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**ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF CUBANIDAD:
DIASPORA, FOLKLORIZATION AND THE PERFORMANCE OF HAITIAN
IDENTITIES IN EASTERN CUBA**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is an ethnographic investigation of the Haitian presence in Cuba. It examines the myriad ways members of Haitian diasporic enclaves have historically negotiated their space in eastern Cuba and how they presently manage their lives, when multiple global processes, but especially tourism, provide new opportunities and a restructured environment for them to assert their identity and historical experiences. By paying attention to the ongoing contentious processes of incorporation, the dissertation traces the enduring struggles over the multiple meanings of *cubanidad* (Cubanness).

In the aftermath of the economic and ideological crisis of the 1990s following the demise of the Soviet bloc, there has been a public opening for alternative articulations of *cubanidad* other than those prescribed by the revolutionary State. As Cuba re-asserts itself into the global economy, Cuban culture is undergoing significant change, especially in regards to the sense of who is Cuban and what it means to be Cuban. While there has been an increased reflection on new expressions of Afro-Cuban culture predominately in the arenas of Hip Hop and Rastafari subcultures, very little has been written on the cultural performance of those of Haitian descent. The emergent presence of Haitian-Cuban cultural performances thus provides a critical site for examining the interplay of identity, performance, and national belonging in contemporary Cuba.

This dissertation examines not only the shifting positioning of Haitian culture in the Cuban imaginary, but also the significance of state-sanctioned public performance in

the construction of diasporic subjectivity among Haitians and their descendants. It questions the consequences for these people, who have been historically marginalized and rendered invisible, of becoming part of folkloric Cuba. The study posits that while tourism threatens to commodify and folklorize cultural forms, it also facilitates articulations of difference. I thus demonstrate that it is in and through public events like national festivals that Haitian-Cubans have a platform to represent, assert and negotiate their identities and in the process legitimize their claim to the nation's patrimony and articulate alternative visions of national belonging.

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INTRODUCTION

ALTERNATIVE VISIONS OF CUBANIDAD

The real history of Cuba is the history of its intermeshed transulturations... There was no more important human factor in the evolution of Cuba than these continuous, radical, [and] contrasting geographic transmigrations.

Fernando Ortiz 1940

La historia de Cuba, es la historia de Havana, pero estamos equivocados porque Cuba no existe sin Oriente.

{The history of Cuba is the history of Havana, but we are mistaken because Cuba does not exist without Oriente}

Rafael Duarte 2001

Soy Haitiano y Soy de Cuba
{I am Haitian and I am from Cuba}

Titina 2000

The past two decades has seen a burgeoning of critical studies on pre and post-revolutionary Cuba. Most of the recent literature has been couched within the intersecting discourses of cultural nationalism, state ideology, social change, and racial politics (McGarrity, 1992; Centeno and Font 1995; Fernandez 1996; Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000; de la Fuente 2001; Sawyer 2006)). Other areas of interest include religion and revolution, tourism, popular culture and identity formation, as well as cultural production and the development of new public spheres (Moore 1997, 2006; Hagerdorn 2001; Berg 2005; Ayorinde 2005; Fernandes 2006). Within these contemporary dialogues there is a noted shift away from the standard representations of the State being a repressive and authoritarian apparatus, towards more nuanced readings of its increasing permeability. In

this view, scholars have been exploring how the most marginalized within the system are attempting to manipulate and maneuver within the new shifting structures.

These works have all been critical in foregrounding the contentious issues concerning the persistent marginalization of blacks, and the crisis of identity that emerged as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, there remains a continual imbalance in how Cuba is imagined and the narratives that help to construct our understandings of the socialist nation. The majority of the literature on Cuba offer few insights into the diversity of Cuban culture *vis a vis* the contributions of Caribbean immigrants to the cultural patrimony of the nation. What falls out of these current debates are the historical narratives of Antillean and Haitian field laborers who have consistently contributed to the socio-economic, political, and cultural life of Cuba, but been denied a space of recognition.

These silences can be traced to the overwhelming tendency in the scholarship produced outside, and to a lesser extent, within Cuba, to speak of the country principally from the sole vantage point of Occidente (western Cuba). To this end, what we know about Cuba tends to be filtered through the lens of Havana and its immediate neighboring cities and provinces. Oriente (eastern Cuba), is often disavowed as a space of critical importance within the ongoing debates and knowledge production, which is in and of itself quite curious, given its cultural significance and the historical and political impact of Oriente and Santiago de Cuba, in particular, to all of Cuba's revolutionary struggles and to the birth of the nation itself.¹

¹ While the historical narratives tend to discuss the significance of Santiago de Cuba as the first capital of Cuba and the home to all of Cuba's revolutionary stirrings, with few exceptions, the scholarship produced by North American scholars seldom engage the questions of the distinctive cultural formation of the east. The peripheral engagement with Oriente dovetails with the ways in which Havana is consistently

Furthermore, the preoccupation with examining the entangled and embittered relationship between the United States and Cuba contributes to the imbalance in the literature. This fixation has indeed proved invaluable to our understanding of the context and complexity of the linkages between Cuba and the United States and its influence on shaping Cuba's distinctive national identity and sense of modernity (see Pérez 1999). Moreover, this focus has made us appreciate the cultural context of the Cuban Revolution and its subsequent diplomatic and economic ramifications. Notwithstanding these advances, continual emphasis on Havana and the Cuba-U.S. connection has limited the field of Cuban studies.

The protracted cultural encounters, impact, influence and struggles between Cuba and Haiti, which are the main concern of this study, remain greatly undervalued and undertheorized within the existing discourses. Thus, important aspects of Cuban history have either gone unexamined or have not received sustain academic attention. It is my contention that the hegemonic prioritization of Havana and the United States has privileged certain historical narratives and identities while rendering invisible and silencing others.

In order to tackle the complex and interrelated subject of identity formation, cultural performance, and articulations of national belonging among Haitian-Cubans, this dissertation interrogates multiple scholarly, official and popular discourses on the question of Cuban nationalism and notions of *cubanidad* and places those scripts in conversation with the cultural narratives and performances of Cubans of Haitian descent. As an ethnographic investigation of the Haitian presence in Cuba, the dissertation

constructed as the cultural mecca of Cuba. This emphasis, however, further perpetuates the elisions of Santiago and Oriente from our normative understandings of Cuban culture and identity.

examines the myriad ways members of Haitian diasporic enclaves have historically negotiated their space in eastern Cuba. It also analyzes how they presently manage their lives at a point when multiple global processes, but especially tourism, provide new opportunities and a restructured environment for them to assert their identity and historical experiences. Thus, the study explores the emergent presence of Haitian-Cuban cultural performances as a critical site of the interplay of identity, performance, and national belonging in contemporary Cuba.

By paying attention to the ongoing contentious processes of incorporation, the dissertation traces the enduring struggles over the multiple meanings of *cubanidad*. The contemporary post-revolutionary moment provides considerable opportunities for Haitians and their descendants, who have figured significantly in the Cuban imaginary, despite small numbers, to utilize the expressive cultural space of festivals to fashion their hyphenated identities.

In the aftermath of the economic and ideological crisis of the 1990s following the demise of the Soviet bloc, there has been an opening for alternative articulations of *cubanidad* other than those prescribed by the revolutionary State to emerge in the public sphere. As Cuba re-asserts itself into the global economy, Cuban culture is undergoing significant change. Especially the sense of who is Cuban and what it means to be Cuban. While there has been an increased reflection on new expressions of Afro-Cuban culture predominately in the arenas of Hip Hop and Rastafari subcultures, very little has been written on the cultural performances of the nation's immigrant national populations, most notably those of Haitian descent. This dissertation, therefore, examines not only the shifting positioning of Haitian culture in the Cuban imaginary, but also the significance

of state-sanctioned public performance in the construction of diasporic subjectivity among Haitians and their descendants. It questions the consequences for these people, who have been historically marginalized, of becoming part of folkloric Cuba. It also argues that while tourism threatens to folklorize and commodify cultural forms, it also facilitates articulations of difference.

The study thus posits that it is in and through public events like national festivals that other ethnicities and identities have a platform to represent, assert and negotiate their identities. In the process they legitimize their claim to the nation's patrimony and articulate alternative visions of national belonging.

ETHNOHISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Haiti in the Cuban Imaginary

If the United States provided for Cuba an example of a modern civilization on which they could model their nascent national identity, Haiti came to represent its antithesis. During the nineteenth-century, the formative years of national formation in Cuba, Haiti would emerge within the political and popular discourse as a threat to the development of a progressive nation. As the first black republic in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti stood out as a menace to colonial power and slave-based economic production (James 1963; Knight 1990; Trouillot 1990; Fischer 2004). Fear of a Haitian style revolution and the paranoia invoked by the supposed Haitian proclivity for witchcraft engulfed the imagination of governing authorities throughout the Americas. In the Cuban context, these apprehensions positioned Haiti as an adverse example that would damage the social fabric of Cuba.

Since the course of the nineteenth century, an image of Haiti as a space of barbarity, disease, religious atavism, and blackness was ubiquitously deployed. First, to forestall Cuba's march towards independence from Spain and again as part of the highly racist polemic that developed to counter Afro-Caribbean labor migration during the first three to four decades of the twentieth-century. Haiti would emerge time and again as that space eternally relegated to the peripheries of modernity and civilization, thus lacking in those qualities that characterized Cuban identity. Ironically, in today's Cuba, descendants of Haitian labor migrants, who have been fated to a life of marginalization and invisibility, are increasingly representing their cultural forms for national and foreign audiences. The aftermath of revolutionary reforms that sought to integrate cultural practices of marginal citizens have been coupled with an expanding tourism industry that provides a platform for their exposure, thus paving the way for the new visibility of Haitian culture in eastern Cuba.

While it is only in the last two decades that the descendants of Haitians have been involved in the public representation of their cultural forms, the Haitian presence on the island has a much longer history. The first migratory wave dates back to the late eighteenth-century. These early refugees were later replenished with a massive influx, in the early to mid twentieth century, of labor migrants, yet consistent flows of political refugees and students followed well into the contemporary era.

The history of Haitian migration to Cuba began shortly before the Haitian Revolution of 1804. French planters and their enslaved domestics settled in Oriente and established strong Franco-Haitian traditions (Guanche 1983; Bettelheim 2001). Enslaved Haitians along with the French émigrés planter class began populating the eastern

provinces after fleeing war torn Saint Domingue. Prior to this movement there were reported cases of contraband trade between Cuba and its immediate Caribbean neighbors, but by the end of the latter part of the eighteenth-century continuing into the first two decades of the nineteenth-century, Oriente became a refuge for scores of *franceses* (local term for Haitians) entering the island to re-establish their lives.

They settled throughout the rugged mountainous terrain alongside independent settlements founded by Africans fleeing enslavement and built cultural institutions to help their transition into Cuban life. Like the original residents of Oriente who have consistently created a cultural environment and social landscape that articulated the intrinsic plurality of Cuban culture and the defense of an autochthonous identity and freedom, so too did these earlier Haitian migrants define themselves and their communities outside of the general structures of the Cuban state and prevailing notions of Cubanness.

By the turn of the twentieth century the pattern of Haitian migration shifted dramatically. The United States' capitalist expansion into Cuba resulted in the revitalization of the antiquated sugar industry. The new economic enterprise created a need for cheap labor and Haitian as well as British West Indian laborers became a viable option to fill the increased demands. This second wave of labor migrants had the more significant socio-economic impact on Cuba's expanding sugar industry, but they also were the most ill treated. The predominantly unskilled and unlettered labor force established rural residences around sugar and coffee plantations, migrating across the interior regions between harvest seasons, while others moved between the two countries. Although relatively isolated, many of these communities did not remain endogamous, but

they maintained a strong sense of cultural pride. The preservation of *Kreyòl* (the native language of Haiti) and the development of an indigenous Spanish *Kreyòl* dialect provided many Haitian-Cubans a certain amount of mobility between their dual ethnic identities.

While language has been important for maintaining a distinct cultural identity, it is the extensive family networks forged through and grounded in Vodou rituals and the social life of community festivals that has influenced the preservation of Haitian culture in Cuba most profoundly. The eastern provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Las Tunas, Guantánamo and Camagüey have been the principal sites for annual ritual celebrations organized and presented by residents of these insular, rural communities.

The performance and exhibition of Haitian cultural practices outside their community context emerged out of regional cultural initiatives that materialized from dissatisfaction with the unfulfilled goals of the 1959 Revolution, which accorded primacy of class over race in forging a new national unity. From the perspective of *Santiagueran* cultural officials, the definition of modern citizenry did not fully integrate Afro-Caribbean immigrant traditions within the cultural patrimony of the nation (James 2000). Santiago's distinctive cultural heritage was consistently situated on the peripheries of national expressions of *cubanidad* and the cultural dominance of Havana. The Santiagueran perception of Santiago and the poorer, rural environments of Oriente being "*la alma de cuba*" (the soul of Cuba) and the administrative center of Havana being "*la cara de Cuba*" (the face of Cuba) has long been an ideological rift that produced a strained cultural, political, and socio-economic relationship between the "two Cubas" (Knight 1970; Moreno Friginals 1978; Ibarra 1992; Pérez, L. 1988).

Beginning in 1970, approximately eight years after Fidel Castro declared Cuba an “Afro-Latin” Caribbean nation, regional officials embarked on cultural campaigns with the aim of unearthing customary practices of the nation’s most peripheral communities. During this period of social and cultural re-evaluation, Cuban researchers, under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and affiliated provincial cultural institutions, traveled to remote rural areas throughout Oriente to investigate “popular traditions.” Community elders and religious leaders became the subject of local ethnographic investigations as cultural workers sought to document their living conditions and, more specifically, their Vodou rituals (Guanche and Moreno 1988; James, Millet and Alacrón 1998). Performance collectivities that had evolved organically were encouraged by the newfound interest in their cultural traditions to develop formal folkloric performance troupes. Hence, many such community groups not only participate in performance circuits including regional and national festivals, but also elicit discussions about the constitutive elements of Cuba’s contemporary national identity, and who as well as what should be included in the nation’s celebration of its traditions.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES & CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This dissertation brings together several disciplines and sub-fields, namely cultural studies, anthropology, history, religion, Caribbean studies, and performance studies, to examine the Haitian presence in eastern Cuba. But this study goes beyond analyzing the context and interrelated forces and factors that led to the historical and contemporary encounter between the two neighboring islands. The particular focus of this dissertation is on understanding how the descendants of Haitian labor migrants,

several generations removed from the homeland of their parents and fore parents maintain and express their ethnic consciousness while at the same time articulate their hyphenated identity and sense of national belonging. Although I discuss various decades to contextualize the analysis and provide a sense of historical continuity, I am concerned with understanding how the descendants of Haitians currently negotiate their identities in relation to their consistent structural and social marginality and in relation to the shifting meanings of *cubanidad*.

Prior to the intervention of cultural institutions like *Casa del Caribe* (Caribbean House) that focuses on research and disseminating information on the Caribbean presence in Cuba, for many of the descendants of Haitians, to be Cuban meant that in public one had to disavow one's ethnic identity. However, in the *bateyes* (agricultural camps) and in their rural yards and communities they maintained the memory of Haiti alive, in language, food, domestic organization, and religion. Their isolated existence facilitated the formation of strong diasporic enclaves in the forested interiors of eastern Cuba.

The centrality of migration as a livelihood strategy for Caribbean residents is undisputed (Richardson 1983). Notwithstanding the preponderance of movement out of the region to metropolitan centers in North America and Europe, there still remains a consistent flow of people and cultural products within the region. However, intra-Caribbean migration has not received the same level of scholastic engagement within the broader literatures on migration, globalization and diaspora (Puri 2003). By shifting the analytical focus of cultural hybridization and identity formation away from the privileged cosmopolitan centers, these dynamic processes in comparatively peripheral communities

can be examined. The socio-economic factors that serve as catalysts for population movements within the region are well-documented (Proudfoot 1950; Thomas-Hope 1978; Marshall 1992; Lundhal 1982). Fewer works engage with the cultural consequences of these migrations.

Following a line of inquiry developed in Shalini Puri's pivotal text, *Marginal Migrations: The Circulation of Cultures within the Caribbean*, this study is particularly concerned with examining the "hybrid practices" and cultural forms that emerge out of regional encounters. The historicized treatment of intra-Caribbean migration and specifically the relationship between Haiti and Cuba does not come to a close where most of the existing literature ends in the late 1930s. Instead, it brings the analysis up to the contemporary era as it looks at the cultural and political consequences of the experience of migrants in the honing of distinct diasporic enclaves.

On Diaspora

Diaspora as a concept, discourse, theoretical framework and/or historical experience has in recent years acquired a new currency within and beyond the confines of the academy. This is in part due to the massive population movements of the contemporary era, which have been propelled and supported by a new economic dispensation of globalized multi-national capital. Economic motivations aside, the proliferation of diasporic communities constituted by processes of displacement and relocation is not only as Tölolian argues, exemplary of the transnational moment encompassing a range of migrant experiences (1991:4-5); it also directly speaks to the dispersals of people caused by warfare, the advanced technological age of faster travel

and communication across multiple locales and configurations of power and access. Thus, the term diaspora has become the signifier *par excellence* of not only movement and transnationality, as Clifford (1997) would argue, but also indicative of the contemporary conditions in which a range of border crossing practices are taking place against a constellation of asymmetrical power structures and differentiated gendered, classed and racialized realities.

However, the processes of diasporic identity formation do not exclusively involve globalized exchanges stimulated by the continuous travel across borders, but are also attained through the daily experiences of constructing a *space/home* and subjectivity within a specific locale. It may also involve the psychic journeys that one engages in through different performative means. Specifically speaking, the concept of “journey” within the context of the Haitian-Cuba cultural performances, speaks directly to notions of “return” that manifest within the realm of desire, longing, and trance. Avtar Brah has argued that, “not all diasporas sustain an ideology of ‘return’” (1996:198). However, for many displaced subjects, the idea of return persists, even if merely ideologically. Whether through imagining an impossible return to an originary homeland, arguing for the persistence of a cultural heritage that refers back to an African sensibility, or as the case of people of Haitian descent living in Cuba, continuously actualizing the possibility of return through the temporal and spatial lapses triggered by sacred possession or the active reconstitution of traditional practice; the questions of home and return remain constant. The concept of diaspora therefore has inscribed, within its logic, the notion of a place of “origin’ and simultaneously articulates a place of location.

Recent invocations of diaspora direct us to critically interrogate the transnational contours and intercultural networks of black cultural production, politics and internationalism, wherein questions of “origins” and “location” are ambivalently displaced. Set within the international sphere of the Black Atlantic and metropolitan France respectively, Paul Gilroy (1992) *The Black Atlantic* and Brent Edwards (2003) *The Practice of Diaspora* examine the conscious participation of blacks in processes of globalization while articulating their own sense and vision of internationalism and pan-African unity. While the theoretical thrust and motivations for their arguments extend beyond the scope of how I intend to utilize the concept of diaspora, in highlighting these two works I want to point specifically to the portrayals of the historical as well as contemporary discursive politics of diasporic identification as essentially a metropolitan phenomenon. Hence, diaspora becomes the frame of reference for articulating transnational black cultural formation within the privileged locations or centers of globalization, even whilst the practice of diaspora traverses several national boundaries making locating it in a specific space difficult.

Indeed, the African Diaspora as a theoretical concern has been an intellectual and political project tied to processes of travel and communication between metropolitan centers, but what happens outside of the metropole where contact with multiple black cultures and peoples were also taking place, even though on a relatively minimal scale comparison to the intellectual and cultural exchanges in Paris and Britain? What is to be gleaned from interpreting diaspora as a condition not solely of mobility, but also a state and process of dwelling? How do the descendants of Haitians express their diasporic But, the latter question is particularly significant given the manner in which the

revolutionary government in Cuba has attempted to construct and project a national ideology that has systematically denied and suppressed the public expression of ethnic difference.

Identity, Folklorization & Cultural Tourism

In the transformative contemporary moment, wherein the integrity of the Cuba Revolution has been repeatedly questioned and with the move towards a neoliberal model of governance, alternative expressions of what it means to be Cuban are coming to the fore and the folklorization process along with cultural tourism has provided the means through which this is taking place. As in the 1920s-1940s, when Cuba was faced with having to construct a national cultural identity in the face of US imperialism, in the contemporary era, Cuba has systematically appropriated some elements of Afro-Cuban culture and “folklore” in its effort to generate foreign dollars and consolidate a collective cultural identity that is increasingly Africanized.

To speak about folklore and culture in Cuba is to enter the contested realm of race. From the 1920s, Cuba has defined its “folklore” not as a representation of the traditional customs of the rural peasant classes, but exclusively in reference to the performance traditions, cultural practices and religious systems of Cubans of African descent (Moore 1997; Martinez Furé 1979; León 1961a). It has long been recognized by state officials that the cultural products of the “folk” could “serve as powerful vehicles for forging new identities” (Guss 2000:12). However, in Cuba the state’s appropriation of the cultural products of black Cubans has had irrevocable consequences, particularly as it relates to the legitimization and sanitation of certain “folk” elements and the subsequent neutralization of oppositional and marginal expressions.

Since the early years of the revolution, Afro-Cuban religions have been routinely repressed and then later provincially legitimated and institutionalized through a process of folklorization. Some have pointed to the ambiguity of the folklorization process, highlighting that in the Cuban government's attempt to integrate the nation's black populations their cultural products and religious traditions have been increasingly commodified and commercialized for foreign consumption (Moore 1988; Daniel 1995; Moore 2006). As such, complex religious systems have been systematically secularized and reduced to aesthetic markers of Cuba's spectacular folklore (Matibag 1996). However, as I show in Chapter 4 and 5, the folklorization process is far from uniform and has had different consequences and implications for the members of marginal Haitian-Cuban populations, who use the state's intervention to their advantage. Tourism has also provided a critical avenue for these marginal populations to publicly represent themselves.

Mass tourism has been conceptualized by social scientists as a pivotal domain for examining social and cultural change (Crick 1990; Graburn and Jafari 1991; Nash 1996), the mobilization of identities (Lanfant et al. 1995), and ethnic, national and regional integration and development (Nettleford 1988; Stanley 1998). Within Cuban Studies, tourism is couched within the perspective of the shifting socio-economic and political terrain of the post-revolutionary era with specific reference to the questions of economic liberalization and its contradictions. The economic crisis of the 1990s that followed the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the subsequent suspension of soviet subsidies, and the tightening of the U.S. embargo through further economic sanctions, presented a decisive moment of rupture and transformation. Consequently, Cuba has been faced with having

to inject life into a dormant economy while still maintaining a socialist republic. Critical to their strategy of generating hard currency has been to turn to tourism, and specifically to look to culture and “folklore” as the newest and most potent product for export.

The increased dollarization of the island’s economy has thrown into relief the imbalances and racialization of power and access along with the resurgent structures of racial exclusion that have consistently haunted Cuba. It has also born witness to the rise of *jineterismo* (prostitution) and the increased commodification of black culture and bodies (Hodge 2001; Perry 2004; Fusco 1998). The dominant framework for addressing these issues has been to foreground the contradictions and social tensions of this rise of racial discrimination and limitations on the full participation of Cuban blacks in the tourism industry. However, while Cuba’s black residents have had limited access to the formal structures, they consistently strategize to create new means for participation and have used those spaces afforded them through tourism to articulate their identities and sense of belonging especially through performance.

MacCannell’s (1999) concept of “staged authenticity” remains one of the dominant frameworks for analyzing tourist performances (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Desmond 2000). Notions of “authenticity” and its relation to the exhibition and commodification of culture have received re-evaluation and critical treatment in regard to tourist attractions, museum displays, and heritage sites (Handler and Saxon 1988; Kasfir 1992; Errington 1994; Handler and Gable 1997; Stanley 1998; Karp and Kratz 2000). With a few exceptions (Brunner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994; Daniel 1996; Hagerdorn 2001) analyses of staged performances in tourist settings place heavy emphasis on the consumption practices of tourists and the ideological framework that

structures the host/guest encounter (Desmond 1997; Tomlin 1999), thus undercutting discussions of what is at stake for local performers and how they negotiate and redefine their identities in new and highly commercial contexts.

Ritual performances produced and set in tourist contexts are not only sites for the rehearsed “staging” and construction of cultural difference for a Euro-American tourist gaze (Urry 1990), but also a pivotal arena for creating and transforming local identities and histories. How ritual and performance idioms are reconstructed across different performance spaces and alter as well as reaffirm the meanings performers assign to their practices are key. Thus, a critical argument is that rituals are not necessarily stripped of their sacrality, politics, history, and cultural meanings, but are instead informed by these elements are continuously reshaped by different performance and social contexts. This study in its examination of the relationships, fissures, and intersections that exist between representations of Haitian culture in community and national performance contexts, builds on the body of ritual and performance literature that blurs the boundaries between sacred and secular staged events (Moore and Myerhoff 1977; MacAloon 1984; Hagerdorn 2001). It further analyzes the interdependence of diverse performance/ritual contexts and examines how identities are situationally constituted, framed, and mediated in relation to and against social and ideological practices through performance.

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

My dissertation works across regional, state and local levels of nationalist ideology and cultural policy as it considers the place Haiti occupies within the discursive constructions of *cubanidad*. It also examines the performance of identity within the

quotidian spaces of a rural batey and family compound and extends this analysis to an examination of staged cultural performances in domestic and national festival settings. To this end, this multi-sited study combines participant-based ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and performance analysis to examine the developments and effects of the increased visibility on the culture, sense of identity and belonging among Haitian-Cubans in and around Santiago de Cuba.

I spent roughly thirty months conducting research in Cuba. My preliminary research took place during the summers of 2000 and 2001, for a total of 6 months. I then returned to Cuba between 2002 -2004. As a Jamaican national I was able to apply for temporary resident status and remain in Cuba for an extended period on a student visa, which facilitated a more comprehensive fieldwork experience in different communities throughout Oriente. While in Cuba, I first lived and studied in a largely lower income black immigrant community in Santiago de Cuba, traveling between Santiago and a rural outpost, Barranca. After the first year, I was based in Barranca among first to fourth generation Haitians in one of the oldest operating bateyes and community of Haitians today. By centering my research between Haitian communities in both an urban and rural setting, I was better able to grasp the distinctions between these two spaces and realities from social, cultural, material, economic and political perspectives.

My particular subject position as a black, Jamaican woman or as I was called, *pichóna jamaíquina* (a point I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3), allowed me a certain level of access into the lives of many of the immigrant families I lived and spoke with. There was a sense that we all belonged to some overarching cultural reality, but somehow were also outcast in terms of our position within the Cuban state. My temporary sojourn

in many ways echoed the extreme feelings of marginality that many of the descendants of Haitians felt. They existed in Cuba, but in many ways were rooted in a very distinct socio-cultural world and social networks. Over time, I was enveloped into the folds of many families with whom I lived and shared time. I was able to see their daily negotiations in a vulnerable economy and hear them discuss their views of their identities and place in Cuba. I was also able to get an intimate look at how a remembered image of Haiti helps to construct their lives and relationships with others. But, it was mostly through participating in rituals and rehearsals for public performances, that I got a clearer sense of the pivotal space that cultural performance plays in their lives.

Indeed, it was through the lens of performance that I first learned about the Haitian presence in eastern Cuba. I was part of a delegation of Jamaican artists who participated in the 1994 Festival of Caribbean Culture dedicated to Haiti. Having studied Haitian dance for over nine years at the time, I was immediately drawn to the polyrhythmic musical structure of the drums and was guided to find its source. Well before the group of revelers became visible, the multi-layered percussive sounds accompanied by the chant, "*Haytien Nou Ye,*" we are Haitian, filled the air.

One by one different groups bedecked in brilliant colors and armed with banners depicting the names of their communities and/or the *lwa* (Vodou divinities or Gods) that protected their bands, charged through the city streets. They paid homage to their gods through song and dance and showed off brilliant feats juggling machetes and burning torches, as well as running razor-sharp machetes across their faces and chests. In that temporal moment they arrested our attention and declared their presence in an island that had rendered them invisible.

I left that first encounter wanting to know more. The only reference one heard of Haiti at that time was in reference to the labor migrations of the early twentieth century. Outside of Santiago de Cuba, and the eastern provinces more generally, very few people discussed or knew about the communities of people of Haitian descent living throughout Cuba. I knew of many family members that went to Cuba to cut cane or had children born in Cuba, but the narratives of their experience always seemed to ostracize Haitians. Even when I returned to do my preliminary fieldwork, many of my compatriots, who wanted their stories told, were quite dismayed with my choice to examine the Haitian presence in Cuba. They took my decision as some kind of betrayal, and often times cautioned me to be mindful of “dem wicked people.” It was precisely this persistent ill treatment and disregard for the descendants of Haitians that lured me to them and their particular stories and experiences.

I have thus tried to incorporate their voices and experiences as well as my impression of their socio-cultural world within the narrative structure of the dissertation. To this end I try to preference their perspectives on particular subjects and integrate those views within the text. I use “thick description” to paint a picture of particular scenes or ritual performances. I also go between the past and the present, Haiti and Cuba, the batey/lakou and the State, in an attempt to examine the multiple spaces and historical frames in which many Haitian-Cubans occupy.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

This dissertation is divided into six main chapters bracketed by an introduction and concluding remarks. The opening chapter, “Imagining Cuba: Cubanidad and the Shifting Discourse of National Cultural Identity” lays the important contextual and

theoretical groundwork for the ethnographic chapters that follows. It begins with an examination of the discursive formation of several national narratives that developed in the Caribbean. It explores how the historical legacy of slavery, indentureship, and the plantation economy constructed racially stratified societies which in turn complicated the process of constructing an inclusive national cultural identity within the Caribbean. More generally, the opening section examines how as a consequence of the Haitian Revolution, the Caribbean came to be defined as a “black space” yet the hybrid cultural realities of the region problematizes this racial designation. Cuba, in particular, has always been uneasy with dealing with the “black question” and has only recently acknowledged blacks as a constitutive part of the nation.

The main body of the chapter examines the shifting ideologies of *cubanidad*. I examine Cuba’s nation building process by interrogating multiple scholarly, official and popular discourses in three distinct epochs and place these scripts within the discourse on modernity as well as broader historical and global dynamics. Significant to the process of mapping the ideological contours of national identity is highlighting the significant place race occupies within these narratives. I demonstrate that from as early as Cuba’s slave-based economies to its post-revolutionary period, the nation has been reluctant to deal with its black population.

Chapter 2, “Haytien Nou Ye: Haiti in the Cuban Imaginary” presents an historical overview of the centrality of intra-Caribbean migration as a livelihood strategy for the regions’ residents. Of particular concern is analyzing the historical encounters and contemporary linkages between Haiti and Cuba, by tracing the development and socio-cultural legacies and contributions of three distinct migratory waves. I argue that during

the course of Cuba's early national formation Haiti was consistently positioned as its "Other." Haiti's position as antithetical to Cuban identity was foregrounded by the colonial administration and Cuban elite to forestall Cuba's independence struggle. This rejection of the Haitian other re-entered the immigration debates of the early twentieth century, which positioned them as not only a health risk and threat to the social and moral fabric of Cuba, but also as potentially diluting Cuba's national essence.

The latter part of the chapter examines how the 1959 revolution had almost immediate social and political consequences in redressing the ostracized position of Haitians on the island. It shows how the reestablishment of diplomatic ties with Haiti and the acceptance of refugees and a large trans-national student body illustrates Cuba's intent in concretizing its relationship with Haiti, and by extension, integrating itself within the broader Caribbean.

Chapter 3, "On the Margins: the Making of a Haitian Diasporic Enclave," moves from a macro level analysis of national and immigration discourses to a micro-level ethnographic investigation of a Haitian-Cuban community. This chapter presents the historical context through which a batey was founded and the manner in which generations of Haitians have over time reconstituted their lives in the rural hinterlands of eastern Cuba. I demonstrate how through the use of language, social organization, and in the re-establishment of cooperative work and living environment, the descendants of Haitians reconstruct their social world and refashion their identities on Cuban soil.

Chapter 4, "Casa del Caribe and the Popularization of Haitian Culture," presents an institutional history of one of the nation's pivotal cultural institutions. It examines the development of Casa del Caribe and the subsequent promotion of Haitian culture in state

sponsored festivities. Of particular concern is demonstrating how Casa's approach to the cultural products and religious expressions of the marginal populations of the east took an alternative approach to the folklorization paradigm developed in the 1960s. I also argue that Casa's cultural mandate and programming serves as a critique to the goals of integration that the revolution promised but failed to deliver.

The last two chapters are case studies of two of the most important ritual and festive performance traditions for the descendants of Haitians. The chapters further trace their transference from that of an insular community celebration and domestic ritual to the streets of a cultural festival in Santiago de Cuba. For both of these cases, I take a performance-centered approach to analyzing what Yudice (1992) has termed the "rearticulation of tradition" (18). To this end, I investigate Casa del Caribe's revisionist mandate on Cuban popular culture and folklore as well as the reinstatement of cultural tourism. Of particular concern is examining the spaces that have opened up for marginal Haitian-Cuban communities to represent their history, cultural expressions and collective identity through performance, as a result of these institutional and wider global processes.

Chapter 5, "Beyond the Gaze: Memory, History, and Identity in the Feeding of Haitian Spirits at Home and on Stage" is a case study of the *manje mort* or ritual feeding of ancestral kin. Ritual and festive ceremonies conducted in and around the *lakou* (rural homestead or family compound) are pivotal arenas around which Haitian-Cubans historically and presently, mobilize and perform their identities. I begin this chapter by looking at the ways in which the *manje mort* is maintained and practiced in a domestic setting and then analyze the process through which a sacred ritual is recontextualized in a seemingly secular context.

Chapter 6, “From Bush to Street: The Shifting Performance Geography of Rara/Gagá” takes a similar approach in that it examines the shifting spatialization of Gaga performances as it moves from Haiti to a variety of locales in Cuba. The central argument is that with each re-enactment of Gaga, whether in the countryside or on the city streets, celebrants create their own meaning and articulate their sense of history and identity in the process.

The concluding remarks, “Re-imagining Cuba: The New Face of Cultural Identities and Performance in Santiago de Cuba” summarizes the main arguments of the dissertations and discusses some of the implications of this increased visibility of Haitian culture on the Cuban national stage.

CHAPTER I

IMAGINING CUBA: CUBANIDAD AND THE SHIFTING DISCOURSE OF NATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

Cubans are known to be...whites born in Cuba, descendants mainly of Spaniards.
- Rafael Montalvo, "Discurso" (1885)

A Cuban is more than mulatto, black, or white.
- José Martí, "My Race" (1893)

Cuba's soul is mestizo, and it is from the soul, not the skin, that we derive our definite color. Someday it will be called 'Cuban color.'
-Nicolás Guillén, "Sóngoro cosongo," (1931)

The blood of Africa runs through our veins – Cubans are an Afro-Latin people
- Fidel Castro (1975)

In Cuba there is no one cultural identity, there are diverse national cultural identities, or, to simplify, there is a multiethnic, pluricultural identity.
-Rogelio Martínez Furé, "A National Cultural Identity?" (2000)

It started as a faint rumble in the far distance but soon swelled in intensity, beckoning those that sought refuge from the midday sun to come outside into the searing July heat. The indecipherable noises of frenetic drum beats continuously punctuated by the cries of shrill *corneta chinas*,² bounced off buildings that created a corridor for hundreds of revelers. With each advance, the muddled syncopated cadences became more precise rhythms and songs, which the expectant crowds of spectators sang and threw back, in antiphonal style, to the masses of black and brown bodies that swayed

² The *corneta china* is a double reed horn brought to Cuba by Chinese indentured laborers immediately following slave emancipation in the late nineteenth century. It is found more prominently in Santiago's carnival where in more recent years a particular performative machismo is associated with the playing of it.

tirelessly to the music of Conga San Augustine.³ “Hasta Santiago a Pie” [to Santiago by foot] they energetically sang, marching through the streets, enveloping everyone into the folds of the festivities. It was the summer of 2001 and Carnival had come once again to the eastern city of Santiago de Cuba; to the municipality below the parched peaks of the Sierra Maestra mountain range, whose environs became the sites of Afro-Cuban maroon settlements, revolutionary stirrings, and home to successive waves of Antillean immigrants. Some of the songs the crowds chanted for endless hours that Thursday afternoon were couched within these intersecting histories reflecting on the cultural tapestry of Cuba’s eastern provinces.

As was typical of carnival celebrations, the streets were filled with colorful pageantry and pulsating rhythms. Yet, in the midst of the familiar sounds and images of the *congas*, *comparsas*, and the regal parading of *cabildos*,⁴ a few elements stood apart from that which was identifiably Cuban. Just walking distance from two of Santiago’s premier hotels, Las Americas and Santiago Meliá, folkloric troupe El Misterio d’ Vodú⁵ performed rituals and sang incantations to the Haitian *lwa* of the dead – Papa Gede. In the city center another performance ensemble sang Jamaican folk songs while tourists

³ Conga in this context refers to a type of comparsa or carnival band made up of a small nucleus of musicians accompanied by hundreds of revelers. Congas often take the name of the neighborhoods in which they were founded and are usually affiliated with a cultural center (*foco cultural*) where they hold their rehearsals. Los Hoyos is reputed to be the most renowned and respected Conga on the island, but in more recent carnivals (2000-2002) its rival, San Augustine, emerged victorious.

⁴ According to Judith Bettelheim, “[a] *comparsas* is a larger group of *conga* drummers accompanied by paired male and female dancers as well as by smaller groups of line dancers performing a specific choreographed routine... [while a *conga* is a] small group of musicians, who all play the same rhythm and are followed by neighborhood residents, who [sing and] dance through the streets with identifying flags or banners” (2001:137). *Cabildos*, in the Afro-Cuban sense of the word refers to a mutual aid/religious society, fraternity, or brotherhood that grouped Africans and their descendants by *naciones* or ethnic/linguistic communities [e.g. Lucumí (Yoruba), Arará (Ewe-Fon-Mahi), Carabalí (Ibo, Ibibio, Efik, Ejagham), Congo and Mandinga. Carnival celebrations include the parading of the King and Queens and the “royal court” of the *cabildos* dressed often times in Spanish colonial style. For more on the history of *cabildos* see, David H. Brown (1989, 2003)

⁵ This particular spelling of “Vodou” as “Vodú” speaks to the syncretic transformations of the religious practices brought to Cuba by Haitians and maintained by their descendants.

attempted to limbo. The salsa, son, and rumba melodies were joined by the soothing tones of *quisombo*, a music style from Angola and Mozambique that many Santiagueros have become intimately familiar with and have made their own.⁶ Within this heightened festive frame Cuba's African and Caribbean sensibilities were proudly exhibited. Marginal expressive forms and identities were given a public forum and occupied central locations in the wider urban and performance geography of Santiago de Cuba.

As I moved through the streets documenting performances and speaking to spectators, I became acutely aware that the definitions of Cubanness were as varied as the performance landscape. For some, the overt expressions of "African" culture were, as one observer remarked, "a negative symptom of tourism, part of the desire to entertain foreigners, accrue foreign dollars, and Africanize Cuba" (personal communication with spectator, July 2001). Yet for others, the diversity of cultural traditions mirrored the plurality of Cuban identity, thus disturbing the undifferentiated mulatto imagery that has historically defined the population. Not surprisingly, many visitors to the island were delightfully perplexed by the cultural spectacle, curiously trying to distinguish whether the songs were in Spanish, Portuguese, Kreyòl, or creolized English.

Particularly notable were the comments made by an older woman affectionately called, "China." She was nestled in a recessed corner announcing the sale of her *ajiaco* [savory soup] when I happened across her kiosk. Having read Fernando Ortiz's description of this culinary dish as a metaphor of Cuba's cultural diversity, I was interested in speaking to China about the soup's ingredients and significance for

⁶ While there seems to be no existing work that examines this music tradition in Cuba, it is indeed plausible that it made its way to the island via the returning soldiers who fought in the liberation struggles in Angola. Certainly the large numbers of students from these southern African nations enrolled in the University of Oriente and the School of Medicine continue to contribute to its continual presence in Santiago.

examining *cubanidad*.⁷ At first she was noticeably surprised by my queries but soon responded with her rendition of the popular song, “Somos Cubanos” from the renowned salsa band, Los Van Van. As she started with the chorus, many of the nearby revelers joined in: “*somos cubanos Españoles y Africanos...una mezcla perfecta*, [we are Cubans the perfect mix of Spanish and Africans], but China continued by adding an alternative view: “*somos Cubanos, Españoles y Africanos, y también los Chinos, Indios, y por supuesto los Jamaicanos y los Haitianos, así es la mezcla perfecta, claro que si...*” [We are Cubans, Spanish and Africans and also Chinese, Amerindians, and of course Jamaican and Haitians, such is the perfect mix, of course it is].

Moving among the crowds of revelers that assembled in Santiago’s streets, I savored the irony of the performance landscape and China’s attempt to expand the definition of Cuba’s contemporary identity. I marveled in the cultural bricolage that so defined the space and wondered about the wider socio-political implications of this open celebration of Cuba’s cultural, ethnic, and racial plurality. Although self-consciously aware of the heightened nature of the festive frame, this multicultural display, and China’s comments, begged a few questions, particularly: (a) what does it mean to be Cuban in this contemporary moment and to what degree is this regionally differentiated? (b) Given that Haitians have historically been positioned as antithetical to Cubanness, why at this time are they, and specifically their cultural forms, so visible in public celebrations? And, (c) what cultural, historical, socio-political or economic developments serve as catalysts for alternative articulations of Cubanness?

⁷ The phenomenon of using a popular or national dish as a metaphor for discussing cultural, racial, and ethnic hybridity is common throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. In Guyana, “awara soup” is said to express the diversity of cultures. Likewise in Trinidad, “callaloo,” a local as well as regional favorite, speaks to the “mix-up” of cultures that define the Caribbean and its people.

Defining the constitutive elements that make up the Cuban subject and national character has been a preoccupation for politicians, intellectuals, social elites, artists, and the lay public since the thirty year struggle for independence to the post-revolutionary era of contemporary Cuba.⁸ The competing ideologies which have emerged through these debates are multiple and varied, but all position race and nation as two intricately linked phenomena. The Cuban nation has therefore been envisioned as “raceless,” racially inclusive or egalitarian, *mestizo* (i.e. racially mixed or hybrid), and more recently, *pluricultural*. It is precisely this continual refashioning of the Cuban nation that shapes the focus of this chapter. Of particular concern is mapping the complex processes through which marginal Afro-Cuban and Haitian-Cuban identities and culture are rearticulated over time in relation to unstable notions of race, nation and cultural identity.

Starting from the premise that nationalist ideologies and the production of national culture are contingent and processual, this chapter explores the ways in which the multiple, and oft times contradictory, definitions of *cubanidad* have been undergirded by historical dynamics that serve to either silence or valorize the nation’s racial and ethnic diversity. In order to explore these persistent shifts and the recent multicultural phenomenon informing contemporary cultural productions and notions of identity, I endeavor to situate these dynamics in a broader historical and comparative frame. I take as my lead Stuart Hall’s assertion that “questions of identity are always questions about

⁸ I separate the revolutionary era into two distinct periods based on the socio-political and economic character of the society. Revolutionary Cuba extends from the “Triumph of the Revolution” on January 1, 1959 till the fall of communism in the Soviet Bloc in 1989, culminating in the *período especial económico* (special economic period) or period of economic uncertainties beginning in 1989 to the summer of 1993. The Post-Revolutionary period (1990-present) marks a shift from a strictly communist state to an informal socialist-democracy, whereby the State apparatus grants a certain degree of economic freedom, allowing the introduction of the U.S. dollar in 1993 and its subsequent replacement by the Euro in 2004 and the prominent position of tourism in the island as the main source of foreign revenue, superseding the revenues generated from the country’s centuries of dependence on “King sugar.”

representation” (1995:234) and Rogelio Martínez Furé’s contention that every nationalist period or “epoch has its [own] identity” (2000: 158) to explore the different discursive strategies employed by Cuban authorities in the nation-building projects of the 19th century through to the post-revolutionary era. By paying attention to the ongoing contentious processes of incorporation, the chapter traces the enduring negotiations and struggles over the multiple meanings of *cubanidad*. It also sets the scene by examining how the varying constructions of Cuban cultural identity are generated from local and global developments and are related to representational strategies of the past. Moreover, this chapter explores Cuban nationalism as it intersects with the metropolitan discourse on modernity and the local ideology of *mestizaje*.

While it is often uncritically accepted that Latin American nationalist ideologies and constructions of cultural identity “proclaim the mestizo [or mulatto to be] the prototype of modern citizenship” (Rahier 1997:421), through a historical analysis of constructions of nation in three distinct periods, I contend that the discourse on *mestizaje* operates in different ways across Latin America. The concept of creating a homogenous nation out of heterogeneous elements and likewise the metropolitan discourse on modernity embraced by the newly independent elite, were both projects of exclusion that emerged at a significant moment in the ideological decolonization of Cuba. But their meaning, significance, and deployment in contemporary Cuba have shifted radically. The concept of *mestizaje* evolved over time, from questions of racial mixture to the recognition of the plurality of cultural identities within the Cuban nation.

In what follows, I examine the dynamics that have shaped nation-building projects in Cuba. While the chapter does not present an exhaustive treatment of the issues

at hand, I nevertheless provide critical historical developments in order to situate readers in local politics and shifting trends and ideologies that inform cultural production on the island. In order to explore the significance of the discursive formation of Cuban nationalism, the first part of the essay situates Cuba within the Caribbean and the broader models of social organization that have come to identify the region. In so doing, I outline how Cuba deviates from, and conforms to, other areas in the Caribbean whose national narratives have come out of the Creolization model.

The second part of the chapter explores the dynamics of constructing a national cultural identity and the ideologies that have informed this process. After discussing the idea of racial democracy operating in Cuba's early republic, I turn to the artistic and cultural revolution of the 1920s through 1940s that fetishized the cultural practices of Afro-Cubans in an attempt to galvanize a counter narrative to North American hegemony. The chapter concludes with an exploration of the mandate for change instituted by the revolutionary government. I further highlight the paradoxical consequences of policies initiated in the 1960s and 1970s and the ideological and economic crisis of the 1990s that presented an opening for expressing hyphenated identities in contemporary Cuba.

PART I

CONSTRUCTIONS OF RACE & CULTURAL NATIONALISM in the CARIBBEAN

The particular racial and cultural diversity in the Caribbean, born out of the violent clash of peoples from Africa, Asia, and Europe, situated the quest for national unity and a cohesive sense of cultural identity as highly problematic (Hall 1995; Alleyne

2002; Puri 2004). As some of the first European colonial possessions and critical sites for the expansion of European capitalism, these supposed “backwater” islands became integrally enveloped into the folds of the modern, industrial western world (Mintz 1985; 1989; Trouillot 1992). However, while the rationalizing principle of the plantation complex helped to produce modern colonies, Sibylle Fischer’s astute examination of the significance of the Haitian Revolution and its intersection with the metropolitan discourse of modernity, reveals that “the brutal modernity of the plantation economy and its social structure did not uniformly translate into a modern consciousness” (2004:23). It was precisely this disjuncture and the region’s elongated colonial history that have informed the constructions of racial categories and the subsequent processes of incorporating these multi-cultural identities into larger projects of nation building.

A constellation of historical and socio-economic forces, primarily slavery, colonialism and the plantation as a social and economic institution, produced racialized categories that existed within either a continuum or hierarchized pyramid (see H. Hoetink 1967 and 1985; Cecilia Karch 1985; Raymond T. Smith 1992; David Baranov and Kevin Yelvington 2003). The distinct colonial experience in each territory established differences between the societies of the English, French and Dutch Caribbean that had fairly rigid categories, as opposed to the “colour-continuum” that is evidenced in the Hispanic territories. As an example, the export oriented plantation economy of colonial Saint Domingue, and later the independent republic of Haiti, inherited a highly stratified social structure wherein race, color, class, religion and culture were the factors that would determine one’s social position. Although relative fluidity existed between the various divisions, the category of *noir* was to be relegated to the lowest rung of the ladder, while

blanc was to represent the pinnacle (Nicholls 1985; Trouillot 1990). However, as Hoffman asserts, this rigid structure is a bit more complicated upon examination of the black and mulatto classes and the political history of Haiti:

In the Haitian context, then, the term *noir* and *mulâtre* do not refer to ethnic type exclusively. They also carry social and political connotations. Social, because while the illegitimate child of a Black working woman and a White sailor on shore leave might be described as *mulâtre* in appearance, he would certainly not be considered as belonging to the *mulâtre* (i.e., upper) class. Conversely, a Black high government official or successful business-man would make certain he was by marrying into a *mulâtre* family. This is tacitly understood rather than openly admitted, and the *mulâtre* group makes it a point to include some ethnic Blacks in the government when it is in power, while the *noir* group does the same for Mulattos when its turn comes (1985:63).

What becomes apparent is that the triangulation of race, color and class determined whether one's classification would modify upon birth or marriage or whether they would be subsumed under the rubric of their preexisting racial groupings. What was certain was that the *mulâtre* and *noir* had few options of moving into the upper echelon of white society regardless of class and/or phenotype. Movement was further limited as the hierarchy within the classes reified the racial categories and subtle distinctions within the classification system.

The vast social cleavages inherited from the Haitian Revolutionary era set the stage for the initial mapping of the national terrain. Since power was limited to the white class, the early constructions of the postcolonial nation celebrated Haiti's French heritage and dismissed Africa as a useful icon in the construction of a modern nation. Purity of "whiteness," was the ideal for it represented what political sociologist Percy Hintzen has characterized as the "foundational principle of colonial [and in the context of Haiti, postcolonial] power, privilege, honor, and prestige" (2002:93) that could be summed up

as a form of “symbolic capital”.⁹ Whiteness represented an ideological social construction that located civilization as its byproduct, and Europeans as its privileged inheritors. “Blackness,” on the other hand, embodied savagery and barbarism, the space in which Africans were located.

The dominant demographic presence of Africans and their descendants, who occupied the lowest rung of the colonial plantation complex and later the postcolonial social order, however, symbolically defined the space of Haiti as black. The 1805 constitutional article proclaiming that “all Haitians whatever their shade shall be called black” (Nicholls 1996:12) further defined Haiti as a black space.¹⁰ It would, however, take the United States Marine occupation (1915-1934) for a more self-conscious politicization and recognition, especially on the part of the elites, of the cultural contributions of the black masses to the formation of Haitian nationality (Dash 1981; Ramsey 1997).¹¹

Indeed, within and outside of Haiti, “blackness” “became the defining criterion for imagining the region” (Munasingh 2001:7). In the Anglophone Caribbean, in particular, racial distinctions among the classes were quite sharp and a “black” racial identity, with its own social values and moral codes, emerged in the lower and peasant classes (Mintz 1974). In the case of Jamaica, for example, cultural elements deriving

⁹ Hintzen’s use of the term “symbolic capital” is taken from Pierre Bourdieu and pertains to the accumulation and display of symbols of honor and prestige that renders “unrecognizable the true exploitative nature of relationships of economic exchange. It is “denied capital recognized as legitimate” (P. Bourdieu (1990: 112-121).

¹⁰ D. Nicholls (1996) argues that Dessalines in an effort to abolish color prejudice and hatred offered the hand of his daughter in marriage to mulatto leader Alexandre Pétion as a means of symbolically expressing the union between the races.

¹¹ This idea of blackness was quite complex and problematic for the ruling elite as Michael Dash, (1998) has argued. Africa was in fact not seen as an image or space of mythic origin out of which a modern nation could emerge, but instead France. According to Dash, the ruling elites “were interested in the ideologies and technologies of modernization and wanted to be a part of world history,” (44) which meant not acknowledging Africa for it was seen as existing in the peripheries of western capitalism and historical development.

from Africa, including the means of social organization, religion, food ways, language, were refashioned in free villages that emerged immediately following Emancipation in 1838 under the leadership of primarily Baptist and Methodist missionaries. These free villages, which promoted the dissemination of Christianity and European social mores, also provided a location for the re-articulation of religious systems of African origin, and provided alternative spaces to reconstruct cultural forms and hone a particular Afro-Creole subjectivity (Patterson 1967; Braithwaite 1971; Burton 1997). Missionary schools also provided the means of economic and social advancement. They had significant ideological influence on the intermediate brown middle class, who achieved upward mobility through education (C. Hall 1995).

The growth of these intermediate social segments in the post-emancipation and later independence periods directly implicated the nationalism that subsequently developed in the Anglophone Caribbean, for their ascendancy to political power in these black dominated societies rested on their supporting and championing the culture of the black masses. In the nationalist and anti-colonial march towards self-governance the long devalued history and cultural practices of the black subaltern classes became the privileged icons of the nation. As historian John Aarons reminds us, “a central tenet of the cultural policy pursued by all [Anglophone] governments since independence has been the necessity of redressing ‘the historical imbalance’ caused by colonial rule. This involved bringing the ‘African experience’ to the forefront of contemporary life by a variety of measures” (1998:38). For example, in Jamaica this was achieved through the promotion of reggae music and the Rastafari movement that both professed an important

shift from a celebration of Europe to a glorification of Africa and its descendants (Brodber 1997).¹²

The black socio-cultural sphere that developed in Haiti and the Anglophone Caribbean in opposition and resistance to the hegemony of European cultural mores is not as vividly transparent in the Hispanic Caribbean where the two cultural spheres (Africa and Europe) were not as sharply separated. As settler colonies, distinct from their extractive counterparts, the Hispanophone Caribbean were the first colonies to imagine themselves as settlements distinct from the metropolis. Those born in the Americas of European ancestry developed a sense of national belonging and an identity that was no longer “Spanish,” but indeed a new social grouping of “Creole.”¹³ The Spanish Crown’s refusal to concede commercial freedoms along with increased tariffs, taxes, and duties levied on products of the colonies, encouraged the formation of an island Creole society that was positioned in opposition to Spain (Knight 1990). The social distance between the two subjects (the Creole and Spaniard/Peninsular) afforded an articulation of the national space as inherently distinct from Europe or the “Old World” and in fact uniquely part of the “New World.”

Unlike Haiti and the Anglophone Caribbean, Cuba’s earliest renderings of itself were not that of a black space, but instead a uniquely Creole or white territory that gradually became a mestizo nation, and later an “Afro-Latin” socialist state. At no time

¹² The black power movement in the United States informed much of how black consciousness was configured in the West Indies even though it did not permeate all sectors of the Jamaican population. While Brodber maintains that popular music helped the shift in focus to Africa in the mid 1970s, Natasha Barnes’ analysis of the 1986 Miss Jamaica beauty pageant argues that these “dignified public affairs” reveal the continual struggles Jamaicans had with identifying the nation as black and validating blackness on a whole. See Natasha Barnes (1997: 285-306).

¹³ See Benedict Anderson (1983) for further discussion. Note his restriction of his discussion to Central and South America. It is important to note that Creole in the Latin American context is racially defined as a person born of Spanish stock in the New World, thus white.

in the discursive construction of the Cuban nation has “blackness,” been used as the *sole* unifying concept that defines the Cuban nation. If indeed “blackness” “became integral to imagining this space” (Munasingh 2001:7) we call the Caribbean, then Cuba in fact presents an intriguing subtle variance. Similar to Trinidad and Guyana, whose national populations have large numbers of persons of Indian ancestry trying to make claims to the ideologically exclusive Creole national narrative, Cubans also attempt to define nation as not a strictly “Afro” terrain.¹⁴ But, before examining the discursive formation of several Creole national narratives that developed in Cuba, it is necessary to examine briefly the Creole society thesis, which made the rendering of Caribbean nationalism possible.

Kamau Braithwaite (1971) offers the model of creolization to discuss the synthesis of diverse cultural fragments in the creation of Caribbean societies in contrast to the plural society thesis spearheaded by M.G. Smith (1965) which argued that West Indian countries were culturally plural societies constituted by distinct socially stratified segments. For Bolland (1992), the plural society model does not allow for an analysis of social actors operating within society as historical agents that actively undermine and reshape the restrictive societal structure to their benefit. Perhaps more of an issue for my concerns in this chapter is that the plural society thesis, as a model of Caribbean society, rendered the realization of nationalism in the region as improbable if not impossible.

¹⁴ Afro-Cubans differ from the Indo-Trinidadian / Indo-Guyanese situation for whereas the former were written into the nation through the Afro-Cubanismo movement and seen as the second critical component to the mestizo identity, the latter were considered too “pure” (i.e. purity of blood) to be mixed into national narratives. For work on the national narratives of Trinidad and Guyana and the space of the Indo-Caribbean subject refer to Viranjini Munasingh (2001); Daniel Segal (1993:81-115); Brackette Williams, (1991); and Percy Hintzen (2001).

According to M.G. Smith:

The common culture, without which West Indian nationalism cannot develop to create a West Indian nation, may by its very nature and composition preclude the nationalism that invokes it. This is merely another way of saying that the Creole culture which West Indians share is the basis of their division (qtd. in Bolland 1992: 50-79)

M.G. Smith explicitly negates the unifying aspect of the creolization process. He fails to see the dynamism of intercultural exchange and the integrationist principle inherent to the creole-society thesis. In contrast, for Braithwaite creolization represents a model of social change that speaks to the bilateral process of cultural contact and its consequences. The model additionally writes the contribution of Africa and its descendants on the formation of Caribbean societies firmly into the history of the birth of the Caribbean and the Americas more generally.¹⁵ Given the inherently immigrant societies where no one can truly claim indigenous status, outside of the decimated Amerindians who once inhabited the region, the creole-society thesis spoke to, as Stuart Hall (1995) suggests, the “complicated process of negotiation and transculturation which characterize Caribbean culture” (213). It provided the Caribbean intelligentsia, as well as the post-independence and post-revolutionary elite, with the tools “to find a language in which they could re-tell and appropriate their own histories” (ibid: 219), bringing forth a claim for national unity.

The creolization process has long been felt to be more advanced in the Hispanic Caribbean, where there was a more equal ratio of whites to blacks and early formation of a free colored group born out of miscegenation, along with more liberal manumission policies. Hoetink characterized the resulting socio-racial structure as follows:

¹⁵ I use “Americas” here in the expansive definition provided by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1992) in their excellent discussion of the cultural processes and social context in which creolization occurred.

Whites (and especially those from the metropolis) were clearly favoured socially over blacks, it is true, but the vast majority of the population had amalgamated sufficiently to leave no room for fixed colour lines. Rather, a colour continuum developed within which subtle differences in skin color, hair texture, and facial features were noted as essentially catalogued in an extensive vocabulary, with all its social implications, but without any group striving after (or succeeding in) the maintenance of strict endogamy, which might have created a separation from all others (1985: 61).¹⁶

Helen Safa (1998) also defines the ascendancy of the Roman Catholic Church, and a mono-language as opposed to the multi-lingual speech communities in other Caribbean territories as being critical to the formation of a rather cohesive sense of national identity in the Hispanic Caribbean. She notes that the relative ease with which blacks were absorbed into the social order in the Hispanic Caribbean is indicative of the validity of Mintz's "assimilation model" which "provide the framework for racial and cultural synthesis, but on the basis of a paternalistic social order" (1996: 123). What falls out of this characterization of assimilation, however, is the contentious historical process of asymmetrical incorporations of blacks as national subjects. Within notions of assimilation, the imperative of nation problematically eclipsed the acceptance and appreciation of non-white racial identities. Moreover, the degree to which the "black" element has been acknowledged and integrated into the internal logic of nation formation is quite different across the three Spanish speaking countries due to dissimilarities in their historical, socio-economic and political formations.

While it can be argued that the Hispanophile emphasis is quite evident in the Spanish Caribbean, the self-conscious quest for nationhood in each of these societies had

¹⁶ The notion of a "colour-continuum" has been the conventional reading of racial categories and dynamics in Cuba and the Hispanic Caribbean more generally. However, Latin American historian, Aline Helg in her critical work on the formation of the first black political party in Cuba and the subsequent 1912 massacre of thousands of Afro-Cubans, in A. Helg (1997) writes against this reading positing that in fact a "two-tier" racial order akin to that found in the United States is also operable in Cuba, with the difference being that the line differentiating black and white is not based on the "one-drop" rule, but on "visible" African ancestry.

to deal with how to negotiate the “black problem.” For example, the rather egalitarian construct of the “all embracing family” prevalent in Puerto Rico’s nationalist narratives allowed for the incorporation of all disparate elements within the broader concept of a stratified family. This idea stood in stark contrast to the Dominican Republic model which valorized a long extinct Taino past within the mestizo category of the *indio*, while defiantly denying any African heritage. Cuba, like Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, has had to consistently reevaluate prevailing constructs of the nation amidst a ubiquitous North American presence. However, with the country being continuously “swamped by immigrants”¹⁷ the need to address the racial and cultural composition of the nation became a persistent concern and preoccupation (Knight 1970: 191). In all of these Hispanic territories (i.e. Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic), nationhood was articulated often in relationship to a glorified Spanish legacy manifested in language, religion, and other institutional and cultural practices of the Creole elite. But with the passing of time and in the face of North American imperialism, the expressive forms of the black subordinated classes and therefore the class themselves were appropriated in defense of a distinct cultural patrimony.

In the preceding section I have argued that the race / color / class trinity inherited from the colonial plantation legacy operates in slightly different ways in the Caribbean, but has been formative to the development of postcolonial racial, cultural, and national identities. Certainly the forms of colonialism, cast as either settler or exploiter plantation economies, corresponded to the socio-racial reality in each country. “Africa” or more

¹⁷ While Spanish immigration was fully endorsed by the colonial administration and supported by the Cuban elite as a means to regulate the racial composition of the population, the question of immigration became particularly contentious with the introduction of African-Caribbean field laborers in the early twentieth-century. The debates and responses to the introduction of black field laborers are examined more fully in the forthcoming chapter.

specifically, “Blackness,” was appropriated during the immediate aftermath of the Haitian Revolution and again as part of the nationalist *indigénisme* movement in response to the U.S. military occupation of the island (1915-1934), as a way to correct the (post)colonial cultural imbalance. Notions of blackness were also exploited in the Creole nationalism projects in the Anglophone Caribbean (see Barnes 1997). However, the celebration and appropriation of the cultural practices of the black folk as national icons was not uniformly practiced. Paradoxically, although people of African descent are demographically numerous, there are significant historical gaps distinguishing when blacks became an accepted political element of Caribbean nations.

Cuban elites have historically been uncomfortable with how to integrate peoples of African ancestry. In the fashioning of the new independent Cuban republic, questions of race were paramount. In a variety of forms throughout the nineteenth century, but primarily through the discursive confluence of scientific racism and the specter of “another Haiti,” Cuba’s march towards political independence was thwarted and the nation divided. The protracted struggle against Spanish colonial rule ushered in a new national consciousness wherein the salient facets of a racially democratic nation had to be pursued in the shadow of Haiti’s successful revolution and a century long creole fear of the “black peril.”

PART II
CUBAN NATIONALISM & THE SHIFTING IDEOLOGY of CUBANIDAD

In the Shadow of the Haitian Revolution

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, notions of race and revolution were at the center of debates concerning the fate of the Cuban nation. With the successful defeat of Napoleon's troops by those many colonial elites deemed "primitive savages," the tension between those who supported colonialism and those who wanted to secure a sovereign nation was thrown into relief. The inevitability of economic decline and the destruction of the Cuban race were said to be the potential hazards of revolution as Cuba's nineteenth century leading abolitionist and ideologue, José Antonio Saco contended in 1848, "[t]here is no country on earth where a revolutionary movement is more dangerous than Cuba...Under present circumstances, political revolution is necessarily accompanied by social revolution; and social revolution is the complete ruin of the Cuban race" (1974: 101). The negative implications of the Haitian revolution and the potential threat of ruin for Cuba, if it followed suit, were manipulated by colonial authorities as they conflated poverty and backwardness with the potential act of rebellion. Perceived by the ruling elite as an inferior black space of barbarism, Haiti became the quintessential symbol and example of the consequences of rebellion and stood as the exemplary deterrent to self-governance within racially plural societies. The political consequences of the Haitian Revolution were thus enormous, instigating and impacting

the very dynamics of state-engineered racial projects in places like the Dominican Republic, Brazil, and Cuba.¹⁸

The ominous residues of colonial defeat and the subsequent rise of black power in the not so distant shores of Haiti were too close to home. In fact the specter of a Haitian style revolution and the increased reliance on African slave labor posed a vexing dilemma for colonialist and the Creole elites who wanted to maintain the white status quo. The threat of a demographic shift in the racial composition of the colony from predominately white to that of predominately black during the period of 1800 to 1850 further encouraged a rather acute awareness of race.¹⁹ Mindful of the imminent “Africanization” of the island and the horrors of the Haitian situation or “black peril,” Saco turned to the ideology of *mestizaje*, stressing that “when the black race ascends to mix itself with the white race, Cuba’s racial problems would be a thing of the past” (Saco 1858:vol.3:208). Saco was one of the early advocates of the racialization of nationalist thought and the explicit articulation of programmatic ideas aimed at socially engineering the racial and moral geography of the island. Recognizing the threat the plantation

¹⁸ The rather fraught relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has been the subject of significant scholarly treatment, in part because the former, which shares the eastern two-third of Hispaniola, developed a starkly different notion of national identity. For further discussion see Lemoine (1985); Lauren Derby (1994); and Michael Baud (1996). In terms of Cuba, the literature on the relationship between Cuba and Haiti is not as abundant or developed. Even though much has been said about the cultural contribution of the *francesas*-- French planter class and their slaves – to the development of Cuba culture (see, Olavo Alén Rodríguez, (1994:109-118) and the ubiquitous use of Haiti in forestalling Cuba’s movement towards independence, (e.g. see Aline Helg 1997) and Ada Ferrer (1999); Alejandro de la Fuente (2001). I think nonetheless that the discussion of Haiti within the context of nation formation has been insufficiently emphasized.

¹⁹ I do acknowledge that the rather simple binary model of black and white is complicated in the Caribbean and Latin America by intermediate categories of the mulatto/brown or the Indian and Black “dougla” mix and other ethnic/racial groupings that destabilizes a rigid black/white reading. However, the use of color as an intermediary interlocutor between the two poles develops in specific historical moments and contexts. Cuba of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, particularly in relation to the discourse around the issue of race and the Haitian Revolution, was often discussed in rather black and white terms. It was not until the notion of the mulatto was fully articulated that we find evidence of politically mobilizing the formation of the nation around the construct of the mulatto. However even within this intermediary category identifying the union of Europe and Africa, whiteness is privileged over its opposite.

system posed for the white or Hispanocentric Cuba he so adamantly championed, Saco lamented accordingly:

The Cubans, allured by the extraordinary prices of sugar and coffee in the markets of Europe, multiplied their plantations. And, although they should have been restrained, or more circumspect in view of the bloody catastrophe in the neighboring island, the prosperity of the moment blinded them to the dangers of the future. What a misfortune that the good patricians of that epoch did not ask for the abolition of the slave trade, and clamor energetically for the importation of white colonists...But even in the midst of the terrors instilled in them by the destruction of Saint Domingue, they still longed for negroes, believing that without them there could be no prosperity for Cuba (1932: 29).

The imminent threat slavery posed for Cuban society was given a sense of urgency through the context of Saint Domingue. Although Cuba's economic success came on the heels of the slave-led Haitian Revolution, Saco was clear that Cuba should steer clear of the same potential hazards of littering the island with a degenerate and potentially rebellious race. Indeed the argument he advances against slavery is not by any means founded on a humanitarian platform, but one grounded in a exclusionary rhetoric that defined Cuban nationality as white, "the Cuban nationality...is that, which is made up of the white race..."(Saco 1858: 54). To reconcile the thousands of blacks in Cuba, Saco argued that the cure to the island's ills depended on white immigration, colonization, and miscegenation. This project of "whitening" and improving the society, as he contended was to, "neutralize, to a certain degree, the terrible influence of the three million Negroes surrounding us, millions that keep on multiplying, and that may swallow us up in the not too distant future, if we remain idle" (1858:vol. 3:201).

To further safeguard Cuba's Hispanic identity, a state-sponsored campaign of terror and extermination – the Escalera Conspiracy 1844-1845 – was ordered to quell the plot to put an end to Spanish domination and slavery. Although there was no clear evidence in support of the accusation of a slave uprising, colonial authorities

systematically tortured, executed and imprisoned thousands of black Cubans and later restricted the rights of the free people of color through racist legislation that greatly hindered their ability to exercise their freedom (see Paquette 1988).

The incessant displeasure with Cuba's growing black population and the subsequent anxiety it created for colonial authorities concerned with holding on to their power is expressed in the writings of Domingo del Monte:

I wish there were no slaves in Cuba, much less that these slaves were black, that is to say, of such a savage branch of the human tree. I am completely convinced, like all men of good heart and intelligence in Cuba, that our fields can be cultivated by free and white hands, and my most fervent wish is that the largest of the Antilles should escape the misfortune that has befallen Haiti and Jamaica, that is, to become the property of a barbarous race on account of our blind greed, when in fact Cuba can aspire to become a beacon of European civilization in the Western world...Spain's social and political mission in Cuba is one not less beautiful and dignified and befitting a great nation: to turn her into a European colony, with an enlightened and European population that can be the brightest beacon of Caucasian civilization in the Spanish American world (qtd. in Alonso (1998:70).

The contempt del Monte had for the slave and plantation systems is based solely on the racial composition of the slaves and the potential threat it posed for a civilized Euro-Cuban nation. The prolongation of slavery was therefore relegating Cuba to the barbarous space of the primitive and outside of the orbit of Western civilization. Rebellion was of course considered a potential outcome that, as was seen in the case of Haiti, could cause as del Monte and Saco believed, disastrous debilitating ruin. The slave question was thus a critical factor in the discursive configuration of Cuban nationality during the pre-independence era as del Monte maintained:

will understand, in the end, that its problems arise from slavery and blacks; that neither this abominable institution nor this unhappy race are compatible with the advances of European culture; that the task, the sole desire and constant purpose, of every true Cuban noble and saintly patriotism should be to achieve the end of the slave trade first, and then to bring about the gradual elimination of slavery, without upheavals or violence, and last, to cleanse Cuba of the African race. This is what reason, self-interest, politics, religion, and philosophy dictates collectively to the Cuban patriot (qtd. in Alonso 1998:73).

For del Monte, Saco, and others of similar persuasion, slavery was an affront to the Hispano image of Cuban nationality and also stood as an institution that precluded its valiant reach towards modernity. Slavery was thought to position Cuba, as Latin American literary scholar, Carlos Alonso has stated, “languishing permanently without recourse in the periphery of the modern” (1998:71). Although by the mid nineteenth-century Cuba assumed the appearance of modernity, with steam powered mills, extensive railroads, telegraphs, and telephones, this industrial modernization was hindered by the overwhelming black population, and, to be modern was not to be black. At this historical juncture, likeness to the metropolis and an embrace of the discourse of Modernity was a means to being legitimated and enveloped into the mainstream of the Western world, an aspiration of many Creole elites (Alonso 1998). The discourse on modernity thus became the vernacular for discussing and configuring Latin American nationhood (García Canclini 1995). It was not enough to desire political independence and then later fight for it; the nation had to exude the markers of the modern, which meant modern industry and a civilized racial landscape. The continued African presence served to interrupt this goal, making way for racialized justification for Spanish colonialism and immigration, which directly targeted and manipulated the Creole elites’ fear of Cuba becoming more African. If the end of the slave trade was to be delayed, the only other answer to rid the country of the black race was to ensure that over time they would mix with whites, dissolving into more palatable mulattos.

Like most nineteenth century Latin American countries that profess miscegenation as a unifying principle in the construction of modern states, in Cuba the project of *blanqueamiento* – the progressive whitening of the nation through selective

mixing and state-sponsored campaigns of repression and violence against non-whites – was particularly critical for the maintenance of the national narrative and in fact the nation itself. Following an evolutionary logic, Blacks were thought to be a weaker race that would eventually be absorbed by the superior whiter races. By asserting that “whiteness” was a natural and necessary precursor to nationhood, those claiming European ancestry were automatically granted a space within the nation. However, racial mixing provided one of the only means in which disparate darker elements (those of African ancestry) could make such claims.

The specific discourse on race in nineteenth-century Cuba located blacks outside of the celebrated “Creole” or white articulations of national identity. The Haitian Revolution stood as testament to the necessity of racially engineering the nation through miscegenation. And Haiti became not only the antithetical example to Cuban nationalism but Cuba’s extreme “Other.” Haiti’s “otherness” was in part due to an idea of its purity, as Francophone literary scholar Michael Dash argues, “Haitians were either partly or wholly of African descent, unlike other elites in the Americas who could claim direct kinship with Europeans” (1998:44). While white “racial purity” and aspirations towards Europe established the prerequisite for imagining nationality in Cuba, “purity of blackness” as Haiti was believed to racially exhibit, represented the impossibilities of nation formation – hence, posing an imminent threat to its realization.

Race & Nation in the Early Republic (1902-1933)

While the question of race, and in particular the model of Haiti, was brandished to derail any progress towards achieving independence, growing disaffection with Spanish colonialism made the question of nation, for the first time, override that of race. Thus, at

the close of the nineteenth century, amidst rampant imperial expansion, a revolution emerged in Cuba which united blacks, whites, and mulattos in an effort to overthrow the yoke of Spanish colonialism and usher into being a “raceless” nation.

The protracted pursuit of Cuba Libre stretched across three decades and three separate wars, but persistent social and racial cleavages stood as an obstacle to its realization. José Martí’s transcendent rhetoric – of a nation “with all, and for the good of all” (1992: 511-512) where dangers of a race war were inconceivable, for being “*Cuban* mean[t] more than white man, mulatto, or black man” (1968 [1893]: 310), was critical in forging a cross-racial insurgent force united by a “triumphant love” (1992:8). It was also instrumental in discursively diluting racial, ethnic, and cultural identities into a homogeneous national one (Martínez-Echazábal 1998). In Martí attesting that “there can be no racial animosity, because there are no races” (1968 [1891]: 150), the “father” of the Cuban nation rhetorically dispelled the fear of the century old “black peril,” asking:

What, then, is there to fear?...Shall we fear he who has suffered most in Cuba from the privation of freedom, in the country where the blood he shed for her has made her too dear to be threatened? Shall we fear the black, the noble black, the black brother, who, the Cubans who died for him, has forgiven the Cuban who still maltreats him?” ... “The revolution, which has brought together all Cubans, regardless of their color, whether they come from the continent where the skin burns, or from peoples of a gentler light, will be for all Cubans (1992, vol. 4:276).

Within these reformulations of Cubanness, Martí redressed white fears that a cloak of blackness loomed ominously over the new nation by evading the question of race, and asserting that the revolutionary ethos made color insignificant. This powerful ideology of a “raceless” nation undermined Spanish assertions of the impossibility of Cuban nationhood. As racial plurality was deemed the negation of nation, Martí shrewdly argued against the existence of such plurality. Nonetheless, North American and European scientists were set to prove that social Darwinism would indeed, over time,

weed out the races and in the end prove that whites were superior. Additionally, the reality of Cuba's racial diversity, as manifested in the extensive classificatory language used to differentiate the nation's mixed population, made the erasure of race polemically challenging.²⁰ Martí had to thus acknowledge the existence of such diversity, but he chose to do so within the context of professing the equality of the races.²¹

Acknowledging the inherent *mestizo* character of the Americas, Cuba's beloved ideologue "seize[d] upon the idea of [Cuba's] Creole personality" (1968:n.p) to create a nation not dependent on foreign models, but one that would emerge out of the harmonious unity of all the races. Like many of his contemporaries, the experience of living in North America informed Martí's engagement with the concepts of nation and modernity. However, while political culture in much of Latin America developed around an adaptation of models operable in Europe and the United States, Martí's egalitarian rhetoric and staunch independent spirit separated him from his peers. For Martí, the

²⁰ The subtle variations of color, hair texture, and other notable physical differences find their expression in a highly developed classification system similar to those found throughout Latin America. Cubans make distinctions between shades of blacks into *negro*, *mulatto*, *moreno*, and *pardo* based on a color continuum which have likeness to Europe and Africa at each of its poles. The term *moreno* suggests a person of chocolate brown complexion, while a *pardo* or *prieto* is someone of dark black complexion. Another classification for blacks refers to very dark-skinned persons that appear to have a deep indigo appearance and thus the phrase *Negro azul* (blue black). The term *mulatto* is further complicated by classifiers such as, *mulatto adelantado* (an 'evolved' mulatto or person of very light-skin and predominate Caucasian features) sometimes also referred to as *mulatto blanconazo* (white-mulatto). A *jabo'a* refers to a mulatto with a reddish or yellowish brown complexion with overtly Negroid features, while a *trigueño* is a person with a light wheat-colored complexion with a mix of Caucasian and Amerindian features. *Trigueños* like *indios* are said to have *pelo bueno* (good – i.e. straight – hair), but the latter have the skin tone and physical features resembling Cuba's indigenous Amerindian population. *Chino*, unlike the others is particularly ambiguous as it refers to descendents of Chinese immigrants and also can refer to a person of Bantu or Congolese descent noted for the heaviness of the eyelids. To further refine these racial classifications terms such as *pelo malo* or *paso* (bad hair, raisins) or *nariz buena/mala*, function as determining qualifiers.

²¹ In response to the conceptualization of the inequality of the races espoused by much nineteenth century positivist theories and especially the work of Arthur de Gobineau's "*Essai sur l'in galiti des Races Humaines*," Haitian anthropologist, Antenor Firmin foreshadows much of Martí's theorization on the equality of races in his 1885 *De l' galit des Races Humaines*. In this work Firmin highlighted the achievements of African civilizations, linking Haiti to ancient Egypt, the Sudan and Ethiopia as evidence of the fundamental equality of African peoples.

institutionalization of racism he witnessed in the United States could not be readily implemented in Cuba without charged resistance, as blacks were critical to the formation of the postcolonial nation and were to be seen as equals.²²

The *ideología mambisa* [ideology of the mambisa or independence fighter] was the earliest expression of nationality that enveloped all of the nation's masses and embraced the discourse of racial fraternity that Martí professed. The doctrine of armed struggle against a common enemy in the service of *la patria* [the homeland] resonated through all of Cuba's revolutionary stirrings attracting blacks to such military efforts. But, the nineteenth-century insurgency was indeed the most critical for this subordinate class, as the liberation wars were to combat colonialism and slavery, as well as bring forth a new national citizenry. It was therefore a charged emancipatory enterprise – one to decide political and human freedoms. As blacks and mulattos, freemen and the enslaved joined the insurgent troops alongside with whites as a means to change their own fate and in the process achieve some degree of social mobility, they were also being written into Cuban history as patriots.

By 1895, the final push towards independence and the desire for Cuba Libre took on a more radical cast as the insurgent forces grew in strength and became darker in composition (Ferrer 1999). Blacks accounted for an estimated 70 percent of the Liberation Army and filled the top ranks of many insurgent troops with such icons as the celebrated “Bronze Titan,” Captain Antonio Maceo and his brother José Maceo, General Quintín Bandera, Flor Crombet, and Guiller món Moncada becoming national heroes

²² The 1901 Constitutional Convention declaring universal male suffrage bespeaks the early republic's endorsement of the racial fraternity Martí championed. But persistent discrimination revealed the unwillingness, on the part of the ruling elite, to encourage the formation of the racially harmonious nation Martí deemed the most fitting reward for thirty years of political struggle.

along the way. Other blacks with leadership roles included *comandante* [commander] Manuel Delgado who, after the war, followed his political aspirations being appointed in the cabinet of President Machado and journalist, writer, and colonel, Lino D'Ou. These men overtly symbolized the race and gender dimensions of the independence movement. But more importantly, their increased involvement in the liberation wars transformed the urgency of political change to that of social transformation - a transformation they believed would assure them and other blacks a rightful share of the new republic (see Helg 1997).

Spanish colonialists desperate to hold on to their last vestige of imperial dominance, however, sought to construct the liberation struggles as a “race war” akin to the revolution in Haiti. Black rebel captains, journalists and intellectuals had to continually speak out about this characterization of the war, stating that they were not contemplating a Negro Republic. Gómez’s delineation of the distinction between Cuban and Haitian blacks and his declaration in 1893 that “We are Cuban, nothing more” was to reject the position that race and nation were irreconcilable. In a letter to Tomás Estrada Palma in 1885, Antonio Maceo spoke out against the accusation of a race war stating, “I love all men...because I look at the essence of life and not its accidents; and so I place the interest of Race, whatever that might mean, beneath the interest of Humanity” (cited in Ferrer, 167). Thus, within the narrative of the nation and homeland we see prominent black public figures locating issues of race as insignificant to the question of national unity. It becomes clear that the avid silencing and denial of race was necessitated by the yearning for nationhood. For it was within the transcendent pronouncement of nation as

“raceless” and “all-inclusive” that blacks and mulattos could truly make a claim to Cuba Libre.

Pronouncements of the nation as “raceless” and racially equal, albeit contradictory, opened up a space for blacks to negotiate their subordinate location. That this foundational discourse was ambiguous was significant, for it suggested that nation formation was not fixed, but open to shifting interpretations. The nationalist discourse was as Latin American historian Alejandro de la Fuente has stressed, not unilaterally interpreted but indeed “a contested process in which blacks had their own voice and their own interpretations of what a racially inclusive nationhood was supposed to mean,” a discourse “open to contending interpretations and appropriations” (1998:45). This rather open-ended view of the nation therefore proved liberating for Cuba’s black population. The ideology gave black insurgents and citizens the tools to speak about racism and inequality and to contend that an inclusive nationhood was a goal to aspire towards (Ferrer 1999; de la Fuente 2001). While this notion of Cubanness provided the discursive space in which Cuba’s black population could negotiate their identities, the myth of independence and the reality of continued public repression precluded their realization of full citizenship.

As with other countries in Latin America, independence from Spain did not usher into being a postcolonial condition, but in fact a lengthy neocolonial relationship with the United States, and blacks in Cuba (i.e. native and foreign) bore the brunt of this arrangement. Cuban independence would be undermined by economic dependency which would consolidate Cuba’s sugar monoculture, and their reliance on U.S. markets, tariff privileges, exports, and manufactured goods. A series of military occupations

during the 1902-34 period, along with the Platt Amendment and the establishment of the Guantánamo Bay naval base, allowed the U.S. to further insinuate themselves into all aspects of Cuban life (Pérez, Jr. 1986). Cuban aspirations towards autonomy were therefore near impossible, as the U.S. informed values, tastes, and introduced new legislation that would challenge all that the insurgents fought for. Political independence was therefore founded on an untenable myth. Alonso (1998) maintains a similar position on the distinctiveness of the Latin American “postcolonial condition,” which deserve to be cited at length:

To conceive of Spanish America’s predicament after the defeat and expulsion of the Spanish presence as a postcolonial condition is highly problematic because what is perhaps the most powerful impulse behind colonial revolt (and likewise the most determining principle in the sub-sequent postcolonial reality) is to understand the period of colonial occupation as a sort of historical parenthesis, as an interruption or hiatus that, once ended, should allow the formerly colonized culture to retake the forcibly abandoned thread of its authentic historical existence....[But,] the Creole and mestizo classes who fashioned the new nations of Spanish America (a) did not belong to the indigenous element, which had been banished almost from the start to the periphery of the social body, and (b) used European language, religion, and cultural models in the construction of their emerging national identities (72).

In the case of Cuba, the decimated Amerindian population did not offer a recoverable indigenous substratum out of which the nation could be constructed. As there was no indigenous past to recuperate, the multi-racial anti-colonial insurgents became a symbol of the collective present out of which the new nation was to emerge. If in fact, as Alonso suggests, the construction of a Cuban identity did not use the framework of a common past; and as historian Louis Pérez Jr. argues, “the apparent absence of categories of the past indicates that much of what became useable as “Cuban” was derived or appropriated from the present” (1999:94), then we must view the independence wars as critical to the early articulations of Cuba’s postcolonial identity. The nineteenth century political insurgency provided the framework out of which public

figures discursively represented and fashioned a legitimate history – a history independent of the metropole and grounded in the present and in the realities of blacks being an active political element of the new nation. This early stage of national consciousness therefore coincided with a historical consciousness that developed under the conditions of revolution. In many ways then, this emergent nationality was not only shaped by anticolonial struggle, but also by general cries for a radical re-conceptualization of the nation's identity as being exclusively Hispanic.

The egalitarian rhetoric launched by Martí was an attempt to redress the cultural imbalance and bias inherited from slavery and colonialism. Yet, his call for new political and ideological structures were difficult to implement, for notions of *cubanidad* vexingly remained embedded within an exaltation of “whiteness” that in turn positioned blacks outside the body politic. Additionally, with the postwar expansion of sugar and increased dependency on a foreign labor force, the realization of an equal nation was further compromised. Immigration became not only critical to the postwar reconstruction efforts, but more importantly informed the debates concerning how postcolonial Cubanness was to be formulated.

Aline Helg's (1990) investigation of race and immigration policies in Argentina and Jeffery Lesser's (1999) work on the influence immigrant minorities had on challenging dominant notions of Brazilian nationality, provide an interesting comparative lens for examining how immigration became a central component of the debates on national identity in Cuba. Helg points out that in the context of Argentina, modernization and economic development hinged on successive waves of European immigration. Blacks, Indians, and to a lesser degree Mulattos, were thus reduced to an “invisible

minority” as cheap European laborers filled all sectors of the economy, successfully whitening the national terrain. The process of whitening in Argentina became the model for many Creole elites, but although the glorification of whitening was universal, the results were far from uniform or successful. In Brazil, the rather narrow black/white paradigm, as Lesser argues, was expanded by immigrant minorities from Syria, Lebanon, China, and Japan, whose ethnicity became critical in the struggle for nationhood. He demonstrates how “these immigrants both manipulated and changed the system, rapidly becoming an integral part of the modern Brazilian nation even as they challenged how nation would be imagined and constructed” (Lesser 2). The diverse transculturation processes used by these ethnic minorities resulted in the emergence of a plurality of hyphenated identities, which, as Lesser maintains, did not congeal to form a static or uniform concept of Brazilianess.

In the postwar environment of Cuba, the immigration question was one wrought with contradictions as debates over the desired foreigner both affirmed and challenged the ideologies which stood as the basis of Cuba’s racial fraternity. For the American occupation forces and Cuban authorities, selective immigration would fulfill the demands of the labor market while also being the means of socially engineering the racial landscape and perpetuating the ideology of *blanqueamiento* (Graham 1990; Skidmore 1993; Lesser 1999; Helg 1990).

While immigration concerns took on significant resonance for all sectors of the Cuban population during the period following independence, immigration had been a consistent theme in the formation of Cuban society. From the advent of the slave trade foreigners have been made to offset the demands of metropolitan capitalist initiatives. By

the mid-nineteenth century alternatives were inaugurated with the importation of indentured laborers from China. Between 1848 and 1874 approximately 125,000 Chinese workers were imported, with the majority (75%) outfitting the regions of large scale sugar production in and near Havana (Turner 1974: 73). However, this non-European class compromised the Hispano image of nationhood the Creole elites wanted to create. Debates over the “coolie trade” revealed the extent to which concern over the island’s racial composition at times proved more significant than meeting immediate labor demands (see Corbitt 1971; Pérez de la Silva and Chapeaux Deschamps and Pérez de la Silva 1974; Turner 1974). Moreover, it stressed the degree to which questions of nationhood did not readily engage ethnicity. Hence, the concept of *cubanidad* was always configured as a black/white issue, with whiteness being the more privileged of the two.

As the abolition of slavery became imminent, Europeans began to enter the nation at a steady rate. From 1882 through to 1899 Cuba received an influx of primarily single white male Spanish immigrants whose numbers reached as many as 520,000, with approximately 100,000 settling in the island (Maluquer de Motes 1992).²³ Spaniards have always formed a critical mass of immigrants and settlers, but with the 1899 census depicting a decline and displacement in the total population after the war, discriminatory immigration policies were inaugurated and Europeans were relied on even more intensely to populate mostly the eastern regions.²⁴ Although campaigns for seasonal laborers from Scandinavia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Puerto Rico were helpful in offsetting some

²³ On efforts to promote Spanish immigration after abolition see Rebecca Scott (1985) and Consuelo Naranjo (1995).

²⁴ The armed struggle against Spain devastated the Cuban landscape, exacting a severe toll throughout the country, especially in Oriente where the overall loss was more acute.

of the labor demands, Cuban authorities viewed “colonization” of stable families from Spain and the Canary Islands as the most favorable solution. These migrants were deemed fit to assimilate and morally contribute to Cuban culture, as they spoke the same language, practiced Catholicism, and would whiten the population.

The discourse on whitening evident in pre-independence Cuba hence resurfaced as the mandate of the new nation and not the *mestizo* reality Martí envisaged. For the North American occupation administration, the hybridity that Martí identified as a marker of the nation’s *difference* announced Cuba’s innate contamination. As an American journalist remarked, “Cuba is politically impossible, socially impossible, economically impossible, because morally rotten....These Cubans are ...the whittling of a race....They can’t rise out of themselves. The fault is racial. Cuba ... yields a hard, indocile mixed blood that riots in depravity” (Gardner 1911 qtd. in de la Fuente 2001: 41). For North Americans, miscegenation represented a regression in the evolutionary schema and an illness that would stunt Cuba’s reach towards modernity. Further retarding Cuba’s progress were the “repugnant,” and “primitive” expressive forms, in particular the “religious atavism” of Cuba’s black population.

The early writings of celebrated Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, expressed this general consensus (see R. Moore 1994 and Helg 1990:47-53). Using positivist thinking, Ortiz in his 1906 publication, *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujo (apuntes para un estudio de etnología)* [Afro-Cuban underworld: Black Sorcerers – Notes for the study of criminal ethnology], argued that the psychological deficiencies unique to Afro-Cubans contributed to their “cultural and moral regression,” which inhibited the development of a more “civilized” state in Cuba (1906: 223). Ortiz’s interest in

criminology led him to associate *la mala vida cubana* [Cuba's bad life or crime] with Cuba's racial topography. However, as Helg (1990) argues, progress as envisioned by Ortiz did not involve "the disappearance of blacks through natural death, intermarriage, or massive white immigration, but instead "with the elimination of the manifestation of African culture" (52). African-based expressive forms, primarily religious traditions and brotherhoods including Santería, Palo Monte, and Abakuá, were part of the corpus of "atavistic" expressions that needed to disappear if Cuba was to achieve the status of modern nationhood.

While the anti-superstition raids of the nineteenth and early twentieth century were instituted to advance the creation of a civilized state, the Creole elite sought to construct the postcolonial nation in the image of the former colonizer through white immigration. According to de la Fuente, "White immigrants were...seen as the solution to two separate but intimately linked "dangers": those of blacks and labor" (2001:100). Notwithstanding the encouragement and systematic migration policies that favored white immigration, the necessity of cheap labor to satisfy the demands of the sugar industry persisted. Cuba's project of whitening through family-based Spanish immigration and colonization initiative thus failed. Of the 780,000 Spaniards that entered during the 1902-1931 period, only approximately 250,000 remained and many of those who stayed moved away from laboring in the fields to take on more prestigious administrative positions in the *centrales* or in the urban centers, thus making the demand for cheap labor an urgent priority (Naranjo Orovio 1984).

Pressured by North American sugar interests and expanding sugar production on the island, by 1902 the Cuban government reluctantly began to authorize the importation

of seasonal laborers from neighboring Caribbean territories. As I demonstrate in the forthcoming chapter, for the next three decades a steady flow of several hundred thousand Antillean migrants started to enter the island. By the latter part of the 1920s, their presence was vehemently attacked on the grounds that they were part of the capitalist machinery of the United States. An anti-imperialist and racist discourse was provoked by an exclusionary nationalist sentiment that positioned foreign blacks as not only an economic liability, but also a social threat to the integrity of the nation. In an attempt to defend the national character and safeguard Cuba from the invasion of Antillean *braceros* (field hands), by the 1930s under Gerardo Machado's regime and the brief Ramón Grau San Martín administration, tens of thousands of Caribbean and specifically Haitian labor migrants were repatriated.

The ploy to populate the country with thousands of Spaniards and the fight against Afro-Caribbean immigrants exposed the whitening ideal of this period and the fragility of notions of racial equality. Spaniards monopolized the highest positions in the agricultural and industrial sectors, and although equally skilled, blacks (local or foreign) were squeezed out (Serviat 1986). Thus, not only were Afro-Cubans faced with a heavily outfitted foreign labor force that compromised their economic opportunities, the fight against the admission of Antilleans also put into question the possibility of their social integration. Under the banner of Martí's racially harmonious nation, Cuba's black populations were able to claim status as citizens, but discriminatory immigration policies revealed that they, like other blacks, would not be granted a space to participate as full members of the republic. Many Afro-Cubans, aware of these socio-political ramifications littered the press in opposition maintaining that Spaniards also negatively

impacted the nation (see McLeod 2000: 49-54). In the words of Augustín Izquierdo we get a true sense of how much Afro-Cubans valued the foundational basis of Cuban nationhood and the degree to which they were troubled by the disinterest and dishonesty of the ruling elite, “they should have sufficient merit to proclaim ‘that this republic is only for whites’ and not shield themselves by identifying dangers for our nationality in the increase in the race of color” (ibid: 51).

In response to the socio-economic and political disenfranchisement the Afro-Cuban population faced, an alternative vision of Cuban nationalism emerged through the formation of the first and only black political party, Partido Independiente de Color (PIC).²⁵ As a political organization that mobilized blacks across the country and utilized the transcendent language of Martí’s cordial republic to support their egalitarian mission, the PIC demanded that Afro-Cubans be included to equal participation in the political, economic and social life of the Cuban Republic. The discourse on Cuba’s racial democracy, which the Creole elites manipulated to hide the socio-economic disparities between Cuba’s races, was turned on its head, as blacks declared that this foundation myth only served to further exclude them and Afro-Caribbean immigrants. Since the PIC was an overtly black, seemingly separatist movement with descendants from the Haitian Revolution as its leaders (Estenoz and Ivonnet) and other actively involved Antilleans, Cuban authorities viewed them as discordantly racist and unpatriotic.²⁶ The violent

²⁵ The absence of Afro-Cubans elected to political office in 1908 was also a catalyst that spawned the formation of the PIC for more see, Aline Helg (1997: 99, 104, 235-8).

²⁶ Aline Helg’s enlightening study on the black struggle for equality in Cuba provides several references to the active involvement of Haitian and Jamaican immigrants in the PIC, see pp. 67, 173-4, 197, 207-8. Interestingly, many of the blacks who participated in the 1912 armed protest were trained by Haitian instructors with previous French military training (pp. 67) or outfitted with talismans and charms made by Haitians pp. 197. For reasons of their perceived militancy and proclivity for witchcraft, Antilleans, especially Haitians were feared and despised, as made vividly clear by an Oriente interim rural guard, approximately six months after the massacre: “[T]he steady introduction of individuals of the colored race

repression of the organization manifested itself in 1912 with the massacre of an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Afro-Cubans from Oriente. With their deaths, the specter of another Haiti or second black republic was also said to die (Duharte Jiménez 1983).

Thus far, I have attempted to demonstrate several things about the early republican period of Cuban nationalism. Namely, I have argued that with the coming of independence the discourse of racial equality was garnered to construct a new Cuban subject. Given the prevalent preoccupation with questions of race *vis a vis* the construction of a civilized national landscape, along with the fears that Cuba would become another Haiti once it ceased to be a colony, the quest for independence had to be cast in a new light. Ideological strategies of incorporation, namely Martí's discursive pronouncement of a raceless nation and racial fraternity were an attempt to locate blacks and whites as equal national subjects. Through re-conceptualizing racial mixture not as an evolutionary process of whitening as Saco would argue, but as a condition of social and cultural exchange, Martí reevaluated mestizaje as part of the natural consequence of the colonial and plantation system. Hence, Cuba and Cubanness were re-imagined as an innately hybrid space and condition. Yet, immigration policies and the massacre of 1912 revealed the extent to which "whiteness" was still extolled as the precursor to defining 19th and early 20th century nationhood and modernity. Additionally confirming this narrative was the 1900 national commission that examined the remains of celebrated

coming from Haiti and Jamaica [has] caused some surprise in Santiago de Cuba...this element not being the most appropriate to the conventions of the country for the promotion and development of its wealth, for experience shows us that once established in this Republic, they turn out to be a pernicious element that with mischievous goals always manages to disturb the cordial relations existing between the ethnic components of this society." Coronel de la Guardia Rural, Jefe Interino del Cuerpo, to Suubsecretario de Gobernación, 22 Jan. 1913 originally quoted in Subsecretario de Gobernación al Gobernador Provincial de Oriente, Havana 10 Feb. 1913, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba (AHPSC), Fondo Gobierno Provincial, leg. 786, exp.1

mulatto hero, Antonio Maceo, and later concluded that while he was phenotypically of the black race, his brain and therefore military brilliance were indicators of his innate whiteness (Helg 1997: 104-105).

As we move into the second republican period, the international *modernism* art movement became the catalyst for critiquing U.S. imperialism on the island. But, more importantly Cubans were given the tools to engage in a process of discovery and recovery thus re-imagining *cubanidad*. It is to this phenomenon that I now turn.

Discursive Modalities of Modernity – Cuba’s First and Second Republic

In his publication, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitch, Postmodernism*, Matei Calinescu offers a stimulating analysis of the discursive modalities of modernity and their fundamental differences. Critical to his discussion is his contention that the concept itself is founded on two distinct meanings: modernity as a socio-economic moment in Western industrial and historical development and modernity as a concept or aesthetic ideal. While these two versions of modernity mutually influence each other, Calinescu maintains that they also attempt to stand as autonomous principles through the negation of each other. His central argument is summarized in the ensuing passage:

It is impossible to say precisely when one can begin to speak of the existence of two distinct and bitterly conflicting modernities. What is certain is that at some point during the first half of the nineteenth century an irreversible split occurred between modernity as stage in the history of Western civilization – a product of science and technological progress, of the industrial revolution, of the sweeping economic and social changes brought about by capitalism – and modernity as an aesthetic concept. Since then, the relations between the two modernities have been reducibly hostile, but not without allowing and even stimulating a variety of mutual influences in their rage for each other’s destruction (1987:41).

Given that cultural nationalism in Cuba and Latin America was a progressive movement dedicated, and in many ways bound to the discourse of modernity, Calinescu's description of the existence of two conflicting modernities allows us to differentiate between the first nationalist period as being one engaged in more universal principles of statecraft, while the subsequent projects moved inwards to more vernacular aesthetic expressions of modernity.²⁷ According to this distinction, the early republican period, which was marked by significant industrial expansion, suggests that the appropriation of metropolitan conceptions of progress and modernity gave the Creole elite the tools for crafting a nationality that would be able to participate in the wider western world. But Cuba's ardent attempt to be part of the European produced meta-narrative on modernity disallowed, to a certain degree, a self-conscious appraisal of their distinct identity. For the newly independent elite, the cultural traditions of the Afro-Cuban masses (whose numbers were considerable) did not adhere to the metropolitan discourse of modernity, progress, and civilization. Instead, the cultural imprint of metropolitan Spain and the United States became markers of the modern.²⁸

With the exception of figures like Martí who stressed the uniqueness of the hybrid condition of Cuba and the Americas more generally, constructions of national identity in the early republican period revealed the rather ambivalent relationship Cuba had with her

²⁷ For more work on the conflation of cultural nationalism and modernity in Latin America see, Nestór García Canclini (1995 and 1996)

²⁸ In Cuba's quest for sovereignty the United States became the emblem of the future and as Louis Pérez Jr. has convincingly argued, "Contact with the North provided new ways to distinguish between Cuban and Spanish and contributed further to the formation of national identity" (1999:54). But other scholars, in particular Santiago Colás contends in his "Of Creole Symptoms, Cuban Fantasies, and Other Latin American Postcolonial Ideologies" that, "the Latin American postcolonial cultures I advocate seeks to understand the simultaneous impossibility and persistence of the project of producing independent Latin American cultural identities," 1994:385. Hence, an argument can be made that the process of decolonization in Latin America was indeed incomplete as metropolitan Spain and the United States informed how postcolonial culture was to be defined.

former colonizer and the emergent neocolonial relationship with the United States. The model of material progress offered by the U.S., along with the cultural traditions and institutions of Spain, were unproblematically embraced as emblems through which Cuba's postcolonial nationalism were first articulated. And marginalized identities, particularly Afro-Cubans, were often not enveloped into this vision. In fact the early republic exhibited a derivative form of nationalism whereby the quest for identity did not produce an independent national culture. The counter-discourse that emerged in the mid twentieth century, however, marked a shift from mimicry to an exploration of "indigenous" markers of difference, and as a result, a contested exaltation of "Africanness." The aesthetic and intellectual concept of modernity therefore presented a framework for rethinking the Afro-Cuban contribution to national culture and the means by which Cuba was able to contribute to the metropolitan discourse on modernity without forfeiting their identity.

My discussion of Calinescu's dualistic treatment of modernity and my subsequent conclusion that this two-fold definition has a historical specificity in Cuba bring me to Partha Chatterjee's characterization of nationalism as a project of mediation between an "inner" and "outer" domain. In his examination of Indian nationalism Chatterjee attempts to disrupt the tendency of appropriating an Andersonian discourse of modularity to explain "third-world" nationalisms. To this end he asserts:

Anticolonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the "outside," of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology...The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is, I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa (1993: 6).

Within Chatterjee's examination of nationalism and Calinescu's analysis of modernity a parallel conclusion is drawn – third world nationalism like modernity exhibit a dialectic between an outward reaching engagement with western principles and an inward aesthetic engagement with the “essence” of cultural identity. The specificities of Cuba's experience with decolonization, modernity, and nationalism, however, suggest that Latin American anticolonial nationalism assumed its own character. Unlike the Bengali elite who engaged with the enlightenment ideals of the West while simultaneously “preserv[ing] their distinctness” (Chatterjee 1993: 6), the early Cuban republic did not construct a “people” to represent or mediate, for there was no clear distinction between the national public and former colonizer. According to Alonso, “In Spanish America there has been no autochthonous sphere that could be configured and opposed overtly to the West as a strategy of containment, since cultural identity has been so inextricably bound to modernity” (1998:35). This absence of a simultaneous material and spiritual engagement reveals the vexing quandary of applying Chatterjee's model to Latin American and Caribbean nationalisms. For, while the aesthetic expressions of the Bengali elite represented a “spiritual” space outside western models, the contestatory posture utilized by the Cuban intelligentsia through an embrace of the “spiritual” reservoir of expressive forms informed by the humble folk was not independent from the west, but intimately informed by the international vocabulary of modernism produced in metropolitan centers like France and the United States.

***Modernism, Afrocubanismo & New Interpretations of Cubanidad
The Second Republic (1933-1958)***

It is against the backdrop of foreign control, radical social movements and political transitions that the general call for a new national consciousness and political, economic, and cultural reforms found expression.²⁹ The hegemonic dominance of North America prompted a nationalist response that in Chatterjee's terms, constituted a exploration of the inner "spiritual" domain marked by cultural difference "[whereby] the new subjectivity was constructed...not on a conception of universal humanity, but rather on particularity and difference" (1993:75).

During the early decades of the 20th century Cuban artists and intellectuals, primarily from Havana, created a repertoire of images that would embrace this notion of *difference* for the new interpretations of *cubanidad*. Through movements such as *la vanguardia*, *minorista* and *afrocubanismo*,³⁰ as well as the foundation of avant-garde magazines like *Revista de Avance*, and cultural institutions such as the *Sociedad de Folklore*, the reconstruction of Cuba's national patrimony was given a public and international forum. As Vera Kutzinski reminds us, the defense of the nation against

²⁹ The expansion of U.S. capital in the form of ever-expanding *centrales* (sugar plantations) accounted for more than 80 percent of sugar production on the island. North American corporations including the Hershey Company, the American Sugar Refining Company, and the United Fruit Company consolidated Cuba's identity as a sugar producing nation, but foreclosed Cuba's participation in its management. Investors from the United States owned valuable farmlands, railroads, and utilities, which strengthened their significant political and socioeconomic power and influence in Cuba. Outside of this North American presence and influence on national life, Machado's decision to illegally extend his presidential term in 1928 and the ensuing Wall Street stock market crash, incited protests from all sectors of Cuban society which contributed to the ousting of his dictatorship and political turmoil.

³⁰ Robin Moore in his acclaimed publication (1997:192) distinguishes between the artistic vanguard and artistic minority by stressing that the former engaged in artistic production for a mostly commercial, international consumer and thus for great profit. The artistic minority, on the other hand, "endeavored to create sophisticated and socially relevant art of enduring value". Some of the artists associated with the *vanguardia* movement included: Antonio Gattorono, Carlos Enriques, Amelia Pelaez, and Wilfredo Lam., while the artist of the *minorista* included: Alejo Carpentier, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Agustín Acosta, and painter Eduardo Abela.

North American imperialism awakened an ambivalent project of recuperation that sought to embrace autochthonous cultural symbols of the folk (1993: 134-162). But who exactly constituted the folk? And what native symbols were embraced as defiant markers of difference and a new national subjectivity?

While prevailing notions of *cubanidad* conjured an image of the Creole elite, the search for the central ingredients of *lo cubano* during the mid twentieth century prompted an investigation and selection of what Raymond Williams (1977) has termed elements of the “surviving past.” For Williams, in any given society there are residual building blocks including traditions, people, or ideas of the immediate past that have some impact on the dominant culture which when appropriated by the dominant give rise to new emergent meanings and values. To this end, elements of the surviving past are selectively recuperated over time for the purpose of solidifying the hegemonic structures of a given society. New forms and ideas are constantly emerging while others are suppressed or obscured from consciousness only to appear at a later stage (115-120). This process of negotiation over the selection, stylization, and distribution of popular forms while contained to the local also extends beyond the borders of the nation-state. As art critic Ticio Escobar (1996) suggests, the struggles over the meanings and values assigned to popular arts and culture are in accordance not only to the desires of the ruling class but also to the demands of international art movements and markets (101-102).

The multiple reinterpretations of Cubanness in the 1920s and 1930s thus have to be situated within these political dynamics and particularly within the international Modernism Movement, for it is within the language of modernism that the evolving discourse of *cubanidad* began to take shape. In response to cultural and political

domination, artists of the *Vanguardia* and *Afrocubanismo* movements sought to create a national artistic aesthetic that created an “indigenous” cultural sphere through the incorporation of the folk. A case in point is the visual and literary engagements with a romanticized peasant class or *guajiro* that located Cuba’s revolutionary triumphs within natural associations to the land. It further provided a space wherein the indigenous Amerindian (Taino, Hatuey, and Siboney) cultures were recast as significant contributors to the nation’s cultural patrimony (Martínez 1994:51-74).

Yet, although *Indigenismo* and *Guajirismo* nationalism offered an alternative outlet for expressing a non-threatening and somewhat familiar expression of *cubanidad*, artists of the *Afrocubanismo* movement, as Moore maintains, “ultimately proved most effective in symbolizing [new interpretations of] Cubanness” (1997:127). This was in part because the artists of this movement like its Haitian counterpart – *Indigénisme*, had an anti-assimilationist stance coupled with a strong sense of racial pride. In other words, the anti-establishment activities in Paris were translated to fit the local socio-political climate of Cuba and in particular used as a lens to explore the liberatory possibilities of African cultures. It also connected to a wider Caribbean search for identity, distinct from the European and American colonizer; an identity that permits one to stand in certitude against the effects of domination. Thus, Modernism, as a movement in the arts did not solely exist as a counter-discourse formulated in Europe, but rather developed its own vernacular expressions throughout the postcolonial world to construct an alternative to what was inherited from colonialism. In the case of Cuba, as Juan A. Martínez (1994) argues, “[m]odernist primitivism provided the Cuban vanguardia [and afrocubanist] with the inspiration and the tools to interpret their own African roots” (1994:76).

Africa became a central theme in both the *afrocubanismo* and *vanguardia* attempts to build a sense of cultural authenticity which would energize and unify modern Cuba. There was an emphasis, therefore, on an African emotive sensibility that stood in opposition to the rationalism of Europe. A different consciousness became possible as Cubans (whites, blacks, and mulattos) began to theorize on the location of Africa within the narration of nation. Poetry that incorporated the folk, specifically the literary explosion of *poesía mulata*, presented a vehicle for political criticism, a revalorization of African culture, as an avenue for the assertion of an authentic national consciousness that also attempted to link local artist to a larger global community.

Abstracted elements of the neglected African presence in Cuba, notably religious, dance, and music traditions, were also for the first time receiving prolific acknowledgement locally through publications, performances and exhibitions, as well as globally due to a burgeoning tourist scene on the island and art markets abroad. The carnival *comparsas*, the urban *rumba*, as well as cubist and surrealist paintings that explored religious themes of African origin became part of the corpus of images that represented a unique nascent national heritage and identity, in a word, a new *cubanidad*. In this quest for native symbols of *difference*, the *Afrocubanismo* movement enveloped the black folk and in turn, “made [them] the equivalent of an indigenous native American” (Barnet 1980:42), thus enabling the assertion of a claim to an Afro-Cuban identity, albeit tentatively, within the definition of *cubanidad*.³¹ No longer were their expressive forms relegated to the peripheries, but reconfigured as native to Cuba and its identity. Black culture also presented a “cultural alternative to North-Americanization”

³¹ While the “black craze” focused on the expressive forms of this subordinate class, the gesture of bringing black culture to the forefront of the reinterpretation of *cubanidad* turned the gaze away from the actual positioning of blacks in Cuban society. Thus this gesture seldom moved out of the domain of rhetoric.

(Kutzinski 1993:141). As Vera Kutzinski notes in the acclaimed literary masterpiece of *Afrocubanismo, ¡EcueYamba-O!* – Afro-Cuban “religious ceremonies were depicted as “therapeutic” alternatives to the culture sugar created” (ibid). For Carpentier, “Only the blacks ...ferverently preserved an Antillean character and tradition ...The *bongo* drum, antidote to Wall Street” (ibid). In opposition to the supposed “threat” black and African elements posed for a modern *cubanía* [self-conscious, desirous will to be Cuban], the 1930s national paradigm incorporated Afro-Cubans and their distinctive cultural traditions as a critical component of national culture. Hence, from slave to national icon, Afro-Cuban culture in this national moment was rescued from the status of permanent inferiority, as in the first republic, to an essential constitutive element of the new Cuba.

Kutzinski (1993) and Robin Moore (1997) have argued that political inclusion was achieved through the commodification, sanitization, and folklorization of black culture. Notwithstanding the ramifications of these processes of legitimization, the cultural products of Cuba’s black population were given a space within this revisionist framework that attempted to delineate the constitutive elements of the Cuban race. I therefore agree with de la Fuente’s assertion that this reformative period provided Afro-Cubans “new opportunities to claim their central role” to the constructions of a new nation and national identity (1998:57).

The New Cuba/Cubanía

Set with the task of creating a pan-national aesthetic and cultural identity through a reinterpretation of Cuba’s racial heterogeneity, the Cuban intelligentsia situated the literary and artistic expressions of *cubanidad* within a new redemptive discourse on race

and nation. With the search for an authentic culture, the work of Fernando Ortiz became valuable to the ensuing exploration of Cubanness and Afro-Cuban culture more generally. As founder of the Sociedad del Folklore Cubano in 1923 and director of its journal *Archivo del Folklore* from 1924-1929, Ortiz's work on the African component of Cuban culture was given a public forum. His exploration into Cuba's vernacular culture within an examination of Afro-Cuban practices was further legitimated in 1937 when he and renowned mulatto poet, Nicolás Guillén, founded the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos and oversaw the publication of its journal, *Estudios Afrocubanos* (1937-1944).³² Ortiz's intellectual move from speaking about Afro-Cuban criminality and uncivilized practices to a valorization of Cuban culture, mirrored quite vividly the changing national discourse. Cuba was no longer a country of blacks and whites, but indeed a *mestizo* nation where the cultures of both races played active and equal roles.

Ortiz's examinations of socio-cultural change over time, or what he called *transculturación*, explored the dynamics that shaped Cuba's new national cultural identity.³³ Like the ideology of *mestizaje*, which Stutzman (1981) argued emerged out of

³² Ortiz's interest in Afro-Cuban cultural practices extended throughout the 1920s to the late 1950s and led to a proliferation of publications that explored their music, dance, and religious traditions. They include, for example: "La antigua fiesta afrocubana de día de reyes," reprinted by M. Barnet and Angel Fernández, (1984 [1920]); "Los cabildos afrocubanos," pp. 11-40, Reprinted by M. Barnet and Angel Fernández, eds. (1984, [1921]); *Archivo del folklore cubano*. (1924-30); and Fernando Ortiz (1951).

³³ The term "transculturation" was coined in the 1930s by Ortiz in critique of the unilateral concept of "acculturation." Ortiz used the term "transculturation" in an attempt to explain the "reciprocal" process of creolization in Cuba, which he argued unfolded in five phases. The first phase Ortiz defines as "hostility" refers to the uprooting and enslavement of blacks and their subsequent position as the "accursed race." The second phase – "compromise" – entails the process of miscegenation where the first generation of Creoles mix with blacks, but trust between the two is non-existent. The third phase – "adaptation" – refers to the second generation of creoles who attempt to maintain their social status by acquiring the attributes and material possessions of whites, while denying the black or "African" components of their heritage. This phase is characterized as being the most frustrating because although the second-generation Creole acquired "symbolic capital," they still remained politically disenfranchised. The fourth phase is "vindication" and marks the period after the crisis of identity witnessed in the third phase, which results in the "man of color regain[ing] his dignity" and is followed by a growing mutual respect between the races. The final stage, "integration" is marked by a utopic vision of cultural and racial synthesis.

the history of miscegenation, Ortiz's use of transculturation was to discuss the process of intermixture and the formation of a new national subject. His focus on the "reciprocal" process of creolization, however, professed an idea of racial and cultural synthesis that differed from Stutzman's characterization of *mestizaje* as "an inclusive ideology of exclusion." Whereas *mestizaje* in Ecuador is defined as a selective process through which "subordinate peripheral heterogeneity [is assimilated] to the dominant homogenous center" through a process of *blanqueamiento* (1981:49), Ortiz maintains that the Spaniard and African never truly existed as primordially "pure" static identities (1939). His idea of fusion suggests that unlike Saco's endorsement of *mestizaje* as the means to "neutralize" the threat of Cuba's imminent Africanization, Ortiz and Martí's view saw miscegenation as part of Cuba's history of slavery and colonialism, therefore an intrinsically Cuban phenomenon.

To further explore *mestizaje* as a process of transculturation, Ortiz turned to a culinary metaphor – an indigenous stew, *ajiaco* – to explore the dynamics of socio-cultural change overtime:

Perhaps it will be thought that one must seek *cubanidad* in that new and synthetically succulent sauce formed by the fusion of the human lineages dissolved in Cuba. Not at all: *cubanidad* lies not in the result but also in its complex formative process, disintegrative and integrative, in the substances that enter into it, in the environment in which it happens, and in the changes it undergoes along the way. The characteristic thing about Cuba is that, being an *ajiaco*, it is not a finished dish but a constant cooking (1940: 169).

Although the concept of transculturation and its culinary exemplar undoubtedly posit an evolutionary schema, its latent transcendent message of cultural fusion points to the processual and imperfect aspect of cultural contact and identity formation. In suggesting that Cuba is an *ajiaco*, Ortiz creatively dispels any notions of completion and disrupts the very concept of cultural-fixity. It follows that *cubanidad*, is historically

constituted, in that the Cuba of 1898 is not the Cuba of 1933, nor can we expect the same culture to exist in 2000. The melding of heterogeneous elements is the only given. It is through this notion of Cuban identity in flux that we can now begin to make sense and appreciate the opening vignette, in particular, China's revision of Los Van Van, "Somos Cubanos" where her additions to the chorus suggest that Haitian, Chinese, and Jamaican cultures that have remained at the bottom of the stew are now slowly beginning to float on the top, making an assertive claim as part of the nation's cultural patrimony.

Paradoxically, while the introspective national period of the 1930s fostered the reappraisal of the nation's black "folk," it also bore witness to an exclusionary moment that served to criminalize black labor migrants. The consistent flow of these *braceros* under the auspices of United States sugar/finance interests resulted in a conflation of their identities with North American imperialism and capitalism. The worldwide economic crisis that locally displaced all sectors of the Cuban public fueled a nationalist and anti-imperial discourse that positioned these black foreigners as a hazard that would instigate a dilution of *cubanidad* (see Carr 1998; Alvarez Estévez 1988). In the words of an 87 year old Haitian-Cuban retired farmer, "we were the backbone [of the sugar industry] and from our sweat and tears the *yanqui* (American) became richer, but it was the Jamaican who was the true *yanqui* for they spoke the white man's language better than he did" (personal communication, Felix Duprí 2000). While the relationship between these culturally distinct immigrant laborers will be explored in the forthcoming chapter, the words of Mr. Duprí reveal the extent to which Antilleans became the scapegoat for anti-American sentiments. Thus, within this search for an authentic national culture there was

a simultaneous paradoxical integration of Cuba's black population and divisive rejection of immigrant blacks on the grounds of cultural and socio-political incongruities.

Although this hostile and exclusive *machadato* environment suggested that "Cuba [was to be] for the Cubans"(Craib qtd. in de la Fuente 1997:41), the formation of several chapters of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) along with the establishment of the Partido Comunista de Cuba (Cuba Communist Party) contributed to a multiethnic labor movement that critiqued the limits of the multiethnic *cubanidad* under construction and encouraged black racial pride among the disenfranchised (Carr 1996, 1998). According to McGaritty and Cárdenas, "The Partido Comunista resurrected the demands of the Partido de los Independientes de Color, [PIC] assuming the role of defender of the rights of a working class that was overwhelmingly composed of black and mulattos, along with black immigrant workers from the Caribbean" (1995:90). While the complexities of racial discrimination in Cuba were beyond the grasp of the Communist Party, it arguably provided a popular political platform to begin to interrogate these dynamics.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION: A Mandate for Change

Re-Imagining Cubanidad

Nineteenth and twentieth century representations of *cubanidad* provide us with a preamble to consider how the shifts in the meaning of Cubanness after the famed 1959 revolution and the contemporary period differed from the earlier ways of imagining Cuba. This historical background also allows us to trace and understand how some of these earlier ideals and expectations of a nation "with all and for the good of all" were rehabilitated in the service of revolutionary integrationist goals. In light of the fluid and

transcendent notion of nationhood Ortiz suggests we can begin to engage the question of Haitian identities in Cuba, not as a thing of the past, but part of a late 20th and early 21st century regional re-evaluation of cultural identity.

The conjunctures of internal economic and socio-political readjustments along with the rise of folk tourism projects have presented a framework for expressing marginal identities. Recent work by Frank Scherer on the revitalization of Cuba's Chinese communities, for example expresses this contemporary phenomenon more poignantly when he states that there is increasingly "the opening of alternative spaces, where the construction of identities other than those prescribed by the Cuban state can take place" (2001:154).

The opening of diverse public arenas, which was a result of the *apertura* or the tentative political and cultural opening following the socio-economic and ideological crisis of the 1990s, has been critical for mapping new expansive cultural terrains of expressive forms and also, and perhaps more poignantly for my concerns here, spaces for emergent counter-narratives and alternative articulations of national cultural identity.

It is against the backdrop of the various shifts and reconfigurations of *cubanidad* that we can then make sense of the previous foil to Cuba's prosperity and consolidation of a rational and civilized nation now playing a pivotal role in regional reformulations of what it means to be Cuban. Given the early to mid 20th century reappraisal of the contribution of Afro-Cuban culture to the general society, it is significant that the music, dance, and religious traditions were further actively revived under the banner of "folklore" in the 1960s and "folktourism" after 1989 to the present. The immediate

consequences of the Cuban Revolution will help frame these dynamics and contextualize the appearance of a regional hyphenated Haitian-Cuban identity.³⁴

On 1 January 1959 Fulgencio Batista and his administration fled Cuba as the 26th of July Movement troops marched into Havana. Six years after carnival festivities in Santiago de Cuba erupted into attacks against the Moncada Garrison, Fidel Castro and his popular revolution emerged triumphant. Many of the goals of the revolution were crystallized years earlier in one of Castro's most famous speeches – "History Will Absolve Me" – wherein he stated:

In Oriente, the largest province, the lands of the United Fruit Company link the northern and the southern coasts. There are *two hundred thousand peasant families* who do not have a single acre of land to till to provide food for their starving children. On the other hand, nearly *three hundred thousand caballerías* of cultivable land owned by powerful interests remain uncultivated. If Cuba is above all an agricultural state, if its population is largely rural, if the city depends on these rural areas, if the people from our countryside won our war of independence, if our nation's greatness and prosperity depend on a healthy vigorous rural population that loves the land and knows how to work it, if this population depends on a state that protects and guides it, then how can the present affairs be allowed to continue? (1959).³⁵

What is particularly revealing in Castro's statement is that unlike previous episodes of political unrest under the first and second republic, the revolution of 1959 was grounded in a call for a social revolution that identified its goals of freedom with the people, specifically marginal rural populations. In this regard, it revived the ideologies and mandates of the independence war era as a means of legitimating the movement and appealing to the masses of Cubans displaced by North American control and influence. The difference was that unlike the nineteenth century, as philosopher Alberto Lamar

³⁴ The public affirmation of this hyphenated identity is a regional phenomenon in that one mostly finds the performance of these identities in State-sponsored public festivals in Santiago de Cuba and other provinces in the eastern part of the island.

³⁵ Castro's famous speech was made during his defense plea at his trial after the assault on Moncada Garrison. Within his eloquent testimonial Castro stipulated the goals of the July 26 Revolutionary Movement, which formed the revolutionary mandate of the 1959 Revolution. Speech translated by Margarita Zimmerman and reproduced in *The Cuba Reader* (2003:307), emphasis indicated in original text.

Schweyer maintained, “To be Cuban and to be a patriot was to be anti-Spanish...After 1959, to be Cuban implied increasingly to be anti-American” (cited in Pérez Jr.1999:490). One of the reasons for this change in sentiment is that while the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in 1934 and the creation of the constitution of 1940 gave Cubans a renewed sense of hope that they were in charge of their socio-economic and political destiny, the pervasive dominance of the U.S. sugar ventures and the Batista dictatorship shattered those dreams.³⁶

It was not simply that Fidel Castro identified Cuba’s social inequities with the U.S. imperialist penetration on the island but the failure to uphold the civil liberties and economic freedoms outlined in the 1940 constitution also pointed to rampant domestic corruption. The failure of the revolutionary past to build a progressive all-inclusive national sovereignty was, for Castro, in part due to the lack of an “effective implementation of popular will and real justice” (Castro qtd. in Chomsky et. al 2003: 307). The ousting of the U.S.-supported Batista government was therefore not just the overthrow of his dictatorship but also a defiant rejection of all that his administration supported and represented especially North American political, economic, and cultural hegemony. The revolution thus provided a platform for Cubans to define, rescue, and articulate a new *patria* under relative conditions of autonomy. The “post-colonial condition” which Alonso (1998) argued was not readily achieved in the Latin American post-independence period became an emergent possibility in Cuba after 1959. This was so in part because the Cuban Revolution was not an isolated struggle for autonomy but one related to other anticolonial struggles after WWII and the emergence of “Third

³⁶ For more on the socio-economic and political penetration of United States owned sugar companies in Cuba, see Oscar Zanetti and Alejandro García, (1976). Also refer to Louis A. Pérez, Chapter 7 “Illusive Expectations” (1999:445-505)

World” nationalism in the Caribbean, India, and Africa. This popular revolution was thus not simply a local momentary period of chaos but a cry for radical socio-political transformations that had a global resonance (Pérez-Stable 1999).

Within the new revolutionary logic the dominant discourse of “modernity” took on new meaning. The proposition of an egalitarian autonomous sovereignty reconfigured the Euro-centric discourse on modernity, and in the process consolidated and reenergized the cultural forms of the 1920s-40s, transforming them into the vernacular expressions of a new civilization. As the locus of the revolution shifted to the Left much of the preexisting social order was rearranged to suit a new moral economy. The capitalist-driven society of the previous era and the civilizing mission of adopted imperialist policies were replaced by a local articulation of socialism that although stood in opposition to the United States would come to adopt the philosophies of another world power—the Soviet Union. The revolutionary affirmation of nationality redefined and inverted the social order of times past. As a result of the popular platform in which the revolution was waged and the notable change in the material conditions that moved towards canceling race-based socio-economic inequities, the revolution became intimately connected with the disenfranchised, dispossessed and displaced citizens, including peasants, workers, women, and Afro-Cubans. In other words, “[t]he 26th July [revolutionary movement, according to Castro] is the revolution of the *humildes*, [humble or less fortunate] for the *humildes*, and by the *humildes*” (Castro qtd. in Pérez-Stable 1999 [1994]:81).

The revolution’s commitment to undoing Cuba’s social ills and vesting the rebel masses with every power to achieve social mobility, gainful employment, adequate health

care, and universal education, manifested itself in a series of radical reforms that were immediately instituted. The revolutionary government went on a campaign of nationalizing land and giving back to the populace the means of controlling and reaping the benefits of their labor. The agrarian reform enacted in the summer of 1959 foreshadowed the radical redistribution of wealth and national resources that was to follow. Within this redistributive logic, basic social services were made available free of charge to the population, including but not limited to, schooling, health care, social security, burial services, food rations, and basic amenities (Benjamin et al. 1986). The nationalization in 1961 of private schools, once the bastion of elite privilege, and the national Literacy Campaign, made education accessible for the masses regardless of race, color, class, gender, and economic status (Fagen 1969). Interestingly, the call to eradicate illiteracy on the island coincided with the breaking of diplomatic relations with the United States and the Bay of Pigs Invasion. The integrationist goals of the revolution were acutely politicized through the Literacy Campaign, as it attempted to not only relieve the Cuban masses from illiteracy, but also bridge the gap between urban and rural residents, making education the right and responsibility of the new citizen. Likewise, the government's increase of wages and job opportunities further served to move towards an egalitarian republic.

The battle to raise the standard of living, reduce unemployment, and provide basic social services to the Cuban public was not completely divorced from issues of race and however minute, Blacks of all ethnicities, as I will argue in Chapter Three, stood to benefit from these institutional changes. We see in a speech by Fidel Castro in March 1959 that he was aware of the discrimination Afro-Cubans faced and argued that, "one of

the most just battles that must be fought, a battle that must be emphasized more and more...the battle to end racial discrimination in Cuba: one that barred blacks from access to cultural centers and another, 'the worst,' one that barred them access to jobs" (Castro qtd. in de la Fuente 2001:263). From as early as the end of March 1959 the campaign to eradicate institutional racism became part of Cuba's socialist mandate. Although in his speech Castro focused on racial discrimination in the work place, the revolutionary government set out on an unparalleled project of desegregating Cuba and opening up public spaces for both blacks and white to interact freely. Racial discrimination and racial prejudice were denounced by the revolutionary government as being "anti-nation" and contradictory to the creation of a new *patria* (Sarduy and Stubbs 1993:6). Thus, from the workplace, beaches, elite and exclusive social clubs (e.g. the Miramar Yacht Club), to hotels, and other recreational facilities, racial barriers excluding the participation of all of Cuba's citizens were lifted. This gradual process of desegregation turned the rhetoric of Marti's racial equality into concrete legislation and structural changes.

Within these ameliorations and commitment to equal access, the issues of "class" became a prominent concern for the revolutionary government. While these structural changes benefited Cuba's disenfranchised communities, in which Afro-Cubans were numerous, the initial laws did not directly designate the issue of "race" as part of new reformist legislation. Instead, the eradication of material inequities, which was a critical programmatic ideal of socialist discourse adopted from as early as the 1930s, denied the Cuban public a platform for engaging questions of race and racial integration as phenomena in and of themselves. As a result, although the perceived institutional changes put in place by the revolutionary government to mitigate the discrepancies within the

social and economic structure were deemed to have resolved the race problem (Serviat 1988), the lived experience of racial exclusion and racism in contemporary Cuban society has not been eradicated (Fernández 2001)³⁷. As Walterio Carbonell provocatively argued in his 1961, *Crítica: Como surgió la cultura nacional*,³⁸ part of the inherent problem was that the revolutionary government failed to see that Cuba's social inequalities were not solely a class issue, but in fact illuminated a historical cultural conflict which in turn ascribed a racist discourse that subverted the African component of Cuba's dual Spanish and African heritage (50-55).

The incessant cultural manifestation of racism at home was particularly disparaging given Cuba's foreign policy at the time, specifically its involvement in Africa (most notably in Ethiopia and Angola) and black nationalist struggles in the United States. In the period of heightened Cold War politics and the U.S. Civil Rights movement, Cuba's identification with African Americans and the development of bilateral programs with African countries was helpful in fabricating a collective national identity around the concept of an "Afro-Latin people." The seemingly utopian paradigm of race relations that Cuba projected however, belied the realities at home. National unity

³⁷ The efforts to desegregate Cuba highlight an important dimension of racial exclusion that continues to persist today. For the Cuban government, the structural basis of racial discrimination was abolished with the coming of the Revolution. Cuban citizens were deemed "equal" under the new constitution and by extension had equal access to the nation's resources. The continual existence of racism is deemed by the revolutionary government as a private issue embedded in individual and family behavior and socialization. As racism is not seen as a public affair and part of the social practice of the State, the government can deny its existence. Yet the persistent Eurocentric bias and attitudes towards beauty and attractiveness continues to inform the ideology of mestizaje, which is predicated on the idea of racial erasure, and in particular, the celebration of the mixed individual over the black. Questions of power, social mobility and visibility remain silent within the celebration of the mestizo national ideal and by extension blacks are continually denied a place of visibility, power, and equal access in contemporary Cuba. For more on the shifting discourses on race in contemporary Cuba see Nadine Fernandez, "The changing discourse on race in contemporary Cuba," 2001.

³⁸ Carbonell's book, (*How the National Culture Arose*) was indeed revolutionary in its undertaking in that he did not follow the orthodox Communist line and as a result his book was banned by the revolutionary government. He was critical of Ortiz and the prevailing views of the marginal role played by Afro-Cubans in the shaping of Cuba's national culture.

was to be paramount and in turn speaking of race came to be seen as divisive and counterrevolutionary (C. Moore 1988; McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995-96-97).

As an example, the ardent claim of nation over race was overtly realized through the systematic repression of independent forms of black socio-political and cultural mobilization, particularly the dismantling of the *Sociedades de Color*, as well as the banning of Afro-Cuban newspapers and journals in the interest of national unity (Moore 1988: 48; Ayorinde 2005:92-93). Within the logic of the early revolutionary period, and, some may argue, even to today, mobilizing around a shared sense of culture, ethnicity or race were not only subverted in defense of the revolution, but in fact denied a space.

For some Afro-Cubans, notably exiled cultural critic, Carlos Moore (1988), filmmaker Rigoberto López (2006), and University of Havana professor, Esteban Morales Domínguez (2007), it is precisely the lack of revisionist policies regarding Cuba's black population and hence denial of the race problem, that threaten the socialist project in Cuba and illuminates the prevalent racial discrimination operating on the island.

Ironically, the persistent policy of silence on questions of race did not limit the government's re-appropriation of elements of African culture at home, notably the dance, music and religious expressions of the black working class (see Daniel 1995). The aim of creating a new historical consciousness and the search for an authentic national culture thus resulted in a paradoxical accentuation and patronization of the cultural expressions of the black "folk." Within the renewed elaboration of folklore, a point which I will expound upon in my examination of Casa del Caribe in chapter 4, the aesthetic value of cultural traditions "expunged of undesirable influences" were to stand as emblems of the new *cubanía* (Ayorinde 2005: 108). Removed from their historical, social and psycho-

spiritual contexts, Afro-Cuban religious expressions in particular have been part of a larger folklorization process that not only reduces complex phenomenon to mere spectacle, but also speaks to a larger legitimizing enterprise.

Indeed, the expressive forms linked to an African origin becomes doubly enrolled in State policy as they are pivotal to contemporary reformulations of cubanidad, and are also used as a radical political critique of the Cuban exile communities in the United States and particularly, Miami. According to de la Fuente, “Whereas the revolution’s ‘true’ Cubanness was identified with the poor and blacks, the identity of the so-called worms was portrayed as the quintessence of all the ills the revolution had avowedly eliminated: class exploitation, foreign dependency, and racism” (2001: 303). The 1980 Miami riots stood as testament to the racial discrimination the revolutionary government had ostensibly “cured” on the island.³⁹ Yet, while institutionalized racism was successfully curtailed, the structural changes made by the government did not envelop all the masses.

The “Special Period” and the Emergence of Alternative Identities

While the revolutionary government attempted to put an end to racial inequality, the socio-economic discrepancies between the races began to reveal the fragility of the nation for all that the Revolution attempted to create. Adding to the vulnerability of the revolutionary project was the demise of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which in turn catapulted Cuba’s failing economy into complete stasis. With the

³⁹ The Miami riots in 1980, as social scientists Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick (1993) argue, reveal the racial profiling of U.S. immigration policies that accepted scores of Cubans through the Mariel boatlift (*marieltos*) while simultaneously denying asylum to Haitian “boat people.” It is interesting to note that the Cuban government’s attacks on the racial injustices and racism operable in the United States and supported by the Cuban *exilos* (exile) was not at all reflective of Cuba’s racist past.

loss of markets and economic ties with the Soviets, the tightening of the U.S. embargo, and amidst the background of worldwide loss of faith in the Socialist paradigm, the permanence of Castro's socialist Cuba became a preoccupation for friends and foes on and off the island. In 1990 Fidel Castro declared that the island had entered a "Periodo Especial en Tiempo de Paz (a "Special Period in Time of Peace") which in turn bore witness to an extensive and austere restructuring program that aimed at reducing national consumption and expenditure while also consciously adopting a neoliberal dollar economy and tourism as a means of stimulating Cuba's depressed economy.

The legalization of the U.S. dollar in the summer of 1993, foreign investments, family remittances, and the authorization of different forms of self-employment, including vending and renting licenses, the opening of *paladares* (family restaurants), and *casa particulares* (guest houses), as well as the parceling of land for subsistence farming, were a few examples of the radical economic restructuring campaign. Although seemingly positive and critical for reviving the economy, the radical dollarization of the island had come at great cost, instituting a stratified economy with *pesos*, *moneda nacional* or *chavito* and dollar/Euro operating along side the *libreta* or ration book. Consequently, not only have the rapid socio-economic transformations left those previously disenfranchised further languishing in the margins but, the divides between the social classes have widened and have become acutely racialized. This is most noted in the racially marked discrepancy in who benefits from family remittances and other economic provisions instituted at this time.

Family remittances form a major part of Cuba's foreign revenue, but this dollar enclave is primarily racially defined as white. It is commonly known that much of these

remittances come from the Hispano-Cuban exile communities in the United States, and particularly, Miami. The immigration of blacks to Miami is relatively recent in comparison to the massive exodus of whites in the early decades of the Revolution. blacks are thus at a disadvantage for they have fewer numbers abroad and therefore do not stand to benefit from this lucrative exchange. Further limiting their access to a fair income is their historical and contemporary social and physical location in the Cuban nation-state. While the Revolution did in many ways level the playing field, it would be inaccurate to suggest that blacks were able to position themselves in large homes in suburban areas. Their overrepresentation in overcrowded apartment buildings *solares* and *cuarticos* made the option of opening guest homes unfeasible. Certainly the mandatory monthly tax in foreign dollars also limits their participation in the expanding tourist economy.

According to sociologist, José Bell Lara, “[b]etween 1989 and 1998, the Cuban archipelago sustained an annual growth rate of 17.9% in terms of the number of incoming tourists. In 1999, more than 1.6 million tourists were received, and by 2003 the island was beginning to close on the two million [mark]” (2002: 112). However, while these numbers suggest that the general populace stood to benefit from the increased foreign revenues entering the island, recent scholarship has stressed the degree to which economic advancement, as well as social and political mobility have become increasingly racially differentiated (Linger and Cotman 2000; Sarduy and Stubbs 2000; de la Fuente 2001). Hence, 45 years after the Revolution, questions of racial discrimination have become a central preoccupation yet again.

The discrepancies in the distribution of wealth and power resurfaced as the income gap widened, and fractured the social classes into those who have contact with foreign revenue and those that do not. Those with access to dollars or to independent income have clearly outdistanced the rest of the population. As a result, consumerism has appeared, the informal economy and the black market flourishes, prostitution has returned with a degree of vengeance, hustling for dollars has also challenged many young Cubans' ingenuity to the limits, and emigration has become a popular option. Additionally, the seriousness of the situation revealed itself more prominently with a marked increase in crime, most notably the August 1994 riots in a predominantly black neighborhood in Havana and increased out migration of predominantly mulatto and black Cubans since 1980.

Notwithstanding the gravity of this period in Cuba's contemporary history, there have also been advances made by those who have historically been rendered non-entities. The economic crisis triggered different responses from Cuba's black population, which did not only focus on hustling and sex work or *jiniterismo*. Folk tourism projects became a viable tool to generate an income and more importantly provides a space in which the undifferentiated "Afro" component of the nation has been increasingly ethnicized. Within the framework of performance other ethnicities not recognized fully by the State have received a venue to re-present and assert their distinct hyphenated identities as ethnically other but nationally Cuban. While it is true for the most part that the majority of the Cuban population has historically tended to identify itself not as distinct *razas* or races and ethnicities but indeed as Cuban, in recent years this has changed. Notwithstanding the serious implications that tourism has for the commodification of not

only black bodies, but the arts, culture and religion, for those of Haitian descent who have historically been deemed invisible within the ideological, discursive narratives of nation, tourism provides a platform to exercise some degree of strategic agency and space within the nation.

In the next chapter, I turn specifically to the Haitian question and examine the entangled history these two islands share. Of particular concern will be mapping the contours of migration from Haiti to Cuba and assessing the differentiation not only in the composition of the migrants, but also the distinct and evolving treatment they received upon arriving to the island.

CHAPTER II

¡HAYTIEN NOU YE! HAITI IN THE CUBAN CONTEXT

There is much of Haity, in its own right, in Cuban history and culture. Haity was present in the drumming ceremony with the Tumba Francesa presided over by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes on October 9, 1868. Haity was present in the Baraguá Protest, a moment in which those who rescued Cuba's national dignity took cognizance of each other by speaking in the Creole language. Haity was present in the holocaust that Flor Crombet faced in the Yateras mountain range. And now, Haity is also present -- here in Cuba, in our festival -- through the revolutionary presence of those Haitian descendants who have found their voice through the day-to-day struggles on behalf of the Revolution's consolidation in face of an inveterate enemy who, nonetheless, shall be defeated. It is in that day-to-day presence, in the context of that struggle, that Haity's presence becomes one and the same with our spiritual sense of being, with our sense of solidarity in the organizing of life. Haity is present in the drumbeats of Gagá, in the invocation of the loas of Radá and Petro -- loas who were always on the side of Fidel and the Revolution.⁴⁰

Speaking of the Haitian presence in Cuba elicits a series of conflicting responses depending on the subject position of the individual being asked. For the *exilo* community in Miami, for example, it presents an improbable suggestion that disturbs the romanticized Hispanic imagery of the Cuba they were “forced” to leave. Moreover, in keeping with the nineteenth century discursive practices of positioning Haiti as antithetical to Cuba, and esteeming the United States as a symbol of the modernity Cuba was to acquire, many Miami Cubans tend to cast the Haitian question as a concern for Dominicans, but not a problem for Cubans. Given the contradictory reception each of

⁴⁰ Joel James, “Palabras Inaugurales” (inaugural speech delivered at Teatro Heredia on 3 July 2004 commencing the 24th annual Festival of Caribbean Culture dedicated to the Haitian Bicentenary), tape recorded and transcribed by the author. Speech also available online, “Palabras de Bienvenida” de Joel James Figuerola, director de la Casa del caribe y Presidente del Festival, www.cultstgo.cult.cu/festivalcaribe04/articulos

these groups have received from the United States government and the place they each occupy within the socio-political and economic landscapes of Southern Florida, this apparent denial, and indeed rejection, of Haitians by the *exilo* community speak to the naturalization of their differences and perpetuation of their continual distinction.

This particular distancing and erasure exist to a certain degree within the distinct regions of Cuba itself. Certainly, *occidentales* (Cuban residents west of Camagüey) conceive of their Cuban reality in ways that privilege certain histories while silencing others. Most notably, the *mestizaje* ideal becomes the dominant reference for imagining the nation. Within this logic, Cuba becomes constructed as a “Latin American” space with its all embracing narrative of racial democracy that in turn elides the question of dealing with the constellation of Afro-diasporic identities within its shores.

In Oriente, however, the geographical and cultural proximity to the Caribbean brings to the fore the myriad of other ethnicities that have contributed to Cuba’s national patrimony. As an example, one just has to observe the blend of French and English surnames of the region’s residents. Moreover, the physical immediacy of both Haiti and Jamaica is made tangible from the Gran Piedra, a 75,000 ton volcanic rock perched on a mountainous peak east of the city of Santiago, near the fishing village of Siboney and a series of abandoned coffee plantations that hug the terraced terrain. One can hike to its peak and, on a clear day, see across the approximately eighty kilometers of the Windward Passage that separates southeast Cuba from northwest Haiti.

The Franco and Afro-Haitian presence is also marked in the architecture of Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo, heard in the lilt of the Spanish spoken in Oriente, expressed in the cadence of their dances and music, tasted in the local cuisine,

experienced as part of the rich spiritual tapestry, recognized in the existence of century old cultural associations and entangled in its revolutionary history.⁴¹ As indicated in the opening passage, Haitians and their cultural practices have been a part of Cuba's journey towards self actualization, providing at times an example, support or leadership, the cultural armory to camouflage revolutionary activities and a defiant counter-presence and an ally in the fight against North American imperialism.

While the foregoing accolades are now proudly pronounced by some Cuban public officials and heard by a wider local and international audience, this has not always been the case. For the most part the consistent presence of Haitians and their descendants has been undervalued or obscured within the narratives of *cubanidad*. It is only within the last three decades that the Haitian presence has been unearthed and the descendants of immigrants given a space to publicly reclaim their histories and identities.

In this chapter I examine Haitian immigration to Cuba and the socio-cultural legacies of the Haitian presence on the island. In looking at the context of both Haiti and Cuba, I argue that we get a clearer sense of the complicated situations that motivated Haitians to see Cuba as a viable option for economic and political security. Notwithstanding the ill-treatment consistently meted out against Haitians, they continued to enter and reconstitute their lives on Cuban soil. I thus demonstrate why Cuba, for some Haitians, provided a space to re-establish their lives and articulate their Haitian-ness, especially when the means of their livelihood came under threat at home.

⁴¹ Apart from the usual advertisement featuring Cuba's music and beaches, the July 2003 issue of the popular Cuban tourist magazine, *Sol y Son* featured an extended campaign that stressed Santiago's cultural distinction including its hybrid roots and Franco-Haitian heritage.

In the weeks following the close of the 1933 sugar harvest, rumors started to circulate among Antillean field laborers of the repatriation campaigns that had ordered the dismissal of thousands of cane cutters. The dead season was charged with an air of anxiety as members of this immigrant class pondered their futures and place within Cuba's changing wage economy. Many of the relatively calm *centrales* in the mountainous environs of the east soon became the sites of unrest as scores of Rural Guards and army bands patrolled sugar estates and sifted out workers without permits, official residences, or gainful employment. After the alleged culprits were rounded-up they were deposited in concentration camps or detention centers in Santiago de Cuba and then later shipped back to their countries of origin.

After years of seasonal travel, many Antillean labor migrants had made Cuba their home. At its peak, as many as 600,000 Haitians and British West Indians legally migrated to neighboring Cuba with a little more than half establishing permanent residences and families (Pérez de la Riva 1979:33). However, with the exclusionary aspirations of the Machado and the Grau Martin administrations, Cuba was to be for Cubans and not open to those deemed racially and culturally inferior or a threat to the social fabric of the nation. Interestingly, while the repatriation efforts targeted all foreign Black laborers, Haitians were singled out as the most undesirable and subject to the harshest of treatment (McLeod 1998). The abject poverty that many Haitian migrants were fleeing, their relatively lower skills and lack of education, as well as discriminatory attitudes towards their religious practices, had historically served to marginalize Haitians throughout the Caribbean, and the world more generally. Moreover, as Mimi Sheller has argued in her comparative study on the processes of democratization in Jamaica and

Haiti, the concept of freedom espoused by the successful slave-led Revolution in Haiti helped to consolidate a white “Haytien fear” narrative wherein “Europeans articulated their claims to ‘whiteness’ and ‘civility’ in contradistinction to Haitian ‘barbarism’” (2000:71). However, this narrative of *difference* was not limited to Europeans or the immediate period following Emancipation, but was also one that would be appropriated by black Cubans attempting to proclaim cultural superiority and their rightful space within a highly stratified economy and nation.

Economic uncertainties brought on by the Great Depression and increased U.S. intervention in Caribbean territories resulted in a period of heightened nationalist sentiment that manifested in some of the most egregious actions against Haiti that the region has ever known. In neighboring Dominican Republic, for example, under Trujillo’s dictatorship, tens of thousands of Haitians were massacred in what was euphemistically called *El Corte* or “the Harvest.” The flow of Haitian laborers in search of a better life in the sugar estates of the Dominican Republic triggered a migratory flow that continues well into the contemporary era. However, the severely restricted immigration laws that were implemented in the aftermath of the economic depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s developed into increased deportation campaigns and by October 1937 the official massacre of approximately 15,000 to 20,000 Haitians working in the western and central border towns (Derby 1994; Howard 2001; Turtis 2002) While competition in an overly saturated labor market was the official line of argument used to explain stricter immigration policies and the subsequent killings, there is no doubt that the confluence of issues concerning race and nationality provided key motivations for the deportation and ensuing slaughter.

Indeed, in Cuba the threat of the dilution of *cubanidad* became the platform on which all those in favor of the expulsion of Haitians rested. However, while the tragedy of the past is still present in the memories of Haitians and Dominicans alike, in Cuba the deportation efforts invariably silenced the past and temporarily erased from popular memory the presence of one of Cuba's largest Antillean immigrant groups. The measures taken to rid the island of Haitians were less severe in Cuba and arguably not as memorable. However, the incessant marginalization of this laboring class in Cuba allowed for strong cultural enclaves to develop in the interior of the island within the secluded rural agricultural outposts (*bateyes*) and hence, outside the gaze of the State and general constructions of Cuba's national cultural identity.

If we are to appreciate the significance of Haitian culture in contemporary Cuban life, any assessment of this group must depart from past approaches that oft times relegated Haitians and their cultural forms to either a disappearing class (Lundahl 1982) or a fully transculturated social group (Guanche and Moreno 1975). Previous studies of twentieth century migratory movements of Black Antilleans to Cuba often focused exclusively on the socio-economic factors that propelled this movement and the demographic patterns and figures of labor flow in the peak years of travel to the island (see Thomas-Hope 1978, Knight 1985). Other works extended the scope by examining issues of class and the intersections of racism and nationalism (Helg 1997, McLeod 1998; de la Fuente 2001). Historian Marc McLeod accurately argues, "previous studies of twentieth-century Black Caribbean migration to Cuba present a broad but incomplete outline of the subject" (2000: 2). Yet his study of the unequal treatment of British West Indians and Haitians in the first three decades of the twentieth century falls short of

providing insight into their post 1959 presence and overtly public re-presentation in contemporary national life. The uncontested view is that Haitian migration to Cuba represents a discrete historical phenomenon of the early 20th century that has little to bear on present-day cultural production on the island. This position, however, has to be reassessed if we are to fully understand the historical and contemporary significance of Cuba's second city, the province of Oriente and its links to the Caribbean.

What is to follow is a discussion of the long historical trajectory of intra-Caribbean migration that significantly shaped the region and its diasporic cultural enclaves. I will then turn to an examination of the ways in which Haiti became constructed as Cuba's ultimate "other." The last section deals specifically with the different migratory flows of "Haitian" nationals into Cuba and the distinction between three principal groups: (1) the *Franceses* (Black and mixed-race domestics who accompanied their French masters) of the late 18th and early 19th century, (2) labor migrants of the early 20th century and (3) political refugees and students of the late 20th century and early 21st century.

MIGRATION AS LIVELIHOOD STRATEGY IN THE CARIBBEAN

The postwar Caribbean migration to Britain stands as a defining moment in the extended history of transnational activities undertaken by the region's citizens. The momentous well-spring of movement from the periphery to the center immediately following WWII, or what the late Jamaican poet Louise Bennett Coverley (1966) metaphorically identified as "colonization in reverse"⁴², soon would become the

⁴² "Colonisation in Reverse" is perhaps Louise Bennett Coverley's most revered dialect poem.

benchmark for engaging questions concerning the transnational flows of people and services from the region to the metropolitan centers of Europe and North America. Indeed the migratory tradition within the Caribbean has played a significant part in the expansion of the scholarship pertaining to questions of transnationalism, empire, globalization and diasporic citizenship (Sutton and Chaney 1987; Laguerre 1998; Glick and Fouron 2001). Yet at the same time, the almost exclusive metropolitan perspectives on Caribbean migration, and in turn the diasporic communities that have developed as a result of such movements, often obscure the elongated history of micro dislocations.

If we are to consider that intra-regional migration, starting from the period of Emancipation in the British West Indies through to the 1940s, outnumbered the outflow of migrants to metropolitan centers, we can begin to place this discrepancy into context and begin to redress the absences that still exist. The question here then is what is to be gleaned from understanding the diasporic experience on a smaller scale and in more insular settings? And, how can we begin to appreciate the circulations of cultures within the Caribbean and their impact on new configurations of identity in the region and specific locales?

Dubbed “the first, the original and the purest diaspora” (Hall 1995:28), the Caribbean exists in many ways as a crucible for the intersection and collision of diverse socio-cultural identities. Yet it is perhaps the region’s entangled political and economic histories – controlled in great part by the whims of superpowers and changing global economic currents – that have been the most responsible for the migratory history of the region and its people. From the inception of a slave-based plantation economy, the idea of mobility, and hence liberty, became a central preoccupation for the enslaved.

Confined to the structures and space of the plantation, their quest for freedom in the humanitarian and physical sense of the word inevitably became synonymous with the idea of migration and specifically that of *marronage* (see L. Gordon 2008). Thus, in the mountainous locales of Surinam, Jamaica, Dominica and Cuba, for example, fleeing to the interior became part of a strategy of resistance, but one that eventually proved unsustainable. It was, however, in the period following Emancipation in the British colonies that we begin to witness the roots of the Caribbean's migratory tradition, as movement within the region, and not solely in one's island emerged as a viable livelihood strategy (see Richardson 1992:132-157).

In parts of the Caribbean, most notably in Barbados where access to land was limited, the shift from slave to wage labor did not rupture the inconveniences of the past. Many freed blacks were forced to work under restrictive conditions that belied their ability to exercise newly gained freedoms. The opening up of economic opportunities in the expanding sugar industries of neighboring Trinidad, British Guiana and parts of Central America, however, presented the first opportunities for freed blacks to begin their march towards economic liberation and a chance at social mobility at home. From as early as the 1840s, the cyclical trend of emigration and return soon became a livelihood strategy that afforded primarily Caribbean men the means to exercise their agency and resist the oppressive strictures of colonial society (Richardson 1983, Williams 1973).

With the establishment of new and more lucrative markets in Central America by the French and North Americans, this early trend of seasonal migration was soon replaced by longer periods of absence from one's native territory. Shifts in the global capitalist markets of the mid 1800s and the eventual decline of British owned sugar

industries in the southern Caribbean triggered an opening for employment that would further deepen the migratory flow of laborers. For approximately 70 years (1850-1920) workers from the French, and later English-speaking, Caribbean were aggressively recruited by European and US companies to offset the demand for laborers in what would become one of the most significant expansion of global trade routes and an engineering marvel – the Panama Canal (see Newton 1984; Petras 1988). Panama soon became the center of Caribbean diasporic culture, as the sizeable Antillean labor force established communities and social networks that eventually spanned the English speaking Caribbean to Panama and neighboring Costa Rica and Honduras where many British West Indians worked on the expanding banana plantations.

The demand for laborers in Panama continued for the first two decades of the twentieth century. In the 1891-1915 period, approximately 91,000 Jamaicans made their way to Panama, while approximately 60,000 Barbadians worked the canal from 1904-1914 (Newton 1984:np). As the demand for laborers began to wane and working conditions continued to deteriorate in Panama, Antillean “work gangs” composed exclusively of British West Indian males began to take up contracts or try their luck in the newly modernized agricultural sector in Cuba. The cutting of cane for US franchised companies in Cuba became the catalyst for yet another cross cultural interaction of Caribbean peoples, but this time it would include a class of migrants relatively new to agricultural wage labor – Haitians.

The contemporary images of Black men, women and children fleeing their native soil on makeshift boats, rafts and inner tubes has become an all too familiar icon of Haiti’s migration history. The term “boat people” has thus become synonymous with the

Haitian migratory experience and has prevailed as the sole defining image within our popular memory. But well before the dynastic Duvalier dictatorship that triggered the wide-spread out-migration of political refugees to the Bahamas, United States, France and Canada, Cuba and many other neighboring Caribbean territories became temporary and permanent residences for Haitians fleeing the horrors of the Haitian Revolution, land displacement, the acute shortages of cash and resources in rural Haiti as well as persistent political and civil unrest.

In comparison to the extensive history of West Indian labor migration within the region, the relative isolation of the Haitian peasantry in the period following its independence and the commencement of the US military occupation in 1915, would suggest that they played a rather peripheral role in the region's early migration history. It is true that in general the movement from Haiti in the nineteenth century had its peak during the Revolutionary era and then became more sporadic. However, it would be inaccurate to conclude that Haiti's insularity completely curtailed the movement of its citizens. In fact, in terms of Haiti's relationship to the United States, anthropologist Michel Laguerre convincingly argues:

there has been an uninterrupted stream of Haitian immigration into the United States with *high, low, and dormant* periods...[evidenced in] three peak periods [that] roughly correspond to the Haitian revolutionary era and its aftermath (1791-1810), the period of the US occupation of Haiti (1915-34), and the Duvalier and immediate post-Duvalier era, 1957-94 (1998:2).

This historical chronology of Haiti's migratory flows to the United States also coincides with a wider pattern of emigration that includes the successive waves of entry into Cuba, but on a much smaller scale and with a parallel as well as contradictory legacy. It is to this history that I now turn.

HAITI & CUBA: THE BEGINNING CONTOURS OF A FORMIDABLE RELATIONSHIP

The Immediate Consequences of the Haitian Revolution

When war broke out in the “pearl of the Antilles” – colonial Saint Domingue – in 1791, the history of Cuba and what emerged as the western hemisphere’s first black republic – Haiti – became irrevocably interlaced. Cuba and Haiti – often referred to as the “pariahs”⁴³ of the Caribbean – emerged out of dissimilar plantation histories but both employed similar strategies in combating colonial domination. The divergent racial composition each country inherited from colonialism and the ideological construction of “race” that fuelled their individual campaigns for freedom, positioned the two countries along what Hintzen has referred to as “two racial poles [whiteness and blackness] that serve as markers for civilization and savagery” (2002: 93). In other words, these two societies developed as polar opposites, so as one clung to constructs of “whiteness” and “civility” as markers of difference, the other was to be cast as a site of infantile primitive barbarism and a symbol of the horrors of black self-governance. Notwithstanding these differences, it was their individual protracted struggles for freedom that would forge the

⁴³ I use the term pariah in this instance for several reasons. Firstly, these two nations have been consistently victimized because of their decisions to stand up against a super power and secure a certain degree of autonomy. As a consequence of this, they each have been relegated, in different degrees and at different times in their history, to the realm of outcast. This particular marginalization manifests itself most notably in the economic penalties of forced repayment to the ex-colony as in the newly independent Haitian republic and/or persistent economic sanctions levied against Cuba. Secondly, due to the global configuration of power; the smaller nations in the Caribbean have also been, at different times in their histories, bullied into severing ties with these nations, especially Cuba. The economic dependency of Caribbean nations to the United States has meant that they have often sided with the Americans so as to secure financial assistance (e.g. IMF loans). The most recent example of the ambiguous position these nations hold in the Caribbean is best expressed in the configuration of the Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME), which is moving in the direction of permitting the free movement of the region’s citizens. During the staging of the 2007 World Cup Cricket in the Caribbean, Cubans and Haitians were made to obtain visas in order to travel to the host nations and it was again made abundantly clear that they exist as part of the Caribbean only when they do not pose a “threat” to the other countries in the region.

beginnings of a symbolic link that had implications that extended beyond constructions of race and nation to also impact spheres of their political economies and socio-cultural landscapes as well.

As a result of the fall of one of the richest colonies, tremors were felt across the colonial world⁴⁴, for in many cases, the Haitian Revolution served as an impetus for increased slave revolts that spread throughout the Americas immediately following its successful end.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, although the wars in Saint Domingue were victorious for calling forth political “independence,”⁴⁶ the success of freedom was overshadowed by subsequent economic decline and poverty that has continually served to ravage and fragment the Haitian nation-state (Trouillot 1990). For colonies that aspired towards sovereignty, Haiti represented a disturbing model of nationhood, as the establishment of the independent state of Haiti rested on forging an alternative to the plantation, which required a restructuring of the preexisting social order.⁴⁷

In fact, Haiti deviated significantly from the logic of plantation society, for “in the process of creating a new state, Haiti destroyed its white elite and promoted its African racial heritage as the proud, homogenizing symbol of the new state” (Knight 1990:221). In so doing, the establishment of the first black republic required a politicization of the term “black” to represent all those who considered themselves part of

⁴⁴ However, both Cuba and Brazil’s late departure from acquiring slave labor seems to read against this logic. Cuba formally abolished slavery in 1886, followed by Brazil two years later in 1888.

⁴⁵ Such uprisings abound including the Second Maroon War in Jamaica, 1795-1796, the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865 based on a peasant uprising, the famous black rebellion in Bahia, “Revolta dos Malês,” which was organized by Yoruba and Hausa Muslims and occurred in 1835. In Cuba La Escalera and the Aponte conspiracy are the most illustrious of these slave rebellions.

⁴⁶ I place independence in quotes because one can argue that Haiti’s sovereignty has historically been challenged and put into question by repeated U.S. military occupation and its influence on Haitian politics.

⁴⁷ The social order in which Haitians defiantly tried to usurp, notwithstanding its failures to fully do so, presented a tremendous amount of courage and determination. It is a step that many island nations living under the guise of independence have not been able to do and thus throughout the Caribbean the social order inherited from slavery and colonialism is still operable although the nationalist rhetoric of each territory would have one assume that it is a thing of the past.

the independent civil polity. This model of nationalism usurped the validity of white supremacy, which its neighboring Spanish colonial authorities extolled as the precursor of a modern nation. While the revolution momentarily shattered the myth that blacks were incapable of self-rule, persistent poverty, illiteracy, and political unrest served only to justify such claims. As Cuban historian and demographer, Juan Pérez de la Riva pointed out, “[t]he once flourishing colony was reduced to ashes and dust...This would be the image held not only by the refugees; the Cuban bourgeoisie was not to forget the disaster, and right up to La Demajagua the specter of Haiti was to spread the most negative of attitudes throughout Cuba” (1975: 370-371).⁴⁸

Cuban historian, Rafael Duarte Jiménez, in his essay, “Dos viejos temores de nuestro pasado colonial” [Two Old Fears of Our Colonial Past] posits that before the Haitian Revolution, it is difficult to see any reference to a “black fear.” He argues that “there was no fear of the slaves in Cuba...because there were many more whites than blacks on the island” (1983:87). The racial balance in favor of white Cubans rendered the enslaved non-threatening within this logic, for they were not a force that was united and could mobilize politically. However, the *Código Negro Carolino* of 1784,⁴⁹ written as a kind of guidebook for social organization, was very specific in outlining a hierarchical social order wherein the values of blood purity, *limpieza de sangre*, served to construct a caste-like social structure, placing the class of the enslaved outside of the body politic. We see from as early as 1784, a legal project initiated by the colonial state-

⁴⁸ La Demajagua was the name of a small *ingenio* in Oriente owned by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, whose act of freeing his slaves on October 10, 1868 was said to initiate the Cuban liberation struggle, thus inscribing the abolition of slavery into debates over the fate of an independent nation.

⁴⁹ The *Código Negro Carolino* (1784) was applied during the period of the handing over of colonial Santo Domingo to France in 1795, but the codification of the social order by race was to apply to all Spanish colonies. Reproduced in, Richard Konezke, *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica* (1959-62: 643, n.308).

apparatus of “whitening,” which implicitly speaks of fear, perhaps not of rebellion, but certainly of contamination. It is evident, therefore, that state-engineered racial projects were a function of the colonial state before the collapse of colonial Saint-Domingue.

The celebration of blood purity and the disciplining of social and sexual intercourse (see Verena Martínez-Alier 1974) were only further endorsed in response to the influx of thousands of enslaved blacks who fled war-torn Haiti, making new homes throughout Oriente, and the increased dependency on slavery that dumped shiploads of deterritorialized Africans on Cuba’s shores.⁵⁰ Whether the Haitian Revolution introduced the “black fear,” as Duharte Jiménez contends, or not, the discourse on race that developed out of notions of the specter of “another Haiti” and the “black peril,” had indelible social effects that impacted the very ways in which the Cuban nation would be imagined and the space which Haiti would occupy in its imaginary.

From as early as the late eighteenth century, Haiti entered the Cuban imagination as its ultimate “Other,” that is to say, what Cuba was not, and stood as an example of what it did not want to be. Perceived by Cuban elites as an inferior black space that achieved political independence at the expense of material progress, both modernity and civilization were considered beyond Haiti’s reach. While the economic vitality of the United States offered an example of a modern civilization worthy of emulation, Haiti’s isolation and depressed economy after its Revolution was something to be feared and not duplicated. Haiti thus became synonymous with the primitive as Francophone literary

⁵⁰ Cuba absorbed one of the largest and longest influxes of slaves in the New World. While slavery was officially prohibited in 1853, a thriving, illegal trade served to replenish the numbers of Africans to the population comprising, at its peak in 1841, of 58.5 percent of all Cubans. The contraband trade in slaves expanded after 1820. The trade in slaves bought mostly from neighboring Caribbean territories (Jamaica, Haiti, Dominican Republic) and sold illegally to planters in the western end of the island formed a vibrant sector of Santiago’s informal economy. For more on the nature of Cuban slavery see Robert L. Paquette (1988); Franklin Knight, (1970 and 1974).

scholar Michael Dash poignantly describes: “Haiti would emerge time and time again as that privileged space lost to modernity where the modernist sensibility could retrieve a sense of organic wholeness and purity” (1998:39).

However, while many European and American writers and artists found in Haiti a space that they could reconnect with an aspect of their lost identities and hence celebrate because it was supposedly void of the trappings of modernity⁵¹, in Cuba, from as early as the mid-nineteenth century, the self-conscious quest for modernity and ways to express a distinct Cuban identity and nationality was juxtaposed against that which was created in Haiti. To this end, the connection between Cuba and Haiti was not necessarily defined by consistent contact, as in the case of the relationship between the United States and Cuba, but the link was established through, and grounded in, a philosophical and ideological idea of *difference*. “Only crass ignorance,” said Martí, “would lead someone to draw comparisons between the two islands” (Martí qtd. in Ferrer 1999:134)⁵²

This visceral concern with differentiating Cuba from Haiti became the subject of a series of articles in the black press, which wrote against the colonialist position that Cuba’s independence struggle was indeed a race war. On May 23, 1893 just two years before the final push for independence, *La Igualdad* published an article by black patriot, son of enslaved Africans, journalist, and director of the Central Directorate of Societies of the Colored Races, Juan Gualberto Gómez, titled, “*Cuba no es Haití*” (“Cuba is not

⁵¹ Haiti held a certain mystique for blacks and whites alike. The late African-American dancer and anthropologist, Katherine Dunham often spoke of finding Africa in the new world when she discussed her love for the culture and dances of Haiti see Dunham 1969. For further information on the connection of African-Americans with Haiti see Krista Thompson, 2007b.

⁵² In the note following this quote by Martí, Ferrer points to his ambivalence over the Haitian question and the ways in which Martí altered his views according to his audience. Thus, as Ferrer states, “in this article addressed to Cubans, [Martí] stresses the differences between Haiti and Cuba, in articles he wrote for Latin American newspapers, he stressed the similarities...” making it important to “consider audience when reading Martí” (p. 233 note 76).

Haiti”). The article, compiled from Gómez’s study on the demography and history of Haiti and Cuba, outlined five contrasting features between the islands. It stated Haitians were more aggressive in temperament as they were from the warlike tribes of Senegal and Dahomey, unlike Cuban slaves who originated from the Congo basin. Secondly, most of Haiti’s blacks were born in Africa, whereas Cuban blacks were born in Cuba. Thirdly, the ratio of blacks to whites in Haiti was 24 to 1, while in Cuba it was 1 to 2. The fourth distinction, Gómez contended, was that the Cuban brand of slavery was milder than its French counterpart. Finally, he concluded that Cuba, unlike Haiti, knew of no irreconcilable hatred between the “two races” (see also Helg 1997: 52-53).

Although this rather embryonic delineation of differences may appear ill founded and pedestrian in its conclusions, the article created an immediate stir. Many Spanish officials and Hispano-Cubans insisted that the colored class was a danger in Cuba. Indeed, after the Haitian Revolution and two infamous slave uprisings, the “Aponte Conspiracy” of 1812 and “La Escalera” (the ladder) rebellion in 1843, it became an axiom.⁵³ In constructing an image of the “black rebel,” the man of color was viewed by colonialists as a descendent of a homogeneously savage African past, unable to make the transition from “un esclavo negrito” (a black slave) to a national Cuban subject, for his racial condition would always preclude his yearning for national unity, hence compromising the national project.

⁵³ Free black carpenter, José Antonio Aponte organized an elaborate uprising in Havana with the coordination of slaves, free persons of color and whites in 1812. Although what came to be called the ‘Aponte Conspiracy’ was crushed, many plantation overseers, whites, and slaves were murdered and a great many sugar and coffee estates destroyed. “La Escalera,” vernacular for the ladder, commenced in the latter part of 1843 in Havana, which was reported to have been led by approximately 200 people. Spanish authorities however heard of a far-flung conspiracy involving hundreds of slaves and thousands of white and free people of color. Approximately 4,000 suspects were arrested in the weeks and months that followed, instigating one of the bloodiest assault on the slave and free people of color class. Many of those who were not hung or garroted were tied to ladders for floggings until they succumbed to a deathly defeat, hence the name “La Escalera” or the ladder. For more see Robert L. Paquette (1988)

Whereas colonists had often posited that Cuba's black population stood as a hindrance for the realization of the nation, activists like Gómez took great pains to illustrate the divergent qualities of the class of blacks found in Cuba and Haiti, stressing "those who insist on seeing a threat in the black race" are in fact the ones that jeopardized the "fate of the nation" more so than the mere proportions of blacks in Cuba (quoted in Fernández Robaina 1985:19). Like Gómez, his contemporary Rafael Serra, in an article in *La Igualdad*, chose to construct black Cubans as being distinct from the warrior-like rebels of Haiti as he stressed, black Cubans were not like "those insurgent black Haitians" but were instead "a peaceful and defenseless class" (1893: 3). Again we see here a construction of Haiti's identity and its people in terms of warfare and brutality. A fact of their political history thus becomes reified as distinguishing historical and moral characteristic separating Haitian blacks from Cuban blacks.

That Gómez and Serra's articles prompted a further conceptual and political distance between blacks of Haiti and those found in Cuba was significant, for it served to complicate and differentiate what had been otherwise portrayed as a generic black race, and because the construction of Cuba and Haiti as binary opposites served to crystallize a form of knowledge and power that was instrumental in ordering the socio-political and racial world of colonial Cuba. If we examine these articles outside of their socio-political contexts one could dismiss these men as staunch racists. The history of race relations in Cuba, however, requires a more nuanced reading. We see here that at the critical moment of an impending independence, Haiti was constructed as providing an alarming example that would impede Cuba's march towards self-governance. In the attempt to demarcate a distinctive identity, race, not simply as a marker of complexion or

transparent reality, but as a socially constructed idea that enshrined a primitive/civilized dialectic, became the contested terrain in which mediations on the nation unfurled. When one examines these racist classifications in the context of what was happening in Cuba, it is clear that Cuban blacks had to construct, in their minds, what they saw as a viable difference and sell it to the white population, so that the blacks would appear to be on their side. These articles thus became part of the evidence to further construct these two nations and their black populations as complete opposites.

Michel Foucault's work on the production of knowledge and power through and within discourse has particular salience for understanding how the discursive formation around notions of Haiti became simultaneously critical in the early articulations of Cubanness. In *The Order of Things* (1973) and "The Subject and Power" (1982), Foucault advances a constructionist argument on the means through which historically constituted "regimes of knowledge" emerged through the employment of specific (disciplinary) technologies and strategies of a particular society and time. He posits that the establishment of hegemonic epistemes requires constructing an "other" through discursive categories or binaries such as sane/insane as a means to not only produce subjects, but to determine and organize what we know about the subjugated other. In drawing our attention to the multiple ways and modes by which not only meaning, but subjects are produced within discourse he writes, "It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (1982: 208).

The formidable relationship between Cuba and Haiti involved the discursive construction of hierarchical binaries wherein a barbarism/civilization, Haiti/Cuba paradigmatic schism developed through a reification of *difference*. This actual or

mythical notion of *difference*, however, functions as more than establishing contrast, but in fact is assigned value and meaning. In other words the discursive practice of creating “Others” is never neutral, but instead operates around a valuing and devaluing of human subjects. The discourse on Haiti developed around what anthropologist Lauren Derby (1994) has identified as “an unstable set of symbolic associations” (490) linking and situating Haiti, blackness and specific cultural practices such as Vodou, and speaking a ‘bastardized’ Krèyol tongue, to the savage slot. On the other hand, the ascendancy of Spanish and Roman Catholicism that developed in the racial and cultural hybrid space of Cuba located civilization as the valorized byproduct.

The poetics of difference manifested in notions of Haitians being a distinct *raza* (race/nation/lineage) were grounded in an epistemological moment of scientific racism that stripped blacks of their humanity and defined them as barbaric. In many ways nineteenth century Cuban elites conflated an image of blackness with Haiti, which in turn contributed to a fear of blacks and trepidations of “another Haiti.” This fear of blacks and loathing of the Haitian other was justified through positivist discourse which maintained that progress and civilization were lost to these undesirables.

In invoking national consciousness notions such as progress and modernity became the vernacular for encoding Cuba’s post-colonial identity. To be civilized and hence, modern, necessarily implied that Cuba would not in any way resemble the black republic. Haiti thus served as a constant reminder of the threat blacks supposedly posed to the nation and the quest for these ideals. North American capitalist initiatives and its all encompassing imperial pronouncements of progress and modernity alongside with the

hegemonic discourse of white supremacy served to hyper-racialize Haiti and its people, hence further positioning blackness outside the ambit of the modern.

As we begin to map the contours of Haitian immigration to Cuba, and in particular the second and most significant wave in the early twentieth century, we will come to see how such sentiments of rejection manifested themselves in popular discourse. We will also come to learn just how much Haitian immigrants and their descendants have influenced Cuba culturally, and the reasons why this fact had to be recognized by the State.

HAITIAN MIGRATION TO CUBA

The Economic & Socio-Cultural Contribution of the ‘Franceses’ – First Wave of Haitian Migrants to Eastern Cuba

Cuba’s earliest contact with Haitians came with the dissolution of colonial Saint Domingue and the subsequent wave of French immigrants that settled in the rural hinterlands above Santiago de Cuba and its immediate environs. Embittered by the reversal of their fortunes brought on by the bloody struggle for independence, French planters with their black domestics looked to Cuba (Debien 1992: 34). The Haitian Revolution thus signaled a changing of the guard, as it were, with Cuba replacing Haiti as the largest producer of sugar, and expanding into coffee production, monopolizing both European and more importantly, North American markets over the next five decades.⁵⁴ Coffee production, implemented by the French refugees (known locally as *franceses*) who settled throughout the mountainous terrain of eastern Cuba, rose in prominence increasing the number of *cafetales* (coffee estates) from 2 in 1774 to 108 in 1802, 586 in

⁵⁴ Louis A. Pérez in his 1999 publication, *On Becoming Cuban*, has argued that trade between the United States and Cuba established, from its inception, the basis on which familiarity developed and contact increased, thus shaping the course and character of their dependent and historically ambiguous relationship.

1804, 1, 315 in 1806, and 2,067 in 1827 (Pérez 1995 [1998]: 73).⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the rather rapid ascent of coffee suffered a swift decline as competition from Brazil and the plummeting of the world market value closed out Cuba's opportunity to reap a profit from its production after the mid 1840s. The lasting legacy of the *franceses* to the history and cultural transformation of eastern Cuba, however, never wavered (see Portuondo 1938: 71-85).

Although initially envisaged as a “way station to those who watched and waited hopefully to return to their homeland” or try their fortunes in Louisiana (Debien 1993:34), tens of thousands of displaced émigrés re-established their lives in Cuba. Starting in 1792 and continuing for the next twenty-two years, they formed significant socio-economic and cultural enclaves that represented one of the earliest intra-Caribbean movements of immigrants to Cuba, and specifically to the desolate eastern region. By 1808 they numbered 7, 500 of Santiago's 33,000 residents (Duharte 1988a:35) and by 1841, even with the waning of the coffee industry, they accounted for almost 1/3 of the population of the city, 28,000 of 91,400 residents (Guanche 1983:277). This substantive foreign “French” class thus became part of the cultural tapestry in both the rural and urban environs of Oriente creating a distinctive culture in these two environments. Most notably, they began to restore Cuba's original capital to prominence – filling it with people, a lucrative industry and cultural activities. As an example, the overwhelming barrenness of the city of Santiago, which one planter remarked as being “gloomy and deserted... [that afforded] only overpowering solitude almost unknown in the rest of the universe” (planter qtd. in Debien 1992:52) soon became a site of bustling cultural

⁵⁵ For more discussion on coffee production and its socio-economic impact in Cuba see, Juan Pérez de la Riva (1944).

activity. Oriente was thus transformed as this migrant class revitalized their economic pursuits and spread the refinement of French culture:

They created a second city on land designated by the Spanish government; it was called the French Quarters. Stones will eventually replace the wood of the primitive constructions, and, if Santiago is today bigger, [and] more heavily populated, it is a result of Saint Domingue's misfortune...In spite of the misery that weighed heavily upon everyone, the French temperament did not change, and [though] deprived of the basic necessities, they did not forget about pleasure...In Santiago, where the misery was killing us, or so we thought, we built a Tivoli... [that] became the meeting point of all social groups...We were miserable but we danced! (quoted in Debien 1992: 53-54).

Tivolí, or what in Santiago is known as El Tivolí, was a fashionable café/dancehall located northwest of the port and industrial center of Oriente province. As noted in José María Callejas, *Historia de Santiago de Cuba*:

High above Loma Hueca, protected by boards with a majestic frontispiece obeying one of the rules of architecture, they made their figures and seeded the land as it should be done and in the background they constructed Tejamán roofs with linen ceilings that covered from three to four hundred people and lined the walls with the same material, the whole thing painted in the best of taste, to which the same name Tivoli was given. Moreover, they built two huts in the best manner and where all sorts of food and drink were served, excellent musicians and a few young French ladies led the whole French population there for the price of admission of one *duro* per individual, and within two months, had paid off the immense cost of their work, and had a lot left over to undertake other speculations (321)

Although the café/dancehall theater disappeared from the Santiaguera cultural scene, the French influence on the culture of the city is commemorated during the Carnival season when huts of the similar style of previous generations are erected throughout the neighborhood that bears the same name – El Tivoli – offering beverages, food, and a place of entertainment.

Indeed, with the establishment of cafés and dancehalls, the cultural renewal of the once barren mountainous environment was underway. However it was the establishment

of the famed *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa*⁵⁶ that promulgated this distinct identity that many Santiguerans to this day celebrate as part of the unique historical legacy of the *Franceses* and part of the region's cultural patrimony. Declared by UNESCO in 2003 as a *Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity*, this cultural phenomenon embodies one of the oldest and most tangible links to the Afro and Franco-Haitian heritage of Cuba's eastern provinces. *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa*, as Rafael Brea and José Millet suggest, "are social clubs and mutual aid societ[ies] founded by Black and French- Haitian mestizos, self-named 'franceses'...Its festivities were under the protection of virgin and saints whose images are hung on the walls, next to photographs of Cuban patriots, some of whom participated in the festivities before going to the War of Independence" (2001:204).

Two important issues stand out in this brief description. Firstly, the concept of *franceses* poignantly demonstrates the deliberate alignment to what was deemed the primacy of power and status – that being a white identity – in this case French. Having appropriated the customs of their masters, the *franceses*, through their act of self-naming and to a certain degree their imitative performance practices and dress (i.e. salon dances, discarded colonial dresses, corsets, full skirts, straight legged knickers), contested the intimation that they were anything but French. The term gave these twice-displaced Africans symbolic prestige that they were able to use to negotiate a space within the rigidly hierarchized Cuban social structure. Most certainly it was also used as a marker of distinction from other black Cubans. The fact that they spoke French and Krèyol, also

⁵⁶ Cuban historian Jesus Guanche notes in his 1983 publication, *Procesos Ethnoculturales de Cuba* that *La Persévérance* and *La Concorde* are reported to be first Masonic Lodges founded in Cuba by this French immigrant class. Approximately three years later, in 1792 the first *Sociedades de Tumba Francesa* (French Tumba Societies) was created (276)

distinguished them from the other blacks in Cuba, but it was through the performance of the *Tumba* that these various cultural signifiers of a refined creolized French-ness was publicly displayed. While it is true that the rhythms played on the drums were not derived from their French ancestry, it is clear that their rigidly held upper-body squeezed into ill-fitting clothes was imaginably an exhibition of comedic juxtaposition. One may even argue a parody not only of their masters but even of themselves.⁵⁷

This particular self-conscious social distancing that this class of blacks performed points to what Herskovits defined as the “social ambivalences” many Haitians (at home and abroad) had towards their dual and seemingly incongruous heritage from Africa and France, which resulted in their “many shifts in allegiances” (1937:295). Indeed, the reality of their subordinate position within Cuban society made this concept of being “French” socially untenable. Their survival in Cuba required a greater cooperation with the existing black communities and specifically the neighboring maroon settlements scattered throughout the mountainous provinces. With the impending Wars of Independence, an opportunity for these cross-cultural/ethnic links found expression and the Masonic Lodge as well as the *Tumba Francesa* Associations became the critical sites for this exchange.

According to historian Aline Helg, the Masonic lodges were instrumental in building and affirming social cohesion among the troops who fought for Cuba’s independence from Spain:

⁵⁷ From the *Kwadril/Quadrille* of the French and English speaking Caribbean, to the *Beguine* of Guadeloupe, we see evidence of the enslaved populations adopting and in many cases transforming the social dances of the planter class in one of the most vivid acts of mimicry and also as a subversive resistance agent of parodying those who deemed themselves more worthy and entitled see John, Szwed and Morton (1988: 29-36).

In the upper strata of Cuba Libre, however, many were Freemasons: Antonio and José Maceo, José Martí, Máximo Gomez, and Bartolomé Masó, to name a few. While in exile in the United States, some had been initiated as Odd-Fellows; others had joined Cuban lodges in Florida and New York. Most belonged to the Grand Orient of Cuba and the Antilles, an irregular masonry that professed independence and racial equality. Although Spain banned masonic activities in Cuba in June 1895, masonry continued to attract members in the battlefield. More lodges were created during the war, and many insurgent officers were initiated; by the war's end the Grand Orient of Cuba and the Antilles had become an institution of more political influence than the Catholic Church (1995:64-65).

While certainly *Tumba* associations did not achieve the same degree of political prominence as the Freemasonry, they served an equally important role for the enslaved and free Black population of Cuba. Moreover, because they were not based on patriarchal structures, *Tumbas* had a wider appeal attracting both men and women from all factions of Cuban society.

Tumba Francesas, like their Afro-Cuban urban counterpart – *cabildos*⁵⁸ – functioned at times as social “clubs” or a space of recreation, as well as a site for the preservation and honing of distinct aesthetic expressions, notably through music, dance and ritual ceremonies. As mutual-aid associations, these organizations were foundational in providing assistance to their members, the most notable being collecting dues from the laboring class of free blacks to help in the purchasing of another member's freedom.⁵⁹ It is important to note, however, that prior to the abolition of slavery and the Wars of Independence, it could be argued that *Tumba* associations were not formally organized, but functioned organically within the confines of the *cafetales*. To this effect, they

⁵⁸ Manuel Moreno Fraginals in his (1984) essay, “Cultural Contributions and Deculturations” argues that “in urban centers...ethnic differences were institutionalized. In Cuba...the colonial government...sponsored and legalized the formation of *cabildos* (lodge type mutual aid associations on a strictly regional or tribal basis, with religious, social, and cultural overtones) where slaves could get together. With the same care displayed by plantation owners, urban authorities encouraged *cabildos* of various ethnic groups to form, making sure that none was sufficiently powerful to overshadow the rest...The urban *cabildos* permitted the survival, with a relatively higher degree of purity, of certain aspects of African culture, including language, which acquired ritual significance,” pp. 8.

⁵⁹ Personal communication with member of a *Tumba* society, June 23 2000

functioned primarily as a hybrid performance (i.e. music, drum, song and dance) complex that merged a colonial planter-class mode of dress, along with the salon and contra dances of France and the percussive instrumentation and melodies of Haiti via Dahomey.⁶⁰

Typically *Tumbas* (which was the name given to the drum and activity associated with its playing) would form part of the festivities to commemorate the feast day of saints San Juan and San Pedro, and most notably the birthday of the plantation owner. The Wars of Independence, however, served to politicize these associations, making them loci of exchange and subversive activities, including the planning of military tactics and as a camouflage for revolutionary activity.⁶¹ The fact that the three principal revolutionary icons of the Wars of Independence, Quintín Bandera, Antonio Maceo and Guiller món Moncada were noted Freemasons and members of the Tumba Francesa, point to the importance of these associations for uniting its members across ethnic and racial lines.

After Cuba's abolition of slavery in 1886 and the resulting migration of the émigré class into the urban environs of Santiago, the institution and cultural forms expanded, becoming a rural and urban phenomenon, and specifically the arena for building the links between these two cultural spheres. As particularly inclusive in their membership practices, unlike the *cabildos* which were organized around the concept of *naciones* (nations or groups of blacks of the same ethnic origin, e.g. Bantu, Lucumi, Congo, etc.), these societies welcomed all Africans, Afro-Cubans, Creoles and *franceses*. Hence, they afforded a location for the dissemination and exchange of "French"/Afro-Haitian cultural forms, along with the exposure and merging of diverse cultural elements

⁶⁰ For more on this performance complex see, Fernando Ortiz 1961: No. 32:36-37 and 116-117.

⁶¹ José Millet, interview by Yanique Hume, hand-written, Santiago de Cuba, 09 May, 2002.

found throughout eastern Cuba, producing what Cuban historian Guanche has called a *franco-haitiano-africano* cultural complex (1983:277).

From Judith Bettelheim's research on Tumba and Tajona societies of eastern Cuba we learn that one of the earliest recorded Tumba associations was founded on the 24 February 1862 under the name *Tumba Francesa Lafayette*, in honor of a French general who made his way to the port of Santiago (2001: 147). In 1905, the name was changed to *Sociedad Tumba Francesa La Caridad de Oriente*, commemorating a slave uprising instigated by *cimmarones* in the historic town of El Cobre. This shift in the name was also in keeping with an 1887 ordinance that mandated that all Tumba's have a patron saint, in this case, "Our Lady of Charity, syncretized as the Yoruba divinity, Oshun, Patron Saint of Cuba. By 1979, the naming was again changed as part of the new revolutionary government's nationalizing efforts, to "Los Maceo-Bandera-Moncada" in honor of the three independence fighters and patriots who were reported to have participated in a Tumba before heading off to fight for Cuba's independence (2001: 141-153).

To summarize, from the early 1800s, the *franceses* began to leave their mark on the communities of eastern Cuba, not only culturally, but also introducing new technological advancements for agricultural production, and putting in the necessary infrastructure to see to its success. By 1815, the first roads – financed by French run coffee estates – joining remote communities to each other and Santiago were constructed, improving transportation and communication remarkably. The French refugees and the enslaved class of Blacks thus brought to Cuba the first wave of industrial modernization through advanced techniques for the cultivation of coffee, and modern infrastructure.

Hence they introduced Cuba to the modern Western world. However, with the importance and longevity of sugar production in Cuba, and particularly because of the United States' active role in its modernization, this dynamic history is often overshadowed or reduced to a discrete historical moment completely separated from subsequent emigration to Cuba. Moreover, although this émigré class often imagined themselves as temporary outsiders, with the passage of time they were fully integrated within the different racial and social classes of Cuban society (see Pardón 1997: 36-65; Berenguer Calá 1979).

Interestingly, it is this first group of “Haitian” or, shall we say, “French” immigrants, who Cubans are more willing to mention as having any degree of cultural longevity and influence on Cuba. Although they were completely absorbed within the structures of the Cuban state and their numbers did not have the same impact as those Haitians who came later, they are granted a certain degree of cultural legitimacy because they were associated with a displaced French planter class. Because they were deemed “French” and hence non-threatening as a social group, they are celebrated as part of Cuba’s culturally diverse heritage; and as such, aspects of this cultural inheritance are demonstrated in the repertoires of national performance ensembles like Cutumba and the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba (both the Havana and Santiago companies).

The reverence that is bestowed on the members of the few existing Tumba associations today is evident in the annual Santiago carnival celebrations, where the descendants of the original *Tumba Francesas* members parade in the streets in their regal finery, to the applause of prideful Santiagueros. While many of these members are today willing to proudly claim their dual Franco-Haitiano culture, it is only through the

outside acknowledgement of the significance of this cultural tradition that greater efforts by the Cuban state have been made to claim its Haitian antecedents and work towards supporting the continued preservation of this cultural treasure.

***The Second Wave:
The “Braceros” and Early Twentieth-Century Labor Migration to Cuba***

According to Marc McLeod, rupture rather than continuity characterized the 18th and early 19th century movement of *franceses* with the labor migrants of the early twentieth century (2000). This is so in part because they were of a different character and magnitude but also because they represented two rather distinct historical, national and economic moments that in turn impacted the ways they and other black foreigners were accepted and integrated into Cuban society. Consequently, migrants of the twentieth century did not have an established community or social network of kinfolk to ease their transition, but instead were left to create new social fields and strategies of survival in an increasingly hostile environment. In the approximately eight decades that lapsed between the waning of the first migratory flow from Haiti to Cuba to the second and more significant introduction of wage laborers, very little activity outside of contraband trade in goods took place between the two islands. But in the wake of US military intervention and financial investments in the islands of the Greater Antilles, another opportunity for contact opened up.

Several distinct yet complementary factors prompted this transnational migration. On the one hand, the introduction of US capital into the antiquated sugar industry revived the demand for cheap labor that black Antilleans were eager to fill. At the same time and perhaps more poignantly, the severe economic deprivation of rural Haitian peasants, the

lack of access to arable land and also the increased anti- superstition campaigns that vigorously attempted to rid Haiti of Vodou, made Cuba and the Dominican Republic viable choices. That Haitian labor migration roughly coincided with the U.S. military occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 is therefore critical for an understanding of the root catalyst for the subsequent migration from Haiti. One lasting legacy of the U.S. Marine presence in Haiti is that it further entrenched the ruptures in the nation-state by displacing the already marginal rural populations, which in turn instigated dislocations on local and regional level. Rather than rehearse the consequences of the military occupation of Haiti, I am interested in presenting a synthesis of previously unconnected historical dialogues about the protracted relationship between Haiti and Cuba.

“Push” Factors

As indicated previously, in contrast to the protracted tradition of labor migration within the English speaking Caribbean, Haitian peasants were relatively isolated until the first three decades of the twentieth century. However, the United States concern with protecting their economic and geopolitical interest in Haiti amidst increased German influence, the autonomy Haitians fought for and tentatively won became a fleeting reality replaced by foreign U.S. control of their political, military, economic, and social lives.

Immediately after their arrival, the United States administration seized control of the national banks, customhouses, and dismantled the Haitian legislature, replacing it with a client-president. Under the guise of abating the recurrent political unrest on the island, the occupational administration revamped the military, which was deemed a destructive inheritance of the Revolutionary past. Further to this restructuring, in 1918, the then secretary of the navy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt drafted a new constitution

allowing for greater concessions for foreign control as indicated in Article 5: “The right to own real estate shall be given to foreigners residing in Haiti and to the societies organized by foreigners for purposes of residence, and agricultural, commercial, industrial, or educational enterprises” (qtd. in Millpaugh 1931:205). Beyond its implication of foreign control of the island, foreign-based land ownership served to threaten the very basis of Haiti’s agrarian structure which was based primarily on smallholdings used for domestic/subsistence consumption rather than for an export economy. However, in an attempt to re-establish the plantation economy, the U.S. bought large tracts of land to serve this purpose and as a result grossly interrupted social and kin networks that were based on cooperative living and working of the land.

As I will argue in the next chapter, the importance of land for the Haitian extended beyond a space to cultivate and sustain generations, or a place where the visible and invisible worlds come together, but the land was in fact an emblematic of Haitian-ness; it was where generations of peasants located their sense of belonging and being. With the lack of access to sufficient arable land many Haitians were forced to look elsewhere. But it was perhaps the reinstatement of the *corvee* system of obligatory unpaid wage labor, which further propelled people to protest and migrate. The occupation forces initiated what a U.S. Marine officer conducting an investigation of the *corvee* system called a “reign of terror,” which conscripted Haitian peasants to work, at times at gunpoint, to build a network of roads across the mountainous interior connecting the capital to rural outposts (Schmidt 1995: 102). Reminiscent of the horrific treatment their fore parents suffered under slavery and French colonialism, the *corvee* system provoked widespread protest, which in 1918 led to a series of *cacos* uprisings peasant organized

guerilla warfare) led by Charlemange Péralte, a land owner and former soldier in the disbanded Haitian army.

By 1920 the Marines had suppressed armed peasant resistance and turned their aggression towards the practices and rituals associated with Vodou. As a means to, as Colonel Eli Cole argued, “clean that place up and establish decency down there, because it does not exist” (qtd. in Healy 1976:213), the occupational forces, as part of their civilizing mission, raided Vodou ceremonies, sacred sites and temples, confiscating ritual implements and most notably baptized drums. Its devastating effects on the Haitian poor and peasant community extended well beyond their occupancy of the island, but only grew in intensity reaching its peak seven years after the U.S. occupation during Elie Lescot’s presidency.

Under the aegis of the Catholic Church and mandate of the Lescot’s administration (1941-1946) the US devised military and police force were sent out with renewed fervor to rid the island of “witchcraft” leaving devastating effects on the communities of Vodou worshipers. As indicated by Patrick Leigh Fermor in his accounts of a man who participated in this spiritual purging:

We began by cutting down trees which were said to be inhabited by their gods...We demolished any numbers of trees and caves and ‘sacred rocks, and even cut down the centre poles of Voodoo temples, and made bonfires of the drums and instruments of the cult.” He showed us photographs of these curious conflagrations...Several were pictures of himself, or one of his party with an axe raised, about to deliver the first blow to an inhabited tree (1950:248-9).

It was thus the combination of these factors that prompted many Haitians to leave their families and country behind in search of a new life. Starting in 1902 the costal towns of Port de Paix and Les Cayes became the ports of departure for numerous peasants and formed a new chapter in Haiti’s migration history.

“Pull” Factors

By the early 1900s, the need to attract more laborers “suitable for ... [Cuba’s] agricultural tasks” became a prominent concern voiced by many, including then Cuban president.⁶² Despite public opposition and the promotion of new subsidized immigration schemes further targeting Europe, the steady expansion of the sugar industry called for an alternative. With the U.S. occupation administration unwilling to take on the cost of subsidizing European migrants, the close proximity of cheaper labor options from neighboring Haiti and Jamaica provided a cost effective substitute. Between 1902 and 1913, Cuban government officials identified 6,956 Haitians and 5,344 Jamaicans entering the island.⁶³ By 1911 the Haitian consul in Santiago de Cuba estimated that approximately 10,000-12,000 Haitians resided in eastern Cuba (Cernicharo 1994: 96). The period following, 1913 to 1931, however, had more than 300,000 laborers from Haiti and the British West Indies, (e.g., Jamaica, Barbados, St. Kitts, Trinidad & Tobago) migrating to Cuba (Pérez de la Riva, 1979; Alvarez Estévez, 1988). Although the introduction of these laborers was organized around a seasonal pattern of movement based on the *zafra* or sugar harvest, many of these Antilleans remained in Cuba. As their presence grew steadily (see table 2.1) in the U.S. franchised mills in the east, Cuban officials marked the black *braceros* as a threat that would obfuscate the civilizing mission of white immigration, thus making them subject to attacks on several grounds and leading to the recuperation of the century old “black peril.” But it would be Haitian *braceros*, shrouded in a cloak of fear and objectification that would become the most

⁶² *La Discusión*, 6 Nov, 1904, pp. 10-11.

⁶³ “Pasajeros, comprendiendo los inmigrantes, clasificados por países de procedencia o destino, 1902-1913.” *Anuario estadístico de la República de Cuba, 1914*, (Havana 1915) 24-5

legally, economically and socio-politically disenfranchised during this period of increased immigration.

Table 1 Sugar Production and Immigration to Cuba, 1909-1921

Year	(Sugar Prod.)	Spanish Immigration	Haitian & Jamaican Immigration
1909	1,563,628	24,662	533
1910	1,868,913	30,913	1,358
1911	1,534,607	32,104	1,484
1912	1,968,840	32,531	942
1913	2,525,103	34,278	3,458
1914	2,622,036	20,140	1,889
1915	2,693,210	24,501	4,287
1916	3,124,277	37,615	12,055
1917	3,598,489	34,795	18,025
1918	3,598,489	14,293	19,824
1919	4,180,621	39,573	34,231
1920	3,872,306	94,294	63,059
1921	4,097,418	26,340	24,592

Source: Sugar production figures are in metric tons and taken from Moreno Friginals, *El ingenio*, 3:38:9. Immigration figures are from República de Cuba, Secretaría de Hacienda, “Nacionalidad y otras circunstancias de los inmigrantes.” *Inmigración y movimiento de pasajeros en el año [1909-1921]*, pp.5 Habana qtd. in McLeod 2000: 45

When Haitians landed on Cuban shores they entered a racially hostile Eurocentric environment. Although blacks accounted for a sizeable number of the population, it was clear that they were not the holders of power but envisioned as a hindrance to the moral progress of the nation. In many ways, Afro-Antilleans became the scapegoat for the frustrations of this subjugated class and also the target of displaced prejudice against North American imperialism, which many viewed Afro-Caribbean laborers as perpetuating. The inherent decay and road of “savagery” that these black foreigners would lead Cuba was explicitly conceived of as a threat that as one Cuban commentator, Carlos Trevis suggests, could “convert Cuba into a second Haiti” (James 1982:87).

As an overtly foreign black migrant class, these predominately male laborers incited some of the most egregious attacks that served to position them as moral, but

more importantly, racial liabilities. Campaigns on the “undesirability” of these black foreigners seized upon economic, sanitary and cultural arguments to prove their case (see McLeod 200: 16-56; and Alejandro de la Fuente 2001. As supposed “carriers of infectious diseases” Antilleans were portrayed as a public health risk that would introduce deadly tropical viruses long eliminated in Cuba.⁶⁴ They were therefore subject to discriminatory quarantine practices and blood tests and biased screening programs (Naranjo Orovio and Gonzáles 1996). Cultural and linguistic difference also distinguished Haitian blacks from other Antilleans. As one observer remarked, “Those blacks do not speak our language, nor do they have the customs and habits of the black Cuban”.⁶⁵ Additionally it was thought that, “Foreign blacks ... [could] not be assimilated [because] in their own consciousness they put their condition as blacks before any other social or political status” (Pérez: 1916: 393).

The inherent diversity within the Afro-Caribbean migrant class had serious ramifications for how Haitians would be treated. In 1912 the Haitian consul made note of this fact when he stated, “Haitian immigration to Cuba is composed entirely of the working and illiterate class.”⁶⁶ Within this statement we become aware of the reification of Haitians as solely illiterate laborers and in turn only suited for agricultural tasks. Moreover, Haitians were repeatedly stigmatized by their Krèyol tongue in an environment that became acutely aware of the symbolic capital of English, and in addition, were lacking diplomatic representation and hence completely politically

⁶⁴ Liga Agraria de la República de Cuba, Comité de Inmigración, to Gobernador Provincial de la Isla de Cuba, (Havana 26 Nov. 1906), Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago (AHPSC), Fondo Cámara de Comercio, leg.46, exp.1.

⁶⁵ *El Grafico* 11, March 1916, p. 7

⁶⁶ Consul d’haiti to R. Manduley, Gouverneur de la Province d’Orient, Santiago de Cuba, 2 July 1912. Archivo Histórico Provincial de Santiago de Cuba, Fondo Gobierno Provincial, leg. 374, exp.15.

isolated. To this end, Haitians were made to bear the brunt of the discriminatory practices of the time and their marginal position in Cuba also helped to situate Haitians as culturally and socially “Other.”

The supposed Haitian proclivity for witchcraft also ostracized them, thus perpetuating the prevalent discursive theme that Haitians were derisive, superstitious and backwards. Interestingly, many of these negative associations were appropriated by Haitians and used as markers of their cultural authenticity and power, as well as their means of differentiating themselves from the population of Afro-Caribbean laborers. Thus, it was commonly understood, as James, Millet and Alacrón have indicated, *con el haitiano nadie se puede meter, porque el que se meta con el haitiano es un hombre muerto* (no one interferes with a Haitian because he who interferes is a dead man) (1992: 79-80). Haitians and their descendants tried to create, through maintaining insular tight-knit communities in marginal rural areas, a space of relative autonomy. The hostile anti-immigrant and especially anti-Haitian environment forced many Haitian migrants to suppress their customs, language and cultural traditions from public view so as not to provoke any unwanted attacks or discrimination. Many of the first and second generation Haitians I spoke with shared stories about their families not teaching them Krèyol on the basis that it would hinder their ability to integrate into Cuban society. Yet, in order to survive within a space that systematically excluded them, Haitians had to rely on their religion and other traditions to organize and preserve themselves.

By contrast, British West Indian migrants⁶⁷ entered with varying skills, higher literacy rates, fluency in English, the ability to claim the Crown or “British-ness” and the

⁶⁷ The British West Indian population in Cuba was quite diverse, but upon arrival to Cuba they were often labeled as “Jamaican” regardless of their country of origin.

status of war veteran (many fought in WWI) as part of their identity.⁶⁸ These interrelated factors were critical in their ability to assimilate into Cuban society, seek protection and diplomatic support from Britain, and secure employment opportunity beyond the agricultural sector. Language and literacy were two of the key defining features that differentiated Afro-Caribbean migrants because it determined their socio-economic positioning in Cuban society. Those who were native English speakers had greater access to jobs in diverse sectors of the Cuban economy. As an example, many of the British West Indian migrants were able to work as taxi drivers, domestics, lift operators, mechanics, and carpenters, thus their ability to move beyond the confines of the sugar fields and better integrate into Cuban society. It was precisely their ability to assimilate that spared many of the English-speaking migrants from deportation. Haitians migrants however suffered a radically different fate as a direct consequence of their subordinate status (see McLeod 1998).

Despite the hostile, xenophobic national environment of the 1930s and the subsequent repatriation of tens of thousands of Haitians, many managed to remain on Cuban soil. Among the strategies employed to ensure their ability to stay in the country was marrying Cuban women and starting families in the hills.⁶⁹ Still others opted to go

⁶⁸ While there is no doubt that these labels in which many British West Indians embraced as part of their complicated identity are within themselves quite loaded showing a certain accommodation to the colonial masters, we must interpret the self-conscious display of British loyalty within both a historical and socio-political context. For a despised class of foreigner, claiming British-ness and appealing to the Crown in dealing with matters of mistreatment by Cuban authorities was probably the only means of securing some degree of socio-economic security and it also made the mother country accountable for the well being of their colonial subjects whether in or outside of the colony. To this end Barry Carr argues, "The frustration and confidence of British West Indian workers were such that during the early 1920s it was estimated that 90 percent of the work handled by the British Consulate-General in Santiago de Cuba and 75 percent of the total business proceeded in 1924 by the British legislation in Havana dealt with matters brought up by Jamaican residents." See Barry Carr, 2003:82.

⁶⁹ To justify the deportation efforts, Cuban officials often made mention of the fact that the predominantly male migrant class from Haiti could not adequately contribute to the society because they were not established in permanent families and as such were deemed a risk.

underground, living completely off the land and literally on the fringes of the bateyes picking up odd jobs and living off the generosity of others and their own will to remain in Cuba and work the land on a subsistence basis. When I would ask my informants, “Why would someone want to live under such insecure conditions,” the question of returning to Haiti seemed never to come up. Haiti was to be a mythic space that held all the hopes of “home”, but many would reply that with the loss of their lands, they no longer had a physical home or the means to make a living in Haiti. The rural environment of eastern Cuba, however, provided a surrogate space/place to articulate new ways of being Haitian.

The Dejoukaj 1986-1994: Haitian Political Refugees in Cuba

It is indeed difficult to truly appreciate the sheer hundreds of thousand or more who have fled Haiti to disparate locales during and in the aftermath of the *dejoukaj* or uprooting of the Duvalier regime. The current formation of a global Haitian diaspora began in the 1960s during the totalitarian Duvalier dynasty. Members of the upper and middle classes were the first to flee the socio-political atrocities, but then by 1972 and continuing to the present a large exodus, composed of a cross-section of Haiti’s poor, began to secure a future elsewhere. For many across the world the Haitian question became a consistent issue of political debates as thousands washed up on the shores of Caribbean territories, in the United States, and even as far a field as Montreal and Paris. However, wherever they happened to appear, they were often received with some degree of hostility and remained in a chronic state of marginality due to their divided allegiances and limited incorporation into host societies (Browdin 2003).

As I alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, the global ill-reception of Haitians became tangible in the highly racist response of the United States government to accepting those traveling on vessels to the United States. As part of the interception policy, for example, the Coast Guard would stop boats carrying Haitian migrants and escort them back to Haiti without allowing passengers an opportunity to request political asylum or refugee status, while at the same time they opened their doors to thousands leaving Castro's Cuba.⁷⁰ The main argument justifying this discrepancy in treatment was that Haitians were classified as economic migrants unlike their Cuban counterparts who were considered political refugees.

Further to this denial of entry, the consistent characterization of Haitians as being a moral threat continued within the charged polemic that typecast Haitians as carriers of infectious diseases. In the wake of the HIV/AIDS scare of the late 1980s, Haitians were often dubbed as being carriers of AIDS⁷¹ and hence a real health liability. The threat of contamination was thus rendered more acute through the immigration debates and was used as a reason to deny their entry into host societies.

Notwithstanding these biased perspectives, Cuba, as she did over a century ago, became one of the only societies during this period to willingly accommodate Haitian migrants fleeing their war torn state. The increasingly violent political environment of Haiti during the Duvalier dynasty and following the 1991 coup that ousted democratically

⁷⁰ For example, the 1966 "Cuban Adjustment Act" gives priority immigration status to Cubans fleeing the Castro administration and later grants them the right to acquire permanent residency after residing in the United States for one year. See Christopher Mitchell, "U.S. Policy Toward Haitian Boat People 1972-1993" in (July 1994): 69-80.

⁷¹The CDC issued a formal report in the 4 March 1983 issue on Morbidity and Mortality Weekly report warning the public to the effect that "... Persons who may be considered at increased risk of AIDS include those with symptoms and signs suggestive of AIDS; sexual partners of AIDS patients; sexually active homosexual or bisexual men with multiple partners; **Haitian entrants to the United States**; present or past abusers of IV [intravenous] drugs; patients with hemophilia; and sexual partners of individuals at increased risk for AIDS."

elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide precipitated another surge of Haitian migrants to Cuba. However, unlike the previous temporary-cum-permanent nature of the labor migration of the early twentieth century, this wave was characterized by a new type – the political refugee. It is estimated that during an eight year period of civil unrest 1986-1994 approximately 300,000 Haitians came to Cuba seeking asylum (Hurlich 1998).⁷² . Many of the Haitians who came to Cuba were intercepted at sea and were later detained, along with Cubans attempting to leave the island, at the United States Naval base in Guantanamo Bay.

After May 1994, when the numbers of Haitians fleeing their country escalated after a policy change by the Clinton administration that allowed those regarded as “boat people” to apply for political asylum, Cuba became a way station for Haitians awaiting either acceptance to the United States or repatriation to Haiti. Additionally, the Cuban government had to deal directly with a potential mass exodus of Haitians arriving on its shores when six hundred Haitians trying to escape a military coup ended up in the eastern provinces. As a result, an emergency refugee camp was set up in southeastern Cuba to accommodate Haitians who had entered the eastern provinces. While it is unclear whether all were eventually admitted, from interviews conducted with officials at Casa del Caribe, there is reason to believe that Haitians have been trickling into the island at a consistent rate during the political turmoil of the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to the late director of Casa del Caribe, “the movement of Haitians in the contemporary era was not like previous periods when they came in by the thousands; it was more like

⁷² At this point in my research I have not found any additional documentation to corroborate the assertions made by the Canadian freelance journalist, Susan Hurlich, or any clear indication as to the means by which detained individuals were able to seek asylum.

three people or maybe thirty that would end up here and plead their case to stay.”⁷³ Interestingly, these migrants were allowed into the island at a time when Cuba was undergoing its most severe economic crisis, thus indicating that Castro’s gesture to open Cuba’s doors was to signal to the wider international community, an opposing geopolitical stance to that of the United States, which revealed the biased policies of the U.S. government toward Caribbean immigrants. The Cuban government’s actions were also to extend and demonstrate fraternal ties with Haiti, the only other nation in the Caribbean with a clear revolutionary past which the new Cuban government could acknowledge as a beacon of the revolutionary history of the Caribbean.

The support for Haiti, incidentally, was not a fleeting political move, but one that continues to strengthen today. As an example, ten years after the mass exodus of Haitian “boat people” and one month after the two hundredth anniversary of the triumph of the Haitian Revolution, concern for the well being and stability of Haiti was communicated at a Special meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Association of Caribbean States, where Cuban Foreign Minister Felipe Pérez Roque maintained:

Cuba believes that the international community cannot leave Haiti alone. The social situation is worsening. The old problems derived from colonialism and exploitation are compounded by new, pressing difficulties relating to the unjust and exclusive economic order. Cooperating with Haiti becomes a duty to all of us, its neighbors....Apart from its internal difficulties, let us help Haiti at this crucial moment of its history – and let us not forget that the struggle of our Caribbean and Latin American peoples for their freedom started right there 200 years ago.⁷⁴

⁷³ Joel James, interview by Yanique Hume, tape recording, Casa del Caribe, Santiago de Cuba, 25 June, 1999.

⁷⁴ Equipo Nizkor and Derechos Human Rights, “Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cuba” [speech online], (Panama City, 12 February 2004, accessed on 07 February 2007). <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/haiti/doc/hti7.html>; Internet.

In this view, all nations of the Caribbean and Latin America are indebted to Haiti's defiant struggle for liberation. It is thus the duty of Caribbean nations to come to the aid of a country that, through the course of history, has had to bear the economic, political and social brunt of their insubordinate will to be free. Given Cuba's lengthy antagonistic history with Haiti, this position would appear out of place. So what were the motivations behind this redemptive evaluation and treatment of Haiti?

The answers can be found in the socialist policies adopted as a result of the Cuban Revolution. While the Revolution has consistently been under considerable criticism and more so with the increased economic instability of the island, the government's recognition of Haiti and their integrative policies cannot be taken for granted and are the root reasons for the re-evaluation of the population of Haitian descendants in Cuba. In a speech made by Fidel Castro in 1960, the deplorable history of neo-slavery that existed in Cuban bateyes stood as a sad reminder of Cuba's capitalist past:

The new plantations required cheap and abundant labor; population was scarce and there was a scarcity of hands. Their inhuman living conditions -- confined to living in shacks and in *bateys*, earning miserable salaries, deprived of any sort of sanitary assistance, and stripped of their most elementary rights in face of their exploiters -- were one of the saddest and most shameful of pages of capitalism in Cuba.⁷⁵

Interestingly, while the revolutionary government has often been criticized for putting matters of class above that of race, we see in this instance how, in highlighting the deplorable economic situation of capitalist Cuba, the question of how to absorb these labor migrants and their descendants was placed firmly on the table. The government's focus on granting a space for those deemed invisible by the mechanisms of a capitalist order, meant that for the first time Haitian-Cubans and other Antillean migrants and their

⁷⁵ Fidel Castro, Informe Central al Primer Congreso del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1960.

descendants were acknowledged as being part of Cuba's history. It was thus the duty of the revolutionary government to integrate these immigrant nationals into mainstream society through literacy campaigns, the restructuring of bateyes and the nationalization and re-distribution of plantation lands.

Socialist policies geared towards cultural renewal and preservation also helped in the formalization of communities of Haitian descendants, thus transforming the bateyes from barracks to socio-cultural collectivities based on shared cultural traditions, customs, and language.⁷⁶ Ironically, these efforts to safeguard the humanity of Cuba's marginal Haitian-Cuban communities came at a time (1962) when Cuba and Haiti severed diplomatic relations after Papa Doc Duvalier, using the threat of a Cuban invasion and Communism to procure millions of dollars in U.S. aid, sided with the U.S. government to condemn Cuba.

The severance of political ties, however, did not reduce the efforts of the Cuban government to restore the dignity of its Haitian-Cuban community. In fact, efforts to safeguard the cultural traditions of this community only grew and gave momentum to local cultural initiatives. For example, outside of the ethnographic research conducted on these communities in the 1960s and 1970s, the 1990s witnessed a burgeoning of cultural institutions that advocated continual cultural encounters and preservation of Afro-Haitian and Afro-Caribbean traditions. In February 1991 the Association of Haitian Residents and Descendants in Cuba was founded as a non-governmental socio-cultural organization with the objectives of unifying and recovering the traditions of Cuba's communities of Haitian descendants. Initially formed as a national organization, today there are chapters in Camaguey, Santiago de Cuba, Ciego de Avilla, Guantánamo and Havana.

⁷⁶ An examination of this transformation forms the subject of chapter III.

There has also been a mushrooming of over forty groups that promote Haitian culture including the famed Sociedad Tumba Francesa La Caridad de Oriente; amateur folkloric ensembles including, Grupo Barranca, Myste d' Vodou, Petit Danse, and also internationally acclaimed touring vocal, percussion and performance ensembles, Ban Rara and Desandann. In addition, the annual Kiba Krèyol festival which is sponsored by a non-governmental cultural institution founded under the auspices of the Caribbean Association of Cuba in 1998 – Bannzil Kiba Krèyol – dedicated to the study and dissemination of Krèyol language and culture in Cuba. According to the president of the association, Hilario Batista Feliz, “We want to study and promote Creole culture and language as part of Cuba’s national cultural patrimony” (quoted in Hurlich 1998:2). Certainly his efforts are not in vain for according to Hurlich, “After Spanish, Creole is the second most-spoken language in Cuba. Over 400,000 Cubans either speak it fluently, understand it but speak with difficulty, or have at least some familiarity with the language” (1998:2)⁷⁷ As a testament to the pervasiveness of Krèyol, the Creole language service of Radio Havana has daily evening broadcasts and can also be heard on the short wave frequency. Thus in many ways Krèyol has moved from being a liturgical language to the lingua franca of rural Haitian-Cuban communities and is expanding its reach to a broader Cuban public.

⁷⁷ Susan Hurlich, “Creole Language and Culture: Part of Cuba's Cultural Patrimony,” (Havana, 21 May 1998, accessed on 20 February, 2007). <http://www.afrocubaweb.com/haiticuba.htm>; Internet.

The Post 1994 Haitian Student Population in Cuba

While Haitian immigration to Cuba tapered during the lapse in diplomatic relations, a new transnational movement commenced thirty-four years after the initial political severance in 1962 when the then democratically elected Haitian president – Jean-Bertrand Aristide restored diplomatic relations on February 6, 1996. The Haitian student population in Cuba thus finds its roots in the restoration of diplomatic ties between the two countries. In a visit to the island in 2001, Aristide told reporters that the trip provided “an opportunity to nurture solidarity between Cubans and Haitians and explore the possibility of further bilateral cooperation.”⁷⁸ One of the direct results of these meetings was the development of scholarship programs ensuring placement of underprivileged Haitian students in Cuban tertiary institutions so as to “safeguard Haiti’s future.”⁷⁹

From 1994 to the present the newest wave of temporary migrants to Cuba constitutes a significant break from the past migratory trend. This distinction is not solely from the perspective of the composite group traveling, but also in terms of the relationship and responsibility these young transnational students have to both their host and home countries. Unlike the political refugees of the 19th and late 20th centuries or in contrast to the labor migrants who traveled seasonally and/or established permanent residences in eastern Cuba, contemporary Haitian students are not coming to permanently escape or secure economic opportunities in Cuba, but to gain an education and the technical and professional tools to return to their countries to better serve their communities. To date Cuban universities accommodate more than three thousand

⁷⁸ *Granma*, 15 July 2001.

⁷⁹ Personal communication with Juan Bautista, professor of clinical medicine in the Faculty of Medicine, interview by Yanique Hume, hand-written, Santiago de Cuba, 10 August 2001.

Caribbean students, with Haitians representing the majority of that number with over seven hundred students in the medical schools of Santiago alone.⁸⁰ Additionally, there are hundreds of Cuban doctors working throughout Cuba, thus pointing to the multi-faceted dimension of this bilateral link. It is likely that these numbers will only increase over time.

Continuing in the vein of Aristide, in a visit by Haiti's President-elect, René Préval on 13 April 2006, the issue of strengthening diplomatic cooperation between Cuba and Haiti was stressed with President Castro and select Ministers. Accompanying Préval on his visit was a group of sixty Haitian students who were to commence their medical studies in Santiago de Cuba.⁸¹ In an interview published by weekly Haitian journal (*Häiti Progres*), Anna Kovac, the head of Radio Havana's Creole Language Service, summarized the Haitian student situation as follows:

...last August, [2005] 128 young Haitians got their diplomas as doctors and 80 of them have gone back to Haiti to work with the Cuban medical brigade.⁸² Afterwards, they are going to come back to Cuba to learn a specialty, that is specialize in some branch of medicine. Every year from now on, all the Haitians students who graduate will go back to Haiti. Each young student has promised to go back to help their community, to serve their community, when he or she returns back home.⁸³

In interviews I conducted with ten Haitian medical students, it became clear that many of the early wave of students into Cuba tried to establish relationships with Cubans or tourists so that they would be able to stay or go to Europe after they finished their tenure

⁸⁰ Faculty of Medicine Handbook 2003, p. 6

⁸¹ René Préval, interview by Anna Kovac, "On Préval's visit to Cuba and Cuban-Haitian Cooperation: An Interview with Radio Havana's Anna Kovac". [interview on-line] (*Haiti Progres: Le journal qui offre une alternative*: 2006) <http://www.haitiprogres.com/2006/sm060419/eng04-19.html>; Internet; accessed on 23 June 2006.

⁸² As part of the agreed cooperation between these two Caribbean territories, Cuba has deployed over 500 medical personnel to treat patients

⁸³ René Préval, interview by Anna Kovac, "On Préval's visit to Cuba and Cuban-Haitian Cooperation: An Interview with Radio Havana's Anna Kovac". [interview on-line] (*Haiti Progres: Le journal qui offre une alternative*: 2006) <http://www.haitiprogres.com/2006/sm060419/eng04-19.html>; Internet; accessed on 23 June 2006.

as a university student. However, the increased initiatives of job placement in Haiti and the growing knowledge that the five hundred medical professionals currently working in Haiti would either be deployed elsewhere or returned home has meant that more and more students are in fact eager to return to Haiti and practice in their homes because as one student maintains:

We could go back with our heads up because we have a future, not like those who came before and never returned to Haiti. Everyone loves Cuban doctors at home and we are being trained in Cuba by Cuban doctors...we will be the ones to further what our Cuban brothers and sisters in solidarity have done for us. We will also bring back to Haiti what we have learned about our Haitian brothers and sisters here in Cuba and teach those in Cuba about Haiti. It is all one big circle; we all are in it together.⁸⁴

Thus, it can be seen that although the imposition of the 49 year old embargo and economic sanctions has placed Cuba on the peripheries of the world capitalist machinery, it still functions as a viable space for safeguarding the future of many Haitian nationals who seek education as a means to better their situations at home. While the social background of contemporary Haitian students differs from that of the political refugee or the descendant of a labor migrant, Cuba, in many ways, represents the hope that some have lost in Haiti. Many students feel they have a responsibility not only to the Cuban government and people who have hosted and educated them and the Haitian people who they will help to lift out of the debris of illness as they relate to poverty, but also to the descendants of Haiti who live in Cuba and who are able to exchange their stories of the past with someone who can speak of the Haiti of the present, thus bringing a tangible reality to the concept of Haiti in which they can all begin to relate.

⁸⁴Emeline Michel, interview by Yanique Hume, tape recording, Bayamo, 03 October 2002.

The Lasting Haitian Presence

Although the estimates range from 300,000 to 600,000 to date there are no accurate calculations of the numbers of Haitians and their descendants living in Cuba. As non-nationals are not represented in the national census, Haitians and their descendants are often absorbed under the different racial categories and not identified as a distinct ethnic group in their own right. Thus, revealing yet another example of state-level erasure of ethnic difference. Also, due to the nationalizing efforts after 1959 which universalized the political rights of illegal immigrants and workers, all Haitians and their descendants who entered Cuba originally as wage laborers were granted citizenship.

Genealogical studies conducted by Cuban sociologists have shown a concentrated presence in the eastern province, thus corroborating the historical narrative. It is, however, harder to determine the exact numbers who claim Haiti as a marker of origin and ethnicity. Notwithstanding the vagueness of contemporary figures, what is clear is that the flow of Haitian migrants into Cuba did not represent a closed, discrete moment in Cuba's labor history, but in fact a movement that has existed from the dawn of the Haitian Revolution, ranging from a flow of 19th century French émigrés and the enslaved population that accompanied them to the more significant movements of laborers in the 20th century and finally to the contemporary transnational flow of Haitian students. Each wave of migrants brought to Cuba their distinct customs and traditions and likewise had very different experiences. It was, however, the *braceros* that received the harshest of treatment, in part because of the massive scale of their migratory influx, the extremist nationalist environment of the time and the fragility of the global economy after the Great Depression. Even with the irregular patterns of migration, the constant

within this movement is that the two island-nations have become irrevocably linked and share a revolutionary history that unites them above historical differences and colonial legacies.

In the next chapter I move from the political constructs of Haiti by Cubans, to an ethnographic analysis of the micro-cultural dynamics of life within a Cuban batey. I explore the ways in which the descendants of the twentieth century labor migrants living in Cuba have over time created their own spaces of belonging or diasporic enclaves within the margins of Cuban society.

CHAPTER III

ON THE MARGINS: THE MAKING OF A HAITIAN DIASPORIC ENCLAVE IN EASTERN CUBA

Diasporic consciousness nearly always involves the aspiration of establishing or re-establishing an original homeland and a degree of commitment to an eventual return, whether permanently or simply as a referent of spiritual or emotional renewal. Like nationalism, diasporic consciousness is a powerful stimulus of myths, historical reconstruction and the redefinition of collective identity

Harry Goulbourne, *Caribbean Transnational Experience* (2002)

No me gusta la palabra pichón haitiano, soy haitiano legítimo, tengo mis dos banderas – de Cuba, donde nací y de Haití, la tierra de mis ancestros y donde origen mis misterios.

(I don't like the term, child of a Haitian, I am a legitimate Haitian. I have my two flags – from Cuba, where I was born and from Haiti, the land of my ancestors and where my gods originate.)

Haitian-Cuban resident of Barranca (2003)

What is particularly intriguing about the historical understandings of the Haitian presence in Cuba is at once the ubiquitous reference to Haiti in the discursive construction of the nation, while at the same time an insistent marginalization of their existence. Consequently, although Haitians and their descendants have been part of the Cuban landscape and social imaginary for centuries, the historical narratives of Haiti and the cultural practices of their descendants tend to be undervalued or discussed as discrete temporal phenomena that do not reflect the realities of contemporary Cuba.

But if this is the case, how do we begin to understand the formation and existence of diasporic enclaves in the rural hinterlands of eastern Cuba? How do we account for the large presence of Haitian descendants who represent their cultural forms, histories, and

identities in their everyday lived experiences and in local and regional festivals today? What do the mechanisms of survival deployed by generations of Haitians and their descendants reveal about issues of diasporic identity formation in a peripheral micro-locality?

To answer these questions, this chapter, in its ethnographic attention to processes of diasporic identification, foregrounds the rural community experience as a crucial site for understanding how Haitian cultural forms are re-imagined and adapted to suit the social environment of eastern Cuba. It investigates how Cubans of Haitian descent construct an alternative space of belonging by ordering their social worlds around an insider/outsider duality. To this end, I demonstrate that the construction of a diasporic subjectivity is not solely dependent upon travel across borders, but is in fact elaborated in response to a sense of invisibility, marginality, and through cultural practices grounded in Haitian peasant sensibilities. Although not a transnational community in the contemporary sense, an examination of the descendants of Haitians in Cuba affords an opportunity to expand and disturb the metropolitan focus of Diaspora Studies.

ON DIASPORA

Theorizations of diaspora have undergone various paradigmatic shifts since its initial association with the dispersal and “multiply-centered diaspora networks” of Jewish societies (see Clifford 1997) to pronouncements of the Caribbean as an example of a cultural diaspora (see Cohen 1997; Hall 1995). Amidst the various definitions, however, scholars have pointed out at least three major features of any diaspora, which include (1) the concept of dispersion across two or more geographical locales encompassing a multi-

generational and historical temporality that extends beyond two generations, (2) the self-conscious awareness of one's identity and roots or routes in and beyond the host country and within a broader diasporic network and (3) embodies a subtext of "home", which may or may not be bounded to a concept of an original or actual homeland.

The discourse on diaspora has also extended to include the sense of alienation experienced by the diasporic subject, and notions of dual or diasporic citizenship, which points directly to the ongoing support and relationship that the individual and collective have to the homeland through political and/or economic activities. The multiple attachments that encode the diaspora experience have led to concepts of *detrterritorialization* (see Appadurai 1997) as these identities are said to exist beyond the confines of any given national boundaries. Clifford (1997) points to the very fragility of notions of the nation-state *vis a vis* notions of diasporic identity when he argues, "Diasporas are caught up with and defined against (1) the norms of nation-states and (2) indigenous, and especially autochthons, claims by "tribal" people (307). Following this logic, the alternative public spheres of diasporic communities exists in part en route as they do through contested processes of "dwelling" within and outside the space of the nation.

Conceptualizing the Haitian Diaspora

Debates around the Haitian migratory and diaspora experience have been closely aligned to the broader theoretical frameworks of globalization and transnationalism (Basch et, al 1994; Laguerre 1998; Glick-Schiller and Fouron 2001). Within the scholarship there has been an emphasis on the border-crossing practices that serve as the social fields through which Haitians attempt to negotiate their dual allegiances. The

literature highlights the struggles of the transnational subject to secure a legitimate space within the unequal structures of power in host societies. It further demonstrates the inherent dialogical dimensions of diasporic identity formation and the fluidity in the patterns of movement between home and host nations.

In his work on the Haitian diaspora in New York City, Michel Laguerre argues that, “the immigrant community is located between and inside these two social formations [homeland and receiving country] and tie them to each other in a transnational spatial flow” (1998:4). Similarly, in her examination of Rara in New York, Elizabeth McAlister maintains that this duality has helped, “transmigrants at the grassroots level of popular culture to reterritorialize both their practices and their identities” (2002:186). The connections the Haitian immigrant has to home and the movement of new migrants to the United States, help to consistently revamp and alter cultural forms as they shift in their location of origin. Consequently, as transmigrants engage in “long-distance nationalism” the two cultural zones become an extension of each other (Schiller and Fouron 2001).

The circulation of cultures between the two zones of existence has afforded Haitians in the United States the opportunity to articulate a diasporic identity constantly informed by developments at home. This reality prompted populist leader Jean-Bertrand Aristide to declare in 1993 that Haitians in the United States (i.e., New York and Miami) constituted the “Tenth Department,”⁸⁵ thus reifying the cultural authenticity and legitimacy of Haitian-American diasporic communities.

Although I would agree with the proposition that the diaspora experience is one that is organized around notions of travel, continuity, belonging and re-rootedness, the

⁸⁵ Haiti is divided into nine-departments or provinces. However, Haitians in North American diasporic communities consistently demonstrate their economic and socio-political influence in Haiti, hence its inclusion in the Haitian political structure.

almost exclusive emphasis placed on transnational flows between home and host societies impedes an examination of diaspora as a condition of *dwelling*. While the construction of the metropolitan Haitian diaspora is organized around what would appear to be a consistent migratory flow between the various localities of home, not all diasporas sustain an ideology of mobility. The primacy afforded to travel thus elides a careful examination of the strategies of those who remain rooted in their new homes. I therefore take as my lead Stuart Hall's assertion that diaspora is determined not solely through "return" or mobility, but also through "difference" (1990:235).

Diaspora Theory and the Trope of Marginality

Critiquing the prevalent core-periphery model within existing diaspora theory, Shalini Puri maintains that the present literature on migration "inadvertently homogenizes the peripheries, rendering invisible the differences within the peripheries" (2003:5). In fact, the peripheries are often excluded or, at best, marginalized in the general literature, and in turn, the metropolitan experience is made to represent and speak to the wide range of diasporic communities.

The contemporary dispersions of people and goods, however, also exist within the margins of the metropolitan "global village." To this end, we find Dominicans in Puerto Rico (Martinez 1995), the proliferation of Rastafari and Reggae in West Africa and Cuba (Savishinsky 1994; Hansing 2005), Asians in Central and South America (Siu 2001), and, as this chapter examines, Haitians in Cuba. The construction of diasporic identities, with their attendant experiences of disruption, displacement, and processes of territorial, cultural, and psychic re-rootedness, are thus locally variable.

The particular configurations that structure the Haitian diasporic experience in Cuba differ dramatically from its metropolitan counterpart. In many ways, the descendants of Haitians in Cuba resemble those in Guadeloupe, who, Browdin maintains, use their marginality to structure their diasporic subjectivity. With “long-distance nationalism ...essentially out of reach” (2003:13) the descendants of Haitians in Cuba have had to construct their own imagined communities steeped in remembered and redefined cultural practices.

What makes the concept of marginalization particularly germane for the current consideration is Brodwin’s claim that “[m]embers of a given diasporic enclave within a larger dominant society are both agents with the capacity to author their (dislocated) lives and ‘subjects’ fixed into place by surrounding structures and discourses” (2003:384). To this end, the question of negotiation becomes critical for understanding how people attempt to self-consciously fashion their individual and collective identities, while mediating the constraints of their specific (structurally and spatially) bounded realities.

LIVING ON THE MARGINS

Eastern Cuba and the Politics of Cultural Difference

In the case of the descendants of Haitians in Cuba, the marginality that is experienced today is not one of political uncertainty (e.g., lack of legal documentation or citizenship). Neither is it a strict matter of economic exclusion, although this is impacted by their physical isolation on the island. Instead, the marginality of those of Haitian descent takes on spatial and societal dimensions. The physical remoteness and poor infrastructure of the *bateyes* and rural areas which the majority of them inhabit and their

existence outside of mainstream understandings of *cubanidad*, is represented in their invisibility as a socio-cultural entity or body of people.

While the geopolitical location of Havana as the gateway to the Americas and Europe situated the west as intrinsically cosmopolitan, the geographically isolated and mountainous environs of the east resulted in the perception that the region was overwhelmingly provincial in character and lacking metropolitan sensibilities. From as early as the eighteenth century the reliance on small scale subsistence farms, a localized mining and cattle ranching sector, and a rather antiquated sugar industry, illustrated a distinct local economy not fully integrated into the island as a whole. Additionally, with capital and technological resources being siphoned to the administrative centers in the west, an illicit but vigorous contraband trade of goods and enslaved peoples primarily from Saint Domingue, Puerto Rico and Jamaica emerged (Pérez 1988). Although most of the enslaved were sold to planters in Havana and neighboring provinces, the large proportion of free blacks and coloreds in the east had always outnumbered those amounts found in the west, serving to engender Oriente as backwards and outside the ambit of a progressively modern and civilized nation.

In addition, the extensive establishment of free settlements known as *palenques* in the vast mountainous environs above Santiago de Cuba perpetuated Oriente's socio-cultural dissimilarity from occidental Cuba. Matthias Röhrig Assunção and Michael Zeuske correctly highlight that, "A 'black' land of freedom developed in Oriente" (1998:414). Outside the gaze and reach of colonial authorities, *cimarrones* - (enslaved Africans who liberated themselves from enslavement by establishing their own self-governed communities) - from across the island forged ties with other fugitives from

neighboring Haiti who fled from nearby coffee estates.⁸⁶ As the locus of Cuba's revolutionary stirrings and home to highly syncretic cultural traditions, the rural hinterlands of Oriente, and Santiago de Cuba more generally, developed a distinct localized identity and eclectic cultural mix with a uniquely Caribbean ethos. With the consistent influx of Caribbean migrants, the eastern provinces became known as the most Caribbean part of Cuba, and the nation's second largest municipality, Santiago de Cuba being locally dubbed, "the capital and crossroads of the Caribbean."

The marginalization of Oriente, expressed in the common labels used to refer to the region, e.g., *palestino* and *el monte*, speaks to the manner in which the east is imagined to be culturally "other." These names capture the cultural and ethnic distinctiveness of the region and at the same time suggest a sense of alienation and deprecation. "Palestinian" is a form of racist designation for *orientales* (i.e. specifically blacks who live east of Camagüey) that evokes the highly contested and racialized Jewish-Palestinian situation. It is used in reference to the preponderance of the region's black residents and connotes "dark-skinned intruder" or "dangerous dark-skinned" person.

The term emerged among the white and racially mixed populations of the west (chiefly Havana) who were resentful of the blackening of the capital city by an influx of poor, dark-skinned migrants from the east. The expression was adopted into the vernacular in the 1980s, when the economic situation began to deteriorate, and scores of *orientales* moved to the capital in search of a livelihood and survival. It became a full-blown epithet in the 1990s during the *periodo especial* and thereafter.

⁸⁶ For more on palenques see Gabino La Rosa Corzo (2003).

Whites in Havana have always considered themselves as “pure” whites and have traditionally denigrated the *orientales* as inferior mixed-blood people. As one Santiagueran (Santiago-born resident) chided, “You, as a stranger to my country holding a foreign passport, have more rights than I have to travel around my own fatherland, but if you were to carry a *carnet* [national ID card] you would be treated just like the rest of us black easterners.” His rebuke was in reference to the revolutionary regime’s enactment of a law in the 1990s that strictly curtailed and policed population movements to the capital, in an attempt to control migration into Havana. The law thus added currency to the label *palestino* and greater legitimacy to the historical othering of a substantial segment of the society.⁸⁷

Paradoxically, while Santiago and the eastern region of Cuba is often acknowledged as being the cultural home and cradle of the Cuban nation (Pérez 1988), the administrative center of Havana and the west becomes the face of the nation, the Cuba the world sees and knows. Furthermore, in Cuba’s plural society the rural hinterlands are marked as racially, ethnically, and culturally other, thus making it difficult for the white occidental elite to reconcile the view that “the rural inland areas are the quintessential guardians of national culture” (Davila 1997: 93). As a direct consequence

⁸⁷ I am grateful for the clarification of this term provided by my Cuban colleagues and friends in Santiago de Cuba and in particular Carlos Moore. So pervasively used is this labeling that even now in Barbados, where I reside, the growing Cuban community, primarily from Havana, use the term to describe me and my particular connections to Cuba. Privately, they refer to me as *la palestina*, adding the disclaimer, *ella vivía en cuba por años pero es una palestina, estaba bien metida con los orientales*. (She is a Palestinian, she lived in Cuba for years, but is a Palestinian who was well embedded in the lives of easterners.) Similarly, the term “pichón” also speaks to this concept of a racial “other,” but in this particular case, the “other” was also culturally and ethnically different. Simply put, *pichón* refers to a scavenger bird, what in Jamaica we call johncrow, or what is commonly known as a vulture. In its popular usage then, *pichón* refers to the perspective that Antillean migrants were living off of others and foraging the scraps they discarded. They were despised by whites who saw them as less than human, not only through their existence being one based on dependency, but also relating their black skins to that of the bird, and the small head and shifting eyes to the lack of intellectual capacity and inherent dishonesty.

of this, the descendants of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, although born and reared in Cuba, are often not recognized as being a constitutive element of the nation.

JOURNEY TO BARRANCA **Ethnography of a Haitian-Cuban Batey**

Setting the Scene

The journey from Cuba's second largest municipality, Santiago de Cuba to Barranca involves traveling north east across roughly thirty-five miles of highway, mountain and secondary agricultural roads. Yet, even though these communities are in relatively close proximity, the actual journey can take anywhere between three to five hours. On the occasion of my first extended visit, there was an island-wide petrol shortage which reduced locomotive options and extended our journey to an arduous fifteen-hour ordeal, involving traveling by a horse-pulled carriage, camion (an open back truck), by tractor and approximately ten miles on foot.⁸⁸

We start out just before day break when the dampness of the pre-morning dew brings a welcomed crispness to Santiago's otherwise stifling heat. Beyond the portal, Yesel (my travel partner and guide) plays the melodious drum salute awakening the Rada spirits he and his family serve.⁸⁹ The flickering of light off the lamppost outside Madame Sylvie's urban compound⁹⁰ seems to follow the rhythmic time of the drum as it cast

⁸⁸ While hired cars have become an option for traveling to the towns leading to the rural hinterlands, they prove unsuccessful in traversing the terrain into the bateyes.

⁸⁹ Rada spirits are one of two main pantheons of divinities or *lwa* that are of Dahomey origin or from Ginen (Africa). Considered, benevolent family or inside spirits, they are revered first and are often propitiated with cool water.

⁹⁰ Haitians and their descendants tended to retreat into isolated rural communities in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Las Tunas, Guantanamo, Camagüey, Ciego de Avila, and Holguin. Some of the communities they settled include: Cadije, Thompson, Cueto, Caridad, Guanamacá, Loma Azul, Pílon del Cauto, La Serfina, Songo la Maya, San German, Buena Vista, and Barranca. Madame Sylvie is one of approximately sixteen families of Haitian descent that I have intimate ties with, living in the city of

shadows on the cracked asphalt. The dancing silhouettes draw my gaze to a graffiti scribbling of a popular slogan on the wall opposite the doorway – “Viva la Revolución, Viva Fidel! For a moment, I stand mesmerized by the haunting song for the Haitian god of the crossroads and destiny, Papa Legba, and try to make sense of this alternative culture being played out just on the fringes of Santiago’s city limits.

Emerging from the kitchen in the back of the house where so many meals are prepared for the extended “family” of “Haitians” visiting and living in Santiago, Madame Sylvie glides into the front room to pay her respects to the lwa. After saluting the altar and placing a cup of freshly brewed coffee on the third tier of the family shrine, she greets me with a warm smile before lifting Legba’s consecrated baton, which she uses to tap on the ground three times while offering these words, “Bonjour Attibon Legba, ouviri barriere pour moi.” After being cleansed with an assortment of fey (leaves) klerin (raw rum) and florida water and nourished by salt biscuits and a thick and heavily sweetened cup of coffee, we set out on a horse-pulled carriage to the provincial bus terminus. We pull into the depot soon after the sun had pierced the horizon, but it will be several hours before we secure a space on a camion.

It is just before 10 am when the camion finally pulls out of the station. Perched on the edge of a narrow plank of wood between two elderly ladies, I look out the side of the truck taking in the last familiar sites. Once past the colonial style houses that line the residential neighborhoods of Sueño and Vista Alegre, we approach the Plaza de la Revolución and the stately monument of celebrated mulatto general Antonio Maceo on horse back, pointing us to the highway that connects Santiago to Havana and Holguin.

Santiago and she is from one of the most respected families that were originally from Songo, a small rural community between Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo.

The camion surprisingly whizzes along the newly paved road before exiting onto a northbound thoroughfare that leads us to a series of steep hills into the mountains. After climbing past a military checkpoint, the road is soon lined with vendors on foot selling freshly cut and fragrant bouquets of flowers, stones from an abandoned copper mine, candles and statues of Our Lady of Charity encased in glass globes or meticulously carved out of cedar, announcing we are approaching the historic town of El Cobre.⁹¹

Once a buzzing, multi-ethnic mining town, Cobre is home to the majestic Basilica that houses Cuba's patron saint and a site frequently visited by newly weds, families and their newborn/young children, and annually by devotees of the Yoruba-based Santería religion, who bring offerings and promesas to the goddess of love, luxury and sweet waters – Ochun. Cobre is the site of a famous slave rebellion in 1731, to which a monument to the cimmarones or maroons stands erect. It is also home to many people of Haitian descent who trace their lineage back to the first generation of immigrants that settled in and around Cobre and in particular a Haitian-Cuban settlement and palenque known as Pilon del Cauto.

We circle the main plaza where many get off and as they leave the Krèyol accented Spanish becomes more audible, thus attesting to the visceral longevity of the connection between the two countries and cultures. As the bus continues its ascent, the vestiges of the familiar sites of "Cuba" quickly disappear. The colonial style architecture, which makes up the city scapes of Santiago de Cuba, Havana, Cienfuegos and Guantanamo, are replaced by the thick and seemingly impenetrable forest of the

⁹¹ The copper mines of El Cobre were active during the late seventeenth into the eighteenth century and were outfitted mostly by enslaved labor from Cuba and neighboring territories, including Jamaica and Hispanola. Cobre is also the site of an important slave uprising and locale of an important maroon community, to which a monument is erected. But it is best known for its Byzantine-styled Basilica that houses the statue of Cuba's patron saint, Our Lady of Charity.

countryside that is interrupted occasionally by a few simple wooden or incomplete concrete structures. We near the town of Palma Soriano, and its difference from the other villages that preceded it is striking. The dense woodlands are replaced by fields of coffee plants in the highlands, but as we descend into the town, miles of cane fields in the distance announce the past and present economic backbone of the village. Further attesting to the predominance of sugar cultivation are the mills and tractor driven carts of freshly cut cane that are parked in the depot just off the dirt path leading to the bateyes. In contrast to the historical monuments, densely situated concrete buildings, plazas⁹² and modern apartment blocks that characterize Santiago's hilly neighborhoods, Palma Soriano's rural landscape is quite pronounced. Additionally, there are very few signs of the economic modernization experienced in other areas of Cuba, as exhibited in a variety of tiendas (dollar store), modern cars, and tourists. Instead, the municipality's reputation as an important agricultural center is evidenced by vendors who carry their loads on tired mules or themselves lug bags and carts of fruit and ground provisions to the State markets.

Just beyond the market, the camion circles cautiously around the town square where most of the passengers exit. We continue along a dusty road that narrows as we get closer to an old sugar mill where we get off and make our way up the muddy track to a crossroads where we wait for one of the tractors that will traverse the fields and valley into Barranca. As expected they are not quick in coming, but just before the sun lowers behind the mountains one arrives and everyone scurry to find a space where they will stand. Yesel is the first to throw his slim frame over the safety bar atop the flat bed. By

⁹² Plazas or open areas / squares were a common feature of the urban landscape in the Spanish colonies and are found across the urban and to a lesser degree, rural areas of Cuba.

the time I make it on to the platform, there is hardly room to stand, as we compete for a space amidst all the other people and their wares. The tractor pulls off slowly, suddenly hurling forward as the driver attempts to navigate a turn off the dirt road onto a meandering maze leading towards the cavernous cane fields.

Before long, the miles of green sugar cane are disrupted by an expansive vista of scorched fields and the intermingling pungent aroma of burning cane trash and stale molasses. Further ahead, the conspicuous landmark of the sugar mill stands as another reminder of the economic backbone of rural Cuba. Each scene reinforces the other and inscribes onto the visible landscape Cuba's historical and contemporary dependence on sugar. Although sugar is no longer king, it is clear that those outside of tourist - dominated urban locales depend on the land for their livelihood. The mestizo guajiros and campesino (i.e. rural Hispanic and mixed farmer/peasant) along with the first and second generation black Haitian field laborers who continue to cut cane on lands they now call their own, although seemingly different, share a common fate of restless work in the remote interiors of Cuba. The bateyes have become those places in which the two groups have lived and worked together for nearly a century.

Very quickly we lose sight of the mill and burned fields and travel up a narrow path, but Yesel soon realizes we are being taken off course, and we exit with a considerable distance yet to cover. Dripping with exhaustion we follow the track around a series of undulating hills. We walk for what seems to be an eternity. As twilight turns to night we had only the moon as our guide. After a couple of hours we see in the distance, a twinkling of lights in the middle of an open valley. By the time we descend the last hill into Barranca, the moon is bright in the sky. The stillness of the dark adds an

air of mystery to the assortment of houses. As we walk westward up the main corridor, the remoteness of the batey is striking. All the familiar sites and feeling of a typical Cuban barrio (neighborhood) with its smells, sounds and people are absent and in their place is a silence that bespeaks Barranca's insularity. At last, we come to a modest wooden structure at the far end of the main road. Waiting just outside the portal is our host, Emeline, who greets us with sweet bread and hot coffee.

BARRANCA: LIFE IN A CUBAN BATEY

In light of this pervasive coupling of their invisibility and marginality, over time Haitian-Cubans were able to forge a collective hyphenated identity and presence in eastern Cuba. Critical to this process were the rural settlements known as *bateyes* where Haitians historically made their living. Bateyes in Cuba commonly functioned as a company town consisting of barracks and other dwellings and communal spaces located close to the cane fields (*campos de caña*). Structured by race, ethnicity, class, and national origin, bateyes were built around a massive base of Afro-Caribbean laborers (who themselves were highly stratified with Haitians occupying the lowest rung); a small middle strata occupied chiefly by poor rural white Cubans (*guajiros*) and a few English-speaking Afro-Antillean migrants; and white American and Cuban business men at the pinnacle of the social structure.

In many respects, bateyes represented discrete self-contained satellite communities, whose principal purpose and infrastructure centered on the efficient cultivation and management of the sugar crop. The class of predominantly black laborers served as the pillar around which the batey functioned, yet they were not socially,

economically, or politically enveloped into the broader society. Although originally experienced as deplorable spaces akin to slave barracks, the revolutionary mandate to eradicate the discrepancies across the classes has positively impacted the structure of Cuban bateyes. In Cuba today, bateyes are communities in and of themselves. They are socially constructed by their residents around an ideology of communal cooperation and as such are envisioned and experienced as an extended family compound or village.

Located to the east of the Sierra Maestra mountain range, Barranca is one of a chain of rural settlements linked to the dozen or so sugar mills still in operation along the eastern corridor between Santiago de Cuba and Holguin. The antiquated railway tracks, traversing the western end of the batey, serve as the artery of communication between the loosely populated communities in the rolling valleys and hills, connecting the interior sugar and highland coffee areas to the commercial town of Palma Soriano (approximately 45km outside of Santiago de Cuba). From oral history accounts, we know that the land in which Barranca now sits was a large amalgamated estate (*finca*) owned and operated by a powerful US multinational sugar company. From as early as 1906 they began to enlarge the labor supply with seasonal male migrants primarily from three principal recruiting centers in the Haitian coastal towns of Port de Paix, northwest of Cap Haïtien; Ley Cayes in the south, and the Plaine de Cul de Sac area, north east of the capital Port au Prince.

The name “Barranca” is taken from the Spanish words *barraca*, meaning thatched roof hut, shanty or shack, *barracones* or slave barracks and *barranco* literally meaning gully, ravine or figuratively, obstacle. According to Cuban historian, Pérez de la Silva, the existence of Haitian laborers in Cuba is one of extreme marginality, not solely on the basis of how they were exploited, but in the spaces they occupied, which were often,

“small temporary shacks of palm, bark and thatch on a crude frame of small branches” or in “open one-room barracones” that featured a hammock made out of discarded flour bags or jute (1975:56). As the name and physical structures suggests, the batey or “shanty town” comprised of crude structures to house temporary laborers was established principally to satisfy expanding capitalist ventures. Barranca thus came into being as a result of socio-economic changes that prompted the establishment of a system of neo-slavery based on the exploitive treatment of a black foreign working-class. Without any clinics, schools or recreational areas, Haitian field laborers were left to their own devices to eek out a livelihood on meager resources. Being outsiders in a foreign country and living under sub-human conditions meant that those who chose to return year after year or remain in Cuba permanently had to develop a mode of existence that was conducive to the new environment in which they found themselves.

The population composition of Barranca continues to reflect the racial and ethnic identity, and relative homogeneity of the initial settlers. Educational opportunities provided by the revolutionary government have meant that many of the young descendants of Haitian cane cutters are leaving the confines of the batey to better their lives and the lives of their families. However, first, second, and third generation Haitians still dominate the community. Of the 520 residents divided among approximately 110 households, Haitian-Cubans account for all but fifteen of the community’s residents. The other residents are the descendants of *campesinos* (white Cuban farmer/small landholders).

Architecturally, the assortment and arrangement of the buildings are quite bewildering, making it difficult to grasp the lay of the land. The rather rigid nucleus of

buildings in the center contrasts with the circuitous collection of houses on either side of the main road. The deceptively insular core of buildings spills out from the center, radiating to the far reaches of the compound towards a wall of untamed vegetation. The wild foliage that hugs the periphery of the village along three sides functions as a natural border reducing the view of the cane fields and separating the space of living from the space of working.

This particular distinction between these two frames of reference and conceptions of space and time become part of the lived environmental reality, which indeed orders and defines distinct social spheres and the relationships that take place within these areas. While work does occur within the boundaries of the domestic space of the home and the plot of land that surrounds the home, work for self is not in the same category as work for “others.” In this case, “others” have historically been U.S. sugar barons, but with the land reforms of 1961, which resulted in the nationalization of farm lands, and industry, the “other” became the Cuban State.

Although there is a clear physical demarcation that structures the distinct views of work, the cultural spheres that divide the inside, private family yard space from the outside, state-controlled farming area is quite fluid.⁹³ This is in part because life in Barranca is quintessentially a public affair. It unfolds in the daily chores associated with

⁹³ According to anthropologist, Henrietta De Veer, the concepts of inside and outside are among the “primary organizing principles” of the Caribbean social order (qtd. in Douglass 1992:184-5). This dichotomy has served as a critical conceptual framework for understanding the social structure and gender-based social relationships and activities in the region. As an example, the prevailing thesis maintains that the inside/outside binary in essence represents two complementary but distinct worldviews that are ideologically grounded within a value system organized around the concepts of respectability and reputation. The former, is female-centered and associated with the domestic, private sphere of family life and the home/yard, whereas the latter refers to the male-centered public sphere of the street (Wilson 1973). Richard Burton, also argues that this duality extends beyond the mere issue of spatial orientation but speaks to the reputation/respectability opposition developed as part of “the “Crab Antics” school of Caribbean anthropology,” see, Burton , 1997:62-168 and see, Wilson (1973)

peasant village life linked to the working of the land. Seldom do you find residents living strictly behind closed doors. In fact, the intimate private inner domain of the house/yard complex spills out quite naturally into the public. Secondly, when we examine the social and architectural organization of Barranca, it becomes apparent that the gender boundaries that help define the distinguishing sensibilities and activities associated with inside and outside are indeed quite porous. Although women dominate the domestic space of the house, men and women equally share the weight of the agricultural tasks in the bateyes. Hence, the women continually traverse the outdoor spaces, which in the Caribbean have traditionally been considered the domain of males (see Burton 1997).

Despite the fact that the community is comprised of first- and second-generation Haitians who categorically identify with their hyphenated identities, or even at times view themselves as Cuban, language is the principal marker of ethnic and cultural difference. Language further orders and separates the zones of existence. Although many of Barranca's residents speak Spanish fluently, albeit with a heavy French Creole accent, Kreyòl tends to be the lingua franca of the home and within the confines of the community. Spanish, on the other hand, is the language of choice for engaging work for others and for the general Cuban community living on the outside. In keeping with this distinction, notable shifts in register or tone accompany the distinct languages, further separating the intimate spheres of domestic life among kinfolk from the distant, anonymous existence of a field laborer. This is not at all to suggest that individuals do not forge intimate relations through working the fields, but instead to argue that the level of intimacy created through this "work for other" is markedly different from the tone of relationships established by creating a shared collective identity through community.

This interest in guarding their ethnic and cultural identity goes beyond that of wanting to maintain a link to their country of origin. Indeed, Haitian migrants were left few options to deal with the severe marginalization of their existence in Cuba. Separated from their extended families and homeland, Haitian labor migrants relied on re-establishing kinship and social networks to facilitate their integration into Cuban life. Significantly, the concern was not to assimilate, but to establish and maintain ties within one's own ethnic group. As they were the most despised and subject to the harshest of treatment by Cuban and U.S. official alike, Haitians had few allies and thus maintained an assiduously separate identity from locals. Even among other Afro-Caribbean migrants, the supposed negative implications that would arise from their association with Haitians were perceived as a threat that had damaging social ramifications.⁹⁴ With no political clout and with their fate in Cuba wedded to the land, many of these migrants saw the establishment of social networks as a matter of urgency in maintaining a strong presence and also for the preservation of their traditional culture.

The terms family and kin were to take on new expansive meanings in Cuba, which removed them from their dependency on blood ties. Today, one's kin, whom many Haitian-Cubans identify with the Kreyòl words *kousin* (m)/*kousen* (f) (cousin) do not necessarily denote a familial connection. Instead, the term is used to designate people from the same region in Haiti and/or those who work in the same *central*. It is also used to suggest an intimate friend, not necessarily sharing the same ethnicity/nationality, but

⁹⁴ I noted this particular snubbing of the Haitian "Other" by descendants of Jamaicans during the period of my fieldwork (2002-2004). I was often questioned and scolded for abandoning my country folk in defense of "de backward Haitian people dem, who will sooner or lata, obeah me." The fact that I was a Jamaican conducting research on the Haitian presence in eastern Cuba was seen as a great offence that betrayed my own identity and people. As a consequence, many of the elder Jamaican-Cubans would try to convince me to change my focus by alerting me to the supposed proclivity Haitians had for "witchcraft."

someone who is sensitive, yet not patronizing to the plight of Haitians and their descendants.

One's family or *famille*, on the other-hand, often refer to those who work, and perhaps share garden plots; engage in a conjugal life; live under the same roof (including outside children raised by the female head of the household and live-in house guests), or those who serve the spirits together. In many cases the actual names of individuals are dropped in place of these titles. Thus, the constellation of *kousin* and *famille*, enveloped within the expansive social network Haitians and their descendants have constructed complicate strict genealogical blood lines.

Historically upon arrival, the sugar estate operators would replace the birth-names of Haitian laborers with offensively grandiose, infantile, and racist epithets, such as "Hercúles", "Tómas Hayti", "Juan el Grande" and "Alejandro el Magnífico."⁹⁵ In the re-appropriation of titles commonly used within the network of ritual kinship, an attempt was made by these displaced Haitians to reclaim their own identities and sense of agency. Although blood ties were cut, new relationships were forged using titles common to the Haitian peasant social structure and Kreyòl language. These titles took on a new significance because their use was critical for re-establishing social networks that were fragmented.

In many ways the prerogative to rename provided Haitians and their descendants the means to construct an alternative reality rooted within Haitian folk practices. Even words that were developed by Cubans to express the Antillean immigrant's extreme alterity (e.g., *pichón*) were reformulated by Haitians and at times used as terms of

⁹⁵ In a genealogical survey I conducted on seven families currently living in Barranca, the parents of all of the forty-five interviewed had their names replaced by the sugar boss.

endearment, suggestive of a shared historical and collective identity or a marker of their cultural authenticity. In so doing, they reduced their negative potency, charging them with new meaning.

One word in particular, *pichón*, has historically been used as a derogatory term to identify and belittle Afro-Caribbean migrants and their experiences in Cuba. Much like the term “nigger”, the meanings of “pichón” are steeped in a history of racism and asymmetrical power relations that associated blackness with backwardness and a host of other ills. While still used in common parlance today, the choice of its use is very specific and thus carries its own set of meanings. In some instances the descendants of Antillean migrants have used the term *pichón* to call attention to a separate collective black foreign and in some cases rural identity which is grounded in an ethos of resistance and perseverance. At the same time, many black *Santiagueros* use it as an ethnic marker distinguishing Antillean blacks from Afro-Cubans. In one incident I heard a black Cuban using it to differentiate members of a folkloric troupe. I remember him pointing to a beautiful dancer and qualifying his ability to relate to the drums by saying, “el es pichón haitiano.” Within this context, I took the word to mean, literally, “the son of a Haitian” and followed my informant’s logic of associating the dancer’s talents with having been steeped in Haitian ritual dance from his parents from a very young age. The use of this phrase was not only to denote the dancer’s ethnicity but also spoke to the cultural legitimacy of those of Haitian descent. Although an essentialist construct, for many Cubans, Haitian are commonly understood to be more “authentically African” and hence more apt to engage in certain activities including drumming, dance, spirit work etc.

This process of naming continues into the contemporary era with those of Haitian descent claiming the terms *haitiano*, *haitiano-cubano*, *cubano-haitiano* *pichón haitiano* as markers of their collective and individual identity. These labels are at times used interchangeably, but they context specific. What they reveal is the multiplicity of identities those of Haitian descent adopt as they attempt to navigate their space in Cuba. The privileging of one title over another reflects the different configurations of national and ethnic belonging Haitians experience and attempt to negotiate.

During my own fieldwork I was able to map the shifts in my status from “outsider” to “insider” in the various communities where I lived and worked based on the classificatory schema developed by Haitian-Cubans. When I started my fieldwork I was called *la jamaquina* (the little Jamaican girl) denoting my ethnicity, nationality, age/youth, and unfamiliarity with the ways of Cuba and the lives of those of Haitian descent. I was afforded a certain degree of entry into the community on the basis of my race and color and because I was not Cuban, but in fact Antillean. However, I was not fully trusted; my allegiances were not as yet clear. Also troubling was my status as a researcher where, in many cases, the elders felt that I was their pupil as well as a child needing to be cultured into a way of life I had lost.

The summer following my first three-month stay in Santiago shifted my title from *jamaquina* to *pichóna*. Having experienced some of the hardships of life in Cuba, the uneven structures of power, and persistent government surveillance, placed me in an interesting position that blurred the “insider”/“outsider” category. No longer living in a State-sanctioned guest house, I was enveloped into the folds of daily life in Santiago and traveling back and forth to the countryside and my various “homes” in the city. When I

returned to Cuba for my extended field work of three years, my time was split between Barranca, and two residences (one with a Cuban family and the other a family of Haitian descendants). My extended residence in Emeline's home in Barranca and her cousin's home in Santiago made me a defacto member of her family, but because my allegiances were split between several houses not necessarily from the same *famille* I was given the title *kousin*. It was not until after eighteen-months in the field and exclusively attending the ritual gatherings of Emeline's extended family in Santiago that my status shifted to that of *famille*.

I thus fell somewhere between *pichóna*, *kousin* and *famille*, which all represented a different degree of "insider-ness" and carried with it its own set of ambiguities that in the end proved particularly helpful in my own negotiations doing fieldwork. More than anything else, these various titles pointed to a self-conscious awareness, on the part of the descendants of Haitians, of the structures of relationship within their own communities. It also pointed to a collective sense of their unified identity and the various gradients that separate those that claim Haiti as their spiritual home, or place of origin.

Making a Living

The history of the early movements of seasonal laborers into Barranca corresponds with the persistent reading that the Haitian presence in Cuba was temporary. Residents maintain that as early as 1906, Haitians worked the sugar harvest. The migration expanded over the course of the next two decades with numbers reaching their peak in 1928 and dropping off after 1934. Contracted as field hands (*braceros*) for approximately eight months, migrants would divide their labor respectively between the planting season in September and the harvest from December to May. The traffic of

incoming migrants was determined by this agricultural pattern and was constituted by two principal waves of migration—1906 to 1912 and 1915 to 1934. The first influx of predominately elder males maintained homes and worked across two national territories. Later, younger men and families disillusioned by the possibilities of life at home in Haiti, under the US Marine occupation, attempted to re-root themselves in the hinterlands of eastern Cuba. This latter group tended to remain in Cuba after the *zafra*, engaging in a range of income-producing activities based primarily on working the land.

One such practice involved traveling into the mountains to the coffee estates to work the harvest during the *tiempo muerto* or dead season (i.e., end of sugar cane harvest). Not all were successful, due to the great distances one had to cover to get to the *cafetales* and the challenges of not being adequately compensated. However, out of the desperate need to support themselves and their families, Haitians began to establish permanent communities based on the patterns of the agricultural seasons. The rugged terrain and considerably cooler climate made planting a challenge. As a result, the hills were known to have periodic shortages of staple foods. With the close of the sugar harvest in May, farmers would pack a generous supply of goods and trek to the interior mountain areas in search of employment. Men made this annual pilgrimage to satisfy their need to secure an income until the start of the new sugar season and to fulfill the demand for cheap laborers in other more localized industries. This circulation of labor and food was not only instrumental to the survival of these migrants; it also fostered their sense of autonomy while rooting them in extensive socio-economic networks and relationships throughout out eastern Cuba.

In the same way that the residents of Barranca have all experienced cutting cane, the maintenance of small subsistence plots has been the defining activity, historically and presently maintaining this community and its people. Nearly all residents work a small piece of land dedicated to the cultivation of ground provisions (e.g., cassava, yams, and sweet potatoes), as well as plantain, bananas, and field peas that are consumed as domestic staples and sold in neighboring towns. Historically, excess produce would be sold in area markets or traded for coffee. However, while this pattern persists, since 1959 there have been economic reforms that have both hindered and assisted the ability of small-scale farmers to sell their crops. Typically, surplus food is brought to Palma and Santiago where it is sold to the State-run markets or to farmers that need to make up their quota of goods to be sold to the State.

Since the food shortages of the early 1990s and the reoccurring droughts of the mid-1990s, small farmers find it increasingly difficult to produce excess crops to sell to the government and have therefore depended on subsistence farming primarily to meet domestic demand and/or to supply the sale of crops through more lucrative clandestine circuits of trade. Usually female centered, the network of vendors traverse the rural communities and towns selling and bartering goods. When asked why primarily women of Haitian descent engage in this activity, rural residents respond, “It has always been that way,” and agree that since the economic crisis of 1989, men, black men in particular, are more of a target for police harassment and may be accused of loitering city streets.⁹⁶ With most of the supplies being siphoned to the tourist sector, as well as administrative centers

⁹⁶ The rise of prostitution (*jiniterismo*) has challenged this presumption. As black women make up a growing number of those strategizing or jockeying to secure a livelihood in Cuba, the traditional vendors have had to develop new tactics and routes so as to alleviate suspicion and the inevitability of being caught and fined.

and cities around the capital before the meager remains make their way back to the east, *orientales* are indeed quite disenfranchised and left to find creative, and in turn illicit, means to *lucha diariamente* (struggle daily).

One example that I witnessed weekly involved two young ladies, simply dressed, each carrying shoulder bags filled with approximately five pounds of fresh coffee beans, that they sold for 10 pesos. It was not necessarily the sale that was intriguing but the actual circuits in which the coffee moved. Once acquired from coffee farms by bartering root crops in the rural hinterlands, the coffee would be sold to the owners of *casa particulares* (guest houses) who then would offer it to their foreign guests as part of a continental breakfast at an extra cost. The surplus would later be given to the neighbor who worked as a physician in the international clinic, which exclusively serves tourists who need, for example, to fill a prescription or get a tetanus or allergy shot. These same tourists would be encouraged to support the local economy by purchasing something unique to the eastern region, coffee. Simply packaged in a rather quaint, rustic manner (a tin can wrapped in banana leaf) the coffee would become a tourist souvenir to be enjoyed by others miles away. The money from the sale of packaged coffee, approximately \$3-5 USD, would then be redistributed to the owners of the guest house, with a small portion going back to the original vendors (approximately 50 cents). The circuit of trade, however, did not complete itself with this monetary exchange, as the original vendors often took their earnings to purchase prized items (soap, toothpaste, cooking oil) in Santiago's dollar stores or clandestinely in the streets and resell them in the batey or supply their own homes.

This contemporary movement and exchange of goods had its antecedent in yet another female-centered, income-producing activity, interestingly not dependent on working the land. The selling of sweets and pastries in neighboring bateyes—which during the 1920s-1940s were discrete self-contained company towns with a potential consumer population of not only laborers but mill operators, drivers, and administrators—was a customary practice. Many of the women I spoke to recount this type of activity as being a critical supplement to the meager wages they earned from cutting cane. Monetary payment was not the only transaction that took place from these exchanges, and in fact it was secondary to the rather sophisticated bartering system that had developed. In exchange for sweet breads, coconut drops, peanut brittles, vendors were able to secure soap and toothpaste that they then resold in the bateyes. Although selling sweets has lost the significant place it once held, the process of reselling is still quite common.

Unlike the loud and boisterous example of the traditional *machann* (market woman), *Madame Sara* (Haitian hawker) or, *revendeuses* (reseller) that link the economy of the countryside and cities of Haiti, the contemporary descendants of Haitian migrants clandestinely engage in a livelihood strategy that has helped define the peasant economy which has been reconstituted in the hills above Santiago de Cuba. Although life on the plantation compound attempted to dehumanize them, they developed creative strategies to survive and negotiate their marginal economic position. Over time in their private lives, Haitian laborers and their descendants have instituted a peasant-based economy and work ethic grounded in the principles of collective work and reciprocity which, in turn,

encouraged the emergence of a “reconstituted peasantry” in the remote environs of Oriente (see Mintz 1985).

The link between agricultural production, the market, and larger regional circuits of exchange is just one part of the household economy. The cutting of cane, agricultural production and trading form three of the four pillars of the rural household economy. The fourth is livestock, specifically the raising of sheep, goats, and pigs have given many of these laborers a certain amount of financial and social security. In times of shortages, of which the contemporary era has seen plenty, these farmers have been instrumental in filling the gaps in agricultural production and distribution. They also are in demand to furnish the animals needed for annual celebrations and Vodú ceremonies. To this end, the raising of livestock, while supplementing household income, also forms a critical component of serving the spirits and the ritual economy of reciprocity that spiritual work requires (McCarthy Brown 1995).

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing features of this community and others inhabited by descendants of Haitians is the persistence of Vodú. Due to the familiar spiritual topography of eastern Cuba, Haitians and their descendants were able to assimilate their religious practice into their new environment rather seamlessly. Indeed, Vodú existed not only as a religious system, but in fact the principal social institution that has ordered the lives of the displaced and served as the agent of rooting them and their successive generations in Cuban soil.

Vodou was able to take root in Cuba because the ritual practices were started with individual priests who established religious family networks in the communities they settled. That most of the initial religious houses were founded by men reflects the gender

configuration of the migratory movement of laborers. Due to the particularities of the labor requirement in Cuba, the majority of migrants during the first three decades of the twentieth century were men. For example, of the 165,567 *haitianos* entering Cuba officially between 1912 and 1927 only 10,495 were women. In contrast 20,838 women of 110,450 migrant came into Cuba from the British West Indies during this period (McLeod 2001:207). I have found that it was this very gender imbalance that inculcated a sense of urgency in guarding one's traditions jealously and authoritatively. In fact, most of the Cuban women who married Haitian men or men of Haitian descent tended to adopt the culture of their husbands, learning the language, participating in and helping to maintain Haitian cultural practices, while in many cases suppressing their own identities as Cuban.

The relative absence of Haitian women, however, has meant that men have been the main purveyor of the religious practices of Vodú in Cuba. They have become not only the authority, voice, and leaders of the communities, but, interestingly enough, male divinities in the pantheon, such as Ogou, Dambala, and Gede predominate. The female *lwa*, while acknowledged, do not occupy the same prominent position and often times are recognized by their syncretic creolized saint names rather than their Fon or Haitian names. This has troubled the accepted narrative of the inherent egalitarian structure of Vodú. In fact, of the approximately twenty-five Haitian-Cuban settlements I visited, only two had women leaders or *manbos*. Notwithstanding the implication of this discrepancy, Haitians and their descendants made a living as traditional Vodú healers in Cuba, servicing their communities and those who sought them out.⁹⁷ More poignantly, serving

⁹⁷ I was struck by the number of people, of a particular generation, in Oriente who either sought the counsel of an oungan or who had been treated by a Haitian healer. Additionally, in Santiago de Cuba it is

the spirits has ensured continuity over time and a tangible connection with a past and generations of Haitians. As a source of tradition, Vodou becomes a source of instruction and the link that as David Scott argues, “makes the past intelligible and legitimate” (1991:279).

FROM AGRICULTURAL OUTPOST TO HAITIAN-CUBAN COMMUNITY

Barranca’s complex identity as a Haitian-Cuban diasporic community and distinct cultural enclave has been in formation from the first influx of labor migrants and as a consequence of the broader shifts in the socio-political national landscape since 1959. In the century that has elapsed from the introduction of migrant laborers to Cuba, Haitian-Cubans have developed creative strategies to maneuver and negotiate their space within the margins of Cuban society. Like other Haitian diasporic communities, residents of Barranca use the traditional markers/tropes of Haitian-ness to re-construct their social worlds in the hills of Cuba. I have demonstrated that it was their societal and spatial marginality, and hence, invisibility that allowed for the creation of an alternative space within the interstice of the batey that would contribute to the process of redefining their identities and sense of community. Outside of the gaze of the State, Haitian-Cubans actively engaged in a process of harnessing a distinct social world founded on the premise of cultural and ethnic difference. This concept of difference was one shaped not only by marginality but indeed formulated through a self-conscious effort to remain a distinct ethnic group and as a community unified by a shared sense of cultural identity.

commonly reported that “los brujos verdaderos son los haitianos, “the true sorcerers are the Haitians.” For more on Vodú in Cuba see, Joel James, José Millet and Alexis Alacron, *El Vodú en Cuba*.

The descendants of Haitian labor migrants have been engaged in a constant process of redefining their identities, and the land has been pivotal to this process of self-definition. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the re-establishment of informal institutions that help farmers collectively structure their labor output. The *konbit* is one such structure that has been transplanted and serves to anchor generations of Haitian-Cubans to their roots and demonstrate their acute appreciation of communal work and living. As a livelihood strategy in Barranca, the *konbit* dates back to the first decade of the twentieth century and continues to the present.

The traditional organization of rural life in Haiti was premised on the centrality of the family and the cooperative, collective sharing of the responsibilities of the household and working of the land. The *lakou*, or residential site comprised of several homes where members of the same family shared in the maintenance of garden plots, supplies, food and livestock. In many ways the structure of the *batey* spoke to a communal existence as it was the locus of all types of collective labor—both for self (this is not used in its singular sense but self as community) and others (the State). Brought together not by lineage but in fact by capitalist exploitation, Haitians and their descendants found themselves re-engineering the concepts of family land to suit their new environment, so as one farmer maintains, “Barranca is one big *lakou*...We are all joined, some by blood but all by sweat.”⁹⁸ The reality that some households are comprised of extended families that work the land together and share in the domestic duties and products of the intimate family unit does not disrupt the view that Barranca functions as an expansive work cooperative and at the same time a *lakou*. However, in consciously renaming the environment, residents re-inscribe a localized meaning that validates their present

⁹⁸ Tomas Dupuy, interviewed by author, tape recording 12 March 2003, Barranca, Cuba

existence as well as historical legacy and experience. It links and re-roots these descendants of migrants to their predecessors, thus forging a bond between then and now and there and here. The communal “we” thus envelops *all* and makes each and every individual accountable for the other. This concept of a shared collective identity in its extension beyond the confines of the batey, articulates a diasporic consciousness that conjoins distinct spaces/places and generations.

Furthermore, the specificities of the local social taxonomy of eastern Cuba, and particularly the rural hinterlands, prohibit, to a large degree, the types of global encounters that give rise to the hybridized identities formed in the metropolis. This is not to suggest that Cuba has not been impacted by cultural flows. The influence of Rastafari, Reggae, Reggaeton, and Hip Hop is unquestionable and points to this cross-cultural fertilization of culture. But these forms tend to take root in urban spaces, in either Havana or the city of Santiago; the provinciality and insularity of the interior has meant that outside influence have been slower to penetrate.

In this redemptive reading of life in a Cuban batey, it is not my intent to belittle or negate the historical and present hardships Haitians experience. Although entitled to the benefits of full citizens, residents of Barranca exist on the peripheries of Cuban society and experience their marginality daily. Food shortages, isolation and immobility due to transportation or petrol shortages, and lack of electricity and running water, magnify the insularity of Cuba in these desolate enclave communities. There are two popular sayings that often go in tandem that express both the reality and resilience of Barranca’s residents: “when things are bad in the town, people are near death in the batey...God chokes but never strangles.” Through these proverbs we glean an understanding of the

very real implications of the persistent marginality of these communities. At the same time, Barranca's residents have not resigned to their fates, but are indeed actively engaged in a constant process of reconstructing their social worlds in a manner that give credence to their historical experience and hyphenated identities.

CHAPTER IV
CASA DEL CARIBE
and the
THE POPULARIZATION OF HAITIAN-CUBAN CULTURE

With the triumph of the Revolution on 1 January 1959, one believed that this would include conditions of equality for the descendants of Haitians and their inclusion as residents and citizens of Cuba. One believed in the possibility of integration that the Revolution would produce, but in reality, that has not been produced. We developed the Festival of the Caribbean in Santiago, a Festival that puts us in contact with those factors, [traditional cultural practices of marginal populations] so as to complete the process of equality, making contact with culture bearers and other elements of our patrimony, giving them the same dignity and their rightful place as being part of our traditional popular culture and national patrimony.

Joel James, *Casa del Caribe: Sueno y Realidad*
(2000)

It is through our work and efforts that the descendants of Haitians recognize their culture and collective identity.

Jose Millet, personal interview (2001)

From its inception in 1982, Casa del Caribe has functioned as the principal agency for shaping and disseminating knowledge about the Caribbean, and specifically, the constitutive elements of Antillean and Haitian culture as it is preserved in Cuba. Further to this, it provides a national platform for members of immigrant enclave communities to represent their cultural forms and identities. My aim in this chapter is to analyze the impact of the cultural programming and activities initiated by Casa del Caribe in its attempt to carry forth the revolutionary mandate of rescuing, preserving and strengthening marginalized popular cultural forms and folklore.

In her examination of the intersections of Afro-Cuban religious practice and the formation of a revolutionary national identity, Christine Ayorinde accurately notes,

“Folkloric studies in Cuba...were a rescue mission, not only in the sense of redeeming formerly unacceptable cultural forms but also in the sense of capturing them before they inevitably disappeared with the construction of a new [revolutionary] society” (2005:111). However, the means through which the various cultural institutions carried out these aims were quite different. Indeed, the mission and strategies employed by Casa del Caribe have to be understood in light of the paradoxically marginal position Santiago and the cultural forms found in the eastern provinces hold within the Cuban imaginary.

Casa del Caribe’s emphasis and interpretation of folklore in the 1980s to the present should not be seen as a seamless extension of the folklorization projects carried out in Havana during the 1960s-1970s, but in fact should be read as a regional critique of the limitations of the nationalist paradigm on culture. As indicated in the opening quote, the institution’s creation of the annual Festival of Caribbean Culture or Feast of Fire has been critical in providing a venue for multifocal expressions of alternative and more expansive visions of *cubanidad*. One of its principal goals, therefore, is that of using culture and the festive frame to fulfill the aims of integration that the Revolution has failed to realize.

Before proceeding with the examination of the development of Casa del Caribe and the subsequent promotion of Haitian cultural forms in public festivities, it is important to situate these developments within the broader shifting interplay between popular culture and policy. Of particular concern to me are the ways in which the founders of Casa del Caribe initially deviated from the normative paradigm established by the Teatro Nacional. To this end, I begin the chapter with revisiting the interwoven articulations of culture and revolution and the role of folklore in fostering a revolutionary

aesthetic. I then turn to the specific case of Casa del Caribe and argue that the pioneering research conducted on Cubans of Haitian descent and their communities in the 1960s and 1970s provided the preamble for the development of the institution and the Festival out of which it emerged. In its analysis of Casa's mandates, the chapter explores the process by which rural field laborers were transformed into performers, and how as a result they use the space and public visibility to make claims on the nation, while at the same time asserting their ethnic and cultural difference through performance.

THE SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC PATRIA

Exaltation of Afro-Cuban Culture & Folklore

The Cuban Revolution awakened a renewed commitment to notions of *patria* and national culture (Carbonell 1961; Martínez Furé 1979; León 1982). But *patria* was no longer amorphous. The revolution gave it definitive form and “new meanings as an all-inclusive community through which to find a sense of purpose and a source of identity” (Pérez Jr. 1999:482). In his speeches, Castro often made reference to the inclusivity of this notion of native land: “we are going to speak about *patria* for everyone ... and we are going to see to it that *patria* belongs to everyone, the way Martí wanted” (ibid). This revised notion of *patria* went beyond its literal translation of “homeland” to a notion of an egalitarian, and in turn, a homogeneous sovereignty in which all citizens were entitled to profit from and feel a sense of belonging. The revolution's emphasis on a shared sense of national belonging or *patria* and identification with the poor or “folk,” deliberately encouraged the reformulations of *cubanidad*.

The cultural renewal of Cuba after 1959, as in the period of heightened cultural introspection in the 1920s through 1940s, meant a reaffirmation of the nation's cultural

diversity and expressive forms. Culture, and in particular Afro-Cuban cultural practices, became yet again the master trope for the exploration and fashioning of Cuba's new revolutionary identity. As historian Louis Pérez Jr. notes, "culture became the site of contest, the place at which to seek recovery precisely because it was everyday and everywhere" (1999:484). It was therefore critical to the politicization and legitimization of the policies undertaken at the time.

Within this framework of using culture as a unifying principle of the "new Cuba," several institutions were established to research, document, and preserve Cuba's arts and expressive forms such as The Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematografía [ICAIC, Cuban Institute of the Art and Industry of Cinematography], the Consejo de Cultura Nacional [National Council on Culture], and the Biblioteca Nacional de José Martí [José Martí National Library]. However, it was the establishment of the Teatro Nacional de Cuba [National Theatre of Cuba] and the Department of Folklore that became critical outlets for exploring and shaping a nascent revolutionary aesthetic that celebrated Cuba's African heritage and its contribution to a new national cultural identity.⁹⁹

The Teatro Nacional was a particularly unique cultural institution in that not only was it a research center and library, but it was also a performance art complex that housed the choral, art, modern dance, and music departments. Its Department of Folklore, directed by Argeliers León and its successors, the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba [CFNC –National Folkloric Ensemble] and the Instituto Nacional de Etnología y Folklore [Institute of Ethnology and Folklore] had the task of rescuing, affirming, and

⁹⁹ Some of the intellectuals that emerged out of these institutions and published in the affiliated journals include anthropologist Miguel Barnet and current *asesor* of the Conjunto Folklórico, Rogelio Martínez Furé

celebrating African influences in Cuba's popular culture (León 1961a). Through the collection of oral narratives, songs, music and dance traditions of the working class, the founders of the National Theatre project began to develop an indigenous aesthetic that would then be stylized for the concert stage. By emphasizing the aesthetic value of Afro-Cuban cultural production, the founders and members of these state-sponsored institutions believed they were redressing the prevalent misunderstanding and devaluation of these marginal cultural forms. León also posited that the theatrical framework presented a non-threatening environment for education and entertainment that would help demystify Afro-Cuban religious practices and by extension reduce the stigma and racism that precluded Afro-Cubans from becoming active participants in a civilized nation (see Hagerdorn 2001:140). Afro-Cuban expressive forms in the process became a central site of contest wherein the integrationist goals of the revolution, along with the desire to define a revolutionary aesthetic that would inform the creation of an authentically Cuban national culture were negotiated and defined.

In the words of León, "The triumph of the Revolution initiated a new stage [in the explorations of Afro-Cuban expressive forms]: the rescue of our traditional culture. And the beginning of a new course of work: to make this culture present; to convert it into the patrimony of our own people; in a word, to liberate it from the alienating forces that impeded its self-appraisal" (1982: 187). With the launch of a series of seminars and workshops on folklore in 1960-1961, the goal of revitalizing Cuba's national culture and African derived traditions was initiated. The workshops focused on training and equipping students with the tools to analyze and interpret Cuba's popular cultural forms,

with the aim of enhancing the nation's appreciation of the diversity and dynamism of Afro-Cuban folklore and culture.

Although the concept of folklore formed a significant part of Ortiz's scholastic studies on *folklore afrocubano* or Cuba's Afro-Cuban ritual and secular culture, the revolutionary era sparked a renewed interest in using it as a vehicle for interpreting Cuba's African heritage. In his 1979 reflection on the status of folklore to the revolutionary efforts, artistic advisor of the CFNC Rogelio Martínez Furé stated:

Folklore is the opposite of *official, bookish, institutionalized*. It is the product of the socio-economic and historical experiences of the whole community, and shows its most characteristic traits as a social entity. Folklore is of the people and for the people. It is anonymous, empirical, collective, and functional... It is in the field that the revolution is waging one of its greatest battles, recapturing for the new socialist culture we are forging, the valuable, positive, traditions created by our people, whatever their antecedents. This will be enriching for our culture as our people become aware of their own heritage, whose diversity is a reflection of the many ethnic groupings that made it up and the force of our popular tradition. Culture that is alive not crystallized, for if we Cubans have preserved it up until the present, it is because it fulfills an important social function; otherwise it would have become *an historic, dead* folklore. My emphasis added (1979: 266-267).

As Ayorinde states, "[t]he Revolution's early policy toward folklore, like similar policies elsewhere, *defined the popular as the traditional* (my emphasis added 2005:114). Likewise, within Furé's view, folklore is interpreted as the expression of Cuba's popular traditional culture that continues to develop, renew and enrich itself over time. Folklore is of the people, part of their socio-historical and lived-experience. To this end, it naturally pushes beyond canonization as it is dynamic and subject to change as members of the society alters and/or invents new traditions. As an ideology, however, the folklorization paradigm bespeaks a process of selection and standardization whereby particular forms that existed within specific practices and experiences are recuperated

within a larger process of articulating a new national culture by means of legitimating the “folk.” Ironically, in locating Afro-Cuban religious and ritual practice under the rubric of folklore, these traditions become inadvertently static representations of once dynamic forms. The rescuing mandate, therefore, could be seen as an attempt to capture and fossilize these forms before they become extinct.

Equally important is the ongoing investigation and rediscovery that is part of the collection and preservation process. For Martínez Furé, who was one of the participants in the seminar on folklore in 1961: “The Conjunto Folklórico Nacional was founded in order to satisfy a need of our country, which did not have an institution capable of retrieving dancing and musical expressions of national character and integrate them into the new socialist state...but without losing their folkloric essence” (1979:248). For example ritual and secular dances were reinterpreted to fit the many goals of the revolution primarily that of borrowing images of difference to create a new identity related to African derived forms.

Paradoxically, while Martínez Furé acknowledges the heterogeneous peoples and elements that have informed Cuba’s folklore, in socialist Cuba, Afro-Cuban religious expressions become the dominant source material for constructing a revolutionary identity that is increasingly Africanized. Additionally, the law to “stimulate folkloric traditions” while grounded in an appreciation of the aesthetic values of Afro-Cuban religions was not however founded on an acceptance of these practices. Santería, Palo and the Abakuá societies, as Helg (1997), de la Fuente (2001) and Ayorinde (2005) poignantly demonstrates, remained criminalized and ridiculed as primitive and superstitious and not in keeping with the rational subject the Revolution supposedly

created. Katherine Hagerdorn's (2001) publication on the CFNC and the performance of Afro-Cuban Santería, reveal the degree to which the music and dance are extracted from the belief systems and cosmological orientation of the Afro-Cuban religious traditions they stage. Thus, the creation of a revolutionary aesthetics depended on a revitalization and re-signification process that elaborates on the traditions of the black "folk" without necessarily endorsing their practices (see Daniel 1991 and 1995). Perhaps even more troubling is the culture of authenticity that the folklorization process instills as a direct result of the repetition, stylization and standardization of songs and dances. The folkloric performance thus gets read as the "correct" way and by extension the State defines the standards through which intimate practices and cultural forms are evaluated and received (Hagerdorn 2001:149). Hagerdorn recognizes that while the establishment of the CFNC provided jobs for a cross-section of the black working class population, there still existed tensions between the black producers of the popular forms and the definition of "high" culture perpetuated by the mulatto and white directors and cultural elites.

These rescuing programs initiated by the State provide the context in which the foundation of Casa del Caribe and their subsequent focus on Haitian cultural forms must be judged. However, Casa's cultural agenda differed fundamentally from the folklorization project adopted by Havana, in that it was exactly this distinction between "high" and "low" that the founding members of Casa del Caribe were attempting to erase. Whereas the CFNC presents stylistic renditions of dances associated with Afro-Cuban street culture and ritual forms, the Festival of Caribbean Culture sponsored by Casa del Caribe provides a space for members of Haitian communities to perform and represent

their own traditions. For the Executive Committee of the Municipal Assembly of the People's Power:

The triumphant revolution of January 1, 1959 meant the social, political and economic vindication of the non-Cuban Caribbean mass and of their descendants residing in our country, thus opening the way for the artistic expressions that they possessed to be inserted in its fair value within Cuba's, revolutionary and socialist national culture...The House of the Caribbean symbolizes the will of the people of Santiago de Cuba to revitalize the cultural links with the Caribbean that unites us (1981:3).

In light of this quote, it is important to note how the concept of folklore is expanded beyond that of cultural renewal, a point I will develop later. What is clear is that for the founding members of Casa del Caribe, the institution and its programming serves as the conduit of exchange and the means of empowering and giving voice to a marginal population that have historically been positioned outside of any definition of Cubanness. While the revolutionary agenda informed the policies implemented by cultural institutions, Casa del Caribe went beyond the original template. By using the concept of "folklore" as a vehicle for fostering awareness, they are attempting to move towards socially integrating *all* of the diverse identities and expressions that have come to define the nation. The integrationist goals of the revolution expanded to an articulation of not just racial but also ethnic identities.

For one choreographer associated with Casa del Caribe, "Santiguerans have a cultural identity that is remarkably different from what is found in Havana and it goes to follow that we express our *cubanía* [self-conscious will to be Cuban] in ways that are unique to the history of Oriente and in keeping with the popular traditions of our people; the festival provided an outlet for celebrating our cultural plurality and strong African-Caribbean roots."¹⁰⁰ The Festival of Caribbean Culture was thus an affirmation of

¹⁰⁰ Joaquin Hernandez interviewed by author, tape recording, June 15, 2000, Santiago de Cuba

Cuba's identity as not just an Afro-Latin state, but specifically as a celebration of the Caribbean/Antillean dimensions of Cuban identity.

THE GENESIS OF A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

The Founding of Casa del Caribe

Situated northeast of the city center in the upper class residential neighborhood of Vista Alegre, Casa del Caribe occupies two buildings on a fairly quiet tree-lined street. Away from the bustle of the city, the institution could be easily mistaken for yet another residence in this once exclusive part of town. However, behind the colonial façade Cuba's diverse African-Caribbean heritage unfolds, as a team of researchers busily write, archive, curate and maintain a relaxed forum for cultural exchange.

On June 23, 1982 Casa del Caribe was founded by the Executive Committee of the Municipal Assembly of the People's Power in Santiago de Cuba. Envisaged principally as a cultural center that would emphasize the primacy of research, Casa has developed into a leading institution with satellite centers throughout the city. Although research institutions abound in Cuba, most are centrally located in Havana and unlike Casa del Caribe not terribly concerned with religious and cultural expressions prevalent in the eastern provinces. For this reason, Casa's cultural programming and activities became permeated with a strong emphasis on Cuba's Caribbean heritage expressed in the cultural forms maintained by the residents of Oriente.¹⁰¹

With a management council consisting of a director and deputy directors of culture, international affairs and investigations respectively, Casa del Caribe is

¹⁰¹ Before the 1959 Revolution and the 1976 governmental provincial re-designations, the provinces of Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, Guantánamo and Santiago comprised a signal region known as Oriente, with Santiago de Cuba as the capital.

responsible for conducting archeological, ethnographic and historical research on Oriente and the Caribbean. Its staff is comprised of folklorists, ethnologists, anthropologists and historians who apart from their own research endeavors organize conferences, colloquiums, specialized workshops, cultural encounters and the annual Festival of Fire, out of which the institution evolved. These venues, but especially the journals, *Del Caribe* and *El Caribe Arqueológico* (published by the institution) provide the primary outlets for disseminating the work and activities carried out by Casa's staff as well as regional and international scholars conducting research on the Caribbean. Additionally, the organization is in charge of managing cultural associations and events throughout the city including the Movement of the Nueva Trova, Week of Santiago's Culture, Festival of Poetry, Cultural Nights and the annual Carnival, to name a few. All of these tasks are in keeping with the institution's quest to unearth and celebrate the particularities of Cuba's diverse heritage, and hence, its search for and affirmation of a more authentically inclusive national patrimony.

Most of the artists and intellectuals associated with the early developments of the institution's programs emphasized its role in revitalizing the historical and cultural links between the city and the Caribbean and bridging the gap between artists, intellectuals, the community and the institution. Many concurred with this position and repeatedly described their activities, especially in the decades leading up to the foundation of Casa, as taking the revolution outside the realm of discourse and ideology into concrete cultural and intellectual practice.

What was particularly notable in these exchanges was the way in which Oriente's cultural distinctiveness and importance yet national marginalization have informed the

way in which researchers at Casa envision their work of knowledge production and dissemination as part of the revolutionary mandate of equality and recognition. In other words, the original founders saw and still see their work as dignifying the region's diverse cultural and religious traditions. By providing a national platform for the public visibility of these expressions, Casa's founding members believed that recognition would serve as the catalyst for greater possibility of integrating the nation's diverse population. In this sense, the process of retrieving Haitian and other Afro-Caribbean cultural expressions from the margins of Cuban consciousness and discourse also attempts to disturb the primacy of Havana and Occidente in the writing of Cuba's history and promotion of national culture. As one staff member mentioned, "The history of Cuba is the history of Havana, yet the heart of Cuba and the cradle of its cultural traditions is in the east, we must acknowledge this fact and show the important role Santiago has played in the very meaning of Cuba." Here the view is that Santiago has been relegated to a space of invisibility within the national narrative and in order to fully realize a sense of national unity, this region has to also be acknowledged as an important sphere of political, economic and socio-cultural influence.

Interestingly, although Santiago is known to be the cradle of nearly all the music genres in Cuba, from the French inspired Tumba rhythms to the Bolero and Son, it is only within the last two decades that the State has begun to exploit the cultural products of Cuba's second city for tourism. A common adage, "no vale nada si no pasa por Havana," (it is of no value if it does not pass through Havana) speaks to the view that it is the capital city that defines what is legitimate and of cultural significance. As a result many artists wanting national recognition and international exposure have had to travel to

Havana for greater visibility and legitimacy. In recent years, however, as a result of the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon and the revolutionary government's exploitation of folk tourism, many tourists are recognizing Santiago's cultural treasures and going to the province directly to experience a taste of "authentic Cuban culture." The interest from the outside is also influencing those within the island to reassess Santiago's space within the nation. Even with these advances made in terms of cultural recognition, the citizens of Oriente still experience their marginalization on a daily basis due to the persistent lack of monetary resources and basic amenities.

This distinction of Cuba into two unequal cultural zones speaks to the spatial arrangement of power relations and cultural ideological production that relegates the east to a space of inferiority. It is therefore understandable that Casa interprets its mission of retrieving cultural traditions from the margins to a more central position, as not only an intellectual, artistic, or cultural enterprise, but one that firmly politicizes their revisionist mandates.

RETHINKING THE FOKLORE PARADIGM

Casa del Caribe's Cultural Programming

Before proceeding it is useful to explore further what the concept of "folklore" entailed and how it is currently being put to use within Casa's cultural programming and revolutionary mandates. While the emphasis on folklore for the purpose of stimulating national conscious is not unique to Cuba, the rather limited definition of the term sets it apart. Unlike the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Romania and many other places where the term "folklore" encompasses a range of activities including indigenous/folk art as

well as specific musical and dance genres that demonstrate a continuity with an agrarian or peasant past; in Cuba the term became synonymous and even rigidly assigned to Afro-Cuban culture.

From the early twentieth century Afro-Cuban expressive forms (i.e. *folklore afrocubano*) and more specifically, religious traditions became conflated with the concept of folklore and its attendant meanings (i.e. preliterate, pre-industrial and pre-modern). Through the work of noted anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, Afro-Cuban religions were first identified as primitive objects of criminality and over time re-interpreted and later valorized and publicized as icons of Cuba's national distinctiveness. Given the historical Hispanophile emphasis one must not underestimate the significance of this shift in focus to the African influence on the nation's cultural patrimony. However, while the tentative reappraisal and acceptance of Afro-Cuban culture brought to the fore the African presence alive in Cuba and spoke to the elites' attempt to define a new inclusive national space, this pseudo legitimization oscillated between co-optation and suppression or what ethnomusicologist Robin Moore has identified as disdain and fascination (1997). This ambiguity manifested and some may argue still manifests itself in the simultaneous appropriation and sanitation of some aspects and at the same time "the systematic campaigns against traditions of African origins" (Ayorinde 2005:168) and most notably Afro-Cuban religions, which are pejoratively dubbed *brujería* or witchcraft.

This revised evaluation of Afro-Cuban culture thus has to be evaluated in light of the historical discomfort with engaging and fully integrating Cuba's black population. In many cases, increased public visibility did not parallel the social reality on the island. In fact, the gesture towards inclusion did not redress the marginal socio-economic or

political status of Afro-Cubans. Although their performance traditions were in part endorsed and hence seemingly legitimized by the middle-class intelligentsia at the time, their expressive forms were to be relegated to the space of the “popular” and forever outside the ambit of “high art.” Moreover, the ruling faction, in its attempt to construct an inclusive *cubanía* appropriated and diminished the oppositional potential of Afro-Cuban culture and religion by incorporating them within a larger legitimating enterprise and thus reducing them to frivolous spectacle devoid of significant content or intrinsic value. To this end, sacred and secular expressive forms are utilized as fragmented images of difference made to represent the nation as whole and further the revolutionary mandates. Within this logic, highly complex ritual and philosophical systems of thought are reduced to visual iconographic markers of the exotic.

The secularization and aesthetization of the ritual form into theatrical representations erases the complex histories, contexts and identities that inform the performance, thus codifying dynamic traditions into static objects or “positive folklore” (see Hagerdorn 2001). Thus, the exaltation of Afro-Cuban culture, while seemingly a redemptive gesture, did not empower it but instead served to pigeon-hole blacks as exotic performers. The other consequence of this early definition of folklore is that it started a process of cultural objectification that was to endure well into the contemporary era.

As a means of combating this trend of de-contextualization, Casa del Caribe inaugurated an alternative approach that attempts to retrieve the teachings, sacred arts and ritual practice associated with African-derived religions from the margins of “folk practice” to a more central position within intellectual discourse. According to one of the institute’s leading religion scholars, José Millet, “religion provides a window through

which to examine the complex multidimensionality of an individual and collective sense of identity. It also helps us locate Cuba's pervasive African-ness."¹⁰² Religion thus became a key lens through which to examine the lived experience of marginal communities. It also served as a critical vehicle for examining the processes of intercultural exchange while at the same time celebrating the cultural expressiveness of Cuba's religious landscape.

Much of the knowledge about the diverse religious traditions practiced in Oriente was initially collected through the ethnographic and sociological studies conducted during the 1960s and 1970s. With this research, folklorists and lay scholars began to archive materials on the social organization of rural communities and the bateyes. They also gathered materials on the rituals and cultural performances, e.g. Gaga and feast day ceremonies celebrated in these ethnic enclave communities. These descriptive accounts were, however, substantiated by greater analysis of the religious and cosmological universe that structures diverse ritual practice found throughout eastern Cuba. By the early 1980s, and continuing for a decade after, a team of investigators including Joel James, Alexis Alacron and José Millet began to focus their attention on the traditional religiosity of Haitians and their descendants living in Cuba. The public acknowledgement and scholastic engagement with what would have otherwise been repressed or dismissed as atavistic represented a major development in recasting this question of religion as folklore. In many public lectures and articles this team approached the sacred lifestyle of Haitian-Cuban communities outside the folklore

¹⁰² Personal communication, Jose Millet, Santiago de Cuba July 10th 2000

paradigm and instead investigated their spiritual world as complex, integrated religio-cultural systems rooted in a history of resistance and survival (see James, et. al. 1998)¹⁰³.

To this end, Casa has helped lead the way toward official recognition of religious practices maintained by Cubans, particularly in Oriente and among immigrant populations. These were to not only include the more popularly known Regla de Ocha (Santería) and Regla de Palo (Palo Monte) but also practices specific to the East, such as Espiritismo and Vodú. Through these efforts Casa consistently acknowledges and disseminates knowledge concerning the centrality of the contribution of African-based religions to Cuban national consciousness. Beyond the spectacular display of Afro-Cuban culture as portrayed in highly choreographed and standardized dance sequences and musical notes, Casa's approach to religion is to emphasize its ritual structure and process, sacred content and beliefs, as well as to highlight the role it plays within society.

For its part, Casa del Caribe has grounded its official endeavors in a process of affirming and legitimating a diverse array of ritual practice as well as the practitioners of African derived religions. This particular emphasis on the practice as preserved within families and communities has led to a focus on the moral authority of devotees (*creyentes*) and leaders (*santeros/as, paleros/as, manbos, hounsans, espiritistas*) that stands somewhat outside the governmental apparatus of the State. For example, it is the religious leaders and practitioners that are featured in their ritual performance events not artists trained to mime and/or feign ritual behavior. The intent and result are thus different from the template provided by the Teatro Nacional and Conjunto Folklórico. While the CFNC are concerned with exhibiting the aesthetic and performative

¹⁰³ In almost every issue of *Del Caribe*, there is a feature on some aspect of African-derived religious practices preserved in Cuba. Additionally the complex ritual structures and religiosity of the descendants of Haitians are also consistently featured.

dimensions of sacred rituals, Casa's programming emphasize the sacred content, belief and ritual structures through recreating rituals within *in context* exhibitionary environments. As a result, Casa devotes an entire physical structure, Casa de las Religiones Populares -- House of Popular Religions, as testament of their acknowledgement of the importance of research into the popular religiosity of the Cuban people.

Set in a colonial building with an attached patio/outdoor ceremonial space, the House of Popular Religions boasts an impressive collection of consecrated ritual objects that are set apart in different exhibits throughout the space. Simply lit and regally set apart with strategically placed story boards that provide critical narrative and explanatory texts, these sacred objects are displayed for visual and spiritual contemplation. There are also exhibits of installed sacred spaces that represent most of the religious traditions popular among Oriente citizens within the structure of the building and in the adjacent outdoor space. The drums and other percussive instruments are placed within the different recreated ritual/sacred environments and photographs of musicians playing them animate otherwise static representations. As one moves outside, the regal presentations of *tronos* (altars) and sacred chambers containing ritual paraphernalia are replaced by an organic representation of a rural environment. In essence, the exhibited altar spaces give way to a more interactive experiential environment wherein the recreated rustic scene takes prominence over discrete ceremonial objects.

Once in the courtyard, medicinal plants as well as trees known for their sacred and healing properties (e.g. the ceiba or mapou), mark the different areas for ceremonial gathering. Amidst the lush vegetation and organic seating arrangements stands one of the

most striking features of the courtyard. On the opposite end of the entrance a thatched roof pavilion or what is known in Haiti as a *peristil* stands erect equipped with one of the most important symbols of Haitian Vodou, a *poto mitan* or sacred center pole capped off with a *pwen* (a point of concentrated spiritual power) of guinea fowl feathers and four teaspoons each pointing to the cardinal points. It is within and in front of this space that the communities associated with Casa come to perform their sacred rites while scholars, researchers, tourists and locals alike view ritual practice in action.

As part of their mission to involve the communities in which they work, lessen the divide between the institute and the society, and expose the Cuban public to the country's diverse religious landscape, Casa's researchers work collaboratively with practitioners and scholars of religion. Religious leaders do not only function as consultants, but they also mount and consecrate exhibition spaces and are called upon to share their knowledge with a wider public through roundtable talks and lecture demonstrations. For its part therefore, Casa has been instrumental in not only validating the existence and importance of African-derived religious expressions to Cuba's Afro-Caribbean identity, but have used the forum of a cultural institution for spiritual advisers and religious leaders to interface with a wider public. Thus, in rethinking the folklore paradigm Casa sees its role as that of mediator and catalyst, empowering not only religions that are marginalized, but the practitioners whose traditions have been historically demonized and exploited.

STAGING CULTURE & PERFORMING DIFFERENCE

The Origins of the Festival of Caribbean Culture

Apart from the investment the research team of Casa has made in preserving and exhibiting the religious and cultural traditions of Oriente, nothing better encapsulates and attempts to actualize their mandates than the annual Festival of Caribbean Culture, or as it is commonly known, Fiesta del Fuego (Feast of Fire). The festival emerged out of a social need to foster exchange and dialogue and in a sense to disrupt Cuba's insularity by using the festival as a conduit for exposing the island, and specifically, the underrepresented eastern areas to a wider Cuban public, its Caribbean neighbors and the world. Held annually since 1981, the week-long July festival brings both local and international grassroots community groups to perform their cultural forms in venues across the city.

As a means of further facilitating an opportunity for dialogue and cultural exchange, the festival also includes colloquium sessions that bring scholars and researchers together to discuss the history, culture and identity of the greater Caribbean region and other concerns that relate to the thematic thrust of the festival's focus. Beyond the wider artistic and international scope of the festival, the fact that communities isolated from urban centers are now given a national platform to be active agents in the valorization and representation of their culture is critical for the ensuing debates and reformulations of what it means to be Cuban today. It also raises the question of what is at stake for these communities that are now being enrolled in several folk tourism projects.

As a performance genre, festivals are multidimensional, multivocal, polysemous events that engender a participatory ethos and are framed and bounded in a specific space and time and set off from the normative practice of everyday life (Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Abrahams 1983; Stoeltje 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). They involve the public display of culture and are a critical site for the production of diverse, ambiguous, and oft times, contradictory meanings, and likewise are equally subject to multiple interpretations (Karp and Levine 1991). These heightened events provide forums for communities to reflect on their own realities, engage in cultural politics, and negotiate a space to be seen and heard. According to anthropologist David Guss, festive forms “are fields of action in which both dominant and oppressed are able to dramatize competing claims” (2000:10). In this vein, festivals are inherently dialogic and acts as ritual sites of socio-cultural and political contestation and aesthetic expression.

More than temporal/liminal spaces of transgression and symbolic inversion, festivals are critical to the fashioning of identities and alternative realities, in fact States have “always recognized the incomparable power of festivals to produce new social imaginaries” (Guss 2000: 13). For revelers and other participants in the festive frame, festivals present an opportunity to imagine and temporally exist beyond the limited scope of one’s normative existence (see Brown 2003). In these politically charged and commercially inundated spaces, festivals provide an opportunity, albeit short-lived, for potential transcendence wherein the claims of legitimacy are enacted, claimed and voiced (Davila 1997).

Throughout the Caribbean, festivals have historically held an important place. From Christmas and (pre)-Lenten festivities like Jonkunnu, Día de Reyes, Carnival and

Rara to their present-day incarnation, and proliferation regionally and abroad, these public spectacles have been sites of empowerment for the masses and/or the underprivileged to carve out a physical space for self-actualization and affirmation. These performance practices grew out of the structures of the plantation economy and provided a vehicle to resist the oppressive system of enslavement and engage in what bell hooks has identified as the development of a “liberatory consciousness” and a “liberatory subjectivity” (211-212). Festivals also continue today as an emancipative agent of embodied counter-hegemonic discourse that attempts to expand the limitations of prevailing asymmetrical power relations. Moreover, they stand as a site for the re-enactment of collective memory, reliving and re-presenting those elements of culture that are considered of significance and social value for a particular group or society.

In considering the development and different trajectories of the Caribbean festival arts, it is useful to identify the different modalities of aesthetic expression and subversion that were oftentimes simultaneously put to use and presented in a variety of festive forms. They include what I call the politics of camouflage, wherein the tradition of masking was used metaphorically and literally to performatively fashion, through the act of “playing”/parodying/cloaking¹⁰⁴, an alternative identity and satirically comment on European domination. The other performative mode involved the poetics of mimicry which used the aesthetic system of assemblage and strategic borrowing of the cultural codes of Europe and the sensibilities of Africa to develop creolized performance forms

¹⁰⁴ For Roger Abrahams and John Szwed (1983), in the African-American context, the concept of ‘play’ and ‘work’ does not have the same meaning as in the European context. The reason for this distinction is that in the African-American context ‘work’ is not seen as a private enterprise but indeed a collective and cooperative phenomenon that happens in the home among kin. ‘Play’ on the other hand is associated with public places and relates to the notions of reputation and masculinity. ‘Play’ also relates to the ethos of the carnivalesque – spirit of license and transgression. It also signals the enactment of unruly behavior that challenges European social mores.

that operated as a parallel system informed by the cultural matrix of the enslaved population (Abrahams and Szwed 1983). Both of these modes were, and to degree still are, used as mechanisms of transgression, wherein the marginal populations use their bodies and the aural and visual resources available to them to reflect on their lives and enact their difference and alternative social imaginaries. Thus, as cultural critic Rex Nettleford maintains: “To the ordinary people festival arts are more than minstrelsy; they affirm the use of mask, literally and metaphorically, in coming to terms or coping with an environment that has yet to work in their interest, a society that is yet to be mastered and controlled by them...” (1988); they are thus the site for the enactment of cultural politics and the negotiations over identity.

Outside of the sphere of subversive practices and the affirmation of identities, the festival arts have functioned as a catalyst not only for constructing and celebrating a new post-colonial dispensation, but also as a source of economic development, as reflected in the Trinidad carnival and the proliferation of music festivals in the region (e.g. Barbados and St. Lucia Jazz Festivals and the World Creole Music Festival in Dominica). Moreover, festivals have been pivotal to the quest of intra-island encounters and regional unity represented in the Caribbean Festival of Culture - CARIFESTA. While it is not my intention to examine these various sectors of the festival arts in the Caribbean, it is nevertheless important to note their existence and the specific trajectory of festival development in the region, for it allows us to better understand the significant roles festivals have played in the Caribbean and Cuba.

Although there are many different types of festivals in Cuba, ranging from religious feasts to art, dance and music festivals, the Fiesta del Fuego presents a rare

opportunity to bring a wide range of artistic, religious and intellectual activity under the rubric of festivity. The genesis of the Festival of Fire finds its roots in the Caribbean Origin Scenic Arts Festival, which started in 1980 and was envisioned, among other things, as an outlet for popular and traditional cultural expressions. Over the next two and a half decades it was to be transformed from a local display of public culture to a leading international festival generating cultural exchange and much needed foreign currency for Cuba's second city. Much of the ideological orientation defining the structure of the institution and what would become the present-day Festival of Caribbean Culture, emerges out of the mandates of the then Santiago Theatre Arts Council. According to Casa staff members, in 1981, the Theatre Arts Council, jointly with notable personalities of Santiago, developed an agenda to redress the failings of the amateur movement and the festival that they sponsored, which they thought inadequately expressed the popular traditional cultural movements of the nation.

In designing what would become the Caribbean Origin Scenic Arts Festival, this group, composed of young theatre artists and recent university graduates, identified several deficiencies with the existing festival template. In particular, they found the selection of participating groups and the awarding of prizes, jointly with the content genre separation, inadequate for the rescue, preservation, and strengthening of the cultural forms and traditions that communities and groups kept alive (Menses 2000:85). Moreover, the festival committee's intervention into the selection of representational elements like music, choreography and costume, and their influence in the actual staging and composition of the presentations, were believed to create a distorted image that detached, disembedded and isolated cultural forms from the communities that created

them (Menses 2000:87)¹⁰⁵. Extracted from the flow of life, these manifestations of culture were believed to eventually be read as trivialized exotic emblems of the “Other,” thus reinscribing the historical fetishizing of African- derived cultural expressions and further negating the redemptive and emancipative potential of the festival. Given what has already been said about Casa’s position on dismissing the conflation of culture as folklore and the mandate of rescuing and conserving cultural traditions of marginal populations, we can better appreciate the restructuring of the original amateur festival from that of a talent show to providing a forum for tradition bearers (*portadores* – carriers of traditional local knowledge) to self-represent.

In realizing this goal, the Caribbean Origin Scenic Arts Festival which took place from 1980-1989 was created, first and foremost, as a space for cultural exchange between various factions of the Cuban society including but not limited to community and religious leaders, artists, researchers, cultural officials and politicians. These early years of the festival were indeed quite localized and geared more towards education through the lens of entertainment. It was, as one of the original founders commented, “to create a space for public interaction and the exchange of different kinds of knowledge and experiences among investigators, specialists and cultural groups.” This opening for cultural dialogue was particularly significant because it helped to introduce cultural forms and different histories and experiences of the Afro-Caribbean diasporic enclave populations to a wider Cuban public. It also provided a space for scholars to share their research and speak with members from various rural communities in order to document their voices and histories. Thus, unlike the approach taken by the national folkloric

¹⁰⁵ These written claims that I paraphrase here are also substantiated by the oral history I collected from six of the founding members of the Festival and Casa del Caribe.

ensemble, CFNC, the cultural bearers were seen as not only the legitimate source of information, but the ones best suited to represent their culture, not amateur or professionally trained performers, but the people themselves who are steeped in the ontological understanding of their cultural forms.¹⁰⁶ This characterization in itself was quite essentialist, but it has to be understood within the context of Casa founding members wanting to move away from the process of excision, decontextualization, restylization, and codification that came to define the folklorization paradigm developed in Cuba from the early 1930s.

TOWARDS A NEW FESTIVAL DESIGN

The Emergence of the Fiesta del Fuego

The Festival of Fire, which was founded as the successor to the Caribbean Origin Scenic Arts Festival, started in 1990, and has been a feature of the Santiaguero cultural landscape since then.¹⁰⁷ While the festival has been widened in scope, most of the original parameters of the organization and design have been maintained. To this end, the event gives priority to grassroots tradition bearers, as opposed to being based on famous artistic figures and/or professional companies. Additionally, the festival is not competitive and it prioritizes the exchange and encounter of different participating groups

¹⁰⁶ It can be argued that a similar process existed with the selection of dancers for the national folkloric ensemble, on the basis of their raw talent. However, overtime, their “raw” cultural products became part of a standardized repertoire which became codified after countless repetition. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998:65) maintains: “Folkloric troupes attempt to find a middle ground between exotic and familiar pleasures and to bring these forms (and their performers) into the European hierarchy of artistic expression, while establishing their performances as national heritage. The more modern the theater where the troupe performs the better, for often there is a dual message: powerful, modern statehood, expressed in the accoutrements of civilization and technology, is wedded to a distinctive national identity. The performance offers cultural content for that identity...the possession of a national folklore, particularly as legitimated by a national museum and troupe, is cited as a mark of being civilized.”

¹⁰⁷ Outside of the regional carnivals throughout the Caribbean, the Festival of Caribbean Culture/Festival of Fire, has been one of the longest running annual festivals in the contemporary Caribbean and it is the only one of its kind to take root and succeed. 2008 marks its twenty-eighth annual year of celebrating Cuba’s Caribbean heritage and links to the broader African-Diasporic world.

and communities. Finally, as a space for not only cultural and artistic exchange, but intellectual encounters and debates, the Festival of Fire has remained committed to developing and maintaining round table discussions, colloquiums and informal conversations on a range of thematic concerns of interest to the Cuban people and Casa del Caribe in particular.

Given the insularity of many Cuban academics, researchers and artists, this multidisciplinary approach to artistic and intellectual exchange have been one of the most important undertakings for the staff and festival committee. In this view, the Festival goes beyond the local need of educating the Cuban populace about their history, to that of fostering a more regional, and since the advent of tourism, a new global dialogue between Cuba and the rest of the participating groups from around the world. This broader view of the Festival of Fire is best represented in the range of countries in which they dedicate the year's festival proceedings. Thus in 2000, the festival was dedicated to Africa and over fifteen countries from across the continent, including Algeria, Ghana, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso, and Mali participated. Additionally, the myopic vision of most Caribbean festivals sponsored by countries that fall within the CARICOM designation (almost exclusively English speaking), has been disrupted by Casa's vision of enveloping a much wider definition of the region. To this end, in 2003 the Dutch Antilles were featured and in 2005, Venezuela. However, it is the Haitian and Afro-Caribbean presence in the country, once depicted as a foil to Cuba's modernist sensibilities, that are the most featured in this week-long event.

In making sense of this inversion in the cultural positioning of Haitian forms within Cuban popular consciousness, it is important to realize that the intervention made

by the staff at Casa del Caribe is indeed a regional one. Because the task for the staff of Casa has always been about exposing the Cuban public and tourists alike to the cultural diversity of Oriente, one finds that there is less focus on the more identifiably Cuban cultural products like Rumba. Instead, there are a disproportionate number of acts presenting Haitian materials. Additionally, because the festival functions as a vehicle for producing revisionist historical narratives, Casa has repeatedly focused on presenting the Haitian-Cuban communities and has adapted some of the tropes and symbols of Haitian Vodou to structure certain aspects of the festivities. As an example, the principal parade is known as *desfile del serpente* (the parade of the serpent) making reference to the symbolism and significance of the serpent within the Vodou cosmology. The venerable deity Dambala is represented by the serpent and in the opening of the procession after singing for Legba in Kreyòl and Yoruba; the members of Haitian-Cuban communities also evoke the spirit of Dambala in song and movement. Additionally, throughout the parade, the descendants of Haitians dance down the streets, waving the Haitian flag and the flags of their community and the gods that they serve. They sing in Kreyòl and with each passing of a group, their voices grow in strength and their dances and acrobatic feats become more determined.

Outside of the official parades, the plazas present a space for the re-enactment of dances and songs associated with a popular Haitian street festival, Rara. The streets also provide a platform for *oungans* (Vodou priests) to demonstrate their mystical powers through the presentation of awesome feats. The street is thus reclaimed as a space to enact and celebrate their identity as being ethnically and culturally Haitian in a national forum, in the presence of Cubans and foreigners alike. The festival is therefore used as a

corrective tool in amplifying those negated cultural forms that have come to identify eastern Cuba. It subverts the normal order of cultural power and visibility, giving the otherwise invisible and powerless identities a liminal space for transgressing their marginal status. During the week-long festivities, the less visible forms (e.g. Gaga and Tumba Francesa) take center stage and the more popular traditions (e.g. Rumba, Son, Orisha Dances) are in the peripheries. This focus serves as a pointed critique of the Havana-centric narratives concerning Cuba's history and cultural development. However, beyond criticism, the Festival of Fire presents an opportunity and forum for legitimating the research conducted within these communities that have been either negated or under-represented in the public and political discourses concerning Cuban identity.

Since its inception, the festival committee has been deeply committed to an intensive curatorial process that brings in various specialists from the intellectual and artistic communities. This particular structure has been critical in bridging the divide between the cultural brokers and producers of cultural products and reflects on the casual accessibility of the Festival activities for participants. For example, to better shape interactive encounters and to access culture not as solely the staged event, but as lived experience, the Festival of Fire marries an organic free-flowing environmental festival, with strategically placed staged performances.¹⁰⁸ With the mandate of bringing the culture from the margins and rural hinterlands to the urban space of Santiago, the decision was made to turn the city and neighborhood towns into an extended "stage." To this end, the city squares, plazas, streets, houses, patios and alleys constitute the main performance areas. In addition the municipalities of Santiago de Cuba (e.g. El Cobre)

¹⁰⁸ Environmental in this sense refers to the specific locality and place of the festival events.

and neighboring provinces, most notably Guantánamo, (home to a large segment of the Afro-Caribbean immigrant populations in Cuba) are considered secondary venues for staging festival activities.

What is particular salient about this particular choice in orienting the festival is that it commemorates physical sites of memory that have historical, cultural, and political resonance for the people of Santiago and Oriente more generally. Through performing in these public and symbolically potent landmarks, submerged histories are not only remembered and brought to life kinesthetically and orally, but to a great degree, the collective act of repetitive ritual gathering¹⁰⁹ invokes a counter-consciousness that speaks to the multiple histories and identities that have shaped Cuba's identity. The participants/performers' physical presence in the various sites around the city also inscribes their identities into the landscape, and, by extension, re-writes them into the history of the city, thus redressing their otherwise physical and social invisibility and marginalization. This decision of steering away from a proscenium arch theatrical approach to staging people's lives and cultural traditions was therefore a deliberate decision for safeguarding the dignity of the performers and their historical agency. It was also an attempt to subjugate the ethnographic gaze and prevailing tendency of folk festivals to stage people/performers as exotic subjects ensconced within a timeless savage past.

¹⁰⁹ While the content of a given presentation evolves and transforms from year to year, the spaces in which people gather often remains the same. I borrow this concept of "repetition" from Margaret Drewal (1992:2), who argues: "Repetition within ritual serves to represent (re-present) time concretely, providing a continuous temporal reference. It has a unifying potential, or rather it provides a common denominator for action and events. Its binding potential is what makes it particularly crucial to any collective action. Repetition *within* ritual may induce a sense of stability and predictability (Moore and Myerhoff 1977: 17)

THE POETICS OF EXHIBITING CULTURES

The Festival of Fire shares a similar ideological and organizational vision with the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, in that the two are not only interested in the live display of cultural heritage, informed and presented by the people themselves, but they are also sensitive to the complexities of such an enterprise. However, while both festivals attempt to foreground the voices of tradition bearers, the presentational format, and, by extension, the experience and engagement with performers is radically different. This distinction can be found in the aesthetics that help shape the execution of the event and the presentational frames utilized. According to director of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Richard Kurin:

For the Smithsonian, the festival constituted the people's [participants and spectators alike] museum, wherein the celebrated national treasures were the people themselves and their traditional wisdom, knowledge, skill and artistry... the festival was seen as a corrective of sorts, a way of telling the story of the diverse peoples that populated the nation, but whose cultural achievements were not represented in the museums or their collections...the festival emphasized authenticity – the presence and unscripted participation of the living people who were active and exemplary practitioners of the represented communities and traditions (1997: 121-122).

Within this logic, the Smithsonian Institution uses the Festival of Folklife as a means not only of democratizing the arts and culture, but also as a vehicle for showcasing authentic cultural treasures that would otherwise go unrecognized. Through the use of different presentational formats or frames – performance, demonstration, instruction and exhibition – performers are often set apart as display objects and their presentation mediated by designated presenters.¹¹⁰ As an extension of the museum, the curatorial

¹¹⁰ For more on the challenges of the Festival of Folklife presentational format see Richard Bauman and Patricia Sawin (1991); and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1991).

intervention is felt and has to be constantly negotiated by both the participants and spectators.

Whereas performers run the risk of becoming objects of interest and scrutiny on the national Mall, where they are set off in pavilions as “authentic” bearers of tradition, with museum-quality informational text panels and trained presenters, in the Festival of Fire, performers enact their traditions in a multiplicity of spaces with very little mediation. In squares, alley ways and patios, members of community groups sing and dance and at times speak to those who are assembled. However, the verbal exchange is left to a minimum, one learns and is exposed by seeing, and when appropriate, doing. Consequently, the entertainment aspect of the Festival of Fire participates more in the logic of carnival, whereby an ethos of participatory revelry pervades. In fact, it is governed by a masquerade sensibility steeped in community folklore and customs, akin to what one may find in West African rites of renewal and traditional masquerade practices of the Caribbean. The festival is for the variety of publics that assemble in Santiago’s streets over the week-long period.

In this respect, the Festival of Fire resembles the Carnival Santiaguera, not strictly in terms of the processional aspects of costumed revelers, which Judith Bettelheim discusses as “underscor[ing] African Cuban participation and the importance of royal regalia in establishing authority during public processions” (2003:97), but it speaks more to the parallel street performances, social interaction, and cultural expressions of the barrios (neighborhoods). The carnival staged for public tourist consumption is in many regards not the carnival of the people that is staged in the barrios and peripheral to the main artery in which the *desfile* (procession) of the *comparsas*, *congás* and *paseos* take

place. Thus, while I am in agreement with Bettelheim's assertion that a Bakhtinian logic of reversal does not easily translate to the logic of the official *desfile*, her delimitation of carnival as being primarily the parade of the bands misses, in great part, a vital aspect of the carnival experience for many Santiagueros. For Bettelheim, the "festival space is delineated by parallel barriers which create vertical lines of closed performances" (2001:126n54). However, from my own research it becomes clear that the bounded and policed space of spectacular display is only one of the spaces in which the festivities unfold. The street interaction and the carnivalesque ethos are not limited to costumed revelers, floats, highly choreographed and competitive displays. For Santiagueros, carnival encompasses the congas that parade through the cities in the weeks leading up to carnival, it is also about traversing many different spaces, especially the barrios of Trocha, Sueño, Martí, and Tivolí, wherein people gather to take in the local lore and traditions of the district. To this end, it is about transgression and disorder, not strictly about conformity.

In his work on the colonial Afro-Cuban carnival – Día de Reyes – art historian David Brown investigates how the aesthetic and performative registers of order and disorder, regality and grotesqueness work in tandem along a ritual-play continuum. He analyzes the manner in which the linear and orderly Afro-Cuban procession performance of the *cabildos* (mutual-aid associations linked to specific African nations/ethnicities) were interspersed and disrupted by African-style masquerade forms. He further states, "Afro-Cuban carnival performances thus toggled between two contrasting codes. One revolved around formal processions of "flags, drums and sabers, just like the whites" ...; the other depended on breakouts of distinct nations' African-style repertoires of vegetal

masquerade, dance and drum rhythms” (2003:48). This aesthetic and performative duality was readily expressed in the “switching of the codes” as a means of both conforming to a European carnival template of linear procession and subverting the status-quo by using more African-derived circuitous and bawdy movements and music.

Brown’s arguments resonate with the case of the Santiago carnival and the Fiesta del Fuego. That the Festival of Fire showcases not only the orderly procession of two big parades to open and close the festival proceedings, but in fact translates the carnival of the side streets as a main organizing trope for the overall festival structure, speaks to the two registers Brown mentions. Moreover, using the carnival structure as a template is significant because the inclusion of essentially Hatian cultural forms and practices legitimizes their role in this national festival as a distinctively Santiaguera and Cuban phenomenon. This loose mingling of people in no particular space, and at the same time everywhere, and the multisensory display of culture through sound, dance, food, music, and commerce outside the ordered and policed displays of Cuban culture as glamorous, erotic spectacle, bespeaks the collective ethos of bacchanal that extends from the Santiaguera carnival to the Festival of Fire.

However, even within this relaxed and organic structure there remain places for order and a more conscious engagement with the participating groups and thematic concerns of the festival. These more structured arrangements happen when the participants parade through the center of town one by one in the identifying markers of their identity in both music and vestment, reminiscent of the *cabildo* processions of yesterday and today. It also includes the enactment of sacred rites that take place in the recreated ritual environment in Casa’s patio, and the performance of Gaga.

As I will demonstrate in the next two chapters, it is in the staging of the Vodú feast for the dead (*manje mort*) and the performance of a reformulated version of the Haitian street festival Rara, known as Gagá in Cuba, where structure and improvisation as well as the reclamation of history and community come together in a dynamic way. In these two case studies, I argue that it is in the space of these public performances that we see the realization of not only Casa's mandate of popularizing marginal forms, but the community members themselves taking charge by enacting a collective identity through representing transplanted and reconstituted cultural forms.

CHAPTER V

BEYOND THE GAZE: MEMORY, HISTORY & IDENTITY in the FEEDING of HAITIAN SPIRITS AT HOME AND ON STAGE

Festivals must initiate their own energies while they organize the celebrants for mutual fun and profit. Thus, festivals begin with a bang, literally, with loud noises produced by drums, guns, firecrackers, and other attention-grabbers. The vocabulary of festivals is the language of extreme experiences through contrasts...

Roger Abrahams 1982

Though virtually all performances contain some ritualized behavior, ritual itself is a particular kind of performance. It emphasizes efficacy over entertainment, adherence to tradition over technical virtuosity. Ritual has “real” consequences.

Henry Bial 2004

...[T]he distinction between festival and ritual that many have tried to make is much more blurred in Latin America where the multiple uses of festive forms preclude identifying them as stable member of any fixed category.

David Guss, 2000

Ritual practice has long been the principal grounding force that anchored first, second and third generation Haitians to their homeland, ancestors and the *lwa*. The laborious ceremonies associated with the practice of Vodou also provided the spiritual armor that served to help Haitians and their descendants negotiate their place in the multiplicity of localities they call home. Within eastern Cuba, and likewise throughout the Haitian diaspora, the enactment of Vodou rites ensured the continuity of the divine universe, community, and hence, a collective Haitian identity and consciousness. Paradoxically, serving the spirits, once a strictly private domestic affair and the locus for establishing and maintaining extended family networks and communities, has over the past decade and a half entered the public and commercial domain of tourist spectacle.

Rituals that were preserved and sequestered in insular forested environs are now available in urban spaces for popular consumption and exploitation.

In response to the opportunities afforded by the expanding tourism industry in Cuba, local peoples and state institutions alike are putting culture on display. From the classic sounds of son and sensuous rumba and salsa dancers to extravagant cabaret shows and the exotic display of religious rites and rituals, *culture* is one of Cuba's leading tourist attractions. The performance of cultural traditions is not new to Cuba. From the advent of its tourist industry in the 1920s, the cultural forms of the "folk" (i.e. Afro-Cuban and peasant classes) entertained North American audiences (Schwartz 1997; Pérez 1999). Today, with Cuba's reintegration into the global economy after the demise of the Eastern Bloc and the island's subsequent economic crisis, the display of traditions for primarily Canadian, European and Latin American tourists is on the rise.

That culture and people (especially their bodies) are increasingly objectified and commodified is undeniable, but notwithstanding this threat, cultural tourism presents one of the few potential loci for carrying forth some of the mandates of the revolutionary government and the means through which those deemed invisible are afforded a temporal space of visibility. To this end, cultural tourism in contemporary Cuba operates under a political dispensation not solely dictated by economic needs, the demands of foreigners and/or the global tourism market, but also in response to revolutionary policies that attempt to redress the persistence of inequalities and repressive attitudes towards African-derived cultural expressions.

To counter the claims that blacks are still quite marginal within the structures of the revolutionary state, Cuban officials have repeatedly gestured towards integration by

means of appropriating and legitimizing the cultural practices of the Afro-Cuban masses. Within the context of the revolution, and the post revolutionary era in particular, African-derived religious practice dubbed locally as “folklore” have been a critical site of this ongoing manipulation. The revolutionary government’s attempt to appropriate Afro-Cuban religions or what Carlos Moore has identified as “the repository of Cuba’s most powerful cultural distinctiveness,” has caused many practitioners and critics to be cautious of this accommodationist gesture (1988:98). Given the turbulent history of systematic repression of Afro-Cuban religions (see Fernández Robaina 1997; Matibag 1996), the radical shift in the 1970s from the overt displays of public hostility towards black forms of worship and spirituality to the contemporary preponderance of representations of ritual performances in the streets and on the stage is quite astonishing. But it is only possible because these practices are not seen as religions, but in fact folk traditions or emblems of Cuba’s diverse folklore.

By systematically recodifying and simplifying complex ritual structures, commodifying sacred objects, and dissecting the music and dances from religious structures and observances, the revolutionary government has attempted to contain and negate the potency of Santería and other African-derived religions. Yet, this strategy of containment has not always been successful. The proliferation of practitioners, *casa templos* (religious houses), and the persistence of religious practice have grown in tandem with the increased exploitation through tourism and folklorization.

Scholars working on Cuban cultural production have examined the processes through which African-derived religions and sacred rites have been over time systematically reworked and integrated within a folklorized paradigm of Cuban culture

(see, for example, C. Moore 1964, 1988; Hagerdorn 2001; Brown 2003; Ayorinde 2005). The literature rightly reflects on the manner in which Afro-Cuban religious expressions have been demonized as a source of African atavism and a natural threat to the modernist, and/or revolutionary sensibilities of the Cuban state. The scholarship further critiques the ardent nationalization and commodification of blackness to serve political and commercial ends, without redressing the subordinate status of blacks in the nation (Kutzinski 1993; R. Moore 1997; C. Moore 1988; Hagerdorn 2001). Within the existing literature, the overwhelming tendency has been to engage the questions of the folklorization of culture from the perspective of State institutions. This emphasis, however, has elided an examination of the actual performers of culture and the particularities of their motivations.

To counter the imbalance in the scholarship, this chapter foregrounds the voices that have been silenced and specifically Cubans of Haitian descent who have historically been denied a public platform to profess their hyphenated identity and celebrate their distinct ethnic and cultural heritage. In other words, this chapter questions the motivating factors that incite members of a Haitian-Cuban community and folk troupe to represent the more intimate aspects of their culture to foreign audiences. It specifically focuses on the articulations of identity and memory through the lens of the enactment of a sacred rite in a secular venue. As such, it analyzes the ways in which members of Pílon del Cauto, a long standing Haitian-Cuban community located in the hills above the old mining town of El Cobre, use an intimate ritual in honor of the dead to memorialize their ancestral kin and Haitian roots, while at the same time express their unique historical experiences in a public forum.

The argument here is that the spaces that are opening up through folk tourism are now being used by community members as they attempt to recuperate their past and represent their autonomous collective identity through cultural performance. Rather than interpret these encounters as potentially destructive to the cultural forms preserved by a people or an occasion for trivialized encounters, this chapter discusses the complex negotiations intrinsic to the performance of culture. It first foregrounds the rural homestead/lakou or original habitus for the enactment of the *manje mort* and then closes with an examination of the process through which this sacred rite is transferred to a festival setting. Of particular concern is analyzing how the meaning of the *manje mort* is framed and constructed in the different spaces and contexts. I also attempt to go beyond the tourist gaze and questions of ritual efficacy to accent the socio-political significance of the descendants of Haitians publicly honoring their once feared and demonized Gods.

STAGING FOLKLORE

Haitian Indigenism and the Dynamics of Staging Vodou Performances

The presentation of Vodou rituals and dances in secular settings is by no means unique to Cuba. The staging of folklore and the use of cultural performances in the construction and reconfigurations of national identity has been ubiquitously deployed by many nation-states as a means of articulating cultural and national difference (Deacock 1967; Handler 1988; Daniel 1995; Savigliano 1995; Ramsey 1997). Within the Haitian context, Vodou, albeit subject to systematic repression and persecution, was strategically embraced by members of the elite classes as an indigenous expression and counter-hegemonic force to the nearly twenty-year (1915-1934) U.S. marine occupation of the island. The *indigénisme* movement that arose during this time placed the Haitian

peasantry as exemplars par excellence of the Haitian folk, and by extension, Vodou as a quintessential marker of the nation's distinct African-Caribbean heritage.

J. Michael Dash describes *indigénisme* as an all encompassing term which described a set of ideas, positions, feelings and affirmation of *native* roots that grew out of a sense of “cultural dislocation” (1981). The mostly urban elite *indigénistes* looked to the culture of the folk to provide a sense of communal “wholeness” and authenticity. Even though Haiti's independence arrived earlier than any other Caribbean country and the second in the Western Hemisphere, the influence of the French language and culture were still particularly strong among the elites. The U.S. military presence compounded this issue of Euro-American cultural domination, which had its most repressive manifestation during the anti-superstitious campaigns that confiscated, burned, and banished religious icons (notably drums) and persecuted practitioners of Vodou.¹¹¹ The epistemic break from European domination that was not fully realized with the Haitian Revolution was by the 1920s-1940s being articulated with a greater sense of urgency and in direct response to North American imperialism. Thus, Haitian Indigenism took on the political excesses and cultural orientation of the elite and argued for an authentic black national identity that challenged the formal orthodoxies and hegemony of Europe and the United States.

The cultural nationalism of Haiti in the late 1920s-1940s argued for a new aesthetic sensibility that incorporated Haitian folk culture, and specifically Vodou, as the new idioms for expressing Haitianness. The movement, like its Cuban counterpart – *Afrocubanismo*, was influenced by the intellectual upheavals that were taking place in

¹¹¹ For more on the historical background of U.S. interventionism in Haiti, the emergence of Haitian Indigenism and its conflation with post-occupation nationalism see Kate Ramsey, 1997

postwar Europe. Paris had become the center of anti-establishment activities and artistic movements in the early to mid twentieth-century, such as Surrealism, Dada, and more poignantly, Modernism.

Modernism embraced a rejection of the increasingly industrialized world, traditional perspectives on art, and a reevaluation of social realities. Europeans became interested in the liberating possibilities of African cultures and looked to the continent and the African diaspora for inspiration. This re-examination of African cultures was making its mark on Haitian and Cuban students at home and abroad, and would later serve as a catalyst prompting a reassessment of the contribution of Africa to the socio-cultural tapestry of these societies. Moreover, as Dash (1981) argues, the French intellectual interest in racialized and cultural essences encouraged the Haitian artists' desire for cultural authenticity. Literature became the new means and conduit for expressing this nascent identity.

In the immediate post-occupation period, the questions of identity that were raised during the near twenty-year U.S. marine presence on the island fueled further investigations into Haiti's indigenous culture. The founding of the *Revue Indigène* in 1927 and the publication of Jean Price-Mars' *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, consolidated the movements mission to recuperate African culture and the Haitian folk practices as sources for a more "authentic" literary expression. According to Michel-Phillipe Lerebours, "The Indigenists revived inspiration; from that point on, Africa, people of African descent, the Haitian countryside and the Haitian peasant would be at the center of Haitian literature" (1992:711). With the establishment of the Institut d'Ethnologie (founded by Jean Price Mars in 1941), "Ethnology soon became the new history, the

preferred methodology which encouraged the inclusion of folk memory in historical narratives” (Clarke 1994:189-190). Performance also became a central aspect of the movement and the institute’s programming or what Kate Ramsey has termed, its “ethnological pedagogy” (1997:353). Similar to the “research to performance”¹¹² approach followed by the Conjunto Folklorico Nacional de Cuba (CFNC) and the National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC) of Jamaica two decades later, an agenda of rescuing and unearthing Haitian popular culture and folklore was initiated as the principal mission of the Institute.

In the 1940s the folk or peasant class was esteemed as the true bearers of tradition and the ones most suited to reeducate the masses who lost touch with their roots. To this end, performers and students of the Institut d’Ethnologie traveled to the countryside as part of their training and preparation. Native informants knowledgeable of the songs and dances also traveled to town to teach members who would later represent the traditional folklore to local and foreign audiences. What is important about these circuits of exchange is that through these efforts the state bureau of ethnology established and authorized a standardized performance template and placed Vodou as a central icon of Haitianness.

The bureau also functioned not only as a center for cultural research, but also interfaced with the nationalist agenda of securing and consolidating a nascent post-occupation national cultural identity that was to be driven by wide spread folkloric performances. Over time, the staged representations and the overall agenda of recasting the maligned image of Haitian culture became critical to the Dumarsais Estimé

¹¹² Véné Clarke coined this term in her discussion of Katherine Dunham’s methodological approach to staging folk dance from the Caribbean, see 1994:190.

administration (1946-50) and the development of the tourism industry in Haiti (see Ramsey 1997:356-358). With these advances Vodou came to hold a paradoxical position within the Haitian imaginary as both an icon of national heritage and identity yet still ambivalently accepted as a legitimate religion.¹¹³

Interestingly, from the earliest staging of Haitian popular culture, state officials emphasized the distinction between the traditional dances and songs from ritual practice. This was particularly curious, since Haitian culture, aesthetics, folklore, and political history is greatly informed by the syncretic Vodou religion. However, the dances were often times dissected from the larger cosmological structure that gave meaning and efficacy to the practice of serving the spirits. Without the ritual structure to anchor and contextualize the movements, the excised dances ended up being portrayed as exotic, sultry, and/or grotesque emblems of the “other.”

The particular separation of the dance and drum rhythms from the ceremonial context should not occasion surprise however, for it can be argued that the dance is perhaps one of the more spectacular visual elements of the ritual practice. The inherent theatricality and performance-based embodied practice of Vodou demonstrate the centrality of the dancing body for invoking and communicating with the divine. During the enactment of rites, it is through the dance that the community ritualizes and becomes a singular collective unit attuned to each other’s presence and to that of the *lwa*. The dance, coupled with the appropriate rhythms and songs provide the medium through which communication with the spiritual realm is possible. Through possession-

¹¹³ For more on the ambivalent treatment of Vodou and its exploitation as folklore see Alfred Metraux, *Voodoo in Haiti*, 1959, esp. pp. 54-56 and 65-67 and Katherine Dunham, *Island Possessed*, 1969

performances communion between the visible and invisible worlds and the display of what Yvonne Daniel identifies as “choreographed improvisation” (2005) is realized.

Further to this, the manifestation of the divine is a creative and organic process that is inherently public and dependent on embodied knowledge of a repertoire of movement structure/vocabulary and iconography for its success. It goes to follow, as Gilbert Rouget argues, “possession cannot function without becoming theater” (cited in Burton 1997:223). In other words, already built into the structure of Vodou rituals is that of spectacle, creativity, and adaptation (see Anderson 1982; Wilcken 2005). Unlike the linear continuum between ritual and theatre proposed by Victor Turner (1992), the theatrical dimensions of Vodou rituals reveal the inherent circular overlappings of these otherwise seemingly static categories.

Vodou rituals, dances and songs were the inspiration and source of not only choreographies adapted for the Haitian and Euro-American concert stage; they also provided the movement vocabulary and structure of the first African-American, Caribbean-based modern dance technique. Dunham technique fused the dances and rhythms of Haiti with the ceremonial ethos of Vodou within a North American idiom of modern dance. Thus, here we see the medium of performance and dance instruction being put to use as a source of inspiration, an aesthetic template for developing an Afro-Caribbean dance technique, and also as a tool for recasting the mystique and negative perceptions of sorcery and black magic that shrouded Vodou and Haitian culture. However, although noble in its intentions, the process had certain limitations as it had to bracket critical components of the religious form. Most notably, the distinctively improvisational practices and subtleties of complex rituals became codified in sequences

of movements and gestures. This observation is by no means meant to take away from Katherine Dunham's masterful achievement. I reference Dunham to only stress my point of the tensions that exist within the staging of rituals as folklore and the separation of complex systems of thought and religious practice into primarily aesthetic markers.

It is in light of this perspective that one can come to appreciate the historical longevity and contemporary proliferation of staging Vodou.¹¹⁴ The approach, however, is far from uniform, for the ideological, political and spiritual intentions of the performances, along with the actual audience composition and location of its actualizations all contribute to the ways in which the ritual performances are framed, interpreted, and experienced. To this end, the hotel floor show that features the dances for the different *lwa* and a possession sequence, and the fragmented excerpt of a Vodou ritual on a concert stage is not meant to be nor can it truly be interpreted or even experienced in the same way as a rural village ceremony under a *peristil* (dance pavilion). But, I would hasten to add that they each carry their own version of authenticity because the various enactments are not discrete events, but in fact are interrelated and operate along a concentric or circular continuum of ritual activity. The various spaces and performances, as I will demonstrate, inform each other and in the process help to redefine and expand the parameters of the ritual structure. In so doing, Vodou undergoes a constant process of innovation while at the same time remaining anchored in reiterated practices and customs that form part of the cultural reservoir of tradition, history, and memory.

¹¹⁴ For work on the staging of Vodou see, Alan Bruce Goldberg (1981); Vèvé Clark (1983); and Joan Hanby Burroughs (1995).

While my discussion thus far has been on the dynamics of staging ritual as folklore within Haiti during the post-occupation period, it is by no means limited to the Haitian context. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, and as I will show with the case study of the ritual staging of the *manje mort*, the folklorization of religious expression has been a part of Cuba's mechanism of incorporating racially, ethnically, and socio-economically marginal populations. However, I wish to emphasize that Casa del Caribe's approach to the staging of ritual has been quite different from the folklorized representation of the "fantastic."

Folklorization can be defined as a process that removes religions from the realm of the sacred, thus reframing and reducing complex systems into aestheticized fragments. Similarly for Eugenio Matibag, "folklorization serves to relegate a vital, lived cultural form to the category of the artistic and picturesque, thus neutralizing its ideological power" (1996:247). To their credit, cultural officials and researchers at Casa have been more concerned with staging rites as a form of pedagogical exercise, or as a teaching tool to demonstrate and emphasize the elements that are shared across a range of Cuban and Caribbean religious traditions. This point is particularly important because Casa deliberately and publicly denounces the State's approach of casting religions as folklore. In this respect, rituals are not decontextualized and reduced to aesthetic markers of a vibrant folk culture, but instead are viewed as complex structures that make up distinct cosmologies and social worlds. With this in mind, education has primacy over entertainment in terms of the restaging of sacred rites. As in Vodú rites that have served generations of displaced Haitians, Casa's programming and cultural mandate of

integration also taps into the realm of the scared in order to bring together the various communities of practitioners and identities in eastern Cuba.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE MANJE MORT

The Role of the Dead in Cuban Vodú

Before discussing the reframing of the *manje mort* in the Festival of Fire, it is useful to explore what the rite entails and how it is situated within the overall ritual structure and sacred worldview of Vodú. Vodú, like its Haitian counterpart, is peopled by an extensive pantheon of spirits or *mistè*, such as the *marasas* (the sacred twins), *lemò* (the dead), and especially the lesser *lwa*. All of these spiritual entities stand hierarchically and theologically below the supreme deity, Bondye, who is removed from the affairs of earth. He is not completely absent, however, for humans have access to his great power through serving His intermediaries who are incarnations of His divine force.

The Vodú cosmology, like most African worldviews, has at the core of its system of thought and ritual structure the mutual interdependency of the invisible and visible worlds. Humans and spirits alike operate on a basis of reciprocity or on a “system of exchange” (McCarthy 1995). In other words, one serves the Gods so that s/he may also be served. Ancestral spirits as well as the *lwa* have the power to enhance the livelihood of their living kin through granting them protection, advice, and warnings. These services, however, are only made available after they have been properly feasted with their favorite foods and drinks, as well as entertained with songs and dances. In the absence of adequate ritual observances these supernatural beings may wreak havoc in the lives of their living kin or withdraw their assistance.

Although it has been maintained that “the dead, after the loa and the Twins, are the third category of supernatural beings to be worshipped” (Métraux 1959:243), in the Cuban variant of Vodou the dead occupy a primary location within the overall hierarchy and ritual structure. The primacy afforded to the dead can be linked to the early formation of the Vodú collectivities that were chiefly organized around family membership and the veneration of ancestral spirits. Upon arriving to Cuba, individual laborers often erected domestic shrines in honor of their dead relatives or those ancestral spirits that were known to accompany their families. Well before ritual specialists began to establish Vodú societies and conduct elaborate ceremonies and celebrations, individuals devoted a space within their modest barracks to honor their family spirits in private. As one elder farmer and Voduisant recounts:

The *lwa* can be very demanding. They require plenty ceremonies. In those days we had to do everything small and out of sight. We honored the *lwa* as well, but it was easier to honor our dead. In Oriente, everyone knows about the dead. The mountain people all pour rum on the ground before they take a drink. Cubans place water and a white candle in front of a picture of their dead relatives and the *paleros* [practitioners of Palo] offer animals during their ceremonies and place the bones of the dead in their *ngangas* [a metal or ceramic cauldron that contains spiritual objects, earth, bones, feathers]. We honor our ancestors too, but we communicate directly with the earth...back then we did it quietly, on the dirt floor of our huts or in the cane fields...The *lwa* require special items, but with our dead, they were satisfied with what we had and what we offered. In the corner of our room we would place bread, sweets, coffee, and rum or whatever food we could find. We would light a candle, spray rum and pray to our family spirits to guide us. As more of us settled and the societies were formed, the mysteries started to demand more and we began to do the *manje lwa*. But, we always fed our dead and still do today, only now our feasts are bigger and last several days and our family includes people like you who come from far to greet the spirits.

In this extract from an interview conducted with a serviteur and resident of Barranca, we learn that the spiritual and iconic parallels between the various African derived religions of Oriente – specifically those of BaKongo/KiKongo origin and Vodou – facilitated the re-establishment of Haitian ritual practices in the Cuban landscape. The

reverence shown to the dead was part of the spiritual affinity shared between African-derived religious practices observed in Cuba and Haiti. However, although Haitians entered a familiar spiritual environment, Vodou beliefs and practices were shrouded in negativity and adamantly opposed by the ruling class. Matibag contends, “Haitians and their ‘magic’ represented a threatening otherness within the Cuban society of the Republican period” (1996:184). This otherness and the pervasive maligned stereotype of Vodou forced the migrant class to conceal their practices. As in the period of slavery, Haitians were forced to practice in complete secrecy, often times under the cover of night in the privacy of their insular domestic spaces. Over time, the individual practices grew to larger collective gatherings whereby the family was no longer limited to one’s immediate blood relatives, but also included the ancestral kin of several extended families and social networks. The arrival of more migrants helped to further establish the Vodú religion and over time other rituals were observed.

For the descendants of Haitians living in Cuba, the *manje mort* encapsulates the overarching tenets of their beliefs and stands, in great part, as a vivid signifier of their sacred traditions and identity as Haitians. The critically important place afforded the ancestors speaks to several things. At once they are deemed the prime agents that channel communication between humans and Gods since they are believed to exert direct influence in the lives of the living. Secondly, repeatedly honoring the dead suggests that the memory of those who have gone before and the cultural identity of the family as being of Haitian descent are constantly being reaffirmed in and through ritual practice. The past is thus made ever present in the lives of their descendants and those who have gone before exist as part of the living memory of the extended family.

Feeding the Dead: The Ritual Structure of the Manje Mort:

As in all ritual events, the *manje mort* exists in a sphere set apart from normative activities. It is a spatially and conceptually bounded series of social interactions and customs that celebrate the constitution and continuity of the community through the act of paying homage to ancestral kin. For Vodú practitioners, the *manje mort*, or the ritual offerings to the dead, is part of an elaborate network of feasting rites that are performed to define and maintain social relations between family members, ancestral kin, and the *lwa*. While it can be celebrated strictly in tribute to ancestral spirits, in some contexts of Haiti and in rural Cuba, the *manje mort* forms part of a larger service that family members celebrate in honor of the *lwa* as well.

The mutual interdependency between the living and the dead is established through the ritual idiom of food. Meticulously prepared and strategically placed in auspicious sites around the family compound, on the ground of the *ounfò* or set on a dining table; foods and beverages become the sacred channels through which communication is established and requests and/or favors are made to the spirit world. It is also the basis of establishing fellowship between community members and the Vodú collective. While the overt purpose of the *manje mort* is to pay homage to the dead through the ritual offering of a meal, through its enactment Haitian-Cubans also assert some of the principal values of interdependency, reciprocity, community, respect, and humility that govern their spiritual and social universe.

Traditionally speaking, the *manje mort* is performed around the *lakou* and in an interior room of a domestic space set apart for ritual activity. Larger ceremonies that commemorate the ancestral spirits of a Vodú collective are otherwise performed in a

patio-like area in the forested environs where community members can gather en masse to prepare the ritual meal and conduct all of the requisite ceremonies in sacred sites (e.g. wells, trees, and springs) around the compound. In the case that a permanent *ounfò* (ritual space) does not exist, a temporary, semi-constructed building is erected to accommodate invited guests. The four-poster thatched-roof structure's rustic aesthetic reiterates the humble surroundings that have served as a space of residence for generations of Haitians on Cuban soil. It also delimits a defined consecrated space on the land that will temporarily house the altar and the offerings.

These ritual events are usually presided over by an officiating *prètsavann* (bush priest), who specializes in reciting Catholic prayers in French and Latin. In terms of the rites associated with the death complex, an *oungan* or *manbo* is called upon only in the case where an immediate family member is an *oungan* or *manbo*, or the deceased was initiated or married to the *lwa*, otherwise, these rites are for the most part the domain of the *prètsavann*. In the bateyes of eastern Cuba, *prètsavann-s* have historically been held in great esteem because they function on one level as spiritual advisors, but they are also teachers responsible for imparting knowledge to residents in the bateyes.¹¹⁵

As spiritual guides, they are called upon to mark the critical transition in the life of a Haitian-Cuban including: baptism, marriage, and death. As repositories of traditions, they are often sought out to impart the cultural memory of Haitian customs. Most of the ritualizing that takes place in the batey or rural homestead is therefore presided over by a *prètsavann*. He is the master of ceremonies conducting the rites associated with the death complex including: the novena or nine days of prayers after the passing of an individual,

¹¹⁵ Before the literacy campaigns of the 1960s, many of the Haitian field laborers were not able to read. The bush priests were among the few literate residents and were often given the task of teaching basic reading and writing skills to their fellow country men and women.

the laying-out of the body, the wake, the burial and the *manje mort*. While the first three rites are performed immediately after a person has died, the *manje mort* can be performed at anytime during the year, and thus, functions as the principal rite for memorializing the dead. It also makes up part of an extensive grouping of feasting ceremonies that include the *manje lesans* (feasting of the angels), *manje masá* (feasting of the twins or *marassa*), *manje lwa* (feast for a particular deity), *ceremonia del lwa blanche* (ceremony for the Rada divinities) and *comida grande* (great feast in honor of all the Rada and Petwo lwa).¹¹⁶

Most of the communal feasting ceremonies I participated in during my fieldwork lasted approximately two to three days. However, the preparation for these elaborate, time consuming, and costly affairs can take several months and some times even up to a year or more. After a date has been agreed upon, the family begins to make arrangements to purchase or raise the necessary livestock for the ceremony. Sheep, goats, guinea hens, pigs, and roosters are the preferred animals. To supplement the various meats, an ample supply of ground provisions, (especially yams, cassavas, plantains, and sweet potatoes), beans and other legumes, vegetables, an assortment of homemade sweets and beverages

¹¹⁶ These ceremonies are part of the main corpus of communal rites and feasts that are performed across Oriente during the calendar year. While the ritual process is similar across the range of feasting ceremonies, they each have their own specific set of regulations. As an example, *el lwa blanche*, literally the feast in honor of the “pure divinities” or the Rada spirits (from the spiritual lineage of Dahomey) uses only white ritual implements and objects. Most of the food offerings are also white. The sacred offerings is covered with a sheer white cloth, and the tables, as well as the walls of the room in which the ceremony takes place is draped in white sheets to limit the potential of contaminating the offerings. Because these ceremonies are particularly costly affairs and also requiring a great deal of time, families may take several years preparing the conditions to feed the spirits and host community members. They function in some ways as a form of thanksgiving offering, in other cases they are part of a ritual obligation that a family member or oungan, manbo is carrying out for a particular spirit or divinity. In all cases, it is believed that one honors the spirits for the good of the whole community.

(soft drinks and alcohol, especially liqueur) are added to the feast.¹¹⁷ Now, as then, the family holding the *manje mort* delegates the various cooking tasks among members of the nuclear family, or in the case of a larger ceremony, the Vodú collective (see figures #1-7).

The preparation of offerings for supernatural beings is a serious undertaking that requires that one meets and follows a series of obligatory guidelines and customs. As an example, the cooking of meals is specific to one's gender, age, ritual knowledge and social standing (i.e. hierarchy) within the family network. As the dead are known to be particularly sensitive, or as one serviteur mentioned, "troublesome when not treated with proper care," the host and the extended community of family members ensure that the right persons are delegated for the task at hand. Women who are menstruating at the time of the feast are isolated from the ceremonial space. So as not to offend the spirits, they do not use the same water supply, or any materials that are to be used for the feast. Similarly, couples are prohibited from engaging in sexual intercourse during the preparatory (usually a few days before the rite) and ceremonial period. In addition, to safeguard against visitors polluting the sacred meal, some of the foods are prepared in a secluded area of the compound out of view from the general activity and traffic of people.

For those in the community who are not immediately part of the family or Vodú collective, it is the ritual bonfire at the threshold of the compound that announces the imminent ceremony. In the occasions where the feast is being held in the rural homestead of an *oungan* or *manbo*, the ritual flags of the deities that protect the household and to whom the *ounfò* is dedicated, are raised and placed on tall bamboo

¹¹⁷ Some of the typical foods offered at the *manje mort* include: Calalú (okra stew), Fufu or Tons-tons (pounded plantain), Potaje (bean stew), Pitimí (millet), Bombón (sweet bread), Table fey (coconut sweets), Table maní (peanut brittle), and Mantecada (sugar bun).

poles at the corner of the entryway at the base of a small ceiba or calabash tree. These iconic emblems serve as mnemonic devices that delimit and consecrate the ceremonial space, thus separating the realm of the outside Cuban countryside from the inside Haitian ritual environment. This distinction is significant not only in terms of the physical demarcation of sacred space, it also hints at the ways the descendants of Haitians conceptualize their identities and configure their intimate social relations as being physically and spiritually separated yet connected to and indeed grounded in the rural hinterlands of Oriente.

As one crosses the threshold, the ritual objects clearly publicize to the celebrants and visitors alike that the space of celebration is not a wholly Cuban space, but in fact an environment that is inhabited by the descendants of Haitians and protected by their ancestral kin and divinities. The ethnic and cultural identity of the group is not only marked in the ritual objects used (e.g. strategically placed charms [*pwen*]), but also performed through their verbal and body language. It is noted in the preponderance of Ogou's sacred colors, red and blue and also in the way women tie their heads in a triangle formation knotted at the nape of the neck¹¹⁸ and in the way the celebrants wear their ritual flags and amulets across their neck, chest or waist. While seemingly pedantic, these gestures and especially the colors used during ritual occasions inscribe onto the bodies of the participants a collective identity that signals their connection to Haiti and the *lwa*. The performance of a distinct Haitian identity is also marked in the manner in which community members animate their Krèyol tongue with the use of their bodies. It is also in the way they cook their food and in the types of food being consumed and offered. In

¹¹⁸ This style of covering the head during religious ceremony is juxtaposed against the commonly seen turban-style headdress used as part of the Afro-Cuban ceremonial attire for women.

short, it is in and through quotidian life and ceremonial praxis rooted in the land and in the protected isolated spaces of their rustic yards that the descendants of Haitians construct their social world and identities.

The land of the Cuban countryside thus shares a similar resonance to that of Haiti in that the family compound, yard or *lakou* has historically and continues to knit generations of Haitian-Cubans together in a reconstituted extended network of kin. Rural homesteads function as the sustained site of ritual activity and social encounters spanning generations. The land is also the temporary abode of the living and indeed the immortal dwelling space of *les mistè* (mysteries or spirits) as well. The rites for the dead performed on Cuban soil anchors the displaced descendants of Haitian field laborers in a cosmological and cultural order and in what M. Jacqui Alexander has argued “a consciousness that draws its sustenance from elsewhere” (2005: 295).

Feeding the family spirits presents an opportunity to reaffirm one’s identity as a Haitian and this is immediately represented by the types of foods (Haitian sweets and stews, mushroom rice) prepared and the communal feeling that is created by worshipping as a collective body. Before dawn and hours before the propitiatory bonfire is set ablaze, family members begin the day with a series of domestic chores. A festive ethos prevails as people busily sweep the yard, wash cooking utensils, shell peas, peel ground provisions, gather vegetables, and prepare the inner sanctuary where the food and beverages will be placed. From the night before and throughout the morning, visitors arrive with offerings of ground provisions, alcohol, and toiletries or other gifts purchased in the dollar store from town. Family and intimate friends barter and exchange goods as they argue over the best way to prepare a certain meal. Young boys tend to the animals

that will be sacrificed during the ceremony and the musicians assemble their instruments and tune their drums in the *peristil*. They intermittently play a few popular secular rhythms and sing meringue-styled ballads to which a few couples dance. The musicians otherwise use the time resting because they will be expected to play well into the night and into the next day.

By mid-morning the official ceremony commences with a simple ritual of prayers and libations at sacred sites where familial spirits are believed to inhabit. The early morning bustle is noticeably more subdued, even though more people have gathered to assist with the massive labor of cooking. An intimate crowd of celebrants modestly dressed in their yard clothes gather in reverence in the *peristil*. The family priest welcomes everyone by spraying the crowd with rum and pouring the remainder at the base of the *poto mitan*. He then exits and the family follows and we all make our way to several *repozwa-s* (a vessel or tree that serves as the sacred abode of a spirit) around the compound. Our journey around the homestead takes us approximately one and a half hours and around to a flamboyant, breadfruit, mango, fig, almond, and ceiba tree where we make offerings of black coffee, tobacco smoke, liqueur, rum and a mixture of fragmented food particles. The family priest taps three times on each tree trunk to awaken the spirit and offers a litany of prayers to which the family assembled soberly responds. After these ritual stops we walk to the edge of the compound and place an offering of sweets, honey and perfume at the bank of the river that runs just behind the land. Finally, toasted corn is sprinkled around the house and libations poured at each of its four corners. The *manje-sèk* or dry offering is the first to be presented in honor of the family spirits.

The initial rites performed around the *lakou* are the first of a series of offerings made over the course of two days. They are particularly significant for framing the occasion because they create a space for celebrants to gather and collectively reestablish the bond between expansive networks of kinfolk. The ritualized practice of reciting memorized litanies calls those who are no longer physically among the worshipers into presence, hence linking two spheres of existence. The physical gathering of the family in specific sites of the compound allows them to trace the ancestral lineage of the *lakou*'s residents. In so doing, the physical journey places the celebrants in communion with the spirit world and evokes a collective cultural consciousness that serves to further define and unite disparate identities. Hence, cultural memory is restored and activated through these encounters, rites, and exchanges.

The second part of the ritual moves to the threshold of the compound where the drummers assemble to awaken the Gods and the dead with a suite of songs and rhythms in their honor. The group of celebrants has grown in numbers and is noticeably more audible. The solemn part of the thanksgiving service has ended and now it is time to ask Legba to guide the proceedings. To begin, the officiating priest draws a *vévé* to Legba and points an enamel cup of water with a candle affixed to its side to the sacred cardinal points. He then pours three drops across the threshold and sprinkles toasted corn, dry cornmeal, as well as fragments of coconut sweets in front and behind the logs that are set a blazed for Legba. A healthy supply of ground provisions is laid out on a large banana leaf in honor of the lame God of fate and chance. The blood of a goat and a cock is then presented to the God of the crossroads before the other sacrifices are made at the same sites we offered libations and the *manje-sèk* early that morning. Before each offering, the

animal is fed and bathed after which the animal is sacrificed and the blood flows over the roots of trees and into the earth. This part of the ceremony takes several hours and unlike the dry offering, which was dominated by women; men now outnumber the women and conduct the sacrifices and ritually carve the carcass so that the women can prepare the meat for cooking.

The third and last segment of the day's proceedings takes place in the *peristil* where the drummers play a series of Rada rhythms for the Ginen spirits. To initiate the ritual activity, the host draws a *vévé* for Danbala, the principal *lwa* of the Rada pantheon and one of the divinities to whom the *ounfò* is dedicated. At the base of the *poto mitan* an offering of Danbala's favorite meal is placed on both sides of the cornmeal ground drawing. For the duration of the night the musicians play for the Gods and celebrants each take their turn in the center of the ring in front of the drums to commune with their *lwas* (see fig. 8). The energy builds as the symbiotic encounter between the drummer and dancer grows more intense. One after the other the *lwa* descend down the sacred center pole, taking temporary refuge in the bodies of their willing horses (see fig. 9a and 9b). Each numinous visitation is greeted by a cautioned euphoria as the celebrants wait to see whether their spiritual labor or *travay myste* will bring forth favors from the *lwa*. As they appear, the Gods entertain the celebrants and provide pointed advice to those assembled. The ritual assistants busily try to meet their demands, but mostly serve as interpreters for the *lwa* while also aiding those who cannot unravel the parables in which the Gods speak.

While the possession-performances are taking place, the host and religious elders enter the *cai misté* or ceremonial room where the offerings will be placed. They dress the altar table dedicated to the *lwa* with finely embroidered white lace before placing

homemade cakes, sweets, bottles of rum and liqueur, breads, flowers, and candles in honor of the spirits (see fig. 10). At the base is a statue of Saint Lazarus, the leper who supports himself with crutches and who is identified with both the Yoruba God of disease (Babalu Aye) and the lame Fon/Haitian deity Papa Legba. Around his neck are draped the *collares* (sacred beaded necklaces) of the five principal Yoruba divinities received when one is initiated into Lucumí. At his feet are offerings of three dry coconuts, bread, sweets, flowers and rum. Above at the head of the altar stands Saint Barbara who is syncretized with the Lucumí divinity Shango and commonly understood among Vodú practitioners as yet another incarnation of the great warrior deity Ogun (see fig. 11). The final items to be draped on either side of the table are the ritual flags dedicated to Ogun and Legba respectively (see fig. 12). These flags further identify the two principal deities to which the altar is dedicated. Taken together, the objects of this sacred assemblage or altar space, praise, incarnate and summon the deities to partake in what is being offered. In short, they serve as the conduits for divine communication.

Within the Vodú rites practiced in the rural interior of eastern Cuba, the shared epistemological history of the sacred worlds of the Fon-based Vodou and Yoruba-based Lucumí/Santería morphs into a re-blending and co-mingling of diverse religious traditions. What is revealed is an interesting syncretic *mélange* of spiritual forces. The syncretism that I speak of is not solely that of the Haitian/Fon understandings of praising the supernatural with the images of Catholic saints, but also the recognition that these Catholic saints are also aligned to the Cuban Lucumí or Yoruba *orishas*. The various African and Western Christian cosmologies that are often positioned as being diametrically opposed come together in this altar space. Through the presentation of

sacred foods, the congregants evoke and provoke the spiritual energies of diverse universes that in turn throw into relief the intrinsic hybrid identity of the community of practitioners. This merging of the distinct worldviews is not unique to ceremonial contexts. I have consistently viewed this merge of sacred worlds on domestic shrines throughout the homes of Haitian-Cuban residents, (see figures 13 & 14)

The drumming and dancing continues until sunrise the next morning, but as if renewed by the blessings of the Gods, the Vodú collective seems even more animated, showing no signs of having been awake and laboring for twenty-four hours. They continue to prepare the last food offering to the accompaniment of chatter and songs. Shortly after three o'clock, two cocks are offered at the threshold of the *cai misté* where the altars were being dressed from the night before. Shortly after Legba is fed at the doorway, a procession of elder women and men carrying plates of food enter the room. They center their attention on the ancestral altar strategically placing the offerings. With the food in place the *prètsevann* begins the ceremony by dipping sweet basil into holy water and sprinkling the libation to sanctify the offering and to open the proceedings. As the litany of prayers start, silence falls across the crowd tightly assembled in front of the table (see figures 15 & 16). The *prètsevann* offers a few songs and announces the significance of the occasion: "The family is assembled at the foot of this table, in front of the foods that fed generations of Africans and generations of our Haitian ancestors. We invite you to share in this meal, to honor us with your continued presence and light. We have Haiti no more, but we have the *lwa* and the dead as our guides. We cannot be lost for we know who we are and from whence we came." With focused contemplation and through the use of their collective voices and attentive prayers and songs, those

assembled summon the spirits who have gone before. The numinous provocation stirs many to tears and some are overcome with uncontrollable fits of sobs as they are provoked to confront their history and the memory of their past through rehearsing their spiritual lineage. As they gather to remember and recognize the power, potency and presence of the divine they are prompted to recall and make tangible in the present their memories of the Haiti their parents and grandparents spoke about and in the process they also fashion their own identities as Haitians.

To close the ceremony, the *prètsewann* lifts the different plates off the table three times before pointing them each to the cardinal points and welcoming the dead to feast. After wiping their tears and the sweat of their labor the congregants leave the *cai misté* and allow the dead to feast in private. They are ushered out with the sounding of the drums and the antiphonal chorus that beckons the *lwa* and transports the congregation to another space and time. Once outside, the host serves food to those assembled and as night falls he provides everyone present with a gift of an offering of food or beverage from the ceremonial altars, thus closing the ritual cycle of feeding the dead and the living. The participatory nature of serving the spirits is represented in the labor of preparation and ritualizing. A sign of its efficacy is the visitation by the spirits. It is also about the sense of community that is forged through sharing a communal meal, and in keeping to the *regleman* (ritual order) of the sacred occasion.

RE-FRAMING THE MANJE MORT FOR A TOURIST AUDIENCE

The Dynamics of Re-Constructing Sacred Space

What happens when one transposes an intimate domestic ritual into a festive frame for tourist consumption? Do the Gods still respond amidst the blinding flash of cameras, the many digital recorders, microphones and other technological interventions made to capture the event and to make it more intelligible? How is collective memory activated in the absence of the sacred sites and the land in which the spirits are lodged and to which generations of Haitians have gone to pay them homage? Does the tourist gaze pervert the sacredness of the occasion? In the end, how does one frame and interpret the sacred in a festive context? These were some of the questions I had as I arrived at the entrance of the stately colonial building that houses the altars and relics of some of the more popular sacred traditions practiced in Cuba.

I flash my badge alerting the guard that I did in fact pay my \$60.00 USD fee that affords me entrance to all colloquia, performances, and the workshop on popular religions. There are several staged ritual events during the week-long activities, but the *manje mort* is the first to be presented. How curious I thought. Here I am in a cultural festival in Cuba about to observe how the descendants of Haitians honor their dead. For Casa officials, the choice of commencing with the *manje mort* made perfect sense. This is so in part because it demonstrates the institution's commitment to exposing marginal traditions. The choice of transporting a rural Vodú ritual to a courtyard space in an urban residential neighborhood is an attempt to legitimize the religion and community of practitioners as being part of the cultural tapestry of Cuba and to also bracket the rite from being read as folk spectacle. As the courtyard space is used as the stage for the

other religious traditions observed throughout Oriente, especially Santería, Palo Monte and Espiritismo, the Casa staff is able to highlight the differences and varying points of convergence that exist between the diverse religious traditions that have contributed to the sacred geography of eastern Cuba.

Stepping down from the paved walkway onto the dusty and gravel laden earth, I am greeted by a haze of smoke rising from a pile of burning logs. As in all Vodou ceremonies, Legba's elemental life force – represented by fire – is used to demarcate and consecrate the space of ritual and the smoke is used as a devise to cleanse all those who choose to enter. But, one cannot enter without passing over or walking around the “crossroads” (Legbas's flame) that separate the secular and scared realms. Crossing the threshold of the ceremonial space instigates a shift in consciousness as one is transported from the “outside” urban residential neighborhood where Casa del Caribe is located to the “inside” adjoining rural yard space or reconstructed family compound. The rustic ambience, achieved by clusters of plants, shrubs, and towering fruit trees that hug the perimeter of the courtyard, is segmented into several “public” and “private” domains where the ritual activity unfolds. With no proscenium arch to delimit a focal point of the “performance,” the entire courtyard becomes the stage. More accurately, it presents a site of encounter, or as Clifford (1997) discusses, a “contact zone” where different cultures and identities meet and multiple narratives of history and memory reveal themselves through the dynamic interplay of ritual performance.

To further transport those assembled, the multilayered rhythmic sounds of Konpa fills the air, but one song in particular poignantly reflects on the purpose of the gathering. The haunting chant of Boukman Eksperyans, “Nou pa sa bilye” (We're not going to

forget this) “Petro, Congo, Rada, Ibo, Nago ... our ancestors are here” calls to memory through the blending of popular konpa sounds and Afro-Haitian religious music, the ancestral lineage of those descendants of Haitians assembled in the yard. As people continue to enter the courtyard, their faces reveal a disquiet and puzzlement. It is as if they are saying to themselves, is this a party or a ritual. With no story boards, or guides to explain the rules of engagement, we all look to each other and to the performers/practitioners scattered around the yard dancing and singing among themselves for a hint as to how to behave. The program blurb speaks to the solemnity of the *manje mort*, but the mood is anything, but somber. With the music and laughter, a festive ethos akin to a family reunion takes root.

As if noticing the perplexed looks, the director of the House of Popular Religions steps center stage to introduce the members of Pilón del Cauto and provides a brief history of the community and the significance of the *manje mort*. It is now almost two hours after the ritual has been advertised to begin and so he apologizes profusely for the late start. But for the performers, the ritual has already commenced. The community of Haitian-Cubans already began their kinesthetic journey of remembering and inviting, through collective singing and dancing, their ancestral kin. The call to remember signaled by the recorded music is marked in their bodies as they sway and sing along with the refrain waving red handkerchiefs in the air.

The moment of ritualizing did not require an official “opening,” it was more about the group collectively responding to an energy that was not yet named, but felt. What becomes apparent is that ritual labor assumes different forms and operates at different registers. The intervention of Casa officials threw into relief the fact that the restaging of

the *manje mort* is indeed a case of a frame within a frame, or a sacred ritual within a festival. However, what appeared to be a secular festive moment is also a critical aspect of the ritualized behavior needed in order to “heat up” the gathering and energize the space, thus opening it up to the more “formal” aspects of memorializing the dead.

In her provocative publication, *Three Eyes for the Journey: the African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*, Dianne Stewart identifies six shared features that serve as a general typology for understanding African and African-derived religions. They include the following: *divination, libation, incantation, offering, visitations, and communion*. Beyond being general concepts, the different elements, or more accurately, each of these actions makes the presence of the sacred tangible and more pronounced and offers a means through which an individual or community of practitioners can interact, and establish a relationship of mutual dependency with the divine. Through these acts of recognition, divine energies are situated and understood to be an elemental force in the life of the living, which can be harnessed, manipulated, and shared among those assembled to worship. For the purpose of making sense of the ritual staging of the *manje mort*, I use five of the six features of this typology (libation, incantation, visitation, offering, and communion) as a lens through which to understand and interpret the ritualized sequence of events that occur during the performance.

The dialectic of “inside” and “outside”/ “public” and “private” also presents useful markers or frames for mapping the different stages of the ritual and the use and definition of the ritual space. With the absence of any boards or announcements, celebrants/spectators have to be guided by the differing ritual activities and the spaces in which they occur. Indeed one can argue that the demarcation of the ritual space

customarily practiced in rural family compound settings is replicated in the organization of the courtyard space for the staging of the *manje mort*. In many ways, meaning is constituted through the use of space. Thus, situating the ritual around distinct spaces helps not only to frame the distinct moments of the ritual, but also provides a context through which to glean their significance.

The major activities of the *manje mort* occur in three principal sites: the entranceway, an intermediary dance area directly in front of a thatched roof pavilion, and the *persitil or tonèl* i.e. a thatched roof pavilion equipped with a *poto mitan* and altar room. Some of these spaces spectators/celebrants are able to easily transgress because they are more “public” in their orientation, as in the entranceway/threshold of the compound where the opening rites for Legba take place. Others are deemed more “private”, like the *tonèl* and the inner sanctum or altar room (*bagi* or *cai misté*) where ritual objects are stored and rites performed, and therefore not accessible to those who are not servers of the spirit or part of the Vodú collective conducting the rite.

The *tonèl*, as a symbol of the hearth of Vodou ritualizing is the nexus through which family and community members interact, and serve the spirits. It is a central locale for communing with the mysteries and solidifying social relationships within a community. This intimate, semi-private domestic space is juxtaposed against the wide expanse of the public compound. One can therefore identify those who are considered insiders and outsiders by examining who gets access to the “back region” or *tonèl* space. However, this dialectic of public/private should not be seen as static categories. Indeed, as the ritual progresses and the disparate energies become unified through collective ritualized activities, some of these spaces become quite permeable as members of the

“audience” are given access to the more intimate spaces that were once shielded. Yet, a great deal of the ritual activities unfolds *in-between* rather than completely inside or outside of these public/private arenas.

Although the *oungans* and *manbo* conducting the ceremony orchestrate the energy and in many ways dictate the flow of the proceedings as it relates to how the space is utilized, there are spaces along the perimeter of the compound where spectators can assemble on their own accord to watch the proceedings from a distance. It is however, in the open space in-between the public entranceway and in front of the private *tonèl* where the majority of the rites geared towards tourists are enacted. What is clear is that these various spaces are mnemonic devices designed to call into being the feel of rural life in a Haitian family compound. During the staging of the *manje mort*, the spiritual labor required to accurately invoke and feed the dead goes in between the distinct sites around the compound, between the public and private realm of worship and ritual work. Those elements that cannot be seen are shielded, and those that require the full participation of those assembled are publicly enacted for all to take part.

Libation, Invocation, & Offerings: Feeding the Lwa Ginen

The ceremony commences at the threshold or Legba’s abode – the divine crossroads – where the sacred and profane / invisible and visible worlds intersect. One of the two officiating *oungans* begins the proceedings with a series of libations to the cardinal points, hence opening the channel of communication between the distinct realms of existence. The ceremonial space is further defined by drawing of a *vévè* for Legba, so as to praise and summon him. In his prayer, *oungan* Milanès announces to Legba the reasons for the gathering and mentions that an “extended family not from the same blood

or land” is assembled to pay homage to the Ginen spirits. This pronouncement is particularly salient for it acknowledges the fact that the dead along with the *lwa racin* or *lwa Ginen* (root or African spirits) are being mutually honored. And that participation does not require one to be of the same bloodline or from the same lakou. The “family” of worshipers, as it were, is being constituted through the process of ritualizing collectively.

Indeed the crowd assembled includes a diverse mix of people, all of whom with varying degrees of commitment to the ritual undertaking. Their level of involvement is structurally marked in their placement around the entranceway during the opening series of libations and incantations. The predominantly female members of Pilón del Cauto are standing side by side in a row backing a cluster of banana trees and a ceiba/mapou tree, which in the understanding of Vodou, is one of the key *repozwa* of the mysteries. The group of practitioners/performers announces their group identity through their peasant attire comprising a blue blouse and long skirt and white head-ties. Immediately behind them are rows of curious spectators, some of whom are servers of the spirits from other Vodú communities, others are practitioners of one of the other Afro-Cuban religious traditions, still others are simply participating in the festival (see fig. 17). While it is not always easy to differentiate the practitioners within the crowd of celebrants, the *extranjeros* (foreigners) are easily identified, as they are often times laden with all the latest technological devices to capture the moment.

On the opposite side of this row of celebrants are the drummers dressed in red shirts, the color of Ogou and the Petwo Gods. A few of them sit while others stand poised ready to play. Leading the ceremony are three ritual specialists (two *oungans* who also happen to be brothers and a *manbo*). As they are charged with leading the ritual and

ensuring that it flows according to the will of the Gods, they draw everyone's attention to the burning logs and intricate vévé, which serve as ritual focal points (see fig. 18). It can also be said that they are particularly mindful of the disparate energies coming together to witness a sacred rite and thus use the space to help maintain the boundaries between the insiders and outsiders, between family members and strangers.¹¹⁹

An ethos of meditative sobriety sets the tone for the initial ritual acts, but the silence is soon interrupted by a series of drum salutations to Legba that initiates an elaborate sequence of dances. The *ounjenkion* (person who initiates the singing) leads the performers through a series of songs that is punctuated with intermittent drum rolls to which they salute the priests with alternating steps to the right and left followed by a full turn and curtsy. They do this in unison facing the *manbo* and *oungans* and then return to their dancing. The complex rhythms build as the sacrificial cock is brought to the flame and offered to the God of the crossroads. A few gasps are audible from the crowd of spectators, but the performers continue to feverishly pluck the feathers off the rooster's limp body. Libations are poured at the root of ceiba and an offering of boiled yams, and beans are placed at its base for the Haitian spirit Loko.

Visitation & Communion: Power, Spiritual Labor and Memory as Embodied Practice

With the presentation of the first set of offerings over, the drum beat changes and at the direction of *oungans*, the group of performers and celebrants move from the threshold to the intermediary space in front of the *tonèl*. As the ceremony moves from the threshold to the dance area, which also reflects on the liminality of this stage of the ritual process, there is a marked shift in register from the internalized, reflective honoring

¹¹⁹ For more on the concept of insider and outsider in Haitian Vodou see, Karen McCarthy Brown, 1995

of the dead to an outward invocation and celebration of their omnipresence. A few enter the *tonèl* and circle the *poto mitan* while the others take turns dancing in the center of the dancing arena. The spatial configuration of their bodies creates a boundary, once again, between the performers and the spectators. They also shield the entry way to the *tonèl* making it difficult to see what the priests are doing inside.

The pitch of the music switches as the volume and pace of the drum heightens. Without warning, the drummers shift to a suite of powerful Petwo rhythms to call forth the powerful warrior, Ogou. After an hour of drumming and dancing Ogou Feray, finally arrives, temporarily inhabiting the body of the younger *oungan*. Bedecked with his characteristic saber, and with his embroidered ritual flag in his hands, Ogou Feray forcibly thrusts his shoulders back in a staccato pattern that mirrors his alternating marching steps. With each advance and retreat, the velocity of the complex drum patterns increases, intensifying the excitement and anticipation that has been building over the last four hours of ritualizing. Without warning, Ogou falls to the ground and takes two razor sharp swords and repeatedly jabs them in his abdomen (see fig. 19 and 20). As he rolls on the ground in a fit of rage, the elder *oungan* brings a goat out to the center of the dancing area and with one clean swoop of a machete cuts off his head, offering Ogou his sacrificial meal. A delighted Ogou hugs the group of performers and for the first time instructs the performers to shift from the front of the *tonèl* so that the audience can get a glimpse of the feast that was laid out for the ancestors and *lwa*. All eyes are drawn to Ogou and the ritual specialists who have turned their focus to feeding the earth. On the ground in front just to the left of the *poto mitan* two large holes are dug for the sacred twins (see fig. 21). An ample offering of food placed inside each hole and then sealed.

Ogou then gathers the members of Pilon and hands them each a bit of food before distributing the offerings before him to the other celebrants present.

The Dancing Body and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory

As Ogou parceled out offerings, the music switched from the rapid, percussive Nago and Petwo rhythms for Ogou to the softer cadences of the accordion and tumba drums typical of nineteenth-century contradans music. A lighter and playful energy fills the space as people meander through the crowd and members of Pilon begin to dance. A quality of regal elegance characterizes the carriage of their bodies, but this is most noted in the way the *manbo* repeatedly twirls and curtsies in front of her partners. As she moves around the space dancing with the younger members of Pilon, she systematically and in a very subtle and informal manner transmits her knowledge of the dance form to the others, while commemorating the Franco-Haitian traditions that Haitian-Cubans have inherited (see fig. 22).

Embedded in the re-enactment of this courtship dance are the historical and cultural fragments of the remembered practices associated with the first generation of *franceses* to Cuba. Beyond recalling and reflecting on the notions of power and prestige as it is experienced and translated in the careful mimicking and portrayal of a European salon dance, it can be argued that it is in both teaching and actually performing the dance that a structure is created for the performers of Pilon to produce cultural memory and in the process reflect on their own identities.

Undeniably, spiritual power is located with the ritual specialists, who, as the guardians of the traditions, orchestrate the sequence of events, thus legitimating their position as knowledgeable persons and keepers of the mysteries. Their power is realized

only by working in concert with the collective who help them activate the spirits through their singing and dancing. The power of the priests is conveyed through primarily nonverbal channels, specifically, their ritual dress and through performative gestures and dances. However, unlike the exhibitionary framework of highly stylized choreographed sequences displaying the different attributes of the Gods, which is the customary template for the public display of Afro-Cuban Lucumí traditions, the staging of the ritual dances in the *manje mort* are noticeably different. For one, the dance is not separated from the ritual intent or content, for it remains the medium through which to access the divine and make it manifest. The movement therefore tends to be more repetitive and concentrated towards intensifying the synergy between the drums and the dance, wherein the two elements become fused (see fig. 23). This careful orchestration of the body over time allows the dancer/devotees to tap into a repository of remembered gestures, traditions and histories that are all apart of their socio-spiritual environment. As Karen McCarthy Brown reminds us “religions such as Vodou inscribe [their traditions] in the bodies of the followers...the tradition, the memory of how to serve the spirits is held in the ritualized and ritualizing human body” (1995:236). The body therefore becomes a site of memory as well as a portal or gateway to the divine. As the primary vehicle through which dialogue between the visible and invisible realms of existence takes place, the dance is granted an exceptionally privileged position in Vodou practices and in this public staging of a rite, the primacy afforded to the dancing body is quite evident. Indeed, the distinction between the types of dances and drum patterns and the definition of who dances what, how, and when are critical aspects for determining the semiotic movement of the ritual event and shifts in emotional engagement.

There are several dance moments throughout the ritual and especially in front of the *tonèl*. Each has its specific texture and character and each of them reflects on a different aspect of Haitian culture as it is remembered and rearticulated in the Cuban context. Besides the series of possession-performances that bring the ritual performance to its climax, the dances and ritual salutations to Ogou and the performance of a courtly nineteenth-century contredans, taken together, vividly comment on the shifting identities of Pilón and the wider community of Haitian descendants living in Cuba. They can be seen as a kinesthetic display of their dual African and European heritage which translates into the Cuban context as a reflection of their distinct Afro-Haitian and Franco-Haitian identity.

ON STAGING THE SACRED

For Haitian-Cubans the process of memorializing one's dead is intimately related to ideas of history, place, memory and identity. Whether performed on the family compound or within a festive frame for tourists, the ritual labor involved in serving the spirits depends on a reservoir of shared cultural knowledge that when mobilized through performative and symbolic actions tap into subjective and transformative emotive experiences, understanding and memories. For Karen McCarthy Brown, "both understanding and remembering...can be seen as products of bodily labor, techniques to orchestrate human energy" (1995:205). The *manje mort*, as in all Vodú rituals, relies heavily on the dancing body, with its musical accompaniment, to structure and create meaning; this then functions as primary communicative channels for communing with the divine. The "bodily labor" and the spatial and locational shifts within the ritual structure are all communicative media that serve to evoke the presence of the divine. Through the

systematic concealing and unveiling of the ritual activity, the celebrants cautiously reveal the power of the supernatural and blur the boundaries between the “inside” and “outside,” as well as family members and foreigners.

The ambiguity of the ritual staging of the *manje mort* in a cultural festival arises out of this question of who determines the “accurate” frame for understanding how the event should be experienced and interpreted. This discussion of the ceremonial proceedings within two distinct contexts was to therefore show the ways in which the most important tenets of the ritual are reconstituted. In light of this, these practitioners do not work strictly within the aesthetic conventions of western theatre and recast the sacred intent of the *manje mort* as folkloric folly. Instead, members of Pílon del Cauto approach their performance as they would their domestic ceremony, utilizing similar ritual objects while following the *regleman* (ritual order) and techniques of the body to communicate with the divine.

Within Casa’s programming, practitioners and elders in the traditions are afforded a great deal of prestige because of their *konesans* or intuitive knowledge and authority. They are thus featured as not only the presenters, but the *portadores* or bearers of traditions. Casa’s insistence on the educational and social benefits of exposing “authentic” sacred rites of marginal groups also coincides with the intension of the ritual specialist and *voduisants* who present their ceremonies in a seemingly secular environment. Many I spoke with envisioned their presentation as an extension of their spiritual obligation to serve the spirits, and as such, recognized the real consequences of their actions. The preoccupation with questions of authenticity becomes a moot point, for the Vodú collective interpret and conduct their rite as an extension of their understanding

and respect of the sacred precepts that structure the ritual process. Concerned with the efficacy of the ritual, community practitioners cum performers are not focused on entertaining a curious audience, and fitting their ceremony within a set time frame more akin to a staged spectacular. Instead, they use the occasion to establish communication with the spirits and reiterate the culturally prescribed actions that help define and give meaning to the particularities of their distinct sacred world, and hence, identity as a people. The ideas concerning their relationship to their spirits, Gods, homeland, kin, history and identity as a displaced people become central components of the rites meaning and thus the way Haitian-Cubans frame the event. This particular approach and understanding from the perspective of the practitioners/performers further enhance the pedagogical approach advanced by Casa's cultural officials.

When asked about the presence of tourists and the intrusion of cameras and tape recorders, members of Pílon del Cauto responded to me in a dismissive tone, "those on the outside can only see what they are meant to see." In other words, not everyone has access to the "back regions" (MacCannell 1973) or have the ability of making sense of the materials being performed. Alan Goldberg has observed that "Haitians have developed ways of masking their cultural resources in order to avoid the opprobrium and exploitation of outsiders" (1981:229). Within the staging of the *manje mort*, this technique is also used as a way of shielding those elements, such as the ceremonial table until after the spirits partakes of their meal.

For the Vodouisants from Pílon del Cauto that I interviewed, the representation of Vodou in what appears to be a secular setting is not perceived as being contradictory or incompatible to their domestic rituals. In fact the sacred is deemed to permeate

everything. The distinction that is often made between secular and sacred is less severe or clearly defined and instead the two bleed into each other. As one of the *oungans* explained to me, “a ritual is a ritual is a ritual, whether in the mountains or city streets, the Gods are our ultimate audience...we answer only to their demands not that of men.” Therefore, what is at stake is something greater than what the audience may perceive to be a “good performance.” The onus is with the Vodú collective and ritual specialists to orchestrate divine energy and call forth the *lwa* and the dead.

By honoring their dead in a public space, members of Pílon del Cauto open their sacred practices to scrutiny, carving a space in the culture and aesthetic identity of Cuba’s patrimony. The memory of their people and some of the emblematic markers of their identities as Haitians are celebrated and shared with a wider public. The efficacy of the ritual is both located in its ability to establish communication with the spirit world and among the celebrants gathered, and in its ability to enable the group of practitioners to express their cultural difference and identity. Politically speaking, the power of the ceremony is being able to differentiate a Haitian-Cuban identity from an undifferentiated Afro-Cuban population. The symbolic encoding of cultural signifiers on the body and the way in which the body moves through the ritual space, helps to facilitate the formal declamation of a Haitian-Cuban collective identity that is expressed through the performance of difference.



Figure 1

Three generations of a Haitian family of drummers in the rural homestead of a popular *oungan*

(Palma Soriano Cuba) 2000
[Photo by Author]



Figure 2

Preparation of bean stews to be offered during the *manje mort* ritual feast to the dead

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 3

Preparation of a meal for the *manje mort* on a typical outdoor pit, the goat in the upper right-hand corner will also be offered as part of the ceremony

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 4

Serviteur stirring the okras and green leaves for the calalú

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 5

Serviteur pounding plantain for Fufu

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 6

Close up of offering of an assortment of homemade sweets, ripe plantain, and toasted corn for the *manje mort*.

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 7

Table setting for the ancestral spirits and offering to sacred twins presented on a banana leaf.

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 8

Vodú drumming with accompanying percussive sounds and antiphonal singing guides participants through their ritualized movement. The different tonal patterns and the “kase” (break pattern or oppositional rhythm) help to destabilize the dancer and lead s/he into a state of possession

(Palma Soriano) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 9a and 9b

Possession-Performance during *manje mort* feasting ceremony

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 10

Ceremonial altar for family spirits with offerings of cakes, baked goods, flowers and rum in honor of the spiritual lineage of the lakou's residents. Feeding the spirit is approached with great care and expenditure on the part of the living. These sacrifices are made because it is believed the *lwa* will bring prosperity and good fortune to their devotees

(Palma Soriano)
[Photo by Author]



Figure 11

Ceremonial altar for family spirits with offerings of food and beverages. A statue at the base of the altar of the Catholic Saint Lazarus is representative of the Haitian *lwa*, Papa Legba. At the top of the altar is a statue of Santa Barbara who represents Ogou Chango for Vodú practitioners.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by the Author]



Figure 12

Ritual Flags draped on the syncretic ceremonial altar. As the ceremony goes on more offerings are added until finally, the flags are brought out as part of the final dressing. Here we also see the statue of Saint Lazarus draped with *elekes* (sacred beaded necklaces) more commonly used in the Yoruba derived Santería religion.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by the Author]



Figure 13

This three-tiered sacred assemblage or domestic altar features prominently in the home of an extended Haitian-Cuban family residing in Santiago de Cuba. The altar features the ritual flags and Dahomean-styled Vodú ritual drums where they are housed until they are needed for ceremonies. To the left, partly covered by a white flag, is a framed image of the Haitian coat of arms and in the upper left is a small Haitian flag. The altar also features an image of a deceased family member with a small ceramic image of La Caridad de Cobre (Patron Saint of Cuba. Ochun within Yoruba derived practices and Ezile Freda amongst Vodú practitioners). Just below is a statue of Santa Barbara or Chango, on the main tier are reproduced images of Sen Jak (the Patron Saint of Santiago de Cuba and of the Haitian-Cuban population). At the base stands a statue of St. Lazarus, who is popularly regarded as Papa Legba.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2000

[Photo by Author]



Fig. 14

Close-up image of the first tier of altar that features bottles of herb-laced rum, drum sticks, a chromolithograph and ceramic statue of Sen Jak or Ogou mayo

(Santiago de Cuba) 2000
[Photo by Author]



Figure 15

Food offerings to the *marassa*, notice the small cup of coffee that is being used to pour libations in the upper right hand corner of the photo.

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 16

A Vodú collective of families from various communities, assembled for the prayer service and blessing of the table in honor of family spirits. The *prètsewann* is in the foreground in the white shirt and blue pants

(Palma Soriano, Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 17

Members of Pílon del Cauto assemble at the threshold in front of the burning logs for Papa Legba. Oungan Tata Milanes gives each performer a drink of rum laced with medicinal herbs, barks, and roots. Note how the dancers create a natural boundary between themselves and the spectators who are in the rows behind them.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001
[Photo by Author]



Figure 18

Oungan Pablo Milanes guides his ritual assistants around the vévé for Legba by the threshold. The enamel cup filled with water, bottle of molasses and basis on herbs were all use to consecrate the ritual space.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001
[Photo by Author]



Figure 19

Oungan Pablo Milanes in the early stage of possession

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001

[Photo by Author]



Figure 20

Possession-Performance

Ogou turns his sword against himself and repeatedly stabs his abdomen.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001

[Photo by Author]



Figure 21

Ogou directs the performers to move from the entryway so that the audience can witness the feeding of the sacred twins inside of the *tonél*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001
[Photo by Author]



Figure 22

The ceremony comes to a close after the sacrifice of a goat and the performance of an eighteenth-century contredans, *maisón*. To the right is the *manbo* who is a devotee of Ezili, syncretized in Cuba as Santa Cecilia. In the background is the thatched roof pavilion where the majority of the secret aspects of the ceremony are conducted. Note how the bodies shield from view the interior sections of the *tonél/peristil*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001
[Photo by Author]



Figure 23

Voduisant or serviteur of Ogou dances in front of the Vodú drums

(Santiago de Cuba) 2001
[Photo by Author]

CHAPTER VI

FROM BUSH TO STREET: THE SHIFTING PERFORMANCE GEOGRAPHY OF RARA/GAGA

The circle of dance is a permissive circle: it protects and permits... – shakes of the head, bending of the spinal column, throwing the whole body backwards – may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself. There are no limits – inside the circle.

Frantz Fanon 1963

It is precisely this rhythmic complexity, rooted in the forms of the ritual sacrifice and directed toward all the senses, that gives pan-Caribbean cultures a way of being, a style that is repeated through time and space in all of its differences and variants.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo 1996

In the Gagá we are one with all who are here and those who are over there. When we're on the streets we have one shared history, one shared culture, one shared identity. We wear different colors and wave different ritual flags, but dance under one flag and to one rhythm.

Yesel (Haitian-Cuban drummer)

A cloud of smoke hovered above the heads of the musicians assembled in Madame Sylvie's living room. They were burning an assortment of herbs and using the heat emitted from the metal cauldron to mystically awaken, tune and charge the assortment of instruments that were *kouche* (put to sleep) after the last ceremony. The men were seated just in front of a Petwo shrine¹²⁰, ceremoniously passing a bottle of *tifei*

¹²⁰ Petwo refers to one of the two dominant *nanchons* (nations) or pantheon of spirits in Vodou. According to Karen McCarthy Brown, unlike the Rada *lwa* who are sweet, "root spirits," intimate family spirits brought from Africa to Haiti, Petwo *lwa* are hot divinities created to deal with the demands of the 'New World,' hence their perceived "foreign-ness." For Petwo and most Kongo-derived religious practice, the ceremonial "ethos is one of urgency and excitement, tinged with danger" and they act swiftly when called to service. For more on this distinction, see, McCarthy Brown, 1995. Petwo altars participate in a similar aesthetic principle of bricolage, as one may see on a Rada altar, but the ritual iconography is somewhat different. Crosses of different sizes and the colors red and blue are prominently featured. Additionally, Petwo symbology, most notably the medicinal packets, use of gun power and whips are seen to also participate in a Kongo cosmological universe, in much the same way as the Kongo-derived practice associated with Kumina, found in the eastern part of Jamaica and the Cuban Palo Monte. For more on Kongo religion and iconography see Thompson and Cornet, 1981; Stewart, 2005; Bettelheim, 2001.

(raw cane rum mixed with hot peppers and various roots, bark, and herbs), for all to take a drink. They intermittingly rubbed their drums and bodies with an infusion of different *fèy* (herbs), filled their *yoncs* (batons) with mysterious powders, and arranged their amulets and the intricate double-stranded *collares* (necklaces) they wore diagonally across their chests. While the musicians were using their spiritual work to ensure a protective armor to safeguard the evening's *sòti* (outing/journey), the *reine/rènn* (queens) were preparing in another way.

Lined up in a narrow patio space in red and blue dresses and red head ties, with bodies in motion they practiced their songs while performing intricate foot-work that belied the sinuous circling of their waist and hips. They each had brilliant red flags with a royal blue border and some with the iconography of the divinity that protected the band, Ogou Badageri, the fierce warrior deity. With each step, the *pòt drapo* (flag bearers) twirled their flags becoming one with the brilliant fabric as it danced above their heads. The *kolonèl* (leader of the band) soon joined the dancers, blowing his whistle in a syncopated percussive pattern, mirroring the fiery energy of the Petwo-Kongo rhythms provided by the *baterí* (ensemble of drummers and percussionists). Moving through the cramped front room, he led the performers to a large ceramic statue of Sen Jak¹²¹ on the altar, and as each member approached the shrine, they passed their hands over the image. The congregation then proceeded to circle a large Sotò drum¹²² (a large Dahomey drum),

¹²¹ Sen Jek is the Kreyòl name for the Fon Ogun and the catholic Saint Santiago, patron saint of the city of Santiago de Cuba. He stands, above all else, as the god of war and military prowess. He is both a creative and destructive divinity who traverses between the different nations of spirits and is one of the most represented in the iconography of Haitian Vodou. Calling on the energy of a warrior divinity bespeaks the view that Rara/Gaga is more than a parade, but in fact a complex ritual and festive event that brings the various social worlds together in an exuberant display of ceremonial rites, song, dance, music and grassroots politics.

¹²² From oral history accounts, the Sotò or Asotò was the first Haitian drum to have entered Cuba. It was reported to have been found in the early nineteenth century in a community in Guantanamo, home to the

which served, in this instance, as the *poto mitan* (sacred center pole). Before completely circling the drum, they each slapped the head with two slender sticks to the accompaniment of the sounding of fire crackers, thus producing a cacophony of explosive sounds that ushered the group through the front door and onto the road. With each surge through the streets they sang boisterously, *bon voyage pití fei mwen, marche moun Rara* (So long my little initiates, charge Rara people).

Myste d' Vodou, a folkloric ensemble based in Santiago de Cuba, comprised of predominantly first and second generation Haitians, is one of approximately twenty groups that present the exuberant sacred performance complex- Gagá - in the annual Festival of Fire. As the opening vignette demonstrates, although removed from the rural batey, where the Haitian Lenten street festival known as *Rara* was reconstituted and transformed into Gagá, the performers approach each lively procession as a sacred obligation, as a “mystical contract” (McAlister 2002:34), as it were, between the visible and invisible worlds, and as such, bring to each “battle” a psycho-spiritual and physical preparedness.

Removed from the locality of the Haitian countryside to the Cuban batey and then again to the streets of Santiago de Cuba, Gagá is one of the myriad of cultural forms that now participate in several symbolic systems and performative contexts throughout Cuba.

successive waves of Franco and Afro Haitian migrants who established and fortified maroon-type communities in the hills. The story of the Sotò and its salience as a potent image of a collective Haitian presence in Cuba was repeatedly conveyed to me by a cross-section of Haitian-Cubans. The Sotò is held in great regard as the repository of the ancient mysteries of Ginen. Therefore, though it is customary for the drums and the rhythms of the distinct *nanchon* to be separated and for Petwo symbolism to dominate in Rara/Gaga performances, in Cuba the Sotò, even if not played, is often present for all important ceremonial gatherings.

It is one of the cultural forms preserved by Haitian-Cubans that now circulate in multiple contexts that remove it from its original ritual intent. Like the *manje mort*, Gagá is being increasingly enveloped within the commercial and tourist sectors of Santiago's growing economy. In large part, this is a global phenomenon of cultural change in the present reconfigurations of market forces, but the question remains, what are the implications of these developments for historically marginal populations?

To begin to engage this question, this chapter critically examines the shifting localities of this festive form as it traverses distinct contexts and acquires new meanings. In so doing, I examine the aesthetic, performative and ritual elements that are deployed across a range of performance frames so as to glean how meaning is informed by these structures and also inscribed within distinct spaces in which Gagá is enacted. The chapter assesses the reasons that Gagá performances are able to transcend locations and still forge a sense of solidarity and diasporic consciousness among its participants. It further evaluates the resonance Gagá has in the different locales, spaces, and contexts where it is performed.

In recent years, Gagá has been featured in regional festivals, as well as in the repertoire of professional, national and amateur dance companies. However, the most politically noteworthy performance was presented by members of a community ensemble, Grupo Barranca, in the foyer of one of Santiago's premier hotels. On this occasion, the nocturnal street parade became part of a daytime celebration, as approximately thirty descendants of Haitians joined a delegation of state officials to welcome the then Haitian President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, on his visit to the socialist island in June 2000. To greet him were the generations of offspring of Haitian field

laborers dressed in brilliant colors, brandishing the flag of his, and their, native homeland. The children of the displaced presented in their melodious repertoire of songs the collective suffering and transcendence of the Haitian spirit. In response, the Haitian president wept silently beneath a smile that bespoke the tone of this momentous encounter. When Aristide stood at the podium, he too began to sing in Krèyol and tapped into that reservoir of traditional knowledge that connected him with those he addressed before him. He remarked on the antiquity yet salience of the songs the group shared and spoke to the defiant spirit of the Haitian people and specifically to those in Cuba, who have given so much to its cultural patrimony and who expressed in their performances the historical ties the two countries share.

What makes this event significant for our current consideration is not so much that Gagá is chosen as the emblematic icon of Haitian identity in Cuba, or placed in a context that seemingly reduces its oppositional potentialities. Instead, its importance is embedded within the notion that with each enactment of Gagá, the past and the history of those who came before is made tangible in the present and represented as the collective memory of a people who themselves become historical agents in the construction of their own social realities. As Michael Largey argues, “As a traditionalizing process¹²³, Rara enacts the past through the concerns of the present performance” (2000:241), to this end there is less of a dependence “on their authenticity and more on their salience in the social realities of the present” (ibid). This question of authenticity is therefore bracketed,

¹²³ Expanding on Raymond Williams’ thesis on the development of culture, Largey argues that, traditionalizing processes speak to an emergent phenomenon wherein cultural forms participate in the dominant cultural codes but over time begin to exhibit and articulate new formulations that participate in the old dispensation while at the same time not wholly replicating the past. See Williams 1977; Largey, 2000

for it is understood by the participants/performers that each Gagá holds, within its particular logic, its own truth, functionality as well as divine and socio-political power.

By mapping the contours of the development of Gagá in different spaces and contexts, this chapter seeks to examine the ways in which meaning is reconstituted through and within performance. Rather than view the new diversified spatialization of Gagá as a symptom of the folklorization process that in turn exploitatively commodifies and homogenizes this festive form, I argue that these new environments foster a recasting process that amplifies the emancipatory power of Gagá . I caution that if we deny the creative agency of its performers to resignify their practices as they traverse different contexts, we miss the dynamic logic that is at the ontological root of Gagá. As Dolores Yonker reminds us, “Rara [Gagá] emphasizes movement in space rather than observances at fixed locations” (1988: 151), to this end, the process of deterritorialization and subsequent reterritorialization across geographical locales and spaces is indicative of the inherent migratory and dialogical structure that governs the form. Thus, Gagá is at its core about crossings, passage and journeys, linking the sacred and secular realms of existence with the communities and territories it passes through; solidifying the identities of those in the immediate space of its enactment and also reaching across to those who exist in different environments.

In this vein, Gagá evokes a transnational performance geography that bespeaks the foundational role of Vodou in the diasporic experience of Haitian migrants. Its presence in Cuba attests to the ways Haitians have historically used their popular cultural forms to create expansive “social fields” that allow them to re-root themselves in the diverse spaces they call home, while maintaining a connection to the homeland, either

literally or figuratively (Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994; McCarthy Brown 1997; McAlister 2002). The argument here is that the facilitation of this diasporic cultural formation and the subsequent fashioning of diasporic subjectivities emerge out of this process of dislocation and relocation (Alleyne-Dettmers 2005).

HAITIAN RARA and the AESTHETICS and SOCIO-CULTURAL ROOTS of GAGÁ CUBANO

Rara in Haiti

Before going any further, it is important to begin our discussion on Gagá by analyzing it within the socio-cultural context of Haiti, out of which it emerged. Rara is one of the most subversive popular expressions observed by the predominant peasant-classes and urban poor of Haiti. Structured as a public ritual, Rara processions navigate the Haitian landscape, often at night, enveloping all within their reach. They provide public platforms for the honoring of the spirits and for the powerless masses to broadcast coded and symbolically potent messages about their collective experiences, disenchantments and social realities. As a festive form, Rara marries religious rituals, politics, exuberant dances, songs and music, in a six week Lenten street festival¹²⁴ that begins on Ash Wednesday in Vodou temples across the country and climaxes the week of Easter with the burning of an effigy of the jwif (jew) or devil.¹²⁵ In this regard, Rara

¹²⁴ Gage Averil and Verna Gillis, however, note that while rara is associated with Lent, it is not bounded exclusively to a specific season, but instead is performed as needed. As a grassroots cultural expression, rara is used by political leaders as well as the people to voice particular concerns, thus “despite its seasonal association, rara can take place at any time of the year and animates political rallies, demonstrations, and celebrations of all types,” 1991.

¹²⁵ The burning of an effigy is a popular subversive act in most carnival traditions of the Circum-Atlantic. Within the specific case of Rara/Gaga the burning of the jwif relates for McAlister’s argument about the Jew being the central referent for the “other” and of difference. During Rara, the image of the Jew is

extends the rites of renewal and rebirth that Carnival enacts and unites the tropes and symbols associated with Vodou and Haiti's military history into the overall structure of its festivity. During the Lenten period, ritual activities are suspended in the Vodou temples and diverted to the Rara bands that enact rites in spiritually potent sites along their nightly pilgrimages.

Rara members identify themselves as a collective body, which is in keeping with the way that the Petwo *lwa* or spirits are organized and revered. In tracing the pervasive contrasts between the two major spirit pantheons, Rada/Petwo, Karen McCarthy Brown describes the spiritual collectivity of the Petwo spirits as expressed in the way in which the Petwo *lwa* are "given a single perfunctory greeting" (1995: 231). This collective ethos translates itself into the Rara bands whereby members organize themselves as a singular, communal unit that is constantly renewed as the band attracts people into its fold who join the revelry of the masquerade. The bands develop in different regions around the country, primarily in rural villages, but also in urban spaces where they create new songs to join an extensive repertoire that is performed as they parade through the streets. Rara bands are in many ways extended families joined by ritual kinship and structured hierarchically as a cast of characters including: presidents, colonels, majors, queens, priests, sorcerers, spirits, and musicians.

Unlike the pre-Lenten carnival traditions that the Caribbean has become famous for, in Rara the Gods are the key players as they enter into a dialogic performance with their devotees who appease them with sacred rites. On the other end of the spectrum, Rara is also about obscenity, the "grotesque body" in motion as it gyrates to the pulsating

collapsed into that of Judas, who was blamed for the killing of Christ. The *fwif* is also readily conflated with that of the devil, and hence, stands as a referent of an evil and anti-Christian force.

rhythms of the *vaksin* (bamboo trumpets), *graj* (scrapers), *klewon* (handmade metal trumpets), *ogan* (metal hoe-blade), *lanbi* (conch shell) and *tanbou* (drum), subverting the mores of the status quo. It also involves “throwing” or offering up powerful songs in a metaphorical, antiphonal style, which serve as pointed critiques of political and social events.

According to Micheal Largey, “Rara bands follow a pattern in their nightly parades resembling the 19th-century insurrection/coup d’etat. Like the regional armies of aspiring Haitian generals, rara bands move through the streets looking to pick up supporters for their musical ‘platform’” (2000:244). These songs, and specifically the particular soundscape, go beyond the immediate environment of their enactments; however, for in many ways they become the aural or what McAlister has called the “sonic flags”, linking the multiple communities of Haitians on the island with those in the diaspora (2002:47).

Elizabeth McAlister, in her acclaimed ethnographic study of the performative and sacred dimensions of Rara, discusses its ethos and sensibility as existing along a continuum of Afro-diasporic performance traditions, whereby the man-of words and the performance of masculinity is exhibited. However, she notes that the competitive and carnivalesque logic that pervades does not diminish Rara’s explicit religious orientation. Hence she argues, “Rara consists of an outer, secular layer of Carnival ‘play’ surrounding a protected, secret inner layer of religious ‘work. These two values are enacted structurally through performance codes, use of private and public space, gender relations, and social hierarchy” (2002: 31). To this effect, while the tone of Rara is that of exuberance, freedom and playfulness, it is also a highly structured and disciplined form

that invites competition and danger, as it does the fulfillment of ritual obligation and socio-political critique.

The performative dimensions of Rara fluctuate, therefore, between what McAlister has defined as the “play” and “work” mode, or between carnivalesque and ritualized sacred behavior. Within these two frames, the procession or en masse movement is its most defining feature, as the Rara band moves through different localities to the accompaniment of boisterous sound and dance. The occasions of revelry are, however, tempered by two types of performance events. One such performative frame is that of the concentrated ritual moments, during which point, different rites are performed in either sacred landmarks, or in the actual Vodou temple or *ounfò*. The other event is comprised of what can be summarized as a musical and dance salute or what is known as an *ochan*. This performance mode involves the exhibition of choreographed routines for notable personalities, like the patrons of a band or important individuals. These performances occur at auspicious sites (e.g. cemeteries, *ounfò*) and are geared for a specific audience.

During most of the processions I have witnessed, I noticed a marked fluidity between the various performance frames and a particular performative dexterity that allows the different genres to bleed into each other in accordance to the varying shifts in the register of the overall performance. In this vein, the festive enactments are similar to the collective energy one experiences through communal worship, again reifying the inherent sacrality of this festive form.

The performance of the *ochan* or ritualized salute, presents a distinct feel and concentrated focus that departs from the free flowing *lage kò- w* or the letting go of the

self that prevails during the procession. This is the case in part because the music style radically shifts from the fiery rhythmic structure and ribald lyrics to a more austere drum salute reminiscent of the French military band tradition known as *aux champs*. The disciplined structure of the music translates into the ordered choreographed routines that are performed for notable members of a community or Vodou temple. As McAlister points out, “*Ochan* is a ritualized moment of political patronage whereby Rara groups align themselves with local notables through a performance of loyalty and homage but at the same time make a monetary demand, asserting the ideal of responsibility on the part of the more powerful” (2002:52). The relationship between the powerful and less powerful is thus mediated through the enactment of the *ochan*, which reaffirms the interdependency of communities and persons of power in a reciprocal exchange between patrons and clients.

One last aspect of the Rara, which is perhaps its most recognizable feature, is also connected to the musical salute, but this heightened event takes on a more spectacular exhibitionary and competitive nature and emphasizes the outward display of masculinity. Juxtaposed against the collective movement of the queens and flag bearers, who are often times the front line of the band charged with clearing the way and blessing the spaces through which the band will travel, the batonnier or *majò jon* are about competition and the display of mystical power. In fact, these men are often considered to be the most potent and powerful persons in the Rara ensemble. Their skills are always on display and as they twirl their batons or amulets of power, which have been prepared and consecrated in the Vodou temples, they can either cleanse or mystically destroy what it is in their path.

Most noted for their multi-colored strips of cloth worn around their waist or flashy sequenced costumes consisting of a dazzling vest or tunic, knee-length pants, a cape and white knee-high socks and white tennis shoes, these men dance low to the ground with intricate foot patterns while simultaneously twirling and throwing a baton rapidly in the air. The spectacular display of artistry and skill is in part to entertain, but it also has the function of inciting monetary contributions and disseminating potentially charged mystical energy.

The aesthetic, ritual and socio-political features work together to give Rara its complex multidimensionality as a cultural performance that merges the festival and sacred arts. Within the context of Haiti, Rara is used as a subversive force that counters the Catholic orthodoxy and social inequities of Haiti in its reclamation of public space for the display of Vodou rites and ribald revelry. Through its spectacular display of oral dexterity, Rara becomes a critical platform for the poor to negotiate their place with the powers that be and to express, albeit in the temporality of its enactment, a liberatory ethos. As Rara migrates with the flows of Haitians that settle in neighboring Cuba, the cultural practices, iconography and aesthetic principles of the form are transplanted, reconfigured, and represented as a means to not only claim public space, but also as a key agent for the reclamation of history and the assertion of a Haitian identity on Cuban soil.

THE SHIFTING SPATIALITY OF GAGÁ PERFORMANCES

Festive Forms and their Shifting Performative Contexts

In his assessment of the shifts in the last few decades within the scholarship on ritual and festive traditions, anthropologist David Guss (2000) maintains that there has

been a move away from examining these forms in terms of their discrete place-based cultural specificity and function, to that of “relocating festive practice in the sociopolitical reality” of the post-modern era (3-7). The realm of the popular is seen, therefore, not as an uncontaminated sphere of cultural production, but in fact one that participates in ever expanding semantic fields. Popular cultural expressions are not static constructs, but informed by processes such as urbanization, migration, tourism and the global flows and circuits of culture within market-driven economies (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988; Garcia Canclini 1995, Ho and Nurse 2005). As such, popular culture is according to Stuart Hall, “born of traveling, rupture, appropriation, loss, exile” (1997:27) and hence demands that cultural expressions undergo processes of re-signification as the distinct art forms replant themselves in diasporic communities. We are reminded by scholars like George Yudice, to examine the “rearticulation of tradition” over time (1992: 18) and to heed James Clifford’s view that “authenticity is reconceived as hybrid, creative activity in a local present-becoming future” (1987: 126) that is in a constant process of negotiation and re-invention.

Following this logic, cultural performances are therefore ripe arenas to not only map the ambiguous and contradictory processes through which meaning is made and remade, but likewise to see how identities are refashioned within and across distinct performance frames. According to Guss, as part of their reflexive quality:

[C]ultural performances will remain contentious and ambiguous, and while the basic structure of an event may be repeated, enough changes will be implemented so that its meaning is redirected. The same form, therefore, may be used to articulate a number of different ideas and over time can easily oscillate between religious devotion, ethnic solidarity, political resistance, national identity, and even commercial spectacle (2000:9)

Such is the dynamic of Gagá today as it is used by performers and cultural brokers for various means.

Gagá, as a traditional ritual and festive form, finds itself in ever-changing semantic arenas or what García Canclini aptly calls “doubly enrolled” in a “*historical* (a process that gives identity to ethnic groups) and a *structural* (within the present logic of dependent capitalism)” paradigm (1988: 486; 1993: 45). However, in respect to the latter, Gagá’s integration into this structural enrollment, of which García Canclini refers, is tempered by Cuba’s rather peripheral socio-political and economic positioning in the global economy. To this end, Gagá is yet to be inscribed within a strictly consumerist framework, in that it is not underwritten by multinational companies or cooperations, but indeed still operates under the patronage of the Gods, community members and, to a growing degree, state institutions. The dynamics of change are however underway. Contemporary renditions of Gagá thus beckon us to historicize the analysis and look at the dynamic interplay of history and the local as well as global political economy to better understand the shifts and expansive proliferation of the festive form outside of its localized arenas.

The historical invisibility of Gagá in the popular and spatial imaginary of Cuba has rendered the form as either non-existent or not significant enough to warrant sustained critical examination. After Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Brooklyn, New York are the next points of reference for discussing Rara/Gagá¹²⁶ (see Deive, 1975; Rosenberg 1979; Averill and Gillis 1990; Alegría-Pons 1993; McAlister, 2002). With some exceptions, the Haitian presence in Cuba, and specifically the cultural performances related to Gagá have not attracted the same kind of scholarly attention. The relative

¹²⁶ This particular bias makes sense given the large numbers of transmigrant Haitians living in these two locales.

dearth in the scholarship does not, however, reflect the dynamism of Haitian cultural practices on the island. Indeed, while Gagá has gained more public visibility through the present-day Festival of Fire, the practice has been guarded jealously and consistently performed in the rural environs of Oriente, where it became imbricated in the social life and logic of the bateyes and functioned as a source of community identification and solidarity from the early 1920s.

The presence of Gagá in Cuba is a direct result of the history of Haitian labor migration, particularly during the first four decades of the twentieth-century, and the subsequent transplantation and refashioning of Haitian-derived cultural practices on the island over several decades. Arguably, the seeds of this complex socio-religious system were initially sown by the early waves of laborers who settled in the rural hinterlands. However, the ritual and processional aspects of Gagá did not fully entrench themselves in all of the rural communities of Oriente and were only recently documented. Thus, one may ask, what accounted for its development in some areas and not others? How did this grassroots festival reconstitute itself in Cuba and garner a following that survives till today? Finally, to what extent did the ritual and performative aspects of Gagá survive its transplantation and subsequent re-spatializations as a popular cultural form in Cuba?

Scholarship on diasporic carnivals and festival traditions in metropolitan centers where Caribbean populations have been translocated, presents a range of conceptual frameworks for beginning to engage the questions of Gagá performances in Cuba. This body of literature emphasizes the ways in which Caribbean migrants used the mas' as a means of remaining connected to their countries of origin, the region, and sense of identity and collective freedom (Scher 2003; Alleyne-Dettmers 2005). At the same time

others have argued that it helped to foster a pan-Caribbean ethos and identity in the metropolis (Green and Scher 2007). Still for others, namely Abner Cohen (1993), the urban street parade is a form of cultural resistance, wherein the marginal masses claim the public space of the streets, pronouncing it as their own to then symbolically invert the moral and social order, while challenging the oppressive realities of racism and discrimination in the UK. Cohen's work goes further in terms of historicizing the event, mapping its changes as different aspects get enveloped into the overall form (1980). Krista Thompson's recent article on the spatial dynamics, of race, class, and sexuality in the urban Freaknic masquerade in Atlanta also provokes scholars to examine the various modalities and spaces of Afro-Diasporic festive forms (2007).

My analysis of Gagá is informed by these models and it starts from the premise that Gagá in Cuba presents an opportunity to expand the dialogue concerning diasporic masquerade forms to include the perspectives on the circulation of cultural practices between peripheral communities within the Caribbean. As an example, unlike Rastafari, which has emerged as a counter-hegemonic culture and discourse and movement in the urban spaces of post-revolutionary Cuba (see Hansing 2005; Pollard and Furé-Davis 2006), Gagá demonstrates the translocation of a rural phenomenon across primarily insular communities outside of the capital or urban centers.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ In recent years, however, this insularity has shifted somewhat as members of these communities perform Gagá annually in the Festival of Fire, thus moving the form from the batey to the city streets, a point I will speak to later on in the chapter.

EARLY HISTORY OF GAGÁ IN CUBA

The Case of Bande Rará/Ban Gagá in the Rural Bateyes

While the historical manifestations of Gagá in Cuba functioned within a wider cultural complex and Afro-Creole performative genre, they did not operate in the same way as metropolitan “street-based protest rituals” like that of *Caribana*, *Notting Hill*, or *Freaknic* (Thompson 2007:27). This distinction is primarily based on the spaces in which Gagá is traditionally performed and the specific intentions of the enactments. Whereas the street becomes the space in which blacks in metropolitan festive rituals publicly transgress in an act of reclamation and symbolic inversion, for Gagá performers the sequestered agricultural zones, where Haitians traditionally inhabited, remain the preferred sites of this annual pilgrimage. As an inherently rural phenomenon, the scale of the event is considerably smaller and organized around a mobile troupe of musicians (playing hand made instruments) and cast of characters including: the president, colonel, flag bearers, majors, queens, priests, musicians and chorus of revelers that roam around the countryside conducting sacred rites and soliciting monetary contributions.

The ethos of Gagá is more akin to a traditional mas’. Thus, one can identify a clear continuum between this contemporary festive form and other African masquerade traditions. The similarities are found in a shared socio-cultural sensibility and an “aesthetic of assemblage” in both the costume making process and in the overall multidimensional aspects of the festivity, most notably the fusion of ritual and play (Nunley and Bettelheim 1988: 35-37). Further adding to this concept of traditional mas’ is the sense that the event renews itself by tapping into an established reservoir of folk knowledge and practices that are continually revived as they are used to anchor a people in explicit religious and cultural worlds. Moreover, the performance is linked to specific

communities that are spiritually contracted to perform Gagá as a means of fulfilling *promesas*¹²⁸ (ritual obligations) that would in turn safeguard the health and prosperity of their families and extended family networks.

Its historical marginality as a cultural form, and hence, invisibility are a direct result of the placement of Haitians in both the spatial and social landscape of Cuba. In many ways, this coupling fed into the structural logic of Gagá, which, in itself, is shrouded in mystery and believed to enshrine mystical powers that are harnessed through clandestine rituals performed in honor of the Petwo *lwa* and the Gede spirits that rule the underworld and death. The ritual practice, therefore, could not be outwardly visible beyond the confines of the bateyes and even within the relatively protected spaces of the cane fields, the mystical work remains relatively cloaked behind carnivalesque spectacle. The seriousness of spiritual work in Rara, which McAlister discusses as operating within a play-work performative continuum, thus became the dominant register of Gagá performances in rural Cuba. For the displaced Haitian migrants in Cuba, as in New York City, the performance of Gagá provided an opportunity to construct an alternative social space built around cultural pride and the celebration of ethnic and racial solidarity. However in Cuba, Gagá was not about the conscious performance of “peasant culture” (see McAlister 2002: 186-192), but instead was grounded in the realities of the

¹²⁸ Promesas are ritual promises made to the *lwa*. They are formalized contracts made to the *lwa* in exchange for good fortune for one’s family and/or community or assistance with making a specific wish come to pass. In return the *lwa* demand that the Gagá band go out and conduct the annual parade and conduct a series of rites throughout the season. In Cuba, the fulfillment of these ritual obligations extends beyond the period of Holy Week and may happen throughout the year. The Petwo-Kongo spirits of which one enters into these binding agreements are known to act swiftly and likewise known to take action if their devotees have failed to satisfy the contract. In some cases, they may be willing to compromise, but generally speaking, these contracts, which may last up to seven years, are binding. Some of the early Gagá bands in Cuba were satisfying contracts made by family members in Haiti. In one interview I learned that a band was initially founded because the *oungan* had moved to Cuba and for three years did not complete his duty and the *lwa* began to take action. To safeguard his failing health, he had to start a band and fulfill the contract in Cuba.

reconstituted peasantries and syncretic religiosity of the rural hinterlands where Haitians re-rooted themselves and their cultural practices over time and across generations.

This concept of Gagá's inherent syncretic nature is particularly germane because it points to what scholar Margarite Fernández Olmos has identified as "a secondary type of syncretism, one between (ex) colonized peoples" (2000:273). Consequently, though Gagá was brought from Haiti to isolated rural communities in Cuba, it did not remain the exclusive domain of Haitians. Gagá, like most cultural performances, is an intrinsically dynamic and transformative expression that adapts to the changes within its given environment. Soon after the introduction of Haitian laborers, Gagá became part of the culture and identity of the batey, and while the majority of the performers were Haitians and then of Haitian descent, Cubans were also part of the festivities. This cross-cultural fusion is at times expressed in the lingua franca of the songs which switch quite seamlessly between a Krèyol inflected Spanish and Haitian Krèyol. Additionally, the organization of the Gagá bands not only followed the structure of the Haitian *sociétés* (fraternal and religious association) that I will speak to momentarily, but also mirrored the structures of power and social hierarchy in the Cuban batey. Hence, as June Rosenberg argues in her work on Gagá in the Dominican Republic, the bands "offer an identity which is far removed from the possibilities of these individuals...the structure of the group reflects the values of the larger society" (1979:203). As an example, in Cuba, as in the case in the Dominican Republic, the maximum leader of the band was called a *dueño/a* meaning "master." The term was used to designate the sugar boss and hence the locus of power and prestige in the bateyes. With the appropriation of the title, the name came also to refer to a Vodou priest (*oungan* or *manbo*) of great repute who was a

spiritual director of the *serviteurs* (Vodou devotees) and revelers and a proprietor of his/her own Gagá society and band.

While syncretism is noted in terms of the language and adoption of the term, “dueño/a,” it is also expressed in the actual rituals themselves. Although the rites and the parade remain steeped in the Vodou cosmology and likewise identifiably Haitian in tone and aesthetics, over time Cuban religious practices were incorporated into the event. Most notably, the expansive repertoires of spirits that are honored are no longer strictly Rada or Petwo-Kongo/Lemba spirits, but also may include divinities more readily associated with Santería. As an example of this cross-religious fusion, Papa Legba is syncretized with the Yoruba/Cuban divinity Babalú Aye and the Catholic Saint Lazarus.¹²⁹ During some Gagá processions the songs and chants for both deities are offered at the crossroads in an attempt to appease and honor their presence and to also safeguard the welfare of the collective. Additionally, the Ogou family of *Iwa* also includes the different paths or incarnation of Ogun that are part of the Yoruba/Santería belief system, thus amplifying an already expansive spiritual lineage. These particular adoptions should not occasion surprise, as there is great fluidity between the African-based religions observed in Oriente. As products of creolization, syncretism and assimilation, the African-derived belief systems found in Cuba, Haiti, and the Americas more generally developed out of the shared experiences of the Middle Passage and enslavement. These hybrid systems of thought and ritual practices, which developed in

¹²⁹ The Haitian Papa Legba, the Yoruba/Cuban Babálu Aye and the catholic Saint Lazarus are believed to exhibit signs of age, illness and/or fragility. All three divinities are said to be crippled with limp and twsted limbs, hence their dependence on either a baton or crutches. They are also represented as being covered in sores that are under constant threat of being overcome with flies or maggots, thus showing their cosmic link to the afterworld.

the margins of the dominant Christian orthodoxy, served as mechanisms of survival and resistance (see Brown 2003; Stewart 2005).

Interestingly, unlike the purist approach to worship, which those in Havana and Matanzas are known to advance, in Oriente there exists an understanding of this shared or complementary spiritual universe among African-derived religious practices. It is therefore customary to see practitioners shifting from one faith system to a next in any given ritual context. This particular dynamic is most noted during the initiation ceremonies for followers of Santería who are often times first mandated to undergo the initiation ceremony for Palo¹³⁰ before proceeding with the *asiento* (ritual crowning). In Havana, this is not commonly practiced, but for religious elders in Oriente it is a prescribed procedure unless it has been divinely ordained detrimental to the well being of the initiate. For *paleros* (Palo priests) they are simply following the axiom, *Iku lobi Ocha* (the dead gives birth to the Orishas), it is only logical that the initiate is ritually marked to serve the dead before s/he is allowed to serve the orishas. It is this emphasis on the dead and ancestral spirits along with the Kikonga based ritual language used in Palo, which resonate with Vodú practitioners in Cuba. In fact, of the various African-derived religions in Cuba, the descendants of Haitians often discussed their affinity with Palo Monte as they reflected on the similar ritual structure of the two religions and specifically the manner in which the spirits of the dead are evoked and put to use during their Gagá ceremonies.

¹³⁰ Palo is considered the most syncretized of the Afro-Cuban religions. It is derived from the Kongo religion of the BaKongo people of central and south central Africa, but it also fuses Yoruba, Catholic and other African-derived practices into its ritual structure. Initially found predominantly in the eastern provinces, Regla de Conga or Palo Monte Mayombe as it is sometimes referred is practiced throughout Cuba and emphasizes the manipulation of magic and the control of the spirits of the dead who are lodged within a receptacle known as an *nganga*. For more on Palo see, Cabrera, 1986; Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003.

Vodou, and by extension, the rites associated with Gagá thus proved particularly adaptive to the Cuban socio-religious environment. Haitians and their descendants were able to reconstruct their sacred expressions and practices in part because of the isolation, and hence, protection the forested rural regions afforded them. More poignantly, the similar vegetation and fortification provided by the physical environment was further enhanced by the familiar spiritual topography of eastern Cuba. Vodou and Gagá were also able to thrive because they were not institutionalized practices requiring a fixed structure, priesthood, codified practice, or geographical center (see Mintz and Trouillot 1995). Instead, they were able to take root in Cuba because the practices were started with individual priests who established religious family networks in the communities they settled.

THE STRUCTURAL AND PERFORMATIVE DIMENSIONS of GAGÁ in the BATEYES

The Formation of the Gagá Sociétés

In their study of the Haitian settlement, Caidije, a batey in the old provincial area of Camagüey, Cuban ethnographers Jesus Guanche and Denis Moreno contend that Gagá bands were started fairly soon after a population of Haitian migrants settled in the batey. As an example, three years after the community of Caidije was founded, the primarily male residents created a Gagá society that has been performing this celebratory and communal rite for the past eighty-two years (1988:111).

The organizational structure of the Gagá ensemble resembles the Haitian *société* or spiritual collectivity connected to an *ounfó* or religious house. In her explication of the importance and interdependency of the *société* to the *oungan/mambo* (the male/female Vodou priest) and the religious structure of Vodou, Maya Deren maintains that:

The term refers to all the people connected with a specific hounfor and defines them as a communal entity. While the hounfor itself is referred to in the name of the houngan, it is understood as being under the sponsorship of the *société*, which has a separate name. The *société* may even include members who live in town and attend only the most important ceremonies, but upon whose assistance the priest can rely should he need to raise money for an expensive ceremony, to arrange transportation, to be advised on building, etc. As a collective unit at the basis the religious structure, the *société* is represented by two heavily embroidered ceremonial flags. Carried by two flag bearers, these banners are used to salute the loa and as a mark of respect to any distinguished guest at ceremonies. When one arrives at a ceremony, the accepted greeting is: *Bonjour, la société* (1953:154).

Following an almost identical structure, the *sociétés* that developed in Oriente mirror the system of reciprocity and exchange found in their Haitian counterpart. While the social networks created out of these collective units are considerably smaller, they function in a similar fashion as they help to define and solidify the community of Haitians and their descendants. They also are a centralizing force, bringing disparate communities of Haitians together under the banner of Vodú. By extension, they have historically helped these displaced migrants reconstitute, develop and reformulate their religious and socio-cultural worlds on Cuban soil, while serving as a catalyst for the maintenance of a Haitian consciousness.

As “a hermetic and laborious brotherhood that few manage to penetrate” (Montero 1992:9), Gaga societies were further fortified by their links to the Masonic Order, which came to serve as a meeting ground for *oungans*, and in particular, those who served the warrior deity, Ogou. For Maya Deren, this association was quite logical, for “[a]s ironsmiths, upon whose craftsmanship much depends, as moral authority, as the respected “influential” citizen much involved in civic affairs and welfare, as a natural leader and organizer of men, and certainly as a believer in ritual, initiations, hierarchy, etc”(1953:154), the Masonic Lodge affirmed the quintessential attributes of the great

warrior divinity and the powerless mass of men aspiring to attain a similar level of prestige.

In Cuba, the Lodge also served as a practical cloak to the more vilified rites associated with Vodú.¹³¹ They were legitimate and established institutions in the socio-cultural and political scene of Santiago from as early as the late 1700s after they were founded by the French émigrés class. That Haitian migrants in the 20th century joined the Masonic Orders soon after settling in Cuba bespeaks the continuation of a cultural practice, but more so, it reveals the strategy employed by *oungans* to shield their religious practice and to also acquire power and legitimacy among their kinsmen and Cubans alike.

Through the ritual guise of the Masonic rites and salutations, the powerful Petwo-Bizango and Chanpwèl societies known for their sorcery and secrecy were able to be re-established in the forested environments of Oriente. The Gagá bands that emerged out of these societies thus operated in many instances as mobile secret societies that conducted mystical negotiations and fulfilled sacred contracts as they paraded the countryside year after year or at least until the *promesas* were satisfied. Gagá leaders collapsed and re-blended the ritual accoutrements of several ritual systems, which then served as the sacred armory used by the *oungans* to mediate between the Gods, the Cuban state, and their new environment.

Interestingly, while the outer layer of Gagá is clearly male dominated; at the core of this matrix is the female religious leader selected as *la riene del bande rará* or the Rara queen. While it is unclear at what point in its historical development women became integrated and actively involved in Gagá, from oral history accounts it becomes apparent

¹³¹ The rampant brujería[witchcraft] scare in Cuba were further intensified by the increasing Haitian presence on the island. Aline Helg demonstrates the way Haiti as an icon of fear revolved around the concept of their perceived moral degeneracy and proclivity for witchcraft. See, Helg 1997.

that from very early women played a pivotal role in the overall structure. Although men initially founded the early *sociétés*, the “locus of feminine power” (Dayan 1994:6) that seems rather marginal in the Vodú hierarchy is redressed by the importance placed on women for the conduct of the religious work of the band. Their presence, however, should not be interpreted as one of subverting the patriarchal dominance, but in fact should be seen as existing as a complementary force and within a symbiotic relationship with the heavily male presence (McCarthy Brown 1997).¹³² The queen’s power is always in relationship with that of her male counterpart, the *preszidan* (president) and *konel* (colonel), who then assists with the execution of the rites.

As women are deemed to be the repository of the sacred knowledge of Vodú, Gagá societies entrust the band to the care of distinguished female ritual specialists to spiritually oversee the rites, food preparation, and moral conduct of the collective unit. To commence the parade, a musical salute or *ochan* is offered at the home of the queen or from the space she spiritually operates, known locally as the *cai mamá* (see fig 24 and 25). The group offers a litany of drum salutes and songs and in turn they are feasted by the Queen and later given individual blessings before they begin the nightly *soti* through the *batey*. On the two occasions that I witnessed these highly ritualized exchanges, I noted the extent to which the carnivalesque play element were submerged, and in its place, an aura of reverence resonated as the male and female members saluted and acknowledged the singular importance of the Queen as the keeper of the traditional knowledge. The particular power that she harnesses is said to be disseminated during

¹³² The sharing of spiritual work between the genders that one witnesses in Gagá performances mirrors the sacred pairing that undergirds the overarching cosmological orientation towards balance in the Vodou religion. This mystical totality is represented in the androgynous divinities, Legba and Gede, and also manifested in the cosmic couples, Dambala and Ayida Wedo, Agwe and La Siren, as well as the sacred twins, Marassa.

these exchanges and passed on to the chorus of queens whose laborious *travaj rito* (religious labor) underpins the successful running of the Gagá festivities.

The Preparatory Rites

Customarily, the preparation and performance of Gagá happens during Holy Week. The *repetisyon* (rehearsals) begins the Saturday night before Palm Sunday and continues straight through to Holy Thursday. All of the preparations later culminate over the Easter weekend with the *gran fete* (celebration) on the Sunday. The shortened time frame correlated with the one-week respite the laborers were given during Holy Week, which also coincided with the height of the *zafra* or harvest period. Unlike Haiti, where Rara bands start to parade on the eve of Ash Wednesday, in the bateyes of Cuba, bands do not begin to make their rounds throughout the community and neighboring bateyes until the Saturday immediately following Good Friday. The days before are spent in conducting preparatory rituals. Among these rituals included the culinary rites and preparation of the sacred foods for the *lwa*, which are ritually placed at the base of trees, in springs, at the crossroads, and on ancestral shrines. The community would also hold a *manje mort*, a ritual feeding of the ancestral kin whose assistance is often times requested for most spiritual undertaking.

Among the observations made by Jesus Guancho and Denis Moreno we learn that the preparatory rituals featured a fascinating instrument known locally as the *caolina*. It was originally played to initiate the preparatory rehearsals held the Tuesday-Thursday nights, prior to Good Friday. Although it is no longer commonly used, from their description and my own research, we learn that this string instrument greatly resembled

what Harold Courlander identified as, “[p]robably one of the oldest of Haitian folk instruments” (see fig. 26) – the earth bow, known as the *tambour maringouin*, or mosquito drum (1960:199).

In his explanation of the traditional procedure for making this instrument Courlander states:

A hole is dug in the earth, perhaps a foot or more deep. It is covered with palm or banana bark, which is pegged firmly all around. A cord is attached to the center of the bark membrane and drawn taut to a bent green sapling, one end of which is buried in the ground at a slight angle. The cord is plucked and snapped with the fingers of one hand, while its tension is varied by the pressure on the bowed stick with the other hand, producing a change of pitch. The covered hole acts as a sound chamber. In a “portable” model of the mosquito drum a tin pail or can is used for a sounding chamber. The pail is inverted and fastened to a small plank, to which the sapling also is affixed. It is believed by some observers that the instrument has a special significance during the pre-Easter holidays (Mardi Gras and Rara), but it may be used at almost any time of the year (1960:200).

In Barranca, there is a living memory of this instrument and many of the narratives coincide with the information provided by Courlander. It would appear, however, that in the Cuban context, the *caolina* was a portable instrument. The bow was passed through a tin and affixed to a plank. The performer would either crouch down or sit on a low bench/stool with the *caolina* between his legs. The musician would then pluck the strings or tap them with a stick with one hand while applying pressure on the bow. The sound was reported to be of a piercing register that would shift in accordance to the pressure placed on the strings. While this instrument was not featured during the actual procession, it was used during the initial rites, with the accompaniment of prayers and songs, to “awaken” the musical instruments that were *kouche* by the altars. The *caolina* was thus used to arouse the instruments, that were being mystically charged and also to rouse the musicians who would use them during their spiritual trek through the countryside.

The rites that follow this preparatory phase are often performed in the inner sanctuary of the domestic space where the shrines are kept. In the absence of local cemeteries¹³³ in the bateyes, the domestic ancestral shrines become the critical sites for engaging the familial *lwa*. After leaving the shrines the band would then move through the batey or lakou to the outdoor *peristil* where the Gagá members would assemble as a group and practice for the last time before moving out on their nocturnal pilgrimage. The first ritual stop happens at the crossroads where they honor the Petwo divinities *Mèt*, *Calfú* and *Gede*.

Mirroring the start of Vodú rituals throughout Cuba, a sacred bonfire, which stands as the manifestation of the divine and creative power of the owner/guardian of the crossroads, is erected and set ablaze for *Calfú*, who stands as the Petwo opposite of Papa Legba. Within Haitian Vodou, *Carrefour* or *Kalfu*, like *Gede*, exists in the interstices between the cardinal points and therefore stands at the eternal crossroads that link life and death. As a young virile man who owns the moon and the night and whose cosmic energy represents the power of uncertainty, *Kalfu* is the one who can bring forth misfortune, hardship, unjust destruction, and illness. He is therefore appeased and called upon so that he may protect against such calamities and restore order in the lives of his devotees. During the Petwo rites for *Calfú* that I witnessed in Cuba, the bonfire is kept ablaze with a generous supply of *kleren* that is offered to the God along with the cracking of a whip and gunpowder. The *oungan* and *manbo* share the duties of conducting the rite,

¹³³ Cemeteries are heavily policed in Cuba with guards posted at different exists and patrolling the grounds. This heavy surveillance of the remains of the dead could be interpreted as a byproduct of the protracted anti-brujeria (anti-witchcraft) campaigns that have been part of Cuba's history from as early as the nineteenth century and continuing into the present. Paleros (practioners of the highly syncretic, BaKongo-based religion) are known to fill their sacred receptacles/cauldrons or ngangas not only with cemetery dirt, but also with parts of human corpses. As the religious practice is centered on the manipulation of the spirit of the dead, the physical remains of the deceased are thus highly prized and sought after.

stoking the fire and pouring an assortment of liquids into the blaze and offering prayers to the God of Chance. The *baterí* of musicians come to a lower register as prayers are offered after which they perform more enthusiastically as the hour draws closer to midnight.

To the accompaniment of the explosive rhythms, the dancers draw on their reserve of spiritual energy to *balance* the ceremony through their side to side movement. The intensity of the moment is inscribed on the bodies of the queens, whose dance become more animated as they stomp their feet into the dusty ground and move counterclockwise around the bonfire. The collective effort is successful in heating up (*echofe*) the ceremony and at midnight a black fowl is brought to the center of the bonfire where the *manbo* offers the bird to the cardinal points before holding it by the head and rapidly twisting it in a 360 degree rotation until the bird expires. It is then placed into the hands of the queens. With hands out-stretched across the rising inferno, unfazed by the heat they feverishly pluck the feathers in time to the explosive rhythms. In minutes they reveal the bare flesh of the limp fowl. They continue to sing long after the animal is offered to *Mèt, Calfú*. The *manbo* places offerings of fruits, bottles of rum, ground provisions, and sugarcane atop the banana leaf that covers the sacred cosmogram or *vèvè* (ritual design used to invoke the *lwa*) that the *manbo* traces on the ground with cornmeal. With the sounding of the whistle, the *oungan* signals the group to continue their journey and in a moment they break into a carnivalesque song and continue along the dark path.

Rites, Characters, and the Complex Performative Structure of Gagá

At first glance and for the untrained eye, the mass of people in a Gagá band may appear to defy any sense of order. However, there is a complex hierarchy on display marked by identifiable visual and kinesthetic attributes of distinct characters. Moreover, while participants may be moved by the celebratory ethos that pervades, there exists a clear structure to the parading and placement of performers. Gagá processions in Cuba are led by the *pòt drapo* (flag bearers), who carry the embroidered flag and other banners of the *société* and opens the way for the others to follow. Each Gagá band has a set number of flag bearers; the number and the color of the banners and *vèvè* correspond to the deity who acts as the patron and guardian of the ensemble. With each sweep of the flags, the *pòt drapo* mystically clears the road, thus opening a cleansed pathway for the rest of the band.

Just behind the flag bearers is the *kolonel*, who brandishes a whip and a whistle and often times next to him stands the *oungan*, who is also the president. Their task is to use these instruments to discharge any negative energy and activate the Petwo spirits who are to be honored. The *reine* queen of the band and the chorus of queens also form part of this opening core. Often in vivid colored dresses and carrying colorful banners they also cleanse the path and further animate the proceeding with their choreographed sequences and suggestive *banda* dance performed in honor of Gede (see fig. 27). They also dictate the tone and pace of the proceedings, not only with their dancing but also with their voices that provide further accompaniment to the heavy percussive instrumentation. The principle queen decides the direction of the band, and although

behind the *pòt drapo-s* and *kolonel*, she chooses the path the band takes and is the first to commence the propitiatory rites that she conducts with the *oungan*.

This opening core of ritual specialists is then joined by a group of *mayó-s* (majors) who form the body of the battalion. These performers “go to battle” or compete with other bands, showing off their mastery of specific skills. They represent the carnivalesque aspect of the band as they are about entertaining the band of revelers and Gods alike. In contrast to Haiti, there exist four *mayó* characters: *mayó table*, *mayó ruá diable*, *mayó machete*, and *mayó yonc* who have particular tasks and spaces they occupy in the overall structure.

The *mayó table* is featured during the ritual feeding of ancestral kin. This ceremony, also known as *manje mort* forms part of the extensive propitiatory rites conducted before the band begins its journey from the *lakou* or *batey*. While *manje mort* ceremonies are performed throughout the year to honor the living-dead, during the *Gagá* season these rites are performed with greater enthusiasm and spectacle, as they are grander in scale and encompass not only the spirits of an individual family, but those of the collective *Gagá* unit. During these occasions, a square table is covered with a richly embroidered white table cloth and bedecked with a full table service (*vajilla*): plate, silverware, tea cup, a drinking glass, serving plates, and some food items (see fig. 28).

After the food is prepared and placed in the different sacred spaces around the *lakou* and set aside for the ancestors, the *mayó table* invites *les invisibles* (invisible spirits) to eat by clenching the table with his teeth and lifting it up in the air. Once he comes to a full stance he stretches out his arms and twirls two batons. He then turns around to face each of the cardinal points to open up the way for communicating with the

spiritual world. Upon lowering the table, the ritual food is distributed and all those assembled, participants, spectators and the Gods partake in an elaborate feast.

Another distinctive *mayó* character, also not featured in Haiti, is the *mayó ruá diable*. This masquerade, more than the others, demonstrate the African and Afro-Caribbean traditional mas' aesthetic of assemblage. The performers wear a two-piece outfit composed of brilliantly colorful strips of fabric that cover the entire body. Atop each performer's head is a two-foot tall headpieces called a *fleché*, which resembles a multi-tiered crown made of an elaborate base of papier machier and bands of strips of cloth that hang in layers like daggers. On either side of the headpiece are two pieces of cord that the dancer pulls down on to keep the *fleché* in place as he twirls and maneuvers alongside the crowd (see fig. 29).

Their placement on either side of the outermost perimeter of the band serves several purposes. Firstly, they contain the crowds by defining and delimiting the physical space of ritual and festive activities. Secondly, they are placed on the outside to attract spectators and solicit monetary contributions. Finally, they form a mystical boundary or armor of protection for the band as they parade through the bateyes. As such, they are put into place to deflect any spiritual "daggers" or *wanga* (magical work) that may have been placed along the path. The term *fleché* means "to wound with an arrow," hence as the performers twirl, the pointed-edge strips of cloth that cover the headgear and the dancers' bodies, they metaphorically throw arrows through the atmosphere so as to counteract those that may have been sent to the band.¹³⁴

¹³⁴The aesthetics and performative function of the *majó ruá diable* has parallels to the Egungun masquerader, the pitchy patchy character of the Jamaican Jonkonnu, and the Sensy mas' of Dominica. All of these mas' characters operate along a continuum of carnivalesque play and ritual seriousness.

The last two *mayó* performers include the *mayó machete* and, the more popularly known, *mayó yonc*. The most defining features of these characters are the deft athleticism, rhythm, and coordination they demonstrate in their dancing and twirling exhibition along the route. While they are part of the main core of the band, they are featured at specific points. Specifically, they are highlighted during the opening ceremony at the *cai mamá* (Gaga Queen's residence) where they put on a show to honor the queen and appease the spirits.

The second and more intense of the occasions occur when two bands meet along the path and are then forced to battle to see who will gain passage. These battles are highly charged and said to be determined by the Gods and not men. The individual who has served the spirits well and the band that has conducted the rites as they should are said to be able to garner the assistance of the *lwa* to help win the battle. The display of skill is therefore interpreted as a manifestation of the Gods' will. During these occasions the *mayó machetes* engage in what resembles a fencing battle, but they are judged not only on their ability to avoid contact with the machete but to defy getting cut or letting blood. Each stroke and movement of the feet is also done to the timing of the rapid rhythms of the drums, whistles and other percussive instruments. It is, however, at the ritualized stops for the performance of rites for the divinities that the *mayó yonc* and *majó machete* are most featured.

One such rite is performed for the pantheon of Ogou deities, and it takes place on the train tracks that traverse the bateyes. Train tracks are auspicious sites not only because they are deemed to manifest the greatness of Ogou's power as owner of metal and protector of those who work with or manipulate metal implements, but they also

stand as a symbol of the transshipment of sugar cane from the bateyes to the town, and hence, function as a figurative condensation of the livelihood of these field laborers and performers. After the crossroads, *la línea del ferrocarril* (the train tracks) serves as another core site for religious activity during Gagá performances in the bateyes. They are also the space, more often than not, where bands encounter each other and face off in a spiritual and physical battle.

The rites for Ogou at the train tracks that I observed began with a lengthy *ochan* that went through several rounds of a military drum salute. The ritual seriousness of the moment is marked by the music, which at once recognizes the extensive pantheon of the Ogou spiritual lineage¹³⁵ and emphasizes the deity's main attributes of being a fierce warrior divinity and ironsmith. A *vèvè* is drawn for the *lwa* on either side of the train tracks and then raw cane liquor is poured around the *vèvè* and along the center of the tracks. The *oungan* ignites the rum with a match and as the blue flames dance in the darkness of the crisp mountain air, the military salute shifts to a powerful Nago rhythm. The entire collective stares intently into the flame as the *oungan* repeatedly pours the rum along the sides of the *vèvè* and set it ablaze with matches and then gunpowder.

After heating up the energy and invoking the *lwa*, the *majó machetes* take center stage. With their heads and waist tied in Ogou's sacred red cloth, they begin their magnificent display of skill and mastery of the sword. The spectacle soon turns into a

¹³⁵ The family of Ogou worshiped in Cuba include: Ogou del Monte (attributes include the machete and bottle of kleren, he is offered goat and colored roosters); Ogou Batala (husband of Erzili who wears white and eats all of the foods sacred to Ercili. This path of Ogou participate in the toilette that is offered to Erzili), Ogou Guerrero (this is the Ogou syncretized with Sen Jak Maje (St. James the Elder) and Santiago Apostol); Ogou del Rio (this Ogou has an affinity with fresh waters and is appeased with river stones which he uses to cleanse devotees); Ogou Chal (This Ogou is reported to be a beggar and liar who steals so as to redistribute his find among the less fortunate); Ogou Bua (mountain divinity), Ogou Balendjo (disciplined warrior); Ogou Ferraille (chief of the Ogou pantheon who stands as a patron of warriors and the forge. He is a fierce and uncompromising deity); Ogou Badageri (the handsome brave warrior who is loyal and just. He is also an ironworker and a field laborer)

possession-performance as the men are taken over by the powerful warrior spirit. They throw jabs at each other and slice through the sky as if clearing bush. They also place the tip of their blades into the burning flame before turning the machete against themselves. They charge through the cane fields that run along either side of the track, slashing cane trash before returning to the center of the tracks where they slap their machetes onto the tracks. The *majó machetes* each take turns at passing the blade across their tongue, face, abdomen, and arms. The frenzied movement builds to a crescendo with the sacrifice of a black goat. In one strike the head is off and those assembled become overcome with the spirit of Ogou. They bathe in the blood of the animal and commune in the ritual feast and cosmic energy of the *lwa* and ask for his strength and protection in their day to day struggles in the fields. The divine ecstasy takes a while to subside. The animal is cut into pieces and separated into parcels.

To mark the end of the rite, the *baterí* stops playing and the *majó machetes* respond by turning their blades face down into the earth along the length of the train track. They then begin to clean the excess blood off their bodies before setting out once again. Before they leave each *majó* pours libations where their blades pierce the earth and spray rum to the cardinal points. As the collective circles the line of sabers they are doused with rum from the pierced lips of the *oungan*. This mystical bath in blood and rum seal the rite to Ogou and provide the necessary protection to continue the journey. Later on, after the meal is cooked in the *lakou-batey*, the queens return to the site and place an offering of goat and ground provisions.

Critical to the success of the rites performed by the Gagá ensemble are the musicians and singers. Intermixed with the *mayó yoncs*, *majó machetes*, *mayó ruá diable*

is the mobile orchestra that provides the necessary musical accompaniment and songs to invoke the spirits. While there is no set template for the configuration of the orchestra, the instrumental ensemble is loosely structured around several lines of musicians playing a wide range of percussive instruments.

Among the instruments featured are the carved conical Petwo drums -- *gwo baka* and *ti baka* -- that are played with the hands and strapped across the body. These drums are also joined by the *tambourin*, which is known as the *basse* in Haiti. This hand-held bass drum head is played in a similar fashion as a tambourine. However, unlike the shrill sound of a tambourine, the *tambourin* produces sounds that are relatively low in register. Accompanying the drums is a *samba* (known as an *ogan* in Haiti), a hoe blade that is played with a piece of metal to keep time. The *lanbi* or conch shell¹³⁶ trumpet is a common signaling device that is used to set the tempo and mark any shift in the velocity of the drum rhythms. The *baccine*, (*vaksin*) are the instruments most readily associated with Rara/Gagá music. They are hollowed pieces of bamboo that are of varying lengths and used as a flute to produce either high or low tones.

Since each *baccine* produces a monotone, there are at least a minimum of three players to produce a layered melody structure.¹³⁷ The bamboo or plastic (PVC pipe) *baccine* are also joined by the *klewon*, a foot long handmade metal trumpet that flares at the end. Together these instruments create the syncopated and melodious soundscape that collectivizes the crowd in communal ritual action and liberates them to gyrate to the bawdy and robust reverberations.

¹³⁶ The conch shell is a symbol of slave rebellion and has long been associated with Maroon communities. In the English-speaking Caribbean it is also used at cricket matches to conjure up a collective spirit and celebratory atmosphere.

¹³⁷ For more on these instruments and Haitian music in general see, Gage Averill, 1997; Averill and Yih, 2000.

To close the ceremonial pilgrimage, the band returns to a small pasture adjacent to the lakou/ batey for the last rites. The event is often greatly anticipated because it involves a grand feast and also a night of much music and dancing. However, it is with the burning of an effigy of the *hwif* (Jew) or *dyab*/ devil that the week-long activities come to a climatic end. This tradition of burning the Jew and the Jew in the social imaginary of Haitians are discussed at length by Elizabeth McAlister (2000; 2002), and so I won't rehearse her arguments here. I would only add that while the tradition was officially banned in Haiti by Jean-Claude Duvalier from the 1970s, it has remained an important element of Gagá performances in Cuba. The transplantation of the practice, however, did not necessarily equate to the tradition holding the same meaning in Cuba.

The complex historical and religious relationship that Haitians have to Jews does not play itself out in the rural environs of Cuba, and so the effigy of the *hwif* was to take on a distinct cultural significance within the context of rural Cuba. For Gagá performers, the reference to the Jews as being the killers of Christ is seldom heard. Instead, they will tell you that the effigy is that of a *dyab*, and as such it represents all the inflictors of misfortune and ill deeds. Within the context of the bateyes, the *hwif* or *dyab* became synonymous with the sugar boss and the oppressive system of the sugar mill. It stood as an iconic marker of their plight and the plight of all blacks under white socio-political and economic domination. Historically, the *dyab* was also clandestinely referred to as a specific personality, but most would argue that the effigy was never meant to represent an individual, but indeed a system of oppression that served to marginalize segments of the population. As the effigy continues to travel beyond the confines of the batey it takes on

other meanings, but for the most part, it remains the locus of negativity and all things evil.

During Holy Week, an appointed member of the *société* is given the job of constructing the effigy. It usually calls for a series of rites, but they are not made visible, instead, the effigy is revealed within three days after it has been commissioned. Standing approximately six feet tall, the effigy is stuffed with sticks and cane trash and dressed in old clothes to appear as a laborer (see fig. 30). The head is often made of a coconut and a straw hat is placed on top. After being on display and sleeping outside against a tree to get mystically charged, the *dyab* is paraded to the center of the pasture where it is ritually set ablaze in a culminating cathartic moment. By the time the band makes it to the site, the effigy is in its place. The cast of characters and crowd of revelers, charged from their pilgrimage, dance around the *dyab* counter-clockwise. They are then signaled to take their places and the *oungan* and his assistant set the *dyab* ablaze. The queens offer prayers and the crowd sings and yell their desires or voice their disgust loudly as the effigy burns to the ground. The moment is quite cathartic as members of the collective reveal their exhaustion for the first time and allow themselves to be overcome with emotion. The *lwa* are not invoked, but instead individuals will offer blessings to their ancestors, whose names they whisper into the blaze.

After the *dyab* is fully incinerated (see fig. 31-33), the *oungan* collects the ashes and mixes it with *tifei* (raw rum laced with peppers, herbs, bark, and roots). The brew is then passed around in a calabash for all assembled to take a drink. There is a highly choreographed salute that is performed as the vessel is offered to each individual. After being given the calabash, the individual passes it back to the *oungan* or *manbo*, they then

return it to the individual who takes a drink and turns over their left shoulder. In many ways, the burning of the effigy symbolically diffuses the potency of negative energies and misfortune and in turn the collective ingests the liquid and converts that negativity into cosmic power. The brew becomes at once a purifying agent that cleanses and restores the strength of the individual and by extension the power of the community of those “here and over there.” The drink makes its rounds until all have taken a sip, after which point a party ensues. The hot Petwo-Kongo rhythms that presided over the night’s event are replaced by the soothing tones of *mason* (a French-derived contradanse music form), and couples dance until daybreak, with a revived sense of purpose and fulfillment.

FROM BUSH TO STAGE / FROM STAGE TO STREET: THE NEW SPATIALITY of GAGÁ PERFORMANCES

Gagá on the Concert Stage

Thus far, I have spoken at length about the development of Rara in the Haitian context and then its subsequent reconstitution as Gagá in the forested environs of eastern Cuba. But Gagá is no longer exclusively found in the bateyes or rural settlements. The spectacular dramatic ritual, with its segmented festive structure, mobile troupe of virtuosic musicians, brilliantly costumed characters, and pulsating percussive rhythms, makes it particularly pliable to suit different types of performance venues and contexts. As a result, Gagá is increasingly being enrolled in a process of folklorization as it becomes represented in public events ranging from the opening ceremony of the 2000 Havana Biennale to pool decks and terraces of Havana hotels; from the concert stage, museum, and the city streets of Santiago de Cuba to Cuban dance and popular culture

workshops in the United States and Europe. No longer a strictly localized event, one can readily see excerpts and participate in this dynamic festive form, which now circulates in a global cultural circuit¹³⁸.

As mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, Gagá has become the iconic marker of Haitian identity in Cuba. More than any other Haitian-Cuban cultural form, Gagá has been integrated in the repertoire of most companies and amateur troupes in Oriente as well as Havana. From as early as 1960, with the founding of the Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente and Ballet Folklórico Cutumba, Gagá was introduced to a wider Cuban public as an exotic display of a sensuous and jubilant Afro-Haitian dance. With Cutumba's mission of "researching, collecting, conserving, revitalizing, and presenting the folkloric manifestations of Afro-Franco-Haitian-Cuban origin found primarily in Cuba's eastern (Oriente) provinces,"¹³⁹ the theatrical renditions of Haitian derived music and dance traditions became further formalized and codified. As part of their repertoire, Cutumba presents a range of folkloric dances including the Cuban *Son*, the *Rumba* cycle according to its traditional forms and distinctive steps and rhythms – *yambú*, *guaguancó*, and *colombia*, the *Conga Santiaguera*, and *Bailes de Ocha* (orisha dances), the dances honoring the divine beings of the Yoruba pantheon. It is, however, the ensemble's repertoire of Haitian dances, including the salon dances of *Tumba Francesa* and *Tajona*, as well as *Vodú* and *Gaga* that sets them apart. Removed from their original localized contexts of ritual and festive communal practice, these forms are in a constant state of

¹³⁸ Several of the founding members of leading Cuban folkloric ensembles have settled in cities across the United States and Europe. In addition to the usual workshops in Rumba, Haitian-Cuban materials are the recent craze, see www.afrocubaweb.com for a listing of the various activities being held in the United States. The Bay area and other cities on the West Coast have been particularly receptive to Haitian-Cuban dances. In 1997 one of the principal dancers of the acclaimed Ballet Folklórico Cutumba founded the Academy of Cuban Folklore & Dance, which functions as an informal extension of Cutumba in the United States.

¹³⁹ Company mission statement presented on a plaque in Teatro Oriente, Santiago de Cuba

reinvention as they become the new markers of Cuba's diverse African and African-Caribbean heritage.¹⁴⁰

Although the aestheticization process runs the risk of taming, sanitizing and controlling movement and gestures associated with the more improvised versions of ritual and festival performative expressions, the inverse happens with the ways dances of Haitian origin and specifically Gagá are theatrically represented. What becomes evident is that the concert stage has made this sacred procession more spectacular, wild, frenetic, and distinctly carnivalesque. The meditative contemplation, which is essential to the enactments of rites to the fiery Petwo *lwa*, is elided and in its place the gyrating pelvis, bulging eyes, and ecstatic movement takes center stage. For their part, Cutumba views their presentation of Haitian material as a logical celebration of the inherent diversity of Cuba and Oriente. The materials are said to be authentically reproduced and, as one Cutumba performer stated, "in keeping with how it would be done in the community with only a few changes for the stage." These changes include the dominant frontal positioning of the cast of characters and more linear configuration of their placement on the proscenium stage. The aesthetics of the theater also created a spectator/performer distinction and boundary, which in its original context remains blurred. Performers are no longer engrossed in serving the spirits, but meeting the demands of audiences for energetic spectacle. Additionally, the athletic virtuosity of the male dancers tends to dwarf the women, who are marginalized within the overall composition of the piece.

¹⁴⁰ Haiti has long been viewed as an extension of Africa in the Americas, which has in turn served to legitimate and vilify Haiti's cultural practices as being both potent and dangerous. In contemporary Cuba, folkloric troupes have been looking to include Haitian materials as a means of diversifying their offerings and expanding the ritualized performances beyond the established mode of dancing for the Orishas. By presenting Haitian materials, some feel that they are better able to express the troupes "authentically African" sensibilities and aesthetics and also convey the dynamic potency of African forms.

They only take center stage when they are dancing with a male partner. Moreover, the confidence that is inscribed onto the bodies of the traditional queens, through their carriage and long garments, are replaced with outfits that reveal rather than conceal. To this end, the female body is not positioned as a locus of feminine and spiritual strength, but instead reduced to a sign of the exotic.

Further compounding the process of turning sacred rites into spectacle are the elisions that inevitably follow. Although it can be said that the ensemble embodies, kinesthetically and aurally, the *ajiaco* stew that Fernando Ortiz offered as a culinary metaphor of *cubanidad*, many aspects of these forms, and the history and socio-cultural and political positioning of Haitian culture in Cuba are erased. The historical marginalization of Haitians and their descendants are also absent from the corporeal narrative of *cubanidad*. Indeed, the repertoire of Haitian materials present a visual and performative history of the migratory waves of Franco and Afro Haitians and the significant cultural contributions made by the distinct groups that entered the island.¹⁴¹ But, the issues concerning their social and political marginalization are glossed over with a smile. Therefore, with this increased exposure of Haitian-Cuban culture on the concert stage, it begs the question of what is at stake. Certainly, there is a growing appreciation of the diversity of Cuba and by extension a disruption of the mulatto imagery that has long identified Cuban culture and national identity. But at the same time, I am reminded of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's astute critique of national folkloric companies and the

¹⁴¹ Another folkloric troupe that has taken this approach is the internationally acclaimed, Ban Rara. However, unlike Cutumba, which used research as the main source of inspiration for their choreography, Ban Rara is comprised of descendants of Haitians who grew up with the various practices. Originally from Guantanamo, the group relocated to Havana.

tendency of reclassifying ritual as art, while at the same time raising questions concerning cultural ownership and difference:

...the proprietary rights to the material [folkloric repertoire performed by national companies] have been transferred from local areas to the “nation,” where regional forms are declared national heritage. National troupes typically perform traditions from across the land, no matter what the personal histories of the performers. Since everyone can perform everything and everything belongs to everyone, *differences do not differentiate*. Polygot programs, besides offering variety generally represent an “imagined community” in which diversity is harmoniously integrated. Difference is reduced to style and decoration, to spice of life. Cultural difference is then praised for the variety and color it adds to an otherwise bland scene (1998:65 my emphasis added).

The question of difference, in which folkloric companies attempt to produce through their diverse program, actually serves to dilute its oppositional potency. However, while I am cognizant of the various implications and dangers of the increased folklorization of Haitian forms, the results are a bit more ambivalent and complex than what is often discussed. Indeed, there are risks in celebrating the superficial harmonious tapestry of cultural difference as they are presented in folkloric performances. Moreover, “valorizing an aesthetic of marginalization” (ibid: 76) only serves to uphold the status quo and normative readings of culture. It further endorses frivolity, as opposed to encourage critique and action. But, to dismiss these staged presentations as somehow aberrant and inherently lacking is a bit too reductive, as they do more than entertain. For the audiences that view them, these performances also have multiple meanings and speak to them in a multiplicity of ways. As academics we tend to leave the concerns of the actors and audience out of the equation, when in fact these are the people who will counter this very claim of superficiality.

The argument here is that despite the challenges of commercialization and folklorization, for popular cultural forms and identities deemed invisible and unworthy,

their exposure can also be interpreted as a challenge to conventional notions of nation and identity. These twin processes (folklorization and commodification) also serve as a vehicle for giving expression and a space for alternative identities to be projected. While not immune to the dangers Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett warns against, the theatrical spectacle has also proven to stimulate an indigenization process in the communities in which the forms emerged. What has become apparent is that as these cultural expressions become more folklorized they also enter a process whereby they are further traditionalized, forming what David Coplan has identified as a “dynamic of persistence” (1994:19) amidst the changing realities and shifting performative contexts in which they are now operating. In other words, though Gagá performances have been exploited principally by those who have no intimate or familial ties to the tradition or communities where it has been preserved, the folklorization process has also encouraged the Haitian-Cuban field laborer, that also performs in wider circuits, to reassess, reconfigure and adapt what has been guarded as a traditional form. In publicly staging once private cultural forms, the descendants of Haitians are using their sacred traditions as a way of articulating their distinct identity. These staged events also serve as a catalyst for stimulating interest in maintaining these cultural performances, so that they are not reduced to folly, but upheld as icons of a collective identity, sacred and secular rite, as well as a marker of history.

GAGÁ IN THE STREETS: THE FESTIVAL OF FIRE AND THE CELEBRATION OF HAITIAN IDENTITY

It is worth noting that while Haitian culture is increasingly being presented for varying publics, members of longstanding Haitian communities are usually not part of these theatrical renditions. Though Gagá has been an important cultural performance featured in the bateyes, and then later folklorized for the concert stage, it is only since the late 1980s that people of Haitian descent have begun to publicly represent the tradition. Today, as part of the annual Festival of Fire, one can witness a “Gran Gagá.” During this occasion, approximately ten to twenty groups comprised of first, second, and third generation Haitians take to the city streets of Santiago in a celebratory procession and performance. Those who assemble each year have extended their contractual agreements with the *lwa* to make this annual pilgrimage, and thus the rites, as the opening epithet indicates, are still performed, but in the privacy of homes as opposed to in the public for all to witness.

Lifted out of its Lenten season and outside of the forested environs, it may appear to be a more secular public spectacle, but I would argue that beneath the public transcript of playful festivity, operates the seriousness of communal work. In this context, the Gods are not feasted in the exposed environment, but there exists the collective labor of fostering community and a shared identity through performance. The Gran Gagá, unlike its rural counterpart, presents an opportunity for several Gagá bands/*sociétés* and Haitian-Cuban communities to meet and celebrate. With many of the community members getting older, the trek through the countryside is growing more difficult. As a result, Gagá celebrations in the bateyes have been radically reduced to accommodate the inability of members to make the journey to neighboring bateyes.

Today, the sense of community, which was fostered by decades of marching through the cane fields, is being revived by the meeting of different Gagá bands in this annual street festival. The occasion is therefore filled with excitement, as community elders reconnect with the extended family of Haitian descendants living across Cuba. Those who migrated to Havana and other parts of the island use the Gran Gagá as an opportunity to reestablish ties and foster new ones, and in a sense, mold their own imagined community outside the confines of the batey. No longer banished to their communities where they performed in insulated isolation for decades, by claiming the public space of the streets, afforded them for that one day, disparate Haitian-Cuban communities assemble under one national flag and dance to one rhythm, regardless of their diverse experiences in Cuba. They are able to use their traditional festive form to celebrate their ethnic and cultural identity and in turn lay claim to their shared historical legacy and sense of belonging to Haiti as well as the Cuban national space.

The Gran Gagá functions as its own discrete festival within the overall structure of events featured in the Festival of Fire. As such, it has its own internal logic and by extension operates somewhat outside of the template established by the Festival of Fire. As an example, the event is not mediated by festival organizers or researchers. Moreover, it does not attract large crowds of tourists, because of its distance from the city center. One may conclude that the marginality of these communities and Haitians more generally is replicated in the placement of the event in the overall Festival structure. It is my contention, however, that this particular spatialization of the Gran Gagá has encouraged the transference of the integrity of the ritual structure within the overall festive frame. The performers thus view the Gran Gagá, not as a performance for spectators, but for

each other. As one *majó yonc* mentioned, “We dance for our ancestors in the batey and they look over us here in the city where we dance amongst our friends.”

Set in a lower income neighborhood approximately twenty minutes outside of the center of the city, there are no architectural monuments or notable landmarks to marvel at; instead one is in an expansive maze of four-story apartment blocks that extend for several miles. It is in Distrito José Martí, where the familiar sounds of the *baccine* and *tambourin* are unleashed with the marching of bands in their brilliant colors, ritual flags, and costumed characters that take to the street. The groups emerge from different roads in a procession before all gathering in the city square or plaza. After the priests, queens, musicians assemble in the square the cast of *mayó-s* take center stage as they engage in battle and competition. The intensity of the performance builds as the individual *myjo-s* exhibit the mastery of a particular skill, with their ritual banners tied around their waist; they bring the *lwa* into the sacred circle where the “battle” unfolds. To conclude the celebration, a *dyab* is brought to the center and set ablaze by a Gagá queen. As the fire engulfs the effigy, the collective group basks in the purifying smoke and, as in the bateyes offers prayers for continued health and prosperity (see photo essay figures 34-56)

GAGA PEFORMANCES and its SHIFTING LOCALIZED MEANINGS

In his, “Introduction: Cultural Performances, Cultural Theory,” John J. MacAloon argues that cultural performances “are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our

collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others” (1984:1). In this view, cultural performances present the means through which communities use their creative expressions to define who they are while reflecting on their identities and history as a people. Within the Gagá, I have shown that it provides a space for the marrying of religious and secular work under the guise of festivity.

As a multidimensional performance and festive form, it stands apart because the Gods and the past are invoked with each song, rhythm, dance and rite, which in turn serves to ignite a historical memory, linking those here with those over there and connecting Cuba with Haiti and its multiple diasporic communities. As Gagá travel across the liminal and geographical boundaries that separate the living and the dead and the various communities of Haitians stretched across the globe, the individual bands are joined in knowing that with each enactment they are connected to the past and the present.

This chapter has also argued that each performance of Gagá brings its own localized and spatialized meanings, thus it calls into question any view of a universal Gagá in terms of form and functions. Gagá is inherently malleable, and for that reason is subject to repeated appropriations, not only by national companies, but also by descendants of Haitians wanting to reconnect with their historical experience and to also commemorate their collective identity and sense of community.



Figure 24

La Reine de la banda Gagá – Gagá Queen holding court with her attendees in front of her residence or *cai mama*

Palma Soriano, 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 25

Ritual Salute or *Ochan* played in honor of Gagá Queen

Palma Soriano 2003
[Photo by Author]

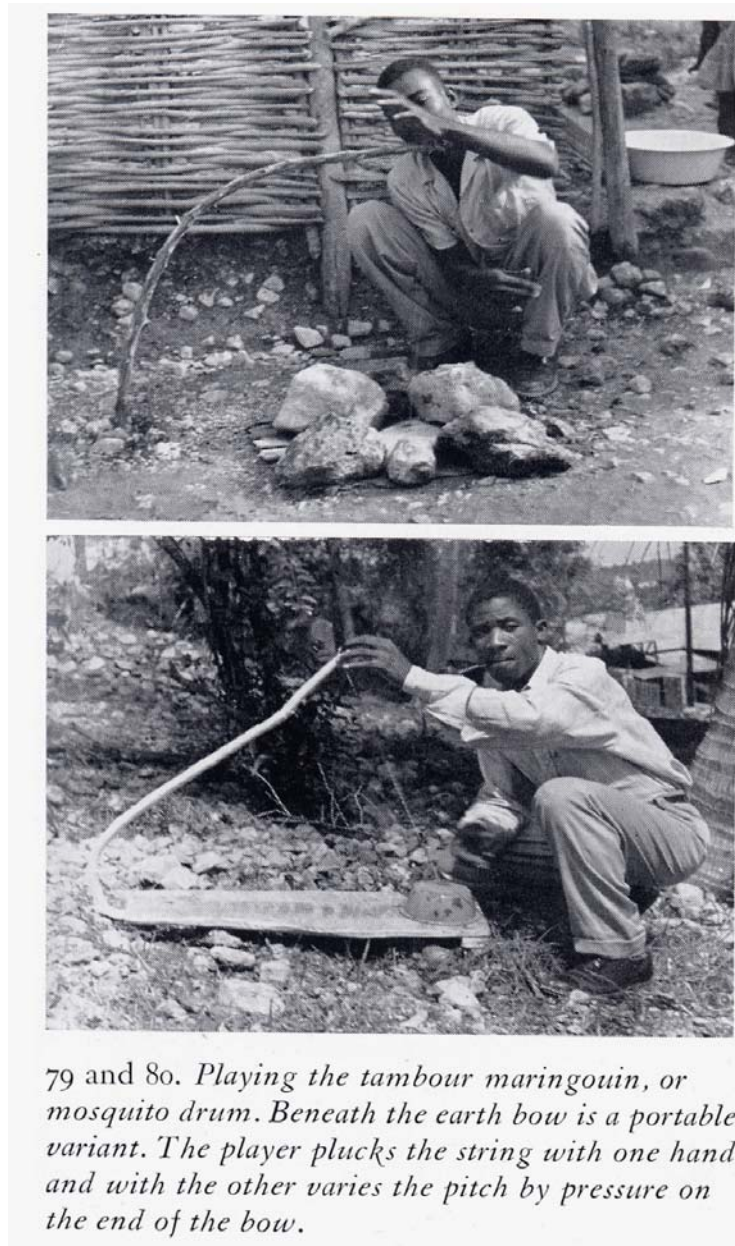


Figure 26

Image of the earth bow taken from Harold Courlander, the *Drum and the Hoe*, 1960



Figure 27

Gaga queen in motion wearing typical ceremonial dress

Palma Soriano 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 28

Manje Mort ritual place setting for ancestral kin

Palma Soriano 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 29

Mayó Ruá Diable

Santiago de Cuba 2002

[Photo by Author]



Figure 30

Effigy of the Jwif/Dyab

Barranca 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figures 31

Ceremonial burning of the dyab/jwif to close Gagá pilgrimage.
In the ritual assistant's left hand is a mixture of cane liquor laced with peppers and herbs;
he will later add the ashes to the brew and pass it around for those assembled to take a
drink.

(Barranca) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figures 32

Ceremonial burning of the dyab/jwif

(Barranca) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 33

Final stages of the ritual incineration

(Barranca) 2003
[Photo by Author]

GRAN GAGÁ PHOTO ESSAY

[Figures 34-56]



Figure 34

Gagá Orchestra or Baterí, featuring *lanbi* (conch shell trumpet) player and drummers

(Santiago de Cuba) 2002

[Photo by Author]



Figure 35

Gagá Orchestra or Baterí, featuring *klewon* (homemade metal trumpet) in foreground

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 36

Gagá Orchestra or Baterí, featuring *piti baka* (Petwo drum) and *tambourin* players

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 37

Gagá band, *Petit Danse*, featuring Queen and revered band leader, Titina and member of the Association of Haitian and Haitian descendants of Cuba, visiting from Havana and making his annual pilgrimage with the Las Tunas group

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 38

Gagá band *Petit Danse* featuring a mayó yonc in the foreground, a queen donning a *ruá diable* headdress and the musical core in the background

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 39

Tambourin players heating up the Gagá festivities

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 40

Procession of Gagá Band

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 41

Procession of Gagá Band

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 42

Pòt drapo-s clearing the way for the assembly of the Gagá Bands in the city square. The Haitian flag is prominently featured as an emblematic marker of power and identity

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 43

Mayó Ruá Diable performing characteristic marching step while manipulating the *fleché* headdress

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 44

Ritual Salutation of the *mayó yonc*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 45

Ritual Salutation of the *mayó-machetes*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 46

The *kolonels* and *oungan* heat up the ceremony with the blowing of their whistles and stomping movements along the periphery of the circle. Their attention squarely focused on the effigy or *dyab*.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 47 and 48

Senior and young *mayó yonc-s* ritually saluting the *dyab*. Note the *mayó ruá diable-s* standing guard interspersed between the queens

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 49

Young *mayó yoncs* ritually encircle the *dyab*. *Mayó ruá diables* stand guard as the first ring of the circle, thus defining the sacred performance space.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 50

Young *mayó yonc* in the heat of battle as community elders look on along the periphery.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by Author]



Figure 51

Gagá queen (*reine*) sets the *dyab* ablaze

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 52

Reine continues to set ablaze the *dyab*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 53

Community elders attentively observe the burning *dyab*.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003

[Photo by Author]



Figure 54

The distinct Gagá bands become one collective unit amidst the rising smoke of the burning *dyab*

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by the Author]



Figure 55

Ogou devotee and mayó yonc in a state of possession passes the open flame against his bare skin as he cleanses himself and those assembled.

(Santiago de Cuba) 2003
[Photo by the Author]



Figure 56

Ogou devotee in possession-performance.
Partly hidden to the left of him is the sacred effigy whose burning embers he uses to light his baton. The smoke is a purifying agent used to cleanse and bless all those assembled

(Santiago de Cuba)
[Photo by Author]

CONCLUSION

RE-IMAGINING CUBA: THE NEW FACE OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES & PERFORMANCE in SANTIAGO DE CUBA

Viva Haiti, Viva Fidel

The bicentenary of the Haitian Revolution in 2004 was marked by celebrations throughout the African Diaspora. Yet while many nation-states took a moment to reflect and commemorate the momentous occasion, the world also watched on as Haiti plummeted into an all too familiar episode of turmoil and violence. In the shadow of Haiti's political chaos, the residents of Santiago de Cuba memorialized the historical achievements of Haiti, reflecting on its revolutionary leaders and its independence struggles. Indeed, throughout the year and across the island, Cubans commemorated Haiti's independence and used the occasion as a prism to reflect upon their own revolutionary history and contemporary identity.

In 2004, at the unveiling of a bronze bust of Toussaint L'ouverture by Cuban sculptor Alberto Lescaj, I stood in amazement as *Santiaguerans* of varying ethnicities, races, and socio-cultural backgrounds chanted "*Viva Haití, Viva Fidel y el Espíritu Caribeño Revolucionario* (Long live Haiti, Fidel and the Revolutionary Spirit of the Caribbean). In front of the prestigious *Hotel Las Americas*, crowds of spectators assembled around the street to get a view of the statue. It is centrally placed in the median of the main junction of *Avenidas Las Americas*, which is a principal thoroughfare that memorializes historical figures of key significance to the formation of Cuba, the Caribbean and the Americas more generally. The masterful replication of the black

military general, strategically positioned at the gateway, stands as a sentinel safeguarding the ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*, which stood as the fundamental principles on which the first black republic was founded. That Toussaint L’ouverture is prominently situated to represent the trajectories of freedom within Cuba, alongside figures like José Martí, dramatically underscores the shifts in the historical position of Haiti within the Cuban imaginary – a point which I have attempted to trace throughout this dissertation.

The statue of Toussaint goes beyond representing the triumphs of Haiti’s revolutionary spirit; it inscribes the history of Haiti’s revolutionary triumph into the physical landscape of eastern Cuba and throws into relief the historical links between the two island-nations. Although undervalued and under examined, the influence of Haitian culture in Oriente is tangibly expressed in the local cuisine, architecture, and indigenous music and religious expressions that have, in great part, given Santiago and the eastern provinces its distinctive cultural identity. However, for most Cubans, Haiti exists as a separate cultural and historical space that stands outside of the nation’s cultural patrimony and revolutionary history.

The great irony is that since the advent of the Haitian Revolution, Cuba and Haiti have been irrevocably and intimately linked. The specter of another Haiti positioned the black republic as Cuba’s ultimate “Other” and by extension a threat that would obfuscate Cuba’s modernist sensibilities and thwart its progress as a civilized nation. Therefore, the self-conscious quest to express a distinct Cuban identity and nationality in the nineteenth century was juxtaposed against that which was created in Haiti. The connection between Cuba and Haiti was established through, and grounded in, a philosophical and ideological idea of racial *difference*.

The discursive construction of *cubanidad* in the nineteenth century, as I have demonstrated in chapters one and two, cannot be adequately evaluated without an examination of how this concept of “difference” and the image of Haiti as an “icon of fear” were promulgated to serve various agendas of the Spanish colonialists, Cuban abolitionists, and the Creole elite. Critical among them was the fixation with the imminent Africanization or blackening of the nation. Debates over the racial composition of Cuba were given a sense of urgency through the context of the events that transpired in colonial Saint Domingue. The incessant differentiation between the two countries carried out in the popular media at the time served to hyper-racialize Haiti and by extension demonize blackness. The attendant social effects manifested in the social engineering of the racial topography through state-sponsored campaigns of whitening through immigration and the systematic extermination of blacks during “La Escalera” repression between 1834-1845. The twentieth century immigration debates concerning the admission of Haitians and other Afro-Caribbean labor migrants as a threat to the social fabric of the nation and the dilution of *cubanidad* revealed the lasting vestiges of the discordant relationship between Haiti and Cuba, which had its most violent expression with the expulsion of thousands of Haitians in the 1930s.

It is for this reason that the contemporary affirmation of Toussaint, the Haitian Revolution and by extension blackness, is particularly telling as it reveals the evolving position on race and identity in Cuba today. As a positive image of blackness Toussaint’s image throws into relief the triumphant struggles over the moral and physical violence of servitude and the injustices of racial discrimination, which have been a sensitive topic in Cuban history and a taboo subject for the revolutionary government in particular. It also

bears direct relevance to the ways in which the nationalist ideal of *mestizaje*, an ideology of racial mixture that promulgates the denial of a black identity, is being publicly challenged.

In what ways, then, might the State-sanctioned celebrations commemorating the bicentennial of the Haitian Revolution speak to a broader phenomenon of the recognition of subaltern racial and ethnic identities? The “policy of silence” – the official stance adopted by the revolutionary government in regards to discussing race relations in revolutionary Cuba – radically restricted public discourse about cultural and ethnic difference. This had detrimental effects in the reification of the marginal status of Afro-Cubans. At the same time, it compounded the invisibility of the descendants of Haitian and British West Indian migrants who have attempted to maintain a hyphenated identity within an environment that consistently negated racial, ethnic and cultural difference. Yet, despite the assimilationist rhetoric of the Cuban revolution and the perpetuation of the myth of racial democracy, grassroots social movements like Hip Hop and Rastafari, along with Casa del Caribe’s efforts of integrating marginal communities through cultural festivals, have been profoundly instrumental in providing a space of dialogue and visibility of marginal identities.

Beyond the Margins: Cultural Performance and the Articulations of a Hyphenated Haitian-Cuban Identity

In considering regional reconfigurations of the ideology of *cubanidad*, this dissertation problematized the undifferentiated mulatto imagery that has come to define Cuba as uncritical of notions of ethnicity and the history of Antillean immigration to the

island and instead emphasizes (1) how notions of national identity operate within local communities outside of the administrative center of Havana; (2) why and how the African and African-Caribbean dimensions of Cuban society were historically marginalized and later nebulously embraced as part of the Revolutionary mandate; and (3) how the post 1989 socio-economic restructuring and the move towards tourism has enhanced the geography of performance in Santiago allowing for peripheral communities to exploit this opening to their advantage.

While the dissertation traces the contours of the discursive articulation of *cubanidad* and the contentious processes of incorporation over time, it also demonstrates how Cubans of Haitian descent have historically managed their lives in eastern Cuba despite their structural marginalization. My explorations of the performance of Haitian identities in eastern Cuba has led me to uncover the historical and contemporary nuances, strategies and negotiations inherent in the process of fashioning and honing diasporic subjectivities within the margins of Cuban society. Through a close analysis of the formation of Barranca as a diasporic cultural enclave, I expose some of the key factors that facilitate the preservation and reconstitution of Haitian peasant culture in rural Cuba. Central among these are the symbolic significance of the land, the exploitation of their structural invisibility and marginal status within Cuba and the maintenance of their socio-spiritual world through serving the spirits. These interrelated elements have been critical in establishing a tangible link to Haiti while fostering a distinct diasporic consciousness.

By focusing on Santiago de Cuba and its surrounding rural areas as an important local context for examining the integrated concepts of national belonging and diasporic identity formation, this study argues for a more expansive paradigm for understanding

transnationalism and diaspora, which moves away from the normative privileging of transmigratory movements and the metropolitan experience of creating homes away from home. The prevailing models of diasporic identity formation and the development of hybrid cultures privileges the persistent migrations from the peripheries to the metropolitan, global centers. The current paradigms do not take into account the plurality of diasporic cultures. Thus, in this study I explore diaspora as being constituted in specific localized social geographies and intrinsically performative or enacted in and through quotidian practices as well as through networks of cultural performances that extend beyond the confines of the *bateyes*.

The identity politics engendered and deployed through cultural performances, like the public staging of a ritual that memorializes the history and identity of a subaltern population, provides a frame for articulating difference. Performance thus offers a space through which identities can be constantly refashioned and used to challenge the absences within the normative historical narrative and exclusionary homogenous framework of national identity. Throughout Cuba's history, the folklorization of national culture through performance has been instrumental in expressing Cuba's distinctiveness. From the advent of tourism in the early twentieth century to its re-emergence in the post-revolutionary era, Cuban officials have consistently appropriated and manipulated Afro-Cuban culture for commercial and socio-political ends. Efforts to institutionalize Haitian-Cuban cultural expressions within the existing structural framework of folk tourism therefore represent a more contemporary manifestation of a much longer process. The folklorization process continues to function within a larger legitimizing enterprise of the (post)revolutionary government. However, the process of reclaiming the

folk is not unilateral or contained solely within the larger State apparatus, but is also a concern for members of these longstanding rural and urban communities who are actively involved in a simultaneous process of recovery and invention.

To this end, while contemporary tourism schemes run the risk of reducing critical cultural expressions to mere aesthetic markers and by extension restricting their oppositional potentialities, it also provides an opening and public forum to critique and expand definitions of identity. Such performances provide the principal means through which members of marginal communities give vocality to their presence and express the struggles of maintaining their hyphenated ethnic and national identities. The question still remains whether this visibility can translate itself into concrete material, social, and political change or whether they will be reified as a folkloric emblem of a new *cubanidad*. It is also left to be seen whether the increased incorporation of Haitian cultural forms within the nationalist framework threatens the space of performance as a site of oppositional practices.

Critical to this study has therefore been an examination of the degree to which the meanings and aesthetic orientation and value Cubans of Haitian descent assign to their traditions change as they become enrolled in multiple and differing social, cultural, and political agendas. Since the early 1990s Cuba has witnessed a mushrooming of folkloric troupes (not exclusively comprised of people of Haitian descent) that present Haitian inspired materials. One such group, Aburreyé, has been performing for the past twelve years and has routinely staged dance dramas informed by a Vodú aesthetic. With this type of work they have won regional and national competitions and have gone as far as Havana to represent Haitian culture on the national stage, but those community groups

that developed in the bateyes have tended to remain in the east and have not yet received the same level of public recognition as other companies and troupes that present their material. This begs one to question whether the efforts of Casa del Caribe were all in vain, whether the folklorization process has now taken over and by extension further marginalized the very people who have maintained these forms in their insular environments. Much is still yet to be seen. What is clear is that these communities have made their mark on the Cuban landscape and have used their performances to articulate their sense of being, place and belonging in eastern Cuba.

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