**Copyright**

**by**

**Marc David Perry**

**2004**

This Dissertation Committee for Marc David Perry certifies this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**LOS RAPEROS:**

**RAP, RACE, AND SOCIAL**

**TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA**

Committee:

_____
Edmund T. Gordon, supervisor

_____
Charles R. Hale

_____
Joao Costa Vargas

_____
Jafari Sinclaire Allen

_____
S. Craig Watkins

# LOS RAPEROS:

# RAP, RACE, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

# IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA

**by**

**Marc David Perry, B.A., M.A.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

The University of Texas at Austin

December 2004

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents

Morton Orville Perry and Margie Francis Ribner Perry

who have given me so much.

**Acknowledgements**

There are numerous people whom have contributed to this project in various capacities, and I am indebted to them all for their support and input over the years. First and foremost, this dissertation could never have materialized if it were not for the support and involvement of a number of key individuals in Havana. In keeping, I want to first thank Magia López, Alexei Rodríguez and their families for opening up their lives and bringing me into the fold of the hip hop community in Havana. My project would be nowhere without their involvement and embracing friendship. I also would like to thank Ariel Hernandez and Pablo Herrera whose engagements, though challenging at times, were important in shaping my insights into the hip hop movement and its role within contemporary Cuban society. I also owe gratitude to Sekuo and Kokino of Anónimo Consejo, the women of Las Krudas, Hermanos de Causa, Los Pizanos, Michael of EPG&B, DJ Alexis and the whole "diez y diecinueve" posse whose work, artistry, and struggles continue to be a tremendous inspiration for me. Other Havana folks who I owe gratefulness to are Tomás Fernández Robaina, Roberto Zurbano, Gisela Arandia, Yesenia Selier Crespo, and Rogelio Martínez Furé, as well as Nehanda Abiodun, Elvira Rodriguez, Rita, and Joseph Mutti. Much thanks to Delbis Gomez and family for their caring and love. In Santiago de Cuba (el orto lado), appreciations to the hip hop crusaders at Ateneo Cultural Antonio Bravo Corrioso, brother Antonio, and Neño whose guidance continues.

I additionally need to give thanks to my dissertation committee, in particular Ted Gordon, Charlie Hale, and later João Costa Vargas for their teachings and patience over the years. I would also like to thank Aline Helg for her enthusiastic and longstanding support for my project, as well as my field compatriots of Jarfari Allen, Rosanne Adderley, and Karen Morrison. And a great amount of thanks to Gilbert Rosas, Lynne Selby, Eve Dunbar, Ina Pavlova, Bob Fernea, Novian Whitsitt, and Baye Adofo Willson for their feedback and plain old support during the long writing process. Finally I would like to thank my family, in particular my aunt Susan Ribner, for their continued support and faith in me.

**LOS RAPEROS:**

**RAP, RACE, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

**IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA**

Publication No. _____

Marc David Perry, Ph.D
The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

Supervisor: Edmund T. Gordon

This dissertation explores the emergent *movimiento de hip hop cubano* (the Cuban hip hop movement) as a critical site to examine the interplay of race and social transformation in contemporary Cuba. Following Cuba's post-1990 economic crisis know as the "special period," the ethnographic investigation centers on the ways young Afro-Cubans are utilizing the expressive cultural space of rap music and broader hip hop "culture" to performatively fashion new kinds of transnationally engaged black identity and related race-based social critique. The author suggest that through such transnationally informed identity processes a new generation of Afro-Cuban youth are positioning themselves in strategic response to the shifting dynamics of race and class in a socialist Cuba increasingly shaped by the interpenetration of global capital and related free-market transformations. In a post-"utopian" Cuba characterized by economic dollarization, expanding tourism, rising social stratification, and – significantly – resurgent levels of racial inequality, the author's analysis seeks to understand how these

emergent subjectivities and the social critiques they invoke pose challenges to, as well as contribute to a current reconfiguring of nationally-bounded constructions of race and corresponding ideologies of national non-racialism. He additionally draws attention to the evolving negotiated relationship between Cuban hip hop as a new, potentially oppositional identity-based social phenomenon, and the Cuban state as it attempts to institutionalize hip hop within a prescriptive, socially homogenizing frame of revolutionary national culture. In turn, Cuban rap has come to occupy a unique site of racially-positioned critique within revolutionary Cuba, serving as a key actor in an evolving black public sphere predicated on the assertion of black political difference within a previously configured non-racial Cuban national imaginary. The author proposes that Cuban hip hop in this capacity represents a critical manifestation of, as well as an active social agent within the shifting transnational complexities of national racial formation in Cuba today.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Introduction

On a hot August night in an open-air theater in Alamar – a municipality just east of Havana comprised of a vast array of high-rise apartment complexes – an 18 year-old rap MC by the name of Papa Humbertico walked on stage followed by two others holding a rolled bed sheet. Before a packed audience of some three thousand overwhelming darker-skinned youth who came out for the first night of the 8th annual Cuban hip hop festival, the bed sheet was unfettered to expose in large bock letters "Denuncia Social" – or "Social Denunciation." The MC asked the crowd if they knew the meaning of the expression before lapsing into a series of songs rapped in a fluid Cuban cadence over hard-edged hip hop beats. His lyrics vividly recounted the daily lives and struggles of people in his working-class, predominately black barrio of Guanabacoa, touching on themes of poverty, crime, imprisonment and prostitution. A sea of hands could be seen waving in the air as the crowd sounded off in energetic agreement whenever the MCs' narrative hit a particularly salient cord. Collective energies peeked as Papa Humbertico riffed critically about Cuban police and their frequent harassment of black youth. "Police, police, you are not my friend; For Cuban youth, you are the worst nightmare... *You* are the delinquent...," the MC exclaimed amidst a ring of cat calls.

The directness of Papa Humbertico's challenge caught many present by surprise, particularly members of La Asociación Hermano Siaz, the state-run cultural institution for youth and the central organizer of that year's festival. Some of the U.S.-based press

at the festival ran with the story, filing articles claiming Cuban rap as a new vanguard of anti-government protest in socialist Cuba. Such claims, in turn, were quickly seized upon by Miami's right-wing Cuban American community as new fodder in their obsessive battle with Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution. Many Cuban rap artists, including Papa Humbertico, however, felt that the U.S. press had distorted and manipulated his words in painting him and other artists whom performed at the festival as *contra-revolucionarios*, or anti-revolutionaries; that Cuban rap in this way had been swept up in the 40 year-old transnational power-play between Cuba and the United States.

While Cuba's evolving hip hop movement is certainly rooted in a nexus of national and transnational interarticulations of history, power, and culture, the complexities of its relationship to the Cuban state, the Cuban Revolution, and the Cuban "nation" itself is radically more dynamic and nuanced than such representations could possible suggest. In my understanding, Cuban hip hop has emerged as an organic social phenomenon of a particular historical moment; one characterized, above all, by rapid social transformation as Cuba negotiates between a socialist past and an ever-advancing capitalist informed present. My suggestion is that Cuban hip hop represents both a critical manifestation of a transformative Cuba, while simultaneously operating as a key social actor within such transformation processes themselves.

This dissertation examines the social contours of the self-defined *el movimiento de hip hop cubano* – the Cuban hip hop movement – as they relate to the critical interplay of race and social transformation following Cuba's post-Soviet economic crisis of the 1990s known as the "Special Period." I am particularly interested in the ways in which

young self-identified black Cubans, who comprise the vast majority of raperos/as (rap artists) and their followers, are utilizing the expressive cultural space of rap music and associated hip hop culture to fashion new kinds of transnationally-engaged black identities and related social critiques. Through such identity processes, I contend, a new generation of black and darker-skinned Cubans are positioning themselves in strategic response to the shifting dynamics of race and class within a socialist Cuba that is increasingly shaped by the island's recent insertion into contemporary transnational networks of neoliberal capital. In a post-"utopian" Cuba characterized by economic dollarization, expanding tourism, rising social stratification, and – significantly – resurgent levels of racial inequality, I seek to understand how these emergent subjectivities and the social critiques they invoke pose challenges to, as well as contribute to a current reconfiguring of nationally-bounded constructions of race and corresponding ideologies of national non-racialism.

My analysis additionally draws attention to the evolving negotiated relationship between Cuban hip hop as a new, potentially oppositional identity-based social phenomenon, and the Cuban state as it attempts to institutionalize hip hop within a prescriptive, socially homogenizing frame of revolutionary national culture. In turn, Cuban hip hop has come to occupy an important site of racially-positioned critique within revolutionary Cuba today. In doing so, I hold, the Cuban hip hop movement has assumed a key role within an evolving black public sphere predicated on the assertion of black political difference within a previously configured non-racial Cuban national imaginary.

In framing my above analysis I ultimately seek to illuminate the dialectical play between new structures and processes of racialization, and emergent kinds of race-based social agency as they contemporarily take form within the changing frameworks of global late capitalism. Drawing on Michael Omi and Howard Winant's "racial formation" model, I suggest that the interface of new frames of racialization and evolving race-based social strategies of blackness – of which Cuban hip hop represents one manifestation – are part and parcel of a shifting national paradigm of racial formation in the making in present-day Cuba (Omi and Winant 1986).

At the core of my inquiry is an investigation into the political character and potential of black identity production as a basis for a politics of social action. Here I recognize the extent to which processes of racial subject making often involve strategic acts of self-position, or what Stuart Hall has referred to as "practices of self-constitution." (Stuart Hall 1996). Such efforts are by no means openly contingent but are rather always and already informed and constrained by historically prescriptive fields of racialized power as they are lived in the material everyday. What I am most concerned with, however, is the ways in which critically positioned identities of blackness are forged and how they can be mobilized towards liberatory-directed kinds of politics.

Within the context of Cuban hip hop, my attention is focused on the processes by which such identities are constituted at the intersection of national and transnational or "diasporic" constructions of blackness. Here, I am interested in moving beyond a notion of the African Diaspora as a conceptual tool to categorize historically displaced peoples of African descent. I venture rather, along with others, to examine the politically laden

processes by which the African, or possibly more appropriate, Black Diaspora, is constituted as a lived social reality through the making of transnational forms of black identification, cultural production, and related social mobilizations. (Gilroy 1993a; Lemelle and Kelley 1994; Gordon and Anderson 1999; Costa Vargas 2003). I am interested therefore in diaspora as a political space; one that enables certain kinds of identity-based social praxis. Among black-identified youth involved in the Cuba's hip hop movement, I contend that diaspora operates instrumentally in this way as a key paradigm of both identity and politics.

In mapping the black identity politics at play within Cuban hip hop, I examine the multiple ways in which such practices contest dominant racial constructions within a framework of antiracist advocacy and struggle. My treatment, moreover, underscores the role of performance in the forging and mobilization of rapero/a identities, and the differing ways such performative makings are gendered in their articulation of new, critically positioned black Cuban subjectivities. I suggest that Cuban hip hop in this capacity operates as a site of critical black self-making through the ways in which such black subjectivities are strategically fashioned and politically deployed. Beyond the immediate context of their making, however, raperos/as are actively engaged in efforts to transform contemporary and historical frames of racialized power. As such, these young people need to be seen as active social agents, rather than passive consumable objects of historical processes.

Briefly, who are these raperos/as? As I will describe in much greater detail in Chapters 4 through 6, the raperos/as of whom I speak are among a new generation of

black and darker-skinned youth who are coming to age at a moment of significant socioeconomic transformation and flux. The majority of these youth are drawn from working-class or poorer families from urban centers across Cuba, comprising an often cited estimated 500 rap groups island-wide. My research, however, focuses on raperos/as in Havana whom represent by far the largest and most cohesively self-identified and organized hip hop community on the island. Many of these individuals I will be introducing represent the avant-garde of the Cuban hip hop movement whose work and personal histories greatly reflect the complexities and the ideals advanced and fought for by the movement as a whole. Though raperos/as themselves may range in age from early teens to one particular case well into his forties, the actors with whom I will be dealing fall generally between the ages of early twenties to mid-thirties.

Regarding methodology, I spent a rough total of twenty months conducting field research in Cuba between 1999 and 2003. This period was comprised of multiple trips to the island due in large part to an inability to secure sufficient sources of research funding that would have enabled me to spend longer periods in Cuba. As a resultant side-effect of the forty year-old U.S. economic blockade that has been inflicted on Cuba and its people, there is a very limited rage of U.S.-based funding sources for academic research on the island. This reality necessitated my frequent back-and-forth movement between Cuba and the U.S. in order periodically rebuild my finances through various piecemeal means. While on the whole this extended considerably the total time necessary to conduct thorough ethnographic research, the four-years of contact with the Cuban hip

hop movement provided me something of a longitudinal perspective on the evolving charter of the phenomenon, its actors, and its changing relationship with the Cuban state.

While in Cuba, I lived in and based my research out of the largely black, working-class *barrio* of Cayo Hueso, home to a few key individuals in the hip hop movement. This densely populated neighborhood in central Havana is often associated with its numerous *solares* – the large formally private homes converted into multi-family units occupied communally by predominantly black working-class and poor families. As a something of a Cuban social institution, *solares* have become a poignant symbol of black urban life and culture in Havana. The development of *rumba* as the archetypal musical expression of a "traditional" Afro-Cuban urbanity,[1] for one, finds contemporary roots in the *solares*. As poor black urban spaces, however, *solares* are commonly associated – often through racially-coded discourses of *marginalidad* – with prostitution, drugs, and criminal activity. By centering my research out of Cayo Hueso, I ethnographically grounded my investigation of Cuban hip hop within the material realities of today's black "inner-city" experience in Havana. Though participant observation in this community, I engaged local raperos/as and their families amidst their daily negotiations of an increasingly dollarized Cuban society in order to illuminate the everyday lived social consequences of race in Cuba today.

Such an ethnographic undertaking, moreover, was significantly informed by and predicated upon my own racialized subject position. That is to say, that on one level my

[1] Famed *congero* Chano Pozo was born and raised in one of Cayo Hueso's renowned *solares* reportedly named *África*. In historical relation to *rumba*, the work of contemporary raperos/as in these very same communities might be likened to the production of a "modern" Afro-Cuban urbanity.

personal experience as an African American navigating the streets of Havana where I am commonly read as a black or *mulato* Cuban greatly informed the ethnographic depth of my exploration into the contemporary ways in which race is lived in Cuba today. During periods my at time daily experience of being stopped by Cuban police and asked for my *carnet identidad*, or national identification card, exposed me to a key quotidian social consequence of being black, male, and young within the context of Cuba's new racially-charged and policed social landscape. My inability to enter a tourist hotel without being challenged by a male security staff is yet another example of my own racialization within the logics of Cuba's new dollarized economy. Yet at the same time I recognized that if I presented to the questioning police officer the tattered photocopy of my U.S. passport that I had become conditioned to always carry, or spoke English to the security guard at the hotel I would be allowed to pass on without further consequence. In the latter case I would then be free to indulge in a the hotel's privileged dollar-zone otherwise restricted to Cubans. Thus, though I was black I clearly remained one of privilege relative to my black Cuban friends and associates.

At the same time, however, my black racial positionality nonetheless served an instrumental site of engagement with my black Cuban peers where blackness, through both its sameness and difference, became an initiating space of dialogue. I speak here of "black" peers in reference to those individuals within the Cuban hip hop movement who politically self-identity as black regardless of how they might be externally labeled within Cuba's graduated racial classification system. Such political identifications of blackness, particularly as they find articulation though the transnational lens of hip hop, becomes a

vital point of departure through which my ethnographic engagement with Cuban raperos/as moves. As such my project is unapologetically political; one directed towards advancing transnational kinds of critical black dialogue and antiracist politics.

In following, my primary subject group is comprised of young, self-identified black raperos, their followers, disk jockeys, music producers and other key individuals involved in the development and promotion of Cuban hip hop. Within the primary group I have participated in and/or attended on a daily basis uncountable numbers of hip hop performances and local *peñas* (parties or small club gatherings), numerous recording secessions, meetings, classes and colloquia. I have gathered field data though the use of video and audio-recorded interviews, video and audio-recorded rap performances, extensive rap lyric texts, and copious field notes. I have also access a secondary subject group which is composed of black self-identified academics, cultural workers and intellectuals, artists, and key individuals affiliated with state-run cultural and research institutions. This second group provided important alternative perspectives on the phenomenon of Cuban hip hop and its emergent racial politics. This group was further broken down into two primary subgroups: the first representing an older generation of black intellectuals; the second comprised of a younger set of hip hop-affiliated black intellectuals, academics, and cultural producers who were generational peers of my primary rapero/a subject group. Largely predicated on their generational positionality, these two subgroups presented differing ranges of analysis and relationality vis-à-vis Cuban hip hop in the shaping of critical dialogues on race.

Another crucial, methodologically-related issue that necessitates brief discussion pertains to the politics of fieldwork in Cuba as a U.S. national. Given the highly charged nature of Cuban-U.S. relations resulting from a history of cold-war policies and imperialist aggression on the part of successive U.S. administrations since the early 1960s, negotiating this divide as a U.S. researcher is a particularly complex undertaking. An immediate challenge for one politically sympathetic to many of the ideals of the Cuban Revolution as a bastion of utopic promise and anti-colonial/imperialist struggle, has been how to develop critical analyses that may confront the limitations – if not the contradictions and autocratic tendencies – of the Revolutionary project without risking the possibility that such conclusions could be exploited by those intent on destroying that very same project for malevolent gain. It would appear that I find myself in a somewhat similar dilemma that Papo Humbertico and others in the Cuban hip hop movement face regarding how to engage in productive and necessary critique without playing into, or at least compounding the designs of U.S. imperialism and its right-wing Miami-based cohort. Given the particularly malicious posture the Bush administration has assumed through its destructive tightening of the already server U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, the stakes of such efforts take on an added and potentially urgent level of political liability.

An obvious yet crucial distinction between myself and raperos however is that my analysis is articulated from a position of an 'outsider' rather than from within – a distinction perhaps further complicated by my U.S. vantage point. Here, my positionality as a U.S. national necessitates a particular sensitivity to both the potential political

consequences of my research with regard to the current condition of Cuban-U.S. relations, as well as to the ways in which my work as might be received in Cuba itself. Such complexities, as I will explore in detail in Chapter 5, can carry real political charge in the field.

How did I come to this juncture and how is it that have I attempted to navigate its challenges. Raised by leftist parents active in the U.S. civil rights movement – my father African American, my mother Jewish – Cuba and its Revolution were celebrated in my household as an alternative to the history of imperialist capitalism and racism in the U.S. The Revolution's declared commitments to racial justice and its support for anti-colonial struggles in Africa carried particular resonance in my household were Fidel Castro was held as something of a folk hero. It was out of this grounding context that in the summer of 1998, privileged with some leftover research money from my Master's project, I first visited Havana to experience "for myself" a Cuba which had long held a mythic allure.

Cuba of 1998, however, was not the Cuba of the 1960s and 70s of my parent's generation. It had been decade since the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the end of Cuba's preferential trade relationship with the Soviet Union and its allies. Since the early 1990s the island's cautious, though ever-advancing re-engagement with global capitalism had introduced new levels of contradiction and social tension in a once confidently socialist Cuba. By 1998 such strains were clearly evident to even a foreign visitor such as myself. Of particular concern to me were the ways in which these developments were impacting the inter-dynamics of race and class on the island long central foci of the revolutionary project. Leaving Cuba later that summer with undoubtedly more questions

than I arrived with, I was moved to return the following year to begin my dissertation research centered on investigating in more methodological depth what it was that was occurring in this "utopia," and how it reflected critically upon the shifting, transnational dynamics of race and racialization processes under global late capitalism.

Though I did not have the opportunity to engage directly with raperos/as during my initial trip to Havana, I became aware of the existence of a Cuban hip hop movement and its pronounced racial significance. Having come into early self-awareness in New York City during the rise of hip hop culture in the late 1970s and 80s, I later became interested through my travels in how this cultural space – organic to the particular socio-racial context of post-industrial inner-city New York – was being reworked by other generations of black youth in the diaspora. In particular, it was my exposure to hip hop in Brazil and South Africa in the early 1990s which open me to the differing ways rap music was being used to mobilize new kinds of transnationally-engaged black identity and related forms of antiracist advocacy.[2] Within these contexts I thus recognized the potentiality of hip hop as an active site of black agency making. Regarding my research interest in Cuba, the key question became how hip hop's black-signified racial politics were being articulated vis-à-vis the island's shifting socio-economic landscape, and to what extent might such practices be enabling new forms of race-based social agency at this critical historical juncture. Cuban hip hop therefore appeared to present an ideal entry into the island's contemporary dynamics of race, as well as a possibly vibrant site of black self-making and action.

[2] See Chapter 1

Beyond intellectual engagement, my desire to pursue this project stemmed largely from my own political orientation and humanist commitments towards furthering struggles for social justice and global egalitarianism. As mentioned, Cuba's position as a one of the last remaining bastions of popular revolutionary promise coupled with its long-standing resistance to western capitalist hegemony continues to evoke a considerable level of political resonance for me. As a racialized subaltern subject, however, the frames through which oppression and corresponding efforts to contest such oppression are shaped by racialized forms of power engender yet another level of political urgency. As one committed, moreover, to promoting black transnationalism as a vital strategic paradigm in combating globalized modes of racial subjugation, Cuban hip hop offers a consequential site for both mapping and advancing such transnationally-engaged processes. It has thus been these junctures of interests, concerns, and political solidarities that have brought me to and maintained my extended involvement with Cuban hip hop as a research site. Channeled primarily through the informal relationships I have developed with members, my engagements with the movement have been feed largely by dialogue, modest material and resource support, and the critical documentation of the movement and its evolution during the four or so years in which I have been conducting research. Positionality and commitments notwithstanding, the complexities intrinsic to the highly-charged divide between Cuba and the U.S. remain in a necessary sense a sensitive space of negotiation as an outside researcher.

In terms of the dissertation's layout, Chapter 1 "Global Hip Hop and the Transcendent Racial Politics of Black Difference" is primarily a survey of literature on

the global dissemination of hip hop culture. My intervention is that I analytically focus on the ways that racialized subaltern youth in various national contexts utilize the racially-oppositional meanings and performative frameworks of hip hop to construct new kinds of racially-oppositional identities vis-à-vis exclusionary national formations. I suggest that in many of these cases these youth advance antiracist forms of politics through their musical voicings and extra-musical activism. Mediated, U.S.-derived representations of blackness, I contend become transnational templates for other forms of racial difference, thus racially transcending the immediate "black" context of their making. This chapter lays the important contextual and theoretic groundwork for my ethnographic exploration of the transnationally-informed black identity politics at play within Cuban hip hop.

Chapter 2 "Cuban Nation Building, Non-Racialism, and Black Historical Agency" presents an historical overview of the centrality of race in the making of the Cuban nation. My emphasis in the chapter is on the ideological construction of national raceless-ness or what I call "non-racialism" throughout the history of Cuba from its inception as a slave-based plantation economy to the building of revolutionary socialism. This chapter is also critically concerned with illuminating the role of black Cubans as historical social actors in both the making and contesting of the Cuban nation and its claims to national non-racialism. This chapter provides the central historical problematics of race and nation which will continue to shape the political terrain of contention within the contemporary social context of Cuban hip hop.

Chapter 3 "Consuming Blackness: New Racial Economies, Tourism, and Evolving Black Social Strategies" examines Cuba's post-Soviet era period following the economic crisis known and the "Special Period." This section focuses on the emergence of a new dollarized economy in Cuba and the complex socio-racial affects that it has engendered 1990s Cuban society. Particular attention is played the emergence of the dollar-based tourism economy as a critical manifestation of the island's new neoliberal reality, and the various ways it has contributed to the cultural commodification of blackness in Cuba today. While providing a framework to talk about both the resurgence of preexisting forms of racism as well as the emergence of new kinds of racializing logics and practices within Cuba's new racialized economy, this section also plays particular attention to new forms of social strategy that black and darker-skinned Cuban have adopted in response to the island's shifting dynamics of race and class. This chapter is crucial in laying the immediate socioeconomic context for Cuban hip hip's emergence which I argue arises in part in response by some black youth to Cuba's new economy of race.

Chapter 4 "Hip Hop Cubano: The Narrative of an Emergent Blackness" introduces an account of hip hop's evolution as an organic sociocultural phenomenon in 1990s Cuba. I refer to Cuban hip hop's initial coming to being as a narrative to underscore that its beginnings have assumed something of the status of canonic urban lore among the initiated and the numerous foreign journalist as well as a growing number of foreign academics whom have further codified the narrative. My intervention is that I critically foreground the centrality of race and racial politics in the early making of

Cuban hip hop, while grounding this approach within an ethnographically-informed analysis. While introducing a number of key individuals and players in the early formation of Cuban hip hop, a central metaphor that I employ in this section relates to Cuban hip hop's production of new black space. Here, I speak of "black space" in a geospatial sense that hip hop in Havana arose though the making of local spaces of black congregation were blackness was in effect performatively enacted and celebrated in new kinds of ways by its participants. I also speak of black space in the sense that Cuban hip hop in-and-of-itself is an assertion of new space of blackness within Cuban revolutionary and national frameworks; historical formations that have otherwise tended to restrict critical articulations and ways of being "black."

Chapter 5 "New Black Revolutionary Horizons" delves more deeply into the ethnographic present with regard to Cuban hip hop's contemporary racial identity politics. This section opens by introducing in more detail my own initial engagements with Cuban hip hop as well as some of the key players in within the Cuban hip hop movement. I then move to a description and analysis of the 2000 Cuban hip hop festival and the ways that event illuminated in stark ways the evolving, transnationally-engaged black identity politics that underskirt the Cuban hip hop movement. Particularly attention is paid to the development of new kinds of black radical identities and politics within the movement through its engagements with black radical currents and individuals from the U.S. I conclude this section with an account of my own complexities at trying to navigate this emergent black Cuban radicalism as an "outsider."

The closing Chapter 6 "Critical Black Self-makings and The State" takes a more detailed look at the ways in which critical kinds of black self-making are occurring through the space of Cuban hip hop. This section opens with an exploration of a personal narrative of one raperos' negotiations of new black radical identity and subjectivity through two distinct spaces of black radicalism; one rooted in a recuperative assertion of a black critical subject of Cuban history, the other through appeals to transnational frameworks and histories of black radical struggle. In following, the second major focus of this section deals with emergence of a new black feminism with the rise of critical black female voices within the Cuban hip hop movement. These women present critiques of both the heavily masculinist character of Cuban hip hop as well as the pervasiveness of racialized *machismo* in revolutionary Cuban society. These women, moreover, bring critical attention to the gendered dimensions of racialized power in Cuba as well as the particular ways such racially gendered power articulates within the logics of Cuba's new economy. The section closes with a discussion of the shifting position of the Cuban state vis-à-vis the development of Cuban hip hop. I suggest that the state had become actively involved in efforts to incorporatively institutionalize hip hop within the frame of revolutionary national culture. While such efforts might seek to limit Cuban hip hop's racial character and political capacities, I contend that hip hop in Cuba is in fact contributing to an opening up of both national-dominant as well as racially-alternative public spheres around critical discussions of race.

A few brief notes on racial terminology and its usage in this dissertation. In this text I tend to use the expression black Cuban rather than Afro-Cuban for a number of

reasons. The first being that in Cuba the term *negro* or black is commonly used to describe darker-skinned, strong phenotypically-marked people of African descent. *Afrocubano* or Afro-Cuban, when used, is most often applied to realms of black cultural production and expressive culture. Even in this context, as I discuss in Chapter 3, it remains a multiply contested term. I will, however, primarily limit my use of the term to refer to cultural realms. In emphasizing the term "black" I further underscore the political significance of black identity and blackness as they are articulated within the space of Cuban hip hop.

I have also tended to use the expression "darker-skinned Cubans" when referring to African-descendant populations and individuals who might not be categorize within Cuba's racial system as *negro* or black. In doing so I intentionally avoid the various gradated vernacularism for non-whiteness such as *mulato, moreno, jabao, trigueño, susuio* or a plethora of other terms used habitually Cuba. I thus employ the more expansive and inclusive expression "darker-skinned" to elude, when necessary, the politically divisive tendencies of such terms. With many scholarly estimates suggesting that Cubans of African-descendent comprise upwards of 60% of the island's population, the potential political stakes of such a "discursive" move are quite significant.

## Chapter One

## Global Hip Hop and the Transcendent Racial Politics of Black Difference

Prior to delving into the ethnographic specificity of the politics of race, identity, and culture within Cuba's emergent hip hop movement, I will first provide a broader sociohistorical analysis of the increasingly global phenomenon of rap music and hip hop culture. In this opening chapter I seek to examine the ways in which the global proliferation of rap and hip hop are engendering the mobilization of new kinds of racialized identity and related forms of social expression. I draw attention to the practices by which new generations of racially-marked youth in various national geographies utilize the racial contours of blackness conveyed through rap and hip hop to give critical form and voice to their own racially-informed subjectivities. Here, blackness – as a mediated effect of black cultural production and corporate-driven commercial commodification – serves as a transnational trope of racially oppositional difference appropriated by other racialized youth in the performative articulation of their own identities of oppositional difference. Beyond the politically laden processes by which these identities are creatively fashioned, I am equally concerned with the ways such critically-situated racial identities are in turn mobilized towards liberatory kinds of politics. Among the global sites of hip hop production that I examine here both within the context of the Black diaspora and beyond, these politics articulate along various lines of antiracist activism. Such an undertaking provides a vital analytical frame for my

exploration of the multivalent social significance of rap and hip hop within a socially transformative Cuba of today.

Since its inception in New York City in the mid 1970s, rap music and the broader cultural phenomenon of hip hop have received bountiful scholarly attention.[3] This has increasingly been the case as a once marginal youth culture encompassing expressive elements of music, verbal lyricism, dance, graffiti art and fashion has evolved into a multi-billion dollar global industry. Although rap and hip hop have undergone considerable transformation during this movement from street to international marketplace, they have undeniably retained at their core – though clearly not without their complexities – a signifying masculine blackness of representational meaning. I thus wish to draw attention here to the complex ways representational meanings of black racial difference are actively constituted and signified through the mediated spaces of rap music and hip hop "culture."[4] Today hip hop has emerged as one of the most visible and widely disseminated forms of black popular imagery globally; commercially mediated not only through music, but increasingly through film, television, and the marketing of corporate merchandise. Though the majority of scholarship on hip hop has tended to focus almost exclusively on the cultural politics of its domestic production and consumption within the U.S., there have been recent moves to examine the social and

[3] The breath of academic writing on hip hop culture expansive, however a couple key pioneering texts are important to mention here: Tricia Rose (1994); William Eric Perkins et al. (1996).
[4] In this dissertation I generally use the expression "hip hop" or "hip hop culture" to refer to the broad set of cultural practices, stylized aesthetics, and the larger cultural industry associated with and inclusive of rap music. I will tend to reserve the use of term "rap" when referring to the music genre itself or when it is necessary to mark a distinction between the two terms.

cultural dynamics involved in the global trafficking and spread of rap music and hip hop culture (Mitchell et al. 2001).

Following this second line of inquiry, this chapter is concerned with how the culturally-signified, black racial significance of U.S. hip hop is being received, translated, and culturally recontextualized in different international settings. My particular interest is in the ways racially and/or "ethnically" marginalized youth in various national contexts utilize rap and hip hop as performative spaces in articulating new, potentially oppositional kinds of racially-informed identity and related antiracist politics. Here, I stress the term racial over ethnic to underscore the ways that so-called "ethnic" group difference, as culturally-defined as they might appear to be, are often configured in racialized (i.e. phenotypically-associated, biologically-ascribed) kinds of ways within various national contexts. This is especially the case of ethnically-categorized minority populations who, often situated in subordinate positions vis-à-vis dominant national cultures and structures of power, frequently experience racialized forms of oppression and discrimination. In these circumstances, as I will discuss in more detail latter in this chapter, the use of the term "ethnic" elides discussions of the racializing processes through which these marginalized identities and experiences are largely informed.

In many of these cases rap and hip hop serve as creative mediums through which transnational or diasporic modes of black identification are discursively forged. In others, hip hop's black signifying difference offers a cultural framework through which alternative forms of racially-oppositional identities can be creatively fashioned and positioned in new socially relevant ways. Such efforts often provide racially marked

minority youth ways of mobilizing under new modes of collective identification, while strategically tying their local concerns within the broader framework of antiracist struggle globally. Rap and hip hop in this way, to borrow from George Lipsitz's writings on global music, serve very much as discursive spaces which "allow for the recognition of new networks and affiliations [as] they become crucibles for complex identities in formation that respond to the imperatives of place at the same time they transcend them" (Lipsitz 1994:6). Though these practices arise out of a negotiated interplay of black cultural production, processes of commercial commodification and cultural appropriation, I am particularly interested in questions of representation, performance, and style in their capacity to culturally convey and reconfigure black racial significance through the increasingly transnational cultural lens of hip hop. In approaching the global trafficking of rap and hip hop in this manner I attempt, through critical literature review and ethnographic material, to elucidate the social significance of these contemporary cultural forms not simply in terms of their international circulation and consumption, but rather through the ways they are actively lived and strategically employed abroad. Such a framing provides an analytical framework within which my work on Cuban hip hop is critically couched.

### *The Cultural Dialectics of Black Performance as Commercially Mediated Blackness*

In setting up my discussion of the locally-transcendent racial politics of hip hop, it is necessary to first outline the ways hip hop's representational politics of blackness are

mediated through a dialectical play of black expressive cultural practice and processes of commercially-driven cultural commodification. An extensive treatment of the subject would be far beyond the scope and design of this chapter. Rather, I attempt to illuminate how the imagery, discourses, and notions of blackness produced within the popular cultural lens of hip hop emerges through a negotiated makings of self- and externally-generated frames of black representational practice.

As is commonly recognized, rap music and broader hip hop culture arose within specific sociocultural settings of postindustrial New York City in the mid 1970s. These mediums evolved as creative means of self-expression among poor and working-class urban youth of color whose structural marginalization left them few spaces to give critical voice to their subjectivity and daily experience. Though associated primarily with African American youth, the emergence of hip hop owes much of its creative impetus to New York City's particular Afrodiasporic mélange of African American, West Indian, and Latino culture in and around its public housing projects, particularly those in the South Bronx. A number of early innovators of rap music, for example, were significantly influenced by 1960s Jamaican "sound system" culture employing cut-and-mix sonic manipulation techniques. Foremost among these pioneers was Jamaican-born Bronx DJ Kool Herc who is popularly attributed as the first to introduce the break-beat[5] generated through the back-and-forth use of two turntables with corresponding copies of the same LP. No doubt further informed by the verbal techniques of Jamaican toasting and dub

[5] The heavily percussive extended interlude or "break" within an otherwise continual melodic song structure.

voice-over, Kool Herc's pioneering microphone shout-outs during his famed jams (street parties) laid the groundwork for the emergence of rapping or MC-ing.

Others have highlighted the particularly critical role Puerto Rican youth played in the early development of hip hop as a cultural space (del Barco 1996; Juan Flores 1996, Rivera 2003). Young Nuyoricans in particular comprised a significant membership of the early breakdance troupes such as the Rock Steady Crew and the New York City Breakers. These Puerto Rican b-boys proved key innovators of breaking and were crucial to the international proliferation of the art form. Nuyoricans were also strongly represented within New York's vibrant graffiti culture which, along with DJ-ing, MC-ing, and breaking, was one of the original defining "four elements" of the early hip hop landscape of the late 1970s and 1980s. As a number of scholars and old school "heads" (hip hop devotees) have lamented, however, Latino participation in the early formation of hip hop culture has been significantly expunged from what has become the dominant narrative of hip hop's evolution (Flores 1994; Rivera 2003) – a narrative, that is, that foregrounds the form's contours of blackness. One key contributing factor to this blackening of hip hop, if you will, involved the commercially-promoted elevation of rap music as the primary expressive component of hip hop's original cultural expanse. In turn, I shift attention to what is undeniably hip hop's centrally signifying trope of blackness – a blackness mediated through the intersections of black expressive cultural and processes of commercial commodification.

While fully cognizant of rap's indebtedness to a history of black diasporic and Latino cultural interchange within the broader frame of hip hop, one cannot loose sight of

the fact that the music genre remains critically rooted – in both form and function – within an historical continuum of black expressive culture and music making. Regarding aesthetic form, the infusion of key Afrodiasporic musical practices such as polyrhythmic percussion and rhythmic-centered organization as well as the black orality of first-person narrative, call-and-response, and "the dozens" stylistically marks rap's historicity as a black cultural form. As exemplified by Eric B and Rakim's celebrated remixings of James Brown to Snoop Dogg's homages to P-Funk, rap's black historicity finds further expression though the innovative use of sampling in which previously recorded black artists are resignified in the making of black musical expression.

Sampling in this manner is evocative of what cultural critic Paul Gilroy has termed "process of recovery" within the black diasporic music genres where "quotes from and parody of earlier styles and performers make the past actually audible in the present" (Gilroy 1993b:37). Building on the work of Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones 1963), Gilroy has referred to such sociocultural processes though the metaphor of a "changing same" in suggesting that the old is continually drawn upon and referenced in the making of new, signifyingly "black" cultural forms and identities – hence a changing same (Gilroy 1993a).[6] Indeed, through the rearticulation of historical black musical elements and the more demonstrative use of sampling techniques, rap has and continues to sonically "represent," as it were, its black cultural significance as a cultural form. Here there is no claim to an essentialized blackness as such, but rather the creative fashioning

[6] Such black reworking the old in the making of the new further resonates diasporically with the practice of *versioning* in Jamaican reggae where artists pay homage to those before through various refashionings of original works in the making of new "versions" (Hebdige 1987)

of signifyingly “black” cultural differences constituted both within and in response to a history of racial exclusion and “otherness” vis-à-vis dominant (read euro-“white”) cultural paradigms.

This is to suggest that a history of U.S. racial oppression and marginalization has on one hand configured black folk as the ultimate racialized “other,” while it has simultaneously constituting the very America-ness of the African American condition. This ambiguity, or what W.E.B. Du Bois seminally referred to as a black “double consciousness” of being neither fully American nor “other” (Du Bois 1989 [1903]), is tied to the ways that African Americans have historically constructed cultural difference both within and against dominant white cultural norms. The evolution of black vernacular English or “ebonics” continues, per illustration, to function as a key cultural marker of black difference and historical site of African American cultural resistance – once again constituted both within and counter to dominant “white” English – is a principle example of this cultural dynamic (Morgan 1994). Here, Henry Louis Gates’ discussion of signifyin(g) and signification practices within black vernacular traditions is particularly fruitful when thinking about how black “difference” is constituted through oppositional plays on normative euro-white cultural forms (Gates 1988). The act of asserting or signifying black cultural differences in this fashion additionally speaks to what Dick Hebdige refers to as a “refusal” of dominant cultural norms among

"subculture" groups in the production of counter-hegemonic cultural practice and collective identity (Hebdige 1988 [1979]).[7]

Rap's historically-grounded evocations of black cultural difference are not tied solely to questions of aesthetics. Rather, what most saliently signifies rap's blackness of tongue, if you will, is that those who produce it on the ground understand it as a conscious and active expression of their subjectivity as black Americans. This is to suggest that rap, as with other historical black music forms from slave spirituals, to the blues, to soul and R&B, arose in large part out of the need to testify and affirm the particularity of the African American experience. Amiri Baraka has referred to such cultural priorities as the "blues impulse" within African American musical traditions (Baraka 1963). These priorities find textual form in rap's lyrical evocations of self-identifiably black themes and concerns through which artists give verbal expression to their subjectivity as young, principally male African Americans. The black inner-city poverty, urban decay and desperation vividly portrayed in Grandmaster Flash's 1982 composition "The Message" stands as a potent early framing of rap's critical voicing of contemporary inner-city black realities as well as the genre's tendencies towards black-centered social commentary and critique. More politically progressive artists from KRS-One to Talib Kweli have furthered in this vein. While not as overtly political, the party-focused lines so prevalent in rap from the Sugar Hill Gang's "bang bang the boogie" to P-Diddy and company's "Pass the Courvoisier" do nonetheless project – though clearly not

[7] In a similar vein, others have evoked Mikhail Bahktin's work in referring to black vernacular modalities of difference as counter-cultural assertions of black heteroglasia (Morgan 1994; Potter 1995)

without their problematics – a celebratory self-referential black male subject attesting to the resiliency of contemporary black life and pleasure.

Such efforts at black self-representational expression, however, clearly cannot be unhinged from the commercial frames within which they have been forged. While self-conscious projections of contemporary black cultural "difference" continue to be at the core of hip hop's representational force and significance – white rapper phenomenon Eminem notwithstanding, the kinds of black images and accompanying discourses constructed through its cultural lens remain without question intimately tied to the commercial commodification that feed its reproduction. Predicated on a multi-billion dollar cultural industry that has emerged today as the quintessential commercial framing of black youth culture, rap and hip hop are arguably as dependent on corporate management and marketing for their production as they are on black artistic expression. This is as true for more "conscious" artists such as Mos Def as it is for the more blatantly commercial 50 Cent. Hip hop today has, in turn, become a primary commercial vehicle for the corporate packaging and commerce of black expressive culture and body imagery. Hence, any discussion of the representational significance hip hop's projected images and conveyed meanings of blackness per se must account for the complex ways such representations are produced through a dialectic interplay of black artistic and cultural production on one end, and corporate-driven commercial commodification and marketing on the other.

As a number of observers have noted, despite these inherent tensions – or precisely because of them – hip hop has operated simultaneously as both a medium of

black self-expression and sociopolitical commentary, and as hyper-commodified cultural product (Ross 1994; Kelly 1996; De Genova 1995; Neal 1999). It is through these two seemingly divergent capacities that hip hop has become a key mediator of not only how blackness is popularly represented in the U.S., but how it is actively performed in the daily public sphere as well. My suggestion here is that as a key site of popular black representation, hip hop's cultural impact is most powerfully felt through the differing ways that its black cultural difference is performatively enacted – both as mediated commercial spectacle and collective social practice – within its multivalent cultural terrain. Underscoring the black representational significance of hip hop in terms of how its black images and meanings are performatively constituted, I suggest, opens up a space to explore the important interconnections between black expressive culture, frames of representational practice, and the politics of contemporary black identity production. Again, representations, meanings and identities of blackness are by no means of a given, essentialized nature; they rather continually evolve through interarticulated processes of negotiation between individuals and institutions within overlapping fields of cultural and social power. Particularly illuminating here is Stuart Hall's suggestion that identities, in particular those subalternly positioned, are constituted through interplay of interpellating forces on one hand and "practices of self constitution" on the other (Hall 1996). This model of subject making is valuable in that it allows for more nuanced understandings of how racialized/subaltern subjectivity and identity are forged in that space between "structure" and "agency" through a Gramscian dialectics of accommodation and

resistance. Hip hop in this way has become a significant contemporary site for just such kinds of negotiated frames of black representation.

Regarding the ground level of music production, when stressing in current African American vernacular the importance of "represent'in'" in order to "keep it real" as it were, African American rap artists and their producers clearly understand the self-representational significance of their work. Beyond simply "rockin' phat beats," what is additionally at stake when recording an album, shooting a music video, or performing live in concert is how these artists perform *themselves* as contemporary African Americans performers. Here questions of black authenticity become paramount. As Mark Anthony Neal observes, "even though some forms of hip-hop craved the prestige and visibility that mainstream culture afforded … hip-hop [is] dually concerned with remaining authentic to its core constituency of black youth located across various and often transitory urban spaces" (Neal 1999:192). Such authentications of black-self, as mentioned earlier, are at one time voiced through rap artists' referencing of contemporary themes, concerns and desires that shape the daily lives of many African American youth today.

Apart from the overt verbal expression, rap's black (self-)representational significance is immediately signified through the sheer visual force of young black, overwhelmingly male bodies publicly performing their blackness through the commercially-mediated space of hip hop. Here, African American rap artists give aesthetic expression to their black male subjectivity through the signifying use of black vernacular English, lyrical word-play, bodily gesture, and material fashion which

collectively project an unmistakable blackness of style. Such stylistic practices are drawn from the larger cultural repertoire of hip hop-informed black youth culture were African American youth often employ the conduits of designer fashion and forms of black vernacular speech to publicly mark, or more accurately "perform" their black identity in collective everyday kinds of ways. As Robin Kelley has noted with regard to the use of style among African American youth in Los Angeles: "Young men wear starter jackets, hoodies, L.A. Raiders caps, baggy khaki pants, and occasionally gold chains not only because they are *in style*, but because it enables them to create a collective identity that is distinct from, and even in opposition to, the dominant culture" (Kelley 1996:133, italics added).

Black popular style in this way can be understood as performative in that it operates as an expressive practice through which group identity and meanings are not simply reflected, but rather actively constituted though their collective social enactment. Here the term performative is two fold: style is performative in that it is literally constituted through the act of doing or "performing" it, while it simultaneously has a "performative" affect in that it acts upon and produces something new, i.e. identity (Butler 1990). The oppositional character of such practice again lies first and foremost in the ways these expressions are constructed as self-affirming signifiers of a black racial difference vis-à-vis the un-marked, un-problematized sociocultural norms of white sameness. The cultural politics of black style in this way recalls Dick Hebdige's seminal work on the use of style among white and Afro-Caribbean working-class youth in Britain. For Hebdige, the social significance of the stylistic use of material culture, bodily gesture,

and language lay precisely in the ways these groups employed them in the construction of oppositional kinds of meaning and identity vis-à-vis dominant cultural norms (Hebdige 1988 [1979]). Regarding hip hop, while such style-driven markers of black difference may be appropriated by other youth including whites, and might as in the case of popular fashion be tied to broader patterns of consumerism and cultural commodification, they nonetheless communicate a level of signifying black meaning through the ways they are fashioned and employed by African American youth as stylized representations of self. If we consider Stuart Hall's suggestion that "it is only through the ways in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how were are" (Hall 1992:30), emphasizing the performative nature of black popular style in this way again encourages considerations of the active self-representational force of style practice in its capacity to culturally articulate, more than simply reflect, identities of blackness and ways of being. Though both verbal expression and stylistic signification, I suggest, hip hop operates as an important cultural framework through which contemporary black identity in the U.S. is self-representationally or performatively manifested.

One cannot understate, however, the significance of the fact that those subjectivities most often given performative expression through the black signifying cultural aesthetics of hip hop are resoundingly male.[8] Such masculinity is tied in the first instance to the dominance of male MCs who commonly project a hyper-masculinized

[8] In underscoring the heavily masculine character of rap and hip hop I do not wish to elide the important contributions and struggles of female rappers in the development of the genre. From the Real Roxanne and Salt'n Pepa to Little Kim and Ra Digga, black women have and continue to assert their presence and voices within the primarily male space of hip hop. For a discussion of female rap artists and the gender politicof hip hop in rap see Tricia Rose (1994), Nancy Guevara (1996), and Gwendolyn D Pough (2004).

heterosexual self-imagery. Frequently framed in sexist and if not misogynistic kinds of ways, these black self-masculinist representations operate in part, along with boastful materialism, as misdirected symbolic correctives to a history of black sociopolitical and economic disempowerment.[9] Like the earlier pimp or "mac" imagery of the 1970s blaxploitation films – themselves filmic renditions of the super-Blackman figure fashioned during the Black Power era[10] – an "emasculated" black man is re-endowed, as it were, with his full, unbridled masculinity through hip hop's self-representations of a super-charged black maleness. To "represent!" is in essence the performance of this self-authenticized heterosexual black male prowess. In claiming at some level an oppositional stance through the evocation of such black male self-authorship, these representations may nonetheless reify many dominant racial stereotypes and discourses of black hyper-sexuality and social dysfunctionality, while at the same time reproduce at least at the level of practice larger patriarchal structures of male privilege.

While at one level black rap artists and music producers may be responsible for the artistic composition of rap music, its imagery and performative style, what "sells"– or what at least is promoted and packaged to sell in often formulaic fashion by the corporate recording industry – is precisely these kinds of hyper-masculinized representations of

---

[9] For a critical account of gender politics and sexism in rap lyricism and hip hop music industry see Trisha Rose (1994). Robin Kelly (1996) also provides an historically contextualize discussion of the masculinist and patriarchal tendencies within hip hop particularly as they pertain to genre of gansta rap. Also see Ernest Allen Jr. (1996) for a discussion of gender imagery in message rap.

[10] Such discourses and representations where tied to the notion during this period that the Civil Rights Movement's passive non-violence methodology and philosophy contributed to an symbolic emasculation of the black male, or what the Black Power Movement was obligated to redeem. The gun and the cock became the icons of the a new black (male) power. For a critical treatment of sexism and masculinity within the Black Power Movement in general, and the Black Panther Party in particular see for example Elaine Brown (1992).

blackness. Similar can be said of the gun-toting gangsta'/thug image so pervasive in much of hip hop which, while embodying some oppositional attributes and critiques (McLaren 1995; Kelley 1996), nonetheless reproduces many dominant racialized discourses of black criminality and social pathology. In their carnivalesque celebrations of U.S. consumerist culture, the excessive materialism of the contemporary "bling bling" tendencies in hip hop additionally operate in this manner. Though market factors may not directly produce such imagery in the first instant, they certainly have and continue to exert a driving influence in their thematic reproduction. At the same time African American producers and performers of rap music are clearly cognizant of the commercially informed logics that underlie the cultural capital of their products. As Kelley has pointed out, the development of hip hop from the on-start was tied to black entrepreneurial endeavors to "get paid" through the melding of work and pleasure. Such efforts ultimately involve an active participation in, to use Kelley's expression, the "self-commodification" of blackness by these young men in ways that bolster rather than undermine these capital-driven processes (Kelley 1997).

At a broader societal level, the performance of hip hop's spectacle of blackness through the commercial conduits of popular music, video, fashion, and advertisement has enabled it to become a powerful cultural force in informing how people – black, white, and other – think about, and to a certain extent enact blackness in the everyday. Hip hop's black representational significance emerges once again through this complex power-laden dialectic of self and commercially-informed representational plays of blackness.

***The Contemporary Racial Identity Politics of Global Hip Hop***

How does hip hop's black representational politics travel as its engages other communities beyond the particular socio-cultural context of their making? The simple answer to this question all depends upon the specific local conditions under which these mediated cultural forms are received and interpreted. Although U.S. rap and hip hop may move along similar transnational routes as geographically and culturally far a field as Cuba and Japan, their reception and recontextualization in the formation of local hip hop followings often involve very different types of social and cultural meaning making. As one of the most widely circulated commercial spectacles of blackness globally, the central question I wish to ask is to what extent and in what ways might rap music and the broader cultural sphere of hip hop be informing contemporary discourses of blackness and identities of difference transnationally. In particular, how are other racialized and/or "ethnically" defined youth groups receiving, translating, and performatively redeploying hip hop's black oppositional difference in new socially relevant ways?

In addition to the commercial processes of their domestic production, any discussion of hip hop's global significance must be equally attuned to the transnational capital networks through which these commodified cultural products circulate internationally. At the forefront of hip hop's international ascendance has been recording conglomerates like Sony, EMI, Time/Warner Music, and the Universal Music Group – themselves owned by even larger international conglomerates – whose combined

holdings by the early-1990s included some two-thirds of the global recording market (Garofalo 1993). Under these corporation's leadership the record industry was able to boast $32 billion in revenues for 2002, with the category of "urban music" which includes American R&B and rap capturing a substantial share of the market.[11] In step with these developments, Def Jam Records – the godfather of the once independent hip hop music labels now part of Universal Music which, in turn, is owned by the Paris-based Vivendi corporation – has expressed interest in opening offices in at least eight foreign counties including the UK, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Japan, and Brazil. Such efforts are joined by the likes of FUBU (For Us, By US), the majority African American-owned retail line of hip hop-associated apparel, which has plans to open some twenty-two international outlets from South Korea to Nigeria (Leeds 2000). Moreover, as the institution possibly most responsible for the projection of hip hop's black spectacle into the international marketplace, MTV – a subsidiary of cooperate media giant Viacom – is currently broadcast in eighteen languages reached some 375 million households in 164 countries[12] These high-end industry-based expansions have been accompanied among others by the proliferation of hip hop-content magazines that are now produced in a wide array of national markets from Italy to Cuba.

Another flourishing and increasingly instrumental source in the global dispersion of hip hop is the internet. There is an unimaginable number of hip hop-related web-sites of an extraordinary range of content and orientation whose numbers are growing daily.

---

[11] International Federation of Phonographic Industry (IFPI) statistics <www.ifpi.org>.
[12] MTV press release, 1/14,/2001 web-posting <http://biz.yahoo.com/prnews/020114/nym069a_1.html>

There are for example extensive networks of hip hop-related web-based promotional material generated by corporate record labels and distributors. In addition to more overtly commercial sites, there is an extraordinary collection of websites ranging in specialization from German to African to Hong Kong rap. The emergence of internet-based file-sharing groups and related software following the demise of Napster has further enabled the global circulation of hip hop music. One particularly noteworthy on-line manifestation of hip hop-gone-global is the Universal Zulu Nation. As the quintessential institutional icon of hip hop's Bronx roots founded in the early 1970s by Afrika Bambaataa, the now "Universal" Zulu Nation has its own website (www.zulunation.com) containing information ranging from the history of hip hop, to afrocentric teachings and readings of world events, to black-produced consumer products. The site even provides an on-line application service for membership, enabling the expansion of what is now the organization's global network of local branches. As these examples illustrate, the internationalization of hip hop has been significantly facilitated through the rise of the internet.

While hip hop's global diffusion may in many ways be intimately tied to the international expansion of capital markets, it would be short-sighted to reduce the cultural form's transnational significance simply to that of a U.S. cultural export, one inactively and uncritically consumed by others. Such a reading would evoke cultural imperialism theses which generally regard the international spread of media and cultural commodities from economically more powerful nations (most notably the U.S.) as overpowering and/or displacent of local cultural practices in non-western locales. Dominant cultural

flows in this view are seen as contributive to a homogenization of global cultural diversity. Arguments of these kinds however have their critiques, with some of the more rigorous coming from those writing on the transnational politics of popular music. As musicologists Reebee Garofalo has suggested of such positions: "In addition to underestimating the power of local and national cultures in developing countries, this tendency assumes audience passivity in the face of dominant cultural power and negates the active, creative dimensions of popular music consumption" (Garofalo 1993:18).[13]

In the case of U.S. rap and hip hop, it is important to recognize not only the active ways these commodified cultural forms are consumed within other national contexts, but also how such forms may be critically rearticulated and redeployed in the formation of local rap artists and followings. Such a proposition does not seek to mitigate the cultural force with which hip hop's commercially-driven elements penetrate and impact other cultural experiences beyond the U.S. Nor is it an attempt to evade the very real, often detrimental global effects of late capital expansion and neoliberal policies sanctioned by institutions like International Monetary Fund (IMF), The Word Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the everyday lives of people, especially those of the non-western developing world. The challenge rather is to illuminate how individuals and communities make local meaning in often strategic kinds of ways both *within* and *through* dominant, if not hegemonic, cultural fields and material conditions of power. Given the growing significance of transnational forces in today's late-capitalist world, such negotiations increasingly take place the interstices of the local and the global.

---

[13] For a thorough review of scholarly critiques of cultural imperialism theses see Tony Mitchell (1996 ).

The writing of Arjun Appadurai among others is often invoked when thinking about how local communities utilize transnational flows of people, goods and information as resources the production of locally-situated, yet globally-conscious modes of culture and identity. Appadurai's notion of "mediascapes," for one, refers to international networks and processes of information distribution which "tend to be imaged-centered, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality [that] offer to those who experience and transform them a series of elements out of which scripts of reality can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (Appadurai 1996:35). Although Appadurai's often celebratory rendering of such processes tends to elide critical discussions of the power-laden conditions under which these transnational "social imaginaries" are shaped (Ong 1999), his framework is nonetheless helpful when considering the ways rap and hip hop serve as cultural resources in the mobilization of new kinds of racially-informed identities transnationally. As commercially-mediated and corporately-propelled as these cultural forms might be, they are still capable of conveying a signifying black racial difference and oppositionality across time and space. It is precisely through the ways racially marked youth receive and strategically reproduce rap and hip hop in the performative self-representation of their own subjective realities, that hip hop's oppositional potential finds articulation globally.

*The Black Diaspora*

When discussing hip hop's black transnational significance one cannot overlook the particular salience of its self-representational politics within the black Atlantic world. Whether Haitian immigrants in Montreal, Afro-Cuban *raperos* in Havana, or Afro-Amerindian Garifuna in Honduras, young people of African descent internationally are utilizing the performative space of hip hop in the local shaping of new, diasporically aware forms of signifyingly "black" identity and self-expression. Drawing on the work of Paul Gilroy, I suggest that rap music and hip hop culture in this manner operate as transnational routes of contemporary black identification through which the African or, possibly more appropriately, black diaspora is actively constituted as a lived social reality rather than an historically-given classification of collective social dispersion (Gilroy 1993a).[14] This is to imply that however historically rooted the black diasporic experience might be, it is precisely through the ways local communities identify with and move from diasporically-aware positions of blackness, that the sociocultural significance of a black diaspora is actively realized. To the extent such identities are often articulated in oppositional kinds of ways vis-à-vis dominant racial constructions and histories of social marginalization, these mobilizations, as Stuart Hall has argued, frequently involve strategic negotiations of power through processes of a creative self-making (Hall 1996). As an increasingly transnational medium of black self-expression and self-representation, hip hop has become an important modality through which such diasporically attuned black self-making occurs among contemporary generations of youth throughout the Black

[14] Taking a lead from Gilroy, I emphasis "Black" over "African" Diaspora in this context to underscore the contemporary sociopolitical significance of blackness as a socially-produced marker of racialized experience and subjectivity as the key signifier of modern, if not postmodern, Afrodiasporic forms of identification.

Atlantic world. To recognize hip hop's diasporic significance in this way is not, however, to privilege the U.S. as a center of black diasporic cultural production and identity. Rather it is an attempt in part to map, through the specifics of hip hop, the ways the expanding global influence of the U.S.-based cultural industries are negotiated and strategically utilized by others in socially and politically significant ways. The following examples are vividly illustrative of just such sort of transnational processes at play.

***Brazil***

The rise of Brazilian rap offers a vivid illustration of how black diasporic identities are being mobilized through the performative space of hip hop. Although hip hop's immediate cultural foundation in Brazil were laid in the 1980s through the circulation of U.S. music videos, record album photos, and stylized images of African American life popularized by Spike Lee's films (Magaldi 1999), Brazilian rap's black diasporic affiliations should be understood within a broader recent history of Afro-Brazilian engagement with U.S. black popular culture. Brazil's *Black Soul* movement of the 1970s represents a particularly notable example of such diasporically-attune engagement. Through the performative mediums of music, dance and fashion, *Black Soul's* ranks of young Afro-Brazilians drew upon the black cultural aesthetics and embodied self-awareness of 1970s U.S. soul music in the voicing of new, transnationally inspired expressions of Afro-Brazilian blackness. Parties were organized where young Afro-Brazilians donned bell bottoms, *dashikis*, and wore their hair in afros while they listened and danced to the likes of James Brown and Marvin Gay. Similarly to the latter

development of Brazilian rap, such practices were informed by mediated flows of black images, ideas, and commercial culture emanating from the U.S.

Transcending questions of simple cultural importation, Michael Hanchard has argued that *Black Soul* represented an effort to construct alternative forms of self-affirming black identity as oppositional responses to Brazil's historical privileging of whiteness and persistent forms of racism (Hanchard 1994). Emerging during the repressive era of Brazil's military government, *Black Soul* events became important venues of the dissemination of information pertaining to the nascent *movimento negro* – the loosely coordinated affiliation of Afro-Brazilian sociocultural and political organizations mobilizing strategically around black racial identity. Hanchard suggests efforts of this kind provided catalysts for the development of later identity-based politics that continue today to be actively articulated within various forms of Afro-Brazilian social and political organizing. Importantly, such identity-based mobilization posed direct political challenges both in form and function to Brazil's historical claims of racial exceptionalism holding that race and racism are purportedly non-factors in society that has one of the greatest levels of social disparity in the world. [15]

The emergence of Brazilian rap, moreover, needs to be viewed within this continuum of diasporically engaged Afro-Brazilian identity-based politics. Young Afro-Brazilian *favelados* – residents of Brazil's urban shanty towns known as *favelas* – in and around São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro were the first to take up rap music in the voicing of their own racially-informed experiences and concerns. The highly popular São Paulo-

[15] For critical treatments of Brazil's "myth of racial democracy" and its impact on black political mobilization in addition to Hanchard (1994) see Howard Winant (1994) and John Burdick (1998).

based Os Racionais (the Rationals) lead by Pedro Paul a.k.a. Mono Brown are a prime example of this early movement in Brazilian rap. Establishing their reputation in the late 1980s and early 1990s while performing primarily in *favelas* and the "darker" suburbs on the peripheries of São Paulo, the group's aggressive lyrics focused on social themes most pressing in these impoverished marginalized communities such as racism, racially-targeted police violence, drug trafficking, and government corruption. The duo's 1994 hit "Fim de semana no parque" ("Weekend in the Park") addressed the harsh living conditions, daily survival, and struggles with police in the *perifieria* or periphery (Magaldi 1999). Os Racionais' 1989 debut album sold over one million copies marking a significant early milestone in the development of Brazilian rap.

Within a couple of days following the infamous Candelaria murders of 1993 in which a group of black street children were systematically gunned down by off-duty police in the center of Rio Janeiro, a protest rally was coordinated in the city by a coalition of organizations within the *movimento negro* to condemn the murders and the broader culture of racism and racial violence from which these acts manifest. Among the rally speakers and performers was the early Rio-based rap duo Consciencia Urbana (Urban Consciousness). Member Big Richard described the political significance of his music this way:

> *In the US blacks have a notion that racism exists. Not in Brazil. In Brazil racism is disguised. In Brazil we live in a racial democracy, believe it if you will. Here we have a small number of black youth who fight against racism, while the majority, even as they suffer racism everyday like being harassed on the bus by the police, prefer to believe what is shown to them on television and in the media. So what happens is that*

*we present the counter-culture to this, and to fight as a counter-culture is not easy, especially in Brazil.*[16]

In addition to employing rap as a pedagogic tool in the shaping of Afro-Brazilian counter-hegemonic sensibilities, Consciencia Urbana's songs lyrically evoke black diasporic imagery and identifications. In referencing the significance of Malcolm X for example, Big Richard explained:

*We decided to make a rap song about Malcolm X because he was not solely a black American. He lost his American-ness when he fought against racism, for any person who fights against racism anywhere in the world is fighting for blacks, for the survival of black people.*[17]

Similar diasporic identifications are echoed in a song by Os Racionais where baggy jeans, baseball cap-adorned Mono Brown riffs "We need a leader with popular credit like Malcolm X as in other times in America, who is black down to the bones – one of us – and reconstructs our pride from ruins" (McDaniles 1999 :7). These artists adoption and rearticulation of Malcolm X's black nationalist imagery within the context of Afro-Brazilian struggle is a poignant example of the ways in which African-descendant communities draw inspiration transnationally from experiences and cultures of black populations elsewhere. By mobilizing such diasporic resources in this manner, to use Jacqueline Nassy Brown's term, Afro-Brazilian rap artists not only tie their struggles historically to others in the diaspora, but in effect actively constitute the Black

[16] personal interview 1993
[17] personal interview 1993

Diaspora itself as a lived social reality (Nassy Brown 1998). In the case of Malcolm X's imagery, such cultural appropriations were no doubt informed by the revitalization of Malcolm X in the U.S. by rap artists such as Public Enemy whom, along with Spike Lee, helped feed the "X" fashion trend of the early 1990s. Although these commodified representations of Malcolm's complex legacy were not devoid of their commercial contradictions, they nonetheless retained a capacity to transnationally convey and generate meanings of a radical blackness for others.

These examples prove illustrative of how U.S. rap music and hip hop-attune black popular culture operate as contemporary routes through which diasporically informed ideas, messages, and identifications can and are actively forged. Such black diasporic processes and understandings are clearly articulated by Big Richard who explains:

> *By principle, we think that rap is not a [North] American music. Rap is a music of black people, and black people originated in Africa. In the case of those who are born outside of Africa, we are speaking of the Diaspora. Here in Brazil, it is a regional music, adapted to the Portuguese, to the Brazilian swing where we mix timbalala and samba-reggae with rap. We make a connection by joining American music with Brazilian music in creating our own style, but without ever loosing the music's roots, because in fact these two roots are sisters – they originated in only one place, Africa.*[18]

While emphasizing the African historical "roots" of rap music, Big Richard simultaneously evokes the contemporary routes of rap's black diasporic significance in referencing its aesthetically conveyed blackness as the basis for constructing transnational black "connections" between Brazil and the U.S. He suggests that such

[18] personal interview 1993.

identifications are made most real not simply through the consumption of rap, but rather through the ways rap is pro-actively transformed in the making of a new culturally-relevant, yet signifyingly black Brazilian music form. Big Richard's reference to "creating our own style" through the fusion of Afro-Brazilian musical elements and the use of Portuguese to indigenize rap, further underscores the important inter-relationality between style making and identity. On both aesthetic and linguistic levels, then, the creative re-working of rap music's signified blackness may give rise to not only a new Brazilian music genre, but might in fact serve as an alternative modality for articulating blackness in Brazil all together. As such, Brazilian rap may provide space for the performative self-expression of new forms of Afro-Brazilian identity that are responsive to the particular socio-historical context of their contemporary making.

Within the broader space of Brazilian hip hop, style is also key to the ways blackness is performatively marked and bodily exhibited through popular fashion. Glossy hip hop magazines such as *Rap Brasil*, *Hip Hop en Movimento*, and *Rap Rima* that have emerged over the past decade are filled with images of young black and brown, primarily male, Brazilians donned in U.S.-inspired hip hop attire. The performative "rocking" of such hip hop fashion is often accompanied by overt body posturing stylistically evocative of that employed by young African American men and male rap artists. Many of Brazil's most established rap groups signify themselves in one form or another through such U.S.-inspired black "urban style." Afro-Brazilian rap duo Afro-X and Dexter for one exemplify the fusion of signified black style and politics. The duo recorded their first album in 2000 while imprisoned in the infamous São Paulo Carandiru

prison complex that first gained international attention in 1992 when 111 inmates where systematically massacred by military police following a prison uprising.[19] Referring to themselves as 509-E after their prison cell number, Afro-X and Dexter's music assails a corrupt justice system while testifying to the violent realities of being black, male, and poor in contemporary Brazil. In addition to limited performances in prison, the duo recorded a video for MTV Brazil in which they can be seen sporting gold chains and designer sneakers (Darlington 2000). The state-regulation beige pants they don are worn baggy and off the hip – stylistically referencing U.S. hip hop-associated fashion practices first coined by young African American males that, interestingly, arose out U.S. prison culture.

As these Brazilian examples suggest, rap music and associated hip hop culture can provide alternative cultural frameworks through which new meanings and identities of blackness can be strategically articulated and performatively mobilized. In line with their U.S. counterparts, however, the predominance of male artists testifies to the overwhelmingly masculine character of such black sensibilities. To the extent to which such identifications are forged through transnationally-projected black masculine imagery, they clearly are not predicated on linguistic intelligibility. Rap's black racial alterity, rather, is conveyed most tangibly through its signifying blackness of style. Such blackness, in turn, is transformed through both linguistic and stylistic innovations in the voicing and bodily performance of new kinds of critical black subjectivity that are both

[19] The prison complex was finally shut down in 2002. Brazilian filmmaker Hector Babenco presented an account of the massacre in his 2004 film "Carandiru."

products of, and responsive to the particular sociocultural imperatives of contemporary Brazil. Writing on Afro-Brazilian youth culture in Bahia, Brazil, Livio Sansone observes that the fashioning of new black-signified youth styles as exemplified in hip hop "offers black people new opportunities for redefining black difference in Western societies by aestheticizing blackness, in the first place, through highly visible styles and pop music" (Sansone 1997:461). Indeed, the adoption of these transnationally-informed youth practices provides young Afro-Brazilians with means of not only marking their blackness more visibly, but actively linking their struggles to a broader black diasporic experience and related political frames of black antiracism. Sansone has additionally proposed, in line with others, that the performance of the black aesthetics embodied in hip hop further enables these Afro-Brazilian youth to participate in a globalized space of black modernity in juxtaposition to the dominant framing of black culture and blackness in Brazil as folkloric or traditional.[20] While arguments of these kind clearly have their critical merits, I will suggest in my concluding remarks to this chapter that it might be equally fruitful to think of contemporary hip hop in terms of its relationship to a black *postmodernity*.

***South Africa***

While the African/Black Diaspora is commonly thought of as being defined by various populations of African descent who share a common historical experience of dispersion from an African "homeland," hip hop's significance as a contemporary route

[20] For other discussions of the relationships between transnational black cultural practices and notions of black modernity see Gilroy (1993), Nassy Brown (1998), and Michael Hanchard (1999).

of black identification clearly resonates beyond these immediate boundaries. The wide-spread proliferation of rap artists and hip hop culture throughout Africa itself represents an important manifestation of just this sort of black transcendent significance. The rise of vibrant local hip hop movements in Senegal, Tanzania, Ghana, Benin, Mali, and Cote d'Ivoire to name a few suggest that African youth today are increasingly engaging in the black-signified cultural space of rap and hip hop.

South African rap stands out as a particularly interesting African context in which hip hop's black cultural politics are being mobilized in response to its own specific, historically defined social imperatives of race. South Africa's alternately self-titled Black or African Hip Hop Movement finds its roots within the particularities of Cape Town's social, cultural, and racial make-up. The reason I speak here alternatively of an "Black" or "African" Hip Hop Movement in South Africa is that during my time in Cape Town in 1991 when the movement was first taking shape, youth involved used the term Black Hip Hop Movement to refer to the nascent hip hop scene. More recent web-based research suggest, however, that Cape Town-based hip hop is now couched as the *African* Hip Hop Movement. Though I lack information to definitively explain this shift, if indeed one has occurred, one might wonder if this change in language might relate to post-Apartheid efforts to move away from racial classifications towards national discourses of non-racialism. Here, the nomenclature "Africa" within the context of multi-racial South Africa could correspond with such a move.

Cape Town has traditionally been the home to large numbers of so-called "colored" South Africans as people of 'mixed-race' were long legally classified under

apartheid's racialized caste system. Occupying literally the racial "middle ground," this group was historically positioned by the white Apartheid government as a buffer between the worlds of white and black South Africa. Residentially, educationally, and frequently professionally segregated from blacks and whites, colored communities often developed their own cultural identity drawing variously upon their African, Indo-Malaysian, and European cultural histories.[21] In line with Apartheid's logic of divide-and-rule, this isolated community was allotted limited class privilege over those of blacks (i.e. the majority of "full blooded" indigenous South Africans). Such efforts historically contributed to a racialized class of South Africans who generally aspired to, and identified more with white South African status to the determent of a non-white or "black" social identity – a development exactly in tune with the grand designs of Apartheid.

The 1980s however was a highly charged time in the Cape Town region for anti-Apartheid mobilization as it was for the rest of South Africa. During this period significant numbers of colored youth were politicized through their activism. The critical turning point in the anti-Apartheid struggle of course occurred in 1990 with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and South African Communist Party (SACP). Emerging within this climate of growing

[21] Significant numbers of enslaved and indentured laborers from what is today Malaysia and Indonesia were brought to the Cape Town region starting in the late 1600s by Dutch traders. These "Malays" later inter-mixed with European settlers and indigenous Africans resulting in the racial codification of "coloreds" as a population group under Apartheid. Large segments of Cape Town's coloured community still practice the Islam first introduced by the Malay/Indonesian influence, and the religion continues to be an important part of their distinct cultural identity. Within the broader coloured population, both Afrikaans of English are spoken a distinctive vernacular accent, cadence, and intonation. Depending on the region, however, one or the other is often used as the primary vernacular.

politicization and rapid social change, the Cape Town-based rap crew Prophets of Da City formed that same year. The group, locally known by their acronym POC, was organized by young men from the the sprawling sandy flatlands known as the Cape Flats just outside of Cape Town which host a number of poor residential areas or "townships" designated as colored-only under Apartheid. At POC's helm was longtime bee-boy Ready D who, following exposure to Liverpool, England's vibrant DJ culture during a family visit, turned to DJ-ing and MC-ing upon his return. Drawing upon Cape Town's strong pre-existing breakdance scene, POC's incorporated breakdancers and poppers – another "old school" form of hip hop-associated dance – as part of their performance troupe and group identity. Releasing a total of seven albums on an independent South African label Ghetto Ruff (distributed by Polygram), POC music took on a strong sociopolitical focus in addressing the everyday struggles of township life of poverty, unemployment, gang violence, and drug abuse.[22] At center of these concerns, most importantly, was an explicit critique of Apartheid and its various manifestations of racial oppression. Such political positioning contributed to the 1993 banning of one of POC's albums by the still then Apartheid government.[23]

A related and additionally defining component of POC's music has been its black identity-based orientation and message. Through their music and other public engagement these youth have consistently referred to themselves, and by extension coloreds in general, as black and African in direct opposition to their historical

---

[22] Jörg Faber "Cape Town's Hip Hop Scene" *Ntama - Journal of African Music and Popular Culture*, Mainz University, website <http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/hiphop/faber/>
[23] Profits of Da City official web page. <http:/ rucus.ru.ac.za/~eitan/poc/pocintro.html>

classification as coloreds under Apartheid. This move is particularly significant when considering that during the same period the colored population voted resoundingly for the Nationalist Party – the white Afrikaner-lead political party which erected Apartheid – over Nelson Mandela's ANC in South Africa's first multi-racial national elections in 1994. As representatives of a new generation of South Africans coming to age at a time of considerable socio-political transition, POC's assertion of a black Africanness in the face of a history of racialization as "colored" represented a political affront to a previously divisive racial paradigm – one that radically hindered political alliance between people of 'mix-race' and the larger "black" South African majority. The point I wish to stress here is that such counter-hegemonic assertions of black identity were significantly informed by hip hop's articulation of a transnational discourse of blackness which, in turn, was drawn upon and ultimately re-employed for strategic ends.

Another influential and long standing Cape Town-based rap group that is illustrative of this dynamic is Black Noise. Possibly more centrally than POC, Black Noise performatively projected self-signifying "black" African identity and social message as a principal defining component of their music and public image. As a particularly notable example of the group's transnational engagement with hip hop's cultural politics of blackness, Black Noise's MCs – all historically classified as colored – are active members of the local South African branch of the Universal Zulu Nation.[24] The irony here of course is that discourse of Zulu Nation carries a whole other set of immediate social meanings within South Africa given both the historical importance of

[24] Jörg Faber.

the Zulu Nation under the famed Shaka Zulu, as well as the contemporary social, cultural, and political significance of Zulus in South Africa today. The question to be asked then is how these overlapping discourses of black Zuluness articulate with one and other within the context of Cape Town's hip hop movement. It is clearly significant on both interarticulated levels, however, that a group of racially-classified colored youth rooted in a community who have historically rejected a black African identity, would chose to identify with – or at least under – the black cultural signifier of Zulu.

Beyond the immediate context of music, such black-signified identity finds active social expression through the numerous workshops and speaking engagements in schools, libraries, and prison that both POC and Black Noise and have undertaken throughout the years. These efforts illustrate a creative fusion of the pedagogic tendencies of rap music with social activism as these youth take their message and concerns to a generation of young people throughout the Cape Town region. Through performative fashioning to political dissemination though music and community engagement, these young South Africans can be understood as not only constructing new oppositionally-positioned identities of blackness, but in fact actively mobilizing them in very real, politically directed ways.

### *Hip hop's Representational Politics of (Black) Racial Difference*

Within the North American context, hip hop's representational politics of black racial difference have registered a significant level of cross-cultural resonance with other

racialized minority youth. Following the early involvement of Puerto Rican DJs and rap artists like Puerto Rock and MC KT of the Bronx's Latin Empire, Latino posses such as New York's Terror Squad have emerged as important players in the East Coast hip hop scene. Their music and creative impetuses are intimately tied to the urban socio-cultural dynamics that first gave rise to hip hop in New York City. The west coast-based, Chicano-identified Cypress Hill is another high-profile example of transcendent black racially significance of hip hop within the broader Latino experience in the U.S. Cypress Hill however is itself indebted to the earlier movement of East L.A.-centered Latino rap artists spearheaded in the early 1990s by the likes of Chicano rapper Kid Frost and Cuban-born rapper Mellow Man.[25] As further illustrated by the diverse collection of west coast Asian American MCs comprised primarily of youth of Filipino and Samoan-descent, hip hop has been taken up by other racialized minority youth in the performative fashioning of their own oppositional expressions of racial difference.

In examining how rap music has been utilized by Chicano youth in L.A. to voice contemporary sociopolitical concerns within the ideological frame of Chicanismo, Fernando Pedro Delgado has observed that "[a]lthough rap remains predominantly rooted in urban black experiences, it has become a cultural form through which other ethnic and racial groups have articulated their experiences as aggravated and under-resources communities.[26] Delgado's assessment is echoed in the examples of Native American youth who have appropriated black-identified rap and hip hop as cultural frameworks for

---

[25] del Barco 1996.
[26] Fernando Pedro Delgado 1998:96 "Chicano Ideology Revisited: Rap Music and the (Re)Articulation of Chicanismo. Source: *Western Journal of Communication.* 62(2):95-114

the production of their own oppositional forms of self-expression and self-representation (Ullestad 1999). Referencing the social invisibility of Native Americans within the national imagination in Canada, Adam Krims's work suggests that Cree youth in Alberta have employed the racially marked status of African American-associated hip hop to signify their racial difference in symbolically empowering ways (Krims 2000). While Krims underscores how these youth strategically identify *with* African American racial marginalization through hip hop, he does not go as far as to consider the ways rap and hip hop may in fact provide these youth creative mediums for the performative articulation of their own Native America oppositionality within new, contemporarily-relevant frames of antiracist struggle.

***France***

Globally further a field, one site that clearly cannot be overlooked when discussing hip hop's transcendent politics of black racial oppositionality is France. As both largest domestic consumer and producer of rap music after the U.S., France has emerged as one the most sophisticated and influential of hip hop industries – boasting a level of artistic production, creativity, and MC virtuosity that arguably rivals that of anywhere including the U.S. What is of interest to me is the ways French hip hop has both evolved within, and is responsive to the racial postcolonial particularities of a contemporary France.

The French have long appreciated popular forms of American music dating back to the strong reception of jazz beginning as early as the 1920s (Prévos 1996). What

makes hip hop's presence in France noticeably different, however, is that the vast majority of French rap artists and their followers are first and second generation immigrant youth from North and West Africa and the French Caribbean. Many of these youth are drawn from France's geographically and socioeconomically marginal *banlieus* (literally suburbs in French); the sprawling high-rise public housing complexes that skirt large urban centers, most notably Paris. Home to large numbers of poor and working-class immigrant families, *banlieus* are often inflicted by many of the social problems that affect impoverished U.S. urban areas such as high unemployment, drug-related violence and addition, crime, and youth gangs. The mounting frustration and desperation within these areas is reflected in the eruption of riots in the 1980s in a number of *banlieus* outside of Paris, Lion, and Marseilles (Prévos 1998). These poor multiethnic/racial *banlieus* were fertile and receptive ground for the growth of an indigenous hip hop movement. This growth received important inspiration from a 1982 tour of France by Afrika Bambaataa and an entourage of breakdancers including the Rock Steady Crew (Aidi 2001). Within two years of this tour the first branch of the Zulu Nation was established in France which, as André Prévos has noted, was instrumental to introducing hip hop culture to youth in Paris' *banlieus* (Prévos 1996).

The social marginalization experienced by immigrant descendant youth of these geographically peripheral *banlieus* is further compounded by their racialized position in French society. These young people represent a new generation of French citizens whose non-white postcolonial condition stands in contrast to a French nation historically predicated on a white-European cultural paradigm and history. Drawing upon the work

of Ben Jelloun, Lawrence Kritzman writes that the marker of "immigrant" in France today serves as "an essentialized troupe of difference, representing everything resisting assimilation to the national consciousness that it perceives as lacking in subjectivity" (Kritzman 2000:17). Such sentiments find contemporary political expression the rise in the 1990s of the rightist National Front (NF) party led then by Jean Le Pen whose fascist, xenophobic positions included advocating for the expulsion of non-white immigrants from France. It is precisely within this heightened environment of racist anti-immigrant sentiment that today's immigrant-descendent youth are struggling to find their place. Caught in this racialized postcolonial dilemma, these youth can neither claim easily an Arab or African identity as their parents might, nor unproblematically a French one.

Hip hop, I suggest, offers an empowering alternative – a cultural paradigm through which a multi-racial/ethnic collective identity of oppositional non-whiteness can be creatively forged. Hip hop provides a means by which these young people symbolically transform their position as racialized national minorities to that of global majority by affirming their solidarity with urban youth of color and antiracist struggles world wide. In this way these youth become part of a transnational cultural movement, one that self-affirmingly asserts a racially oppositional identity of difference in the face of an often racially exclusionary – if not overtly racist– Euro-western cultural hegemony. Here the black representational significance conveyed through the mediated cultural space of hip hop becomes the basis through which new kinds of oppositional identities of racial difference can be mobilized. This is to suggest that regardless of how "truly" oppositional U.S. rap music and hip hop culture might be, their transnational significance

as resistant cultural practices lies in the particular ways they are received and redeployed by others. In the case of the inter-lingual dissonance between American English and French, such oppositionality is conveyed not so much through the intelligibility of the spoken word, but rather through its aesthetics and language of style.

What particular forms then does this oppositional difference take within the context of French hip hop? With regards to the politics of aesthetics, like their U.S. contemporaries French rap artists and their followers don much of the latest in black-signified U.S. hip hop-related fashion as a key performative marker of their identity as hip hop "heads." Breakdancing and graffiti art have also evolved as critically vibrant elements within French hip hop culture. These expressive, style-driven practices operate as additional sites through which alternative, if not oppositional, identities are performatively constituted through the transnational cultural paradigm of hip hop.

On a more culturally specific level, French rap has a history particularly in Paris of drawing linguistically on *verlan*, a form of vernacular street slang especially common in Paris' *banlieus*. As a type of word play characterized by syllabic and spelling inversions of French words, *verlan's* roots can reportable be traced to French criminals in the 19th century who used the coded vernacular to communicate discreetly with one and other. Today's *verlan,* however, is practiced by and associated primarily with French urban youth of immigrant backgrounds. Although the vernacular has been increasingly appropriated by white French youth and broader commercial media as a cultural symbol of generational chic, *verlan* as with all slang is constantly being remade and re-inscribed with meanings by minority youth as performative markers of their French difference. In

this way *verlan* operates similarly to black vernacular English in that it draws upon standard European linguistic forms and structures while creatively reworking them in the stylistic construction of a signifying vernacular, racially-coded difference.

It is important to emphasize that in the case of *verlan* such oppositional difference is actively constituted through the ways in which it is collectively enacted or performed, and thus serves as an means by which these youth negotiate their individual and group identity as a racialized, socially marginal population in France. French rap artists' incorporation of *verlan* and Arabic expressions commonly used by the large numbers of French youth of North African descent, represents both a signifier of their cultural authenticity as members of the 'hood, while it simultaneously positions the genre itself in cultural opposition to an otherwise exclusionary French society and culture. It is worth noting that MC Solaar, probably one of the most internationally recognized French rap artist, rarely if ever uses *verlan* in his lyric compositions. Solar to the contrary is known for his highly poetic use of formal French grammar which has contributed over the years, along with other factors, to his image as a commercially oriented cross-over artist. While this may be true, an alternative reading might suggest that Senegalese-born Solaar's adept use of formal French produces a sonic racial dissonance within the otherwise racially-exclusionary constructions and discourses of French culture. MC Solar notwithstanding, the political resonance of the wide-spread used of *verlan* is reflected in the establishment of the Toubon Law of 1994 which, in part a response to the growing influence of French rap, attempts to guard the French language against incursions of Americanism, Arabism, and *verlan* (Aidi 2001).

Highly successful long-standing Marseilles-based group IAM (Imperial Asiatic Men) for one provides an other key illustration of the ways alternative, racially oppositionally French identities are being articulated through the space of hip hop. Reflecting the strong multiethnic character of the southern port city of Marseilles which boast a considerably large and diverse immigrant population, IAM's members of Madagascar, Algerian, Senegalese, Spanish and Italian origin champion a self-image that draws more from Africa and the Mediterranean for its imagery than from France. These MCs have all adopted pharaonic names and have suggested in their lyrics that Marseilles was originally part of Africa prior to the continental drift, and therefore rooted in an African historical experience as opposed to European (Prevos 1996). Here, Africa becomes a metaphor of racial/cultural difference vis-à-vis a white Euro-French centered national imaginary and cultural hegemony. IAM also embraces an identification with Islam, particularly as it is voiced by one of the group's members Akhenaton who, of working-class Italian descent, is a convert to Islam. Ted Swedenburg has suggested that IAM projects what he calls a black Islamic Mediterraneanism though their music that serves as a pan-ethnic/racial framework reflecting Marseilles' multicultural makeup. This Islamic informed discourse stands in juxtaposition to France's white Euro-Christian national identity and pervasive anti-immigrant sentiment often expressed in anti-Islamic terms. Swedenburg additionally notes that the transnationality of hip hop further enables a level of identification among IAM's members with African American rap artists associated with Islam including those identified with the black nationalist-oriented Five

Percenters (Swedenburg 2001). In both cases hip hop's embodied meanings of racial alterity serve as frames for the production of other forms of oppositional racial difference.

IAM's celebration of a self-affirming non-European identity takes on an added level of significance when considering that the group's own artistic maturation occurred at a time when Le Pen's previous mentioned anti-immigrant National Front rose to prominence with a string of local election victories in the south of France in the mid-1990s. In response, IAM became increasingly active in antiracist activism during this period. Following their participating in a massive counterdemonstration against a Le Pen campaign stop in Marseilles in 1997, the group released a single entitled *"11'30" contre les lois racists* (Eleven Minutes Thirty Seconds Against Racist Laws). Produced in collaboration with a French antiracist organization, the song was aimed at increasing critical awareness about racists immigration legislation while encouraging Marseilles youth to vote against the National Front (Swedenburg 2001). This antiracist activism emerged through a creative framing and mobilization of racially oppositional identities in response to the politics of racial exclusion in contemporary France. Hip hop in this instance provided just such a frame.

IAM is but one of a number of influential old school rap groups that have helped establish French hip hop's strong tradition of social protest and critique in the 1990s. Positioned at the margins, these critiques were frequently targeted at the French government as corrupt and unresponsive to the plight of France's poor and socially disenfranchised minority populations. Some of the most formidable criticism has been reserved for the French police who are viewed particularly among youth as repressive

agents of a hostile state. Such voicings have often brought the contempt of the French government which over the years has exhibited a significant level of combativeness with French rap. One of the most infamous examples of government sanctions against French rap involved the influential Paris-based Suprême NTM.[27] During a 1995 concert organized by the antiracist organization SOS Racime to protest the election of a Nation Front mayoral candidate in the south of France, members Kool Shen and Joey Starr (of Portuguese and Caribbean descent respectively) provocatively challenged police and/or security guards after performing their accusatorial song "Police" whose 1993 release first brought the duo into conflict with the French government. A French judge eventually found the members guilty of public slander, giving them a three month jail sentence, a six month ban on public performances, heavy fines, and demanded a commitment that they would limit their provocative use of language in the future (Rosello 2000; Prévos 1998). The high-profile affair dramatically boosted the group's record sales, reportedly helping them acquire a multi-record deal with Sony Music and an apparel contact with Adidas (Aidi 2001).

Another related and highly celebrated controversy, as recounted by André Prévos, occurred that same year (Prévos 1998). In 1995 the French record company Delable produced a French hip hop compilation inspired by the recently released film "La Haine" ("Hate") by young French director Mathieu Kassovitz. Set in a *banlieu* outside Paris amidst heightened tensions following the hospitalization of a young Arab at the hands of French police, the film centers on three unemployed youth – a West African, an Algerian,

[27] NTM is short for *Nique ta mère* which translates literally from French as "fuck your mother."

and a Jew – whose anger and frustration over the incident ultimately leads to their own fatal confrontation with police. Drawing on French hip hop's associations with *les banlieus,* the film's bleak black and white portrayal of *banlieu* life is accented with a fast-paced filmscore inflected with French hip hop. One of the groups participating in a follow-up hip hop compilation inspired by the film was Paris-based Ministère AMER whose founding members Stomy Bugsy and Passi are of Cape Verdean and Congolese (the Republic of Congo) respectively. The group's contributing track entitled "Sacrifice de poulets" ("Sacrifice the Chickens") caused an immediate firestorm. Headlining with the derogatory French slang expression *les polutes* for police, the song drew parallels to Ice T's earlier "Cop Killer" in triggering the anger of the national police union over the song's provocative title and content. The police union initiated a lengthy court battle against Ministère in which its members were ultimately charged with publicly calling for the killing of police, as well as insulting the French police force and the French government. As punishment, Ministère's two MCs were fined a total of roughly $70,000. The notoriety of the case however helped secure Ministère's place within the annals of "hard-core" French hip hop history as they went on to contribute to compilations in 1997, 1998, and 2000.

Through the stylistics of language, fashion, graffiti, and dance, to the discursive imaginings of alternative histories, to more overt challenges to racialized forms of state power, French hip hop has emerged as an important site for the articulation and mobilization of contemporary identities of difference among France's immigrant and immigrant-descendant youth. As a highly commercialized cultural industry, however,

French hip hop shares many of the contradictions and ambivalences embodied within U.S. hip hop. Hence, any discussion of the oppositional nature of such practices must therefore always consider the mediated cultural terrain through which such difference is constituted and performatively enacted.

***Germany***

A related and final illustration of the ways racialized identities and related antiracist politics are being mobilized through the increasingly globalized cultural field of hip hop is Germany. Germany represents the second largest consumer of rap music in Europe after France, and as in the case of France immigrant youth are key players within Germany's vibrant hip hop scene. The cultural politics of difference at play within German hip hop, however, may at some levels be articulated in more staunchly oppositional terms vis-à-vis national conscriptions of race and culture and related discourses of citizenship. This is particularly the case when considering the cultural dynamics of Germany's prominent Turkish rap movement. As with all emergent social phenomena, it is necessary to situate Turkish rap within the particular social context of its making.

The rise of new right-wing nationalists currents following the reunification of Germany 1990 significantly complicated the already ambiguous position of large numbers of immigrants currently living in former West Germany territory. Often categorized as *gastarbeiter* or temporary "guest workers," the liminal status of these immigrant communities of predominantly Turkish and North African origin is

exemplified by the fact that children born of immigrants are not automatically granted German citizenship as they are in most other Western countries. Moreover, these communities have in the past been the brunt of racists anti-immigrant violence carried out by neo-Nazi skinheads who – comprised primarily of youth from the former East Germany – have turned to xenophobic scapegoating in reactionary response to their social displacement amidst the economic instability of the post re-unification period. It is against this national backdrop that hip hop in Germany has emerged during the 1990s as a popular cultural force among second generation immigrant youth who have played a particularly visible role in its development.

In addition to the early influence of MTV Europe, rap music first found its West German groundings in cities and towns near U.S. military bases where locally-broadcast American radio programming and large numbers of African American GI's provided local youth access to the music and the broader black cultural context of its making (Bennett 1999). As Dietmar Elfein has noted, early films on New York hip hop culture such as *Wild Style* (1982) and *Beat Street* (1984) were additionally instrumental in introducing hip hop to German audiences (Elfein 1998). Although German youth soon followed in organizing local rap groups, rap has had a notably strong resonance among racially marked youth of immigrant parentage. This has been most evidently the case with those of Turkish descent who, representative of some two million Turkish immigrants in Germany, exhibit a particularly powerful presence among the ranks of contemporary German rap groups and their followers. Focusing on rap music among "ethnic minority" youth of primarily Turkish and Moroccan background in Frankfurt,

Andy Bennett observes that these young people "have appropriated aspects of African-American hip hop culture and, moving beyond a point of straight-forward imitation, are beginning to rework it to act as a mode of expression for a range of local issues" (Bennett 1999: 77). Bennett notes that issues relating to racism and the problematics of an exclusionary German national identity are often of central thematic concern among these groups.

Bennett's analysis is important in that it not only underscores how these youth are mobilizing rap and hip hop as modes of political self-expression, but it also draws attention to questions of identity as they relate the local (re)production of these popular cultural forms. His work suggests that while some racially marginalized youth employ the protest-oriented space of rap to textually assert their national legitimacy as German citizens, others utilize the oppositional character of hip hop in the projection their own self-affirming identities of difference as affronts to exclusionary constructions of German national identity. This second trend is pointedly illustrated in the movement of Turkish-descendant youth in Frankfurt who have opted to rap in their native Turkish rather than German. In addition to overtly marking their linguistic difference, rapping in Turkish also provides these young people with a collective means of performatively enacting their identity as minority youth in new, oppositionally-positioned kinds of ways.

Although Bennett notes that such practices evoke their own nationalist claims – in this case Turkish – as strategic counter-balances to dominant national constructions of Germanness, his use of the term "ethnic" to describe these immigrant populations seems inadequate to account for the very real, everyday kinds of racializing forces and

discourses that shape the collective experiences these communities. My suggestion rather is that what might hold the most significance for these racially marked youth is their identification with hip hop's embodied black racial oppositionality which, in turn, is rearticulated in the performative fashioning of new racially-informed expression and identities of Turkish-German difference. Common refrains among Turkish MCs like "we are the blacks of Germany" or alternately "we are the niggers of Germany" are illustrative – though not unproblematically – of such identification and its redeployment (Ayse Cagler 1998).

Ayse Caglar has argued, however, that scholarly and popular representations of German Turkish hip hop have tended to uncritically celebrate its marginal and oppositional character without taking into consideration the role of state institutions in the promotion of rap and hip hop among Turkish youth. Focusing on Turkish hip hop in Berlin, Caglar suggests that government-sponsored youth centers in the 1990s were instrumental in introducing rap music, breakdance, and graffiti to youth of immigrant parentage – in particular those of Turkish descent. Viewed as non-threatening cultural activities, she follows, hip hop was encouraged as an alternative cultural framework for immigrant descendent youth whose high levels of unemployment and social marginalization marked them as an 'at risk' population. In Calgar's understanding such moves represented systematic attempts on the part of the German state to incorporate Turkish youth within institutional structures, in effect reifying the production of cultural difference while simultaneously modifying and regulating it. Drawing attention to such practices, Caglar contends, complicates the notion of Turkish hip hop as an "authentic"

and "spontaneous" mode of oppositional cultural expression. Caglar's work is illuminating in underscoring the role of state institutions in contributing to the development of Turkish rap in the first instance, and how such efforts sought to reconfigure potentially oppositional expressions of cultural difference within a de-politicized discourse of German multiculturalism. Her analysis, however, does not undermine the fact that rap and hip hop have become key spaces through which Turkish and other racially marked immigrant descendant youth are articulating and, importantly, employing their difference in strategic and politically meaningful ways.

The influential German rap collective Cartel serves as a poignant example of the cultural meaning-making and activist-focused concerns that have become defining elements within Germany's Turkish-identified hip hop movement. Formed in 1995 with the release of the album *Cartel*, a collaborative project between the groups Karakan, Da Crime Posse, and rapper Eric C, Cartel was successful in fusing signifyingly-Turkish instrumentation, melodies, and elements of Turkish language with a strong antiracist message. The group's highly charged lyrics have focused on themes such as anti-immigrant racism and violence, social exclusion, and drug abuse among immigrant youth (Swedenburg 2001). Through the melding of style and politics, Cartel's music has been influential in providing cultural form and critical voice to a new generation of Turkish/immigrant youth in Germany. As a press release of the collective's reads: "As in France and England, here also ethnic minorities have stated to rebel against discrimination their own music. Hip hop as a language is here a logical choice. Cartel

understands itself as a music lobby for thousands of kids of the second generation, speaking up for what they feel" (Elflein 1998:260).

Resonating beyond its national boundaries, however, Cartel's music has also struck a cord among youth in Turkey were its popularity has helped spark the growth of the country's own ingenious hip hop movement. Evocative of the black diasporic context, Turkish hip hop in this manner serves as a popular modality through which diasporic forms of Turkish identification can be transnationally forged between immigrant descendant youth in Germany and their generational peers in Turkey. Although the politics of their production in these national settings may differ, the diasporic significance of Turkish hip hop remains significant in both. Within Germany, hip hop has enabled marginalized immigrant youth a symbolically empowering means to tie themselves to an alternative national framework of Turkishness. Illustrative of this move, Cartel's album cover graphics utilized red background and an ornamented "C" for Cartel evoking the Turkish national flag's white crescent framed in red. These discursive associations, however, have raised problems in post-WWII Germany where nationalist appeals raise immediate alarms and are often readily condemned. Such was the case with Cartel who were accused of advocating an anti-German Turkish nationalism which they, in turn, felt compelled to disavow (Caglar 1998). The rise of hip hop in Turkey in turn must be understood within that country's broader and continued struggle to define itself as a "modern" western-styled secular state following its historical ambiguity as a crossroads of East and West – between Islamic civilization and empire on one hand, and hegemonic constructions of a Euro-western modernity on the other. Hip hop provides

youth of Turkey today a means to construct their own (post)modern identities as contemporary Turks; identities that link them to their diasporic cousins in Germany while tying them to a more expansive imagined community of a hip hop (trans)nation.

### *The Transcendent Politics of Black Racial Oppositionality*

In my attempt to explore the politics of race and identity as they play out within the increasingly globalized phenomenon of rap music and hip hop culture, my query has centered on one simple question: how does the "black" in black expressive and black-identified popular cultural travel? Though it clearly depends on the specific local context of its reception, my attention has focused on the tendency – and it is a significant one – among other racially marked youth to translate, reconfigure, and redeploy the black racial oppositionality conveyed through rap and hip hop in articulating their own oppositionally-positioned identities, related social critiques, and antiracist activism. I have suggested that representational meanings of blackness embodied within the frame of rap and hip hop have emerged in the first instance through highly mediated negotiations of African American expressive and artistic production on one side, and racially prescriptive commercial processes on another. The resulting "performance" of blackness that arises from this dialectic has become an influential modality through which blackness and racial difference is popularly represented and enacted in the U.S. and increasingly beyond. Underscoring the ways black images and representational meanings are performatively shaped through the cultural lens of hip hop, I have argued, reveals the important inter-relationality of black expressive culture, representational practice, and the

politics and processes of black identity formation. This is to say that the broad cultural sphere of hip hop in the U.S. functions interdependently as a realm of black cultural production, a commercially commodified black spectacle, and as an important everyday space for the production and signification of contemporary black identities of difference.

The politics of style, I have emphasized, serve as central conduits through which hip hop's blacknesses of meaning are performatively constituted and conveyed. Be it the signature bass-heavy beats or cadent lyric flow of rap music, or the cultural materiality of hip hop-informed "black urban fashion," hip hop's black textuality is signified above all through its style. It is precisely through such black-signified stylistics, as complexly interarticulated as they may be, that rap music and hip hop culture communicate a racialized difference transnationally. Here there is no claim to an essentialized African American or black culture "authenticity" and/or ownership of hip hop. Rather, the question becomes one of cultural roots verses cultural routes: hip hop's historical rootedness within an African American continuum of expressive culture and music making – one additionally forged at the intersection of Afrodiasporic/Latino culture interchange; and the contemporary transnational routes through which hip hop is refashioned in the sociocultural making of new meanings and ways of being.

Hip hop's politics of black style provide a frame for other racialized minority youth for the performative refashioning and mobilization of their own alternative identities and politics of racial difference. Again, the cultural politics aesthetically conveyed through the stylistics of hip hop operate at a meta-linguistic level; enabling non-English speaking youth globally to identify intelligibly with and redeploy hip hop's

racially oppositional underpinnings despite barriers of language. Blackness functions transformatively in these contexts as a transnational signifier of racial difference; one which can be utilized as far away as New Zealand where the Upper Hutt Posse, a Maori rap group, has sonically fuse elements of Maori language with samples of Nation of Islam's Minster Louis Farrakhan (Mitchell 1996:2). The global space of rap and hip hop in these ways possess, to borrow again from George Lipsitz, the capacity to "created new networks of identification and affiliation that render obsolete some traditional political practices and identities while creating complicated and complex new cultural fusions with profound political implications."[28]

The cultural processes and the racially reconfigured identities that emerge from within hip hop's increasingly transnational contours are, moreover, by their very nature intimately tied to broader economic, social, and cultural dynamics associated with global postmodernity. Along the lines of Fredrick Jameson, David Harvey and others, I speak here of the postmodern as an historicized global condition materially linked to and characterized by the rapid expansion of transnational capital. For Jameson, a defining characteristic of this new global reality involved practices of cultural commodification: that is, the advancing global pace at which "culture," in all its potential forms, is being transformed into objects of market value by and for the seemingly transnational boundlessness of a postmodern cultural logic. The cultural complexities of hip hop's production and global diffusion, as I have argued, are inextricably linked to such commercially-mediated modes of cultural commodification as they are to the

[28] Lipsitz 1994:13.

proliferation of transnational capital networks and markets. The trans-local flows of music, images, fashion and meanings that feed rap and hip hop's internationalization are themselves material and discursive manifestations of these same postmodern processes. Cultural flows of these kinds, in turn, operate as key resources in the (self)fashioning of emergent, critically-positioned identities of difference within hip hop's global cultural frame.

Beyond their cultural sources, such hip hop-informed identities are further marked by postmodernity in a number of interrelated ways. Within the sociocultural context of the Black Atlantic, as previously mentioned, there are prominent scholarly arguments that root the black diasporic experience, its politics, and identities squarely – if not uncontestably – within historicized space and project of Western modernity.[29] My suggestion, however, is that while black diasporic frameworks may engage, evoke, and/or reproduce their own discourses modernists structures and discourses, they nonetheless propose some fundamental *post*-modern challenges in both form and function to modernist interarticulations of race and nation. Predicated on the projection of nationally-transcendent forms of black identification, black diasporic modes of identity are often strategically mobilized in contestation of dominant national constructions of race and corresponding modes of racialized subjugation. As the cases of Brazilian and South African rap vividly illustrate, hip hop's black transnational significance has enabled the mobilization of new forms of black identity and politics which challenge the racial underpinnings of national formations and their socially disabilitating affects. In

[29] See again Gilroy (1993), Nassy Brown (1998) and Michael Hanchard (1999).

contexts such as France and Germany, racially marked minority youth employ hip hop's racially oppositional meanings in articulating new identities of racial difference and antiracist politics which contest exclusionary and repressive tendencies of Euro-national identity and citizenship. In all these cases, the outer-national production of critically-mobilized forms of racial identity undermine nationally-bounded constructions of race which have historically underskirted the construction of "the nation" as the quintessential organizational structure of modern power.[30] In these ways these emergent hip hop-inflected identities of difference and their political framings can be understood as postmodern ruptures within the modernist façade of their respective national contexts – effectively fracturing the homogenizing meta-narratives of national monolithies.

The social mobilization of racialized identities through the transnational frame of hip hop in these ways can be further understood within the context of new identity-based social movements. The term new social movements generally speaks to the emergence of new kinds of action-oriented social organization predicated most often on subaltern forms of identity politics. A sizable body of recent literature theorizing the rise of new social movements has occurred within the context of Latin America where indigenous and African-descendent communities have mobilized around "ethnic" and/or racial identities (as opposed to "class") in struggles for greater cultural and political rights.[31] Such struggles and the politicized identities around which they are organized are frequently

---

[30] For discussions of the historically interarticulations of race and nation see Paul Gilroy (1987) and Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991). For key treatments of the nation and modern power see Benedict Anderson (1991), Anthony Smith (1991), and Partha Chatterjee (1993).

[31] For a comprehensive review of Latin American-based new social movement literature see Charles Hale (1997).

articulated in oppositional terms vis-à-vis exclusionary constructions and practices of specific national formations. Identities of oppositional difference therefore become the social lens through which these groups mobilize in response to forms of social power and inequality that are expressed along these very same lines of difference.

A significant segment of the literature on new social movements has underscored the links between the rise of identity-based social mobilization and the advancing pace at which transnational capital and related neoliberal policies are reshaping the social landscape of previously more-bounded national contexts. The emergence of new national-transcendent, locally-manifested social imperatives, in turn, demand new forms of equally responsive collective social strategies. As I have attempted to illustrate, the transnational cultural framework of hip hop has enabled the mobilization of just such kinds of critical identities. In many of these cases new racialized paradigms have both shaped and necessitated the emergence of new kinds of racial-based social strategies on the part of new generations of racially marked citizenry. In Europe we have seen the rise of new forms of racism tied to right-wing neo-nationalist movements and settlement that primarily target non-western immigrants whose "cultural difference" is viewed as incompatible with Euro-national cultural norms. This rise of what Etienne Balibar has termed neo-racisms (Balibar 1991) calls for new kinds of racially responsive agencies of which hip hop, as illustrated in the case of France and Germany, has become an important site for immigrant-descendant youth to critically shape and act from newly articulated identities of racial difference. In these cases the current economic and social restructuring towards an integrated Europe in conjunction the postcolonial movement of

peoples from the "peripheries" to the "centers" that characterize this moment are largely informed by the global workings of late capital.

In the case of South Africa, a new generation of racially classified colored youth are attempting to position themselves amidst shifting racial paradigms of "old" and "new" where current claims to non-racialism run counter to the continuing socioeconomic structures of hierarchical racial privilege. In Brazil, hegemonic discourses tied to notions of "racial democracy" are increasingly becoming unhinged as Afro-Brazilian youth utilize the diasporically-configured black racial contours of hip hop to construct new identities as the basis to critically interrogate the social realities of their everyday. In all these instances, rap music and the broader cultural frame of hip hop enabled a level of strategic self-making within and through prescriptive structures of racialized power as they intersect at the nexus of the local and global.

As U.S. and other globally-situated examples of hip hop attest, the creative fashioning of such "postmodern" informed racial identities are resoundingly masculine in character. To the extent to which patriarchal forms of power may be reproduced in efforts to advance oppositional kinds of racial politics and antiracist activism, the question that must be asked is whether such attempts at political praxis can be truly liberatory. While the late Audre Lorde reminds us that the masters tools may never dismantle the master's house (Lord 1984), the growing assertion of women's voices within local rap communities holds possibilities for a more inclusive envisioning of a socially-just hip hop future. As I move to my examination of *el movimiento hip hop cubano* questions of gender and liberation remain a highly contested domains as they

plays out at the intersections of revolution, *machismo,* U.S. black radicalism, and emergent black Cuban feminisms.

## Chapter Two

## Cuban Nation Building, Non-Racialism, and Black Historical Agency

Before I offer a more detailed description of *el movimiento de rap cubano* and its relationship to the interplay of race and social transition in contemporary Cuba, it is necessary to first contextualize the historical significance of race in the making of a modern Cuban nation. In order to do so, it is imperative that one be attentive to the constitutive roles different forms of black political mobilization have played within Cuba's dialectic of race and nation. Such an effort is an attempt to locate black Cubans as active agents in the historical process of Cuban nation building rather than as passive objects or "cultural elements" of the nation as they are all too often portrayed.

As throughout the Caribbean, Cuba's development as a modern nation is inextricably tied to race through the foundational role of African slave labor. Within eight years of initial Spanish settlement, the first enslaved Africans were brought to Cuba in 1522. Early interest in gold extraction using coerced indigenous labor quickly gave way to cattle ranching and small-holding tobacco cultivation which became the mainstays of the Cuban colonial economy throughout the seventeenth and most part of the eighteenth century (Segal 1995:82). Though the importation of enslaved Africans continued during this period, neither cattle ranching nor tobacco production required enormous numbers of slave labor. Cuba did, however, serve as a key trafficking point for slave ships en route from Africa to their various destinations in the new world. It was not until large-scale plantation-based sugar production took hold in Cuba that the demand for

African slave labor dramatically escalated, radically altering the historical direction and character of the island as a whole.

This transformation of the Cuban economy was directly tied to the collapse of the colonial sugar industry of St. Domingue, brought on by the initiation of the Haitian Revolution in 1791. Capitalizing on St. Domingue's abrupt departure from the world market as the Caribbean's preeminent sugar economy (Pérez 1983), Cuba – with the help of thousands of French settlers who had fled St. Domingue with some of their enslaved workers – embarked on a rapid, large-scale expansion of sugar production. In total, some 750,000 enslaved Africans were introduced to Cuba between 1763 and 1862 (Pérez 1983:85), feeding Cuba's ever-expanding sugar industry which would soon became the world's largest.[32] As a grim illustration of the pace at which African lives were consumed by Cuban sugar, the average life expectancy of enslaved Africans on many nineteenth-century plantations was less than seven years (Pérez 1983:92). In general terms then, Cuba's enslaved population was sustained less through "natural growth" than through the ongoing acquisition of Africans – a practice which continued as late as the early 1860s (Thomas 1996).

Such brutality, however, did not go unanswered. Though there were numerous slave revolts during the eighteenth-century, it was not until Cuban slaves began hearing word of the freeing of slaves in the British West Indies in the 1840s that resistance to Cuban slavery increased dramatically (Segal 1995:93). These rebellions represented some of the first collective expressions of organized black opposition. Under Spain's

[32] For an unparalleled examination of the rise of Cuba's plantation-based sugar economy see Manuel Fraginals' *EL ingenio* (1978).

colonial authority, Cuba's repression of these early forms of black resistance came to a head in the infamous *La Escalera* massacre of 1844,[33] in which thousands of slaves and free people of color were accused of plotting to end slavery and Spanish control of the island. By the end of 1844 – which became known as *año de cuero* ("year of the lash") – thousands of people of color, both free and enslaved, were executed, imprisoned, or simply disappeared (Paquette 1988).

The physical repression of Cuba's enslaved population, and the racist legislation targeted primarily at free people of color which ensued, appear to have been intended more as systematic attempts to curtail the potential of black resistance and political mobilization than a response to any real threat. In fact, there has been significant historical debate as to whether the alleged plot behind *La Escalera* may have been a state-fabricated "conspiracy theory" to justify its bloody reprisal against blacks (Paquette 1988). White Cuban creole elite's fears of a "black Cuba" were most certainly exacerbated by the recent memory of the Haitian experience. While the specter of the Haitian experience would continue to haunt "white" Cuba (Duharte Jiménez 1993), *La Escalera* would in many ways set an historical precedent regarding how Cuba would chose to deal with oppositional expressions of black political organization and mobilization.

*The Independence Wars, Antonio Maceo, and the Assertion of Black National Legitimacy*

[33] *La Escalera*, or "the ladder", refers to the inhuman practice of binding individuals suspected of insurrection to ladders, upon which they where interrogated and often severely whipped as punishment. This was the a central method by which Africans allegedly involved in this "conspiracy" were disciplined, hence the name La Escalera.

Another significant, if not historically constitutive, moment of early Afro-Cuban mobilization occurred during Cuba's wars of independence. During the first set of independence wars between 1868 and 1878, and the second between 1895 and 1898, upwards of seventy percent of the rank and file of the liberation army were estimated to be men of color – e.g. black or mulatto (McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995:82). Such rates of black voluntary military participation were remarkably high when compared to other black populations in the hemisphere. The key inspiration for such involvement was the promise of manumission to those who volunteered, as well as the association of the independence struggle with the abolition of slavery and eventual social reforms (Helg 1995). When the larger rebellion refused to emancipate blacks en masse, General Antonio Maceo, a "mulatto" and a key military figure in the independence wars, led raids on plantations to free enslaved blacks and encouraging them to join the independence struggle. These freed blacks, who were among the officially recorded thirty-two percent of Cuba's population of African descent in 1887 (Helg 1995:24), made up the vast majority of *los mambises* – the famed, horse-backed fighting force of the liberation army.

Concerning the historical position of Afro-Cubans vis-à-vis questions of national citizenship, the significance of Maceo's role and symbolism as heroic liberator of both black Cubans and the Cuban nation is a complex one. Under the leadership of Maceo and other black *cabecillas* (rebel leaders), including his brother José, the involvement of thousands of recently freed blacks in the nationalist struggle represented the ultimate challenge to those who would choose to exclude blacks from equal participation in a

newly liberated Cuba nation. Within this clearly male-centered nationalist paradigm, claims of black national legitimacy were predicated on the fact that black soldiers were willing to sacrifice their lives in the struggle for an independent Cuba. In so doing blacks were therefore entitled to demand their rightful share as full citizens within a newly independent Cuba (Helg 1995). Realizing such claims, however, proved quite illusive. Following the official abolition of slavery in 1886 – the second to last country in the hemisphere to do so, Cuba finally gained independence from Spain in 1898. Cuba was then immediately occupied between 1899 and 1902 by the U.S. military after Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. Within a newly formed Cuban Republic, blacks continued to experienced systematic exclusion from full participation within the political, social, and economic spheres of a 'liberated' Cuban nation.

Though Antonio Maceo died in battle two years before Cuba officially gained independence, his historical importance as a leader and embodied icon of Cuban nationalism can not be overstated. Among *creole* elite at the time, however, such reverence was accompanied by fear – a racist fear resonant of the Haitian Revolution of a black *caudillo* (leader) ushering in a black Cuba (Duharte Jiménez 1993; Ferrer 1999). This fear was clearly prevalent among white civilian independence leaders during the period just prior to Maceo's death, when his position as the second most influential of Cuba's rebel generals was increasingly under attack.[34] It has been suggested that such white fear may have been a contributing factor to Maceo's (un)timely defeat and death at the hands of the Spanish (Duharte Jiménez 1993; Helg 1995).

[34] Maceo officially served as second in command of the liberation army after Dominican-born General Máximo Gómez was named commander and chief in 1878.

Among black Cubans, Maceo represented the martyred personification of black national legitimacy. For many creole elite of an emerging Cuban Republic, however, the image of a black or mulatto occupying such a key position in Cuba's national beginnings was in conflict with those attempts to write a "white" Cuba into history. To these ends an "anthropological" study of Maceo's exhumed skeleton was commissioned in 1900 that employed 18th century eugenics theories to "scientifically" prove that Maceo's "white" heritage predominated over that of his "black" (Helg 1985:104-5, Ferrer 1999:168). Such attempts to erase Maceo's blackness – and by extension the significance of black participation in the independence wars – symbolized larger efforts to erase blackness itself from the face of the nation and corresponding conceptions of *cubanidad*.

Maceo's African ancestry would eventually be resurrected by celebrated Afro-Cuban/nationalist poet Nicolás Guillién, whose work was instrumental in promoting a racially creolized discourse of Cuban national identity during the *Afro-Cubanismo* movement of the mid-1920s (Moore 1997, Ellis 1998, Marínez-Eschzábal 1998). Maceo's blackness, or more accurately "mulattoness," would be further revived in a post-1959 revolutionary Cuba that posited Maceo as one of three heroic father-figures of Cuban nationalism.[35] Maceo's non-white mulattoness – symbolic of black participation in the independence wars – is celebrated in such a way that it testifies not only to the multi-racial character of Cuba, but ultimately to the *non-racial* foundations of the Cuban nation itself. Moreover, Maceo's racially-mixed background provides an embodied icon

[35] The other two are General Máximo Gómez and the nationalist intellectual José Martí, to whom I will return shortly. These three stand as canonic expressions of the highly male-defined character of Cuban nationalism.

of a creolized[36] Cuban national identity which the Revolution, developing on a history of twentieth-century nationalist discourse, has come to claim as the sprit of *cubanidad*. Fidel Castro's recent proclamation of Cuba as a "Latin-African" nation is illustrative of this position (see Moore 1988). As I will soon argue, such creolized conceptions of *cubanidad*, as with similar nationalist discourses of *mestizaje*, have proven problematic vis-à-vis black Cuban efforts towards the development of black-identified forms of political action.

***José Martí, National Non-racialism, and U.S. Interventionism***

Another key figure of Cuban nationalism whose intellectual legacy has been central to questions of race and nation in Cuba is the Cuban intellectual and activist José Martí. While in exile in New York City in 1892, Martí founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party whose platform embodied his appeal for a united Cuba in which all Cubans regardless of race or class would join collectively in struggle for an independent republic. Martí was later killed in 1895 in a skirmish with Spanish troops within a month of returning to Cuba to join in the offensive. Though his death deprived the independence movement of one of its most respected and promising civilian leaders, Martí's writings on nationalism and anti-colonialism/U.S. imperialism have been powerfully resonant

[36] I use the term creolized here as opposed to mestizo to signify the black racial significance implicit in the notion of racial mixing in Cuban. The term "mestizo" as it is commonly used within the Latin American context refers in historical to the cultural or "biological" mixing of indigenous and European peoples. Within the sociohistorical context of the Caribbean, the term creolization is more often used signify syncretization of African and European cultural elements.

within twentieth-century nationalist thinking in Cuba (if not throughout Latin America). Martí's conception of a non-racial Cuba has been particularly enduring.

In his celebrated essay "Our America" published in New York in 1891, Martí outlines his ethical and political visions for a future Cuba. Appealing to the Cuban independence movement, he rejects the idea of biologically-determined notion of race by asserting: "There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races" (cited in Shnookal 1999:119). Martí's appeal was no doubt informed by his recognition of the necessity of a racially unified independence struggle, which in turn would become the foundation of a newly established Cuban Republic predicated on non-racialism. In his 1893 essay "My Race," Martí more explicitly elaborates:

> *In Cuba, there is no fear of racial war. Men are more than whites, mulattos, or Negros. Cubans are more than whites, mulattos or Negros. On the field of battle, dying for Cuba, the souls of whites and Negros have risen together into the air. In the daily life of defense, loyalty, brotherhood and shrewdness, Negros have always been there, alongside whites. (cited in Shnookal 1999:161)*

Like Maceo, Martí was later canonized by the 1959 Cuban Revolution as a nationalist symbol, employing his vision of non-racial Cuba as a central tenet of a revolutionary Cuban society. During one of two notable speeches in March 1959 on the question of race and the Revolution, a recently triumphant Fidel Castro evoked Martí's non-racialist ideals when he declared:

> *We have asked people to collaborate in the way which is most worthy, that they help us find greater friendship and understanding among all Cubans, and that they help us*

> *fight against every injustice, that they help us fight against prejudice... We have to uproot the last colonial vestiges, conscious of making that phase of Martí's reality. He said it before, we have to repeat it now: that the Cuban is more than white, more than black, we are Cuban*.[37]

Among black soldiers of the independence army, Martí's racially-inclusive nationalist discourse was used to further justify their claims to national legitimacy. Historian Adda Ferrer contends that black soldiers often employed this language of non-racialism to expose and condemn what they saw as racism within the nationalist ranks. Here, discourses of a raceless nation – those positing racial harmony and integration – were employed by black Cubans to win concessions within the independence movement (Ferrer 1999:9-10). A similar argument has been posed by de la Fuente, who maintains that popular discourses of national racelessness have provided blacks with spaces to make political claims demanding the realization of such principles (de la Fuente 1999).

While such discourses of non-racialism may embody strong antiracist claims, they nonetheless present serious obstacles to the development of extra-national forms of political identification and action. More specifically, beyond simply dismissing biological arguments of race, Martí's non-racial proscriptions leave little legitimate space for the production of racially-informed kinds of identification that could serve as the basis for black political mobilization. By radically juxtaposing the concepts of race and nation in this manner, forms of racial identification were configured as "racist" in their antithetical opposition to strictly "nationalist" modes of identifying. Within this non-

[37] Fidel Castro, "Revolución," Havana, March 26 1959, pp. 4-5. cited in Fernández Robaina (1993:103)

racial paradigm, claiming one's blackness (or whiteness) is akin to an act of anti-patriotism, if not by implication one of national treason. As Ferrer suggests, the historical silencing of race in this way denies space not only for black Cuban political organizing, but possibly the very validity of black Cuban subjectivity as well (Ferrer 1999). These concerns continue to be a central dilemma of the black Cuban experience.

The reality, however, is that before history allowed space for the Cuban independence movement to address in one fashion or another its promise for a non-racial Cuban Republic, U.S. imperialism usurped the moment though its intervention and defeat of colonial Spain in the Spanish-American War of 1898. The intervention in effect commandeered the battle over Cuba, transforming it from popular nationalist insurrection to imperialist conquest. The ensuing U.S. military occupation in 1898-1902 and subsequent second intervention and occupation in 1906-9 had critical and lasting effects upon the Republic's historical trajectory and, arguably, the islands racial dynamics well into the 20th century and beyond. These interventions provided secure footholds for U.S. capital expansion within Cuba's sugar economy over the next fifty years.

U.S. commercial interests in Cuban sugar, though, date back to the intensification of the mono-crop's production though enslaved labor during the 19th century to feed growing U.S. and European consumption.[38] By the mid-1890s the U.S. had in fact replaced Spain as Cuba's primary importer of sugar (Martínez-Alier 1989). The ultimate issue, however, was one of control as successive U.S. administrations made unsuccessful

[38] For a seminal study of the political economy of sugar consumption in the West as an engine for the rise and expansion of slave-based plantation economies in the Caribbean see Stanley Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985).

bids during the mid-19th century to annex the island within its territorial fold (Pérez 1988). Given that by the middle of the 19th century Cuba under slavery was producing 25% of the worlds total sugar production (Leogrande and Tomas 2002:325), the potential economic stakes of such control were great. There was, moreover, concern by 1997 within the McKinley administration regarding the advancing successes of the largely black independence army that could, in its assessment, potentially lead to the installation of a "Haitian-style black dictatorship" – a development that could, in turn, threaten U.S. interest in the island (Helg 1995:89). Two military interventions resolved these dilemmas, and by the mid-1930s U.S. firms controlled upwards of seventy-five percent of Cuba's sugarcane production (Jatar-Hausmann 1999:11). By 1959 U.S. commercial investments in Cuba exceeded those of any foreign country with the exception of Venezuela, while it managed to consume roughly two-thirds of the islands exports and supply about three-quarters of its imports (Aguilar 1996:96). Such imperialist designs were secured and codified in the Platt Amendment of 1901 which gave the U.S., among other things, the right to intervene for "the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property and individual liberties…"[39] In this Cuba became a forth jewel among Spain's former colonial holdings – along with Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam – within the U.S.'s expanding imperialist war chest.

Subsequent with U.S. control, a number of scholars have argued that the U.S. occupation of 1898-1902 and ensuing influence up through and beyond the second occupation of 1906-9 contributed to further socio-political marginalization of black

[39] To this end the Platt Agreement established the permanence of the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo Bay.

Cubans during the first half of the 20th century. Helg for instance has suggested that the occupying U.S. military administration drew upon Cuba's long standing patterns of racial differentiation in instituting policies that reified and further entrenched structural discrimination against blacks. She draws attention to systematic discrimination in employment and the implementation of new restrictive election laws that had a limiting effect on black Cuban participation within the island's system of universal male suffrage – a key sanctioned triumph of the independence struggle (Helg 1995). Alejandro de la Fuente has contended, moreover, that the U.S. military administrators actually introduced a "scientific racism" into Cuba's social framework which institutionally codified an ideology of black racial inferiority enabling an importation of southern, U.S.-styled Jim Crow segregation within U.S.-owned sugar facilities with regard to housing and social amenities such as barber shops (de la Fuente 2001:109). Many of these developments were perpetuated under the administration of Tomás Estrada Palma who, with the explicit consent of U.S. military governor, became the Republic's first elected president in 1902. Estrada Palma's government as later brought down in 1906 by a political uprising through the organizational framework of the oppositional Partido Liberal (Liberal Party) in which black Cubans participated in large numbers (de la Fuente 2001). It was this shift in power, again were black folks played a critical role, that provoked the second U.S. military intervention in Cuba that same year.

***Partido Independiente de Color***

The emergence of the Afro-Cuban-based Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color) in 1908 represented a radical challenge to the young republic's early claims of a national racelessness. The Partido grew out of a growing black disillusionment over the continued exclusion of black Cubans from full and equal participation in the newly formed nation. As former combatants and supporters in the independence wars, blacks found themselves systematically relegated to the working and peasant classes. This situation was further exacerbated by massive state-promoted immigration of Spanish workers encouraged through the systematic use of European labor preferences. In total, some 128,000 Spaniards entered the Cuban labor force between 1902 and 1907 (Helg 1995:99). In addition to advancing black socio-economic marginalization, the creole elite's encouragement of larger-scale Spanish immigration was also designed to promote a racial "whitening" of the Cuban population. Historian Aline Helg has argued that Cuba's official efforts at national whitening – unlike other Latin American variants of blanqueamiento (most notably Brazil) – was predicated less on the idea of "racial mixing" than on the notion that massive importation of European workers would further numerically marginalize blacks as a racial minority (Helg 1995). Official discourses aside, the historical consequences of so-called whitening and racial "miscegenation," as I will discuss shortly, have been and continue to be very complex ones with regards to questions of Cuban nationhood.

It is within this context of continued black exclusion and marginalization that the Partido Independiente de Color formed in 1908. As the first autonomous black political party in the Americas, the Partido built upon already existing organizational networks

developed during the independence wars. Politically, the Partido brought a range of black individuals and interests together in presenting a program that pressed for demands to end racial discrimination, increasing access for blacks to state-sponsored employment, and social reform (Helg 1995). Given the early passage of universal male suffrage, the Partido's ranks grew rapidly, posing an electoral threat to the established white-dominated parties. The growing presence of black racial consciousness surrounding the Partido's ascendance posed an additional challenge to the Republic's attempts to silence race through its mantra of non-racialism. The particular character of black Cuban racial identification given form by the Partido, however, did not embrace a black separatist or nationalist character. Rather, the Partido's ideological orientation and political project were directed toward the inclusion of blacks as full members within the Cuban nation – again, an assertion of an Afro-Cuban national legitimacy (Helg 1995). As such, these political aims can be seen as framed within what Paul Gilroy has called a "politics of fulfillment" in their call for the realization of contractual promises by "the nation" and/or state power regarding the rights of full citizenship (Gilroy 1993a). Such an approach is to be distinguished from a "politics of transfiguration" that would, in Gilroy's formulation, seek to transform, rather than fulfill, existing structural conditions and contractual forms of state power. I will later argue that an analogous politics of black national fulfillment finds contemporary (re)articulation through the space of Cuban hip hop.

Demands on the part of the Partido's leadership for full and equal citizenship were nonetheless perceived as a threat to the national (read racial) status quo. In response, the established Partido Liberal, which had traditionally garnered the majority of

black votes, passed legislation to prohibit political parties from organizing along class or racial lines. The Moúra amendment of 1910 effectively banned the Partido from participating in national elections. For two years party members unsuccessfully waged legal challenges against the law. As a final strategy, the Partido organized a massive protest in Havana in 1912 against the amendment.[40] The protest was brutally crushed by the Cuban army, effectively annihilating the party's organization and its agenda. More than three-thousand blacks were massacred while black folks were systematically terrorized across the island. Often referred to as the "race war of 1912" by reactionary press and official accounts for decades, the massacre was fed once again by lingering white fears of a black Cuba rising to swallow up the nation in the making of another Haiti. The experiences of 1912 were a radical reminder of the political stakes at play concerning Cuba's proclaimed non-racialism. In this case, the perceived threat of an asserted black voice through autonomous political action was met with unrestrained state violence. As Helen Safa observes, the events of 1912 are a clear illustration of how a system of racial hegemony – in Cuba's case, one predicated on notions of national racelessness – can shift to one of overt physical coercion when threatened by the formation of a racial (or "ethnic") blocs (Safa 1998:9).

The 1912 massacre effectively put an end to independent black political parties in Cuba as blacks subsequently worked within existing political parties and trade unions as opposed to their own autonomous organizations. There exists some debate as to whether

[40] There is some debate over whether protesters were armed or not. The official State account at the time held that they were bearing arms. Given the experience of *La Escalera*, these claims might have been fabricated as a pretense for the Cuba government's bloody reprisal against the Partido Independiente's supporters.

this move signified a radical neutralization of black political expression within Cuba. Some have suggested that the brutal razing of the Partido Independiente amounted to the end of organized black radicalism in Cuba (e.g. Helg 1993:21). Others have argued that blacks continued to press political demands through their work within national organizations and structures (la Fuente 2001). The Cuban Communist Party (PCC), for instance, took up some of the demands of the Partido Independiente de Color, assuming the role as vanguard of working-class which was overwhelmingly made up of black Cubans and a new and growing body of black migrant workers from the Caribbean (McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995).

Between 1912 and 1931, more than 300,000 black Caribbean immigrants, primarily from Haiti, Jamaica and Barbados, entered Cuba to work the cane fields following a post WWI sugar boom (Carr 1998; de la Fuente 2001). The introduction of these workers – the largest numbers from Haiti and Jamaica – significantly complicated the national dynamics of race on the island, as well as contributed a new and lasting black presence primarily in the eastern provinces of Camagüey and Oriente. By the 1920s these immigrants became targets of racist anti-immigrant hostilities fed by elite fears of a black "invasion" which would thwart those efforts at "whitening" the Cuban Republic (de la Fuente 1999). Racially-coded discourses of disease and national contamination were systematically tied to these immigrants (Carr 1998:86; de la Fuente 1999:52). Additionally, growing anti-imperialist sentiment linked black Caribbean workers to the increasing influence of U.S. capital, which had come to dominate Cuba's sugar sector by this time (Carr 1998:84).

An important development tied to the growth of the black Caribbean immigrant population at this time was the establishment of Cuban branches of the UNIA. The UNIA's publication the *Negro World* began circulating in both Spanish and English editions in 1920 (Fernández Robaina 1998). The organization's black nationalist organization presented an ideological, if not oppositional, alternative to the racial exclusivity of an ostensibly non-racial *cubanidad*. The UNIA's message was particularly appealing to Cuba's radically marginalized Caribbean-born black population. In fact, the UNIA's race-based appeals were staunchly rejected by black Cuban intellectuals and the established black press. When Garvey himself visited Cuba in 1921 his reception among black Cuban leaders was rather mixed (Fernández Robaina 1998). President of a prominent Havana-based black society, Miguel Angel Cépedes was at the time quoted as saying:

> The black Cuban strove to create a republic where he could live in dignity and enjoy all the rights of a civilized and free man: he cannot imagine another homeland other than the Cuban homeland. He does not share in the Pan-African ideal because he has a cosmopolitan notion of the human spirit.[41]

As this quotation illustrates, hegemonic discourses of national inclusively found a level of resonance among the black middle-class establishment. Another possible factor contributing to an on the ground distancing of black Cubans from the UNIA is that racist anti-immigrant attacks often targeted "indigenous" blacks as well as immigrants (Carr 1998). It has been suggested that this situation may have helped discourage black Cubans

[41] Cited in Fernández Robaina 1998:121.

from participating in racially-identified forms of political organization (Aviva Chomsky 1994 cited in Carr 1998:86). Yet, among Caribbean-born blacks Garvey and the UNIA remained popular, especially with English-speaking Jamaican workers. By the late 1920s, however, both Garvey and the UNIA were banned by the Cuban government.

The combination of anti-immigrant sentiment and the growing economic crisis culminated in a massive general strike in Havana and other cites which eventually brought down the U.S.-backed Machado dictatorship in 1933. The brief five-month reign of the left-leaning Grau San Martin government was unsuccessful at consolidating its position amidst continued labor unrest, and was quickly overturned by a U.S. supported coup lead by army strongman Fulgencio Batista. Through the organizational leadership of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) and its allies, black sugar workers – who were comprised of large numbers of Caribbean immigrants – were at the center of the labor mobilizations which helped shape the political outcomes of 1933 (Carr 1998). During the same period, the PCC had begun a short-lived campaigning for the establishment of an autonomous black region, or "franja negra" ("black belt"), in the eastern part of the island – an idea which was eventually abandoned. Although the PCC positioned itself as a champion against racial discrimination and the deportation of foreign-born black workers, the depth of its organized support among Cuban blacks was limited.

Alternatively, blacks continued to organize within the space of religious and cultural organizations which had developed as traditional black social institutions. *Cabildos* were established during slavery as spaces in which groups of blacks organized themselves into collective societies to promote social welfare and cohesion among the

enslaved. The formation of *cabildos* were initially encouraged by the Cuban state and Roman Catholic Church in Cuba as a means, at least in part, to create individually identified slave communities as a bulwark against a unified African slave population (Segal 1995). Many of these societies practiced forms of 'traditional' African-based religion and ritual involving the initiated. *Cabildos*, however, are to be distinguished from earlier religious communities such as *lucumi*, *abakuá*, *arara*, and *mayombé* orders formed by enslaved Africans along ethnic or "national" lines, many of which still exist today. The more prolific *santería* – a collection of more self-consciously syncretic forms of Yoruba/Congo-based religious practices – has and continues to serve as another important space for Afro-Cuban cultural production and social organization.

As these examples illustrate, cultural institutions evolving around realms of expressive culture have historically been key sites of Afro-Cuban social organization given, in part, the limited access to other kinds of collective mobilization. Through the production and codification of self-identifiably "black" cultural practices, black Cubans constituted group identities of difference through the space of expressive culture, providing a basis not only for collective identification, but collective action as well. Throughout the early twentieth century, however, many of these groups experienced harsh periods of repression from succeeding Cuban administrations (Moore 1997). This repression was accompanied by continued racial discrimination and exclusion of blacks from national structures of power. Though a new constitution was established in 1940 that nominally made racial discrimination illegal, black Cubans continued to experience systematic racial inequality at the national scale.

***Fernando Ortiz, Race and the Cultural Politics of Cubanidad***

One cannot adequately discuss the historical interplay of race and nation in Cuba without addressing the ways in which the two have been configured vis-à-vis questions of culture within popular, if not hegemonically constituted, conceptions of Cuban national identity. The work of Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz has been particularly instrumental in influencing twentieth-century ideas on race and culture in relationship to notions of *cubanidad*. Ortiz was part of a movement arising during the early 1920s comprised of primarily middle-class white elites and vandgardist intellectuals who represented the first wave of Republic-born intelligentsia. These individuals led efforts to hegemonically construct a national Cuban identity independent of, if not oppositional to, a history of Spanish colonial influence and growing U.S. imperialist domination (Moore 1997).[42] Ortiz and his colleagues recognized that contemporary ideas of national Cubanness, though they may have made claims to a non-racialism, tended to exclude non-whites from national representations. In search of an "authentic" Cubanness, these individuals looked toward black Cubans as the cultural saviors of a Cuban national soul. One manifestation of this ideological development was the previously mentioned *Afro-Cubanismo* movement of the mid-1920s, comprised chiefly of writers, poets, and musicians (Moore 1997).

[42] By this time the U.S. had launched its second military intervention and occupation of 1906 and 1909.

Commonly venerated as the 'father' of Afro-Cuban studies, Ortiz's early work argued that Afro-Cuban religious practices, in particular so-called *brujeria*,[43] were examples of an Afro-Cuban cultural and social pathology. Much of his initial writings attempted to argue a black racialized propensity towards criminality – efforts which took on added force given Ortiz's early work as a professional witness for the prosecution of black religious leaders (Moore 1997:34). In a related vein, Ortiz made early recommendations that immigration to the island be limited to northern Europeans as a way of stemming the incorporation of other "races" that would contribute to a greater level of Cuban criminality (Helg 1995:104). Presumably abandoning much of his earlier racist orientations, Ortiz's latter work shifted considerably as he became an active champion of Afro-Cuban culture. These efforts were institutionalized in his founding of the *Sociedad de Estudios Afro-Cubanos* (the Society for Afro-Cuban Studies) in 1937. In addition to presenting a new-founded academic legitimacy to Afro-Cuban culture and religious practice, the establishment of the *Sociedad de Estudios Afro-Cubanos* also laid an institutional groundwork for an appropriation and folklorization of black expressive culture as the basis for a Cuban nationalist culture (Moore 1994). The configuring of Afro-Cuban expressive culture and by extension black Cubans themselves within nationally-bounded discourses of "folklore," as I will discuses in the subsequent chapter,

[43] The term *brujeria* or "witchcraft" is a derogatory, creole-derived catch-all expression which refers to various Afro-Cuban espiritism practices which employ a complex use of plants and animals, incantations, and the exercise of supernatural powers to heal, protect, or harm people. See Ortiz's *Los negros brujos* (1906) for an example of Ortiz's early representations of Afro-Cuban cultural criminality.

additionally poses a number of problematics with regard to black cultural and political viability outside nationally prescribed dictates of non-racialism.

Perhaps Ortiz's single most influential idea within Cuban nationalist thinking in the later twentieth century has been his notion of transculturation. Drawing heavily upon, among others, Mellville Herskovits' work on acculturation (Moore 1997),[44] Ortiz first elaborated his idea of transculturation in his 1940 work *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Cuban Counterpoint of Tobacco and Sugar) in which Bronislaw Malinowski's introduction contributed a level of canonic authority. For Ortiz, Cuban culture evolved through a historical process of continual cultural – if not biological – mixing or "transculturation" between peoples of African, Spanish, and to a lesser degree Chinese descent.[45] As an ideological variant of *mestizaje*, Ortiz held that such processes had given rise to what he understood as a uniquely hybridized character of Cuban culture and national identity. Here Ortiz made a distinction, drawing on Herskovits, between the idea of "acculturation" – which he understood as processes by which subaltern cultures are assimilated into larger or more dominant ones – and a process of transculturation in which two or more cultures engage each other through continual interaction resulting in mutual "transmutation" (Morejón 1993). Out of this dialectic, Ortiz argued, arose a new creolized Cuban culture and national identity that stood distinctly apart from both its cultural antecedents.

---

[44] See Herskovits (1938)

[45] Some 130,000 mostly male Chinese "contract workers" (i.e. indentured laborers) were introduced to Cuba between 1853 and 1872 to replace an increasingly shrinking numbers of enslaved black labor due to gradual manumission (Thomas 1996:18)

Ortiz's claim of a synthesized Cuban exceptionalism was reminiscent of Mexican ideologue José Vasconcelos' earlier conception of *la raza cosmica* (Vasconcelos [1925]). An apparent distinction between these two models, however, is that while Vasconcelos' *la raza cosmica* paradigm was grounded in biologized notions of race – the mixing of indigenous and Spanish "blood" in the making of a new *mestizo* people – Ortiz's Herskovitian orientation focused more on processes of cultural syncretism and hybridization as the foundations for the production of *cubanidad.* I speak of this as an *apparent* distinction to underscore the ambiguity of Ortiz's culturalist approach. Although Ortiz's model of transculturation employed the language of culture, it often conceived of it subtly racist, biologically-essentialized, and racially hierarchical kinds of ways (Moore 1994).

Another key problematic of Ortiz's notion of transculturation is that his model of cultural interchange is devoid of any critical discussion of power. This is to say that Ortiz's paradigm of transculturation does not account for the gross power discrepancies that have historically defined inter-relationships between Cubans of African and European descent. Any cultural and/or racial intermixing which has occurred between these two groups of actors by their very historical positions involved negotiations of power along axes of race, class, and gendered positions. Ortiz's "poetic" account of Cuba's transculturated beginnings clearly elides such examinations. To the extent to what Ortiz's notion of transculturation like all ideologies of *mestizaje* ultimately invokes "whitening" (Wade 1993), Ortiz's discussion of cultural mixing tended to obfuscate the reality of Cuba's historical experience of racial mixing.

As Verena Martinez-Alier's study *Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* makes clearly apparent, racial mixing within Cuban slave society was a highly gendered, power-laden affair. Almost without exception, interracial 'relations' between black and white Cubans during the period involved white men and women of color, both free or enslaved (Martinez-Alier 1989). The writings of prominent nineteenth-century Cuban intellectual and political leader José Antonio Saco lent intellectual legitimacy to such practices. In advocating limited interracial mixing as a means to "neutralize...the terrible influence of the three million negros" poised on overrunning a "white" Cuba, Saco argued that interracial liaisons should be limited to those between white men and black or mulatto women (Martínez-Echazábal 1998:28). The early production of what Ortiz and others would later celebrate as the uniquely hybridized essence of Cuban national identity or *cubanidad* is therefore historically rooted in practices of socioeconomic domination along lines of gender and class, as well as those of race.

Ortiz's idea of transculturation and related notions of cultural syncretism continue to have strong resonance within official, academic, and popular conceptions of the Cuban national imaginary. As prominent black Cuban poet Nancy Morejón recently argued: "We have not been assimilated, that is to say acculturated to Spanish or African culture. With a highly creative sprit, in the constant quest for nationhood, we have produced a mixed people, who inherit and embody both components, no longer either Spanish or African, but Cuban." (Morejón 1993:232) Although such discourses of Cuban cultural creolization – and by extension national racelessness – may be racially incorporative, like

similar national ideologies of *mestizaje* they simultaneously undercut efforts among blacks (and other "others" ) to mobilize around real-lived experiences of racial exclusion and racialized forms of oppression (Stutzman 1981; Wade 1993, Hanchard 1994, Safa 1998, Windance Twine 1998).

***Race and the Cuban Revolution***

With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the soon-to-be acknowledged socialist government placed the elimination of racial discrimination as a center-piece of its revolutionary program. In two famous speeches within three months of triumph, Fidel Castro directly addressed the issue of racial inequality in Cuban society by laying out the fundamental position of the Revolution with regard to the question of race. The focus was on institutional practices of racial discrimination with regard to two areas: access to employment; and access to recreational and educational facilities and institutions (Casal 1979). In line with a Marxist-Leninist materialist analysis, racial discrimination – and by extension race itself – was seen as a product of underlying class exploitation rooted in the historical system of racialized slave labor, a system which had been perpetuated under capitalist (read U.S. imperialist) modes of production. By dismantling the foundational material and class basis for racial discrimination this position held, structures and practices of racial inequality would follow (de la Fuente 2001).

Scholarly debate concerning the nature of race relations and racial discrimination in post-1959 Cuba have been highly politicized, often resulting in fierce debate over the effectiveness if not legitimacy of the socialist government. Nadine Fernández has

suggested that ridged ideological positions often hamper critical analysis of the social consequences of race in Cuba (Fernández 1996). A summary of those positions are as follows: There are those who contend that the revolution inherited and resolved the racial problem (e.g. Ring 1961, Serviat 1993). A second position argues that the revolution inherit a racist society, but has either reinforced or at least failed to eliminate racial inequalities (e.g. Moore 1988). Another position argues that the revolution has had a mitigative impact on racism, but argues that pre-revolutionary Cuban society had already open doors for black advancement and that there had been a long-term trend towards racial integration in Cuba (e.g. Masferrer and Mesa-Lago 1974; Domínguez 1978). A final argument contends that, while socialist Cuba has made substantial reforms that have significantly reduced structural forms of racial discrimination and inequality, more "cultural" manifestations of racism have not been eradicated from Cuban society (Casal 1979; de la Fuente 1995; Fernández 1996, 2001).

This final position represents a significant break from the previous arguments in that it draws an analytical distinction between structural forms of racial discrimination and racial ideologies that affect everyday individual thought and practice. As Casal contends: "It can be unhesitatingly affirmed that racial discrimination has been solidly eradicated from Cuban society [...] This does not imply that all forms of prejudice have been banned or that the consciousness of all the people has been thoroughly transformed" (Casal 1979:479). A critical question that such a conclusion begs, however, is whether "institutional" and "individual" manifestations of racism exist as exclusively distinct phenomena. Nadine Fernández for one has argued that a critical understanding of race in

revolutionary Cuba has been elusive given Cuban academics' long reluctance to analyze the mutually-constitutive relationships between racial ideologies and structural inequalities of race. (Fernández 1996). I will return momentarily to this key problematic.

It is unquestionable, however, that in a general sense black Cubans benefited significantly from the social gains of the Revolution. As historically among the most socially marginal and poor, black and darker-skinned Cubans gained much from the Revolution's efforts at to build a more socially egalitarian society based on the principles of a "class-less" nation. With regards to education, for example, the 1961 nationalization of private schools – most of which were racially segregated – and the mass mobilizations of the national literacy campaign initiated that same year, set in motion an educational system that was significantly more inclusive of black Cubans (de la Fuente 2001). This was accompanied by an educational shift in an emphasis on liberal arts to one promoting professional vocations (Dominguez 1992). Largely as a result of these changes the ranks of black professionals, not to mention literacy rates, increased significantly during the revolutionary period in comparison to pre-1959 levels. And while in a structural sense racial discrimination was declared illegal, overt programmatic efforts such as affirmative action-type policies were never embraced by the revolutionary leadership (Fernández 2001). In terms of housing, the urban revitalization projects undertaken during the period with a focus on the building lower-income units also benefited the black urban poor, significant numbers of whom lived in shanty-like conditions prior to 1959 (de la Fuente 2001). Similarly, the massive socialization of national healthcare under the Revolution

greatly impacted the quality of healthcare for poorer black and darker-skinned Cubans. With the flight of large numbers of doctors following the exodus of wealthy and middle-class white Cubans with the Revolution's triumph, there was a desperate need to train more doctors of which black and darker-skinned Cubans made a sizable contribution (Dominguez 1992).

Such gains taken aggregately lent credence to the idea that racial inequalities were ultimately historical products of class-based stratification. Again, beyond officially banning racial discrimination in employment and recreational and educational facilities, little more race-specific remedies were introduced. By 1962, the second Declaration of Havana proclaimed that revolutionary Cuba had successfully eliminated racial discrimination (de la Fuente 2001). From this point on, any discussion of racism or "racial politics" in a purported non-racial Cuba was viewed by the Cuban government as taboo and tantamount to political subversion. Black Cubans concerned with what they perceived as the continued presence of racial inequalities found themselves in a dilemma. If they were to organize around racially-associated grievances they risked being labeled counter-revolutionaries. If they did not, they would in effect be complacent in their oppression.

Carlos Moore has been one of the most outspoken of Cuban-exile critics of Castro and the revolutionary Cuban government with regard to the question of race in post-1959 Cuba. Though Moore may have his own ax to grind, his thoroughly researched *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* (1988) provides, among other things, important information concerning revolutionary Cuba's repression of independent forms of black political and

cultural organization. His work draws attention to the increasing restrictions the Cuban government put on Afro-Cuban *cabildos* and religious groups during the 1960's. *Cabildos* and black religious leaders experienced systematic harassment by the Cuban state during this period, and their festivals were heavily curtailed and policed (Moore 1988:100). Moore also documents the ways in which black religious fraternities – recalling earlier efforts– were often associated with criminality through discourses evoking notions of social pathology (Moore 1988: 102).

As part of a larger "folklorization" of Afro-Cuban culture (Daniel 1995), the Cuban state has also initiated a program targeted at promoting Afro-Cuban religious practice and ritual as national folkloric symbols for consumption by foreign tourists. The political consequences of such moves are multi-fold. Such institutionalization of Afro-Cuban culture and practice tends to freeze blacks within static representations of the "traditional" rather than recognizing the dynamic and changing character of Afro-Cuban culture and identity. Configuring black cultural practice as a commodity for foreign consumption further confines Afro-Cuban blackness as an affixed, exploitable resource for tourist dollars. Moreover, efforts to incorporate these images of Afro-Cuban culture within official representations of Cuban national culture and history may also serve as means of neutralizing these realms as spaces for the production of potentially oppositional forms of black subjectivity. This last concern is a particularly significant one when considering the evolving relationship between the Cuban state and Cuban hip hop. Again, I will be returning to the sociohistorical significance folkloric discourses in Chapters 3 and 6.

Such questions come to bear when reviewing Moore's accounts of how the revolutionary government systematically dismantled the *Sociedades de Color*, which, having been established in the late nineteenth-century to promote education among former slaves, had increasingly become forums for the articulation of black social and political demands (Moore 1988: 48; see also de la Fuente 2001). Moore further furnishes accounts of a government crackdown starting in the late 1960's on a series of alleged underground black political organizations (Moore 1988:306-13). Whether these organizations ever existed in an real operational capacity is not completely clear. If Moore's assessment is even partially accurate, it suggests that in the late 1960s and early 1970s the Cuban state actively policed organizations perceived as having the potential for fostering autonomous black political consciousness or activity.

It is interesting to note is that, while Cuba may have been repressing domestic forms of black political aspirations, the revolutionary leadership was fervently drawing parallels between Cuba's battle against U.S. imperialism and civil rights and black nationalist struggles in the U.S. In drawing a direct contrast to the racist violence and turmoil of the 1960s U.S., Cuba held itself up as a paradigm of racial utopia under socialism. Any attempt to suggest otherwise was considered counter-revolutionary, an affront to the very sovereignty – if not solvency – of the Cuban nation. The irony then is that for black Cubans to be "included" into the Cuban nation they must not speak of, nor organize against the many ways in which they have been historically excluded from full participation in the Cuban nation itself.

Regarding the Revolution's initial approach to and the subsequent silencing of race, let me return to the distinction the revolutionary leadership made early on between "public" and "private" spheres of racism (Fernández 1996; de la Fuente 2001). The argument here being that while the state could make efforts to eradicate overt, public expressions of racism (i.e. legal and "structural" forms of racial exclusion), with respect to the "private" spheres of the home, family, and interpersonal relationship racism it was held could not as easily be challenged. In a particularly poignant illustration of this position, Fidel Castro in one of his early speeches on the topic of race stated in effect that the Revolution would never force a young white girl to dance with a black boy (Moore 1988). The point to underscore again here is that while revolutionary social reformed may have effect certain "structural" changes though which racialized power and exclusion were historically articulated vis-à-vis black and darker-skinned Cubans, the ideological manifestations of racism remained very much alive in revolutionary Cuba. Though officially banned and silenced, historically-configured, racially-inscribed notions of black intellectual inferiority, criminality, and laziness, for instance, persisted as "culturally" engrained components of Cuban society.[46]

Yet on another critical level, as mentioned earlier, this discursive differentiation between "public" and "private" forms of racism obfuscates the constitutive linkages between individual practices and institutionalized structures and process of racial forms of oppression. The logic in declaring that only residual forms of individual racism exist now that structural forms have been officially eradicated inhibits any analysis, let along

[46] The following chapter will examine some of the social contours of such racist beliefs and practices.

public discussion, of the systemic processes that shape both individual as well as broader institutionalized kinds of racist practice. In discursive terms, such framings find expression in the common privileging of the term "prejuicio" (prejudice) over "racismo" (racism). Here there is a common tendency to use the individualizing expression "prejuicio" when referring to racist behavior on the part of individuals rather than using the "r" word which would imply a systematic level of racialized power inequality. By limiting the terms of discourse to individual practice – which was officially claimed beyond the immediate scope of the Revolution – there is little recourse to challenge broader processes; hence, a further silencing. Nadine Fernández has pointed out, moreover, that by relegating the persistence of racism to only those private spheres of practice the revolutionary leadership could make claims that racism, if it did exist at all, was an historical remnant from Cuba's past that would dissipate in time (Fernández 2001). Hence, rather than recognizing racism as a complexly dynamic, continually reproducing social process, the state in effect ultimately washed its hands of the issue.

It is, however, important to acknowledged that by significantly reducing the gross levels of social stratification which once marked pre-1959 Cuba, the Revolution was able at certain levels to undermining the expressive power though which such "interpersonal" forms of racism could be exercised at the mirco-level of the everyday. This is to suggest that by reducing, though clearly not eliminating, the socioeconomic disparity between most Cubans – be they black or white – white Cubans' ability to exercise racist practices no longer carry the same level of force they once did given the past pervasiveness of white class privilege. Here I do not wish to reproduce reductive analyses that would

collapse racial forms of oppression and difference into those of class (Hall 1986; Omi and Winant 1986) – a key limitation of the Cuban Revolution's own approach to race. Nor clearly do I seek to define racialized power solely to those "individual" practices and forms of expression. What I am suggesting, however, is that in the context of revolutionary Cuban society, where most Cuban's under socialism have had narrow economic privilege, there has been a limiting affect on the relative leverage in which such interpersonal expressions of racism and racial exclusion can be practiced. It could be argued that such conditions have opened up space during the revolutionary period for the emergence of a certain level of nationally-configured class solidarity among Cubans predicated on the structural limiting of overt forms of historical white privilege.

Having said this, it is necessary to once again underscore that such achievements did not eliminate the very real and persistent presence of racism in Cuban society. To the extent to which revolutionary socialism was able to mitigate the expressive capacity of racialized power though "structural" class-based efforts, fundamental contradictions between discursive claims of a raceless Cuba and the enduring lived realities of race, while silenced, remained ever present. As I will argue in the following chapter, these historical contradictions as well as their expressive capacities found emboldened and new form within the context of Cuba's socioeconomic transformations of 1990s. To the extent to which revolutionary efforts might have had a "limiting" effect on various manifestations of racialized power, with the expansion of Cuba's dollar-based economy all bets were now off. These same transformative processes, moreover, proved fertile ground for new, strategic kinds of black social agency as well.

## Chapter Three

## Consuming Blackness:
## New Racial Economies, Tourism, and Evolving Black Social Strategies

Before probing further into the specifics of *el movimiento rap cubano*, it is necessary to first provide a broader contextualization of the shifting socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of race in Cuba today. Of particular concern to me are the ways new forms of racialized power are increasingly shaping the everyday lives, experiences, and social strategies of black and darker-skinned Cubans. This evolving socio-racial complex, or what Omi and Winant have referred to as a "racial formation" (Omi and Winant 1986), manifests itself through the interwoven articulation of resurgent structures of racial exclusion, new modalities of racialization, and related processes of racial commodification – all inextricably tied to deepening incursions of transnational capital within Cuban society. Here I wish to expand on this proposition with the intention of probing the critical connections between Cuba's reintegration into global capitalism, and the evolving dialectical interplay of racialized "structures" and corresponsive racial "agencies" as lived by black and darker-skinned Cubans today.

### *Economic Crisis and el Periodo Especial*

It is unquestionable that the 1990s marked a distinctive new juncture in Cuba's national narrative. From its 16th century inception as a slave-based plantation society, through its late 19th century wars of independence seeking to redefine the island's

historical trajectory, to the 1959 triumph of the Cuban revolutionary army and the subsequent pursuit of socialism, Cuba at the millennium's end found itself undergoing yet another decisive moment of rupture and transformation.

The economic relationships initiated in the early 1960s with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc effectively underwrote the Cuban economy and, by extension, the Cuban Revolution during the consolidation and development of Cuba's efforts to build a socialist society. While a shift may have occurred at the Revolutions triumph from free-market capitalist to state-centralized forms of economic organization, as it had in the past sugar continued to be the principle driving force of the island's economic base. Brief post-1959 attempts at diversification not withstanding, Cuba's perpetuation of its mono-crop dependence began with the initiation of Soviet subsidies in 1960 in which Cuba was guaranteed preferential market prices for sugar. This scenario was augmented by payments in Soviet oil where surplus supplies were sold on the international market as a key source for hard currency (Jatar-Hausmann 1999). Entrenched in its position as sugar producer, Cuba was admitted in 1972 to CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance) becoming the primary supplier of sugar to the Soviet bloc by 1981.[47] In the short run this agreement appeared to pay off. Between 1972 and 1985 the Cuban economy grew an average of 6% annually, where 1970 to 1974 saw double digit levels of annual growth (Brundenius 2002:366). Such economic subsidization largely shielded Cuba from full impacts of the U.S. trade embargo officially initiated in 1960 following

[47] Also known as Comecon, the CMEA was established in 1949 to foster economic coordination between communist bloc counties as an alternative to global free-market capitalism. Within this arrangement Cuba also received capital goods from automobiles to television sets to food stuff at preferential prices from various Eastern bloc countries in return for its sugar exports.

the revolutionary government's nationalization of U.S.-controlled interests on the island. For many Cubans much of the 1980s represented a golden moment of the Revolution in which the period's economic growth translated into a time of relative prosperity were access to food, healthcare, higher wages, and services such as transportation were significantly increased over previous levels.

All this, however, radically changed with the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the subsequent suspension of Soviet subsides in 1990. As consequence, trade between Cuba and the Soviet Union/Eastern bloc fell by 89% between 1989 and 1994 resulting in an annual loss of three to four billion dollars (Leogrande and Tomas 2002:342). The island plugged into a sever economic crisis which saw the GDP decrease more than 40% between 1989 and 1993 (Jatar-Hausmann 1999:46). In 1990 during a major speech before the Congress of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) Fidel Castro declared that the county had entered a "Periodo Especial en Tiempo de Paz" (a "Special Period in Time of Peace") which called for new austerity measures and social sacrifice aimed at reducing national consumption and expenditure. This "Special Period" was characterized by severe shortages in food, electricity, and transportation due in significant part to drastic oil shortages as a result of the suspension of Soviet oil imports upon which the island's economy had become completely dependent (Jatar-Hausmann 1999; Brundenius 2002). Some Cubans I know infamously recall the early 1990s as "el tiempo de los flacos" – "the time of the shinny ones" – in which acute scarcities of produce, shelved goods, and meat of any kind lead to endemic levels of undernourished. Family food consumption in fact fell 33% between 1990 and 1993 which was accompanied by the rise of some

neurological diseases tied to poor nutrition (Leogrande and Tomas 2002:343; Hidalgo and Martinez 2000). Moreover, as a result of server oil shortages extended planned power outages know as "apagones" were the ubiquitous during the Special Period as was the drastic reduction of transportation service – both public and commerce-related – across the island. It was during this period that Cuba arranged the importation of over a million Chinese-made bicycles which took over the island's now largely auto-less streets and roads.

Significantly exacerbating, if not intentionally exploiting the crisis situation, the U.S. began tightened its trade embargo against Cuba in the early 1990s. The 1992 passage of the Torricelli Act was aimed at restricting third-country commerce with the island effectively halting an estimated $768 million in annual trade, 90% of which involved imports of food and medicine (Leogrande and Tomas 2002:355). The Helms-Burton Act of 1996 further sought to discourage foreign investment by, among other measures, penalizing foreign corporations and company officers who conduct business with Cuba. The economic costs of such U.S. interventionism to Cuba's economy has been estimated at $67 billion, equaling roughly four times Cuba's GDP and approximately sixteen years' worth of export revenue (Hidalgo and Martinez 2000:104). Such developments no doubt contributed to a deepening of crisis' social toll on the everyday lives of Cubans, markedly squeezing and stretching already scarce recourses such as food and medicine.[48]

[48] See Hidalgo and Martinez (2000) for a critical discussion of the social cost of the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba.

By 1993 the Cuban leadership realized that a fairly radical intervention needed to be undertaken in order to stem the deepening economic and social crisis. It was at this point that socialist Cuba was forced to seek a new kind of economic relationship within the shifting paradigms of a post-Cold War world: one that meant reinserting itself cautiously, though ultimately unequivocally, within the global networks of late capitalism. It was that year 1993 that the Cuban government decriminalized the possession of U.S. dollar as a means of capturing the flood of dollars already circulating within the island's expanding the black market – most of which stemmed from clandestine remittances to Cubans from family aboard. Such hard currency was desperately need by the Cuban state now that that had engaged itself within the global free-market. The codification of the dollar as legal tender was followed in the early 1990s by a set of economic reforms which included the limited sanctioning of private-owned small businesses and cooperatives, and the opening up of the economy to foreign investment and joint ventures with foreign-owned companies. In aggregate these reforms in effect initiated what was tantamount to a move towards a neoliberalization of the heretofore closed socialist economy of the previous revolutionary moment. A critical and instrumental facet of this movement was the re-introduction of tourism as a strategic generator of fast hard currency. While the confluence of neoliberal dollarization and tourism would usher in a new phases of Cuban history, as it had in the past race would continue to operate as a key if not shifting social dynamic within this transformative historical frame.

*The Racial Logics of the New Economy*

In his influential 1991 article "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Frederic Jameson set out to ground the notion of the postmodern within a materialist framework, providing a model for understanding postmodernity as an historicized global condition tied to the rapid, post-fordist expansion of transnational capital. As a defining characteristic of this new global reality, Jameson suggested that what he termed late capitalism was radically altering the nature of cultural production the world over. A central facet of Jameson's critique revolved around questions of cultural commodification – that is, the advancing global pace at which "culture" in all its potential forms is being transformed into objects of market value by and for the seemingly transnational boundlessness of a postmodern cultural logic. In Jameson's understanding, ultimately nothing is sacred, nothing is beyond the grasp of such processes inherent within this late capitalist moment.

The central framing question that I explore in this dissertation concerns how contemporary Cuba and its people are responding to these new global imperatives as they are reinserted – and reinsert themselves – within an international marketplace increasingly dominated by transnational capital and the socioeconomic affects of neoliberalism. Here, I wish to draw particular attention to the new inter-articulated ways that race and "culture" are being (re)configured within Cuba as it efforts to negotiate its place within this shifting global landscape. Moving beyond Jameson's focus on the cultural affects of globalized capital, however, I endeavor along the lines of Aihwa Ong who has underscored the political and analytical necessity of locating subjects within, and

– importantly – the particular strategies that they employ in response to these new transnational processes of power and corresponding modes of subjugation (Ong 1999). Ong refers to such situated practices on the part of positioned subjects as "maneuvers" in emphasizing the active and strategic nature of these efforts. The question I ask is whether one can map such maneuvers and their socio-political consequences within the rapidly shifting social frameworks of contemporary Cuba.

In a post-1990 Cuba where tourism has become the main source of foreign currency as well as increasingly its principal site of global interface, one could argue culture has replaced social revolution as Cuba's defining export. What is of particular concern to me is the differing ways Afro-Cuban culture, or possibly more accurately Cuban blackness itself, is being commodified and marketed in Cuba for international consumption, and the various transnationally-informed practices or maneuvers black Cubans employ in response. Such an analysis attempts to illuminate the critical interplay of race, nation, and culture as they intersect and are lived in Cuba today as it mediates the cultural logics of this *post*-modern "new world order."

As discussed, sugar has been a definitive factor in shaping the economic and social history of Cuba as a nation since its inception in the early 19th century as the largest plantation-based society in the Caribbean. While it is unquestionable that sugar has framed Cuba's modern history, then it might be said that foreign tourism today is a key actor in its transformative, postmodern present. This is to suggest that Cuba's economic liberalization and re-entry into an international marketplace is signified above all by the rapid resurgence of tourism. While the dismantling of Cuba's Batista-era

tourism industry infamously characterized by casinos and prostitution was one of the first celebrated achievements of the Cuban Revolution, tourism was (re)identified as strategic sector by the Cuban state shortly after 1989. Tourism now accounts for more than 40% of Cuba's foreign currency income;[49] making it, as mentioned, the single largest source of hard currency on the island. According to official Cuban figures, gross revenues for tourism increased 800% between 1990 and 2000, generating an excess of $12 billion dollars over the last decade.[50] Foreign visitors have increased during this period by an average of 18% annually with the number of hotel rooms jumping from roughly 13,000 to 35,000 between 1990 and 2000.[51] In 2003 alone a reported 1.9 million tourist visited Cuba (Comellas 2004).[52] These figures illustrate the rate at which tourism has exploded in Cuba over the last decade – at one level freeing it from a history of single-source sugar-based trade dependency, while at the same time impacting Cuban society, its people and culture in many complex ways.

Most notably, tourism along with U.S. dollar remittances from Cuban's living abroad has fed the dollarization of the island's economy, giving rise to a paralleled dollar/Cuban *peso* economy. At the everyday level of the streets, the growing dominance of the dollar is contributing to greater class-based social stratification in a nominally socialist Cuba where virtually all are now dependent on U.S. dollars for daily existence. Within this dual economy, it is virtually impossible for most Cubans to survive on the

---

[49] *Associated Press*, July 4 2001
[50] *Prensa Latina*, August 4, 2001
[51] ibid.
[52] Foreign tourism revenues did, however, take a significant hit after the 911 attacks as the level of westerners opting to travel internationally dropped significantly.

state-regulated *peso* salaries when basics like soap, clothing, cooking oil and other essential food-stuffs can be purchased only with U.S. dollars in state-run "dollar stores" or on the black market. Virtually everyone has to have some sort of hustle, or in Cuban terms *mecánica* (mechanism), to acquire dollars in some fashion. Moreover, there is mounting recognition that race is increasingly a factor impacting *who* and *how* one gets access to these circulating dollars.

With regard to remittances, black Cubans comprise a minority of Cubans living abroad,[53] putting them at a significant disadvantage in terms of access to the estimated $600 to $800 million dollars remitted annually to the island (de la Fuente 1998). In addition to immediately enabling a relatively higher standards of living, remitted monies are often reinvested by Cubans in developing small entrepreneurial projects that may additionally provided economic benefits further along. With relatively limited access to remittances, many black Cubans are left with tourism-related activity as a potential source of dollars.

Within Cuba's European-oriented hotels and related tour services, however, there is a growing acknowledgment that "white" Cubans are most often favored for employment (de la Fuente 1998:33). Though these workers receive salaries in Cuban *pesos*, their incomes are often augmented exponentially by tips and other transactions in

[53] Surveying the largest and most economically positioned group of Cuban's abroad for illustration, the 1990 U.S. census recorded 83.5% of Cuban immigrants living in the U.S. identify themselves as "white" (cited in de la Fuente (1998:6). Black Cubans who are living in the U.S. tend to be poorer, more recent immigrants in comparison to the long established networks of "white" Cuban Americans in particular Miami. Though these Cuban's might have more immediate links to family "black home," they do not possess the levels of surplus income their relatively advantaged white counterparts.

dollars which flow freely within these contained tourist spaces. One often finds that the only visible black or brown faces working within hotels are young male security personnel who stand at the doors vigilantly guarding the boarder between these privileged dollar zones and the public space of *la calle*, the street. One commonly found explanation for these 'whitened' Cuban spaces is that a significant number of high-end tourist hotels are managed by foreign staff whom, it is argued, exercise racial prejudices when making hiring decisions. An alternative explanation offered is that the tourist market is simply responding to the tastes of Cuba's predominantly white European and North American clientele who prefer to be served by people who "look like them." While these dynamics may be contributing factors to racial exclusion within these areas of tourist activity, they simultaneously present some rather disturbing problematics for contemporary Cuba where, as discussed, the eradication of racial discrimination is popularly cited as a triumph of the Cuban Revolution in its realization of a professed non-racial socialist society.

Leaving this problematic aside for the moment, it does appear as if these new practices of black socioeconomic marginalization are certainly tied in important ways to structural shifts in the Cuban economy through capital liberalizations. Given these the limitations on black Cuban participation in the legal dollar-based tourism industry, what are the alternatives available to black and darker-skinned people and, importantly, what kinds of strategic spaces are they creating for themselves within this new Cuban reality?

Before attempting to answer this question, I must first return to a more general discussion of contemporary tourism in Cuba. Clearly part of what draws tourists to Cuba

is the island's "tropical" beaches and other "scenic" attractions. Such, however, can be found anywhere in the Caribbean. Rather what it is that Cuba uniquely has to offer foreign tourists – the vast majority of whom again are from Europe and North America – is its revolutionary history and allure, its culture, and its people. There certainly was a time when most foreign visitors to Cuba came out of solidarity with, and support of the Cuban Revolution. This era, however, has clearly passed in that it would not be a stretch to claim that for many tourists the extent of their engagement with the Revolution is their purchase of a Che Guevara tee-shirt or figurine. As Che's image has become commodified as the quintessential icon of the Cuban Revolution, so too is Cuban culture currently experiencing its own form of commodification.

Ruth Bahar once spoke of the "*buena-vistaization*" of Cuba in reference to the 1997 album of classic Cuban *son* music produced by Ry Cooder and the subsequent documentary directed by Wim Wenders that launched an international commercial frenzy for Cuban music, and by extension, Cuban "culture."[54] This craze was and continues to be embedded with discourses of nostalgic desire for the "old Cuba": the pre-Revolutionary Cuba of old American cars, historic urban architecture, and "traditional" signifyingly Cuban forms of expressive culture and tropical exoticism – all to be relived after a forty-year hiatus. Reminiscent of Renaldo Rosaldo's notion of imperialist nostalgia (Rosaldo 1989), *buena-vistaization* might then speak to the contemporary ways cultural markers of Cubanness are historically reconfigured, commodified, and marketed

[54] Reference made during a panel presentation "Complex Relations: Contemporary Art in Cuba," Austin Museum of Art, Austin, TX. September 25, 1999.

for Western consumption both on and off the island. Such reconstructions, I suggest, are often inscribed with racialized and gendered meanings and power.

When speaking specifically about realms of expressive culture in Cuba one cannot avoid the question of race. Anyone who has recently visited Cuba knows that there is a strong tourists market for Afro-Cuban culture a wide range of forms. "Afro-Cuban" or *Afro-Cubano*, however, remains a highly contested term within certain sectors of Cuban society given the history of "racial" mixture on the island, as well as the previously mentioned national institutionalization of non-racial discourse. The term *Afro-Cubano* in this context is seen as marking off a black 'difference' from an otherwise normalized "white" Cuban national identity, hence unmooring a hegemonically constructed frame of national non-racialism.

Further ideological discussions aside for the moment, there are cultural practices in Cuba that are African-derived or informed, and are associated with, and most importantly practiced primarily by people who identify themselves and their practices as *negro* (black) within the Cuban historical context. Many of these cultural practices such as *rumba* music and dance, *santería* and other Afro-Cuban identified religious systems have, however, been historically configured within the officially sanctioned trope of national folklore or *folklorico* (Daniel 1995; Moore 1997;. Hagedorn 2001). Institutionalized by the likes of seminal Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz as previously discussed, the classification of elements of Afro-Cuban expressive culture as folklore effectively roots these forms, and by extension those who practice them, squarely within the discursive constructions of a non-racial Cuban national patrimony. Efforts to

incorporate Afro-Cuban culture within official representations of Cuban national culture and history, moreover, may also serve as attempts to neutralize these realms as spaces for the production of autonomous and potentially oppositional kinds of black subjectivity. Configurations of folklore in this manner tend to relegate Afro-Cuban culture to an ahistorical, unchanging past, effectively freezing blacks within static representations of the "traditional" rather than recognizing the dynamic and ever-changing nature of black Cuban culture and identity. Within the hyper-commodified cultural marketplace of today's Cuba, such moves simultaneously facilitate the packaging and marketing of black cultural forms as affixed, exploitable resources for tourist dollars.

Although the Revolution created and has continued to support a number of cultural institutions to document and institutionalize (Afro-)Cuban "folklore," there has been a strong resurgence of public exhibitionism of black culture that to a large extent has coincided with the rise of tourism. Today there are numerous spaces in Havana, both institutional and informal, where one can regularly see and *experience* "authentic" Afro-Cuban *rumba*. Such performances are also making limited inroads into hotel settings that are usually reserved for *son* groups who often play the entire *Buena Vista Social Club* repertoire while tourists sip their *mojitos*, tap their feet, and hum along.

The Yoruba-based *santería* religion has also experienced a public outing of sorts. There was a period in recent revolutionary history when it was a social liability to openly mark oneself as a *santero* or practitioner of *santería*. This reality grew out of a history of police repression and harassment of black Cuban religious organization and practice

which were often associated with social deviance and delinquency.[55] Today however it is not uncommon to see black and as well as a growing number "white" Cuban followers of *santería* wearing their religious color-beaded necklaces in public. This is also the case with the white-clad initiates of the religion know as *iyawos* who have become a commonplace image in the streets of Havana. The growing visibility if not popularity of *santería* may not necessarily be tied to the rise of tourism. It may, however, signify a new openness in Cuban society to black-identified forms of cultural expression that does articulate with tourist-related marketing of black culture.

Possibly more overtly related is the rise of what some in Cuba have dubbed *babalaoismo*. Borrowed from the Yoruba-derived term *babalao* for priest of the *santería* religion, the term *babalaoismo* draws its reference from the increasing numbers of foreigners who are coming to Cuba, often repeatedly, for spiritual work related to *santería.* Such services are most often provided by *babalaos* who live and work in areas in close proximity to zones of high tourist activity. Though the relationship between *babalaos* and their Cuban clientele has traditionally been one of paid patronage, exchanges between these Afro-Cuban *babalaos* and their foreign patrons are almost exclusively in dollars and often at levels far exceeding what Cubans would pay for similar services. Given this reality, the term *babalaoismo* for some has come to suggest the commercialization or even a "pimping" of *santería* by practitioners for tourist dollars.

[55] For discussions of Cuban revolutionary repression of Afro-Cuban religion see Moore (1988) and Hagedorn (2001). For treatments of pre-revolutionary state repression of Afro-Cuban religious practice and practitioners see Moore (1997) and Palmie (2002).

Though I certainly do not wish to reduce *santería's* complexities and meaningfulness simply to its black racial significance, it is unquestionable that *santería's* associations with "traditional" African-derived spirituality – along with related discourses of a "primitive" black authenticity – are certainly important to its cultural draw and capital within a western-oriented consumer market. To the extent that such an economy of exchange is informed by its racial markers, blackness operates as a space within which some Afro-Cuban *babalaos* can and do exercise a level of agency in accessing tourism-related dollars outside other legally sanctioned means. Although the gendered-specific proscriptions of *santería* allow for men only to be *babaloas*, female *madrinas* or religious "godmothers" within *santería* can also establish relationships with visiting practitioners of the religion where dollars are also the currency of exchange.

In addition to these informal, individually-initiated examples, there has also been an emergence of institutionally state-sanctioned, religio-cultural commerce where foreigners pay to tour *santería* houses or organized events to experience "genuine" Afro-Cuban religious ritual and ceremony. There has in fact been an emergence of government-sponsored tours for foreigners who wish to undergo initiation into *santería* for sizable sums of money (Furé 2000). Examples of these kinds clearly illustrate the elevated institutional and state ante regarding the commodification and commercialization of Afro-Cuban culture and signs of blackness in Cuba today. Such occasions, moreover, complicate in some interesting ways the distinctions traditionally drawn between the cultural "authentic" and commercially "performed." They simultaneously bring to clear relief the larger context of a performed blackness – that is

the ways in which individuals and communities involved in these commercial contexts are at some level performing their blackness as a means of accessing tourist-related commerce. These examples moreover again illustrate the ways some black Cubans can and are utilizing the commodified space of blackness as a form of maneuver or *mecánica* within the postmodern logics of contemporary Cuban society.

In 1999, a French hip hop producer pulled together four young Cubans in France and produced the first internationally successful Cuban rap album. Since then, the Spanish language album has gone gold in France and Spain and has been widely popular through out Western Europe. The key to the project's success was the astute fusion of signifyingly "Cuban" musical elements such as *son*, *rumba* and traditional Cuban vocal styles, with contemporary rap lyricism and hip hop-informed beats. One of the most popular songs in the album is a bouncing, rap-laced remake of the classic *son* song "Chan Chan" made international famous by the *Buena Vista Social Club* release two years earlier.

The name chosen for the group was Orishas, taken from the Yoruba name for deities of the *santería* pantheon. In the album liner notes individual members – whose gradated skin complexions range in Cuban terms from white to black – can be seen posing adorned with beaded colored necklaces symbolizing various individual *orisahs,* marking them (truthfully or not) as initiates in the religion. At least one urban legend in Cuba, where the group has also been phenomenally popular, purports that the group's producer consulted a *babalao* about a name and was divinely given "*orishas*."

Alternatively, one of the group's members explained in an interview that first and foremost the name was chosen "like and ID for Cuban music worldwide. People would see the name and think of Cuba, because of the connection, spiritually" (Rose 2001). Here *santería* operates as a national marker of Cubanness effectively decontextualized from its Afro-Cuban historical context and meanings. The signified economy of race and blackness remains nonetheless ever-present in the packaging of the project from its opening with Yoruba chants to actual *orisahs* and the heavy use of "traditional" Afro-Cuban percussion throughout the album, to the stylized darkening of the members' photos on the album cover and liner notes.

In the album's title track "A Lo Cubano" ("the Cuban way") the members sing of a hetero-masculinist Cuban-style partying awash with tobacco and rum. Shot in Cuba, the song's video depicts group members on a beach frolicking with young Cuban women in bikinis and beach balls – reproducing tendencies within both U.S. rap videos and Cuban popular culture regarding the sexual objectification of women and their bodies. The male-centered representations of Cuba painted in the album embody an apparent level of ambivalence. While one song celebrates the "mystical" quality of Cuban women, another critically addresses the recent rise of female-focused sex tourism. Another laments the struggles of single mothers in Cuba's urban centers. As such, these songs reflect competing gendered discourses circulating in Cuba today – this being on one level the notion of gender equality promoted by the Revolution in its efforts to elevate women's status through their incorporation within a democratically-structured workforce and higher educational system. At the same time, however, the historically

embedded culture of *machismo* and patriarchy remain signifying, ever-present elements of present day Cuban society.

Within Cuba's ingenious hip hop community, however, Orishas are viewed by many as nothing significantly more than a commercial product, one packaged and marketed for overseas consumption. It is apparent, moreover, that race plays an important if not calculated role in such packaging where Afro-Cuban symbolism is configured and mediated through the ways it is performed within the commercial frame of popular music. I will return in Chapter 6 to a more explicit discussion of Orishas as it relates to commercialization pressures within the Cuban hip hop movement vis-à-vis questions of race, commodification, and performance in contemporary Cuban society.

Focusing on the realms of material culture, there is also a foreign market for blackness in Cuba in the form tourist-related arts and craftwork. In the large crafts markets of Havana and other concentrated tourist areas, such as the Cancun-like beach resort of Vadadero, one finds a bountiful collection of racialized, if not racist, imagery of black Cubans. Many figurines and tee-shirt prints employ racially-inscribed physical attributes such as grossly accentuated large mouths and lips – often construed into the proverbial 'big smile.' Others frequently play upon gendered-specific discourses of a primal black hyper-sexuality. In male form this may translate into a smiling black figure with a protruding, absurdly large erect penis complete with pink end. One of the most prevalent images, however, is the black female figure with exaggeratedly large breast – which may or may not be exposed – and correspondingly ample backside. Discursively

resonant with eroticized historical representations of *la mulata* as the oversexed temptress (Kutzinski 1993; Williams 2000; Arrizón 2002), this figure-type more often than not is commonly accompanied by a large phallic cigar projecting from a, once again, smiling mouth. While such representations draw upon a long history of racist stereotypes associated with blackness in Cuba, they simultaneously articulate transnationally with other Latin and North American historical constructions as well.

Interestingly, many Cubans themselves including some blacks do not necessarily regard these images particularly offensive let alone racist. Upon speaking to market venders – many of whom are not black – about the significance of physical stereotypes and sexual explicitness of the black images, some vendors responded that these were simply representations of Cuban "folklore." Some claimed that these figures with their hyper-exaggerated body parts actually resemble black Cubans. Suggestions that these images might be infused with racist meanings where often meet with adamant denials of any racist content or intent. I would contend, however, that such positions are in part couched within and informed by historically-constituted hegemonic notions of Cuban non-racialism, which may elide more critical readings of such representations. This has certainly been my personal experience, though my reading of these images and experiences of race on the island are clearly informed by my own particular positionality as an African American from the U.S. What is less debatable, however, is that these racially-inscribed images historically resonate with both overtly racist caricatures of blackness employed in pre-Revolutionary Cuba, as well as globally manifested representations and discourses of black racism. Most significantly, this imagery is

intentionally reproduced for an international market. This dynamic comes into focus when one considers that a number of vendors, when pushed, claimed that black images and figures of the like are produced first and foremost to meet foreign tourists' own notions and consuming tastes for iconic representations of Cuba and its "culture." Clearly, blackness sells.

The commodification and market for the exotics/erotics of blackness in Cuba is not limited strictly to realms of cultural production. Increasingly black bodies are being consumed by the thousands of overwhelmingly-white European and North American tourists who flock to Cuba yearly to participate in its flourishing sex trade. As previously mentioned, the dismantling of tourist-based female prostitution of the Batista-era was a key reform undertaken shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Emphasis was put on reintegrating former sex workers into a revolutionary envisioned society-in-the-making through education and vocational retraining programs. Beyond the immediacy of their social worth, such efforts took on an added level of symbolic meaning. In the eyes of the Revolution, the prostitution of Cuban women to foreign – in particular U.S. – men within the pre-revolutionary period was tied to the symbolic national rape of Cuba by a history of U.S. imperialism and preceding Spanish colonialism. The revolutionary reclaiming of Cuban women's bodies, it was held,

signified a re-masculinizing empowerment of an otherwise historically emasculated Cuban nation.[56]

As a number of researchers have noted and as is clearly apparent to the casual observer, the majority of female sex workers in Cuba today are black and darker-skinned (O'Connell Davidson 1996; Fusco 1998; Cabeza 1998). An important contributing factor feeding this economy is tied to contemporary reconfigurings of hyper-sexualized imagery of the black Cuban women as *la mulata*. A growing body of scholarly work examining the expanding international sex trade industry, some key research of which has been conducted in the Caribbean, has drawn attention to the role of racialized sexual fantasy among western tourist in third-world sex markets (Kempadoo et al. 1998; de Albuquergue 1998). Playing on such objectifying desires, European tour operators in places like Spain and Italy regularly employ coded language to advertise Cuba as a travel destination for sex tourism. Moreover, the profusion of international internet sites designed for the heterosexual male sex-traveler commonly reference Cuba as a top destination for sex tourism. One English-language site "cuba-sex.com" posts the following anonymous commentary:

> Cuba prostitutes are called jineteras, or "jockeys." Wild, untamed, uninhibited women, they love to get on top and ride a man *hard*. Often displaying Afro-

---

**[56] For a more thorough treatment of the Cuban Revolution's discursive positioning of pre-revolutionary female sex work vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism see Rosalie Schwartz (1997).**

> Cuban features, these dusky, scantily-clad native girls with fine asses are very passionate and may cling tightly and fondle you after sex.[57] *(italics original)*

This short caption unabashedly illustrates, in the most blatant of racists terms, the racially inscribed sexual objectification of Cuban female sex workers that circulate the internet's global network of sex-tourism sites. Not only does this example reproduce the hyper-sexualized imagery of the black women in Cuba, it further situates this eroticized representation squarely within a racialized discourse of an innate black primitivism. It is precisely these kinds of overly racist representations that feed and are inextricably interwoven within the economy for female sex-work in Cuba.

The Cuban state's position vis-à-vis the resurgence of female sex work in Cuba, in practice, has been ambivalent. At one level the official position is one of condemnation, recognizing that the rise of prostitution correlates with the growth of tourism. A distinction, however, is made between pre-revolutionary and contemporary forms of sex work. The dominant discourse argues that female sex workers today, unlike their predecessors, are highly-educated, healthy and engaged in sex work not out of desperation, but more out of materialist desires to acquire luxury goods like clothing and to access privileges afforded to foreign tourists (Fusco 1998; Cabeza 1998). The dilemma of prostitution then is couched within the rubric of moral crisis rather than an assessment of the complex structural (and cultural) factors contributing to the rapid

[57] Cited from <http:/cuba-sex.com/cuba_prositutes.htm>.

resurgence of female sex work in a transitional Cuba. Since 1996 there have been periodic crackdowns on the streets of Havana and the beach resort of Vadadero. However, many critics – including those emanating from the reactionary Cuban exile community in Miami – have argued that the Cuban state has long encouraged prostitution as a means of generating tourist-based revenue, and that the crackdowns have occurred only after increased negative international publicity over the bludgeoning sex trade. Although prescribing to the official view of prostitution as one of moral degradation, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC)[58] has in the past been critical of what they have identified as the Cuban state's own use of images of bikini-clad *mulata* women to promote tourism on the island. The FMC took a particular strong stand against the Cuban government's consent to a 1990 *Playboy* pictorial of beach-set topless young women in Vadadero.

Based on my own experience it seems apparent that there is indeed a level of tolerance on the part of the Cuban state to what has become a pervading presence of foreign client-based prostitution in heavily touristed areas such as Havana and Santiago de Cuba. In these areas one literally cannot avoid the sight of older white European or North American men particularly at night in the company of young, often seductively-dressed Cuban women. What is most visually striking about these public spectacles are the blaring contrasts of age and skin color. While male tourists may range between their mid-twenties to well into their fifties and sixties, it is not uncommon to see a white man in his fifties with a black or blown-skinned Cuban woman who looks no older that her

[58] The official Cuban state organ of women.

late teens. As illegal as it might be, the sheer numbers of these interactions and the dollar income they generate within the vast network of night clubs, restaurants, car rental and taxi services, hotel, and *casas particulares* (legally sanctioned private homes that rent rooms to tourists) that cater to dollar-paying tourists make it an essential component of Cuba's expanding, increasingly crucial tourist sector.

As for its promotion, there are indeed frequent images of young bikinied women – with or without the company of men, and more often than not white rather than of color – used in tourist-targeted magazines and material to promote products from cigarettes to resort hotels. The same use of women's bodies is prevalent throughout advertising the western world over. However, while captive waiting in line to pass through immigration in Havana's new international airport one can find oneself greeted by a Cuban-produced music video playing loudly over one of the newly-installed television monitors. The song entitled *La mulata* is sung by a popular black Cuban *salsero* (*salsa* vocalist) who serenades his pledges of desire for a young, attractive brown-skinned women with long wavy brown hair. In the video we see the *salsero* moving through a colorful Havana setting while in crooning pursuit of this woman or, more appropriately, an image of a women for in keep with the objectified historical image of the Cuban *mulata* "she" never speaks nor do we get any sense of her own subject position.[59] By song's end the *salsero* rides off in an old pre-1959 American convertible along Havana's famed Malecon with "la mulata" in tow. Welcome to Cuba…

[59] For critical discussions of the historical configuring of the mulata figure within Cuban national discourse see Vera Kutzinski (1993) and Alicia Arrizón (2002).

Unlike the depthlessness of the song's figure, black and mulatto women's subjectivity is very much present and active within the economy of the Cuba sex trade. Here I return to the previously cited internet reference to female sex workers as *jinetera*s. As the excerpt suggests, *jinetera* is derived from *jinete* which means horse jockey. The feminizing word-play on the term thus refers literally and figuratively to these women's "riding" of tourists for their dollars. Within this metaphoric understanding one can subvert, if not invert, the paradigm prescribed by this white male-centered reading of the power dynamics between foreign clients and female sex workers. The question then becomes whom is being "pimped" by whom? The related and commonly used male linguistic equivalent *jinetero* does not in fact have direct sexual connotations. *Jineteros* rather refer generally to the large numbers of young Cuban men who work the streets of Havana and other urban centers hustling for dollars by providing various kinds of non-state sanctioned (i.e. illicit) services to tourist such as selling cheap cigars or acting a guilds. Like their female etymological counterparts these men are most often black and darker-skinned due in large part to their limited access to legal forms of tourist-based dollar commence. In a broader sense, the expression *jineterismo* has become a metaphor for any kind of tourist-based hustling in Cuba's dollar-dependant economy.

The central point I wish to make here regarding the dynamics of female sex work in Cuba today, is that black and *mulato* young women and men are able to access the space of blackness to position themselves within a dollar market of which they are often otherwise excluded. This is to suggest that within Cuba's new sexualized economy of race, an erotized blackness has assumed a new level of cultural capital – one which can

and is employed by individuals to access economic privileges of which they are otherwise marginalized.

Within the context of the previously mentioned spaces in Havana where tourists flock to bodily experience the black authenticity of Afro-Cuban *rumba*, there is one weekly event held along a narrow a small street, know as *callejon de hamel*, which has become notorious for the hustling of white tourist women by young black men. Many of these men speak of, at times in the plural, of "girl friends" from Europe or North America they have met while these women were on holiday in Havana. When talking with some of these young men it becomes apparent that they are clearly cognizant of the dynamics of black sexual desire at play and their ability to work it for gain. These relationships most often differ from the more overtly economic nature of exchange that characterizes much, but not all of female *jinetera*-related activity. The ultimate goal for many of these Cuban men is to arrange a fiancé visa in order to travel abroad and make a new life with (or without) their foreign girlfriend. Given the extraordinary prohibitive costs of the visa application and related legal fees for most Cubans – all of which must be paid in U.S. dollars – foreign women are most likely those who finance such procedures that often require extended months of waiting time. During these periods it is not uncommon for these women to provide additional financial support to their Cuban boyfriends and their families. These scenarios resonate strongly with those cited in research on white female tourism conducted in other Caribbean locales (de Albuquergue 1998; Phillips 1998). This is not to suggest that healthy and lasting relationships may not give rise to or grow out of these kinds of arrangements. Rather, what cannot be denied is that such situations

are most often informed by a larger racialized economy of sex and desire that permeates the cultural logics of Cuba's contemporary tourism market. In a related vein there are what is commonly referred to as *pingueros* (taken from *pinga*, the Cuban vernacular vulgarism for penis) who participate in Cuba's paralleled gay foreign-based sex trade (see Hodges 2001). Though many of these young men in places like Havana may not be black in the strictest of senses, there remains an undeniable, ever-present racialized power dynamic between the predominantly white, gay male johns from European and North American and their racially sexualized Caribbean-Latin partners.[60]

In setting up this discussion, I do not wish to elide the very real class and gendered power dynamics at play between darker-skinned sex workers and foreign clients. Nor do I wish to project ethnographically romanticized degrees of social agency. Rather, what I am attempting to do is underscore that while the commodification of blackness operates as a locale for its commercial consumption, it simultaneously provides black Cubans space for maneuver – again to use Ong's term – within a shifting socioeconomic structure offering few other options. The agency of black and *mulato* sex workers predicated on the cultural capital of blackness, is once again ultimately realized through the ways in which such blackness is performed – performances which at one time conform to transnationally-prescribed desires, fantasies, and their racially-inscribed

[60] Hodge's treatment of male sex workers, among other things, is completely devoid of any analysis let alone mention of racial dynamics.

disciplining effects, while simultaneously enabling a level of strategic positioning and play among some black Cubans.[61]

Within this emergent dollar-based Cuban economy where racial status is increasingly tied to who and how one obtains U.S. dollars, illicit strategies and practices developed by black Cubans to access dollars have become heavily policed by the Cuban state. The escalation of police activity in the streets of Havana since 1999 serves as a critical material expression of the new dynamics of racialized power in Cuba today. During a speech in January 1999 commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the National Revolutionary Police, Fidel Castro address what he understood as the increase in illicit activities such as prostitution, street crime, and drugs since the introduction of the dollar (Hammond 1999). In response, Castro argued, the streets in effect much be taken back. Shortly following this announcement police could be seen on virtually every other street corner in many areas of central Havana, particularly those with high concentrations of tourist activity. A central focus of this crackdown has been street crime and the illicit dollar-based black market economy upon which large numbers of blacks – if not most Cubans in general – are dependent given their relatively limited access to legal forms of acquisition. As a result, this crackdown has disproportionately affected black, particularly young men who are often racially profiled by Cuban police as *delincuencia*. Discursive association of blacks with criminality and social pathology

[61] Such practices are resonant with Robin Kelley's discussion of how young African American males have learned to performatively exploit racial stereotypes in the production of commercial rap and hip hop "culture" in the U.S. (Kelley 1997).

have a long history in Cuba dating back to the early work of Fernando Ortiz who, as mentioned, has been profoundly instrumental in shaping twentieth-century ideas in Cuba on race and culture in relationship to national constructions of *cubanidad* (Moore 1994, 1997). The difference here, however, is that a confluence of "old" pre-existing racial discourses and "new" economic processes ushered in by the new dollar-based economy gave new form and force to racialized structures and practices in Cuba today.

In their quotidian scenarios, black youth are routinely asked for their *carnets identidades*, or national identification cards, whose information may be radioed in to check for previous involvement with police. Such scenes have become a common fixture in Havana's streets. If the questioned are unable to produce this document or if there are any discrepancies, these youth are often taken in and held by the police. In response to the seemingly systematic proliferation of these practices, young men in a few more marginal, predominantly-black *barrios* in Havana began wearing their *carnets* – the very markers of their national legitimacy and citizenship – around their necks in symbolic protest. While such developments clearly resonant with a history racist discourse and representation, these current practices and enabling discourses of black criminalization I suggest are being reconfigured and emboldened within newly articulated frames of racialized power. Shifting racialized "structures" of these kinds, in turn, both shape and necessitate the emergence of new forms of race-based social strategy on the part of black and darker-skinned Cubans. In the following chapters I will argue that Cuban hip hop has emerged as just such a space.

## Chapter Four

## Hip Hop Cubano: The Narrative of an Emergent Blackness

In the preceding chapter I outlined some of the evolving contours of what I have called Cuba's new economy of race which, as suggested, is tied in important ways to the impacts of transnational capital on the Cuban social landscape following the economic crisis of the early 1990s. Within the interwoven contexts of economic dollarization and an expanding tourism industry – two critical expressions of Cuba's increasingly neoliberal reality – I sought to illustrate how this new racial economy is predicated on the convergence of preexisting racial structures and discourses, and a new racialized socioeconomics grounded in growing class stratification and a post-modern logic of cultural commodification. While this confluence of "old" and "new" is giving resurgent force and form to lived experiences of blackness in Cuba today, I have been particularly concerned with exploring the range of social practices that black and darker-skinned Cubans have developed in response to these rearticulations of racialized power. The focus hence had been on the interplay of contemporary frames of racialization and emergent race-based social strategies as they are increasingly shaped at the nexus of the local and global.

As I now move to my examination of *el movimiento hip hop Cubano* my analysis of this shifting interchange between racialized "structures" and corresponsive racial "agencies" centers more squarely on the politics of black identity formation. An undertaking of this kind ultimately involves an investigation into the political character

and potential of black identity production as the basis for a politics and praxis of social action. Here I draw upon Stuart Hall's work in recognizing the ways in which processes of racial identity formation often involve strategic acts of self-positioning, or what Hall has referred to as practices of "subjective self-constitution" (Hall 1996:13). Such efforts are by no means openly contingent but are rather always and already informed and constrained by historically prescriptive fields of racialized power as they are lived in the material everyday. Such power-induced subjectivization invokes a Foucauldian derived notion of power as a positive, constitutive force in the shaping of individual subjectivity and identity (see McNay 1984). Where Hall's Gramscian-inflected approach intervenes however is in his suggestion that racial identities find articulation precisely *between* these interpellating forces (Althusser 1971) – i.e. subaltern racializations, and individual and collective practices of self-making.[62] Hall's privileging of the term identification over identity moreover is significant in that it underscores not only processual but also the (pro)active capacity of identity construction on the part of individuals and groups.

In this respect I would hold that identity, in its capacity as the outward, self-aware expression of subjectivity, serves as a processual intermediary though which racialized subjects become racially self-identified social actors; an ontological movement akin to what Coco Fusco has called identity's transformation from essence to action (Fusco

[62] McNay makes the argument that Foucault's later writings on "governmentality" and "ethics of self" represent a reformulation of his ever-evolving conception of power that allows for a greater role of individual social agency in the shaping of subjectivity. In her reading Foucault's later work accounts more for a dialectical play of domination and resistance in comparison to his earlier, more totalizing notion of power as exemplified in the image of the 'docile body' – a formulation she contends which tends to be over-emphasized in Foucauldian treatments of the power/subject dynamic. Such an appraisal, especially as it relates to Foucault's writings on governmentality, offers more potential convergences between Foucauldian and Gramscian positions on questions of resistance/counter-hegemony than many have previously conceived.

1992). Collective forms of racial identity in these ways provide an experiential lens through which individuals come to recognize the commonalities of racialized experience which in turn can serve as the ground upon which collective modes of politics can be waged. Here the dynamics of identity, as Roger Rouse observes, are "fundamental to the cultural politics that link personal experience to collective forms and actions" (Rouse 1995:351). I am not suggesting some sort of teleological relationship between identity and identity-based action where a unidirectional progression from identity formation to identity mobilization necessarily exists. Rather I speak of both the *potential* of this progression as well as the ways in which racialized subjects can become racially self-aware actors through their involvement *within* politicized contexts of racially-centered organizing and action. In both cases "the political," as it were, operates on two processual levels of potentiality: at the level of the negotiated making of subalternly positioned racialized identities, and at the level of their social mobilization.

Regarding Cuban hip hop it is precisely within this framing of identity politics that I seek to understand the ways in which critical situated identities of blackness are forged, and how they are mobilized towards liberatory-directed kinds of social practice. I contend that within the evolving space of Cuban hip hop identity operates as a site through which transnationally informed notions of "blackness" are engaged and deployed in ways directed at contesting racialized expressions of power within an increasingly neoliberalized Cuban everyday. Here a new generation of black and brown skinned youth are drawing upon the black-signified expressive frameworks of rap music and hip hop "culture" in fashioning new, critically positioned black identities as the basis for

advancing race-based social critique and antiracist struggle. These moves I hold emerge largely in strategic response to these young people's quotidian experiences of racism and racial exclusion within Cuba's new, globally imbricated economies of race and class.

At the same time, such processes are again bound by late capitalism's logics of cultural commodification that both conditions the grounds of their emergence as well as provide matériel for their production. While a tourist-driven, consumerized market for blackness may be a key component of Cuba's new racial dynamic, in the same breath commodified representations of blackness through a commercialized lens of U.S. hip hop provide recourse for the fashioning of alternative black social vistas. In this sense Cuban raperos are complexly implicated simultaneously as consumers, producers, subjects, and agents of a globalized 'post-modern' economy of blackness.

Dynamics of these kinds recall the work of authors like of George Lipsitz (1994), Arjun Appadurai (1996) and others who have underscored manner in which global capital expansion has enabled the making of intricate new forms of local culture, experience, and identity through transnational flows of people, commodities, and information.[63] With their explicit emphasis on social agency over economic determinacy, such positions have been critiqued by some for what is viewed as their tendency toward unproblematic celebrations of transnational processes of cultural/identity making without significant attention to how power is unequally articulated within these contexts (Rouse 1991, Basch et. al 1994, Lemelle and Kelley 1994, Lavie and Swedenburg 1996, Ong 1999). Such positions nonetheless generally recognize a central, seemingly incongruous tendency of

[63] Also see Featherstone and Lash (1995) and Hennerz (1996).

advanced global capital: a predisposition towards producing differentiated forms of domination along social axes such as race, "ethnicity," and gender which, in turn, provide conditions for the emergence of new and/or rearticulated identities and related social strategies that often seek to contest the very power-infused circumstances of their making.

Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd provide an insightful intervention along these lines in their suggestion that transnational capital often produces sites of contradiction at the level of the local in which ""culture" obtains a "political" force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refuction it for exploitation or domination" (Lowe and Lloyd 1997:1). In their understanding contemporary social mobilizations such as those predicated on antiracism, feminism, and anti-imperialism cannot be subsumed under traditional social paradigms of class struggle, but rather "these struggles in themselves occupy significant sites of contradiction that are generated precisely by the differentiating process of advancing global capital" (1997:2). When considering the sociohistorical particularities of Cuban hip hop Lowe and Lloyd's discussion is productive on a number of fronts. In recognizing the intrinsic tension between globally-inflected modes of differentiated domination and corresponsive forms of social agency, contemporary identity-based struggles are seen as emerging largely out of contradictions arising from collisions of pre-existing, "modern" constructions of social difference – e.g. race, ethnicity, gender, etc. – and varying "post-modern," commodity-driven reifications of such differences for market consumption (1997:24). My suggestion here is that Cuban hip hop, as a site of social formation, has arisen within just this kind of

historical collision and resulting contradictions between "old" and "new" paradigms of race and racialized frames of power. Rather than operating at some type of meta-discursive level, these contradictions are negotiated by black and brown-skinned youth in the lived everyday as they attempt to critically situate themselves and move amidst a constellation of social transformations that define Cuba's current moment. The central role of "culture" in Lowe and Lloyd's analysis as an active terrain of the political further lends itself to an examination of the ways Cuban raperos utilize realms of culture and cultural production in the critical forging and deployment of identities of blackness towards socially-directed kinds of intervention. Culture and identity hence are recognized in these contexts as potential sites of both political articulation and action.

***Hip Hop Cubano: the narrative***

In my understanding it is clearly no coincidence that the evolution of hip hop as a social space over the last decade or so in Cuba has occurred precisely at this current moment of rapid social disjuncture and transformation. Though the early roots of rap music and hip hop "culture" in Cuba can be traced back to the mid 1980s, it was not until amidst the economic crisis of the Special Period of the early 1990s that hip hop began to take shape and an apparent urgency as a self-identified culture movement on the island. I suggest that *hip hop Cubano* has emerged as an organic sociocultural phenomenon of this particular historical juncture – one that operates as both a critical manifestation of, as well as a space of social agency within a shifting historical field constituted at the conflictive intersection of national and transnational matrices of power.

I begin here by presenting a sketch of the social narrative of hip hop's emergence in Cuba. I speak of a narrative in the sense that the story of hip hop's birth on the island has become something of urban lore through its telling and retelling by the initiated. Given the relative youth of the movement many involved often claim some level of involvement as an authentic marker of one's 'old school' status, while others' own personal narratives have become woven – or in the process of being so – into the wider narrative as part and parcel of Cuban hip hop's larger collective story. The increasing growing throngs of foreign journalist, filmmakers, and academics descending on Havana in the last few years to "research" and "document" Cuban hip hop are actively reproducing their own rendition of the narrative. In visiting this narrative I do not wish to replicate pre-exiting accounts, but rather to analytically foreground the constitutive role that race has and continues to play in hip hop's ascendance in Cuba – a role which all to often is either downplayed or whose complexities have been largely obscured by previous treatments. Such a contextualization is essential in the framing of my own more ethnographically focused treatment of contemporary dynamics of the Cuban hip hop movement. I also feel a responsibility to the folks with whom I work to render a reading of this history based on my own personal experience and knowledge of the actors and stories involved. In the end hip hop's narrative in Cuba is exactly that: an interwoven collection of personal stories, struggles, relationships, and internal politics upon which a sociocultural movement is made.

As the first to publish scholarly on Cuban hip hop,[64] musicologists Deborah Pacini Pacini Hernández and Reebee Garofalo's article "Hip Hop in Havana: Rap, Race and National Identity in Contemporary Cuba" (2000) makes an important contribution in documenting the early history and social contours of hip hop in Cuba within an academic frame. It is unfortunate, however, that in spite of promising claims of the article's title their treatment falls short in grasping the extent and political significance of race and racial identity in the making of Cuban hip hop as sociocultural phenomenon. A particular limitation of Pacini Hernández and Garofalo's examination is that although they situate hip hop's emergence within an analytical frame of globalization, they fail to recognize the politically-laden transnational character of black identification and black racial identity so critically present among raperos and their followers. While two more recent treatments have been relatively more straightforward in their attempts to address the centrality and transnational dimensions of racial politics within Cuban hip hop (Fernandes 2003a/b; West-Durán 2004), their emphasis on textual analyses and resultant lack of ethnographic depth has at times produced cursory renderings of the social complexities and identity politics that shape the movement.[65] Here I am not adverse to textual analysis per se. Rather it is when text-based approaches either make claims to ethnographic authority and/or lack accuracy when depicting ethnographic subjects or social phenomenon that such approaches become problematic. Whilst my work is in

[64] There are numerous articles published on Cuban rap and hip hop in popular, journalistic-based media that predate Hernandez and Garofalo's work.
[65] Given their similar analytical framings and references, I consider two journal articles published almost simultaneously by Sujartha Fernandes in 2003 on Cuban hip hop for all intents and purposes one treatment.

dialogue with the above mentioned authors this is precisely where my intervention is critically directed: providing a more ethnographically-grounded analysis of Cuban hip hop as a multivalent site of contemporary racial formation. To do so it is necessary to first outline the context of hip hop's early development in on the island.

The narrative of hip hop's birth in Cuba, much like its forebearing U.S. counterpart, has become something of urban lore among the initiated – one that many cite and claim some level of involvement as an authentic marker of one's 'old school' status as raperos – as well as foreign chroniclers. This narrative usually begins with Alamar, the previously mentioned costal municipality just nine miles east of Havana which is commonly sited as the "birthplace" of Cuban hip hop. This sprawling collection of over 2000 multi-storied cement-block apartment buildings was constructed between the 1970s and early 1980s by Cuban workers and prison laborers with the help of Soviet architects. Though many buildings were erected by individual *microbragadas* – volunteer civilian work crews organized to build their own housing with state-supplied materials, the cubical form and grid-like orientation of Alamar's semi-urban layout reflects an utilitarian Soviet functionalism of their architectural design. Originally raised to accommodate the overflows of young couples from Havana's over-populated urban center as well as an influx of workers from *la provincial*,[66] the municipality is now home to an estimated 300,000. Outside commentators have tended to make claims of a black or Afro-Cuban majority in Alamar (Sokol 2000; Pacini Hernández and Garofalo 2000). My

[66] As other regions of the island are commonly referred to by geocentric habaneros.

understanding based on conversations with residence and observation is that though black and browner-skinned folks are a visual component, the municipality's working-class population is generally more multiracial in character.

Leaving aside the question of race for the immediate moment, one key factor in Alamar's significance within Cuban hip hop's narrative relates to its geographical location. One of the principle routes of rap music's initial entry into Cuba in the mid 1980s was via Southern Florida-based radio stations like Miami's "99 Jams" whose FM signal on good days could be picked up on make-shift antennas fashioned out of apartment windows or on roof tops in and around Havana. With its high-rise apartment buildings and its northern sea-side location Alamar was positioned ideally for such reception. And it was there – the narrative follows – that a cultural space which would eventually be identified as hip hop first began to take root. Building on this lore, many U.S. journalistic accounts of Cuban hip hop tended to liken Alamar, as Cuba's massive "housing project," to that of the South Bronx's public housing-laden urban topography that first gave rise to rap and hip hop in the 1970s (Sokol 2000; Robinson 2002). While this analogy may carry cultural cachet both in and outside Cuba, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely where and when hip hop actually "began" in the Havana area. In all probability there were multiple, intermingling sites of cultural naissance.

What is less in contention however is that those who immediately took active interest in U.S. rap music via the radio waves, be they in Alamar or Cayo Hueso, were overwhelmingly black and brown skinned youth. *Habaneros* and others in close proximity to the North American mainland have long accessed U.S. radio broadcasts by

informal means, this is not new. U.S. rock & roll for example had a popular following among Cuban youth in the 1970s Cuba. A Cuban friend of mine in his early 40s from Havana told me of his own experience listening to North American top 40 via AM radio from as far away as Arkansas. The consumption of U.S. popular culture has in fact been an important, if at times ironic and contradictory, component in the historical shaping of popular culture and national imaginary in Cuba[67] – a theme underscored by historian Louis Pérez who has argued that the ever-present influence of North American culture since the 1850s has inextricably tied Cuban notions of national identity and modernity to those of the U.S. Pérez 1999).[68] Conspicuously absent from Pérez's treatment however is any attention to how race has historically figured within such Cuban/U.S. inter-culture dynamics.[69]

---

[67] In their treatment of Cuban rap Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Reebee Garofalo have argued that Cubans under socialism have largely not been "bombarded with images and products emanating from multiple metropolitan sources," were "Cuban youth are able to catch only fragmentary, intermittent, and highly decontextualized glimpse of non-Cuban cultural forms such as rap" (2000:19). This understanding seems to run counter to the fact that although politically speaking relations between revolutionary Cuba and the United States have been characterized primarily by hostility and ideological oppositionality, within realms of popular culture there continues to be a strong and present Cuban affinity – whether officially condoned or not – for U.S. popular cultural forms such as music, film, and fashion.

[68] As an illustrative case in point one only needs to consider Cuba's celebrated national sport of baseball – or *pelota* as Cuban's lovingly refer to it as – whose introduction to the island dates as far back as the1860s (Milton 2000).

[69] It is remarkable that beyond a handful of pages pertaining to José Martí and the early independence movement, Pérez recent 500 page opus *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* completely sidesteps the question of race in the making and transnational framing of Cuban history and culture vis-à-vis the United States. Completely absent from his account for instance is any discussion of the island's long standing engagements with jazz, one that stands as a poignant example of the ways race has variously framed both the transnational context as well as domestic character of Cuban cultural production in the 20th century (Acosta 2003). Nor is their any mention of the historical figure and work of poet Nicolás Guillén let alone his influential longstanding relationship with Langston Hughes (see Ellis 1998). For a collection of essays pertaining to a history of black Cuban and African American cultural and intellectual engagement see Lisa Brock et al. (1998).

Within the contemporary context of Cuban hip hop there can clearly be no such evasion. The reality that the majority of youth drawn to rap music in Cuba were and continue to be black and darker-skinned, urban and less economically-advantaged is not coincidental nor is it inconsequential. As laid out in my opening chapter, the participation of racialized subaltern youth in the making of local hip hop followings frequently involves strategic mobilizations of racial difference were transnationally informed practices of cultural consumption are instrumental. In many of these contexts performative rearticulations of black racial meanings through the racially-coded lens of hip hop are often central to such collective endeavors. Transnational engagements of these kinds, if we recall, have been employed by black youth in various Afrodiasporic locales in forging new kinds of critical black subjectivities and identity (Wade 1999; Anderson 2000; Sansone 2003). In the case of black and brown Cuban youth in the late 1980s and early 90s, the active engagement with U.S. rap music by way of radio and other resources like records, cassettes and videotapes signified, I maintain, a form of racial politic; one that involved significant levels of racial identification and racial self-meaning making.

Ariel Fernández, whose prodigious work over the last handful of years as a 25 year-old Havana-based journalist, DJ, and hip hop promoter has garnered him something of a position as an organic intellectual within the hip hop movement, brings through his own "memories" of this period some important insights into the early background of rap's emergence in Cuba. Mindful of the fact that Ariel's 25 years put him at a very young age in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I am tempted to think of his recollections as

something of a personal rendering of the popular narrative of hip hop's evolution on the island rather than necessarily first-hand testimony. Given the handful of articles he has written on Cuban rap in state-run periodicals, there is no doubt that Ariel has substantial collective resource to draw upon in his personalized account.[70] In a more expansive sense, however, Ariel's story gives multivalent entrée into the sociocultural dynamics, tensions, and contradictions present within the larger movement as a whole. Born, raised, and like most young Cubans still living at home with his parents in Havana's outlying *barrio* of Lauton, Ariel's transition from adolescence to adulthood – as with most his hip hop peers – directly coincided with Cuba's own transformative shifts from the1980s to the 1990s. Beyond a simple relationship of temporal correspondence, these consequent transformations of self and nation find articulation through the space of identity. Under Cuba's racial classification system Ariel would probably fall phenotypically-speaking under the broad category of *mestizo* with his very light brownish skin and straighter-than-curly short cropped hair. To my North American-attuned, black-seeking eye his facial features nonetheless clearly mark an African descendantness. Politically speaking however Ariel evokes his blackness as the primary source of his identity. As he explains:

> *I consider myself black. Sometimes I am more black. I don't know, it's a concept a bit strange. Everyone on my mother's side is black. And those on my father's side are white. So my black family came from Africa and my white family came from the Canary Islands of Spain. So I think I have both cultures, both races. A mix, no? But I feel more black than white. I think it is something positive.*

[70] Ariel's article published in the state-run, youth-centered periodical *El Caiman Barbudo* entitled ¿Poesía Urbana? O La Nueva Trova de los Noventa" (2000) touches many of the same historical elements he mentioned to me in our discussions.

While such black self-understanding, as his comments seem to suggest, may not be without its ambivalences, it is apparent that Ariel's evolving sense of black identity has been significantly shaped and – importantly – found political form through his engagement with hip hop. Similar can be said of the many staunchly black-identified raperos I have met who would otherwise be classified as *mulato, jabao, trigueño* or some other gradated vernacularism for non-whiteness in Cuba. A number of these individuals expressed to me that it was precisely through their involvement with the hip hop movement that they came to identify themselves as black. In the case of Ariel, his dedication hip hop in fact boarded on the obsessive. This driving commitment is exemplified in his toils as a self-taught journalist to be the first to publish comprehensive articles on Cuban hip hop in the state-run media, to his on-going development as a DJ, to his now somewhat conflictive position as an institutionally-situated producer of hip hop-related events. When we first met in 2000, Ariel was in white-clad marking his year-long status as an *iyawo*, or initiate of *santería*. Through our conversations it has always been clear that his involvement in the Afro-Cuban identified religion has also been a vital component of his everyday life and sense of self. Rather than competing ontologies of blackness, the racially-marked spaces of *santería* ("traditional," nationally-bound) and hip hop ((post)modern, transnationally-expansive) have been integral, mutually-constitutive parts of how Ariel actively defines his blackness.

As an important illustration of the seeming organic intersectionality of these two routes of black self-making, Ariel has described how through his religious practice he has been advised that his *camino,* or personal path, was to remain in Cuba to work towards

advancing hip hop as a constructive force in Cuban society. Understandings like this appear to have emboldened him against the daily frustrations he often seems preoccupied with be they personal, political, or resource related (i.e. continual scarcities). Ariel explained that it was also this conviction that precluded the thought of immigrating to the U.S., a plan that was all the more tangible after a month-long stay in New York City in the fall of 2001 as part of a Cuban delegation of hip hop artists. During this trip Ariel and others spent significant time connecting with elements of New York's hip hop community which among other things included a Bronx visit with the 'godfather' of hip hop himself Afrika Bambaataa. As a coveted trophy and documentation of his experience Ariel returned with a sizable collection of photographs of him posing with various prominent personalities of New York's hip hop scene. That Ariel lives and breaths hip hop is unquestionable. It is his devotion as a Cuban hip hop "head" however that has and continues to frame his sense of self as well as the race-grounded identity politics that guild him.

In recalling his memories of hip hop's Cuban emergence – or possibly more accurately his memories of the narrative itself – Ariel told me about the *movimiento de soul* (soul movement) in 1970s and 80s Havana that he suggested just predated rap's appearance. Among its adherents he recalled the popularity of James Brown – the personified cultural icon of that period's black transnational aesthetic,[71] as well as a group calling themselves "Los Estevies" who gathered devotedly every weekend to listen

[71] See for instance Manthia Diawara's account of how James Brown's music and imagery inspired a diasporically-attuned cultural movement among Malian youth in the 1960s and 70s (Diawara 1998).

to the music of Stevie Wonder. With few LPs floating around Havana and given the absence of a state-sanctioned commercial market, the primary source of this music were highly coveted audio cassettes of recorded U.S. radio broadcasts. The same applied for the early circulation of U.S. rap and R&B which similarly spread through an informal hand-to-hand cassette economy. Along a similar vein Ariel and others recall glimpses of the U.S. television broadcasts of Soul Train which, on rare occasions often associated with weather conditions, could be tapped-into using improvised TV antennas. Regarding the circulation and consumption of these black signified images and meanings Ariel recounts:

> *So there were people who had video cassettes. . . these people recorded [the program] on these cassettes and would learn how to dance from them. Soul Train you know is a dance program. . . So people learned how to dance, and they exchanged cassettes. And also what helped out this movement a lot were athletes who traveled [abroad]. Almost all athletes – track and field, volleyball, baseball – are blacks, no? They liked this way. They liked the style, the clothing, the large pants, no? They would buy nice radios to play in the streets. Boom boxes, these kinds of things. These people travel and would buy records, LPs, which folks then copied onto cassettes.*

Ariel points out that though informal access and trafficking of U.S. media was popular, it was not was not legally sanctioned by the state. In the case of U.S. radio broadcasts of rap and r&b music Ariel recalls:

> *I don't know if it happened accidentally or intentionally, but there started to be broadcasts of Cuban radio at the same frequency as broadcasts from the United States.* [he followed in English] *I don't know if it was accidental, you know. But it was very funky, because they put a radio station in the same as 99 Jams. They put a Cuban station with so many force, you know, it was impossible to get 99 Jams.*

While the Cuban government has a recent history of jamming U.S. radio transmissions – the most renowned of which involves the notorious U.S. funded/Cuban exile-run Radio Martí out of Miami – the blocking of popular music programming would appear to represent a different set of concerns. Here Cuban censorship strategy was less about blocking potentially harmful U.S. imperialist-based propaganda then about guarding against what was viewed as "culturally" disruptive. In light of such limitations Ariel's recollection and personal understanding of the moment suggest that young black Cubans' consumption of commercially mediated forms of black popular culture were by no means passive. Rather such engagements were in fact active, intentional and, I would hold, involved performative resignifications of black self-representational meanings. Ariel's reference to the ways folks attempted to emulate black styles of dance is illustrative of just this kind of dynamic. Here the transnationally identifiably "black" significance of these expressive cultural forms are performatively rearticulated in the making of local meaning and ways of being. Recalling Michael Hanchard's discussion of the black transnational character of Brazil's *Black Soul* movement of the 1970s, such plays between consuming and re-producing black (self-)meanings have the capacity to not only shape collective notions of black identity, but in doing so may also lay the groundwork for eventual race-based social mobilizations as well (Hanchard 1994).

*La Moña and the early makings of Black Space*

In the case of hip hop the movement from active listening to performative remaking developed as interest in rap music spread in the late 1980s and early 90s from

the radio waves to the streets. As increasing numbers of youth, almost exclusively black and largely male, began gathering in both private and public settings a cultural space began to take shape. During this period parties referred to as *los bonches* began springing up in private homes, parks, and street corners were young people got together to listen to, dance, and otherwise participate in the collective making of *la moña* – the term coined to refer to both U.S. rap and R&B music as well as the black-signified cultural space that developed around the music. Ariel tells for instance of a park in his *barrio* known as Parque Policía after the adjacent police station, where in the late 1980s young *moñeros* would gather on weekends around a make-shift DJ table "on top a piece of wood placed over boxes" involving rudimentary amplifiers and speakers to listen and dance to U.S. rap, R&B, and funky soul. At the time of our conversation I told him that his description was remarkably reminiscent of the pre-hip hop "street jams" of the mid 1970s which my teenage babysitter would drag my brother and me to in our lower-east side neighborhood in Manhattan. Cognizant of Ariel's astuteness as a student of U.S. hip hop, I wondered if his description might at some level be informed by his knowledge of hip hop's originating narrative in the U.S. and, if so, a possible effort to situate himself within its now globally-dissimilated historical lineage.

Ariel's personal details notwithstanding, I have heard from others of Parque Policía's famed reputation in the late 1980s and early 1990s for *los bonches*. Rather than picking up microphones which in all probability was not an option in such resource-strapped settings, a central component of these early *bonches de la calle* (of the street) was a localized form of breakdancing. Recollections of this period describe informal

competitions know as *los rectos de breakdance* in which dancers challenged one another over audiocassette-derived beats of la moña often accompanied by the now legendary rhythmic chants of "la caja, hey, hey, la caja." While the principally black crowds in attendance may have been mixed-gendered, performatively speaking *los rectos* were largely male-dominated celebrations of music, body, and movement. Similar gendered dynamics would come to define the male performance-centeredness of Cuban rap which soon evolved out of these spaces. Reminiscent of New York's early male-oriented b-boy battles of 1980s, *moñeros* adoption and recontextualization of breakdancing was no doubt informed by early U.S. rap videos that made their way to Havana via visiting family members from abroad, traveling Cubans or, by the 1990s the growing presence of tourist-related foreigners on the island. Much like their earlier black and Latino peers in New York City, these youth were similarly involved in the appropriation and use of public space in their making of *la moña* as a new site of black-signified cultural production. And if we are to consider anecdotal accounts of frequent police breakups of *los bonches* such emergent "black" spaces were apparently not well received by the Cuban state (Hoch 1999).

Attempts at state regulation of public space and the airwaves notwithstanding, it would be inaccurate to portray the Cuban state's position vis-à-vis the evolving black-identified space of *la moña* as one of opposition. State institutions in fact played important roles relatively early on in shaping the development of *la moña* by providing access to U.S. popular music through various channels. One early source was state-produced television programming targeted towards youth which presented both domestic

and international popular music. Ariel recalls for instance hearing and seeing video clips of Herbie Hancock's 1983 hit "Rockit" – whose incorporation of hip hop-inspired elements was pivotal in introducing hip hop to the U.S. mainstream – as well as the late-1980s bubble-gum pop duel of Milli Vanilli on Cuban television. Such state-sponsored presentations of U.S. popular music would appear to run counter Ariel's account of government jamming of U.S. radio broadcasts. From this vantage point there is no definitive way to explain this apparent discrepancy other then to suggest that policies do shift and change over time. There is also an important distinction between uncontrolled radio waves out of the U.S. and institutionally produced programming of edited U.S. entertainment material.

Possibly more significant along these lines was the establishment of state-sponsored parties and institutionalized spaces in the early 1990s where youth, primarily black and darker-skinned, gathered to dance and listen to black-identified U.S. popular music. The premier among these spaces was La Piragua – an open-air performance space on the seafront Malecon adjacent the famed Hotel Nacional were weekend *la moña* parties were organized during summers. Along with other open-air music parties centered around various popular music genres, La Piragua was organized by the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC) (Union of Young Communists) which, as the youth-wing of the Cuban Communist Party, is broadly speaking responsible for promoting socialist ideals, commitment, and political participation among Cuban youth. As an alternative to these larger state-organized events, smaller more informal *bonches* would continue to be organized in private homes. While these developments marked the organic growth of a

new cultural movement in the making, they also underscore the beginning of the Cuban government's varying efforts to institutionally frame this emergent, racially implicated space of youth activity.[72] This play, if you will, between the street and the state would in fact remain a central and defining tension – if not battleground – within an evolving hip hop movement.

As they have been described to me it appears as if a probable rationale behind these state-sponsored parties may have been to safely channel young people's energies during the long summer vacation months in ways productive, or at least not disruptive, to the social order. If so such logics would seem to have taken on an immediate urgency considering that these spaces were organized at the height of the economic crisis of the Special Period in the early 1990s, a time when scarcities of food, electricity, medicine and general collapse of any productive semblance of heretofore socialist rewards pushed Cuban society and most Cuban's themselves to desperate ends.

I do not wish to suggest a reductive reading of the Cuban state's intentions during this period. On purely socially responsive grounds it would make sense that the socialist state would feel compelled to provide Havana youth leisure outlets during their hot and extended break from state-run education system. Such priorities however could easily be in confluence with interests in maintaining effective levels of state governmentality. One only needs to recall the summer *huelgas* (riots) of 1994 when hundreds of residence of Central Havana – large numbers of whom were black and young – took angrily to the streets breaking and looting storefront windows containing dollar merchandize only

[72] It would be the UJC's cultural arm, la Asociación Hermanos Siaz that would soon take the lead in the Cuban state's efforts to institutionalize hip hop in Cuba. (See Chapter 6).

foreign tourists and a few well-positioned Cubans could afford at the time. Following a year after the legalization of the U.S. dollar, this merchandize represented a first sign of dollar-privileged consumer power at a time when the vast majority of Cuban could barely secure proper levels of daily nourishment. Triggered by the armed hijacking of a Havana ferry in a successful effort to flee the island, this previously unimaginable expression of post-1959 frustration and unrest was a critical link in a chain of events that coalesced in that summer's crisis of *los bolseros* (rafters).

Largely in response to *las huelgas* and in an effort to immediately alleviate mounting social pressures, the Cuban leadership was compelled to allow tens of thousands of Cubans to take flight on make-shift rafts towards the U.S. mainland. For a period of roughly a month a carnivalesque environment ensued in the greater Havana area as individuals, groups, and families scrambled for materials and resources to construct improvised rafts out of inner tubes and scrap wood.[73] The 1994 exodus of *los balseros* represented the first time since the Mariel boatlift crisis of 1980 that Cubans were temporality granted the liberty to leave the island en masse. In both episodes black and darker-skinned Cubans comprised a sizable percentage of those fleeing. In all the early 1990s and 1994 in particular represented critical moment of crisis and reckoning for the Cuban state, the Revolution, and Cubans in general. And it was evident, moreover, that the dynamics of race and youth appeared to be significant if not potentially volatile

[73] This moment of frenzy is vividly captured in Carles Bosh and Joseph Maria Doménech's Oscar-nominated 2003 documentary "Balseros" produced for Spanish Television Tv-3. New York-based photographer Janis Lewin has also dramatically documented the moment through her exhibited collection of photographs of the event.

elements of the moment's social equation – a reality that both the Cuban leadership and black youth themselves may have variously just begun to recognize.

It was amidst the crisis-level social volatility of 1994 that a soon-to-be DJ Adalberto Jiménez acquired a small space in Central Havana dubbed "ell local" where he started organizing weekend *la moña* parties. This move marked an important new phase in the evolution of the Cuban hip hop scene in that it initiated a movement towards a more quasi-institutionalized space for hip hop and R&B in Havana. Pacini Hernández and Garofalo suggest this development was largely in response to the government's recent opening to U.S. music as well as the growth in size of *los bonches* which could no longer be easily held in private homes or informally organized in public spaces (2000). The particular timing of the development, however, is notable. While DJ Adalberto should certainly be credited for his creative initiative as Pacini Hernández and Garofalo suggest, he could not have opened the space without the explicit blessing of the Cuban state. As an emergent black cultural space *la moña* was certainly proliferating as an organic social phenomenon at a moment of acute societal crisis. Hence, there most likely was a confluence of interests – individual, collective, and clearly state – which brought *el local* into being.

From that moment on through the mid-to-late 1990s similar *la moña* gatherings would find intermittent homes in a number local *casas de cultura* (neighborhood cultural centers) in the central Havana area were DJ Adalberto's music continued to be a central facet. Though these spaces were initiated by *moñeros* themselves, they always operated with the tacit consent of the Cuba government which at the local level often made these

locations available for such use. Consent of this kind however was apparently not without its ambivalences and temperamentality. Viewed with a level of suspicion as sites of foreign cultural influence and anti-social(ist) behavior, local *la moña* parties where often broken up by police according to anecdotal accounts (Olavarria 2002; Sokol 2000). Such concerns would be consistent with the discourse of *diversionismo ideologico*, or ideological diversionism, formulated in the early 1970s when debates over the role and instrumentality of "culture" in the making of a revolutionary socialist society where first articulated. Cultural forms viewed as embodying capitalist-engendered values of competitive individualism were, for instance, deemed antithetical and counterproductive to the building of socialist ideas, practices, and collective subjectivity. These forms took on added discord when associated with the penetration of U.S. capitalist culture within the otherwise held organic, nationally-bounded Cuban cultural repertoire. In this way such forms were in effect 'ideologically diversionary' from both the socialist path as well as the historically-given national character of *cubanidad*. Within this framed logic, rap music was viewed as clearly fitting the bill. Yet on another critical level, rap music's strong associations with blackness both in the U.S. and increasingly in Cuba might pose additional challenges to Cuban ideological orthodoxy particularly as it relates to revolutionary discourses of national non-racialism.

The establishment of El Local nonetheless marked a new phase in the development of *la moña* as an emergent and growing a black space in Havana. In particular this moment signified a shift in focus from one organized around *moñeros* to

one centered more on raperos; from one characterized by cultural consumption and leisure to one of cultural production and politics.

While by the late 80s and early 1990s Havana-area black youth had begun taking up rapping in informal settings, it was not until 1995 that a more formal convergence of Cuban rap began to come into focus. That year Rodolfo Rensoli, a late twenty-something university-educated cultural worker and poet, along with partner Balxesy Rivero founded the collective Grupo Uno though with they organized a rap competition in Rensoli's East Havana *barrio* of Bajia. It was from this precipitating event that the annual Cuban hip hop festival evolved, quickly shifting locations the following year to neighboring Alamar. I first met Rensoli and Balxesy in 1999 as they were in the midst of preparing for the 5th annual hip hop festival.[74] Prior to his involvement in hip hop Rensoli had been active in Havana's preexisting rock scene as a promoter of music-related events – something of a rarity for a dark ebony-skinned man in a cultural space traditionally dominated by a much lighter/whiter following. Rensoli explained to me that though he had considered himself a rockero at the time, as followers of rock music are known, he was additionally influenced by the growing presence of reggae through which he would also come to identity himself with Cuba's "rasta" movement. There is a significant racial juxtaposition between the largely white and definitively black-identified respective followings of rock and reggae, Rensoli's various involvements appear to have been motivated above all by an intellectual commitment to advancing avant-gardist forms of

[74] Unfortunately, due to funding limitations I had to return to the U.S. a couple weeks prior the start of the Festival. I would, however, attend the following four successive festivals between 2000 and 2003. (See Chapter 5).

sociocultural expression through the promotion of *músicas alternativas*, or alternative music-based movements, among Cuban youth. His participation in the early shaping of Cuban hip hop seems to have similarly developed along these lines of commitment.

What it was that first drew Rensoli's attention to the a new rising youth culture in-the-making was not rap music but breakdancing which, he recounts, had become an increasingly visible presence in the streets of his *barrio* by 1995. He found his intellectual curiosity deepen after attending a local "folkloric" presentation where a discussion of the African "roots" of the dance form took place. Around this time, Rensoli recalls, youth began gathering at a local patio to rap, and as he recollects *"I remember going to a party and there was a [rap] group working on producing music but there was no space for them to perform."* It was at this point that he decided to explore the idea of organizing an event to showcase what he apparently recognized as an emergent moment of Cuban rap. Given the lack of resources and no viable alternatives for such other than the all-providing socialist state, such an undertaking would necessitate government support. Rensoli realized, Pacini Hernández and Garafalo [have ]suggest[ed], that in order to garner state support Grupo Uno would have to present rap in such a way as to differentiate it from how rock music had been previously received by the government leadership. As they quote Rensoli:

> *The idea was to avoid the same thing that happened to rock in Cuba. Rock was much misunderstood here, for being a genre that wasn't considered national – another idiocy that was fashionable then, the product of limited vision; that it was associated with the so-called diversionismo ideologico (ideological diversionism); that it brought with it capitalist influences, deviances of all sorts, physical and moral. And since we suffered that ourselves before, we approached the*

*Asociación Hermanos Sais (sic.) …With this connection it was easier to get the project going.* (2000:26-7)

While Rensoli's comments nicely contextualizes the discourse of *diversionismo ideologico* as it was earlier employed in the context of rock music, I suggest that similar concerns in fact would continue to underlie and shape the state's ongoing dealings with Cuban hip hop. More immediately his remarks references the initiation of Cuban hip hop's evolving, long standing relationship with la Asociación Hermanos Saiz[75] which took the early lead as the principle site of intuitional contact – and initial state mechanism of institutionalization – between the Cuban state and the developing cultural movement. In its capacity as the cultural arm of the UJC, la Asociación Hermanos Saiz (AHS) operates as something of a union of young artists and musicians charged with promoting – and channeling – artistic and cultural production among Cubans under the age of 35. Though this institutional association was essential for Group Uno to obtain official sanction and access to public space, the festival was organized for the first five years on shoestring budget supplied almost exclusively through local municipal sources (Hock 1999). During this period the official state position with regard to Cuban rap was one more akin to blind neglect than active support. While raperos continued to struggle for official recognition and just access to resources, the Cuban state's view of the growing rap movement generally remained that of an inorganic cultural phenomenon with anti-social(ist) tendencies – in a sense an ideological diversion that would soon fade by the

[75] Named after the late Saiz brothers Luis and Sergio, teenage sympathizers of *El movimiento 26 de julio* (the revolutionary guerilla campaign lead by Fidel Castro) who were killed in 1957 by police during Batista's dictatorship.

wayside. The very opposite in fact was be the case. And it was not until 1999 that state's position, if not its implicit strategy, vis-à-vis Cuban hip hop shifted radically.

Here I have employed the somewhat awkward expression "anti-social(ist)" to characterize hip hop's initial perception vis-à-vis the Cuban leadership to suggest a play of multiply overlapping discourses with which the state has framed the emergent cultural phenomenon and its 'disruptive' potentialities. The first being the previously mentioned application of the notion of *diversionismo ideologico* in which rap music's supposed transmission and reproduction of capitalist cultural values is viewed in oppositionally juxtaposition to the socialist project. On another potentially more threatening level, hip hop's overtly "black" racial significance would in fact pose direct challenges to the foundational notion of a transculturated, *mestizaje-ed* Cuban national body upon which a post-1959 (as well as pre-) revolutionary socialist Cuba are predicated. Hence, in this way it could additionally be considered 'anti-socialist.' At the same time the manner in which the racially marked black space of Cuban hip hop has in the past been associated with "anti-social" behavior by the Cuban state resonates historically with racialized discourses of black social pathology and criminality – propagated at both academic and popular levels – discussed in the previous chapter that have long been part and parcel of Cuba's racist belief system. Though I will return to a more extensive discussion of the racially "disruptive" tendencies of Cuban hip hop and the state's response in the following chapter, I felt it necessary to contextualize the Cuban government's early dealings with the movement in this light.

It did appeared, however, that those in the Cuban leadership who initially viewed Cuban hip hop with misgivings as an inorganic foreign import could clearly have had fodder within this logic. Given the long absence of technical and financial resources for rap music production, up until very recently the vast majority of Cuban rap was performed over pre-recorded "background" tapes originating from the U.S. and Europe. Anecdotal accounts suggest, moreover, that Cuban MCs early on tended to mimic performance styles and dress of African American rap artists often donning the likes of hooded jackets, skull caps, big boots, and imitation gold chains (Smith 1998). Although many of the earliest lyrics may have been light on social commentary and political "consciousness," raperos initial appropriations and redeployments of U.S. black male-centered youth style were by no means devoid of politically imbricated meaning. Such practices I suggest symbolized at least in part opening efforts at black masculine self-making through the performative, black-signified cultural stylistics of hip hop.

Similar to previously black Cuban appropriations of dance styles associated with U.S. soul music and breakdancing, Cuban MCs' early efforts to reproduce hip hop's "black" cultural aesthetics represented attempts at resignifying transnational markers of blackness as a means of both invoking one's own black racial difference, as well as (re)constituting that very black self-difference in the first instance. As I will develop further along, I speak here of a (re)constitution of blackness to underscore that such identity-based self-making is processual and constantly in a state of re-formation. For many youth involved in hip hop their racialization as black is a everyday lived reality. The critical point however is that the dominant prescriptive frames within which such

blackness has been historically configured – i.e. as 'traditional', autochthonously rooted in, and bound by the Cuban nation – began at this moment to be reconfigured and reconstituted by these youth though their engagement with the transnationally conveyed, black-signified stylistics of hip hop. Recalling the work of Dick Hebdige, politics of style in this way are mobilized not merely as a passive reflection of self, but as an active, productive mode of black self-representational practice (Hebdige 1988). As such these practices marked an initiating movement from transnational forms of black identification (identifying with) to transnationally informed kinds of black identity based self-making (identifying as). Nowhere has this movement more dramatically pronounced than in successive Cuban hip hop festivals.

*Performing Blackness and the Cuban Hip Hop Festival*

As an annual marker of hip hop's development on the island the Cuban hip hop festival grew both in size and performative sophistication through 1999. In spite of the dramatic lack of resources the festival expanded during this period from one involving a handful of East Havana-based groups to a multi-day event encompassing groups from various parts of the island as well as the participation of a collection of foreign MCs including, most significantly, a small number of high-profile, New York City-based African American artists. As I came to understand the festival, based on my attendance from 2000 to 2003, the event represented not only the collective culmination of a year's artistic development but also an annual inspiration for many raperos to push their music

politically as well as creatively. Traditionally held in Alamar's open-air amphitheater before some three thousand predominantly black and brown youth, the festival was without doubt the largest single stage for Cuban hip hop and one that MCs recognized as the best opportunity to showcase their music, themselves, and their message. This was all the more the case given the mentioned absence of production resources as well as any semblance of a commercial market for domestic rap through which recorded music could be more broadly disseminated. Hence Cuban rap from its inception was grounded in the live performance. And it was within the annual context of the hip hop festival that such performance often found some of its most avant-garde and demonstrative expression.

From the festival's inaugural year in 1995 the social contours that came to largely define the Cuban hip hop movement first began coming into focus. Central among these was the beginning of raperos' lyric text focus on socially-oriented themes and critique drawn from their own daily experiences of the island's shifting, increasingly dollarized social landscape. As played out in the 1995 festival, an early thematic concern along these lines was directed towards the then emergent phenomenon of *jineteras* (female dollar-based sex workers). During the festival significant numbers of songs were apparently devoted to critiquing the rise of tourist-driven female prostitution, often chastising what was viewed as the excessive materialism of those women involved. This tendency towards a kind of reductive, gendered-focused "blaming the victim" approach to the social complexities of Cuba's dollar-based sex trade was in many ways in line with prevailing discourses – both official and popular – regarding female prostitution discussed in the previous chapter. It is not surprising that such patriarchically infused

readings would resonance among the festival's overwhelmingly male concentration of performers. As self-limiting as these critiques were, they nonetheless represented early illustrations of the socially directed character and commitments – as masculine in orientation as they were – that continued to shape the developmental direction of hip hop on the island. It was not too long, however, before such male-centeredness was challenged by emerging female voices in the movement.

By the third festival in 1997 there appeared to be a new critical focus evolving within a nascent *hip hop Cubano* in which Havana-based raperos began to more clearly define their music and themselves as a cultural "movement" through a further emphasis on social themes they recognized as critically affecting their lives. Such a socially-engaged focus is illustrated by the now routine use of the term *temas sociales* (social themes) or simply *temas* (themes) by Cuban MCs in referencing their individual compositions rather than the standard Spanish term "canciones" (songs). Beyond pure semantics, this rhetorical practice signifies raperos' emphasis on the social message or *mensaje* (message) of their work rather than a preoccupation with entertainment per se. Although social thematics had already begun to take hold within Cuban rap, the 1997 festival seemed to mark a significant move towards more overt incorporation of social themes particularly as they relate to race and racial identity.

Moving beyond the politics of style of the pervious moment, it was through lyrical expression that discourses of blackness and racial difference found more explicit political (re)articulation. One incident etched in the collective memory by raperos and chroniclers alike involved the pioneering rap trio Primera Base's 1997 festival

performance of Igual Que Tu" ("The Same as You") in tribute to Malcolm X.[76] In prefacing the song a member of Primera Base explained before the Alamar crowd something to the effect:

> *This is an homage to Malcolm X, because he is our brother and we relate to black people all over the world, even in the United States, and we feel sorry for our black brothers in the Unites states who have to live the way they do. They have it the worst of the worst.*[77]

Evoking themes of resistance the song drew inspiration from the life story and defiant black masculine imagery of Malcolm X. When it came to the chorus refrain members chanted "Igual que tu/igual que tu nigger" ("Equal to you/equal to you nigger").

A collection of North Americans present at the event were openly dismayed by the seemingly flippant, decontextualized way in which the term nigger was used to reference Malcolm X, leading to a heated debate over the frequent use of the expression within U.S. hip hop. As one of the group's members Rubén Marín would latter recount in a 1998 interview:

> *Everyone here sort of felt the echo of Malcolm mania after Spike Lee's movie, so I read his autobiography to try to get to the truth of what he was really about. The point I am trying to get across in the song is if a great man like Malcolm X is considered a nigger, then I want to be a nigger too like him.*[78]

---

[76] In 1996 Premera Base was the first group to record a commercially produced rap album in Cuba. The album was produced through a Panama-based labeled Caribe Productions. Its also worth noting that the group's members are comprised of two black and one white Cuban.
[77] Quoted in Hoch (1999)
[78] Quoted in Verán (1998)

While an experiential understanding of the historical violence engendered through the term nigger may have been absent, a race-based identification with Malcolm X as a transnational figure of black liberation clearly was not. The MCs' comments moreover further attest to the effectiveness of U.S. media in conveying images and ideas of blackness transnationally. In this case Spike Lee's 1992 filmic depictions of Malcolm X struck a resonant cord among young black Cubans as it similarly did in the context of Brazilian hip hop as discussed in Chapter 1.

During the 1997 festival another pioneering group Amenaza (Menance) made another potentially more overtly political intervention along racial lines with the performance of their song "Ochavon Cruzao," roughly translating as "Mixed-up Octoroon."[79] In this *tema* the groups' three members of variously mixed-race background addressed the lived ambiguities of racial identity in contemporary Cuba in ways significantly complicating, if not implicitly contesting, hegemonic discourses of *mestizaje* as a stable, historically harmonious, race-neutral core of the Cuban social body. An except of the song's lyrics is as follows:

<u>*Ochavon Cruzao*</u>
*Amenaza*

| | |
|---|---|
| *también soy congo,* | *I too am Congo* |
| *también fui esclavo,* | *I too was a slave* |
| *también mi esperanza sufre para aquellos* | *and so too has my hope suffered for them* |

[79] Cruzao is a Cuban term most often used in religious contexts to refer to the syncretistic fusion of African-derived religious forms in the making of everyday kinds of religious practice. It is also worth noting that two of the three original members of Amenaza would eventually travel to France and under the tutelage of a French hip hop producer would form the previously mentioned "Cuban" commercial rap sensation Orishas in 1999. I will return to the significance of Orishas in Chapter 6.

| | |
|---|---|
| *que el racismo no ha acabado,* | *because racism has not ended* |
| *soy rumba Yoruba Andavo* | *I am rumba Yoruba Andavo*[80] |
| *y no acabo hasta ver lo* | *and I won't be done until I see what's* |
| *mío multiplicado* | *mine multiplied* |
| *no ves soy pinto, ochavon cruzao* | *can't you see I am mixed, mixed octoroon* |
| *negro como el danzon y el son cubano* | *black like the Cuban danzon and the son*[81] |
| *negro como esta mano* | *black like this hand* |
| *negro como mi hermano* | *black like my brother* |
| *negro como Mumia,* | *black like Mumia* |
| *y negro como mucho blancos mas quien lo* | *and black like lots of whites but who could* |
| *diría y no me cuantas* | *tell, so you don't count me* |
| *desafía raza mía* | *my race defies* |
| *dijeron negro pero a mi no me contaron* | *they said black but they didn't count me* |
| *dijeron blanco pero en esta clan no me aceptaron* | *they said white but that clan didn't accept me* |
| *dijeron tantas cosas,* | *they said so many things,* |
| *soy el ser que nadie quiso* | *I'm the one that no one wanted* |
| *lo negro con lo blanco, el grito de un mestizo* | *the black with the white, the cry of a mestizo*[82] |

While this lyric excerpt gives poetic expression to struggles over racial self-meaning and identity as currently lived by young Cuban's of 'mixed race,' I suggest it also represents an early foregrounding of the movement's quest for a politicized frame of black identification that transcends dominant national constructions and its contemporary contradictions. By exposing the dissonance experientially embodied in the celebrated national figure of the *mestizo*, the song's first-person narrative undermines the central foundational symbol of Cuba's historical claims to a racially transculturated – read racially neutral(ized) – nation. At the same time the song's *mestizo* subject position seeks to rectify this dissonance by asserting its own historical claims to blackness. Along

[80] Name of a famed Afro-Cuban *rumba* performance troupe based in Havana.
[81] Two 'traditional' popular music forms historically represented as national cultural paradigms of a harmonized Cuban racial mixture.
[82] Original Spanish text by Joel "Pando" Heredia as cited, with my own corrections, in Pacini Hernández and Garofalo (2000). Modified English translation my own.

‘cultural’ lines such affirmations of black self are articulated through an identification with *rumba* whose own black cultural significance is further secured, both literally and discursively, though its association with the Afro-Cuban performance troupe *Yoruba Andavo*. Potentially more contestive, the black racial recuperation of the *danzon* and *son* – ‘traditional’ music forms celebrated as national symbols of a harmonized, racially-transculturated Cuban cultural heritage given their syncretized fusion of African and European musical elements (Moore 1997) – makes further claims of black cultural legitimacy

On a more overtly political level the song’s text invokes the collective social memory of Africa (*congo*) and the racial terror and suffering of slavery – two critical components, Paul Gilroy has argued, in the historical shaping of racial consciousness in the Black Atlantic world (Gilroy 1993a). It is the persistence of racism, however, that serves as an historical linkage between the past and the present; the everyday lived ground upon which such historicized black identification is experientially rooted. Racism here is referenced not so much as an objective truth ‘out there’ but rather a subjectively lived reality “that has not ended.” Within contemporary Cuba, the song text seems to imply, regardless of one’s interpolation as *mestizo* one’s non-white self remains subject to – or more accurately a subject of – racializing forms of power.

Although such liberatory directed struggles over racial self-meaning are framed within the sociohistorical space of the Cuban nation, recourse to blackness are not necessary bound by such borders. The brief though pointed reference to Mumia Abu-Jamal represents a critical move in this regard. In breaking from the preceding allusions

to nationally defined markers of blackness, Mumia's invocation presents an alternative, outer-national site of black self-identification – one that further transcends the conflicting tensions between a racial "ideal" and the racialized social realities of being non-white in Cuba's new economy of the 1990s. Rather than the historical figure of Malcolm X, Mumia's contemporary black radicalism brings a more immediate political urgency to bear on the transnational contours of such black identification. Calls in English to "free Mumia!" have in fact become a frequent refrain among some of the more overtly political of Cuban MCs. Tee-shirts framing Mumia's dreadlocked image are also coveted visible marks among many raperos. As I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter, engagements with U.S. black radicalism – both discursive and literal – have in fact been critical to the making and mobilization of black identity politics within the Cuban hip hop movement. As Amenaza's poetic "*grito de un mestizo*" suggest, however, in spite of such black self-affirmations, resolution to the lived social contradictions of being of mixed-race in Cuba today remains a lived struggle. At least so was the case in 1997.

As it stands, this present text-heavy focus on song lyrics could conceivably open me to critiques that I myself have raised regarding the potential limitations of textual approaches to understanding social phenomena. While this tension may not be completely unavoidably, let me respond by foregrounding the ethnographic context of performance within which Cuban rap's lyric-based expression is grounded. Possibly more so then any other contemporary western music genre, rap's aesthetic form is predicated on the centrality of the spoken word, the enunciated text. Among Cuban MCs such textual prioritization is reflected in their common use of the term *los textos* to refer

to their lyric compositions. Within the live performance-driven setting of Cuban hip hop, however, the "black" signifying force of *los textos* takes on a whole other level active social significance.

Beyond the initial phase of lyric composition when textual meanings are first shaped, it is through Cuban MCs public performance of their *textos* that such black textuality is actively embodied and self-actualized. It is of course the "rap" through which the rapero actively defines him/herself. Here in a very tangible sense the text moves from realms of discourse to those of practice. While it one thing for a Cuban youth of mixed-race to compose a lyric line "*[soy] negro como Mumia*," it is a whole other undertaking to mount a stage before three thousand of your peers and verbally proclaim over a microphone "¡*[soy] negro como Mumia*!."[83] Here it is less about performing a text than it is about the instrumentality of the text as an active mode of self-representational practice. It is within this context of public performance, I suggest then, that "black" signifying texts can be mobilized in the strategic self-fashioning of critically positioned kinds of black identity and subjectivity. Similar to the performative use of style previously discussed, raperos' textual invocations of blackness in this manner are reconfigured and redeployed in ways in which they take on their own locally generated structures of feeling (Williams 1977). Such imbricated practices of cultural consumption and reproduction of blackness, as it were, underlie the strategic creativity of black self-making on the part of Cuban MCs. And although these black (self-)reconfigurations may

[83] It was bold proclamations of these kinds which helped Amenaza's "Ochavon Cruzao" win first place in the 1995 hip hop festival. The competition component of the festival, however, was soon fazed out in succeeding years.

be imbued with autochthonous sociocultural – i.e. "Cuban" – significance, they nonetheless continue to consciously signify a black transnationality from which they arise.

My proposition here is significantly counter posed to that of Pacini Hernández and Garofalo's (2000) who have concluded based on their research in the late 1990s that Cuban MCs and their followers tend not to foreground their contemporary connections to the Afrodiasporic world, and thus display a conspicuous absence of black diasporic forms of identification. In their words: "Thus, even as young Cuban rappers have become more conscious of their racial identity in local – Cuban – terms, their perceived relationships to people of African descent still seem to be located in the historical past rather than the present" (2000: 39). Their assertion is supported in part by an interview conduced with Pablo Herrera, a pioneering Havana-based rap producer and instrumental figure within the Cuban hip hop movement, who is quoted as suggesting that contemporary Africa holds little attention among raperos as a source of identification and inspiration. While in my own experience this may indeed be the case, there is an important distinction to be made between the present-day contexts of Africa and the African diaspora with regard to contemporary forms of black transnational identification. Although I recognize that Africa has and continues to serve as source of both contemporary routes (Pierre 2004) as well as the historical "roots" (Gilroy 1993a) of Afrodiasporic identification, a critical site of transnational black belonging nonetheless remains those active, present-day connections forged *between* African descendant populations within the Black Atlantic

world. Such a distinction appears to be obscured, if not lost all together, in Pacini Hernández and Garofalo's argument.

As I myself have come to know Pablo Herrera there is little ambivalence as to his own understanding of the critical importance of black transnational engagement within Cuban hip hop – engagements which have significantly shaped his own highly articulated sense of black self-identity. I first met Pablo in the summer of 1999 at the offices of Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba while he was doing translation work for a group of North American participants of dance workshop hosted by the institution.[84] The class had gathered that day for a screening of black Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando's recent documentary "Eyes of the Rainbow" celebrating the life of African American political exile Assata Shakur who has resided in Cuba since 1986.[85] Noting Pablo's seemingly flawless North American accent and familiar affect with the visiting Americans, I simply assumed 'the brother' was from the States. It was not until we spoke after the screening that I realized that not only was he Cuban but was in fact one of the key contacts suggested to me by a mutual acquaintance of ours in New York City. Our communication from that point on has been almost exclusively in English sprinkled with U.S. black vernacular, affecting from the start a sense of a black transnational

[84] The Conjunto Folklórico Nacional is the national Cuban dance troupe specializing in Afro-Cuban "folkloric" dance and music founded in 1962 as part of the Revolution's early efforts to institutionalize and codify national culture. Among those participating in the workshop organized by Yvonne Daniel, the U.S. academic and author of Rumba (1995), was Shelia Walker - the then director of the University of Texas' Center for African and African American Studies.
[85] Influenced by the work of friend Aline Helg, Gloria Rolando later produced the film "Raices de Mi Corazon" (2001) based on the infamous 1912 massacre of followers of the Partido Independiente de Color. For her part, Assata Shakur, as I will soon return, has been an influential figure and inspirational icon of black radicalism with Havana's hip hop community.

camaraderie. Though such finesse was part and parcel of Pablo's operative charisma and charm, our relationship was significantly more complicated than simply this.

I soon learned that Pablo had earned a degree in English and Russian translation at the University of Havana, and had later spent a number of months living and working in Brooklyn where he was able to hone his African American-inflected vocabulary and accent. Pablo's linguistic and cultural fluency in "African American-ness" was so attune I had heard of his ability to pass in the streets and hotel lobbies of Havana as a *yuma* (Cuban street vernacular for foreigner) – a feat rather remarkable for a dark skinned black man in Cuba. As an illustrative aside, in the 2001 film rendition of Danny Hoch's "Jails, Hospitals & Hip-Hop" Pablo played a naïve, mono-linguistic, camera-totting African American tourist in the streets of Havana opposite Danny Hoch who ironically assumes the role of local, fast-talking *jinetero* character.[86] Such cultural facility has undoubtedly contributed, along with his achievements as Cuba's pioneering hip hop producer, to Pablo's success over the years in developing a prolific range of North American contacts. It was through such contacts he first acquired an assortment of small-scale digital music production equipment assembled into an improvised music studio in his small roof-top apartment in Havana's residential *barrio* of Santo Suarez. His mother, whose accomplishments as a reputable black female architect under the Revolution clearly

[86] New York-based, hip hop-identified performance artists and cultural activist Danny Hoch has long been an active and influential figure with Havana's hip hop community. Building upon a strong network of relationships developed since the late 1990s with local MCs and others involved in the local scene, Danny been involved in organizing a number of collaborative projects including a tour in 2001that brought nine Havana-based raperos – including Pablo and Ariel – to New York City for a month long series of performances and politically-directed engagements.

infused a level of black pride and grounded respect for socialism, designed his apartment which sits atop her home. Over the years Pablo's place has become something of an institution within Havana's hip hop community where, working with a handful of the most high-profile of Cuban rap groups, he has crafted some of the first locally-produced hip hop background beats on the island. Now in his later 30s, his astute intelligence and committed involvement has garnered him the status as one of the most influential figures within the movement, a position which – along with a particular set of interpersonal dynamics – has contributed to a history of competitive tension between he and the younger, highly ambitious Ariel.

As Pablo recounts, his involvement in Cuban hip hop first stemmed from his thematic incorporation of rap music into his course work during a teaching stint at the University of Havana in the mid 1990s. It was at that point that he first came into contact with Amenaza, eventually developing a relationship with its members that lead to a managerial role with the group. Pablo told me that he was concerned early on about what he felt was Amenaza's initial lack of a critical black consciousness. It was this shortcoming he believed contributed to a certain level of disregard among some local raperos who viewed the group as politically shallow "pretty boys." This despite the fact that Amenaza were at the time considered by many to be among the most talented of Cuban rap performers. In his capacity as manager Pablo claims he pushed Pondo, the creative head of Amenaza, to deal more explicitly with questions of race and racial identity. This intervention, he contends, contributed to Amenaza's composition and subsequent performance of the above mentioned *tema* "Ochavon Cruzao" which garnered

first place in the now defunct song competition during the 1997 festival. Regardless of possible sources of inspiration, Amenaza's "Ochavon Cruzao" signed a new level of racial self-reflexivity within Cuban hip hop.

Although I cannot comment on whether his work with Amenaza may have directly informed their referencing of Mumia Abu-Jamal, I do know that Pablo's own exposure to U.S. black radicalism has been a prominent fixture in his life for a number of years. Possibly more than any 'older school' member of Havana's hip hop community, Pablo has over the years developed particularly close personal relationships with African American political exiles Assata Shakur and Nehanda Abiodun whom have been influential figures within the movement. While Assata has become an inspirational icon of black radicalism among many Havana-based raperos stemming in part from her internationally celebrated status as a black revolutionary, Nehanda has been more personally involved in the growth of Cuban hip hop since receiving political asylum in 1990. Now in her early 50s, Nehanda's mentoring role among many local MCs has conferred upon her something of a *la madrina*, or "godmother" status within the movement. Nehanda's relationship with Pablo as I have come to know it has similarly been an involved and mutually respectful one. The kinds of relationships that Pablo has developed over the years with both Assata and Nehanda has certainly been an influence, among others, affecting Pablo's political development as well as his transnationally expansive sense of black self.

Regarding Pablo's relationship with Nehanda, as an expression of their shared, transnationally-geared political engagements the two have served together as the Havana-

based representatives of the African American centered, activist-oriented Malcolm X Grassroots Movement's Black August project (Black August for brevity).[87] Using hip hop as an organizing medium, the black nationalist leaning Black August has been active in supporting the on-going struggles of African American political exiles residing in Cuba. Over the years the organization's involvements in these directions have spurred an active interest in supporting an emergent Cuban hip hop movement. Though I will explore in greater detail the various U.S. black radical/black nationalist influences and their resultant expressions within Cuban hip hop in the following chapter, the point I am asserting is that like many involved members of Havana's hip hop community Pablo has utilized the transnational frame of hip hop to forge a range of politically engaged connections with African Americans as well as mainland Puerto Ricans. Such connections, importantly, prove vital resource in the production of politically-grounded, nationally-transcendent kinds of black identity which continue to shape the social dynamics that define Cuban hip hop as a space of critical self-making of black subjectivity and action. Here politicized identities of blackness arise in both strategic response to Cuba's new socioeconomic imperatives of race, while serving as the basis for race-based social critique and mobilization. In this manner black self-identity making can serve as a modality of social praxis.

[87] Nehanda was actually one of the founding members of the organization.

## Chapter Five

## New Black Revolutionary Horizons

In the previous chapter I outlined some of the social contours of hip hop's emergence in Cuba with an emphasis on the instrumental role of transnational black identification and identity in the early formation of *hip hop cubano* as a contemporary social phenomenon. While incorporating some of my own ethnographically informed insights and understandings of "the narrative," my framing was primarily an historical one. At this juncture I now delve into the "ethnographic present" by centering my exploration of Cuban hip hop's on-going development and more squarely upon my field experience in Havana between 1999 and 2003. In this chapter I introduce in greater ethnographic detail the immediate context of my field research while presenting some of the political negotiations of my own engagements within the Cuban hip hop movement. The central concern of this chapter, however, remains the exploration of Cuban hip hop as an active site of critical black "self-making." To this end a key argument I am proposing here is that such black self-making occurs at the confluence of two distinct currents of nationalist discourse and history; the first drawn from a nationalist tradition of U.S. black radicalism, the second rooted in a recuperation of a black radical subject within Cuba's own national narrative. Through the articulation of the two, I hold, black antiracist advocacy is simultaneously advanced through transnational appeals to black diasporic histories of struggle as well as assertions of full black citizenship and rights

within the nation. By paying close ethnographic attention to raperos and their work I hope to illuminate the complexities of these social dynamics and contours.

As with all narratives there is a precipitating event or framing that sets everything in motion. My initial introduction to the hip hop scene in Havana came about through a colleague of mine Rosanne Adderley, currently an associate professor of history at Tulane. Rosanne and I were among a small group of Afro-descended graduate students and junior faculty (herself) who, engaged in critical race scholarship, happen to be doing research in Cuba during the summer of 1999. Though modest in size, this small cadre of "black folks doing race stuff" represented something of an historical precedent in Cuba.[88] Never has there been in the past anything approaching a critical mass of young black scholars concurrently examining Cuba's historical problematic of race. Our presence was at least in part a result of Cuba's recent *apertura* or opening to foreign researchers that has inspired a growing tied of North American academics to the island since the early 1990s. At the same time we represented a new generation of critically trained black scholars from the U.S. exploring from various vantage points the transnational facets of race in the making of the black Atlantic as lived. Given our diasporically attuned orientations it is not surprising that we quickly found ourselves converging that summer in Santiago de Cuba during an exploratory foray into eastern, more *caribeño* (read "darker") side of the island. While I made some preliminary contacts with the small rapero community in Santiago during my short visit, I committed myself to concentrating

[88] This "cadre" included Jafari Allen and Frank Guridy currently assistant professors of anthropology and history respectively at the University of Texas, Austin.

my research within Havana's larger and more developed hip hop community. Amidst Afro-Cuban religious ceremony and *salsa* performances during Santiago's Festival de Caribe, and sweltering trips to the Universidad de Oriente and the church of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre,[89] we conversed informally about our current projects which for most of us were in their formative stages.

It was within setting that Rosanne, aware of my proposed research on Cuban hip hop, informed me of a rap group named Obsesión she had seen perform just days before back in Havana at the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC).[90] Situated on the shady grounds of a once lavish pre-1959 villa and now the site of one of Cuba's preeminent cultural institutions, UNEAC's patio-bar is renowned for its weekly performances of "folkloric" and "traditional" music forms such as rumba and bolero that regularly draw a packed audience of rum-drinking, dollar-paying tourists and local Cubans. I recall that it initially struck me that Cuban rap, a heretofore marginal(ized) music form on the island, had made inroads into such a culturally prescriptive institutional space such as UNEAC. In mentioning my work to group's members after the performance, Rosanne obtained a contact number which she later passed on to me in Santiago. Once back in Havana I immediately followed up in contacting the group after which we agreed to meet one afternoon at my apartment for introductions. So began my relationship with Magia López, Alexei Rodríguez and Roger Martínez whom comprised what was at the time the rap trio of Obsesión. Although Roger – who eventual left the

[89] Cuba's patron saint who is herself the syncretic Catholic half of Ochun, santeria's *orisha* of love and feminine sensuality.
[90] Union of Cuban Writers and Artists

group to immigrate to the U.S. in 2001 – and I were initially close, it was Magia and Alexei with whom I developed some of my strongest and most lasting friendships in Cuba.[91] A married couple whose creativity and tireless commitment over the years has helped positioned them among the most successful and respected of artists in the movement, Magia and Alexei became two of my first and most trusted entrées into Havana's hip hop community. In broader sense, moreover, however, they and their families proved invaluable windows into the social complicities of contemporary Cuban as a whole.

***Obsesión***

My initial conversations with Magia and Alexei, then in their late and mid twenties respectively, were significant in informing my early thinking about Cuban hip hop particularly as its related to questions of race and racial identity. I recall one of our fist exchanges occurring on the roof-top patio of Alexei's parents' house in Regla where he and Magia primarily reside.[92] A fifteen minute ferry ride across Havana's industrialized harbor,[93] the municipality of Regla is known for its strong associations

[91] Leaving for the U.S. on a fiancé visa, Roger is now living in the Los Angeles area and is married to a former UT graduate student whom I had initially introduced him to.
[92] In the past, Alexei and Magia split their time between Regla and Magia's mother's apartment in Cayo Hueso in central Havana. These days, however, it is a rare occasion they pass a night outside Regla though hardly a day passes when they do not spend some time at Magia's mother's more centrally located place.
[93] Locally know as *la luncha*, it was this ferry to Regla that was hijacked in the summer of 1994, setting off the crisis of *los hulgas* discussed in Chapter 4. In April 2003 Regla's ferry would again be commandeered by an armed group of Cuban's attempting to flee the island to the U.S. The hijackers were eventually apprehended by Cuban commandos after the ferry ran out of fuel.

with santería dating back to the late 19th century founding of la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora. The church is home to the image of the black Virgin de Regla whom is syncretized with Yemayá, the maternal *orisha* of the sea. Today Regla is home to a sizeable community of *babalaos* and *Iyas de ocha* (religious godmothers or *madrinas*) who live among its narrow, sleepy streets. And revelers continue to pilgrim to la Iglesia de Nuestra Señora to pay homage to the alter of the Black Virgin shrouded in Yemayá's oceanic blues. Born and raised in the black working-class family a few blocks from the waterfront church, Alexei's sense of history and black self is deeply a meshed with that of Regla's. Alexei's self-consciously modern sense of blackness, however, ultimately reaches beyond the local. When I posed a question about the seeming ubiquitousness of black self-affirmation within Cuban rap lyrics, Alexei responded:

> *This is a stage of rap. One must first announce "I am black." And when you acknowledge this we can then move forward from there. I think this is valuable, this is valuable today especially here in Cuba. It seems to me that black people now know more about themselves. I think that our work is contributing to establishing this. And part of what is necessary here is to know your history in a deep kind of way – to know who you are, your roots, and where you come from.*

As Alexei's comments suggest, his conception of black identity is clearly a political one. Rather then passively given, such identity is understood within the Cuban context as a conscious assertion of self – "I am black," which in turn serves as a the

---

Shortly following, three of the groups' members were executed after a brisk tribunal hearing, triggered a considerable level of international condemnation from various fronts including some long term supporters of the Revolution including Columbia novelists Gabriel García Márquez. Incident was the first of a series of hijackings in 2003 – two involving domestic airplanes – that signaled a new point of social crisis in Cuba's ongoing post-1989 struggles.

ground upon which to "move forward," to act. Alexei was not implying that blackness, per se, was some a kind of discursive signifier 'out there' which can be willy-nilly chosen or rejected at whim. In Alexei's case, his dark complexion, kinky hair, and strong features unmistakably marked him as *negro* within Cuba's racialized classification system. The point, however, as I interpreted it was to embrace and celebrate one's blackness in the face of a dominant history that has either imbued blackness with negative value or attempted to negate it all together.

Magia, a beautiful dark brown-skinned woman with full features, interjected that she herself had been resistant to identify as black in spite of the presence of positive black affirmations within her family. She recalled for instance that while a school-age girl in her largely black *barrio* of Cayo Hueso in Central Havana she sought to claim any non-white marker other than that of black. Dominant racists dictates taught that blackness was not necessarily a desirable attribute to be associated with. At the same time, the ways in which Magia has had to negotiate her blackness are of course particular to the gendered specificity of racialized power and history in Cuba. Such gender-defined historical prescriptions that would celebrate *la mulata* as the Cuban essence of a sexualized feminine aesthetic could, for instance, create pressures among darker-skinned women to distance themselves from identifying as *negra*.

By 1999, however, things had clearly changed. As I have come to know Magia, her identity and performative self-projection as a black woman has been at the very center of her ever-evolving work as a one of Cuba's pioneering female rap artists. Opposed to celebrating *la mulata*, much of Magia's work has in fact come to explicitly

critique the historically-configured, racialized sexualization of black and brown skinned women within Cuban society. Efforts of this kind represent an assertion of new forms of black womanist subjectivity and woman-centered critique within the otherwise male-dominated space of Cuban hip hop. Such intervention not only challenge hip hop's masculinist orientation, but provided the basis from which to pose broader critiques of racialized patriarchy as they are experienced in the Cuban everyday.

During the four years I have known Magia and Alexei their blackness, while ever present, has become an increasingly outwardly celebrated facet of their personal and public lives as artists. Here, black-signifying style has been instrumental. When I first met the two, Alexei keep his hair conventionally short cropped, while Magia had her hair interwovenly braided with synthetic extensions. Within a couple years Alexei, like a growing number of raperos, began grooming what is now a full head of mid-shoulder length dreadlocks. As previously mentioned, young black men in urban centers such as Havana and Santiago de Cuba whom may not necessarily be involved in Cuba's Rastafari movement have in small but increasing numbers embraced dreadlocks as a non-conformist, Afro-centered marker of their black masculinity. This practice has most often been received in hostile terms within an otherwise socially conservative, racially prescriptive Cuba.[94] Despite, or possibly more accurately in opposition to such racially-

[94] The wearing of dreadlocks in recent years has also been taken up by some young black men engaged in informal tourist-based activity including sex work. As within other Caribbean contexts, dreadlocks have become a commodified symbol of an "authentic" black masculinity – often associate with a racialized virility – among "thrill seeking" European and North American tourists, particularly women. (See again Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, et al. (1998) and Klas de Albuquergue (1998)) Regardless of motivation, young dreadlocked black men have and continue to be subjected to racially-inscribed associations with criminality and drug use by Cuban police and the broader Cuban public as a whole.

coded antagonism, Alexei holds his locks as part and parcel of his identification as a black man within a nationally-transcendent community of blackness. As for Magia, she now wears her long, reddish-brown hair naturally combed out into a big 'fro-like crown, or wrapped-up 'African style' akin to the new-age, afro-chic Erykah Badu. In line, Magia often adorns herself in West African-inspired gowns when performing in celebration of her black womanhood. Though he has been known to don African prints on occasion during performance, Alexei's thin frame is more often then not draped the proverbial raperos attire of over-size baggy pants, footwear from the U.S., and long lose-fitting tops. Regardless of outfit, it has long been the case that Magia and Alexei never hit the streets of Havana without adorning a set of wooden amulets which rest conspicuously atop their chests. Fashioned by Alexei as symbols of the couple's collective bond, these amulets are carved in the likeness of faces with strong 'African'-like features and are spoken of as carrying important protective significance for the two.

While such performative expressions of black-signified style and aesthetic may at some levels be transnationally informed, both Magia and Alexei understand themselves and their blackness as deeply rooted in Cuban history, nation, and revolutionary struggle. Such commitments find poetic form in their music. One of Obsesión's earliest signature *temas*, "Obsesión Mambí," is poignantly illustrative of this interarticulation of black self, nation, and struggle. Foregrounded in the group's initial album – the first rap album commercially produced in Cuba,[95] "Mambí" is filled with historical references to *los*

[95] The group's 1998 album "Obsesión" was recorded and released under Cuba's state-run music label Egrem. The project's producer, an accomplished young black Cuba jazz pianist by the name of Roberto Fonseca, was able to use his professional used clout to access state-run

*Mambíses*; the formally-enslaved, machete-wheedling regiments of black (male) of soldiers who fought in Cuba's late 19th century independence wars under Antonio Maceo.[96] Rather then simply recounting the history, the song's first-person narrative portrays the group's members as modern-day *mambíses* When asked about the song's thematic significance, Magia put it simply "*somos mambíses, luchando lo mismo*" ("*we are mambíses, we are fighting the same [struggle]*"). Below is an except from "Mambí."

| | |
|---|---|
| *[Alexei] Pa´l pueblo aquí estoy yo* | *For the people here I am* |
| *[coro]: Yo estoy aquí diciendo* | *[chorus]: I am here speaking* |
| *Obseción Mambí pinchando* | *Obsesion Mambí working hard* |
| | |
| *[Alexei]:Que nadie espere ningún tipo´e chance* | *Nobody should wait for chance* |
| *Si Quintín Banderas nunca dio masaje* | *If Quintín Banderas*[97] *never gave up*[98] |
| *¿Por que yo entonces?* | *Then why should I?* |
| *¡A fajarse!* | *Let's Fight!* |
| *Que la manigua está gritando: Yo soy yo* | *The la manigua*[99] *is screaming: I am me* |
| *Y es por mí por quien doblan las campanas, no metan forros* | *And it's for me for whom the bells toll, don't tell lies*[100] |
| *El morro sabe que al combate corro y corro junto a los bayameses* | *The fort knows that in combat I run and run with to the bayameses*[101] |
| *¡Cuba orgullosa de mí!* | *Cuba be proud of me!* |
| *No le temo a una muerte gloriosa* | *I don't fear a heroic death* |
| *Esténse quietos que insurrecto y prieto es un lío ¡Rebambarambara! . . .* | *Stay calm, to a rebel and black is trouble ¡Rebambarambara!*[102]*. . .* |

---

recording facilities and institutional resources. The album was distributed in limited numbers through both official and informal outlets for Cuban peso's rather than U.S. dollars making more readily available to young Cubans island-wide.

[96] The *mulato* general and key military figure in Cuba's wars of independence who is celebrated today as one of the central figures of Cuban nationalism and, by implication, an heroic symbol of a racially transculturated Cuba. (see chapter two)

[97] A celebrated (though at times ambivalently) black general and Mambi leader who served under Antonio Maceo. Upon independence it is reported that he was unable to find employment other than work as a janitor. In 1906 he was assassinated in his sleep by Cuban government troops after becoming involved in organizing resistance to the then U.S.-aligned administration of Estrada Palma (see Ferre 1998b).

The significance of Alexei's lyric invocations operates as a number of overlapping levels. In an immediate sense, foregrounding the black racial significance of *los mambíses* underscores the historical centrality of blacks in Cuba's national liberation struggle. Such efforts signify an historical recuperation of a critical black subject and agency within an otherwise racially neutralized national narrative (Helg 1995; Ferre 1998a). Much like Maceo, *los mambíses* are celebrated in official revolutionary discourse as liberators of the nation in ways in which their Cubaness supersedes, if not ultimately negates, their blackness. As I will discuss in further detail shortly, the historical erasure and subsequent recovery of a critical black subject is a key driving thematic within Cuban hip hop. In the above excerpt, such black recuperations are asserted through Obsesión's poetic self-configurations as contemporary *mambíses,* thus situating themselves and their work within an historical (masculinist) tradition of black liberatory struggle. Rather than autonomously forged, however, such struggle is grounded within a Cuban nationalist framework and history. Here, black liberatory action and anti-racism is held as intrinsically part and parcel of the broader historical

---

[98] "Mensaje" literally means massage. Alexei explained within this vernacular context, however, that it refers to Banderas' refusal to bow in the face of danger.
[99] Early Mambi brigade from the region of La Manigua in *el oriente*, the eastern part of the island.
[100] The line "no metan forros" literally translates as "don't mess with the cover /or lining" but in Cuban vernacular the expression is used to imply "do not tell lies or cheat." However, in this contexts the expression operates as a pun – i.e. "no metáfora" – playing on the previous line's literary reference.
[101] "Bayameses," literally the people/men of Bayamo, is taken in this context from Cuba's national anthem "Al Combate Corred, Bayameses" which recounts a 1868 battle in which nationalist forces were victorious over the Spanish in capturing the town of Bayamo. Hence, Bayamese is synonymous with nationalist liberators. The anthem was officially adopted in 1902 and retained by the Revolutionary government after 1959.
[102] In Cuban vernacular *rebambarambara* refers to a tremendous problem/fiasco/mess. Hence, "!Rebambarambara!" might be translated in this context as "Make hell!"

context of national liberation and birth. *Los mambíses*, as the fighting core of Cuba's national liberation army, fought for the promise of their 'rightful share' as full citizens in a here-to-come racially egalitarian Cuban republic (Helg 1995).[103] Sacrifice in the nation's wars of independence – Cuba's first "revolution" – consequently warranted the nation's historical indebtedness to black Cubans. Obsesión's excavation of such historical claims of black citizenship and revolutionary legitimacy in turn provides a rhetorical bridge between the revolutionary past and present. "*Yo estoy aquí diciendo… pinchando… corro y corro junto a los bayamese... ¡Cuba orgullosa de mí!... insurrecto y prieto es un lío ¡Rebambarambara*,"[104] is all about declaring: 'I am black *and* Cuban *and* revolutionary, recognize me, hear me speak, today!' In doing so similar historical assertions of black citizenship and antiracists struggle are once again proclaimed within the contemporary context of revolution. Here, Alexei and Magia's self-legitimization as 'revolutionary' is directly tied to their strong identification with *the* Revolution. As the two explained to me that evening in Regla:

> *[Alexei]: We are rapping from the perspective of a socialist society, from the point of view of socialism, and engaging it from a positive position.*
>
> *[Magia]: Our role [as raperos] within the society is well defined within socialism, this is independent of whether we communicate, critique, or denounce certain kinds of things* in *society. Our position is well defined in this sense.*
>
> [Marc]: Do you consider your music somehow connected to the Revolution?
>
> *[Alexei]: Yes, we cannot separate one from the other. I cannot make music by putting aside what is significant about the Revolution for me. I can make a song that*

[103] See Chapter 2.
[104] *"I am here speaking… working hard... running with the rebels/liberators… Cuba be proud of me!... [to be] a rebel and black is a problem.. make hell!"*

*is critical of something, but never against the Revolution, never against the Revolution. Because it is not like this, not for Obsesión.*

*[Magia]: Since I was little my mother always told me "Gracias por la Revolución" (thanks the revolution) for blacks, because black people have had more possibilities under the Revolution. I get annoyed however when a black person makes a lot of noise in criticizing the Revolution… After the triumph of the Revolution my mother told me that even light skinned [black] women couldn't even get work as servants [criadas]. The Revolution allowed blacks study, to work, to be who we are today. From here on its is us who have to work double, triple, whatever [it takes] to arrive at who we to become. It depends on us.*

In comparison to many of their peers, Magia and Alexei have in fact been consistently among some of the most self-identified and vocal supporters of the Revolution and, by extension, the Cuban state. I recall numerous, at times heated discussions over the years concerning the current state of Cuban society in which my critical readings as an "outsider" where often met with rather fervent defenses of "the Revolution." Here I refer to the Cuban Revolution in quotations to underscore what I have found as the tendency within post-1959 revolutionary nationalist discourse to conflate *la Revolución*, with *el estado*, and in turn *el pueblo.*[105] Within this framing one is all, as all are one. The most likely intentional effect of this secularized "holy trinity" is the restriction of critique. Within such configurations critique or a perceived challenge to one facet (e.g. the state) is deemed a challenge – if not hostile attack – on the other mutually constitutive components. While such a logic may seek to curtail domestic dissent, I have found that it can take on a whole other level of defensive significance when that critique is leveled from *afuera*, the 'outside.' Such dynamics seemed to have

[105] the Revolution, the state, and the nation or people.

often informed the tone of some of our more contentious conversations, with Magia frequently being the most impassioned in her positions.

As Magia's previous comments suggest and as I have come to know both her and Alexei, their orientation towards the Revolution stems in significant part from their parents' own deep-felt convictions vis-à-vis the Revolution. In recalling conversations I have had with Magia's mother Caridad and Alexei's father Celso, I was always struck with their fervent faith in both the principles and achievements of Cuban socialism. Yes, there may have been *errores*, mistakes, but the Revolution has worked and is working to correct them. I often found their perspectives and insight a refreshing respite from the more conflicted and critical assessments one hears (and lives) daily in Havana. Habaneros are ubiquitous with their expressions of displeasure regarding the contemporary hardships of Cuban life. The expression "*no es fácil*" ("it's not easy") per illustration has assumed something akin to a national mantra among Cuban's today.

What I came to understand is that Caridad and Celso are among a generation of black Cubans who shared a collective memory of what Cuba was for poor black folks prior to the Revolution and the hard fought achievements that followed. Magia's recollection of her mother's experience is illustrative of the staying power of this social narrative for her. Now in their early thirties, however, Magia and Alexei are representative of Havana's hip hop old-guard. Given that the majority of today's Cuban MCs are more likely in their late teens and early 20s, their parents would be in turn significantly younger than Caridad and Celso who are well into their 50s and early 60s. This has certainly been my experience. This disparity may in part explain the particularly

robust Revolutionary identification Magia and Alexei hold in comparison to many of their raperos peers who do not have parents who share such a long term perspective on the changing circumstances for black Cubans. As I will develop shortly, revolutionary self-identification and discourse is in fact a central and defining component among Cuban MCs. A key distinction lies in the articulation between Revolution with a capital "R" and alternative (black) revolutionary conceptions in the making of identity and politics within *the movement*. Magia and Alexei's comments underscore Cuban raperos' general tendency towards viewing their work as critically engaged from *within* rather than *against* the Cuban Revolution and, by explicit extension, the Cuban state.

On another level, Magia's retelling of her mother's account of black women's difficulty in attaining employment even as domestic workers prior to 1959 underscores the gendered contours of race and racism in Cuba which she is herself acutely aware. Returning to Obsesión's *tema* "Mambí," Magia gives early expression to her own gendered critique of racial patriarchy, a critique which would become increasingly part of her identity and personal politics as a performer. Her opening volley in the song comes as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| *[Magia]: ¿Como e´? Yo soy niche* | *What's that? I'm black* |
| *Mi intención no es salir como negrita linda en los afiches* | *My intention is not to be a pretty black girl in the posters* |
| *Y si me ven así es porque* | *And if they see me this way it's because* |
| *sé que todavía hay* | *I know that there are still ones* |
| *quien quisiera ser mayoral* | *who would like to be an overseer* |
| *Pa' verme trabajando sin descanso en los trapiches* | *So they can see me working without rest in the trenches* |
| *Eso lo he sufrido, lo he visto. . .* | *I have suffered that, I have seen it. . .* |

Here, Magia opens by invoking her identity as a black woman using the Cuban vernacular expression *niche* for black person. While historically the term *niche* carried a racially derisive if not overtly racist connotation, more recently the term has worked its way into the vernacular of black Cuban youth. In a somewhat similar fashion as African American inverted appropriations of the term "nigger" (i.e. *nigga*), black Cuban youth today often utilize *niche* as a pro-black self-affirmation. This *niche* Magia proclaims however, is not about to conform to the normative gendered prescriptions that would configured her black body as a sexualized object of patriarchal gaze and consumption. Her experience of such racialized gendered constructions are once again contextualized in the racialized past as Magia invokes the historical memory of enslavement; "*I know that there are still ones who would like to be an overseer/So they can see me working without rest in the trenches.*"[106] In proclaiming, "*I have suffered that, I have seen it,*" Magia both signifies her lived historical linkages to racial slavery as well as testifies to its continued vestiges in her quotidian struggles as a contemporary black woman. Magia declaring once again, *"somos Mambíses, luchando lo mismo."*

[106] It is worth noting that like many raperos neither Magia nor Alexei are formally employed outside their work as hip hop performers. When I first meet the couple Alexei was working part-time in a Havana book binding factory. He soon left this job to devote all his time to his artistry. As one of the most successful of Cuban rap groups, Magia and Alexei have been fortunate enough over the years to have garnered income, as inconsistent as it might be, though their local shows and national tours, , and local sales of their two recorded albums, and most notably their three performance-related trips aboard. Most other raperos, however, have not been nearly as successfully in translating their talents into income. While the majority are formally unemployed, like large numbers of young black Cubans many find ways of "getting by" in one form or another. In almost all cases these young people live at home with their parents were the basics are provided. The challenge of course is to get beyond bare basics.

***More Black Space***

It was during these first three summer months of 1999 that I first engaged with Havana's hip hop community, making contact with many of the folks who either were or became key players in the movement as I came to know it. In addition to Magia, Alexei and later Pablo, Rensoli, and Nehanda Abiodun, I befriended a crew of hip hop affiliated folks who resided in the Vedado area of Havana where I had been staying during this initial research trip. The sea-side barrio of El Vedado, with its tree-lined streets and numerous, once palatial signal-family houses, was at one time home to some of the most wealthy (read "white") families living in Havana. Many of these households fled to Miami around 1959 in fear the Revolution's socialist policies that threatened their historical privilege. Today Vedado remains home to some of the more advantaged of Havana's residence, significant numbers of whom are family members of those who emigrated during the earlier "white flight" exodus from the island. In addition to racially-skewed dollar remittance patterns that would privilege such lighter skinned Cubans, Vedado residents live amongst some of the most coveted real estate in Havana which, in today's dollar-driven tourists economy, translates into marketable capital. Unquestionably the barrio with the highest concentration of dollar-generating *casa particulares* (private homes) which rent rooms both legally and illegally to tourists, Vedado families disproportionably benefit from this facet of the island's new economy. There are, however, pockets of black and darker-skinned Cubans living in Vedado. Many of these families acquired houses and apartments vacated by their previous

employers whom members worked for as domestics. Once occupied by a single family, many of these residences now accommodate numerous households within multiply partitioned units.[107]

One such pocket centers around the intersection of Tenth and Nineteenth streets – locally know as "diez y diecinueve" – where an early twenty-something, dark-skinned, now dreadlocked adorned black man by the name of Deno lives with his mother, sisters, and extended family. Deno's home, which is located in a formally grand two story house now in need of serious restorative work, has over the years become a communal center for the EPG&B crew (the Executive Plan Ghetto and Barbito).[108] Founded in the joining of Grandes Ligas, a rap duo out of the same local section of Vedado, Junior Clan, a duo from the adjoining *barrio* of Cerro, and later a spoken-word collection known as Jóvenes Rebeldes, EPG&B would come to self-style themselves as one of the more "underground" collectives of MCs in the Havana area.[109] Increasingly graffiti-adorned the patio aside Deno's house at the corner of diez y diecinueve became something of a local institution within Havana's hip hop community. There, beginning in 2001, a series of street concerts were hosted by EPG&B and their local posse where the collective performed along with invited guests, many of whom were among the most established

---

[107] Such post-1959 partitioning of formally occupied residential spaces occurred throughout Havana as socioeconomically disadvantaged folks gained access to now vacant housing of the formally elite. Famed for their rumba while often denigrated through their association with poor blacks and accompanying racialized discourses of social marginality, central Havana's communally organized, multi-unit *solares* are products of similar historical conditions.

[108] Barbito is the name of a fellow member of the diez y diecinueve posse who died a couple years earlier. Barbito was known for his graffiti work, some of which adorns the mentioned local patio.

[109] I will be returning in the following chapter to a discussion of the significance of the term "underground" as it is used within the context of the Cuban hip hop.

raperos in Havana. Often taking on the flavor of a festival block party, these informal concerts regularly drew hundreds of black youth into the adjacent cobblestone street in an otherwise sedate, and predominantly white, Vedado. In the past such gatherings frequently evoked the attention of police who have more than once shut down the event. I refer to these concerts as informal to underscore the organic nature in which these shows initially came into being through the initiative of the "diez y diecinueve" posse. Increasingly, however, through institutions most notability La Asociación Hermanos Saiz, the Cuban state lent official support to these events by supplying audio equipment and arranging greater tolerance on the part of police. Such moves, as I will soon discuss in further detail, reflected the state's shift in approach from one of initial distrust, including the policing of such "black spaces," to an active institutionalization.

Though members of Grandes Ligas and Junior Clan had close associations in 1999, EPG&B as a collective had yet to be formally established.[110] It was during this time, however, that I made early connections with the group's members and their extended Vedado-centered following. Many of these contacts grew out of my regular visits to a small cabaret-style club named La Pampa. In 1999 La Pampa was the latest local incarnation of *la moña* where Adalberto Jiménez was resident DJ and organizer.[111] Fittingly located in the shadow of Antonio Maceo's statue at the corner of Parke Maceo

---

[110] By late 2003 EPG&B began to dissipate as performance collective due to a series of precipitating events. One of the two members of Grandes Ligas left Cuba for Switzerland on a fiancé vista earlier in the year for leaving the remaining member solo. I have also recently heard that this remaining member has had the very unfortunate luck of being arrested on charges of marijuana possession – a charge that reportedly brings a minimum of one year in prison (regardless of quantity) under Cuba's harsh drug procession laws. See chapter 3 for references to the racialized undercurrents behind Cuba's recent crackdown on marijuana and drugs.
[111] See Chapter 4.

(Maceo Park) and el Malecon, one could on any given Thursday through Saturday night find a crowd of black youth extended out into the street in front of the club mingling well into the AM. While many may not have been able to afford the then twenty Cuban peso entrance fee (equivalent at the time to one U.S. dollar), others preferred the relatively cooler Malecon air outside to the stifling heat within.

Many of the young men present donned baggy paints, lose jerseys (including NBA and NFL jerseys with numbers), hip hop-associated head gear including U.S. baseball caps, and among the privileged few FUBU and Eckô designer jerseys – some of the latest in black youth style from the U.S. Such style-driven markers of a Cuban hip hop collectivity were often informed by the dog-eared U.S. rap magazines and videocassettes of recent rap videos from BET and MTV that circulate continually among these youth. As discussed in the previous chapter, both the fashion and the commercially-mediated images that inspire them frequently found their way to Cuba by way of visiting family, friends, and tourists from the U.S. At a macro level, these commodified expressions of U.S. black youth culture were of course tied to Cuba's recent openings to transnational incursions of capital, people, and cultural influences as well as a growing culture of consumerism tied to the new dollar economy in a once definitely anti-consumerist socialist society.

Inside the small, sweltering, barely lit space JD Adelberto – interspersed with often distracting, off-beat microphone "shout-outs" – "spun" audiotape cassettes of U.S. hip hop and R&B before a moving mass of sweat soaked bodies. Predating the more recent emergence of locally produced Cuban rap, La Pampas' scene was all about U.S.-

derived *la moña*. To a half-way attuned hip hop follower from the U.S. much of the music might have been considered dated at the time given the rather extended lag time it took for North American music to make to the island. Over subsequent years, however, this would be less the case as musical sophistication and consumption habits quickly evolved, fed in large part by the greater frequency and broader access *moñeros* had to more recent music out of the U.S. This wider access stemmed principally from the increased trafficking of North Americans traveling to the island to variously "engage" Havana's hip hop community, as well as the contributions of a privileged few who have been able to accumulate cashes of CD's through their travels to the U.S.[112] Over the last couple years the growing availability of computer-based CD "burning" technology has greatly facilitated the rapid dissemination of new music within Havana's tight social networks of hip hop followers. Today folks are just about as informed on the most recent "beats" as any hip hop 'head out of New York City.

Recalling those earlier nights at La Pampa, regardless whether a track was a week or a year old, a chorus of dancing revelers, hands aloft, could be found singing with the lyrics though most themselves could not speak English. As one of the only state-sanctioned locales in the Havana area at the time for the hip hop devout, La Pampa's strictly dance-only format precluded any live performances. As such local raperos at the time had to rely on the varying Friday or Thursday night 'open mics' events at Alamar's amphitheater as the only regular performance venue. Regardless, La Pampa was the first,

[112] Including the likes of Pablo, Ariel – who today in his latest incarnation as a DJ has arguably the largest CD collection of U.S. hip hop on the island – and a couple of Havana-based rap groups including Obsesión who themselves toured the U.S. in 2001 and 2003.

though certainly not the last, of hip hop's emergent "black spaces" I encounted during my field research. This was 1999.

***2000 and beyond: Hip hop into the millennium***

I returned to Havana in the summer of 2000 just a week or so prior to the 6th annual Cuban hip hop festival which as customary was to be held in August. The common logic behind this scheduling was so the event would be held during the summer recess when school-age youth, who comprised a sizable component of the local hip hop fan-base, would be free to attend the nightly concerts which often ran late well into the night. Another key factor was that Black August, a New York-based hip hop collective that had for a number of years running coordinated the participation of African American rap artists in the festival, organized events during the month of August. Since 1997, the collective's involvement had become an important and influential facet of the festival, one not to be compromised if possible. What this all immediately translated to was that the festival took place during the island's hottest month of the year. Unlike the previous year when I had missed the festival due to funding limitations, at this stage of my research I could not afford to miss another year's event. As a cumulative annual marker of hip hop's developmental progression as well as an instrumental site of creative innovation, the festival was an ideal context within which to launch my next six months of field research.

Within a day of arriving in Havana, Magia and Alexei brought me to the home of a woman they knew who had a room available to rent. The apartment was on ground

floor of the building immediately across the street from Magia's mother's apartment central Havana's *barrio* of Cayo Hueso.[113] Belkis, a *mestizo* woman in her mid- 50s with abundant energy and wry wit welcomed me into her home – for $12 USD a night. I wound up the first of many foreign lodgers Belkis and her son Antonio, a medical student, hosted over the succeeding years as they gradually transformed their three bedroom apartment into a proficient dollar-generating *casa particular*. Over the course of my many extended stays at her place between 1999 and 2002, Belkis and I developed a strong and endearing relationship, with her becoming something of a Cuban godmother of mine.

Our relationship, however, was not at times without its challenges. Although Belkis claimed a non-white identity and cited the blackness of her son's father as testimony of her antiracism, the ways in which she at times uncritically reproduced racist discourse, while often infuriating, gave me valuable additional insight into the workings of racism in Cuba. This perspective was even that much more appreciated given the fact that but for a few exceptions my entire community of friends and contacts on the island were black. Thus began my time in Cayo Hueso; a congested, densely populated *barrio* known for its sizable working-class black population. Its dusty, pock-marked streets are seemingly filled with the sounds of children playing, the shuffling of dominos, *salsa* ,

[113] Although Cayo Hueso literally translates to "Bone Key," common narrative holds that the name stems from a Spanish transliteration of Key West which early residents appropriated for the area years ago. Here, Hueso stands in for West, as Key is directly translated to Cayo. It is ironic, however, that the name for the southernmost tip of the U.S. mainland, Key West, is in fact an anglicized derivation of the original name Cayo Hueso the Spanish dubbed the island in the 17th century. Legend has it that first European's to visit the island discovered bones of indigenous folks scattered on the beach, hence the bone reference.

rumba, religious *batá* drum rhythms, and of course hip hop. Cayo Hueso in many ways provided the ideal location from which to base my research. Not only was it a solidly black working class community and centrally located, but I was smack in front of Magia's place and a block down the street from La Pampa. What else could I ask for?

Once situated, I immediately headed out to reconnect with folks after a year's absence. All were caught in preparation for the upcoming festival. More often than not the complaint on the street concerned the disorganization on the part of the festival's lead coordinator, Grupo Uno. What I came to realize year after year was that this was always the case. There was always tremendous confusion over the details of the event's preparation, necessary resources were never in place and schedules where constantly in flux. While this never seemed to change, one thing that did, however, is that this was the last year that that Rensoli and company who comprised Group Uno would coordinate the event. Since 1999, the Cuban state had begun to subtly but increasingly step in as a more active participant in the festival's organization. This move represented an important expression of the state's previously mentioned shift vis-à-vis Cuban hip hop from one of blind neglect to active institutionalization – a shift I will return to in Chapter 6. For the time being, however, Rensoli and company were still the key organizing force behind the festival's four nights of performance and the state-provided resources remained meager.

I recall heading out to Alamar's amphitheater one afternoon the day before the opening night for a sound check. Rensoli was at hand in the control area scrambling around pulling together final details. I had come to Alamar among others things to arrange my credential tag that would afford me entrance and, theoretically, back-stage

access during the festival. While waiting for Rensoli I joined in on a *cajita* lunch that was passed around to all working on the prep. Named after the small brown paper boxes stuffed with fried pork, *congri* (red beans and rice), and raw cabbage which have become a Havana street stable, these *cajitas* represented a limited gesture of the state's current support of the festival. While eating my *cajita*, I listened as the group Reyas de la Calle do their sound check for their *tema* "El mundo va a acabarse" – "The World is Coming to an End." The song's background instrumental opened with a sampled riff of a the classic 1974 hit "La Habana Joven" by the immortal Los Van Van, Cuba's premier dance band since the nineteen seventies. I later found out that the track was produced by Pablo Herrera who often talked about the need to create an "authentic" Cuban sound behind Cuban MCs rather than relying on U.S.-produced backgrounds. In comparison to the upbeat Van Van original, however, Reyes de la Calle offered a radically different contemporary rendering of a "young Havana."

Filled with liturgical references and images, the song's lyrics, though playful, present a biting critique of everyday racism and social hypocrisy. Though the Catholic Church appears to be a central focus of the lyric barrage, the real target of the song is contemporary Cuban society itself. Here, Reyes de la Calle like many Cuban MCs employed metaphor and *doble sentido* (double meanings) to guise more overt kinds of critique. Their satirically playful performance style further cloaked the acuteness of such contestation. Their narrative employed apocalyptical references to a society riddled with racism and duplicity in which blacks are constantly "squeezed," where a "black God" in turn will take retribution against racists leaving black folks secure and liberated. As it

turned out "El mundo va a acabarse" was the opening song during on the festival's first night that evening.

I retuned to Alamar later that night with Alexei and Magia who were not scheduled to perform until the third of the festival's four nights. Within a couple blocks of the amphitheater I could feel the reverberation of hip hop beats echoing down the streets, building along with my excitement as we drew closer to the source. Despite our lateness the concert had apparently not gotten underway given that we were greeted by the sounds of U.S. rather than Cuban artists. The organizers where evidently priming the gathering crowd with recent tracks by the likes of Common and The Roots, two particular favorites of the local audience.[114] As we made our way towards the entrance along the line of ticket holders, purchased at five Cuban peso a piece (equivalent to about $.25 USD), we were met by a couple Cuban police who passed us by after eyeballing our credential tags. Once around the bend we were met by a descending sea down to the stage below of what was estimated at some three thousand young people milling about in energized anticipation of the festival's first night of music. It was unquestionable that this was a predominantly black crowd in attendance. Much like La Pampa's patrons but thirty times in multitude, many of the young men were dressed in baggy pants and tops, baseball caps and skullies (skull caps), athletic team jerseys, while a few flaunted hip hop affiliated desire attire like FUBU and Tommy Gear. Among the young women, spandex tights and shorts along with form-fitting tops seemed to be the standard fair. What was notable was how young every one was. The medium age of those attending could not

[114] New York-based Common performed during the previous year's Festival, while Philadelphia's The Roots would follow in 2003 in a specially organized concert in Havana.

have been much more than seventeen. This was noticeably younger than the La Pampa crowd which was more in the range of early twenties reflecting closer to the range of most raperos themselves. The majority of these young people were from Alamar itself. The distance and scarcity of reliable night transport from Havana's city center made it difficult for many outside Alamar to make it to the event. This of course did not stop the most faithful who managed by hook or crook to make all the festival's four nights.

Squarely backdropping the stage below hung a gigantic Cuban flag which, as it basked and fluttered in the multicolored stage lighting, signified for all "this is Cuba, be there no confusion." Once the music started all attention was directed down to the stage as the audience responded with enthusiastic energy to performer's lyric challenges, at times signing in chorus with some of the more popular songs, or engaging in various kinds of call-and-response. Including Reyes de la Calle, groups that performed that opening night included Raperos Crazy de Alamar (RCA) – a local favorite, Pasión Obscura, and the pioneering, diva-esk female trio of Instinto.[115] The last performers left the stage around 1:30 am as the audience filled out into Alamar's streets headed home in anticipation of the next night's performance. For many including ourselves, however, the night was not over yet. The state-run buses and twenty peso *máquinas* (old, privately-owned pre-1959 American cars that run prescribed city routes) that had brought us were nowhere to be found at that point. Sweat soaked, dehydrated, hungry, and exhausted we dragged ourselves up to the main highway to Havana (a 20 minute walk on a good night)

[115] I will return shortly to this all female group.

to wait for a passing bus. We got home to Cayo Hueso at around 4am, all to do it again the next night.

The following evening seemed immediately to have a different feel than the previous night. Without question one could tangibly sense a higher level of excitement and nervous energy among the milling crowd outside. One critical difference from the onset was that in comparison to the previous night's handful, this evening's concert had brought out scores of blue-clad and capped police who made their presence unmistakably felt. In addition to the significant numbers outside the amphitheater, a stern-faced phalanx of police could be seen standing in front and aside of the performance stage. What was different or had changed about this night, I asked myself. One key distinction about this particular night's performance was that along with a list of Cuban groups the New York-based rap duo Dead Prez and DJ Tony Touch were scheduled to individually perform. This was Black August's night at this year's festival. On entering the amphitheater members of the Black August's New York contingent handed out flyers in Spanish introducing the collective. The flyer's front was adorned with the large afro-ed images of George Jackson[116] and Assata Shakur framed within a big five-point, Cuban style star. Aside lay in block letters "Black August 3rd Annual Benefit Concert 2000, Dedicated to Assata Shakur and Vieques, Puerto Rico." The eight page handout opened

[116] The California prison movement leader who was murdered by San Quentin prison guards during an inmate uprising in August of 1971. The original Black August movement emerged in the early 1970s out of the California prison system as a space of political education and organizing among black inmates. In remembrance Jackson's murder and history of black political resistant during the month of August dating back to the Nat Turner rebellion, members held August as a particularly significant month for political activism and resistance.

with the question "¿Por que el agosto negro?" following with a brief history of event which began by explaining:

> *"La tradición del agosto negro fue establecido durante la época de los 70s en el sistema penal de california (EEUU) por parte de los hombres y mujeres del movimiento de la liberación negra/nueva Africana como una manera de reconocer y investigar la herencia de resistencia en las Américas."*
>
> ["The Tradition of Black August was established during the 70s in the Californian penal system by men and women of the Black/New African liberation movement as a way to remember and investigate a heritage of resistance in the Americas."]

This opening was followed by a outline of the Collective's central mission principles that include supporting:

- The global development of hip hop culture as a means of facilitating international interchange between communities of youth with the intention of promoting greater consciousness around social and political issues
- Collective opposition to the criminalization of youth and youth culture
- Organizing against the international prison industrial complex and the escalated incarceration of political prisoners in the U.S.
- Fighting the persistence of white-supremacist propaganda and volitions of human rights.

This second and final paragraph closed with the statement: *"A través de un unión potente de al cultura de hip hop y información política, el colectivo del agosto negro promueve nuestro propio estética hip hop y lo cual se de énfasis a la autoexpresión sincera, la creatividad, y el sentido de responsabilidad por la comunidad."*[117] The remaining six

[117] "Through a powerful union of hip hop culture and political information, Black August promotes our own hip hop aesthetic which emphasizes sincere self-expression, creativity, and the sense of responsibility to the community."

pages are filled with song lyrics translated into Spanish of the two scheduled performing artists, Dead Prez and Toney Touch.

As evident for this excerpted material, Black August organized itself around a very particular set of racially-grounded politics. At center is the collective's emphasis on hip hop as a site of political education and mobilization among African descendent youth transnationally. Such diasporically-framed commitments found further expression the following year when Black August coordinated a South African tour of U.S. hip hop artists to coincide with U.N.'s 2001 International Conference against Racism in Durban.[118] The tour opened with a highly publicized concert at the paralleled NGO conference site. Importantly, Black August's transnationally expansive approach to black liberatory-directed struggle and antiracist organizing is significantly informed by the collective's strong black nationalist orientation. This orientation is at once signified though the collective's above use of the term "nueva Africana" or New African as a referent to black populations of African descent. Such vocabulary is drawn from the collective's associations with post-1960s black nationalist traditions of radical organizing in the vein of the Black Liberation Movement (BLM) and the New Afrika People's Organization (NAPO). Many of these groups' members have either been imprisoned, killed or, as in the case of Nehanda Abiodun, forced into exile. Along with its root organization the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement (MXG) from which it stems, Black August's support of political prisoners and anti-prison work emerges in significant part from this affiliation. Hip hop, in turn, is understood as medium for advancing this

[118] Performing artists included Dead Prez, Talib Kweli, and Black Thought of The Roots – all of whom either had or would shortly perform in Cuba.

tradition of black radical politics and resistance into a new generation and era of black political organizing.

Predicated on an understanding of both rap and Cuba as vangardist sites of resistance, many of these commitments found overlapping expression in Black August's engagements in Cuba between 1998 and 2000. Here, the collective's dual focus of supporting Cuba's emergent hip hop movement and the ongoing struggles in Cuba of African American political exiles such as Assata Shakur and Nehanda Abiodun was part and parcel of the same political project. The organizer's co-dedication of the 2000 concert to Vieques, moreover, not only underscored the collective's transnationally expansive understandings of social justice but recalled black radical movements of earlier periods in recognizing the often critical linkages between antiracist and anti-imperialist struggle. In a more immediate sense Vieques' invocation most certainly also reflected the New York membership's sensitivity to the longstanding history of Puerto Rican radicalism and national liberation struggle shared by their [racialized] Nuyorican peers. A couple of New York-base Puerto Ricans have in fact been integral members of Black August and the collective's involvements in Cuba. One of these key individuals was Clyde Valentine who was one of the editors of *Stress*, the now defunct New York-based hip hop magazine.

For three years running the collective hosted an annual benefit concerts in New York City with the dual purpose of raising money to support U.S. political prisoners and their families as well as provide financial and material support for Cuba's resource-strapped hip hop community. Along with a host of more progressive and/or politically

sympathetic African American and Puerto Rican rap artists, the veteran musician/activist Gil Scott-Heron was among the performers topping the bill in 1999. The collective's previous participation in the Cuban Hip hop festival included performances by Mos Def and Talib Kweli of Black Star in 1998. During the 1999 festival the fusion of music and politics, of rap and (black) resistance was in clear evidence when Common, the U.S. headliner of the festival, interrupted his performance to read a letter addressed to the audience from African American political prisoner Dr. Mutulu Shakur. The event, which created something of a stir among Cuban higher-ups present at the festival, was instigated by Nehanda Abiodun who provided Common with the letter and encouraged him to read it.[119] Under the auspices of Black August Common is rumored to have also met with Assata Shukur whose story he later recounted in a track entitled "A Song for Assata" that was released on his 2000 album "Like Water for Chocolate."

Upon returning to Havana in 2000 the collective brought in tow from New York included the radically-minded Afrocentric duo Dead Prez and Puerto Rican DJ-turned-music-producer Tony Touch. At the time it appeared as it must have been these artists' scheduled performances that had contributed to the heightened police presence that second night. Dead Prez's M1 and Stickman were slated to open the night's performance.

[119] As doctor of acupuncture and co-founder and director of the Black Acupuncture Advisory Association of North America (BAAANA) and the Harlem Institute of Acupuncture, Mutulu Shakur was a founding member of the Republic of New Africa and is currently active in the New Afrikan People's Organization of which Nehanda Abiodun is also a member. Shakur was accused by the U.S. law establishment as being a key figure in a black radical cell known as The Family which the FBI alleges organized a 1981 Brinks truck robbery in Nyack, New York in which two security guards were killed. Nehanda who is alleged to have been involved, is the only remaining person of those indicted still at large. One of those indicted Kathy Boudin, a former member of the Weather Underground, was released from prison in 2003 after serving a 21 years. Mutulu Shakur is still in prison serving 60 year sentence for eight indictments including his reported involvement in the 1979 freeing of Assata Shakur (no relation) from prison.

In the work-up to the duo's entrance their support crew projected slides against the back wall of the stage where images of Nelson Mandela, shackled black fists, and African soldiers flashed adjacent the towering Cuban flag. When Dead Prez finally made their entrance the crowd went wild. It was quite a remarkable scene to watch M1 and Stickman in their dreadlocks, surrounded by stoic cordon of Cuban police, on stage rallying close to three thousand black Cuban youth in excited unison signing "I'm a African, I'm a African/And I know what is happen'in!/You a African, You a African/Do you know what's happen'in?" from their popular tack "I'm a African." And in the event that some did not understand the Afrikan nationalist meanings embodied in the lyrics one only needed refer to their Spanish translations provided in the previously distributed Black August flier.[120] I recall in fact being surprised by the large numbers of youth apparently familiar with the duo's more popular tracks. Here, English proficiency evidently was not necessary for cross-cultural intelligibility and communication predicated on mutual identifications of blackness. It is significant to note that when Tony Touch performed later that evening he received a much cooler response from the crowd. This despite his efforts at addressing the audience in his limited Nuyorican Spanish while signifying his *boriqua-ness* by referring to himself as Toney Toca. Dead Prez on the other hand spoke not a word of Spanish. They were just plain black – albeit Afrikanized, and they turned the house out.

[120] I use the term "Afrikan" here similarly as the above mentioned black nationalist-oriented New Afrikan People's Organization employs this term to denote a political reclaiming of an African-based identity by "new world" African descendent populations.

I recall Alexei telling me how impressed he was with Dead Prez's presence and performance. He commented to the effect "*su mensaje fue con mucho fuerza*" ("their message had a lot of force"). He did, however, express disapproval of one of their performed songs entitled "They Schools" with its blistering denunciation of the U.S. school system. Alexei felt the duo's anger filled song was over the top. He had particular issue with the line "All my high school teachers can suck my dick, telling me white-ass lies and bullshit" feeling it was gratuitously disrespectful. I tried to explain to him that as I understood the song it was more a critique of a corrupt, racists education "system" rather than a personal attack on individuals; systemic rather than individual. Alexei had a difficult time with this. In large part it was the level of black anger and societal alienation he had difficulty understanding and identifying with. Such dissonance recalled for me a distinction Cuban raperos have made in the past between their music and much of U.S. hip hop – the violent degree of racism and social marginalization historically inflicted upon African Americans which, in turn, finds expression in much of commercial hip hop in the states. Cuba, in this way, was "different." Racism without doubt existed regardless of official and popular discourses to the contrary, this was clear. But its history and form of expression was understood as particular to the Cuban experience.

A key point however is that language barriers notwithstanding, Dead Prez's and by extension Black August's racially-grounded radicalism was not lost on deaf ears. Though for all intents and purposes Alexei spoke no English, he was able to decipher meanings from the English rap lyrics often through the translation help of others. It was the commonalty of blackness (black identity) and racial struggle here that transnationally

facilitated a level of racial identification and dialogue. As one of the key coordinators of the festival, Rensoli had expressed to me his understanding of the event as an opportunity for just this kind of black diasporic dialogue between MCs from Cuba and the U.S. In practice, however, there were some real limitations put on the extent to which such dialogue could be fully realized. I recall voicing my frustrations over what I felt was the very limited actual contact and interpersonal exchange that occurred between Black August's New York entourage of twenty or so and local raperos. In the case of Dead Prez, the only opportunity most had to engage the duo was a few minutes back stage just prior to their performance.[121] Handshakes, embraces, and autographs were plenty, but not much more. It seemed for many the priority of the Cuban trip was more to connect and engage those key African American political exiles on the island at the expense of any set-aside time for structured "intercombio" (exchange) with Havana's hip hop community.

The following day after Black August's performance I attended an afternoon meeting of raperos held in a cultural center in Alamar's as part of the festival's *coloquio* (colloquium) series. In a dimly light room with a handful of metal chairs and small desks sat just over a dozen or so raperos and a few supporting cast members such as Ariel, a local Cuban journalist, and myself. It basically was a freewheeling discussion revolving around issues, concerns, and grievances – both personal and political – affecting the hip

[121] The privileged exceptions to this were Pablo and Ariel who were more successfully in accessing the artists and other Black August folk given their connectedness. Pablo in particular, with his English fluency and position as a Black August liaison in Havana, spent a significant part of his time during the festival working (and just plain hanging out) with artists and their entourage.

hop community. One complaint voiced by a few of raperos present was what they felt was their lack of access, and by implication Black August's lack of initiative, to the visiting U.S. artists. They told of how a group of raperos comprised in large part by the "diez y diecinueve" crew attempted to visit with the Black August delegation in their Vedado hotel and were not even allowed in the hotel lobby. I had myself spent time with Black August and their artists over the last few days and it was indeed apparent that the had conformed, intentionally or not, to Cuba's new apartheid economy that segregated local Cubans from dollar-paying foreign tourist and their spaces of privilege.

Another issue raised during the *coloquio* that afternoon concerned the large presence and behavior of the police at the festival. One veteran rapero who is among the oldest of the old school and whom I will call Neño was incensed by what he felt was the disrespectful treatment he and others received by the police the night before. He recounted how he was harassed and questioned as he tried to move about as an artist (though he was not actually performing that night) – behavior which amounted to "!falta de respeto en mi propia casa!"[122] As he angrily narrated his account he rubbed his finger along the inside of his forearm invoking the everyday Cuban gesture for blackness (e.g. "its in the blood") to underscore the racialized significance of his experience. During the discussion that ensued there were complaints that rap performance always seemed to draw the attention of the police much more so then say *salsa* concerts which they claimed are notorious for drunken spats of violence. An even more telling comparison is that of Cuban rock shows whose followers are overwhelmingly "white" in Cuban terms.

[122] "Lack of respect in my own house!"

Many pointed that that these gatherings of young people with their customary head-tossing long hair rarely if ever garner the number of police hip hop had to contend with.

The difference many claimed was hip hop's strong association with black youth which, in the case of police, tended to translate into association with antisocial behavior including violence and marijuana use – again resonation with historical racialized associations of blackness with criminality. In contrast raperos frequently point out proudly that rarely if ever do fights break out at hip hop events. I myself have found this to in fact be the case, somewhat surprising for me given past experience at U.S. rap concerts where tensions were sometimes so thick you could literally get your head knocked by it if you were not careful. I remember during some of my first ventures into Havana's hip hop spaces the joyful camaraderie and seeming lack of animosity in the air between folks. In the scores and scores of hip hop-related functions I have attended over the years I can recall only one incident in which a brief fight broke out between two hip hop followers outside La Pampa one late night. I am not claiming Havana's hip hop community is free of internal tensions and interpersonal grievances. Far from it. Rather the point here is that violence, criminality, and other so-called anti-social(ist) practice are far removed from the bulk of hip hop's following in Havana. Yet in 2000 the Cuban police and by extension the Cuban state appeared to think otherwise, perpetuating the historical practice of policing black space.

***Anónimo Consejo***

The force of that second night's concert lay not solely in the performances by the North American artists. In fact the energy set in motion by Dead Prez and company continued to build throughout the evening as local Cuban group's passed the torch. Closing out the night's show was a Cuban duo whose powerful stage presence and lyric provocativeness carried the audiences energy and excitement to yet another level. Anónimo Consejo's Yosmel Sarrías and Maigel "Kokino" Entenza hit the stage wearing Vietnamese-styled straw hats and black tee-shirts adorned with giant images of Ché Guevara's face in white.[123] Though I had been aware of the duo who had the reputation as one of the most dynamic and lyrically uncompromising artists in Cuba, I had yet to personally meet the two. After experiencing their performance I knew this had to change. Natives of the adjacent, sleepy seaside municipality of Cojimar, Anónimo Consejo were among the local favorites of the Alamar crowd, and it showed. Working the crowd through call-and-response, the duo had the riled up audience singing along in unison with many of their *temas*. Given the overwhelming numbers of youth fluently participating, it was apparent that many were well versed with the texts. One of the songs performed that night that seemed to get some of the strongest rise out of the audience was "Las Apariencias Engañan" ("Appearances Deceive"). An excerpt of the *tema's* lyrics are as follows:

<u>*Las Apariencias Engañan*</u>
*Anónimo Consejo*

| | |
|---|---|
| *¡Anónimo Consejo Revolución!* | *Anónimo Consejo Revolution!* |

[123] As I will discuss shortly Yosmel would soon assume the African-signified name Seuko as an expression of his on-going political and creative development as a black Cuban artist.

| | |
|---|---|
| *¡Yosmel y Kokino Revolución!* | *Yosmel and Kokino Revolution!* |
| | |
| *No me la aprietes más* | *Don't squeeze me any more* |
| *que yo sigo aquí* | *that I'm still here* |
| *No me la aprietes más* | *Don't squeeze me any more* |
| *déjame vivir* | *Let me live* |
| *Por mí Cuba lo doy todo soy feliz* | *For my Cuba I give all, I am happy* |
| *Y tú sigues reprendía en mí,* | *And you continue reprimanding me* |
| *suéltame a mí* | *Let me go* |
| *No te confundas con la* | *Don't confuse yourself with the* |
| *arena que pisas* | *sand you step on* |
| *Dos pasos más y se te recuerdas* | *Two more steps and you'll be reminded* |
| *que estas en área divisa* | *that you are in a dollar zone* |
| *Varadero* | *Varadero [beach]*[124] |
| *Todo no es como lo pintan* | *Everything is not how it is painted* |
| *y yo sigo aquí de frente a los problemas* | *and I am still here confronting problems* |
| *Aguantando con mi mano el hierro caliente* | *Holding with my hand the hot iron* |
| *Sin pasarme por la mente coger una balsa* | *Without considering taking a raft* |
| *Y probar suerte en* | *And trying my luck in* |
| *otra orilla - a 90 millas* | *another shore - 90 miles away* |
| *Todo no es como lo pintan* | *Everything is not how it is painted* |
| *y yo sigo aquí* | *and I am still here* |
| *Cada paso en la calle es una preocupación* | *Every step in the street is a preoccupation* |
| *Extranjero en busca de comunicación* | *Foreigner looking for communication* |
| *Con la población,* | *With the population,* |
| *5 minutos de conversación* | *5 minutes of conversation* |
| *Policía en acción sin explicación* | *Police in action without explanation* |
| *Andando pa´ la estación* | *Going to the station* |
| *Trabajes o no trabajes,* | *Whether you work or don't work* |
| *ellos no pueden creer* | *They can't believe* |
| *Que estés hablando de cualquier otra cosa* | *That you're talking of other things* |
| *Que no sea de negocio (de madre socio)* | *That isn't business (damn, brother )* |
| *Coge tu acta de advertencia* | *Take your ticket of warning* |
| […] | […] |
| *Entonces te vas a reprender en mí* | *So then you're going to reprimand me* |

[124] As previously mentioned, the hotel-lined peninsula of Varadero is Cuba's preeminent beach location for tourists which has grown in the last decade into something of a Cuban version of Cancun. For years designated as a dollar-only zone of commerce, access to its white powder, palm-treed beaches has long been restricted for most working class Cubans.

[125] The *libreta* is the Cuban food ration card issued to every family by the Cuban government to access subsided food stables. In the past the *libreta's* monthly allotments provided families with a significant portion of their basis nutritional needs like rice, beans, cooking oil, and meat. Since the economic crisis of the special period, however, the card's monthly allowances have dwindled to practically nothing.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Yo que vivo y muero aquí* | *I that live and die here* |
| *Yo que nací con el concepto y el ideal de José Martí* | *I that was born with the concept and the ideal of Jose Martí* |
| *Déjate de abuso* | *Drop this abuse* |
| *Coge mi coro cubano que dice* | *Take my Cuban chorus that says* |
| *Yo sigo aquí, jamando el mismo cable que tú* | *I am still here, jamming the same cable as you* |
| *Yo sigo aquí, preparando el mismo vaso de agua con azúcar que bebes tú* | *I am still here, preparing the same glass of water with sugar that you drink* |
| *Yo sigo aquí, cogiendo el mismo camello insoportable que coges tú* | *I am still here, taking the same unbearable [Cuban] bus that you take* |
| *Yo sigo aquí, con el mismo pan de la libreta que te comes tú* | *I am still here, with the same bread from the libreta that you eat* [125] |
| *Con el apagón que molesta,* | *With the [electrical] black outs that's annoying* |
| *Piénsalo antes de arrestarme* | *Think about it before arresting me* |
| *Justifica tu pregunta* | *Justify your questions* |
| *yo tengo mi respuesta* | *I have my answer* |
| […] | […] |
| *Entonces yo me pregunto quien es el bueno* | *And so I ask myself who is the good guy* |
| *El que coge un viaje y se queda* | *The one who takes a trip and stays* |
| *O el que ha estado todos estos años* | *Or the one who all these years has been* |
| *Dándole el pecho a los problemas* | *Giving face to problems* |
| *Entonces porque ¡coño! Te reprendes en mí* | *Then why the fuck do you reprimand me* |
| *Yo que sigo aquí junto a ti* | *I who am still here together with you* |
| *Sal de mí no me la aprietes más* | *Get rid of me, don't tighten it more* |
| *¡déjame vivir!* | *Let me live!* |
| *Esto no es pa´ que te erices* | *This is not to make your skin crawl* |
| *Esto no es pa´ que me caces la pelea* | *This is not to make you fight with me* |
| *Esto es para que entiendas* | *This is so you can understand* |
| *de una vez y por todas* | *once and for all* |
| *Que todos los jóvenes no somos basura* | *That not all the young people are garbage* |
| *Porque la divisa ha cambiado la forma de pensar de mucha gente* | *Because the dollar has changed the way of thinking of many people* |
| *Y mucha de esa gente no somos nosotros* | *And many of those people aren't us* |
| *Los jóvenes cubanos, quienes apoyamos* | *[We] the young Cubans who support* |
| *la idea de lo que es revolución* | *the idea of what is revolution* |
| *en todos los momentos.* | *at all moments.* |

I have provided a this rather extended excerpt because it is so richly illustrative of the politically charged nature and highly poetic use of social critique in Cuban hip hop.

Thematically speaking, "Las Apariencias Engañan" also expresses in bold, undiluted fashion some of the anger and frustration experienced by black youth today, while introducing a set of key problematics that have come to define hip hop in Cuba as an organic sociocultural phenomenon. This *tema*, moreover, poignantly exemplifies Anonmio Consejo's particularly contestive brand of music which has helped position them as two of the most respected artists in the movement.

Though never mentioned directly, the immediate subject and context of the song's narrative is clear; Cuban police and their harassment of (black) youth within the logic's of Cuba's new dollar-based economy. I put "black" here in parenthesis to similarly signify that though not directly mentioned, race, in particular racialized profiling by police, is implicitly central to the song's critique. References to being "squeezed," "reprehended," and taken in by police for simple acts of talking with foreigners evokes the common experience of being racially profiled as *jineteros/as* whenever black youth are seen in the company of *yumas*.[126] The reference to the sands of Varadero as "en área divisa" (dollar zone) further contextualizes the social segregation and hypocrisy that characterizes Cuba's new dollarized reality. Rather than "*coger una balsa*" and flee the island to the U.S. like so many young people have in the past, Anónimo Consejo proclaim they remain here to stay and struggle through the hardships of everyday Cuban life; the same hardships, they point out, of their fellow compatriots the police.[127] While

[126] See Chapter 3 for description and accounts of such scenarios. *Yuma* once again is a Cuban vernacular term for foreigner.
[127] I latter found out that the lyric reference to *los balseos* carried real personal resonance for the two who witnessed many of their friends depart from their sea-side *barrio* of Cojimar during the *balsero* crisis of 1994.

the duo declares "*la divisa ha cambiado la forma de pensar de mucha gente*," they affirm – and this is important – that they themselves have stood fast in their support and belief in "*la idea*" of revolution "*en todos los momentos*." Here, Anónimo Consejo's assertion "*Yo que nací con el concepto y el ideal de José Martí*" is ripe with significance. At one level it roots the duo's black-situated demands for fair and equal treatment by the police (and state) *as Cubans* are squarely within the Cuba's national historical narrative. Here, assertions of full citizenship, to be black *and* Cuban, are implicitly embodied within the very inception of the nation. At the same time it is this emphasis on the *ideal* of Martí's vision of a racially egalitarian Cuba, as well as the *idea* of revolution that they remain committed rather than to – as the song's title implies – "*las apariencias*" of such.

Interarticulated notions of race and revolution have in fact become a centrally defining themes of Cuba's hip hop movement. As suggested above, however, such framings often predicated on an implicit (or not so implicit) critique of contemporary Cuban society and, by extension at times, the Cuban state itself. Once again the emphasis on the nationally imbricated *ideals* of racial equality and revolutionary struggle; ideals which are understood as historically unrealized, if not significantly compromised, within the current Cuban moment. The key tension thus lies between the principled claims of a non-racial, revolutionary socialist society and the quotidian lived realities of race and racism in Cuba today. Cuban hip hop emerges precisely from within these historically configured contradictions of race, nation, and revolution as they are contemporarily manifested, while at the same time engaging those same sets of contradictions from the critical vantage point of black-situated critique. Within this context discourses of

revolution take on a decisive racial significance; there is no "revolution" without racial equality and justice, the two are joined at the hip (hop) so to speak.

Yosmel and Kokino's signature chant *¡Anónimo Consejo Revolución!* which open's "Las Apariencias" is emblematic of their particularly flamboyant use of revolutionary discourse and imagery. This very same expression encircling Ché Guvera's famed star-capped image appears in the form of matching tattoos inscribed on the duo's right shoulders. This discursive play on revolution has found further expression in Anónimo Consejo's celebrated mantra "Hip Hop Revolution" which has over the years taken up a collective resonance among many local raperos. But again, what specifically is meant by these calls to "revolution"? When asked about this Yosmel and Kokino explained to me at the time that their invocations of "revolution" were not necessarily in reference to *the* Cuban Revolution, at least not directly so. Rather, they directed me to the dictionary definition of revolution as a one of radical, progressively-directed social change. This they affirmed was what their music was all about, advocating change. I would hear similar explanations from other raperos I knew when I posed the question how and to what extent they saw their work articulating with the Cuban Revolution. Such positions mark a subtle distinction from more direct kinds of identification with the Cuban Revolution as expressed in the example of Magia and Alexei of Obsesión. This is not to imply that Magia and Alexei do not share this embrace of Cuban hip hop's relationship to broader notions of revolutionary struggle. However, the emphasis here is on the articulation of alternative revolutionary visions, ones that are not necessarily

beholden to national proscriptive frames of the Revolution though they clearly remain informed by and in critical dialogue with them.

Possibly the most productive way to think about how raperos and their followers view hip hop's relationship to overlapping discourses of revolution is through the often touted analogy of Cuban hip hop as a "revolution within a revolution." The immediate implication here is that hip hop is organic to and operates internally within the larger context of Cuban revolutionary society. It is from "inside" rather then "outside" through which change is struggled for and effected. Such a posture is in line with the central and repeated refrain among raperos that their work is by no means positioned counter to the Revolution. Claims of this kind obviously carry a certain strategic currency given the Cuban state's long standing intolerance for any public dissention that might upset the holy trinity of *la Revolución*, with *el estado*, and *el pueblo*. On another level, however, as I have suggested there is a genuine level of identification among many raperos with the ideals and principles of the Cuban Revolution which they are willing to fight for and defend. These youth in a significant way remain products of Cuba's revolutionary experience, though clearly not uncritically so. Their demands for a socially and racially just Cuba and world stem first and foremost from the principles embodied within the *promise* of Cuban socialism. Their task, as is often articulated by raperos, is to reveal and critique the limitations, contradictions, and at times hypocrisy rooted in the chasm between the promise and the realities of today, all towards the ultimate end of strengthening Cuban society. The often expressed sentiment "*somos constructivos, no*

*destructivos*" speaks directly to this self-positioned role. As Ariel expressed this relationship:

> *I think that hip hop takes on the necessary critique in our country to educate. I always say that the best way to be a revolutionary is to be critical, you understand? The best form of art is the one that says what is good, what is bad, what is harmful, or what is missing, this is valued, this is critical. You understand? The position most revolutionary is to speak the truth. Art has to say what is good and what is bad. If you hide your problems, or if you escape from them nothing will be resolved.[…] Rap is a music of resistance. It is fighting for rights that the Revolution notes but that society does not deliver*

At the same time, however, among Cuban raperos and their followers Cuba is not the sole source of revolutionary inspiration. Over the years, for instance, Yosmel and Kokino and others have invoked the lives and struggles in their music of African American radicals such Malcolm X, Mumia Abu-Jamal, and Shaka Sankofa (Gary Graham) as well as Nelson Mandela. When asked where their awareness of such U.S. black radicalism stems, the two cited Black August's participation in previous festivals as a significant influence. As I will discuss shortly, Black August was but one route of the duo's transnational engagements with black radical and nationalist traditions. It is important to note, however, that African American struggle has long been a visible fixture of Cuba's internationalist commitments to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance dating back to the island's solidarity with civil rights and black radical movements of the 1960's. From Fidel Castro's famed 1960 stay in Harlem's Hotel Theresa and subsequent meeting with Malcolm X, to Cuba's offerings of asylum to political fugitives from Robert Williams and Eldridge Cleaver to Assata Shakur and

Nehanda Abiodun, Cubans have a long history of awareness and politically sensitivity to antiracists black struggle in the U.S. [128] I recall for instance Rita, an early forty-something year old Cuban friend of mine, reminiscing about her childhood experience of signing for the freeing of Angela Davis from prison. As she sang the song for me, fist raised in the air, she began to cry as the emotionally laden memories of the experience returned to her. This was not for Rita a "black thang" per se – she is in Cuban terms white. Rather it was her heart-felt solidarity with African Americans' struggle for social justice *as a Cuban*. As for Anónimo Consejo and many other members of Cuba's hip hop movement, I would suggest that this was certainly the case. Yet at the same time there was critically more at play: a sense of political solidarity predicated first and foremost on a transnationally expansive sense of black racial identification. As I came to know Yosmel and Kokino their evolving political sense of themselves and their music, was significantly informed by yet another more immediate transnational route of black radical inspiration – notably Nehanda Abiodun. This was especially the case with Yosmel who, under Nehanda's tutelage, eventually took on the African-signified name Sekuo as an expression of his continued, ever-evolving efforts at critical black self-making. But once again, let me not get ahead of myself.

[128] Relations between visiting black radicals and the Cuban state did not always result in mutually respectful terms. A number of back nationalist such as Robert Williams, Eldridge Cleaver, and Kwame Ture (then Stokely Carmichael) left Cuba significantly disillusioned with what they viewed as the Cuban state's and Revolution's shortcomings regarding its proclaimed antiracist commitments. For further discussion see Carlos Moore (1988) *Castro, The Blacks, and Africa,* Ruth Reitan (1999) *The Rise and Decline of an Allia*nce, and P. E Joseph (2002) "Where Blackness is Bright? Cuba, Africa And Black Liberation During the Age of Civil Rights."

***2001 – The Meeting***

By the spring of 2001 I began to feel as though I had become something of a familiar fixture within Havana's hip hop community. Through consistent attendance at hip hop related events from concerts, to rehearsals, to meetings, and recording sessions, I had by that time established relationships of one kind or another with many of the groups and affiliated personnel that comprised Havana's avant-garde core of the movement. Such relationships, however, where not without their complexities and tensions. One immediate challenge involved negotiating many of the interpersonal politics and dynamics that drove the inner workings of the movement. I had hoped to remain "non-aligned" among the constellations of group and individual affinities, rivalries, and antagonisms, and this was naïve. I had unavoidably taken on my own role and set of responsibilities within the community. The critical distinction, however, was that I was an outsider. Not only was I not a rapero, but I was not even Cuban. Worst yet for some, I would learn, I was a Yankee.

Whether it was appropriate of me or not I was concerned at the time with what I saw as a lack of an articulated, coherent vision among raperos that would help define their collective efforts as a "movement." I had from the start noted various divisions and histories of personal friction that seemed to inhibit more unified kinds of organizing within the community. When they did occur meetings were often occasions when such tensions, sometimes in not so subtle ways, arose. Given this history many avoided these kinds of meetings for fear that the same-old, same-old would occur. I had often

expressed my own sentiment to those who were willing to listen that such meetings were for this very reason necessary in order to resolve differences and work more cohesively towards addressing common concerns effecting all. It was within this context that the following scenario took place.

Over the past few months I had run into Assata Shakur at a number of hip hop related events where we had opportunities to converse, mostly about Cuban hip hop itself. One evening during a conversation I asked if she would be willing to talk with me in more detail sometime about her thoughts on hip hop in Cuba and her experience with the movement. She responded by telling me that she would in fact find it a more productive experience if she could actually have a dialogue with raperos themselves about their work. I explained to her I thought I could arrange such a meeting and took it upon myself. In addition to facilitating this meeting for Assata I saw this as an opportunity to encourage more open and critical dialogue amongst folks, or at least a new start at it. The prospect of the meeting also offered an occasion to explore in a more focused way this question of "revolution" in Cuban hip hop and, in particular, its relationship to black radical/nationalist struggle and history in the U.S. Over the next week or so I spoke with a number of key players in the community whom were most familiar about the potential meeting. I also enlisted the help and participation of Nehanda Abiodun who could provide an additional bridge between Assata and invited raperos. I recall there being some signs of resistance from a number of corners, some folks just plain weary of another meeting where old personal issues and personalities would clash. There were, however, some other concerns to which I myself would soon be party. By

week's end there appeared to be ample enough interest to pull the meeting together. For a number of those interested the opportunity to have some focused time with Assata seemed appealing. I convinced a writer friend of mine who had a history of collaborative projects with the movement to host the meeting at her house.

Assembled that evening was something like thirty of Havana's most active and politically engaged MCs, a handful of key hip hop related players – most notably Pablo and Ariel – and Assata and Nehanda. After introductions the meeting fairly quickly took on a certain level of tension as some subtle and not so subtle grievances began to be aired around challenges facing past and present efforts at cooperative organizing. Lack of resources from performance space and access to audio and recording equipment was always a central concern among raperos. There was a proposition presented to raise monies to help a rapero whose home had recently collapsed after a storm, though ultimately nothing was follow through upon. For the most part, however, the issues and politics at play at this meeting were clearly more personally oriented. Less a dialogue with Assata and Nehanda, the meeting eventually became more about airing a certain amount of dirty laundry. And I was far from immune. There was a question raised as to my own transparency regarding my work in the community.

It was at that point that Ariel took the floor and in a very hostile manner raised the question as to whether I could in fact be a CIA informant. I was floored. Only a few nights earlier the two of us had been out drinking and sharing some fairly intimate stories. And now here he was in front of some of my most important associates rather hostilely attacking me as U.S. intelligence informer. Again, I was shocked. He wondered, for

instance, how was it that I received funding for my research for such an extended period of time? Why was it that I had not reported to *el estado* (the state), laying out my credentials on the table in order to provide them the opportunity to screen me and my work for clearance. Assata responded by stating that it was true one never knows who could be an informant, but stated that she personally had full confidence in me. At the time I was not sure if Assata herself might have been somewhat spooked by the allegation. She certainly needed to keep her guard up.[129] In reply, I responded the best I could at that moment given how off-balance this all caught me. It did not help matters that the tremendous level of anxiety I was immediately feeling made it that much more difficult to express myself clearly in Spanish as I would have hoped. Eventually the meeting moved on but I felt truly devastated and as well as furiously angry at Ariel for what I experienced as a malicious personal attack on me. At first I honestly could not understand where it had come from. After the meeting a couple people came up to consoled me while many others did not approach me at all. Was it that Ariel's words had struck a resonant cord? Or was it simply not as significant of an event as I had experienced it? In retrospect I have been told by a couple people present at the meeting that the incident was not all that significant or personally in their minds. I my experience, however, it was all a deeply challenging episode.

[129] By this point security for Assata has become particularly urgent following the $100,000 bounty then New Jersey Governor Christy Todd Whitman put on Assata's head in 1998. The bounty was widely advertised on Radio Martí, the U.S.-funded/Cuban exile-run radio transmission into Cuba from Miami. That same year the U.S. House of Representatives had passed a resolution demanding the extradition of Assata back to the U.S.

Down on the street after the meeting I immediately approached Ariel, and I was livid. I told him in no short order that he was completely out of place to publicly attack me in the manner he did, let alone in a meeting that I myself had organized. If he had had issues with me, I asked, why not address them with me personally rather the coming out of left field at a meeting? My issue with him, I continued, was less so the questions he raised then the anger and viciousness from which it came, and the context under which it occurred. He seemed somewhat unprepared for the level of angry interrogation I was now directing towards him. At the time he offer no apologies and we left it at that. Ariel would, however, apologize to me some weeks later. While he explained that it is true that one never knows for sure who-is-who under these circumstance, he conceded he was wrong to have attached me publicly in the way he did. Ariel also confided later that a mutual associate of ours, a Cuban, who was also present at the meeting had expressed suspicion about me laying out a similar scenario as Ariel had voiced. Ariel claimed that the thought had not occurred to him before the conversation. Given my past experiences with this particular person, and the subtle level of distrust he seemed to have conveyed from the beginning, I was not at all surprised. I could in fact have envisioned him saying these exact words as Ariel recounted them to me.

The whole experience gave me much to think about. And upon further reflection I gained some greater insight into the varying dynamics that contributed to the outcome of the event, while walking away from the experience with some important lessons. I recognized that the most immediate variable was Ariel himself. Prior to the meeting Ariel had recently assumed a position with La Asociación Hermanos Siaz (AHS) – long

the principle institutional intermediary between the Cuban state and hip hop – as La Asociación's event coordinator and official liaison with the movement.[130] Though garnering next to nothing of a peso salary this move catapulted Ariel, already something of an organic intellectual and leading figure within the community, into a official state capacity. Importantly, his appointment was a significant development in the state's increased efforts at institutionalizing hip hop as an officially sanctioned, supported, and managed space of culture and music making. Ariel later described his new position as representing his move from one of the margins to one more of the center; a move that may have been suggestive of a larger process at play with regard to Cuban hip hop as a whole.

In his new capacity Ariel became something of a the go-to person when one needed access to state-owned audio equipment for music related events. This was the case one afternoon at "diez y diecinueve" where EPG&B had organized a street concert with invited guests. Ariel was the man of the hour having coordinated the logistics for the event's audio needs which, in Cuban fashion, arrived a couple hours late. It was that afternoon that I approached Ariel to inform him of the upcoming meeting with Assata. He had seemed a little surprised but did not have any particular comment other than that he would try to make it. In my ensuing conversations with him following the meeting episode I found out that he was upset by the fact that I, an "outsider" had organized the meeting. Why, he asked, wasn't *he* approached by Assata if she was interested in

[130] One U.S. journalist who now has a book out on contemporary Cuban music once referred to Ariel in this capacity as the Cuban "Minister of Hip Hop" (Robinson 2002).

arranging a meeting with raperos. Was it not he that should have been in his official position the go-to person?

It hence became apparent to me that at least part of what inspired Ariel's assaultive challenge of me that night was that I had in his view undermined his new found authority by circumventing his institutional responsibilities. His whole argument questioning why it was that I had not gone though "official" channels, and cleared myself with *el estado* seemed now clearly to have arisen from his new positionality and identification with the state and a sense of being personally undermined in this capacity. I would not be at all surprised if for instance he had in fact discussed the upcoming meeting with AHS members prior to that night. The truth is I was not interested in making this an officially organized event, nor do I think that many of those involved would have wanted this either.

Regarding Ariel's new found positionality, in a conversation I had a number of months into his new job he acknowledged that his thinking had recently changed with regard to his long standing distance from the state and "the Revolution." He now told me he saw things somewhat differently. When asked if he had a greater level of identification with the state due to his new involvements, he responded:

> *Of course, completely.* [What changed?] *I don't know, my thinking is more deep, my struggle is more deep, my political understanding is more profound. Before, when I started, the only thing important was that rap could be in Cuba, that it could be heard in Cuba. Now I'm interested in what role rap can have in the political life of the country, no? In the social life [...] Many people complain about the state but there are things that the state does that may harm five or six people but benefit many. Its very complicated, understand? Its very complicated to understand . . .*

To be fair Ariel's thinking and positionality was always evolving and often characterized by conflicting tensions he seemed to be continually in struggle over. In describing his new found responsibilities working for La Asociación, the seeds of some of these conflicts seemed apparent.

> *My mission is to be an artist, to be human. Think for it, work for it [the movement]. This is the same mission of the movement itself. I am fighting to be a messenger between the Cuban institutions and the artists. Understand? I arrived at the Cuban institutions— the Minister of Culture, AHS – because raperos wanted that. I am there to fight because raperos want concerts, disc, for these kinds of things.* [Like a bridge?]*Yes, like a bridge. I do not desire that people create an identity of me apart from the movement, no. I think that people intend for me to have a role within the movement. I don't want people to think that I want to be a "mogul" like Russell Simons. Sincerely, if I am a leader, or the face of the movement about many things, I always have to respond to what the movement wants.*

Though Ariel above seemed to be suggesting the contrary, his comments underscored for me the tensions he was experiencing as a 'middle man' between hip hop on one hand and the state on the other. Ariel's need to repeatedly foreground his allegiance to the movement reflected the potentially compromising position he now occupied as an "organic" member of the hip hop community. Most raperos I know highly respected Ariel and what he has been able to access for the movement through his work with AHS. In reality though there was little alternative to the state in terms of securing necessary resources such as performance venues and equipment. And if Ariel could facilitate such access then it was a productive thing for the movement.

For most, however, this need-based relationship did not translate uncritically so into unguarded involvement with the state and its institutions. Some I knew were in fact quite wary of deep personal involvement with AHS or any state institution. Ariel in turn seemed cognizant of how he, as an employee of La Asociación, might himself be implicated in such concerns. One well positioned person within the movement went as far as to liken Ariel to "a house negro" at AHS. The truth I think is that Ariel was himself conflicted about his position. He often complained about the frequent arguments he would wage with the institution's leadership over the direction of his work and the movement itself.[131] Ariel would later express some misgivings about continuing his direct involvement (i.e. employment) within AHS. He talked about the desire to break from La Asociación and organize his own hip hop-related projects independent of the state. The challenge of course was how to accomplish this and with what resources. Though Ariel may have eventually made moves to create some distance between himself and La Asociación, he was for the time being caught at the epicenter of the ongoing negotiated play between hip hop and the state as both attempted to grapple with Cuba's ever transforming social landscape. For a highly ambitious individual like Ariel such were the stakes.

The above provides some contextual background to Ariel's highly performative outing of me that evening. Indeed, as I came to understand the episode it had as much to do with his need to perform before his peers as it had to do with putting me in place. It

[131] Truth be told Ariel was always arguing with someone. It was part and parcel of his personal character and everyone knew this about him. This is not to suggest, however, that his issues with AHS may not have been materially substantive.

appeared to me that under the circumstances Ariel felt the need to assert his authority in a effort to (re)capture a space in which he otherwise felt sidelined. His recent state-side position was new and complicated territory for him particularly as it related to his ongoing relationship with folks in the movement. In this light it is understandable how he might use the opportunity to present a strong posture in front his fellow community of raperos. At the same time I along with practically everyone else was aware going into the meeting that a real riff was building between Ariel and Pablo who was also present. I recall that the duo were in fact barely on speaking terms that night.[132] Though among two of the most influential, resourceful, not to mention ambitious members of Havana's hip hop community, their relationship has long been a contentious one. Possible personality clashes not withstanding, it was apparent that this tension stemmed in significant part from their mutual competitiveness. I was actually warned before the meeting that stuff might fly between the two during the gathering. Though this did not come to pass it is quite possible that part of Ariel's inspiration to step up in such an unquestionably hostile way may have been informed by this competitive tension with Pablo.

Aside from what may or may not have motivated Ariel that evening, the experience forced me to confront some very real on-going challenges and potential limitations of my work to date. For one it brought into unavoidably clear relief the distance I occupied as an outsider. Regardless of my invested efforts in building organic relationships with folks – at times a challenging undertaking in and of itself, I would of

[132] When I last checked the two still have little in any contact between them except when overlapping work necessitates it.

course always remain a *yuma* in the eyes of most. Potentially more politically challenging was that regardless of my diasporically shared blackness upon which much of my dialogic engagement with folks was significantly hinged, at the end of the day I was still a still a privileged Yankee. Yes, within the streets of Havana my brown body was often racialized in similar ways as most other black young men present at that meeting. And yes, these same youth indeed embraced a level of racial affinity and identification with African Americans along lines of both culture and politics. All this said, my nationally-framed blackness was clearly a significantly privileged one vis-à-vis my Cuban peers. Ariel hit it right on the head when he raised the question as to my seemingly uninhibited ability to spend extended periods in Cuba while moving to and fro between the island and U.S. For many of these ambitious young people such privileges of travel and mobility are among the most coveted. Every Cuban MC I know holds as one of their greatest hopes the possibility that their music might offer them the opportunity to travel abroad. Such has been the case for a very select few such as Obsesión and Anónimo Consejo whose combined travels have recently brought them to the U.S., France, and Brazil. Given the heavy economic and political limitations placed on overseas travel for most Cubans, music offers these youth one of their very few potential options. Most likely the only real alternative for most would be the foreign fiancée visa hustle as sizable numbers of other young black men and women have opted for. [133] Such has in fact been the case for a handful of Havana-based raperos I know. In my case, however, such privileges of transnational mobility are a given as a foreigner.

[133] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of this black Cuban strategy of 'self-exploiting' blackness.

There were of course additional set of issues at play with my being a Yankee. The very real and clearly ongoing historical antagonisms between revolutionary Cuba and successive U.S. administrations since the early 1960s unquestionably informed the context of my own work in Cuba. My blackness and expressed political convictions not withstanding, as a U.S. researcher I remained potentially implicated in the broader frames of U.S. imperialist design in the eyes of some. It is particularly understandable given the acutely aggressive posture the current U.S. administration has taken vis-à-vis the Cuban state and, by consequence, the Cuban people in its absurdist ever-escalation of the U.S. trade embargo. Even Alexei, one of my most trusted friends, when asked why he and Magia did not come in on my defense during the meeting asked me in turn, "What could we have said? That we know you to be a good person?" His point being that nobody knows for sure who is who given the current political context. Anybody could be an informant. Could I in fact deny this?

At the same time something additionally interesting came out of this particular line of discussion. During later conversations I had with Alexei and Ariel individually, they both made the point in no light manner that Cuban hip hop could offer those who would like to undermine revolutionary Cuba an ideal site of infiltration and provocateur work. Indeed, Nadine Fernández suggests that the Revolutionary leadership has long been concerned that the race question in particular could be manipulated by enemies of the state who would used the issued as a nationally divisive one (Fernández 2001). Raperos in fact were quite aware of the political stakes of their work as a critically-oriented youth movement vis-à-vis the outside world. There were for instance well

founded concerns about how Cuban hip hop could be exploited by anti-Cuban interests overseas particularly those in the U.S. Cuban MCs had repeatedly had their words and lyrics manipulated by U.S. journalist to fit certain dominant readings of Cuban hip hop in the U.S. as a new site for counter-Revolutionary dissent on the island. This dissertation's opening reference of the ways Papa Humbertico's "denuncia social" was decontextualized by the U.S. press and flaunted by Miami Cubans as a an anti-Revolutionary diatribe is but one example. In my own capacity as an "authoritative" academic I myself have been subject to politically motivated misrepresentations by a U.S. journalist. I further recall Alexei and Magia's experience of being aggressively mobbed in a Miami airport upon their arrival by a Cuban American TV news reporter who questioned them about whether Cuban rap was a new voice of anti-government protest and whether they planed on defecting to the U.S. Such were some of the broader political implications of Cuban hip hop that necessitated a certainly level of vigilance. Could I in all honestly find fault in this even when I myself was not held completely beyond suspicion? In reality this was part of the political context in which I had to negotiate my work. While there obviously was no getting around this, the whole experience forced me to reconcile the fact that as an outside researcher I was indeed an "informant" of one kind or another.

## Chapter Six

## Critical Black Self-makings and The State

### *Sekuo and Recuperative Forgings of Radical Blackness*

Returning to this central question of Cuban hip hop as a site of critical black self-makings, there were two hip hop-related spaces that emerged between 2001 and 2002 that served in differing though complimentary ways as important sources of black radicalization for a number of key individuals in the movement. The spaces in question were two informally organized "classes" geared towards redressing, in their respective nationalist frameworks, themes of black radical struggle and history. One individual who in many ways most dramatically embodied the confluence of these two spaces of black radical (re)articulation was Yosmel of Anónimo Consejo. His participation in both classes was both a critical outgrowth of, as well as a significant contributing factor to his on-going political and personal development as a Cuban MC.

Sometime in 2000, Nehanda Abiodun began holding occasional gatherings in her apartment just outside Havana. By 2001 when I encountered them, these gatherings had become fairly regular weekly events. These evenings drew a interesting collection of young people comprised of local Cubans as well as an assortment of North American college-age students who were in Havana on various educational programs. Though these gatherings had an informal and at times somewhat festive atmosphere, the meetings were used as a space for serious discussion on issues ranging from the imprisonment of African American political activists and patriarchy to interracial dating. These classes, as

Nehanda referred to them, always drew a core group of local raperos. The space was unique in that it provided a forum for cross-cultural dialogue around questions of race, gender, and power as they manifest themselves in both Cuba and the U.S. – kinds of critical exchange that had yet to occur in any significant way elsewhere within the hip hop movement. Discussions were often highly engaged and at times impassioned as varying perspectives were aired and collectively negotiated amongst the group. The impetus and framing of such exchanges were largely informed by Nehanda's political commitments to a nationalist tradition of black radical struggle and organizing. She understood such undertakings, she explained to me, as simply an extension of her ongoing work as a black revolutionary. Just because she was in Cuba, she asserted, this did not mean that her active commitments to and engagements in political struggle had ceased to be part of her life. In the several gatherings I attended, Yosmel was consistently among one of the more outspoken of participants, Cuban or otherwise. His involvement always struck me as particularly thoughtful and critically self-reflective. It was in these meetings that I first got a sense of what appeared to me as Yosmel's quest for personal growth and critical self-education.

An important inspirational influence in this process was Nehanda herself. She had over the years developed close personal relationships with both Yosmel and Kokino due in part to the fact that they shared neighboring *barrios* in the Havana de este (east Havana) area. It is clear that her involvement in their lives as a mentor figure has had a significant impact on their thinking, their sense of black selves, and their music. Nehanda's personal history of black radical struggle and nationalist orientation,

moreover, was clearly a instrumental facet of this mentoring. As an expression of both the level of personal connection as well as the black nationalist contours of their relationship, Nehanda presided over a diasporically-hybrid New Afrikan ceremony in which the two raperos were given the African-signified names of Sekuo Mesiah Umoja and Adeyeme Umoja for Yosmel and Kokino respectively. While Kokino would ultimately continue to be known primarily by his original name, Sekuo in contrast fully embraced his new identity as testament to his new found sense of black Afrikan selfhood. As an expression of this commitment, on his shoulder opposite the one affixed with Ché's figure and the slogan "Anónimo Consejo Revolution," Sekuo soon added a large tattooed image of Africa enclosed by the prose "Mi mente, mi esperitu, mi vida esta aqui" ("My mind, my sprit, my life is here"). Poetically revealing, the juxtaposing imagery of these two scenarios was symbolically reflective of the seemingly competing nationalist lenses though which Sekuo negotiated his every-evolving understanding of himself as a black Cuban man. These very same nationalist frameworks – one "Cuban," the other predicated on a transnationally diasporicized notion of blackness – in a broader sense operate as key self-referential paradigms of black identity making within the larger context of Cuba hip hop as a whole.

While the above described scenario illustrates one nationalist current of critical black self-making within the movement, almost concurrently another pedagogic related space opened up directed to the other side of the nationalist shoulder as it were. In 2002 Tomás Fernández Robaina, a bibliographic archivist of Afro-Cuban history at Havana's Biblioteca Nacional de José Martí," initiated an informal weekly class at the Biblioteca

Nacional on Afro-Cuban history. The class, open to all, was held in an open-air corner section of the library's second floor reading room. On an average day the gathering drew roughly a dozen-and-a-half or so participants the vast majority of whom were young, almost exclusively black. In addition to a small handful of U.S. researchers like myself who attended some classes, the core constituency was comprised of young academics, politically oriented artists, and a few hip hop-affiliated individuals among whom Alexei, Ariel, and Sekuo were the most consistent participants. The fact that a class of this kind was being held in a public institution like la Biblioteca Nacional was reflective of a new tolerance on the part of the Cuban state to more open public discussions of racial themes. Similar kinds of spaces were occurring in places such as UNEAC where well publicized and attended academic-focused symposium of race was held that same year.[134]

In curricular terms, the class entitled "El negro en Cuba" was thematically organized around Tomás Fernández's similarly entitled pioneering work *El negro en Cuba, 1902-1958: Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (Fernández Robaina 1990).[135] The course focused on the role of black political mobilization and antiracist/discriminatory activism during the 20th century prior to the 1959 triumph of the Cuban Revolution[136] and sought to explore the text's central thesis: black Cuban negotiated confrontations with Cuba's historical problematic of race and nation. Regardless of its varied historical examples, the fundamental struggle, as

[134] I will shortly suggest that Cuban hip hop has emerged as an instrumental agent of this recent racial *apertura*, or opening in Cuban society.
[135] "The Black in Cuba: Historical Notes on the Struggle Against Racial Discrimination."
[136] A time frame which clearly reflected strategic considerations given the sensitivity of Cuban scholarship on race post-1959. Sticking with these historical parameters in the class no doubt served similar ends.

historically framed by Tomás, was one directed at black attainment of full national citizenship and rights within a Martí-envisioned non-racial Cuba. Within Cuban historical orthodoxy such foregrounding of autonomous kinds of "black" agency in the making of Cuban history and nation clearly represented a revisionist undertaking; one geared towards rectifying the historical erasure of the critical black subject from Cuba's past. In many ways I saw Tomás' class as serving precisely that role for many of it participants; the historical recuperation of the critical black subject from an otherwise racially-neutral(ized) national narrative. I use the term "critical" to underscore black Cuban's as active, critically engaged subjects rather than passive, consumable objects of historical processes – e.g. *mestizaje* – as they have all to often been portrayed within prevailing Cuban national discourse as I have previously demonstrated. Historical examples such as Antonio Maceo, el Partito Independiente de Color (PIC), Afro-Cuban journalist Gustavo Urrutia, and more recent figures such as Juan René Betancourt and their varying efforts at addressing racial exclusion within "the nation" were among those interwovenly discussed.

As the following anecdote suggests, one dynamic that emerged in class discussions that I attended involved some subtle differences in positionality between Tomás and some of the young participants in the course. One afternoon Tomás returned to Maceo's famed quotation "*Nunca pedir como negro, solo como cubano*" ("Never ask as a black, only as a Cuban") which he often references as suggestive of his understanding of black Cuban struggle as historically predicated on national integration rather than racial autonomy or separation. After class I was speaking with Sekuo who

expressed to me in no uncertain terms that he did not respect Tomás' implication in his Maceo comment that black Cuban's were somehow "Cubans" before they were black. He asserted defiantly that he was Africano first and foremost before anything else. In another conversation I later had with Alexei he similarly expressed the sentiment that he considered himself *negro* first and then Cuban which, at the time I actually found surprising given what I had long understood as his strong identification with the nationalist ideals and framework of the Revolution. In both cases it appeared to me that these statements signified the shaping of increasingly black-centered kinds of self-identity that exceeded nationalist definitions and constraints.

At the same time, however, Tomás' class as suggested was all about the assertive recuperation of a critical blackness within the national historical narrative. Or framed in a slightly different way, for many of the young people present it was in effect an assertion of "self" as contemporary black subjects of history within a racially sanitized historical narrative. A possible distinction here between the political situatedness of this project and that of Tomás' may stem in part from generational differences of racialized experience and positionality. Now in his 50s, Tomás is among a earlier generation of black intellectuals that were trained and socialized during the height of the Revolution. As such, Tomás' identity as a black man and intellectual is deeply implicated in complexly lived kinds of ways with the revolutionary project. As a gay-identified, light brown skinned man who would commonly be read as *mestizo*, however, Tomás has long fought for recognition as both black and gay within exclusionary political and intellectual circles that might have otherwise denied him both. Full acceptance and inclusion of his

subjective identity within the prevailing revolutionary context would therefore be a significant facet of his political project. Among Sekuo, Alexei and others such historically configured, nationally-bounded commitments to nation and national inclusion are not necessarily articulated in the same kinds of ways. In the immediate sense they are coming of age in a distinct historical moment were lived experiences of race and racialized power are manifested differently; where daily experiences of racism are more self-consciously present. This is to suggest that in today's Cuba where the national contradictions of race are so much more apparent, there is a more urgent need for politically-grounded black identities that supersede the limitating discourse of national non-racialism. Yet at the same time, these young people have access to alternative, nationally-transcendent routes of black identification and identity that clearly translate for them into structured kinds of feeling. This is particularly the case for those engaged in Cuban hip hop.

Potential differences notwithstanding, it was apparent that folks participating in the class were gaining invaluable access to historical material that they otherwise would have little other recourse to. Again, the key intervention here is the recovery of a critical black subject within the national historical narrative; a recovery which in turn roots the present-day legitimacy of politically-grounded black identity and claims of citizenship squarely within the national frame. In the case of Sekuo, Tomás' class clearly proved instrumental in his on-going negotiations between national and nationally-transcendent assertions of black political autochthony. As a direct and vivid expression of his involvement in the class Sekuo soon produced a new *tema* for he and Kokino entitled

"Afro-Cubano" which quickly became one of Anónimo Consejo's most celebrated songs. Sung over an innovative background track by Pablo Herrera and incorporative of heavy Afro-Cuban percussion, Sekuo's lyrics pays homage to a history of black resistance figures centered on a narrativized rendering of the struggle and ensuing massacre of el Partito Independiente de Color. Importantly, the song situates the duo as historical inheritors of this legacy of black resistance. The following are excepts of Afro-Cubano's lyrics.

*Afro-Cubano*
*Anónimo Consejo*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Pedro Ivonnet, ibaé* | *Pedro Ivonnet, ibaé* |
| *Soy Lagardere, ibaé* | *Soy Lagalbe, ibaé* |
| *Evraristo Estenoz, ibaé* | *Evraristo Estenoz, ibaé* |
| *Gustavo Urrutia ibaé* | *Gustavo Urrutia ibaé* |
| *Aponte, ibaé* | *Aponte, ibaé* |
| *Antonio Maceo, ibaé* | *Antonio Maceo, ibaé* |
| *A nuestro mártires del partido* | *To our martyrs of the Independent* |
| *independiente de color, ibaé* | *Party of Color ibaé* |
| *Pedro Ivonnet, ibaé, yo con usted* | *Pedro Ivonnet, ibaé, I'm with you,* |
| *Por la justa causa moriré* | *Will die for a just cause* |
| *Amor sin diferencia hace la fe* | *Love without difference makes faith* |
| *Hombre y mujer, guerreros de África,* | *Man and woman, warriors of Africa* |
| *otra vez de pie* | *Again on their feet* |
| *Ofi Zumbi, Ganga Zumba* | *Ofi Zumbi, Ganga Zumba* |
| *Adeyeme, Sekuo* | *Adeyeme, Sekuo* |
| [. . .] | [. . .] |
| *Rastafari filosofía, resistencia* | *Rastafari philosophy, resistance* |
| *Erguidos ante la policia* | *Standing [tall] before the police* |
| *Dreadlocks p'arriba* | *Dreadlocks raised up* |
| *Orgullo fortaleza nuestra fila* | *Pride fortifies our position* |
| [. . .] | [. . .] |
| *Nyabinghi valor* | *Nyabinghi courage* |
| *muerte al opresor,sin excepción de color* | *death to the oppressor, regardless of [skin] color* |
| *de los falsos profetasse encargará el Señor* | *God will take care ofthe false prophets* |
| *Fuego Babilón* | *Babylon burn* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Nuestra función: educación* | *Our function: education* |
| *En cada barrio que por revolución* | *In every neighborhood [that is] for revolution* |
| | |
| *Coro:* | *Chorus:* |
| *Aheeaho, aheeaho, abre los ojos, raíces* | *Ahee aho, aheeaho open your eyes [to your] roots* |
| *Afro-Cubano soy yo* | *Afro-Cuban I am, I am* |
| *Aheeaho, aheeaho abre la mente, raices* | *Ahee aho, aheeaho open your eyes [to your] roots* |
| *Afro-Cubano soy yo, soy yo* | *Afro-Cuban I am, I am* |
| […] | […] |
| *África, llena de cultura y gente* | *Africa, full of culture and people* |
| *Apreciando la raíz potente* | *Appreciating the powerful root* |
| *La lucha continua* | *The fight continues* |
| *Hoy micrófono, cultura* | *Today microphone, culture* |
| *Anónimo defiende los ancestros,* | *Anónimo defends the ancestors* |
| *acentúan!...* | *who accentuate!...* |

The *tema* opens with an ritualized evocation of black resistant figures such as famed 17th century slave rebellion leader José Antonio Aponte, Antonio Maceo, and members of PIC including its leader Pedro Ivonnet – all of whom were focal points in Tomás' class. Each is followed by refrains of *ibaé*, a truncation of the Yoruba phrase *ibaé bayé tonú* which is uttered at the initiation of santería ceremonies to invoke the participation of ancestral sprits. A connection to the present, however, is immediately made as the duo professes their allegiances with Ivonnet to "die for a just cause." While Ivonnet and his fellow PIC members are invoked in nationalist language as a "our martyrs," in the same breath their history – and by extension those of Sekuo and Kokino – is framed within a broader diasporic context of black historical resistance. Here references to Ofi Zumbi and Ganga Zumba, the leaders of Brazil's famed Quilombo dos

Palmares,[137] provide linkage to histories of black Atlantic struggle which are nationally transcendent of Cuba's particular historical outlines. And although the ultimate historical foundation for these "*guerreros de África*" is Africa itself, the routes to such black Africanness are very much "new world" in their orientation. The numerous references to Rastafari imagery from nyabinghi to Babylon is reflective of the growing influence of the Cuban Rastafari movement on Sekuo's thinking and self-identity at the time.[138] While as previously mentioned a number of raperos had begun wearing dreadlocks as transnational markers of blackness, Sekuo's growth of locks and attention to a more "ire," or naturally-oriented lifestyle was informed more directly by his ideological engagement with Rastafari associated beliefs and discourses of resistance. In his reference to "Standing [tall] before the police/Dreadlocks raised up/Pride fortifies our position" Sekuo clearly draws upon such black resistive imagery as an inspirational source for his own defensive posturing. Again, the source of such black signified identification and self-imagery is diasporic in scope.

However, as the song's title implies and is lyrically reiterated in the chorus, however, Anónimo Consejo are ultimately asserting their identity and historical groundedness as *Afro-Cubanos*. The *tema* closes with tributes to a number of contemporary black figures such as filmmaker Gloria Rolando, preeminent Afro-Cuban intellectual Rogelio Martinez Furé, and Tomás Fernández Robaina himself. In a similar

---

[137] The large 17th century maroon society in the north eastern interior of Brazil which for over a century.
resisted violent attempts to incorporate it within colonial Brazil's plantation slave system.
[138] For a discussion of Rastafarianism in Cuba see Katrin Hansing (2001) "Rasta, Race and Revolution: Transnational Connections in Socialist Cuba."

cadence as the opening each name is followed by refrains of *aché*, the Yoruba expression for the divine power of the *orishas* used in santería ritual. In proclaiming "*La lucha continua/Hoy micrófono, cultura/Anónimo defiende los ancestors*," their position is secured within this historical continuum of black Cuban struggle through their work promoting education "in every neighborhood [that is] for revolution." Here, it is significant that the original Spanish text reads in somewhat ambivalent fashion "en cada barrio que por revolución." This phrasing is a direct play on a popular revolutionary slogan "en cada barrio, revolución." It refers to local revolutionary organs known as los Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDRs) originally organized as neighborhood-based vigilance organizations.[139] Through such play a subtle distinction is again suggested between Anónimo Consejo's endorsements of revolutionary struggle and those of *the* Revolution. In assuming their self-styled objective of *anónimo consejo* (anonymous advice), the revolutionary "*educación*" that the duo claims to promote is understood as an implicitly critical one. While Tomás' class was an obvious source of inspiration for Sekuo's penning of "Afro-Cubano," the transnationally expansive notions of black resistance that underskirts the song's self-celebrate narrative no doubt found encouragement from other points of engagement.

Another influential rap duo whose work in necessitates at least brief mention at this juncture is Hermanos de Causa ('Brothers of Cause'). Drawn from the adjoining *barrios* of Cojimar and Alamar respectively, the music of Zoandris and Pelón is among the most poetically sophisticated and politically uncompromising of any artists on the

[139] The slogan was actually appropriated from the lyrics of a popular 1970s song by Grupo de Experimentación Sonora de ICAIC entitled "Canción de los CDRs"

island. One of their most celebrated signature *temas* entitled "Tengo" ("I have") similarly contextualizes contemporary black struggle within an historical frame of Cuban national blackness but manages it in a more bitingly satirical manner. The song is in fact a play on the famous poem by the same title by celebrated Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.[140] Originally penned in 1964, Guillén's *Tengo* celebrates the recent opportunities opened up to blacks as a result of the Cuban Revolution's early efforts at addressing the island's history of racial inequality. "Tengo" becomes Guillén's rhythmic refrain in gratitude to all that "I have" now as a black Cuban man, thanks to the Revolution. As the revolutionary appointed national poet, Guillén's *Tengo* and its exaltive message has assumed popular canonic status in Cuba and is standard reading in Cuban secondary schools. Working self-consciously with these parameters, Hermanos de Causa present a critical reversioning of Guillén's *Tengo* as a modus of black social commentary on questions of rights and citizenship.

*Tengo*
*Hermanos de Causa*

*[Zoandris]*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tengo una bandera, un escudo, un tocororo* | *I have a flag, coat of arms, a tocororo* |
| *También una palmera, un mapa sin tesoro* | *I also have a palm tree, a map without a treasure* |
| *Tengo aspiraciones sin tener lo que hace falta* | *I have aspirations without having what I need* |
| *Tengo más o menos la medida exacta* | *I have more or less the true measure* |
| *Crónica que compacta* | *Scenario that tightens* |
| *Polémica que impacta* | *Polemics that impact* |
| *Pasan los años y la situación sigue intacta* | *Years go by, things still the same* |
| *El tiempo no perdona* | *Time shows no mercy* |
| *Pregúntale a La Habana* | *Ask Havana* |
| *Que ahorita está en la lona* | *What right now is on the canvas* |
| *A nadie le importa nada* | *Nobody cares about anything* |

[140] In Cuban historical terms Guillén, with his light skin and wavy hair, was considered *mulato*.

| | |
|---|---|
| *Tengo una raza oscura y discriminada* | *I have a dark race and discrimination* |
| *Tengo una jornada que me exige y no me da nada* | *I have a job that demands from me and pays me nothing* |
| *Tengo tantas cosas que no puedo ni tocarlas* | *I have so much that I can't even touch.* |
| *Tengo instalaciones que no puedo ni pisarlas* | *I have all these places I can't even enter* |
| *Tengo libertad entre un paréntesis de hierro* | *I have freedom inside a parenthesis of steel* |
| *Tengo tantos derechos sin provechos que me encierro* | *I have so many rights I don't enjoy that enclose me* |
| *Tengo lo que tengo sin tener lo que he tenido* | *I have what I have without having what I've had* |
| *Tienes que reflexionar y asimilar el contenido* | *You have to think, take in the content* |
| *Tengo una conducta fracturada por la gente* | *I have a fractured behavior because of the people* |
| *Tengo de elemento, tengo de conciente* | *I have the element, I have the consent* |
| *Tengo el fundamento sin tener antecedentes* | *I have the foundation without having antecedents* |
| *Tengo mi talento y eso es más que suficiente. . .* | *I have my talent, and that's more than sufficient. . .* |

In the above opening except of "Tengo," Zoandris begins by signifying his Cuban citizenship by referencing the national icons of the flag, coat of arms, and *el tocororo*, Cuba's national bird. While he may have a palm tree, however, he has no tropical treasure. Indeed, "I have aspirations without having what I need" Zoandris proclaims. Thus he introduces the central problematic of the *tema*; the dissonance, disjuncture, and chasms between the promises of full citizenship and rights under non-racial revolutionary socialism and the lived frustrations of being young and black in Cuba today. Similar to Anónimo Consejo's previous allusions to being "squeezed," Zoandris speaks of the current moment in terms of a "scenario that tightens." In a tone marked by disillusionment he expose the quotidian hardships and contradictions within Cuba's new dollarized economics of apartheid in declaring "I have so much that I can't touch/I have all these places I can't enter." And in one of the *tema's* most poignant lines, Zoandris follows with an unflinching poeticism "*Tengo libertad entre un paréntesis de hierro/Tengo tantos derechos sin provechos que me encierro*" ("I have freedom inside a

parenthesis of steel/I have so many rights I don't enjoy that enclose me"). At the same time, however, he appears to call into question Guillén's own rendering of the past in proclaiming "I have what I have without having what I've had." Here, Zoandris stakes out his own position as a rapero in affirming "I have the element/I have the consent/I have the foundation without having antecedents/I have my talent, and that's more than sufficient." In true rapero form, Zoandris asserts, it is through the performed word that he advances his politics.

***Black Radical Feminist Arising***

With only a couple of exceptions the illustrations I have provided to this point regarding the politics of black identity making and social critique within Cuban hip hop have been wholly masculine in character. The simple logic behind this emphasis as earlier discussed is that as discussed earlier hip hop in Cuba, as in most other global sites of its production, is primarily a male dominant affair.[141] With regard to the immediate examples above both the assertive claims to black national legitimacy as well as the (re)articulated black subject positions from which they arise are solidly predicated on appeals to masculine paradigms of power. As in the case of Anónimo Consejo, contemporary self-assertions of black male resistance are moored to an interarticulated continuum of black Cuban and Afrodiasporic histories of struggle defined primarily in masculinist terms. As Hermanos de Causa's gender-specific name implies, their "cause" moves first and foremost from a male-centered subject position. Such black masculinity

[141] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of masculinist tendencies of hip hop's global dissemination.

in the end is ultimately expressed through the ways it is performatively enacted within the theatrically-driven space of Cuban hip hop. Taken in its totality, within Cuban hip hop masculinist framing to be black, in effect, is to be male.

Increasingly, however, black women have been making their voices heard within the movement, often asserting black female-centered critiques of gendered forms of power as they intersect with those of race. Such critiques I suggest emerge from new critically positioned kinds of black female subjectivity that find performative articulation through Cuban hip hop. As briefly mentioned previously, the female trio known as Instinto was one of the key pioneers of Cuban women's involvement in hip hop. Though all three of the group's members have for the last few years been living in Spain, I recall their performances as choreographed events that employed a highly theatrical use of sexualized female energy on stage. While wearing form-fitting outfits with significant skin exposure, these self-styled divas of Cuban rap often played with sexual provocation as a means of launching female-centered critiques of Cuban *machismo*. Monica, another early pioneering rapera who is no longer actively performing, rapped alongside 'old school' MC Irak Saenz who is now part of the performance duo Doble Filo.[142] Though I have meet Monica I unfortunately have never had the opportunity to see her perform. But unquestionably the most long term active and constantly engaged of female MCs is Magia Lopez of Obsesión.

As alluded to earlier, Magia's subjectivity as a black woman has over the years increasing become vocal and politicized component of her music and public persona.

[142] In the last couple of years Doble Filo and Obsesión have collaborated on a project dubbed La fabric_K which produced an album under the same name in 2003.

While it has been Alexei who tended to be the primary scribe of many of the duo's *temas*, it became clear during the period I have known the two that Magia progressively took a more direct role in asserting her own voice within the music. A central and reoccurring concern in much of Magia's work has been directed towards challenging frames of racialized gendered discourses and practices historically ascribed onto the bodies of black and brown women. In self-affirmingly celebration of her unapologetically *black* female subjectivity in assertive, non-sexually provocative terms, Magia directly contests the dominant imagery of *la mulata* as a hyper-sexualized icon of a racially "transculturated" Cuban nation.[143] One *tema* that marked Magia's political and artistic maturation in this direction was her solo track entitled "La Llaman Puta" ("They Call her a Whore") which was first performed in 2001. In this song Magia gives a compassionate account of the struggles of young women engage in Cuba's tourist-driven sex trade. Though she never directly addresses the question of race, it is poetically implied as Magia interweaves her narrative with choral chants in Yoruba to Ochún, the feminine *orisha* most strongly associated with female sexuality. Sung to the polyrhythms of the sacred *batá* drum used in santería rituals to call upon the *orishas*, the song opens as follows:

[143] See Chapter 3.

*<u>La Llaman Puta</u>*
*Magia*

*La llaman puta*
*para todos no es mas*
*que una mujer suela*
*disfrutando el hecho de ser bonita*
*!Loca! carne que invita*
*que esita provoca*
*menudo oficio el que le toca*
*esta chica ambulante*
*ese look evidente que*
*hace proposiciones indecentes*
*es un cuerpo de cuerda que se agita*
*traduciendo fuego interior que no siente*
*dientes se clavan en sus senos,*
*llego el momento de gritar y*
*ensayar locura*
*apura sus caderas porque*
*afuera espero otro cliente*
*puede ser un borracho,*
*puede ser un demente,*
*un tipo elegante,*
*o un asesino que vino escondido*
*en un cuerpo masculino.*
*!Cuantas no van por ese camino! Y*
*Entonces La llaman puta,*
[. . .]
*obligada a hacer lo que no deseas*
*le huyes a la idea ,*
*pero la miseria tiene la cara fea*
*aunque no se crea , y entonces lo que sea*
*te arreglas como puedes*
*sales sonando los tacones*
*revisando mentalmente*
*por si hay otras opciones, pero no*
*tu cuerpo asume y*
*la llaman puta.*
[. . .]
*de pronto estas haciendo fila*
*arananado algun empleo*
*desesperada pero la jugada esta apretada*
*vas una y mil veces y nada*
*duermes escuchando el sonido de las puertas*

*They call her whore*
*for everyone she is no more*
*than a solitary  woman*
*enjoying the fact of being pretty*
*Crazy woman!  Flesh that invites*
*that excites that provokes*
*petty  is the job that she falls to*
*this roving  girl*
*that evident "look" that*
*makes indecent proposals*
*it's a wind-up body that agitates*
*translating inner fire that isn't felt*
*teeth dig into her breasts,*
*the moment to scream and rehearse*
*madness arrives*
*she hurries her hips because*
*outside another client waits*
*it could be a drunk,*
*it could be a lunatic,*
*an elegant guy*
*or a murderer who has come dressed up*
*in a masculine body.*
*How many don't take this road!*
*So for that they call her whore*
[. . .]
*forced to do what you don't want to*
*you avoid the idea,*
*but misery has an ugly face*
*even if you don't believe it, so whatever*
*you fix yourself however you can*
*you leave clicking your heals,*
*mentally revising*
*in case there are other options, but there aren't*
*your body assumes (them) and*
*they call her whore*
[. . .]
*suddenly you're getting in line*
*scratching for some job*
*desperate, but things are tight*
*you go a million times and nothing*
*you fall asleep listening to the sounds of*

| | |
|---|---|
| *que te cierran en la cara*<br>*la sociedad tira el anzuelo y tu*<br>*muerdes la carnada. . .* | *the doors that are shut in your face*<br>*society throws the hook and you*<br>*bite the bait. . .* |

The level of Magia's empathy with the narrative's protagonist and her position is poignant. The bleak scenario she paints of female sex work is very much one of societal victimhood in which women are not only "forced to do what you don't want to," but are shunned for doing so. With little other options the body is recognized as these women's only exploitable capital. In Magia's understanding of the circumstances, "society throws the hook and [they] bite the bait." Although in my own academically tinted lens Magia's rendering of female sex workers tends to undervaluate questions of social agency, she is in many ways singing against more dominant representations of *jinerteras* as joy seeking materialists whose decisions to engage in sex work stem from positions of moral compromise.[144] Magia alternatively presents an image of these women as social casualties of Cuba's new economy whom have few others means through which to access today's life-essential dollars. While at one level her repeated, melancholic refrains to Ochún are employed narratively to call upon the *orisha's* presence and aid in defense of these women, Magia's personal appeal Ochún additionally marks her own subjectivity as a black woman. As I know Magia she herself is not a practitioner of santería, yet she chooses to invoke the female *orisha* in ritualized Yoruba to spiritually, culturally, and racially ground her woman-centered narrative. Magia's performative identification with

[144] See Chapter Three.

both these women and Ochún is therefore rooted in this confluence of gendered and racial experience that binds them all in struggle.

Through Magia's tenacious work over the years as one for the most active and accomplished of MCs regardless of gender, she has garnered considerable respect from practically all in the movement. While she has increasingly asserted in more powerfully confident terms her own voice as a woman over the years, as a member of a male-female (*sic*.) duo she nonetheless continues to be strongly identified within the movement with her husband Alexei who makes up the other half of Obsesión. More recently there has been a small but growing number of all female groups and female soloists emerging from within Cuban hip hop. Though a small few have tended to reproduce performance styles reminiscent of the sexualized "hoochie chochie"-like characteristics ubiquitous in female *salsa* performances, most have assumed more assertive, less prescriptively gendered kinds of postures in their performance.

One more recent expression of ascendant female voices whose emergence has posed a radical womanist challenge to the male-centric space of Cuban hip hop is Las Krudas. Las Krudas, or "the raw ones," are an openly lesbian trio of black, afro-centered vegetarian feminist who entered Havana's hip hop scene in 2001. Prior to their involvement in hip hop, the trio of Peluka and the sisters Pasa and Gaunga had long been active in street theater and music performance, most notably as members of a colorful performance troupe of stilt walkers who performed regularly in the highly touristed area of Havana Vieja where the three reside. Within a couple months after Las Krudas made their hip hop debut Pasa described the group's orientation to me in this way:

> *[We are] a female trio of new hip hop, with a new consciousness, a new understanding about the role of women within this movement of hip hop. We classify our music as "superground". So I am here with Peluka and Gaunga fighting, writing, and working to have our music heard so to help, to open the mentality and the consciousness of this movement. We feel it is very important that they listen to our words.*

Pasa's reference to the trio's music as "superground" is a play on a term "underground" commonly used by raperos to draw a distinction between commercially compromised "pop" hip hop which dominants the genre in the U.S. and more "authentic," politically-oriented forms that have remained true to hip hop's organic socially committed roots, hence "underground." This terminology has in fact been at the center of ideological debates within the movement over the current challenges and future directions of Cuban hip hop. The critical resurfacing questions is whether individual artists, if not ultimately the movement itself, will "sell out" their social commitments and political convictions to the ever-encroaching commercialism swallowing the Cuban everyday. To remain "underground" for many is to signify one's resistance to such commercially co-optive processes which are seen already having corrupted much of hip hop in U.S. Such positions are therefore explicitly grounded in critiques of capitalism. Indeed, raperos are themselves very vocally critical of what they see as the "micky micky" tendencies in U.S. commercial hip hop, using the vernacular youth reference to Mickey Mouse as a metaphor for the social vacuousness of much of U.S. commercial culture.

Pasa's playful allusion to Las Krudas as "superground," however, is meant to underscore the overt political nature of their feminist-directed intervention within the male-dominant culture of Cuban hip hop; an intervention aimed at 'opening up' the movement's "mentality and the consciousness." Commenting further on the group's inspiration, Pasa continues:

> *This is my race, this is my color, this is my people. And [yet] the movement greatly lacks female representation. The community is made up of both black women and black men. We therefore have to represent black women. So we're supporting the movement, particularly the women because there are different realities. Some[in the movement] may think all is the same, no. There are different realities, different truths, different experiences that women have due to their sex, their gender.*

While Pasa and her sister Gaunga's black identification might appear more obvious given their dark-complected skin and phonotypical features which unquestionably mark them as "*negra*," Peluka with her very light brown skin and reddish-color hair would by contrast most likely be racialized as *jabao* or *trigeña* within Cuba's racial classification system.[145] In my eye Peluka's facial features subtlety suggest the possibility of some Asian descent stemming most likely from Cuba's history of Chinese indentured labor whom immigrated to the island in the later half of the 19th century. Significantly however, Peluka – like many lighter-skinned male MCs embracements of blackness – largely self-identifies in a political sense as a black woman.

Referring more directly to Pasa's concern regarding the lack of black women's

[145] The terms *jabao* and *trigeño/a* are somewhat similar in phenotypic discretion to the expressions "red-bone" or "meriny" used historically by Africa Americans in the U.S. South to refer to lighter skinned folks with reddish hues.

representation within Cuban hip hop, her comments recalls in many ways similar critiques leveled by U.S. black feminist of the male-centered leadership and character of black liberation movements of the 1960 and 70s. By foregrounding the particularities of black female subjectivity though the differentiated ways in which racial oppression is gendered, Pasa like black feminist before her challenges the notion of a unified black subject (i.e. masculine) of struggle upon which the male-focused Cuban hip hop movement is largely predicated. In keeping, a central concern that Las Krudas articulate though both their music and their personal engagements within Havana's hip hop community is the pervasiveness of *machismo* within the movement and broader Cuban society. As Pasa again explains*: "I feel that it is an impossibility to talk about racism without talking about machismo. [In the past] machismo was a phase of slavery. Understand? It's also a form of racism. And so our temas talk about these things.*" By asserting a black lesbian feminist subjectivity within the movement's otherwise masculinist hetero-normativity, Las Krudas' intervention resonates in many ways with those articulated in the U.S. by the black lesbian feminist Combahee River Collective of the 1970s and 80s. Excepts of the Collectives's 1986 statement reads:

> *Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work. This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. . . [T]he most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity. . . Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand. . . We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism....* (Combahee River Collective 1986)

The trio's very choice of name is very much reflective of this kind of feminist-based assertion through the politics of identity. On an immediate level as they described it, Las Krudas – again a feminine-signified "raw ones" – was chosen to signify the group's adherence to vegetarianism (i.e. raw food) which they understand as an important part of their collective alterity as female artists. At the same time the women refer to the unadulterated, female "rawness" they and their lyrics represent; a rawness that refuses to conform to patriarchal gendered prescriptions of Cuban women as passive, male-gaze oriented objects. Again Pasa:

> *I think we also call ourselves La Krudas because our image is a bit difficult to qualify under established classifications. Within the culture of hip hop it seems that our image is very powerful. Because in reality women that I have seen tend to be delicate, very refined, passive. Women for men, as usual. Understand? So we are another type of thing. We are not nicky, chicky or micky.*

Indeed, Las Krudas with their dreadlocks, full-figured bodies, in-your-face feminist lyrics, and unorthodox performance style clearly represent radical departures from both conventional Cuban images of feminine beauty as well as the standard masculinist hip hop fair. As Peluka recalls, the group's initial performances were greeted by raperos and accompanying audiences with silent, wide open mouths and eyes. Among male MCs I knew there clearly was an initial coolness to the trio when they first hit the scene. When I asked a prominent MC early on what he thought about Las Krudas, I recall him commenting to the effect "*no tienen ningún tipo de floow,*" or "they don't have any type 'flow'" referencing the all important verbal dexterity or "flow" raperos exhibit

in performance. I found it interesting that rather than referencing the lyric content of their music, critical attention was paid in a dismissive manner to Las Krudas "skills" as raperas. There was, however, no getting around the highly provocative, feminist orientation of the trio's music. One of Las Krudas signature *temas*, for instance, entitled "Tema Dedicación" ("Dedication Song") reads as something of a black feminist critique of gendered oppression as it manifests today in Cuba. The *tema* opens as follows:

*Tema Dedicación*
*Las Krudas*

| | |
|---|---|
| *Cantarte, Tema dedicación* | *Sing, Dedication song* |
| *Dedicado a todas las mujeres del mundo* | *Dedicated to all the women in the world* |
| *A todas las mujeres que como nosotras* | *To all the women like us, who* |
| *estan luchando* | *are fighting* |
| *Atodas las guerreras campesinas urbanas* | *To all the urban peasant guerrilla women* |
| *A todas las hermanas* | *To all the sisters* |
| *Especialmente a las más negras* | *Especially to the most Black* |
| *Especialmente a las más pobres* | *Especially to the most poor* |
| *Especialmente a las más gordas* | *Especially to the most fat* |
| *Soy yo, paz en sí* | *I am, peace itself* |
| *Nunca nadie te hablo así* | *Never anybody talked to you like this* |
| *Nunca aquí* | *Never here* |
| *Me fuí... me fuí... me fuí...* | *I left… I left… I left* |
| *Chata, me cantas* | *Small one, sing to me* |
| *Juguemos nuestro papel en nuestro tiempo* | *Let's play our role in our time* |
| *Artificios de risas y postizos son* | *Fake laughs and implants are* |
| *Continuación del cuento colonialista* | *a continuation of the colonialist tale* |
| *No te cojas pa´ eso* | *Don't buy it* |
| *Deja esa falsa vista* | *Move away from that false point of view* |
| *Tienes talento y pregunto* | *You are talented and I ask* |
| *Hasta cuándo seremos esta poca cantidad* | *Until when we will be this little number* |
| *En Tarima?* | *In Tarima?* |
| *Maldita y machista sociedad que contamina* | *Wicked and macho society that corrupts* |
| *No hay racismo?* | *Is there no racism?* |
| *Y, coño,* | *And, shit,* |
| *Y nosotras qué punto? en el mismo escalón* | *what about us? Still on the same step* |
| *No hay verdadera revolución sin mujeres* | *There is no real revolution without women* |
| *No es flojera* | *It is not laziness* |

| | |
|---|---|
| *Como mujeres imperfectas* | *Like imperfect women* |
| *Yo tambien como tú he hecho cosas mezquina* | *I like you have also done nasty things* |
| *Yo tambien como tú he fregado por dos* | *I like you have paced the street corners for* |
| *pesos que sonaban en cualquier esquina* | *the clinging of two pesos* |
| *Yo tambien como tu he sido forzada y* | *Me like you have been forced and* |
| *llevada sin mi voluntad a fornicación* | *taken against my will to fornicate* |
| *Y aún seguimos siendo objeto de valorización* | *And still we are objects of valorization* |
| *que nos queda?* | *What is left for us?* |
| *Prostitución, seducción* | *Prostitution, seduction* |
| *Esto es sólo una costumbre de edad para* | *This is only a tradition of our times* |
| *Ayudar a nuestras gente económicamente* | *to help our people economically* |
| *En este mundo tan material* | *In this very material world* |
| *No somos nalgas y pechos solamente* | *We are not only breasts and ass* |
| *Tenemos cerebro, mujer* | *We have brains, woman* |
| *Siente, siente. . .* | *Feel, feel. . .* |

The song begins with a celebratory homage to a universalist notion of women's struggle within which the trio politically situate themselves. Promptly, however, a self-referential identification is claimed particularly with those women black, poor, and yes, fat. Here lies a central critique of the song's text; the patriarchal objectification and disciplinary conditioning – in Foucauldian sense – of (black) Cuban female bodies and subjectivity (Foucault 1977). Referent suggestions to the ways Cuban women conform both behaviorally and bodily to the dictates of a hetero-normative male gaze in particular recall Judith Butler's writings on the performative hetero-normativization of female subjectivity (Butler 1990, 1993). The refrain "*Fake laughs and implants are a continuation of the colonialist tale/Don't buy it*" alludes directly to such disciplinary effects on women. Implying historical linkages between these practices and colonialism, moreover, historicizes the duality of female oppression and liberation within broader anti-colonial/anti-imperialist struggles upon which the Cuban national and Revolutionary

narratives are themselves based. They in turn call for a resistance, a 'moving away' from such self-objectifying gender/ed conformity. Within this "wicked and *machista* society," they rhetorically ask, "is there is no racism?" While the answer is clearly yes, they are most concerned with the intersection of racism and sexism – as well as hetero-normativity – particular to black women's experience and subjectivity. Here, claims of "Revolution" are empty without the critical recognition and participation of (black) women and their struggles within broader revolutionary struggle.

"Tema Dedicación" ultimately centers on the experience of female sex workers as an acute manifestation of the racialized sexual objectification of black Cuban women and their bodies. Possibly more directly so then Magia's "La Llaman Puta," Las Krudas' level of empathetic identification with these women and their circumstances is grounded in their narrative through the first person: "I like you have paced the street corners for the clinging of two pesos/I like you have been forced and taken against my will to fornicate." For Las Krudas such are the conditions in which (black) women find themselves today, where male-focused female sexuality is once again viewed as a key if not sole source of exploitable capital. "What is left for us?," they ask, "[t]his is the only tradition of our times/To help our people economically in this very material world." Moving away from such externally-produced, materially-directed interpolations of black women's bodies, black female self-redemption lies in the recognition that "We are not only breast and ass," but in fact, "We have brains." Rather then be a material object for male-centered consumption, Las Krudas call on women simply to "feel" who they are for themselves.

***Black Radical Challenges, La Apertura, and The State***

I have to this point provided illustration of the ways black and brown-skinned Cuban youth are negotiating new critically-positioned kinds of black subjectivity and identity through the performative space of Cuban hip hop. The political nature of such self-constituting processes, I have argued, lies first and foremost in the highly politicized context of their making. Not only do these negotiations occur at the power-infused intersection of racializing forces and efforts at race-based self-making, but importantly there are overt, self-consciously political meanings deeply implicated in the ways these young people chose to define themselves as black. At the same time such identities of blackness are realized in their most tangible and active of forms through the ways in which they are enacted through their performance. To "be" black in this context is to "act" as such not simply in the dramaturgic sense, but rather in the political sense of moving or *acting* consciously from critically positioned kinds of black identity. For raperos/as, the political *enactment* of black-self is ultimately exercised through lyric voicings of race-based social critique.[146] Beyond the immediate circumstances of their making, however, what kinds of broader impacts might these black political engagements be affecting within the larger Cuban social context? What, moreover, in a more comprehensive sense has been the Cuban state's own response to Cuban hip hop and its new identity-based politics of race?

---

[146] I have up to now generally used the male-signified term "rapero" to refer to Cuban MCs in reference to the largely masculinist character of this population. Here, however, I use the term "rapero/a" to mark what I have now more distinctly defined as the gendered specificity of male and female subjectivity within Cuban hip hop.

In an immediate sense, the ways that raperos/as are actively (re)articulating their blackness in and of itself poses challenges to Cuba's historical configurations of race and nation so central to past and present nationalist projects. Returning to the non-racial nationalist foundations of Martí and Maceo as they have been dominantly framed, any assertion of black identity with the slightest of political implication have tended to be viewed as counter-national in their perceived foregrounding of "race" over "nation" (Helg 1995; Ferrer 1998a, 1999; de la Fuente 2001). Such race-based assertions in turn, as discussed on Chapter 2, often carried with them very real political consequences in both pre- and post-1959 Cuba. The state-sponsored massacre of the leadership and followers of el Partito Independiente de Color in 1912 is but the most grievous illustration of such stakes. Here, black political demands for full citizenship as *Cubans* predicated on the promise of a racially egalitarian Republic were viewed as tantamount to "race warfare," and were thus met with the full, unbridled violence of the state. One need not look at the direct allusions made by Anónimo Consejo to recognize that today's raperos/as are making similar kinds of claims on the nation. These young people's calls for full participation as "*negros/as*" within an increasingly racially and socially stratified Cuba are similarly shaped by the ideals – if certainly not the reality – of a racially-just Cuban Revolution and nation. In this sense, as Alejandro de la Fuente has suggested in other historical moments, while national discourses of non-racialism may have at some levels inhibited black political mobilization they may simultaneously open up strategic spaces for advancing claims based on the promise of such principles (de la Fuente 1999). Much of de la Fuente's discussion of this tactical distinction is framed within the context

of non-racial forms of political organizing in which black Cubans could implicitly make such claims without evoking race directly. The difference in the case of Cuban hip hop, however, is that such demands are explicitly racial, directly exposing the present-day contradictions of national non-racialism as they are live.

On yet another level, the black identity politics posed by Cuban MCs implicitly contest dominant representations of blackness as they have been historically configured within the nationalist troupe of "folklore." As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the framing of Afro-Cuban expressive culture within notions of folklore has tended to fix black Cubans within prescriptive, nationally-bound constructions of a racially transculturated (i.e. race-neutralized) Cuban national patrimony. Within these discursive parameters blackness, if recognized at all, is viewed as a "traditional" cultural holdover from an earlier historical moment, and therefore autochthonously rooted within Cuba's *mestizaje-ed* national past.[147] Such logics have the effect of freezing Afro-Cuban cultural production within static, politically-neutralizing terms of non-racialism, while at the same time ultimately precluding the existence of autonomous expressions of black subjectivity outside such restrictive historical parameters.

Raperos/as production of self-consciously modern, nationally-expansive expressions of black Cuban identity in many ways represent an historical rupture of Cuba's nationalizing meta-narrative of race. It is important to note that there have long been examples of transnational dialogue between black Cubans and other Afrodiasporic

[147] Isar Godreau (2002) has argued that blackness in Puerto Rico has undergone a similar historical folklorization regarding the ways Puerto Rican blacks are effectively relegated by dominant nationalist discourse to the historical past rather than contemporary subjects of the nation.

locations though which political affiliations and identifications were forged (Brock et al. 1998; Childs 2001; Guridy 2003). Cuban hip hop represents a most recent expression of such black transnational engagement; one that both reflects and responds to the specific social, cultural, and economic imperatives of this particular historical moment in Cuba. While black Cubans and their "culture" are by their very historical condition rooted in that of modernity (Palmie 2002; see also Du Bois [1903]; Gilroy 1993a; Hanchard 1999), the kinds of black identity and cultural production engendered by Cuban MCs are explicitly modern, or more accurately *post*-modern in their political and cultural sensibility.[148] Cuban hip hop's assertion of a critical black difference contests in both form (identity) and function (lyric-based critique) the utopic, modernist claims of national racelessness which would seek to silence and politically neutralize social difference for the greater "Cuban" national and Revolutionary good. In this sense raperos/as identity-based interventions are very much an assertion of what Cornell West prudently dubbed a "new cultural politics of difference" in their deployment of blackness a liberatory-directed mode of social praxis (West 1990).

In seeking to historically ground both identity and racial struggle through the recuperation of an autonomous black subject of Cuban history, Cuban MCs moreover disrupt de-politicizing narratives that have attempted erase blackness as an historicized space of social agency. At the same time, however, such identity and corresponding race-based political articulations are not themselves beholden to nationally circumscribed

[148] See additional Chapter One for a discussion of the ways in which the "black" identities, subjectivities, and related forms of racial politics fashioned though the global space of hip hop are in many ways reflective of a "post-modern" cultural condition and sensibility.

historical frameworks. They are both spatially and temporally transcendent of such fixed, meta-narrativistic historiography. In these ways Cuban hip hop signifies a boisterous, unapologetic post-modern(esk) break from dominant racialized – if not racist – configurations of blackness as an ahistorical, politically-neutralized "object" of national consumption. Rather, the racial politics advanced by these youth are directed towards the assertion of blackness as paradigm for the making of critically engaged "subjects" (i.e. agents) of history. But again, how are such interventions being received beyond the immediate social context of hip hop?

It is unquestionable that the politicized character of black identity and race-based social critique voiced within Cuban hip hop has been instrumental in pushing critical discussions of race into otherwise tightly controlled realms of Cuban public discourse. Never has there been in the history of revolutionary Cuba anything akin to an autonomous space that has engendered the level of open, racially-positioned critique and antiracist advocacy as Cuban hip hop is currently provoking. Where else in Cuba today can one gather publicly before anywhere from one-hundred to three-thousand black folks and engaged in relatively opening critique of systematic racial exclusion let along racially-directed police harassment? The widely popular dance music genre of Cuban *timba* of which the majority of performers are black and darker-skin certainly presents an alternative contemporary space of black-derived social contestation through popular cultural performance (Hernandez-Reguant 2004). While *timba* is without question an important component of an expanding space of race-based social expression – one which is very much in dialogic relationship with Cuban hip hop – it does not articulate

the same kinds of overt sets racial politics and critique that hip hop has managed to produce. Cuban hip hop in this capacity is in many ways operating as an vangardist site of racial articulation in Cuba today. It is even reported that Cuban hip hop lyrics are being analyzed in college courses at the University of Havana – the bastion of Cuban intellectual production – as sources of contemporary social commentary on Cuban society.

I suggest in fact that the Cuban hip hop movement is emerging as a key player in an evolving black public sphere predicated on the assertion of contemporary black political difference within a previously configured non-racial Cuban national imaginary. I speak here of a black public sphere in the sense that Michael Dawson, building on Nancy Fraser, refers to a black "counter public" in the U.S. to delineate its subaltern position vis-à-vis the dominant, hegemonically-constituted broader public sphere in the U.S. (Dawson 1995). Dawson distinguishes this alternative black "counter public" from that of Habermas' bourgeois concept of the public sphere as one predicated on formal institutional structures (e.g. media, the academy, organizational forms, etc.). Indeed, in the same collection Michael Hanchard suggest in the context of Brazil's *Movimento Negro* that Afro-Brazilians utilized the space of cultural production in fashioning an "alternative" black public sphere were "culture" becomes "an organizing principle against racial oppression, and as [a medium] for constructing and enacting Afro-Brazilian identities" (Hanchard 1995:186). In this formulation the interconstitutive relationships forged between new, performatively-centered spaces of cultural production (i.e. Afro-

Brazilian *blocos afros*) and identity provide frames of social praxis towards advancing race-based political claims and social organization.

Though its voicings of a new racial politics of Cuban blackness, I maintain that Cuban hip hop is operating in a similar fashion in the opening up an alternative public space of black political articulation where identity serves as the grounds for maneuver. One expression of this new political opening is illustrated in the growing attention that an older generation of established black intellectuals have begun to pay Cuban hip hop and the challenges it is posing. In addition to Tomás Fernández Robaina who, coming out of his experience with raperos/as in his class "El Negro en Cuba" has engaged in scholarly commentary on the black racial politics of Cuban hip hop (Fernández Robaina 2002), there are a number of other influential black intellectuals who are increasingly engaging with raperos/as and their music. For her part filmmaker Gloria Rolando has interviewed and filmed Anónimo Consejo in relationship to their *tema* "Afro-Cubano" in development of one of her recent documentary projects on the 1912 massacre of el Partido Independiente de Color.[149] Two other engaged intellectuals on the periphery of Cuban hip hop are Roberto Zurbano, a poet and vice-president of UNEAC's literary section, and Gisela Arandia, a prominent researcher and journalistically-trained scholar on contemporary black issues who is also based out of UNEAC.[150] The two have for

[149] In developing this project Gloria Rolando has been working with Swiss historian Aline Helg who's work "Our Rightful Share" (1995) of the Partido Independiente de Color has recently been issued in a Spanish translation addition in Cuba.
[150] Gisela Arandia was the key organizer for the previously mention "Color Cubano" symposium held at UNEAC in 2002.

example been consistent and often outspoken participants in the preciously mentioned rap colloquium held annually during the Cuban hip hop festival.

Unlike earlier years when it was not much beyond an informal gathering involving a handful of raperos, since 2000 when I first presented the colloquium has grown into a multi-day, academically-directed event involving Cubans and foreigners focusing on commentary and analysis of Cuban hip hop as a new social phenomenon. This shift has largely been a result the increased involvement of state institutions in directly supporting and framing hip hop in Cuba. In this case the hosting institutions have been UNEAC and la Museo de la Musica (The Museum of Music) though La Asociación Hermanos Saiz has been the primary coordinator of the event a number of years running. These public forums have in fact often produced heated debates around issues of race, racism, "blackness," citizenship, identity, and the role of women as they relates to Cuban hip hop. Its significant to note that with this shift towards more a formal academic direction tended to marginalize raperos/as as participants within the colloquium. While they filled the seats of the auditorium listening to others, including myself, pontificate about them and their music, they were rarely if ever on the podium themselves. This, however, did not inhibit them from making their voices heard from the floor. Cuban MCs participation in the colloquiums, whether institutionally sanctioned or not, contributed a critical component to the tone and scope of the discussions.

Ariel for one, who played an active role in organizing a number of colloquiums in his official capacity with La Asociación Hermanos Siaz, presented a rather blistering critique in 2002 of the racist tendencies exhibited in official tourist-directed print

advertising. Using actual clippings Ariel illustrated both the invisibility of blacks within much promotional literature or, when presented, black people were configured in racial caricature in was that reprocessed racist, "colonial' (i.e. "folkloric") imagery. During his presentation he also offered a handful of Cuban rap lyrics to illustrate the black racial character of the movement. Ariel's tone was unapologetic and represented something of a milestone in that it was the first time in my experience that such an overt proclamation of the movement's black racial orientation was discussed in an open public forum. It was as if Ariel was shattering the official public silence on the question of race vis-à-vis hip hop; the taboo subject to which the state itself it is dealings with the movement had yet to publicly acknowledge. In the same breath Ariel firmly challenged any suggestions that Cuban MCs and their music were somehow counter-revolutionary in political orientation and practice. This contention was meant to address both the assertion black identity as well as the race-based social critique articulated by raperos/as. The first point being that one could be both "black" and "revolutionary" – that is the assertion of one's black identity is not in and of itself an anti-revolutionary (i.e. anti-national) act in defiance of Cuba's sacred national racelessness. At the same time Ariel was also defending the position that "constructive" forms of social critique are necessary within revolutionary society and processes. Cuban hip hop, for Ariel, moves from this location.

Such discussions produced some interesting exchanges. At one point a middle-aged black man from the audience addressed a panel complaining of what he saw as a misguided emphasis on the part of raperos/as on racial identity and critiques of racism. He suggested that these MCs were merely uncritically reproducing the discourse of U.S.

hip hop, and that such concerns were inorganic to Cuba. His statements did not carry much resonance among the present audience, the majority of whom were raperos/as themselves, and whom have long defended their "Cubaness" as artists. Yet on another day Seku addressed the colloquium from the floor protesting the fact that young black Cuban's have no sense of a black history of struggle in Cuba. He complained of how if one were to approach black youth in the streets of Havana and ask who were black leaders of the past, "who fought for you?" Many he claimed could not name anyone other then possible, in that ambiguous nationalist way, Antonio Maceo. Astutely, Seku followed by suggesting that black youth have to look elsewhere for such "black heroes" giving the examples of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King.

Again, it is important to note that not only were such politically-charged discussions openly taking place in a public forum,[151] but the event itself was organized and hosted by state institutions. What I wish to underscore here is that though these new critical black openings were largely engendered by the on-going growth and efforts the Cuban hip hop movement, the Cuban state itself played a role in a cautious 'opening up' of public space for just this kind of critical discussion. And to the extent to which Cuban hip hop is contributing to the development of an alternative space of black political articulation, it is one which is emerging through the Cuban state's own negotiations of a shifting sociopolitical landscape of which it too is a compelled participant.

[151] Though granted the packed auditorium probably held no more than two hundred people

Returning to the context of the colloquium, another increasingly active player in recent years has been a small group of young black intellectuals many of whom first came into contact with raperos/as while attending Tomás' class in 2002. This new generation of young thinkers and cultural producers have come to share with their rapero/a peers a more radical political and racial orientation in comparison to their predecessors. One such individual of this new hip hop-engaged generation of black intellectuals is Yesenia Selier Crespo, a thirty-something, social psychology-trained researcher at Havana's Centro Juan Marinello. Yesenia's work has centered on the problematics of race and racial identity in Cuba with a focus on racial attitudes among black, *mestizo* (mixed-race in Cuban terms), and white Cubans. Committed to advancing antiracist struggle, a key critique in her work relates to what she sees as a lack of an historical memory of race on the part of black Cubans and the broader Cuban national imaginary as a whole. She has suggested such silences and gaps are not accidental, but rather have been actively and intentional produced through hegemonic national discourse (Selier Crespo 2002) – an analysis echoed in this dissertation. Yesenia has recently found fertile creative and intellectual ground for her research in Cuban hip hop and had recently taken on the movement's racial identity politics as central site of investigation. Rather than detached researcher, Yesenia's engagements with Havana's hip hop community has ranged from co-authoring an article with Pablo Herrera on Cuban hip hop for the prestigious Casa de Las Americas to performing poetry alongside a collection of female MCs during a hip hop show. Currently, Yesenia is in the New York area on a

research grant through which she has continued to write on Cuban hip hop and other themes relating to contemporary racial dynamics in Cuba.

One additional individual in need of brief mention who is also in a broader scene part of this new hip hop-conversant generation of young black intellectuals is artist Roberto Diago Durruthy otherwise known as Diago.[152] As an exceptionally successful young Cuban artists his early thirties, Diago has had dozens of exhibitions of his work since the mid-1990s in both Cuba and aboard. Infused with social critique, much of his paintings deal provocatively with contemporary themes of race, racial identity, and racism often mixing Afro-Cuban religious symbolism with racially-charged text in a stylistic form reminiscent for some of the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat (Mateo 2003). My first experience with Diago was in Tomás' class where he was often a rigorous participant in discussions. Like Yesenia and others, moreover, it was in Tomás' class that Diago first came into dialogue with raperos/as. Though it never materialized, there was brief talk at one point between he, raperos/as and other class participants in organizing a collaborative presentation around the course's racial thematics. When later interviewed by a Cuban journalist concerning the centrality of racial critique in his work – which was suggested was exemplary of a new generation of black intellectuals – Diago responded by drawing parallels between himself and raperos/as regarding the "carga agresiva" ("aggressive change") that characterizes the kinds of "in your face" challenges and black self-assertions present in both spaces of artistic production (Mateo 2003).

[152] Diago is the grandson of the pioneering black Cuban artists Roberto Diago (1920-1957) from whom he takes his name. The elder Diago also broadly exhibited his work internationally as well as domestically.

At the same time Diago has become something of a celebrated son of Cuba's new openness to overtly "black" forms artistic and cultural expression. The artist for instance had a highly coveted solo show at Havana's new Museo Bellas Artes in 2002. During the exposition a well attended symposium was held on his work and its racial thematics. A collection of high-profile black intellectuals assembled to participate including Rogelio Martínez Furé and celebrated Afro-Cuban poet Nancy Morejon. The symposium was officiated by Cuba's iconoclastic Minister of Culture Abel Prieto whom has emerged today as one of the most influential of a new generation of Cuba's leadership and institutionally-groomed intelligentsia.[153] Significantly, Prieto has been a long-standing advocate for an openness within the Revolution to more plural and anti-dogmatic forms of contemporary cultural production in Cuba (Davies 2000). Within his capacity as Minister of Culture Prieto has been an instrumental agent in the shift within the Cuban state to more "responsive" approaches to cultural production and industry within an increasingly commercialized national landscape. Though in Havana at the time, I unfortunately was not present at the mentioned colloquium organized around Diago's work. I was, however, informed by a few who did attend that ensuing discussions around the heretofore sensitive themes of race and racial expression in art and cultural practice were quite involved. From accounts there were also some engaged exchanges around the nature and extent to which the state and its institutions have been receptive, or not, to such expression, as well as calls for greater openings for dialogue in the arts and culture on questions of race.

[153] A published poet himself, Prieto was president of UNEA between 1991 and 1997.

At one level the evolution of the hip hop colloquium and Diago's exposition are in part expressions of the previously mentioned opening or "aperture" taking place place in Cuba by the mid-1990s to more critical kinds of public discussions around racial themes. Many commentators in both Cuba and abroad cite the 1986 Third Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba as something of a watershed event in this regard (Fernández 2001; de la Fuente 2001).[154] It was during the Third Congress that the Cuban leadership set in motion the national Rectification Campaign aimed at haltering what was perceived as Cuba's diversion from socialism following a series of economic reforms initiated in the 1970s and 1980s. In the Congress's closing speech Fidel Castro acknowledged that racism and racial discrimination had in fact not been eliminated, pointing out in particular scarcity of blacks as well as women and youth within the ranks of the party's leadership. Following, he challenged the political structures, institutions, and Cuban society as a whole to address the issue of exclusion; the immediate result of which was a two-fold increase of blacks and *mulatos* in the Party's Central Committee (de la Fuente 2001:313) following a purge of older committee members (Moore 1988; Dilla Alfonso 2002).[155]

Castro's statements signified something of a re-opening of public discussion on the topics of race and racism after their long silencing following the 1962 Second Declaration of Havana proclaiming racial discrimination eliminated in revolutionary

---

[154] Such was also conferred me in private conversations by Roberto Zurbano and Tomas Fernández Robaina.

[155] Carlos Moore, however, asserts that significant numbers of those purged were an older generation black committee members, and hence suggest that the move was an effort in part to eliminate an older guard of influential black politicos.

Cuba.[156] As is often the case Castro's speeches set the official tone on issues upon which other government figures, state institutions, the press, and the intellectual community itself take its cues in terms of the direction of public discourse on such issues. The Party's Fifth Congress in 1997 similarly drew attention to the continued absence of blacks, women, and youth in the party's ranks, raising the question once again concerning the persistence of racial exclusion (along with gendered and age-based forms) within Cuba's political and social structures (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000). Separated by a decade, the historical situatedness of these two declarations were distinct in that the second was set against the backdrop of Cuba's recent social transformations following the early 1990s crisis of the Special Period.

Nadine Fernández has examined what she identifies as an important shift in the 1990s within Cuba's popular press and academic circles regarding the terms of public debate around the problematics of race (Fernández 2001). Fernández suggests that the earlier part of the 1990s saw cautious moves among some journalist and academics towards addressing the persistence of racism Cuba. The ways in which such discussions were framed, she asserts however, kept within official party lines of discourse on the topic. Fernández points out that between 1996 and 1997 an important break occurred in which more critical kinds of debate began being aired in a small but significant range of popular and academic writing, many of authors of whom were black. These writings

[156] See Chapter 2.

tended to moved away from the normalized rhetoric of institutional vs. individual racism as well as the notion of racism as a static historical holdover from the past.[157]

In discussing the factors that may have contributed to this new critical impetus with within the academic sphere, Fernández suggest that Cuban scholarly engagements with North American peers at conferences like the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) and, I am sure, the growing numbers of North American researchers in Cuba itself encouraged broader, possibly more critical frames of academic analysis with regard to race. She points out, however, that according to at least one account the Cuban state gave a group researchers headed to LASA's 1992 conference a green light to engage in open debate on Cuba's racial dynamics while in the U.S. (Fernández 2001:128).[158] Fernández's account suggest once again that the Cuban leadership played a role in initiating this new
*apertura* in the 1990s for more public discussion of the previously taboo subject of race.

It is important to recognize that such developments occurred within a broader general context of a greater openness on the part of the Cuban state in the 1990s to a wider range of social expression (Dilla Alfonso 2002; Hernandez Rodriguez 2003). The Cuban government's relatively more receptive approach to homosexuality, long viewed as socially deviant from the revolutionary national course and broadly repressed as such (Arenas 1993; Lumsden 1996), is one particularly poignant example of such recent

[157] See discussion in Chapter 2.
[158] The researcher in question who gave this account was Thomas Fernández Robaina.

openings (Bejel 2001).[159] With regard to the question of race, however, it is unquestionable that the surfacing of a new set racial imperatives tied to Cuba's shifting socioeconomic landscape of the 1990s necessitated critical kinds of responses on the part of both black Cubans – including, but certainly not limited to academics – and the Cuban state itself. Concerning the revolutionary leadership's initial broaching of the topic of racism in the first years of the Revolution, black intellectuals were key in instigating and pushing the terms of public debate (de la Fuente 2001). Within the current context, I suggest that a similar process is taking place in which Cuban hip hop has emerged as an important social actor in the (re)opening of critical dialogue on race and blackness. Here, the negotiated play thus occurs between hip hop as an emergent social space of racial articulation in both form (racial subjectivity) and function (race-based critique), and the Cuban state in its efforts to manage the terms of such articulation amidst the rapidly evolving social complexities that define Cuba today. But what more specifically are the contours of such negotiations?

Throughout my treatment of Cuban hip hop I have underscored the ongoing role the Cuban state has played vis-à-vis hip hop's emergence and development as a sociocultural phenomenon. From alternately enabling and restricting accesses to U.S. popular music to consenting to a limited opening of space and resources during the phenomenon's evolution from *la moña* to *hip hop Cubano*, the state's earlier engagements were characterized by one of cautious tolerance. An important shift

[159] Widely screened in Cuba, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's critically acclaimed 1994 film *Fresa y chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate), with its central portrayal of a homosexual man with strong nationalist convictions, is often cited as an important sociocultural milestone.

occurred in 1999. In May of that year Abel Prieto, the previously mentioned Cuban Minister of Culture, held a meeting with representatives of both rapero and rockero[160] communities in Havana where he expressed the state's recognition of rap and rock music as legitimate forms of Cuban cultural expression. In a public ceremony held the following June, Prieto declared: "We have to support our Cuban rappers because this is the next generation of Cubans and they are saying some powerful things with this art. I am responsible for giving this generation the freedom to claim their power culturally" (Hock 1999:194). Prior to this moment as discussed earlier, the Cuban state officially regarded hip hop as an inorganic expression of U.S. capitalist culture with implied 'ideologically diversionary' tendencies.[161] From this point on, however, the Cuban state took a much more active interest in Cuban hip hop with the Ministry of Culture under the direction of Abel Prieto serving as the central coordinator in promoting efforts to institutionalize hip hop within the frame of Cuban revolutionary culture.

As mentioned, La Asociación Hermanos Siaz (AHS)[162] took the early lead as the state institution most directly involved in Cuban hip hop. The increasingly active role AHS assumed in successive Cuban hip hop festivals is a poignant illustration of the state's expanding institutional engagement with the movement since 1999. Though AHS was the official institutional home for Grupo Uno, the collective headed by Rodolfo Rensoli which launched the first Cuban hip hop festival 1995 ran the first five years of

---

[160] The self-styled term *rockero* refers to members of Cuba's rock movement. Within the Cuban racial paradigm, and in notable contrast to raperos, the majority of *rockeros* are drawn from the ranks of "white" youth.
[161] See Chapter 4.
[162] The cultural arm of the Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas (UJC) (Union of Young Communists)

the festival with nominal material support from state institutions including AHS. While the 2000 festival saw a significant ratcheting up of AHS's direct involvement in the festival, but 2001 La Asociación took full control of the festival's coordination leaving Rensoli and others of Grupo Uno completely out of the fold.

The new public face of the festival was put on display during a high-profile press conference held in a swanky lounge bar atop the Teatro Nacional (National Theater). On the podium along with Pablo and Ariel book-ending the table were a couple of institutional figures including AHS's vice-president Fernando Leon Jacomino. As La Asociación's key contact with Havana's hip hop community Jacomino, as he was known to all, had established a fairly respectable reputation among raperos/as by this point. His easygoing, good-natured affect certainly facilitated his acceptance among many. Fairly quickly, however, Jacomino disappeared from the scene as the state's central institutional liaison with Cuban hip hop. This role was filled by Alpidio Alonso, AHS's new national president who had recently transferred to Havana from Santa Clara to take up his appointment.[163] The shifting of responsibility from the vice to presidential rank of La Asociación's institutional hierarchy represented a further ratcheting up of the Cuban state's engagement with the movement. Assuming this role with a direct, fairly aggressive hands-on approach, Alpidio was eventually able to establish a range of working relationships within Havana's hip hop community over the following years. Most of these relationship, however, were clearly not without their tensions and ambivalences.

[163] Santa Clara is the regional capital of the island's central province of Villa Clara.

When asked about the evolving role of the state vis-à-vis Cuban hip hop, Alpidio explained to me that as he understood it the responsibility of AHS was to help incorporate raperos and their work within institutional structures as a means of supporting and channeling their creative energy more directly within the Revolution. In outlining such, he spoke of raperos as among "la vaguada" ("the vanguard") of the Revolution; holding that hip hop was in many ways "en frente los instituciones" ("in front of the institutions") in terms of their social vision (and critiques) of what is occurring in Cuba today. As such, he concluded, the institutions – and by extension the state and Revolution – then needed to pay attention to what it was raperos and their music were saying. In a similar vein, in response to a Cuban interview's question in 1994 about whether AHS has provided a space for hip hop, Alpedio responded:

> Prefiero que esta pregunta se la haga a los mismos raperos. Pero, sí, el rap cubano ha encontrado a través de la AHS un espacio para decir, para formar parte de la Revolución. Y se difunde un mensaje revolucionario y comprometido porque sus textos así lo dicen.
>
> (I would prefer if the question was asked directly to the raperos themselves. But yes, Cuban rap has found a space to speak, to form part of the Revolution. And it spreads a revolutionary message, and a dedicated one, because their texts express it this way.)[164]

Despite Alpidio's expressed concern for not speaking for raperos/as, what became apparent with AHS's increased involvement with Cuban hip hop over the years is that that state was clearly working in certain capacities to manage the public face – if not the organizational character – of the movement. The official press conference for the 2002

[164] Quoted in Matienzo (2004).

hip hop festival is a vivid case in point. Held in Havana's International Press Center, a small collection of middle aged white men book-ended once again by the younger and darker Pablo and Ariel, sat on the stage before a packed audience. At center was Alpidio himself directing the conference while Pablo and Ariel sat less so as active participants than window-dressing. For their part, the dozen or so MCs who actually showed up for their "own" press conference were lined up along the back wall completely opposite – both in location and "hue" – to those on stage listening along rather disinterestedly. The scope of this disconnect was echoed in a remark Pablo later made about how telling it was to see this one older bearded white man from the AHS at the table listing the various U.S. artists who were planning on participating in the festival and had no idea how to pronounce their names. Pablo's implication was that this gentleman was clueless about hip hop yet he was one of the institutional "authorities" presenting on behalf of the movement. Such was in keeping with the paternalistic tone which presided over much of the press conference. Here, the message conveyed by Alpidio and company was one to the effect that these were "our" Cuban youth – as silent/silenced as they were – and that they, the state, was here to provide. Following the press conference another well positioned individual within the movement put it this way: "black music, white people, the same old story."

In line with such paternalistic framing that would deny autonomous voice and subjectivity to Cuban MCs, conspicuously absent from the press conference was any mention of race. Such omissions has in fact become standard practice in practically all publicly disseminated discourses on hip hop by the Cuban state and its institutions. The

incorporative discourse of "our youth," for instance, is often strategically deployed in state pronouncements in avoidance of any public acknowledgement, let along discussion of the black racial significance of the movement. In the context of the press conference such an omission was all too apparent given the blatant racial divided between the white men on stage and the black, mostly male raperos standing removed in the rear. One public space in which critical kinds of discussion has occurred, as mentioned earlier, was in the hip hop colloquium. While this space was cautiously opened up by the state, it was raperos/as and others themselves whom exploited the opening in pushing the dialogue into new terrain. And while Ariel has played a key role within the state's broader institutionalizing effort, at the same time it was he who first challenged the official public silence on race vis-à-vis hip hop in the 2002 colloquium. It is further notable that Sekuo, after critiquing what was tantamount to the historical erasure of black political figures from Cuba's national narrative during the same colloquium, was seen being pulled aide by Alpidio and reprimanded from his failure to appreciate his Cuban heritage. How could he, Alpidio protested, forget about Martí and his non-racial legacy.

The state's institutional ante vis-à-vis Cuban hip hop was raised a considerable notch with the establishment of La Agencia de Rap (The Rap Agency) under the Ministry of Culture in late 2002. La Agencia took on the responsibility of representing a select group of hand-picked rap groups with whom it coordinated performance activities such concerts and tours. It was generally understood that a key criteria used in choosing this handful of artists was what was perceived as these group's commercial viability. And in a couple cases political connectedness seemed to be a contributing factor as well.

Appointed to head La Agencia was Susana Garcia, a black women in her late-thirties to early-forties who had previously worked in an institutional research capacity on the theme of blacks in Cuban literature. Though it seemed clear to all that her blackness was seen by the Ministry of Culture as a political asset, many commented that she had no background in music administration let alone a knowledge of hip hop. In this light she was viewed by many as not much more than a *funcionaria*; an institutional cog or functionary operating uncritically within the larger bureaucratic apparatus. In a conversation I had with her in the summer of 2003 she did not present much that would have otherwise dispelled this notion.

In describing the objective of La Agencia, Susana explained straight forwardly that La Agencia was formed with the objective to promote and commercialize hip hop talent within its portfolio. Such intentions were not necessarily received unproblematically by within the hip hop community. Shortly after its formation one particularly well positioned individual in the movement expressed concern to me that La Agencia signified the state's move to position itself to siphon off Cuban hip hop the international marketplace. Similar institutional arrangements had already occurred with regard to the ever expanding numbers of Cuban musicians traveling aboard in response to the boom in international demand for Cuban music since the 1990s. In some of these scenarios Cuban state was able to garner up to 50% of overseas earnings acquired by those musicians and groups traveling abroad (Watrous 1997). Regarding the new institutionalized interest in hip hop, the apprehensive individual above likened such moves as tantamount to state attempts to "pimp" Cuban hip hop for commercial profit.

Its no doubt that those in decision-making positions were made aware of the commercial potential of Cuban hip hop given the international success of Orishas, the previously mentioned "Cuban" rap group produced out of France whose premier 1999 album "A Lo Cubano" surpassed the gold mark in Europe and sold over 50,000 copies in the U.S. (Varela 2002). The impact of Orishas came home when the members, two of whom culled from the pioneering Havana rap trio Amenaza, returned to Cuba for a series of sold-out concerts in December 2000 and January of 2001. While most local raperos/as as mentioned previously are critical of what they view as Orishas' overtly commercial character, many recognize that the group's commercial success has opened up certain doors for them at home as well as abroad. The extent and consequences of such openness, however, remains to be seen.

When asked about what she saw as the social significance of Cuban hip hop, Susana made the point repeatedly that hip hop in Cuba was a totally different thing – "una otra cosa" – in comparison to hip hop in the U.S. What specifically was she implying by this? She emphasized that raperos/as had begun developing their own style of dress, gesture, and textual thematics that reflect a "Cuban" aesthetic and sensibility. In keeping, she seemed to have adopted much of the official discourse developed around hip hop including referring to raperos/as in general, non-racial terms as "los jovenes" (the youth) whom were contributing to a deepening of understanding of Cuban society, "pero en una forma constructiva" (but in a constructive way) within the revolutionary process. When I asked her specifically about the racial significance of the movement, she responded: "Here in Cuba you can speak about pigmentation (*la pimentación*), of

coloration (*de coloración*). But you cannot talk about "the races" (la razas). Because in reality we are all mixed." I found this response a bit incongruous, if not ingenious, given that her previous institutional focus dealt with the topic of "el negro" in Cuban literature. She went on to explain that in terms of skin color, yes, the majority of raperos/as are darker-skinned but, she emphasized, there are also those "mas claro" (more lighter skinned). I then prodded her a bit by suggesting that race clearly factored into Cuban hip hop well beyond simply questions of skin color, pointing out the centrality of black racial *identitdad*, identity within the movement. At that she pretty much let the issue rest without further comment. While its quite possible that Susana may have been cautious with me as an "outsider" – again, a Yankee at that, her avoidance and then fairly unsophisticated negotiations around the racial question was telling. Such seemed to lend some credence to the idea that she was indeed operating not too removed from the role of a *functionaria* by enabling, in an apparently uncritically-engaged way, institutional(izing) policy vis-à-vis Cuban hip hip.

One the first projects Susana undertook in her capacity as director of La Agencia was to accompany Magia and Alexie of Obsesión, and MC Edgar González of Doble Filo during a U.S. tour in 2003. Though the tour was entirely organized and funded by a collaboration of progressive Miami and New York-based art organizations and activist,[165] the Ministry of Culture able to negotiate Susana's inclusion as something of an official

[165] The New York contingent was represented by the International Hip Hop Exchange collective comprised of a number of hip hop-activists with strong ties to Black August including Nuyorican Marinieves Alba as well as performance artist Danny Hoch.

state chaperone for the performers.[166] This was a marked development in comparison to the first tour of Cuban raperos to the U.S. in 2001 when a group of MCs along with Pablo and Ariel spent a month in New York City – unaccompanied by any state functionary – performing and otherwise engaging in the city's local hip hop scene.[167] It appeared that Susana's inclusion on the 2003 tour was largely about putting an official face in the tour, while establishing a new level of institutional coordination of Cuban hip hop as a whole. A joke circulating within the Havana community had it, however, that Susana had in fact spent most of her time during the tour shopping. In keeping, La Agencia was not necessarily received with open arms by the majority of raperos.

While Obsesión as one of the most accomplished rap groups on the island was "represented" by La Agencia, many other highly talented and more overtly critically-postured groups in Havana were not. During a rather heated discussion during the 2003 Cuban hip hop colloquium, Zoandris of Hermanos de Causa took the floor to challenge what he saw as La Agencia's exclusionary character – an accusation which carried with it a certain anti-socialist charge. The critique was leveled at Alpidio who had already been defending La Agencia given Susana's conspicuous absence from the colloquium, the first one held during her new tenure as director. Alpidio responded that it was impossible for La Agencia to represent all groups, implying that it was ultimately was a question of limited resources. In actually, Zoandris's charge was very much reflective of the broader

[166] A highlight of the tour was Obsesión and Edgar's performance Harlem's Apollo Theater along side The Roots among other high-profile "alternative" U.S. hip hop artists.
[167] See Chapter 4. During the 2001 tour there was, however, one political causality. On rapero member of the delegation refused to return to Cuba with the tour. He later showed up in Miami and was quoted in the El Nuevo Herald, the Spanish edition of the Miami Herald, as saying some rather unfaltering things about the Cuban government (Cancio Isla 2001).

disillusionment – if not overt distrust – that many within the movement held for the start-up La Agencia. Even Magia and Alexei who were among the celebrated "stars" of La Agencia soon became highly critical of the office's workings as well.

The truth once again, however, was that the state had the resources that raperos desperately needed. In 2004 La Agencia collaborated with el Instituto de la Música (The Institute of Music) in the coordination of a collaborative national tour of tour involving Obsesión and Doblo Filo. If it were not for state institutions of the such these kinds of tours would most probably not be able to occur under the present circumstances if only for material and resource reasons. Moreover, over the last few years La Agencia, along with AHS and Instituto de la Música, has also been involved in organizing a host of hip hop shows in various theaters and other venues throughout Havana. One particularly important setting has been the relatively glitzy Café Cantante beneath the Teatro Nacional were weekly hip hop concerts were held fairly consistently between 2002 and 2003. There DJ Acho, Ariel's *nome du jour*, played host with technical support from others including Pablo. Such events have also included a number of concerts devoted specifically to the performance of female MCs. The first of these were held 2002, the largest of which occurred during that year's hip hop festival. In doing so the state has been instrumental in providing space for the emergence of female voices within the movement. Additionally, in 2002 a fairly regular hip hop *peña* was held at AHS's Havana field-office known as La Madriguera were Ariel once again held court as DJ Asho. Under the auspices of AHS, once more, the annual Cuban hip hop festival grew dramatically between 1999 and 2003 from three nights in Alamar to a non-stop, five-day,

multi-sited event held throughout the greater Havana area. Lastly, after years of anticipation, the first issue of "Movimiento" – a magazine devoted to Cuban hip hop – was released during the 2003 festival. While institutional funding from the Ministry of Culture was coordinated through La Agencia, the issue was completely produced by hip hop-affiliated writers, photographers, and graphic designers whom had fairly open editorial control over the magazine's content.

As these numerous examples testify, through its various institutions the Cuban state has greatly expanded the space within which Cuban hip hop has been able to operate since 1999. Only a few years ago completely invisible, raperos/as are now celebrated in state-run television and print media as part of Cuba's broader revolutionary cultural repertoire. Such accommodations, however, did not come about through the benevolence of state paternalism as some might wish to hold. Rather, the individuals who make up the Cuban hip hop movement have fought long and hard for the recognition, resources, and the space to give critical expression to their music, subjectivity, and political voicings. Through such efforts raperos/as are contributing to the emergence of new kinds of race-based political articulation at the level of public discourse as well as within a brewing black public sphere. The Cuban state, in turn, has had to accommodate hip hop and its insurgent racial voicings. In doing so, however, its has attempted to manage if not mitigate the effects of such challenges though efforts to institutionalize hip hop within the structural and discursive folds of revolutionary national "culture." While such endeavors may have had their restrictive affects, is its also evident that the Cuban hip hop

movement has been able to exploit such openings in order pose critiques and expose contradictions in both discursive and material realms of the Cuban everyday.

It is yet to be seen, however, what the ultimate consequences of such increased revolutionary "national" incorporation will be on the viability of Cuban hip hop as a site of alternative racial articulation and politics. Robin Moore, for instance, has documented the ways in which the *nueva trova* movement of the 1960s and 70s in Cuba was transformed from a youth-derived protest music to a prominent component of institutionalized music making (Moore 2001). Much like raperos/as today, *trovadoras* were early products of the Revolution who embraced many of the ideals of socialism while critically questioning the extent to which such ideals were being realized in revolutionary society. Moore points out that the Cuban state was not initially receptive to such questionings and respond with a period of political intimidation and repression directed at a number of the movement's lead artists including Pablo Milanés and Silvio Rodríguez (Moore 2001: 188). A shift occurred, however, by the early 1970s with the establishment of el Movimiento Nacional de la Trova (MNT) under the Ministry of Culture which effective institutionalized the *nueva trova* movement within the state apparatus. While such moves provided *trovadoras* much needed access to state-controlled resources such as performance venues, studio time, and distribution networks, Moore notes that the new arrangement affected the movement's political autonomy of voice. Artists' work was now under tighter scrutiny, beholden to possibilities of losing the state's favor if they did not tread lightly. As Moore phrases it: "Established *trovadores* thus walked an ever more delicate line between fidelity to a government that

now supported them and fidelity to themselves and their own points of view" (Moore 2001:192).

The question to which the example of *nueva trova* begs, therefore, is whether Cuban hip hop might be faced with similar challenges. I recall Magia telling me some years ago that some had likened *hip hop Cubano* to the "La nueva nueva trova" (the new *nueva trova*) – an analogy Ariel also picked up on in one of his articles (Fernández 2000). Its most likely that none of us at the time was completely aware of the range of implications that such an analogy could possible represent. At the same time, however, what is clearly apparent is that hip hop and the Cuban state are engaged in something of an on-going dialectic of mutual negotiation in which each seeks to affect the other while both are transformed to some extent thought the process. Such negotiations take place, moreover, within the broader context of a shifting (trans-)national landscape; one which shapes both actors as well as the contemporary socioeconomic and political imperatives which drive them.

## Concluding Thoughts

I have throughout this dissertation employed the term "movement" to describe the active and evolving character of hip hop in Cuba. At one level I use the phrase because raperos/as themselves refer to the cultural, social, and political space they have forged through their music and labors as *un movimiento*. Granted, within Cuban Spanish argot the term "movimiento" is often used in a more culturalist sense to describe, for example, the previously discussed illustration of *el movimiento nueva trova*. Such usage is in large part juxtaposed to the ways we in the U.S. tend to speak of social and/or political "movements" in more formal political terms. Even in the case of *nueva trova* there clearly was an organic political component to the music in its inception. For most Cuban raperos/as, however, politics remains much at the center of what it is that delineates the orientation and thrust of hip hop as a sociocultural phenomenon in Cuba today. As social actors, Cuban MCs define both themselves and their music through such political commitments. And here again it is identity, in particular critically-positioned identities of blackness, which serve as the basis for such political articulations. By identifying themselves as *un movimiento* raperos/as seek at a discursive level to give cohesion and form to these race-based assertions and their contestations.

In what ways, then, might the example of Cuban hip hop speak to the broader contemporary phenomenon of new social movements, particularly as they have emerged within the Latin American context? Clearly, Cuban hip hop shares with many of these recent, subalternly-positioned forms of social mobilization the instrumentality of identity

as the ground upon which to make and move a politics towards claiming greater rights and resources within otherwise exclusionary national settings (Escobar and Alvarez 1992). Similar to the rise of both indigenous and black social movements in Latin America, the identities articulated and mobilized by raperos/as are done so through the language of difference. While both indigenous and black-oriented social movements have tended to evoke – at times strategically – such difference through discourses of "cultural" or "ethnic" differentiation vis-à-vis the *mestizo* nation (Warren 1998; Wade 1993, 1997; Archa 1998; Perry 1999; Thorne 2004), within the context of Cuban hip hop, difference is asserted in explicitly racial terms. Overt expressions of racial difference which have long been superseded, if not effectively silenced, under both pre and post-1959 nationalist projects are now finding new politicized voice and form through the space of Cuban hip hop. Here, the politics of identity are at the same time "expressive" as they are "instrumental" in the sense that hip hop offers a new organizing frame for the social constitution of blackness, while simultaneously serving as medium through which such blackness can be collectively set in motion (Foweraker 1995).

In apparent contrast to much of the new social movement literature which has tended to focus on more formally-organized kinds of social mobilization, the racial identity politics engendered and deployed through Cuban hip hop are not necessarily exercised in such conventional ways. Rather, it is through performance-based practices of cultural production that the politics of identity are realized and acted upon. As opposed to dismissing these efforts as an example of a politically ineffective "culturalists" approach to racial politics (Hanchard 1994), its is necessary to recognize

the ways that raperos/as are utilizing realms of expressive culture to affect the political terms of debate on race in Cuba in ways that may potentially contribute to greater social democratization (Dagnino 1998). Indeed, value-based distinctions traditionally drawn between the cultural/discursive and the material/political may analytically obfuscate more than they illuminate (Hale 1997, 2004; Wade 1999). While it is quite possible that the challenges that hip hop presents run the risk of being politically neutralized, or at least significantly diffused, through their incorporation within the institutional frameworks of revolutionary national culture (i.e. Hanchard 1994), it is also quite possible that significant numbers of raperos/as may retain a level of critical distance from which to continue to advocate and agitate from positions of relative autonomy. There have indeed been recent efforts within some important sectors of the movement to resist on-going processes of state incorporation. Alternative sites and resources outside institutional spheres of control have began to emerge, while a number of established groups including some, though certainly not all, within the state-run La Agencia de Rap have begun distancing themselves from state-involved projects.

The insurgent black identity politics that undergird Cuban hip hop, like many identity-based frameworks upon which other new social movements have been grounded, have emerged in significant part due to the erosion of the hegemonic salience of the national-popular project – predicated on ideological variations of *mestizaje* – which has taken place throughout Latin America (Hale 1997). In the case of Cuba, revolutionary socialism's positing of a homogenized, non-racial national identity of inclusion has been significantly undermined by incursions of global capital and their fragmenting and

socially differentiating affects. The utopic, modernist promise of a unified, racially and socially egalitarian nation could no longer be supported under the weight of historical contradictions exposed and exacerbated by late capitalist transformations.

Such processes call to mind scholarship exploring the linkages between neoliberal capital expansion and the rise of identity-based social movements (e.g. Harvey 1998), as well those that deal more broadly with the constitution of new kinds of neoliberal subject formation (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2001). Drawing on her work with Chinese immigrant female garment workers, Lisa Lowe has suggested that while transnational capital is currently engendering differentiated forms of exploitation and oppression along lines of race and gender, it is paradoxically enabling the formation of new "political" subjects who can and do work towards collective social action (Lowe 1997). For Lowe sites of cultural production serves as spaces through which such political subjectivities are actively constituted and, moreover, are done in ways that transcend the limits of the nation-state itself. Similar processes, I have argued, have and continue to operate within the sociocultural context of contemporary Cuban hip hop.

At the same time Charles Hale has suggested that neoliberal reform in Latin America has actively encouraged the adoption of multiculturalism as a new form of state governance to replace the previous moment's hegemonic national paradigm of *mestizaje* (Hale 2002, 2004). While such "neoliberal multiculturalism" may open up space for new kinds of political organizing around subaltern locations of difference, Hale argues that these developments may also serve the interests of transnational capital by providing a premise of greater political rights while enabling further neoliberal restructuring of the

socioeconomic landscape. In a similar vein, others have likened multiculturalism in the North to a reformist strategy of neoliberalism which seeks to exploit discourses of difference as means of fetishizing and commodifying otherness (Gilroy 2000; San Juan 2002). In doing so, E. San Juan has argued, "others" are ultimately consumed back within the fold of politically debilitating national hegemonies which (now) deny the existence of structural inequalities under a "refurbished humanist cosmopolitanism" (San Juan 2002:7).

In the case of Cuba, however, such framings of neoliberalism and its impacts have an important caveat. Unlike most of the "developing" world, Cuba's still self-identified socialist leadership has refused to this point to engage in formal contractual relationships with international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) – relationships that would dictate the conditions of neoliberal restructuring and policy "reforms" that have taken hold of much of the hemisphere. As such, the kind of politically calculated, or at least systemically implemented encouragement of a neoliberal multiculturalism to which Hale speaks is not as directly applicable in the case of Cuba. However, it is unquestionable that in a much broader sense "the logics" (i.e. Jameson 1991) of neoliberal capital expansion and its socially differentiating effects, as mentioned, are very much at play within Cuba today. My discussion of Cuba's new racialized economy and the emergent race-based social strategies and processes of black self-making which have arisen largely in response is very much predicated on this analytical assumption.

The question then becomes whether one should heed critics' cautions about the potential political risks of celebratory renderings of black racial difference as in the case of Cuban hip hop, without garnering any significant political gains from such moves. Here it is clear that the Cuban state has for various reasons both cautiously expanded the space for racial articulation (Chapter 6) as well as exploited a new marketability of Cuban blackness (Chapter 3) towards its own strategic ends. And it has done so, moreover, largely in response to new socioeconomic imperatives tied to the growing incursion of transnational capital within the Cuban national landscape. As such, Hale, San Juan and others' collective warnings regarding the politically neutralizing tendencies of neoliberal multiculturalism may in fact be actively resonant within contemporary Cuba. In the case of Cuba's racialized sex trade, the sexualized commodification of black bodies for tourist consumption might offer the most dramatic expression of what San Juan refers to as a reconstitution of social relations through an economy of difference in which "privatized sensibilities and sensoriums become the chief organs of consumerist experience." (San Juan 2002:8). I have argued, however, that even within the logics of this particular "economy of blackness" black and darker-skinned Cubans have found ways to exercise strategic forms of social agency.

Having said this, a very real and immediate challenge facing Cuban hip hop is the extent to which its increased commercialization – fed by the same neoliberal processes – might further erode the political-directed character and commitments of raperos/as and their music. In contemplating this question it is worth considering the recent example of Cubanitos 20-02. As one of the first groups to be adopted within La Agencia de Rap's

representational roster, Cubanitos 20-02 has become arguably the biggest commercial success of domestically-produced hip hop in Cuba.[168] Unlike most groups discussed, Cubanitos are unapologetically commercial in performance style and lyrical content. Emphasizing dance beats and party themes over politics and social critique, the trio formed in 2002 have heavily incorporated stylistic elements of *reggaeton* – the hip hop/reggae hybrid genre out of the Spanish Caribbean which has recently swept Cuba. The group's 2002 album was widely popular among Cuban youth, reaching far beyond Cuban hip hop's traditional loyal following thanks largely to their catchy dance rhythms and playful lyrics. Cubanitos, through the coordination of La Agencia, is reported to have conducted an international tour during the summer of 2004. What is additionally noteworthy here is that one of the group's members, DJ Flipper, was originally part of the pioneering hip hop group Primera Base discussed in Chapter 4. To recall, Primera Base was one of the first of Cuban groups to articulate a politicized black racial identity.[169] Could this be the way for more raperos/as in the future? There have in fact been other Havana-based artists who have more recently gone the way of commercial *reggaeton*, a development which has contributed to something of a split within the movement between more commercial and more politically-minded, aesthetically pure "underground" hip hop artists.

Cuban hip hop has, however, emerged and continues to persist as a vital site of critical black self-making or, as Joao Costa Vargas has suggested in another context, a

---

[168] Again, a distinction needs to be made between locally-produced hip hop and the previously discussed example of Orishas which, though unquestionably the most commercially successful in international terms, was produced overseas for an international market.
[169] It may also be worth noting that Flipper is one a very few "white" Cuban MCs.

space of "black radical becoming" (Costa Vargas 2004). Beyond the immediate contexts of their making, these new historical actors are actively engaged in affecting the frames of both national-dominant as well as racially-alternative public spheres of sociopolitical articulation. In so doing Cuban raperos/as must be seen in historical terms as both subjects and social agents within Cuba's shifting terrain of national racial formation. I speak here again of racial formation in the sense that Michael Omi and Howard Winant have used the term to describe competing "racial projects" undertaken by social actors, inclusive of the state, in the continual making and remaking of racial meaning and corresponding structures and relations of power (Omi and Winant 1986). It is fairly evident in this light that the Cuban hip hop movement and the Cuban state are invested in advancing distinct kinds of racial projects. The two, however, are operating within a larger set of national and transnational frameworks of power that additionally affect the character and dynamics of these processes.

The eventual outcome or at least direction that such positioned plays of power will take – as with practically everything in Cuba today – remains to be seen. However, what is currently transpiring with Cuban hip hop underscores the potentially transformative effect that transnationally-engaged, race-based social strategies have on "modern" national formations where the terrain of blackness itself becomes a site of social praxis. Although Paul Gilroy, for one, has lamented that black cultural practices and their liberatory impulses are "being transformed beyond recognition by the uneven effects of globalization and planetary commerce in blackness" (Gilroy 2000:13), what he and others seem to have forgotten is that these same commercially-mediated modes of

black expressive culture often retain a capacity to convey oppositionally-positioned racial politics across time and space. These conduits of black transnationalism can be drawn upon and redeployed within new contexts of struggle. Young raperos/as are representative of a new generation of Cubans who will soon inherit a rapidly transforming Cuba. Their transnationally-informed positionalities and on-going abilities to critically engage others will certainly have meaningful and lasting effects.

## Bibliography


Acosta, Leonardo
2003 *Cubano Be, Cubano Bop: One Hundred Years of Jazz in Cuba*. translated by Daniel S. Whitesell. Washington DC: Smithsonian Books.

Aguilar, Luis E.
1996 [1993] "Cuba, *c.* 1860 - *c.* 1930." in *Cuba: A Short History*. Leslie Bethell, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 21-56.

Aidi, Hisham
2001 "B-Boys in 'Les Banlieuses': Hip Hop Culture in France." web-article <www.africana.com>

Allen, Ernest Jr.
1996 "Making the Strong Survive: The Contours and Contradictions of Message Rap." in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap, Music, and Hip Hop Culture*. William Eric Perkins, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp.159-191.

Althusser, Louis
1971 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus." in *Lenin and Philosophy, and other Essays*. New Left Books.

Anderson, Benedict
1991 *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun
1996 *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Archa, Jamie
1998 "Inclusion of Afro-Colombians: Unreachable Goal?" *Latin America Perspectives* 25(3):70-89.

Arenas, Reinaldo
1993 *Before Night Falls*. New York: Viking.

Arrizón, Alicia
2002 "Race-ing Performativity through Transculturation, Taste and the Mulata Body." *Theatre Research International* 27(2):136-152.

Balibar, Etienne
1991 "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, London: Verso.

Balibar, Etienne and Immanuel Wallerstein
1991 *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso.

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, Cristina Szanton Blanc
1994 *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Langhorne, PA.: Gordon and Breach.

Baraka, Amiri (LeRoi Jones)
1963 *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*. New York: William Morrow.

Bejel, Emilio
2001 *Gay Cuban Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bennett, Andy
1999 "Hip Hop am Main: The Localization of Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture." *Media, Culture & Society* 21:77-91.

Brock, Lisa and Digna Castañeda Fuertes (et al.)
1998 *Race and Empire: African Americas and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Brown, Elaine
1992 *A Taste of Power: A Black Woman's Story.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Brundenius, Claes
2002 "Whither the Cuban Economy After Recovery? The Reform Process, Upgrading Strategies and the Question of Transition." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34(2):365-396.

Burdick, John
1998 *Blessed Anastácia: Women, Race, and Popular Christianity in Brazil*. New York: Routledge.

Butler, Judith
1990 *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
1993 *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge.

Cabeza, Amalia Lucía

1998 "Discourses of Prostitution: The Case of Cuba" in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, eds. New York: Routledge. pp. 79-86.

Cagler, Ayse
1998 "Popular Culture, Marginality and Institutional Incorporation: German-Turkish Rap and Turkish Pop in Berlin." *Cultural Dynamics* 10(3):243-262.

Cancio Isla, Wilfredo
2001 "Rapero De Cuba Se Queda En EU." *El Nuevo Herald*, November 16, 2001

Carr, Barry
1998 "Identity, Class, and Nation: Black Immigrant Workers, Cuban Communism, and the Sugar Insurgency, 1925-1934." *Hispanic American Historical Review* 78(1):83-116.

Casal, Lordes
1979 "Race Relations in Contemporary Cuba." in *The Position of Blacks in Brazilian and Cuban Society*, *Minority Rights Group Report*, 7, pp. 11–27.

Chatterjee, Partha
1993 *Nations and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Childs, Matt David
2001 *The Aponte Rebellion of 1812 and the Transformation of Cuban Society: Race, Slavery, and Freedom in the Atlantic World.* dissertation thesis. Department of History, University of Texas, Austin.

Comaroff, Jean and John L. Comaroff
2001 "Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming," in *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, eds. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1- 56.

Combahee River Collective
1986 *The Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties*. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press.

Comellas, Miguel
2004 "1.9 Million Visitors in 2003." *Granma International* January 11. 2004.

Costa Vargas, João
2003 "The Inner City and the Favela: Transnational Black Politics" *Race & Class* 44:19-40.

2004 "Black Radical Becoming in The African Diaspora: Imagining Beyond The Master's Tools And Embracing Liberation." (forthcoming article)

Dagnino, Evelina
1998 "Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left." in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Culture: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements*. Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds. Boulder: Westview Press. pp. 33-63.

Daniel, Yvonne
1995 *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Darlington, Shasta
2000 "Brazilian Rappers Speak to the Poor: Popular Duo Launch Recording Career From Notorious San Paulo Prison" *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto) September 5, 2000 p. A10.

Davies, Catherine
2000 "Surviving (on) the Sup of Signs: Postmodernism, Politics, and Culture in Cuba." *Latin American Perspectives* 113 27(4):103-121.

Dawson, Michael C.
1995 "A Black Counterpublic? Economic Earthquakes, Racial Aganda(s), and Black Politics." in *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*. Houston Baker Jr. and Michael C. Dawson, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 199-227.

de Albuquergue, Klas
1998 "In Search of the Big Bamboo: Among Sex Tourists in the Caribbean." *Transitions* 8(1): 48-57.

De Genova, Nick
1995 "Gangster Rap and Nihilism in Black America: Some Questions of Life and Death." *Social Text*. 13(2): 89-133

de la Fuente, Alejandro
1995 "Race and Inequality in Cuba, 1899–1981." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30:131–167.
1998 "Recreating Racism: Race and Discrimination in Cuba's Special Period." *Cuba Briefing Paper Series* 18. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.
1999 "Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900-1912." Latin American Research Review. 34(3):39-69.
2001 *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

del Barco, Mandalit
1996 "Rap's Latin Sabor." in *Dropping Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, William Eric Perkins, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 63-84.

Diawara, Manthia
1998 *In Search of Africa*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dilla Alfonso, Haroldo
2002 "Cuba: The Changing Scenarios of Governability." *Boundary 2* 29(3):55-75.

Dominguez, Jorge
1992 "Cuba Since 1959" in *Cuba: A Short History*. Leslie Bethel, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 95-148.

Du Bois, W.E.B.
1989 [1903] *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Bantam.

Duharte Jiménez, Rafael
1993 "The 19th Century Black Fear." in *AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race,Politics and Culture*. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds. Melbourne: Ocean Press.

Elfein, Dietmar
1998 "From Krauts with Attitudes to Turks with Attitudes: Some Aspects of Hip-Hop History in Germany." *Popular Music* 17(3): 255-65.

Ellis, Keith
1998 "Nicolás Guillén and Langston Hughes: Convergences and Divergences." in *Between Race and Empire: African Americas and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, eds. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. pp. 129-167.

Escobar, Arturo and Sonia Alvarez
1992 The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy, Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, eds. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Featherstone, Mike and Scott Lash
1995 "Globalization, Modernity and Spatialization of Social Theory: An Introduction." in *Global Modernities*. Mike Featherstone et al. eds. London: Sage.

Flores, Juan

1994 "Puerto Rican and Proud, Boyee! Rap Roots and Amnesia." in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*. Andrew Ross and Tricia Ross, eds., New York: Routledge, pp. 89-98.
1996 "Puerto Rocks: New York Ricans Stake Their Claim." in *Dropping Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture*, William Eric Perkins, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 85-105.

Fernandes, Sujatha
2003a "Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings, and State Power in Contemporary Cuba." *Anthropological Quarterly*, 76 (4): 575-608.
2003b "Island Paradise, Revolutionary Utopia or Hustler's Haven? Consumerism and Socialism in Contemporary Cuban Rap." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 12(3).359-375.

Fernández, Ariel
2000 "¿Poesía Urbana? o la Nueva Trova de los Noventa." *El Caimán Barbudo* 296: 4-14.

Fernández, Nadine
1996 "The Color of Love: Young Interracial Couples in Cuba." *Latin American Perspectives.* 23 (1): 99-118.
2001 "The Changing Discourse on Race in Contemporary Cuba." *Qualitative Studies In Education* 14(2):117–132.

Fernández Robaina, Tomás
1993 "The 20th Century Black Question." in *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture.* Pedro Pérez Sarduy, and Jean Stubbs, eds. Melbourne: Ocean Press. pp. 92-105.
1990 *El negro en Cuba, 1902-1958: Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial*. Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales.
1998 "Marcus Garvey in Cuba: Urrutia, Cubans, and Black Nationalism." in *Between Race and Empire: African Americas and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*. Lias Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes, eds. Philidelphia: Temple University Press., pp. 120-28.
2002 "El Tratamiento del Tema Negro en el Rap" *La Jiribilla*, Havana. <http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2002/n67_agosto/1605_67.html>

Ferrer, Ada
1998a "The Silencing of Patriots: Race and Nationalism in Marti's Cuba." in Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A Fernández, eds. *Jose Marti's "Our America": From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, pp. 228-249.
1998b "Rustic Men, Civilized Nation: Race, Culture, and Contention on the Eve of Cuban Independence." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*. 78(4):663-668.

1999 *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Foucault, Michel
1977 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage.

Foweraker, Joe
1995 *Theorizing Social Movements*. London: Pluto Press.

Fraginals Manuel
1978 *EL ingenio*. Editorial Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, Cuba.

Furé, Rogelio Martinez
2000 "Homogenizing Monomania and the Plural Heritage." in *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*. Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, pp. 154-161

Fusco, Coco
1992 "Pan-American Postnationalism: Another World Order." in *Black Popular Culture*, Gina Dent, ed. Seattle: Bay Press. pp. 279-283.
1998 "Hustling for Dollars: *Jineterismo* in Cuba." in *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, eds. New York: Routledge, pp. 151-166.

Garofalo, Reebee
1993 "Whose World, What Beat? The Transnational Music Industry, Identity, and Cultural Imperialism." *The World of Music: Journal of the International Institute for Traditional Music* 35(2):16-32.

Gilroy, Paul
1987 *There Ain't No Black in The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
1993a *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
1993b *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. London: Serpent's Tail.
2000 *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Godreau, Isar
2002 "Changing Space, Making Race: Distance, Nostalgia, and the Folklorization of Blackness in Puerto Rico." *Identities* 9:281-304.

Gordon, Edmund T. and Mark Anderson

1999 "The African Diaspora: Towards an Ethnography of Diasporic Identification." *Journal of America Folklore* 112(445):282-296.

Guridy, Frank
2003 "From Solidarity to Cross-Fertilization: Afro-Cuban/African American Interaction during the 1930s and 1940s." *Radical History Review* 87(1):19-48.

Guevara, Nancy
1996 "Women Writti' Rappin' Breakin'." in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture*. Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds. New York: Routledge, pp. 49-62.

Hagedorn, Katherine
2001 *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Hale, Charles R.
1997 "Cultural Politics of Identity in Latin America." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26:567-90.
2002 "Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34:485-524.
2004 "Rethinking Indigenous Politics in the Ear of the 'Indio Permitido'." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 38(2):16-21.

Hall, Stuart
1986 "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10(2):5–27.
1992 "What is this Black in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*. Gina Dent, ed. Seattle: Bay Press. pp. 21-33.
1996 "Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay, eds. London: Sage Publications, pp. 1-17.

Hammond, Jack
1999 "The High Cost Of Dollars." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 32(5):24-5.

Hanchard, Michael
1994 *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
1995 "Black Cinderella?: Race and the Public Sphere in Brazil." in *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book*. Houston Baker Jr. and Michael C. Dawson, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 165-185.
1999 "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora." *Public Culture* 11(1):245-268.

Hannerz, Ulf
1996 *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. New York: Routledge.

Hansing, Katrin
2001 "Rasta, Race and Revolution: Transnational Connections in Socialist Cuba" *Journal for Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27(4): 32-47.

Harvey, David
1989 *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Cambridge: Blackwell.

Harvey, Neil
1998 *The Chiapas Rebellion and the Struggle for Land and Democracy*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Hebdige, Dick
1988 [1979] *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Comedia - Routledge.
1987 *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music.* London: Comedia.

Helg, Aline
1995 *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality*, *1886–1912*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Hernandez-Reguant, Ariana
2004 "Blackness with a Cuban Beat." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 8(2):31-36.

Hernandez Rodriguez, Rafael
2003 *Looking at Cuba: Essays on Culture and Civil Society*. translated by Dick Cluster. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Herskovits, Melville J.
1938 *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact*. New York : J. J. Augustin.

Hidalgo, Vilma and Milagros Martinez
2000 "Is the U.S. Economic Embargo on Cuba Morally Defensible?" *Logos* 3(4):100-120.

Hoch, Danny
1999 "La Revolución Embraces Hip-Hop with Fidel's Blessing." *Village Voice,* October 5, 1999, p. 194.

Hodge, G. Derrick
2001 "Colonization of the Cuban Body: The Growth of Male Sex Work in Havana," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 34( 5):20-24.

Isla, Cancio
2001 "Rapero de Cuba se queda en EU." *El Nuevo Herald,* November 16, 2001, p.18A.

Jamail, Milton
2000 *Full Count: Inside Cuban Baseball*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Jameson, Fredric
1991 "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." in *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-54.

Jatar-Hausmann, Ana Julia
1999 *The Cuban Way: Capitalism, Communism, and Confrontation*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.

Joseph, P. E
2002 "Where Blackness is Bright? Cuba, Africa and Black Liberation During the Age of Civil Rights." *New Formations.* 45: 111-124.

Kelley, Robin
1996 "Kickin' Reality, Kickin Ballistics: Gansta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles" in *Droppin' Science: Critical Essays on Rap, Music, and Hip Hop Culture*. William Eric Perkins, ed. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 117-158.
1997 *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Kamala Kempadoo, ed
1999 *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Krims, Adam
2000 *Rap Music and The Poetics of Identity.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kritzman Lawrence
2000 "Identity Crisis: France, Culture, and the Idea of the Nation" in *French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads*. Marie-Pierre Le Hir and Dana Strand, eds. State University of New York Press. pp. 11 -27.

Kutzinski, Vera
1993 *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Lavie, Smadar and Ted Swedenburg, eds.
1996 *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Leeds, Jeff
2000 "Speaking in Tongues: Rap Music in Korea and Polish? As the Hip-Hop Culture Explodes Worldwide Record Label Def Jam is Leading the Race to Capitalized on the Phenomenon." *Los Angeles Times* December 17, 2000, p. C-1.

Lemelle, Sydney J. and Robin Kelley
1994 "Imagining Home: Pan-Africanism Revisited" in *Imaging Home: Class, Culture and Nationalsim in the African Diaspora*. Sydney J. Lemelle and Robin Kelley, eds. New York: Verso. pp. 1-16.

Leogrande, William and Julie Tomas
2002 "Cuba's Quest for Economic Independence." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34(2):325-363.

Lowe, Lisa
1997 "Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural Politics." in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp. 354-374.

Lowe, Lisa and David Lloyd.
1997 *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Lipsitz, George
1994 *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Politics of Place*. New York: Verso Press.

Lorde, Audrey
1984 *Sister Outsider*: *Essay and Speeches.* Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

Lumsden, Ian
1996 *Machos, Maricones, and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Magaldi, Cristina
1999 "Adopting Imports: New Images and Alliances in Brazilian Popular Music of The 1990s." *Popular Music* 18(3):309-329.

Martínez-Alier, Verena

1989 [1974] *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba. A study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Martínez-Echazábal, Lourde
1998 "Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845-1959." *Latin American Perspectives,* issue 100, 25(3):22-42.

Masferrer, M. and C. Mesa Lago
1974 "The Gradual Integration of the Black in Cuba Under the Colony, the Republic, and the Revolution." in *Slavery and Race Relations in Latin America*. R. Toplin, ed. Westport: Greenwood Press. pp. 348-84.

Mateo, David
2003 "No Todos Los Negros Tomandos Café." *La Gaceta de Cuba* (mayo-junio): La Habana: Ediciones Unión. pp. 22-26.

McDaniles, Andrea
1999 "Striking Cord With Youths, Brazil Rappers Nudge Reform" *The Christian Science Monitor* January 11, 1999, p. 7.

McGarrity, Gayle and Osvaldo Cárdenas
1995 "Cuba." in *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*. London: The Miniority Rights Group. pp. 77-107.

McLaren, Peter
1995 "Gangsta Pedagogy and Ghettoethnicity: The Hip Hop Nation as a Counterpublic Sphere." *Socialist Review* 25(2):9-57.

McNay, Lois
1994 *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge, U.K. Polity Press.

Mintz, Sidney
1985 *Sweetness And Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking.

Mitchell, Tony
1996 *Popular Music and Local Identity: Rock, Pop, and Rap in Europe and Oceania*. London: Leicester University Press.

Mitchell, Tony et al.
2001 *Global Noise: Rap and Hip Hop Outside the USA*. Tony Mitchell, ed. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Morejón, Nancy
1993 "Race and Nation." in *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture.* Pedro Pérez Sarduy, and Jean Stubbs, eds. Melbourne: Ocean Press, pp. 227- 237.

Moore, Carlos
1988 *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa*. Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, Center for Afro-American Studies, UCLA.

Moore, Robin
1994 "Representations of Afro-Cuban Expressive Culture in the Writings of Fernando Ortiz." *Latin American Music Review* 15(2):32-54.
1997 *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
2001 "From the Canción de Protesta to the Nueva Trova, 1965-85." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14(2):177-200.

Nassy Brown, Jacqueline
1998 "Black Liverpool, Black America, and the Gendering of Diasporic Space." *Cultural Anthropology* 13(3):291-325.

O'Connell Davidson, Julia
1996 "Sex Tourism in Cuba." *Race and* Class 38(1):39-48.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant
1986 *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960's to the 1980's*. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Olavarria Margot
2002 "Rap and Revolution: Hop Hop Comes to Cuba." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 35(6):28-30.

Ong, Aihwa
1999 *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ortiz, Fernando
1973 [1906] *Los negros brujos*. Reprint of second edition. Miami: Ediciones Universal.
1963 [1940] *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. La Habana: Direccion de publicaciones Universidad Central de las villas.

Palmie, Stephan

2002 *Wizards and Scientists*: *Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Paquette, Robert L.
1988 *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires Over Slavery in Cuba*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Parker, Dick
1999 "The Cuban Revolution: Resilience and Uncertainty." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 32(5):17-20.

Pérez, Louis
1988 *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press.
1999 *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Pérez Sarduy, Pedro and Jean Stubbs, eds.
2000 *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Perry, Marc D.
1999 *Garifuna Youth in New York City: Race, Ethnicity, and the Performance of Diasporic Identities*. MA Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Texas, Austin.

Pacini Hernández, Deborah and Reeebee Garofalo
2000 "Hip Hop in Havana: Rap. Race, and National Identity in Contemporary Cuba." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 11/12:18-47.

Phillips, Joan
1998 "Tourism-Oriented Prostitution in Barbados: The Case of the Beach Boy and the White Female Tourist." in *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*. Kamala Kempadoo ed., Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. pp.183-200.

Potter, Russell
1995 *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip Hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pough, Gwendolyn D
2004 *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Prévos, André
1996 "The Evolution of French Rap Music and Hip Hop Culture in the 1980s and 1990s." *The French Review* 69(5):713-725.
1998 "Hip-Hop, Rap, and Repression in France and the United States." *Popular Music and Society* 22(2):67-84.

Reitan, Ruth
1999 *The Rise and Decline of an Alliance: Cuban and African American Leaders in the 1960s.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press.

Ring, Harry
1961 *How Cuba Uprooted Race Discrimination*. New York: Pioneer Publishers.

Rivera, Raquel
2003 *New York Ricans From the Hip Hop Zone*. New York: Palgrave.

Rosaldo, Renato
1989 "Imperialist Nostalgia." *Representations* 26:107-122.

Robinson, Eugene
2002 "The Rap Revolución." *Washington Post,* Sunday, April 14, 2002, G01

Rose, Mike
2001 *Edmonton Sun*, Wednesday, June 28, 2001

Rose, Tricia
1994 *Black Noise.* Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.

Rosello, Mireille
2000 "Rap Music and French Cultural Studies." in *French Cultural Studies: Criticism at the Crossroads*. Marie-Pierre Le Hir and Dana Strand, eds. State University of New York Press. pp. 81-102.

Ross, Andrew
1994 "Introduction." in *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture.* Andrew Ross and Tricia Rose, eds. New York: Routledge, pp1-16.

Rouse, Roger
1991 "Mexican Migration and the Social Space of Postmodernism." *Diaspora* (1):8-23.

Safa, Helen
1998 "Introduction." in *Race and National Identity in the Americas*, *Latin American Perspectives*, issue 100, 25(3):33-20.

San Juan, E.
2002 *Racism and Cultural Studies: Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and The Politics of Difference.* Durham, NC : Duke University Press.

Sansone, Livio
1997 "New Blacks from Bahia: Local and Global Afro-Bahia." *Identities* 3(4):457-494.
2003 *Blackness Without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schwartz, Rosalie
1997 *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Segal, Ronald
1995 *The Black Diaspora*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Selier Crespo, Yesenia
2002 "Identidad Racial de Gente Sin Historia." *Caminos* 24/25. Centro de Memoria Martin Lurther King. Habana.

Serviat, Pedro
1986 *El problema negro en Cuba y su solución definitiva.* Havana: Editora Política.

Shnookal, Debora and Mirtha Muñez. eds.
1999 *José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas*. New York: Ocean Press.

Smith, Anthony
1991 *National Identities*. Reno, Nevada: University of Nevada Press.

Smith, Shawnee
1998 "Words & Deeds: Cuban Hip-Hop Starts To Come Into Its Own." *Billboard* September 19, 1998.

Sokol, Brett
2000 "Rap Takes Root Where Free Expression is Risky" *New York Times*, September 3, 2000.

Stutzman, Ronald
1981 "El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion." in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*. Norman Whitten and Arlene Torres, eds. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, pp. 45-93.

Swedenburg, Ted
2001 "Islamic Hip-Hop vs. Islamaphobia: Aki Nawaz, Natacha Atlas, Akhenaton." in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-hop Outside the USA*, Tony Mitchell, ed. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press. pp. 57-84.

Thomas, Hugh
1996 [1993] "Cuba, c. 1750 - c. 1860." in *Cuba: A Short History*. Leslie Bethell, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thorne, Eva
2004 "Land Rights and Garifuna Identity." *NACLA* Report on the Americas 38(2):21-25

Ullestad, Neal
1999 "American Indian Rap and Reggae: Dancing to the Beat of a Different Drummer." *Popular Music and Society* 23(2):62-91.

Varela, Jesse
2002 "Orishas Emigrante – Reseña." *Latin Beat Magazine* September 2002.

Vasconcelos, José
1979 [1925] *The Cosmic Race/La raza cósmica.* Didien T. Jaén, ed. Los Angeles: Pace.

Verán, Cristina
1998 "¡Viva la rap revolución!" *The Source* (January 1989). pp. 132-140.

Wade, Peter
1993 *Blackness and Race Mixture*: *The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Columbia.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
1997 *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. Chicago: Pluto Press.
1999 "Working Culture: Making Cultural Identities in Cali, Columbia." *Current Anthropology* 40(4):449-471.

Warren, Kay
1998 *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Williams, Claudette
2000 *Charcoal & Cinnamon: The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Williams, Raymond.
1977 *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford Press.

Winant, Howard
1994 *Racial Conditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Windance Twine, Frances
1998 *Racism in a Racial Democracy: the Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

West-Durán
2004 "Rap's Diasporic Dialogues: Cuba's Redefinition of Blackness." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 16(1)1: 4-38.

West, Cornell
1990 "The New Cultural Politics of Difference." in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*. Russell Ferguson et al. (eds.) Cambridge: MIT Press.

Other sources:

Behar, Ruth
1999 Panel Presentation as participant in "Complex Relations: Contemporary Art in Cuba." Austin Museum of Art, Austin, Texas. September 25, 1999.

*Associated Press*, July 4 2001

*Prensa Latina*, August 4, 2001

Web sources:

Faber, Jörg
"Cape Town's Hip Hop Scene." *Ntama - Journal of African Music and Popular Culture*, Mainz University. <http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/hiphop/faber/>

Matienzo, María
2004 "Así lo dicen sus textos" *La Jiribilla.* <http://www.lajiribilla.cu/2004/n170_08/170_23.html>

Watrous, Peter
1997 "Eye of the Storm: The Artist and Cuba's Music Industry." *Descarga Newsletter*, 1 April 1997. <www.descarga.com>

“Cuban Prostitutes.” anonymous web posting <http:/cuba-sex.com/cuba_prositutes.htm>

## Vita

Marc David Perry was born in New York City on February 6,1967 to Morton Orville Perry and Margie Francis Ribner Perry. After graduating from New Lincoln high school in Manhattan, he attended Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York where he graduated in 1989 with a B.A. in Africana Studies. Upon graduation he worked for a year as a New York City Urban Fellow with the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice. After completion he traveled to East Africa and spent a year-and-a half working in Kenya and South Africa. Upon returning to the U.S. he worked for five years in documentary film and educational television production. In 1996 he entered graduate studies in the African Diaspora Program in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent Address: 160 W. 97 Street, apt # 7L, New York, NY 10025

This dissertation was typed by the author