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BEYOND THE COLOR CURTAIN:

Empire and Resistance from the Tricontinental to the Global South

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Empire and Resistance from the Tricontinental to the Global South

By

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B.A., University of Pittsburgh, 2006
M.A., Emory University, 2012

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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies
of Emory University
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ABSTRACT

BEYOND THE COLOR CURTAIN:
Empire and Resistance from the Tricontinental to the Global South

By Anne Garland Mahler

Contemporary capitalist globalization creates immense potential for international solidarity among grassroots political movements. Scholars across the humanities and social sciences have attempted to describe this phenomenon in recent years, and the term "Global South" has become widely accepted. *Beyond the Color Curtain: Empire and Resistance from the Tricontinental to the Global South* argues for grounding this concept of global subaltern resistance in the legacy of the 1966 Tricontinental in which delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations came together in Havana, Cuba to form an alliance against imperialism.

This alliance, called the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) quickly became the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of its cultural production. Through an analysis of its journals, newsreels and posters, this study examines how the OSPAAAL, especially through a sustained engagement with the African American Civil Rights Movement, presents a deterritorialized vision of imperial power and an argument for an equally global revolutionary subjectivity. This new Tricontinental subjectivity is articulated through a political signifier of color that is unlocked from a racially deterministic signified, meaning color refers not to physical appearance but to a shared ideology of anti-imperialism, which serves to destabilize racially essentialist or trait-based claims to belonging.

Because the Tricontinental represents the extension into the Americas of the anti-imperialist union of Afro-Asian nations begun at the 1955 Bandung Conference, it points to a moment in which a diverse range of radicalist writers and artists in the Americas began interacting with its discourse. By tracing the circulation of the Tricontinental's ideology in its cultural production and in related texts from Third Cinema, Cuban Revolutionary film, the Nuyorican Movement, and writings by Young Lords and Black Power activists, *Beyond the Color Curtain* outlines how tricontinentalists laid the groundwork for a theory of power and resistance that is resurfacing in the contemporary notion of the Global South.

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INTRODUCTION

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In recent years, the world experienced a remarkable wave of political activism. On May 15, 2011, inspired by the 2010 Arab Spring in which protests erupted in seventeen countries in the Arab world within a period of months, demonstrations were organized in over fifty Spanish towns and cities. These protestors, calling themselves the *Movimiento 15-M* [15-M Movement], set up tent cities in plazas throughout the country to express indignation over unemployment, political stagnation, bank bailouts, cuts to social programs and economic disparities. A few months later, in September 2011, a few hundred protestors began a similar demonstration, occupying Zuccotti Park in Manhattan to voice their discontent over the global financial system and its disproportionate benefit to a small wealthy minority. Within one month, this protest, called Occupy Wall Street, had been named the Worldwide Occupy Movement, and similar protests were occurring throughout the United States, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.[1]

Following these international displays of political solidarity and activism, it would be difficult to deny what many scholars have been claiming for some time, namely, that contemporary capitalist globalization creates the conditions for a radical expansion in emancipatory politics. The immediacy of global communication, through venues like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and the increased movement of materials and peoples across geo-political borders allow grassroots political movements to spread their messages and to create political alliances far beyond the confines of the nation-state. This, in fact, is a central paradox of our time: the deregulation and international integration that are the hallmarks of the neoliberal global financial system are also the

very tools through which transnational movements of opposition to that system are formed. The "corporatocry," as the Occupiers would call it, is the venue through which an imagined resistant political community is created.

By calling attention to this reality, my intention is not to allege the hypocrisy of a protest against neoliberalism organized through the proliferation of smartphones, but rather to denaturalize this complex reality by asking some basic questions about the contours of our contemporary global political imaginary. For example, how do people from diverse national, ethnic, linguistic and class backgrounds see their goals as aligned and view themselves as participating in a shared movement? How does one articulate an international political movement in which the people participating have vastly different experiences with the system they are protesting and drastically differing levels of access to the apparent benefits and costs of that system? And, especially for my purpose in these pages, where does such an idea originate? When and how were the foundational cornerstones put into place in order that, despite these seeming inconsistencies, such a towering transnational vision could be constructed?

The way in which capitalist globalization yields greater international solidarity among grassroots political movements has been described with varying terms in recent scholarship. Arjun Appadurai calls this trend "grassroots globalization" or "globalization from below"; Boaventura de Sousa Santos uses "subaltern cosmopolitanism" and "counter-hegemonic globalization"; Fernando Rosenberg refers to it as "cosmopolitismo alternativo, sureño" ["alternative, southern cosmopolitanism"] and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe it simply as "the multitude." However, the Global South has gained the most currency.[2]

The Global South, which generally refers to a political consciousness resulting from the recognition by diverse peoples of a shared experience of the negative effects of globalization,[3] has only recently emerged as a critical category of cultural analysis. Through outlets like the Indiana University Press journal *The Global South*, established in 2007, the term's usage implies a departure from the limitations of postcolonial theory. Since its formal emergence in the late 1970s, postcolonial theory, with its focus on the experience of European colonization, has become mired in debates concerning whether it is relevant to peoples living within Western Europe and North America and whether its use in reference to Latin America is merely part and parcel of an orientalizing Western academy. As a category, postcoloniality has not had a reach commensurate with the transcendence of geo-cultural boundaries within globalization. Thus, concepts such as the Global South, which recognize the existence of "Souths" even within the geographic North, have emerged in an attempt to provide a more useful rubric for theorizing contemporary hegemony than a postcolonial condition that is largely defined by the historical circumstance of former colonization.

However, because the Global South diverges from postcoloniality while still rooting itself in the vast intellectual tradition generally subsumed under postcolonial theory, its historical and ideological parameters remain vague. In this regard, I suggest that the emergence of the Global South represents an attempt to recover a latent ideological legacy that has been lost, or at least overlooked, within the all-encompassing frame of postcolonial theory. This specific ideology, I argue, is embodied in the January 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba, in which delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations formed an alliance against imperialism called the

Organization of Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). The OSPAAAL, which Robert Young characterizes as "the formal globalization of the anti-imperial struggle," quickly became the driving force of international political radicalism and the primary engine of its cultural production throughout the world (*Postcolonialism* 192).

Young, the scholar who has to date written most extensively on the OSPAAAL,[4] locates the beginning of an epistemology of postcolonial subjectivity in the 1966 Tricontinental and even suggests "tricontinentalism" as a more appropriate term for postcolonialism. However, while he recognizes the Tricontinental's[5] anti-imperialist ideology as the source of what would later coalesce under the academic category of postcolonial theory, I contend that its vision of power and resistance is much more akin to the worldview encapsulated by the Global South. Specifically, what I find relevant about tricontinentalism is the way in which, in contrast to postcoloniality's focus on formerly colonized nations, it explicitly includes those in the geographic North within its subjectivity. As the Tricontinental represents the extension into the Americas of the Afro-Asian solidarity of decolonized nations begun at the famed 1955 Bandung Conference,[6] it marks a moment in which this global alliance began to reach out to African Americans. African Americans, according to the Tricontinental, experienced the same oppression that the representatives of the three continents experienced, and the Jim Crow South was viewed as a microcosm of a global system of imperialism. Because African Americans were fighting within the United States and within the proverbial belly of the beast, the Tricontinental viewed their cause as particularly representative of its global one.

For the Tricontinental, one could be located in the United States, Vietnam, Cuba or anywhere else, and be understood as subject to the same oppressive structure of power. In forming a revolutionary subjectivity as transnational as the imperial power it sought to describe, tricontinentalist discourse often used a racial vocabulary to mark ideological position rather than physical appearance, attributing color as a signifier of subaltern resistance to phenotypically white people who shared its views, and in this way, sought to destabilize racial essentialisms and trait-based claims to belonging. It is this deterritorialization of power and destabilization of trait-based requirements for inclusion that, I argue, makes the Tricontinental a model for an international political subjectivity that anticipates and is intrinsically relevant to contemporary notions of transnational political resistance.

This acknowledgment of the Tricontinental's contribution to current concepts like the Global South is not intended to imply a one-to-one correlation between the two.[7] Within a 1960s Cold War context, many of the liberation movements that formed the Tricontinental tended to consider the creation of a space free of imperialism as an attainable goal. With the collapse of Soviet communism and ascendancy of the neoliberal model, the possibility of excusing oneself from collusion with global capital has become much further out of reach and participation in the global economy has developed into an important tool for the growth of transnational political movements. This shift, theorists of the Global South maintain, does not mean the end of mankind's ideological evolution, as Francis Fukuyama argued, but rather the advent of ideologies of subaltern resistance that challenge and undermine neoliberalism from within. Yet in spite of the different circumstances of the late 1960s and the present and the development of

discourses of power and resistance to respond to those circumstances, it is what tricontinentalism has in common with theories of the Global South that I find particularly useful.

The Tricontinental had a large propaganda apparatus that included the *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966-88), published in English, Spanish, French and sometimes Arabic; posters which were folded up inside of the Bulletin; the *Tricontinental* magazine (1967-90); books and pamphlets; radio programs; and the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel. Through its publications and films, and through the iconic posters for which the OSPAAAL is now recognized, the Tricontinental created something akin to an "imagined community," to use Benedict Anderson's term, among political movements around the world. It provided both physical and textual spaces in which diverse political groups came into contact and exchanged ideas and functioned as an ideological nerve center that simultaneously shaped and was shaped by the perspectives of the various delegations it represented.

Since the Tricontinental marks the entry of the Americas into the Afro-Asian alliance of Bandung, it also points to a moment in which a diverse range of radicalist writers and filmmakers in the Americas began to closely engage its discourse. Works situated within the Nuyorican and Black Arts political and artistic movements, Third Cinema, and Cuban Revolutionary film represent a map of closely linked loci of radicalist New World cultural production whose connections remain largely unexplored because of the specificities of the identity politics, geographies, and artistic media asserted in their classification and study. Scholars have discussed the exchange between writers from the Black Arts and Nuyorican Movements (Jackson, *Black Writers*; Torres,

A.), the political alliances between the Cuban Revolutionary government and Black Power activists (Gosse; Marable; Tietchen; Young, C.), and the influence of Cuban Revolutionary film on the Third Cinema movement in the United States and elsewhere (Guneratne; Young, C.). While these studies are integral to this project, this dissertation places these intellectual, artistic, and political exchanges within a broader context, tracing the tricontinentalist argument for a deterritorialized imperial power and equally transnational and transracial resistant politics that is woven throughout texts from these diverse movements.

In recent years, historical studies of the Cold War have explored a more nuanced understanding of this conflict by viewing it through the lens of marginalized nations and peoples (Anderson; Arne Westad; Borstelmann; Dudziak; Marable; Prashad). However, the popular and scholarly discussion around much of the cultural production that emerged from these contexts still often reflects a reductive conceptualization of the Cold War in which radicalist texts are dismissed as simplistic or as dogmatic communist propaganda. Most of the works I will be examining here are propagandistic and have suffered from the oversimplified characterizations and readings to which hard-hitting, political texts from the 1960s are often relegated. However, I would suggest that it is in these seemingly one-dimensional cultural products, such as Cuban newsreels by Santiago Álvarez or Nicolás Guillén-Landrián, writings by Black Power and Young Lords activists like Robert F. Williams and Felipe Luciano, prose and poetry by Nuyorican poets Piri Thomas and Pedro Pietri, and the posters and pages from the early issues of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, where we find the Tricontinental's nuanced model of global subaltern political resistance. The writers and filmmakers analyzed here take up tricontinentalism by

revising a preexisting discourse, which poses blackness as a signifier of both an experience of imperialist exploitation and anti-imperialist resistance to that exploitation, into a non-racially deterministic revolutionary subjectivity in which color is used to refer not to the color of one's skin but to an ideological position of tricontinentalism. In this way, they theorize a global subalternity that is resurfacing in the current transnational and transracial notion of the Global South.

Tricontinental Roots

The thread of tricontinentalism that runs throughout the texts mentioned above will be analyzed in depth in the coming chapters, but it is first necessary to establish the foundations in which tricontinentalism was rooted and from which it attempted to depart. The conceptual framework that the Tricontinental would take up and widely disseminate around the globe did not originate at the 1966 Tricontinental Conference; rather, tricontinentalism has deep and multiple roots. For example, in its description of the United States as an imperialist monster in which African Americans are fighting in the belly of the beast, the echo of Cuban independence leader José Martí's famous words, "viví en el monstruo y le conozco las entrañas: - y mi honda es la de David" ["I lived in the monster, and I know its entrails:- and my sling is the sling of David"] from his final 1895 letter in which he discusses the U.S. threat to Cuban independence and mentions his years of exile in the United States, is unavoidable (563; 347).

Similarly, in the Tricontinental's use of color to refer to a global subalternism, one recalls the writings of African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois and his declaration at the Pan-African Conference[8] on July 15, 1900 in London that the defining problem of the

twentieth century is that of a global color line, a racial division that he predicted would characterize global inequality for the next century and of which the Jim Crow South was merely a local manifestation. Similar to this vision of the Jim Crow South as a microcosm of a global imperial system and similar to the view that African Americans' oppression mirrors that of other colonized peoples, the Communist International organization (1919-43) and the U.S. Communist Party's call in the 1930s for the formation of a separate nation among African Americans in the southern "Black Belt" states is also clearly influential.[9] I mention these clear antecedents as examples of the Tricontinental's foundational influences, but there are many others.

While the cultural production surrounding tricontinentalist thought in the Americas, including texts studied here, emerges out of diverse contexts, the *afrocriollo* movement, which Richard L. Jackson calls "the Harlem Renaissance of Latin America," is a clear shared point of contact between all of them (*Black Literature* 20). In referring to the *afrocriollo* movement, I follow Jackson's lead in *Black Literature and Humanism in Latin America* (1988) in which he uses the term to indicate a transnational literary and artistic movement from the 1920s-40s that took place in the Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean, which encompasses *negrismo*, *négritude, afrocubanismo* and *afroantillanismo*, and to which one might also add Haitian *indigénisme*. The black internationalism of the *afrocriollo* movement, and the engagement between *negrismo*, *négritude* and the Harlem Renaissance that it implies, has its own foundations in the works of such seminal figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey and Arturo Schomburg.[10]

Likewise, the trajectory of anti-imperialist thought in the hemispheric American

context is equally broad and can be found in the Cuban and Puerto Rican nationalist causes, in the post-Spanish American War anti-imperialism of Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó or in the *indigenista* Marxist writings of José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, just to name a few examples.[11] However, I find that limiting the focus to the *afrocriollo* movement as a conceptual framework illuminates how tricontinentalism attempts to respond to a specifically *afrocriollo* formulation of blackness as a signifier of anti-imperialist resistance.

The *afrocriollo* movement, which includes *negrismo* in the Hispanic Caribbean and *négritude* in Francophone African and Caribbean countries, was a transnational cultural movement that, while highly heterogeneous, can generally be characterized by a pan-Africanist cultural vision, an engagement with Cubism, Surrealism and Harlem Renaissance writings, and a political stance of anti-imperialism. While it is the commonalities among *afrocriollista* writings that will form the basis of tricontinentalism, it is first necessary to note the important differences between *negrismo* and *négritude*, which served diverse functions in each of their respective national and linguistic contexts.

Both *negrismo* and *négritude* were internally diverse movements, yet one can still parse out some general differences between them. For example, most of the *negrista* writers, in contrast to their *négritude* counterparts, were not of African descent. Additionally, whereas *négritude* implies the radicalist indictment of French colonialism and the black assertiveness of writers like Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor or Léon-Gontran Damas, *negrismo* is often associated with the gesture of European primitivism through which white writers, such as Luis Palés Matos or Alejo Carpentier, "ventriloquized" blackness—as Jerome Branche has suggested—for nationalistic

purposes.

The difference between these two movements is already implied within the terms themselves. Whereas *negro* in Spanish does not necessarily have a derogatory connotation and, like *noir* in French, represents a color description, *négritude* reclaims the derogatory term *nègre* as a source of black pride, and thus, in comparison to *negrismo*, suggests its anti-racist content within the term itself.[12] In this regard, Jackson considers the Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillén, as a *négritude* writer rather than grouping him with the white *negrista* writers of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean since his writing is more explicitly opposed to racist stereotyping (*Black Literature* 26).

According to Darién J. Davis and Judith Michelle Williams, the *negristas*, in contrast to *négritude* writers,

> did not claim […] that the African element was the center and the redemption of Caribbean culture. […] Their agenda was to emphasize the unity of blacks and whites in the forging of the Cuban community—a community that was culturally mulatto. (152)

In this sense, *negrismo* could be framed within the broader Hispanic-American discourse of *mestizaje*, meaning that *negrista* writers embraced a form of multiculturalism that, in its promotion of national consolidation, celebrated non-white subjects, especially the *mestizo* and in this case the *mulato*, while paradoxically veiling the harsh reality of racial inequalities (Kutzinski 4-5). Thus, *negrista* writers' goals in their representations of black culture are generally characterized as being distinct from those of *négritude* writers.

While it is important to keep these differences in mind, *afrocriollista* writings shared some important similarities that will form the roots of tricontinentalism. In this

regard, I am speaking purely in generalities, which is useful for outlining the framework to which the Tricontinental would later respond, but by which I do not mean to imply that there are not writers or texts that escape these categorizations. First, *afrocriollista* writers generally tended to uphold blackness as both the emblem of a transnational experience of imperialist exploitation, beginning with slavery and European colonialism and continuing into twentieth-century U.S. expansionism, as well as the signifier of anti-imperialist resistance to that exploitation. This general tendency, I would argue, arose out of the immediate historical context of the U.S. military occupation of multiple Caribbean islands in the years during and immediately preceding the rise of the *afrocriollo* movement: Haiti from 1915-1934, the Dominican Republic from 1916-1924 and Cuba from 1917-1933.

Leading up to these back-to-back military campaigns, U.S. expansionism was already inspiring a growing solidarity between people of color from within the United States and those subjected to its hegemony abroad. In the *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), Comer Vann Woodward discusses how although Jim Crow segregation laws[13] had existed in the U.S. South since the end of Reconstruction (1877), with the U.S. expansion of the Spanish-American War (1898), this un-democratic doctrine of white supremacy would come to define foreign policy towards the eight million people of color newly brought under U.S. jurisdiction. For example, during the U.S. occupation of Cuba between 1898-1902, the Cuban military was racially segregated for the first time and strict restrictions were placed on Haitian and Jamaican immigration to the island (Kutzinski 138). In this regard, many have argued that the improvement in racial equality that was achieved through the participation of black Cuban soldiers in Cuba's wars of

independence was curtailed with U.S. intervention.[14] According to Mark A. Sanders, "the United States attempted to export to Cuba a post-Reconstruction model of American democracy, one that secured white privilege at the expense of black disenfranchisement and economic deprivation" (xxxi).

Meanwhile, as Jim Crow gained footing abroad, the possibility of challenging its inequalities on the domestic front would appear even further out of reach. While Jim Crow became more entrenched in the U.S. South with the Spanish-American War, it "took flight," according to Glenda Gilmore, with the U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1915 (22). In *Defying Dixie: the Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (2008), Gilmore discusses how the U.S. occupation of Haiti was headed by the Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels, who had managed an 1898 disenfranchisement campaign against African Americans in North Carolina. Daniels put white Southerners in charge of governing Haiti, and they quickly instituted segregated facilities and impressed Haitians into forced labor. As a result, Haitian dissidents, such as the well-known writer Jacques Roumain, reached out to black political groups in the United States. In turn, African American activists, like NAACP Secretary James Weldon Johnson, protested against the occupation (22-24). The occupation of the only black republic in the Western hemisphere would serve as proof for many *afrocriollista* writers that U.S. imperialism and Jim Crow were mutually imbricated and inextricable.

The transnational system of racial oppression fueled by U.S. expansion, which Gilmore simply calls "Dixie," would foment the development of a pan-Africanist anti-imperialism that circulated among Antillean and U.S. writers alike. This is not to diminish the legacy of slavery and European colonialism behind racial oppression within

the domestic spheres of Caribbean islands. This history loomed large over domestic contexts like Cuba, where thousands of black Cubans were massacred by the Cuban Army in 1912, or the Dominican Republic, where the ideologies of whitening and racial uplift that would become formal policy under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo were already firmly in place. The series of U.S. occupations, however, would lead to the common recognition of a transnational racial hegemony that superseded national contexts.

In other words, I would argue, for many *afrocriollista* writers, whether a black person was living in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Harlem, the U.S. South, in Martinique under French colonial rule, in the French, Portuguese, or British colonies in Africa or in a country where slavery was abolished as early as 1791 or as late as 1880, the presence of an imperial power and the experience of racial oppression appeared to go hand in hand. This is the awareness that sparked Aimé Césaire, in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) [*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1947)], to trace a pan-Africanist geography of oppression throughout the text, referencing the Caribbean countries of Guadeloupe and Haiti and the Southern U.S. states of Florida, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia. This is also the conceptual basis from which Fernando Ortiz, in *Contrapunteo cubano del tobaco y el azúcar* (1940) [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947)], would present his pan-Caribbeanist argument for the similarities of plantation-based economies throughout the Antilles, claiming that the plantation has led to "supercapitalismo […] extranjerismo, corporativismo e imperialismo" [super-capitalism […] foreign ownership, corporate control and imperialism], an argument later taken up and repeated by Antonio Benítez-Rojo (198; 51).

Blackness was, for *afrocriollista* writers, a symbol of resistance against the history and continued presence of white/imperial oppression. For Ortiz, this oppression was emblematized in the sugar plantation; for Césaire it was French colonialism that starved "les Antilles qui ont faim" ["the hungry Antilles"] (*Cahier* 72; *Notebook* 1). Similarly, Palés Matos presented the shaking of the *mulata*'s hips as a provocation against Uncle Sam, and for Carpentier, the bongo in his *Ecué-Yamba-Ó* (1933) served as the antidote to the pervasive Yankee invasion. It is this *afrocriollista* use of blackness to signify anti-imperialist resistance that, I will argue, forms the ideological basis for tricontinentalism.

However, in order to illuminate how tricontinentalism will use and attempt to transform this anti-imperialist signifier of blackness forged by the *afrocriollo* movement, it is necessary to address a second and equally important commonality shared by *afrocriollista* writers, which is that they have been criticized for a tendency to slide into essentialist representations. Some critics have argued that while the Francophone *négritude* movement sought to challenge racism, *negrismo*, despite its anti-imperialist vision, did little to dismantle negative stereotypes and often heralded colonialist caricatures of blackness—such as the cannibal figure—as well as other stereotypical associations with myth and lasciviousness (Branche; Jackson *Black Literature*). However, I would point out that both *negrista* and *négritude* writers have been criticized, although to varying degrees, for engaging what Stuart Hall has called "inferential racism," which refers to the unquestioning inscription of racist premises into apparently naturalized representations of black subjects (20).[15]

This is precisely the critique that Martinican writer and anti-colonialist theorist Frantz Fanon would launch in his *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) [*Black Skin, White*

Masks (1967)] against both Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor's *négritude* and the writings of Harlem Renaissance writer Langston Hughes. Fanon responds to *négritude's* poetics by remarking:

> De l'autre côté du monde blanc, une féerique culture nègre me saluait. Sculpture nègre! Je commençai à rougir d'orgueil. Etait-ce là le salut? J'avais rationalisé le monde et le monde m' avait rejeté au nom du préjugé de couleur. Puisque, sur le plan de la raison, l'accord n'était pas possible, je me rejetais vers l'irrationalité. (*Peau noire* 130)
>
> [On the other side of the white world there lies a magical black culture. Negro sculpture! I began to blush with pride. Was this our salvation? I had rationalized the world, and the world had rejected me in the name of color prejudice. Since there was no way we could agree on the basis of reason, I resorted to irrationality.] (*Black Skin* 102)

Fanon claims that by rejecting rationality and embracing a "magical black culture," *négritude* writers claimed ownership of a world inaccessible to whites. While Fanon recognizes the importance and value of *négritude* for black self-definition, he argues that it touts an essentializing representation of black culture and that the identity it fashions is dependent on a relationship to whiteness. He quotes French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's *Orphée noir* (1948) [*Black Orpheus* (1976)] saying:

> [L]a négritude apparaît comme le temps faible d'une progression dialectique: l'affirmation théorique et pratique de la suprématie du Blanc est la thèse; la position de la négritude comme valeur antithétique est le moment de la négativité. Mais ce moment négatif n'a pas de suffisance par lui-même et les Noirs qui en

> usent le savent fort bien; ils savent qu'il vise à préparer la synthèse ou réalisation de l'humain dans une société sans races. Ainsi la Négritude est pour se détruire, elle est passage et non aboutissement, moyen et non fin dernière. (*Peau noire* 141)
>
> [Negritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Negritude as antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the Blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to pave the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without race. Thus Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is transition and not result, a means and not the ultimate goal.] (*Black Skin* 112)

Fanon sees Sartre's intervention as grounded in a paternalistic view that reduces *négritude* to merely a stage. However, he does in fact appear to agree with Sartre's critique of the antithetical value of these writings in which *négritude* is proposed in response to, but never achieves transcendence of, a colonial construction of whiteness.

With Fanon's characterization of *négritude* as an antithesis to colonial whiteness, we might understand his critique of *négritude* within the *ariel/calibán* binary that has characterized rhetoric against U.S. imperialism in Latin America over the last century. *Ariel* (1900), written by Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó in resistance to U.S. imperialism in Latin America in the wake of the Spanish-American War, was the first to introduce this famed binary into anti-imperialist discourse. In response to the threat of what he called "nordomanía" ["Yankeephilia"], Rodó writes, "[t]oda igualdad de condiciones es en el orden de las sociedades, como toda homogeneidad en el de la Naturaleza, un equilibrio inestable" ["[a]ny equality of conditions in the order of society,

like homogeneity in nature, is but an unstable equilibrium"] (46, 35; 90, 65). The United States, with what Rodó characterizes as its utilitarianism and commitment to "la igualdad en lo mediocre" ["egalitarian mediocrity"], epitomizes this defect (46; 89). In this sense, Rodó argues, the spirit of the United States is best embodied in the monstruous and debased figure of Caliban from William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (1623). Caliban is, for Rodó, a representation of the monstrosity of a tyranny of the masses and a "símbolo de sensualidad y torpeza" ["symbol of sensuality and stupidity"] (1623) (10; 4).

The masses, he claims, "será un instrumento de barbarie o de civilización, según carezca o no del coeficiente de una alta dirección moral" ["will be an instrument of barbarity or of civilization according as it has or lacks the coefficient of high moral leadership"] (36; 67). Consequently, imitating the United States, where democracy is "la entronización de Calibán" ["the enthronement of Caliban"] will only drag Latin America down to its level of barbarity (34; 63).[16] Instead, Rodó writes that Latin America should be more like Ariel, the spirit who serves the magician Prospero in *The Tempest* or who, for Rodó, takes Europe as its model and symbolizes reason, order, noble inspiration, artistic taste and good manners.

Roberto Fernández Retamar, Cuban writer and president of the Casa de las Américas publishing house, would later invert these categories in his *Calibán: Nuestro símbolo* (1971) [*Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America* (1974)], claiming that because Ariel was faithful to his master Prospero, he cannot be the archetypal figure for Latin America. While Retamar praises Rodó's *Ariel* for its opposition to the United States, he characterizes its vision as misguided. *Ariel*'s anti-imperialism depends on the elitist perspective of Latin America's largely white ruling

classes that, through safeguarding European ideals of civilization, modernity and progress, merely reproduce the discourse of European colonialism.

Instead, the rebellious Caliban, who Prospero forced into servitude and who Retamar understands as Shakespeare's anagram for cannibal, is the emblem of a Latin America and a Caribbean that threw off its European colonizers and that has continued fighting U.S. imperialism. In Spanish colonial discourse, the term *caníbal* [cannibal] was first applied—as a Spanish misnomer for the term *carib*—to Caribbean Amerindians and later to African slaves, and eventually, according to Valérie Loichot, "to all images of 'black' and Tropical 'others' […] through the common trait of savagery that Europeans projected onto these groups of humans" (*The Tropics* xxv). Following in the footsteps of Edward Brathwaite, Aimé Césaire and Fanon, who had already posed Caliban as a symbol of the colonized, Retamar transforms the racialized cannibal figure from the European colonial imagination of the Americas into a banner of Latin American and Caribbean anti-colonial resistance. For Retamar, Ariel then is the Caribbean and Latin American intellectual who must decide whether he will serve Prospero, who now stands for the ruling classes, the United States and other sources of imperialist oppression, or Caliban, the anti-imperialist resistance.

If we employ these same categories and characterize post-Spanish American War anti-imperialist sentiment in the Americas with the elitist rhetoric of Rodó's *Ariel*, a rhetoric that Retamar argued only served and reiterated a broader colonial discourse, then the anti-imperialism of *afrocriollista* writers, following the early twentieth century U.S. interventions in the Caribbean, would have represented, in Fanon's view, a shift from *arielismo* to its racialized *calibanismo* counterpart. Like Caliban, who learns his master's

language not to repeat him but to curse him, *afrocriollista* writers would have viewed themselves as taking up the images of barbarity and otherness of colonial representations of the Americas and using it as their banner of anti-colonial resistance. Edward Said makes a similar argument in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) when he states that *négritude* writers embraced a "Caliban who sheds his current servitude and physical disfigurements in the process of discovering his essential, pre-colonial self" (214). Yet Fanon would argue that while these writers may embrace the figure of Caliban, their thesis would remain an antithesis that reinforces, and thus does little to destabilize the binary between the image of colonial whiteness implied by the archetypal figures of Prospero and Ariel and the image of anti-colonial blackness in Caliban.

For Fanon then, *négritude* represents a step towards, but not the full achievement of what Sartre calls an eventual "realization of the human society without race" (*Black Skin* 112). Fanon concludes his *Peau noire, masques blancs* with the call for a synthesis to this dialectic. He calls for a different way of relating to one another in which people move away from the "voix inhumaines qui furent celles de leurs ancêtres respectifs afin que naisse une authentique communication" ["the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication can be born"] (*Peau noire* 228; *Black Skin* 206).

Despite Fanon's critique, one can find many instances of *négritude* writings that resist this antithetical and essentialist position. Césaire's *Cahier* describes his *négritude*, in contrast to the towers and cathedrals of the "monde blanc" ["white world"], as that of "les fils aînés du monde […] étincelle du feu sacré du monde" ["the eldest sons of the world […] spark of the sacred fire of the world"], and so plays into the notion of a

magical black culture that defines itself in contrast to colonial whiteness (114; 35). However, Césaire also draws an equivalence between the experience of his people and that of "un homme-juif […] un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta" ["a jew-man […] a Hindu-man from Calcutta"] as well as the more general "l'homme-famine, l'homme-insulté, l'homme torture on pouvait à/ n'importe quel moment le saisir le rouer de coups" ["famine-man, the insult-man, the torture-man you can grab anytime"] (*Cahier* 84; *Notebook* 11-12). These comparisons between diverse experiences of exploitation, which he would later develop more fully in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1955) [*Discourse on Colonialism* (1972)], undermine the racial determinism and essentialism that Fanon might otherwise attribute to Césaire's text.

Similarly, Brent Hayes Edwards discusses how some Francophone radicals in the 1920s used the term *nègre* not only to construct an anti-imperialist solidarity among people of African descent but broadened "the term nègre into the service of anti-imperialist alliances among what W.E.B. Du Bois called 'the darker peoples of the world'"(36). These moments, among others, suggest that although tricontinentalism would reject some of the more essentialist representations of *afrocriollista* writings, we can also find the presence of a budding tricontinentalism in these writings, especially in the *négritude* movement. The *afrocriollo* movement provides the foundations of an ideology that the Tricontinental would later globalize.

Fanon's critique will play an important role in the Tricontinental's response to the *afrocriollo* movement. As a Martinican, Fanon's participation in the Algerian struggle for independence precedes, by over a decade, Latin America's entrance into the Afro-Asian alliance of Bandung and Che Guevara's subsequent guerilla activity in the Congo.

Because of this and because his *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) [*The Wretched of the Earth* (1963)] became a manifesto of decolonization, Fanon's influence on later anti-imperialist movements is widely known. Yet what is not discussed, but what is fundamentally important for understanding the development of anti-imperialist thought in the Americas, is the way in which tricontinentalism responds directly to Fanon's critique of *négritude*. While tricontinentalism does not go so far as proposing "the realization of the human society without race" that Sartre described, I argue that tricontinentalism does posit itself as the synthesis to Fanon's dialectic through its attempt to revise the *afrocriollista* use of blackness as a signifier of anti-imperialism into a non-racially deterministic revolutionary subjectivity in which color refers to one's political stance of anti-imperialism rather than the color of one's skin (Fanon, *Black Skin* 112). In this way, tricontinentalism attempts to destabilize the *afrocriollista* notion of blackness as the essentialized antithesis to the colonial construction of whiteness through outlining a new vision for global subaltern resistance.

***Afrocriollismo*'s Black Anti-Imperialism Becomes the Color Curtain**

Fanon published *Peau noire, masques blancs* only three years before the 1955 Bandung conference in which twenty-nine newly decolonized African and Asian nations met to promote economic cooperation between their respective nations and to oppose imperialist intervention by either the United States or the Soviet Union. One might conjecture that his contemporaries would view the Bandung alliance, with all its diversity, as an opportunity for resolving the dialectic that he describes or for imagining an anti-imperialist revolutionary subjectivity beyond the white/imperialist thesis versus

the black/anti-imperialist antithesis. However, in the case of African American writer Richard Wright, who documents his experience at Bandung in *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956), a text that I will discuss in more detail below, he merely expands the *afrocriollista* use of blackness as a signifier of anti-imperialism to refer to people of non-African ancestry but continues to maintain the racial determinism and essentialism that was the subject of Fanon's critique.

Much had changed in the time between the birth of the *afrocriollo* movement and the 1955 Bandung Conference. Following the end of the Second World War, Europe had lost much of its grip over its former colonies. By the time of the Bandung Conference, U.S. communist containment policy was in full swing and there was growing discontent against Stalinism within the Eastern bloc. After gaining independence from the colonial powers, many of the participants at Bandung were not interested in signing up with either the United States or the Soviets (Young, "Postcolonialism" 12). Long before the Bandung Conference, African American and Afro-Antillean activists, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore and Frantz Fanon, had fostered a relationship of solidarity with Africa's anti-colonialist movements, and Du Bois had organized five Pan-African Congresses between 1919 and 1945.

The Fifth Pan-African Congress, held in October 1945 in Manchester, England and the first of its kind since 1929, included two hundred delegates, mostly from Africa and the West Indies. In comparison to the previous four congresses, it took a more activist approach and had the stated goal of eliminating colonialism from the African continent. It catalyzed the groundswell of African independence movements that would emerge over the next two decades (Padmore v). According to Du Bois's memorandum to the

United Nations following the Fifth Pan-African Congress, this Congress "helped to bring persons of Negro descent in the Americas in sympathy and co-operation with their African brethren" (Padmore 9). In addition to building transatlantic ties among peoples of African descent, through releasing statements of solidarity with the anti-colonial struggles in India, Indonesia and Vietnam, this conference laid the groundwork for the eventual Afro-Asian solidarity movement carried out through the 1955 Bandung Conference.[17]

During the early years of these decolonization efforts in Africa in the late 1940s and 50s, African American writer Richard Wright was living in Paris, a city that since WWI had been central to the interactions between African American, Afro-Antillean and African writers that had produced *afrocriollismo* and where, following in this tradition, Wright collaborated with Aimé Césaire on the literary review *Présence Africaine* (1947-) (Edwards 3). Due to his growing interest in anti-colonial movements, in 1953, Wright traveled to the Gold Coast to observe Kwame Nkrumah's leadership as he transitioned Ghana from British colonial rule to independence and wrote about his experience as Nkrumah's guest in *Black Power* (1954). Shortly afterwards, Wright would be one of the only people from the United States to make the trek to Indonesia to attend the 1955 Bandung Conference, documenting his participation at the conference in his now famous *The Color Curtain* (1956).

In September 1956, Wright participated in the Premier Congrès des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs [First Congress of Black Writers and Artists] in Paris, which was frequently described by the participants as a follow-up to Bandung and in which Aimé Césaire, Fanon, Léopold Senghor and James Baldwin were present. According to

Baldwin, who published the essay "Princes and Powers" (1957) about his participation at the conference, one of the central questions for the writers present was: "Is it possible to describe as a culture what may simply be, after all, a history of oppression?" (7). The myriad responses to this question dealt with how black intellectuals might articulate a pan-Africanist culture that does not present itself either as a mythic return to a pre-colonial origin or as an antithesis to a colonialist notion of whiteness. In Aimé Césaire's speech at the conference "Culture et colonisation" (1956) ["Culture and Colonization" (2010)], he responds to this central question with a statement that clearly evokes Fanon's call for a synthesis to the white imperialist/black anti-imperialist dialectic. Césaire states:

> Nous sommes aujourd'hui dans le chaos culturel. Notre rôle est de dire: libérez le démiurge qui seul peut organiser ce chaos en une synthèse nouvelle, une synthèse qui méritera elle le nom de culture, une synthèse qui sera réconciliatrice et dépassement de l'ancien et du nouveau. Nous sommes là pour dire et pour réclamer: donnez la parole aux peuples. Laissez entrer les peuples noirs sur la grande scène de l'histoire. (35)
>
> [Today we are in cultural chaos. Our role is to say: free the demiurge. That alone can organize this chaos into a new synthesis, a synthesis that will deserve the name of culture, a synthesis that will be the reconciliation and surpassing of old and new. We are here to say and to demand: Let the peoples speak. Let the black peoples come onto the great stage of history.] (142)

This synthesis that will "deserve the name of culture," Césaire maintains, will eventually emerge and the responsibility of black intellectuals in bringing this to fruition is to continue to demand black freedom.

Considering Wright's participation at this conference, his interest in African

decolonization movements and the Afro-Antillean circles in which he found himself in Paris, it seems logical that Wright would propose Bandung—the new movement of solidarity among decolonized peoples of diverse ethnicities and nationalities—in his *The Color Curtain* as a possible path for articulating the synthesis outlined by Fanon. In other words, by expanding the image of anti-imperialist resistance formulated by *afrocriollista* writers to people of non-African descent, Bandung might provide an outlet for destabilizing prior framings of both blackness and anti-imperialist resistance as being antithetical to colonial whiteness. However, I would argue that this is not the approach that Wright takes.

Throughout *The Color Curtain*, which is composed of Wright's own reflections as well as interviews with conference delegates, Wright remarks that all of "these people were ex-colonial subjects, people whom the white West called 'colored' peoples" (11). According to Wright, this shared "colored" identity allows him and his interviewees to speak frankly with one another. While one of his interviewees claims that "[t]he West calls some nations 'colored' in order to impose a separation between the dominator and the dominated," "colored" for Wright clearly implies not just the experience of domination or an anti-West sentiment but, throughout the text, is directly tied to physical appearance (*The Color Curtain* 68). In other words, Wright views the colonial experience of exploitation, as well as the anti-imperialist resistance that Bandung embodies, as incorporating people of non-African descent. However, "color" as a physical attribute is still central for Wright to defining who is included within the "color curtain."

In addition to the emphasis he places on the skin color of the people included within

this alliance, Wright associates the African and Asian people with whom he comes into contact with religious fanaticism and irrationalism. He ends the book with a call for the African and Asian elite, whom he claims have all been educated in the West, to take the lead or else the "Asian-African secular, rational attitudes will become flooded, drowned in irrational tides of racial and religious passions" (*The Color Curtain* 219). Wright's embrace of rationalism, about which Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has recently published a biting critique,[18] uncritically represents colonized peoples through the very tropes that have been used in their oppression and thus, while not proposing a celebratory antithesis to colonial whiteness, falls into the same trap that Fanon describes as one that should be avoided.

With Wright's representation of Bandung, Wright transforms the *afrocriollista* black anti-imperialist resistance, including some of its essentializing representations, into a "color curtain." In this sense, although Wright uses "color curtain" to refer to the Afro-Asian solidarity of the Bandung Conference, we might submit the term to a deeper analysis by considering it as a metaphor for a tendency towards a flattening racial essentialism within the anti-imperialist movement in the Americas prior to the Tricontinental. The color curtain, as a concept, encapsulates a political resistance of "color" that, like the iron curtain from which Wright takes its name, is overdetermined and constitutive of binary oppositions. In other words, in taking up the colonial category of color to formulate an anti-colonialist resistance, the color curtain concept also maintains much of the caricaturesque iconography that colonialist discourse attributed to non-white peoples, and in this way, the color curtain remains, like Fanon claimed about *afrocriollista* writers, constrained in its existence as antithesis.

I view the Tricontinental, then, as representing an attempt to push *beyond the color curtain* or an attempt to achieve the synthesis for which Fanon calls. By this I do not mean that the Tricontinental responds specifically to Wright's memoir about his experience at Bandung but rather responds to the essentializing tendencies that Wright's text embodies. Color in the Tricontinental refers to a politics of anti-imperialism that does not imply colonialist stereotypes of non-white people. More importantly however, the tricontinentalist signifier of color is unlocked from a racially deterministic signified, meaning that within tricontinentalism, color functions as an umbrella for a politics of anti-imperialism but does not necessarily denote the skin color of the peoples included under that umbrella.

Considering the trajectory I have laid out above, it is not surprising that the original idea for convening a tricontinental conference came from yet another participant at the 1956 First International Conference of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris, Afro-Cuban scholar Walterio Carbonell, who lived in Paris from 1953 to 1959 and who was an acquaintance of Richard Wright. The idea for a tricontinental conference came to Carbonell in 1959 during his brief period as the Cuban Revolution's ambassador to Tunisia (Moore, *Castro* 72).

In the December 5, 1959 issue of the Cuban newspaper *Revolución*, Carbonell explained that although the African and Asian countries that met at Bandung were now independent of the European colonial powers, they remained threatened by the "colonialismo disfrazado" ["disguised colonialism"] of the United States ("Congreso" 2).[19] Latin America, although long independent from Spain, "es hoy menos libre que el conjunto de los Estados afro-asiáticos" ["is today less free than the group of Afro-Asian

states"] (2). Therefore, Carbonell proposes that Latin America participate in the formation of a third power bloc because "el bloque de los países Americanos-afro-asiáticos ninguna potencia podrá intentar agredir, directa o indirectamente a cualquiera de los Estados Solidarios de la Comunidad de los países subdesarrollados" ["no power will be able to try to attack the block of American-Afro-Asian countries, not directly or indirectly any of the States in Solidarity from the Community of Underdeveloped Countries"] (2). He claims that Cuba should take a leadership role in this global anti-colonial movement and even proposes Havana as the location for "el próximo Congreso de los Países Sub-desarrollados" ["the next Conference of Underdeveloped Countries"] (2).

While Carbonell's intervention here has more to do with political strategy than an explicit aim at moving beyond a racially essentialist notion of transnational subaltern subjectivity and while Carbonell would eventually revoke his support of the Castro government, his vision of tricontinentalism would endure and would respond to the debates in which Carbonell was engaged in Paris. For example, in the December 1967 issue of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, an article about Fanon appears that contains the following statement:

> Certain dogmatists have dubbed Fanon a 'reformist.' Although this word carries an evil meaning, this same meaning may be turned in his favor. If Fanon did 'reform' something, it was the narrow viewpoint of post-war Afro-Asian nationalism […] His violence is basically the same violence that is today impelling the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America forward in the Tricontinental armed struggle against imperialism. (21: 23)

Fanon's position here is characterized as reforming the "narrow viewpoint" of Bandung, by which it refers to Bandung's non-violence, and pushing the anti-imperialist struggle toward the Tricontinental. While this quote references Fanon's thoughts on violence, and not his critique of *négritude*'s representation of black anti-imperialism per se, I mention this article as an example of how the Tricontinental viewed itself largely in response to Fanon. The Tricontinental responds not only to Fanon's call for violence but also to his critique by taking up the political signifier of blackness envisioned within *afrocriollismo* but attempting to move beyond its association with essentialist representations and racial determinism. It reframes *afrocriollismo*'s black anti-imperialism into a non-racially deterministic vision of subaltern resistance that undergirds contemporary notions like the Global South.

The chapters that follow further outline the Tricontinental's ideology and, through textual case studies, trace the argument for tricontinentalism in a wide array of American radicalist cultural production. These case studies examine authors and texts together that, while often created through a shared political dialogue, have been kept apart through the regional, national, linguistic, ethnic and genre classifications that have traditionally determined the way scholars approach the study of cultural production. The *afrocriollo* movement underlies a range of hemispheric New World cultural production, and the texts produced out of 1960s radicalism in the Americas are equally vast. I do not intend to argue that all such texts reflect the influence of tricontinentalism. Rather, what I am calling tricontinentalist texts are those that engage explicitly with the rhetoric and/or aesthetics of the Tricontinental movement. They reflect a deterritorialized vision of imperial power and recognize imperialism and racial oppression as interlinked and they

attempt to move beyond the caricaturesque tropes of *afrocriollista* writings, beyond the color curtain of a racially deterministic signifier of anti-imperialism, and toward an abstract use of color to signify an ideological position of resistance to imperialist subjugation.

Through an analysis of the Tricontinental's cultural production (such as the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, the OSPAAAL's posters, and a close reading of a film short called *Now* (1965) by the head of ICAIC's Latin American Newsreel Santiago Álvarez), the first chapter, "In the Belly of the Beast," illuminates the central tenets of a tricontinentalist ideology. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the central importance of African American civil rights to the Tricontinental's attempt to transform an essentialist notion of black anti-imperialism into a new vision for global resistance.

The second chapter, "Solidarity in Amerikkka," seeks to demonstrate how this vision circulated in radicalist writings outside of Cuba and outside the OSPAAAL's own cultural production. Through an analysis of Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), works by Pedro Pietri and Felipe Luciano, writings by the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party and an issue of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* devoted to the Young Lords, this chapter discusses the presence of tricontinentalism in the radicalist writings of the Nuyorican Movement of the 1960s and 70s. In these texts, Nuyorican writers argue for structural inequalities in their particular contexts as part of a larger pattern of imperial power and, in line with tricontinentalism, use this to theorize a global anti-imperialist subaltern subjectivity.

Following my analysis of how tricontinentalism appears in Nuyorican writings, the third chapter, "Todos los negros y todos los blancos tomamos café," considers the Cuban

context specifically, reflecting on how Cuba's involvement in tricontinentalism shaped its domestic discourse on race. Through a study of Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián's ICAIC newsreel, *Coffea arábiga* (1968), I discuss how tricontinentalism, through the filmic aesthetic of its newsreels and its theorization of a deterritorialized imperial power structure that is maintained through racial inequality, provided a vocabulary and framework for articulating a critique of racial discrimination in Revolutionary Cuba, where racism was said to have been eradicated. Through this case study, I argue that tricontinentalism should not necessarily be understood as a solely Cuban movement or as a movement whose discourse directly mirrors that of the Castro government. Tricontinentalism transcends the limits of the Cuban Revolution, becoming a tool used by Cubans to critique their own government and maintaining its influence on radicalist movements long after the international Left becomes disillusioned with the Revolution.

Finally, in "Global Solidarity," I conclude by discussing how tricontinentalist writers' theory of power and resistance is resurfacing in the current transnational and transracial concept of the Global South as it responds to the limitations of postcolonial theory. The conclusion outlines the specific ways that recognizing the Tricontinental as a theoretical and historical foundation contributes to a clearer, more robust understanding of our contemporary political landscape.

The writers and filmmakers discussed in the pages that follow are people that, in the end, seek a different way of relating to the world where one's body can be seen as a vessel of one's ideas, and where, they imagine, it might be possible to overcome the overdetermined roles carved out by colonialism and its aftermath. Several of them have

to physically travel somewhere else—to Alabama, Havana, Harlem, and Beijing—in order to fully place the social inequities that they witnessed and experienced at home into a larger context of global systems of oppression. In this sense, tricontinentalist writers beg tricontinentalist readers who are as internationalist in their thinking and understanding of oppression and resistance as they are. *Beyond the Color Curtain* represents a step towards developing a tricontinentalist reading, one that attempts to outline a concept that continues to be imagined, theorized, written, and believed.

[1] See *The Guardian*'s "Occupy Protests Mapped Around the World."

[2] Levander and Mignolo provide a list of recent titles that incorporate the "Global South" as evidence of the term's current prevalence.

[3] In this definition of the "Global South," I draw from López's introduction to *The Global South* journal's inaugural issue in which he defines the concept of the Global South as "the mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared condition at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization" (1). López's definition, in its reference to a subaltern subjectivity and consciousness rather than a geographical region, differs from the term's geo-political usage to refer to the seventy-seven developing nations that established the UN Group of 77 in 1964 to promote South-South economic cooperation. For detailed information on the development of the Global South as a geo-political concept, see Dirlik.

[4] Prashad devotes one chapter of his *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (2007) to the Tricontinental, but he treats it as a single event rather than a movement. Rodriguez [sic] identifies an ideology of "tricontinentalism," a term which she takes from Young, within the writings of African American activists that participated in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) and notes in these writings an ideological use of the term "colored" in describing Fidel Castro. Following up on Rodriguez, Seidman notes that Stokely Carmichael's solidarity with Cuba was based on a shared "tricontinentalism," which she does not describe in depth. These studies have been foundational to this project in which I seek, through an in-depth examination of tricontinentalist ideology and its cultural production, to expand and define more precisely

the notion of tricontinentalism that is introduced within this prior scholarship.

[5] I use Tricontinental and OSPAAAL interchangeably.

[6] Bandung is often referenced as the beginning of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which refers to those nations that sought to form a third bloc apart from the capitalist West or the communist East and which held its first meeting in 1961. The central concerns at Bandung (and for NAM moving forward) were political and economic independence, nonviolent international relations and nuclear disarmament, and the democratization of the United Nations. Bandung was also highly influenced by the non-violence of India and Indonesia's anticolonial struggles. In 1961, Cuba attended three conferences planned by the Organization of Solidarity of Afro-Asian Peoples, and the initial idea for an alliance of the three continents was discussed in these meetings. Per a request by the Cuban government, the Third Conference of the Solidarity of the Afro-Asian peoples that was held in 1963 in Tanzania chose Havana as the site for the Tricontinental meeting. Since Castro wanted more concrete action on behalf of anti-colonial struggles, Cuba's involvement would mean that the Tricontinental would diverge significantly from NAM's platform of peaceful coexistence. Additionally, in the eleven years between Bandung and the Tricontinental, anti-colonial movements responded to U.S. containment policy by becoming more closely allied with the Soviet Union and moving from a non-violent philosophy to one of militancy. In this sense, although the Tricontinental defined itself in terms of anti-imperialism, not communism, and the Soviet Union was not a member, "non-aligned" is not an accurate descriptor for the Tricontinental. For more detail, see Young, *Postcolonialism*; and Prashad.

[7] Nor do I suggest the OSPAAAL as the only relevant antecedent to the Global South.

The influence of Gramsci's analyses of the disparities between northern and southern Italy in texts such as "La questione meridionale" ["The Southern Question"] (1926) resonates within the term itself, and we can locate other possible influences in Eduardo Mendieta's three waves of postcolonial theory (153), U.S. civil rights discourse, as well as the wide array of writers and movements that Prashad and Young discuss. However, in order to avoid repeating the same over-generalizing tendency of postcolonial theory, each of these sources would need to be examined for how power and resistant subjectivities are theorized.

[8] This Pan-African Conference was organized by Trinidadian H. Sylvester Williams in London and included thirty delegates, mainly from England and the West Indies, and a few African Americans. According to Du Bois, this meeting "put the word 'Pan African' in the dictionaries for the first time" (Padmore 13). While the conference took place in 1900, the next conference of its kind would not be held until 1919 in Paris, which would be the official First Pan-African Congress, organized by W.E.B. Du Bois and head of the Tuskegee Institute Robert Morton (13).

[9] See Gilmore; Kelley; and Von Eschen.

[10] See Edwards; Davis and Williams.

[11] Rodó will be discussed later in this chapter. Mariátegui argued in his *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928) that Andean indigenous communities practiced a pre-Marxist communism and could be radicalized, alongside the laboring classes, into a socialist revolution. Young also mentions these thinkers, among others, as roots of tricontinentalism in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001).

[12] For more on the development of differences between the terms *nègre* and *noir*, see

Edwards.

[13] State and local laws enacted in the United States, from 1876 to 1965, which mandated segregation in public facilities, such as schools, restrooms, restaurants and swimming pools.

[14] See de La Fuente; Ferrer; Helg; and Sawyer.

[15] Here, I am following Kutzinski's lead in *Sugar's Secrets* (1993), where she uses Hall's term to characterize *negrista* writings.

[16] In this sense, Rodó's *Ariel* departed from *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* (1845) by Argentine writer and President (1868-74) Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, whose canonical analysis of the Argentine context of the early to mid-nineteenth century made a case for the United States as a model that Argentina should follow.

[17] Other precursors to Bandung include the 1927 League Against Imperialism in Brussels, which was convened in response to the perceived "paternalistic imperialism" of the 1919 League of Nations, as well as the 1945 Subject Peoples' Conference in London in which Indians, Burmese, Ceylonese, Malayans, Africans, West Indians and others took part with the intent of discussing the formation of a formal organization for the international anti-colonial struggle (Prashad 21).

[18] See Gates, "Third World of Theory: Enlightenment's Esau."

[19] Translations of Carbonell's article are mine.

CHAPTER 1

In the Belly of the Beast:
Viewing African American Civil Rights Through a Tricontinental Lens

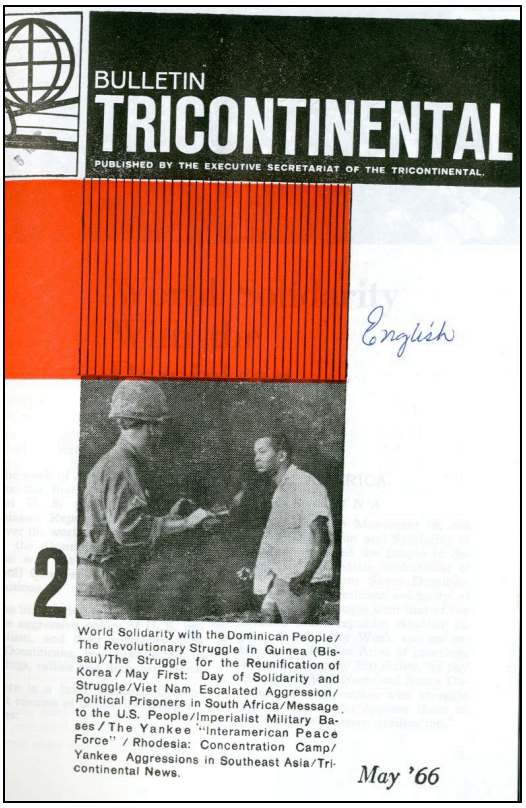

Fig. 1—*Tricontinental Bulletin* 2:1.

In the photograph that appears on the cover of the second issue (May 1966) of the OSPAAAL's *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966-80), a white soldier stands with his back to the camera, threatening to strike an unarmed black protestor with the butt of his rifle. The protestor, positioned below the soldier, faces the camera slightly and stands with clenched fists, looking ready to fight. This image is one of hundreds like it that the OSPAAAL would disseminate around the world through its bulletin, magazine, posters and films. It provokes identification and solidarity with the man whose face the viewer can clearly see as well as dissociation from the soldier whose back is symbolically turned

away from the viewer.

The location where the photograph was taken and the names of the people depicted are not listed, because in the view of the Tricontinental, this photograph could have been taken almost anywhere and could refer to almost any of the articles, listed below the photograph, that are included in this issue. In other words, it could have been taken in the Dominican Republic where U.S. soldiers invaded the year before, occupying the island until four months after the issue's publication, in Guinea-Bissau where rebels were fighting the Portuguese, in Apartheid South Africa, or it could be a photograph from the civil rights or Vietnam War protests in the United States.

The image communicates the Tricontinental's basic message that the people of the three continents—and their sympathizers in places like the United States—are all "facing the same cruel enemy" (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 2:31). In this sense, the racial division between the soldier and the protestor is meant to signify, in an abstract way, the division between the Tricontinental's imperialist enemy and its political solidarity of resistance. This process of abstraction, in which the Tricontinental's cultural production condenses the complexity of its vision of global empire and a non-racially deterministic global subaltern resistance into the seemingly simplistic imagery and vocabulary of a white/black racial division, is key for understanding the Tricontinental's discourse. An analysis of this discourse, following a brief overview of the historical context and background of the Tricontinental, will be the focus of this chapter.

The Tricontinental: A Summary

In January 1966, delegates from the liberation movements of eighty-two nations

came together at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba to form an alliance against imperialism. The goal of this alliance, called the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), as defined by the November 1965 issue of *Towards the First Tricontinental* (a pamphlet published by its International Preparatory Committee) was to "outline a programme of joint struggle against imperialism, as well as to fortify, increase and co-ordinate the militant solidarity which should exist between the peoples of the three Continents" (2: 9). Through the wide disemmination of its cultural production, this alliance would have a profound influence on political radicalism throughout the world.

For many years prior to the Tricontinental, Pan-Africanism created political solidarities among subaltern groups across the Atlantic, and in the years leading up to the Tricontinental, Cuba was already supporting, both militarily and financially, anti-colonial struggles in the Congo and Angola. However, despite these transatlantic political solidarities, at the time of the 1955 Bandung Conference, there were "effectively two analogous but separate spheres of subaltern struggle": one in Asia and Africa and the other in Latin America (Young, "Postcolonialism" 17). With the mounting U.S. military campaign in Vietnam and a common recognition of Cuba and Vietnam as participating in a joint struggle, these formally separate spheres would fuse together at the Tricontinental. Following the 1962 ousting of Cuba from the Organization of American States, Cuba would request to join the preexisting Afro-Asian alliance that had originated at the Bandung Conference. This would result in the 1966 Havana Tricontinental and the formation of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (OSPAAAL) (*Towards* 1:4).

The Tricontinental alliance stemmed largely from the common recognition among decolonized nations that political independence did not necessarily imply economic independence (Young, *Postcolonialism* 192). So while the OSPAAAL facilitated international support for militant liberation struggles in places as diverse as Vietnam, South Africa and Palestine, it also sought to create an economic alliance in order that members could trade with "the advanced countries on such bases that will allow our own development" (*Towards* 1:9). Following the 1966 Tricontinental conference, the OSPAAAL published in the first issue of its *Tricontinental Bulletin* a statement of the organization's goals and political positions in which it proclaims the right to complete political independence for all represented parties and promises mutual military and moral support for the representatives' armed struggles in achieving this goal. It states its intent to eliminate all "vestiges of imperialist economic domination" and the right to national control of resources, trade and the national economy (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 1:20). It condemns the war in Vietnam and the embargo against Cuba, claims that racial discrimination is a central component of the maintenance of imperial power and calls for a trade blockade against Apartheid South Africa by all represented countries (1:18-21).

Through these stated goals, the Tricontinental joined together movements from diverse contexts and developed a broad and all-encompassing definition of its common enemy of imperialism. Some of the delegations represented countries, like Cuba, that had long since obtained national liberation from its original colonizer but found itself continually threatened by the economic and military bullying of the United States. Others, like those from the Congo and Guinea-Bissau, were actively engaged in armed struggle with long-established European colonial powers. The Vietnamese delegation

was fighting U.S. military invasion and occupation, and others, like the Dominican Republic, were struggling to end a U.S.-backed political regime.

Considering Cuba's close alliance with the Soviets and announcement in 1961 of the socialist nature of its Revolution, and considering the profound influence of Marxism on many of the anticolonial and independence struggles represented at the Tricontinental, one might expect that the unity between these diverse movements would be described as a common commitment to international class struggle. While references to Marxism abound in the pages of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, and the *Tricontinental* magazine often includes Marxist analyses of the contexts in which individual liberation struggles are being waged, the socialist camp is viewed as one force among several "great revolutionary currents, which are repeatedly dashing against the bastion of imperialism" (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 26:26). What unifies these diverse movements is a resistance to what they simply call "imperialism," which encompasses economic exploitation and the domination of any nation militarily over another, the continuation of European colonialism, and the maintenance of the cultural and economic vestiges of colonialism and slavery. This broad definition of imperialism unifies the diverse movements but also recognizes their heterogeneity.

While the OSPAAAL was against any of these forms of military and economic imperialism, it consistently pointed to the United States as the quintessential representative of imperialist aggression. As a central component of its condemnation of the U.S. government, the OSPAAAL consistently identified the cause of African Americans as an integral part of its platform. Tricontinentalists maintained that African Americans were subject to the very same oppression that they were, and thus, not only

considered them to belong to the Tricontinental but—because they were said to be fighting within the belly of the beast of the imperialist United States—deemed them particularly representative of its global subaltern subjectivity. Through their argument for the Jim Crow South as a microcosm of global empire, the Tricontinental expressed a deterritorialized notion of imperial power in which one could be located inside the United States and still be understood as equally victimized by its imperialist oppression as those located on the outside.

Moreover, rather than a socialist rhetoric of commonality based around class, tricontinentalist discourse often used the term "color" (such as in "colored peoples" or "colored leader") to refer not necessarily to the color of one's skin but to one's alignment with the Tricontinental's anti-imperialist politics. So, in addition to a notion of a deterritorialized power structure, tricontinentalism is marked by a racial vocabulary that is used to describe its global subaltern subjectivity and that serves to destabilize any racially deterministic notions of inclusion into the alliance. This deterritorialization of power and destabilization of trait-based requirements for inclusion is central to understanding the way in which, I argue, the Tricontinental provides a model for emerging theories of contemporary global subaltern resistance.

While the ideology claimed by the Tricontinental was already circulating among the international Left well before the 1966 meeting, the OSPAAAL would globalize this discourse through its large propaganda apparatus. In fact, although many smaller meetings of OSPAAAL delegations were held following the 1966 Tricontinental, the entire Tricontinental alliance met only one other time in Cairo in 1968. Instead, the Tricontinental's massive cultural production would become the primary site for the

communication between its delegations. The OSPAAAL had four official arms of propaganda: the *Tricontinental Bulletin* (1966-88), published monthly in English, Spanish, French and sometimes Arabic, which provided updates on liberation struggles and OSPAAAL actions and published letters, interviews and statements from delegations; radio programs; the iconic posters, each devoted to solidarity with a different liberation struggle, for which the OSPAAAL is now recognized and which were folded up inside of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*; and the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 37:44-5). While the OSPAAAL mentions only these four in its *Tricontinental Bulletin*, in August 1967, it also began publishing a bimonthly magazine in English, Spanish, French and Italian called *Tricontinental* (1967-90), which published prior speeches and essays by revolutionaries, like Che Guevara and Amilcar Cabral, as well as interviews and in-depth analyses of the political and economic contexts of each struggle. The OSPAAAL produced books, pamphlets and special supplements as well (Estrada and Suárez 2-3).[1] The ICAIC Latin American Newsreel, or short films made by the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC),[2] played weekly in Cuban theaters from 1960 to 1990, was often distributed internationally and engaged themes such as the achievements of the Cuban Revolution and independence struggles in Vietnam and elsewhere (Chanan, *BFI* 1).

The ICAIC, created less than three months after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, was the first cultural organization decreed by the Castro government (Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 35). Its cinema occupied a central space of social dialogue within Revolutionary Cuba and would have a profound impact on the development of a new radicalist aesthetics of filmmaking throughout the world. Cinema of the Cuban

Revolution would be made with the style defined by Julio García Espinosa in his famous 1967 manifesto as "cine imperfecto" ["imperfect cinema"], which celebrated the imperfections of low-budget film that, in contrast to the conventional smooth-surfaced Hollywood studio cinema, which encouraged a passive viewer, emphasized filmmaking as a process and sought to actively draw its audience into the film's revolutionary struggle (Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 184). Because of limited materials due to the U.S. blockade, the time constraints of a weekly chronicle and the improvisational creativity of Santiago Álvarez as a filmmaker, the inventive short films that made up the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel, which was headed by Álvarez, are arguably the clearest embodiment of the aesthetics of imperfect cinema.

The Tricontinental played a central role in the circulation of this revolutionary film aesthetic among the international Left. Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas's renowned essay, "Hacia un tercer cine" ["Towards a Third Cinema"] (1969), which named revolutionary filmmaking, and especially the documentary genre, as the defining artistic arena of the anti-imperialist struggle, was first published in the *Tricontinental* magazine and the distribution of the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel was a key component of the Tricontinental's propaganda campaign. Considering the central position afforded to the African American cause within the Tricontinental, it is not surprising that the most famous of the ICAIC's newsreels is *Now* (1965), a six-minute fast-paced film by Santiago Álvarez that pairs Lena Horne's eponymous 1963 song to documentary footage of white-on-black police brutality and images of protests from the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The film was released the same year as the Tricontinental's first publication, *Towards the First Tricontinental* (1965).

Scholarship and reviews of *Now* generally describe the film as a denunciation of violence against African Americans and a rallying cry in support of civil rights activists (Charity; Hess; Rist). However, I maintain that *Now*'s message is far more complex in that, through presenting a pointed critique of the reformist goals of the Civil Rights Movement[3] and pushing for radicalization and militancy, the film attempts to frame the African American struggle within the Tricontinental's global movement.

In the following pages, I use *Now* alongside the *Tricontinental Bulletin* and several of the OSPAAAL's posters to outline how tricontinentalist ideology, by pointing to imperialism within the geographic borders of the United States and privileging African American protestors as representative of its political subjectivity, attempts to deterritorialize empire and destabilize colonial racial divisions. An analysis of the argument put forth in *Now* sheds light not only on the Tricontinental's use of a local and racialized discourse to formulate a global, non-racialized revolutionary subjectivity but also on the way in which a text such as *Now* acquires new meaning when viewed through a Tricontinental lens.

Now's Critique of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Dream"

The 1965 release of *Now* was met with immediate international acclaim and the film was shown in festivals around the world. Its final frame, in which the word "Now!" is spelled out with machine-gun shots onto the screen, even inspired the logo for Newsreel, the New York collective of activist filmmakers founded in 1967 (Hess 388). With time, *Now* has been a testament to the enduring relevance of Álvarez's work. It currently boasts tens of thousands of views on YouTube and was included in Travis Wilkerson's DVD compilation of eight of Álvarez's films, *He Who Hits First Hits Twice*:

The Urgent Cinema of Santiago Álvarez (2005).

In keeping with Solanas and Getino's theory of "Third Cinema," in which the role of the revolutionary filmmaker is not merely to document but to intervene, Álvarez claimed that he intended to "join things up in such a way that they pass before the spectator as a complete entity, with a single line of argument" (Chanan, *BFI* 6).[4] In this sense, his newsreels, which are not intended to report the news with objectivity but to make a clear political argument, reflect the critical stance and subjectivity that is characteristic of the essay film (Rascaroli). The images in *Now,* taken from pirated news footage and photographs cut out of *Life Magazine*, are brought to life through the rapid sequencing, quick cuts and aggressive zooms that characterize Álvarez's "nervous montage" style (Hess 393). This style has been described as "diametrically opposed to the 'long take' form of the direct cinema approach that dominated U.S. production" at the time (Mraz 133).

Yet the true driving force of the film is the audio track: Lena Horne's song entitled "Now!" (1963), which was composed for a performance Horne delivered at a Carnegie Hall benefit for the Students for Nonviolence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Hess 387).[5] SNCC worked closely with Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to carry out the famous sit-ins and Freedom Rides that occurred across the U.S. South and played a leading role in organizing the 1963 March on Washington where King delivered his legendary "I Have a Dream" speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.[6] Horne's song largely reflects King's ideological perspective as expressed in this famous speech in which King defined the Civil Rights Movement as fundamentally concerned with the acquisition by African

Americans of all of the rights promised to American citizens in the U.S. Constitution.[7] King's political position is fully embraced in Horne's song. Consider, for example, the following citation from the song's chorus:

> Now, now, come on, let's get some of that stuff.
>
> It's there for you and me, for every he and she.
>
> Just want to do what's right constitutionally.
>
> I went to take a look in my old history book.
>
> It's there in black and white for all to see.

The lyrics express a clear sense of urgency regarding the granting of civil rights across the racial divide yet emphasize doing "what's right constitutionally" and the United States' history of a discursive commitment to equality. The song suggests that one can look in a history book and find "in black and white" the rights promised to African Americans. The belief in equality has always been a part of American history, the song argues; it just needs to be extended to the black community.

Álvarez noted that in *Now*, "[t]he script is in the song itself. As you follow the song, you write the script" (Álvarez, "With Santiago"). In other words, the images in the documentary are arranged in rhythmic timing with the soundtrack and often directly correlate with the lyrics. However, this does not mean that there is a perfect coincidence of argument between song and film. In fact, I suggest that whereas Horne's song echoes the philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr. in drawing its inspiration from the social promise of the Constitution, Álvarez appropriates the song to formulate his own counter-argument, claiming that this constitutional promise of equality does not apply to the African American community.

According to Michael Chanan, "Álvarez is a staunch believer in the naked power of the image, illustrated by music. He hates using verbal commentary...'that simply means you have not explained yourself'" (*BFI* 10). Likewise in *Now,* Álvarez conveys his argument through his use of images, arranging the photographs and film footage in a montage style in which the message is contained in the metonymic relationship of one image to the next (Mraz 133). Considering that Álvarez's most immediate audience was a primarily Spanish-speaking Cuban public that, despite the cursory subtitles, may not have necessarily understood all the English lyrics of Horne's song on a first viewing, the message conveyed through image becomes that much more important for understanding Álvarez's intended meaning. In other words, one could watch the film with the sound off and still come away with the film's core message.

However, there are several key moments in which Álvarez places his images in ironic juxtaposition with Horne's lyrics, situating the visual track in an intermittent relationship of counterpoint with the audio track. These instances of ironic interaction between the images of the film and the song's lyrics, which I will detail in the analysis below, appropriate the discourse of Horne's song in order to undermine it, giving a sharp edge to the film's critique. Some of these key lyrical moments are not translated in the subtitles, meaning that while a non-English speaking person would comprehend the overall argument on a first-viewing, she would miss many of the subtleties that would be more clearly conveyed to an English-speaking viewer. This suggests that the film's intended audience is also, and perhaps primarily, a U.S. or international Left that sympathizes with the song's rhetoric that the film seeks to challenge and radicalize.

In keeping with its focus on claiming the rights set forth in the Constitution, the

song begins by evoking the origins of U.S. democracy in the figure of its Founding Fathers:

> If those historic gentleman came back today, Jefferson, Washington, and Lincoln.
>
> And Walter Cronkite put them on Channel 2 to find out what they were thinking.

Álvarez pairs these lyrics with a photograph of protestors sitting on steps. The camera focuses in on an African American boy, who is holding an American flag. The next image shows a policeman who appears to be violently pulling the flag from the child's arms. The lyrics that follow are accompanied by a close-up of a black person's eyes:

> I'm sure they'd say thanks for quoting us so much, but we don't want to take a bow. Enough with the quoting. Put those words into action and we mean action.
>
> Now!

The whites of the eyes transform in a dissolve into the face of Abraham Lincoln, which fades into an image of the Lincoln Memorial, immediately recalling the location from which King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech two years before the production of the film. The camera descends from Lincoln's head down to the base of the memorial where the face of a protestor, who is being beaten, winces in pain. As Horne sings the lyric "Now!" the word appears as though written across the protestor's pained face.

Fig. 2, 3, 4— Álvarez, Santiago. *Now*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.
Source for original photographs of child with flag: "No More Police Brutality." 17 June 1965. Take Stock/Matt Heron.

While the images in the documentary are topically consonant with the song's lyrics—for instance, Álvarez presents images of the Founding Fathers in the same moments that Horne sings about them—the reference to the U.S. forefathers takes on a different meaning in the film than it does in the song. The song evokes the forefathers in order to point to their unfulfilled, but viable, dream of equality such that Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln are narratively positioned as the ones calling for action. According to Hess, "the song, and through it Álvarez, argues that the United States was once a revolutionary country which then lost its way. To solve our contemporary problems- for example racism- we must reclaim our revolutionary past" (392). While I agree with Hess's assessment of the song's argument, I argue that the images themselves communicate a very different message. The man wincing in pain is positioned beneath the feet of the Lincoln monument as if he were being crushed by the massive statue. The American flag is ripped from the protesting child's hands. Whereas the song evokes the U.S. identity as a call to action, the film posits an a priori separation of African Americans from citizenship, evoking a call to action based precisely on *disidentification* with the United States and suggesting that if one really "went to take a look in my old history book," one would find a history of violence and anything but equality.

Álvarez reinforces this history of oppression throughout the film, which consists of a montage of images of police brutality against African Americans edited in time with the song's rhythm. He emphasizes racial hierarchies by featuring images in which white police are standing above—often pointing a gun down at—a black victim, who is lying on the ground. While the film footage and several photographic stills are taken from the 1965 Los Angeles Watts Riots, in which black residents rioted for six days in protest of

police brutality and housing discrimination, Álvarez does not show images of the rioters taking violent action. Instead, he emphasizes their victimization, using photographs like the one in which two young boys, who have been arrested, stand beneath a Los Angeles Police sign.

Following the line "people all should love each other. Just don't take it literal mister. No one wants to grab your sister," several images of police violence directed at black women appear. In one image of excessive force, a woman is picked up by her arms and legs by a group of five policemen that surround her. As she is forcibly carried to the back of a truck in front of a crowd of people, her shoes fall off into the street and her dress comes up, revealing her thighs and slip. The phrase "no one wants to grab your sister" addresses the racist fear of miscegenation, specifically the fear of sexual relations between white women and black men, that underlay many of the Jim Crow laws as well as the practice of lynching. Martha Hodes argues that during slavery in the United States, white men maintained not only the sole right to vote but also the perceived right to sexual violence against women, both white and black. According to Hodes, the extent to which suffrage was associated with domination over women's bodies became evident in the post-emancipation period when "whites conflated the new political power of black men with sexual transgressions against white women" (241). Hodes points out that while this fear had been present since the colonial era, political power and sexual power were so fundamentally intertwined in the minds of Southern whites that it was not until suffrage was extended to African American men that this fear reached the level of social panic.

Fig. 6— Álvarez, Santiago. *Now*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.

Tellingly, this single line of Horne's song is purported to have caused it to be effectively banned in the United States by the refusal of some major radio stations to play it (Gavin 332). Álvarez juxtaposes this phrase with the conceptually inverted image of gang-like violence by white policemen towards black women, suggesting that it is not white women who are threatened by black men, but rather, it is white men who "grab" black women. As Álvarez pairs these disturbing images of police violence with the song's reference to the fear of miscegenation, he alludes to a history in which the constitutional right to vote is associated with African Americans' victimization rather than empowerment. This line of the song, as well as references to the Constitution, are not translated in the film's subtitles, suggesting that many of the subtleties of Álvarez's critique of U.S. democracy are directed to an English-speaking public.

Considering the film's critique of the hypocrisy of U.S. democracy, it is significant that Álvarez originally received a copy of Horne's song from Robert F. Williams, whom Álvarez described as a friend (Álvarez, "With Santiago"). Williams, the former president of the Monroe, North Carolina division of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and a staunch opponent of King's strict

pacifism, was living in exile in Cuba when Álvarez made *Now*.[8] The critique that Álvarez puts forth in *Now*, while ironically dissonant with the lyrics of the song that Williams gave him, directly parallel Williams's own ideology. Alvarez's representation of the separation of the black community from U.S. citizenship echoes a statement by Williams in which, when asked by a reporter if he would give up his citizenship in his support for Cuba, he replied, "As an Afro-American, I never had American citizenship" (Young, C. 27).

In addition to aligning with Williams's views on citizenship, *Now* also channels Williams in its critique of the non-violence for which the Civil Rights Movement is recognized. Álvarez's juxtaposition of photographs in which African Americans are victimized with the song's chorus, "Now is the moment. Come on, we've put it off long enough," proposes action as the path to ending oppression. Whereas the song does not imply that this action need be violent, I suggest that the film calls specifically for militancy. The film's critique of non-violence is suggested in the extended photographic still that serves as the backdrop for the opening credits. In the photograph, some of the Civil Rights Movement's most prominent leaders—President of the SCLC Martin Luther King, Jr., President of the NAACP Roy Wilkins, President of the Committee on Racial Equality James Farmer, and Executive Director of the Urban League Whitney Young—sit in a meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson. Hess argues that the photograph sets up the oppositional relationship between protestors and police that characterizes the rest of the film (388-89). In support of this argument, I will add that during the time the still photograph remains on screen, the following credits appear in overlay: "Personajes- Negros y Policías Norteamericanos" ["Characters- North American Blacks and

Policemen").[9] This description of the characters sets up a binary of victims and victimizers, associating Johnson with the policemen and emphasizing the very opposition to which Hess refers.

Fig. 7—Álvarez, Santiago. *Now*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.
Original photograph: "Johnson and Civil Rights Leaders." 18 Jan. 1964. AP Photo.

However, although this photograph can be read as one more depiction of the division between the "negros y policías norteamericanos," Chanan notes that the photo "establishes the film's tone of skeptical irony," an assertion that is not followed with further analysis (2004, 219). The photograph, juxtaposed with video footage of riot police running and marching, stands out as particularly static in an otherwise fast-paced, "nervous" film. In a newsreel lasting merely six minutes, this photograph remains on-screen for forty-five seconds. Álvarez does little to dynamize the image (such as fast cuts or zooms) but rather presents the photograph in the Hollywood "long take" style to which he is known as being opposed. Additionally, while I agree that Johnson is associated with the brutality of the policemen, the photo is the only image in which black and white men lean in toward one another in a communicative gesture and appear on the same level, Whitney Young sitting slightly higher than Johnson.

Johnson is the subject of biting criticism in a number of Álvarez's films, such as *LBJ* (1968) and *Hanoi Martes 13* (1967). In *Now,* other than in this photograph with

Johnson, the civil rights leaders do not appear again in the film. Instead of focusing on these leaders' activism by showing images of them protesting, Álvarez's only presentation of them is in a static image in which they appear with this reviled politician. In this way, Álvarez presents a subtle critique of the Movement's reformism, suggesting that cooperating with politicians, like Johnson, within a flawed political system does not bring change, only stasis.

The skepticism that Álvarez demonstrates towards the Movement's leaders is then explicitly extended to its non-violent methods. For example, the lyrics, "We want more than just a promise. Say goodbye to Uncle Thomas," are sung simultaneously with the appearance of a famous photograph of a civil rights protestor taken in front of the Traffic Engineering Building in Birmingham, Alabama. The woman is kneeling and her eyes contain an expression of agony. In direct timing with the words "Uncle Thomas," a derogatory term referring to a black person who is subservient to white people, Álvarez focuses in on the protestor's hands that are folded together as if in prayer, a subtle allusion to the religious character of civil rights protests like the SCLC's Birmingham campaign. After zooming in on these praying hands, Álvarez then immediately cuts to the tied hands of a black man in a photograph in which a mob of white men hold him captive by a rope, suggesting that the nonviolent philosophy of the Birmingham protestors is yet another manifestation of black subjugation, or modern-day Uncle Tom-ism. The praying hands are tied and held by the rope of white domination.

Fig. 8,9,10—Álvarez, Santiago. *Now.* Havana: ICAIC, 1965.
Original photograph of woman protestor: "Woman Kneeling." 5 May 1963. Peter Harris/Take Stock

The Uncle Tom figure, which alludes to the protagonist of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), operates in racialist discourse as the inverse of the threat of miscegenation alluded to earlier in the film. Valérie Loichot writes in *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature* (2013) that within this paradigm, black men "[i]f not literally raped or castrated, such as in acts of lynching or sexual exploitation through sexual tourism […] become passive, feminized, or sexless beings who can enter the white home without constituting a threat" (106). This unthreatening image of faithfulness to the white slave-owning family that is found in the Uncle Tom figure is one of the myths that, similar to Roland Barthes's argument in *Mythologies* (1957) regarding how a photograph from a cover of a Paris magazine of a young black soldier in French uniform devotedly saluting serves to justify French colonialism, is used to naturalize slavery and racial inequality, cleansing it of its injustices.

While the song rejects both the racist stereotypes of the threatening rapist and his castrated inverse through the lyrics "say goodbye," the film uses the Uncle Tom figure to critique the Civil Rights Movement's association with Christianity and its ideology of nonviolence. By accusing the non-violent protestors of being Uncle Toms, the film places them at fault for their own experience of oppression and gives credence to a myth

through which that oppression has been legitimized. Although I will argue that the film, through its tricontinentalism, ultimately intends to break with these caricaturesque representations, as well as with any racial determinism, this use of the Uncle Tom figure to critique the Civil Rights Movement represents a moment in which the film, in my view, falters in its argumentation.

The film's critique of nonviolence is further emphasized in its final frames, which show non-violent protestors who have chained their hands together in a symbolic act that communicates their continued enslavement even in the era of putative freedom. Once the song reaches its crescendo, Álvarez focuses in on the bound hands of these protestors. As Horne sings the final line, "the time is now," Álvarez cuts to an image of a man running and zooms in on his hands, free of chains and tightened into fists. Next, the film comes full circle, back to an image of a boy who, instead of holding an American flag, furrows his brow and holds up his fists in anger. The final photograph depicts a woman standing above a crowd with her fist in the air, and the film ends with the sound of a machine gun firing, as the word "NOW" is symbolically shot onto the screen. The message is clear: break free of your chains and fight! The pacifist approach of the Civil Rights Movement is implicitly decried as yet another enslavement and a militant approach is affirmed as a more viable path towards liberation.

Fig. 11, 12, 13. Álvarez, Santiago. *Now*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.

'Negros y policías norteamericanos' in the Tricontinental Spotlight

In his critique of civil rights discourse, Álvarez seeks to disconnect the African American struggle from a particularly U.S. identity, merging it with a global struggle against imperialism. Significantly, the year following the release of *Now* is known in Cuba as the "Year of Solidarity" because of the 1966 Tricontinental, which brought together delegates from Latin America, Africa, and Asia to form the OSPAAAL (Mraz 137). Despite consistently pointing to the United States as the "implacable enemy of all the peoples of the world" and the quintessential representative of imperialist aggression, from the very beginning, the OSPAAAL would identify the cause of African Americans as an integral part of its platform (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 1:18). In the materials published leading up to the 1966 conference, the Tricontinental's International Preparatory Committee defines "support to the negro people of the United States in their struggle for the right to equality and freedom and against all forms of discrimination and racism" as part of the agenda for the upcoming meeting (*Towards* 1:8).

This initial solidarity with the African American freedom struggle only becomes more pronounced in the years following the first Tricontinental conference, as is clearly evinced by the many articles devoted to it in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, which, beginning in April 1966, was published monthly in Spanish, French, English and sometimes Arabic and distributed internationally, as well as the many posters produced from 1967-71 that were folded up inside the *Tricontinental Bulletin* and that state the OSPAAAL's solidarity with the African American struggle. The two posters included below, for example, celebrate August 18th as the OSPAAAL's day of solidarity with the African American people, named in honor of the August 1965 Watts riots.

Fig. 14 (left)—Abreu, Lázaro. "Solidarity with the African American People." Havana: OSPAAAL, 1968.
Fig. 15 (right)—García, Daysi. "Solidarity with the African American People." Havana: OSPAAAL. 1968.

Similarly, the August-September 1966 issue of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* states:

> [A]lthough, geographically Afro-Americans do not form part of Latin America, Africa, or Asia, the special circumstances of the oppression which they suffer, to which they are subjected, and the struggle they are waging, merits special consideration and demands that the Tri-Continental Organization create the necessary mechanisms so that these brothers in the struggle will, in the future, be able to participate in the great battle being fought by the peoples of the three continents. (5-6:21)

In this statement, the OSPAAAL does not just express its support for African Americans but explicitly brings them within the fold of the Tricontinental alliance itself.

Richard Wright points out in *The Color Curtain* that the only mention of "the Negro problem" in the United States at the Bandung Conference came from the African

American U.S. congressman Adam Clayton Powell who, Wright claims, was sent by the U.S. government to hold press conferences in order to defend its "bill of racial health" (175). In contrast to the Tricontinental then, it does not appear that the African American struggle, although gaining momentum on the world stage in the mid 1950s, was on the forefront of issues discussed at Bandung. The shift in focus towards the African American freedom movement then seems to be related not only to the increasing radicalization of this movement but also to the extension of the Bandung solidarity into the Americas where the legacy of *afrocriollismo*, and its relationship to African American activism, formed the backbone of anti-imperialist thought. The centrality of the African American freedom struggle to the OSPAAAL will be integral to the Tricontinental's attempt to revise the color curtain concept into the synthesis that Fanon imagined.

The explicit incorporation of African Americans into the Tricontinental alliance should be understood within the context of an ongoing exchange between U.S. black leftists and the Cuban Revolution. From the earliest years of the Revolution, Castro's government actively reached out to African American activists. This was most famously demonstrated when Fidel Castro, during his visit to New York for the UN General Assembly in September 1960, moved his entire delegation from the Manhattan Shelburne Hotel to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, where he was met with cheering crowds and where he spoke with African American leaders such as Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, and LeRoi Jones (a.k.a. Amiri Baraka). This highly publicized demonstration of Cuba's solidarity with the African American community was suggested by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), a U.S. organization of journalists that aimed to balance the negative

media portrayal of the Cuban Revolution.

Several members of the FPCC, including the African American intellectuals and journalists John Henrik Clarke, Richard Gibson, LeRoi Jones, Julian Mayfield, Robert Williams and William Worthy were invited to visit Cuba in July 1960 to celebrate the anniversary of the attack on the Moncada Barracks of July 26, 1953 (Rodriguez 63). Upon their return, members of the FPCC delegation wrote a series of articles about their experiences in Cuba in left-wing newspapers around the country, most of which were reprinted in the FPCC journal, *Fair Play* (1960-1), in which they applauded Cuba's aggressive policies against racial discrimination and drew parallels between the plight of black people in the Southern United States and that of Cubans (66). Besenia Rodriguez [sic] uses the term "tricontinentalism" to refer to the "critique of global capitalism and its exploitation of the world's racialized peoples" articulated in these early 1960s FPCC articles, which suggests that the discourse that the Tricontinental would take up as its banner, which Rodriguez does not analyze in depth, was already present in the writings of African American activists traveling to Cuba.[10]

The *Tricontinental Bulletin*, in turn, is flooded with images of police brutality against African Americans, images strikingly similar to those that appear in *Now*. Like *Now,* the *Tricontinental Bulletin* consistently points to the oppression of African Americans as revelatory of the hypocrisy of U.S. democratic ideals. For example, an August 1967 article states,

> It would take too long to enumerate each and every case of lynching, rape, physical torture and other atrocities perpetrated against the Blacks in a country where the rulers brazenly proclaim themselves the defenders of democracy

> and freedom. (17:10)

Just as Álvarez pairs images of violence against African Americans with the song's references to the U.S. Constitution, the writers of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*[11] point to lynching and rape as evidence of the hypocrisy of the "democracy and freedom" that U.S. political leaders claim to uphold.

The *Tricontinental Bulletin* uses this evidence of hypocrisy to argue for the colonial nature of the U.S. government's relationship to African Americans. A January 1967 article entitled "Black Power: U.S. Version of Struggle Against Colonialism" argues:

> Those masses who are discriminated against already understand that their problems do not revolve around the right to eat in certain cafeterias, the right to vote or the right to send their children to certain schools. The question goes much deeper. The radical Negro vanguard is becoming aware that their fight is a part of the independence movement of the colonized peoples and that their enemy is Yankee imperialism. (10:4)

In this statement, the writers of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, like Álvarez in *Now*, present the reformist goals of the Civil Rights Movement as shortsighted. The article celebrates what it claims is the increasingly popular belief that, as explained in a January 1970 article, African Americans' "objective of national liberation, the liquidation of racism, cannot be achieved within the present, imperialist, capitalist structure" (46:15). Their path to liberation, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* argues, lies primarily in their recognition of U.S. democracy as a farce and of U.S. imperialism as the enemy.

In presenting the United States as an imperial power so pervasive that it has

become "the common enemy of the peoples of the world," even including those who live within its borders, the OSPAAAL anticipates by more than three decades the theories put forth by Hardt and Negri on the nature of modern empire (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 2:31). In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri claim that in contrast to the transcendent nature of European colonialism, modern-day empire:

> establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. (xii, emphasis original)

They identify the logic of the U.S. Constitution as exemplary of this immanent nature of empire in that, in producing its own internal limit by simultaneously granting and restricting constituent power, it turns outwards towards the frontier in order to avoid reflection on its internal contradictions.

This vision of empire as unfettered by territorial boundaries and incorporating the entire world is parallel to the representation of imperialism in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, which quotes Stokely Carmichael (a.k.a. Kwame Ture) in a January 1967 article as saying, "imperialism is an exploiting octopus whose tentacles extend from Mississippi and Harlem to Latin America, the Middle East, South Africa and Vietnam" (10:7).[12] The logic behind the Tricontinental is that the resistance to this monster must be equally global, a concept perhaps best articulated by Che Guevara in his 1967 "Message to the Tricontinental," which he wrote prior to leaving for Bolivia in 1966 and which was published by the OSPAAAL on April 16, 1967 in a special supplement (Estrada and Suárez 2).

According to Young, Guevara's message is especially significant because of the way in which it defines a new revolutionary subject—not the proletarian of Marxism—but "'we, the exploited people of the world'. 'We, the dispossessed'" (*Postcolonialism* 212). Guevara's vision of a global subaltern subjectivity is akin to Hardt and Negri's claim that with an immanent empire, there exists more revolutionary potential since it creates "the set of all the exploited and the subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire" (393). The two make essentially the same argument: that the expansiveness of empire, lacking geo-political boundaries, allows for the creation of a new revolutionary subject, one who also lacks boundaries and who identifies with exploited people anywhere from Vietnam to Cuba to Alabama.

Among these exploited people of the world, the OSPAAAL consistently privileges African Americans. If imperialism is an octopus covering the earth with its deadly tentacles, then African Americans, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* maintains, are fighting "within the guts of the monster itself" (25:30). This argument, which the *Tricontinental Bulletin* makes repeatedly in reference to African Americans, is summed up quite aptly in a 1971 OSPAAAL poster, which was published in Spanish, French, English and Arabic, in which an abstract drawing of a black man holding a gun appears inside an outline of the map of the United States. The caption beneath it states "Nosotros destruiremos el imperialismo desde afuera. Ellos lo destruirán desde adentro" ["We will destroy imperialism from outside. They will destroy it from inside"].

Fig. 16—Uknown artist. “Nosotros destruiremos el imperialismo desde afuera.” Havana: OSPAAAL. 1971.

While one could argue that the use of “we” and “they” undercuts the *Tricontinental Bulletin*’s explicit inclusion of African Americans into the alliance, the statement of solidarity at the bottom of the poster reinforces the shared cause of African American activists with liberation struggles in the three continents. More importantly, the poster reiterates African Americans’ important position within the OSPAAAL as those that are destroying imperialism from “the inside.”

Likewise, in an October 1969 issue of the *Tricontinental Bulletin,* the writers acknowledge that “the importance of their [African Americans’] struggle, for they are striking at U.S. imperialism from inside, while we are dismembering it from outside” is meant to extend as well to other groups who are also struggling from within (43:15).

They write:

> The white population, the Afro-Americans and other national minorities—Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and others in the heat of the present process of radicalization—have the historic responsibility for confronting in the United States those very monopolies, racist groups, and the imperialist government which takes its cruelty, crimes, and exploitation to a part of the world still governed by capitalism. (46:15)

Thus, the fight being fought by African Americans is one for which other U.S. radicals, regardless of skin color, are also responsible. This statement is followed with explicit approval for the alliances being forged in the United States between such radical groups as the "Afro-American Black Panther Party, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, the Mexican-American Brown Berets and white Young Patriots," alliances that, as I will suggest in the following chapter, clearly reflect the influence of tricontinentalism (15-16).

While the *Tricontinental Bulletin* explicitly recognizes that other groups are also fighting imperialism from within, the especially representative position attributed to African Americans stems, I believe, not just from their location within the United States but also from a view of the transatlantic slave trade as a foundational moment of colonial hegemony. Consider the statement by Mao Tse Tung that Robert F. Williams published in the October 1964 issue of his newsletter, *The Crusader*:

> The evil system of colonialism and imperialism grew up along with the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes, it will surely come to its end with the thorough emancipation of the black people. (1964, 4)

Mao, a central figure of the OSPAAAL,[13] identifies the enslavement of black people as

foundational for imperialism and equates their liberation with the end of imperialism itself.

Aníbal Quijano argues that because slavery was the economic driving force behind European colonialism, racial categories were devised to legitimize colonial hierarchies (183). As a result, "colonizers codified the phenotypic trait of the colonized as color" (182). In this sense, Guevara's revolutionary subject arises out of a preexisting discourse in the Americas, which Richard Wright called "the color curtain," that broadened the anti-imperialist revolutionary subjectivity of *afrocriollismo* to include colonized peoples of non-African descent and that appropriated the colonial language of race, which separates the colonizer and the colonized into categories of white and colored, in order to create a phenotypic articulation of an international anti-colonial resistance. However, while Guevara's "exploited people of the world" may arise from this preexisting discourse of color, this tricontinentalist revolutionary subjectivity should not be confused with the racial determinism or the essentialist representations of the color curtain.

The tricontinentalist use of color is ideologically—but not racially—deterministic such that it does not describe the skin color of the tricontinentalist revolutionary but rather the anti-imperialist contours of his politics. The phenotypic language used to describe the Tricontinental revolutionary is a racial abstraction, meaning the designation of "color" is dissociated from physical characteristics, signifying rather an ideological position of anti-imperialism. Rodriguez makes this very assertion when she explains that when Williams refers in his newsletter to Fidel Castro, a white descendant of a Spanish landowner, as "colored," the word is disconnected from a Black Nationalist insistence on

ethnicity or the suggestion of a pan-Africanist cultural heritage. Rather, in the spirit of tricontinentalism, it is used to "forge a solidarity based on a common exploitation" (75). In other words, color, for Williams, is coded to signify the same global revolutionary subjectivity to which Guevara refers.[14] So, while the new revolutionary subject, as defined by Guevara and the OSPAAAL, finds its clearest expression in the politicization of the "colored" identity of the former slave, lending a central representative position to African American activists within the global anti-imperialist struggle, this discourse of color is transcendent of a direct relationship to physical appearance.

This abstract use of color does not, I would argue, engage in what Gayatri Spivak calls "a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest," or the homogenizing suppression of difference that is often used by marginalized peoples to forge an essentialized group identity for political purposes (205). Rather, the common ideology that "colors" and unifies the Tricontinental's delegations creates a chain of equivalences that recognizes various experiences of racism, colonization and exploitation. Diverse ethnic, national, and linguistic groups are linked through a shared tricontinentalist worldview yet maintain their heterogeneity as individual movements with distinct causes and goals. This can be seen clearly in the OSPAAAL's posters, through which, most often, the OSPAAAL announces a specific day of solidarity that is to be celebrated with a specific struggle, acknowledging the unique identity of each movement but situating it within the larger structure of the OSPAAAL.

One the other hand, although the Tricontinental acknowledges the individual circumstances of each cause represented and although the articles in the *Tricontinental Bulletin* sincerely attempt to delve into the complexities of each movement, it must be

said that the Tricontinental's cultural production oversimplifies the causes that it engages. This oversimplification, however, is quite distant from the essentialist associations with myth, irrationality and other colonialist tropes encapsulated in the color curtain concept. Moreover, I am not suggesting that there are not instances in the Tricontinental's materials where the use of "color" does indeed refer specifically to skin color and phenotypic appearance. However, the Tricontinental's materials reflect an awareness of the danger of slippage from color as abstraction to color as essentialism and, on the whole, racial determinism in Tricontinental texts is not sustained.

An understanding of tricontinentalism's political signifier of color provides further insight into Álvarez's *Now*. Hess criticizes the way in which Álvarez conflates multiple groups within *Now*:

> When Álvarez sets up the analogy in *Now* among Nazis, the KKK, the U.S. government, the police and guardsmen (this was before Kent State), white racists, and LBJ, what is he trying to indicate? Is he arguing that they are all Nazis, that politically the U.S. is a fascist state [...] Or is he saying that all these men [...] repress disenfranchised people? I can't answer this question, and think that this ambiguity, which works well on an emotional level, is also Álvarez's greatest weakness as a filmmaker. (398)

However, in view of the preceding discussion, we might consider Álvarez's fusion of images of repression into the over-simplified category of "North American policemen" in a different light. By depicting the white policemen's oppression of African Americans, Álvarez exploits the colonial categories of "white" and "colored." So, while the film exhibits an attempt to incorporate African Americans into the anti-imperialist project of

the Tricontinental, it also appropriates an African American identity to stand in for all "the exploited people of the world." Just as the "policías" embody colonial oppression, the "negros" epitomize what Hardt and Negri would call the potential revolutionary multitude.

This is made more explicit in another of Álvarez's newsreels, *El movimiento panteras negras* [*Black Panther Movement*] (1968), a newsreel about encounters between black militants and police in the United States, which was released on August 19, 1968. Following the opening sounds of sirens and bongos, a sonic representation of the divide between the white police and the black protestors depicted in the film, a voice-over reads a quote by Malcolm X:

> El problema afro-norteamericano no es un problema de los negros ni un problema de los norteamericanos sino un problema de la humanidad.
>
> [The African American problem is not a Negro problem or a North American problem but a problem of humanity.][15]

The film thus immediately establishes the connection between African Americans' struggle and a larger international community.

The rest of the film alternates between quotes by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black Panther leader Huey Newton coupled with images of police brutality against African Americans and images from a police manual on riot gear with a voice-over that sarcastically narrates the manual as if it were an advertisement. For example, images from the police manual instructing on the use of military-grade mace are narrated by a man's voice who states, with the bravado and rhyming wit of a radio advertisement:

> El mace es un novedoso producto químico para lanzar sobre los ojos de los

> negros amotinados. Nunca falla. Negro tocado, negro segado. Solicite una muestra gratis. Use mase y ríase de lo que pase.
>
> [Mace is a novel chemical product to spray at rioting blacks' eyes. It never fails. A sprayed black is a down black. Request a free demonstration. Use mace and laugh at what takes place.]

While the film posits that the tear gas, mace, flame throwers and tanks in the police manual are designed specifically for use against black militants (and it should be noted there is in fact historical evidence for this claim),[16] the voice-over also boasts that these weapons are

> económicos y eficaces contra obreros, contra estudiantes, contra negros, contra blancos, y contra todos los que perturben la paz y el orden.
>
> [economical and efficient against workers, students, blacks, whites, and against all whom disturb peace and order.]

By extending the possible victims of police oppression to whites and to the general descriptors of students and workers, the film signals the many images of bloodied black protestors as emblematic of a larger power struggle that goes beyond the black/white divide. This point is further emphasized in the last frame of the film, which states over a map of the world that 1968 is the "año del guerrillero heroico" ["the year of the heroic guerrilla fighter"]. In other words, instead of ending the film with a statement of solidarity with the Black Panthers or African Americans in general, the film explicitly relates their struggle to a global unity and signals African American militants as representative of all the *guerrilleros* fighting imperialism all over the world.

We see this same argument made more succinctly in the 1967 OSPAAAL poster

by graphic artist Jesús Forjans in which the alignment between the message of Álvarez's films and that of the Tricontinental is displayed quite explicitly. The poster, which states "NOW!" at the top in black block letters depicts a white policeman with his back towards the camera, using his baton to threaten a black protestor who appears to be shouting and who is facing the camera. The image is quite similar to the photograph on the cover of the second issue of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* that was discussed at the beginning of this chapter in which a black protestor faces the viewer while a white policeman turns his back towards the camera, signifying the Tricontinental's politics of identification and disidentification through the simplistic black/white divide.

Fig. 17—Forjans, Jesús. "Now!" Havana: OSPAAAL, 1967.

While it may appear that this poster is advertising Álvarez's film, it was actually made by OSPAAAL and not by ICAIC,[17] which produced a poster for the film when Álvarez's *Now* was released in 1965 in which an image of a young girl depicted in the film appears with the word "now!" written across her face, and which provides

information on the director and soundtrack. The 1967 OSPAAAL poster above overtly references the film but extends its revolutionary message to the entire organization of the OSPAAAL. Whereas almost all of the other OSPAAAL posters state the organization's geographically and culturally cross-cutting solidarity in three languages with a particular cause or group of people, the image on this poster, like the photograph discussed at the beginning of this chapter, need not be assigned to a particular group. It is at once a reference to the African American cause as well as an abstraction of the global struggle with which every OSPAAAL member can identify. The white policeman signifies global Empire and the black protestor embodies the global subaltern struggle.

Considering this, I return to Hess's apparent confusion with the conflation of many causes and oppressive forces in *Now*. While perhaps a fair criticism of the totalizing perspective of the film as well as the Tricontinental itself, this critique is symptomatic of both a lack of historical context in discussions of *Now* and a dearth of scholarship on the ideology of tricontinentalism. The way in which tricontinentalism destabilizes colonial racial categories by employing its very vocabulary as markers of ideological position rather than phenotypic appearance is parallel to the way in which it deterritorializes empire through locating its presence in the global North.

This vision of global oppression and resistance, which is described ironically through a defined geographic location and a racialized body is, I would argue, a trope that is repeated in a range of anti-imperialist cultural production in the Americas, meaning that I would like to suggest *Now* as more of an exemplar than simply an isolated filmic event. In looking beyond similar texts' apparently simplistic oppositions by seeing how their representations of local hegemony are actually metaphors for an immanent empire

and how their racialized discourses are divorced from a one-to-one relationship to physical appearance, we may begin to outline a tricontinentalist poetics and in doing so, better situate our engagement with emerging concepts of transnational subalternity within the wider trajectory provided by tricontinentalism.

[1] I have been unable to ascertain data on the circulation of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*. However, 50,000 copies were printed of the first issue of *Tricontinental* magazine in 1967 and both *Tricontinental* and the *Tricontinental Bulletin* include a statement on the first page authorizing total reproduction of all articles (Estrada and Suárez 3).

[2] Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos

[3] With the term Civil Rights Movement, I refer to the sector of the larger Black Liberation Movement (BLM) in the United States that practiced non-violence and that sought "civil rights," or further incorporation into civil society. Elsewhere, I reference Black Power, by which I mean the heterogeneous section of the BLM that took a more radical approach through such ideologies as black nationalism and communism. While I recognize that the boundaries between them are often blurry and that many activists participated concurrently in organizations on both sides, my differentiation draws from Cha-Jua and Lang's seminal article, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire," which recognizes Black Power and Civil Rights as having differing ideologies and objectives.

[4] Álvarez's description of his role as a director, as well as the newsreels themselves, reflect the influence of Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, who theorized montage as a collision of shots that, like the explosions in an internal combustion engine, drive the film and its thesis along. For more on Soviet influence on ICAIC films, see Mraz.

[5] The lyrics, written by Broadway duo Betty Comden and Adolph Green, were set by composer Jule Styne to the tune of the celebratory Hebrew folk song, "Hava Nagila," thus drawing an implicit comparison between the racism suffered by Jews with that of African Americans (Buckley 248). However, the song's festive tone also connotes a celebration of the momentous historical present (now) in which change is occurring.

Álvarez claimed he was sued by the Twentieth Century Fox Recording Company for his use of the song. He responded to the suit in a letter, maintaining that the song belonged to the people and not to a recording company (Chanan, *BFI* 10).

[6] Later, when SNCC came under the leadership of Stokely Carmichael, it would diverge from the reformist philosophy espoused by King (Joseph).

[7] In a study of King's rhetoric, Mark Vail explains that "the logic that ultimately drove the 'I Have a Dream' speech" was "that the civil rights issue was a moral imperative driven by a religio-political obligation spelled out in the covenantal documents of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence," and that "[t]he nation had strayed from the sacred covenant" of these documents (58). In other words, King characterized the movement as maintaining an ideological stance of compatibility with and acquiescence to the dominant cultural and legal structures of the United States.

[8] Williams became known for forming a self-defense militia within his NAACP chapter (*Negroes with Guns* 50). He was also a journalist and became an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement because of the international media attention given to the famous Monroe "kissing case" in which two African American boys, aged nine and eleven, were jailed and sentenced to fourteen years in reform school after a white girl kissed one of them on the cheek. As a result of Williams's journalistic coverage, the case quickly gained international attention and became an embarrassment to the U.S. government. After facing death-threats, Williams fled to New York and later to Canada, and when the FBI issued warrants for his arrest, he escaped to Cuba in 1961. From Havana, he continued to publish his newsletter, *The Crusader* (1959-69), and hosted a radio

broadcast called Radio Free Dixie (1962-66). For further information on Williams, see Tyson.

[9] This phrase could also be translated as "Blacks and North American Policeman," which would support my assertion that Álvarez seeks to dissociate the African American community from a U.S. identity.

[10] Later, African American militants like William Lee Brent, Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, Angela Davis, Huey Newton, Assata Shakur and Robert Williams visited Cuba and many defected to Cuba. Several of these activists would become disillusioned with the Revolution as they became familiar with its domestic racial inequalities. However, despite this, I maintain that the ideology of tricontinentalism, which U.S. black leftists had a pivotal role in shaping, continued to circulate, providing a model for current conceptualizations of global subalternity. For more on African Americans and the Cuban Revolution, see Gosse; Guridy; Joseph; Rodriguez; Sawyer; Tietchen; and Young, C.

[11] While the authors of interviews and statements sent in by delegations are mentioned, many of the articles in the *Tricontinental Bulletin* are not attributed to an author. Rather, the writers are loosely defined as the executive secretariat of the OSPAAAL, which was made up of representatives from "Vietnam, Korea, Syria, Pakistan, Portuguese Guinea, Congo, United Arab Republic, Republic of Guinea, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Venezuela, Puerto Rico and Cuba," with Cuban politician, Osmany Cienfuegos, acting as General Secretary (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 2:45; 3:3). The bulletin was edited by Miguel Brugueras, head of the OSPAAAL's Department of Information, but much of the information on events occurring within individual liberation struggles was provided by

the delegations themselves (Estrada and Suárez 1). Interestingly, Carlos Moore, one of many who has faced persecution in Cuba for speaking out against racism, points to Cienfuegos, the OSPAAAL General Secretary, as exemplary of the racist attitudes held by some of the Revolution's prominent leaders (*Pichón* 182). I mention this as one example of the disconnect between the anti-racist discourse of tricontinentalism, in which Castro's government was actively engaged, and discriminatory racial practices and rhetoric in Cuba's domestic sphere.

[12] In August 1967, Carmichael visited Cuba and spoke at the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) Conference, which was formed by the twenty-seven Latin American delegations of the Tricontinental (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 1: 8). Following up on Robert Young's study of the Tricontinental and Besenia Rodriguez's discussion of the ideology of tricontinentalism within the writings of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, Sarah Seidman has written an in-depth article on Carmichael's celebrity in Cuba in which she notes that what bound Carmichael to Cuba was a "shared Tricontinental ideology," which she describes briefly as a particularly Cuban "political construct akin to Third Worldism" (2). According to Seidman, Carmichael called the OSPAAAL "'one of the most important organizations for the development of the struggle of the Negroes in the United States,'" and years later dubbed the *Tricontinental* magazine "'a bible in revolutionary circles'" (3). Footage from one of Carmichael's speeches appears in another of Álvarez's most famous films, *LBJ* (1968).

[13] Young cites the influence of Maoism as initiating within the Third World radical Left a shift away from a eurocentric orthodox Marxist focus on the industrial proletariat towards

an emphasis on peasant struggle, a shift which will help to ideologically unify guerrilla struggles from Cuba to Vietnam (*White Mythologies* 15).

[14] Similarly, Joseph notes that in 1959, years before his shift away from black separatism, Malcolm X "ignored Castro's alabaster complexion, claiming the white skin Cubano as his own" (36). It might be tempting to read this "coloring" of Castro as one more manifestation of Revolutionary Cuba's domestic racial discourse, which, as I discuss in the third chapter, has largely continued *negrismo*'s project of national unification that celebrates non-white subjects in order to veil the reality of racial inequalities. For this reason, I emphasize the equivalence between the Tricontinental's frequent references to "colored peoples" and Williams's usage of the term. Color, for Williams and for the Tricontinental, is a highly charged term that is specifically situated within postcolonial and post-slavery contexts. In other words, it is not an empty symbol of multiculturalism and national unity that is used to deny the presence of racial inequality, but rather a political signifier that refers to a subjugated and resistant subjectivity.

[15] Translations of the captions from Álvarez's *El movimiento panteras negras* are mine.

[16] For a discussion of the beginnings of the paramilitarization of U.S. police forces in police action against U.S. black militants, see Weber.

[17] The vast majority of posters in Cuba have been made by three different organizations, although many of the graphic artists have worked concurrently for all entities. They include ICAIC's film posters, the OSPAAAL's global solidarity posters and Editora Política, which has been responsible for domestic political propaganda (Cushing 9-10). Graphic artist, Alfredo Rostgaard, was named the Artistic Director for the OSPAAAL's Department of Information, and along with designers Olivio Martínez and Lázaro Abreu,

has been responsible for the majority of OSPAAAL's posters (Estrada and Suárez 1). Rostgaard created the ICAIC poster for *Now* (Cushing 88).

CHAPTER 2

Solidarity in Amerikkka:
Piri Thomas and the Nuyorican Movement in a Tricontinental Context

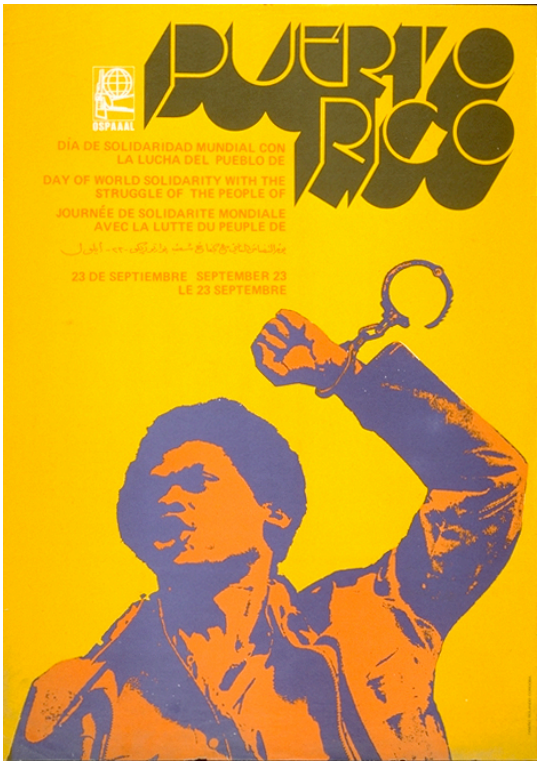

Fig. 1—Córdoba, Rolando. "Día de solidaridad mundial con la lucha del pueblo de Puerto Rico." Havana: OSPAAAL, 1976.

The Tricontinental's iconic posters, each one devoted to solidarity with a different liberation struggle in places like Vietnam, Mozambique, Palestine, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and elsewhere, are easily identified by their colorful screenprinted graphics, statements of solidarity in multiple languages and by the OSPAAAL logo (a globe with an arm holding a gun). OSPAAAL posters are currently featured in art exhibits, coffee table books, and many are for sale on Ebay. The ongoing visibility and accessibility of these posters, most of them made in the 1960s and 70s, as well as the continued relevance of the aesthetic they popularized (such as in the Barack Obama Hope posters), speaks to the wide dissemination of the Tricontinental's political ideology.

The Tricontinental's deterritorialized notion of empire, its privileging of African Americans as representative of the global struggle, as well as its use of a racial vocabulary to refer to a revolutionary subjectivity based on an ideological position of anti-imperialism, rather than racial determinism, represents a discourse that circulates in a range of cultural production beyond Cuban newsreels, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* and the writings of U.S. Black Power activists. Moreover, this ideology does not originate with the 1966 Tricontinental, but rather, the Tricontinental becomes an official mouthpiece and formal movement for ideas already being exchanged among American radicals. In this chapter, I examine *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), the well known text by Piri Thomas—the most widely read Puerto Rican writer in the United States and the first to be embraced by mainstream U.S. publishers—as an example of both the broad reach of tricontinentalist discourse and the presence of this worldview in leftist writings conceived in the years prior to the first convening of the Tricontinental.

Through a close reading of the text's treatment of Puerto Rican and African American political solidarity, I trace Thomas's tricontinentalist argument for the formation of a global subaltern politics of resistance. While perhaps not as hard-hitting as Santiago Álvarez's newsreels or the propagandistic writings in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, Thomas's tricontinentalist worldview, as expressed in *Down These Mean Streets*, is quite explicit but has consistently been overlooked in the abundant scholarship on his text. Through the analysis provided in this chapter, which I will detail below, I aim to demonstrate how a critical engagement with tricontinentalism facilitates new readings of even canonical texts of 1960s radicalism.

Piri Thomas: Nuyorican, Afro-Latino and "Citizen of the World"

When Piri Thomas, Harlem-born son of a Puerto Rican mother and Cuban father, met Joseph Heller, the author of the renowned 1961 novel *Catch-22*, at a writers' event, Heller told Thomas that his vocabulary was limited. To this, Thomas replied, "And so was your mother when she gave birth to you" (Thomas, "They"). Thomas has consistently mentioned in interviews how he was introduced to poetry and writing through playing the dozens, in which one insults his opponent's mother or father through a play on words. Here, much as he does in his written work, Thomas shrewdly confronts Heller's high literary snobbishness with his use of the vernacular, specifically African American Vernacular, in order to undermine the power and value structures from which his opponent operates. While this comical exchange is merely one anecdote among many that Thomas, always the dynamic storyteller, might rattle off in an interview, I mention this moment as a window into a rhetorical strategy of resistance that Thomas would employ in his life and in his work.

Down These Mean Streets, an autobiography and bildungsroman that chronicles Piri Thomas's childhood in Spanish Harlem in the 1940s, his young adulthood and involvement with drugs and gangs, and his prison time and eventual release in 1957, ushered in a renaissance of Nuyorican[1] cultural expression in the late 1960s and 70s that focused on social justice for people of Puerto Rican descent living in New York city and that is often referred to as the Nuyorican Movement. Responding to the hopes and struggles of their parents' generation, many of whom migrated to New York as a result of Operation Bootstrap,[2] writers of Puerto Rican descent born and raised in New York, such as Piri Thomas, Miguel Algarín, Sandra María Esteves, Pablo 'Yoruba' Guzmán, Tato

Laviera, Felipe Luciano, Nicholosa Mohr, Pedro Pietri, Miguel Piñero and others, would, through their poetry and prose, give words to the impoverished conditions in which Puerto Ricans lived in *el barrio* (East Harlem) as well as to the lack of political rights for Puerto Ricans living on and off the island. Their work would reject the U.S. narrative of equality and freedom, proclaiming the emptiness of the so-called American Dream, pointing to the colonial oppression of Puerto Rico and calling for independence and exposing a widespread culture of racial discrimination in the United States.

While the political impulses of the Nuyorican literary movement are widely recognized, there is a tendency among contemporary critics to oversimplify the ideological perspective expressed in these works. Juan Flores's seminal *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (1993) perhaps best embodies this position, writing of the Nuyorican literary movement:

> For despite its origins in proletarian misery, and its forceful protest against abusive conditions, this art rarely suggests any specific revolutionary project. Typically, the tone is one of prolonged sarcasm, and the outcome of any emotional movement is existential desperation or individualized brooding. (134-35)

Flores's view that the protest works by Nuyorican writers lack a specific revolutionary project is reflective of a dismissive tendency within contemporary criticism towards the ideological position of much of the radicalist cultural production of this period. Similar to the way in which Álvarez's *Now* has consistently been described as a critique of discrimination in the United States, a summation that overlooks the film's call to militancy and its argument for African Americans as core members of the

Tricontinental's global resistance movement, the political position of Nuyorican literature is often oversimplified.

The resistant politics of the Nuyorican Movement tend to be summed up with a brief paragraph about the broader political context, such as the emergence of the Young Lords Party[3] and civil rights and anticolonialist movements. While these characterizations are accurate and helpful for contextualizing the works, I argue that there is much more to be gleaned from a sustained study of the political ideologies of these texts, especially within the context of a clearer comprehension of tricontinentalism. This chapter, therefore, proposes to reread a foundational text of Nuyorican literature, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, as a case study of how a critical engagement with tricontinentalism can nuance our understanding of Nuyorican and other related radicalist writings.

At the heart of *Down These Mean Streets* is the narrative of the personal transformation of the protagonist, Piri, in relation to his racial identity.[4] At the beginning, Piri is resistant to being labeled as black, insisting that his Puerto Rican heritage affords him a higher status in the U.S. racial hierarchy, but by the end of the narrative, he proudly identifies as a black Puerto Rican and views his experience of racial discrimination as an impetus for political solidarity with African Americans. *Down These Mean Streets* addresses the complexities of a specifically Afro-Latino[5] experience in the United States, an experience that, both at the time and in present day, remains marginal and often occluded in representations of Latino communities.

Because of the text's attention to Thomas's particular experience as a black Puerto Rican, Piri Thomas is often seen as an intellectual successor of the famed Arturo

Alfonso Schomburg, a black Puerto Rican writer and archivist who moved to New York in 1891 as part of a wave of Puerto Rican and Cuban political exiles who participated in the independence movements against colonial Spain in the late nineteenth century (Flores 144). In 1892, Schomburg helped establish the Club Las Dos Antillas [Two Antilles Club], which worked for the independence of both Puerto Rico and Cuba from Spanish colonialism and which collaborated closely with Cuban independence leader José Martí and his Partido Revolucionario Cubano [Cuban Revolutionary Party]. Later, Schomburg would become famous for his collection of historical documents, currently held at the New York Public Library, related to the African diaspora in Spain and the New World.

While he is most often associated with the Harlem Renaissance, his commitment to the anti-colonial cause and his collecting of texts related to peoples of African descent throughout the Americas embodies the exchange between the Harlem Renaissance, *negrismo* and *négritude* that I described in the introduction as a budding tricontinentalism. Schomburg's editorial and journalistic writings contributed to the body of work that emerged from this exchange, which sought to address a transnational racial hierarchy to which people of African descent were subjected throughout the Americas.[6] In Thomas's attention to the black Puerto Rican experience in Harlem, Schomburg's legacy is unavoidable, and in this sense, the Tricontinental and Piri Thomas find their roots in the same dialogue among inter-American black literary and political movements that is embodied in the figure of Schomburg himself.

While Schomburg formed part of the Puerto Rican population that immigrated to New York in the years leading up to the Spanish-American War, this population rapidly increased after the Foraker Law of 1900, which made Puerto Rico a U.S. territory, and

the Jones Act of 1917, which named Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens (Luis, *Dance* xii). Piri Thomas's parents migrated in the 1920s following the Jones Act. With Operation Bootstrap, the post-WWII industrialization campaign of Puerto Rico, many more Puerto Ricans would migrate to New York. According to Sánchez González, "From the late 1940s to the 1960s, the stateside Puerto Rican population grew from about seventy thousand to almost one and a half million people strong, over half of whom took up residence in the New York City area" (103).[7]

It is during these mid-twentieth century years that a Puerto Rican literature written about life in the mainland United States truly emerges as a genre beyond the testimonial and journalistic writings of Puerto Rican migrants in the earlier periods. Writings from the late 1940s to the mid 1960s, which Flores describes as the second stage of literature about Puerto Ricans in the United States, include Jaime Carrero's *Jet Neorriqueño: Neo-Rican Jet Liner* (1964), Jesús Colón's *A Puerto Rican in New York, and other Sketches* (1961), stories by José Luis González, René Marqués's *La carreta* (1953) and Pedro Juan Soto's *Spiks* (1956) (Flores 148). Many of these writings, which span literary genres of theater, autobiography, poetry and fiction, deal with the impoverished conditions and racial discrimination faced by Puerto Ricans in New York and so paved the way for what Flores calls the "third, Nuyorican stage in emigrant Puerto Rican literature" (150). In Jesús Colón's discussion specifically of his experience as a black Puerto Rican in *A Puerto Rican in New York*, his work will be especially influential for later writers like Piri Thomas.

During this period and beyond, African Americans and Puerto Ricans lived in close quarters in the Harlem community, but *Down These Mean Streets* was the first

Puerto Rican literary text to bring these two groups together (Sánchez González 55). According to Flores, one of the major differences between the second stage of Puerto Rican migrant literature and the Nuyorican writers is the later writers' attention to the language practices of the East Harlem community (148). In this sense, Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* would be foundational for the Nuyorican literary movement in that it provides a complex linguistic mapping of Spanish Harlem in the mid-twentieth century that entails textual representations of diverse linguistic varieties, such as those described by linguists as standard and non-standard forms of Spanish, standard English, Puerto Rican English, Hispanized English and African American Vernacular English, or what Piri simply calls, "a street blend of Spanish and English with a strong tone of Negro American" (Thomas, *Down* 121).

Much critical attention has been paid to the bilingualism of *Down These Mean Streets* and to its illuminating discussion of the problematics of ethnic identity. Prior readings examine how the text navigates both the rigid racial structure of the United States as well as the Hispanic American discourse of *mestizaje*, which is often used to emphasize a foundational mythic and peaceful mixing of Spanish and indigenous peoples while negating the presence and influence in the nation's history of people of African descendent.[8] Studies of Piri's negotiation of these distinct but equally discriminatory discourses tend to address the text's success or failure to articulate a specifically Afro-Latino identity and view his identification with African Americans as aiding or hindering in that goal (McGill; Pérez, R; Sánchez González; Sandín; Santiago-Díaz and Rodríguez). This solidarity with African Americans, in turn, is viewed as being based on a biological notion of race or a Pan-Africanist concept of shared roots (Caminero-

Santangelo; Santiago-Díaz and Rodríguez). My reading builds on these previous studies but takes them in a different direction by questioning the very assumption that Thomas's examination of racial discourses is intended to resolve itself in a clear definition of an Afro-Latino identity from which a stable pan-Africanist solidarity with African Americans might be constructed.

Rather, I argue that through a close analysis of the specific moments in which Thomas textually represents African American Vernacular English, a poignant political argument emerges that transcends the apparent racial determinism generally understood as the basis for this solidarity. Through Piri's appropriation of African American speech, Thomas points to a transnational and deterritorialized power structure and proposes a political solidarity of resistance that is not bound by race or place but is, rather, equally global in its vision. In spite of the fact that Thomas defines this global revolutionary subjectivity through a local geography and a racial vocabulary, I argue that his text ultimately aims to break completely with racial or geographic determinism and instead to propose a transnational and transethnic subaltern resistant subjectivity.

While prior scholarship has pointed to the autobiographical works of Black Power writers like Malcolm X or Eldridge Cleaver as clear influences on *Down These Mean Streets* and *Seven Long Times* (1974), Thomas's memoir about his seven years of incarceration (McGill; Sandín), and have noted that Thomas marched for civil rights in the U.S. South with John O. Killens, with whom he was a fellow member of the Harlem Writers' Guild (McGill), an in-depth engagement with the political ideology of *Down These Mean Streets* has yet to emerge. Although I recognize that *Down These Mean Streets* was written prior to the convening of the 1966 Tricontinental (Thomas began

composing the text while in prison), and I do not suggest that Thomas had any direct contact with it (such as owning copies of the *Tricontinental Bulletin* or its posters), I do argue however that *Down These Mean Streets* engages directly with the worldview that the Tricontinental took up as its banner. By laying claim to an African American experience in the Jim Crow South, the text articulates the same vision of a deterritorialized power structure and global subaltern resistance that the Tricontinental would disseminate to liberation struggles around the world.

The Linguistic Politics of *Down These Mean Streets*

Down These Mean Streets' appropriation of an African American experience occurs through marked representations of African American Vernacular English. By using the term "marked," I draw from the many linguistic anthropological studies that have discussed how the social group with the most power constitutes the invisible norm from which everyone else is viewed as diverging. In the case of the United States, the norm, or the "unmarked," has been called "white public space," which refers to such "norms" as phenotypic whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, the middle class and Christianity. Those that do not fit within these norms are "marked" as different (Hill 453). The linguistic variety chosen by the dominant institutions and the representatives of these norms is then characterized by these institutions as superior, a phenomenon which Michael Silverstein has called "the culture of monoglot Standard" and which is represented in the United States by the hegemony of Standard American English (284). The linguistic practices that diverge from this Standard, and which often index other race and class divergences from white public space, are seen by these institutions as having an

intrinsically negative value.[9]

Down These Mean Streets inverts this power dynamic. By this, I do not mean that Standard American English necessarily stands out as marked in the text but rather that, in contrast to white public space and the culture of monoglot Standard, Thomas immerses his reader in a textual linguistic landscape where the constant admixture of standard and diverse non-standard varieties of English and Spanish establishes itself as its own internal and invisible norm, eschewing any non-standard stigmatization by maintaining an unmarked status for this composite linguistic landscape within the text.[10] Integral to the text's linguistic landscape is the continued presence of both lexical and grammatical elements of African American Vernacular English. For example, in the line "Pops…how come me and you is always on the outs? Is it something we don't know nothing about? I wonder if it's something I done, or something I am," the negative concord in "don't know nothing" and the absence of the auxiliar in "I done" are examples of the text's widespread incorporation of African American Vernacular (Thomas, *Down* 22). These uses emerge out of and seek to textually represent the interactions between African Americans and Puerto Ricans in their shared Harlem community.[11] However, beyond the continuous presence of African American Vernacular in Piri's narration, there are several exaggerated representations of African American speech that are explicitly marked in the text. These moments, I argue, provide a window into the text's political thesis.

The first instance occurs when Piri's father loses his job with the WPA,[12] and Piri accompanies his mother to the home relief office where he serves as her translator to request food and clothing. Despite his young age, Piri perceives the humiliation his mother experiences when asking for government help. While they wait their turn to

speak with the social worker, Piri overhears a woman named Mrs. Powell, whom he describes as "colored," speaking with one of the social workers:

> What you-all mean, man?…That Ah'm taking help from you-all an' hit ain't legal? Ah tole you-all that mah man done split one helluva scene on me an' the kids. Shi-it iffen that sonavabitch evah showed his skinny ass round ouah pad, Ah'd put a foot up his ass so fast his eyebrows would swing (43).

Through such strategies as replacing the "I" with the monophthongal "Ah," the use of "ain't" and using a hyphen to signal diphthongization in "Shi-it," Thomas marks Mrs. Powell's speech as distinct from both the norm established in the text and the Standard English with which the social worker questions the truth of Mrs. Powell's story. Piri comments that the social worker "had all our personal life put down in good English," attributing the social worker with access to the "good English" that allows him his unmarked status within the culture of monoglot Standard. (45). In other words, while the social worker possesses the Standard and therefore the power, Mrs. Powell embodies the opposite, representing a subaltern position through her non-standard speech.

By marking Mrs. Powell's speech to the point of exaggeration, I would argue, Thomas creates distance between Mrs. Powell and the protagonist. Nevertheless, Piri admits that "[h]er pleading was too close to my people's: taking with outstretched hands and resenting it in the same breath" (43). In other words, Piri recognizes that—in spite of their differences—the circumstance of their poverty unites them, and in this moment, Thomas hints towards a contestatory solidarity that is formed through a shared experience of oppression and that is defined in opposition to the dominant culture represented by the social worker. However, this suggestion of solidarity remains merely a gesture at this

point in the text because of Piri's investment in differentiating himself as a Puerto Rican from African Americans.

These dynamics become more explicit in a scene that follows shortly afterwards that takes place at Piri's school. Despite his pleading, Piri's teacher will not allow him to use the restroom because she thinks he simply wants to loiter in the hallways. Once Piri feels he cannot hold it any longer, he tries to leave and when the teacher physically prevents him from doing so, Piri hits her and runs out of the classroom with urine running down his leg. The principal of the school, seeking to punish Piri for hitting a teacher, chases after Piri as he bolts out of the school towards his neighborhood, a chase which Thomas describes as an "uneven contest," emphasizing the power differential between the principal and the scared child (67). Once Piri gets to the building where his family lives, his neighbor, an African American woman named Miss Washington, stands in front of him to protect him from the principal. As in the earlier scene, Thomas signals a marked contrast in the linguistic varieties employed by the principal, a representative of an institution of the culture of monoglot Standard, and Miss Washington.

In the scene that took place in the home relief office, Thomas did not indicate the ethnicity of the social worker, but the implication of the linguistic exchange was that he did not come from the same community as the people he was serving. This time, however, through Miss Washington, Thomas clearly indicates that the principal is white. When the principal explains to Miss Washington that Piri "punched a teacher and he's got to be chastised for it" she responds:

> Now hol' on, white man…There ain't nobody gonna chaz-whatever it is-this boy. I knows him an' he's a good boy-at least good for what comes outta this heah

trashy neighborhood-an' you ain't gonna do nuttin' to him. (67)

The contrast between the principal's Standard English and Miss Washington's speech not only embodies the racial division between the characters but also their opposing views on the culture of monoglot Standard. Miss Washington's response to the principal's use of the word "chastise," saying "ain't nobody gonna chaz-whatever it is-this boy" signals a solidarity (the African American woman protecting the Puerto Rican child) against the culture of the Standard represented by the principal.

Similarly, shortly afterwards, the principal states, "this young man is gifted with the most wonderful talent for prevarication I've ever seen," to which Miss Washington responds, "What's that mean?," thus emphasizing the divisions between these characters once again through their vocabulary (68). While the principal tries to make himself seem more benevolent by claiming that the term "prevarication" means imagination, Piri informs Miss Washington that the principal is actually calling Piri a liar. Based on the oppositional way in which Thomas presents the characters, it is not surprising that Miss Washington and the other neighbors believe Piri over the principal. Because of this community solidarity, the principal leaves and Piri remarks that "I felt like everybody there was my family" (69).

In spite of Piri's identification in this moment with Miss Washington as part of his family, I suggest that Thomas marks Miss Washington's speech with exaggeration in his text in order to symbolize Piri's internalization of the linguistic and racial prejudices of the culture of monoglot Standard that views difference as inherent inferiority. In other words, the linguistic representations of African American speech emblematize Piri's perception of his African American neighbors as different than, and even inferior to,

himself. Throughout Piri's childhood, he insists that he is not black but Puerto Rican, commenting, "It really bugged me when the paddies called us Puerto Ricans the same names they called our colored aces" (120). His insistence on his distinct identity, such that he corrects the insult "nigger" with "spic," reflects the protagonist's superiority complex over African Americans (32).

Piri, whose brothers and mother have light skin, learns this behavior from his father. Like Piri, his father often exaggerates his Spanish accent to try to signal to white interlocutors, who he claims are less racist towards those perceived as being "Spanish," that he is not African American. Nevertheless, although Piri does not want to recognize it, Piri belongs to a society that identifies him as black. Because of his appearance, and in spite of his feelings of superiority, Piri experiences much the same discrimination that his African American neighbors do. Considering the importance of language for marking racial difference in the text, it is not surprising that the transformation that Piri experiences in relation to his racial self-perception is manifested on a linguistic level.

For example, one of the first moments in which Piri has to confront this racialization occurs in a white community in Long Island where his family has moved. When Piri tells a white girl at the school dance that he is Puerto Rican, she is surprised because he doesn't have a Spanish accent but rather an accent that she describes as "more like Jerry's" (83). Piri thinks to himself, "*What's she tryin' to put down?*...Jerry was the colored kid who recently had moved to Bayshore" (85, emphasis original). When Piri asks her to dance, she courteously replies that she has a boyfriend, but moments later, Piri overhears her whispering to her friends, "[i]magine the nerve of that black thing" (84). Her friends respond that, Puerto Rican or not, "[h]e's still black," and therefore, should

not have asked a white girl to dance with him (86). Considering that African American speech is so marked in the text, the comment that Piri has an accent like Jerry's is suggestive since it could mean that Piri's speech and that of his African American neighbors are not as different as is represented in the text or it could suggest that Piri's physical appearance, for the girl, implies an accent that the girl predetermines even before Piri begins speaking. Whatever the reason, Piri finds himself in a system in which he is identified as black in spite of whatever self-perception he may have.

The concept of a black identity that is imposed from the outside becomes especially clear when Piri returns to Harlem and becomes friends with an African American character named Brew, who speaks very similarly to Mrs. Powell and Miss Washington. Piri and Brew start a friendly game of insults that Thomas calls the "dozens," which is slang for the verbal dueling that Claudia Mitchell-Kernan has described as a characteristic element of "black English" (Thomas *Down* 121, Mitchell-Kernan 159). In this game, Piri calls Brew an "ugly spook" to which Brew responds, "[d]ig this Negro calling out 'spook'" (121). When Piri insists, like he has throughout the text, that he's not black, but Puerto Rican, Brew remarks, "You think that means anything to them James Crow paddies?," meaning Southern white racists (123). For Brew, blackness is an essentializing and homogenizing category assigned by those in power, a concept akin to what Frantz Fanon has called being "sur-déterminé de l'extérieur" ["overdetermined from the outside"] (*Peau noire* 93; *Black Skin* 95). Therefore, according to Brew, "Jus' cause you can rattle off some different kinda language don' change your skin one bit. Whatta yuh all think? That the only niggers in this world are in this fucked-up country?" (Thomas, *Down* 124).

This conversation with Brew begins a process of personal transformation for Piri that results in his deciding to travel to the U.S. South to see "what a *moyeto's*[13] worth and the paddy's weight on him" (143, italics original). In other words, he wants to experience a racial power structure to which he is subject that, while certainly present in the North, manifests itself most obviously in the Jim Crow South. Piri's growing sense that he is united with African Americans through a shared experience of oppression by white, dominant culture becomes more explicit when Piri is asked to leave a white restaurant in Mobile, Alabama. The racial divisions in the South offer a clear and honest picture of the inequalities that Piri has felt subconsciously throughout his life in which the constitutional promise of equality is "only meant for paddies. It's their national anthem, their sweet land of liberty" (123).

The image of racism and inequality with which Piri is confronted in the South is, for Thomas, only a microcosm of a larger structure. From the South, Piri decides to go work on the U.S. Merchant Marine, which allows him to travel around the world delivering U.S. goods. On these travels, Piri discovers that "[w]herever I went—France, Italy, South America, England—it was the same. It was like Brew said: any language you talk, if you're black, you're black" (191). In this sense, the Jim Crow South becomes emblematic of a global system of inequality in which blackness indexes a transnational and translinguistic subalternity that is oppositional to an equally global "white" oppressor**.**

Much in the same way that Thomas employs the U.S. South as a lens through which to view a global system, I argue that Thomas takes up the Jim Crow overdetermined category of blackness to describe a transnational subaltern subjectivity

that is, like that of the Tricontinental, not intended to be essentializing or racially deterministic. This becomes most clear in the two instances that occur immediately before and after Piri's trip to the South when Piri himself employs the marked variety of African American Vernacular that he previously attributed to African American characters. Before leaving for the South, Piri tells his blonde-haired, blue-eyed younger brother, José, that he has realized that he is black, meaning, according to Piri, that his brother is also black on the "inside" (145). José responds indignantly, claiming that their father's dark skin color comes from "Indian blood," a view that reflects a Hispanic Caribbean discourse of *mestizaje* that often recognizes the mixing of Spanish and Amerindian peoples as the foundations of the nation while implying an erasure of Afro-descendancy. Piri responds to this familiar rhetoric with "Poppa's got *moyeto* blood. I got it. Sis got it. James got it. And, mah deah brudder, you-all got it!" (145). "[M]ah deah brudder" is the first time that Piri employs the marked variety of African American Vernacular that, until this point, has only been used to mark difference in the text. This conversation ends in a physical fight between Piri and his brother with José screaming, "I-am-*white*! And you can go to hell!" (145, emphasis original).

This scene is very similar to the second and only other time that Piri imitates African American Vernacular, which occurs shortly after Piri's return from his travels when Piri looks through his father's things and finds a picture of his father's mistress, who is white. Because of his anger against his father for having deceived his mother and for seeking out relationships with white women, Piri decides "to get back at Poppa somehow" (198). His revenge against his father takes the form of appropriating African American speech, saying, "Why, sho' man, if'n yuh sho' nuff willin', you can sho' nuff

go wif me all," to which his father responds, "Stop that goddamn way of talking" (198). Piri continues, "Why sho', Pops,' I said, 'if y'all doan' like the way Ah's speakin', I reckon Ah could cut it out" (198). This infuriates his father who attacks Piri, hitting him and screaming at him to stop "[t]alking like you came from some goddamned cotton field" (199).

The fact that Piri's appropriation of these exaggerated representations of African American speech provokes such anger in Piri's family members is suggestive because it implies that these characters adhere to a linguistic ideology in which African American Vernacular English occupies the lowest value status, and in this way, reflects the racial hierarchy of which the Jim Crow South is a microcosm. In earlier scenes, such as in the social services office, Thomas marked the speech of African American women in order to signify, at the linguistic level, the distance between the social worker and his client and in order to suggest the perceived differences between Puerto Ricans and African Americans that underlay the protagonist's feelings of superiority. Piri's explicit appropriation of African American speech in these scenes represents for Piri's father and brother the inversion of the social structure through which they see themselves as superior to their African American neighbors.

Although Piri appropriates African American speech in order to identity himself as black, he does it in a marked and stereotyped way, and thus, in one sense, maintains a difference between himself and African Americans in the very moment in which he attempts to undermine those differences. Piri describes the pronunciation he uses to emphasize his identification with black people as a "southern drawl" (198). This Southern way of speaking has little to do with Piri's actual background and experience.

It is not, unlike his physical appearance, an integral part of himself that he finally accepts and embraces, but rather a foreign identity that he appropriates.

In this sense, the moments in which Piri speaks in such a marked and "southern" way suggest that what Piri wants to communicate to his family transcends skin color. If the Jim Crow South is a symbol of a global system, then appropriating a black, Southern identity suggests that, in addition to recognizing himself as phenotypically black, Piri positions himself in the place of the oppressed. Through ventriloquizing African American speech, he aims to communicate that he, as a Puerto Rican, is subject to the same system of exploitation as those who come from the "cotton field" (199).

In both of the moments in which Piri imitates African American speech, although Piri does point to a racial biological essentialism that—within a U.S.-based racial framework—would make his father and his blonde brother black, what Piri articulates much more adamantly and what most infuriates his family is his identification with a Southern black identity. The blackness to which Piri lays claim and which he wants to communicate to his family is not merely based on biology; it is a colonialist-cum-Jim Crow construction of blackness that he appropriates and imbues with political meaning. African American Vernacular here functions as a dual sign through which Piri performs his victimization to a system of exploitation and, by pointing to his solidarity with African Americans, performs his resistance to that system.[14] In this sense, blackness emerges in the text as a political category and tool rather than a biologically essentialist conceptualization.

This analysis of the linguistic and racial hierarchies that the text exposes and that Thomas uses to communicate a politically contestatory position, clarifies several issues

that consistently trouble critics. For example, Lyn Di Iorio Sandín argues that the disappearance of Brew from the text "has the effect of leaving the race question disturbingly unresolved" and many readings of *Down These Mean Streets* (Caminero-Santangelo; Pérez, R.; Sandín) have struggled to understand a shift that occurs towards the end of the novel in which Piri seems to re-embrace racist stereotypes of black people (112). For example, in a scene towards the end of the novel that takes place in Comstock prison, where Piri was sentenced for seven years for an armed robbery and for shooting a policeman a few years after his return from the South, Piri is approached by three inmates who he senses are planning to sexually assault him or who have "the *carcel* [sic] look of wolves digging a stone lamb" (Thomas, *Down* 251, italics original). Rocky, an African American inmate, asks Piri to draw a picture of him and Piri draws him as a "funny-book black cannibal, complete with a big bone through his nose," which infuriates Rocky (252).

The racism of the drawing is unsettling because as Richard Pérez has indicated, "the drawing captures Rocky in the same racial language Piri has struggled against throughout the novel" (103). According to Valérie Loichot,

> In white racist fantasies, both the act of cannibalism and rape lead to the fear of annihilation of the white man: the first by swallowing him up, the second by 'contaminating' his progeny through the rape of white girls and women. Cannibalism and miscegenation thus lead to the same fear of disappearing whiteness. (121)

In other words, by attributing the man who threatens to rape him with the image of a black cannibal, Piri reproduces a fiction in which rape, dark skin color and cannibalism

are collapsed into a white, colonialist fear of blackness.

While I do not deny that the drawing reifies racist stereotypes, considering the previous discussion of Piri's use of African American Vernacular, this moment might be read differently. Through the drawing, Piri makes light of Rocky's attempted rape of him and indicates his lack of fear of him by configuring Rocky as an exaggerated stereotype of blackness in the colonial imaginary. The cannibal of the drawing, which is coded as a rapist, is presented as an ideological construct that Piri finds unthreatening. At this late point in the text, it has already been established that Piri accepts his African ancestry as well as his skin color, but like his ventriloquizing of African American speech in which Piri performs blackness, Piri points in the drawing to a dissociation between phenotypic appearance and the construction of blackness within colonial discourse. Although one cannot deny the reproduction of racist images in the drawing and in his imitation of African American Vernacular, it is important to understand that in each of these cases, Piri uses these symbols as weapons. Whereas the young Piri believed subconsciously in the ideology that gave meaning to these colonialist caricatures, such as that of the cannibal, for Piri, as an adult, this image has become nothing more than a tool that he can wield for his own ends.

However, Thomas does not just stop with a Calibanesque reclaiming of the cannibal as weapon. As the essentialist notions of blackness begin to lose their weight, Piri also begins to see whiteness as a construct that becomes destabilized from a direct relationship to white skin color. This represents another area in the text that has bothered some critics. During his incarceration, Piri converts to the Nation of Islam. When the imam in prison states, "God or Jehovah is the white man's God and he's used his

Christianity as a main weapon against the dark-skinned inhabitants of this world," this theology resonates with Piri because he had long been bothered by the allegedly white appearance of Jesus Christ (291). For example, in a previous scene, Piri symbolically blows smoke in the face of a portrait of a white Jesus at Brew's apartment.

However, at the end of the book, he embraces the Christianity with which his parents raised him, saying, "If God is right, so what if he's white?" (323). Critics have struggled with this easy acceptance of a white God since the entire book up to this point is dedicated to breaking down white supremacist notions. Sandín explains this moment with the comment that "[t]he passage in which he takes on the white God is extremely brief, facile, and unconvincing, even if we know that in real life, Piri did take on religion" (115). Similarly, Sánchez González maintains that Piri's "journey hits a dead end, when Piri capitulates his will and word to a divine and conspicuously white father figure whose omniscience is absolute and unfathomable, thus permanently deferring the text's hermeneutical crisis" (108). However, instead of dismissing Piri's comment (Thomas did not just convert to Christianity; he wrote an entire book about it called *Savior, Savior Hold My Hand* (1972)) or viewing this moment as indicative of the text's ultimate failure, I think that when read within the context of the previous discussion, Piri's comment can be interpreted entirely differently.

If we accept that the text emphasizes a separation between phenotype and the colonialist iconography attached to that phenotype, such that the categories of black and white become unhinged from racial essentialisms, then the idea of a white God is revealed as a farce. The rhyme and playful tone of the phrase, "If God is right, so what if He's white," certainly suggests as much. Instead of signaling a rejection of all that Piri

has stated, this phrase represents the culmination of an ideology that has developed throughout the text that attempts, through dissociating skin color from colonialist stereotypes, to unhinge those essentialisms that apply color to beings as ethereal as gods.

Through Piri's ideological transformation, Thomas argues for the existence of a deterritorialized hegemony and proposes a resistant political solidarity that crosses ethnic and linguistic boundaries. Although this solidarity employs a colonial vocabulary by defining itself in terms of race, it eventually seeks to destabilize racial categories, proposing a resistant subjectivity that is fundamentally inclusive, a concept to which Piri hints at the end of the novel, stating "[a]round the world, hear this, North and South, East and West: We are all the same in our souls and spirits and there's nobody better than anybody else, only just maybe better off" (199). This tricontinentalist vision that Thomas proposes is, like the Tricontinental itself, not a perfect model for international solidarity among subaltern groups; the politics of representation of women and non-heteronormative subjects in the text, for example, are highly problematic and have been widely commented. However, reading *Down These Mean Streets* within the context of tricontinentalism sheds light on Thomas's use of race as a political signifier for a global subaltern subjectivity, a vision that, I maintain, undergirds contemporary notions of subaltern politics.

To Be Called Negrito Means to Be Called LOVE

The reading I have provided of *Down These Mean Streets* is intended to open the door to critical re-readings of other Nuyorican and related radicalist writings that would address these texts' engagement with, or positioning towards, a tricontinentalist ideology

and thus better situate them not only within the context in which they were composed but also address their influence over our contemporary context. For example, it is well-known that several of the Nuyorican poets, such as Pedro Pietri, Felipe Luciano, and Pablo 'Yoruba' Guzmán, were actively involved with the Young Lords Party, a political group whose contextualization within contemporary scholarship generally does not extend beyond its association with the Black Power and Puerto Rican nationalists movements (Dalleo and Machado Sáez; McGill). Yet the tricontinentalism in the writings of the Young Lords is quite explicit.

The Young Lords Organization (YLO), which formed in Chicago the same year (1967) that *Down These Mean Streets* was published, was a street gang turned revolutionary organization under the leadership of José "Cha Cha" Jiménez that took on real estate developers who were evicting Puerto Ricans from their Lincoln Park homes. News of the YLO reached New York when the June 7, 1969 issue of the Black Panther Party's newspaper published an article about the formation of a Rainbow Coalition among the Chicago Black Panther Party, the YLO and the Young Patriots Organization (a white street gang turned leftist political activist organization aimed at assisting migrants from the Appalachia region) (Abramson and Young Lords Party 10). Shortly afterwards, young Puerto Ricans of several New York organizations such as the Puerto Rican nationalist Sociedad Albizu Campos [Albizu Campos Society], which was named after the Puerto Rican independence leader and president from 1930 to 1965 of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party Pedro Albizu Campos, joined together to form the New York chapter.

The membership of the New York chapter, which would eventually reach the

thousands, was primarily made up of Puerto Rican youths who were from working class and Spanish-speaking families and who were born or raised stateside but also included Mexicans, Dominicans and Cubans. Twenty percent of its membership was African American (3). Within months, they founded their own bilingual newspaper, *Palante*, as well as a radio show, organized the famous Garbage Offensive, in which they forced the city's garbage collection to clean up East Harlem's trash by piling it in the middle of the street and causing a traffic barricade, and convened free breakfast and lead poisoning detection programs and political education meetings (9). The New York chapter of the YLO, which changed its name to the Young Lords Party in 1970, was especially inclusive. Beginning in 1970, women occupied central leadership roles in the organization, both a women's caucus and a lesbian and gay caucus were formed, and the leadership took a strong stance against discrimination towards these groups.

According to member Iris Morales, the Young Lords envisioned themselves as "part of a larger movement […] connected with millions of people" and were moved to change a world social and economic order by the "Cuban and Chinese revolutions and by liberation struggles in African and Latin America" (4). In October 1969, the Young Lords released their Thirteen Point Program and Platform. This platform, which they revised in May of 1970 to be more critical of *machismo* and more inclusive of women, was published along with a Young Lords position paper on women's roles in liberation struggles in the March 1971 issue of *Tricontinental Bulletin* with illustrations of Young Lords' Minister of Finance Denise Oliver on the front cover and Denise Oliver and Field Marshall Gloria González on the back cover. In this platform, the Young Lords describe themselves as a "revolutionary party fighting for the liberation" of "all colored and

oppressed people" and state that "the Latin, Black, indian [sic], and Asian people inside the u.s.[sic] are colonies fighting for liberation" (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 60: 20-21).

Fig. 2, 3—*Tricontinental Bulletin* 60.

Among these oppressed people, The Young Lords attribute a particularly representative position to African Americans. For example, in a 1971 compilation of Young Lords writings called *Palante: Voices and Photographs of the Young Lords, 1969-1971*, Deputy Minister of Information Pablo 'Yoruba' Guzmán writes:

> We know that the number-one group that's leading the struggle are Black people, 'cause Black people—if we remember the rule says the most oppressed will take the vanguard role in the struggle—Black people, man, have gone through the most shit. (Abramson and Young Lords Party 74)

This position is frequently summarized in Young Lords materials by their consistent spelling of America as "Amerikkka." Like in the arguments made in the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, Álvarez's *Now* and Piri Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets*, the racial oppression of the Jim Crow South, of which the KKK is a clear symbol, emerges as a

microcosm of an unequal power structure not only in America but metonymically around the globe. Just as the KKK, like the white policeman in *Now,* stand in for that global hegemony, "black people" in the U.S. epitomize for the Young Lords those "colored and oppressed people" around the world (*Tricontinental* 60:20).

Central to the Young Lords' solidarity with African Americans is their critique of the racism, as exemplified in *Down These Mean Streets* by Piri's family members, by some Puerto Ricans towards their African American neighbors in Harlem. Guzmán writes:

> [E]ven in New York, we found that on a grass-roots level a high degree of racism existed between Puerto Ricans and Blacks, and between light-skinned and dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. We had to deal with this racism because it blocked any kind of growth for our people, any understanding of the things Black people had gone through. So rather than watching Rap Brown on TV, rather than learning from that and saying, 'Well, that should affect me too,' Puerto Ricans said, 'Well yeah, those Blacks got a hard time, you know, but we ain't going through the same thing.' This was especially true for the light-skinned Puerto Ricans, Puerto Ricans like myself, who are dark-skinned, who look like Afro-Americans, couldn't do that, 'cause to do that would be to escape into a kind of fantasy. Because before people called me a spic, they called me a nigger. (Abramson and Young Lords Party 68)

Guzmán's position was embraced by the Young Lords membership, which was largely made up of black Puerto Ricans, leading them not only to critique racism against African Americans but also to insist in the fourth point of their thirteen-point platform

that "Puerto Ricans are of all colors and we resist racism. Millions of poor white people are rising up to demand freedom and we support them […] Power to all oppressed people!" (*Tricontinental Bulletin* 60: 21). In other words, just as Robert Williams's description of Castro as "colored" placed him among Guevara's "we, the exploited people of the world," the Young Lords' representation of "colored and oppressed peoples" is not meant to be a descriptor of physical appearance. "Colored" becomes a political signifier, rather than an ethnic signifier, of a global revolutionary subjectivity.

The Young Lords were influential in their community and in the Nuyorican cultural production from this period. For example, the most famous text of the Nuyorican Movement, second only to *Down These Mean Streets*, is Pedro Pietri's "Puerto Rican Obituary." Pietri first performed this poem in December 1969 at the First Spanish Methodist Church in Harlem, which the Young Lords rebranded the People's Church, occupying it for eleven days in order to provide free clothing drives, breakfast programs, day care center, health programs and nightly entertainment, such as poetry readings (Dalleo and Machado Sáez 17). Newsreel, a network of radical filmmakers which formed in 1967 and which took its signature image of a machine gun spitting out its logo from Álvarez's *Now,* got the entire church take-over as well as Pietri's performance on film, releasing the footage in the film *El pueblo se levanta* (1971).[15]

Pietri presents the now widely known poem as an obituary for the general Puerto Rican migrant population, to whom Pietri gives the common names "Juan, Miguel, Milagros, Olga, Manuel," writing not just for people who have died in the past, but for those "who died yesterday today/ and will die again tomorrow" (15). The poet associates this dying with the "empty dreams" of Puerto Rican emigration to the United States,

claiming, “All died dreaming about America” (16). In other words, the very notion of the American Dream, in which the immigrant pulls herself up out of poverty through hard work, inversely represents the death of Pietri’s characters.

The poem ends with a nostalgic vision in which the poetic voice imagines that “[i]f only they/ had turned off the television/and tuned into their imagination/ If only they/ had used the white supremacy bibles/ for toilet paper purpose,” then they would have been “where the wind is a stranger/ to miserable weather conditions/ where you do not need a dictionary/ to communicate with your people/ Aquí Se Habla Español all the time” (23-4). This ending has generally been read as an idealistic return to Puerto Rico. However, in the final lines of the poem, these references to Puerto Rico take on a more political tone: “Aquí Qué Pasa Power is what’s happening/ Aquí to be called negrito/ means to be called LOVE” (24, emphasis original). While the reference to Black Power is quite obvious, it is the final line of the poem that, in the context of tricontinentalism, calls my attention.

Pietri’s use of the word “negrito,” employed throughout the Hispanic Caribbean as an affectionate term for children and partners regardless of their appearance or ethnicity, has been interpreted as conveying an idealistic vision of Puerto Rico as a place free of the racism in the mainland United States. Certainly this reading is a valid one, but considering the context in which Pietri first performed this poem, two years after *Down These Mean Streets* was published, in the midst of the Young Lords’ takeover the First Spanish Methodist Church, and in the presence of Newsreel filmmakers who took their cues from Álvarez, I am inclined to read this line differently. “Aquí” [“Here”] in the space of the church, the space of a common resistant subjectivity where Puerto Ricans,

African Americans, Dominicans, Chicanos, Anglo-Americans and others come together for a common political purpose, the word "negrito," like Robert Williams's and the Young Lords' use of the term "colored," captures in a word the revolutionary subjectivity of the Tricontinental.

Referencing Hardt and Negri's notion of the multitude, which in the first chapter I compared to the transnational and transethnic concept of global subaltern subjectivity defined by the Tricontinental, Jon Beasley-Murray argues in *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America* (2010) that the multitude, which he acknowledges "is not the traditional working class" nor "the delimited identities of cultural studies' multicultural alliance" is characterized by its openness and inclusivity (228). He writes, "the multitude's immanent expansion proceeds by means of *contiguity* and contact, in resonances established through affective encounter'" (234, emphasis original). By ending his poem with the phrase "to be called to negrito/ means to be called LOVE," I suggest that Pietri refers precisely to that affective encounter that Beasley-Murray describes that binds the "colored" peoples of the Tricontinental together. Piri Thomas would, in fact, echo this same sentiment in his 1975 essay "A Bicentennial Without a Puerto Rican Colony," writing, "No revolution can succeed unless it is built on the firm foundation of love and understanding, a unity among all the colors." This expansive unity is built through mutual empathy, in which others' struggles are integrated into one's own.

In this way, I do not read Pietri's reference to the affectionate term "negrito" as an idealized dismissal of the presence of racism in Puerto Rico or in the Hispanic Caribbean; in fact, it is quite the opposite. Reading his poem through the lens of tricontinentalism

suggests that Pietri sums up in the word "negrito" the presence of a deterritorialized imperial and racist power structure that leads to the creation of a new revolutionary subjectivity among the exploited or among those "colored and oppressed peoples" that gathered at the People's Church and that the Tricontinental sought to define.

In this sense, "negrito" in Pietri's poem functions similarly to the word "nigger" in Young Lords Deputy Chairman Felipe Luciano's poem, "Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger," which appeared both in 1970 on the first album by The Original Last Poets, an African American and Puerto Rican performance poetry and music group that laid the groundwork for the emergence of hip-hop and in which Luciano was a founding member, and in their 1968 film *Right On!: Poetry on Film*, directed by Herbert Danska. "Jíbaro, My Pretty Nigger," uses the pejorative term "nigger" in its reclaimed status among some African American users as a term of endearment, to signify a shared belonging among Puerto Ricans born stateside and those born on the island who have migrated. "Jíbaro," a Puerto Rican term referring to a peasant or poor farmer, a figure generally considered the emblem of traditional Puerto Rican life and customs, signifies here a common ancestry in the Puerto Rican countryside and a common experience of migration, or of being, as the poem states, "vomited [...] up on the harbors of a cold metal city to die."

Much in the same way that Thomas uses African American Vernacular English to communicate his solidarity with African Americans, Luciano employs the slang word "nigga" to signify community among Puerto Ricans. He writes, "yea, you my cold nigga man/ And I love you 'cause you're mine," a line that directly recalls Pietri's "to be called negrito means to be called LOVE." However, interestingly, in a poem about Puerto Rican nationalism, Luciano does not use the Puerto Rican term "negrito" but rather the

English pejorative "nigger" as well as the African American Vernacular term "nigga." In this way, Luciano privileges African American experience and, similar to tricontinentalism, appropriates the Jim Crow vocabulary of racialization in order to signify a transnational and transethnic solidarity shared not only among Puerto Ricans but with African Americans and exploited people everywhere.

The writings analyzed in this chapter by Luciano, Pietri and Thomas serve as examples for reading Nuyorican and other radicalist writings in the Americas from the late 1960s through the lens of tricontinentalism. In producing these tricontinentalist readings, I intend to suggest these texts as part of a much larger, international body of cultural production. Although Nuyorican cultural production is not commonly studied alongside Cuban films or the Tricontinental's political ephemera, these divisions are simply a product of the traditional categories that have determined the study of cultural production, categories for which tricontinentalists had little use or concern. Readings these texts within the light of tricontinentalism not only helps us understand them better but also allows us to consider the impact that these writers have had on a contemporary hemispheric American imaginary in which a term like the Global South is easily integrated into our vocabulary and in which movements of political solidarity spanning national, linguistic and ethnic boundaries are commonplace. Although the significant influence these writers have had on that imaginary has long gone unrecognized, their ideas have, in fact, endured, informing contemporary understandings of present-day subaltern resistant subjectivities.

[1] The term "Nuyorican" refers to people of Puerto Rican descent born and raised in New York. *Neorriqueño*, which combines *neoyorquino* [New Yorker] and *puertorriqueño* [Puerto Rican] and which was originally used disparagingly by island Puerto Ricans to describe New York Puerto Ricans, is often seen as the etymological origin for "Nuyorican." Jaime Carrero was the first to use the term in a literary text in his *Jet neorriqueño: Neo-Rican Jetliner* (1964), which parodies the speech patterns of New York Puerto Ricans. However, none of the New York Puerto Rican poets of the late 1960s and 70s used Nuyorican, Neo-Rican, *neorriqueño* or any variation in their writings. It was not until Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero's founding of the Nuyorican Poets Café in 1973 and the publication of their foundational *Nuyorican Poetry* (1975) anthology that such a term became more commonly used (Noel 15-16). Piñero and Algarín reclaimed the term, replacing, according to Urayoán Noel, "the *Neo-Rican* (as in Carrero's funny but problematic chapbook) with a politically empowered and linguistically savvy *Nuyorican*" that captured the ethnic pride and political consciousness of the moment (17). Although Piri Thomas was himself resistant to the term "Nuyorican" for its categorizing impulse, claiming he wanted to be "a citizen of the world," since *Nuyorican Poetry* anthologized the generation of writers to which Piri Thomas belonged and since the Nuyorican Movement generally refers in contemporary scholarship to the political and cultural outpouring of the 1960s and 70s, I will use this term to refer to Piri Thomas and the other writers discussed in this chapter (Thomas, "A Conversation" 182).

[2] Operation Bootstrap refers to the rapid industrialization campaign of Puerto Rico that began at the end of WWII in which Puerto Rico's Popular Democratic Party (PPD) encouraged U.S. industries to set up subsidiary manufacturing plants in Puerto Rico in

order to take advantage of the island's lower labor costs and tax breaks. Ironically, these economic changes yielded a net decrease in jobs on the island, resulting in massive migration to the mainland United States throughout the 1950s. See Milia-Marie-Luce.

[3] The Young Lords was a revolutionary organization made up of primarily Puerto Rican and African American youth that based itself on the model of the Black Panther Party. It began in Chicago in 1967; the New York chapter formed in 1969 and changed their name to the Young Lords Party in 1970. The Young Lords were militants, community organizers, and supported Puerto Rican nationalistm. They will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

[4] I will refer to the author as Thomas and the protagonist as Piri throughout this chapter.

[5] *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* (2010), edited by Juan Flores and Miriam Jiménez Román, explains that, since the 1990s, the term "Afro-Latin@"—beyond its obvious attention to gender in the use of the ampersat—has surfaced primarily in the United States to "signal racial, cultural, and socioeconomic contradictions within the overly vague idea of 'Latin@'" and to emphasize that black and Latin@ are not mutually exclusive (2). While the term "Afro-Latin@," which refers to "Latin@s of visible or self-proclaimed African descent," has not traditionally been commonly used, according to Flores and Jiménez Román, "Afro-Latin@s increasingly identify as such in recent years" (4). Drawing from W.E.B. Du Bois, they define the complexity of the experience of U.S. Afro-Latin@s as one of "triple consciousness," in which one is simultaneously "a Latin@, a Negro, an American […] three warring ideals in one dark body" (15).

[6] For more on Schomburg and his writings, see Flores and Jiménez Román; Sánchez González; and Sinnette.

[7] For these and other data on Puerto Rican migration, see Picó.

[8] Many studies have discussed how Hispanic American discourses on *mestizaje* often emphasize indigenous and Hispanic origins, thus reflecting a dual claim to belonging and ownership of the nation, while eliding the presence and influence of African descendants. One of the most well known of these studies is Richard L. Jackson's *The Black Image in Latin American Literature* (1976).

[9] See Bucholz and Hall for a concise discussion of this phenomenon.

[10] Although one could argue that Thomas's italicization of Spanish terms as well as the glossary at the end of the book, which translates Spanish and slang terms into Standard English, serves to reestablish the ideology of the Standard over the text, I would argue that the complexity of the linguistic environment of Thomas's fictionalized *barrio* still functions as the norm of the text.

[11] For studies of the linguistic interactions among African Americans and Puerto Ricans in Harlem, see Urcioli; and Zentella.

[12] The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a national program started in 1935 under President Roosevelt's New Deal that provided employment to unemployed laborers by contracting them in public works projects.

[13] *Moyeto*, which is sometimes spelled *molleto*, is a slang term, used in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, to refer to a dark-skinned, muscular man.

[14] In "The African-American Speech Community: Reality and Sociolinguists," Marcyliena Morgan discusses perceptions of African American Vernacular English within African American communities, where, she claims, it is perceived positively by some people as an explicit rejection of the notion of Standard American English's

inherent value and negatively by others because of its original formation on Southern plantations. Morgan maintains that African American Vernacular English is a dual sign of both oppression and liberation. In other words, its use reflects a power differential and simultaneously presents itself as a counter-hegemonic sign.

[15] For more information on Newsreel, see Chapter 3, "Newsreel: Rethinking the Filmmaking Arm of the New Left" from Cynthia Young's *Soul Power*.

CHAPTER 3

Todos los negros y todos los blancos tomamos café: Racial Discourse in Tricontinental Cuba

The Tricontinental's ideology circulated widely among radicals in the Americas and around the world. It influenced the cultural production of leftist movements and helped shape a vision of transnational political resistance that is becoming increasingly relevant to our contemporary reality. Through the Tricontinental's focus on the African American freedom struggle and through Cuba's primary role in producing the Tricontinental's cultural production, Revolutionary Cuba presented itself to the world as a government deeply committed to the struggle for racial equality. This image of Cuba allowed organizations like the Young Lords and the Black Panthers to view their struggle as aligned with the Cuban Revolution and to envision their local movement as part of a global, Tricontinental one and even encouraged some U.S. black militants to see Cuba as a safe haven in which to seek asylum.

One such person is Assata Shakur, the former Black Panther who escaped prison in 1979 and who received asylum in Cuba in 1984. On May 2, 2013, Shakur became the first woman to be placed on the FBI's list of Most Wanted Terrorists. This announcement, made on the fortieth anniversary of the death of the New Jersey state trooper who she was convicted of murdering, has been highly controversial since Shakur maintains her innocence and claims that she is a victim of an FBI counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) that specifically targeted domestic black militant groups. Due to this controversy and the countless articles that have appeared about it in the global media, public interest has been renewed in Cuba's long commitment to the African American freedom struggle and its role in protecting African American militants from

capture by the U.S. government.

Only six weeks prior to the FBI's announcement of Shakur's terrorist status, Roberto Zurbano Torres, Afro-Cuban[1] scholar and former Editor-in-Chief of Cuba's famed cultural organization Casa de las Américas, published an article in *The New York Times* entitled "For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn't Begun." In this article, Torres claims that the economic reforms in Cuba over the last ten years, which reflect an increasing trend toward private enterprise, have disproportionately benefited white Cubans who use funds provided by their families in Miami to convert their houses into private restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts. Racial inequality in Cuba is nothing new, Torres explains, "and a half century of revolution since 1959 has been unable to overcome it."

Torres attributes this lack of progress to the official silence surrounding the problem of racism in Cuba. The Revolution's claim in 1962 to have ended racism on the island meant that, for many years, it was seen as counterrevolutionary to publically raise the issue of black Cubans' restricted social mobility. The government's silence regarding the nation's racial inequalities has only reinforced the problem, Torres explains, and his article seeks to open up dialogue so as to "bring about solutions that have for so long been promised, and awaited, by black Cubans."

In the week that followed the publication of his article, Torres experienced a tremendous backlash in the Cuban press. *La Jiribilla*, a weekly digital arts and culture magazine, published seven rebuttles, all written by leading Afro-Cuban intellectuals, in its March 30-April 5, 2013 issue. Much of the protest responded to the article's title (which Zurbano later claimed was mistranslated by *The New York Times*) because the

phrase "the Revolution hasn't begun" seemed to imply that the Revolution had done nothing to improve the lives of black Cubans.[2] Others acknowledged that there was truth to what Torres wrote but claimed that these debates needed to remain "entre nosotros" ["between us"] and critiqued him for publishing the article in *The New York Times* (Fernández).

According to Desiderio Navarro's analysis of the role of the intellectual in Revolutionary Cuba in "In Medias Res Publicas: On Intellectuals and Social Criticism in the Cuban Public Sphere" (2001), the notion that Cuban intellectuals should not provide the Revolution's enemies with any critique that would further the negative propaganda against it, as well as the insistence that a critique of any negative element of Cuban society is only legitimate when it notes the positives that exist alongside it, are common rhetorical strategies that have been used over the last fifty years to limit social criticism in the public sphere in Cuba. This has especially been the case with taboo subjects like prostitution and racism. Equally common, Navarro notes, are the reprisals through which the Cuban government disciplines intellectuals that step out of bounds. Indeed, the day after *La Jiribilla* published its seven responses to Torres's article, Torres was demoted from his position as Editor-in-Chief at the Casa de las Américas to that of a researcher.

Torres responded to the controversy in an article entitled "Mañana será tarde: Escucho, aprendo, y sigo en la pelea" ["Tomorrow Will Be Too Late: I Listen, I Learn, and I Continue in the Struggle"],[3] published one week later in the April 13th-19th issue of *La Jiribilla*, in which he claims that his commitment to fighting racial discrimination is in line with the Revolution's own goals. He defends his decision to publish in a U.S. press, instead of in a Cuban publication, because racism is "un fenómeno globalizado y la lucha

contra este va más allá de cualquier frontera" ["a globalized phenomenon and the fight against it goes beyond any border"] and because this venue allowed him to expand the discussion to a global audience.

I introduce these two instances, Shakur's exile in Cuba and Torres's efforts to increase the visibility of racial inequalities in Cuba, because of the way in which their juxtaposition points to a dissonance between Cuba's international and Tricontinental discourse on racial inequality, in which Cuba has been an outspoken supporter of black liberation movements, and its domestic one, in which people have had to struggle, sometimes risking their careers and well-being, in order to further public dialogue on racism. Torres's argument in "Mañana será tarde: Escucho, aprendo, y sigo en la pelea" that racial discrimination is a global problem allows him to defend publishing his piece within the U.S. media and to claim that exposing racism anywhere, even within Cuba itself, is an act aligned with the Revolution's goals. In other words, Torres uses the Castro government's own rhetoric on global racial inequality, which it articulated most clearly through participation in the Tricontinental, to justify writing about the existence of racial inequality in Cuba.

This rhetorical strategy is not new. In fact, in the years immediately following the Tricontinental conference in 1966, the Tricontinental's vision of racial discrimination as essential to the continuity of a deterritorialized imperialist power structure provided Cubans with a ready-made platform for discussing racism at home. To call attention to the presence of racial discrimination was to call attention to the way in which the Revolution was not living up to its ideals, and thus rhetorically, could be posited as a critique of the Castro government that was still pro-Revolutionary. This strategy, in

which the critic posits himself as more revolutionary and, in the cases discussed here, more tricontinentalist than the Revolution itself, will be the primary avenue for articulating a counter-argument to the Castro's regime's racial politics. Through an analysis of an ICAIC newsreel *Coffea arábiga* (1968) by Afro-Cuban filmmaker Nicolás Guillén Landrián, the following chapter offers a case study of how the Tricontinental provides a platform from which to launch a critique of the Cuban government's hypocritical dismissal of domestic racial inequalities. In this film, Guillén Landrián appropriates the Tricontinental's theory of the concurrence of imperial power and racial hierarchy, as well as the filmic aesthetic of its newsreels, in order to expose racial discrimination within the Revolution.

In the previous chapters, I addressed the global and multiple roots of tricontinentalism as well as the equally transnational extent of its influence. In these pages, I examine how tricontinentalism has been used to critique the Cuban Revolution's racial politics. In this way, I intend to illustrate how tricontinentalism as an ideology escapes and transcends the Cuban Revolution's own politics and rhetoric, maintaining its influence long after the international Left parted ways with the Castro government.

Nicolás Guillén Landrián: An Introduction

In the last interview before his death, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, Afro-Cuban filmmaker and painter and nephew of the Cuban Revolution's first poet laureaute Nicolás Guillén, said he wanted people to remember him in the following way:

> Como un negro de seis pies de estatura, ameno, inteligente, cariñoso con todo el que pudiera serlo…Que me recuerden así. Como artista, ahí está mi obra.

> Continúo siendo artista, sigo pintando, ya hice un documental. Que me recuerden como yo creo que soy…Un buen tipo. Sí. Un buen tipo. ("El cine")
>
> [As a black guy six feet tall, pleasant, intelligent, affectionate with everything you can be affectionate with…Remember me like that. As an artist, my work is there. I am still an artist, I still paint, I made a documentary. People should remember me as I think I am…A good guy. Yes. A good guy.][4]

Immediately prior to this statement in Guillén Landrián's interview with Cuban filmmaker Manuel Zayas for a documentary on his life and work called *Café con leche* [*Coffee with Milk*] (2003), Guillén Landrián mentioned a script he once proposed for his only fictional film. It was called *Buena gente* [*Good People*] and was about "un individuo muy buena gente" ["a very good type guy"] that plots to kill a head of state. Not surprisingly, considering the subversive subject matter of the film, the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) did not approve the script and the film was never made. Instead, Guillén Landrián maintains, the script was used at his trial as evidence of his counterrevolutionary sentiments, even though, the filmmaker remarks with apparent sarcasm, "el filme tenía un happy end de carajo" ["the movie had a damn happy end"]. With the seemingly benign final words in which he describes himself as "un buen tipo" ["a good guy"], Guillén Landrián suggests a parallel between himself and the protagonist of his never realized fictional film, closing his final interview with the characteristic irony and fearless iconoclasm for which his films have become known.

Guillén Landrián died shortly after this interview, on July 21, 2003, of pancreatic cancer in a Miami hospital. His widow, Gretel Alfonso Fuentes, returned to Havana where she buried him in the Colón Cemetery and where she resettled in an apartment

filled with her late husband's paintings.[5] During his life, Guillén Landrián suffered decades of political persecution at the hands of the Cuban government. He moved to Miami in 1989 where, prior to his first exhibit at the Cuban Museum of Arts and Culture in 1990, he sold his extraordinary Cubist paintings for next to nothing, and where he eventually made his final film, a portrait of downtown Miami called *Inside Downtown* (2001).

Before all of this, however, Guillén Landrián was once one of three black filmmakers at the Cuban Film Institute (ICAIC) and a student of the renowned Cuban filmmaker Santiago Álvarez who, as I discussed in the first chapter, made nearly all of the newsreels that the Tricontinental designated as part of its propaganda apparatus. Guillén Landrián made eighteen documentaries[6] before the age of thirty-four (1972) and formed part of the new wave of low-budget documentary filmmaking emerging out of the Cuban Revolution. Few of his films were ever publicly exhibited, facing censorship for over thirty years because of their supposed counterrevolutionary content. Despite Guillén Landrián's status as one of Cuba's only black filmmakers, the censorship of his films has resulted in a dearth of scholarship on his work. However, with the loosening of restrictions in recent years in Cuba towards the work of artists and intellectuals who were previously censored,[7] several of Guillén Landrián's films were released for public viewing in Cuba in 2002.[8] Until very recently, however, Guillén Landrián has been largely absent from Cuban film historiography.[9]

Cuba's film industry rapidly expanded its documentary output in the early years of the Revolution. Between 1959 and 1960, documentary films produced per year increased from four to twenty-one, and by 1965, ICAIC was making forty documentaries

per year (Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 203). Chanan's *Cuban Cinema* (2004) organizes ICAIC's documentary production in these early years into seven thematic categories.[10] The ICAIC films that the Tricontinental claimed as part of its propaganda and the most well known of Santiago Álvarez's newsreels would fall into the category of films that treat international solidarity and the revolutionary critique of capitalism and imperialism. Guillén Landrián's films are better described by other categories such as discussion of the revolutionary process, didactic films and documentaries on cultural practices, social history and sports.[11] However, I will argue that one of his films, *Coffea arábiga* (1968), which was comissioned as an educational film on coffee production, will in fact take up the Tricontinental's rhetoric on imperialism in order to launch a pointed critique not of racial discrimination in the United States but of discriminatory racial politics in post-Revolutionary Cuba.

Coffea arábiga (1968) was commissioned by ICAIC as part of the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* [Greenbelt Plan], an ambitious agricultural campaign by the Cuban Revolution to plant fruit trees, coffee, and peas in the peripheral zones of Havana (Scarpaci, Segre and Coyula 140). The *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* intended to supply food to Havana, allowing it to become self-sufficient while redirecting labor from the Revolution's offensive against bureaucratism and private businesses (328). It formed part of a larger deurbanization effort in this period by the Revolution, which posited rural communities as a moral alternative to the corruption of urban lifestyles (206). In this sense, the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* aimed to integrate *habaneros* into *La Gran Zafra* [10 million ton sugar harvest], a national campaign to drastically increase sugar production throughout the late 1960s, culminating in a ten-million-ton crop in 1970. *La*

Gran Zafra emphasized the volunteerism required to produce this massive crop as the moral prerogative of the Revolution's *nuevo hombre* [new man] who was represented as hard-working, disciplined and motivated by the common good. The *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* would eventually be largely unsuccessful, resulting in a small agricultural yield disproportionate to the publicity surrounding it. More importantly, *La Gran Zafra* of 1970 would fall far short of its goal, leaving behind economic difficulties and a blow to national morale.

While *Coffea arábiga* was commissioned as part of the promotional materials for this campaign, the didactic portions of the film, while aesthetically experimental and sophisticated, do little to clearly explain to the Havana public how to plant and grow coffee. For example, Guillén Landrián makes his lack of interest in this area quite obvious in the section of the film on fertilization that simply states, "fertilización, ¿está claro?" ["fertilization, is it clear?"].[12] Instead, the film uses the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* as a framework for articulating a much further-reaching political statement. *Coffea arábiga*, I argue, appropriates a tricontinentalist filmic aesthetic, used to discuss racial discrimination and oppression abroad in films such as Álvarez's *Now*, in order to critique racially discriminatory practices within Revolutionary Cuba. In this sense, I will argue, *Coffea arábiga* remains a testament to how Cuba's involvement in the international and anti-racist rhetoric of tricontinentalism has provided a platform for critics of Cuba's domestic discourse on race.

Sowing the Seeds for *Coffea arábiga*

Guillén Landrián made *Coffea arábiga* in particularly precarious circumstances.

In *Café con leche* (2003), Zayas's documentary on the filmmaker, Guillén Landrián explains that he made the film upon his return from prison on the Isla de Pinos [Isle of Pines] where he claims to have been imprisoned for ideological differences with the Cuban government and forced to undergo electroshock therapy.[13] The Cuban government's strict regulation of the activities of intellectuals and artists and its repression of those seen as counterrevolutionary is usually considered to have begun with the 1961 censorship of the film *P.M.* and Castro's pivotal speech "Palabras a los Intelectuales" ["Words to the Intellectuals"] in which he defined the Revolution's cultural politics with the phrase "[d]entro de la Revolución, todo, contra la Revolución, nada" ["[w]ithin the Revolution, everything, against the Revolution, nothing"]. While the closure of newspapers and radio stations that opposed the Castro government began earlier than 1961, following the pivotal censure of *P.M.*, independent magazines and presses (like *Lunes de revolución* and El Puente) that supported the Revolution were shut down as the country's intellectual institutions were centralized.

The controls placed on intellectuals that began in the early sixties would culminate in the 1971 Padilla affair, in which Cuban poet Heberto Padilla was imprisoned and forced to publicly repent for his book of poems, *Fuera del juego* [*Out of the Game*] (1968), an event that is generally viewed as the beginning of what Cuban author Ambrosio Fornet has termed the "quinquenio gris" ["five gray years"] (1971-76), a period of Stalinization of culture and repression of artistic freedoms in Cuba. Intellectuals in Europe and Latin America protested Padilla's imprisonment in an open letter to Fidel, published on April 9, 1971 in the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*. Largely in response to this letter, the Castro government held the Primer Congreso Nacional de

Educación y Cultura [First National Conference on Education and Culture] from April 23rd-30th, 1971. This conference announced the beginning of a process of *depuración* [purification] of the nation's cultural institutions and the naming of Luis Pavón Tamayo, president of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura [National Council of Culture], to oversee the process. The conference famously announced the removal of homosexuals from positions of institutional influence (Fornet). According to Navarro, the *quinquenio gris* is a euphemism since, on one hand, it "in fact lasted for about fifteen years (approximately from 1968 until 1983), and, on the other, was in fact not gray but black for many intellectual lives and works" (198).

Guillén Landrián would make *Coffea arábiga* during this repressive period, but his imprisonment, he explains, was in response to another of his films, *Ociel del Toa* [*Ociel from the Toa*] (1965). *Ociel del Toa* is a sixteen-minute documentary about a sixteen-year-old boy named Ociel who left school in the third grade to deliver food and goods on the Toa River in Baracoa, a rural area in eastern Cuba on the coast of Guantanamo province. This film alternates between black and white footage of Ociel and his neighbors and captions that explain the action of the film. Many of these captions contain quotes that, like in a silent film, appear to stand in for the voice of Ociel and the townspeople.[14] The wide shots of Ociel and his co-worker Filín on the pristine Toa River contain a bucolic beauty, and consistent close-ups lend the film's subjects a quiet dignity.

In this sense, *Ociel del Toa* is reminiscent of post-WWII Italian Neorealism, a film movement—highly influential to Cuban feature films—that responded to the studio facades and melodramas of cinema from Italy's Fascist period with films focused on the hardships of the working class. Italian Neorealist cinema was often filmed on location

and used non-professional actors.[15] Similarly, *Ociel del Toa* appears to attempt to expose Baracoa's poverty and hardships to the viewing public in Cuba's urban centers. This becomes especially clear when the caption, "Es bueno que esto lo vean en La Habana" ["It's good people in Havana will see this"] follows footage of the two young men pushing the heavy boat upriver and a statement that they spend hours with their feet in the water. In this sense, one may see the film as participating in the overall effort of the early 1960s to mobilize urban volunteers to participate in agricultural work and education campaigns in Cuba's countryside. Yet *Ociel del Toa* will provide a critical reflection on the Revolution's actions in rural Baracoa, taking this suggestion of the distance between Havana and Cuba's countryside a step further by arguing that policies made by the government in the capital can be burdensome and irrelevant to the lives of people in the rural zones.

Fig. 1, 2—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Ociel del Toa*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.

For example, Ociel, whose daily work in a small boat is compared in the film to the pain of giving birth, has one day off, Sunday, in which he goes to the town to attend church and watch cockfighting. The footage of cockfighting is the only moment that Ociel or any of the film's subjects smile yet this scene is cut short by a caption that informs, "van a quitar los gallos" ["they're going to get rid of cockfighting"], a reference

to the Revolution's strict policy against gambling which was already in place by the time the film was made.[16] This statement is then followed with the comment, "si no hay gallos, habrá otra cosa, peor es la muerte" ["if there isn't cockfighting, there will be something else, only death is worse"], suggesting the futility of outlawing one of the only pastimes of these hardworking people.

Fig. 3, 4—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Ociel del Toa*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.

The film follows its dismissal of the prohibition of cockfighting with a commentary on the burden placed on farmers and rural workers, such as Ociel, by the education reforms. After the statement, "ahora los domingos los campesinos tenemos plenaria de educación" ["now on Sundays we farmers have the education session"] Guillén Landrián cuts to footage of farmers walking in a parade to the sound of drums as they head towards the session.[17] The next caption notes, "y se camina desde muy temprano y se cruza el río y el monte" ["and one starts walking very early and crosses the river and the mountain"], emphasizing the long distances these farmers have to travel on their only day off to attend the education sessions that start in the morning in the town of Baracoa. While the film comments that "hay que ir o uno se queda bruto" ["you have to

go or you will stay ignorant"], the images of the blank faces of farmers who stand in the heat, listening to the session, call into question the effectiveness of these education assemblies.

Fig. 5, 6—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Ociel del Toa*. Havana: ICAIC, 1965.

The film continues this subtle critique of the Revolution's policies by commenting that the young woman who sells refreshments at the education sessions wants to be a Communist but is prevented from doing so because she goes to church with her aunt, a detail that Guillén Landrián emphasizes by repeating the caption twice "pero va a la iglesia" ["but she goes to church"].[18] Following this statement, it cuts to footage from the Protestant church in the Toa river region and a caption noting that on Sundays, because there is nothing to do in the evening, the church fills with *guajiros* [Cuban peasants], suggesting once again that the Revolution's policies, which are forged in Havana and seem to have little to do with the reality of daily life in Baracoa, threaten to take away the very few sources of entertainment and joy for the people of this region.

Guillén Landrián then emphasizes his overarching argument with a reflection on death that recalls Ociel's prior comment that they will have to replace cockfighting with a different pastime since only death would be worse than having no diversion from work.

As the film closes with Ociel working on the river and the phrase, "la muerte no se puede tocar ni oír ni sentir" ["death can't be touched or heard or felt"], *Ociel del Toa* depicts the life of this child as a death from which he will not be saved by the Revolution's well-intentioned but out-of-touch policies.

After the release of this film, Guillén Landrián was imprisoned for what he describes as "ideological reasons," about which he only elaborates by stating that his films did not reflect the euphoria of the moment ("El cine"). Due to psychological distress, Guillén Landrián was released from prison and placed under house arrest in Havana where he requested to either be allowed to continue making films or to leave the country. He was returned to ICAIC but was moved from the artistic department to the department of scientific and technical documentaries, which Guillén Landrián explains as a concession to ICAIC's management that reluctantly took him back ("El cine").

The twenty-minute short *Coffea arábiga*, the most well known and politically controversial of his films, would be his first film in the scientific and technical department. *Coffea arábiga*, coupled with another of Guillén Landrián's films, *Taller de Línea y 18* (1971), would cause the filmmaker to subsequently be expelled from ICAIC and permanently labeled a political dissident. While many have attributed this backlash to *Coffea arábiga*'s irreverent pairing of images of Castro with *The Beatles*' song "The Fool on the Hill," as well as to the ironic coincidence that the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana* ended in failure, I maintain that Guillén Landrián's critique cuts much deeper. Guillén Landrián appropriates a tricontinentalist rhetoric and aesthetic, which the Castro government used to critique racism abroad, to argue that the racial hierarchies of Cuba's colonial legacy are perpetuated within the Revolution. However, in order to explain the

weight of Guillén Landrián's critique, it is first necessary to outline the complex racial politics to which his film responds.

From Cimarrón to Revolucionario: Racial Discourse in Revolutionary Cuba

Through narrative, media spectacle, film and political propaganda, the Cuban Revolution has long presented itself as the culmination of the nation's history of black political activism or as the final realization of the struggle for freedom begun by the *cimarrones* [maroons] during slavery and the black *mambises* [insurrectionists] in the wars for independence. Cuba's first war for independence, The Ten Years' War (1868-78), began when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes declared his slaves free and recruited them for the independence fight, beginning a "comingling of Cuban national identity and black civil rights," that according to Mark A. Sanders, "would persist across all of Cuba's revolutions" (xviii).

In this sense, the Revolution would fashion itself as the culmination of independence leader José Martí's vision of Cuba as a raceless society.[19] According to Martí in his 1891 essay "Nuestra América" ["Our America"], in Cuba "no hay odios de razas" ["there is no racial hatred"] "porque no hay razas" ["because there are no races"] (32; 295). The "mestizo autóctono" ["native mestizo"], he claims, has erased the existence of race, and thus of racism, in Cuba (28; 290). The notion that racism did not exist in a country where slavery had only officially ended five years before (1886) was of course a fantasy, but this was a strategic statement that countered the long-held colonial notion that an independence movement among whites in Cuba was impossible because of fears that the country's large black population would cause a race war (Ferrer 9). The

Revolution saw itself as reviving Martí's vision for a raceless *Cuba Libre*. In other words, it was finally ensuring the equality between black and white people that was fostered in the independence wars and that, many have argued, was curtailed by U.S. intervention—thus transforming the Cuban War of Independence into the Spanish-American War—and the subsequent influence of U.S. racial policies on the island.[20]

Countless Cuban texts produced since 1959 have contributed to the image of the Revolution as the final stage of the nation's long tradition of black political resistance. One obvious example of this rhetoric is *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) [*Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1966)] by Miguel Barnet, current president of UNEAC (Unión Nacional de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba) [National Union of Writers and Arists of Cuba] and a former student of the anthropologist and writer Fernando Ortiz. This text presents the island's history through the testimonial narrative of Esteban Montejo, a *cimarrón* who fought in the wars for independence against Spain and whose voice serves, in the *testimonio* style that would become popularized throughout Latin America in the 1970s, as a stand-in for the voice of the Cuban people itself. Montejo's narrative focuses on the eras of slavery and independence and never mentions the Revolution, but the Revolution's rhetoric is implicit throughout the text, permeating Montejo's constant struggle for freedom and self-determination.

While *Biografía de un cimarrón* is widely recognized as a foundational text of the Cuban Revolution, other well known examples of this rhetoric include Nicolás Guillén's poem "Tengo" (1964) ["I Have" (1974)], which reflects on the long awaited material and spiritual gains that the Revolution has provided for black Cubans, or ICAIC's many films on slave insurrection and resistance, such as the trilogy[21] by Sergio Giral or Tomás

Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* (1976) [*The Last Supper*].

Similarly, Humberto Solás's film *Lucía* (1968), an epic of Cuba's history of political struggles, is composed of vignettes about women activists, all named Lucía, in three different historical contexts: the independence period, the Machado dictatorship of the 1930s, and the post-Revolutionary period. The Lucía of the final section, a woman of African descent whose struggle is narratively positioned as building on the courageous actions of the women who came before her, fights back against her white husband's abusive and controlling behavior in order to participate in the Revolution's literacy campaign.

Her desire to learn to read and write are supported by the black Cuban couple who run the local union and who try to convince her husband, Tomás, that it is his revolutionary duty to allow his wife to be tutored by the volunteer teacher from Havana despite his jealous misgivings about his wife spending time with another man. The racial makeup of the characters subtly contributes to the notion that to be a true revolutionary, one must support the agency and full participation in Revolutionary society not only of women but also of black Cubans. Prior revolutionary struggles, the film suggests, have led to the culminating moment of the Revolution in which those who have been most oppressed (including Afro-Cubans and women) in Cuban society are now finally obtaining the rights they have long deserved.

Perhaps one of the most famous texts to situate the Revolution within a history of specifically black political struggles is *Calibán, Nuestro símbolo* (1971) [*Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America* (1974)], written by Casa de las Américas president Roberto Fernández Retamar in response to the outcry by European

and Latin American members of the leftist intelligentsia over the 1971 imprisonment of poet Heberto Padilla. Retamar's *Calibán* is written as a counter-argument to José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel* (1900), the foundational treatise on Latin American identity composed by the Uruguayan writer in response to the U.S. expansionism of the Spanish-American War. Rodó compares Latin America with the United States, which he views as utilitarian and barbaric and which, for Rodó, is symbolized by the monstrous island inhabitant Caliban from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1623). Latin America, he claims, should not imitate the North but rather aspire to the nobility and intellectual superiority of Ariel, the spirit who serves the magician Prospero in *The Tempest.*

Retamar's *Calibán* revises Rodós categories, noting that Ariel, unlike Latin America, faithfully obeyed his master Prospero and claiming that Latin America's history of anti-colonial resistance is more clearly embodied in the rebellious Caliban. Shakespeare's character Caliban, Retamar claims, is an anagram for cannibal, the symbol of barbarity that Spanish colonizers attributed to Amerindians and later to Africans. Similar to this racialized othering, Retamar notes, the Spanish soldiers in Cuba's wars of independence described the Cuban insurrectionaries as *mambises*, a term originally used pejoratively to suggest that all of the independence fighters descended from black slaves. Cubans, he argues, have reclaimed the term *mambí*

> como un timbre de gloria el honor de considerarnos descendientes de mambí, descendientes de negro alzado, cimarrón, independentista; y *nunca* descendientes de esclavista. (34, emphasis original)
>
> [as a mark of glory the honor of considering ourselves descendants of the *mambí*, descendants of the rebel, runaway, *independentista* black— *never* descendants of

the slave holder.] (16, italics original)

The Cuban Revolution is presented as the logical descendant of this history of black resistance. Therefore, Caliban, according to Retamar, is the symbol of the insurrectionary history of Cuba, the Caribbean and Latin America. The Latin American intellectual, to whom Rodó attributes the character of Ariel, has a choice between allying himself with Caliban or serving Prospero. In other words, Retamar argues, Latin American intellectuals, and especially those that appear to be troubled over the Revolution's relationship to freedom of expression, have a choice between supporting Cuba's "black" revolution that is embodied in the figure of Caliban or furthering imperialism through their bourgeois sensibilities and distance from the realities faced by the common man.

By the late 1970s when Nancy Morejón published her poem "Mujer negra" (1979) ["Black Woman" (1990)], which charts the history of black women's struggles on the island, culminating in a celebratory representation of the revolutionary present, this narrative of the island's history of black struggle that culminates in the Revolution had arguably become somewhat of a cliché. Mark A. Sanders has insightfully suggested this poem as Morejón's ironic response to the Revolution's rhetoric on black political resistance, writing a poem that delivers the rhetoric flawlessly but flatly and without emotional conviction.[22] A more recent example of a text that engages this familiar discourse is María de Reyes Castillo Bueno's *Reyita* (1997), which by calling attention to racial inequalities in contemporary Cuba emphasizes the Revolution as an ongoing struggle instead of a triumphant celebration of the Revolution's achievements. All of these texts, with the exception of *Reyita*, were funded and promoted by the Revolution's

strictly regulated cultural apparatus and have served to further its self-fashioning as a black political movement.[23]

This rhetoric has helped the Castro government garner popular support for its Tricontinental commitment to black liberation movements abroad. For example, Castro famously described Cuba for the first time as a "pueblo latinoafricano ["Latin-African people"] when Cuba committed 70,000 troops in 1975 to backing the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Castro, "Angola"). Perhaps the earliest and most widely recognized example of the Revolution's outreach to black movements abroad occurred when, on a visit to New York for the UN General Assembly in September 1960, Castro dramatically moved his delegation from the pricey Shelburne Hotel in Manhattan, where the other nations' diplomats were staying and where Castro claimed to have experienced racism, to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem.

This highly publicized media spectacle was suggested by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), a U.S. organization of journalists that aimed to balance the negative media portrayal of the Cuban Revolution. Several members of the FPCC, including the African American writers John Henrik Clarke, Richard Gibson, LeRoi Jones, Julian Mayfield, Robert Williams and William Worthy, were invited to visit Cuba in the early 1960s and their published reports on their experiences in Cuba did much to garner support for the Revolution among sympathetic African Americans (Tietchen). As the FPCC predicted, the streets of Harlem erupted in celebration upon Castro's arrival, solidifying, for many, the Cuban Revolution's solidarity with the African American freedom struggle. Castro's move to Harlem epitomized an ideology, which would become formalized at the Tricontinental, in which African American civil rights activists

and Cuban revolutionaries viewed themselves as brothers in a single struggle against U.S. imperialism.

While Castro met with Malcolm X, Langston Hughes, LeRoi Jones and other civil rights leaders inside, thousands surrounded the hotel, day and night. One of the activists working the crowd outside was a young Carlos Moore. Born in Cuba and the son of Jamaican immigrants, Moore and his family had moved from Cuba to Harlem only a few years before. As a teenager in Harlem, Moore became involved in the FPCC and, as a black Cuban, played a pivotal role in working up support for the Revolution among African Americans in Harlem.

In his 2008 memoir, *Pichón: Race and Revolution in Castro's Cuba*, Moore describes the euphoria he experienced when he was invited to attend a private reception at the Theresa Hotel in Castro's honor. His unflinching support for the Revolution and for Fidel Castro, he explains, largely emerged out of his wholehearted belief in the Revolution's posturing as a black revolution, writing, "Africa was everything to me, and the Cuban Revolution was but an extension of Africa, and Fidel an extension of Lumumba" (147). At the reception, however, he was surprised to see that with the exception of General Juan Almeida Bosque, all of the members of Castro's delegation were what he calls "lily-white" (145). This seemed in conflict with Castro's rhetoric on racial justice, but as he listened to Castro express solidarity with his black brothers in a common struggle against imperialism before the UN General Assembly on September 26, 1960, a rhetoric that would become the hallmark of the Tricontinental beginning in the late 1960s, Moore dismissed any notion of General Almeida's appointment as mere tokenism.

Yet a seed of doubt regarding the Revolution's commitment to racial equality was planted in Moore, and once he returned to Cuba in June of 1961 in support of the Revolution, this seed would slowly grow into full-blown dissidence against the regime's racial politics. Because Moore spoke out against racism in Cuba, he suffered imprisonment and persecution, and by November 1963, he would leave the island fearful for his life.

The change of heart that Moore experienced towards the Castro government in the early years of the Revolution is not unique among U.S. black intellectuals who defected to Cuba or who otherwise supported the regime. While Assata Shakur, Angela Davis and William Lee Brent[24] have remained supportive of Castro's government, Robert Williams, Stokely Carmichael and Eldridge Cleaver all have similar stories of growing distrust and eventual outright dissidence towards Castro's government (Sawyer).

Williams's Radio Free Dixie, where Moore worked as a newscaster and which broadcast to the Southeastern United States, faced criticism from the Cuban government for its promotion of black militancy (Moore, *Pichón* 168). After four years in Cuba, Williams would leave for China, writing an open letter to Fidel criticizing his hypocritical racial discourse and stating that "Cuba was in the hands of a white petite bourgeoisie" (Sawyer 90). Stokely Carmichael, who was initially warmly welcomed in Cuba, later spoke out against the Revolution, claiming that socialism does not necessarily imply the elimination of racism. Similarly, after Eldridge Cleaver attempted to start a Black Panther Party in Cuba, he fell out of favor with the Revolution and left Cuba for Algeria, characterizing Cuba's government as "the white, racist Castro dictatorship" (Sawyer 95). In short, according to these activists, Cuba was not the racism-free promised land that it

claimed to be.

In the early years of the Revolution, the Castro government did make strides in turning the tide of racial segregation. In 1959, Castro addressed the issue in numerous speeches and interviews, private beaches were made public, ending their de facto segregation, public parks were remodeled to encourage further integration, countless seminars and conferences were held to discuss the problem, and by 1960, private clubs that had been segregated were nationalized and open for public use (de la Fuente 358-73). While a true commitment to desegregation arguably would have been reflected at the highest levels of government, when Castro visited the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, his anti-racist rhetoric in the international sphere lined up at least on the surface with his domestic policies.

However, in April 1961, the day before the Bay of Pigs invasion, Fidel publicly declared the socialist nature of the Revolution, and as early as 1962 official discourse held that racial discrimination had been eliminated by the economic and social reforms in Communist Cuba (de la Fuente 21). Anyone who critiqued that notion or tried to organize around racial identity would be seen as divisive and counterrevolutionary. In September 1961, more than 170 black organizations were shut down under the auspices of desegregation and further incorporation into Revolutionary society (de la Fuente 384). Members of several black movements that emerged in the late 1960s and 70s, such as Movimiento Liberación Nacional, Movimiento Black Power (1971) and the Afro-Cuban Study Group (1974) are reported to have suffered various forms of political persecution, such as imprisonment, forced renunciation of their beliefs and forced exile (Sawyer 67). Because of its large Afro-Cuban membership, the publishing house El Puente was

accused of being a Black Power organization and was closed in 1965 (Miskulin 32).

This aggression towards black political organizing in Cuba is not unique to the post-Revolutionary period. The most infamous example of similar policies is the 1909 Morúa Law, which outlawed political parties based on race and which was eventually brutally enforced with the 1912 massacre of members and suspected sympathizers of the Partido Independiente de Color [Independent Party of Color]. *Negrismo*'s celebration of black and *mulato* figures would emerge in the decade following the 1912 massacre and would be used by intellectuals of the 1920-40s to promote national consolidation while disavowing racial inequalities (Kutzinski 4-7).

The disillusionment experienced by Black Power leaders in post-Revolutionary Cuba is a symptom of the way in which Cuba's domestic discourse on race did not line up with the international discourse of tricontinentalism that Cuba played an active role in creating. As I have established, tricontinentalism, a movement and worldview of an international group of radicals in which the Revolution was one—albeit major —player, is characterized by a committedly anti-racist rhetoric in which the exploitation of black people is viewed as the foundation of an imperial power that oppresses Cubans, African Americans and other exploited peoples. In contrast, the Revolution's domestic racial discourse has been characterized as one of "inclusionary discrimination," which Mark Sawyer has described as a mix of Latin American exceptionalism, in which the seemingly inclusionary pre-Revolutionary celebration of the *mulato* and *mestizo* figures (seen in Martí's writings and later in *negrismo*) is used to support a myth of racial democracy, as well as Marxist exceptionalism, in which socialist reforms are purported to have eliminated racial inequalities.

Whereas tricontinentalism would attempt to revise the racial essentialisms and stereotypical representations of *negrismo*'s anti-imperialism, the Castro government often unquestioningly continued this pre-Revolutionary racial discourse. The Revolution's celebration of black resistance, often through *negrismo*'s tropes such as Roberto Fernández Retamar's use of the cannibal figure in his essay *Calibán* (1971) to define the Cuban Revolution as the symbol of a resistant Latin American politics, dovetailed easily from pre-Revolutionary racial discourses and arguably had little relevance to the reality of black political mobilization in Cuba. The Revolution's domestic racial discourse combined the pre-Revolutionary nationalist mythification of non-white subjects with its post-Revolutionary Marxist ideology to argue that racism did not exist in Cuba and that, as Sawyer has noted, racial inequalities in Cuba are not systemic but are the "result of the individual incapacities of blacks" (16).

Cuba's role in producing the many texts within Tricontinental cultural production that dealt with racial discrimination abroad allowed the Castro government to externalize its racial problems, pointing to racism as an expression of U.S. imperialism to which both Cuba and African Americans were subjected and denying the presence of racial inequalities within Cuba itself. In this sense, the "coloring" of Castro, through which tricontinentalists challenged racial determinism, could also be used by the Castro government to misrepresent the Cuban domestic context to the international community.

While Cuba's active participation in developing an ideology of tricontinentalism allowed the Revolution to externalize its racial problems, it also provided critics of the regime's racial politics with a readily available and easily recognizable platform from which to launch their critique. The very ideological framework through which Cuba

expressed solidarity with liberation movements abroad and externalized racial issues to the imperialist North would be used to call attention to racial discrimination under the Revolution. Critics of the Revolution's claim to have ended racism would take up the tricontinentalist argument that black exploitation is foundational to a deterritorialized imperialist power structure and, by pointing to continuities between Cuba's past and its Revolutionary present, would use a tricontinentalist argument to argue for the continuation of racial discrimination under the Castro regime. Since empire was dissociated from any one particular nation or power and since the Tricontinental did not necessarily propose socialism as the end-all cure for dismantling global empire, then it was logical (and still in line with Cuba's own tricontinentalist rhetoric) to argue that imperialism and thus racial inequality might still have a hold on Cuba.

This argument, which has largely driven critiques of the Revolution's racial discourse, has been articulated in varying ways. Some have claimed that while the Revolution has done much to challenge racial discrimination, the legacy of pre-Revolutionary colonialism and slavery is still firmly entrenched in Communist Cuba and the government must be more aggressive in its policies to overcome it. For others, like Nicolás Guillén Landrián in *Coffea arábiga*, this critique is more strident, claiming that the Revolution, through its very actions and rhetoric, furthers both the discriminatory practices and exoticizing racism of the pre-Revolutionary period and therefore does not follow through on its tricontinentalist rhetoric.

Cuban Documentary at the Intersection of Racial and Aesthetic Politics

The use of tricontinentalist discourse to critique the Revolution can be found in

texts by U.S. black activists, like Williams or Moore, who played a central role in envisioning tricontinentalism and who employed their internationalist and anti-racist stance of tricontinentalism to critique the Castro government. Much of the scholarly work on writers' dissidence with Cuba's racial politics has focused on these non-Cuban perspectives. However, since the OSPAAAL's propaganda apparatus was the organizing structure of tricontinentalism, I find the cultural production most closely associated with it to be the most appropriate starting point from which to outline how tricontinentalism could be used to critique the regime itself.

As noted in the first chapter, the Tricontinental had several propaganda outlets through which it disseminated its ideology: the pages of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, the magazine *Tricontinental,* the now famous posters which were included in the back of the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, pamphlets and ephemera, the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel and radio programs. Since the posters and publications were overseen by core members of the government, such as OSPAAAL general secretary Osmany Cienfuegos, critiques of the Revolution in these texts are not readily apparent. However, the ICAIC Latin American Newsreel could be viewed as providing more artistic license.

This not to say that ICAIC did not strictly control its output or was not involved in the business of censorship, the most famous example being ICAIC's denial of permission for the public screening of *P.M.* (1961), a documentary by Sabá Cabrera Infante (brother of the famed writer and editor of *Lunes de revolución*[25] Guillermo Cabrera Infante) and Orlando Jiménez Leal. A discussion of the censure of this film will provide further context for analyzing Guillén Landrián's argument. *P.M.,* a fifteen-minute film, which depicts Cubans, especially black Cubans, drinking and dancing at bars, was banned from

public exhibition six weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion and six weeks after Fidel declared the Revolution to be socialist. The reasoning for the film's censure has been explained in various ways.

Fig. 7, 8—Cabrera Infante, Sabá and Orlando Jiménez Leal. *P.M.* Havana: Lunes de revolución, 1961.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the editor of *Lunes de revolución*, the literary supplement of the newspaper *Revolución* that independently provided the funds for the film, describes the issue as a turf war in which *Lunes de revolución*, by making its first-ever film, was thereby staging an incursion on ICAIC's control over the film industry (149). In William Luis's reading, the conflict goes much deeper in that the film's censure is representative of the culmination of ongoing aesthetic and political differences between ICAIC and *Lunes de revolución*. Whereas the members of *Lunes de revolución* aligned themselves with the July 26th Movement,[26] the Castro government gave control of its new film institute (ICAIC) to the Communist Cine Club Marxista [Marxist Film Club], which had long maintained a close relationship with the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). According to Luis, ICAIC's censure of *P.M.*, and the closure of *Lunes de revolución* that would follow the controversy, is the result of the Communists' increasing power in the immediate wake of the Revolution's public alignment with the Soviets and is an early example of the growing tendency towards centralization of the country's cultural

apparatus.

In response to ICAIC's refusal to show the film, *Lunes de revolución* put together a protest document with the signatures of two hundred artists and intellectuals. Castro arranged three meetings in the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí in June of 1961 in which representatives from the PSP and from both ICAIC and *Lunes* were in attendance. In these meetings, ICAIC's director Alfredo Guevara would accuse *Lunes* of being anti-Soviet Union and anti-Revolutionary, seeming to use the controversy to centralize the country's film industry under his leadership and to confirm Luis's interpretation of bitter political differences between the two groups.

In addition to these political disagreements, *Lunes* and ICAIC differed in aesthetic preference as well. *P.M.* was highly influenced by English Free Cinema, which emphasized an observational use of the camera rather than an interventionary or propagandastic one, whereas ICAIC found Italian Neorealism, and later the Soviet-inspired "nervous montage" of Santiago Álvarez, in which the filmic image, rather than standing alone, becomes a tool for communicating a clear political message, to be more conducive to a militant, revolutionary cinema (Luis, *Lunes* 47). Directors of *Lunes,* such as Carlos Franqui and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, maintained a more open posture in their cinematic appreciation, and in response to the censure of *P.M.*, published the February 1961 issue "Lunes va al cine" ["Lunes Goes to the Movies"] which included a debate on Italian Neorealism versus Free Cinema and a section on eroticism in film. The section on eroticism included photographs of the sexiest actresses of the moment, including several U.S. actresses, which was viewed as a direct affront to the Castro regime and to ICAIC (Luis, *Lunes* 49).

The two organizations' differing ideological positions can be seen in the difference between *P.M.* and *Cuba baila* [*Cuba Dances*] (1963), an ICAIC film to which Luis mentions that *P.M.* was responding, although without further analysis. *Cuba baila,* by Cuban film screenwriter, director and theorist Julio García Espinosa,[27] was the first feature film to be completed by ICAIC. However, since it dealt with the pre-Revolutionary bourgeoisie and ICAIC intended to make its debut with a film about the Revolutionary struggle, *Cuba baila* was not released until 1963 (Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 144). It narrates a father's attempt to give his daughter a *quinceañera* party based on bourgeois ideals of decorum and propriety, exposing the race and class divisions that dictate where and how Cubans dance. The weak and taciturn father, Ramón, emerges as the hero in the end when he admits that he doesn't have the money to throw his daughter's party at the salon where wealthy white people host their events and instead invites guests to a public concert and dance that is often attended by lower classes and especially by black Cubans. The film ends with a display of unity as the community, previously divided by race and class differences, comes together to dance and celebrate.

The opening scene of the film is a public dance, attended largely by Afro-Cubans, in the location where Ramón will eventually host his daughter's party. Ramón and his wife stand by, watching disapprovingly as women shake their hips in tight-fighting hourglass dresses. In overlay appears the phrase, "Esta historia pudo suceder en Cuba en cualquier período pasado de su vida republicana. Hoy, la clase media despierta y la politiquería ha sido liquidada" [This story could have occurred in Cuba in any past period of its republican life. Now, the middle class awakens and cronyism has been eliminated].[28] Thus, the film asserts from the very beginning that the race and class

divisions that the film attempts to address are decidedly pre-Revolutionary and have been resolved by the Castro government. According to *Cuba baila*, segregation in the Cuban social scene is a thing of the past. This claim is the central issue, I believe, in the controversy over *P.M.*

Fig. 9, 10—García Espinosa, Julio. *Cuba baila*. Havana: ICAIC, 1963.

While I certainly accept Luis's arguments that these two films represent organizations with differing political affiliations at a time when Cuba was becoming increasingly intolerant of political difference and while I also agree that *Cuba baila*, overseen by the father of Italian Neorealism Cesare Zavattini, takes a decidedly different approach than *P.M.*'s Free Cinema-inspired refusal to impose an interpretation on its viewers, I maintain that these two films' treatment of racial segregation is central to the discussion. *P.M.*'s treatment of race hasn't gone completely without comment. Only six weeks after the Bay of Pigs invasion, ICAIC viewed the film as "aesthetically and politically irresponsible," since, according to Chanan, "it presented black people in roles associated with the state of oppression from which they were in the process of liberation" (*Cuban Cinema* 135, 33). In other words, in a time when the regime desperately needed national unity in the face of external threats, and in a time when the Revolution was

making huge efforts to desegregate public spaces, these images of drunkenness and dance were viewed as reifying racist stereotypes and were offensive to the severe sobriety of the political moment.

Yet many of the images in *P.M.*, such as the films' lingering focus on black women's hips and buttocks, are so similar to those of *Cuba baila* that it seems that the issue at hand is not necessarily regarding the representation of black subjects. In other words, based on the lack of censorship of *Cuba baila* as well as the Revolution's willingness to take up other tropes of *negrismo*, it is unlikely that the negative response to *P.M.* emerged out of the Revolution's critical stance towards representations of black people that were popularized in the *negrista* movement. Rather, whereas *Cuba baila* asserts that segregation in Cuban popular culture is a thing of the past, *P.M.* shows a specifically Afro-Cuban nightlife in a specifically post-Revolutionary context.

In this sense, I understand the conflict between Italian Neorealism and Free Cinema, or the conflict regarding whether the camera should be used to observe or to intervene, to be more about *P.M.*'s refusal to impose a pre-Revolutionary timeline on the behaviors that it attempts to capture. It presents a post-Revolutionary reality and does not attempt to fit that reality neatly into the Castro government's discourse on race. *P.M.* implicitly attests to the fact that what *Cuba baila* wants to present as a thing of the past continues in post-Revolutionary Cuba despite the rhetoric of Marxist exceptionalism that claims that socialist reforms has eliminated these kinds of race and class divisions.

In the final meeting on June 30, 1961, one month before all political parties would be consolidated under the Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas (ORI) [Integrated Revolutionary Organizations], which would later become the Partido Comunista de Cuba

(PCC) [Communist Party of Cuba], Castro would give his famous "Palabras a los intelectuales" ["Words to the Intellectuals"]. Neither *P.M.* nor *Lunes de revolución* would be deemed to fit "dentro de la Revolución," and within a few months (November 1961), *Lunes de revolución* would be closed.

As demonstrated not only by *P.M.* but also by the censorship of Guillén Landrián's films, the authoritarian control over cultural production that would become the norm in Cuba during the *quinquenio gris* of the mid 1970s was already being experienced by artists in the early 1960s. Yet the conversation that *P.M.* began would not end there. I maintain that *P.M.* set a precedent within Cuban cinema for the filmic image as an effective and deeply cutting mode of critique against the Revolution's rhetoric on racial equality, and as I will argue in the pages that follow, film will continue to be used in this capacity.

A Tricontinentalist Reading of *Coffea arábiga*

Considering the controversy over *P.M.*, the importance of the ICAIC newsreels to the Tricontinental's propaganda, as well as the gap between the Revolution's international face of tricontinentalism and its domestic one of inclusionary discrimination, it is not surprising that there would be heightened sensitivity and censorship directed at films that exposed Cuba's inconsistent treatment of racial discrimination. One such film, to come full circle, is Nicolás Guillén Landrián's *Coffea arábiga* (1968), which, I argue, uses the tricontinentalist view of the exploitation of black labor as foundational to imperialism to critique the continuation of pre-Revolutionary race relations in post-Revolutionary Cuba. *Coffea arábiga* will also employ the

tricontinentalist aesthetics of Álvarez's newsreels, used to condemn racial discrimination in places like the United States, in order to denounce the perpetuation of the exploitation of black labor under the Revolution.

As stated previously, Guillén Landrián was a student of Santiago Álvarez, who made the majority of ICAIC's newsreels and whose work would largely define the Tricontinental's anti-imperialist filmic aesthetic. Álvarez's influence can be seen in some of Guillén Landrián's earlier films, such as *Retornar a Baracoa* [*To Return to Baracoa*] (1966), which through the use of both film footage and still images, animation with photographs, and captions that critically narrate and evaluate the presented materials, engages in some of the experimentation with montage for which Álvarez would become known. However, in general, Guillén Landrián's documentaries prior to *Coffea arábiga* consist of long takes set to instrumental music that lend a slow-moving and pensive quality to the films. While these films do not present their material with the observational passivity of the Free Cinema approach for which *P.M.* was criticized, they also do not engage in the hyper-editing through which Álvarez communicates his hard-hitting political arguments. Guillén Landrián's aesthetic choices, however, change dramatically with *Coffea arábiga*, which clearly draws from Álvarez's emphasis on quick cuts and zooms, found material and montage. The choice of this tricontinentalist medium is integrally tied, I suggest, to the message of the film.

In 1967, the year before *Coffea arábiga* was made, Guillén Landrián, as well as other leading black cultural and political figures, such as Nancy Morejón, Sara Gómez and Walterio Carbonell prepared a statement on race in Cuba that they planned to present at the 1968 World Cultural Congress, a meeting of intellectuals to discuss the cultural

problems of the "Third World." The content of this statement is not currently available, but we do know that this cooperation among Afro-Cuban intellectuals and their comments on race in Cuba were labeled by the then Minister of Education José Llanusa Gobels as seditious, and the writers and artists involved were branded as troublemakers (Sawyer 66-67). It is in this context in which, after Guillén Landrián returns to ICAIC from prison and is asked to make his first film for the scientific and technical department, a newsreel about the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana*, he could be interpreted as taking this opportunity to appropriate a political discourse and an aesthetic form that is being used to critique racial discrimination abroad to comment on racial discrimination within the domestic context of Communist Cuba.

Coffea arágiba subtly suggests the film's discourse as alternative to the one provided by the Revolution in a scene in which an interviewer asks a fashionably dressed white woman (wearing large sunglasses, a pixie haircut, and a pattern shift dress), who appears to be standing on *Calle 23* in Havana, her opinion on the *Plan del Cordón de La Habana.* Instead of giving an opinion, she begins to explain the process of planting shade-grown coffee in the outskirts of the city, repeating nearly word for word the sound bite from the *Cordón de La Habana* radio program that plays in the background immediately before this scene. As she is still speaking, the Supremes' "You Keep Me Hanging On" begins to play in the background. With a technique strikingly similar to Álvarez in *Now*, the camera zooms in and out on different parts of the woman's face to the rhythm of the lyrics, "set me free why don't you baby," suggesting that this woman needs to be freed from her rote and basic understanding of the campaign. While this scene reiterates the anti-bourgeois and anti-urban rhetoric that helped motivate

volunteerism in the Revolution's agricultural campaigns, it simultaneously suggests that the liberation that the film will provide will be an alternative discourse to the official one indicated by the radio program.

Fig. 11, 12. Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Coffea arábiga*. Havana: ICAIC, 1968.

Coffea arábiga alternates between instructional material on how to plant coffee and commentary on the history of Cuba's coffee industry. At first glance, this historical commentary appears to present a tidy narrative in which the *Cordón de La Habana* campaign represents a revolutionary form of coffee production that liberates Cuba's proletariat from the oppressive, capitalistic coffee plantations of the past. However, at the same time that Guillén Landrián presents this revolutionary narrative, he undermines it as well by pointing to the continuation of the racial hierarchies of the colonial past under the Revolution's present agricultural model, and in this way, he launches the same critique that the Tricontinental makes of imperialist nations against the Castro regime's racial politics. He achieves this critique by arguing for the continuities and similarities between three historical moments of Cuban coffee production: nineteenth century slavery, post-independence U.S. occupation and post-Revolutionary Cuba, positing that the Revolutionary era has only supposed a continuation—rather than a heroic reversal—of the racial politics of slavery and U.S. occupation.

Guillén Landrián opens his film with the voice of his uncle, Nicolás Guillén, who in addition to being Cuba's national poet would be named founding president of UNEAC in 1961, reading the final stanza of his 1958 poem, "Un largo lagarto verde" ["A Long Green Lizard"], in which the poet presents the island as an alligator, once sad and enslaved, who has woken up from his slumber. The film then reiterates this transition from slavery to awakening by recalling the history of slavery within coffee production, stating that coffee was first cultivated in Wajay, a municipality of Matanzas, which because of its sugar plantations, had a rapidly increasing slave population throughout the nineteenth century and which is a center of Afro-Cuban culture. Guillén Landrián further emphasizes the historical connection between coffee production and slavery by showing images from the *Museo de la Gran Piedra*, a nineteenth-century coffee plantation that was originally the property of French immigrants who left Haiti in the wake of the Haitian Revolution.[29]

After showing these images of the plantation, the film cuts to a black screen with white text that states, "los negros en el cafetal como mano de obra" ["blacks in the coffee plantation as hard labor"]. It reverts back to images of the plantation and then cuts to another black screen with white letters that ask the seemingly sarcastic question "¿cómo?, ¿los negros?" ["what?, blacks?"] and then the answer "sí, los negros" ["yes, blacks"]. As drums begin to play in the background, a photograph of broken chains appear, followed by video footage of drums and Afro-Cubans dancing in folkoric dress. The juxtaposition of the dancing with broken shackles suggests dance as symbolic of a liberation from slavery. However, the ironic tone with which the film asks the obvious question, "¿los negros?" destabilizes a facile analysis of this moment of the film, introducing a subtle

irony which will become more explicit when this same dance footage appears again later in the film.

Fig. 13, 14, 15—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Coffea arábiga*. Havana: ICAIC, 1968.

The film then presents information on the process of planting coffee and on the parasites and diseases that can damage the plants, explaining that plants catch diseases just like humans do. Through anthropomorphizing the plants' suffering, showing the *pata prieta* (an illness, literally translated as "black leg," that especially affects tobacco and that turns the roots of plants a dark color) as feet with dark planters warts on the heels, the caption that follows with the word "control" acquires a double meaning. "Control" here seems to refer to both the need to control the diseases that affect the crops before they become unmanageable as well as the control over the human body implicated by the prior section on slavery.

Fig. 16, 17—Guillén, Landrián. *Coffea árabiga*. Havana: ICAIC, 1968

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This suggestion of the control over human bodies inherent within the history of the coffee industry links the prior section on slavery to the second chapter of historical commentary, which introduces the three main coffee companies that were nationalized by the Revolution and whose owners would relocate their headquarters to the United States.[30] After the caption that states "Los café Tu-Py, Pilón, Regil presentan" ["Tupy, Pilón, and Regil Coffee present"], photographs of well-dressed white women, many of whom appear to be debutantes, are juxtaposed with images of one-room shacks and the calloused and cut hands of a worker. These photographs as well as images of white-on-black oppression, such as a photograph of three smiling white women holding a black woman by her arms as she appears to attempt to struggle free, are paired with a recording of an English lesson read by a woman in a performatively eerie and echoing whisper. "Do you believe in Santa Claus?" the woman on the audio track asks as bombs drop, creating a direct association between the history of U.S. occupation signaled by the English lesson, the continued threat of U.S. invasion indicated by the bombs, the oppressive racial hierarchy of the island's history of coffee production seen in the photographs and the coffee companies that have now established themselves in Florida. In this way, the coffee companies come to embody a host of signifiers of colonial hegemony from Cuba's past and present. "Quieren Uds. tomar Café Regil, o Pilón, o Tupy?" ["Do you want to drink Regil, Pilón, or Tupy Coffee?"] the films asks its viewers. "No!" it replies, with guns pointed in the air, presenting yet again a narrative in which the Revolution's new agricultural model liberates Cuba's people from its oppressive past.

Fig. 18, 19, 20—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Coffea arábiga*. Havana: ICAIC, 1968.

The last half of the film is devoted to the *Cordón de La Habana* campaign and to coffee production under the Revolution. Based on the repetition throughout the film of the transformation of Cuba's enslaved past to a liberatory present, one would expect this final section to be a triumphant celebration of the Revolution's agricultural model. Instead—and here is where the film takes a turn markedly critical of the Revolution—Guillén Landrián insists on the similarities between the island's history of coffee production and the revolutionary present. The section begins with footage of Castro ascending a platform to the chants of "Fidel" and images of flowers blooming. Next, the camera fades in and out, lending an animated quality to the subject's actions, between a series of photographs of a black woman styling her straightened hair with curlers while she listens to the radio.

Aisha Cort provides an insightful reading of this moment of the film by reflecting on the way that natural hairstyles, popular among African Americans in the late 1960s as a politically charged rejection of white cultural standards of beauty, were frowned upon in Revolutionary Cuba. Black Cubans who wore their hair naturally were associated with the Black Power movement and were persecuted (Moore, *Castro* 259).[31] This was consistent with the Cuban government's general rejection of countercultural influences imported from the North, such as men wearing long hair or jewelry, The Beatles and other rock music, and any other clothing or behaviors that were viewed as reflecting U.S.

or European influence.[32]

However, even considering this general trend, it is noteworthy that at the same time that Cuba, through the Tricontinental, was producing celebratory films and propaganda materials on Black Power that featured photographs and film footage of activists who wore their hair naturally in "Afros," the appropriation of Black Power's symbology, as well as its ideology, by Afro-Cubans would be suppressed. Cort writes, "Landrián challenges the authenticity and revolutionary value of straightened hair and also reevaluates the stigma and negative connotations of the natural characteristics of black hair" (62). Building on Cort's reading of the film's commentary on the stigma against natural hairstyles within the Revolution, I would like to suggest this moment of the film as encapsulating what will be its central critique of the Revolution's hypocrisy regarding its commitment to black freedom. Hair here epitomizes the distance between the Revolution's rhetoric of tricontinentalism, in which Black Power is fully embraced, and its suppression of black organizing at home.

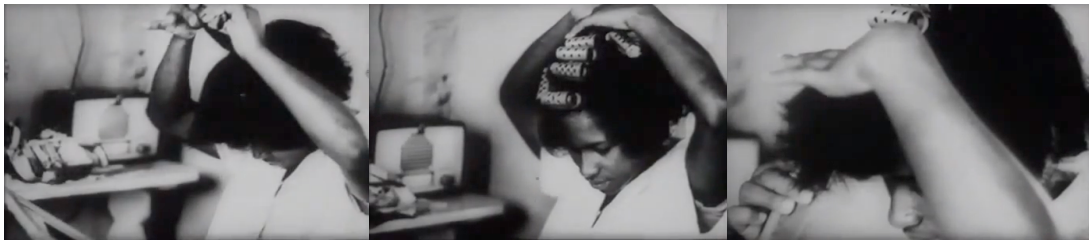

Fig. 21, 22, 23—Guillén, Landrián. *Coffea arábiga.* Havana: ICAIC, 1968.

This allusion to the film's central argument, through the photographs of the woman fixing her hair, is followed by magazine clippings on women's roles in the agricultural project. In the footage that follows, Guillén Landrián presents the viewer with a racial hierarchy within the division of labor in post-Revolutionary Cuba. For

example, he shows the "Secaderos" ["dryers"] as white women talking and laughing as they leisurely dry the coffee beans with their shovels. Minutes later, he presents black women working in a loud, threshing factory. This subtle representation of the division of labor along racial lines ironizes the film's statement that in order to work in the threshing room, one has to have good sight and good eyes. As Guillén Landrián cuts to a close-up of a black woman's eyes, he imbues this supposed requirement of good eyesight with racial connotations.

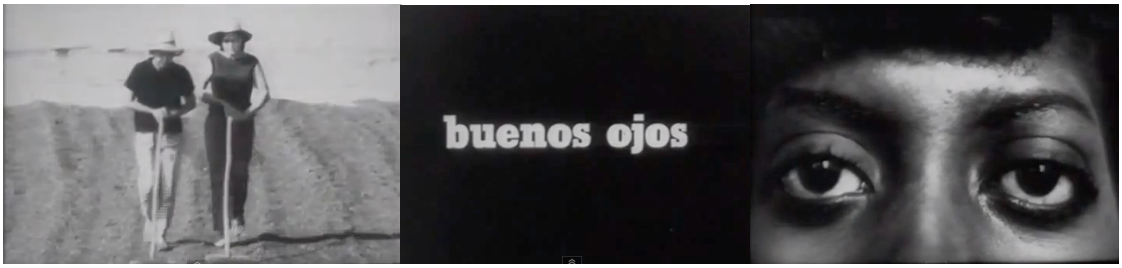

Fig. 24, 25, 26—Guillén Landrián, Nicolás. *Coffea arábiga*. Havana: ICAIC, 1968.

The film's commentary on the racial division of labor is then followed by footage of Cubans, black and white, drinking coffee, a cheering crowd, Castro ascending a platform again to give a speech, and then significantly, the same footage of drumming and dancing that appeared towards the beginning of the film in association with the history of coffee plantation slavery. While we might view this dancing as parallel to the celebratory tone expressed by the cheering crowd waiting for Castro's speech, when we consider the stark racial divisions in Guillén Landrián's representation of the Revolution's agricultural project, the reappearance of this footage from the section on slavery suggests the continuity of racial hierarchies that divide black and white labor under the Revolution.

This ambiguous moment in the film is then paired with the statement, "En Cuba,

todos los negros y todos los blancos y todos tomamos café" ["In Cuba, all blacks and all whites and everyone drinks coffee"], a phrase that revises the famous lyrics "Ay Mamá Inés, todos los negros tomamos café" ["Ay Mama Inés, all us blacks drink coffee"] from a song that was originally composed by plantation slaves, then used in the caricaturesque *Bufo* theatre,[33] and made internationally famous by Afro-Cuban classical musician Ignacio Villa. While one could view this revision of the slave song to the more egalitarian concept that "everyone," drinks coffee and, more importantly, harvests coffee, as a triumphant portrayal of the Revolution's achievements, both the dance footage that precedes this statement and the images that come afterwards will call this reading into question.

As the Beatles' song, "The Fool on the Hill," begins to play, which is already suggestive of the contestatory nature of the film because the Beatles were banned on the radio in the mid 1960s, the photograph of the worker's calloused hands from the section on U.S. imperialism appears, suggesting yet again the continuity between the inequality of Cuba's pre-Revolutionary past and its present. In this sense, the seemingly guileless celebratory phrase that all whites and all blacks drink coffee becomes permeated with an irony that works to undermine the Revolution's celebratory rhetoric.

***Coffea arábiga*'s Counterpoint**

Through presenting the racial hierarchies of coffee production within three distinct moments of Cuban history (19th century slavery, post-independence U.S. imperialism, and post-Revolutionary Cuba), *Coffea arábiga* makes an argument that is very similar to the one presented in Afro-Cuban writer Walterio Carbonell's censored

1961 text, *Critica: Como surgió la cultura nacional* [*Critique: How the National Culture Emerged*]. In this text, Carbonell, who originally proposed the idea for a tricontinental conference in a 1959 article in the newspaper *Revolución*, argues that the exploitation of black labor has characterized Cuban history. He states that the Republic's seemingly revolutionary banner of "con todos y para todos" ["with all and for all"] served as a legitimizing rhetoric for the continuation of white domination post-independence (*Crítica* 19).[34] He warns that this ideology is being perpetuated within the Castro government's rhetoric and urges a revision of what he calls "el poder ideológico de la burguesía" ["the ideological power of the bourgeoisie"] (19). Guillén Landrián and Carbonell had previously collaborated on a statement on race in Cuba that was intended to be presented at the 1968 World Cultural Congress but was censored.[35] When we view *Coffea arábiga* within the context of Carbonell's argument, the celebratory phrase, "in Cuba, all blacks and all whites, and everyone drinks coffee," obtains yet another layer of skepticism towards this simplistic image of racial harmony.

In addition to echoing Carbonell, the film's discussion of the continuation of pre-Revolutionary labor relations within coffee production engages, and provides an alternative to, the well-known sugar-based critique most closely associated with Fernando Ortiz's *Contrapunteo cubano del tobaco y el azúcar* (1940) [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947)]. Ortiz, whose anthropological writings would undergird *negrismo*'s mythic construction of Afro-Cuban culture and folklore as a talisman against U.S. military and economic interventionism, famously argued in *Contrapunteo* that the sugar industry in Cuba, mostly owned by North American companies at the time of Ortiz's writing, had produced the economic conditions for the

continuation of U.S. imperialist domination on the island (198). While Ortiz's argument clearly resonates within the Tricontinental's view of plantation slavery as foundational to imperialism, Ortiz's critique of the sugar industry has been inextricably tied up in *negrismo*'s colonialist tropes.

A clear example of this link might be found in Antonio Benítez Rojo's influential *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* (1989) [*The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and Postmodern Perspective* (1996)]. Benítez Rojo rewrites Ortiz's pan-Caribbeanist argument for the similarities of plantation-based economies, using the "máquina plantación" ["plantation machine"] and the racial hierarchies it implies, to refer not only to the division of labor and resources within individual plantation economies but also to a socioeconomic structure that repeats itself continuously throughout Caribbean history, turning out "capitalismo mercantil e industrial" ["mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism"] and "guerras imperialistas" ["imperialism"] (xii; 9). He defines the plantation system, the quintessential "máquina caribeña" ["Caribbean machine"] as being that "cierta manera" ["certain way"] that the Antilles connect North and South America (xi, v; 8, 4).

He associates this "certain way" of the Caribbean to an Afro-Caribbean, and specifically Afro-Cuban, body by relating how he was consoled during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis and realized that there would not be nuclear war when

> dos negras viejas pasaron 'de cierta manera' bajo mi balcón. Me es imposible describir esta 'cierta manera'. Sólo diré que había un polvillo dorado y antiguo entre sus piernas nudosas […] una sabiduría simbólica, ritual, en sus gestos. (xiii) [two old black women passed 'in a certain kind of way' beneath my balcony. I

> cannot describe this 'certain kind of way;' I will say only that there was a kind of ancient and golden power between their gnarled legs […] a symbolic, ritual wisdom in their gesture.] (10)

Later he adds that the "certain" thing that makes Martin Luther King, Jr. a Caribbean person is not only "su ancestro africano" ["[h]is African ancestry"] but also "la antigua sabiduría que encierran sus pronunciamientos" ["the ancient wisdom embodied in his pronouncements"] (xxxi; 24).

In these moments of the text, especially through his metaphor of the "old black women" whose way of walking reminds the writer of the permanence and continuity of the Caribbean world, Benítez-Rojo represents that "certain way" of being Caribbean through the very essentialist tropes for which *negrismo* and writers like Ortiz have been criticized. For him, Caribbeanness, which is inextricably tied to blackness through the plantation machine, also means being linked to that "symbolic, ritual wisdom" that *negrista* and other *afrocriollista* writers often attributed to black Caribbeans.

In contrast to a writer like Benítez-Rojo, Guillén Landrián takes up Ortiz's commentary on the plantation and its links to imperialism but does not blunt the sharp edges of his argument by slipping into racial essentialisms. In the spirit of tricontinentalism, *Coffea arábiga* moves beyond the tropes of *negrismo*, using the folkloric dance footage at the beginning and the end of the film and the song from *Bufo* theater, not to further the Revolution's empty celebration of black culture but to critique the Revolution's lack of commitment to actual racial equality.

The film points to the Revolution's hypocrisy, in which it supports black struggles abroad while furthering inequalities at home, through employing the very aesthetic form

of Álvarez's newsreels that was used by the Tricontinental to critique racial discrimination abroad. Guillén Landrián appropriates a tricontinentalist ideology (in which racial discrimination is viewed as evidence of a continuation of colonialism) and aesthetic (the urgent cinema of Álvarez) to argue that the Revolution does not measure up to its tricontinentalist ideals. In this sense, although the Cuban Revolution was largely responsible for the publication and dissemination of the Tricontinental's posters, films, and journal, through which it would externalize racism, the film is a testament to the way in which tricontinentalism as a discourse transcends the Cuban Revolution itself and could even be employed as a critique of the Revolution. This discourse would continue to circulate within radicalist circles inside and outside of Cuba long after the international Left grew disillusioned with the Revolution, maintaining its influence even in contemporary notions of transnational subaltern resistance. In this sense, *Coffea arábiga* is much more than just a creative product of Third Cinema or a propagandistic newsreel from the Revolution's agricultural campaign, but rather remains an enduring critical statement on the Castro government's complex racial politics and provides a window into a tricontinentalist and Afro-Cuban counter-discourse formulated during the first decade of the Revolution.

[1] While scholarship, written in English, on black Cubans frequently uses the term "Afro-Cuban," it is important to note that in Spanish the term *afrocubano* is problematic. *Afrocubano* recalls the exoticism of the *afrocubanismo* movement (more broadly termed *negrismo* or *afrocriollismo*) of the 1920s-40s, and black Cubans do not tend to employ the term as a community marker.

[2] For an English translation of the original article, entitled "The Country to Come: and My Black Cuba?," see Mark Sanders's translation on AfroCubaWeb.

[3] Translations from Torres's "Mañana será tarde: Escucho, aprendo, y sigo en la pelea" are mine.

[4] All translations from this interview are by Zayas. See Zayas, "Interview: Nicolás Guillén-Landrián."

[5] Raydel Araoz and Julio Ramos made a documentary called *Retornar a La Habana con Guillén Landrián* [*Returning to Havana with Guillén Landrián*] (2012) in which Gretel Alfonso Fuentes, now living in Havana, discusses Guillén Landrián's life.

[6] These films include *Homenaje a Picasso* (1962), *Congos reales* (1962), *Patio arenero* (1962), *El Morro* (1963), *En un barrio viejo* (1963) *Un festival,* (1963), *Ociel del Toa* (1965)*, Los del baile* (1965)*, Rita Montaner* (1965), *Retornar a Baracoa* (1966)*, Reportaje* (1966), *Coffea arábiga* (1968), *Expo Maquinaria Pabellón Cuba* (1969)*, Desde La Habana, 1969* (1971), *Taller de Línea y 18* (1971)*, Un reportaje sobre el Puerto Pesquero* (1972)*, Nosotros en el Cuyaguateje* (1972), and *Para construir una casa* (1972). Many of these films, such as *Homenaje a Picasso*, *Congos reales, Patio arenero, El Morro, Rita Montaner,* and *Expo Maquinaria Pabellón Cuba* have been lost entirely. The only ones that were exhibited publicly prior to 2002 were *En un barrio*

viejo (Honorary Mention at Krakow Film Festival), *Ociel del Toa* (First Prize at the Valladolid International Film Festival), *Coffea arábiga* and *Nosotros en el Cuyaguataje*. See "Nicolasito Guillén."

[7] One of the most recent iterations of this general trend occurred in August 2012 when a radio ban on dozens of musicians, such as Celia Cruz and Gloria Estefan, was lifted in Cuba (Rainsford).

[8] They were shown at the Muestra de Jóvenes Realizadores, an annual film festival, funded by ICAIC, for works by new Cuban filmmakers (or in this case filmmakers new to the Cuban public) (Zayas, "Three Letters").

[9] For example, Zayas notes on his blog *Cine-Ojo* that Michael Chanan's *The Cuban Image* (1985) and his later edition *Cuban Cinema* (2004), which are considered the disciplinary standard on Cuban film, never mention the filmmaker. I too noticed this glaring omission in Chanan's thoughtful and detailed books. When I visited the ICAIC archives in June 2011, I was told that ICAIC does not have any of Guillén Landrián's scripts or any documentation pertaining to his work.

[10] These include films on the revolutionary process, didactic films on issues such as hygiene or agricultural methods, cultural and artistic subjects, social history and Cuban character, films on the Revolutionary critique of capitalism and imperialism and on international solidarity and the principles of internationalism, films on the subject of women and sports (208)

[11] In my view, Guillén Landrián's ICAIC films deal with two main themes: artistic portraits of Cuban life and people (*En un barrio viejo* (1963), *Un festival* (1963), *Los del baile* (1963) *Reportaje* (1966)) and thoughtful commentary on the Revolution's policies

(*Ociel del Toa* (1965), *Retornar a Baracoa* (1966), *Coffea arabiga* (1968), *Taller de Línea y 18* (1971), *Para construir una casa* (1972)). Some films, such as *Ociel del Toa*, combine both.

[12] All translations of the captions in Guillén Landrián's films are my own.

[13] Isla de Pinos is an island off the coast of mainland Cuba. It was renamed Isla de la Juventud [Isle of Youth] in 1978. The circular panopticon prison on the island, the Presidio Modelo [Model Prison], was built during the Machado dictatorship between 1926-1928. It later housed Fidel and Raúl Castro for two years after their failed 1953 attempt to overthrow Fulgencio Batista. After the Revolution, the same facility was used to imprison dissidents.

[14] Guillén Landrián mentions, for example, that the caption, "Es bueno que esto lo vean en La Habana" ["It's good people in Havana will see this"], was a quote by one of the men working on the Toa River ("El cine").

[15] For a discussion of Italian Neorealism's influence on Cuban film, see chapter seven of Chanan's *Cuban Cinema*.

[16] Gambling, along with prostitution, was associated with the corrupt image of pre-Revolutionary Cuba under Batista. Initially, Castro's government only prohibited cockfighting, but by 1962 all casino licenses were revoked and the National Lottery was discontinued. Gambling of all kinds was made illegal resulting in hefty fines and even prison time (Rovner 125).

[17] Following the 1961 literacy campaign, which sent almost 100,000 *brigadistas* (student volunteers) to the countryside in an effort to reduce illiteracy rates that were between 40-50% in rural Cuba when Castro took power, the Revolution began several follow-up

educational campaigns (Pérez, L. 273). This included the Worker-Peasant Educational program that involved large group course sessions and home reading circles. See Lutjens; and UNESCO.

[18] Once Castro declared the Revolution socialist in 1961, religious practices were officially discouraged. Catholicism was associated with the conservative elite of Spanish descent, and Protestantism had historical ties to U.S. military involvement on the island. While religious practices were not outlawed, religious believers were banned from membership in the Communist party (Chomsky 151-52).

[19] This concept is most often associated with José Martí, but many of the important nationalist figures—like Antonio Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gómez, Martín Morúa Delgado, and others—shared this vision in their writings (Ferrer 3).

[20] For more context on U.S. military intervention in Cuba through the Spanish-American War and the way in which this influenced domestic racial politics within Cuba, see de la Fuente; Ferrer; and Helg. Additionally, Ricardo Batrell's memoir, *Para la historia: Apuntes autobiográficas de la vida de Ricardo Batrell Oviedo* (1912), translated and edited by Mark A. Sanders as *A Black Soldier's Story*: *The Narrative of Ricardo Batrell and the Cuban War of Independence* (2010), is a fascinating account of a black independence fighter and later member of the Partido Independiente de Color who witnesses first-hand the dissolution of this promise of racial equality and who writes his autobiography as a "call to a return to the original promise of Cuba Libre" (Sanders xlviii).

[21] In addition to Giral's documentary on Esteban Montejo, called *Cimarrón* (1967), Giral made a trilogy of films on slave resistance. *El otro Francisco* [*The Other Francisco*]

(1975) is an adaptation of the nation's first novel on slavery, *Francisco* (1839) by Anselmo Suárez y Romero. It critically re-writes the novel, changing the protagonist's suicide to a slave revolt and providing a list of all of the slave rebellions that took place prior to and after the publication of *Francisco*. *Rancheador* [*Rancher*] (1979) depicts a *cimarrón* who is captured and forced to assist ranchers in hunting for runaways. Instead, he leads the ranchers to their death. *Maluala* (1979) is about *cimarrón* communities during the colonial period. While the Spanish government attempts to convince them to come down from the mountain in exchange for their freedom, the *cimarrones* refuse, knowing it is a trap to enslave them.

[22] Sanders made this comment in a course entitled "Afro-Cuban Culture," taught at Emory University in Spring 2012.

[23] Barnet's *Cimarrón* was originally published by Cuba's Instituto de Etnología y Folklore; Retamar's *Calibán* was first published by Casa de las Américas; Nancy Morejón's poem "Mujer negra" was included in *Parajes de una época* (1979) published by Editorial Letras Cubanas; and films by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Sergio Giral and Humberto Solás were produced by ICAIC.

[24] Interestingly, Jane Mcmanus (the U.S. citizen who became the life partner of William Lee Brent, a Black Panther who arrived in Cuba in 1969 when he hijacked a U.S. passenger jet) worked as the translator for the *Tricontinental Bulletin* from 1969 until the late 1970s. For more on Brent, see his memoir *Long Time Gone* (1996).

[25] *Lunes de revolución* was the first magazine established following the Revolution. According to Luis, since *Lunes de revolución* had a television program and supported music events and film (in the case of *P.M*), it was more like an arts organization than a

literary magazine. It published well-known writers from Cuba and abroad, often devoting an entire issue to a specific country. Its 66th issue (July 4, 1960), "Los negros en U.S.A.," was edited by Robert Williams and featured writings by African American writers Richard Gibson, Robert Williams, Harold Cruse, John Henrik Clarke, Langston Hughes, Julian Mayfield, Marguerite Angelos, Alice Childress, Sarah Wright, Lucy Smith and Leroi Jones. For more on *Lunes de revolución*, see Luis.

[26] The July 26th Movement was Fidel Castro and Che Guevara's organization, named for the failed attack on the Moncada barracks on July 26, 1953, that overthrew the Batista dictatorship in 1959. In July 1961, it would be integrated with other organizations, such as the PSP, to become the Integrated Revolutionary Organizations (ORI). The ORI would be named the United Party of the Cuban Socialist Revolution (PURSC) in 1962, and in October 1965, it would become the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

[27] García Espinosa directed fourteen films between 1955 and 1998. He is most known for his film manifesto, "Por un cine imperfecto," ["For an Imperfect Cinema"] and for creating the Revolution's comedic hero in *Las aventuras de Juan Quín Quín* [*The Adventures of Juan Quín Quín*] (1967).

[28] Translations of the captions from Julio García Espinosa's *Cuba baila* are mine.

[29] The plantation was originally called La Isabélica, because the owner Víctor Constantin Couzo, named it after Isabel María, his concubine and slave whom he brought with him from Haiti. It was burned by *mambises* in 1875 and restored into a museum on May 18, 1961 (Hernández).

[30] Prior to the Revolution, nearly three quarters of all land in production was held by only eight percent of the farms. The May 1959 Agrarian Reform Law limited agricultural land

holdings to 3,333 acres, and lands in excess of this limit were nationalized, compensated with twenty-year bonds at a yearly 4.5% interest rate. Expropriated land was redistributed among farmers and organized into state cooperatives (Pérez, L. 243).

[31] This policy changed after Angela Davis's visit to Cuba in 1972 when an "ardently pro-Soviet black Communist" was seen wearing her hair naturally (Moore, *Castro* 303).

[32] This attitude against the culture of those the Revolution viewed as bourgeois pseudo-leftists would culminate in the 1971 Primer Congreso de Educación y Cultura, becoming further entrenched during the *quinquenio gris*.

[33] *Bufo* theater is a satirical theater form that originated in the nineteenth century in which actors parodied the customs of the lower classes of Cuban society. Its use of local music and colloquial language is often seen as an example of early Cuban nationalism. In addition to shaping Cuban national identity, the actors' portrayal of stock figures like "the sexy mulatta, the naive farmer (*guajiro*), the freed black man (*negrito)*, the ignorant Spaniard (*gallego*), and the cunning Chinese man (*chino*)," also helped to create many of the nation's most entrenched racial stereotypes (Caballero 204).

[34] Translations of Carbonell's *Crítica* are mine.

[35] This document is often referenced in accounts of Afro-Cubans' attempted participation in the 1968 World Cultural Congress, but the document itself, which was immediately censored by the government, and the contents contained therein are not detailed and remain unavailable. See Sawyer and Moore.

CONCLUSION

From the Tricontinental to the Global South

The vision of a deterritorialized global empire and equally global subaltern resistance that was consolidated into a formal movement at the 1966 Havana Tricontinental once widely circulated among the international, radical Left. Tricontinentalism took up a preexisting signifier of black anti-imperialism from *afrocriollismo*, which Richard Wright expanded to include people of non-African descent in *The Color Curtain,* but stripped it of its association with essentialism and racial determinism. The Tricontinental thus attempted to move beyond the color curtain, or beyond a racially deterministic signifier of anti-imperialism, and toward an abstract use of color that referred to a shared political ideology rather than to physical appearance. In this way, the Tricontinental provided a framework for imagining a new global revolutionary subjectivity.

The reach of the Tricontinental's ideological and aesthetic influence can be found not only in the dissemination of its films, posters, journals and ephemera but also in the thread of tricontinentalism that undergirds texts from other sites of American radicalist cultural production of the same time period. As I argued in the third chapter, tricontinentalism even provided a ready-made discourse and aesthetic for launching a critique of the Cuban Revolution's racial inequalities and its failure to live up to its Tricontinental ideals. As case studies of both the extensive circulation of tricontinentalism and of the way in which an understanding of this movement provides new and more nuanced analyses of certain texts, I have offered readings of the OSPAAAL's propaganda as well as other works by related Cuban filmmakers, Black

Power and Young Lords activists, and Nuyorican writers. These readings are not intended to encompass the entirety of cultural products in which the influence of this movement may be found but to serve as examples of a much larger body of work that, I believe, would benefit from a better understanding of the Tricontinental's worldview and historical context.

Despite the once wide-ranging influence of the Tricontinental, the central tenets of its ideology have been largely forgotten. The international student protests that erupted in May 1968 began an exchange between poststructuralist theory and the intellectual work of the "Third-World radical left," such as the Tricontinental, that, according to Young, would eventually become postcolonial studies (*White Mythologies* 15). Postcolonialism would not be formally articulated as a critical category of literary analysis, however, until the 1980s, such as in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), in which postcolonial literatures are broadly defined as "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present-day" (Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin 2).

Despite this panoramic approach, in practice, the study of postcolonial literature has tended to focus on the former African and Asian colonies represented at Bandung, dismissing Latin American writers almost entirely. Some Latin Americanist scholars, in turn, have been resistant to identify with postcolonial studies, seeing it as a sweeping categorization articulated from the North American and Western European academies and as a misappropriation of concepts long rooted in Latin Americanist traditions.[1] John Beverley characterizes this resistance to postcolonial studies among some Latin Americanist scholars as a *neo-arielista* attitude, meaning that its anti-imperialist rejection

of the Western academy is founded in an elitist self-distancing from Latin America's marginalized populations. In contrast, scholars of literature of the Southern United States, in their innovative uses of postcolonial theory, often have to defend its use by arguing for parallels between the histories of the U.S. South and other postcolonial contexts (Cohn; Zamora 119).

Perhaps more important than this tendency to elide the Americas, however, is the way in which postcoloniality as a concept emphasizes the circumstantial, in which a conceptual premium is placed on non-whiteness and homologized with a narrowly defined experience of former colonization,[2] rather than the ideological. This is precisely what Bill Ashcroft argued when he claimed that postcolonial discourse is the discourse of the colonized and is not necessarily anti-colonial in sentiment ("Modernity's" 14-15). In contrast, the Tricontinental was focused on an ideological stance of anti-imperialism. While it recognized similarities between experiences of colonization, the basis of its solidarity was not dependent on those similarities nor was it dependent on trait-based characteristics, such as skin color, geographical location or the social class of a person's family background. In other words, even though tricontinentalism is recognized as a foundational moment for postcolonial studies, the two are quite different in perspective.

Over time, the focus in subaltern studies has shifted from the experience of colonization to a shared experience of the negative effects of globalization. The expansive nature of contemporary capitalism creates the conditions for an equally global emancipatory politics that, like the recent Worldwide Occupy Movement, joins people together of diverse nationalities, ethnicities, and languages, and with varying levels of access to the economic advantages and disadvantages of the neoliberal economy.

Through the use of the Internet and social media to communicate with sympathizers across the globe, these movements appropriate the tools of the very system they protest, using them to spread their political messages and to fight neoliberalism from within.

In response to this reality, new categories like the Global South have been emerging over the last ten years as attempts to describe the common goals and worldviews of contemporary resistance movements across national boundaries. While many of these concepts focus on an experience of exploitation, and thus can imply a very broadly defined circumstantial definition, López's definition of the Global South as the "mutual recognition among the world's subalterns of their shared conditions at the margins of the brave new neoliberal world of globalization" is particularly compelling (1). This mutual recognition implies a mutual worldview and ideology, and in this sense, captures precisely the tricontinentalist image of Che Guevara's "exploited people of the world." These new concepts aim to transcend regional and ethnic identities and a narrowly defined historical condition of postcoloniality and they recognize the negative effects of globalization on groups located within the global North. In this sense, they could be viewed as attempts to revive an elided tricontinentalism.

By proposing the intellectual recognition of the Tricontinental's legacy, I would like to make clear that I am in no way arguing for its triumphalist embrace. The Tricontinental is an imperfect model with inconsistencies and weaknesses that arise from, for example, the overwhelming tendency of its cultural production to address itself to a masculine and heteronormative subject. Additionally, while it attempts to recognize the heterogeneity of the individual organizations, ethnicities and nationalities that make up its revolutionary subjectivity, the totality of the Tricontinental's vision risks oversimplifying

local struggles and flattening the complexities of the racial, linguistic, class and gender stratifications that result in radically different experiences with the global system it seeks to unearth. In this sense, my attention to the Tricontinental is not meant to redeem it as a model for political activism but rather to shine a light from a scholarly perspective on the insights to be gleaned from its study, which are several.

First, the Tricontinental offers a long view of the Global South, a starting point from which to develop and depart that, as I have attempted to demonstrate here, necessitates a close examination of foundational Cold War texts. Second, rooting the Global South in tricontinentalism clarifies the concept not as a mere offshoot of postcolonial theory but rather as an explicit divergence from postcoloniality as an organizing category in an effort to recover the basic tenets of tricontinentalism. This implies that theorists of the Global South, in recognizing the legacy of tricontinentalism, would commit to articulating the ideological grounds for inclusion through which individuals imagine themselves as part of a global resistant subjectivity over trait-based and circumstantial conditions.

Third, recognizing tricontinentalism as a model means explicitly acknowledging the central contribution of Latin American and African American intellectual traditions, which are often marginalized in postcolonial studies. This acknowledgement, which does not imply the dismissal of other intellectual traditions represented at the Tricontinental, has important implications for the U.S. and Latin American academies alike. The Tricontinental provides a theoretical backbone for scholars doing comparative work in hemispheric American subaltern studies. Additionally, it implies that since postcolonial theory significantly diverged from tricontinentalism, those Latin Americanist scholars

who view postcolonialism as an over-generalizing or foreign construction may be justified but that Global South theory cannot necessarily be labeled in quite the same way. In other words, recognizing the tricontinentalist roots of the Global South has enormous potential for opening communication between intellectual traditions that has often been stymied under the rubric of postcoloniality.

Finally, as the Global South attempts to name and theorize the present reality of transnational resistant politics, further study of its relationship to the Tricontinental yields a more informed engagement with our contemporary political landscape. In this regard, *Beyond the Color Curtain*: *Empire and Resistance from the Tricontinental to the Global South* is intended as a foundational step towards grounding the Global South in the Tricontinental and towards a deeper reflection on how the arguments put forth in tricontinentalist texts undergird and sustain our contemporary political imaginary.

[1] For in-depth discussions of the Latin Americanist debates on postcolonial studies, see Coronil; and Lund.

[2] Edward Said states that postcolonialism does not adequately account for the experience of neo-colonialism caused by structures of economic dependency ("A Conversation" 2).

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