuando fui yo....al cumpleaños de Ochun de Chan. Quien estaba cantando? Jorgie Luis. Pero Ronald está tocando en el Cerro con otro grupo de Yoruba Andabo. Quizá tiene que reforzar en alguien pero, Yoruba Andabo. Y todo el mundo dicen, “Yoruba Andabo, Yoruba Andabo, Yoruba Andabo”...Entonces Jorge Luis está en el Cerro, Ronald está en Cayo Hueso, y Lekiam está en... Y Yerilu está en San Miguel del Padrón. Pero se ve a Yerliu allí, se dice “Yoruba Andabo”. Entonces Yoruba Andabo es una sola cosa. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

[W]hen everyone sees Jorge Luis [at a tambor], they say “Yoruba Andabo”. But if Roland comes, they say “Yoruba Andabo”. If Chan were to be there, like when I went...to the birthday of Chan’s Ochun. Who was singing? Jorge Luis. But Ronald is playing in el Cerro with another group of Yoruba Andabo. Maybe he has to supplement with someone but, Yoruba Andabo. And everyone says, “Yoruba Andabo, Yoruba Andabo, Yoruba Andabo”... So Jorge Luis is in el CARro, Ronald is in Cayo Hueso, and Lekiam es in...and Yerilu es in San Miguel del Padron. Pero when they see Yerilu there, they say “Yoruba Andabo. So Yoruba Andabo is a single thing.

In other words, regardless of how many Yoruba Andabo members actually participate, and despite the group argument’s that the work is executed as individuals as opposed to professionally under the group name, the community of religious devotees still conceive the presence of any member of Yoruba Andabo as a synecdoche for the same professional entity. Instead of having the effect of division, the splitting actually has the effect of multiplication. The vast majority of times, the entire group will not participate in a community ceremony together. However, Yoruba Andabo, as a body-politic, exercises

ownership over their professional entity through de-centralized decision-making and reproducing themselves dynamically outside the terms of the group's state-sanctioned role.

When I asked one of the drummers why he continues to play at state gigs with Yoruba Andabo if he ultimately makes more money doing informal private work, he replied,

*Porque el trabajo particular es un momento, pero no es siempre. Te pongo un ejemplo en un mes tiene actividades 4, 5, 6 y después te metes tres meses no tienes ninguno. Es de acuerdo con como este el patakín. Particular es cuando se pueda. Pero Yoruba [Andabo] es constante y parte Yoruba Andabo te da una institución. Es como los arroz y frijoles. Arroz y frijoles es todos los meses. (Lemoine 2013)*

Because private work pays more but it's not always there. For example, in one month you could have 4, 5, or 6 gigs, but then you will go three months without anything. It depends on how the patakín goes. Private work is when you can but Yoruba [Andabo] is constant. But apart from that Yoruba Andabo gives you an institution. It's like rice and beans. Rice and beans you have every month.

These few lines are dense in meaning and evoke a complex assessment of the shifting political economic terrain through religious analytics, recruiting the "rice and beans" analogy. The term patakín or patakí, is Yoruba word that refers to religious parables that are meant to offer advice on how to deal with life's uncertainties and problems. Patakí are typically passed on in the context of spiritual divination by a babalawo<sup>106</sup>. "Rice and beans" is an allusion to the basic foodstuffs included in the monthly government rations. It is common knowledge that these rations are not enough to feed you throughout the whole month, but you can count on them to be there. The ration card (*libretta*) represents the subsidized economy that sustained families during the years of the revolution when the Cuban subsidized economy was actually strong enough to carry out its socialist vision, due to its trade agreement with the Soviet block. After the fall of the Soviet Union, more and more items have been removed from the *libretta*, weakening the government safety net.

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<sup>106</sup> The speaker is a babalawo himself.

Rice and beans represent meager constancy in a world of uncertainty. Although a family cannot live on rice and beans alone, the potential big gains won in the private sector come with insecurity and risk. He assesses that it is best as a religious musician to try to operate across all markets, maintaining association with the state even while taking advantage of opportunities outside of it and, in the process, forging a space of autonomy between them guided by religious moral wisdom.

Despite seasonal lulls or unexpected droughts in religious activity, Afro-religious practitioners from the black lower-class consider labor within the sacred market to be more reliable and holistically worthwhile for getting through times of hardship and scarcity than formal labor working for the state or the formal private sector alone<sup>107</sup>. Besides one's moral obligation to participate in the ceremonies of one's *casa-templo*, I found that many members of the black urban poor are increasingly driven to make the life choice to work "full-time" in the religion instead of getting state jobs or trying their luck in the private sector, where they are systematically at a disadvantage. *Tú me salvas a mí, yo te salvo a ti*.

The Afro-Cuban religious community is made up of a comprehensive network of specialized producers, service providers, workers, retailers, and their consumers who each make-up a vital role in a reciprocal system run by and for practitioners of Afro-Cuban religiosity. Each religious actor is trained and accrues increased specialization and expertise through study and community-based practice, governed by a shared system of faith, ethics, hierarchy, and pragmatism undergirded by a religious philosophy and worldview. These "full-time" Afro-religious workers are often counted within Havana's indices of the officially unemployed population, bolstering the dominant association between blackness as a marker of vagrancy and laziness expressed through disparaging

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<sup>107</sup> The practice of economic self-reliance promoted through religious practice during the most historic period of economic crisis the Revolution (The Special Period beginning in 1989), is discussed in (Hernandez-Reguant 2010) and (Ayorinde 2004).

appraisals of *rumbero* sociality. Thus, the unambiguously commoditized performance of rumba in the sacred market points to a counter way of employing the black body that is read as counterproductive to social well-being and a drag on national development by state bureaucrats while pragmatically addressing the immediate material and affective needs of this sector.



Figure 13: Vladimir dancing Rumba Columbia at Salon Rosado, June 12, 2013

Vladimir, a dancer in *Yoruba Andabo*, expresses how he and his people feel misrepresented and misunderstood by the larger society who label *rumberos* in a negative light. He complains about how black cultural-religious practices are misread as symptomatic of “marginality”, an umbrella term that is used to refer to poverty, delinquency, hedonistic, and anti-social behavior closely associated with the rumba ambience. This disparaging perception of the rumba scene (*ambiente*) has created a negative reputation for those who partake in such events. As a result, *rumberos* are often called “*ambientales*”.

*...Y vamos a decir marginal eso? Porque demos un bembe, un güiro, un tambor en una casa, **para salvar** la humanidad, para dar una transmisión a dios, o Olofi ,como llamemos nosotros... **para salvar** una persona que está enferma, **para salvar un pueblo**, como damos nosotros en los tambores... incidente de muchos artistas, hemos dado tambores nosotros, los religiosos **para salvar un pueblo**.*

...And are we going to call that “marginal”? Just because we do a bembé, a güiro, a tambor in a house to save humanity, to transmit something to God—to Olofi, as we say... to save a person who is sick, to save a people, like we do when we give of ourselves when we do tambores. Thanks to many artists, we the religiosos have done tambores to save a people. (Vladimir Quevedo Armenteras [dancer], 2013; my emphasis)

The religious practice choreographs a grassroots movement that addresses the particular social problems facing their communities, grounded in an embodied epistemology that is incoherent to members of the larger dominant culture. Referring to the sacred traditions of enslaved Africans in Brazil, Harding reminds us that the inability of the dominant class to recognize their resistance as such is a testament to its truly subversive character (2003, 152). Within this alternate worldview, the ludic climate of the live performance does not preclude its functionality as a vital tool for survival in the here and now, economically, spiritually and in terms of group solidarity. On the contrary, it is part of the strategy to attract and maintain group cohesion and “*salvarse*” in the here and now.

None of the members I spoke with claimed to have a political agenda and in fact would explicitly oppose this assertion. However, within the context of Afro-Cuban religiosity the sacred is always already about power and how to pragmatically harness limited power in one’s favor using divine/ancestral wisdom and energy as a vital resource. The slippage between *lo religioso* and *lo político* rises to the surface when looking at performance as an analytical space from within the hermeneutic frame of its practitioners. A glimpse of this slippage is captured in one of the dancer’s pained exasperations about the negative way in which his community’s ritual practices are measured against the dominant code of social respectability.

*Por qué no vamos a dar un tambor **para** salvar un ser querido nuestro? Un amigo? un vecino? Por qué no podemos hacerlo? **Porque no podemos hacer una actividad política, y expresarnos como un pueblo, para dar una expresión a lo que queremos decirles? Porque no podemos? No! No somos ambientales, somos religiosos. Somos artistas.***

Why wouldn't we do a tambor **to save one of our loved ones**? A friends? A neighbor? Why can't we do it?! **Why can't we do a political activity and express ourselves as a people?** To give an expression of what we want to say? **We are not "ambientales", we are religiosos. We are artists.** (Vladimir Quevedo Armenteras [dancer], 2013; emphasis mine)

In response to the stigmatized term often applied to *rumberos*, "*ambientales*", Vladimir demands that his own dignified self-identification as a religious artist be acknowledged and the labor they perform through religious ritual to save their communities be respected. In our interview, he welled up with tears as he spoke, revealing the emotional injury felt by the disparaging perception of *rumberos*. Voicing a common theme amongst interviews and conversations with *rumberos* and other members, he affirms that their role as professional artists is to defend the dignity of the marginalized people their culture represents. The politics of representation he alluded to begs one to ponder about the potential of such a body-politic outside the terms of modern civil society. As skilled professionals in "the creative capacity to shape the world", they suggest that the artists are activists in their communities who are responsible for ameliorating the lived realities of the constituents. This shows a disjuncture between the hegemonic demarcations of the political sphere in modernity, that rests on a separation of the cultural and the spiritual from the political (Asad 1993, Habermas 1994), and the lived experience of their interconnection.



Figure 14: Tambor pa' Ochun After-Party, Casa-Templo 10 de Octubre, San Miguel del Padron, Havana, April 5, 2014

Yoruba Andabo provides a unique case study to observe how Afro-Cuban folkloric performers deploy their art beyond the tourist sector, by and for Afro-Cuban religious worshippers, and how this deployment can provide creative openings for an economically, socially, and performatively<sup>108</sup> autonomous pursuit. My analytical focus entails that the sacred sphere is a critical embodied space of socio-political economic production with ongoing salience for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the Americas. Late-Socialist Cuba is not exempt from this diasporic phenomenon. This examination as an attempt to respond to Alexander's (2005) call for the deconstruction of the Western sacred-secular divide that, she argues, inhibits holistic analysis of social phenomenon and reproduces an incomplete theorization of social change. Alexander's theorization of a "spirit-based politics" (also referred to as "spiritual re-membering), helps me to think through the

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<sup>108</sup> I am borrowing from Diana Taylor's notion of *lo performático* in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003). In it she defines it as the nondiscursive register of meaning transmitted in gesture, orality, movement, dance, attitude, sound, behavior, and tone. See Chapter 1 for further discussion of this term.

political effect of the ritual performances that my research subjects enact, yet without minimizing the concern for how their practices coincide with the essentialist caricatures of blackness that are convenient for institutions of white hegemony. Instead of generating what some black critical theorists refer to as a “celebratory narrative of the oppressed” (Wilderson 2003), I take seriously that something useful can be learned by opening up the customary fields of investigation and epistemological frameworks for understanding political action. Even if they utter no immediate political intent, these nonverbal exchanges channel affective forces that articulate history, ethics, and ideology, and structure black political subjectivity.

*Religiosamente, “yoruba” es territorio y “andabo” es amigo. Entonces tenemos ese vínculo religiosamente. Así que no tenemos problemas. Mientras exista la religión, existe Yoruba Andabo. Porque yo cuando me levanto por la mañana yo toco la campanita de mi ángel de la guardia, yo digo “Maferefun Ochun, mira mi Ochun que ayuda a Yoruba Andabo en todo”* (Cardenas [lead vocalist & founder], 2013)

In the religion, “Yoruba” is territory and “Andabo” is friend. So we have that link. And as long as that link exists, we won’t have problems. As long as there is religion, *Yoruba Andabo* will exist. Because when I wake up in the morning, I ring the bell of my *angel de la guardia*, and I say “*Maferefun Ochun*, listen, my Ochun, help Yoruba Andabo in everything”.

#### **IV: “EL MUNDO ES PA’LANTE (THE WORLD IS FORWARD MOVIN’): EMBODYING POLITICAL ECONOMY”**

The critical distance from the secularized exploitation of black cultural production I describe does not imply that their performance, even in the sacred market, is somehow shielded from the effects of global capitalism<sup>109</sup>. However “distant” the sacred sphere may appear from the emergent private sector, the economic “*actualización*” being ordered on a

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<sup>109</sup> Scholars of globalization have written extensively about this dynamic relationship between the global market and local culture and cultural identity within the world system of capitalism (Appadurai 1998, Friedman 1994).

national scale is indeed co-choreographing the very tempo/rality of rumba performance<sup>110</sup>. To purport otherwise would be to fall into the very folkloric tropes of black bodies as timeless figures in a primitive state against which modern subject hood is defined. The notion that performance is the place where political economy is embodied (Cánepa-Koch and Bigenho 2001)<sup>111</sup> resonates here with one of the drummer's reflections on what it feels like to be a *rumbero* today.

*Ahora hay que tener efectos. Antes se tocaba con 2 cosas, ahora uno toca 4 o 5 cosas a la vez. Porque es así. La vida te va enseñando que tiene que hacer más para comer... Porque una persona no puede tocar una sola cosa na más. Hay que tocar todo, hay que tocar congas, hay que tocar bata, hay que tocar güiro, chekere... hay que cantar. Hay que hacer de todo. En el grupo, la mayoría de las personas hacen de todo; cantan, tocan, bailan... y eso se paga. Es como el reloj. El reloj no se para, es pa'lante. Así va la rumba, así va todo... Y no es porque la vida esta duro, es porque la vida es pa'lante. (Julio Cesar "El Gordo" Lemoine [percussionist], 2013)*

Now you have to have effects. Before you [the drummer] played two things. Now you have to play 4 or 5 things at the same time. Because that's the way it is. Life teaches you that have to do more things to eat... And now, one person can't just play one thing. You have to play everything. You can't just play the congas. You have to play bata, you have to play güiro, you have to play chekere, you have to sing... You have to do everything. In the group, the majority of the people can do everything; play, sing... and that pays. Life is an evolution, its forward moving. It's the clock. The clock doesn't stop, it keeps going forward. That is how the music goes, that is how rumba goes... That's how everything goes. And that's not because life is hard, it's because life is forward moving.

In this description you can feel the pressure undertaken on the body to perform to this new beat interpreted through an afro-religious analytics. In describing what it takes to be a *rumbero* today the drummer shows how external forces impel the body to perform in more

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of the social effects of time/space compression under globalization see Bauman (1998).

<sup>111</sup> In reference to Andean festivals such as La Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria she declares, "*las manifestaciones culturales tradicionales no son pues ajenas a los procesos de modernización y globalización, sino que incluso los constituyen*" [traditional cultural manifestations are not external to processes of modernization and globalisation, rather they constitute the processes themselves] (see Cánepa-Koch, 2001, 21)

complex ways. The capacity of the body must expand accordingly. Vocal chords must vibrate new tones; hands must quickly learn to speak in new instruments. The beat is speeding up. “...*Porque la vida es pa'lante, no es pa'tras* (...Because life is forward moving, not backward).” “*Alante*” also means faster in musical terms. If you want to survive, you have to be able to keep up with the time. And the rhythm is beating at a faster pace. Today you’ve got to “move it” to be able to compete *más alante*. A new generation is coming up from behind and they are fast moving.

Valentín<sup>112</sup>, locates the cause of the change in tempo to the younger generation; inevitable change personified.

*Sí. Hay un cambio. Hoy hay una juventud que vienen con ese carisma, con ese vigor, con esa fuerza, con esa impronta, que lo que yo [un viejo] hago en 10 minutos tu [un joven] lo haces en 4. En entonces, la rumba era más pa'tras, mucho ritmo pero menos técnica.... Ahora existe una rumba con un tecnicismo con una onda, con una métrica, y entonces le va inventando, y entonces el quinto, el redoble del quinto, el palito, e...ahora hay un redoble de deber que es mucho más rápido, más difícil. La misma calidad, pero los tiempos... a la juventud hay que darle paso. Siempre.* (Valentin Marquez Quiñones [production assistant], 2013)

Today the youth come with a certain charisma, that vigor, that strength, that stamp, that... what I [an old man] do in 10 minutes, you [a young person] do in 4. So that is why before rumba was slower, with lots of rhythm but less technique... Now another rumba exists with a technical nature, with a certain vibe, with a metrics... and they [the youth] start being inventive, and so the drum beat becomes a drumroll... And now there is a drumroll of duty that is all happening much faster. The same quality as before but with greater difficulty... You have to give way to the youth. Always.

The heightened speed and increased technical difficulty is a response to increased competition. It can also be seen as a metaphor for the quickening pace of a growing consumer culture where the “new & improved” reigns supreme in the market. This

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<sup>112</sup> Valentin is the only person I interviewed who was university educated, trained in economics. He did not formally study a field related to music but was a performer in an amateur rumba group in his youth.

challenge is met not with complaint or value judgment, but with increased bodily virtuosity. The technology of the body must produce “more effects”. This evolution is understood as natural law. As such, if you seek out divine information and follow it, you will experience *desenvolvimiento* (personal development) even under the harshest of conditions.

These accounts describe the intensification of labor demands on the body in the face of an inevitable force that threatens to leave them in the past. Knees supple— in *mollelo*—they felt the rhythmic shift as the *akpwón* in the *Comité Central del Partido Comunista* officially announced the “*actualización del modelo*”, and are moving with it. If you want to develop, stay in sync with the rhythm the future is setting. You must seamlessly re-establish a relationship with the tempo. The *clave* (key)<sup>113</sup>— an organizing rhythmic structure that unifies the dance, song, and percussion— is what orients all pieces together in space and time ensuring a stable channel for continuous affective exchange. It is constant until a musical break or when the song is over. Then it is bound to reappear, perhaps in another tempo. Whatever way it shows up, it is the responsibility of the group to shape themselves around it. Rumba bodies submit to the orienting pattern of the *clave*, the unifying rhythmic key that makes all of the parts fit. Very quickly we see that in describing the rhythmic and kinesthetic changes experienced by *rumberos*, we gain a lens with which to understand how this sector might interpret the way Cuba is adjusting under the external pressures of global market.

I keep the *clave* in my body at all times and remain supple, *mollelo* in my knees so at any moment... The beat arrests. —I am suspended— in the measure. After all this time I still feel the beautiful aching in my chest in anticipation. I surrender to the break, head back, neck exposed. This isn't a lull, it's a prolongation of time. A bead of sweat travels down my temple to find a resting place on the shelf of my collar bone. Some of us look to

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<sup>113</sup> Both the rhythm and the instrument on which the rhythm is played, two hardwood sticks, is called *clave*. The *clave* rhythm can also be clapped with one's hands. See Chapter Three for a description of the *clave* rhythmic pattern, pg.106.

Didier (the lead drummer) asking, “when? Now?” with their eyes. Others simply close their eyes and bask in the unknowness. Didier assertively looks right and left to the drummers at his sides, assuring their focus. They affirm with determined, obedient eyes, aware of vulnerability of the moment and the urgency of resuscitating our bodies back to the present. Then, always in the most unlikely moment, his wooden stick comes down on the *campana*, bap! Break..... Bap! Bap! Breaks again in the most unexpected place... Bap! I catch the deluge of accelerated rhythms that flood into the space, a pool gathers in the deep swing of my hips, sinking into a steady syncopation that our bodies ride collectively to the end. Heart open. Exchanging knowing glances of the high-vibrating sensation, the shared trauma of our own volition brings us closer.

The shift in the economy brings a temporal shift, dancing to the metrics of an insatiable market. *Rumba Guanguancó*<sup>114</sup> cultivates a readiness for sudden movement(s). In sync is the only way through; bodies moving in sensed unison. The principle of synchrony as embodied in rumba extends to the performance of collaboration between the afro-religious practitioners in the sacred market to “save themselves” amidst the constraints of material scarcity. The inextricable intertwinement of the sacred imperative toward synchrony and the global imperative toward “modernization”, is what is mutually co-choreographing the movement of the *rumbero* body and development of the body-politic.

Yoruba Andabo’s particular brand of rumba musical “modernization”, referred to as “*guarapachangueo*”, is a large part of what makes them so celebrated amongst their popular fanbase (R. M. Bodenheimer 2010). *Guarapachangeo* was popularized by Pancho Quinto—*Ibaye*—, a prominent founding member of Yoruba Andabo. In the 1980’s he made this innovation to the classical rumba instrumentation format a Yoruba Andabo signature. The rhythm is played on three batá drums tied together in a pyramid, while the drummer sits on a cajón and plays a cowbell all at once by the same person<sup>115</sup>. This

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<sup>114</sup> A fast-paced form of rumba driven by a “chase, discussed in terms of a metaphor in which a rooster stalks a hen” (Daniel 1991, 2). Women must always try to deflect the men’s attempt to *vacunao* typically expressed in the swift thrusting gesture of the pelvis, elbow, foot or scarf. The movement is greatly influenced by *makuta* and *yuka* dances of the Conga-Angola tradition.

<sup>115</sup> See Bodenheimer’s dissertation for an extended discussion of the historical origins of this rhythmic form.

intensification of the drummer's labor was, in a way, anachronistic for that time. The 80s were considered the "Golden Epoch" of the Revolution, when the Soviet Bloc still had strong economic ties with Cuba; a time when poor blacks were indeed able to experience a level of social mobility through education, professional occupations, and social programs. At that time the practice of Afro-Cuban religions was still underground due to harsh religious persecution by the government (Ayorinde 2004). The musical tradition had to be transmitted at a lower volume (rate) and at a slower cadence.

As Didier, the percussion director, says, in reference to Pancho Quinto and his musical invention, "*No lo explotó muy bien. Nosotros lo hemos rescatado y lo hemos mejorado, modernizado, con nuestras cosas* (He didn't make the best use of it. We have rescued it and improved it, modernized it, with our things/flair)" (Didier Acosta [percussion director], April 20, 2013). YA's younger members are actually encouraged by the elders to be artistic leaders by experimenting with the musical form and innovating the sound as long as they can demonstrate their mastery the traditional form through that expression. This embrace of "(post)modernity" is also reflected in the group's self-presentation. When not performing for government functions, the clothes they wear at performances are in line with the latest urban "cool" trends: i.e. gold chain, embellished t-shirts, baseball caps, dark sunglasses, tight jeans, etc.<sup>116</sup> Hence, although Yoruba Andabo's artistic director is an elder member from back in the Port days, the head of percussion (Didier) is actually the youngest member (25 yrs old). By supporting the innovations of the younger members, Yoruba Andabo situates itself at the vanguard of this rejuvenation or "rebirth" of the rumba tradition, propelling the aesthetic to speak to the current moment.

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<sup>116</sup> At government functions they adhering to the "traditional" formal dress code associated with staged folkloric respectability (i.e. guayabera, slacks, hardsole shoes)

Perhaps it was prescience that called Pancho Quinto to institute a rhythmic structure that has permitted the group to rehearse the intensification of their labor within rumba ahead of their time, while in “the break”, so to speak. Thanks to this musical re-invention they were ready to respond to the call when the current rhythmic tempo of the recent reforms began to flood Havana’s streets. Their knees were supple, in *mollelo*. Now, other younger groups are trying to replicate their *guarapachangeo* sound, saying “*Oye! Suena como Yoruba Andabo!* (Hey! It sounds like Yoruba Andabo!)” when they feel they have achieved complete mimesis. However, the specific format of the drums (see figure 14) have not, to my knowledge, been duplicated (R. M. Bodenheimer 2010). Perhaps out of respect for the spirit of Pancho Quinto and the sanctity of his legacy that lives on in the group that holds the name of his original set of *cajones* (drums).<sup>117</sup>



Figure 15: *Guarapachangeo* drum format

“*Guanguancó* cultivates a readiness for sudden movement(s). The members of Yoruba Andabo speak of a “rebirth of rumba” referring to ever new musical innovation

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<sup>117</sup> Yoruba Andabo de Pancho Quinto” was painted on the side of the wooden drum that day when they were discovered at UNEAC by Pablo Milanés, when the men of *Grupo Marítimo Portuario* were thrust into an unanticipated professional trajectory.

within the rumba form, incorporating “more effects” and different musical genres (i.e. reggaeton, samba). However, there is also a renewed demand for rumba on the national stage at diplomatic events and government functions, providing more public venues where rumba can be displayed. Thus the current rebirth of rumba is securing young black participation in this tradition. Seeing growing prospects on the horizon for secular and sacred *desenvolvimiento*, different generations are coming together around a common forward moving activity.



Figure 16: Rumba Yambu at Tambor pa’ Ochun After-Party, Casa-Templo 10 de Octubre, San Miguel del Padron, Havana, April 5, 2014

However, the high demand for their labor in both sacred and secular markets must be negotiated with their obligations as religious practitioners. This involves prayer, piety, study of religious liturgy, active participation in the ritual lives of their religious family (especially their godparent), and active mentorship and leadership of the spiritual

progression of their godchildren. Their fulfillment of these religious obligations demonstrates their respect and love for their “*angel de la guardia*” (spiritual guide) and religious lineage.

*Tú hablaste con Geovani. ...[É]l es un director. Es hijo de Chango. Como director tiene que actuar con decisiones, patrones, conductas como director. Como hijo de Chango, tiene que ser buen hijo de Chango como todos los hijos de Chango. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

You spoke with Geovani...[H]e is a director. He is a son of Chango. As a director he has to make decisions, follow models, abide by the conduct of a director. As a son of Chango, he has to be a good son of Chango like all sons of Chango.

Piety is demonstrated through daily acts and behaviors, which cannot be substituted by professional success. In the same way that one adheres to the standards of one’s occupation, dual adherence to religious norms of piety must be equally upheld for their holistic well-being. The ability to attain professional success is understood as compensation for one’s consistent acts of devotion.

Yoruba Andabo members hold this dialectic relationship between their religious piety as devotees and their professional success as artists in tension. Their busy performance schedule means that they may participate in more religious rituals as paid artists than they can dedicate to other kinds of religious labor.

*Cuando estas en un grupo como Yoruba Andabo no puede estar en todas las actividades religiosas en el barrio. No puede ser así porque los músicos también necesitan su descanso. Hay dos días de la semana que yo siempre descanso... Normalmente Yoruba [Andabo] tiene dos o tres shows a la semana. Entonces tiene como dos días, más o menos, para otras actividades religiosas. (Aguilar 2013)*

Because I’m in Yoruba Andabo I can’t participate in all of the religious activities that are going on in my neighborhood...Musicians have to have their rest. Two days a week I always rest. Normally, Yoruba [Andabo] has two shows a week or three shows a week. So you end up having only 2 days, more or less, for religious functions.

Some in the group insist that a high-degree of personal organization is needed to maintain a respectable degree of religious activity. El Gordo attests that is indeed very difficult, but it is entirely possible if one respects the important role they hold in their community as a religious leader. As a babalao (priest of Ifa), he finds a way.

*Nosotros los babalawos, como somos sacerdotes de Ifa, lo único que nos da a uno es un consejo para dónde cogemos; pa'lante o pa'tras, pa'lado, pa'lante, coge por aquí, coge por allá... usamos a Ifa para salvar a la humanidad, salvarse a uno mismo, salvar a los hijos, salvar a la familia. (Lemoine [percussionist], 2013; emphasis mine)*

Us babalawos, being priests of Ifá,...all that we give to people is advice, to know which way to go; forward or backward, to the side, to go forward take this way or that way... we use Ifa to save humanity, **to save yourself, to save your children, to save your family.**

“El Gordo”, was beading *elekes* (religious beaded necklaces) by hand for a godchild during our interview, demonstrating his keen ability to juggle sacred and secular tasks simultaneously. He attests that the discipline instilled by the religion was essential training for him to be able to manage his multiple professional duties.

Others, admit to not being able to devote as much time to religious study due to professional demands. The musical director, also a babalao, says that he prioritizes his commitments as a professional musician and his family over religious duties.

*[Lista de prioridades:] Después de mi familia viene la música. Apartando la familia, la música es lo máximo. Yo soy babalawo. Yo practico la religión. Pero la música me quita un poquitico del tiempo [para practicar la religión]. No estoy en la religión como estoy en la música. La música me impide estar todo el tiempo en un Ifa o en un santo. Me impide eso. Porque los ensayos, las actividades, una fiesta religiosa que tenemos que tocar. Casi no tengo tiempo pa' practicar [la religión]. Sé más de la música que la religión. Todo se debe a un estudio. Si no estudie no aprende. (Acosta 2013)*

[List of priorities:] After my family, the music. Putting my family aside, music is the greatest. I'm a babalawo. I practice the religion. But the music takes time away [from my religious practice]. I'm not in the religion like I am in the music.

Because the music prohibits me from being in [practicing] Ifa, It doesn't let me. Because I am rehearsing, at a concert, at religious party I have to play at. I almost don't have time to practice [the religion]. I know more of the music than I know about religion. Everything comes down to study. If you don't study, you don't learn.

Due to the high value he places on being present for his immediate family, the added pressure of his role as director of musician at such a young age has forced him to make tough decisions about where he will devote his energy. He has chosen to devote more time and energy to making sure he is able to adequately perform his role in Yoruba Andabo than to his role as a babalawo. Thus, his religious devotion is channeled to his music. Playing professionally for religious ceremonies now constitutes his primary involvement in the religious community, as an artistic service worker.

*Muchos ensayos. Depende del tipo de concierto que vamos a dar. Si es para Yoruba Andabo y otra agrupación, ensayamos 2 veces a la semana, 2 semanas antes del concierto. Si es un concierto de Yoruba Andabo solo, ensayamos varias veces, puede ser 4 veces en la semana, porque no solo tocamos rumba. Tocamos Congo, Abakuá... Hacemos Yoruba. Tenemos un patakín yoruba de Obba con Yemaya, Ochun, Chango, Obatala, Ogun... Y eso lleve un proceso de ensayo fuerte. Porque ese día no podemos tener ninguna inseguridad y transmitir bien el mensaje. No podemos entregar al público lo que no estamos seguro nuestro mismo. Hay personas [en el público] que no saben nada de música. Pero siempre hay gente que saben de música que nos están mirando y escuchando. Y saben cuándo hay un golpe mal, cuando hay un vocal mal, cuando hay inseguridad, cuando hay un mal trabajo. Entonces siempre nos preparamos.*

Lots of rehearsal. Depending on the type of concert that we are going to do. If its going to be with another group, we rehearse 2 times a week, starting two weeks before a show. If it's just YA, then we rehearse lots of times a week, can be 4 times because we don't just do rumba. We play Congo, Abakua... We do Yoruba. We have a patakín yoruba de Obba con Yemaya, Ochun , Chango, Obatala, Ogun... That means we have to do a substantial rehearsal process. Because that day can't have any insecurity in order transmit the message well. We can't transmit to the audience what we don't have sure ourselves. We have people [in the audience] that don't know anything about music. But there are always people that know the music listening to us. And they know if there is a bad hit of the drum, or a bad vocal note, when there is insecurity, when there is poor work... So we have to always prepare. (Acosta 2013)

When I interviewed him he was only a few months into being promoted to this role, and so his feelings of anxiety with regard to how the religious community would assess the reputation of the group if they didn't perform the large repertoire of religious music perfectly weighed on him. In this sense, his respect for the religious integrity of the music ironically competed with his ability to fulfill a virtuous religious practice in his personal life. While others, like Regla, say that they abstain from performing many ceremonial gigs, preferring to only fulfill the minimum job requirements of the professional gigs. This frees her up to participate in more ceremonies as a devotee rather than work as an *akpwón* in a religious setting.

The range of ways that Yoruba Andabo artists respond, both corporally and collectively, to the accelerated demands on their labor in this new era, reveal a heterogeneous negotiation between sacred and secular ideologies and desires. Stephan Palmié asserts that the monetization of sacred services throughout history is a response to the modern push of market forces on a crumbling socialist regime (2002). The idea of “spiritual contract” and “reciprocal exchange” were ways of countering the violent extraction of labor from black bodies. Indeed the pragmatic synthesis of sacred and secular libidinal imperatives— underlying forces that stabilize a certain construction of the self— govern how Afro-religious artists strategically move within the complex political economic rhythm currently at play.

## V. CONCLUSION

The ways in which Yoruba Andabo strategically moves across the Cuban political economic landscape illuminates the racialized impact of the reforms themselves. The economic pathways seized by Havana's folkloric artists, leveraging their cultural resources and state-issued social capital in religious-specific ways to fulfill life projects, constitute

an important line of analysis for understanding black self-making in contemporary Cuba<sup>118</sup>. In this chapter, I discussed how Yoruba Andabo uses secular performance venues primarily to maintain its public profile. This accrual social capital is then exchanged (“cashed in on”) in the sacred market —run by and for their community— where they not only earn a living wage, but gain nourishment in various ways. They consciously reject the state-designated channels to account for their laboring bodies in the emerging economy (as “private small-businesses”) and teach/perform on their own terms at critical moments. Their ability to strategically negotiate between multiple spheres of economic activity simultaneously and perform their investment in racialized working-class community corporate interests, suggest that they might be better understood as agents of strategic “momentary essentialism” (Gordon 2004) than wholesale self-folkloricization. In describing the processes of identity construction on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, Gordon noticed a “tactical negotiation and an agentic construction of identity within a specific conjuncture...based on a particular repertoire of material and symbolic resources available to them as the interpolated.” I apply Gordon’s notion of “momentary essentialism” to describe Yoruba Andabo’s consciously strategic participation in their own folkloricization, as a means to increase their relevance in their religious communities, rather than an ends in and of itself. Momentary essentialism speaks to the performance of “flexibility— within limits— [at] momentary locations from which to strategically struggle”. Although Yoruba Andabo’s artistic services are indeed commercialized (as in made available for purchase) and indeed foster a climate of pleasure and diversion, the commoditization and consumption of this cultural form in the sacred market is qualitatively distinct from the

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<sup>118</sup> For examples of book-length ethnographic studies of contemporary Afro-Cuban religious practice from within the sacred sphere post-1959 beyond a folklore framework see Christine Ayorinde’s *Afro-Cuba Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity* (2004) and Lázara Menéndez’ *Rodar el coco: procesos de cambio en la Santería* **Invalid source specified.**

way in which Afro-Cuban performance functions for a foreign audience. Furthermore, their own commodification of their artistic services are distant from the ways in which the Cuban state would have black folk be “productive” actors in the new economy by rendering themselves folkloric and exploitable for nation-building. Instead of enlisting rumba to add value to the tourist industry, auctioning off the allure of Cuba’s very own exotic Other to the highest bidder, these performances are the nuclei that brings together Afro-religious practitioners across generations. Rumba— like the *clave* rhythm itself— becomes an increasingly necessary coordinating apparatus, where techniques of intragroup subsistence are rehearsed by and for their community-members in order to mediate the global market pressures on their lives.

As Cuba moves toward a more market-based economy, the state aspires to control the commodification of blackness through centralization of profits made by black dancing bodies. Despite the “expanding opportunities” for prosperity in the state-sanctioned private sector, Yoruba Andabo demonstrates an increased reliance on informal, community-based networks and practices of racialized collectivity that are relatively autonomous from both the emerging private sector and the state-subsidized economy. This form of autonomy has direct material implication, mitigating pressing life hardship, while sustaining a politics of representation fought at the level of discourse, affect, and aesthetics. The alleviation in the here and now may not shift their structural class position, but it does rehearse a social choreography<sup>119</sup> that animates a base of bodily alignment and group identity foundational to their movement(s) writ large.

Engaging performance as a place where political economy is embodied, allows us to sense the choreographic tension between black self-making and the nation-building

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<sup>119</sup> Refer to Chapter 1 for a more in-depth discussion of Aimee Meredith Cox’s notion of “social choreography” (2015).

project. The director's protective stance against the state's overstepping of collective group interests holds an implicit critique of the state desire to use black bodies as vessels for the extraction of surplus value —reflected in policy decisions at a macro level about how Cuban culture is produced and marketed on the ground— even while he participates in that very market. The group is indeed moving to the new accelerated rhythm of the reforms, but their micro-gestures create important syncopation.

In music, syncopation involves the interruption of the regular flow of rhythm, by placing a stress or accent on an “off-beat”, where they are unexpected to occur within Euro-Western time-line patterns. In dance, syncopation causes a kinesthetic effect in the body, as the body moves to supply the missing beat. Syncopation is a performance strategy that is key to black music and expression diasporically. As black historical and musical theorists argue, syncopation has provided the basis for the survival of black consciousness amidst societies that are metered for their annihilation (Levine 2007, Floyd 1995, Pressing 2002). The black cultural meaning of rumba performance in today's Cuba is solidified dialectically in and through the body in movement, reinforcing extra-national diasporic group identification.

An important factor to note pertains to the groups' great emphasis in our interviews on the fact that the “private” religious functions they participated in as paid artists were done as individuals not as a group, even when they played together. They were explicit that these jobs were done as religious practitioners, not as “Yoruba Andabo” the entity belonging to the *Empresa de Música Popular*, even while they operationalized the community-members' understanding of the presence of any single artist from Yoruba Andabo at a ceremony as a synecdoche for the professional-entity. I sensed in our interviews that there was a level of anxiety about going “on record” as conducting

“unofficial business”. I suspect that the fact that my research was conducted under the auspices of a well-reputed cultural investigation institute under the Cuban Ministry of Culture<sup>120</sup> contributed to their caution. (Ironically, they probably wouldn’t have agreed to participate in my study at all if it wasn’t approved by the Ministry of Culture.) I was asked repeatedly not to mix the two ways the members earn an income, leading me to structure my analysis according to two conceptually separate sections: secular and sacred.

The level of discretion they employed when talking to me about their religious work was counterbalanced by their demonstration of piety as religious devotees. The right granted them as Cuban citizens to practice religious freedom was critical for rationalizing the social and legal sanctioning this kind of employment, free from government oversight. In light of this emphasis around what economic activity falls under the jurisdiction of religious freedom, I see a vivid politics of collective self-determination expressed through their defense of autonomy as *omo orisha*, “*gente de color*”, etc. The practice of religiously guided conceptions of racialized collective self-determination— *salvándose*— is important for the understanding of how black identity politics are performed by the Afro-religious urban working-class.

Yoruba Andabo’s performances in the community-based sacred market speaks to how black collectives are navigating the new era of the Revolution in socio-political registers and economic spheres unintended by the state, syncopating its forward moving progression. Thus, performance, by and for practitioners of Afro-Cuban religion, takes center stage in this ethnography as a strategic response to the shifting landscape. A “*rumba pa’ Ochún*” provides a window into how religious-inflected black cultural politics meets their needs in ways that neither the state nor formal political activity provide. If the sacred

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<sup>120</sup> *El Instituto Cubano por la Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello*

market is taken seriously, it reveals that this sector of the working class is not simply catapulting to commodified stereotypical postures that are counterproductive to their greater well-being, but might instead see a more promising means of achieving well-being through their involvement in autonomous channels rather than the state-designed emerging economy.

In arguing that politics can be performed differently, in different political registers, in different spaces than Politics is traditionally conceived—in critical movements of syncopation—I consider how the particular form of political consciousness exhibited by professional performers of Afro-Cuban popular traditional culture finds itself in a paradoxical relationship with the dominant ideological thrust of the “New Afro-Cuban Movement.” My work continues the analytical concerns of the previous studies of antiracist black self-making in Cuba produced by the anti-racist movement, but locates rumba performance outside the tourist market/gaze and off the national stage to offer another (unlikely) entryway into the debate. In doing so, I wish to displace the centrality of the foreign and state audience, and with that the assumption that religious performance must be directed away from the sacred in order to produce political economic derivatives of consequence to its performers. This move away from the officially designated place of Politics, is inspired by McKittrick’s employment of Edouard Glissant’s “poetics of landscape”: creative acts that influence and undermine spatial arrangements (McKittrick 2006, xviii). In the chapter that follows, I consider what happens conceptually, discursively, and corporally when artists who operationalize a sacred performance repertoire work in places that are institutionalized as secular. What are the stakes of displaying an allegiance to secular liberalism for both afro-religious practitioners in the audience and those on stage? And, what are the political stakes of black collective diversion from the secular script of national citizenship?



Figure 17: Yoruba Andabo , Sala Covarrubias, Teatro Nacional, Havana, March 17, 2013

## **Chapter Five: Yemaya Melli: critical ruptures & rehearsals of racial performativity**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapters described how the social memory of collective action is transmitted (Chapter Three) and operationalized by Yoruba Andabo in their professional work as artists across both sacred and secular markets (Chapter Four). I will now pinpoint specific moments during one of Yoruba Andabo's professional "gigs" to ground my analysis of embodied collective memory's performative effects. Yoruba Andabo's performance at the Teatro Avenida was chosen for close reading because it constructively troubles the neat categories of sacred and secular that I so carefully laid out in the previous chapter. I explore the ways in which Yoruba Andabo negotiates multiple ideological, material, and affective demands on their bodies as both folkloric artists and religious practitioners. This sets the scene for nuanced appreciation for how Yoruba Andabo members make sense of the liberal secular boundary they uphold while actively operating across it. In addition, the Teatro Avenida performance provides a concrete analytical frame to examine how the Afro-religious urban working-class embody black collective subjectivities through sacred repertoires of movement, and how those bodily enunciations reify and rupture hegemonic scripts assigned to their racialized bodies, queering the libidinal economy of Cuban nationalism.

This chapter furthers my larger investigation of how black political subjectivities/imaginaries are rehearsed and reified in bodily movement. By "rehearsal" I refer to Judith Butler's theory of performativity, where she asserts that rather than gender being the outward expression of an inner truth, gender accrues the effect of a stable identity as a result of reiterated action. In other words, the tacit collective agreement to rehearse gender is what produces its "truth", obscuring the inherent instability and ever-present

contradictions of a gender binary. I position the sacred-secular binary as one such “truth” tacitly agreed upon by good citizen-subjects of the modern nation-state. In instances like the ones I unpack, shared embodied memory of sacred repertoires are used as a vital resource in black political choreography to rehearse other ways of performing self-hood in public space. This theoretical approach makes visible political lives that are often rendered deviant, disreputable, and thus accomodationist to oppressive stigmas of blackness.

This ethnographic case affirms that bodies in movement express forms of sociality (ways of being-in-the-world together) and serve as a means to understand and constitute subjectivity. Harding describes African-based religious practice during slavery in Brazil as a counter-orientation of the body in a place, which in effect produced alternative spaces of being for enslaved Africans. These alternative spaces sustained operations of collective agency by those denied subjecthood in the larger society (Harding 2003). Scholars of Yoruba-based ritual (Daniel, 2005; Drewal M. T., 1992 [1989]; Drewal M. T., 1990; Harding, 2003; Alexander, 2005; Menéndez , 2008) make the argument that what is produced in the sacred realm has lasting effects long after the moment of time and well beyond the place of the ritual, fundamentally altering the lives and subjectivities of the practitioners.

I recruit this theory of black spatial self-making together with Muñoz’s concept of “racial performativity”, “the aspect of race that is a political doing”, to think through the nature of the bodily and affective labor involved in the performance of autonomy I witnessed at the public theater that night in September. He writes,

Brown feelings are not individualized affective particularity...I am interested in all sorts of antinormative feelings that correspond to minoritarian becoming. In some cases, aesthetic practices and performances offer a particular theoretical lens to understand the ways in which different circuits of belonging connect, which is to say that recognition flickers between minoritarian subjects. (Muñoz 2006, 680)

Originally conceived for “ [U.S.] latino” identity, I adapt Muñoz’s concept to tend to black subjectivity in Cuba, “recognizing the racial performativity generated by an affective particularity that is coded to specific historical subjects who can provisionally be recognized by the term [black]” (Muñoz 2006). I argue that the racialized space of danced diversion —categorized in Cuban public discourse as “*el ambiente*”— that Yoruba Andabo shows occupy, in particular, is a powerful way of bringing these two registers together to highlight how the socialization of the body can be taken up as sign of social identification (Wirtz 2014).

I build from these notions to highlight the heuristic process enabled when racialized-as-black bodies assemble and move according to affective scripts of behavior shared in collective memory (i.e. based on a “geneology of performance” (Roach 1996). Since the logic of Cuban nationalism (“*cubanidad*”) is predicated on particular ideologies of racialized and sexualized gender to reproduce ideal/virtuous citizens, dancing has the potential to rehearse and reconfigure how identification, and thus social belonging, is felt. In this chapter, I ask what social scripts have to be navigated in order for black belonging to be felt in public space? Answering this questions brings to light the subtle play between social scripts/discourses/repertoires that choreograph black cultural expression in Cuba.

I insist that a more robust intersectional understanding is gained when we recognize that social actors occupy more than just racialized bodies, but bodies that represent racialized genders and sexualities. Thus not only race, but gender and sexuality, is also reified performatively through the body in movement. The social actors I identify in this chapter imbue particular racialized-gendered-sexualized meanings that play an important role in the meaning-making paradigm of scenarios where black collective action takes place. Hegemonic conventions of race, gender, sexuality, and political agency are made apparent in the moment of their collective transgression. A performance lens helps make

visible when a rupture occurs, invoking new meanings into the social through the body. This makes my analysis itself a kind of performative act.

This chapter aims to show how a performance lens can tune or eyes to how the specific form of racial performativity rehearsed during Yoruba Andabo's shows both shores up and challenges white heteropatriarchy, queering the supposed sacred-secular divide of the modern nation-state. The group's necessary negotiation with the political economy of the nation-state reasserts the limited nature of the autonomy they perform. Ultimately, we are reminded that the embodiment of racial subjectivity is rehearsed alongside terms of viability for black agency in the Cuban nation-state. Thus, my attention to the performativity of affect and embodiment helps me to 1) de-naturalize the secular-hetero-masculinist bent in scholarship around political action by rendering political agency visible in ostensibly apolitical spheres, 2) identify how racialized forms of gender & sexuality are rehearsed and reified in/through the body, and 3) acknowledge the ever-present capacity to, not change the way our bodies are raced, but to collectively perform other ways of being in our raced-bodies albeit within a structurally limited range of possibility for action, that can nevertheless point toward openings for rupture.

## **II: "YEMAYA MELLI" (A DOUBLE YEMAYA) AT TEATRO AVENIDA & THE RACIALIZATION OF PUBLIC SPACE**

### **"Yemaya Melli" at Teatro Avenida**

Gilberto announced the show on the previous Saturday at the end of their weekly performance at Cabaret Las Vegas. *Yoruba Andabo! Viernes a las 9pm al Teatro Avenida!* This was a must-see event and the word spread quickly.



Figure 18: Teatro/Cine Avenida, Photo credit: Michael Eastman<sup>121</sup>

Friday, September 13, 2013

The show is supposed to start at 9pm. We get there early, at 8pm to be sure to get a ticket. The theater is located in the neighborhood of Marianao in Playa district on Avenida 41 between Calles 56 and 58. There is no special price for foreigners. The run-down cinema-turned-community-theater after the Revolution did not attract tourism. It is a soon-to-be relic in the quiet, middle-class residential neighborhood where you can see the advent of new upscale restaurants modeled after Miami's metropolis. As 9pm approaches more and more black people accumulate around the theater.

8:15pm.. greetings as people trickle in. As each *gaugua* (bus) deposits more groups of proto-audience members dressed in their carefully color-coordinated assembles, reaching the vestibule in front of the main doors of the converted cinema in waves.

8:30pm... two cart women sell *chuchería* to the mingling clumpings of laughing, drinking friends who have been waiting all week for this special Friday night outing.

8:40pm... What seems like hundreds of eagerly anticipating spectators are drinking, eating, laughing...

By 8:50pm... The theater has yet to begin seating. People start to swarm the entrance, negotiating with the security guards who defend a metal chain that separates the front of house staff from the outside.

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<sup>121</sup> <http://eastmanimages.com/>

9pm... for reasons unknown to me, the ushers have yet to remove the chain and collect tickets. The crowd turns impatient, growing in anxiety as if the show would start without them. Holding up their tickets high to legitimate their right of entry proves unsuccessful.

9:15pm... desperation ensues. While some try to verbally negotiate with the theater staff from different angles, taking different rhetorical strategies, others try to make their way through the partitioning chain on pure brute force. Not preoccupied by their carefully ironed outfits, one person sees an opening during a split-second when the guards are distracted with commentary from the sidelines. They kneel down and sneak past the chain. Those from behind seize the moment and leverage their collective weight in solidarity to break the barrier of security guards stationed at the entrance. All of the sudden, the crowd turns into a mob, literally trying to barge their way in. My friends and I, huddled in the middle trying to get our bearings, are thrown off our center of balance by a wall of moving force from behind. Our bodies are effectively added to the offensive maneuver, falling on those in front of us. Pressing forward relentlessly, yet seemingly gaining only inches in proximity to our goal, it is too late to surrender the effort. Despite our objective failure, the more we push, the more kinesthetically gratifying the physicality of the sustained struggle becomes. The security guards respond in kind with more intransigence, sweat dripping down their forehead from sustaining a counterweight to the masses. The more the security guards delay entrance, the more people push; and vice versa. It is a deadlock; bound flow. Theater management barks orders to staff while devising an ad-hoc strategy to de-escalate the situation. There is a state of panic. The tension between the people pushing in and the security guards pushing out create an ominous yet exhilarating tone, as if at any moment a match will light and the whole theater will go up in the awesome flames. Protesting voices yelling, "I have a ticket!!! Let me in!!!", are swallowed up in the frenzy.

The fact is that everyone has a ticket. The seats are assigned, so I am bewildered as to where the panic, on the part of the public, is coming from. Smushed into the tight spot I occupied in the sweaty multitude, as if on the *guagua* during rush hour, I drift into silent meditation. I ponder the possible thought scenarios that could have sparked the present moment:

Perhaps the ticket holders believed that the performance was beginning without them, as if Yoruba Andabo was already on stage (performing for empty seats) and they were missing the whole thing outside; Or perhaps they were actually competing against one another, afraid that someone else would take their seat if they didn't enter and claim it first; Or perhaps they mistrusted the venue, suspecting that there were more tickets than actual seats in the theater (At the nightclub where Yoruba Andabo most regularly performs matinees, the venue did regularly get filled to capacity, forcing the security guards to turn away latecomers. On those occasions the performances would normally start and end roughly on time so as to not delay the nightclub's late night attractions); Or

perhaps this crowd didn't sincerely believe that the venue, a site not typically open to rumba music, would allow them entrance, even with a ticket. Nevertheless, the public in attendance clearly is not adhering to the codes of conduct that the theater management seeks to enforce. Whether untrusting of their fellow ticketholders, or the theater itself, or any other possible explanation, all I know for sure is that the disjuncture between the people and the venue is inciting absolute confusion and mayhem.

Eventually, the order is given to allow entrance. One at a time, the ushers methodically rip each thin paper ticket and indicate what door to follow based on the seat assignment on the stub. As people enter the large theater, the energy does not dissipate. Instead it is channeled through the aisles and up the stairs to the balcony level. Yoruba Andabo has yet to take the stage, but the heightened energy usually created by marked off moments of framed virtuosic display (aka. performance) is already established. The audience is already giving of themselves, already contributing their energy. Now Yoruba Andabo has to reciprocate and return the same amount of energy to those whence it came. This is prone to be a powerful performance indeed.

9:30pm... everyone is finally inside, but still no sign of Yoruba Andabo on stage. The same din of laughing and chatter from the street continue. Only some of the tension is released from the struggle at the door. My nerves are still a little on edge even after reaching my seat, however the tension is mixed with excitement about what is to come. My seat assignment is in the balcony. I have a view of the entire theater; a dusty shadow of its pre-revolutionary architectural splendor. At this point I have seen Yoruba Andabo perform dozens of times, but never from this birds-eye vantage point. It is a breathtaking sight. A tumultuous sea of black bodies adorned with bright colors pulsing in the bolted seats, transforms the rigid, decaying proscenium setting with vibrancy and movement. Any moment now, surely, the show will begin.

9:45pm... finally, someone takes the stage and approaches the microphone. It is the manager of the theater. He makes an announcement saying that the performance cannot begin until *everyone sits down!* The official tries to bring discipline to a scene still frenetic, like at a principal at highschool school assembly on the last day of school. He is able to convince some to conform their bodies to the arm-chaired configuration beneath them, but not all.

It's nearly 10pm... The band finally takes the stage. Although YA typically begins with a traditional rumba number, this time they begin their show with the "ciclo Yoruba". When the batá drums begin, the entire crowd becomes mute out of respect for the sacred rhythms. Elegua, the messenger, who opens and closes the paths is being evoked in a conversation formed between the three drums. [After finally getting into the theater after much struggle, this was the only way to cool the tension in the audience].

When the song begins and the dancer does not immediately appear, a different sense of excitement takes over the audience. Eleggua is known to be the ultimate trickster and so people are on high alert. Rather than exhibiting free flow with ambient focus, people began to deliberately search in anticipation of Eleggua's appearance, aiming to outsmart the orisha who famously catches you by surprise. Could Eleggua be approaching from the back of the theater? Those that are seated stand to get a better vantage point. Those of us in the balcony send someone to rush to the front edge to peak and see if indeed there was a dancer advancing from the doors entering the orchestra level. There is an electric anticipation that the space will be transgressed by the representation of Eleggua personified, and as such, anything is possible....

Rhythm change.

Oggun enters with his eyes closed from the back of the orchestra level, smoking & chomping on a lighted cigar compulsively, led only by the whispered directions of Valentín to guide him. Even without vision he takes confident strides forward. His shoulders are broad and commanding. Chest and arm muscles flex. He carries a heavy machete in hand. Thick smoke from his cigar leaves a pungent trace in the air behind him. No matter how packed the venue, people make way for Oggun to proceed according to his volition. At the optimal moment Valentín positions himself directly in front of Lázaro and places his thumbs over Oggun's eyelids, wiping them slowly for a few long moments; more whispers. Then Valentín slaps Oggun's shoulders with a brisque whack. [Valentín would later tell me that this is a reenactment of Oggun's manifestation on the earth in that moment, mimicking the process of transformation that happens in the back room when the person who has been mounted by an orisha puts on their ceremonial garment, completing the conversion of subjectivity. "*They usually come with their eyes closed. Then they must be opened to see in the human plane....*" (Marquez Quiñones 2013).] Oggun's eyes burst open. A theater full of spectators are revealed to his sight. He breaks out of his composure, as if indignant that he has been disturbed from his work in the spiritual plane where he resides peacefully, in the mystic space of "*el monte*" (the brush). Brought down, now he must perform for an audience.



Figure 19: Lázaro dancing Oggun, September 11, 2012, El Palacio de la Rumba

He proceeds to sharpen his machete on the concrete floor in the aisle. Begrudgingly he labors. He makes no eye contact with the onlookers, looking past the multitude as if they aren't there. He is consumed in agitation. He travels down the aisle aggressively striking his machete against the floor, clearing thick brush that only he sees. Shreds of his *skirt* made of *mariwo* (palm fronds, raffia), representing the brush in *el monte*, fly into the air; collateral damage and testament to the real effort he is using to wield his instrument. He slowly clears a path to the stage, stopping only to fiercely slice the machete across his tongue, eyes bulging defiantly. The *akpwon* (Yerilu) cues the drummers in song to change to the *chachalokafun* rhythm. The rhythmic shift is meant to be kinesthetically persuasive, indicating a firm transition to a quicker foot pattern. Perhaps Yerilu timed this shift to compel Lázaro to feature his dance technique while on center stage. (He has yet to execute any of Oggun's technical footwork). Lázaro-as-stubborn-Oggun is not rushed or swayed in his actions due to the change of song or rhythm. He has work to do. That is his first and foremost duty. He obliges the *akpwon* with a few paces of the signature ñongo step, demonstrating his dance proficiency. But only a few. Then he stomps down the steps of the short staircase and continues his journey at the lower house level. Not even the most daring would obstruct his path. Weighted steps propel him through the aisle with strong forward moving force in continuous flow, exuding strength and force, ready to slice anyone that tries to challenge him.

Suddenly, mid-aisle, he starts to crack, the direct continuous flow of motion becomes indirect and erratic. Spasmodic movements, puffing cheeks rapidly drawing air in and out, and frenzied shifts of weight that seem to teeter beyond his center of gravity, act as mnemonic triggers. We register that we are witnessing the slow disintegration of Lázaro the-sovereign-man-performing-a-convincing-interpretation-of-Oggun-character, to Oggun actually assuming control over Lázaro's body in spirit possession. The audience's attention is captivated by the familiar scenario of psychosomatic (mind-body) struggle of a person trying to maintain composure of their body, only to finally relinquish control and assume their role as a vessel for orisha to commune with humans gathered in common purpose. A low murmur of whispers disperses throughout the audience. While maintaining fixed focus on Oggun's "second (or third) entrance", Yerilu calls for Yemaya to take the stage.

Jennyselt, is famous around the world for her interpretation of Yemaya. To witness her dance in person, for aficionados of orisha dance and orisha worshippers alike, is a blessing. The house lights are lowered, directing all focus to the stage as Jenny performs. However, the energy in the theater is so ecstatic that everyone remains standing. In spite of the obvious lighting and architectural cues given by the dimming of the house, and the arrangement of the structural attributes in the proscenium theater, to be seated would feel kinesthetically inappropriate. The *aro*, Yemaya's quintessential prayer, commences. This is where Jenny's virtuosity as a performer shines. As expected, Jenny goes to ceremoniously salute the drums. Saluting the drums, is a standard ceremonial gesture of

respect and acknowledgment to *Aña*, the *orisha* or deity whose secret resides within the drum, executed in ritual. The salute begins with the *Iya* (mother) drum in the middle, followed by the *Okonkolo* (the smallest drum to the right of the *Iya*), and finally the *Itotele* (the middle sized drum to the *Iya*'s left). In ceremony the salute is done by priests of a particular *orisha* when that *orisha*'s songs are played in the *oro cantado*. It is also the first ritual act that the *orisha* must execute when they arrive to the earth via the body of a priest. The drums Yoruba Andabo use to perform in secular contexts are *abericulá* (meaning not consecrated), and thus do not possess *Aña*. However Jenny executes this gesture to reference that ceremonial act, indexing to the audience that her dance to follow should be put in the same interpretive frame as that ceremonial event they know so well. Jenny takes pride in her ability to convince the audience that she has been mounted, "*La gente siempre piensa que yo me monto, pero no! jajajaja!* (People always think that I get mounted, but I don't! hahahaha!)", she chuckles in delight after a performance. For her, the misrecognition speaks to her masterful technical ability and prowess as a performer, warranting her choice of framing through the salute gesture. After this is done she can begin her play of seduction with the audience, expertly prolonging the intensity of the prayer to orchestrate the most opportune initiation of the climactic moment of signature spinning that is H/her trademark.

As Jenny returns from the salute I notice a convulsing women's body steadily advancing barefoot down the aisle towards the steps to the stage, clearly drawn toward the source of the drumming. She seems to want to salute, as well. Although the upper body is shaking, the feet maintain a firm runner's stance—as in *tere mina mina tere*: weight shifting back and forth between one's right flat foot and back left metatarsal— giving the body a firm base that enables an incremental forward moving trajectory. For the first time I notice the security guard at the base of the stairs. He methodically puts his arm out while maintaining an outward gaze, doing his professional duty to block the public's advancement past the threshold that separates the audience from the performers on stage. Her convulsing yet sturdy body is clearly not deterred. The guard then takes her by the shoulders with both hands, pushes her back, and releases. But the convulsing body comes right back. Everyone in the theater's gaze is now enthralled in this contest between professional duty to maintain order and divine calling to salute. He tries again and fails, again. I look to Jenny onstage who has visibly also become aware of the situation to her stage-left. The audience's attention had clearly been intercepted. All of Yoruba Andabo take notice and steal short glances in that direction. In live performance, however, the show must go on. Jenny, a true professional, keeps on dancing, and the drummers stay with her. But she is now competing with the Yemaya in the aisle house-left for attention. For the rest of the *aro*, both performances of Yemaya occupy the theater. The already blazing atmosphere feeds off the energy of the drum and the Yemayá Melli (double Yemaya) in counterpoint, unsettling the stability of space's secular constitution. The audience's dual recognition of both the sacred and the secular Yemaya endorse and enrich the blurring. As the *aro* reaches its climax, the Yemaya down below increases in

her persistence. The security guard's inability to gain control of the relentlessly advancing body creates pregnant intensity.

Oggun, still at orchestra level, also sees the security guard's helpless efforts. He marches down the aisle and lifts the woman in a solid big bear hug, raising her body completely up off the floor. Her bare feet dangle in the *mariwo* between his legs. Once the woman is safely suspended in Oggun's embrace, the drummers let loose and demonstrate their rhythmic prowess. The pounding vibrations of the drum are made visible in the head, neck and shoulders of Oggun's captive, yet he maintains a firm grip. Lazaro's strong arm muscles bulge from maintaining the resistance. Meanwhile, Jenny is finally able to display her awesome technical mastery. She makes up for lost time and takes back the reigns of focus, leading the *akpwon* and percussionists to play several musical climaxes, as she spins like a oceanic cyclone.



Figure 20: Jennyselt dancing Yemaya, Photo credit: Dashiell Rodriguez. October 6, 2012, Cabaret Las Vegas

Taken by the multimodal density, the audience is back under Jenny's spell, and they erupt in cheer. Jenny expertly absorbs the energy into her wide blue dual tiered skirt, and incrementally slows the rotation of its clockwise spin. The drummers mirror her to a tee, and so does the captive body. Until finally, Jenny, the percussionists, the *akpwon*, the chorus, and the body come to a complete halt.

Triumphant, Jenny faces the audience on the stage's apron, downstage center, and takes a bow to thunderous applause; the body goes limp, and Oggun carries the woman back to her seat. All are dripping in sweat.

The Yoruba portion of the evening comes to a close. Rumba follows.

### ***“El Ambiente” & “El Foco”*: Racialized Space & Performative Possibility**

This ethnographic vignette deserves concerted attention because it illustrates several important elements that are key for understanding Yoruba Andabo as occupying a prime location at the intersection of multiple desires, constantly negotiating between both semantic and embodied registers. The Cine Avenida performance highlights how the greater discursive acceptance for rumba by the state, reflected in the allowance of folkloric-rumba performances in more state-managed venues, can turn those venues into charged sites of contestation by the afro-religious urban poor around how black cultural production is supposed to be consumed. Consumption here refers to the internalization of sensual phenomenon that entails a participation in a symbolic economy of a particular ideological project. The root of this contestation lies in the friction between divergent stakeholder desires directed toward these particular forms of black cultural expression: as national folklore or as black cultural identity. In this chapter, the performance that September evening at Cine Avenida acts as a useful site of analysis, bringing the moments that lead up to Yoruba Andabo’s professional labor to be considered within the same analytic framework as the period marked off for the virtuosic display of folklore. I am interested in engaging the racial performativity at play during such displays in ways that are salient both within and beyond the temporal demarcation of the event. I am particularly interested in the performative effect of Yoruba Andabo’s representations of the orishas. Specifically, how they enable practices of embodied agency grounded in a black body-politic that runs counter to the logic of the modern nation-state. To the extent to which the desires of the nation-state have hegemony over what is considered proper libidinal drives, the state logic occupies a structural position of whiteness. Whiteness, in this respect is defined by Muñoz as “a cultural logic that prescribes and regulates national feelings and comportment...an

affective gauge that helps us understand some modes of emotional comportments good or bad” (Muñoz 2006, 680). The collective counter-orientation of the black body-politic affirms extra-national desire and black belonging. However, this autonomy is limited in nature, reflected in how Yoruba Andabo navigates discourses of respectability and liberal secularism to safeguard their professional reputation as folkloric artists vis-à-vis the state. The performative effect of Yoruba Andabo’s dual resistance and accommodation speaks to the perceived limits of their range of motion while navigating the current political economy.

### *Venue*

Immediately after the close of the Yoruba portion of the show, my friend, an ethnomusicologist (the only socially white person in the audience), turned to me with her jaw dropped in shock. She had heard about Yoruba Andabo many times but had never before seen them live in person. “Does this always happen?!” she asked. I said that I actually hadn’t noticed anything like this before. Primarily because Yoruba Andabo typically doesn’t perform in proscenium theaters that would allow me to see the entire audience from a birds-eye view. Nevertheless, I doubted it was common because in the nightclub setting where they most often perform, the visual focal point during the “*ciclo Yoruba*” is centered on the body of the professional dancers who interpret the orisha. Typically, the central focal point only enlarges to include the audience members that are in direct contact with the professional dancers.

Another important distinction is the architectural design of the different venues. In nightclub venues, the zones designated for the professional performers and the audience are both on the same level without any physical partitions in between them. The zone

designated for the audience surrounds the “stage zone” in a semi-circle, indicated by the placement of small circular tables surrounded by moveable chairs. This set-up allows audience members the ability to adjust the furniture as needed. Audiences members frequently make their way to the professional dancers, whether the dancers are in the “stage zone” or meandering through the audience zone. In short, the convention of the “fourth wall”<sup>122</sup> is not in operation. Audience members frequently take advantage of this flexibility to give bills of money and salute<sup>123</sup> in exchange for a “*limpieza*”/hug/chest bump/candy (depending on the orisha being performed). Thus the physicality of the venue played an important role in the potential utility of the space<sup>124</sup>.

The flexibility offered by nightclub venues allows the performance to easily adapt to fulfill a certain mode of desired interaction between performers and audience that has become a convention of Yoruba Andabo shows for their devout afro-religious audience. Whereas the set-up of the proscenium theater mandated a performativity of rigidity, enforced from the onset by the management’s various attempts to subdue the crowd into submission to a particular bodily socialization/comportment that would correspond to the unequal (audience and stage separated by different levels) and stationary material attributes of the proscenium theater once inside. The discrepancy between the audience’s expectation for flexible bodily comportment during Yoruba Andabo’s show and that of the theater resulted in conflict. Instead of conforming to the conventions of the venue, the audience collectively asserted a defiant counter-orientation of their bodies in the space. In effect, the

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<sup>122</sup> The “fourth wall” refers to the imaginary “wall” at the front of the stage in a traditional proscenium theatre, through which the audience sees the action. The fourth wall is the epidermis through which one is able to visually enter the world of the play, but is not to be traversed physically by the audience members or the actors.

<sup>123</sup> A salute in this context is typically done by positioning themselves in front of the dancer, crossing their arms across their shoulders, and touching shoulder to shoulder with the dancer.

<sup>124</sup> I thank Regla (YA singer) for this insight.

public asserted a sense of collective ownership over their bodies, grounded in an alternative bodily socialization that was regarded as “excess” in the secular space of “high-culture”.

### ***“El Foco”***

Yoruba Andabo’s devout following asserted the legitimacy of a particular bodily socialization that is cultivated and rehearsed in the *casa-templos* of their neighborhoods. This sacred practice of bodily assemblage was reaffirmed during Yoruba Andabo’s folkloric shows in public. As such, “folkloric” music and dance is a sign of social identification for the afro-religious audience. The social identification as a *folklórico* becomes salient in secular spaces at critical junctures; many interviewees self-defining as “*rumberos*” or “*folklóricos*” interchangeably. As a racially subjugated social group in Cuban society, that evening’s performance served as a staging for the struggle for corporate agency in the public space of the secular state theater. This sense of belonging was mutually and collectively endorsed nondiscursively. For me, the most important sign of collective endorsement came from the fact that everyone remained on foot and dancing throughout the entire show, and no one from the audience intercepted the convulsing barefoot woman’s course toward the drums. I read their collective embodied consensus as nonverbal demonstration of a shared understanding of the religious need for the orisha to salute the drum upon arrival in the body of one of its children as primary, and the importance of their own danced participation to achieve the necessary transmission of energy in the moment. It may be important to note that not every religious practitioner will become mounted in their lifetime<sup>125</sup>, nor is it considered appropriate for someone who can be mounted to do so on any occasion. Here, I draw attention to the nonverbal consensus by the audience that for

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<sup>125</sup> This is indicated during one’s initiation as a “priest” of an orisha.

any of them to obstruct the woman's ability to be mounted would be inappropriate in and of itself. Instead, the "proper" reaction was to keep dancing, and defer to Oggun.

Taking up J.L. Austin, I am less concerned with whether the woman was "truly" mounted by an orisha at the Cine Avenida that night or not. In his now canonical text for Performance Studies, *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), Austin lays out a way to analyze statements beyond valuations of true or false. His theory of language draws our analytic eyes to the "performative utterance". "When a person makes an utterance of this sort we should say that he is *doing* something rather than merely *saying* something" (Austin 1962). Instead of searching for verification, one looks for social coherence through empirical evidence. Austin indicates that speech acts can be regarded as "felicitous" or "infelicitous", according to certain governing social rules. In order to be regarded as felicitous, the social convention must exist and be accepted. Meaning, it must abide by a shared norm. The success of the utterance is evidenced in the way people act accordingly. If they are consistent with the assertion, then the utterance was "true". In sum, in order to be considered a performative utterance, the actions after the utterance must be consistent with the claim.

In other words, the mounting made the body-politic reacted according to shared sacred conventions, giving those conventions legitimacy in a space demarcated by the state as secular. The social significance lies in the way movements were performed according to accepted social conventions derived from "*el foco*" (term used colloquially to refer to the afro-religious ceremonial space by practitioners). The movements enacted by Yoruba Andabo so precisely resembled those witnessed in *el foco*, that they were socially accepted as true, and were reciprocated in kind. I suspect that once the afro-religious audience accepted Lázaro's performance of Oggun as true, it had the effect of rendering spirit-possession a communally sanctioned possibility in the space, thereafter shifting the way in

which they apprehended their own potential. Lázaro's convincing ("felicitous") performance of being mounted by Oggun, paired with Jenny's compelling ("felicitous") ceremonial mimicry of salute, persuaded the audience to believe that the arrival of (more) orisha in the bodies of other priests present was possible. The Cine Avenida no longer constituted a barrier to perform in ways conventionally seen in successful *tambores de fundamento*<sup>126</sup>.

The virtuosity of Lázaro's rendition of Oggun cannot be reduced to the choreographic aspects of the dance, as he executed very little planned movement in fact. It was the performative effect of his Oggun-becoming, bringing Oggun-being to life so vividly, that rendered the space ambiguous in its secularity. Likewise, it wasn't solely Jenny's technical mastery of the dance that signaled a direct association with the sacred presence of Yemaya. Instead, her gesture of ceremonial mimicry (her saluting of the drums) invited religious practitioners to interpret the source of her virtuosity to the divine presence of the orisha themselves, as is customary for *subidores* (priests who are mounted by orisha) in *el foco*. Even if it was only "a show", they opened up the cognitive space of possibility for the sanctioned presence of Orisha-becoming in the theater, lending credulity to the barefoot woman travelling up the aisle, and thus sanctioning their desire to facilitate her progression. In other words, the performativity of Yoruba Andabo dancers model the possibility of "what if" to become "what is" through movement.

The potent performativity of Yoruba Andabo's dancers is one of their trademarks as a folkloric group. This effect is facilitated by the fact that when they perform for an exclusively afro-religious audience, during the Yoruba portion of the show in particular, the dance director does not impose her own choreography for the dancers to follow. In fact,

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<sup>126</sup> This idea of the religious terms of ceremonial success will be discussed later.

the dancers do not know which songs will be played beforehand. They can make suggestions to the *akpwon* before they go on stage, but ultimately the *akpwon* decides in the moment what songs from that orisha will be played. The liturgical choreography of the orisha determines the movements of the dancers. Leaving room for this codified spontaneity is integral to Yoruba Andabo's distinctive style. In the words of the musical director, "*Así somos nosotros, muy espontáneos. Y la música cuando es así tiene que estar llena de corazón, de bomba y siempre estar generando nuevas ideas* (That's who we are, very spontaneous. And when the music is like that it has to be full of heart, of *bomba*, and always generating new ideas)" (La Calle del Medio 2009).

This contrasts to the performance of the National Folkloric Company (*El Conjunto Folklórico Nacional*, CFN), where the production of new ideas are always set in advance. CFN dancers are explicitly instructed to not to practice personal agency during live performance. Everything must be rehearsed and approved by the artistic director who is appointed by the Ministry of Culture. The CFN performs a carefully curated folkloric repertoire that has been adapted from ritual for the proscenium stage and performed in the same manner it was approved. Katherine Hagedorn documents how since the onset of the revolution, measures were taken to ensure that the dancers in the National Folkloric Company did not transgress the strict secular parameters of their embodiment of orisha deities in performance, implemented to prevent spirit-possession in particular (Hagedorn 2001). During Cuba's Cultural Revolution in which the CFN was founded, the act of bringing popular culture to the theatrical stage was seen as an act of prestige. But in the transfer from *casa-templo* to proscenium stage, the relationship between the performers and the audience became more distanced, designating clearly differentiated roles and rules of behavior. Regla (YA singer) speaks to this difference between Yoruba Andabo and the CFN:

*El público iba por arriba de esos bailarines [de CFN] como con Yoruba Andabo el día de hoy. ¿Pero qué pasa? La coreografía también ha cambiado. El Conjunto trabaja muy distante al público. Siempre están en el Teatro Mella. El público no llega al escenario. Nosotros estamos más cerca al público, mas “en vivo”. Es posible más la interacción con el público el bailarín... Casi siempre trabajamos en lugares pequeños, lo que lleva más interacción con el público. Y [entonces] cuando se trabaja en lugares muy grandes, el público siempre pega a nosotros. Hasta en los teatros. (Monet Diaz 2013)*

You would see people on top of those [CFN] dancers like you see people on top of our dancers today. But what has happened? The choreography has changed The Conjunto also work very distanced from the audience. Now they are always in the Teatro Mella. In those theaters, the audience doesn't get to the stage. We work more “Live”, we are much closer to the audience. And it's possible for the dancers to have most interaction with the audience. We almost always work in small venues, so it allows for more interaction between the audience and the dancer... And [then] when we work in big venues, the audience always sticks to us

Another way this detachment from the sacred was enforced was through tightly choreographed songs. The “closed” choreography (meaning prohibitive of improvisation), numeric timing, and intricate group formations made by the disciplined ensemble of dancers align their bodies with the prescribed choreography of the national project as it remade itself in the 60s and 70s (Berry 2010). Yerilu, a former CFN singer attests to the difference between the performance styles of the CFN and Yoruba Andabo describing the former as monotonous and stagnant<sup>127</sup>. The dancers in Yoruba Andabo come to the group already with a wealth of training from lived experience in *el foco* and amateur groups. Vladimir (dancer) describes the sought after characteristics as “*el factor de atrevimiento...y de la locura y de la espontaneidad y del deseo de trabajar* (brazenness, craziness, spontaneity, and the desire to work [hard])” (Quevedo Armenteras 2013). Personal wisdom and mastery of the entire artistic repertoire from the religious sphere enables the degree of comfort necessary to engage in collective spontaneity on stage without losing cohesion.

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<sup>127</sup> This interview was cited in Chapter Four.

That sophisticated wit/brazenness (“*atrevimiento*”) derived from lived experience and profound confidence in one’s personal connection to the orisha is encouraged and valued. For the most part, Yoruba Andabo dancers perform as soloists, enabling not only intimate interaction with audience members, but also enabling more personalized interpretations of orisha energy<sup>128</sup>. Moreover, even though the “ciclo Yoruba” is broken up into sections that feature one orisha at a time, once each dancer has made their initial entrance, they stay in character as that orisha throughout the other sections. They perform a *wemilere* (Fiesta de los Orishas) where multiple orishas are present simultaneously and join in celebration with their devotees in the human plane of existence<sup>129</sup>. In orisha character, they typically move throughout the audience, saluting those who approach them, continuing the cultivation of interpersonal intimacy and beloved belonging.

According to this distinct convention, no choreography was set that obliged Lázaro to stay center stage and display technical virtuosity according to the conventions of the proscenium performance venue. No one from the audience or the company dared to question or obstruct Lázaro’s path while he performed the indignant labor as Oggun, maintaining in character well after his songs were over. He was well positioned to then come back during the Yemaya section to step in for the security guard in addressing the barefoot woman one-on-one. To devout practitioners, the sacred performative effect of indeterminacy and intimacy felt at Yoruba Andabo performances register kinesthetically as distinctly familiar in relation to the way that folklore is propagated by the state.

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<sup>128</sup> They typically perform choreographed phrasing as an ensemble when they anticipate a mainstream (white) Cuban audience or a foreign audience abroad. The way Yoruba Andabo performs abroad as opposed to at home, particularly for devout afro-religious followers is quite different choreographically, appealing to different aesthetic preferences that they project will please a foreign audience.

<sup>129</sup> The CFN stages a *wemilere* differently. In the finale, all of the orishas do the same choreography on stage in synchrony in a prescribed formation.

Yoruba Andabo's performances are taken up by the afro-religious urban poor (who largely make-up their audience in Havana) as a *foco* where a counter-orientation of the body is cultivated through ritual acts and affirmed in community. This counter-orientation of the body comes attendant with a different vantage point of consciousness from which to make sense of the world, creating what Harding calls "alternative spaces of blackness" (Harding 2003). The collective endorsement of subjugated forms of embodiment which run directly counter to the dominant logic of order and discipline, speak to the cultivation of an alternative body-politic, where alternative black political subjectivities are affirmed.

### ***"El Ambiente"***

When situated in places that are designated as secular, the state racially marks certain kinds of bodily socialization as "un-disciplined" for their divergence from Euro-Western social and cultural norms. In Cuban public discourse, "un-disciplined" behavior in public is characteristic of "*el ambiente*" (a site of hedonistic excess). The history of rumba as a cultural practice rooted in the black working class converges to form a semiotic link between *rumba* sociality as paradigmatically *ambientoso*. The stigmatization of *rumberos* as "*ambientosos*" (people who engage in undisciplined behavior) further edifies the racialized ascription to forms of sociality that diverge from hegemonic definitions of propriety. Rumba, then becomes read as a fitting cultural practice for those (*ambientosos*) who do not value discipline. This line of reasoning forecloses other performance based ways of interpreting rumba sociality. For instance, I propose that the motivation to seek entertainment and diversion through rumba is imbricated in the cultivation of an alternate collective consciousness, based on an alternate definition of social order, in pursuit of a larger sense of fulfilment. This pursuit is enacted through the body in movement. I argue here that the crowd of black people pushing their collective weight against the security

guards to break through the entrance of the theater and the barefoot black woman defiantly progressing up the aisle to salute the drum, for instance, are critical bodily acts that affectively reify a particular body-politic. This body-politic is asserted in these acts of public solidarity, belonging, and pleasure rooted in a shared appraisal of what should transpire in Yoruba Andabo spaces. These affective forces ultimately override the rules of behavior imposed by secular institutions. In short, Yoruba Andabo shows create space for a transgressive movement across the norms of modern propriety—norms which assert a secular liberalism as an ideal (Asad 1993). The territorial division between sacred and secular are heavily protected by the state via institutions. Those institutions are heavily guarded both culturally and socially (i.e. the security guards at the Cine Avenida). Therefore, the racialized notions ascribed to “el ambiente” associated with the forms of sociality by the afro-cuban urban poor, also point to a potent space of potentiality where blackness is positively affirmed. The afro-religious audience at Cine Avenida point to a place of potentiality where racialized communities resist and reshape relations of inequality and subordination to which their racial difference is bound through (social) movement.

### **Negotiating Respectability**

On the other hand, Yoruba Andabo, as a state-subsidized folkloric group, must also protect its social standing in the larger Cuban society in order to maintain their professional license to work. Therefore, as licensed professionals under the auspices of a state institution, they too are expected to protect the boundaries between sacred and secular. In a secular space demarcated for high-culture, being mounted is automatically marked aberrant, and therefore social excess. The interpretation of the unsanctioned

mounting at Cine Avenida by particular stakeholders within Yoruba Andabo bring to light how the ways in which shows are taken up by the urban, working-class afro-religious public compromises the prescribed folkloric function that Yoruba Andabo has been designated to fulfill for the nation-state. Yoruba Andabo members negotiate these dual desires —corporate-spiritual vs. nation-state— through different methods of persuasion. The degree to which the members of Yoruba Andabo are regarded as “professionals” in these state venues also hinges upon their fluency in the discursive logics of the state. The tropes of professionalism, discipline, and responsibility constitute the attributes of black respectability. Their investment in the notion of secular liberalism (to be discussed in further in the section to follow) as a moral value is leveraged to do the rhetorical work of countering anti-black stigma against their body-politic that would render them “unrespectable”. Cues to where the dividing lines lay can be gleaned from both discursive and nonverbal practices.

### ***Professionalism***

As discussed in Chapter Three, Yoruba Andabo’s professionalism in the sacred market is also at stake when performing for a religious audience, whether taking place in secular or sacred spaces. Therefore, they must consistently enact performative openings for “un-disciplined” (read: black/religious) ways of being even while discursively distancing themselves from the effects they engender. This was clearly demonstrated in my interviews with the members, especially when I asked them for their explanations with regard to what occurred that night at the Teatro Avenida.

*La música en el sentido general, si te gusta lo que están haciendo te emociona. Y te emociona tanto que bailas, brincas. Porque esa música mueve tu espíritu. La*

*música que tocamos también mueve el espíritu. Porque tratamos de trasladar nuestro ánimo al público. Y eso es lo que convence al público. Cuando tu subes al escenario tu sube con la idea que tienes que convencer al público de lo que estás haciendo, lo que sientes. Que tu siente la misma emoción que siente el público, en la medida en el que se emociona. Si el público no te emociona, tú no te emociona tampoco. Porque no está sintiendo la energía de lo que está haciendo. Pero no quiere decir que tu traslada a tu religión. ...La música que nosotros tocamos es una expresión de cubanía...Porque religión es religión, y música de esa religión es música de esa religión. Son dos cosas distintas... Pero cuando nosotros tocamos, no tocamos como miembros de la religión Yoruba. Tocamos su música, y la música te llena si eres religioso porque tratamos de hacerlo como se hace en el tambor. La base en religioso, pero tendría que ser un tambor de fundamento pa' ser igual. Por eso contestar eso le va ser muy difícil. Porque cuando tocas [Didier], no estas tocando como hijo de Obatala ni como Babalawo. Estas tocando como músico...Lo que la música que está tocando es la música de sus ancestros. De nuestros ancestros. Pero no de punto de vista religioso, si no punto de vista cultural. (Del Pino 2013)*

Music, in general, when you like what the music is doing, it moves you. It moves you to the point that you dance, you jump. Because the music moves your spirit. The music that we do also moves your spirit. Because we try to translate our *animó* (spirit) to the audience. And that is what convinces the audience. Because as a musician, when you step on stage, you do so with the idea that you have to convince the audience of what you are doing, the emotion that you are feeling. So that the audience feels the same emotion that you do. If the audience doesn't feel it, than you don't either. But that doesn't mean that you are bringing the religion to the people. ... What we do is an expression of cubania... Because religion is religion and music of the religion is music of the religion... When we play our music, we don't play as members of the Yoruba religion. We play its music, and that music fills you up if you are religious. And it can arrive as sacred, because we try to do it like it's done in a tambor... The base is religious, but it would have to have to be a tambor de fundamento to be the same. That's why is really difficult to answer this question...Because when you [Didier] are playing, you are not playing as a son of Obatala or as a babalawo [priest of Ifa], you are playing as a musician.... But the music he is playing is the music of his ancestors. Of our ancestors. But not from a religious perspective, form a cultural perspective.

Here the artistic director jumps in after a drummer spoke of the religious faith which he directs toward his instrument whether in a secular or sacred setting. The director's words express an anxiety around the drummer's testimony and a felt need to recuperate the territorial separation between the two spheres that the group member testifies to

experiencing as a continuum. In the above quote, Geovanni struggles to rhetorically convince me of their separation, although conscious of the circular logic he employs. Regardless of the strength of the argument, his performance of investment in drawing a line of separation is primary for maintaining his professionalism. This exercise is pedagogical, modeling to the drummer (the youngest member) how to discursively perform selfhood for the public, regardless of how he may empirically interpret his life up until the point when I asked the question. For the youngest member, being interviewed about one's affective investments and answering "correctly" according to the imposed norms of secular liberalism is part of one's professional development.

*Es arte. No es sagrado....Eso de que se monta para mi, es una ridiculez. Porque el santero que se respete, el montador que se respete, se prepara antes de ir... En un tambor está saludando al santo, porque en el tambor están tocando un tambor consagrado y llama. Pero ya en una obra de teatro es un espectáculo....Una cosa es el zapato y el otro es el zapatero. (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

It's art. It's not sacred... That thing about getting mounted, for me, is ridiculous. Because the santero that respects themselves, the mounter that respect themselves, will prepare themselves before going [out]... At a ceremony you are saluting the saint, because in the ceremony they are playing consecrated drums and they call [down divinity]. But in a theater piece, it's spectacle... One thing is the shoe and the other is the shoemaker.

Valentin goes as far as to demean the mounted woman as "ridiculous". Her inability to discern secular space or perform an investment in its maintenance is placed as a counterpoint to personal responsibility and decorum that the group projects as professionals simply "doing art", expressing "cubanía". A drummer with more years in the group employs a similar narrative.

*Porque el "triple" está en la transmisión del tambor. El triple...tienen signos y cosas que hasta....se sube. Tiene signo de transmisión. Cualquier cosa, ellos se suben. Pero nosotros estábamos tocando normal. No estábamos haciendo nada. Pero bueno, se le subió la mujer, se le subió el espíritu. Y se le dio la perreta.*

*Bueno, eso es problema de ella. En ese sentido parece que si [parece al tambor de fundamento], pero no es. (Lemoine 2013)*

Because the “triple” lies in the transmission of the drum. The triple... it has its signed and things that cause...one to be mounted. [She] has a sign of transmission. Anything makes them get mounted. But we were playing normally. We weren’t doing anything. But well, the woman was mounted, her spirit was lifted. And [the mounting] really wouldn’t let her go. But oh well that’s her problem. In that sense, it seems that yes [its similar to a *tambor* ceremony], but it’s not.

The “triple” the drummer is referring to refers to the sense of three-beat repetition that characterizes Yemaya’s *yakota* rhythm. Yvonne Daniel eloquently describes the kinesthetic effect of the temporal process involved in this sacred choreography between drummers and dancer, producing a highly-potent open space for spirit to enter (Daniel 2005, 266). Here again, he legitimizes the ability for someone else’s bad luck, while also acknowledging the validity of the happening on sacred terms. Even when legitimating the happening as sacred, he nevertheless insists that they, the drummers, knew better to not play with religious intention, thereby distancing himself from the stigma of the occurrence. A singer takes the approach of almost apologizing for the audience member, explaining how the audience’s faith blinds them from making rational distinctions between the real and the unreal.

*Hay muchas personas que son devotas a distintos orishas. Entonces ellos enfocan al bailarín como si fuera realmente el orisha. Por eso tu va mucho la interacción del público con el bailarín. Porque son demasiado devotos a estos orishas. Por ejemplo, a Yemaya. Mucho público arriba de la bailarina de Yemaya porque son muy devotos a Yemaya y le gusta también cómo le hace el bailarín. Le gusta el público como le [el orisha] expresa el bailarín. Para el público lo vea real. El público lo vea netamente real porque son demasiado devotos. Y eso es lo que tu ve con la interacción con el bailarín. (Monet Diaz 2013)*

There are lots of people that are devoted to certain orisha. So they focus on the dancers as if it were the orisha. That is why you see so much interaction with the audience and the dancer. Because they are too devoted to these orishas. For example, Yemaya. Lots of people get on top of the dancer for Yemaya because

they are very devoted to Yemaya and they also like how the dancer dances her. They like the way the dancer expresses the orisha. The public sees it as real. They public sees it as a clearly religious thing, because they have soo much devotion. And that is what you are seeing in the reaction of the public.

The artistic director, denies that mounting could indeed occur at a Yoruba Andabo show at all, attributing any emotional responses to the effect of good Cuban music in general. While the other members give credence that a mounting did take place, they make sure to testify that Yoruba Andabo as a group was not at fault. They deduce that the woman's religious faith paired with her "sign"<sup>130</sup> made her susceptible to divine transmission of "the triple". Her error was that she did not take responsible measures to control *her "problema"* (issue). All of the testimonies locate the root cause of the transgression beyond the group's sphere of influence and intention ("We weren't doing anything... that's her problem"). The public is "too devout", swayed by the artistic excellence of the group. Hence, part of the professional development of group members lies in their ability to demonstrate an emotional investment in the separation of two spheres that constantly resist empirical separation. The ability to successfully draw the separation demarcates a level of separation from the community on the part of the artists, that their performance practice actively blurs. The number of years of the person in the company was a variable in how invested they were in proving their professionalism in those terms.

What follows are testimonies from dancers, drummers, and singers using the trope of professionalism explicitly with regard to their work as musicians in general, including when they play for a religious audience in a ceremonial context. These testimonies show that the notion of professionalism also has currency in the sacred market and is used to demonstrate the reliability of quality service as a core underlying principle.

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<sup>130</sup> By "sign" they are referring to a form of identification given upon initiation decreeing/sanctioning that person to serve as a vessel for orisha.

*Todos somos religiosos. Eso es lo primero. El trabajo es el trabajo. Y la pincha tiene que salir bien. Igual con trabajo religioso. Tiene que salir bien. No se puede llegar tarde.... La profesionalidad es importante. Porque si no, estas en el aire. La **profesionalidad** es importante para todo. (Lemoine 2013)*

We are all religious. That's first and foremost. Work is work. It has to turn out well. It's the same way with a religious work. It has to turn out well. You can't show up late ...Professionalism is important. Because if not, you are in the air. The **professionalism** is important for everything.

*Cuando canto con YA trato de hacerlo siempre lo mejor que puedo. El público no tiene culpa de que tal vez tú te puedas sentir mal o haya tenido un problema personal, o simplemente que el día no te ha ido bueno. No, hay que hacerlo bien... Y cuando participo en una fiesta ya religiosa, ya netamente religiosa en una casa, es lo mismo. Hay que hacer lo bien, con claridad... Eso es el **prestigio** que te ganas como religioso y como artista. Es decir que siempre tiene que hacerlo bien, hasta en hasta tu vida cotidiana ...Porque la gente te vea en la calle y dice mira, es el que canta en YA. Y eso tu debe el respeto a esa persona porque en definitiva son las personas en el público que te aplauden. Son las personas que reconocen el talento tuyo. (Hernandez Padron 2013)*

When I sing with YA I try to always do it the best I can. The audience doesn't have the blame that you had a bad day, or that you feel bad. No, it has to be done well.... And when you are at a religious party, in a religious house, it's the same. You have to do it well, you have to do it with clarity. That is the **prestige** that you earn as a religious practitioner and as an artist. So you have to always do it well, even when it comes to your daily life. Because people will see you in the street and say, that is the guy who sings for YA. And you have to respect those people because for sure those are the people that are in the audience and applaud you. They are the ones that recognize your talent.

The trope of professionalism is key for demonstrating a critical distance from and disavowal of accountability for religious excess, but it is also considered a necessary quality for their services rendered in the sacred market as well. Whether they attest to the “veracity” of the mounting or not, the company disavows any personal responsibility for the actions of their devout public in a secular context by discursively endorsing the logic of the state through the trope of artistic professionalism in the name of national pride. Nevertheless, their masterful projection of embodied cues to agency (described at length above) within sacred conventions demonstrate a desire to tap into the sacred epistemology

of the viewing public. The performative effect of Yoruba Andabo's performance conventions in the secular market (i.e. the Cine Avenida performance) directly challenge the durability/hegemony of secular norms. Professionalism becomes a way of mediating divergent notions of what should transpire in any given place, thereby affirming their aura of black respectability without sacrificing their aura of religious authenticity in "*el ambiente*".

### ***Discipline***

The shared familiarity of the audience with so-called "spirit possession" in *el foco* calls upon the audience to consciously adopt secular bodily socialization when in public, through embodied restraint against their religious faith, and act as disciplined spectators of folklore according to the secular norms of the state. Scholarship on folklore attests to this as being a key function of national folkloric companies; to channel the power of the masses into disciplined subjects that will invest their faith in state power over other potential allegiances (Berry 2010). In interviews with Yoruba Andabo members, they boasted about their audience's social literacy in vindicationist ways that directly challenge the anti-black public discourse about *rumberos* as indecent, socially illiterate, and poorly-behaved.

*El público respeta a esta agrupación. Porque, por ejemplo, cuando Ronald dice '¡Vengan!' pa' que que se forma "La Gozadora"<sup>131</sup>, pero cuando los bailarines cuando van a bailar el público no se para. Eso es el respeto que se ha dado esa agrupación. (Lugo Valdespino 2013)*

The audience respects the group. Because, for example, when Ronald says, 'Come on!' so that they get into the "*La Gozadera*", but when the dancers are dancing, people don't get in their way.

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<sup>131</sup> *La Gozadera* was Yoruba Andabo's number one hit song at the time of my fieldwork.

*Porque eso radica en las raíces nuestras. La educación entra en las raíces nuestras. En las religiones... Para mi, eso es cultura. El saber expresar. No hay que ser filósofo. No hay que ser catedrático. No hay que ser un gran doctorado para poder expresarse y saber conducirse en la vida.... La vivencia de las personas, la ética, la educación, la reverencia es muy importante en los bailes. Se llama educación artística. Y no hay que estudiarlo. Eso viene desde las raíces. Desde el vientre de la madre...Desde un gesto de una gente tan llamada marginal aprendemos a educarnos a conducirnos en la vida, a expresar a darle sentimientos.... Somos marginales, pero no somos marginales. Somos ricos en esencia, en cultura, en decencia. (Quevedo Armenteras 2013)*

Because that is rooted in our roots. Education within our roots. In the religions... For me that is culture [refinement]. Knowing how to express oneself. One doesn't have to be a philosopher. One doesn't have to be a professor. You don't have to be a great doctor to be able to express yourself [well] and know how to conduct yourself in life... The life experience of the person, the ethic, the education, the reverence is very important in the dances. They call that artistic education. And you don't have to study it. That comes from the roots. From the belly of the mother... From the gesture of a so-called marginal people we learn and educate ourselves on how to conduct ourselves in life, to express our feelings... We are marginal[ized], but we are not marginal. We are rich in essence, in culture, in decency.

These examples speak of the audience as exhibiting esteemed moral uprightness that they attest is derived from their afro-religious practice. The audience's ability to discern between varying practices of spectatorship for each kind of music in their repertoire, and conduct themselves in such a way that permits the group to execute their professional duties as artists during any given performance situation, is linked to the vindicationist idea of black moral superiority and cultural ethics due to afro-religious practice.

However, the particular conventions of Yoruba Andabo performances alter the way literacy is performed and assessed internally by the group. For instance, at a typical folkloric performance, of the CFN for example, spectators are expected to stay seated at all times and respect the "fourth wall". However, at Yoruba Andabo's shows for a devout audience, the conventions of showing "discipline" allow the audience to move from their seats as long as the dancers can travel through the space unobstructed. Interacting with the

artists without compromising the demarcated space where the musicians are situated, and always leaving room in front of the microphone for the dancers to execute group choreography, done on their own personal volition demonstrate adherence to distinctive norms of discipline that are specific to their body-politic.

I asked the dancers explicitly if the public displays of religious piety during the ciclo Yoruba bothered them and they replied emphatically “no”. They all attested that they were used to, and even came to expect, the audience to perform their religious duty to venerate the orisha that “has their head”<sup>132</sup>.

*A mí me gusta. Cuando no me saluda, me siento que estoy haciendo las cosas mal o que ya no me gusta mi público. A veces que le da miedo entrar al escenario. Porque le da pena. Pero cuando pasa por el pasillo, te da un abrazo tan fuerte que no sé qué!...Pero no hay que darse pena porque el cantante es religioso y sabe que es su deber inspirar esa transformación del público a los orishas. Somos religiosos. Entonces cuando llega esa parte, el cantante sabe que hay que repetir el canto para dar tiempo a la gente saludar y bailar contigo... Nosotros no lo vemos como interrupción.... [A] nosotros no nos molesta. Para nosotros nos enriquecen. No pasa nada. Y aparte estamos acostumbrados. Esta relación con el público ya está...siempre ha sido así (Pedroso 2013).*

I like it. When they don't salute me, I feel like I am doing things poorly or that the audience no longer likes me. Sometimes they are scared to come to the stage. Because they are shy. But when I pass by the aisle, they give you a hug so strong that you can't believe it!... But one doesn't have to be shy because the singer is religious and it's their duty to inspire that transformation of the audience to the orishas. We are religious. So when that part comes, the singer knows they have to repeat the song to give people time to salute and dance with you... We don't see it as an interruption.... It doesn't bother us. For us, it enriches us. It's not a big deal. And besides, we are accustomed to it. The relationship with the public has already been established...it's always been that way.

Zulema goes on to affirm that at their performances there is a mutual religiously-rooted respect and understanding for the orisha that unite everyone present and strengthen a

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<sup>132</sup> “has they head” refers to the orisha you have been “crowned for” during initiation as a priest in Ocha

relationship of trust and belonging vis-à-vis shared religious devotion that “has always been that way”.

*Porque tenemos un público netamente religioso. Porque somos religiosos... Todos los bailarines de YA somos santeros. Practicantes de la religión. Y cada cual tiene un orisha en su cabeza y su ori y nos entregamos en la proyección del orisha. Entonces muchas veces las personas que adoran este santo consideran y a veces piensan que realmente está el orisha como tal allí. Pero es la entra, la proyección. Uno quiere proyectar al público una representación de todas las que hacía, las características, para que el público se siente consolidado, atraído con su ángel de la guarda o el orisha que le gusta. (Pedroso 2013).*

Because we have a clearly religious audience. Because we are religious... All of the dancers in YA are santeros. Religious practitioners. And each one has an orisha on their head and their *ori*<sup>133</sup> and we give ourselves over to the projection of the orisha. So the people that adore this *santo* many times consider and sometimes think that the orisha as such is actually there. But the projection of the orisha is what enters them. One wants to project to the public a representation of what all of the [orishas] did, the characteristics, so that the public feels consolidated, attracted to their guardian angel or the orisha that they like.

Here, the dancer speaks to the feeling of belongingness (consolidation) achieved amidst audience members through the veneration of an orisha as a goal that they hope to accomplish through their talented performance. The production assistant, Valentin, affirms that the open demonstration of religious piety at Yoruba Andabo shows is acceptable and ethically proper.

*El saludo [al bailarín en un show de Yoruba Andabo] es correcto. “Yo quiero que me vean que yo soy hijo de Ochun”. Yo quiero a Ochun en el escenario, fuera del escenario, en la puerta, antes de la puerta... Dondequiera que este una manifestación de Ochun, a saludarte.... Es que todo los que aman a su angel de la guardia... cuando lo vean representado va a saludar... Y después todo el mundo va a saber de quién soy hijo yo. Es que uno adora a su ángel de la guardia, como se representa... (Marquez Quiñones 2013)*

A salute [to a dancer at a Yoruba Andabo show] is correct. I want them to see that I’m a son of Ochun”. I love Ochun on the stage and off-stage, in the door, and before the door.... No matter where the manifestation of Ochun may be, I will

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<sup>133</sup> Ori is a yoruba word that refers to one’s spiritual intuition.

salute...It's because everyone that loves their guardian angel... when they see them represented will salute... And then everyone will know whose child you are. One adores their guardian angel, in representation.

This implies that the company has a certain degree of confidence in their audience's ability to respond according to internally established shared norms of propriety. These norms do not preclude embodied demonstrations of sacred connection to the professional spectacle because of the way in which representations of divinity are the means through one performs their sacred subjectivity within religious community. The notion that you would limit your demonstration of piety to delimited places would tarnish one's social reputation as a practitioner that would raise questions around one's sacred virtue. In as much as Yoruba Andabo members perform an investment in demarcating between appropriate religious veneration and religious excess, they are able to engage in sacred forms of social relation on stage while securing their claim to professionalism vis-à-vis the state.

### ***Responsibility***

One can observe how even during the shows themselves Yoruba Andabo takes critical tacit measures to demonstrate their due diligence as professionals in nonverbal ways as well. These demonstrations of nonverbal "responsibility" are carefully done in such a way that doesn't compromise their religious credibility. By nonverbal measures, I specifically refer, for example, to the way that Lazaro came to surrogate the security guard at the Cine Avenida who clearly struggled to control the woman, to prevent her from saluting the drum on stage. Through this critical nonverbal act, we learn that coming up to the drums to salute is considered an inappropriate expression of piety that crossed the conventions of what should transpire in that space (as opposed to the permissible expression of piety in saluting of the dancers). However, Lazaro approached the woman in a way that was consistent with how Oggun-energy would react to an inappropriate

situation. As Oggun, Lazaro bear-hugged the woman, restraining her in a tight embrace, which effectively kept her from actually saluting the drum. This act was meaningful for it's a clear embodied negotiation of sacred-secular norms of respectability, in that the gesture was executed in a way that resonated with his performance up until that point. He interacted with the woman as the mighty warrior Oggun would, *not* as Lazaro the dancer who is trying to figure out how to remove the distraction so his fellow dancer could resume control as the center of attention. Yoruba Andabo members are obliged to adhere to religious logics of behavior because, as all the other members attest, "*Yoruba [Andabo] tiene un público diferente a muchos agrupaciones. Un grupo, y un pueblo muy religioso (Yoruba[Andabo] has a different audience than lots of groups. [It's] a very religious group and people)*" (Quevedo Armenteras 2013).

Other nonverbal measures taken are not as apparent to the viewing public. In that vein, even though the musicians play sacred music, they intentionally do not fulfill certain sacred conventions in order to observe secular norms. I previously mentioned how they do not play secular shows with *bata de fundamento* (consecrated drums); instead they play *aberricula* drums (unconsecrated drums made for use in secular spectacle). Playing drums without *fundamento* follows the convention for folkloric ensembles since the formation of the CFN, instituted with the explicit purpose of preventing divine transmission in secular spaces. Another subtle nonverbal measure is done by Jenny when she salutes the drum during her performance of Yemaya. In discussing the similarities and differences between sacred and secular shows, I mentioned how Jenny's salute to the drum during her performance of Yemaya gives the impression to the audience that she is mounted. El Gordo quickly corrected me saying, "*Si, si. Pero no baja la cabeza. Ella lo hace artísticamente. Como teatro...Pero tu tiene que estar sentado allí [en la posición del tambolero] para que vea que no ponga la cabeza igual [como lo haría con tambores de fundamento]*". (Yes, yes.

But she doesn't lower her head. She does it artistically. Like theater... But you have to be seated there [from the vantage point of the drummer] to see that she doesn't not put down her head the same way [as she would do with consecrated drums]" (Lemoine 2013). In cases like these, where the "artistic" (read: secular) gesture is done in a way that can't be readily perceived as such by the audience, then Yoruba Andabo is able to maintain both their professional reputation as a secular artist vis-à-vis the state, while maintaining the sacred performative effect on the devout spectators. Other subtle nonverbal, artistic measures abound:

*Yo misma, los días de Obatala, que es el santo que rige a YA. Obatala es dueño de YA; cuida a todos sus hijos de YA. Entonces el día que caiga de obatala 24 de septiembre, yo siempre monto un trono en [Cabaret] Las Vegas o en El [Café] Delirio, donde estemos. Pongo una jícara para las personas pueden saludar. Pero la gente sabe que es una fantasía. Uno es profano y otro es sacramento (Pedroso 2013)*

I myself, on Obatala days, who is the *santo* that reigns Yoruba Andabo. Obatala is the ruler of YA; takes care of all of his children of YA. So when Obatala day falls, 24 of September, I always put up a throne in the [Cabaret] Las Vegas or in the [Café] Delirio, wherever we are. I put a jícara so that people can salute. But people know that its fantasy. One is secular and the other is a sacrament.

Zulema's careful installation of a fake altar to Obatala at Yoruba Andabo's show in secular venues on the day that corresponds to his feast day in the religion, again, speaks directly to this constant negotiation between different registers of respectability while strategically tapping into the logics of the sacred symbolic economy to achieve calculated gains.

*Entonces nosotros los religiosos más que seguidores y respetuoso de este religión que le damos de los ancestros, somos nosotros que frenan para que las cosas no pasen de los simple a lo ridículo. El arte es el arte, lo profano es lo profano y el secreto es el secreto. Y hay cosas que no tiene por qué ir al arte. Al arte va los orishas, como se vestían, que hacían cuando era personas como nosotros, como veían, sus atributos. Eso sabe todo el mundo. Secreto es lo que se hace con ellos. Eso es religiosos. Si va a hacer un show en un teatro o en la televisión, hasta allí. No te pasas, pa'lla es un secreto. Y es para respetar. Paraqué todo queda en armonía. Nosotros no estamos en esa lista negra. Nosotros hacemos hasta aquí.*

*No nos pasamos. Porque yo que fue iniciadora de cambiar la parte del bantú. Soy la única persona que trabaja en el escenario con una serpiente, de toda Cuba...Porque soy madre inkissi. Soy Cotalima de verdad. Y en el escenario yo soy Cotalima. Yo invente hasta aquí, y hago hasta aquí. Hay un caldero, pero por dentro no hay nada. Un poco de aserrín que es madera. Pero nada de tierra. Nada. La jícara tiene agua. No tiene ron, ni tiene...Ni tiene el venaje que usamos. Nada de eso. Es una réplica, pero hasta allí. Yo estoy muy consciente de hasta dónde voy (Pedroso 2013).*

So we religious people, more than being followers and respecters of this religion that our ancestors gave us, we are the ones that put the brakes on things so that they don't get made into a mockery. Art is art, the secular is the secular, and what is secret is secret. And there are things that shouldn't go into art. The orishas, how they dressed, what they did when they were people like us, what they looked like, their attributes, that goes to art. Everyone knows that. Secret is what you do with them. That is religious. If you are going to do a show in a theater or on television, don't cross that line. Don't overstep, over there is a secret. And that is to be respected. So that everything stays in harmony. We are not on the black list. We go just until the line. We don't pass it. Because I was was the person who initiated changing the bantu part [of YA's repertory]. I am the only person that works on the stage with the snake, in all of Cuba. And on stage I am *Cotalima*. I exercised creative liberty until this point, and I do up to this. There is a cauldron, but there isn't' anything inside. A little bit of sawdust which is made of wood. But no dirt. Nothing. The jícara has water in it. It doesn't have rum, or ....It doesn't have the *venaje* that we use. None of that. It's a replica, but that's all. I am very conscious of how far I take it.

Yoruba Andabo's ascription to certain conventions of the folkloric genre and not others, or their strategically covert ascription to secular norms, speaks to a subtle negotiation between investments in different, and at times contradictory, logics of professionalism in which they are propelled by distinct and contradictory desires. Taken as a whole, the ethnographic data supports that the tacit agreement to perform the *will to sacred-secular separation* is paramount, even if crossing the boundary in practice. This speaks to the felt need to not only be considered legitimate in terms of what the state requires, but also maintain a competitive edge in authenticity with their devout audience to whom they owe their livelihood and reputation in the sacred market.

### III: SACRED-SECULAR AFFECTIVE BOUNDARY MAINTENANCE

*...[L]a parte religiosa es la parte religiosa, y la parte del escenario es la parte del escenario. El escenario no tiene nada que ver con la vida religioso...con la religión que yo practico. (Del Pino 2014)*

..[T]he religious part is the religious part, and the stage part is the stage part. The stage doesn't have anything to do with religious life... with the religion I practice.

Geovani del Pino, April 10, 2014

Yoruba Andabo's discursive and nonverbal performances of black respectability hinge upon displaying an investment in boundary maintenance between the sacred and the secular. Anthropologists of secularism (Asad 1993) and Afro-Cuban religion (Palmie 2013) have researched, from different angles, the historical process of how the notion of "religion" as a discrete analytical category coincided, or furthered, modern secular liberalism. The instability, and reactive policing, of these spheres are most pronounced during critical moments of social flux.

The Cuban revolutionary government legislated this strict division by creating the category of "folklore" and literally policing the bodies of Afro-Cuban religious practitioners. In 1961 "folklore" became an official bureaucratically managed category of cultural production to fulfill the mission of inculcating the masses with revolutionary ideology. At the same time religious practice was criminalized and incurred important social penalties in terms of education and career opportunities (Wirtz 2014, 221, Berry 2010). The development of an institutional infrastructure to support and control folkloric artistic production was done in the name of democratizing access to the arts as a public good. As the national benefactor of culture, the state oversaw the distribution of cultural resources, and developed its own criteria to determine how the resources were allocated, to whom, and for what. However, the dual ideological function, to consolidate power under the state, was never secondary.

Fidel Castro announced the rationale behind the strategic use of black popular expressive culture in his “*Palabras a los intelectuales* (Speech to the Intellectuals)”:

*Hay expresiones del espíritu creador que por su propia naturaleza pueden ser mucho más asequibles al pueblo que otras manifestaciones del espíritu creador . . . [e]ntre las manifestaciones de tipo intelectual o artístico hay algunas que tienen una importancia en cuanto a la educación del pueblo o a la formación ideológica del pueblo, superior a otros tipos de manifestaciones artísticas. (Castro 1961 (June 30))*

There are expressions of the creative spirit that due to their own nature could be much more accessible to the people than other manifestations of the creative spirit... among the manifestations of the intellectual or artistic type, there are some that have a greater importance in terms of the education of the people or the ideological training of the people, over other types of artistic manifestations.

Assuring that the ideological project was reflected in displays of popular tradition lent a legitimacy to its libidinal demands on the people’s “*espíritu creador* (creative spirit)” for self-compartmentalization. According to a report issued by the Cuban Ministry of Culture with regards to its cultural policy, the state re-valuated cultural practices based on their potential “use-value” within socialism. This entailed “la asimilación de las *mejores tradiciones* de la cultura nacional” (Saruski and Mosquera 1978, 20: my emphasis). The valuating of traditions in this way recalls “Best Practice” schemes used in business management to increase profit margins, but in this case applied to the established beliefs and desires of a decentralized practicing community. Thus, the representation of spiritual practice as “folklore” on the national stage, was vital for re-organizing the “hearts and minds” of the black poor in order to nationalize their modes of self-perception.

Ethnomusicologists have described how folklore spectacles were subject to strict surveillance because of their association with ongoing religious practice and identity politics, both of which countered the Marxist-Leninist agenda of that time (Moore 2006, Hagedorn 2001). Kristina Wirtz’ research on folkloric spectacle in Oriente province sheds

light on the stakes involved for state-subsidized folkloric ensembles in Cuba with regard to the audience's "inappropriate" cultural consumption practices, during the period when Yoruba Andabo was granted professional status.

Professional folklore ensembles like Cutumba and the Folklórico de Oriente, too, felt the bureaucratic and ideological constraints on their work. A choreographer involved with one of these groups recounted a choreography the group had presented during the late 1980s based on legends (*patakines*) from Santería about the oricha Babalú Ayé that used the festive rhythms of bembés, popular drumming ceremony to fete the orichas. He told me that the work was tremendously popular, attracting large Cuban audiences, who treated it as an actual bembé, dancing in the aisles and, in some cases, even succumbing to possession trances. As I recorded the choreographer's story in my fieldnotes, the government then prohibited further performances of this piece because it promoted religion. Things changed later, but the ensemble has never reinstated the work. He concluded that this piece could now be performed because it would be interpreted as "*un hecho folklórico para rescatar las tradiciones*" (a folkloric act to rescue traditions). The proper framing of performances as "folkloric" was essential, and audience reframing of this particular piece to highlight its religious significance ruptured its presentation as salvaged tradition by revealing that in fact bembés are living tradition. (Wirtz 2014, 225-226)

Although the prohibition on religious practice was officially lifted in the early 1990s when Cuba went from being an officially atheist to an officially secular state, the taboo against defaming the border between the sacred and the secular is still heavily maintained. The lingering threat of professional repercussions (i.e. performance opportunities, recognitions, prizes, social standing) discipline professional folkloric artists to represent their cultural practices on the secular stage in a way that evokes a performative past tense. This speaks to the limited nature of folkloric artists' agency as art-workers of the revolution (Berry 2010), even despite the thriving practice of afro-religious faith today.

It is necessary to acknowledge that my ability to muse on the similarities between their performances in the sacred and secular spheres is situated from a place of relative privilege as a researcher. My own social standing and valuation as an academic

“professional” is not dependent on such compartmentalization<sup>134</sup>. Therefore, in discussing the social constructedness of secular liberalism as an ideal that serves the modern nation-state project, I am careful not to persuade the reader that the separation between sacred and secular Yoruba Andabo evoke is “false” (as in fake or insincere). Rather, I intend to demonstrate specifically how the notion of self-compartmentalization holds meaning for the group in ways that effectively maintain its social salience. In other words, I want to linger here on the sheer degree of discursive work exhibited by Yoruba Andabo members to maintain a division between their affective labor as religious versus as folkloric artists, as signaled in the epigraph to this section.

To that effect, what follows is an abbreviated selection of exemplary to questions I posed to different members of Yoruba Andabo in interviews where I specifically asked them to articulate if they generally perceived a difference or not between their artistic and affective labor in sacred versus secular settings:

*MB: Para tí, como se describe la diferencia o no que uno sienta cuando toca/baila/canta para una ceremonia religiosa en comparación con un show? ¿Qué es la diferencia o no al nivel de su desempeño artístico? ¿Qué es la diferencia o no al nivel emocional o espiritual de usted en lo personal? ¿Qué se hace diferente? ¿En qué aspecto(s) es lo mismo?*

MB: For you, how do you describe the difference or not that you feel when you play/dance/sing for a religious ceremony in comparison with a show? What is the difference or not at the level of your artistic performance? What is the different or not emotionally or spiritually on a personal level? What do you do differently? In what aspects is what you do the same?

The questions were framed in this way to respect the social need for maintaining a professional separation but also leave room for reflecting upon the distinction itself. This section aims to pinpoint how they have come to understand their embodiment as categorically divided between artistic professional work in “*el escenario* (the stage)” or “*un*

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<sup>134</sup> I hope!

*show*” and private religious professional work (*trabajo particular religioso*) for “*un tambor*”. Put another way, the question asks: Are they technically doing the same bodily acts (playing the same rhythms, singing the same songs, and dancing the same steps) in sacred and secular work? How and to what degree does the responsibility of nationalism determine both the practice itself and the self-perception of their embodiment of that practice as serving a national-secular function as opposed to an extra-national corporate one? This section delves deeper into how this tension is reconciled in practice and in discourse.

Gathering a representative sample of the answers from the group was important for this task. Yoruba Andabo is given professional accolades as a musical group—a subsidized member of the *Empresa de Música Popular*, winner of numerous awards (including the 2006 Latin Grammy) for their recorded albums— however this does not reflect the sum total of their parts. Yoruba Andabo is constituted by percussionists, singers, *and* dancers whose unique contributions towards the whole have been vital for their popular success. The member’s themselves, all shared that the release of the DVD “Rumba en La Habana...con Yoruba Andabo” (2005), launched them into national and international fame. Pablo Milanés indeed “discovered them” launching their professional career. However, the circulation of the DVD made them a household name for rumba aficionados in Cuba and abroad. The role of the dancers in the DVD is far from understated. This is reflected in the amount of time, resources, and effort that was put into the production of cinematic scenes featuring the dancers in “natural environments” where they could showcase their physical and theatrical virtuosity. These scenes are interspliced throughout video of live performance where the dancers, again, are center stage. The women dancers,

in particular, gained celebrity status for their dramatic interpretations of La Madre Nkisi<sup>135</sup> in the “ciclo Congo”, and Yemaya in the “ciclo Yoruba”. The dancers constitute the visual focus and propel the narrative progression of DVD. Although in Yoruba Andabo’s CDs the dancers are absent, they are far from marginal to the live performance.

In my participant observation with Yoruba Andabo it was evident that the dancers played a central, rather than peripheral role for the audience. As discussed earlier, the dancers are integral for transforming the felt space of the venue. The dancer’s movement throughout the audience invites the rehearsal of other forms of body socialization that transform the nature of spectatorship that the music alone would not achieve. It is this feeling of collective transcendence ignited by the dancers’ labor that keeps Yoruba Andabo’s shows filled to capacity. Nevertheless, it was evident from conversations had over time that the dance component was undervalued by the group’s administration and leadership<sup>136</sup>. Although recognizing her technical skill, Jenny’s labor as dance director was often scrutinized creating a tension around her autonomy to make decisions regarding that aspect of the performance. While there is an equal number of men and women dancers, I argue that the notion that the dancers as whole, are peripheral and thus expendable to the group, is enabled by the patriarchal tendency to designate “women’s work” (that is work centering the body as primary instrument) as less skilled and less important. This practice serves to obscure the necessary interdependence of all of the parts in practice. As discussed in Chapter Three, the way in which Yoruba Andabo’s group identity is remembered — as a legacy of deeds by great men— perpetuates this partial view of its make-up. Thus, my inclusion of a cross-section of responses is done intentionally with the aim of gathering

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<sup>135</sup> Religious status of rank in Palo Mayombe tradition.

<sup>136</sup> I thank Julie Skurski for reminding me of this internal dynamic of tension.

how each component of the group's unique function in the performance's totality lends a fuller representation of how sacred-secular boundary maintenance occurs.

The unique insights about how each part of the group reconciles the separation of sacred and secular coalesce around several overlapping discursive themes: proper framing, sentiment, technical demands, commission purpose, measures of assessment, and religion *as* folklore.

### **Proper Framing**

When I asked if their public performances were sacred to them, some blurted immediately “yes” or “no”, then asked me to qualify what I meant. Others paused pensively and responded, “*en qué sentido?*” (In what sense?), even before answering. The very definition of “sacred” within the context of the question was important to establish in relation to the preconceived understanding of the speaker. This showed a desire to assure a shared understanding, rather than taking the category as self-evident. As can be gleaned from the long-quote above about the choreographer from Oriente whose dance got prohibited, the sacred had be carefully framed. Proper framing, by establishing provisional definitions of terms, enabled the creation of categories while allowing those categories to remain capacious and flexible. This allowed the artist to better manage different expectations at any given moment.

Singer:

*Si considero que los espectáculos de YA son sagrados porque cada vez que hacemos un espectáculo tratamos de hacerlo mejor. Siempre buscamos la manera en que salga bien. Por eso la cantidad de público que nos va a ver. Los espectáculos en vivo siempre tienen sus fallas. Puede haber fallas de muchos tipos, pero nosotros que somos parte de la agrupación tratamos de asegurar que los fallos no sean por nosotros. Entonces por eso digo que los espectáculos de Yoruba Andabo son sagrados. En el campo religioso, va a atenderte con una*

*persona por x motivo. Entonces esa persona tiene que ser bien claro en lo que está haciendo porque está jugando con la vida de una persona. Eso lo llevo aquí a mi trabajo y es lo mismo. Hay un público muy grande que va a ese lugar para escucharte para verte. Tiene que primero de todo respetar ese público y entonces respetarte tu como artista. Por eso te digo que es sagrado, porque tiene que salir en el espectáculo lo mejor posible. (Hernandez Padron 2013)*

Yes, I consider the shows of YA to be sacred because every show we try to do it the best, and find a way to do it well. For that reason that many people come to see us. The shows always have their failures. There can be failures of different types, but we try to make sure that the failures are not due to us. That is why they are sacred. In the religious camp, you have to treat a religious person for x motive, and you have to be very clear because you are playing with the life of that person, so I bring that to my work here. There are lots of people that come to hear you, to see you, so first of all you have to respect that audience and respect yourself as an artist. For that reason, I say that it's sacred because it has to turn out the best possible.

Singer:

*De hecho, cuando empezamos a cantar, empezamos con el Padre Nuestro. Es una plegaria que lleva al espectáculo, que transmite la misma energía que he sentido cuando he estado en una actividad religioso. **Entonces, si creo que es sacrado. Y creo que el público lo sienta también, porque siente un respeto hacia la agrupación. Entonces pienso que si es sacrado.** Saben el espacio donde está. Cuando es la parte de la rumba, cuando es la parte de los santos, y cuando es la parte de La Gozadera de Ronald, por ejemplo. Que ya allí deja de ser completamente sacrado. Y es cuando es tu cumpleaños de santo y primero tocas un tambor y después pone la música... Por eso digo que es sacrado porque todo es dentro del mismo círculo de la misma trilogía de lo que hacemos los santeros, los religiosos. Cuando tu toque un tambor para Yemaya por ejemplo, cuando se acabó el tambor tu pone un poco de música, toma cerveza...es lo mismo. Tiene tres fases que va hacia allí [tambor, rumba, guaracha]. (Lugo Valdespino 2013)*

In fact, when we begin to sing, we begin with the Our Father [prayer]. It's a prayer that you are bringing to a show, that transmits the same energy that you feel, that I have felt, when I have been in something religious. **So I think that yes, it's sacred. And I think that the audience feels like it that too, because you feel a respect toward the group. So I think that yes, it's sacred.** The audience knows the part that they are in. They know when it's the part of the rumba, when it's the part of the *santos*, and when it's *La Gozadera* de Ronald, for example. And then there it stops being exclusively sacred. Then it's like at your saint birthday when you first play a *tambor* and then you turn on music and just

have fun. That is why I say its sacred because it falls within the same circle, in the same trilogy, that we do as religious practitioners. When you play a tambor for Yemaya, for example, When the *tambor* is done then you turn on music and have a few beers and ...it's the same. It has the same phases that go there. [tambor, rumba, guaracha].

Dancer:

*[Diferencia entre bailar en un contexto religioso o popular o en un show?]Es diferente porque cuando estamos bailando en la casa, estamos entre familia, entre amigos. Podemos...los sentimientos son más arraigos en sentido de la familiaridad. Te estás viendo tu mama, tus hijos, tus amistades, tu familia, y te entregas, y los sientes. Lo sientes un poco más porque estas dentro de tu hogar, dentro de tu panteón, dentro de tu iglesia, dentro de tu cultura. Porque no es lo mismo bailar una rumba en tu casa, que bailar una rumba en un teatro. Es lo mismo paso, es el mismo movimiento, pero dentro de la casa tú te sientes más en confianza. Porque en el teatro tu sientes, como quiera que sea, este bichito ... de miedo escénico...De entrada, cuando tu entras en un teatro, está transmitiendo cultura. Está transmitiendo arte. Desde la forma de vestir, hasta transmitiendo arte, sinceridad, amor, y elegancia. (Quevedo Armenteras 2013)*

[The difference between dancing in a religious context or popular context or in a show?] It's different because when we are dancing in the house, we are amongst family, amongst friends. We can... the feelings are more rooted in the sense of familiarity. You are seeing your mother, your children your friends, your family, and you give of yourself more, you feel it. You feel it a bit more because you are inside your home, inside your mausoleum, inside your church, inside your culture. Because it's not the same thing to dance rumba in your house as it is in a theater. It's the same step, the same movement, but in your house you feel more trust. Because in the theater, no matter what you say, you feel those nerves...of stage fright... Right off the bat, when you enter a theater you are transmitting culture. You are transmitting art. From the way your dress, to transmitting art, sincerity, love, and elegance.

In these quotes, sacred comes to mean perfectionism, audience participation and respect, organization, or comfort. The capacious nature of the term allows for infinite ways to locate oneself inside and outside its bounds at any given moment.

## Sentiment

Some of the musicians interpreted sacredness in terms of their own affect, embodiment and devotion or commitment to the work. In Spanish, the word best suited to encompass this theme would be “*entrega*”. The artists measured sanctity by thinking out loud about their affective relationship to their body’s action in their memory:

*Dancer:*

*Son cosas muy diferentes. No parecen en nada. Eso no se puede ni comparar. Son cosas que se sienten. No te puede decir porque nunca me he pasado [montarme]. Pero mi madre que es un bailador [montador o subidor]. Imaginate. Sé que debe ser diferente. Algo existe. En definitiva cuenta. En ese caso yo, yo tengo hecho Ochun. Cuando yo bailo Ochun, no puedo pensar que Ochun va a bajar en la tierra. No; debo pensar en mi público porque es mi trabajo. Entonces, son dos cosas diferentes. (Pedroso 2013)*

They are two very different things. They aren’t similar at all. You can’t compare them. They are things that you feel. I can’t tell you because it has never happened to me [to be mounted]. But my mother is a dancer [someone who gets mounted professionally]. Imagine. I know it has to be different. Something exists. It must count. In this case I, I have Ochun made. When I dance Ochun, I can’t be thinking that Ochun will come to the earth. No’ I have to think in my audience because that is my job. So they are two different things.

*Drummer:*

*En el caso mio [el sentimiento religioso] está pasando música [dentro del espíritu]. Para mí, muchas cosas. Pienso en lo que estudie allí que no están, lo que hacían...los tengo presente...Es como una entrega que tu hace, me parece a mí... [En contrario en el escenario] la actuación es muy fundamental. Actuación es más allá de tocar, de saberme los temas. [Es] demostrar las, expresar a la gente, lo que yo no tengo. Eso es lo que tengo que buscar. Poco a poco, Es importante porque a lo mejor tú estás haciendo la música magnífica, pero si demostrarle al público que lo está haciendo, eso es bueno. Sin embargo si tú muestra un carácter serio, antipático, la gente van a decir, “No, no le gusta” (Aguilar 2013).*

In my case [the religious sentiment] is passing music [within the spirit]. For me, it’s a lot of things. I think of the people who I studied that are not here anymore, what they did... I keep them present... It’s like an *entrega* that you do, it seems to me... [In contrast on stage] the acting is fundamental. Acting goes beyond

playing, knowing the songs. [It's] demonstrating them, expressing to people what I have. I have had to search for that. Little by little. It's important because maybe you are doing the music magnificently, but if you demonstrate it to the audience, it's good. Nevertheless, if you give off a serious character, people will say, "No, he doesn't like it."

Singer:

*Tiene que ser diferente. Porque no se puede ligar lo social con lo religioso. Si me contrata para tocar a tu tambor, entonces voy con sentimiento religioso. Cuando voy a un teatro, ya no hay sentimiento religioso. Somos religiosos, pero vamos socialmente. Entonces eso varia, pero siempre con el mismo origen. Eso nunca se pierde.* (Cardenas 2013)

**The feeling has to be different. Because you can't join the social with the religious.** If you contract me to play at your tambor, then I go with a religious sentiment. When I go to the theatre, then there isn't anymore religious sentiment. We are religious but we are going socially. So it varies, but always with the same origin. The origin never gets lost.

Singer:

*¿Tu sabes lo que yo siento cada vez que canto? Como un campo magnético alrededor, en mi mente. Un campo magnético que solo existe percusión, bailarín y yo, así. En el caso de Yoruba Andabo, que nos cubre, que nos protege. Te lo juro que siempre he sentido eso. Y cuando canto en los tambores también, mucho más. Porque un tambor de fundamento, añá, es un santo que te protege.*

Do you know what I feel every time I sing? It's like a magnetic field around, in my mind. A field in which the only thing that exists is the percussion, the dancer, and myself. A field that covers us [YA], that protects us. I swear to you that I have always felt that. And when I sing in the tambores I feel that too, even more so. Because a *tambor de fundamento, añá*, is a saint that protects you. (Lugo Valdespino 2013)

## Technical Demands

Others focused on the technical demands of their physical labor and mental demands in each setting to find distinction there:

Singer:

*...tambores le desgata la voz. El tambor es mucho más fuerte que el tambor artístico. Y yo no quisiera perder mi voz.... Por ejemplo, es un tambor que empieza a las 4 de tarde a las 9 de la noche y a veces termina mucho más par 'allá de las 9 de la noche. Yo no quisiera... Yo prefiero ir [a un tambor] para bailar para divertirme, no cantar. (Monet Diaz 2013)*

*...tambores wear out the voice. The religious *tambores* are much stronger than artistic *tambores*... For example, when there is a tambor that begins at 4pm it ends at 9pm and sometimes it ends even later than 9pm. I prefer to go to *tambores* to dance and have fun, not to sing.*

Dancer:

*La ceremonia religiosa, yo no soy subidora. Ochun no pasa todavía por mi. Pasara un dia, por transcendencia, porque un día debe ser. Pero bueno, por ahora, no . Pero la diferencia pienso yo es muy diferente porque tu tiene que escuchar al cantante, proyectar al publico, ver coreografía, ver lo que te están tocando. Son muchas cosas en la mente, arriba del trabajo. Cuando es una tambor religioso, *tambores* fundamentados. Tienen sus secretos. Los bailadores de tambor van preparado psicológicamente para lo que van a hacer. Presente frente del tambor. Hasta que ya *iboribori* baje ese santo a la tierra por arriba de la persona. Es espontaneo. Por esa parte se parece un poco. El cantante le canta al orisha. Todo las cosas de la vida que le pasaron. Nadie trate de salsarlo, para que le da dinero. Hay... no es asi. Y tambien le canta a muchas orishas no solamente a ese solo frente del tambor. (Pedroso 2013)*

In religious ceremony, I'm not a *subidora*. Ochun doesn't pass through me yet. She will pass through one day, because of my lineage, it has to happen. But for now, no. But the difference is very different because you have to listen to the singer, project to the audience, choreography, what they are playing. There are lots of things going on in your head, on top of the work. When it's a religious *tambor*, consecrated drums. They have their secrets. The dancers of the drum go preparing themselves psychologically for what they are going to do. In the presence of the drum. Until *iboribori*, the *santo* comes down to the earth on top of the person. It's spontaneous. In that sense it is a little similar. The singer sings to the orisha. Everything that happened in their life. No one tries to sauce them up to give them money. Oh, it's not like that. And also one sings for many orishas not just the one in front of the drum.

Drummer:

*Sí, yo siempre considero en sentido general son los espectáculos sagrados. Porque yo creo que cuando uno canta, toco un instrumento de percusión siempre*

*estas interaccionando con unos dioses, con las deidades siempre que esté en un espectáculo, en Nueva York, que este donde quiere. Siempre está algo sagrado. Como músico, lo que quieres que la transmisión llegue. La transmisión de lo que tú estás haciendo. Que lo sientan. (Aguilar 2013)*

Yes, I always consider the shows to be sacred in a general sense, because when you play percussion, in a way you are always interacting with something sacred. No matter where you play. As a musician, you want the transmission of the music to reach. The transmission of what you are doing. The feeling.

Singer:

*Ya cuando toca pa' una fiesta religiosa ya es otro sistema de toque. A no ser que sea una guarachera. Si es una rumba pa'Ochun, es una rumba pa'Ochun que tú puede ver con Yoruba Andabo. Al toque de un tambor de fundamento ya es otra historia... El mismo perro con diferente collar. Ya un tambor de fundamento es diferente porque es un fundamento... Tiene que ir por lo normal, no puede ir por lo no normal. Tiene que ir por lo religioso... Cosas que no se ven en el teatro. Porque a la vez que estamos tocando pa' seres religiosos, uno hace oro seco al trono, que le da conocimiento al santo y entonces después se pasa a la otra etapa. No tiene que ver con el teatro. (Cardenas 2013)*

When we play for a religious event, it's a different system. Unless it's a guarachera. If it's a rumba for Ochun, then it's the same rumba for Ochun that you could hear by Yoruba Andabo. But if it's a *tambor de fundamento*, then that's another story... The same dog with a different collar. It's a different thing because it's a *fundamento*. ... You have to go by what is normal, not by what is abnormal. You have to go the religious way... Not what you see in a theatre. Because when we are playing for religious beings, you do an *oro seco* to the throne, which gives knowledge to the *santo*, then it goes to another stage. That doesn't have anything to do with the theatre.

Singer:

*Pero, yo trato de esa misma energía que transmito cuando estoy cantando en un tambor religioso, llevarlo al escenario. Para mi yo no hago distinción entre cantar por, ah es en un espectáculo. También ayuda que la gran mayoría de los bailarines que baila los orishas también son religiosos y entiende lo que tu estas diciendo. No es lo mismo tu diciendo que da la vuelta y da un brinco. Jaja! Quizás es por eso que tengo esa magia. Con la misma fuerza que yo hago una llamada a Yemaya es la misma fuerza que yo doy al bailarín [de YA]. Es lo mismo. Claro, no me puede exceder porque es menos tiempo. La diferencia es cuando to canta en un tambor, es que tienes todo el tiempo del mundo. [En un*

*espectaculo] artísticamente es muy poco tiempo entonces te queda con ganas de seguir [cantando]. (Lugo Valdespino 2013)*

I try to transmit the same energy that I bring to a tambor de fundamento, bring it to the stage. I don't distinguish my singing by thinking, oh, this is a spectacle. It also helps that the great majority of the dancers that dance for the saints in YA are also religious and they understand what you are saying, that helps a lot. It's not the same if you are telling them to do a turn and they do a jump. Haha! Maybe that is why I have that magic. I give the same amount of force when I am singing to bring down Yemaya as when I sing for the dancer [of YA]. It's the same for me. Of course I can't extend myself as much because it's a shorter amount of time. The difference is in a tambor you have all the time in the world. [In a show] artistically, you have very little time so you are left with the desire to continue [singing].

Drummer:

*Es diferente [tocar pa' una ceremonia religiosa]. A ver, es igual en el sentido que son los mismos cantos, los mismos toques, tal vez un poco más de canto [en un tambor]...pero el tambor de fundamento es un poco más asentado. Aquí en un concierto de YA, yo puedo tirar golpes, todo lo que a mí me da la gana, siempre y cuando este en clave. Pero en el tambor, tiene que hacer lo básico del tambor. Si puedes improvisar, pero no como en un concierto de Yoruba Andabo. Porque ya es un tambor de fundamento. No puede estar inventando, tiene que dar la base, lo que va. Si acaso quiere poner un poquitico más, se puede, pero no pasarte. No como aquí en el aro de Yemaya por ejemplo. Yo estaba bang-bang-bang-bang! Se puede hacer, pero se ve un poquitico mal porque mucha bulla... te cansa también porque es muy alante, es rápido en velocidad. Llega un momento en que la música no se entiende nada el público [los creyentes]. Puede ser que tu sepa lo que estás haciendo, pero no estás haciendo nada porque no está transmitiendo al público [creyentes], no entiende lo que estas tocando. (Acosta 2013)*

[Playing for a religious ceremony] its different. Well it's the same in the sense that it's the same rhythms, the same songs, [in a *tambor*] maybe there are more songs...but a religious ceremony its more *asentado*. Here in a YA concert I can throw what hits all I want, as long as I'm in *clave*. But at a tambor, it has to be the basic rhythms. You can improvise a little, but you not like you can in concert of YA, just what it necessary. Because its a *tambor de fundamento*. You can't be making things up, you have to give the base, what is right. If you want to put a little improve in, you can, but you can't get ahead of yourself. Not like with the aro de yemaya, for example. I was hitting bang-bang-bang-bang-bang! You can do that in a tambor, but it would look kinda bad, because of all the noise... really fast in velocity. It can get to a point where the music you can't understand it anymore, because you are no longer transmitting to the audience [worshippers].

Maybe you know what you are saying, but if the public doesn't get the message, they won't be able to follow you.

### **Commissioned Purpose**

Although where they draw those lines of distinction may be different, group members coincided that the commissioned purpose of the performance held substantial weight for making a distinction. When they are playing for a *tambor* they are commissioned to fulfil a religious role in the community as a *santero*, whereas when they perform folklore they are commissioned to do creative work as artists. The urgent stakes involved for those that commission them are key to the differentiation.

Drummer:

*La diferencia está en ya cuando toca en una actividad religiosos, son otros factores. [En un tambor] mayormente está tocando por un yeya, por un objetivo: personas que tocan por salud, personas toca porque tienen un gran problema, toca para elogiar a los santos. Eso es muy diferente. Los ritmos son iguales, pero la energía no es igual. Le diferencia de la energía es según la problemática que estas desempeñando a la hora. Si estas tocando religiosamente, pero estas tocando en una situación de luto tienes que desempeñar el luto, si estas tocando para una fiesta tienes que desempeñar la fiesta. Si la persona tiene un problema de salud, hay que transmitir eso [en tu energía]. (Aguilar 2013)*

The difference in playing for religious ceremony, then there are other factors. [In a religious ceremony], you are playing for a *yeya*, an objective: people that play for health, people play for big problems, they play to praise the *santo*. It's very different. The rhythms are the same, but energy is not the same. The difference in the energy depends on the problem/objective/situation you are performing at that time. Yes, you are playing religiously, but if you are playing to mourn a death you have to perform mourning, if you are playing for a party you have to perform party. When you play for the health of someone, you have to transmit that [energetically].

Drummer:

*La única diferencia que yo siento en esto es... que cuando están en un show le gente están disfrutando del show. Cuando toca en una ceremonia religiosa la*

*gente viene por un sentimiento de dolor. A veces alegría, a veces satisfacción. Puede ser en los dos lugares también. Porque hay gente que se sienten mal y van a un show y se desestresen.* (Aguilar 2013)

The only difference that I feel when I'm playing is... when you are at a show people are having fun. But when you play at a *tambor*, people come due to a feeling of pain. Sometimes happiness or satisfaction. But it could be in the both places, because there are people that come to a show because they feel stressed and they de-stress.

Singer:

*En la religión Yoruba buscamos salvar vida. Esto enfoca eso. El santo da salud que lo que vamos buscar; el salud... Todo salió a la luz con el Folclórico Nacional. Hacia documentales, hacían películas, la gente la estudiaba... Ya todos los otros grupos siguieron la guía esa. Yoruba es una tradición, de nuestros ancestros... Lo que hacemos por mediación de esa tradición es una fantasía. No es lo real. La fantasía es lo que se lleva al escenario. Los bailes son los mismos. Los cantos son los mismos... pero tú lo lleva en una obra teatral. Y en la religión yoruba, hay muchas ceremonias que son secretos que es para las personas que estan autorizadas en esta religión. La parte ritual no se lleva al escenario. Los bailes, los ritmos, los cantos, sí; un poco enriquecidas el vestuario. Los bailes son más sofisticados de lo que es realmente el Yoruba.* (Monet Diaz 2013)

In the Yoruba religion are try to “save” people. We try to save lives. This is what is focused on in the religion: Health... Everything was brought out in the open with Conjunto Folklórico Nacional. Then began documentaries, films, people started studying it... Then all of the groups that came after followed that guide. Yoruba is a tradition, it's our ancestors'. What we do by way of that tradition is a fantasy. It's not real. We bring a fantasy to the stage. Well, the dances and the songs are the same... But you do it in a theatrical piece. And in the Yoruba religion, there are lots of ceremonies that are secret. That only people who are authorized in the religion to know. It's not the same that we bring to the stage. The ritual part you don't bring to the stage. The dances, the rhythms, the songs, yes; a little more embellished in costume... The dances are more sophisticated, than what the Yoruba [religion] is.

We learn that secular shows are understood to have a purely artistic purpose whereas religious labor is intended to bring out change or mark change in the lives of the audience (i.e. health, celebrate, give thanks, get information). However, the exceptions to these rules make them instable on those grounds alone.

## Measures of Assessment

I proposed that maybe the measures of assessment for the performance would be different for a *tambor*/ceremony as opposed to an artistic spectacle. The responses to this suggestion were quite generative.

*Dancer:*

*Éxito? El público es el que sube o te baja. Mirar la reacción del público. Un tambor de éxito, el que vaya personas. Que canten que bailen, que participen. Que haya mucha gente coronadas. Y en cualquier momento tu ángel de la guardia puede bajar a la tierra. 5 o 6 santos. [Dice,] “Que tambor buenísimo, vinieron 6 santos! Y que todo el mundo canto y divierto! Caballero que la gente se fueron contenta!” Si es tu primera vez en Cuba y tu va a un show de YA y después viene a la casa [templo]. Para ti te vas a decir, “Cuál es la realidad y cuál es la mentira? Porque viste cosas parecidas...pero siempre hay que decir, el teatro, el mundo del arte es muy diferente, porque es lo negativo del secreto. Esto es profano. Es una representación. (Pedroso 2013)*

Success? The audience is who lifts you up or brings you down. One must look at the reaction of the audience. A successful *tambor*, one that people go to. Where they dance, they participate. Where there are lots of crowned heads. And in any moment your guardian angel can come to the earth. 5 or 6 *santos*. [They say,] “What a good *tambor*, 6 *santos* came! And everyone sang and had fun! Gentlemen, the people left happy.” If it’s your first time in Cuba, and you go to YA show and then to a religious house, for you, you are going to say, “Which is true, and which is a lie?” Because you have seen similar things. But you always have to say, the theater, the artistic world is very different. Because it’s the negative of the secret. It’s secular. It’s a representation.

*Singer:*

*En el caso de tambor religioso, ya es una persona quien te contrata para tocar en su casa a su orisha. Es la persona que te contrata quien te dice si le gustó o no le gustó. Porque ya en el tambor religioso se paga. En [Caberet] Las Vegas hay un cover para entrar al lugar. Pero en caso de un tambor religioso, la persona les paga a esos músicos que toquen a su orisha. [En el caso de los shows publicos] ese dinero viene a mi como mi salario, como cualquier trabajadora, es dinero lo comparto el estado. Entonces la cantidad de personas que viene a nuestros shows no influyen al salario que me dé como artista el estado. (Monet Diaz 2013)*

In the case of a religious *tambor*, it's a person who contracts you to play in their house to their orisha. That person who has contracted you says if they were pleased with your work. Because religious *tambores* pay. In a regular performance, it's not the same. In [Caberet] Las Vegas they charge an entrance fee. That is the fee that the audience pays to enter the venue. But in a religious ceremony the person pays the musicians to play. [When I play a public performance] I get my salary as a worker, but the cover is shared by the state. So the number of people that come doesn't influence my salary as an artist of the state.

Drummer:

*El baile de la gente demuestra que ha transmitido tu energía. Sabes que el tambor fue un éxito cuando la persona realmente resuelva su situación. Porque esa misma persona vuelve a decirte. En el momento, no se puede saber definitivamente, pero a veces se sabe. Porque la persona de acerca y da la satisfacción. No te dan aplauso, pero la gente se ve contenta en el ambiente, se ve en el rostro. [MB: ¿Y esperas que el orisha baja?] Cuando sea necesario. Ya esto está según la persona. Hay personas que le gusta a persona que no le gustan. Está en el astral de la persona. [MB: ¿Entonces no busca a eso como para saber que has hecho bien o mal?] No.*

The dancing shows that you have transmitted your energy... You know that the *tambor* was a success when the person resolves their problem. The person could come up to you later and tell you what resulted. So in the moment, you don't really know for sure, but sometimes there are ways to tell. Like if the person shows their satisfaction. You don't get applause, but then you can tell in the environment that the people are content, in their faces. You want an orisha to come down when it's necessary. You know it's necessary according to the person. They are people that don't like it, there are people that do. It's in the astral. [MB: So one doesn't see "mounting" as a sign of success or not.] No (Aguilar 2013)

If indeed, as they say, a successful *tambor* is when lots of orisha come down, the mounting of a member of the public was deemed positive in sacred terms. However, the very thing that distinguished, for Yoruba Andabo, the difference between a sacred and a secular gig, was performatively conflated that night at the Avenida. The Cine Avenida was a success, according to sacred conventions, in that more than one spirit (performatively) "came down" from the sacred plane. However, the potential professional repercussions

they incurred made it unfortunate. The ability to come out free from government scrutiny was a measure of success in and of itself for secular shows.

### **Religion as Folklore**

The word “sacred” wasn’t the only word that had a shifting signifier. Some of the members referred to their religion as folklore and the believers as *folklóricos*. Framing their community as avid patrons of folklore speaks to the cognitive effect of cultural policy, compelling people to refer to themselves in the chronotopic past tense, even if assigned to people living (and worshiping) in the present. In effect, expressive culture becomes a social signifier. These two ostensibly distinct forms of behavior —art and religion— are conflated under the umbrella of “*lo africano*” or “*lo negro*”; providing an open interpretation for signifying “nationalized blackness” (Moore 1997) or racial pride.

*Dancer:*

*Porque tenemos un público netamente religioso. Porque somos religiosos. Muchas etnias vinieron de Africa y ya aquí a Cuba, el Cubano es religioso. Mas folklórico que nada. (Pedroso 2013) .*

Because we have a public that is clearly religious. Because we are religious. Many ethnicities came from Africa and so here in Cuba, the Cuban is religious. More folkloric than anything else.

*Singer:*

*El folklore es cosa religiosa, tanto de baile, de canto, como instrumento en la percusión. Allí no hay instrumento ni de viento ni de cuerda. Eso es bomba. Y por eso no hay que leer. En esa orden de cosas son analfabetos. Lo de bomba es que viene de tu corazón. Lo distingue de nosotros es que **nosotros nos mantenemos la transcendencia de los viejos**. Eso se no olvide, lo que enseñaron los viejos. El matiz de tocar y el matiz de cantar. **El orgullo que tenemos.***

Folcore is religious thing, dance, song, percussion. In that musical genre there is no chord or wind instruments. It has bomba. For that you don’t have to read. There can be illiterate people. Bomba is what comes from your heart. What makes us distinct is that **we maintain what the elders taught us**. That is very forgotten.

The matice of playing and singing. **The pride we have.** (Cardenas 2013: emphasis mine).

*Dancer:*

*El orisha, el primero que pienso es, que yo soy Eleggua. Sus características, quien fue, que hacía. Sus movimientos. La proyección es muy importantes. Creerte lo que estás haciendo. Ante todo creer te lo....La clave es creérselo (Pedroso 2013)*

The orisha, the first thing I think is, I am Eleggua. His characteristics, who he was, what he did. His movements. The projection is very important. Believing what you are doing. Before anything, believe it yourself...The key is believing it yourself.

Here, Zulema uses the past tense to speak of Eleggua, as if a relic, fulfilling the institutionalized expectations of the state. This is a learned discursive strategy to fulfill a compulsory folkloric role for the state. In our interview she, and her groupmates, vacillated back and forth between referring to the orisha in the past preterit and present tense. This comes from an internalized understanding that her performance of ideological conformity is just as important as the artistic quality of her performance in guaranteeing high-repute by the Ministry of Culture and thus achieving professional success. After the interview ended she invited me to a *tambor* at her family's *casa-templo* where her mother is an esteemed *subidora*<sup>137</sup>. Curiously enough this was not the only invitation I received from group members to attend religious ceremonies they were participating in as practitioners whether professionally or simply as worshippers. After demonstrating their professionalism as secular folkloric artist, they were eager to demonstrating her authenticity in sacred terms.

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<sup>137</sup> Person who is hired by a religious house to get mounted at a tambor. This requires the permission of the desired orisha, serious psychological preparation, rituals acts, and usually a fee of \$50 CUC.

I think that my positionality as both a black *creyente* and an anthropologist is key here to appreciating the kinds of answers to the question I posed. They acknowledged a sense of personal identification with me on religious and racial terms, but also established distance as someone who, in a way, was also part of the bureaucratic system that assesses/oversees their “proper” performance as a professional representative of nationalized culture. In this sense, I represented the dual sets of expectations Yoruba Andabo balances between the secular state and their afro-religious community. On the one hand, they may have wanted to emphasize the religious authenticity which they bring to the professional work, but on the other hand they also may have wanted to emphasize their ability to discern between those two realms as part of their artistic professional duty.

As an anthropologist whose research is sanctioned by the Cuban Ministry of Culture, requesting an interview with them staged a scenario whereby both “culture bearer” and “scholar” are expected to participate in the reproduction of folklore as a category. As Wirtz so aptly states, folklore spectacles “contribute to the ideologies of nationhood that legitimate those state practices of authorization and authentication” (Wirtz 2014, 220). Those employed as folkloric artists have devised mechanisms of self-auditing that legitimate this compulsory division, modeling idealized secularized subjecthood for the masses. “The state’s success in objectifying certain domains of practices as folklore also relies on its creation of spectators for folklore spectacles” (Wirtz 2014, 229). Shifting afro-religious masses’ embodied orientation vis-à-vis their faith is an ongoing iterative process of body socialization that is rehearsed in these very moments when a foreign researcher or symbol of authority compels this reporting.

What emerged were loose trends that represent the range of interpretations to my question regarding how they distinguish between the sacred and the secular as discursive categories. They include: framing the question to establish provisional and ever shifting

definitions of terms in the moment, dutifully searching for language to describe one's affective response, thinking through technical demands on their body and mental pressures, weighing the perceived stakes of the performance, measuring outcomes, and creating distance or proximity to the past. Each person's distinct yet interdependent role in the production, created a complex picture of how the boundary was felt differently when either playing, singing, or dancing. As my research shows, reconciling the separation of the body into distinct secular-sacred selves happens in riffs. This sometimes results in slippages of language (using religious language/denominations to explain folkloric action and vice versa) even by the vanguard of folkloric performers about their social roles. The intended purpose of the performance proves to be a significant way to measure one's affective relationship to the body's labor. Overall, "the sacred" and "religion" was a constantly shifting signifier, reflecting the ambiguity of those categories even as they are affirmed. What is clear is that the ability to feel, perceive, and articulate affective difference between sacred and secular is not uniformly shared or operative a priori, but instead is something rehearsed in the act of forced reflection.

The Revolution's policies sought out to create a homogenized, regularized posture towards apprehending the confluence of rhythms, song and dance. To become accustomed to the secularized representations of religious practice entails a normalization of the secularized self, demanding an eventual shift in consciousness. Although ostensibly, after more than sixty years of Revolution this process should have already been complete, in reality this separation has happened unevenly and competes with the reification of sacred epistemology in critical moments of collective motion.

#### **IV: CONCLUSION: PEDAGOGIES OF DESIRE: QUEERING SECULAR SPACE & BLACK POLITICAL BECOMING**

In light of what we have learned in the previous section about the discursive rehearsals that maintain the salience of conceptual boundaries, I want to come back to the audience member's performative mounting as what Wirtz calls a "'folk' rupture" (Wirtz 2014, 229). The barefoot woman in the aisle, and the solidarity with the woman on the part of the audience in not intervening on her trajectory toward the drums, warrants concerted attention as nonverbal acts of self-definition that run counter to the idealized secular citizen-subject. This is a performative resistance against the conventions of folklore that the state has designated for such performances of black cultural production and the secularized selves they hail as spectators, but also a transgression of religious rules that designate strict liturgical process. Her act of resistance became a source of anxiety for those who could be held responsible by the state. Propelled by the resonance of Yoruba Andabo's performance, the happening speaks to the embedded political potential of the sacred to rally an extra-national body-politic; one that the Revolution intentionally sought to marginalize with prescribed representations of folklore on the national stage. However, it also speaks to how a project invested in countering anti-black stigmatization establishes other limits on the counter-hegemonic potentiality of the alternative spaces they create. The barefoot black woman in the aisle warrants concerted attention as a trace, an ephemeral signifier, of a latent body-politic that perhaps extends even farther beyond the Yoruba Andabo's imagined political kin.

#### **Gendering Yemaya**

In previous chapters I described how the genealogy of political subjecthood in the performance of social memory does the work of rehearsing a certain gendered moral configuration of black political action. I argued that the gendered way in which black

political protagonism is remembered structured the kinds of political subjectivities that are rehearsed and imagined. The remembered acts of state-oriented oppositional bravery rehearsed by ARAC and Yoruba Andabo —whether its reading history against the grain, bargaining for small degrees of institutional change, positively re-investing in stigmatized forms of black sociality and/or asserting critical distance from market forces— are underwritten by specific constructions of black heteromascularity which in turn structure the perceived proper role of women in political movements as passive, and auxiliary, at best. This memory prefigures a certain gendered view of black women that obscures the forms of political activity they engaged in throughout history, thus determining our expectations for black woman’s political agency in the present.

It is poetic that the orisha evoked at the time of the performative mounting was Yemayá, “Mother of fish”, the divinity that represents the mother of all living things. “Yemoja is noted as a primordial female orisa, she is central to how Yoruba religious discourses enact the power of performing gender as a reflexive critique and satire of these roles in society and culture” (Otero and Falola 2013, xix). Falola and Otero are right to remind us that debates continue about whether gender indeed exists as an ontological category in Yoruba tradition through language and religious discourse.<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, the assignment of gendered and sexualized meanings to different orisha has been a salient part of the way Cuban practitioners of afro-religiosity make sense of themselves and their social positionality as they navigate the legacy of patriarchy and homophobia that continues to undergird “*cubanidad*”.

The “Yemayá Melli” (double Yemaya) present in the Cine Avenida —one a professional performer, one a mounted audience member— stage a poetic play with the

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<sup>138</sup> See Oyeronke Oyewumim’s *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. (1997)

social script of racialized femininity. The woman's black bare feet in the audience (as opposed to the trademark barefoot accoutrement of folkloric costumes displayed on stage) firmly situated her within a position of social primitivism, relegated to the temporal space of the performative past, and the figurative place of "*el monte*" (bush). Like in the case of Tomasito's divergence from the social script (discussed in Chapter Two), again here, the saying, "*se fue pa'l monte*", would be fitting. As Falola & Otero state, "religious narratives can be gendered through multiple narratives of traditionality that co-exist within the layered tapestry of *orisa* religious practice" (Otero and Falola 2013). Likewise, several gendered interpretations of this particular instance of "bush" behavior are available. I offer one of many driven by my own desire to see the possibility and potentiality of the use of black women's erotic autonomy here.

In the secular space of a state-owned theater, being possessed by a spirit is excess according to the modern ideology of the inherent separation between the sacred and the secular. To explain this transgression within sacred terms, one can follow the gendered assumptions that are assigned to people who are mounted by spirits. This is discussed by Aisha Beliso de Jesus in her ethnography on the effeminate male subject in Cuban Santeria (2013). In quoting a male research subject she writes "In Havana, they think that when the *santo* comes you are weak. That you cannot be a [real] man and be mounted" (Beliso-De Jesus 2013, 55) . Beliso de Jesus discusses how masculine gendered bodies are deemed "weak" when they are seen to be susceptible to being "ridden" by an orisha, especially orisha gendered as female, leading to suspicions about their sexuality. Thus, if it were a man's body that got mounted at the Cine Avenia, an entirely different level of discursive work would have been called for in order to perform respectability vis-a-vis investment in heteropatriarchal hegemony. The fact that it was a woman's body who was mounted fits within the gendered expectations for women, whose bodies are inherently weak and thus

easily penetrated. Heteropatriarchal logics within Cuban Santería make the homosexual female subject penetrated by female energy absent within religious discourse (Beliso-De Jesus 2013), therefore the mounting of someone socially gendered as a woman by a feminine orisha is seen in mother-daughter terms. So, in a sense, this act affirmed the social truth that women are the “weaker” sex, and likewise affirmed the religious “truth” that Yemaya is a “fierce mother” who aggressively summons her children, a testament to her gender. Therefore, while Tomasito’s “rupture” during the press conference assumed a notably queer valence (his own sexuality enabling his radical agency in the moment to be misread as an expression of emotional weakness), the assumption that women are naturally weaker than men and hence more susceptible to spirit possession naturalized the image of the barefoot woman in the aisle under the patriarchal logics that cut across both sacred and secular Cuban discourse.

On the other hand, the fact that this “weakness” explicitly ran against the way the ideal citizen-subject is supposed to obediently consume folklore spectacle from a sedentary and detached position made the act boldly political in a different key. Instead of assuming a masculinist oppositional stance against the state, she exhibited a recurring yearning orientation toward the *Iya* (mother) drum. Her performative embodiment of Yemaya-being made the sacred desire for sensual contact with the drum public. Her struggle against the security guard’s multiple attempts to keep her back in her rightful place, nonverbally spoke back against how black people are expected to relate to the sacred in the nation-state and to each other. Instead of policing each other to conform to the construct of idealized secular subjecthood bound by the state, the audience ritually reified that aspect of their own identity that is maintained through reciprocal exchange with orisha-spirit in their communities.

Hence, the performative Yemaya mounting disrupted the way the body-politic was being hailed to embody a raceless, secular, national self. In doing so, I interpret the

woman's mounting as an erotic disruption of the hetero-patriarchal gendering of political agency. Yvonne Daniel asserts that "the ideas of community and education for ritual participants are expressed most fully in Cuba within the sacred choreography of Yemayá—the caring force, the essence of nurturing, the source of existence, the salt water, the oceans" (Daniel 2005, 266). The forward moving convulsing woman in a grounded *tereminaminatere* stance was not the obedient bystander of masculine agency rehearsed in "Protesta Carabalí", nor was she the calm waters of the ocean, *Yemaya Asesu*. This is Yemaya in *omolode* rhythm, powerfully surfacing from the ocean's depths to splash against the shores, demanding her children, all those who yearn for her embrace, to come forward.

### **The Uses of the Yearning: Queering the Nation-State**

Yemaya's performative appearance in the aisle at the Cine Avenida comments on the very socio-economic policies of the revolution that brought that performance and that audience to that location. As part of the campaign to make high-culture accessible to the masses, the Revolutionary government seized the movie cinemas that once served Havana's elite and turned them into community theaters. Instead of showing the latest Hollywood movies imported from the U.S., many of the performance troupes sponsored by the National Council on Culture (later to become the Ministry of Culture) during the cultural revolution were assigned former cinemas to rehearse and perform for the community at subsidized rates. As discussed above, part of the campaign to make high-culture accessible to the masse was to oversee the secularization and control of popular culture. Cultural policies promptly changed art from being a commodity to a public good. However, since the 1990s, re-stratification along the lines of race and class re-segregated places of leisure (De la Fuente 2001). This is all to say that the audience that Yoruba Andabo attracted to the Cine Avenida was just as out of place in this predominately white

steadily bourgeois area as Yemaya herself. Yoruba Andabo's loyal "rumbero" audience racially marked the "updating" neighborhood, transforming it into a site of "*ambiente*". One can speculate that the theater's management was not prepared to receive *that* kind of audience at the entrance that night. The racialized transgression of the secular theater in a white neighborhood waged a rupture, a queering, of the nation-state.

Heterosexuality is privileged within the heteropatriarchal structure of Caribbean nation-states who depend on the economies of colonial desire (Alexander 2005). The libidinal structure of the Cuban nation-state is fundamentally based on heteronormative desire, resting on the trope of a transcultural relationship between people of Spanish and African descent to produce the idealized *mulato* subject (Ortiz 1991 [1940]). Within this libidinal economy the drive of a black population to love their own kind is figured as a vestige of the past, one that is bound for dissolution in the *ajiacó* ("stew", melting pot) of Cuban identity. Thus one could argue, that the affective economy of *rumbero* pride or black group identification in Cuba, in effect, queers the nationalized sexual project that underwrites the narrative of harmonious racelessness. In this hegemonic trope, black femininity is constructed to enable this fluid exchange. Black women are socialized to readily acquiesce to the national libidinal project and raise obedient (raceless, Cuban) creole children. The undeterred movement of the black barefoot woman down the aisle, called by her mother, reveals that other competing notions exist about what is supposed to transpire on the national stage and how black femininity is supposed to perform. "As Jaqui Alexander asserts in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, outspoken and anticolonial expressions of gender and sexuality in vernacular religious traditions are especially vexing to official religious and secular institutions" (Otero and Falola 2013, xix). Where racial difference is denied, the sacred performatively inscribes racial meaning onto public space, queering the

logic of nationalized sexualities<sup>139</sup>. The black body in movement to syncopated, ritually open rhythm, enunciates marginalized “counternarratives of colonial heteronormativities” (Beliso-De Jesus 2013).

We can imagine for a moment and speculate what would have happened to the theater, as a site where folkloric blackness is disseminated to the public, if Yemaya’s child would have successfully made it to the drum. If we accept Alexander’s premise that the territorialization of the sacred-secular has had epistemological implications which have shaped not only subject formation, but has also resulted in an institutionalized compartmentalization that directly inhibits transformative politics, what would the spirit-based epistemology embodied by the black barefoot woman in the aisle make legible about modernity’s totality? What if her erotics —that power of unused, unrecognized or unexpressed feeling (Lorde 1984)— could break through the physical barrier of the security guard’s arm?

Yemayá’s dance compels the community to take the shape of a circle, to then furrow down and spin up through circling spiral, and to reach spiritually for everyone and everything by encompassing or surrounding all Yemayá energy in the circle and allowing it to radiate outward...The rhythm and the dance leave an open space. In dancing “the triple” worshipping performers imprint in space, on the ground, and in the air, the indelible statement that life is ongoing, alternating between planes, binding beings together, embracing matter and encompassing energy...Suddenly there is a smack of the Iya drum and Yemayá is kicking—aligning her energy with Chango but simultaneously swishing and throwing her skirts outward in time with each smack. *Waro mio waro yeo; waro mio waro yeo, o mio Yemayá!* She ebbs and flows as she kicks and pulls, and then her shoulders are shuddering rapidly, vibrating intensively; she is backing away and drawing downward into the ocean again (Daniel 2005, 266).

The pedagogic implementation of the black dancing body in worship holds profound meaning here. Phenomenologically speaking, the body is the vantage point from which the

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<sup>139</sup> See Cuban counterpoint breakdown & nationalized sexualities discussion by Aisha Beliso de Jesus. (Beliso-De Jesus 2013)

world is understood, giving perspective to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 2002). Contrary to the way the founding thinkers of this philosophical trend in academia theorized, the way the body is raced, gendered, and sexualized, fundamentally influences the perspective from which consciousness is imbued. How *rumberas* and *rumberos* collectively move in racialized spaces —“*el ambiente*”— helps us to understand an active embodied counter-engagement with the world that privileges an alternative way of knowing and perceiving the terms of what can conceivably happen in the present. This counter-orientation within space provides important insight as to how collective physical, spiritual, and affective labor can be put to work in the “updated” political economy. What if this body-politic were already drawing downward for resources that lay in the bottom of the ocean, to achieve a sense of internal/kinesthetic balance, imperceptible from the shore?

On a personal level, I deeply regret not bringing my camera to Teatro Avenida that night. Since it wasn't in an area frequented by tourists, I was wary about filming with my camera and marking myself as foreign in a space where I could easily blend otherwise. It's a shame I didn't because I would have been positioned perfectly to document the entire scene from where I was seated in the balcony. At that point, I had seen Yoruba Andabo perform seemingly dozens of times in their nightclub venues, and nothing like this had occurred. So it really caught me off guard. I figured that a proscenium theater was the least likely environment for a happening of that nature, precisely because it was a formal state venue that was socially demarcated as secular. I, too, brought my own socially constructed perception of what was supposed to transpire there.

What lingers with me about that atypical night at the theatre, is that it shows a glimmer of practices of black self-making in the sacred sphere that continue to hold deep meaning for people despite the presumed totality of the nation-state project's reach. In

other words, its political potentiality lies not in that fact that this kind of rupture in secular space happens all of the time, but instead in the realization that this is still happening widely in spaces tucked away from the state's gaze. The potency lies in the fullness of these practices of erotic black self-making, with desire so overflowing that they have the ability to spill out and cross over without a warning.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

This is not the dissertation I wanted to write. In pursuing graduate studies in Anthropology, I developed an attraction to political maneuvers in forms that were legible to the academic audience I encountered. During coursework, I was animated by the texts I had read on social movements in Latin America and was frustrated by the omission of Cuba in their analysis (Escobar 2010). It was as if Cuba was somehow always elusive, just beyond the scope of critical engagement on the left in Latin America. The momentum of the Afrodescendant movement in the Latin America gave me hope for those who had been working against racism in Cuba for decades to achieve substantial gains. When I arrived in Havana the summer after the international meeting of Afrodescendant activists in Caracas, it seemed like things were finally opening up in civil society for discussions around racism on a larger scale. The *Instituto Cubano de Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello*, where I was affiliated as a guest researcher during fieldwork, had hosted an event about race in Cuba with high-profile African-Americans who were sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution<sup>140</sup> and other invited dignitaries. Although those Afro-Cubans I knew who attended commented that the event was “*una vitrina*” (a fabricated showcase), there was a sense amongst anti-racist activist intellectuals that real change was more possible now than ever before.

This dissertation was not the one I set out to write, but it became the one I had to write. My participation in a range of different forms of black political agency was pedagogical. It taught me about the performativity of black body-politics at corporal, affective, and social levels, the ideological repertoires they navigate and pull from, and the complex choreographies necessary to sustain their formations amidst intersecting

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<sup>140</sup> James Early (Director of the Center for Folklife Programs and Cultural Heritage, Smithsonian Institute), Danny Glover (actor and activist),

structures of power and processes of domination. Yoruba Andabo represented a literal escape of sorts for me, but also an homage to my divine right to well-being as a descendant of my ancestors—explicitly and unabashedly on those grounds. My ancestors, who died as chattel and were sacrificed in the founding of nation-states that continually diminish our lives, spiritually accompany me so that I may walk strengthened by the wisdom of shared lived experience. My physical accompaniment of the two black body-politics I discuss in my dissertation have lead me to draw the following conclusions with regard to the main four interlocking themes: racial belonging, the sacred, gender, and the libidinal economy of the nation-state. I begin with reflection upon the latter theme because it contextualizes my analysis of the other three.

I learned that Yoruba Andabo's practices of self-organization allowed them to maintain a critical distance from registers of civic life that fell under the scope of suspicion in which ARAC was trapped. Rather than representing a lack of political consciousness, Yoruba Andabo's practices of social memory and body socialization (Chapter Three), momentary essentialism and syncopation (Chapter Four), and performative transcendence and discursive mediation (Chapter Five) demonstrated a virtuosic sophisticated understanding of how power operates and how capital circulates in the Cuban nation-state. As the Cuban state aspires to control the commodification of blackness through centralizing profits made by black dancing bodies, self-organization around rumbero-black identity ensured undeterred collective forward motion. On the other hand, the terms of ARAC's collective progress was contingent upon its ability to recruit state legitimacy, posing an inherent conflict to the libidinal economy of the nation-state. ARAC's press conference was simply never aired.

By withholding footage of ARAC's press conference from the public, the practice of different constructions of desire and belief in different social orders remain insulated.

The omission of ARAC from the mass media during a historic campaign for national development endorses the ongoing reproduction of racial inequality within market socialism that ARAC opposes. Instead of disseminating proof of even constructive bottom-up critique, the state carefully curated a public spectacle on national television that reaffirmed its paternal benevolence. This shows that non-market oriented acts of independent collective action are not useful within a political economic project that privileges private business and personal consumption as new revolutionary mandates for public desire. When ARAC positioned the state as the target audience for their performance of autonomy, they inevitably limited their reach in ways that Yoruba Andabo circumvent by strategically performing to its base, even while simultaneously attentive to dominant ideologies of revolutionary respectability.

Given the economic and political constraints of a centralized racial state moving toward market socialism, afro-religious artists like Yoruba Andabo have determined how to most efficiently pursue the path of *ire*<sup>141</sup> by maximizing their sociopolitical and economic agency armed with the cultural resources and social capital they operationalize through their bodies. In this process, they have created spaces for forms of black collective agency sustained by autonomous religious networks to be publically felt. Whether in nightclubs, in theaters, or on national television they create potential openings for radically queering the libidinal economy of the nation-state.

In this dissertation, I have explored how black collective movements in Cuba are co-choreographed by a scripted economy and the particular political *mise en scène* conditioned by the current acceleration of economic reforms instituted to “update” the Revolution. I argue that this current moment in Cuban nation building cannot be

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<sup>141</sup> *Ire* in Regla de Ocha/Yoruba ritual language, translates as blessings/good fortune

understood outside the heteropatriarchal colonial imperative to procreate citizens to populate and re-produce a hegemonically defined racial nation-state (Goldberg, 2001). Therefore, the expressions of black collective agency at this moment in Cuban history must be considered in relation to the corporal, affective/libidinal, and social registers of that political project of modernity. Only then do we glean a clearer sense of the alternate political project they present even if no political intent is explicitly uttered in words.

The normative systems of sex and gender discipline the body to normalize the state apparatus, legitimate its authority, and mobilize collective desire in ways that maintain a hegemonic construction of social order. The libidinal economy of white racial hegemony recruits normative understandings of sex and gender to foster certain social formations and structures of power while inhibiting others. “[H]eterosexualization is at once necessary to the state’s ability to constitute and imagine itself and becomes, at the same time, a site of its own instability” (Alexander 2005, 23). Alexander’s analysis challenges us to consider how normative constructions of racialized gender function within the heterosexualizing imperative, both in the way citizen’s bodies are socially constructed as well as nation-states themselves. This disciplining of the body-politic entails a necessary disciplining of its animating libidinal force, including a narrowing of the terms of expression of that desire amongst the populous.

I argue that the Cuban state’s investment in the normalization of interracial libidinal desire expressed through raceless belonging is mirrored in the way political desires are rationalized by its institutions. In contemporary Cuba, for example, the processes of the state move black descendants of common perceived ancestors away from desiring for each other’s company in determining their collective futures according to their own collective wisdom. This yearning becomes grounds for negrophobia, political dissidence, and national treason. The reactionary feelings of paranoia, guilt, and shame around that “queer”

desire for one's own reinforce the legitimacy of a nation-state that enables the libidinal economy of anti-black racism sedimented during colonialism and racial slavery. Understood in this way, the stakes for dismantling white heteropatriarchy become inseparable from to the struggle for radical black liberation.

As the Cuban state holds up "*amor por la patria* (love of fatherland)" as sacrosanct in this moment (as in previous moments) of national development, the performances of self-organization exhibited by my research subjects perform citizenship akimbo. Just as I was aware of the repertoire of pre-established signs within which my behavior would be interpreted under state surveillance, Yoruba Andabo and ARAC rehearse alternate forms of collective organization alongside the terms of viability that that the neocolonial project entails. They enunciate a transgressive embodiment of affirmative racial identity and black agency, reinvesting in social bonds and forms of identification that should ostensibly no longer hold import in a presumed racially exceptional patria. However, the extent to which their performances give continuity to dominant forms of gender oppression in their rehearsal of black masculinity, warrants further research if positioning these performances as prefiguring a more just horizon of social order and collective well-being.

Rather than reproduce facile notions of a singular, monolithic black body-politic, a performance lens allows us to appreciate the range of political practices and subjectivities constructed by black collectivities in the doing. My research demonstrates that these different black body-politics move under the same constellation of pressures differently, oriented by their particular social memory of struggle against white hegemony. Observing difference in simultaneity, using counterpoint, allows other questions and answers to emerge, such as: Why aren't ARAC and Yoruba Andabo dancing together? When one is attentive to both the form and content of each group's movements, one is able to make clearer inferences about the feasibly (or not) of the pairing.

I found that there was little room in the conventional political registers for ARAC to pursue the kinds of economic strategies that Yoruba Andabo carry out with technical grace outside of it. Likewise, Yoruba Andabo has too much to lose to make demands of government institutions, like ARAC so bravely does (whether those bold assertions are ever known by the general public or not). Nonetheless, the moments of seemingly fleeting resonance between these seemingly disparate formations create important echoes pointing toward “choreographic unity”.

My ethnography supports that the Cuban nation-state formation institutionalized a particular scenario for black autonomy that precludes the viability of black group identities that explicitly profess joint cultural and political projects. Therefore, although both groups have fashioned practices of semi-autonomy from the state logics (i.e. ARAC refusing to legally enlist as an association and Yoruba Andabo members capitalizing on their caché in sacred markets) groups like Yoruba Andabo and ARAC are unlikely to ever move together. Like their predecessors, Yoruba Andabo and ARAC continue to place their bets on their disidentification from one another, while trying to maximize their autonomy in different spheres of political action.

However, a performance lens makes visible forms of active transgression between the neat categories they may discursively uphold. Despite both group’s performatic strategies of concealment and accommodation, they remain a perpetual threat to the nation-state due to blackness’ inability to be completely absorbed into the body politic of the nation. As part of the same choreographic unity, both their destinies are joined by the vestige of the anti-blackness within Cuban nationalism consolidating these two different political communities under the logic of racelessness/racial fraternity. Although they may never meet, Yoruba Andabo members never attending ARAC events and vice versa, their performances are yoked by something larger than the sum of their parts: the inherent anti-

blackness of the modern nation-state. This shared experience of resisting anti-blackness constitutes their shared “black” subjectivity vis-à-vis the state. The performances of autonomy of each group are thus necessarily in continual conversation, part of the same choreographic unity of black-self making. I reiterate: Observing their difference in simultaneity helps us to decipher the contours of the political economic scenario for black self-making in Havana at this particular moment in history.

I will now more pointedly address how ARAC and YA resonate with each other in terms of the interlocking themes of racial belonging, gender, and the sacred within the choreographic unity of black self-making I have laid out. This analytical framework as led me to three key findings pertaining to each of the aforementioned themes: Firstly (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three), negotiating black belonging in public space requires a choreography of signification that produce multiple valences simultaneously. Black performances of autonomy must tend to the dominant narratives of national identity, yet in doing so they take advantage of the elasticity (or fullness) of collectively shared signs to strengthen the social memory of racial subjectivities traced to prior practices of black collectivity understood as political kin. Secondly, these expressions of collective agency are intrinsically in dialogue with the sacred, whether through disidentification or direct engagement, as an economic, ideological, or socio-spiritual resource. As described in Chapter Four, economic, ideological and socio-spiritual engagement with the sacred ruptures the western secular episteme and creates pragmatic rifts in the market-oriented design of exchange and resource distribution. Thirdly, throughout the dissertation I’ve noted how, the particular performances analyzed mutually reinforce a certain social construction of black masculinity characterized by righteous insubordination that is salient in this current moment in history when new idealized masculinity is being oriented toward actualization in neoliberal notions of entrepreneurial achievement.

These conclusions suggest that Yoruba Andabo and ARAC's movements may counter hegemony along lines of race, yet are not fully liberatory on those grounds alone. The way black femininity is scripted relationally to masculinity is an ongoing site of internal conflict directly related to the intelligibility of these groups along the patriarchal nationalist logics within which they forge black identity. The valorization of the male political actor within both groups permits them to more decisively challenge some aspects of the national political economic project while simultaneously reproducing others, enabling the reproduction of hegemonic ideals of macho leadership internally. Yet these collective formations do not foreclose critical movements of agency that challenge the contours of their political horizon. Rather, they create space for other rehearsals of black political becoming — exemplified by Tomasito's radically queer candor and the barefoot woman's unwavering erotic advance to the stage— reified with every reiteration.

The fact that these black political imaginaries aren't totally bound by the logics of nation-state warrants final emphasis. These Afro-Cuban movements enact an inherent critique of the present libidinal economy of nation-building, although through different means and in different political spheres. The libidinal economy of the nation-state, explained another way, is about the valuation of people's desires, fantasies, and phobias, fears, repulsions and where those emotions will be oriented toward as citizen-subjects (Wilderson 2010). If the state is an apparatus that directs the exchange of affection and aversions within the polity, with the aim of reproducing its own monopoly of power, then these performances rehearse radical queer libidinal arrangements where black collectivity —*feeling for* one's own— is put at the center. Whether committed to gaining a "fair share" of the formal political arena or sustaining corporate ethno-religious community projects, both forms of black agency I address in this dissertation embody desires for justice that challenge what the nation-state, as an apparatus of white heteropatriarchy, is meant to

maintain. These critical movements of syncopation between collective self-making and nation-building, the sacred and the secular, and the discursive and the embodied animate black movements for a more desirable present. These movements transmit ideas about race, gender, the nation, and politics, and produce them. A performance lens helps us to make these processes visible, training our eyes to perceive when a rupture occurs and new ideas gain materiality through the body.

This interdisciplinary theoretic is key for understanding how political economy, secular liberalism, racism, and heteropatriarchy intersect to structure experiences of embodiment and co-direct the performativity of a subjects' course of action. I insist that a more robust intersectional understanding is gained when we recognize that social actors are not just racialized bodies, but are bodies that occupy a certain racialized gender. The social actors I look at imbue particular racialized-gendered meanings that play an important role in the meaning-making paradigm of the scenario where black collective action takes place. Thus not only race, but gender, is pronounced performatively by black people themselves during these performances of autonomy.

Looking at these ways in which racialized gendered bodies pursue coordinated movement toward more desirable futures brings to light alternative “genealogies of resistance” that are occluded within modernity’s secularized episteme. Taking spiritual labor seriously, acknowledging sacred epistemes, widens the existing repertoire of political action to reveal other ways of making the world intelligible which might point toward a different horizon in the black political imagination beyond that which the (colonial) nation-state could provide. Exploring this has larger implications for making visible the political lives that are often rendered apolitical by the white masculinist euro-western conception of Politics within the nation-state apparatus. I follow black feminist’s critiques of traditional geography (McKittrick 2006) to argue that political science, too, is founded upon a

singular, white, patriarchal, eurocentric, heterosexual, classed vantage point that would have us believe that the world “just is” stable and that all political action must be negotiated under predetermined terms of engagement within the nation-state. Our academic conception of “the polis” conceals other histories and ways of exercising agency and organizing the social.

M. Jaqui Alexander’s sacred theoretics helps me to assert that the sacred episteme is interlaced with a different sense of politics that can be useful for “re-membering” a more liberatory subjectivity as we struggle for social justice under white heteropatriarchal domination. Performance theory precisely allows us to more closely apprehend the embodied technology that the sacred employs to bring these concepts into materiality. The sacred opens an alternate understanding of space, history, time, and human relation that is transmitted through a socialization of a corporeal body to forge body-politics that strive to ensure dignified collective living. To center accountability to one’s ancestors as an orienting principle of the sacred is to wage a transtemporal political critique of the present as that which should continually strive to break free from the past. This sense of linear temporality tied to a notion of progress undergirds formulations for national development. These international development models promise progression from a so-called primitivism toward a hegemonically defined condition of growth that can only be mediated by strong nation-states that trade in their citizenry’s desire. In other words, within the Family of Nations, individual nation-states are granted prestige and power in as much as they can perform according to hegemonic standards of political economic modernity that favors the exchange of particular libidinal currencies.

“Crossing” the secular/sacred episteme, in itself, is a pedagogical tool for discovering new ways of being in our bodies and new ways of being/doing/knowing/feeling beyond the hegemonic terms of the nation-state. In the case

of Cuba, the autonomy allowed for religious practice has formed a creative opening for black struggle in the sacred register. By taking the sacred seriously, we can signal alternative patterns/movements/scenarios that work alongside traditional plots/scripts/narratives, and make visible new or unacknowledged modes of political subjectivity and struggle. We can acknowledge that which moves in “the crevices of power” (McKittrick, citing Jenny Sharpe), that signal different practices of political machination and different potential futures. The question for black self-making then becomes, how to metaphorically “come down from the mountain” (so to speak) on one’s own terms with *ire*? Maybe it entails a descent into the depths of the ocean, unperceivable by the shore.

In as much as the ethnographic evidence demonstrates that collectives are drawing from knowledge about how their political ancestors’ performed on the national stage during Cuba’s formation, it supports my overarching proposition that black body politics in the present day are actively reflecting upon the period of nation-building at the turn of the century, and with good reason. Cuba’s current process of national (re)formation is also marked by the specter of foreign (U.S) invasion, both solicited (via tourism) and unsolicited (via political influence). Since the planned layoff of 500,000 people from the public sector in 2010, during my field research I witnessed a gradual decrease of items on the *libreta* (government ration card) or available in the bodegas (store that distributes rations). When I left the field, Havana was buzzing about the new opportunities for upward mobility in the expanding formal private market. Now, as I finish writing-up, the buzz resounds from both sides of the Florida strait.

I am writing this final section exactly one year from “D-17”, the now historic, simultaneously televised announcement made by U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban

President Raul Castro on December 17, 2014. The broadcasts officially proclaimed the opening of negotiations to normalize foreign relations between their countries after over 50 years of trade embargo. The fact that the two governments' decided to use the choreographic device of counterpoint to address their respective body-politics is loaded with significance. Counterpoint beckons us to see their respective movements within the same field of view as a choreographic unit. This analytical approach allows us to see the leaders as engaged in a complex political duet that directly speak to the same issues of race, gender, the sacred, and the libidinal economy of the nation-state I have described. Although located in different geographic places on the stage, these racialized national leaders are engaged in a shared patriarchal performance for an audience that both includes and surpasses their respective citizenries alone. The nuances of what meanings were transmitted in their staged virtuosic display exceeds the parameters of this dissertation. For now, it will have to suffice to say that this renewed duet between these two geopolitical states is spurring the transmission of political economic wisdom expressed in the way differently racialized subjects remember who they are in time and space.

If we think of performance as more than just framed virtuosic displays, but as practices that entail "acts of transmission" (Roach 1996), then it follows that acts of transmission by racialized-as-black bodies are inseparable from global systems of material, social and political inequality linked to the exploitation of African peoples and their descendants as commodities. Global markets, the coerced movement and exchange of commodities for capital, have guided black movement(s) and framed black being in the Americas. Therefore, moments of black cultural transfer are always charged with that history and either implicitly or explicitly are products of the limits of black representation/subjectivity in modernity. My dissertation stresses the ways in which these acts of transmission entail "histories, names and places of black pain, language and

opposition which are spoken with the whole body and present to the world other geography, other rhythms, other times, other spaces.”<sup>142</sup> These acts of transmission are important sites for knowledge production that can critically intervene on the current governmentality of desire that today pushes citizen-subjects to invest in an economy of nostalgic anticipation for a “normalized” relationship between these two neighboring nation-states, in ways that constrain our imagination of other desirable futures.

Ultimately, I aim to contribute to conversations about what political imaginaries are re/produced and transmitted through racialized-as-black bodies in collective movement. In dialogue with contemporary literature on race politics and self-making in revolutionary Cuba (Allen 2011, De la Fuente 2001, De la Fuente 2012, Perry 2004, Saunders 2015, Sawyer 2005), my goal was to critically assess what “resistance” and “agency” looks like for black folks in Cuba’s particular contemporary context. This entailed an ethnographic investigation of different gestures, genres, venues, and audiences in contemporary Cuba. My study makes the case for black self-organization as having multiple modalities that correlate to particular metrics of politics and corresponding limits on their reach and agency. The serious consequence of cultural politics is made clearer when considering how sacred epistemes are articulated through performance. The different choreographies converge revealing the dynamic contours of the present “updating” stage for black self-making in Cuba today as it re-opens for business.

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<sup>142</sup> McKittrick (2006) citing Merlene Nurbese Philip, xvii.

## Appendix

Song: “Protesta Carabali”

Album: El Callejón de los Rumberos (2003)

Artists: Yoruba Andabo’s CD

Composer: Reinaldo Brito.

These lyrics were adapted from the Cancionero Rumbero blog, <http://cancionerorumbero.blogspot.com/>.<sup>143</sup> I have modified them where needed to reflect the version I saw performed during my fieldwork.

[diana]

Me voy a profundizar

[diana]

Me voy a profundizar

En las luchas de Cuba

[diana]

Para que las aprendan a respetar

[diana ]

La Demajagua en el ‘68

La independencia en el ‘95

[diana]

Con el triunfo del ‘59

Tres etapas, una sola misión

[diana]

Tres etapas, una sola misión

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<sup>143</sup> Blog by [guarachon63@gmail.com](mailto:guarachon63@gmail.com). Psted on 6.14.2008.

Así debemos ser  
Todos los pueblos sufridos  
[diana]  
Honestos,  
[diana]  
rebeldes,  
[diana]  
*guerrilleros... [rhythmic transition]*  
[lead Singer changes to Chan:]  
Ya-yooooo!  
'68, '68  
En el 1816 a 42  
Al terminar su carrera  
de abogado cruzó a España  
Un hombre  
De grandes conocimientos  
y de un trato afable  
“El Caudillo Bayamés”  
Cuando Martínez Cármos  
y otros generales españoles  
La Demajagua sonó  
Carlos Manuel de Cespedes  
sus esclavos liberó  
Les dijo: “¡vamo' a luchar!”  
Ese hecho...  
Consituyó una gran epopeya  
para los tiempos modernos  
El grito dado  
Por el Caudillo Bayamés

¿ Ese hecho como se llamó ?, a...

*Coro: ¿ Ese hecho como se llamó ?, a*

*¿ Ese hecho como se llamó ?, a, o-o-yo, o-yo...*

Solista: Ese hecho se llamó "El grito de Yara"

*Coro: Ese hecho se llamó*

*El grito de Yara,*

*ese hecho se llamó*

*O ya yo, o ya yo,*

*ese hecho se llamó*

Solista: Jeyei, jeyei, jeyi, jeyei, jeyei Moruá

[allí na'ma- Regla]

Asukurú kwa ntiyén eriero

akota cho endiwó Mosongó mofe

Ebión ero kita uyo mañongo úmpabio

Antrókofo komo kwa irén

Itá ibá ero ibá, akosí ibá, ¡ i ba rió-o !

*Coro: Ya yo e e e, ya yo ma, e... (bis)*

*A wa bero kanagua Moruá*

*a wa emboribó Iyambá...*

*Ya yo e e e, ya yo ma, e...*

{*Montuno*}

Marcha: Jeyei, teté úmpa irán takuá la kó ndondó

Takuá la kó ndó ndó-o, takuá la kó ndó ndó

*Coro: Teté úmpa irán, chakuá la kó ndó ndó*

Solista: Takuá la kó ndó ndó-o, chakuá la kó ndó ndó

*Coro: Teté úmpa irán, chakuá la kó ndó ndó*

Solista: Ireme Eribángandó-o, chakuá la kó ndó ndó

*Coro: Teté úmpa irán, chakuá la kó ndó ndó*

Solista: E, afiárufié, afiároro, chakuá la kó ndó ndó

*Coro: Teté úmpa irán, chakuá la kó ndó ndó*  
Solista: Ireme Eribángandó, chakuara kó ndó ndó  
*Coro: Teté úmpa irán, chakuá la kó ndó ndó*  
Solista: I e-e, ñangarike úmpa irán, ko fimeremo  
Ñangarike úmpa irá-an, ko-o fimeremo  
*Coro: Ñangarike úmpa irán, o fimeremo*  
Solista: O-o, ñangarike úmpa irán, o fimeremo  
*Coro: Ñangarike úmpa irán, o fimeremo*  
Solista: Irem’o ya ko ndó meta, ya fimeremo  
*Coro: Ñangarike úmpa irán, o fimeremo*  
Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma e, o fimeremo  
*Coro: Ñangarike úmpa irán, o fimeremo*  
Solista: Jeyei, jeye munanguere, e ye munanguere  
Abasí lo dika ma ya yo, e ye munanguere-re  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma e, jeye munanguere-ye  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma o e, jeye munanguere-re  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ireme eribangando Moruá ya yo e ye munanguere  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma e, jeye munanguere-ye  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ireme ta ría i bonkó, jeye munanguere ye  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ya yo, Ékue Enkoboro, jeye munanguere-ye  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*  
Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma e, jeye munanguere-re  
*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*

Solista: Jeye, Ireme Eribangando ya yo, jeye munanguere

*Coro: Jeye, muñanguere, jeye, muñanguere*

Solista: I e, Ékue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bonkó

Ékue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bonkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: E, Ékue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bonkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: É-kue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bonkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: E, Ékue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bo-onkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: Chichi-ina, ina-ina-ina, Ékue taria i bo-onkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: Ireme a bongó meta, Ékue ta ria i bonkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: Ya yo, ya yo ma e, Ékue taria i bonkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

Solista: E, Ékue taria i bonkó, Ékue taria i bo-onkó

*Coro: Ékue taria bonkó, Ékue taria bonkó*

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## Vita

Maya Berry is a third-generation Afro-Cuban-American and an artist-scholar. She fulfilled high school at the American School of Paris in France and the United Nations International School in NYC while training as a ballet and modern dancer in both countries. She earned her Bachelor's Degree at the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at New York University in 2006 with honors. Maya danced professionally in modern, jazz, and contemporary companies in NYC, before turning to graduate studies. Her professional dance training includes Dance Theater of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She began her formal study of Afro-Cuban dance forms in 2004, training extensively in Cuba, Miami, and NYC. In NYC she was a member of *Areytos*, a Bronx-based Afro-Caribbean dance-theatre company, dedicated community-based multi-disciplinary productions. After working as Director of Education & Outreach at a Brooklyn, NY-based dance non-profit organization, she entered the Master's degree program in Performance Studies at New York University. After graduation in 2009 with honors, she travelled to Peru to participate in the Workshop for Cultural and Social Leadership Training for Afro-Peruvian Youth hosted by *El Museo Afroperuano de Zaña*, and worked as a Research Assistant to the Fellows at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Studies. In 2010, she entered the doctoral program in Social Anthropology (Diaspora Program) at the University of Texas at Austin. She was awarded the Ford Foundation Pre-doctoral Fellowship for graduate training in 2011, and the Zora Neale Hurston Travel Award by the Association for Feminist Anthropology in 2015. She currently teaches Afro-Cuban dance at the City of Austin's African American Cultural & Heritage Center. In the Fall, she will begin as Postdoctoral Associate at Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music.

Permanent email address: [maya.berry@utexas.edu](mailto:maya.berry@utexas.edu)

This dissertation was typed by the author.