

WINTER 2018

ReVista

HARVARD REVIEW OF LATIN AMERICA



AFRO-LATIN AMERICANS

Resistance, Democracy and Music

My dear friend and photographer Richard Cross (R.I.P.) introduced me to the unexpected world of San Basilio de Palenque in Colombia in 1977. He was then working closely with Colombian anthropologist Nina de Friedemann, and I'd been called upon by *Sports Illustrated* to research a story why this little community off the Colombian coast had produced three world-champion boxers. I soon found out that Palenque—as most call it—had been a runaway slave community. The boxing techniques grew out of fist-heavy martial arts intended to fend off attacks.

Richard, who knew everyone in the community, took me to talk to young and old alike, to watch girls and boys practicing their boxing-like martial arts, to learn of the history of this valiant community. Now the struggle was not only one of resistance: it was one of democratic evolution, as the community aimed to make its voice heard to demand roads and other basic services.

Resistance and democracy became the two foundation stones on which this *ReVista* about Afro-Latin Americans has been built. But I also wanted to include a section on humanities. At first, I thought of seeking articles on art, literature, music, dance and film... certainly Afro-Latin American culture has been accomplished in all of these areas, both in the past and nowadays.

But I feared I would be expanding in too many directions. I settled on music alone, although I feared at first that it could be interpreted as a cliché. But I thought about the shape of the issue. Music is resistance and the music of Afrodescendants past and present has been used to resist the dominant white culture. Music is identity—it is a way of asserting oneself and one's heritage. And music is often democratic, allowing all to participate, whether as performer and artist or spectator.

And besides, San Basilio de Palenque—my first intensive experience with an Afro-Latin American community—literally explodes with the sound of drums. The performers of martial arts move with the grace of dance, and the turban-clad Palenque women with basins of fruit on their heads who ply the beaches of Cartagena sell their wares with uncanny songlike chants.

So there we had it, resistance, democracy and music, a bit of Brazil and Colombia and Chile and Cuba and a flurry of other places. One issue of *ReVista* can't pretend to cover everything about a significant part of Latin America's population and history. It's a beginning, an exploration. And it's one that wouldn't have been possible without the excellent collaboration of Alejandro de la Fuente, director of the Afro-Latin American Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research here at Harvard. Not only did he provide inspiration and consultation with his deep and broad knowledge of Afro-Latin America, but he also is responsible for the beautiful artwork that graces this issue and its cover. Thank you, Alejandro!

June C. Erlick

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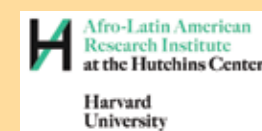
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ON THE COVER
Sin Título, 2017 mixed media
 on cardboard 40x30cm
 By Juan Roberto Diago

FIRST TAKE

The Rise of Afro-Latin America

By ALEJANDRO DE LA FUENTE

IT WAS A FOUNDATIONAL EVENT. NEVER before had so many activists concerned with issues of race and justice in Latin America come together to discuss their experiences and to chart new agendas for the future. Never before had racism and racial inequality been so visible, so central in Latin America. Seventeen years ago, on December 5-7, 2000, more than 1,700 activists, government officials and representatives from regional and international organizations gathered in Santiago de Chile for the Regional Conference of the Americas. They were preparing for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that would take place in Durban, South Africa, a year later. Romero Rodríguez, then president of the Uruguayan organization Mundo Afro, synthesized brilliantly the impact of these events: “*entramos negros, salimos Afrodescendientes*” (“we came in as blacks, but came out as Afrodescendants”).

Romero was highlighting a momentous transformation. In many cases for the very first time, the participating states officially recognized the persistence of racism and discrimination in countries that had frequently claimed to be free from such ills. As the Conference’s concluding declaration stated, “ignoring the existence of discrimination and racism, at both the State and the society level, contributes directly and indirectly to perpetuating the practices of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.” I followed these events carefully, sensing that they would impact our scholarly work and the nascent field of Afro-Latin American studies. Anticipation became certainty thirteen years

later, as I came to Harvard to found the Afro-Latin American Research Institute, the first research institution in the United States devoted to studying the history and cultures of peoples of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean. The new field of study had come of age and this process owed much to the Santiago Regional Conference.

The Conference contributed to the creation of a transnational agenda on race, justice and human rights focused on the specific needs and histories of people of African descent, who in Latin America represent between 20 and 30 percent of the total population. States began to see people of African descent as distinctive political subjects with new legal, cultural and ethnic connotations. The Plan of Action approved by the Conference “urged” states to compile and disseminate information that could be used to implement programs of social inclusion and equality, leading to important policy changes. In country after country, activists used these guidelines to demand the inclusion of ethno-racial categories in national censuses and other official statistics, seeking to counteract the previous invisibility of Afrodescendants. The results are telling. Whereas only the censuses of Cuba and Brazil gathered information according to skin color or race in the 1980s, today almost all countries in the region include this question in some way. Numerous countries introduced constitutional reforms to acknowledge the existence and specificity of peoples of African descent and to explicitly condemn racial discrimination. The number of state offices devoted to issues of discrimination proliferated across the region. Several countries introduced compensatory policies to counter the historical effects of racism and to create educational and economic opportunities for individuals of African descent.

Brazil led many of these efforts, as the administrations of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) implemented a variety of policies that sought to reduce income inequality—including some forms of racial

Romero Rodríguez, then president of the Uruguayan organization Mundo Afro, synthesized brilliantly the impact of these events: “*entramos negros, salimos Afrodescendientes*” (“we came in as blacks, but came out as Afrodescendants”).



A young violinist plays in Cuba.

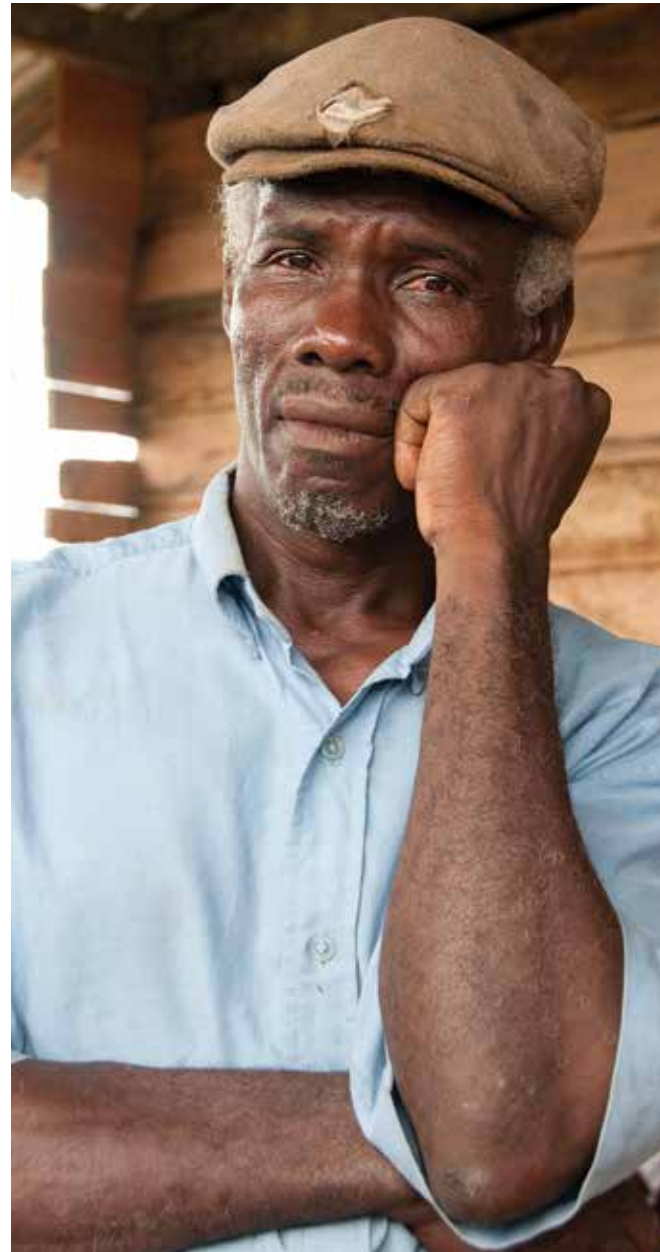
inequality. These included conditional-cash-transfer and income-maintenance programs such as Bolsa Família, which supports families below the poverty level on condition that their children attend school regularly. At the same time, since the 1990s different forms of racial quotas and affirmative action policies in higher education and employment were implemented in that nation, home to the second largest Afrodescendant population in the world, after Nigeria.

These policies were hotly debated and even challenged legally, but in 2012 the Supreme Court decided unanimously that racial quotas were constitutional. That same year the Brazilian Senate approved, almost unanimously, the Law of Social Quotas, requiring the country’s federal universities to reserve one-half of

their entering places for graduates of the country’s public schools; to guarantee that black, brown and indigenous students are represented in numbers equivalent to their proportion in the local population; and also to guarantee that at least half of the quota students meet certain income criteria. These quotas are being phased in gradually and it will take some time before we can evaluate their full impact on Brazilian society. All analysts concur, however, that their impact is significant and, as President Dilma Rousseff told me in one of her visits to Harvard, the quotas are probably irreversible. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the two most prestigious universities in the country, UNICAMP and São Paulo, approved racial quotas in admissions only recently, in the summer of 2017.



Photographer Steve Cagan captures the faces of Afro-Colombians.



In any case, thanks to the concerted efforts of the activists of the Afrodescendant movement, of state institutions, and of a variety of international organizations and actors, it is now impossible to sustain that the countries of Latin America are free from racial discrimination and inequality. This is a major transformation in how the peoples of Latin America think about themselves, their nations, their cultures, and their history.

Afrodescendant activists, artists and politicians who articulated demands for racial justice could be depicted as ungrateful and resentful, even as traitors.

Most scholars and activists have interpreted this transformation as conclusive evidence that the traditional ideologies of mestizaje and racial harmony that came to define the nations of Latin America for decades are now bankrupt. The typical explanation states that the countries of the region have transited “from” ideas of mestizaje and racial democracy “to” the recognition of racial differences and the implementation of racially-based



A Cuban doctor examines a young patient.

policies such as affirmative action. These explanations are based on the belief that race-justice policies are only possible if previous formulations of race and nation that downplayed racial conflicts are debunked as pernicious lies. It is an either/or approach that leaves little room to indeterminacy and creativity: it is either mestizaje *or* racial justice, racial harmony *or* racial equality.

I beg to differ with these interpreta-

tions, which tend to ignore some of the specificities of race making and nation building in Latin America. It is true that the ideologies of mestizaje and racial harmony glossed over social and racial injustices, since they advertised harmony and mixture as the essence of Latin America. It is also true that by linking racial harmony with the fate of the nation, these ideologies condemned certain forms of racial mobilization as antipatriotic and

harmful, contributing in the process to the reproduction of social hierarchies and racial prejudice. Afrodescendant activists, artists and politicians who articulated demands for racial justice could be depicted as ungrateful and resentful, even as traitors. That is why the history of Latin America is littered with examples of upwardly mobile blacks who were shut down, contained, repressed or executed.

But this is not the whole story of race



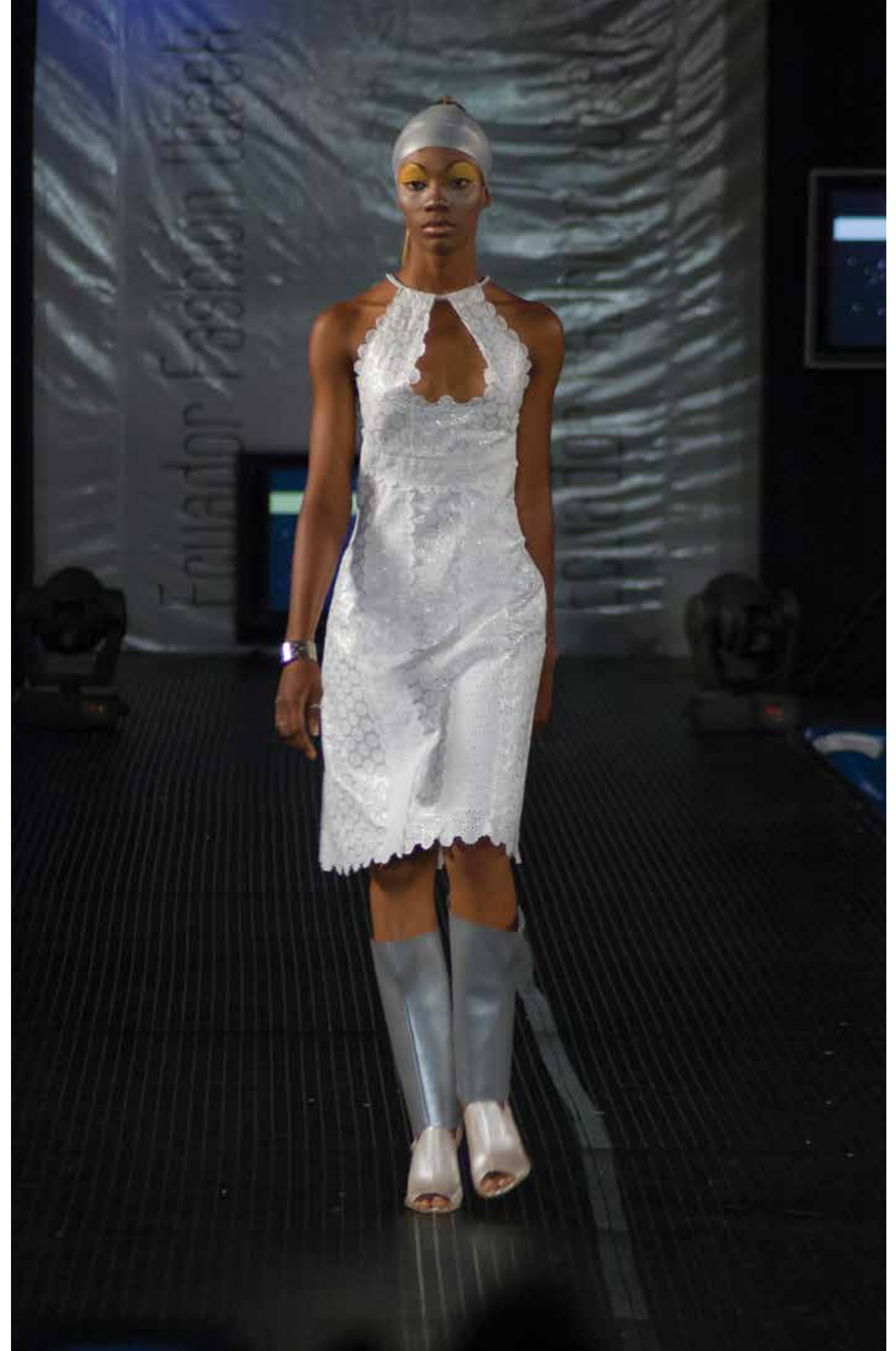
Barbers are at work—maybe a first haircut?

and nation in Latin America. There are other possibilities, other paths. The ideologies of *mestizaje* and harmony were not just tools of social control, but utopian visions of racially harmonious and racially integrated nations, anticipations of a future when racial distinctions would eventually cease to have social meaning and impact. Places so utterly mixed, so hopefully mestizo, that they would be the envy of the allegedly civilized populations of Europe, who spent the early decades of the 20th century killing each other, or of the United States, who spent the same de-

acades lynching the others. *Todo mezclado*, as Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén wrote in the 1940s. It was a familiar metaphor, as illustrated by the Mexican *raza cósmica* of José Vasconcelos, by the Luso-tropical civilization of Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, by the Cuban *ajiaco* of Fernando Ortiz, or by the *café con leche* of Venezuela's Andrés Bello. *Todo mezclado*.

Polling data from the 2010 Americas Barometer, analyzed by sociologist Edward Telles and collaborators, confirms that most residents in countries with large Afrodescendant populations,

such as Brazil and Colombia, continue to embrace the ideologies of *mestizaje* and perceive racial mixing as a positive trait of their nations. Most importantly, this belief is widely shared across racial groups and finds similar levels of support among whites, blacks, mestizos and mulattos. This would suggest that these ideologies are truly national, in the sense that they are embraced by most people, regardless of social and racial background. In what sense, then, have Latin Americans moved away “from” their cherished utopias of racial mixture and harmony?





Young Men at the Beach

More to the point, the same data suggest that most people in the region do not see any contradiction between these national ideologies and public policies that seek to redress racial inequality and discrimination, including policies of affirmative action. Many Latin Americans support such policies not despite the ideologies of mestizaje and racial harmony, but rather because of those ideologies, which posit that Latin American nations should be, even if they are not in practice, racially egalitarian and inclusive. As any other utopian vision, these national myths misrepresent social realities. But if the vibrant Afrodescendant

movement in the region is any indication, and I believe it is, there is little evidence that such representations are necessarily paralyzing or fatal. The recent history of race and mobilization in the region rather suggests that these ideologies can become platforms for emancipatory approaches to race and justice.

Still, the fact is that for most Afrodescendants in the region, these possibilities remain unrealized. People of African descent continue to face formidable barriers to social mobility and equality. Dark skin continues to predict poverty and marginalization with appalling precision. Dark

skin invites police repression and incarceration. Dark skin means lower salaries, fewer opportunities, higher infant mortality, lower life expectancy. Dreams and utopias matter, but precisely because they do, Afrodescendants demand results. Now.

Alejandro de la Fuente is the Robert Woods Bliss Professor of Latin American History and Economics and Professor of African and African American studies at Harvard University. He is the director of the Afro-Latin American Research Institute at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research.

MEMORY AND RESISTANCE



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Slavery and Precarious Freedom

A Strange Co-Existence in 19th-century Brazil By SIDNEY CHALHOUB

SLAVERY WAS A FORM OF LABOR EXPLOITATION in which workers became the property of others; slaves were considered *things*, thus routinely exposed to transactions such as sale, auction, mortgage, renting. They appeared in last will and testaments, scribes duly recorded them in post mortem inventories, and masters bequeathed them to their heirs. Deeds of sale are common in surviving archives pertaining to slave societies, often recording the separation of couples, of parents and children, the constant disruption of families and slave communities. Violence against them was rampant, often combined with other strategies to intimidate and discipline the labor force. Twelve million Africans were taken from their native lands to be enslaved in the Americas from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Beyond these common characteristics, however, slave societies differed sharply from one another. Readers familiar with the characteristics of slavery in the U.S. South may find surprising that about five million Africans arrived in Brazil as a result of the slave trade, as opposed to fewer than four hundred thousand coming to the United States. While achieving freedom seemed a meaningful possibility for slaves in Brazil, manumission was virtually impossible for slaves in the U.S. South; while slaves in Brazil were distributed throughout the national territory, with a significant number of them living in urban areas, the United States is known for its sharp North/South divide in regard to slavery and for the concentration of the enslaved in the plantation economy.

According to the census of 1872, the only national census carried out in Brazil before the abolition of slavery in 1888, the country had a population of nearly 10 million people, of whom about 8.5 million were free and 1.5 million remained slaves. Regarding the racial composition, 38 percent were white, approximately 20 percent black, more than 38 percent *pardos* (mixed race), and 3.9 percent

indigenous. People of African descent (blacks and *pardos* together, including all social conditions—that is, free, freed and slave) comprised 58 percent of the total population, or approximately 5.7 million people. Another way of looking at these numbers is that about three out of every four people of African descent in Brazil lived as free or freed while slavery still existed in the country, a sharp contrast with just about 11 percent of African descendants who were free or freed in the United States in 1860.

The different demographics of slavery in Brazil and the United States raise a number of interesting questions, but in this text let us just think about the fact that in Brazil, to a greater extent than in other slave societies, a significant number of enslaved people achieved freedom, for themselves and their descendants while slavery continued to exist, with about 74 percent of people of African descent being free or freed in 1872. What consequences do these demographics have in regard to the experience of freedom? What was it like to live as a free or freed person of African descent in a society in which so many people who shared your race and cultural legacies remained in bondage, performing similar jobs, moving in the same spaces? In sum, what was freedom like for black people in Brazilian slave society, and what were the legacies of that situation for the post emancipation period?

The short answer to the questions above is that freedom was very precarious while slavery existed. People of African descent remained vulnerable in the post-emancipation period in part because of the risks associated with freedom during slavery. Although manumission rates were relatively high in 19th-century Brazil, slave owners granted a significant number of conditional freedoms. Usually about 30 to 50 percent of freedoms depended on the fulfillment of a condition stated in a letter of liberty, such as continued service for a number of years or until the death of the owner. In addition, freedoms

could be revoked. Many freedoms were revoked informally, as for example when a proprietor promised to free a slave in his or her last will and testament, but then decided to sell the slave before his or her death and the ensuing opening of the testament. A letter of manumission could also be revoked by means of another letter explicitly annulling the freedom previously granted. Revocation of freedoms remained a legal possibility for owners until the gradual emancipation law of 1871. A slave could buy his or her liberty from the owner, but self-purchase often involved borrowing money from a third party, and then working for years under slave-like conditions to pay the sum back to the lender.

Perhaps the main fact that rendered freedom precarious for people of African descent in 19th-century Brazil was the widespread practice of illegal enslavement. Despite a law that prohibited the African slave trade to Brazil in 1831, Africans continued to arrive there as contraband until 1850, when a new law again abolished the slave trade, but this time was enforced. More than 750,000 people were illegally enslaved as a result of the contraband trade after 1831 (about twice the total number of Africans brought to the United States!). Pretending not to see that so many enslaved Africans working in the plantations and urban areas had been smuggled to the country required certain institutional and policy “adaptations,” so to speak. For example, in the 1830s, the chief of police of the city of Rio de Janeiro defended the idea that in the case of “blacks” (*pretos*) arrested by the police because they were suspected of being runaway slaves: “it is more reasonable (...) to presume their bondage, until they present a certificate of baptism or a letter of liberty to prove otherwise” (Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, police correspondence). In other words, according to this doctrine, which clearly prevailed in the long run, blacks apprehended by the police should all be deemed slaves until proven otherwise.



Une vente d'esclaves, à Rio-De-Janeiro.

F. Biard, “A slave sale in Rio de Janeiro,” in *Deux années au Brésil*, Paris, 1862.

On the one hand, postulating that Africans and their descendants should be presumed slaves allowed authorities not to investigate the possible right to freedom of hundreds of thousands of Africans smuggled into the country; on the other hand, free and freed people of African descent found themselves under the constant threat of being suspected of being slaves, thus running the risk of being auctioned off back to slavery in case they did not manage to prove their status as free or freed.

Conditional manumissions, revocation of freedoms, illegal enslavements, and police assumptions about the bondage of people of African descent show that the boundaries between slavery and freedom in 19th-century Brazil were often uncertain. In this situation, and considering the high percentage of free and freed people of African descent in the population while slavery still existed, meanings associated with skin color, command of the Portuguese language, body language, modes of dressing and other cultural traits became a decisive aspect of black experience. Giving the wrong *signs* might trigger suspicion

by the police or others invested with the mantle of white supremacy, thus ensuing harassment, arrest as a runaway, and risk of auction and enslavement.

Police correspondence pertaining to the city of Rio allows fascinating glimpses of the daily construction of the subtleties in the perception of race originating in this tense and conflictual world of uncertain frontiers between slavery and freedom. For example, on November 11, 1835, “the black Domingos Cabinda, a slave of Mariano So-and-So, was *arrested as a runaway* and sent to the Calabouço” (a prison for slaves in Rio; my italics). “Cabinda” indicated the African origin of Domingos and it seemed to be enough justification for suspecting that he was a runaway slave. On March 11, 1836, “Joaquim Kassange, *who says that he is a freed man*,” was “seized for begging needlessly.” In this case, “Kassange” was another sure indication of African origin; for this reason, Joaquim’s allegation that he was free led the scribe to express some misgivings: he “says that he is a freed man.” Another entry for November 11, 1835, begins this way: “*Arrested for vagrants*, and sent (...) for naval service

were João Antônio da Silva, *a black freedman* (...).” Here the approximation of the words “black,” “freed” and “vagrant” indicates a looming threat to the scores of free and freed people of African descent living in the city of Rio—then and now. As slavery declined in the 1870s and 1880s, harassment and detentions associated with the suspicion of being a runaway slave gave way to a rapidly rising number of arrests for “vagrancy.” The politics of racial designations and meanings, in Brazil, originated in the tense exercise of negotiating social places and conditions in a society where slavery and freedom coexisted in intense and largely indeterminate ways for a very long time.

Sidney Chalhoub is Professor of History and of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. A Brazilian historian, he has published five books, including A força da escravidão: ilegalidade e costume no Brasil oitocentista (2012), on illegal enslavement and the precariousness of freedom 19th-century Brazil.

Afro-Boricua Agency

Against the Myth of the Whitest of the Antilles By AGUSTÍN LAÓ-MONTES

PUERTO RICO IS IN CRISIS. MADE UNIMAGINABLY worse by Hurricane Maria, this ongoing crisis highlights the racial character of our colonial condition. President Trump, who charged that Puerto Ricans just *want things to be done for them* and that providing disaster relief to the island represented *a problem for the U.S. budget*, reveals the ugly face of imperial policy, neglecting basic aid to the devastated archipelago, while giving post-hurricane support to Texas and Florida. When he threw paper towels to an audience during his brief visit to the island after the storms Irma and Maria, his racist utterances upset international opinion just when the profound humanitarian crisis of Puerto Ricans—U.S. citizens—began to be acknowledged.

The catastrophe of the late modern colony in the aftermath of the hurricanes resurfaces the discontents of the double coloniality confronted by Afro-Puerto Ricans. The collapse of the colonial state was triggered by its fiscal fall leaving it with a \$74 billion debt to speculators from Big Finance Capital, and governed de facto by a Financial Control Board capable of suppressing basic labor and citizens rights to pursue the primary goal of milking money from the ill insular economy. After the hurricane Puerto Rico definitely became a failed state without the ability and practical will to solve basic needs like supplying electricity and fresh water. As we write, close to 200,000 Puerto Ricans emigrated to the United States. Afro-Boricuas remained overrepresented among those who have suffered the most from the crisis, before and after the storms.

The racialization of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans is a complex matter that requires investigation. In U.S. imperial imaginary and discourse, Puerto Ricans as a people-nation tend to be racialized

as non-white and therefore as allegedly inferior to the authentic citizens of the American White Republic. This attitude can be traced to three factors 1) the civilizational/racial divide between *Anglos* and *Latinos* which premised the hemispheric dialectic between the two Americas, the one that Jose Martí called *Our America* in contrast to Anglo-America in the British Protestant tradition; 2) the U.S. imperial labeling of the Caribbean as its *backyard* with Puerto

As in the rest of the Americas, darker-skin Puerto Ricans had historically suffered from structural racism that includes relative social marginalization, lack of political representation and denial of historical and cultural recognition, as well as everyday experiences of discrimination both in Puerto Rico and the United States.

Rico as its prime colonial playground and laboratory (as evidenced by sugar cane plantations and mass sterilization of a colonized population) and 3) the location of Puerto Ricans living in the United States as *colonial migrants* who in spite

of formally holding U.S. citizenship, are de facto second class citizens. They face ethnic-racial discrimination as non-white subjects (regardless of their skin color), with subordinate inscription in U.S. economy, polity and society in what Kelvin Santiago-Valles has characterized as a *colonized labor force*.

The racialization of Puerto Rico as a Latin American/Caribbean archipelago and of Puerto Ricans as non-white should not deny the specificity of Afro-Puerto Rican difference. Indeed, the very existence and nature of Afro-Boricua difference and of racism among Puerto Ricans are matters of debate in Puerto Rican intellectual and political scenarios. As in the rest of the Americas, darker-skin Puerto Ricans had historically suffered from structural racism that includes relative social marginalization, lack of political representation and denial of historical and cultural recognition, as well as everyday experiences of discrimination both in Puerto Rico and the United States.

The peculiarities of anti-black racism in Puerto Rico and among Puerto Ricans are colored by the condition of long-term colonialism. Through this long history, Afro-Puerto Ricans confront a double colonial condition, as colonial subjects of the empire, and as racialized internal others of the nation. The efforts by both the Spanish empire and creole elites to whiten the island by conceding land and rights to European immigrants in the 19th century, in an archipelago where the plantation system was less developed than in other Caribbean spaces, resulted in Puerto Rico being perceived as *the whitest of the Antilles*.

Nevertheless, Afro-Puerto Ricans have excelled providing meaningful leadership in both the Puerto Rican and African diasporas at least since the 19th century. For example, Arturo Alfonso



A rally at Boston's Villa Victoria prominently displays the Puerto Rican flag.

Schomburg, an Afro-Boricua born in the island, became active in New York in the movement for independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico. A key figure in the African diaspora's intellectual and political life, he founded the first and still most important archive of Africana studies in the world, now hosted in a branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem. Given that a large percentage of Puerto Rican migrants to New York City since the late 19th century was black, the cultural, intellectual and political leadership of the Boricua community in the city has historically been Afrodescendant. In the generation after Schomburg, we can highlight librarian Pura Beltré and socialist journalist Jesus Colón. One generation later, Antonia Pantojas promoted the emergence of a network of Puerto Rican institutions such as *Aspira* that educated and inspired the youth who

championed the Boricua movements of the 1960s-70s.

The Puerto Rican liberation movement of the 1960s-70s in the United States combatted colonialism, capitalism and racism as entangled forms of oppression. This entailed fighting U.S. white racism against Puerto Rican colonial subjects, as well as racial discrimination of Afro-Puerto Ricans by lighter-skin Boricuas. This is also mediated by class and gender domination, especially in Puerto Rico where the colonial ruling class is mostly white males. As counterpoint, in many working-class U.S. barrios, Puerto Ricans of all colors and U.S. blacks share in a conviviality that gave rise to shared cultural productions such as hip-hop culture, and a dialectics of affinity and conflict in urban political coalition-building.

The Young Lords, a key organization

of the Puerto Rican movement of the 1960s-70s, militated against colonialism, capitalism, sexism and racism. This sort of politics—that we now call intersectional because it understands power as based on articulations of class, ethnic-racial, gender and sexual oppressions—shaped the political culture of Puerto Rican radicalism. The racial politics of the Young Lords were expressed with poetic justice in Felipe Luciano's verse *Jibaro My Pretty Nigger, Jibaro Mi Negro Lindo*, in which he challenges the idea of the Puerto Rican subject as a white peasant, an image that has circulated since the 19th century and became emblematic in the 1930s.

The next generation, the one that produced hip-hop culture—an urban mixture of music, dance, style, art, economy and politics—spawned community cultural institutions such as Taller Boricua and Nuyorican Poets Café



Celebrating at Villa Victoria, a Puerto Rican cultural center in Boston.

with an Afro-Puerto Rican aesthetics linked to the politics of Latina/o self-affirmation. In this context, Marta Moreno Vega, an Afro-Boricua woman, founded in 1976 the Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute (CCCADI), which became one of the primary global spaces for cultural, religious and political exchanges in the Africana world. The CCCADI, which organized three world congresses of Yoruba religion, launched the Global Afro-Latino and Caribbean Initiative (GALCI) that has been instrumental in weaving networks of Afro-Latina/o social movements across the Americas.

Afro-Puerto Ricans on the island also participate in the web of activism that placed Afro-Latin American social movements at the forefront of worldwide movements against racism and for racial justice. Afro-Boricuas provided leadership in the 2001 Third World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, conceiving there the Decade

of Afrodescendance. The First Congress of Afrodescendants in Puerto Rico in November 2015 convened more than a thousand activists, intellectuals and cultural agents at the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras. At the inauguration, then-University Chancellor Carlos Severino, an Afro-Puerto Rican himself, denounced the racist history of the prime institution of higher education in the island, advocating for a new era in which Black Studies would become an integral part of the university's agenda. Maria Elba Torres, its main organizer, is now leading efforts toward the Second Congress of Afrodescendance in Puerto Rico.

The contested terrain of racial politics clearly came to public light in Puerto Rico when television actress Angela Meyer recently tried to revive a blackface character from the 1970s called Chianita. After protest from Puerto Rico's anti-racist and black movement, television networks decided not to broadcast the character. Anti-racist poets and performance artists

organize a public burial of Chianita, a theatrical happening that motivated a debate about racism in the media and the meaning of blackface. Chianita fans accused her critics of using arguments similar to those used by terrorists against Charlie Hebdo.

Another arena of racial politics in Puerto Rico is the census. More than 80% of Puerto Ricans from the archipelago were recorded as white in the 2000 census—provoking alarm and debate. The history and visible human landscape of Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island with strong African ancestry, reveal these numbers as counterintuitive. A combination of the relative success of a whitening ideology, displacement of blackness to U.S. blacks—given that we are using U.S. census categories, and lack of educational campaigns to enhance black self-affirmation—account for the dramatic increase in the population identified as white. Colectivo Ilé's subsequent campaign for people to acknowledge African descent seems to have influenced a decrease of white demographics in the 2010 Puerto Rican census to 75%. The growing visibility of a movement fighting racism and advocating Afro-Puerto Rican identity, culture and politics, will likely change the equation more.

The roles and significance of Afro-Boricuas in Puerto Rico itself and in its situation as a translocal nation, as well as in the African diaspora, are mediated by class and gender. Cultural genres such as reggaeton explicitly give voice to subaltern sectors in terms of race and class. The lyrics of lead artists such as Tego Calderón and Don Omar, vindicate Afro-Boricua popular cultures from the barrios and caserios (public housing projects) using a challenging masculinist tone. These spaces of Puerto Rican-ness, racialized, marginalized and criminalized in both Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland, tend to be identified as black, unruly and dangerous as evidenced in the scholarship of Afro-Boricua sociologists Kelvin Santiago-Valles and Zaire Dinzey. They are also places where Afro-Puerto Rican identities flourish and aesthetic genres

emerge that highlight Afro-Boricua cultural components.

The dissemination of Bomba music and dance, perceived as been from supposedly subaltern black territories such as Loiza and San Anton, into youth and activist spaces, also show a sort of blackening of Puerto Rican public cultures. In the public sphere, matched with academic recognition, Afro-Puerto Rican writers like Mayra Santos Febres, Yolanda Arroyo Pizarro and Ivonne Denis represent and cultivate the values of Afro-Boricua histories and cultures through their literature, while performing a critique of the intersections of racial, class, gender and sexual domination,

that compose and configure the colonial condition of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans.

The combined injuries of race and class faced by Afro-Boricua subaltern sectors who circulate between the island barrios and the U.S. ghettos deepen with the world crisis of neoliberal capitalist globalization. In the Caribbean context that means, as Maurice Bishop said, that when the empire catches a cold, we get pneumonia. Projecting its optimal critical potential, a cultivated double consciousness of Afro-Puerto Ricans could turn our collective historical agency into a powerful transformative force within a long and complex process

of decolonization and liberation from the intertwined powers of colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy and racism, in both shores of the Atlantic pond that divides and connect the U.S. empire-nation and the archipelago of Puerto Rico.

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A View of Afro-Diasporic History from Colombia

A PHOTOESSAY BY CRISTINA GARCÍA NAVAS

THE MUNTU BANTU, A MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER IN Quibdó, Chocó, on Colombia's Pacific coast region, seeks to work "for the study, promotion and diffusion of the Afro-Colombian culture, and the advancement and improvement of the living conditions of Afrodescendant populations." Working from an "Afrogenetic and Afrocentric" perspective, it proposes to look for the union of human beings among cultural diversity, serving both as a cultural center for the Chocóan population and an educational center for the Colombian society as a whole on the history of the country's African diaspora.

The center was imagined, designed and built piecemeal

over many years by the Chocóan historian Sergio Mosquera, professor at the Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó. The mural at the entrance depicts black Colombian politicians and Independence heroes from Latin America and the Caribbean. A film room, where movies are frequently played for the community, showcases internationally famous black singers and movie stars. With three floors and multiple thematic rooms, the museum is dedicated to topics going from the slave trade in the Americas and the symbolism of the African and Chocóan fauna myths, to those of slavery, gold mining and armed conflict-related violence on the Pacific



Clockwise; 1. Professor Sergio Antonio, opposite page. 2. Group of children and teenagers dancing in front of the San Francisco de Asís Cathedral, central plaza of Quibdó, Chocó. July 2016 3. "Afro Power," Graffiti at the Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó (UTCH) 4. Muntu Bantu view from the outside 5. Chirimía Group of students from the Licenciatura en Música y Danza at the UTCH 6. Atrato river from Quibdó's malecón, July 2016.

coast of Colombia.

The museum, open to the community and guided by Professor Mosquera himself, is frequently visited by school and college student groups to learn about the worldwide African diaspora and the histories and cultures of Afro-Colombian communities, with a special emphasis on Chocó. Muntu Bantu also functions as a cultural center for events and has published books by Mosquera and magazines such as *Cuadernos de Muntú-Bantú*.

Together with other institutions such as the Corp-Oraloteca, a documentation and research center for the sound, oral

and corporal practices of the Pacific littoral region, and the Association for Cultural Research of Chocó (ASINCH), this space nourishes the vibrant and innovative cultural, musical and historical research of Chocó and the black Pacific Coast of Colombia.

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Mining and the Defense of Afro-Colombian Territory

The Community of Yolombó, Colombia By STEPHEN AND ELIZABETH FERRY

WE—AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AND PHOTOGRAPHER, sister and brother—visited Yolombó in the department of Cauca, Colombia, in June 2017. Yolombó is part of a federation of five towns known as the Corregimiento de La Toma, governed by an autonomous community council, as are many Afro-Colombian areas in the Pacific region.

When we asked María Yein Mina about mining in her community, she said, “I’ll have to divide my answer into ‘before’ and ‘after’ the arrival of the retros,” the backhoes that outsiders brought to the Ovejas River beginning in the late 1980s.

Until then, members of the five towns practiced a balanced economy of mining, fishing and subsistence agriculture along with a few commercial crops such as coffee. People usually worked on the farm on Mondays and Tuesdays and spent the rest of the week mining and fishing. At first some members of the community fell into the trap of the retros, neglecting their farms in order to mine the strata of gold particles exposed by the machinery in the banks of the Ovejas River. But then they realized that this way led to ruin: the banks were churned up, gold was becoming scarce, and people no longer wanted to swim or fish because of mercury in the water. They petitioned the authorities to enforce environmental laws, without success.

Led by the younger residents of Yolombó, the community went en masse to the river, boarded the machines and compelled the owners to turn them off. In 2014, a group of fifteen women traveled, mostly on foot, to a series of other Afro-Colombian communities also faced with the imposition of mechanized alluvial mining in their territories. Strengthened by numbers, they arrived in Bogotá to pressure the national government to act.

The media called their movement “The March of the Turbans,” in reference to the scarves many of the women wrapped around their heads in traditional Afro-Colombian fashion. The marchers reached out for national and international support.

Their efforts worked, perhaps too well. They had hoped for administrative action that would compel the backhoes’ owners to remove them; the police simply showed up and burned the machinery. As a consequence, leaders of the movement received multiple death threats.

The people of La Toma had to defend their territory on a second front, this one underground. This conflictive history had historical roots. In the early 2000s, the multinational company AngloGold Ashanti had begun taking core samples in the area, sending agents into the community as social workers, festival sponsors and contributors to public works such as repairing the highway. This is a common—and from the corporate perspective, widely accepted—strategy, but one that was viewed with suspicion in the villages of La Toma. Sure enough, they soon learned that the Ministry of Mines had granted mining titles to AngloGold Ashanti and to private citizens with no links to the community. These concessions entailed the removal of the families living there—practically the entire town of La Toma. In 2009, the government sent the police to displace the residents. The community had stood its ground, facing security forces with crowbars and machetes in hand.

They had also fought back through the courts, filing lawsuits on grounds of loss of livelihood and the lack of prior consultation, in violation of the International Labor Organization convention to which Colombia is a signatory. In 2010, the Constitutional Court accepted their

arguments and declared that the mining titles must be suspended. Again, leaders received death threats in the form of pamphlets, phone calls and text messages.

In the face of these threats, residents formed the Maroon Guard. The word “maroon” refers historically to communities of escaped slaves, but its meaning has expanded to refer to black resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean in its many forms. The Guard is a community police force of about forty young men and women, which manages internal conflicts and protects the community from outside threats. They based their movement on the Palenque Police, set up by residents of the historic maroon community of San Basilio de Palenque. The Maroon Guard also shares methods with the Indigenous Guard, an organized force within the nearby reservations of the Nasa people that has confronted leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries and the state in defense of native territory.

The families that live in the five towns in the jurisdiction of La Toma—Yolombó, Gelima, El Hato, Dos Aguas and La Toma—have inhabited this region on the Pacific coast of Colombia since the early 17th century, when they were brought as slaves to work the Gelima gold mine and surrounding farms. The gold from Gelima and other smaller mines enriched the city of Popayán, and the whole Real Audiencia de Quito, which included parts of southern Colombia, current-day Ecuador and northern Peru. The Jesuits mainly owned the mines until their expulsion from the Americas in 1767.

Francia Márquez Mina, community member, lawyer, and recipient of the National Prize for the Defense of Human Rights in Colombia, told us that although mining brought their ancestors from



A group of miners, members of several families who have owned land in Yolombó for centuries, direct jets of water at the hill to form a channel of red mud at its base. Next page: Miner, Yolombó, Cauca, 2017

Africa as slaves, it also made them free; many bought their liberty by mining for gold in the Ovejas River, while others escaped and lived as maroons. Their families, and the families of those emancipated in the mid-19th century, bought the land from the proceeds of mining and defended it from successive attempts to displace them over the centuries.

In recent years these attempts have become even more aggressive. Beginning in the early 2000s, a combination of high prices for metals, more efficient technologies, and greatly improved security conditions have made Colombia newly attractive for transnational corporations. The Colombian government prioritizes large-scale resource extraction as a central feature of its economic development agenda. The current mining code

was drafted in 2001 in collaboration with Canadian advisers, and favors large-scale projects over traditional mining. Foreign mining companies now see Colombia as a new frontier.

In all this planning, the government and foreign corporations tend to ignore local communities that have been mining gold for centuries. At least 350,000 Colombians make their livelihood directly through small-scale gold mining activities, with many more depending on them through family ties and commerce. These miners have dense social and territorial relations with gold, customary rights, and long histories.

As the “mining locomotive” (to use President Juan Manuel Santos’s phrase) gained momentum, these local miners have come into conflict with multinational

corporations, with the Colombian state, and with companies from outside their communities who bring in mechanized and highly destructive machinery such as the retros. Yolombó is just one place among many where these conflicts have come to a head.

When we visited in June 2017, the river was too high for alluvial mining, so we went to an area close to the school in Yolombó, to see a form of mining called *minería de chorreo* or “water-jet mining.” We watched a group of some fifteen miners, members of several families who have owned land in Yolombó for centuries, directing jets of water at the hill to form a channel of red mud at its base. They then use *bateas* (a wooden pan used in mining since Pre-Columbian times) and *almocafres* (a traditional tool shaped like a



garden hoe) to separate the gold. Instead of mercury, they use the viscous sap of a plant known as *escoba babosa*, traditionally used in Colombia as an anti-inflammatory, that also helps separate gold from its surroundings. By these methods, they can mine for decades in the same area.

The threats have continued. Sent by email from unknown parties, they accuse the community of “opposing progress” and undermining the government’s plans for development through foreign investment. For her safety, Francia Márquez no longer lives in the area and travels accompanied by armed bodyguards provided by the state.

AngloGold Ashanti appears to have left the region and its titles have been suspended, but not cancelled. Sabino Lucumí Chocó, president of the La Toma Community Council, calls these titles “a

The families that live in the five towns in the jurisdiction of La Toma—Yolombó, Gelima, El Hato, Dos Aguas and La Toma—have inhabited this region on the Pacific coast of Colombia since the early 17th century, when they were brought as slaves to work the Gelima gold mine and surrounding farms. The gold from Gelima and other smaller mines enriched the city of Popoyán, and the whole Real Audiencia de Quito, which included parts of Southern Colombia, current-day Ecuador, and northern Peru. The Jesuits mainly owned the mines until their expulsion from the Americas in 1767.

permanent threat” to the survival of the community.

Against this uncertain future, the towns remain organized. Among other things, the community council conducts media relations and legal actions, promotes ancestral culture for youth, and is planning an independent environmental school, to be called “La Batea.”

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Their book’s website is <https://red-hookeditions.com/product/la-batea/>

African and Afro-Indian Rebel Leaders in Latin America *Con Tanta Arrogancia* By OMAR H. ALI

ON CHRISTMAS DAY IN THE YEAR 1521, AND HALF a world away from home, a group of enslaved West African Muslim warriors led a slave revolt on the island of Hispaniola, a distant island across a vast ocean. The Wolof slaves had little chance of success, facing the long steel swords, lances, and guns of their Spanish captors. Their valiant, albeit desperate, revolt was quickly put down. Nevertheless, they unsettled their Iberian captors, whose quest for power and wealth stoked the fires of war on both sides of the Atlantic.

Spanish authorities, relying increasingly on Portuguese slave traffickers, soon passed a series of ordinances to limit the number of Muslim Africans taken to their colonies in the Americas. Many of these Africans were captives of war with military experience, and they were viewed as particularly dangerous. Still, the Spaniards’ insatiable desire for labor outweighed their fears, which were well-founded as enslaved Africans (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) continued to rebel. Over the next three centuries there would be hundreds of documented instances of African revolts in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the Americas.

During the 16th century, Africans and their descendants outnumbered Iberians and their descendants in Mexico City, Lima and Salvador da Bahia—the three principal cities of colonial Latin America. Between the 16th and mid-19th centuries, more than ten million West and Central West Africans (with an additional 720,000 from Southeastern Africa) were forcibly taken to work on the plantations, gold and silver mines, and in the cities of Spanish and Portuguese colonists in the Americas. Resistance to slavery took place at the first point of contact in Africa and continued at sea and in the colonies in various ways such as feigning illness, poisoning masters, setting fire to crops,



“The Three Mulattoes of Esmeraldas” is an Ecuadorian painting from 1599 by Andrés Sánchez Gallque.

escaping and armed rebellions. Although many enslaved Africans and their descendants also assimilated into colonial societies, no one (colonists, servants or slaves) could escape the violence of slavery that permeated the Atlantic world, either as perpetrators, victims or witnesses.

Once they landed on American soil, some Africans escaped to join Native Americans. These Africans mixed with Taino and Arawak peoples in the Caribbean, and Wayuu, Caquetio, and Chocó, among other tribes, and their descendants, on the mainland. Many others escaped slavery by taking their own lives and “flying” back to Africa, rather than face the social death and brutality of slavery—or they ran away into the hinterland. The latter runaways, called “maroons”—a word that comes from the Spanish *cimarrón* (used to describe wild or escaped cattle)—fled into the forests, swamps, hills and mountains, where they entrenched themselves—and, from there, continued to wage war.

Among the most prominent maroon leaders of the Atlantic world was Benkos Biohó. Captured in Guinea-Bissau, West

Africa, in 1596, Biohó was shackled and shipped to the port of Cartagena. Within three years of his arrival to New Grenada (now Colombia), Biohó organized a slave revolt involving nearly three dozen people. The rebellion included his wife, Wiwa, and a grown daughter, Orika, among thirty others whom he led deep into the forest. There, they formed and defended one of the longest-lasting maroon settlements in the Americas, known as San Basilio de Palenque.

From Palenque at the base of the Montes de María, Biohó launched multiple attacks on Spanish colonists in Cartagena. The attacks went on for fourteen years, until 1613, when he agreed to a peace treaty with the Spaniards. By then Biohó had become known as “el rey del arcabuco,” “the king of the thick forest.” However, Biohó openly visited Cartagena under protection of the treaty, and he did so dressed in Spanish gentleman’s attire with sword and dagger at his side. But the audacity of a free African walking into the colonial stronghold *con tanta arrogancia* (“with such arrogance”), would only be tolerated for so long by the Spaniards.

Betrayed, Biohó was arrested on one of his visits and executed. But even in death Biohó would continue to inspire others to resist their enslavement, take up arms and follow his footsteps into the forest.

Maroon settlements and slave insurrections would haunt colonial authorities for generations to come. Over the next two hundred years, successive waves of maroons in New Grenada included many who took Biohó's name, or variations thereof, as a title. The name 'Biohó' had effectively become synonymous with African resistance, his story forming part of the collective memory of African and African-descended rebel leaders across Latin America. These figures included Gaspar Yanga, a contemporary of Biohó, who formed a powerful maroon settlement in the highlands near Veracruz, Mexico; the maroon Miguel, who escaped from the mines near Barquisimeto, Venezuela, and formed a free settlement made up of African slaves and enslaved Native Americans; Joseph Chatoyer of St. Vincent, a Garifuna (mixed African and Native American) leader who led a protracted war against colonists during the 18th century; Dutty Boukman, a contemporary of Chatoyer, who was an early leader of what became the Haitian Revolution; and Ganga Zumba, the son of an Angolan princess and the first leader of a massive maroon settlement Quilombo dos Palmares in Brazil.

To be sure, not all Africans were slaves and not all slaves were Africans. Iberians first enslaved Native Americans, who fought back and proved difficult to keep alive and in bondage, as many died because of their lack of immunity to certain diseases (especially small pox), fought back, or escaped, being familiar with the terrain of their own land. In the complicated political conditions of the transatlantic slave trade and early colonial period, Africans and people of African descent sometimes even fought alongside Spaniards. People of African descent had been part of Christopher Columbus' crew at the end of the 15th century—by which time sub-Saharan Africans had already become a presence in southern Iberia with the first African captives taken to Iberia as

early as 1444.

The most famous African soldier fighting for Spanish interests was Juan Garrido, originally from West Africa, who fought on the side of Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortéz whose army invaded Mexico and lay siege on the Aztec capital at Tenochtitlan in 1519. But whether in the battles for domination over the Aztecs or in other colonizing efforts elsewhere in the Americas—including the Spanish conquest of Peru—Africans and people of African descent at times found themselves on the defensive, even stranded with Spaniards.

One such occasion took place in the spring of 1568. Eighteen months earlier, and some forty years before the English settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, soldiers of African descent were part of Spanish expeditionary forces in the Piedmont of North Carolina. The soldiers were left stranded—marooned—in the small forts they had built in the North American southeast when Native Americans pushed back against Spanish incursions. Among these Spanish forts was San Juan, built next to Joara (Xuala), a large Native American settlement and regional chiefdom of Mississippian culture in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In a coordinated attack in May 1568, Native Americans destroyed Fort San Juan along with four other small Spanish forts that had been built under the orders of Governor Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, who wished to claim the interior of North America for Spain to establish an overland route to the silver mines near Zacatecas, Mexico (the colonists were more than two thousand miles off in their calculations).

Africans fighting alongside Spaniards, however, were a small number compared to those who fought against the Iberians. From the earliest moments of Iberian colonizing efforts in the Americas, Africans joined forces with Native Americans. If they had been successful in their Christmas day rebellion, the Wolof warriors might have joined Native Americans, as others did across the Caribbean. Among these rebels were Garifuna, West Africans who escaped from a slave shipwreck off

the coast of St. Vincent in 1675 and who intermixed with Carib and Arawak peoples on the island. After a century of warfare and a series of forced migrations, the Garifuna people eventually settled in Central America after their greatest leader, Joseph Chatoyer, was killed in battle in 1796.

Rebellions in South America mirrored those across the Caribbean and North America. The largest maroon settlement in the Americas was formed in Brazil in 1604 in what is now the state of Alagoas, south of Recife. Called Quilombo dos Palmares, and founded by an African named Ganga Zumba in the Serra de Barriga, the settlement of Africans and Native Americans grew to more than 11,000 strong and lasted for nearly a century—that is, until its last leader, Zumbi (like Biohó) was betrayed and executed. Resistance to Portuguese forces continued well into the next century but it was Muslims in the area of Bahia that were at the forefront of a powerful series of revolts during the early 19th century.

Over the course of the transatlantic slave trade, Brazil received nearly four and half million Africans (some 40 percent of the total number of Africans taken out of the continent). Among these captives were at least 800,000 Muslims—an estimated twenty percent of Africans enslaved in the Americas. And nowhere was their presence more acutely felt than in Salvador da Bahia, culminating in the Malê revolt of 1835 (Muslims were called Malê in Bahia, derived from the word *imale*, a Yoruba Muslim).

Led by Muslim Yoruba and Hausa slaves, leaders of the revolt included Manoel Calafate, who recruited slaves on the eve of the attack, scheduled for Sunday, January 25. However, plans of the revolt were leaked and the rebels were forced to launch their attack a day earlier. Street fighting broke out and spilled into neighboring areas, including near the barracks. Under heavy fire, including multiple cavalry charges, the Iberians were able to contain the rebellion. In the aftermath, and fearing another Haiti—where slaves seized power and abolished slavery in 1804—colonial authorities executed nearly half a dozen leaders, sent others to prison and hard

labor, and publicly flogged dozens of other black rebels; others were simply deported back to Africa. While Brazil ended the slave trade in 1851, it would take the country until 1888 to abolish slavery itself—the last place in the Americas to do so.

Cuba, like Brazil, witnessed slave revolts throughout this same time. By the early 19th century, Cuba had become the most productive sugar colony in the Caribbean and had a reputation as one of the most brutal plantation complexes. In the area of Matanzas, enslaved Africans with military experience organized a series of large-scale rebellions. Ten years before the Malê revolt in Brazil, and starting on June 15, 1825, about two hundred slaves participated in a coordinated revolt that spread to over two dozen plantations. Notably, the vast majority of the slave rebels, including leaders such as Pablo Gangá and Lorenzo Lucumí, were born in Africa. Even though the rebels originally came from different geographic regions and ethnic backgrounds in Africa, they were joined by their common desire to be free.

Slave rebellions were also part of the African diaspora on the Andean side of South America. In Peru, where more than 100,000 Africans were imported, slaves cleared land, laid the streets, and carried supplies, among others duties; mortality rates among enslaved African-descended populations working the silver mines in the Andes were especially high.

As elsewhere in Latin America, Africans and their descendants in Peru resisted slavery in a number of ways—most commonly, by running away. In 1595, for instance, one Domingo Biafara took flight for weeks at a time; in 1645, Francisca Criolla was sold “without guarantee” because of her reputation for escaping. The official punishment for running away changed over time, but starting off with 100 lashes was not uncommon. One group of slaves destined for Lima was shipwrecked off the coast of Guayaquil. Many of those who survived would join Native Americans to form what became the largest maroon society on the western coast of South America, in what is today Esmeraldas. A painting by Adrián Sán-

chez Galque in 1599 powerfully depicts one of its Afro-Indian leaders, Don Francisco (de) Arobe, flanked by his two sons, depicting a mix of Spanish, African and Native American influences.

Today, African and Afro-Indian rebels are remembered to varying extents in Latin America. There are reconstructed images, such as statues of figures such as Biohó in Colombia or Zumbi in Brazil. In each of those countries these figures are considered national folk heroes, especially among Afro-Colombians and Afro-Brazilians, respectively. In Peru, however, most citizens are unaware of black resistance to slavery because the history of its African-descended population is little known (despite such eminent religious figures, most strikingly, San Marin de Porres, the son of an Afrodescendant mother and a Spanish father). Meanwhile Garifunas in Honduras, Belize, Guatemala and Nicaragua, struggle to have a voice in their respective countries, where they remain segregated from most national histories. Nevertheless, their history is performed through dance and music—as is the case across much of Afro-Latin America (carnival being an expression of this across Latin America).

For instance, the battles waged by Garifunas against colonists are performed today as *yankunu* by men in which they depict the ways their ancestors launched attacks on colonists. Garifuna women sing and dance other stories in *punta*, which like *yankunu* is accompanied by multiple drums.

To the extent that African and Afrodescendant rebels have a history, it is reconstruction upon reconstruction. Layers of history and legend intermixing. What comes through when panning out across the whole of Latin America and

over the course of several centuries, however, is the ongoing resistance of men and women born in Africa or descended from those who originally came from Africa.

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The Routine of an Unconventional Path

My life as an Afro-Latin American at Harvard By ANTONIO J. COPETE

AS A SCIENTIST BY TRAINING AND BY CONVICTION, I wish sometimes that I could just be like so many of my esteemed colleagues: just keep doing research in High-Energy Astrophysics, build a career around it, and hopefully derive my life's satisfaction from it. But I happen to sit at an intersection of identities that constantly remind me of a larger life's purpose that stretches beyond the lab. As a black Colombian at Harvard, first as a Ph.D. student in Physics and now as a postdoctoral researcher in Astronomy, I've become used to spending most of my life as a trailblazer, walking down an uncertain path that few have walked before me, yet with a responsibility to set an example and open doors for those coming behind.

Coming from parents of humble beginnings in the far reaches of Colombia, my father from the town of Tadó (Chocó) in the Pacific region, and my mother from Guamal (Magdalena) in the Caribbean region, I'm humbled to see how far we've come in just over one generation. It feels oftentimes like a heavy weight to carry, though, made all the heavier as it has become increasingly clear how massively underrepresented people of my background are in the high academic environments. It was difficult enough back in Bogotá, where despite my being born and raised there, people in certain social and academic circles would routinely view and treat me as an outsider, in no small part due to assumptions and judgments made based on my appearance. In my entire time at Harvard, being one of only a handful of black students and scholars not only from Colombia but from all of Latin America at any given time, the contrast was even more dramatic. Such underrepresentation of one of the core ethnic groups of our region is indicative of a massive problem not only for Colombia and Latin America, but also for Harvard.



"If something's black, it's beautiful."

As a casual example of how these worlds collide as a matter of course for someone like me, a couple of years ago I happened to be in a Harvard-owned building, carrying a box of drinks into an apartment I had just started renting. As I got into an elevator with a student I hadn't met before, he innocently asked me: "Hi, where are you from?" As I was just about to reply "I'm from Colombia," he stopped me to clarify what he meant by his original question: "I mean, what service do you work for?" To keep things simple while making clear I wasn't there just to deliver a box, I replied: "I'm a student," to which I got an embarrassed expression that evidenced the many wrong assumptions that led to the question he had asked.

To compound the situation, that Harvard student not only turned out to be a student from Latin America, but one who was quoted in a university website as being particularly concerned about

alleviating the poverty and inequality in his native country of Mexico. While I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of his convictions, this episode illustrates the reality of environments where members of underrepresented groups are still regarded as outsiders—however unconsciously—and where purported good intentions towards those groups are no match for the leverage of having a voice and a seat at the table. When those are the same environments where groundbreaking ideas are hatched and leaders are groomed—as is the case at Harvard—the visibility that diversity affords has the potential to change the destiny of whole countries and communities.

In the case of the Afro-Latin American community in particular, there is a broad and deep reservoir of talent and agency to occupy leadership spaces, though largely hidden in plain sight. A recent personal experience was my visit this past summer to Salvador, Bahia, the capital of the Afrodescendant population of Brazil, where I was invited to speak at a forum on technology and innovation. It was heartening and hopeful to see many colleagues being trailblazers and making a difference for their communities in their own way, seeing many young Afro-Brazilians eagerly participating in hackathons, designing solutions to technology-based challenges, and using as a staging ground—of all places—Salvador's soccer stadium of World Cup fame. In sum, they were challenging the notions about their ethnic group and their disadvantaged part of Brazil by channeling their talents in unconventional ways, such as the pursuit of science, technology and innovation. They, like many others across the region, are just waiting for opportunities to be welcomed as the protagonists and not just the spectators



Top photos: Scenes from the Brazil conference; bottom photo: Antonio Copete (far right) with his family in Colombia..



of their own future.

For countries and institutions, diversity is a popular buzzword, often trivialized as a politically correct exercise in achieving numbers and quotas. Yet its true power lies in the way the characteristics of individuals become encoded in the way each of them thinks. When those diverse ways of thinking are truly represented at the table to achieve inclusion, it becomes a powerful tool for progress. At a place like Harvard, true inclusion is the key to opening doors to innovative ideas and solutions, in a way that could not be achieved by any smaller subgroup of people, thereby enhancing the chief contribution of the university to the world.

At the same time, diverse ways of thinking often produce discomfort, by their very nature of challenging or even directly contradicting the ideas of others—just as we scientists do in our labs. As I see it, the true paradox of diversity and inclusion for black people

lies in that people generally support the notion of rights and freedoms for us as a group, yet the same people suppress and marginalize our distinct way of thinking as individuals when it diverges from theirs, or it challenges their preconceived notions of what people in our group should do or say. What truly gives meaning to the presence of blacks or any other minority group at Harvard, or at any other place that aspires to inclusion in its truest sense, is the commitment to stimulate and enhance our ability to add perspective

and challenge the ideas and assumptions of the dominant groups, as to opposed to blindly following them.

For my part, both inside and outside the lab, my heart will continue to be the heart of a scientist. Advancing the boundaries of our knowledge of the natural world is one of the most noble and visionary of human activities, and it is my life's purpose to continue to support and contribute to that mission. Yet I and so many others of my generation of Afro-Latin Americans will also continue to engage in our own form of activism, reaffirming our identity, occupying spaces that people like us haven't occupied before, speaking our mind without fearing the reaction from the dominant groups, and taking the inevitable challenges and disappointments with grace. Taking our rightful place in society will likely take generations to achieve, and in my personal case, I am thankful that my experience at Harvard has given me both the perspective and the tools to advance that goal, however slightly.

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“I Found My Island”

Field Reflections of a Black Nuyorican in Puerto Rico **By MIARI TAINA STEPHENS**



Miari Taina Stephens, a black Nuyorican in Puerto Rico.

I LANDED IN SAN JUAN FOR THE FIRST TIME as a young adult with a bright orange 52-pound suitcase, my dog Zora, and an eager excitement to be reunited with the island. My exhaustion from having recently survived my first year of graduate school—packed with required seminars, thousands of pages of readings, building new communities, and chronic imposter syndrome—was alleviated by the refreshing breezes cutting through

the humid, Caribbean summer air. While I planned to conduct preliminary fieldwork and brush up on my Spanish in anticipation of my future, yet very distant dissertation, this trip was also intimately personal.

Often during that summer, I found myself listening to the soundtrack of *In the Heights* often, a musical that I have seen four times, which narrates the stories of Caribbean Latinos in Washington

Heights in New York City. In Lin Manuel Miranda’s Tony Award-winning musical, Dominican-American bodega owner Usnavi de la Vega yearns for a place that feels like home since his parents passed away. He hopes that by eventually going back to his parents’ homeland, he can find the feeling of home he is searching for. He dreams of his Cuban neighbor, the abuela of the block—Abuela Claudia—of returning to the Caribbean.

They sing:

Think of the hundreds of stories We’ll create/ You and I!. Ay...

[Abuela] *We’ll find your island*

[Usnavi] *I’ll find my island sky*

I’ll find my island. These lyrics resonated with me in the most cliché way throughout my summer but I couldn’t shake them. The essence of my academic interests in racial identity and black womanhood through the lens of beauty in the Latino Caribbean has been fueled by this same quest. I can trace these intellectual interests and questions back to an anthropology class I took in my first year of college. “The Black Church in the U.S.” course introduced me to Samiri Hernandez Hiraldo’s ethnography *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience* about the black community of Loiza, Puerto Rico. I had never heard anyone mention black Puerto Ricans in a book or classroom. The book drew me to explore academia and research as a means to answer questions about my identity that I hadn’t consciously acknowledged.

For me, a third generation black Nuyorican, Puerto Rico itself was an unfamiliar place with an ubiquitous presence. I could identify *puertorriquenidad* in my home, my church, my childhood neighborhood, in my comfort food. Yet, people generally did not recognize me

as Puerto Rican—I do not fit the (false) image of the light-skinned Latina people generally imagine Puerto Ricans to be. My insecurities of being a dark-skinned black girl led me to emotionally cling to Puerto Rican identity as a symbolic escape from being black. I also internalized the false conception of Puerto Rican and black as mutually exclusive categories. My research as an undergraduate indirectly addressed this insecurity and other questions I had about my family—why did my mom identify as black? Why did my grandma vehemently deny it?

By the end of my first year of college I had decided to major in African American studies and Latin American studies, but the disconnection between the two curricula was apparent. Puerto Rico was especially lost in this gap—widely regarded as racially mixed or ambiguous Latin American country, but also not perceived as Latin American enough due to its commonwealth status.

[Abuela] *Dream of the seaside air!*

See me beside you there!

Think of the hundreds of stories we will share! You and I!

While my research throughout undergraduate studies quelled these identity crises, my summer in Puerto Rico still had a resonance of finding home which I expected to encounter through building community in my process research. On the one hand, I found this palpable connection I had been searching for on the island through food, through music, seeing elements of myself, my home and family. On the other hand, I faced the same questions and doubts about being Puerto Rican while there.

I recall one exchange in a restaurant where an elderly white man sitting at the table next to me said “bon appétit” once my food arrived. I simply replied “gracias.” He audibly gasped and asked me in Spanish where I learned Spanish. Continuing our exchange in Spanish, I told him I was Puerto Rican. He put his hands up, slightly crouching, dramatizing the slight attitude I gave off. He apologized

and scurried off. I had a similar exchange when a man with skin complexion similar to mine asked me where I was from. I ignored his question and told him I was Puerto Rican—since I knew what he wanted to know was where to place me racially and ethnically, and how to make sense of a dark-skinned girl with locs in San Juan. He asked if I was from Loíza, a town east of San Juan known for its large Afro-Puerto Rican population. He seemed baffled when I said no.

Discourses of racial mixing, *mestizaje*, and whitening, *blanqueamiento*, attempt to rid the island of blackness, or compartmentalize it as folklore (Davilla 1997; Rivero 2005; Godreau, Cruz, Ortiz & Cuadrado 2008; Rodriguez-Silva 2012; Godreau 2015). My insecurities in being ‘too black’ to claim my Puerto Rican identity, then, were not just products of the misinformed racial imagination of Americans about black Puerto Rican identity; rather, they were products of global anti-blackness that did not skip over the island. My grandma’s distancing from her own blackness, for example, is intertwined in this systematic, sociopolitical ideology in Puerto Rico, the wider Latin American Caribbean and the entire Latin American region.

[Usnavi] *“If you close your eyes that hydrant is a beach/ That siren is a breeze/ that fire escape’s a leaf on a palm tree!”*

On the day that Usnavi plans to leave Manhattan to go to the Dominican Republic, he realizes his role in his community and the fact that New York is his home. Manhattan is his island. I had already reversed this idea of myself as a paradox based on narrow U.S.-centered notions of race; and later realized, too, that my own quest for home and forged connection on the island was actually kind of nonsensical. This is not at all to say that black folks’ quest for a home(land) is not valuable or meaningful; but rather that the antiblack rhetoric that denies my relationship to this place does not have to be supplanted with a forced sense of

belonging and cultural ownership. And, honestly, the same antiblack rhetoric is present in Puerto Rico in similar but distinct ways that deny black Puerto Ricans a sense of belonging in their own home. I can love Puerto Rico, everything it’s given me, how it has shaped me and my family while recognizing that trips to the island don’t make it my own in the way I had hoped when I arrived in San Juan. Being Puerto Rican from Brooklyn does not change the reality that I am the third generation in my family born and raised in the country that does try to claim Puerto Rico as its own while simultaneously ignoring it. This is made especially evident right now as I write this essay about being Puerto Rican with lights overhead and clean, running water in my house while Puerto Ricans on the island are suffering the devastating, life-threatening effects of Hurricane Maria in the exact moment that I type these words.

While my research on the (racialized, classed, gendered and sexualized) politics of beauty in Puerto Rico is driven by my experiences as a dark-skinned black Puerto Rican woman and has drawn me closer to this place that was once home for my family, I cannot lose sight of my positionality in relation to Puerto Rico. I left San Juan that summer with my bright orange suitcase, my dog Zora, and the comfort of embracing my identity as a black Nuyorican—in spite of insecurities embedded by anti-blackness—by claiming the island that continues to shape me, New York City.

[Usnavi] *“I found my island/ I been on it this whole time/ I’m home!”*

Miari Taina Stephens is a second year Ph.D. student in African & African American studies with a primary field in Anthropology at Harvard University. She is interested in the politics of beauty, black womanhood and black feminisms in the Latino Caribbean. Her current work explores the politics of beauty and its entanglement with race, gender, class and sexuality in Puerto Rico.

Transforming Havana's Gay Ambiente

Black Lesbian Gender Performers and Cuba's Sexual Revolution

By MATTHEW LESLIE SANTANA



Drag king performers are led by working-class black lesbians.

THE EPICENTER OF HAVANA'S GAY AMBIENTE might be La Rampa—a stretch of Calle 23 in the touristy El Vedado neighborhood—but the peripheral neighborhoods of Havana are also home to drag shows and other queer nightlife. Recently, my friends Argelia and Ana invited me and my partner to see them perform at a privately run party in the neighborhood of Párraga on the outskirts of Havana. Párraga is roughly seven miles south of El Vedado and a journey of at least an hour on multiple city busses. We met up with our friends—a black lesbian couple who also perform as drag kings—caught a bus to Párraga, climbed a steep hill on foot, and followed the sound of music at the end of the block to reach the party.

The venue was handsome, an open space in the patio and backyard of a large house with tables and chairs, a bar and a small stage. That night, perhaps as a result of my friends' appearance, an audience made up mostly of Afrodescendant lesbian women arrived behind us. This already differentiated the event from most of those in the El Vedado nightclubs, where the audience is predominantly gay male. We spent the night sharing a table with a group of women who had participated at one time or another in Grupo OREMI, the network of lesbian and bisexual women of the National Center for Sex Education (CENESEX), the most prominent player in Cuba's sexual revolution.

One of these women told us that she lived in the Playa neighborhood, meaning she had traveled even further than we had to come to the party. When I asked her why she had come such a long distance when there was desirable nightlife in her neighborhood, she responded that she felt she could have a better, more relaxing, and less costly night in Párraga than at any club in the city center. I imagined that this had something to do with the conspicuous absence of tourists in this space. The gay parties in El Vedado are characterized by the tourists who attend them and the jineteros or hustlers who chase after them. These parties represent a heavily male, transnational and commercial scene. In Párraga, however, my partner and I were

possibly the only non-Cuban citizens, and in our solitude we did not attract a great deal of attention.

In my fieldwork for my Ph.D. dissertation on race, gender performance, and sexual revolution in Cuba, I focus on the barriers these black lesbian drag performers face in finding steady work as gender performers. While drag QUEEN performance has flourished in Havana in recent years, brought above ground by the state's more accepting approach toward nonnormative sexualities that is often described as a "sexual revolution," Havana's drag KING scene is just getting off the ground. This lag is indicative of one aspect of the sexual revolution that has been criticized for its failure to fully include lesbian women in its drive for change. The nascent drag king scene emphasizes the need for lesbian space in Havana, and it calls attention to how the changes brought about by the sexual revolution have not made a sufficient impact on the lives of working-class and Afrodescendant Cubans.

Back at the party, my partner and I settled in to listen to our friends perform "Mientes" by the Mexican group Camila: the women emerged from backstage with their hair slicked back and facial hair carefully pasted on to their faces. They wore three-piece suits, shirts and ties. When they reached the chorus, the audience shouted along at full voice, a somewhat ironic performance given that my friends were silently lip-synching to the recording. This kind of anthemic song is a typical opener for them: they will often begin with a romantic piece, pass through some salsa or reggaetón, and finish with rumba, animating their audience bit by bit over the course of their selections. True to form, they closed their portion of the show with "Estoy aquí" by the famed folkloric ensemble Yoruba Andabo. By this point, the public was primed to jump to their feet, dance with the performers, and break the barrier between audience and artist.

This was not the only folkloric element of the night. One day a week, this establishment hosts an afternoon rumba performance, and on this occasion the

numberos came the night before to play a set of songs for the orishas, deities in the Yoruba religion Regla de Ocha. Dancers sat on stage dressed as various orishas, waiting for their canto to sound. Among them was the drag queen who runs this party, who was dressed as Yemayá. As her song began, she rose, dancing and swirling so her blue and white dress resembled the foam of the ocean over which Yemayá presides. Women dressed as Obbatalá and Ochún also rose and danced when their respective orishas were called. The audience responded with particular enthusiasm to this part of the evening, stuffing tips in the dresses of the performers. While Afro-Cuban cultural production and folkloric elements are not absent from the stages of Havana's downtown performance, this kind of dwelling on Afrodiasporic themes was certainly more than would be typical on La Rampa.

We stayed with our friends at the party until the first city buses would start running in the neighborhood a little after 4 a.m. We waited a long while on a street corner near the party and eventually caught a bus back to the hub. There our two friends caught another bus to nearby Mantilla—where they live—and we caught one back to El Vedado along with the various performers who lived in Centro Habana and our neighborhood. We checked in with our friends when we got off the bus, and they were already home, settling in to bed just before 6 a.m., which is relatively common for gender performers in Havana.

Neighborhoods like Párraga are often referred to as the "barrios marginales" of Havana, referring to both their geographical placement in relation to the city as well as the socioeconomic status of their residents. The marginal nature of these neighborhoods is reflected in the lives and work of female gender performers in Havana. While they do occasionally appear in mainstream gay nightclubs, they more often perform at early evening performances known as peñas or at parties on the outskirts of the city, where they also live. They face considerable economic

Nevertheless, drag king performance remains an unrealized proposition in Havana.

and social hardships: Not long before our night spent together in Párraga, the cement column that supported their water tank in their back patio collapsed, making it considerably harder for them to store and access the water that comes in from the city once a day. A couple of months later, the effects Hurricane Irma exacerbated existing problems with electricity and leaking in their old wooden house. And all the while they had been caring for Ana's father as he suffered from dementia and finally passed away in October.

Tellingly, these are also the characteristics that put them on the periphery of Cuba's sexual revolution, which has catered to gay men, cozied to the spending of tourism, and underplayed the linkages between racism and homophobia in Cuba. By contrast, the nascent drag king performance in Havana has been led by working-class black lesbians whose explicit aims are to combat lesbophobia and generate sorely needed lesbian spaces in Cuba's capital. They often clearly articulate that their consciousness comes from their marginal position as black, working-class, lesbian women.

When I ask my interlocutors why they do drag performance, they often tell me they do it to show that they—as women—can. While it is easy to think of gender performance as a liberating practice that promotes gender fluidity, it is important to understand it as well as an industry that is dominated by men—drag queens, artistic directors, and nightclub owners—and too often adheres to rigid gender norms. Male performers in Havana are often expected to arrive in masculine garb so as to appear “normal” and to highlight the transformation into their stage persona.

The performativity of this masculinity, however, gets obscured as they step out on to the street and blend in to the larger canvas of gender presentation in Havana. By contrast, female gender performers put that masculine veneer on stage to be ogled, applauded, laughed at. Their transformation underscores the fluid and performative nature of masculinity more generally and takes place in a context in which men have disproportionate access to the formal portion Cuba's tourist economy and the better-paying jobs that characterize it.

Nevertheless, drag king performance remains an unrealized proposition in Havana. My friends have had a frustratingly difficult time securing steady work as gender performers in the city, as male hosts and artistic directors often prefer to hire the glamorous drag queens to which gay male audiences are accustomed. It also remains to be seen whether and how their work gets folded into Cuba's sexual revolution. At the 10th Jornada Contra la Homofobia y la Transfobia in May of this year, my friends—who have also become important interlocutors for my dissertation—performed at the nationally televised Gala Contra la Homofobia in the immense Karl Marx Theater, becoming the first drag kings ever to have done so. However, the announcer failed to point out that the people on stage were female gender performers, and many spectators assumed they were men. It is unsure whether they will be invited to perform at the 11th Jornada in May 2018 and whether it will be made clear to the audience that the artists they are enjoying are black lesbian women performing masculinity as a job in Cuba's challenging economy.

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Sandoval Redux

BY NICHOLAS T RINEHART

“WHILE I LIE ON A CUSHION OF WORM SLIME, Father Alonso de Sandoval appears”: So remarks one of the several enslaved narrators in Afro-Colombian author Manuel Zapata Olivella's 1983 novel *Changó, el gran putas*, translated into English in 2010 by Jonathan Tittler as *Changó, the Biggest Badass*.

Zapata Olivella thereby reimagines—on the granular level of everyday intimate contact—the life and work of the Jesuit missionary Alonso de Sandoval (1577-1652), whose theological writings betray the profound moral contradictions and epistemological blindspots at the heart of his Christianizing project.

This conflict surfaces in the second section of the novel, “The American Muntu,” as newly arrived African slaves in the Colombian port city of Cartagena de Indias encounter the proselytizing zeal of the Society of Jesus—which, from its founding until its ultimate expulsion from Spanish America in 1767, was among the largest slaveholders in the Americas. Father Sandoval's entrance onto the stage of Zapata Olivella's novel is shaped both by coercion and elation. His commands—“Open your mouth and drink,” “Suck on this grain of salt,” “Receive the Lord's grace”—receive no verbal response until the nameless speaker, regaining his voice from extreme thirst, speaks to Sandoval “in his own tongue.” The renowned Jesuit missionary exclaims excitedly “You are a Christian! Praise the Lord!” and “jumps for joy.” Zapata Olivella continues:

I don't know how much he paid for me or if he managed to beg for my freedom. He himself, pulling the cart that transports the sick, takes me through the door that used to open only to vomit out the dead. [...] While Moncholo shoos the flies from my face, Father Alonso brought some oranges.



Sandoval Manuscript

Splitting them open with his fingernails, he squeezed their juice into my mouth. Only at that moment, when life ripped off my death mask, did he recognize me.

This failure of recognition—Sandoval's delayed realization that the nearly dead figure before him is no anonymous *bozal* but rather a former colleague of sorts, an enslaved translator who had helped the “novice” during his early missions to the African continent—structures the entire section of *Changó*. This collision of the priest's triumphal joy and the stoicism of now-named Domingo Falupo (“we suffer very little and feel only the affliction and joy of the dead”) establishes a spiritual conflict hardly legible in Sandoval's own writings on slavery.

First published in Seville in 1627 as *Naturaleza, policia sagrada i profana, costumbres i ritos, disciplina i catechismo evangélico de todos etiopes*, Sandoval's magnum opus is a thoroughly hybrid text. Book I of the so-called *Treatise on Slavery* describes African geography, languages, cultures, religions and dress

in an ethnographic style typical of 16th- and 17th-century missionary writings, whereas Book II argues that slaves' suffering is rooted primarily in their ignorance of the Christian God. Book III provides instructions for baptizing and catechizing enslaved Africans, paying particular attention to the logistical difficulties posed by linguistic difference. Book IV, moreover, largely abandons the previous focus on the plight of enslaved Africans in Cartagena and instead articulates a global vision of Jesuit mission work—and its spiritual and ethical imperatives—across the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Known more commonly as *De instauranda Aethiopia salute* (“On restoring salvation to the Africans”)—the Latin title affixed to an augmented 1647 edition of the text published

in Madrid—Sandoval's work frequently includes material gathered from daily interactions with enslaved Afro-Cartagenans, whose voices are ventriloquized and refracted in the body of the text. In the chapter “The Slave Ships,” for instance, Sandoval writes of the Middle Passage: “I know individuals who have endured this journey. They say they are extremely cramped, nauseous and mistreated.” Evidently basing his description on accounts told to him by enslaved people themselves, Sandoval considers how Africans' testimony of the transatlantic crossing has altered his own perception of the trade. “The slaves look forward to eating once every twenty-four hours, although they get no more than a half cup of corn or crude millet and a small cup of water. Other than that, they get nothing else besides beating, whipping and cursing,” he continues. “Many people I know have experienced this, although I once believed that some of the slavers treated them more gently and kindly these days.”

But the *Treatise* is no anti-slavery

text. Sandoval himself recognized the ambivalent position of Jesuit missions striving to baptize, catechize and spiritually purify newly disembarked African slaves while working within institutions that depended upon their bondage. The college in Cartagena where Sandoval worked owned several haciendas, including La Ceiba—where sugarcane and cattle were raised—and its two satellite tile factories (*tejares*) Alcivia and Preceptor, where 111 slaves were employed at the time of the Jesuit expulsion from the Americas in 1767.

This state of affairs was neither paradoxical nor hypocritical according to the theology of Sandoval and his Jesuit colleagues, the most famous of whom—Sandoval's apprentice and “companion” Pedro Claver, another character in Zapata Olivella's novel—was ultimately beatified in 1850 and canonized in 1888 for his spiritual work among African slaves in Cartagena. The Society of Jesus, while recognizing the misery of their African subjects, did not seek in any demonstrable way to protest, curb or even seriously question slavery itself; they perceived the pagan *bozal* as capable of spiritual redemption through baptism, catechism and confession.

Indeed, Sandoval is at pains throughout *De instauranda* to distinguish his own benevolent practices from forms of mass conversion carried out before disembarkation from the African slave coast. In one striking passage, Sandoval relates how Africans aboard slave ships or held captive at slave ports understood their forced baptisms. “Some respond that they are afraid of this water and believe the whites do this to kill them. Others think that the water is like a brand, a mark put on them so that their masters know who they are when they buy and sell them,” he writes. “One slave told me that water was poured on him to enchant him, to prevent him from rising up against the whites in this ship in the course of the voyage. He also thought it was done so he would live many more years and bring gold to his masters.”

In contrast to these images of coercion, Sandoval depicts his own baptismal

practices as moments of celebration. “Miguel feels so much gratitude for the benefits of baptism that to this day, whenever he sees me he stops before me, falls on his knees, and claps his hands as a sign of joy,” he writes of one encounter. “Then he asks me for my hands and puts them over his eyes, and then he gets up and goes on his way.” Here, the “joy” of an enslaved African named Miguel at the prospect of spiritual salvation reflects the fictional Sandoval’s “jumps for joy” in Zapata Olivella’s novel written across a gulf of three hundred years. But *Changó* foregrounds and excavates this misrecognition at the heart of Sandoval’s Christianizing enterprise.

Structured like the *Treatise* in several discrete sections, the novel narrates the history of the African diaspora—what Zapata Olivella calls the *ekobios*—through key moments of insurgent conspiracy, political revolution and outright rebellion: an uprising aboard a slave ship; the Maroon wars in 17th-century Cartagena led by religious heretic Benkos Biojó; the Haitian Revolution, as narrated by Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe; the Latin American wars of independence, featuring appearances by Simón Bolívar, José Prudencio Padilla, and José María Morelos; and finally a near-parodic gathering of prominent black Americans—including Nat Turner, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Tubman; Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey; and Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and Claude McKay—told through the fictional character Agne Brown, a young Columbia University anthropologist and spiritual medium likely modeled on Zora Neale Hurston.

Zapata Olivella splices his rendering of early modern Cartagena—where slave and free Africans conducted a series of battles in order to establish and defend their own free town (Palenque) at San Basilio, a small village amid the foothills south of the city—with the judicial language of Inquisition tribunals. He writes:

For being a proven and confessed fornicator with four burros, Antonio

Here, the “joy” of an enslaved African named Miguel at the prospect of spiritual salvation reflects the fictional Sandoval’s “jumps for joy” in Zapata Olivella’s novel written across a gulf of three hundred years.

Bolanos was condemned to one hundred lashes and public shaming as a lesson to the Africans who, having received holy baptism, feign practicing the faith, going to mass, confessing, and taking communion in order to make a show of being good Christians, but who, in their hidden life practice the most nefarious concupiscence and obscenities learned from their elders.

The joyous redemption described in Sandoval’s text is here rendered as subterfuge, and Domingo Falupo is the culprit. The translator himself is brought before the Inquisition:

It is ordained that all the baptisms in which the Moor Domingo Falupo participated to be subject to review, because of his tergiversation in bad faith of the questions that through his mediation were asked of the Africans....

For all of the above, it would be appropriate to obtain from the reprobate a complete and candid confession and, if said confession should prove to be contrary to our aims, to cloak it in the greatest secrecy, lest a wave of disbelief was over the baptisms verified by the company, with those who are sincerely and really Christians being taken for Moors, and the most abominable reprobates being taken for Christians.

Father Sandoval then reappears, this time as a “Friendly Shadow” who is “buried in Seville and is only retracing his footsteps in Cartagena,” imploring Falupo to appease the Inquisition and reveal “whose baptisms were done *sub conditione* of your wayward conduct.” Echoing their initial

(re)encounter, the priest meets the same response. “In my silence you will find my answer,” Falupo remarks. “None of those ekobios who speak languages unknown to you and to your interpreters, for whom I served as interpreter, disavowed their Orichas.” With that, Sandoval’s “grieving” ghost retreats from Falupo’s cell “as if it really had been his body and not his Shadow that entered therein.”

Changó thereby enacts a narrative repetition that signifies, in miniature, the novel’s broader historical reenactment. The surreal return of the figure of Father Sandoval within the spiritual world of the text ripples outward as Zapata Olivella’s implicit conjuring of *De Instauranda*. If the *Treatise* surprisingly comprises an ethnographic repository for the memories and beliefs, joys and terrors of enslaved Afro-Cartagenans under Sandoval’s spiritual supervision, it also spurns the possibility of their duplicity, fugitivity, or resistance. Zapata Olivella’s novel reimagines that misrecognition between Jesuit priest and pagan slave not as a momentary lapse ultimately to be reconciled, but rather as a fundamental precondition for the history of the African diaspora in the Americas.

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DISCRIMINATION AND FORMS OF ACTION



George Reid Andrews *Afro-Latin America by the Numbers* • Cristian Alejandro Báez Lazcano
Reflections on the Afro-Chilean Social Movement • Lowell Gudmundson *Avoiding and Encountering Blackness
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Reflections on the Afro-Chilean Social Movement

We Entered as Blacks, and We Left as Afrodescendants...and Afro-Chileans Appeared on the Scene **By** CRISTIAN ALEJANDRO BÁEZ LAZCANO

A SAYING POPULARIZED BY THE AFRO-Uruguayan leader Romero Rodríguez comes up again and again in the history of the Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean movements: “We entered as blacks and left as Afrodescendants.” It’s not just about words. At the December 2000 conference in Santiago de Chile on racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, the term “Afrodescendants” was adopted through consensus after much discussion. And that’s when we Afrodescendants in Chile realized we were Afro-Chileans.

So many terms had been imposed by the colonizers to describe us: *negro*, *zambo*, *mulato*, *zambaigo*, *moreno*. With the term Afrodescendant, we get to define ourselves as “people of African origin who were brought as slaves during colonial times and who historically have been victims of racism, racial discrimination and slavery, with the consequent denial of their human rights, experiencing conditions based on marginalization, poverty and exclusion that are expressed through the profound social and economic inequality under which they live,” in the words of the Declaration of Santiago. And here, in Chile, we are still trying to be counted.

The term Afrodescendant—as set forth in the Declaration of Santiago and adopted in the 2001 Declaration and Plan of Action of Durban, South Africa—was officially recognized as both a legal and political term by many countries and the United Nations.

Following the words came action. The first non-governmental Afro-Chilean organization, founded in December 2000, was Oro Negro—Black Gold—

led by the then-mayor of a community in the north of Chile, Sonia Salgado Henríquez. The very establishment of this organization called into question the myth that blacks did not exist in Chile; had they ever been there, however, they must all have perished because of the cold, hostile weather. Oro Negro made Afrodescendants visible in the social, cultural, legal and political realms in this long, narrow country perceived by many as exclusively white.

The movement began as a social and cultural one. Archives and academic studies about Afro-Chileans are few and far between. Thus, in the first stage of the organization (2001-2007), research became a priority. Customs, traditions, history and territories were documented in an attempt to define and promote the legacy of Afro-Chileans. In 2003, the Lumbanga organization was set up to conduct oral histories and to promote the living and intangible patrimony of Afro culture in Chile. The point was clear: “We Afro-Chileans are here and present and we haven’t disappeared.”

It was not only a matter of convincing others that Afro-Chileans existed; in many cases, it involved self-recognition, because many descendants of slaves in Chile simply had not acknowledged their race. We needed to reconstruct from the inside to develop and feel ourselves Afrodescendants.

At the same time, Afrodescendant organizations had to implement the plan of action formulated at the world conference in Durban, which was more technical and political than the initial cultural agenda. The Afro movement in Chile formed the Alliance of Afro-Chilean

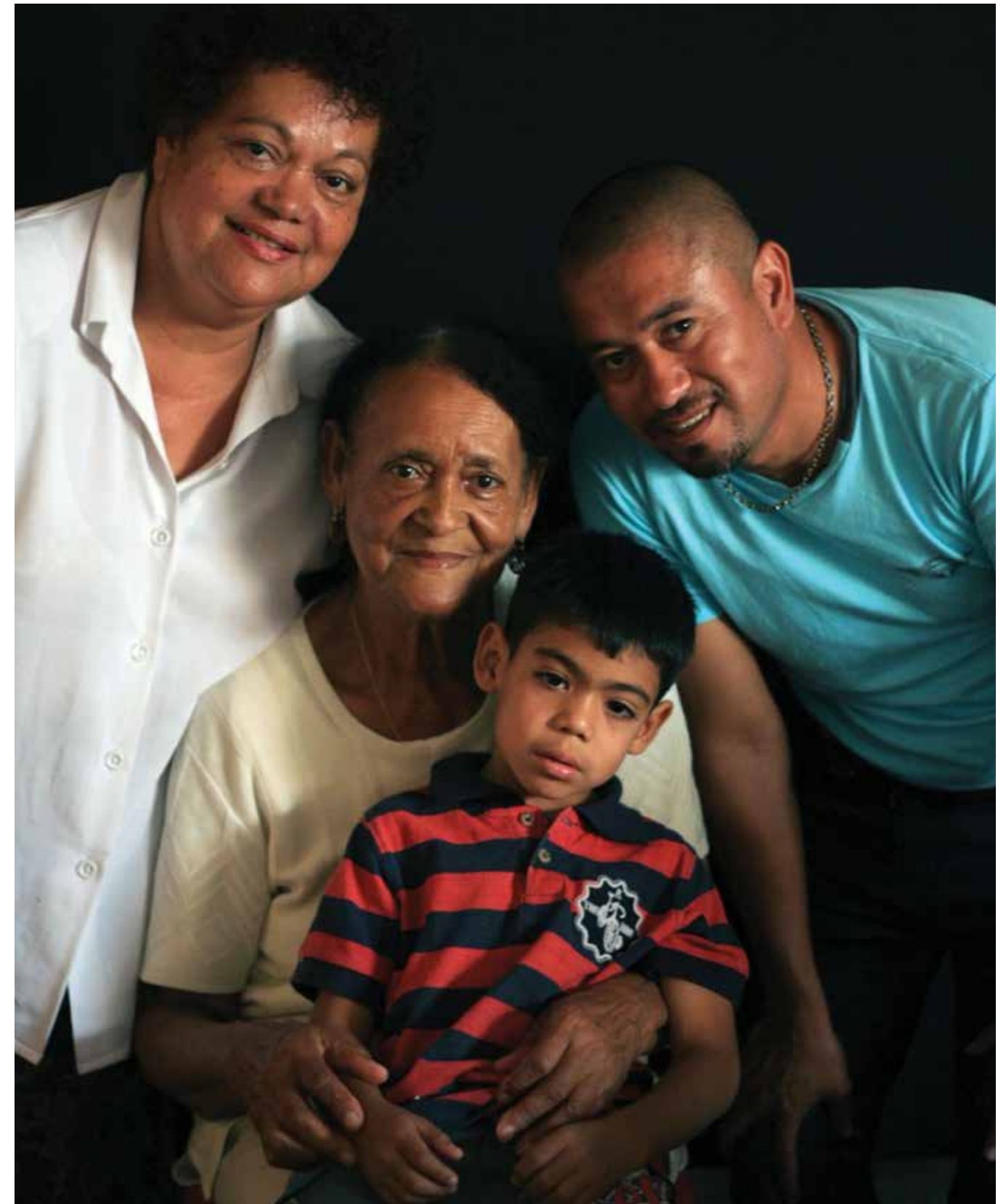
Organizations to articulate local issues and negotiate with the Chilean state. In addition to Oro Negro and Lumbanga, other groups such as Arica Negro, Seniors Club Julia Corvacho and the Luanda Afrodescendant Women’s Collective joined the network.

We had to come up with a plan, developed along many fronts:

- A legal framework that recognizes the presence and contribution of Afro-Chileans.
- An institutional framework with the creation of a public entity to deal with the demands and needs of the Afrodescendant community.
- A political framework to justify immediate social, cultural and economic actions on the local level in favor of Afrodescendants.
- A statistical framework that defines technically the number of Afro-Chileans at the present time and our economic and social situations.
- We recognize the plethora of local actions by Afrodescendant organizations, especially in the provinces of Arica and Parinacota, where the largest communities identifying as Afro-Chilean are found, but I want to share some experiences that indicate the challenges still facing the movement.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH LAW AND INSTITUTIONS

We’ve found that few legal instruments exist to obligate the Chilean state to put into effect measures for inclusion and for making the Afro-Chilean community visible, although an article in our Constitution, similar to that of many countries in Latin America, establishes that people should not be discriminated against because of race or religion. An



A family portrait, Cristian Báez Lazcano on right.



Afrodescendants in Chile want to be included in census; opposite page, portraits of Afro-Chileans.

During its 17 years as a political movement, Afro-Chilean organizations have made three attempts to get a law recognizing the identity of Afrodescendants in Chile.

indigenous law, passed in the 1990s about native peoples, does not apply to us because we are a transplanted people who came to Chile at the same time as the colonizers, but as slaves.

One of the strategies was to take advantage of Chile's post-dictatorship commitment to human rights issues in the international arena to pressure the country to initiate actions of inclusion in favor of Afro-Chileans. We had to research agreements, pacts, conventions, declarations, protocols and other political and legal instruments to which Chile was a subscriber and to commit government officials to apply these measures within its borders.

The Afro-Chilean political movement had to venture forth into the world to become politically mature and to form alliances, especially with our more experienced counterparts in

Latin America and the Caribbean. Our organizational leaders learned about the currents of political-ethno/racial discourse and became more black-identified, able to make greater strides within Chile because of alliances and knowledge from beyond its borders.

During its 17 years as a political movement, Afro-Chilean organizations have made three attempts to get a law recognizing the identity of Afrodescendants in Chile. In 2005, congressional representative Iván Paredes, under the aegis of Lumbanga, gathered historical arguments to justify such a law, but the effort never got off the ground. Later Lumbanga and Oro Negro both put together a document to be presented by congressional representative Antonio Leal, but the bill was shelved, even after another representative, Orlando Vargas, lent his

support.

Finally, in 2016, the bill was revamped with additional legal, historical, anthropological and political arguments. This became bill N° 10625-17, a document that would guarantee the individual and collective rights of Afrodescendants in Chile. The bill, submitted by representative Luis Rocafull in April 2016 and approved by the human rights and citizenship commission, passed into consideration by the Chamber of Deputies in the Chilean Congress.

The Chilean government in 2014, through the Culture Ministry, invited the Afrodescendant groups to participate in a "prior consultation" process in the context of agreement 169 of the international Treaty on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. This was an important step in the recognition of Afrodescendants as a "tribal people," opening up a new legal space in which to argue for human rights.

Prior to these measures, the first Office of Racial Equity, designed and proposed by Oro Negro and Lumbanga, opened in 2011 in the municipality of Arica. The Durban action plan calls for such offices to be created both on the national and local levels.

THE STRUGGLE FOR STATISTICS

In 2001, following the Durban meeting, Oro Negro had tried to get Afrodescendants included in the 2002 census. But the census was only a year away, so the effort was postponed until 2005, when a pilot program took place in the Arica region to get Afrodescendants to identify as such in preparation for full inclusion of the Afrodescendant category in the 2012 census, working together with the National Institute of Statistics (INE).

The effort was underway to include the census question, "Do you consider yourself Afrodescendant/black?" with the possible answers of "yes," "no," or "don't know" in the 2012 census. But a technical analysis, based on the pilot program and subsequent focus groups, concluded that it was premature to include the question because people did not understand the meaning of "Afrodescendant" and that it was preferable just to use the term "black."

This official decision by INE did not definitively end the debate about Afrodescendant inclusion in the 2012 census; we denounced the exclusion as having a racist component, and international organizations began to listen to our arguments, resulting in negotiation with INE to carry out the census on a limited regional basis. It was found that in 2014, in the region of Arica and Parinacota, 8,415 people self-identified as part of the Afrodescendant culture, the first recognition by the state of our community through statistics.

The 2012 census in Chile was annulled, and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recommended a new "shortened census" to be carried out in April 2017. Again, we entered into a struggle for statistics—the right to be counted—but this time, much strengthened because the census tools were more sophisticated and inclusive. We also had other types of modern historical and anthropological academic studies to bolster our efforts, as well as certain international legal and political instruments that would oblige INE to include at least one category or variable about Afrodescendants in this shortened census.



Above, Marcos Baez Rios and his mother Francisca Rios Sanchez Below, Francisca Rios Sanchez with her grandson Diego Baez Baez

To our surprise, we found that INE had not included the question about Afrodescendant identity nor even the category, justifying the exclusion because the census itself was abbreviated. This act of exclusion forced the Afro-Chilean community to denounce the census in local and national legal venues. Both the Chilean Appeals Court and the Supreme Court rejected the petition, and we have brought the case before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. We are still fighting to be counted and recognized.

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Afro-Latin America by the Numbers

The Politics of the Census By **GEORGE REID ANDREWS**

WHERE DID THE ALL-ENCOMPASSING TERM “Afro-Latin America” come from? While “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro-Brazilian” and other national terms were invented in the first half of the 1900s, the broad regional concept appears to have originated in Brazil in the 1970s. A group of black socialist activists and intellectuals in the city of São Paulo were paying close attention to racial issues and struggles not just in Brazil but in Africa, the United States, and throughout the African diaspora. These activists, many of whom participated in the creation of the Movimento Negro Unificado in 1978, named their movement the Grupo Afro-Latino-América. When offered the opportunity to publish a regular section of articles and commentary—edited by the young journalist Hamilton Cardoso—in the leftist magazine *Versus*, they called the section “Afro-Latino-América.” This was coined a paradigm-shifting concept that would eventually reverberate across the diaspora.

The idea of Afro-Latin America was introduced to the United States by political scientists Anani Dzidzienyo and Pierre-Michel Fontaine, both of whom were doing research in Brazil on black social and political movements. Dzidzienyo published his findings in a 1978 article on “Activity and Inactivity in the Politics of Afro-Latin America”; two years later Fontaine reported on “The Political Economy of Afro-Latin America.” Fontaine defined the term to include “all regions of Latin America where significant groups of people of known African ancestry are found.” But that definition left at least two questions unanswered. First, how do we “know” when people are of African ancestry? And second, how large do groups of those people need to be before we consider them “significant”?

For answers to both questions, we

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might logically turn to Latin American censuses, an invaluable source of information on national societies. But at the time that Fontaine was writing, only two countries in the region, Brazil and Cuba, were gathering and publishing census data on their African-descent populations. Every other country had either removed questions on African ancestry from the census or, in some cases, had never included any. In the face of that statistical oblivion, how do we document the presence of African-descent populations and the conditions under which they live? Throughout the region, black activists posed precisely this question during the 1980s and 1990s,

placing the census at the center of their demands for state action against racial discrimination and inequality.

CENSUSES THEN

Modern censuses began in Europe in the 1700s and arrived in Latin America in the 1770s and 1780s, when Spain and Portugal both ordered comprehensive population counts of their New World colonies. In both empires, caste laws organized colonial societies into racially defined groups that owed different combinations of taxes and labor obligations to the Crown. In order to verify the numbers of people falling into each group, the colonial censuses all gathered data on race, though using different systems of categorization in different parts of the empire. Officials in Cuba and Puerto Rico paid close attention to distinctions between blacks and mulattoes, noting the numbers of slaves and free people in each category. Census-takers in Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Panama created a “free people of all colors” category that drew no distinctions between blacks and racially mixed *pardos* (browns). Officials in Honduras, Guatemala and Nicaragua followed a similar approach, counting all free nonwhites (except for indigenous people) as “ladinos.”

Despite these varying approaches, the colonial censuses made clear that by 1800, six present-day countries—Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and Nicaragua—were majority Afrodescendant (black and brown), and another four—Cuba, Colombia, Argentina and Honduras—were between one-third and one-half Afrodescendant. Even Mexico, only ten percent black and mulatto, had the second-largest Afrodescendant population in the region, at an estimated 635,000 people. (Brazil was number one,

with a black and brown population of at least 1.3 million; see map 1.)



Map 1. Afro-Latin America, 1800. Numbers under country names indicate the size of the black and brown (*pardo*) population, in 000s. (Map by Lena Andrews.)

Following independence for most of the region in the 1820s, the new republics faced the issue of whether they wished to keep counting their populations by race. All of the new nations, including monarchical Brazil, had overturned the colonial racial laws and replaced them with constitutional declarations of full civic and racial equality. Those egalitarian principles seemed to argue against retaining colonial racial labels in national censuses, and some countries (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Uruguay, Venezuela) did drop race from their 19th-century population counts. Others, however, such as Cuba (still a Spanish colony), Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Brazil, continued to count by race. They were joined in the early 1900s by countries that were either taking national censuses for the first time (Dominican Republic, Panama) or that had decided to return to gathering racial data (Colombia, Costa Rica).

Those turn-of-the-century censuses

were powerfully influenced by the doctrines of scientific racism that prevailed throughout the Atlantic world. Individual and national destinies were largely determined by racial inheritance, those doctrines argued. Nations seeking to improve and modernize needed to know the obstacles they were up against, hence the need for racial data. Or perhaps the opposite: nations seeking the path to modernity might prefer to ignore their racially mixed composition. This was the case with Brazil, which after documenting a relative decline in the black and brown population from 58 percent of the national total in 1872 to 47 percent in 1890, eliminated race from the censuses of 1900 and 1920. The resulting absence of racial data did not prevent census officials from concluding in 1920 that “the coefficient of the white race is constantly increasing in our population,” accompanied by “a reduction in the coefficient of inferior blood.”

During the next two decades, however, notions of superior and inferior blood fell increasingly out of favor in Brazil and other countries. In the 1940s, in response to the atrocities of German Nazism, scientific racism was roundly repudiated in the world community. Brazil and other Latin American countries now re-imagined themselves as “racial democracies,” thoroughly egalitarian societies in which the gathering of racial data served no useful purpose and might even provoke racial divisions. By the 1950s, only four nations (Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba and the Dominican Republic) were still collecting data on their Afro-descent populations; by 1980, only Brazil and Cuba were doing so.

Under pressure from local movements and from international agencies, Latin American governments ultimately agreed to add questions on Afrodescendants to their censuses and national household surveys.

CENSUSES NOW

Yet as we have seen, it was precisely in the late 1970s that the concept of Afro-Latin America—and the national black movements that had given rise to that term—were taking form across the region. During the 1980s and 1990s, black movements in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Peru and Uruguay pressed national governments to acknowledge the disparities between racial democracy in theory and racial democracy in practice, and to take action to close those gaps. And in every country, high on the list of those movements’ policy demands was the restoration (or in some countries, the inclusion for the first time ever) of racial data to the national census.

It was imperative, those movements argued, that Latin American nations document their racial composition, the actual size of their black and brown populations, and the conditions of social and racial inequality under which those populations lived. Further supporting those demands were requests from international financial and development agencies, which by the 1990s had come to see deeply rooted racial and gender inequality as major obstacles to social and economic development. As a first step toward combating those obstacles, the United Nations, World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank all pushed Latin American countries to provide systematic data on their class, racial and gender composition.

Under pressure from local movements and from international agencies, Latin American governments ultimately agreed to add questions on Afrodescendants to their censuses and national household surveys. Colombia and Uruguay inaugurated those questions in the 1990s,

Ecuador and most of the Central American countries in the census round of 2000, and Argentina, Bolivia, Panama and Venezuela in the census round of 2010. Mexico and Peru have both agreed to gather racial data in censuses to be taken in 2017 and 2020, respectively. Chile and the Dominican Republic are currently the only Latin American countries with no concrete plans to canvass their Afrodescendant populations.

As in the colonial period, different nations have framed census questions on race in different ways, with results that are not always easy to compare across national boundaries. Afro-Colombian activists charge that, by failing to include the commonly used racial label “moreno” as a possible response, Colombia’s 2005 census substantially undercounted the nation’s black and brown population. Conversely, Venezuela’s use of the same term has led to intense debate over whether or not racially mixed “morenos,” the single largest category in the 2011 census, should be considered as Afrodescendants.

Given the complexities of racial identities (how one sees oneself) and racial identifications (how one is seen by others) in Latin America, such debates are unavoidable and will surely continue into the coming decade and beyond. In the meantime, numbers yielded by the 2010 round of censuses do enable a provisional estimate of the region’s black and brown populations. As of 2010, three nations were majority Afrodescendant, down from six in 1800: the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Brazil. (Dominican Republic figures are taken not from the census, which does not count race, but from the Latin American Public Opinion Project [LAPOP] survey of 2010; in Venezuela, I have considered morenos to be Afrodescendants). Cuba’s black and brown population officially registered at 36 percent of the national total; in all other countries, Afrodescendants accounted for 12 percent or less of the national population. The total Afrodescendant population for the region as a whole was an estimated 135-140 million, most of whom (97 million) live in Brazil. Another

15 million live in Venezuela, and 8 million in the Dominican Republic (map 2).



Map 2. Afro-Latin America, 2010. Numbers under country names indicate the size of the black and brown (pardo) population, in 000s. (Map by Lena Andrews.)

Even more important than those population totals was the information that the censuses offered on conditions of Afro-Latin American life. Public debates in

Brazil have long been informed by census and national household survey data documenting pervasive racial inequality in that country. Now that similar information is becoming available for almost every country in the region, comparable debates will surely take place in those countries as well. And just as Brazil has taken major steps toward racially compensatory policies in education, public health, and employment, similar policies are already being proposed and, in some cases, adopted in Colombia, Panama, Uruguay and other countries. Without doubt, census data will be a central component of those policy debates.

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Prejudice and Pride

Avoiding and Encountering Blackness in the Nation of the Black Virgin

By **LOWELL GUDMUNDSON**



From left, Leda Artavia Rojas: *The Baby of the Family Photo* and as *Dinga's Narrator*; Leda as *Perfil's Model of the Year*; Leda in her international modeling career and as a symbol of black pride.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE BLACK IN CENTRAL America? From the Garifuna people along the Atlantic Coast to the descendants of Jamaican and other West Indian groups throughout the isthmus, the region’s citizens have become increasingly self-conscious, visible and interested in their Afrodescendent legacy—to a degree. This reawakening has largely been associated with ethnically and linguistically distinct populations, recognizing and even celebrating them while once again reinscribing blackness as something belonging to “others.” However, only very recently has there been any serious attempt to reposition blackness at the center of dominant historical narratives of mestizo nationhood and contemporary self-identification.

How far we have come in recent times might best be measured by comparing and contrasting early 20th-century imagery, and its now often distorted memory, with early 21st century visual and film representations. Nowhere is this more striking than in Costa Rica, the nation most invested in a white identity, paradoxically juxtaposed with its veneration of a black patron saint and protectress, *La Virgen de los Angeles*. Costa Rican national identity has long involved invidious comparisons with its Central American neighbors, from the very first official histories and

Costa Rica is home to many a paradox—and not just that a self-proclaimed white nation venerates a black Virgin as patron saint.

promotional publications in the mid-19th century to the present. Beyond their neighbors’ all too frequent civil wars, greater poverty and inequality, a central element in all such comparisons has been the claim that, because of its colonial-era isolation and poverty, Costa Ricans descend overwhelmingly from Spanish peasant forebearers, with far less indigenous heritage, the “white legend” of national origins, identity and distinction. Blackness or African descent has been virtually ignored as a source of national origins and identity, consigned to foreign or more recent immigrants and distinctly minority groups in peripheral regions, as has been the case elsewhere in Central America.

Just as with many a Central American and Costa Rican president during the 19th century, Afrodescendant public figures in the early 20th century made a point of ignoring their origins, whether in the

case of Nicaragua’s Rubén Darío or the Costa Rican Communist Party militant, legendary children’s literature author, and *Benemérita de la Patria*, María Isabel Carvajal, better known by her pen name Carmen Lyra. Many such intellectual and political figures aligned themselves with *mestizo* nationalist ideals of the day, at times employing or echoing overtly anti-black imagery and rhetoric. More recently, at times no less controversially, Afro-mestizo cultural expressions have emerged that not only embrace blackness but seek to reposition it at the center of national history and mythology. This interrogation of public attitudes and lived experiences reveal a minefield of silences and ambiguities surrounding blackness and racial perceptions among the very *mestizo* majority populations for whom blackness may remain a shared, distant ancestry and religious tradition, but also something deeply other—even when this blackness is inescapably part of their daily life and community.

In this more recent phenomenon, the documentary film “*Si no es Dinga ...*” and its central figure/narrator, Leda Artavia Rojas, provides a needed perspective on questions being intensely reexamined by this generation of both public intellectuals and young people. We will explore the lives and images of Carmen Lyra and Leda



Top, Carmen Lyra in official memory on the 20,000 colon note. Bottom Carmen Lyra, ca. 1920

Artavia to enter into the hall of mirrors that is blackness in the white nation of Costa Rica.

CARMEN LYRA AND COLOR-BLIND POLITICS

María Isabel Carvajal, or Carmen Lyra (1887-1949), was born to a single mother, raised in poverty in San José, and died in exile in Mexico shortly after the 1948 Revolution that expelled her and banned the Communist Party she had co-founded. At age 17, she graduated from the Girls' High School (*Colegio de Señoritas*) in San José, and within a decade she began to publish her first stories. She played a central role in organizing the female-led and occasionally violent street demonstrations, including the burning of the pro-regime newspaper, that brought down Costa Rica's last military dictatorship in 1919. The new civilian administration rewarded her with a fellowship the following year to study early childhood education in France and Italy. Upon her return, she helped found the first Montessori School in San José and became the first children's literature professor at the teacher training school in Heredia. Her radical politics never failed to upset her relations with institutions and employers, leading to a life-long collaboration with individuals who shared her ideas and jointly founded the Communist Party with



her in 1931.

Beyond partisan politics, however, Carmen Lyra's lasting fame came as the author of classic children's literature, in particular, "*Cuentos de Mi Tía Panchita*." The collection gave voice to countless folk tales familiar to generations of Costa Rican children, including several tales of African origin such as the *Tío Conejo* (Brer Rabbit) stories. The only explicitly "colorized" or color-based fairy tale in that collection was titled, "*La Negra y la Rubia*," (The Black

and the Blond Girls). Contemporary literary analysts have puzzled over and criticized this fable's overtly anti-black and pro-Christian imagery of favor and redemption, particularly in a nation whose patron saint and virgin is popularly known as "*La Negrita*."

However, like many such expressions of anti-black orthodoxy by 19th- and 20th-century Afro-mestizos elsewhere in Central America, the fable could be read against the grain rather than simply as yet another pledge of allegiance to white supremacist national iconography. Lyra's writings, both political and literary, give no hint of a fondness for irony bordering on satire, parody or sarcasm, but she was not an orthodox author of socialist realism either, given her choice of the genre of fairy tales adapted to the local context, among the first to be written to sound like popular speech. The fable of the favored *Rubia* and the disparaged *Negra* could thus be read as a not-so-veiled allegory describing the social and psychic costs of deeply entrenched discriminatory attitudes and beliefs the author herself was perhaps only too aware of.

Literary analysts who have yet to detect or suspect such an undertext in Lyra's story also rescued from national historical amnesia a particularly revealing and powerful photograph of the youthful

writer turned militant. At the ceremony to found the Cátedra Carmen Lyra at the Universidad Nacional (the former teacher training school in Heredia) in 2015, they publicized an image used by her friend and admirer, former Education Minister María Eugenia Dengo Obregón, in her homage to Lyra as one of many iconic Costa Rican educators in her book, *Tierra de Maestros*.

As was common throughout Central America then and now, both official and popular historical memory whitens and softens their icons with the passage of time. Carmen Lyra, communist exile and official villain for more than half a century, was rebranded as popular martyr when she became *Benemérita de la Patria* in 2016. Her newly honorific, semi-official image graces the largest denomination of local currency in circulation, the 20,000 *colón* note.

Carmen Lyra may well have cultivated the austere, proletarian "look" in her many public images after returning from Europe and founding the CP, but none compares with the striking beauty of that youthful image, of the *Afromestiza* firebrand poised to commit her life to the "people's cause." Her contemporary and posthumous supporters have tirelessly noted her illegitimate birth and childhood poverty, but in the centuries-old tradition of assimilationist silence, politely ignored her *Afrodescendance*.

LEDA ARTAVIA: FROM HIGH FASHION TO DINGA'S LEADING LADY

In late 2014, the screening of the Costa Rican documentary film "*Si no es Dinga*" became a local watershed—a "happening." Produced by Isis Campos Zeledón and Rodrigo "Kike" Molina Figuls, the 52-minute film explores a range of Costa Ricans' (mis)understandings of their relationship to blackness. The producers use a variety of tropes and strategies, beginning with the title itself which comes from the colonial-era saying from Peru, "*Si no es de Dinga es de Mandinga*," referring to race and cultural mixes having either indigenous (*Inca/Inga/Dinga*) or African (*Mandinga*) roots. They proceed

to explore how very common words and expressions, as well as local musical traditions, are clearly unrecognized as African in origin. The film uses interviews with a range of men and women on the street, as well as with academic specialists, to try to understand how this peculiar compartmentalization of attitudes came to be. An often reflexive pride in national whiteness coexists alongside a quotidian recognition of dark-skinned mixedness, as well as an abiding reverence for "*La Negrita*" and the pilgrimage to her shrine in the colonial capital of Cartago each August 2.

The driving force of the documentary, however, is the narrative voice and on-screen presence of Leda Artavia Rojas. Part youthful everywoman and explorer leading the viewer on a journey of discovery, more profoundly the muse offering a window on the world of Costa Rican stereotypes and misperceptions about blackness, she offers not only firsthand, lived experience, but access to her own complex family history. Reframing the documentary enterprise more fundamentally as if it were simply "getting to know someone," and that someone as engaging and disarming as Leda Artavia, proves a brilliant strategy to avoid the traditional academic pitfalls of would-be objectivity and didacticism.

As she revisits various neighborhoods from her childhood, she reminds viewers that she grew up entirely in the Central Valley. Somewhere between joke and lament, she wonders aloud why she is always asked if she is from Limón or why she does not like "rice and beans"—both references invoke local code for identifying "blackness" associated with West Indian immigrants from the Atlantic coast. Or, why do people who seem to want to be polite, assure her that she is "not really" black. Later in the film, many of the academic informants enter into conversations with Leda, seeking to explain the very long history of willful ignorance of colonial black populations' role in race mixture, the emergence of imagined "*mestizo*" majorities, and the denial of blackness as a form of polite

society's partial acceptance of Hispanic *Afrodescendants*.

Dinga's story deepens further in a series of on-camera conversations Leda has with her older sisters about their experiences with color diversity within the family. In a bittersweet exchange haunted by the all-too-fresh memories of the premature death of their mother, the discussion ranges from their grandfather's opposition to her relationship with Leda's father, how her color difference was perceived by the sisters, and how they identify themselves in color and ethnic terms. In conversation with genealogist Mauricio Meléndez Obando, they are able to identify multiple generations of their forebearers from parish records and family album photographs, learning ironically that he and they are in fact not-so-distant cousins. These records show that they all descend from distant indigenous, Spanish and African forebearers, however similar or different their phenotypes in the current generation, and also display an age-long, strong preference for Spanish and *mestizo* identifiers.

As her sisters leaf through family photos and images, many Costa Rican viewers of the film are forced to juggle their own multiple images of Leda. In *Dinga* she presents herself as the unassuming, casually dressed, twenty-something narrator confronting her identity and positionality at home in the Central Valley, but others know her already as the high-fashion model, winner of national prize competitions. Treading the path taken by Carmen Lyra in reverse, recognition for Leda Artavia involves foreign travel, study and work in Europe, Asia and the Americas, not as prelude to a career choice at home but as inherent to the career choice itself. Nor does it involve silencing or submerging her *Afrodescendance*. Far from it, both at home and abroad it involves a foregrounding of blackness, its beauty and its burdens, in a society which has been loath to recognize it; a society whose imagined ethnic homogeneity means that only Spanish and indigenous heritages constitute the mythical national "we" versus the "others."

Costa Rica is home to many a paradox—and not just that a self-proclaimed white nation venerates a black Virgin as patron saint. At least half a dozen of Costa Rica's presidents trace their lineage to an 18th-century enslaved woman, Ana Cardoso, whose invisibility can perhaps be gauged by the fact that generations of schoolchildren continue to voice disbelief when told that Africans and slavery actually existed in colonial Costa Rica. Long a regional bulwark of anti-Communist politics, here once thrived Carmen Lyra's Communist party-led nationalist reform well before Italy branded its own version as Euro-Communism. Today those less discerning among its politicians anguish over how to join the “developed” world—in a society already as transnational, postmodern and multicultural as any on the planet.

Carmen Lyra lived and struggled in an era of proletarian internationalism turned nationalist, of pro-*mestizaje* ideologies that ignored or excluded blackness. Both ideologies claimed to resolve their own paradoxes with healthy doses of optimism, self-sacrifice, and silence. Carmen Lyra's Afrodescendance was politely ignored by her comrades-in-arms then and long thereafter. Leda Artavia was born at the dawn of an era of resurgent transnationalism and multicultural ethnic identity politics. For her generation, blackness has become a central existential question of who am I, where do I come from, and why am I perpetually surrounded by mistaken assumptions? As diametrically opposed as the two eras and their paths may seem to us, these two Afro-mestizas shared a struggle for recognition, always subject to reframing by friend and foe alike, one never fully within their grasp perhaps, but a struggle neither would shrink from.

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Salvador de Bahia

Pelourinho as Inclusive Heritage

By ENRIQUE AURENG SILVA

“BOM DIA, MOÇO! TODO BEM? BEM-VINDO À Bahia!” three enthusiastic women, one of them dressed as a typical Baiana, greeted me warmly at the tourism office at Salvador de Bahia in northeastern Brazil. It was my first time there, and I needed to know how to get from the airport to the famous Pelourinho.

As a second year student at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, I'm investigating the relation between the preservation of the built heritage—frequently associated with UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS)—and issues of social injustice, spatial segregation and cultural inequality that inevitably arise around such touristic destinations.

Salvador de Bahia, the first capital of Brazil founded in 1549, is one of the oldest colonial sites of America and one of the 14 cultural World Heritage Sites of the country. The city's historic downtown, known as Pelourinho, received UNESCO's WHS status in 1985, and has undergone preservation and restoration processes ever since. Mainly financed by local and state governments, the preservation efforts have gradually rescued the old city's historic quarters, which by the 1990s had fallen into total disrepair, focusing on preserving what UNESCO described as “the most important collection of baroque colonial architecture in the Americas.”

“What brings you to Salvador?” asks the Baiana as she hands me the touristic map and points towards the blue bus that will take me to the historic district. “Pelourinho and the Bahia de Todos os Santos, of course. Muito obrigado!” I answer as I go out of the airport and into Salvador's humid 80°F winter.

As I arrive in the historic “Pelô”—as it is affectionately referred by locals—I keep admiring the colorful colonial houses

with tiled roofs and wooden doors, the magnificent baroque churches and the stone-paved streets that I had only seen in books and websites. These historic sights dramatically disappear as I look for Rua de Sao Francisco, where I had previously booked a room in what supposedly was a centric and well-reviewed hostel.

“Did you come from the south side or the north side of the street?” David, the 40-year-old hostel owner, asks me as he extends the map and highlights the main touristic sites and best places to eat. “The south side,” is my answer. “Well, just walk the north side from now on, it's better to avoid the south side when possible,” he insists, crossing out the ten blocks directly across the hostel that separate us from Praça da Se and Elevador Lacerda, two of the main attractions of the city center. “And do not go into this area at all, walk around it. It will be safer.”

As the most important city on the Bahia de Todos os Santos (Bay of All Saints), Salvador has always been divided into the Cidade Baixa (Lower City) and the Cidade Alta (Upper City). Geographically linked to the bay and its ports, the Cidade Baixa has always been the place for commercial activities, while the Cidade Alta, where the Pelourinho lies, has historically been the residential neighborhood and a center for culture, politics and religion—a hub of Afrodescendent pride. While back in the early 1990s governor Antonio Carlos Magalhaes made efforts to clean, preserve and make Pelourinho a safer place for both locals and tourists, a quick stroll around the historic district and a quick glance of the ladeiras (hillsides) that connect it with the Cidade Baixa demonstrate two very distinct scenes in the urban fabric.

After eating some acarajé, a popular



Clockwise: Abandoned building on Ladeira do Carmo. Metal structures supporting old buildings are commonly seen throughout the surrounding streets of Pelourinho. Abandoned buildings without roofs are common in the deteriorated Cidade Baixa. Largo do Cruzeiro do São Francisco in the heart of Pelourinho on an early winter afternoon.

Many parts of the city have been neglected, even when their inherent beauty, historic value and economic potential is huge.

street food made from blackeyed peas, and enjoying a plate of delicious açaí berries right by Largo Terreiro de Jesus, I head to Ladeira de Misericórdia to visit one of the most famous restoration projects created by Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi. Built in 1980, the project was intended as the model that all future preservation endeavors should have aspired to emulate: 17th- and 18th-century buildings were restored and used for affordable housing; cheap prefabricated materials were used in order to keep low costs and public amenities were built in a vacant lot. Thus, I was shocked when I found Lina Bo Bardi's project completely abandoned and in ruins, just like many of the buildings on the periphery of the Pelourinho.

The contrast between the UNESCO site and its surroundings became immediately apparent. The boutiques, artisan shops, cultural institutions, restaurants, coffee shops and hotels that abound in Pelourinho

stop right by the Igreja de Sao Francisco to the south and by the Convento do Carmo to the north, with the majority of tourists walking exclusively around a very defined perimeter. The preservation of the cultural and historic heritage helps to hide the social inequalities and security problems that still today afflict the periphery of the city center; tourists, attracted by the preserved area, generally just don't go elsewhere.

Architects and planners have always aimed to restore the historic buildings of the Pelourinho in a democratic and inclusive way, but it is evident that the task is still incomplete. Many parts of the city have been neglected, even when their inherent beauty, historic value and economic potential is huge. And as with the buildings, the local population has also been forgotten.

As a student of architecture, I ask myself what would be the right approach.

Is it really possible to rescue and transform the peripheries and ladeiras without displacing their inhabitants? How can preservation and restoration be done without gentrification? How can the touristic appeal proper to Pelourinho be used in favor of the surrounding low-income neighborhoods? How could the historic heritage value of Pelô benefit locals as well as visitors?

“This is going to be a very interesting thesis topic,” I think to myself while sitting on the steps of Monumento da Cruz Caida (Fallen Cross Monument), as I watch the sunset magically silver-plating the Bay of All Saints and its tranquil waters. I wish I had the answers already.

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Witches, Wives, Secretaries and Black Feminists

Finding Gender in Latin America's Black Movements **By** TIANNA S. PASCHEL

THE ISSUE OF GENDER HAS BEEN FRONT and center for me, both as a subject of my fieldwork on black politics in Latin America, and how I conducted that research, particularly in how I navigated largely male-dominated black organizations. I am, after all, a black woman, albeit one with certain outsider and sometimes privileged status. As an African American researcher from an elite U.S. university, I found that at times I was able to dodge some of the sexism that was so commonplace within the movements I was studying. Still, there were other times where my being a black woman trumped any other identity and did not shield me from blatant sexism and sexual harassment. This was especially true because I was a relatively young black woman traveling alone. Because of this, I learned to schedule interviews with activists and bureaucrats early in the day so as to not spill into the evening hours. I also learned to deal with background noise on recordings because I insisted that we keep doors open while conducting interviews, especially with male leaders. Perhaps most interesting, I learned that only certain activists, under certain conditions, would talk to me about how gender, and patriarchy more specifically, figured into these movements.

When I began my first book, *Becoming Black Political Subjects in Colombia and Brazil*, I was seeking to explain the role of black movements in the rise of specific legislation for black populations beginning in the late 1980s. While I thought gender figured into this story, I did not know how central it would become. My time in the field made it increasingly clear that telling that story required telling another one about how gender figured into black organizing in the

region. I became intrigued by how much the internal dynamics of these movements were shaped by gender, in both explicit and implicit ways. Gender was not only important for explaining the successes of black movements in the region, but also for understanding ideological and organizational differences, and was critical to mapping the organizational fields of black movements in each case.

Before going to the field, I knew from the work of Kia Caldwell and Sonia Alvarez that black women activists in Brazil had fought for years to make the case that the mainstream movement's political platform should pay more attention to the unique ways that racism and gender hierarchies differentially affected black women. They raised many issues, including violence against black women, state-led sterilization campaigns, the exploitation of domestic workers, and the negative portrayals of black women within popular culture. If male-dominated black organizations addressed these issues at all, they often relegated them to the margins. This marginalization mirrored the ways in which a Brazilian women's movement dominated by white, middle-class women treated issues affecting black women. Because of this double marginalization, a black women's movement in Brazil began to rise during the 1980s and 1990s. While the dozens of black women's organizations that arose during this period had varying degrees of relationships to both the black movement and the women's movement, they also sought to carve out their own space.

Knowing this, but not fully understanding this history, I remember naively asking activists in Brazil's black women's organizations how they began their

militancy in the "black movement." Many of them responded as Vilma Reis did, "The experience of the movement of black women, for me it isn't the experience of the black movement" (interview, Vilma Reis, June 2009). Other black feminists corrected me, saying, "Oh, you mean the black women's movement?" These activists wanted to make an important ideological and historical distinction. As Edna Roland, one of the founders of the black feminist organization Speak Black Woman! explained, organizations that we typically understand as "the black movement"—as well as state institutions like the Conselho do Negro in São Paulo—were in fact "fundamentally masculine" (interview, Edna Roland, May 2010). Black women, fed up with both overt and subtler forms of sexism within male-dominated black organizations, began to build spaces within and outside mainstream black organizations where black women could organize autonomously. Their critique of the male-run black movement was multilayered. Women who had worked within "mixed organizations"—or organizations made up of both men and women—found the sexism palpable. Organizing separately meant that women could take leadership positions in ways that they could not in male-dominated organizations. Consequently, they could fully develop their voices as militants.

In Colombia, the black women's movement was slower to develop than in Brazil. While the Association of Afro-Colombian Women was created in 1990, it was not for a decade later that the network would take shape. During the First National Assembly of Afro-Colombian Women held in Tolima, which convened hundreds of black women, the

association became the Kambirí National Network of Afro-Colombian Women. At the same time, another dynamic was emerging in towns along riverbanks throughout Colombia's countryside, as black women began to organize in groups and networks within the ethno-territorial movement. Just like their counterparts in urban black organizations, black rural women had also been central to the intellectual, political and everyday administrative functioning of black peasant organizations. Nevertheless, and with few exceptions, it was men who became the most visible protagonists of these movements. In ethno-territorial movements on Colombia's Pacific Coast, this contradiction became increasingly pronounced, and was at the center of the rise of black women's groups and networks. Unlike their urban counterparts, these black women's groups were less likely to understand themselves as feminists, even though they were radically challenging gender hierarchies.

The experiences of black women active in Colombia's male-dominated ethno-territorial movement sound strikingly like those of black women throughout the hemisphere. Fundamentally, patriarchy and traditional ideas that "la política es cosa de hombre"—politics are a man's thing—as one activist put it, made the field of black politics a profoundly gendered space. One place where this was particularly obvious in Colombia's black movement was when black women stepped outside of traditional roles, and appropriated political styles associated with masculinity. In doing so, several Afro-Colombian activists became known as the *brujas* or witches of the movement. These women were often in organizations that they started themselves, and were powerful and polemic figures in the movement. While I suspected that they appropriated the representations of themselves as witches in order to sustain their position in the movement, this was confirmed in my interviews with some of them. The women who occupy this symbolic category of "the witch" in the movement are also the only women that I



saw at the center of male-dominated black movement gatherings literally fighting over the microphone and yelling at high government officials, just as the male leaders often did.

While these women did not raise issues around gender in their political platforms, their presence did highlight some of the ways that gender functioned in these movements. In particular, these *brujas* adopted a particular kind of protagonism that allowed them to, as one Afro-Colombian male activist said, “go head-to-head” with male leaders, which included adopting masculine oratorical styles. Yet while they acted like their male counterparts, their political performances were also tinged with something we might call the “witch persona.” For example, one such leader hardly ever misses an opportunity to cry, laugh hysterically, enter political gatherings dramatically. Sometimes she would even take off her head wrap in the midst of heated political debates, like a tornado swirling above the crowd. Yet, as these women contested traditional gender roles within the movement, new gendered ways of understanding them emerged that had to reconcile the conflation of political power and masculinity. In understanding these women as witches, black activists reproduced the idea that certain kinds of political power, if held by women, must be supernatural. This kind of power seemed juxtaposed with the natural political power that men possess.

The stories of the black women activists I met while in the field, as well as own experiences navigating a similarly treacherous political terrain, led me to a new research project tentatively titled *Witches, Wives, Secretaries and Black Feminists: The Politics of Gender in Black Movements in Latin America*. In it, I draw on some of this previous ethnographic work as well as interviews with activists to better understand how gender figures into black organizing in this region. How do black women in Latin America involved in black movements reproduce, appropriate, perform, and sometimes subvert expected gender roles? Relatedly, is there a way



In understanding these women as witches, black activists reproduced the idea that certain kinds of political power, if held by women, must be supernatural.

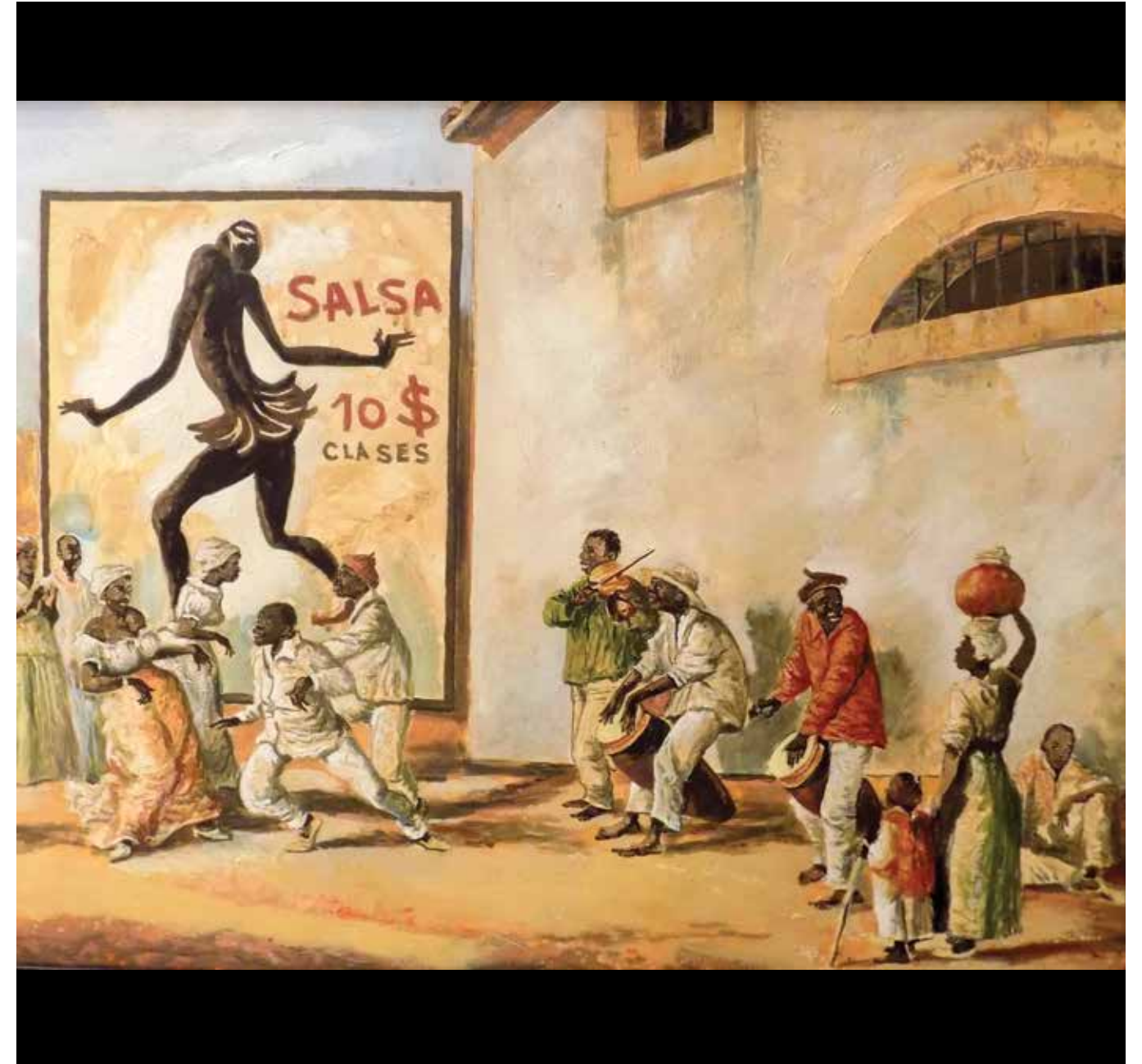
to occupy more “appropriate” gendered areas and still challenge them? How do black female leaders understand their own protagonism? Finally, how are women who reject their so-called appropriate roles understood and what are their relationships with activists (female and male) of male-dominated organizations?

Addressing these questions means taking seriously the ways in which black women activists sometimes attempt to undermine patriarchy *within* male-dominated spaces and within dominant tropes for female participation. One

example of this comes from black women activists—from Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica and Brazil—who organized around the Third World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa (2001). They told me that while the men in the movement loved to “echar discurso” and grab the microphone during meetings, when it was time to actually do the work of writing the documents, few men were left. As such, rather than fight with their male compadres over the inclusion of specific provisions on black women’s rights in official black movement declarations, they simply would insert them at the crack of dawn, when only they were left to do the work of writing up the official declarations. It was a sly acceptance of a more appropriate gendered role for women—in this case, the role of the secretary. These women reminded me of the classic case of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina where women were able to take a serious political stance against human rights violations (specifically forced disappearances) in the midst of a repressive dictatorship precisely by appropriating the acceptable role of the grieving apolitical mother. As I worked in solidarity with black movements in both countries, I was often in charge of keeping notes, partially because of gender, but also because I had a laptop. As I typed away, I often thought about what kinds of power could be exerted in the act of writing meeting notes and official declarations. This is one of the many questions I will tackle in this new project.

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MUSIC AND DANCE



Ned Sublette [The Bearers](#) • Yosvany Terry [Afro-Roots and Mozart Too](#)
 Álvaro Restrepo [Negra/Anger](#) • Rebecca Kennedy de Lorenzini [La Candela Viva](#)
 Genevieve E.V. Dempsey [Multi-Faith Lives of Brazilian Congadeiros and Umbandistas](#)
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Top: Grupo Tambor Yuka. Below: Musicians of Ojundegara, Arará group in Jovellanos.

The Bearers

BY NED SUBLETTE

VIÑALES'S SPECTACULAR NATURAL BEAUTY makes it one of Cuba's busiest tourist attractions, but tourists don't come to this mango grove, and the bus driver who brought us wasn't happy about taking the beat-up road that leads here. Plus, it's raining. No matter, there'll be a party.

As we arrive, we see the piglet, roasting on a spit. Someone opens a bottle of rum. We—my Cuban colleague, musicologist/producer Caridad Diez and I, along with 27 travelers from the United States—are in the only part of Cuba (that we know of) where traditional Congo *tambores yuka* are still played in family and community celebrations, summoning the neighbors from over the hillside with drum calls to fiestas that don't stop the same day they start.

When sugar was creating fantastic wealth across a wide swath of western Cuba in the 19th century, these drums were ubiquitous. When work stopped long enough for a dance, the drummers brought out *tambores yuka*. Rumberos say that the *yuka* is behind the 19th-century style of rumba called the *yambú*, still danced widely today—or, as Diosdado Ramos, director of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, put it, “slow down the *baile yuka* a little and you have the *yambú*.”

Different Cuban drums are classifiable by the way the drumhead is rigged to the shell. These *tambores yuka* are hollowed-out avocado tree trunks with the heads nailed on; they're Congo (which I will spell here with a “c” instead of the anthropologists “k”), from Central Africa.

Over the years in Cuba, I've seen ceremonies, or recreations of ceremonies by practitioners, from five different African *naciones*. The most visible is the Yoruba (or Lucumí, or Ifá, or Regla de Ocha, or *santería*), with its beads, its color codes of dress, its white-clad first-year initiates on every street in Havana,

its exportation to countries around the world, and above all its spectacular, formalized repertoire of music. And there's also Carabalí (including the Abakuá secret society for men in Havana, Matanzas, and Cárdenas, but also other groups); Arará (from present-day Benin, especially the city-states of Ardra and Ouidah); and Gangá (Sierra Leone). And massively, there is Congo, which I think of as the base layer of Afro-Cuban culture since perhaps the 1580s.

All over Cuba, people continue ancestral musical and spiritual practices, most commonly through the efforts of particular families, maintaining and transforming them in turn. Prudencio Rivera, the director of Grupo Tambores Yuka and a truck driver by day, is one of those people the Consejo Nacional de Casas de Cultura calls *portadores*—bearers, who take charge of the tradition for a time and pass it on the next generation.

As we watch, the drummers lay the drums on the ground and make a small fire in order to tune them, as described by Anselmo Suárez Romero in his 1838 Cuban novel *Francisco*:

Then it was necessary to heat up the drums; for that reason they had lit the bonfire, with which the skin that covers the broader end of the drum acquires its sonority, and springs to the touch, and the sound resonates better in the hollow cylinder of the drum's body; it is the tuning key of the instrument; without flame it doesn't get heard, it doesn't reach far away to farms all around; it doesn't thump, it doesn't give pleasure, it doesn't make anyone leap.

Then they begin to play, continuing a tradition that Swedish writer Frederika

Bremer described during her 1850 visit to Cuba:

The music consisted, besides the singing, of drums. Three drummers stood beside the tree-trunk beating with their hands, their fists, their thumbs, and drumsticks upon skin stretched over hollowed tree-stems. They made as much noise as possible, but always keeping time and tune most correctly.

The group has the typical African three-drum configuration, with two drums playing an ostinato while a third comments. Congo songs tend to be highly repetitive—indeed, the origins of groove-based pop music the world over have much to do with Congo musical tradition—and, perhaps because Congo has been a part of Cuba for so long, Congo songs and even religious ritual tend to incorporate more Spanish than the other African traditions of Cuba.

The singers repeat the line over and over: *El rey del Congo tiene que venir, el rey del Congo*. The Congo king has to come, the Congo king.

I'd heard about *tambores yuka* for years, but I'd never actually seen them.

In the Congo religion, called *palo* in Cuba, there are two worlds, the land of the living and the land of dead, which are in constant contact, separated by a watery barrier called *kalunga*. On a Cuban sugar plantation, where the labor force was systematically worked to death and replaced with fresh arrivals from the other side of the water, the border between living and dead was a familiar one, with two-way communication.

Fernando Ortiz tells us of a Congo instrument called *kinfuiti* that communicates with the dead. I didn't think I'd ever see one in real life, but that was before I went to



Conga de Paso Franco, Santiago de Cuba. Opposite page, flames and drumheads.

the little town of Quiebra Hacha—also in western Cuba, in Artemisa—to see the group Ta Makuende Yaya. Cuban musicologist Sonia Pérez Cassola, who's worked with the group for years, calls the kinfuiti *el tambor de los muertos*—the drum of the dead, whose call reaches to the other side of the kalunga line. It's a friction drum. That is, instead of percussing the drumhead, a wand attached to the drumhead is stroked with wet hands—an organological cousin of the Brazilian *cuica* or the Venezuela *furro*. It makes a sustained low-register push-pull: grunk GRUNK, grunk GRUNK...

The group performs for us in a video projection room that serves as the town's movie theater. They're Congo-identified, but they also play songs addressed to the

Yoruba deities (called *orishas*) that don't sound much like the orisha music I've previously heard. These are understood to be distinct traditions, but they overlap and cross in all kinds of ways, all over Cuba. After the performance, we walk down the road to a small temple originally founded by the enslaved, and rebuilt by the community, dedicated to San Antonio, or St. Anthony, whose name denotes Congo.

Throughout the history of transatlantic slavery the Congo were identified with Catholicism; the kingdom was first Catholicized in 1491—yes, the year before Columbus—when missionaries came to Mbanza-Kongo (in present-day northern Angola). Nzinga a Nkuwu, the *manikongo*, or king, immediately

and enthusiastically accepted baptism as Rei João I, and converted his entire kingdom, which adopted the new power objects and symbols while continuing traditional practice. So the much discussed syncretization began *before* the Middle Passage, and was carried to all parts of the Americas; all up and down the hemisphere, Congos were assumed to be Catholic.

In the center of the island, Sagua la Grande was once a wealthy river port for sugar, as the town's elegant architecture makes clear. It's bristling with African religion: the Congo cabildo, Kunalumbo, was founded in 1809. There's a strong Yoruba presence in Sagua, and there's even a Gangá society.

The Kunalumbo house is small but well kept—a dedicated space, a testament to perseverance. Its interior walls are painted with cosmograms and historical narrative, proudly noting a 1950 performance there by Orquesta Aragón—one of the grand names of Cuban dance music, a flute-and-violins *charanga* founded in Cienfuegos in 1939. When they played Kunalumbo, Aragón hadn't made a record yet, but their career soon got a boost with the help of their hometown friend Bartolomé Maximiliano Moré.

A black *guajiro*, the oldest of eighteen children, Moré grew up in the south central part of the island, in a little town eight miles from Cienfuegos that the world knows about primarily through his song extolling it: Santa Isabel de las Lajas. Beginning his career as a strolling singer in the dockside taverns of Old Havana, Moré became a singing star during an extended stay in Mexico with the Conjunto Matamoros, in which he sang with Francisco “Compay Segundo” Repilado, and changed his professional name to Benny (or Beny) Moré. After appearing in Mexican movies and on hit records with Pérez Prado, he returned to Cuba in 1950. After starting his Banda Gigante, “El Benny” began his reign as Cuba's most loved singer, the one who sang all the Cuban genres to everyone's satisfaction. He was powerful enough to insist booking agents stop locking the provincial Aragón out of the Havana market.

Benny grew up in Lajas, where he lived next door to the Casino de los Congos, a mutual aid society founded by his African-born great-great-grandfather, Ta Ramón Gunda Moré. From his earliest years, he had free run of the place, a young Congo prince dancing to *tambores makuta*, drums that have long since disappeared from daily Cuban musical life. I'd never seen *tambores makuta* outside of a museum before. But the Casino de los Congos still exists in Lajas, in its own house now as then, and the *tambores makuta* that Benny heard as a child are still there. Its members perform a solemn ceremony, advancing with the Cuban flag



The drummers lay the drums on the ground and make a small fire in order to tune them, as described by Anselmo Suárez Romero in his 1838 Cuban novel *Francisco*.

around the perimeter of the house.

An hour later, we're down the road in Palmira, a center of santeros and babalaos in the Yoruba tradition. Palmira was the site of Benny's last concert; after a short life with too much cheap rotgut, he vomited blood before singing a show there and died in the hospital in Havana on February 19, 1963 at the age of 43. In Palmira, we visited the leader of the group Obacosó, who guarded a set of three two-headed cylindrical drums I'd never seen before: *tambores de guerra*, or war drums, consecrated to Changó, the orisha of drums and thunder. (Ethnomusicologist Amanda Villepastour has sent me a photo of a similar set in Jovellanos.)

The next day, in Trinidad, the group Leyenda Folk played for us *tambores trinitarios*—sawed-off little drums with a powerful crack. That made three kinds of drums I'd never seen before in less than 48 hours, and I've been doing this since 1990. Cuba is inexhaustible.

In Jovellanos, in Matanzas province, the group Ojundegara, centered on the Baró family, maintains its Arará heritage, singing in Fon to the *fodduces* who are more or less counterparts to the Yoruba

orishas. In front of Ojundegara's house, there is a monument that matches a counterpart erected in the modern nation of Benin following a visit the group made there in 1991. 150 years wasn't that long ago: one of Ojundegara's members, Patricio Pastor Baró Céspedes, who died in July 2016 at the age of 89, was the son of Esteban Baró Tossú, brought in slavery as a child from Dahomey ca. 1866.

After 1850, Cuba was the last place in the Americas importing Africans. The final decades of slavery were peak years for the introduction of kidnapped Yoruba, who were brought where the sugar mills were at that time: western Cuba, particularly Matanzas province.

Everyone agrees that Matanzas, the port city and “Athens of Cuba” on the north coast, was and is the great crossroads and transmitter of Afro-Cuban religion. With time, the Yoruba religion moved farther east, coming to Oriente (eastern Cuba) only in the 20th century. *Fundamento* (the activating element in the Yoruba *batá* drums) came to Camagüey in the middle of the island only in 1980, I was told by Ángel Echemendía, the erudite director of the Conjunto Folklórico in Camagüey, and, according to Abelardo Luardet Luaces, only came to Santiago de Cuba in 1986.

So there's a layer of Congo that covers the country, and a Yoruba power in the west that moved east. People often are initiated in more than one Afro-Cuban system. In eastern Cuba, which was not 19th-century sugarland, people generally become *rayado* (initiated in palo, evidenced by permanent skin scratches) before making *santo* (Yoruba).

And there's another factor: the *lwa* live in Cuba too. There is plenty of vodú (or vodou, or voodoo) in Oriente, and other parts of Cuba, if you look.

There's no way to understand the history of mountainous Oriente—or, for that matter, of the Cuban revolutions that have blown from east to west—without taking into account St. Domingue/Haiti, whose mountains are visible from high points in Oriente.

There are three Domingan-descended societies called *tumbas francesas* (in Santiago de Cuba, Guantánamo, and a rural one in the foothills of the Sierra Cristal, near Sagua de Tánamo). Acknowledged by UNESCO as Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, their wardrobe references French salon wear of the late 18th century. They dance *contradanza* as well as African dances, but the music is entirely drums and voices.

The rural *tumba francesa* of mountainous Bejuco was so isolated that Cuban scholars learned about it only in 1976, but it's recognizably the same set of instruments and rhythms as its urban counterparts. Its story is a key to understanding all kinds of movements and migrations in post-Haitian Cuba. In Guantánamo, meanwhile, the beautifully dressed Santa Catalina de Ricci (or Pompadour) society is regal in its headquarters. The last time I saw them was at a world music festival in Havana in March, where their slamming battery of drummers jammed memorably with a group from the island of Reunión; such is Cuba.

After a performance by the Tumba Francesa La Caridad de Oriente, the Santiago group, some years ago, one of the group's elders asked me if I was satisfied. When I made an affirmative response, she smiled and said, "you know, it's not only we the living who are dancing here." Meaning, the dead were dancing with them.

But though spirit is everywhere, *tumba francesa* is not vodú (or vodou, or voodoo). There is indeed vodú in Cuba, much of it courtesy of the large number of Haitian cane-cutters brought to Cuba in the 20th century, when sugar had expanded to eastern Cuba during the pre-revolutionary neocolonial republic. Many remained, becoming a Kreyol-speaking minority.

In his surprise worldwide hit "Chan Chan," Compay Segundo commemorated a line of railroad stops in eastern Cuba: "*De Alto Cedro voy para Marcané / Llego a Cueto voy para Mayarí.*" "From Alto Cedro I go to Marcané / I get to Cueto

and go on to Mayarí." I haven't stopped in Alto Cedro, but I took a group to visit Cueto, where there's a statue of Compay, no tourists to speak of, and something that doesn't appear in *Buena Vista Social Club*: vodú.

In Cueto, a group of schoolgirls in a community project sing songs in Kreyol before we visit the house of a recently deceased powerful *mambo* (female vodú ritual expert). Family members salute the *lwa*, but one woman fails to get far enough away before the drums begin, and she's "mounted," or "ridden," by the spirits.

In Guantánamo, we visit the home of the *houngan* (ritual expert) Francisco; in his humble back patio, the vodú group Los Cossía rehearse. But vodú doesn't only exist in pockets of Oriente; it's in central Cuba, too. It's strong in Camagüey. There's vodú in Ciego de Ávila; when I ask Ariel "Goma" Gallardo Ruiz, director of the group Rumbávilá, if vodú came to central Cuba overland from the east, he said, "it also entered by north and south"—that is, straight into central Cuba via Haitian sugar workers during the first half of the 20th century when there was a demand for cane-cutters. I show Goma a video of a vodou ceremony from New York the week previously, and he identified it at once. "That looks like a ceremony for Erzulie," he says. Pause. "We do it differently."

The Cuban sugar industry has been downsized, but it still exists, and wherever there are still *centrales* (sugar mills), they're important nuclei of culture. In the small central Cuban town of Primero de Enero, home of the Violeta mill, a community project plays vodú drums and dances, and then its directors take us to the Casa de las Flores, an extensive orchid garden. Down the road in Baraguá, members of the group La Cinta offer their guests *black cake* (a delicious rum cake, *panatela* in Spanish) and plays Anglo-Antillean music handed down by cane-cutting ancestors from the English-speaking islands. It's 90 degrees or so and there's no fan, but they deliver an intense, impeccable, high-energy performance

with stilts, a maypole, a hobbyhorse, and propulsive drumming.

In Colón, in Matanzas province, Eneida Villegas Zulueta takes us into her community, largely Yoruba-descended, that lives in the very *barracones* (barracks) where their ancestors were enslaved at the infamous Julián Zulueta's Central Álava. She shows us the works of their community project *Tras las Huellas de Nuestros Ancestros* (in the footsteps of our ancestors), whose members have created their own museum out of artifacts conserved in their households since slavery days. After visiting a ring of magnificent *casa templos* (house temples), we hear not one but two *bembés* (sacred party for the gods) back-to-back: one with children dancing the orishas, one with adults.

In Güines, home of the Amistad sugar mill, Luis Pedroso Sotolongo guards the Cabildo Briyumba Congo, which boasts the largest *prenda* I've ever seen. (They have a larger one, but you have to have a *limpieza*, or cleaning, before you can see it.) Even though Luis performs Yoruba divination in front of it, this is straight-up Congo. A *prenda* (the Kikongo word is *nganga*) is the center of the palero's practice—a large iron pot containing all sorts of power elements, significantly including human remains, but also various natural elements, including sticks of different kinds of wood.

Briyumba Congo's *prenda* is made from a former sugar cauldron, making the connection explicit. There are also other *prendas* in the room, and there is a wooden chair that dates from the early 20th century, when the police would bust up rumbas and ceremonies, requiring the camouflage of drums as household items; no sir, no drums here, I'm just sitting in my chair. Luis's chair is really a big box drum, all of its parts giving different tones as he slams out a rhythm on the sides while sitting in it.

Around the corner from Briyumba Congo, in the barrio of Leguina, is the Catholic chapel of Santa Bárbara, which is the center of one of the biggest processions in Cuba for that saint

(famously syncretized with the orisha Changó), whose day is December 4. And there's the community project called Patio de Tata Güines, named for Aristides Soto, whose professional name, Tata Güines, was a Congo shoutout to his home town. The Patio is in the *solar* (multiple apartments around a central patio) where Soto grew up, across the street from the house where the great Arsenio Rodríguez lived.

For all his fame, Arsenio, who brought black consciousness to Cuban popular music beginning in the 1930s, is still an understudied figure. Though he's mostly known for his musical innovations, the texts of his songs contain a world of lore and deserve a scholarly edition. Sitting in the Cabildo Briyumba Congo, I ask Luis

something I've always wondered: what does Arsenio's "No hay yaya sin guayacán" – there is no *yaya* without *guayacán* – mean?

Luis smiles, and points to a smaller *prenda* alongside the big one.

"This is *yaya*" – he points to one stick of wood sticking up out of the *prenda*, then to another – "and this is *guayacán*." If you don't have both, neither will be effective.

If you want to know about Arsenio's lyrics, go across the street from where he grew up, and ask.

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La Cinta, Baraguá

Afro-Roots and Mozart Too

Building Foundations for Jazz and Beyond **By YOSVANY TERRY**

I DISCOVERED JAZZ AT 13 IN MY MUSICAL household in Cuba when my brother brought home a cassette tape of Chick Corea's record "Friends," and ever since I have been obsessed with the genre. There was no such thing as jazz in the conservatory where I was already studying, not even a whisper from our teachers that this American form existed. I began to find out everything I could about jazz. I traveled to the National Library in Camagüey to see what I could learn, and then discovered two radio stations in Cuba that broadcast jazz, so I began teaching myself by transcribing what I heard on cassettes and the radio.

By then at the conservatory I had chosen the saxophone as my major instrument and the piano as my secondary instrument. I loved the freedom that jazz would allow me as well as how I could use my instrument. What jazz offered me was complete ownership of what I was going to write and play. I wrote my first jazz composition when I was fifteen; I was very proud of it and hoped that my future would be in that musical genre. I continued to study both jazz and Cuban popular music and was greatly influenced by saxophonists John Coltrane and Wayne Shorter as well as by the popular Cuban group Irakere with their multi-genre styles of playing. When I graduated with my Master's from Havana's National School for the Arts (ENA) at nineteen, I began touring and playing with the famous "nueva trova" singer and composer Silvio Rodríguez.

I formed my first jazz group, Columna B, in the 90s and began playing in the clubs in Havana. In 1993 a board member of the Stanford Jazz Workshop heard my group and made it possible for me to travel to Stanford University in 1995 to play and teach in the United States.

My musical journey had begun even earlier than that discovery of jazz at 13.

My father's orchestra, Maravilla de Florida, was one of the most important charanga orchestras in Cuba. Charanga, the most popular music in the dance halls of the island, was created by the creoles, and since the beginning featured mixed-race ensembles and symbols of a new cultural identity.

It was a foregone conclusion that I would become a musician, and so my parents engaged a teacher and I began learning to play the violin at age five. When I was old enough they sent me to the conservatory. In the conservatory the teachers were from Russia and the then-Eastern Block countries, and we studied the Western classical cannon exclusively. Monday through Friday I studied Western classical music, and on the weekends I continued to learn Cuban popular music at home, as well as the traditions that were part of the African lineage of my family. Afro-Cuban and Afro-Haitian musical traditions are rich on both sides of my family. I started going to Lukumi and Haitian vodou ceremonies when I was a child. At these religious ceremonies, I would learn chants and rhythmic patterns, as well as how to play several traditional instruments. This was something I couldn't talk to my friends at school about, because at the time there was a stigma associated with African cultural traditions.

I am conscious of being Afro-Cuban, because in Cuba it's difficult to escape that fact. Racism is present in the general culture, but since my parents never spoke about race in a divisive way at home, and given that schools in Cuba are racially mixed, that never got in the way of learning music.

Most Cuban people don't see music in

terms of black and white, and the Cuban cultural mixture is from both Africa and Europe. This marriage is so deep and strong that the elements are hard to separate. Music has served as a unifying force, bringing Cuban people together in concert halls and on the dance floor.

MY CREATIVE PROCESS IS NOT RANDOM.

Growing up in Cuba in a musical family I understood that music feels fresh and spontaneous to the listener—after hours of practice by performers to master our instruments, and rehearsals to master the genre we want to play. I have always been a questioner, even as a child. "Why, where, and how" were my first responses to being asked to learn anything. This curiosity made research feel like a natural part of the creative process as I grew up, and is critical to my work today.

Those questions made me curious about my Afro roots. Like Bartok and Kodaly before me who collected Hungarian folksongs and used them in their compositions, I draw from Afro-Cuban heritage, jazz and classical music in my compositions. There are many cultural references in my music in both obvious and subtle ways, in the instrumentation, melodies, rhythms, harmonies, chants and the use of specific composition techniques. I see composition as an independent art form within music, which requires focused study in order to learn both the acoustic principles behind the music as well as the composition process within the western classical musical tradition and the jazz canon. I believe this is where the legacy of creative musicians resides, and it is also where we reflect and explore the boundaries of music.



Yosvany Terry, Harlem, New York City, December 18, 2013.

For a composer and improviser there are a lot of communalities within the creative process, and it is hard to become an artist with both a unique voice in your genre as well as a distinctive sound on your instrument. The art of improvisation demands that you work daily in an organized and methodical way.

The preparation for improvisation requires rigorous training, as you need to study the language, vocabulary and styles of those who preceded you in any genre in order to achieve mastery of your instrument as well as the theoretical and acoustic foundations of music. Only then can you start getting ready to make your own musical contributions and craft your personal sound and style. The goal is to train our mind and senses to quickly react in any given musical circumstance or situation. Improvisation is a form of composition that happens in real time in

the context of band members interacting and interplaying with each other utilizing various musical themes or ideas.

MY PROJECTS ARE DRIVEN BY A FOCUS.

Much of my current research is stimulated by a new project and therefore has the goal of informing specific compositions, CD or a unique performance. My "New Throned King" project is the result of my ongoing research on the Arará tradition, and is a good example of how I marry African and jazz traditions and contemporary aesthetics.

"Okónkolo," a project with the Bohemian Trio, is a unique opportunity to grow and expand on my classical music training through the chamber music format. The trio's repertoire focuses on composers from the Americas—North and South—to reflect the multitude of musical

traditions from these continents.

My latest musical adventure has been with the "Ancestral Memories" quartet, a project that was the result of a grant from the Mid-Atlantic Foundation's French-American jazz exchange program that provides resources for an American and a French jazz composer to work together. French pianist and composer Baptiste Trotignon and I set out to research the musical traditions that came out of French former colonies, including Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, and New Orleans, as well as Cuba, to create a body of compositions that reflects the cultural narratives of the Caribbean. Included in the recording that came out of this project were Yuniory Terry on bass and Jeff "Tain" Watts on drums. We are continuing to tour as part of this project in the United States and in France.

MY TEACHING REFLECTS AN ATTENTION TO CONTEXT.

As a professor I bring my personal knowledge and approach to research to the students at Harvard in both my West African Musical Tradition and Foundation of Modern Jazz courses. Students get the opportunity to learn the chants, melodies and rhythmic patterns from the African Diaspora and the social context in which these musical traditions were created and preserved. In the Foundation of Modern Jazz course students learn the language and vocabulary of the jazz canon within the social and historical context of the United States. I hope to inspire my students to dig deeper into cultural traditions and gain a more complete understanding of how culture and history are reflected in music.

When I came to this country I met and toured with the saxophonist Steve Coleman, whose musical trajectory inspired me to continue to look back into my own culture and rethink spirituality in the context of Afro-Cuban music and American jazz as I teach, play and make my contribution to the current musical conversation.

Yosvany Terry is a senior lecturer on music at Harvard and director of the Harvard Jazz Band.



Negra/Anger

By ÁLVARO RESTREPO

NINA SIMONE ONCE SAID THAT HER LIFE HAD BEEN A CONSTANT STRUGGLE BETWEEN BLACKS AND whites...and that she had finally found her balance between the black and white keys of her piano. This is the *core message* of my piece *NEGRA/ANGER*, for 32 dancers, dedicated to Dr. Nina Simone and to the great poet and statesman from Martinique, Aimé Césaire... Both these great artists struggled through their art and throughout their lives to convey a message for human dignity, against any form of exclusion or discrimination. *NEGRA/ANGER* was born as a *corporeal poem* to denounce racism in one of the most racist cities in the world: Cartagena de Indias in present-day Colombia, main port of entrance of African slaves during the brutal Spanish colonial era in Latin America. The genocide of indigenous people and of the kidnapped Africans brought as beasts to the Americas is a wound that continues to bleed. When we see what is still happening in the world, in the United States (white supremacy in the Trump era) and in other corners of our planet, we realize that the human race has still not understood that cultural, ethnic, political, racial, religious, sexual, biological diversity is the main patrimony and wealth of our species.

Álvaro Restrepo is a Colombian dancer, choreographer and teacher. He is the founder/director of *EL COLEGIO DEL CUERPO* in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia. Restrepo is also a frequent international guest teacher and lecturer in universities and cultural institutions as well as a columnist for various Colombian newspapers and international magazines.



The dance group *El Colegio del Cuerpo* performs Álvaro Restrepo's piece *NEGRA/Anger* dedicated to Nina Simone and Aimé Césaire in Bogotá and Cali, Colombia.



La Candela Viva

Igniting Musical Connections in Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia

By REBECCA KENNEDY DE LORENZINI

THE DRUM BEAT IS THE PULSE OF PALENQUE DE SAN BASILIO; it is central to birth, death, marriage and other celebrations. In this Colombian town, drumming is about communion and connection: with the ancestors, spirit-energies, dancers and singers. Rafael Cassiani Cassiani, one of the town's most legendary musicians, affirms this strong connection. He is in the patio of his home, sitting atop his *marímbula*, a rectangular box instrument with metal keys that he explains came to Palenque from Cuba. Smiling, he eagerly awaits guests to whom he will explain the significance of music in his life and the living history that he embodies.

I am one such guest, part of a tourist group of professors and scholars of Latin America who are taking an organized tour of Palenque (also called San Basilio de Palenque), said to be the oldest surviving free community established by runaway slaves in the Americas. It was founded in the early 17th century by enslaved peoples who fled from Cartagena de Indias, one of the largest slave entrepôts in Spanish America. Our tour, like many tours here, is organized with the close cooperation of community members. One of them met us in Cartagena, sharing the history of Palenque with us *en route* to the town. By the time we arrived, we had learned of the social structures, local agriculture, religion, the Bantú-derived Palenquero language and the importance of musical heritage.

We stepped down from our tour bus into the central plaza of the town, dominated by a tall statue of Benkos Bioho, the runaway slave warrior who founded the community. The statue is a reminder of the long history of black resistance in Colombia and the liberation achieved by Bioho. His power and strength are evident in his posture and expression, rising out of the column that lifts the statue into the air far above human height. His hands, the right lifting beyond his body, show where chains were around the wrists. Bioho, known as Domingo in the Americas, was said to be an African king who came from the Bioho region of what is today Guinea-Bissau. He fled Spanish colonial slavery with his family,

Benkos Bioho statue in the central square of Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia.



and established Palenque. As Colombian anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann asserted in one of the first cultural studies of Palenque, *Ma Ngombe: guerreros y ganaderos in Palenque* (1979), the name Benkos Bioho has come to symbolize the spirit of rebellion.

Due to its maroon community heritage, Palenque has traditionally been portrayed in terms of its relative isolation and insularity. Its separation from mainstream Colombian culture and preservation of long-held traditions are celebrated locally, nationally, and more recently, internationally. UNESCO named the town a site of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Yet Palenqueros have long contributed to Colombian society more broadly; music—as well as sports (it is the birthplace of three world champion boxers)—has been an essential conduit of connection. In the following three examples, Palenque's musical engagement in a wider, African diasporic community is visible. I follow the lead of historian Kim Butler, who claims that the unique relationships forged between members of the African diaspora and their communities, including across generations, are a fundamental aspect of the diasporic experience and process. The first is an example of outsiders coming in, the last two represent moments of Palenqueros reaching out, bringing their music to wider national and international audiences.

Ha llegado el habanero, Ha llegado el palenquero

—from “Chí Chí Maní,” Totó la momposina

The Sexteto Tabalá celebrated ninety years of creating music this year. Members have come and gone from the group, but Rafael Cassiani has been one of the most consistent across the decades. He joined the group as a child in the 1930s. When he spoke to our tour group about the Sexteto's history, he repeatedly emphasized how influential Cuban culture has been to the group. This is surprising, given that Palenque is understood to have



Top, Totó la momposina
Middle photo, Kombilesa Mi,
Bottom, Sexteto Tabalá Album cover.

a rich musical tradition that has been relatively untouched, untainted, and more “African” than other musical styles. Yet the Palenque Sextetos were the result of intercultural collaboration.

Cuban sugar workers arrived from the island in the first decade of the 20th century to work in the Central Colombia Sugar Mill, located in Sincerín on the Canal del Dique near Mahates. Some of these workers settled in Palenque; others

met Palenqueros who worked in the mill. Their proximity fostered a cultural exchange that resulted in Palenque's adoption of Cuban *son*, a musical style based





in African-derived rhythms and the use of the *marimbula*; the instrument upon which Rafael Cassiani was sitting when I visited his home. Palenqueros added instruments to the Cuban *son*, resulting in the identifiable Sexteto sound of the *timba*, *claves*, *guacharaca*, *maracas*, *tumbadora* and *bongo*. The group incorporated elements of other coastal musical traditions such as *bullerenge*, *porro* and the funerary music of the Bantú religion of Palenque, the *lumbalú*.

By 1930, Cassiani's uncle, Martín "Hombrón" Cassiani, had created El Sexteto Habanero inspired by El Sexteto Nacional de Cuba that immigrated to the region around 1920. The first members of El Sexteto Habanero also included two other uncles of Rafael Cassiani, Federico Cassiani Cáceres and Pedro Cañata, who worked at Central Colombia. Eustiquio Arrieta was also an original member of the group, along with Pantaleón Salgado, a relative of Batata, one of Colombia's most revered sacred drummers. The sugar mill closed in 1952, and eventually Cassiani's relatives moved to other locations on the coast. Cassiani carried on their legacy, changing the group's name to El Sexteto Tabalá in 1980 after a friend suggested that the name "Tabalá" (meaning "war drums") was more fitting than the honorific "Habanero."

El Sexteto Tabalá played locally until 1992 when it left the country for the first time to play in Washington, DC. Four years later, Lucas Silva, a Colombian who had spent some time in France, recorded the group on his Palenque Records label with Radio Francia. Notable songs such as "El Toche y La Cotorra" and "Esta tierra no es mía" were included in the recordings that led to international recognition. Alfonso Múnera, the Colombian Ambassador to Jamaica, brought the group to Kingston; subsequent invitations included Panama and Ecuador. The group has since traveled to the United States, England, Spain, Denmark, Argentina and Canada. In 2011, the group brought their music

back to Cuba, performing in La Habana and Santiago de Cuba, where Cassiani was questioned about the use of the *marimbula* and the history of the original Sexteto Habanero. Cassiani generously shares his historical memory of Cuban and Colombian diasporic connections.

BATATA TOCA TU TAMBOR

from "Tu Tambor," Totó la Momposina

Totó la Momposina begins one of her most celebrated songs with the crisp, confident command: "Entra la tambora." A beat begins, but not to her liking: "No señor." A second attempt, and, "Eso, así e." "Palma!" Drums, the conduit of spiritual and physical energy in Afro-Colombian culture, begin "La Candela Viva," and Totó's rich, powerful and lofty vocals bring in the melody. The song, originally recorded on Peter Gabriel's Real World Records in 1991, has recently been re-released on the album "Tambolero" (2015). Afro-Colombian musical styles of *lumbalú*, *mapale*, and *bullerengue*, are all included on the album: they have survived and shifted across the centuries, and are intimately knit into the cultural fabric of Colombia's Atlantic coast. Palenque symbolizes that culture, and the album is a homage to Batata III, one of the most celebrated drummers from the town.

Paulino Salgado Valdez, Batata III, was born in 1927 to Manuel Salgado Batata II and Luz María Valdez La Luz—part of a long lineage of drummers who play *el pechiche*, a tall drum used in the funerary music of Palenque. In 1954, dancer Delia Zapata Olivella convinced Batata to come to Bogotá to play these *lumbalus* in the capital city and at 20 years of age he traveled to other cities in Colombia including Medellín. On his travels he met Totó la Momposina and played with her on her extensive national and international tours. He wrote some of her most famous songs, "La Verdolaga," "La Ceiba," and "La Candela Viva." He accompanied her to play in Stockholm at the Nobel Prize Ceremony of Colombian author Gabriel García

Márquez in 1982. In that moment, Batata III's Caribbean coastal music rhythms represented his nation on the international stage. His legacy continues to draw outside attention to his native Palenque.

KOMBILESA MI AND RAP FOLCLÓRICO PALENQUERO (RFP)

In conversation with the older generations who offer invaluable leadership and musical knowledge, the next generation of Palenquero musicians has found its own voice through incorporating rap and hip hop elements learned from the internet and musicians in Venezuela. Kombilesa Mi is one such group that formed in 2011 and coined its own musical genre: *rap folklórico palenquero* (RFP). Their name is Palenquero for "my friends" and their songs are sung in both Palenquero and Spanish. Their catchy, playful and reflective music is based in traditional styles with new takes on the foundational concept of freedom established by Benkos Bioho. Group member Andris Padilla Julio (Afro Neto) stated to Vice, "el hip hop como tal es un movimiento de resistencia, de lucha," describing hip hop as a resistance movement. It seems a natural fit in Palenque.

"Ma Kuagro," one of the group's most popular and well-received songs, is bright, cheerful, and full of pride. It explicitly celebrates reaching out to the world and back toward the traditions of Palenque. It ends with the call: "Oye Oliver!/para todo' lo' kuagro' de Palenque y del mundo/duro!/pura identidad/patrimonio/diaspora africana/escucha Benko!...Pura tradición!" Oliver likely refers to Oliver Keen, an English collaborator with the group. Kuagros are socialization groups in Palenque, but the lyrics extend that tradition "to the world" and invoke the African diaspora more broadly. The song ends with a call for all of those who would live by the rebellious spirit of freedom to "listen to Benko." While some community members have criticized the use of hip-hop as an unwelcome foreign cultural expression, the

group claims that the new music is helping to keep the younger children of Palenque interested in the traditional language and heritage.

Children are a focal point of the "Punto" music video which celebrates Palenque identity in terms of "musicalidad, ancestralidad, lucha y libertad." As local support grows for the group, so does national and international attention. They have recorded their songs in the Casa de la Cultura in Palenque that was rehabilitated with the support of the Colombian Minister of Culture, Mariana Garcés Córdoba, in 2015. With these first recordings, their music has gained the attention of Palenque Records in Bogotá, improving access to wider audiences. The group was recently included in a project led by Carlos Vives to promote ethnic and racial diversity in Colombia. For this effort, Grammy-award-winning Vives was named an "Ambassador of Inclusion" by USAID. Increasing international acclaim will undoubtedly grow for the group.

For his part, Rafael Cassiani has welcomed the new musical styles as he welcomed our group of scholars into his home. He affectionately shares his talent, memories, and intergenerational wisdom that he has accumulated across the years. The female voice of Kombilesa Mi, Keila Regina Miranda Pérez (KRMP), was trained by Cassiani, and the group recorded a version of the iconic "Esta tierra no es mía" with El Sexteto Tabalá. According to Guillermo Camacho's *El Espectador* article of July 2017, Cassiani tells the members of Kombilesa Mi, "No hay que dejar de soñar y persistir en lo que se cree." These dreams and beliefs resonate with Palenque's past, present, and future; inextricably tied to those who have collaborated along the way.

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Multi-Faith Lives of Brazilian Congadeiros and Umbandistas

Dissertation Advice from an Old Black Slave Spirit **By GENEVIEVE E. V. DEMPSEY**

I STOOD OUTSIDE OF THE SMALL CHAPEL, pointing my video camera through the grates of the window. Inside, the devotees of the religious group Moçambique Thirteenth of May of Our Lady of the Rosary drummed and sang to beseech divine protection from Our Lady of the Rosary and black saints. The enchantment that they wove with their singing constituted the ceremonial preparations for a festival of *Congado*, a syncretic Afro-Brazilian ritual of popular Catholicism. While the camera captured the sounds that emanated from the chapel, I briefly turned my gaze toward the adjacent hills, observing the urban patchwork of precariously built, low-income housing so characteristic of Belo Horizonte, the capital of Minas Gerais, and other megacities of Brazil.

Dona Isabel Cassimiro das Dores Gasparino, the group's leader and Congado queen—a royal title used to indicate hierarchy among these musicians (*Congadeiros*) since the 17th century in Brazil—had granted me permission to film the ritual preparations in the chapel as part of my dissertation fieldwork. Worried that my recording might interrupt the ceremony, I tried to make my ethnographic presence, despite a hardly surreptitious video camera, camera, and notebook, as incognito as possible. Yet soon after I started to document the ritual, senior member of the group Sebastião Corrêa Braga led me into the chapel, motioning for me to stand on a couch by the back wall. Despite my concerns about alighting upon the furniture, I quickly realized the new vantage point provided a fine sight line for filming.

The Congadeiros began the morning rituals that August day in 2014 with a



Opposite page, Black and white saints adorn the altar. Above: Renata da Silva with image of Our Lady of the Rosary.

particular song that requested intercession from Our Lady of the Rosary to prepare their minds and bodies for the spiritual forces that they would encounter throughout the festival. Using the rhythmic pattern known as *serra abaixo*, the drums (*tambores*) played a slow-tempo call-and-response exchange, while captain Ricardo Cassimiro das Dores Gasparino, a day laborer in his mid-forties and son of Dona Isabel, sang, "I ask for permission from my mother, the woman of the rosary." The other Congadeiros answered verbatim, stretching each word across a simple melody as several members continued to drum. Ricardo Cassimiro then placed his hand in the water vessel on the altar and proceeded to wash the sacred batons, symbols of leadership and sacrality, with the sacred water. The Congadeiros continued to play the drums, in addition to the *patangome*, a shaker whose swooshing sound derives from the movement of black seeds within welded automobile hubcaps, as they intermittently sang, "I ask for permission from my mother, the woman

of the rosary." Soon the song came to an end, signaling the devotees' preparedness for the spiritual journey to begin.

The singing and drumming were directed toward the altar. To an outsider, the statues of Catholic saints, *caboclos* (indigenous Brazilians), *pretos velhos* (old black slaves), *boiadeiros* (cowboys), and *marujos* or *marinheiros* (sailors) that vied for space on the altar might look like an aesthetics of hodgepodge. But to devotees, the cascading layers of figures arranged on the altar signaled reconciliation between different sacred traditions originating from African diaspora religions and Roman Catholicism. It is not that worshipers of African-derived religions did not suffer erasure, oppression, and exploitation at the hands of Portuguese Catholic authorities, but that the encounter between different religious traditions compelled worshipers to be resourceful and reconciliatory in their forging of a New World tradition.

Soon after the Congado festival, Dona Isabel, both a Congado queen and a *mãe-de-santo* (mother-of-divinity) in Umbanda, invited me to a session at the chapel, a structure that functions dually as a place of popular Catholicism and Umbanda. In fact, while the chapel serves as a place of worship for popular Catholic rituals on the weekends, it is re-purposed in Umbanda *sessões* or *giras* (healing and consultation ceremonies) on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday evenings. The chapel, moreover, is referred to as the *terreiro* (temple) during Umbanda. Umbanda, a syncretic Brazilian religion focused on spirit possession, blends African diaspora religions with Roman Catholicism, Amerindian shamanism, and Spiritism, a spiritualistic philosophy begun by a French educator known as Allan Kardec who postulated that immortal spirits take

on human form in various incarnations to achieve moral and intellectual edification. Umbandistas engage in spirit possession to call immortal deities (*orixás*) and spirits from the astral plane into their bodies for healing and spiritual guidance. Although Umbanda did not coalesce among disenfranchised Afro-Brazilian slave descendants as a de facto religion until the 1920s in Rio de Janeiro, it is generally accepted that devotees began practicing

the ambiguity within which Catholic and Umbanda statues signify speaks to the creative ways in which practitioners have made their religious cosmologies converge over the centuries. What is more, throughout my fieldwork, I came to understand that while Umbanda and Congado are embodied simultaneously, they are expressed serially. In other words, devotees carry out religiously pluralistic traditions, but implement individual

statue of Saint George, which is also Ogum.

AG: You speak of Saint George and Ogum. This is what happens. Here we have both a house of Congado and a house of Umbanda. There is this mixture. There is this reality. But in Congado, we don't say that Saint George is Ogum. We say Saint George. There is separation. When it is a festival of Umbanda, it isn't Saint George, it's Ogum. Each thing in its own place. There is separation. One doesn't mix one thing with another.

GD: But, for example, why have a separation if a saint is the two things?

AG: But here is the question. When it is praise in honor of the rosary, it is praise in honor of the rosary. When it is something from Umbanda, it is Umbanda. It is not the same time. Coffee is coffee, milk is milk. Combine the two, it is café com leite. It is neither café nor milk, it is coffee with milk—café com leite. This is why there is a separation. (Antônio Cassimiro das Dores Gasparino 2014)

With a simple metaphor of coffee with milk, Antônio illuminated how Afro-Brazilian worshipers often lead religiously pluralistic lives, finding harmony in praising Catholic saints on one day of the week and worshipping African orixás and incorporating spirits on another day. He explained how the individual religious components troped as coffee and milk must run separately for musico-religious pluralism to work. Each component works individually to fulfill the overarching goal of encouraging supernatural deities to intervene in their everyday lives. Indeed, they believe each to contribute uniquely toward building matrices of social, economic and sacred support in the face of societal exclusion and affliction. Hence, religious boundary separation and crossing diversify and enrich devotees' toolkit as they pursue self-empowerment, social justice, and healing in the material world.



Congado group member sing and play drums and shakers to celebrate their devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary.

Umbanda in an inchoate form in Brazil as early as the 19th century.

Broadly speaking, Catholicism was not only the official religion of Brazil from the time the Portuguese colonized Brazil in 1500 until 1889 when the establishment of the republic rendered church and state formally separated, but Portuguese authorities prohibited African and African diaspora religions in toto. Yet, Africans and Afrodescendant peoples (slave, free, and freed) creatively maneuvered around these proscriptions by associating Catholic saints with African deities. For example, Ogum, the deity of iron and war in Umbanda became synonymous with the Catholic symbol of Saint George. Hence,

rituals on different days of the week, in addition to attributing different meanings to them. Thus, while worshipers cognitively and corporeally embody distinct religions at the same time, rituals must be expressed in distinctly temporal and symbolic ways.

The following exchange with Antônio Cassimiro das Dores Gasparino, a security guard in his late forties and another of Dona Isabel's sons, helped me to understand that while both religions coalesce to form a sacred totality in their lives, it is a collective whole that is separately articulated. We were talking in the chapel when I motioned toward the altar:

GD: There, on the altar, you have a

In both Umbanda and Congado, practitioners see music as a mystical conduit that enables them to perform a kind of spiritual work that brings prosperity to the body and mind. Just as Congadeiros use sacred song and prayer to ask for blessings from Our Lady of the Rosary, these same practitioners during Umbanda sessions use songs (*pontos*), dance, and prayer to call spirits of *Caboclos* (Indigenous Brazilians), *Pretos Velhos* (Old Black Slaves), *Crianças/Erês* (Children), *Baianos* (People from the Bahia State), *Boiadeiros* (cowboys), *Marujos* or *Marinheiros* (Sailors), and *Exús* and *Pombas-Giras* (male and female entities loosely associated with the devil) from celestial heights to inhabit their bodies and instantiate healing and resolve problems. Mediums (*médiums*) and initiates (*filhos-de-santo*, literally children-of-saint) desire to be possessed by the spirits of these archetypal figures because in coming to serve as *guias* (guides), they aid and counsel devotees in fixing dilemmas and appeasing orixás.

The first time that I attended an Umbanda ceremony, I observed one devotee become possessed by a spirit. Suddenly, his body convulsed. Growing hunched, he hobbled about as if crippled by senility. He beckoned for someone to retrieve a cane that stood in the corner of the chapel, all the while grunting and sputtering. With labored movements, he made his way over to a small, white bench. Dona Isabel brought me to sit face-to-face with the possessed medium so that I might consult him on any matters of consternation. Broadly speaking, spirits in Umbanda serve less as oracular mediums who tell the future and more as counselors offering advice on personal obstacles. As I sat in front of him, his eyes remained closed. He only moved to puff on a pipe. And then, he spoke, breaking the profound silence between us. Despite being fluent in Portuguese, I could hardly understand a word.

Dona Isabel whispered to me that the medium embodied the preto velho Father Joaquim, so his Portuguese was that of pre-emancipation Brazil (1500-1888).

She offered to stay and translate the language of the old slave spirit into modern Portuguese. During the transatlantic slave trade, close to six million Africans were forcibly brought to Brazil. Although the law of 7 November 1831 abolished the maritime slave trade and freed the African who were illegally imported to Brazil, the slave trade continued unabated both across the Middle Passage and within Brazil until Princess Isabel abolished slavery in Brazil by dictum in 1888. Slaves primarily came from vast expanses of the west coast of Africa, primarily being drawn from Bantu cultural areas of West Central Africa (present-day Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Gabon) and the Yoruba, Ewe, and Fon cultural areas of West Africa (present-day Guinea, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin (Dahomey)). Given the diversity of peoples who were trafficked in the Luso-Brazilian slave trade, it is difficult to speak of a homogenous African population in Brazil. Nonetheless, one can speak of the many convergences that marked enslaved Africans' experiences in Brazil: dispossession, hunger and violence.

The encounter with Father Joaquim made me realize that this figure was not a wild extremity, but rather a purposeful archetype who embodied the history of a disenfranchised people whose resilience was as sacrosanct as their religious practices. Father Joaquim was one of many old slave spirits who returned perpetually in human form to teach followers about the struggle, both past and present, against those who worked and continue to work to invalidate their humanity.

At the time that I conducted fieldwork, I was formulating a dissertation about the music of devotee's struggle for social justice via African- and European-derived sacred ritual in wider contexts of racism and exclusion. When it came to turning the participant-observation and interviews of fieldwork into a dissertation, the process proved daunting. So, I asked Father Joaquim, "How do I make sense of the fieldwork and then turn it into a dissertation?" Resolute, he answered, "Let the devotees speak." This counsel became a guiding force in the dissertation

writing process as I strove to intertwine my observations with worshipers' performative voices.

Strikingly, what seemed prima facie like straightforward dissertation advice from Father Joaquim was really his clarion call for the decolonization of dissertation writing. Indeed, Father Joaquim's advice favored the exercise of agency by devotees. In reflecting upon this, I realized just how much a dispossessed historical figure, representing in bodily form Brazil's negation of Afro-Brazilians' humanity and humanness during slavery, could still serve as a preeminent symbol of what it looks like to work toward negating the inequalities of Afro-Brazilians in the here and now. Hence, this old slave spirit, rather than being the antithesis of modernity, became the mobilizer of it.

My encounter with Father Joaquim informs my larger thinking about how practitioners see Congado and Umbanda as individual cogs that form a unified wheel rotating toward redemption. Although an agenda of racial empowerment is not always explicit in Congado and Umbanda, many communities work toward socio-spiritual justice by making legible their performances as healing, devotion, and social commentary. In the end, the advice from Father Joaquim was not merely about solving an ephemeral, personal problem. For myself and others who are willing to listen, the guidance from an old black slave spirit was meant to render audible devotees' present-day struggles to create lasting racial equality in a longstanding history of alterity.

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In the Footsteps of La Rebambaramba

Afro-Latino Dance, Identity and Cultural Diplomacy **By** BELÉN VEGA PICHACO

TRACING THE JOURNEY OF AMADEO ROLDÁN'S Afro-Cuban ballet *La Rebambaramba* (1928) I arrived in Paris. Yes, in Paris, France... both the author of the original libretto, the Cuban writer and musicologist Alejo Carpentier, and the—also Cuban—choreographer Ramiro Guerra insisted in recalling the ballet's 1961 staging at the *Théâtre des Nations* (Theater of Nations) in Paris.

However, it was not the geographical distance—the almost 5,000 miles from Havana to Paris—that was unusual. Paris, the mecca of the international artistic avant-garde in the first half of the 20th century, had long ago welcomed the music of Afro-Cubanist composers Amadeo Roldán and Alejandro García Caturla, with the help of Carpentier, a resident of the French capital from 1928 to 1939. The orchestral version of *La Rebambaramba*—without choreography—had been performed at the Straram Concerts in Paris (1931) with a great success.

The striking feature was not the geographical but the temporal remoteness. More than three decades had passed from the creation of the score to its staging (Roldán, who died in 1939, was never able to see it). I wondered why had it not been danced before. And why was the Afro-Cuban ballet recovered in the early years of the Cuban Revolution? The answer to the first question was offered by Carpentier himself in *Trajectory of a Score* in which he explained *La Rebambaramba's* “full-of-accidents-history.” The breakup of an interested U.S. dance company spearheaded by Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn, whose romantic relationship also fell apart, delayed a possible performance. Also the businessman Sergei Diaghilev, soul of the *Ballets Russes*, and enthusiastic about the production of the Cuban show,

died suddenly. Work had just been started to adapt the score for the stage. Both the breakup and the death could be considered unfortunate “accidents” that greatly delayed the production.

In 1933, Cuban playwright Luis A. Baralt failed in an attempt to collaborate with Roldán himself on a stage performance because of the chaos in the aftermath of the fall of Gerardo Machado's dictatorship in Cuba. Finally, the choreographic starting point of the ballet—the dancing of conga and lucumi troupes (*comparsas*)—could hardly have been carried out before 1959: mixing black dancers with the white *ballerinas* of the elitist Pro-Arte Musical Society would have been a scandal.

In the late 1950s, the choreographer Alberto Alonso, one of the three founders of the Cuban National Ballet (together with his brother Fernando and his sister-in-law Alicia), prepared a show for Cuban television. From the aesthetics and staging points of view, that kind of performance is unsatisfactory. For one thing, video montage imposes its own narrative rules and also the viewer's vision is limited to the camera's “eye.” However, the media and social impact of that television performance of *La Rebambaramba*—possibly greater than any other in a Cuban theater, especially before 1959—should not be underrated. Can we then make a link between the recovery of *La Rebambaramba* and the Revolution ideology by taking into account this television performance during Batista's dictatorship? To try to answer this question, I invite you to join me on my journey in the footsteps of *La Rebambaramba*.

Roldán, Carpentier, Guerra... they all led me, last fall, to the archives that hold the historical papers of the Theater of

Nations in Paris to find out more about this annual festival. Practically forgotten today, this gathering had a great importance from its foundation in 1957 until the mid-1960s, because of the high degree of international participation. Theater, lyric and dance companies from all over the world attended the yearly festival that took place there. International artistic companies competed there in a kind of “Performing Arts' Olympics”—as the press baptized it—during the Cold War. Think, for a moment, about the Theater of Nations as we do the sports Olympics, in which each country presents its best athletes not only to get the most Gold medals (unequivocal display of power), but also to show off their national «values» such as strength, resistance and control—attributes that in this political context took on a metaphorical meaning. Analyzing the presence of *La Rebambaramba*—as well as the other works presented by Cuba in 1961 and 1964—at the Theater of Nations, may perhaps bring us closer to an answer.

For its first appearance at the Theater of Nations, Cuba chose a show that alternated three pieces of modern dance by Ramiro Guerra (*Suite Yoruba*, *La Rebambaramba* and *Rítmicas*) with folkloric dances. Despite the apparent lack of cohesion of the spectacle, one element gave it unity: the recurrence of the theme of Cuba's African heritage. Guerra's choreographies turned to the Afro-Cuban pantheon (the gods or orishas of Yoruba santería) in *Suite Yoruba* and to an episode of colonial life when African slaves grouped in *comparsas* enjoyed “freedom” to perform their songs and dances on the eve of Three Kings Day (January 6) in *La Rebambaramba*. In the third choreography, Guerra recovered another of Amadeo Roldán's most emblematic works—along with the aforementioned



Afro-Cuban ballet—composed for Afro-Cuban percussion instruments (*güiro*, *marímbula*, *chequeré*, *quijada*, etc.).

The folkloric dances, all of African descent, were introduced by Cuban National Theater director, Isabel Monal (by the way, a Harvard graduate, according to the French press), as what “the Cuban people dance in their daily life.” Their performance by a group of popular dancers trained as part of the

amateur movement (*movimiento de aficionados*) promoted by Castro's regime contributed to accentuate this popular imprint. Not surprising the headline of *L'Humanité* newspaper declared: “The voice of an entire people.” However, the French Communist newspaper contradicted itself (and Monal's statement) when it explained that these folkloric dances, “rumba, columbia and guaguancó, lead to the heart of the

daily life of blacks in the country.” Were all Cubans black? In the light of the 1961 show, one might conclude that was the case. And that Cuban people could even be considered as African people, given the press release from the Theater of Nations in which it linked the “most authentic folklore” of the Caribbean island with that of other African countries (Niger, Madagascar and South Africa) attending the Festival.



The Cuban National Theater performs folkloric dances in Paris.

The coincidence of Cuban participation in the Theater of Nations, in April 1961, with the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba delayed the arrival of part of the dance company and reduced its performance to only one of the five scheduled days. However, it was powerful anti-imperialist propaganda, as the French press commented on this «unexpected consequence» for culture, and was looking forward to the arrival of the missing Cuban dancers. It also strengthened the diplomatic ties with the U.S.S.R. as Theater Company Vakhtangov from Moscow publicly proclaimed the solidarity and support of the Soviet people to their Cuban counterparts. After its Paris show, Guerra's Modern Dance Company continued its route towards the Eastern Bloc area: the German Democratic Republic, Poland and, of course, the Soviet Union.

In 1964, Cuba returned to the Theater of Nations, but—excluding modern dance on this occasion—it featured the newly founded *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional* (National Folkloric Ensemble) which presented a program of congo and yoruba dances. The ensemble group once again conveniently omitted the Hispanic or European roots of Cuba's folklore (a chauvinist French critic denounced the absence of the *contradanza* without saying a single word about the *punto cubano* or *zapateo*, among other music and dance genres connected to Spanish colonialism). The 1964 Cuban participation had also an important propaganda factor: the picture of Ernesto Che Guevara linking arms with one of the black dancers and the director of the company, made headlines in French newspapers, so the performance of the National Folkloric Ensemble and the political task of Che Guevara in Algeria (a meeting with Ahmed Ben Bella) became connected in this indirect way. Indeed, following the Paris performance, the company undertook a tour that concluded precisely in that African country.

In short, the self-representation of Cuba in the Theater of Nations as an Afro-Cuban people (if not African) allows

Cubaines... Si!



CONSEQUENCE (INATTENDUE) DE LA RÉBELLION ANTICASTRISTE: Les danseuses cubaines ne se produiront pas lundi à Paris

us to place in a broader context Ramiro Guerra's recovery of *La Rebambaramba* and other works with music by Roldán (*Mulato* after *Tres pequeños poemas*, 1926; the anti-imperialist ballet *El milagro de Anaquillé*, 1929/1931 and the aforementioned *Rítmicas*, 1930) in the early years of the Revolution. As Fidel Castro tried to bring dance closer to the "Cuban people" by making them the creators—regardless of their race—of export-quality professional shows, Guerra followed anti-racist policies in his company, such as the hiring of "10 White, 10 Black and 10 Mulatto dancers," a quota that paradoxically emphasized segregation.

Undoubtedly, one of the readings that could be extracted from the emphasis on Afro-Cuban roots during the early years of the Revolution would lead, precisely, to an image of racial integration that is not exempt from deep contradictions. However, bearing in mind Castro's foreign policy and the "internationalist" work in Africa, we cannot ignore the equally strong anti-colonialist message launched by the representation offered by the Cuban National Folkloric Ensemble in 1964, first in Paris and then in Algeria (until 1962 a French colony). Likewise,



Opposite news clipping caption here goes about the 5 pices of art that are here

let us recall Fidel's speech at a later date (Guinea, 1976) where, in listing the reasons for his help to the Angolan people, he identified Cuba as a "Latin African people."

But did not the aforementioned dance performances at the Theater of Nations constitute a more powerful diplomatic tool than words, by embodying the "Latin-African" identity while disguising it, at the same time, as a simple choreographic spectacle?

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Black Aesthetics and Afro-Latinx Hip Hop

"I'm an African" By SUJATHA FERNANDES

THE U.S. EMCEES FROM THE GROUP DEAD PREZ rapped, "I'm an African, I'm an African," in front of a crowd of thousands at the 1999 Cuban hip hop festival. The amphitheatre resounded with the thundering response of the Cuban audience chanting back the words. It was Pan-Africanism in motion.

The politics didn't always translate, however. Unaware of the implications of what he was about to do, rapper M-1 pulled out a dollar bill on stage, and began to burn it with a cigarette lighter, an act considered illegal and a defacement of property in the United States. "Because of this dollar, the children in my country are dying for crack, or for drugs, or for bling bling."

The audience became furious. How could he be burning a precious dollar bill? "Oye, no, gimme that dollar, I can buy some bread, or some french fries," people in the audience cried out. Then he began to burn a ten dollar bill. "Nooooo! Stop!," screamed the audience. "What is that crazy guy doing? I could feed my whole family for a month with that." One member of the U.S. delegation, Raquel Rivera, was translating, explaining to the baffled audience that in the United States black people are dying because of the dollar bill. "But here in Cuba," shouted one person, half-seriously, "people are dying of hunger."

Incidents like these lead me to wonder: Can hip hop—a subculture that includes rapping, d-jaying, beat-making, and graffiti writing and a dance form known as b-boying—forge political alliances between Afro-Latinx and Afrodescendant people across the world? Is there such a thing as a global hip hop generation and could it act politically?

HOW HIP HOP WENT GLOBAL

Hip hop is the contemporary expression of African-based dance and music that empowers local youth and subverts dominant orders. Hip hop became global



Magia and Alexey MC's from the Cuban group "Obsesión," Regla, Havana. 2006.

Growing up in the '80s, the Cuban rapper Alexey from the rap duo Obsesión was attracted by the raw energy and soul of the hip hop music he heard on 99 Jams FM, broadcasting from ninety miles away in Miami.

both through the commodification of hip hop culture and what the dance scholar Halifu Osumare calls an Africanist aesthetic that includes complex rhythmic timing, rhetorical strategies, and multiple layers of meaning.

Many emcees had their start as b-boys or b-girls, as the dancers in hip hop culture are called. Growing up in the '80s, the Cuban rapper Alexey from the rap duo Obsesión was attracted by the raw energy and soul of the hip hop music he heard on 99 Jams FM, broadcasting from ninety miles away in Miami. As a kid he would

build antennas from wire coat hangers and dangle his radio out the window, "crazy to get the 99." On episodes of the music-dance television program Soul Train on television from Miami, Alexey saw b-boying for the first time. He copied the steps and then showed them to the kids in the neighborhood. Alexey remembered the gatherings in the El Quijote park. Kids would form a circle, and in the center the b-boys would polish the concrete with their back spins and windmills, while others broke into a beatbox or rhymed.

Julio Cardenas, known as El Hip Hop Kid, was an emcee from the Alamar housing projects, just outside of Havana. Julio was raised by his mother in the neighboring sector of Guanabacoa. As a kid, he would come rushing home from school to watch the b-boys "retandose"—battling—and "tirando cartones"—laying out the cardboard strip—on the back patio of his building. They watched bootleg copies of the hip hop films *Beat Street*, *Fast Forward*, *Breakin'* and copied the moves. Julio moved to Alamar in the 1980s at the age of fifteen, where he became caught up in the hip hop movement that was taking the black and working class community by storm. He would go to the *moños*, or block parties where people rapped and d-jayed.

Julio went on to technical college to do a degree in civil construction, graduating at the height of the economic crisis of Cuba's "special period." There were no jobs so he went to work with his grandfather in the nearby fishery for some cash to help out his mother and to get the local authorities off his back. The local police had a tendency to harass youth, especially black youth, who were not working full time. Eventually he found a job as a bridge operator, raising and lowering the bridge that connected Alamar and Cojimar, to allow the ships to pass through. The job was a no brainer. At

Because of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, Cuban rappers lacked samplers, mixers and albums. But like their Bronx counterparts who developed the sound system from abandoned car radios and made turntable mixers from microphone mixers, global hip hoppers adapted materials from their local environment.



7 a.m., Julio would raise the bridge and by early afternoon when all the boats had gone through, he would sit back with his friends exchanging news about who had the latest rap magazine from the States, and who had heard this song from the rap groups Pharcyde or EMPD.

In '96, Julio formed the group Raperos Crazy de Alamar (RCA) along with Carlito "Melito," a carpenter, and his friend Yoan. They started out just to amuse themselves, without ambitions of being serious artists. "That moment we were living was so critical, so boring," related Julio. "Everything was closed off and censored. We, the youth, were doing hip hop just to do something, looking for a way of having fun."

The rap scholar Tricia Rose identified this need to break the cycle of boredom and alienation as one of the factors that underlay the rise of hip hop in its birthplace, the Bronx. While Cuba presented quite specific conditions of economic crisis combined with political restrictions, this existential void wasn't something peculiar to Cuba. Hip hop was a way out of the boredom. It wasn't the same boredom that kids in the suburbs experienced, wanting reprieve from their

sheltered existence. It was the boredom of low-paying, menial jobs and truncated opportunities. And hip hop wasn't just a distraction from the void. It was a way of recreating a sense of community and finding spaces of pleasure in the face of isolation and the regimentation of life. By the mid-1980s, the elements of graffiti and b-boying were in decline. Rap emerged as the central means by which hip hop culture was packaged for global consumption. At this time, rap movements also began to develop in various countries. Young people rhymed on street corners, using their voices to make a background beat, known as a human beat box. As more serious rap crews began to develop, they realized that they needed digital beats, which often required expensive equipment.

Because of the U.S. embargo against Cuba, Cuban rappers lacked samplers, mixers and albums. But like their Bronx counterparts who developed the sound system from abandoned car radios and made turntable mixers from microphone mixers, global hip hoppers adapted materials from their local environment.

Cuba's first hip hop DJ Ariel Fernández improvised a set of turntables with old-school portable cassette player Walkmans as the decks, simulating a mixer by using volume controls. Producers drew on a rich heritage of Afro-Cuban music and Afro-diasporic instruments to make their beats. They recreated the rhythmic pulse of hip hop with instruments like the melodic Batá drums. In the heavily Afro-Cuban-influenced eastern provinces, Madera Limpia rapped live with an entire ensemble of Cuban instruments. Obsesión

used instrumentation to evoke the era of slavery. In their song "Mambí," the gentle strumming of a *berimbau*, a string instrument associated with Afro-Brazilian capoeira, and water sounds produced by the traditional *palo de agua* give the sense of being near a river or stream, which evokes the rural roots of slaves.

THE LATINX-AMERICAN-CUBAN CONNECTION

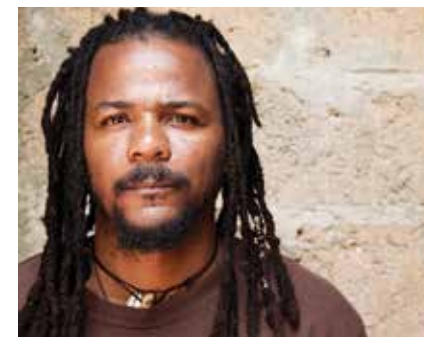
Julio and Alexey, like other Cubans of the hip hop generation, had little or no memory of the early years of the revolution. They'd heard stories from their parents about the literacy campaign that mobilized one and a quarter million Cubans, or about the desegregation of whites-only spaces during the 1960s. As the younger generation, they had benefited from the extension of education, housing, and health care to black families. But they came of age during the crisis of the post-Soviet period, as the revolutionary years gave way to times of austerity, and racism was visible once again.

In a society where it was taboo to talk about race publicly, racism was the elephant in the room that everyone knew existed, yet everyone pretended wasn't there. Fidel Castro had attempted to create a color-blind society, where equality between blacks and whites would make racial identifications obsolete. But while re-drawing the geography of Cuba's racial landscape, the state simultaneously closed down Afro-Cuban clubs and the black press. As racism became public once again during the special period—it had never really gone away—black people were left without the means to talk about it. When called on their racism, officials trotted out the same tired line—*en Cuba, no hay racismo* (in Cuba, there is no racism). But black youth were harassed by police and asked for ID. They had a harder time getting jobs in tourism than their white peers.

It was into this juncture that hip hop culture appeared and took root. While the black nationalism espoused by an earlier generation of visiting black radicals like Marcus Garvey or Stokely Carmichael never had much appeal in Cuba, African-

American rappers spoke a language of black militancy that resonated with Cuban youth. It spoke to their experiences of racial discrimination in the special period. Young Cubans of African ancestry proudly referred to themselves as black. Cuban emcee Sekuo Umoja from Anónimo Consejo told me, "We had the same vision as rappers such as Paris, who was one of the first to come to Cuba. His music drew my attention, because here is something from the barrio, something black. Of blacks, and made principally by blacks, which in a short time became something very much our own, related to our lives here in Cuba." The U.S. rapper Common organized a meeting with local rappers in which they exchanged ideas and stories. The transnational Black August Hip Hop network brought equipment and records for the Cuban rappers.

The Song "Tengo" (I Have) by the group Hermanos de Causa presents the resurgence of racism in the contemporary period in striking contrast to the post-revolutionary euphoria of Afro-Cubans, who saw in the Cuban revolution the possibilities of an end to racial discrimination. Borrowing the title and format of a 1964 poem by celebrated



Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, where the poet lists the changes that the revolution has brought for blacks, Hermanos de Causa instead describe the situation for young Afro-Cubans in the contemporary post-Soviet period: "I have a dark and discriminated race/ I have a work day that demands and gives nothing." Through hip hop, Cuban rappers were reintroducing a lexicon of race and racism that had been abandoned for many years because the revolution had supposedly resolved issues



Yadirra, opposite page. Dayanna, above and Zekou below.

of racism.

It was not always the rap lyrics that created a sense of affinity between U.S. black and Afro-Latinx youth. The Venezuelan gangsta rappers Guerrilla Seca and Vagos y Maleantes were influenced by U.S. rappers like Tupac, Nas and Ludacris. They couldn't understand the English lyrics, but they said that there was a certain "flow," a feeling associated with the music that spoke to them. We can see this echoed in the song "Boca del Lobo" (Mouth of the Wolf) by Vagos y Maleantes. Coming from the poor barrios of Caracas, they felt that the bleakness and despondency of the music echoed the deteriorated social fabric of their lives.

But while global hip hoppers found strong connections to U.S. hip hop, attempts to come together in global alliances revealed the fractures that existed. The pain of racism may have been the bridge that connected the U.S. rappers with those in the diaspora. But that racism took different forms in each context, as the Black August hip hop collective encountered during their trip to Cuba. Some local rappers were bitter about the various rap collaborations done between visiting U.S. rappers and Cuban rappers which tended to make money for the U.S. artists but not the Cubans. Cuban rappers were getting tired of the one way stream of outsiders treating their local scenes as exotic cultures to be

packaged for the consumption of western audiences.

The Latinx-American-Cuban connection was somewhat tenuous when subjected to the very real differences of language, culture and history. The black militancy of the U.S. rappers was not comparable to the racial consciousness of Cuban rappers. Black Cuban identity—always expressed within the boundaries of an anti-colonial nationalism—was not equivalent to U.S. blackness, shaped through the fiery battles of abolition, desegregation, and civil rights. Cubans didn't have a civil rights movement that brought a discussion of race out into the open. The black-white dichotomy of American race relations did not exist in Cuba. While in America, even "one drop" of black blood categorized a person as black, Cubans had a much broader spectrum of racial classifications—from the darker skinned *prietos*, *morenos*, and *negros* to the mixed race *pardos* and *mulatos*. The militant stance of the American rappers appealed to the Cubans, particularly with its language of racial justice. But the categories of U.S. racial politics could not be superimposed onto a culture where racial identity was not so clear-cut.

IS IT GLOBAL?

In 2001, Julio Cardenas left Cuba and moved to New York City. He experienced what many rappers after him were

to encounter: without professional qualifications or credentials, without family in the states, he was forced to abandon his music and bus tables like many other migrants in the city. Eventually he moved into the area of hip hop theatre, and with a grant from an arts foundation he wrote and acted in a play called “Representa!” with the Chicano poet Paul Flores. The play explores the developing relationship between them in the distinct locales of Havana and New York City. Paul is finishing up college and using his school loans to fund a trip to Cuba. He wants to see the country where his grandmother was born and reconnect to his Cuban roots. The actors stand side by side, Paul in his college dorm planning the trip, and Julio riding a bus in Cuba, both of them speaking aloud their thoughts. Paul wants to see the Cuban hip hop festival. Julio wants to perform in the hip hop festival. Paul wants to dance salsa and drink Cuban rum. Julio wants to go to the Palacio de la Salsa and dance with a beautiful woman. The play explores how Paul, a minority in his own country, has access to certain privileges in Havana that are not available to marginalized youth such as Julio. Walking in the city, Julio is policed and his movements restricted by the authorities. Paul’s discomfort comes from the perception of him as a rich tourist, a positionality he is not used to occupying.

The Latinx-American-Cuban connection seemed to have a better chance of being realized when Cubans and Latinxs could live in each other’s spaces and acknowledge their differences. Even if the global hip hop ‘hood was more a fantasy than actuality, experiences like those of Paul and Julio seem to suggest that the solidarity hip hoppers were looking for could be found in the diaspora. The story of the global spread of hip hop is itself one of movement. A movement of ideas, a movement of commodities, a movement of people. Hip hop is a force defined by rupture and flow. If there is anything that marks this moment, it is as much the motion and mobility that bring us together, as it is the boundaries and borders that divide us.

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Raperos

BUILDING BRIDGES

Compañeros En Salud: Mental Health Services

and Gender Equality **By MERCEDES AGUERREBERE GÓMEZ URQUIZA**

I HAVE LIVED IN NON-INDIGENOUS rural Chiapas in southern Mexico since 2013, working with Compañeros En Salud (CES)—a Harvard affiliated non-profit organization that partnered with the Mexico’s Ministry of Health to guarantee people’s right to health care in Chiapas’ Sierra Madre region.

Soon after starting its work in the region in 2011, CES staff realized that many patients came to the clinics because of mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. To bring mental health care to marginalized communities, CES launched the mental health program in 2014—which I helped design and for which I served as coordinator from 2014 to 2016.

After treating hundreds of women with depression I became aware of the psychological consequences of gender inequality. The narratives women told me about their illness were plagued with stories of violence by an intimate partner (including sexual violence) (IPV), sexual abuse by a someone who is not a partner (SA), or isolation due to gender norms that hampers personal freedom and restrict women’s activities to the household.

Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from depression (Kuehner 2016). Some biological differences between men and women could explain this phenomenon. For



instance, biological differences in the stress response, in levels of serotonin and its receptors in the brain—a neurotransmitter closely related to depression—and effects of estrogen and progesterin—hormones found in higher concentrations among females (Parry and Haynes 2000; Kuehner 2016). Still, other authors point to recent evidence that shows the gender gap in mood disorders stem from gender role traditionality (Seedat et al. 2009) and higher exposure to adversity among females, such as sexual abuse, and intimate-partner violence (Kuehner 2016; Heim et al. 2000).

Since many women and girls have only the consultation space to talk safely about their experiences, how could mental health services in primary care be leveraged as spaces of reflection on gender inequality? How could Compañeros En Salud adequately equip health service providers to adequately address acts of violence? What role could CES community health workers—more than a hundred women—play in promoting women’s human rights? How do gender norms and roles affect psychological distress, alcohol abuse and

suicide among men? Questions like these saturated my brain while I was applying for the Harvard Masters of Medical Sciences in Global Health Delivery.

Shortly after arriving in Boston, I decided to focus my thesis on violence against women and mental health in CES’ catchment area. The project has not been easy for me as a physician and an idealist. Medicine is quite straightforward compared with anthropology, sociology, feminism and politics: disciplines I had not deeply explored until now. There is no magic bullet to prevent or address violence against women.

Still, violence against women is strongly associated with mental illness (Howard, Feder, and Agnew-Davis 2013), with high alcohol consumption by the male partner also associated with women’s experience of abuse (Abramsky et al. 2011; Heise 2011). In addition, while conducting the field work, I have learned that traumatic experiences since childhood are highly prevalent among men who suffer from alcohol use disorder.

My research project aims at measuring the scope of violence—both IPV and SA—in one of the communities where CES operates, and to understand social norms and structures that support excessive alcohol use among men, and support violence

against women. The results will inform the ability of mental health services provided by CES and other Partners In Health sites, to deliver gender-sensitive mental health services and prevent and address intimate-partner violence, non-partner sexual abuse, and alcohol use disorder.

Although the project is ongoing, I am confident that CES can address these abuses and their mental health consequences, to work on several fronts: assure the mental health program is equipped to respond to cases of trauma in boys, girls, women and men, and to cases of alcohol use disorder; engage with the community leaders to provide healthy spaces for youth recreation, socialization and reflection on gender, development, and health; and guarantee that CES health programs—including community health workers, mental health, maternal health, and referrals—address gender inequality in the day-to-day practice.

Mercedes Aguerreberere, M.D., previously served as Mental Health Coordinator for Partners In Health Mexico (Compañeros En Salud), where she built a model for integrating mental health services in rural primary care clinics. She is currently a student at Harvard Medical School pursuing a Master’s degree in Medical Sciences on Global Health Delivery.

Social Policy in Cuba: Across the Great Divides

A REVIEW By CHRIS TILLY

Social Policies and Decentralization in Cuba: Change in the Context of 21st-Century Latin America, edited by Jorge I. Domínguez, María del Carmen Zabala Argüelles, Mayra Espina Prieto, and Lorena G. Barbería (David Rockefeller Center Series on Latin American Studies, Harvard University, 2017, 272 pages)

From my snapshot views of Cuba in five visits over the years, two eye-opening moments stand out. In 1980, after visiting one workplace after another where union and management representatives explained how no conflict existed between labor and management under socialism, I stumbled on a heated open-air labor-management negotiation in Santiago that was rapidly degenerating into a shouting match. In 2003, co-leading a participatory community workshop in Havana, I was startled to hear a government representative identify the biggest obstacle to community development as “the bureaucracy.” Both moments speak to the continuing inequalities of power and resources in socialist Cuba.

In fact, I would suggest a Cuban-U.S. volume on social policy in Cuba like this one must engage at least *five* great divides. The first is the rapidly growing income inequality in that country, which has exploded

since the Soviet Union collapsed and discontinued its economic support of Cuba. That inequality is most starkly visible to natives and visitors alike in the disjunction between the dollar and peso economies. The second is the gap in power and opportunities between Havana and the rest of the country. A third divide, found in Cuba as in most countries, is the distance between the Cuban state and its people embodied in top-down policies and limited opportunities for bottom-up input. Collaboration between Cuban and U.S. researchers entails two other divides. One is simply differing perspectives across the two countries. A U.S.-Cuban analysis must also contend with the sharply polarized views of Cuba’s government and its policies *within* each country and more broadly in the world.

Social Policies and Decentralization in Cuba is the latest in a series of DRCLAS books from an ongoing research project on social and economic change in that country. The authors make a strong case that the policy terrain has shifted significantly in recent years, making this new addition not just an update but an exploration of new policy processes. The chapters spotlight individual sectors (enterprise development, education, health care,



environmental policy, remittances) and processes of participation and decentralization, as well as framing these in-depth looks with an overview and two chapters on social policy in the broader Latin American context.

Viewing the book as a whole, what do we learn about Cuban social policy? First, we learn that in ways analogous to broader shifts across Latin America and the world, Cuba has shifted from universal subsidies and services toward more targeted programs—while maintaining universalist ideals about access to health care, education and economic opportunity. Second, the authors point out the ways in which formal universalist policies can fall short at the implementation level in the context of limited and unequally distributed resources. Some chapters address disparities in *outcomes*, some underscore disparities in *access* to benefits

and services, some touch on both—and some avoid the issue altogether—but taken as a whole the essays make this point repeatedly and effectively. These observations are particularly salient in a Cuban context in which resources have become *both* more limited and more unequally distributed since 1990. A third lesson: there has been significant movement away from centralized, top-down policy implementation. This glass is definitely half-full, but that marks an important advance from the Cuba I first saw four decades ago.

The book’s editors and authors gamely take on the five great divides—in ways that are distributed unevenly across the ten chapters. Growing inequality by class, perhaps Cuba’s most consequential social shift in its last three decades, and continuing inequality by gender and race, take center stage in María del Carmen Zabala’s chapter on participatory community development projects and the papers on education and employment (Dayma Echevarría and Mayra Tejuca), health care (Susset Fuentes), and remittances (Lorena Barbería). The findings are most detailed on gender, thinnest on race, given Cuba’s omission of race from official statistical surveys, but form a fascinating composite picture. Perhaps most interesting are the convoluted ways in which *class* plays

First, we learn that in ways analogous to broader shifts across Latin America and the world, Cuba has shifted from universal subsidies and services toward more targeted programs—while maintaining universalist ideals about access to health care, education, and economic opportunity.

out in contemporary Cuban society: access to remittances, for example, or access to better health care via social connections or economic bribes.

The economics of the Havana/hinterlands divide is, disappointingly, under-reported in the book, but the *politics* of that divide, and the related state-citizenry divide, come in for close examination. The two strongest chapters in the volume, papers on policy decentralization by Geydis Elena Fundora and Mayra Espina, offer clear-eyed assessments of the promise and risks of decentralization, and the barriers to local initiative that remain in place. The two chapters offer two very different vantage points, both valuable: Fundora reports on the views regarding various aspects of participation expressed by key informants from government, the academy and communities; the core of Espina’s chapter is a review of seven concrete decentralization initiatives, in a set of mini-case studies of policy. Each chapter is packed with concrete discussion of steps forward and continuing limitations and barriers in breaking down these two potent gaps and moving toward broad channels of

voice and participation. My “glass half-full” image at the outset of this review is based on these two rich chapters.

Zabala’s essay on local participation and a chapter on nonfarm cooperatives by Reynaldo Jiménez and Niurka Padrón also touch on the state-citizen divide. Like Fundora and Espina, Zabala tells us how policy is implemented on the ground, in this case, through community development projects. However, Zabala primarily explores *what dimensions of inequality get recognized and addressed* within these projects; she is silent on the relationship of these NGO-based projects and processes with the state. Jiménez and Padrón’s paper falls short in a more basic way: their analysis is limited to description of a series of laws and statistics on cooperatives.

The U.S.-Cuban dynamic plays out in interesting ways in this volume. Cubans authored the bulk of the book, seven out of ten chapters. But Harvard- and DRCLAS-linked scholars wrote the three chapters that are positioned to frame the book: Jorge Domínguez’s introduction, and closing chapters by Lorena Barbería and Soledad Artiz that place Cuba in the wider Latin American mosaic.

In the Cuban academy, there are limits to the extent of acceptable criticism of the Cuban government and its policies—Fidel Castro’s dictum of “within the Revolution, everything; against the Revolution, nothing” remains in force, though the definition of what is “within” has expanded somewhat. The Cuban authors have dealt with these limitations in different ways. Fundora and Espina have written chapters full of critique, but the critique comes via the voices of informants and of other researchers who have evaluated specific programs. Zabala, as noted above, largely avoids mention of the state. Jiménez and Padrón (on cooperatives), Echevarría and Tejuca (on education), and Marta Rosa Muñoz (on environmental policy) thread the needle by giving statistical summaries of outcomes and lists of laws and policies, but with little or no evaluation how policies are linked to outcomes, nor assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policies (though Echevarría and Tejuca chapter do offer a bit more). As a result, though these three chapters are useful resources on the contours of policy and key outcomes, I found them arid and ultimately frustrating

reading.

The Harvard-linked authors who sit outside Cuba face a different set of incentives and constraints, and it shows. This is especially true in Domínguez’s introduction, which offers a blunt, though not unsympathetic, assessment of Cuba’s serious social and economic problems, and of the achievements and shortcomings of the country’s evolving mix of social policies. Barbería takes the same road as Fundora and Espina, citing research that exposes the mixed impacts (ameliorating poverty, but intensifying inequality) of the current system of remittances in Cuba. Artiz’s chapter provides interesting data on Latin American public opinion regarding social policy, but misses the opportunity to use this analysis to think through Cuban social policy in light of Latin American experiences.

Are Cuba’s social policies adequate to overcome Cuba’s great divides? The evidence from this book says not yet, but there is some room for optimism in Cuba’s continuing commitment to egalitarian ideals and its continuing process of policy experimentation. For me, at least, that is indeed a glass half full.

Chris Tilly, professor of Urban Planning at UCLA, studies bad jobs and how to make them better, and the role of social movements in economic change. Though not a Cuba scholar, he has visited Cuba in 1979, 1980, 1994, and most recently twice in 2003.

Consumption as Resistance in the Age of Late Capitalism

A REVIEW By EDUARDO LEDESMA

Delirious Consumption: Aesthetics and Consumer Capitalism in Mexico and Brazil by Sergio Delgado Moya (University of Texas Press, 2017)

Sergio Delgado's brilliant book, *Delirious Consumption*, performs a truly radical feat of locating anti-capitalist resistance precisely in the heart of the beast, in consumer culture and the culture industry. He does so by examining the work of notable Mexican and Brazilian writers and artists from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, a period of "consumer frenzy" when Latin America was becoming increasingly urban and industrialized, and the middle classes were on the rise. Through close readings of murals by David Alfaro Siqueiros, poetry by the Brazilian concrete poets and by Octavio Paz, and analysis of the object art of Brazilian neoconcretists such as Lygia Clark, Delgado analyzes the ways in which these artists used tools from advertising and consumer culture to challenge capitalist structures, paradoxically fighting capitalism through consumption.

The territory Delgado is negotiating is tricky and fraught with potential danger, but he skillfully works through the paradox, offering a nuanced and thoughtful analysis of the ambiguous position(s) taken by these artists. For him, they represent "an assured but adjustable stance



against commodification, alienation, and the politics of domination and inequality that define consumer capitalism" (2-3). Delgado tells us that the works he studies "model an approach keenly attuned to imitation as an incisive, at times subversive, response to capitalist modes of signification" (3). As he deftly unfolds his argument, the author shows that it is by imitating, mimicking and replicating the very processes and strategies of marketing, advertising and mass communication that these innovative artists cast a potentially subversive light on the process of modernization and development in Latin America and disrupt the depoliticizing effects of commodity fetishism.

So what *Delirious Consumption* is attempting to do is to bring attention and redress a gap in scholarly work, one that has been neglected or automatically ignored: namely, the positive potential

of consumption, typically presented as individualistic and banal. For the author, however, "Consumption is power: it is coercion and control, but it is also, sometimes, resistance. At times, inasmuch as it mediates our inner lives and the world that makes us, consumption may serve as a road to freedom; it may even work like a promise of happiness" (3). Treading where other noteworthy Latin American critics of consumer culture such as Néstor García Canclini, George Yúdice and Graciela Montaldo have placed their theoretical pendants, Delgado stakes out his own claim for the centrality of consumption in the cultural history of the Americas, positing an aesthetics of consumption as instrumental for the identity formation of contemporary transnational subjects and emerging forms of national and global citizenship. We are who we are, in part, because of our purchases. We are defined by our consumption—and that is not necessarily a bad thing.

Indeed, what Delgado achieves is to reframe the question of consumer culture to allow for the agency of artists and consumers alike. Although his focus is on an earlier period, his arguments have direct bearing on the contemporary neoliberal crisis. Delgado asserts that a more accurate assessment of the neoliberal moment and

the possibility of resistance to it *has* to include the individual responses of citizens who are not mere passive subjects of the forces of consumption, but rather active consumers: "Understanding neoliberalism [...] entails an expansion of what we understand to be the logics of both consumption and neoliberalism, a repositioning that takes seriously the modes of operation of subjects traditionally conceived to be completely under the coercion of institutionalized structures of power [but are not]" (26). Consumers are not to be seen as the zombie-like victims of capitalist exploitation.

But what makes Delgado's book a "deliriously" enjoyable read in addition to being a scholarly tour de force, is how its author anchors his argument on specific examples, on close readings of poems, paintings, objects and performances, as well as a thoroughly fleshed out historical contextualization for both of the countries he studies, Brazil and Mexico (the two largest economies in Latin America). He examines works by some of the best-known avant-gardists of the post-War World II period. *Delirious Consumption* explores "how each of them arrived at forms of aesthetic production drawn tight between high modernism and consumer culture" (27).

In the first chapter, dedi-

cated to Siqueiros' billboard murals from the 1950s, Delgado astutely teases out the tension between the Mexican painter's commitment to leftist causes and the very commercial enterprise that the murals represented. The case of Siqueiros is particularly interesting because his earlier works reflected his Marxist ideology, but later he created murals for the hotel and tourist industry. Throughout his career, however, Siqueiros insistently engaged with techniques and tools of advertising. Delgado elucidates Siqueiros' investment in new technologies and mass media, including his innovative use of materials such as acrylic paint or concrete, and his recourse to industrial processes. Reinforcing Delgado's thesis about the subversive potential of consumption, the chapter investigates the ways in which Siqueiros' murals established links between art and advertising, expressing "their shared need to arrive at forms appropriate for addressing mass publics" (69). Delgado analyzes, for example, several of Siqueiros' murals in Ciudad Universitaria (Mexico City), concluding that for the Mexican muralist, "the forms of commercial propaganda [are] a fresh source of formal innovation that could be adapted for the purposes of political agitation" (71). The author, however, is not naïve to the turn Siqueiros took in his later works, as he fully embraced commercialism to the detriment of his more nuanced earlier artworks. Unlike his earlier, publicly displayed pieces, Siqueiros' last mural, *La marcha de la*

humanidad en la tierra y hacia el cosmos (1964–1971), was placed in a luxury hotel frequented by North American tourists, so that "commercial enterprise trumped subversion" (81). Nevertheless, Delgado makes an excellent case as to why Siqueiros' work is worth examining, especially in our time, as we experience a reality "decisively more wrought by consumption and consumer culture than the reality Siqueiros had to contend with" (82).

In his second chapter, Delgado turns to the fascinating case of Brazilian Concrete poetry. The Concrete poets of the *Noigandres* group—Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari—had close ties to advertising, mass culture and consumer capitalism. Several of them worked in advertising firms, and often it is difficult to distinguish where a poem begins and an advert ends. At first glance the close alliance with advertising can prompt the question: is the viewer or reader made into a passive consumer by works that look like ads? Delgado's nuanced interpretation, however, finds another valence in this highly visual poetry. In his reading of Pignatari's acclaimed 1957 poem "beba coca cola" (a work that imitates a Coke ad but equates the American soft-drink with excrement), Delgado insists that "if advertising works by effectively, economically, and seductively conveying information about how the world works and how we should inhabit it, anti- or counter-advertisements like 'beba coca cola' work not by resisting but by pushing

further the mechanism of advertising, by being more witty, more seductive, and more materialistic than the original advertisement ever was, by showing more than what the advertisement was ready to show, revealing a less ideal, more physical level of reality behind the advertised product" (108). The radical force of Concrete poetry, therefore, lies on its surface, on its way of arranging typography and making the material elements of words visible, its capacity to convey meaning beyond its verbal signification, so that "concrete poetry puts forth a challenge to seldom-acquainted hierarchies of language operating in late capitalism, hierarchies whereby the nonverbal, non-linear, 'irrational' aspects of language, its vocal and visual dimensions, are deemed experientially enriching but ultimately inconsequential" (104). What Delgado foregrounds in this genre is its power to appropriate consumer culture, to imitate elements of mass media such as neon signs, advertising logos, newspaper ads, in order to challenge our habitual forms of perception. Poetry becomes anti-advertisement, using the tools of consumer capitalism to undermine it.

The book then elegantly transitions from Brazilian concretism to Octavio Paz's experimental poetry from the 1960s, more specifically to his poems *Blanco* (1967) and *Discos Visuales* (1968). Paz was profoundly influenced by technology, advertising and mass culture, writing several theoretical essays on these subjects which also inform

Delgado's readings. Paz's relationship to technology and modernity, Delgado argues, is linked to the massive infrastructure projects taking place in Mexico in the 1950s and 60s, much like Brazilian Concrete poetry was aligned with Brazilian developmentalism and the construction of Brasilia.

In his final chapter Delgado examines the work of several Brazilian neoconcretist artists, most importantly Lygia Clark's object art. Associated with both neoconcretism and the Tropicália movement, Clark's main contribution was the *bichos* (animals), a group of interactive hinged sculptures made of folding metal plates that required the participation of the spectator. For Clark, process and participation and "the physical production of her work" (172) were key elements of the aesthetic experience, as Delgado observes. But Delgado also critiques Clark's intent to industrially mass-produce the *bichos*, stating that, had she done so, "some of the most intriguing aspects of these works—participation, relationality, an insistent sense of free play—would have gained in substance, but only at the risk of trivialization" (163). This desire for mass production might signal Clark's work as sliding toward depoliticization. Delgado, however, reframes Clark's art as partaking of a "language of micropolitics" that is centered on the domestic materials and everyday spaces where she generates her work. This political valence of Clark's art "has to do with the way our

consciousness of objects, of subjects, and of the relationships that hold between subjects and objects changes by means of the kind of attention Clark cultivates: attention to our everyday routines and to materials that sustain these routines” (178).

Thus, although consumer capitalism provides the background for the work of the artists Delgado examines, he makes a cogent case for how they represent the modes of contestation and resistance within the very

heart of consumer culture. *Delirious Consumption* therefore provocatively suggests the potential to find, at the center of capitalism, its means of interruption. For this reason, this book is also a courageous gesture at a time when, within academic circles, a proposition in favor of consumer culture can be seen as problematic. Delgado’s book challenges such dogmatic perspectives while advocating for the revolutionary potential of doubt, nuance and ambiguity. Perhaps one criticism that could

be made about this otherwise excellent book, is that it often fails to make the necessary connections between the neoliberal moment we are living today and the period it examines. While Delgado’s argument, I believe, still is valid for the present, the latest turn to savage capitalism raises questions about the contestatory potential of consumption. Of course, this analysis of consumption and culture in the neoliberal age could provide the raw material for Professor Delgado’s next book.

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this narrative a history of our own realities. We can, through this recounting, look the monster directly in the eyes. The agreements signed between the Panamanian government and Finmeccanica and its affiliates represent, according to Berguido, “a modern version of greediness without limits or shame.” The negotiation for luxurious helicopters; the way in which government officials organize to coopt the state; and the political appointments that permit the justice system to become an accomplice of corruption are all situations to which we are accustomed.

With rare exception, corruption has been a constant in the history of Latin American countries, with justice systems often as accomplices to the looting of state coffers. Spineless judges have not been capable of putting a brake on the abuse of power by the government of the day. Because of this, it is easy to identify with the frustration Berguido expresses, “To confirm, with concrete facts, the great plunder of my country was very painful. Even harder was to know, with the very poor system of Panamanian justice, eternal pimp to impunity, probably the embezzlement would have remained a simple anecdote. Without punishment.” This appropriation of funds during Martinelli’s administration was very similar to that which took place in Guatemala, my country, during the government of Otto Pérez Molina. There the former president has faced multiple judicial processes on corruption charges since 2015, although up until now with impunity because of the legal artifices of his lawyers and because of the obstacles the judicial system set up precisely to protect the corrupt.

Like other Central American countries, Panama lacks a solid system of justice that guarantees the impartiality of the courts. The case of Finmeccanica, like others in which powerful government officials are under investigation, demonstrates that where the system of justice is weak and is used to protect the corrupt, international judicial cooperation is needed to investigate in an objective and impartial manner. Berguido’s narrative demonstrates the difference between an independent system of justice like that of Italy, capable of investigating its country’s top authorities, and that of Panama, used to cloaking its officials with impunity.

The author relates how the Panamanian judicial system during Martinelli’s government was used to block the investigation. The Attorney General himself asked that the case be closed for lack of evidence. Meanwhile, in Italy, the ongoing investigation produced mounting evidence about the corruption surrounding the contracts with Panama. At the same time, the investigation was going nowhere in Panama with the government defending the legality of the contracts, while concealing information on grounds of national security. In Italy, the prosecutors, legal experts, judges and officials in the Bureau of Financial Oversight demonstrated with irrefutable evidence the shady role of officials, intermediaries and contractors in the deals with Panama. “Without mincing words, the Italian prosecutor was directly pointing the finger at Presidente Martinelli for bribery.”

Due to Berguido’s diligent and timely efforts as ambassador, the Republic of Panama was legally recognized as an affected party within the judicial process

for the crime of international corruption, as it is known in Italy. Moreover, because Berguido is both a lawyer and investigative journalist, he managed to carry out successfully the complex diplomatic negotiations that voided the contracts with Finmeccanica and obligated the Italian firms to recognize the surcharges and reimburse the amount to Panama. This process of resolving a problem through diplomatic negotiations marked the beginning of a new era in the commercial relations between the two nations, one in which the goal is to develop projects in accordance with the law and the spirit of transparency.

When President Varela disclosed the results of the negotiations, he stressed it was a commercial agreement that did not impede the criminal prosecution of those responsible. Many Panamanians demonstrated unconditional support of these efforts, since the case exemplified that with political will and honest officials, it is the country and its inhabitants who reap the benefits. *Anatomía de una trampa* is a thorough documentation of how some rulers enrich themselves through government business, but it is also a tale about the effectiveness of diplomacy when handled with expertise.

The way in which the annulment of the contracts was negotiated with the resulting return of the surcharges can serve as an inspiration to other Latin American countries still under the shadow of multimillion bribes paid by the Odebrecht firm to public officials. It is not enough to initiate criminal proceedings against those responsible for these illegal deals; it is also necessary to require that the company return the overpriced surcharges to the state.

As Berguido aptly illustrates in his compelling and well-written narrative, it is necessary to find mechanisms to break the vicious circle of those Latin American rulers protected by “an unwritten Mafia pact of impunity” in which new presidents end up covering for the previous one so that the next will do the same.

Berguido’s book ought to be required reading for those who recognize that corruption is one of the greatest obstacles to the development of countries. It should also be required reading for those honest officials who are willing to work for the good of their country and for those of us who push for reforms in the justice systems in the hope that someday the courts will have the tools to punish those who abuse power.

Claudia Escobar is a former magistrate of the Court of Appeals of Guatemala and a respected legal scholar. She became the lead whistleblower in a case of grand corruption that revealed illegal interference in Guatemala’s judiciary by high-ranking political officials including the country’s vice-president and the former president of Congress. She was the 2015-2016 Scholar at Risk Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. During 2016-2017 she was a fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Washington DC, examining the impact of international institutions on the fight against corruption in Guatemala. She is now affiliated with Georgetown University as a Centennial Fellow in the Walsh School of Foreign Services. She can be reached at claudiaescobarm@alumni.harvard.edu

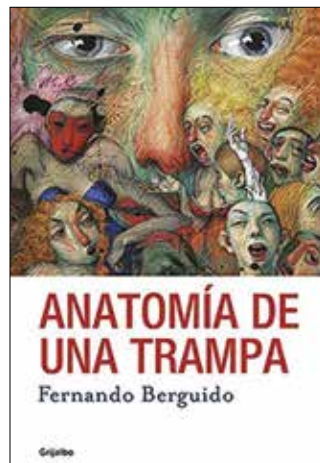
Fighting Corruption through Diplomacy

A BOOK REVIEW By CLAUDIA ESCOBAR

Anatomía de una Trampa by Fernando Berguido (Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial México, 2017)

While campaigning, many politicians in Latin America use the rhetoric of dignity and rectitude to sway voters. However, in power, they often forget electoral promises, abusing their position for their own benefit and that of their close circle. Ricardo Martinelli was no exception. The successful businessman was elected president of Panama in 2009, with a platform of honesty and personal integrity: “I am a rich man, and I have no need to rob,” he declared. But his actions were a far cry from his words, and when he reached the presidency, he dedicated himself to multiplying his already great fortune.

In *Anatomía de una Trampa*,



journalist and former Harvard Nieman Fellow Fernando Berguido relates, with a wealth of details, one of the greatest scandals of international corruption involving Presidente Martinelli: a case known as Finmeccanica. The story—a blend of journalistic investigation and historical

novel—is also the testimony of a citizen fighting a battle against corruption. The author shares his experience as Panama’s ambassador to Italy, sent by current President Juan Carlos Varela to unravel the judicial wrongs which arose from the shady business dealings of the Martinelli government with several Italian firms.

Berguido declares that when Martinelli ended his mandate in 2014, cases of corruption were sprouting like mushrooms: “Corruption was drowning the country. It was not the first corrupt government. Unfortunately, we have had four administrations, democratically elected, in which the cheating was coordinated from the presidential office. But in the previous governments, to some degree, an effort was made to guard appearances and to show certain restraint. Martinelli broke

the mold. It was plunder. There was not a single public works project without the shadow of corruption.”

When Martinelli took office, he sought out Italian Prime Minister and media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi to seek business with Italian firms. Panama made the largest direct purchase in its history from Finmeccanica, avoiding the legality of a bidding process. The transactions included radars, helicopters, boats and digital maps. The author calls this deal “literally a dance of millions of dollars,” in which million-dollar commissions were destined to a business—an intermediary—by the name of Agafia, whose purpose was to enrich the president, his family and business partners.

Those of us who have lived in countries where corruption is a habitual practice recognize in

(Junk) Food for Thought

A REVIEW By GLENN GARVIN

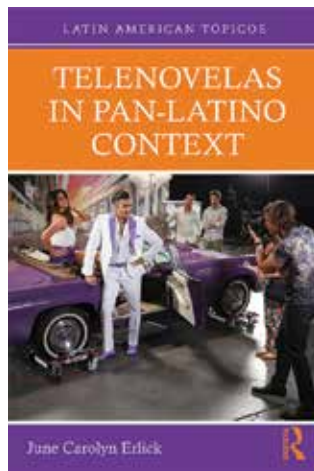
Telenovelas in Pan-Latino

Context by June Carolyn Erlick (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2018).

When I was running a newspaper bureau in Nicaragua, I once went to look for my housekeeper to ask where we kept something or other. She wasn't there, but her TV was on. And on the screen were three topless women with fangs, dangling upside down from a ceiling. I turned around to find my housekeeper curiously watching me watching the screen. "What *is* that?" I asked. "Telenovela," she replied, as if that explained everything.

I've often wondered about the name of that telenovela—the Latin American counterpart to U.S. soap operas—and where it was made. June Carolyn Erlick's fascinating book *Telenovelas In Pan-Latino Context* (yes, I am aware of the incompatibility of that title with the word "fascinating," clearly the marketing department at Routledge needs to be slapped around a bit) did not provide me with the answer. But practically everything else about this weirdly beloved television genre—every gay kiss, narco-trafficker slut, philandering boss, and secretly-exiled-to-the-peasantry oligarch kid, plus the social implications of each one—is included in a book that's both academic and entertaining.

Erlick, who got to know telenovelas during the years she spent as a newspaper reporter



wandering Latin America before joining the staff of Harvard's Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, clearly adores telenovelas and understands both their significance and their triviality. Her book is fully in the spirit of Latin American sociologist Lorenzo Vilches, who once wrote: "It is true that a telenovela is a carousel of melodramatic clichés. But it is also true that, as Umberto Eco would say, two clichés produce laughter, but a hundred are moving."

(Time for full disclosure: Erlick and I met in the 1980s while we were both covering the civil war in Nicaragua and have remained friends. But as any number of people who've eaten dinner with us over the years will testify, we are fully capable of yelling at one another when she's wrong about something.)

Which reminds me that I'm not quite right in calling telenovelas soap operas. It's a comparison that's often made,

and the two forms share some characteristics, particularly their emphasis on hyperemotive romances and melodramatic story lines. But there are also significant differences.

The telenovelas air in prime time with the broadest possible audience, and they have a fixed endpoint: The ugly-duckling heroine turns into a swan (or, in some of the newer narconovelas, a bullet-riddled corpse) and the show is finished, period, usually in six months or less). U.S. soaps, by contrast, go on as long as they draw viewer eyeballs -- a mind-boggling 57 years in the case of CBS' *Guiding Light*.

Erlick tracks telenovelas back to their gritty origin, on the floors of Cuban cigar factories, where bosses hired *lectores*—readers—to perch on tall stools, reading newspapers and books to the workers to keep their tedious tasks of cutting and wrapping from driving them mad. By the 1940s, the *lectores* had spread onto radio, where the voracious appetite for content soon led to the production of scripted dramas with voice actors—the radionovela, which blasted across Latin America faster than any bullet. One São Paulo radio was airing 22 of them a day.

The introduction of television only intensified the process. Because TV sets were imported and heavily taxed, they weren't widely present in Latin American homes for two or three decades after their introduction. That turned viewing telenovelas into a

communal entertainment—and mutual experience—that often took place at a neighborhood bar or a gathering at a friend's house.

And as scripts, writers and producers jumped back and forth across borders, Erlick writes, telenovelas were "creating a kind of informal globalization long before the term was popularized."

Globalization, of course, spreads not just goods and services, but ideas as well.

Erlick is quite persuasive in her contention that the popularity of telenovelas has combined with their mobility to create a quietly subversive force in socially conservative Latin America.

Taboo topics from birth control to homosexuality, from infidelity to rape, in many countries surfaced publicly for the first time in telenovelas like Mexico's cheating-husband *Senda prohibida* (Forbidden Path), or Argentina's *Botineras* (Soccer Wives), whose various couplings included a pair of gay soccer players who kissed one another on screen and made it clear they did more intimate stuff off-screen.

Except in a couple of instances, Erlick does not argue that the telenovelas by themselves *create* significant change; more often, she says, quoting a Chilean study, they have "a multiplying effect and solidify these changes." But governments keep an eye on them. In 1982, Colombian president Belisario Betancur

One of them, *Ven conmigo* (Come With Me), set amidst a rural literacy campaign, in which the various characters practiced reading, writing and ripping of bodices with equal enthusiasm, was so successful that when a note at the end of one episode provided an address in Mexico City where literacy materials could be picked up, 25,000 potential students gridlocked the capital streets until well after midnight.

ordered the producers of *Mala hierba* (Bad weed), one of the first narconovelas, to give it a new ending—one that was not happy for the drug bosses, lest it make narco-trafficking too inviting.

The less democratic the country, the more elements of a telenovela are potentially subversive. In Nicaragua, under the Marxist Sandinista rule, the broadcast of (an undoubtedly pirated) 1982 Mexican remake of the granddaddy of all telenovelas, *El derecho de nacer* (The right to be born), became a rallying point for the opposition, which saw it as a celebration of "pretty clothes and pretty landscapes" at a time when the Sandinistas were preaching the creation of a New Man who wouldn't be distracted by baubles and bangles.

To be fair, Sandinistas liked *El derecho* too, supposedly because of the discipline and dedication of its doctor-hero and the staff of the hospital in which much of the story unfolded. Though I've always suspected its popularity had more to do with the excruciating boredom of the state television network, which specialized in grimly Stakonovite Soviet documentaries,

incomprehensibly subtitled Bulgarian sitcoms, and whatever else they could get for free from Havana and Moscow.

But Marxist regimes are surely not the only ones who have profited from the diversionary aspects of telenovelas. When the boss of Mexico's Televisa network, Emilio Azcarraga, was asked to explain the wild popularity of his Cinderella story *Los ricos también lloran* (The Rich Also Cry), he all but called it the opiate of the masses.

"Mexico is a country of a very screwed over humble class, who are never to stop being screwed over," he said. "It's an obligation of television to bring entertainment to those people and take them away from their sad reality and difficult future." You don't need to have quite such a Nietzschean worldview to acknowledge that telenovelas, like all popular art, act in part as a distraction from the drudgery of daily life.

As Erlick notes, telenovela viewers don't merely *watch* the shows; they sometimes live them out. In 1969, a Peruvian telenovela called *Simplemente María* told the story of a poor peasant girl who learns to sew on a machine and turns into

first a small businesswoman and ultimately a wildly successful fashion designer. That triggered so many sewing machine sales all over Latin America that Singer presented a gold one to the actress who played María.

The Peruvian sewing machine epidemic seems to have been a spontaneous eruption. But in 1975, Mexico's Televisa launched a series of telenovelas, written and produced in conjunction with government agencies, that were deliberate attempts at social engineering. One of them, *Ven conmigo* (Come With Me), set amidst a rural literacy campaign, in which the various characters practiced reading, writing and ripping of bodices with equal enthusiasm, was so successful that when a note at the end of one episode provided an address in Mexico City where literacy materials could be picked up, 25,000 potential students gridlocked the capital streets until well after midnight.

Erlick recounts this in approving language. But that begs a question: At what point does advocacy—particularly state-aided advocacy—turn into propaganda? Even something as innocent sounding as a literacy campaign can easily turn sinister, as citizens of Marxist

Cuba or Nicaragua can attest all too readily. I wonder if Erlick would be as sanguine if the Trump administration stuck an anti-abortion story line into *The Young and the Restless*.

Ultimately, I suspect, the unpredictability of audience reactions will make the telenovelas an unsatisfactory tool for propagandists. Among the most amusing—and, possibly, most chilling—tales related in the book is that of the 2006 Colombian narconovela *Sin tetas, no hay paraíso* (Without tits, there's no heaven). Its protagonist is a young woman who becomes a hooker in order to realize her dream, surgically enhanced breasts. From there it's on to narco-trafficking, orgiastic violence and eventually killing. It shouldn't require a spoiler alert here to reveal that the eventual conclusion of *Sin tetas* would meet with Belisario Betancur's approval.

The popular reaction, however, would not. The moral that many South American women drew from the show was that big breasts are better. Breast-enhancement surgery became a popular gift for teenagers for their *quinceañeras*, 15th-birthday coming out parties. In Argentina, nightclubs drew big crowds with the raffle of implants. A (female) legislator in Venezuela proposed a program of state aid for underprivileged girls who wanted bigger breasts. Telenovelas almost always have happy endings, but it's not always clear for whom.

Glenn Garvin spent decades covering Latin America as a newspaper correspondent, and another dozen as the Miami Herald's television critic.



Matos Series Inaugurated

On October 3, 2017, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Moses Mesoamerican Archive inaugurated the Eduardo Matos Moctezuma Lecture Series in Mexico City. A Harvard delegation traveled to Mexico City to take part in this historic event that included a behind-the-scenes tour by Eduardo Matos himself of Templo Mayor, one of the main Aztec temples at their capital of Tenochtitlan. Pictured here, Brian Farrell, Faculty Director of DRCLAS (left), listens as David Carrasco, Neil L. Rudenstine Professor of the Study of Latin America at Harvard (center), shares anecdotes with the Harvard deans and senior officials about his many decades of friendship and fruitful collaboration with Matos, the most famous archaeologist in Mexico who is renowned for his excavation of Templo Mayor (right).

The night of Matos' lecture at the Museo Nacional de Antropología, Professor Carrasco was especially enthusiastic to present a gift to Matos: an original copy of a painting by Mexican-American, Los Angeles-based artist George Yepes, commissioned to create the visual symbol for the lecture series. The painting by Yepes, titled "El Caballero Águila," is a monumental work, measuring five by four feet. The composition is defined by the Mexican flag overlaid with a portrait of Matos excavating Templo Mayor just below the Mexican coat of arms, which is derived from an Aztec legend. DRCLAS would like to thank José Antonio Alonso for his generous support and David Carrasco for his leadership in the establishment of the Eduardo Matos Moctezuma Lecture Series.



**Afro-Latin American
Research Institute
at the Hutchins Center**

**Harvard
University**



ALARI: Building a New Field of Afro-Latin American Studies

Housed at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, the Afro-Latin Research Institute is the first research institution in the United States devoted to the history and culture of peoples of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over 95 percent of the Africans forcibly imported into the Americas went to Latin America and the Caribbean, almost two-thirds of them to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. Many Hispanics in the United States are also of African descent. Cultural forms and community practices associated with Africa are conspicuous across the region - indeed, the very existence of Latin America would be unthinkable without them. During the last few decades, Afro-Latin Americans have created numerous civic, cultural and community organizations to demand recognition, equality and resources, prompting legislative action and the implementation of scholarship on the Afro-Latin American experience and provide a forum where scholars, intellectuals, activists and policy makers engage in exchanges and debates.

To learn more about our mission and activities, follow us on Facebook and Twitter: @harvardalari and visit our website ALARI.FAS.HARVARD.EDU



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