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Negrometraje, Literature and Race in Revolutionary Cuba

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B.A., Yale University, 2005
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An abstract of
a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

Negrometraje, Literature and Race in Revolutionary Cuba
By Aisha Z. Cort

Negrometraje, Literature and Race in Revolutionary Cuba, explores the expression of Afro-Cuban identity and its illustration by Afro-Cuban writers and filmmakers within the context of the Cuban Revolution. It answers two questions. First, how does Afro-Cuban artistic expression of Afro-Cuban reality change from the 1970s to the 1990s? and second, how can we reread works from Afro-Cuban writers and filmmakers within the context of the Cuban Revolution in light of the ideological disconnects between Revolution, racial discourse, and artistic expression? To answer these questions I looked to a diverse group of Afro-Cuban artists who produced groundbreaking works during the 1970s and 1990s.

Beginning with Nancy Morejón as an example of a well-known literary figure in Afro-Cuban arts, the dissertation delves deeper into the evolution of Afro-Cuban aesthetics with the cinematic works of Nicolas Guillen Landrian in the 1960s, Sara Gómez and Sergio Giral in the 1970s and finally Gloria Rolando in the 1990s. These are all artists whose work has previously never been considered in concert, but together, their works engage in an interesting dialogue and provide a collective answer to the research questions on which this project is based.

In the 50 years of the history of the Cuban Revolution, few dissertations have considered such a broad range of works of Afro-Cuban narrative. This project deliberately moves chronologically from the early years of the revolution into the 1970s and finally into the 1990s; providing a unique perspective on the trajectory of Afro-Cuban cultural production and the development and varied manifestations of an Afro-Cuban aesthetic. The extensive focus on film aids in the expansion of the literary imagination, as well as broadens the idea of what constitutes narrative, as I am arguing via its use that film is an extension of literature. An expansion of the concepts of literary imagination and narrative not only influence the way we think about literature, but how we talk about it. The theoretical expansion of these concepts is crucial to the continued growth and development of literary discourse as consideration of alternative narratives provides a unique lens through which to examine seemingly disconnected discourses.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother and father, who have stood by me through all my endeavors; scholastic and otherwise. Thank you for instilling in me the value of education and for your loving support. Also thank you for providing the experiences that have molded my interests as well as myself as an individual. Thank you to my family and friends who have provided constant patience and encouragement throughout this process. Thank you all for keeping me grounded, humbled and sane especially over the past five years by reminding me what is most important in life.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Negrometraje, Literature and Race is divided into an introduction and three chapters, roughly following a chronological and thematic order. In the introduction I open with Nancy Morejón's 1975 poem, "Mujer Negra," in which the poet tap dances effectively between revolutionary, racial and artistic discourses. As a poem that incorporates, history, memory, culture, religion and identity, Morejón weaves through these themes in order to straddle these discourses and explore Afro-Cuban identity. Using Morejón as a springboard, in the next three chapters I explore how these elements manifest themselves in various combinations to provide a perspective on Afro-Cuban identity.

Chapter one considers the articulation of race and identity (in addition to exploring the role of memory and counter-memory) in the early 1960s documentaries of Nicolas Guillen Landrian, *En un barrio viejo* and *Coffea Arábiga*. In addition it also investigates Sara Gomez's articulation of counter-discourses of identity in her film, *De cierta manera (1977).* These works allow for an in-depth investigation into the initial clash of revolutionary discourse and artistic expression, and also the clash of these two with racial discourse.

The significance of these works in their ability to express and represent imaginings of Afro-Cuban identity (and its representation) is doubly compacted, not only by the context of the Cuban Revolution, but also by the Padilla Affair of 1971. Due to the Padilla Affair, works by artists that were deemed "counter" revolutionary or promoted agendas perceived as opposed to the interests of the state were banned and/or heavily

censured. This censorship was further compacted when artists attempted to promote a racially conscious agenda. These works then allow for an in-depth investigation into the initial clash of not only revolutionary discourse and artistic expression, but also the clash of these two with racial discourse.

Chapter two considers Sergio Giral's *negrometraje* filmic trilogy and the reinterpretations and alternatives to the Caliban figure. Prominent Caribbean scholars debated the Caliban figure feverishly in the 1960s and 1970s and this chapter examines the function of this symbol in each of Giral's films. In his films Giral not only probes the previously delineated limits of Afro-Cuban identity, but also the idea of slavery as an insurmountable condition. I argue that the films of Sergio Giral's *negrometraje* trilogy present alternatives to the Caliban condition. This chapter argues that these films more specifically present counter-hegemonic alternatives to the Caliban condition and traditional views of the Afro-Cuban subject. Moving in a progressive chronological fashion, the first film, *El Otro Francisco* (1974), presents a submissive and oppressed slave who is deeply lodged within the crevices of hegemony. The second film, *Rancheador* (1976), is a captivating look at an aware yet still oppressed slave who exists in the grey area between two competing hegemonic planes. Finally, the third film, *Maluala* (1977), introduces the viewer to a fully liberated Cimarron who engages in a conflicted relationship with intersecting hegemonic structures that yields a cacophonic discursive melee. I believe that these films constitute a profound social commentary on the means and modes of representation of Afro-Cuban identity in 1970s revolutionary Cuba.

Chapter three ventures into the 1990s and explores the re-imagining and re-invention of Afro-Cuban identity in the midst of Cuba's economic crisis, known as the "Special Period in Times of Peace"; an era of dynamic socio-cultural and socio-political change following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of subsidies from the Soviet bloc. The works explored include the introspective first two documentaries of filmmaker Gloria Rolando, *Oggún: Eternal Presence* (1991) and *My Footsteps in Baragua* (1996). I believe that the spirit of re-invention that many scholars argue encapsulates the Special Period is present in the works of Gloria Rolando in her attempts at exploring and reimagining contemporary representations of Afro-Cuban identity.

This dissertation is loosely structured along two axes: the Seventies and the Nineties in Cuba. The 1970s and 1990s are of particular interest to this study on account of two pivotal historical events, the Padilla Affair of 1971 and the Special Period of the 1990s. The Padilla Affair, as is well known in Cuban literary and political history, refers to the case of Heberto Padilla, a Cuban writer who was jailed in 1971 for the content of his work, "*Fuera de Juego,*" which was deemed anti-Revolutionary.[1] His incarceration sparked outcries from the Cuban and the international literary communities, as it called attention to the disparities between the tenets of the Cuban Revolution and the freedoms allowed to all Cuban revolutionary artists.

The post Cold War period in Cuba in the 1990s marks Cuba's plunge into economic depression. Simultaneously though, this period witnessed a surge in Cuba's artistic production and a loosening of the stranglehold on the limits of artistic expression,

[1] The details and events that constitute the Padilla Affair occurred between 1968 and 1971, therefore the films and literature examined in relation to this time period begin in the 1960s to serve as a lead-in to the work produced in the aftermath of the Padilla Affair. For example, Nicolas Guillen Landrian's films premiered before the Padilla Affair, but also raised the same concerns as Padilla's works.

as Cuba opened itself economically to the international community, allowed joint ventures in tourism and in other economic initiatives, while also permitting artists to publish, and receive money from abroad. As a result, both of these decades mark pivotal moments in the history of the Cuban Revolution as well as Cuban revolutionary cultural production, in that they both represent tumultuous times in which the incongruities present in the policies of the Cuban Revolution were questioned internally as well as externally.[2]

Narrating Cultural identity: the convergences and divergences of film and literature

For many, in terms of the socio-cultural and political context in which they operate, perception is reality. That being said, often times the perceptions that morph into reality are nothing more than a pile of myths, stereotypes and misconceptions. It is then the quest of those who find themselves on the receiving end of these perceptions to distinguish between perception and reality, not only for themselves but also for those who ingest said perceptions as reality. In the act of sorting out and marking off the parameters between the two, the issue of representation is key. In order to fulfill this task, the elements of representation-- who is represented, how they are represented and who controls the representation-- must be clearly defined.

W.J. T. Mitchell understands representation as a triangular relationship. Meaning that, "representation is always of something, or someone, by something or someone, to someone" (12). In this way Mitchell skillfully synthesizes representation while reminding us that not only are there different modes of representation (verbal, visual, musical), but

[2] The question of race never disappeared completely from Cuban discourse. My interest in focusing on the 1970s and 1990s obeys a certain logic of cultural continuity, where the 1990s, and the "Special Period in Times of Peace" sought to go back, and revise the period of the 1970s. An account of Afro-Cuban works during the 1980s, for example, in the visual arts, should certainly include the work of Manuel Mendive and Jose Bedia, among other Afro-Cuban artists.

also different types (aesthetic, semiotic and political). [3] It is the overlapping of these various elements that lends a type of familiar vagueness to "representation" itself. As Mitchell argues, it is the "relationship between aesthetic or semiotic representation (things that 'stand for' other things) and political representation (persons who 'act for' other persons)" (11), as expressed through representational modes that converge to yield this vagueness. The elements of representation then form the base of correcting perception as well as interrogating the prevalence of myths perpetuated by perception as truth. This interrogation is carried out by the proposed fourth dimension of representation, which represents the " 'intender' or 'marker' of the representation" (Mitchell 12).

Applying this four-dimensional concept of representation to race and identity, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's Racial Formation Theory becomes particularly interesting. Racial Formation Theory argues that,

> In all circumstances where racial groups exist, the relationship between them as well as the content of those particular categories cannot be reduced to or explained by ethnicity, class, or 'color-blind' frameworks. Instead they contend that racial categories have their own dynamics in which objective and subjective conflicts between racial groups emerge, are transformed, and constantly remapped; that is, race is 'an unstable and (decentered) complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle (Lusane 91).

This theory is of particular relevance to this study as it is cognizant of the interconnected nature of race and socio-political change in addition to the mutable and flexible nature of racial identity formation in the face of such socio-political change. In other words, Racial

[3] Mitchell defines aesthetic and semiotic relationships as "things that 'stand for' other things" (11) and political representation as "persons who 'act for' other persons" (11).

Formation Theory acknowledges that racial representation can and will be articulated in diverse ways based on the manner and the mode in which it is represented (Mitchell 13). The manner and mode of racial representation is then directly linked to sociocultural/political change, as "even purely 'aesthetic' representation of fictional persons and events, can never be completely divorced from political and ideological questions…" (Mitchell 15). Thus, as a result of socio-political change, racial representation is in a constant state of flux and renegotiation.

Narrativity is another concept that plays a prominent role in this dissertation. Narrativity is concerned with narration and the "habits of storytelling" (Miller 66). Due to the universal nature of storytelling among human beings, there are a vast amount of theories of narrative, including but not limited to: Marxist, Bakhtian, structuralist, semiotic, Post-structuralist and deconstructionist (Miller 67). Narratives aid in our understanding of the world around us. They provide a space for analysis, as well as criticism of our experiences. As Miller contends,

> …in fictions we order or reorder the givens of experience. We give experience a form and a meaning, a linear order with a shapely beginning, middle, end, and central theme. The human capacity to tell stories is one way men and women collectively build a significant and orderly world around themselves. With fictions we investigate, perhaps invent, the meaning of human life (69).

To buttress the conclusions reached by these narratives in regards to the "meaning of human life," stories are repeated over and over. The repetition of traditional stories and narratives serves to perpetuate a normative or conventional narrative that is passed on via its repetition. Despite the fact that many different narratives exist, they have a tendency to utilize the same formulas in "recognizable variations" (Miller 70). Narratives become

increasingly intriguing when they deviate from these conventional norms. As Miller points out, “variations from the norm draw much of their meaning from the fact they are deviating from the rules” (70). These “deviant” or counter-narratives then serve as a means for exploring and representing identities that exist on the borders of normativity.

The post-structuralist view on narrativity provides crucial insight to understanding Afro-Cuban identity in revolutionary Cuba. Post-Structuralists, as Clarence Lusane argues, “have emphasized the role of narrativity in identity construction including that of race…Racial identities, according to the paradigm, are constructed and mediated through political struggles that embody contending narratives across overlapping historic and social landscapes.” (Lusane 91-92). This viewpoint explains the means through which the products of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory are expressed. Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson advance this viewpoint in their keen observation that, “it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social identities” (Somers and Gibson 59; Lusane 91).

Both theories, the Racial Formation Theory and Post-Structuralist theory of narrativity, observe and acknowledge the link between socio-political change and identity and are essential to the elucidation of the central argument of my dissertation; that the Cuban Revolution has influenced and inspired an expression of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness that changed as the goals and tactics of the revolutionary government transformed in tandem with political developments of the time. In addition I am arguing that the expression of this revolutionary inspired expression and consciousness is visible via film and literature.

As William Luis argues in *Voices from Under: Black Narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean*, the 1960s:

> …marked a significant stage in the development of black narrative, a period in literary history in which writers and critics became actively engaged in exploring and reevaluating the black image in Latin American and Caribbean literatures. This latest stage in black literature has allowed many to rethink the history of Blacks and analyze its past and present from another point of departure (7).

During this decade, many black Caribbean and Latin American writers received recognition for their works as a result of, and in conjunction with, numerous socio-political events of the time. Namely, the Boom of the Latin American novel, the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Black Power Movement. All socio-political events which drew the world's eye to the region, and in effect to the nuances of its cultural production (Luis 8).

According to Luis, "The literature of and about Blacks allows for another reading of history. If the history of America was conceived as a European invention and dramatized by the search for El Dorado, black narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean offers an alternative to a European understanding of America" (3). As an alternative to hegemony, the consideration of black literature is crucial to the comprehensive study of the Latin American and Caribbean cannon. Stuart Hall takes this claim one step further, as he explains that the subsequent identities formed in the Caribbean are not only continuous with dominant discourse but also represent a "rupture" with it: "We might think of Caribbean identities as "framed" by two axes or vectors, simultaneously operative: the vector of similarity and continuity, the vector of difference and rupture" (Hall 225). Positioned against the reference point that the cultural center of

hegemony represents, it follows that the identities created in opposition to, or in light of this reference point, with regards to definition and articulation are, "…the boundaries of difference" that are "continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference" (226). Literature, as a narrative art, provides a space for the articulation and expression of the contradictory, problematic, and "different" identities.

Robert Richardson discusses the utility of a joint exploration of the narrative modes of these genres in his study, *Film and Literature*. The relation of film and literature is nothing new, as evidenced by the works of Sergei Eisenstein and Siegfried Kraucauer. Building on the foundational works of Kraucauer and Eisenstein, Richardson argues for the interconnected and overlapping relationship of film and literature as narrative modes.

> If one considers literature as the art of words, that is to say, if it is letters or words that give literary activity its peculiar and distinctive character, then of course, we should have to say that film is obviously neither literature, nor even literary, certainly not in the silent era and only marginally or collaterally in the sound era. If it is the primacy of the word that creates or allows literature, then one would have to be content with saying that the film is at most analogous to literature having, as it does, its own pictorial vocabulary and its montage for syntax. But if one is willing to shift the focus a little, and to describe literature as being, in the main, a narrative art, intent upon creating images and sounds in the reader's mind, then film will appear much more obviously literary itself. This description would seem to argue that the film is only an extension, but a magnificent one, of the older narrative arts (Richardson 12).

Positing the relationship between film and literature in such a way then, Richardson echoes the post-structuralist view of the role of narrativity and narratives in the expression of identity.

The consideration then of both Afro-Cuban film and literature in the context of socio-political upheaval will provide a different prospective from which to consider Afro-Cuban cultural production, due to the insight that,

> Blacks as a people have experienced history according to different circumstances, not as the initiators and recorders of events, but as the victims of actions imposed upon them by others. The black concept of history is different. Their view of events is a product not of a dominant but of a marginal position in society. And the literature of and about Blacks reflects this reality (Luis 3).

I would add into this observation of Luis that not only literature of and about Blacks as it is traditionally understood reflects this reality but also the films of and about Blacks are reflective of this reality, as argued by Richardson. Film and literature, as narrative arts then, constitute a space for the exploration of the continuous negotiations of the currency of blackness in addition to the expression of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness. The articulations of black identity represented in these modes of narrativity are of particular interest due to the tensions between the tenets of the Cuban Revolution and artistic expression as well as those between the tenets of the Cuban Revolution and racial expression.

Negrometraje, Literature and Race in Revolutionary Cuba investigates cinematic and literary examples of the Afro-Cuban aesthetic and their representations of *Afrocubanía*. This project is primarily focused on film, as I not only view film as an extension of literature, but also because film is yet another mode of exploring alternative narratives of identity, a mode that was readily available to Afro-Cuban artists during the chronological timeline of this project. Read against the framework of racial and artistic expression within the context of the Cuban revolution, Afro-Cuban cinema and literature

take on new meaning. These products of Afro-Cuban cultural expression become more than instances of an isolated movement. They become initial examples of the foundations of a seldom explored, but very real Afro-Cuban aesthetic.

As a result, a large portion of this project is contingent on the reconsideration of the foundational works of Sergio Giral, Nancy Morejón, Sara Gómez and their artistic and intellectual predecessors. This body of work must be understood, not only contextually, but also theoretically, as a continuous deconstruction, construction, and reconstruction of Afro-Cuban identity within the context of revolution. A comprehensive examination Giral, Morejón and Gómez will serve to highlight not only the true message and intention of these works but also signal the Afro-Cuban artistic vision of Afro-Cuban reality within revolutionary Cuba while critiquing hegemonic tradition.

Chapter One: Identity Politics and Revolutionary Ideals in Nancy Morejón's "Mujer Negra"

Often anthologized as the essential example of Afro-Cuban literature, Afro-Cuban artist Nancy Morejón's, "Mujer Negra" is a literary representation of, "…the racial themes of her early works and her commitment to the revolution" (qtd. Luis 93). As such, 'Mujer Negra' has been called "a poem of identity and pride, of history and memory, of culture and religion, of death and rebirth" (Luis 93). It marks a transition in Morejón's voice, and her newfound political awareness and consciousness. In this poem, there is a certain balance between aesthetic, racial and political discourse. Following Luis, I believe that Morejón's negotiations between identity and revolutionary politics come to a head in this poem. "Mujer Negra" is exemplary of the achieved goals of the artists analyzed in this project; their quest to achieve the delicate balance between aesthetic, racial and political discourses in their work. Morejón skillfully navigates between competing racial and political discourses while remaining true to her aesthetic values, and in "Mujer Negra" she is able to further her exploration of the transaction between self and society by examining the themes of memory, silence and trauma.

Prior to the appearance of this poem Morejón had released three other volumes of poetry, *Mutismos* (1962), *Amor, Cuidad Atribuida* (1964), and *Richard trajo su flauta y otros argumentos* (1967). Each of these volumes exhibits the progressive development of Morejón's poetic and political voice. In *Mutismos (1962)*, the reader is introduced to a young Morejón who searches for a place where she can anchor her identity, as she is just beginning the lifelong journey of understanding herself as an artist and a (black) subject against the backdrop of the Cuban revolution. *Amor, Ciudad Atribuida (1964)*, is a

continuation of Morejón's on-going quest for self and a means by which to express that blossoming woman within. Similar to the poems contained in *Mutismos*, the poems in this collection revolve around themes of self-evaluation, but the inner conversations of Morejón's eighteen year old self from *Mutismos* (1962) are extended in *Amor, Ciudad Atribuida* (1964) to include an on-going and more revealing conversation that engages the maturing Morejón, as well as the consequences and circumstances of the physical space that she inhabits; the city of Havana.

Richard trajo su flauta y otros argumentos (1967) represents an interesting transformation in Morejón's artistic voice. It is a volume that introduces a noticeably more mature and socially conscious Morejón, as can be seen in poems such as "La Cena", "Ojos de Eleggua" and "Richard trajo su flauta", among others. In these, Morejón unveils the mysterious internal dynamics of the Cuban family (a metaphor for Cuban society as a whole) as well as Cuban religious culture and tradition as she begins to allude to themes that will appear repeatedly in her future poems and essays; blackness and difference within and beyond the Cuban context. When the poem "Mujer Negra" first appeared in the tiny 1979 volume, *Parajes de una epoca*, it had been 15 years since Morejón's previous book of poems. But in the years that lapsed between *Amor, ciudad atribuida* and *Parajes de una epoca*, Morejón had not been idle, especially during the late 1960s.

There is a dramatic and noted gap in the Morejón's artistic work between 1967's *Richard trajo su flauta* and 1979's *Parajes de una Epoca*, which includes "Mujer Negra".[4] To explain this lull and also the shift in poetic agenda William Luis, Linda S.

[4] Linda S. Howe argues that it was originally published in 1975 in Casa de las Americas

Howe and other scholars, point to the events of 1968 and Morejón's involvement in the alleged "Black Manifesto Plot" (Moore 307).

In 1968, the Cuban government falsely labeled Nancy Morejón, along with Rogelio Martínez Furé, Nicolas Guillen Landrian, Sara Gómez, Pedro Perez Sarduy, Manuel Granados and other black intellectuals as "black troublemakers." This group of black intellectuals was accused of hatching a plot to overthrow the government after they met with the then Minister of Education, José Llanusa Gobels to discuss a position paper on race and culture in Cuba that they had prepared for presentation at the World Cultural Congress in January of 1968. In the meeting, the contributors to the essay were encouraged to speak freely with Gobels about their concerns regarding race in Cuba under the false impression that their opinions would be incorporated into the Congress. But midway through the meeting Gobels made it clear that voicing such concerns to an international audience at the Congress would be nothing less than sedition and thus after meeting with Gobels, the position paper was quickly labeled as the "black manifiesto plot" and its organizing members dispersed (Moore 308).

After the dissolution of this group of black intellectuals, a number of the groups members were sent to prison, UMAP camps[5] or rehabilitated. Morejón, in addition to Pedro Perez Sarduy, Rogelio Martínez Furé and others were, as Carlos Moore states, "granted the opportunity to 'rehabilitate' themselves and given small jobs in various government agencies…"(310). As a result of this rehabilitation, from this moment on Morejón never publicly involved herself in racial protest.

Reimagining Race and Nation

[5] Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción. These camps were rumored to be concentration camps for those deemed counter-revolutionary such as radical intellectuals, homosexuals and dissidents.

As stated previously, race muddles. Not only in societies founded on and based in a black and white dichotomy, but also and most strikingly in societies based on plurality. Cuba is the perfect example of the latter. Structured loosely as a three-tiered system, consisting of black, white and mulatto racial discourses, relations and politics have always played a role in political and social change of the nation. This loosely structured system was mutable, in the sense that the mulatto category could be collapsed onto the black one, and in certain cases, individuals were able to move from the mulatto category to the white category, based on phenotypic characteristics. Clarence Lusane further explains:

> Although the mulatto strata existed and some members enjoyed more privileges than blacks, for the most part, mulattos and blacks were sutured into a single racial caste. Racial identity and preservation of caste were constructed along the lines of visibility rather than a formal set of guidelines as evolved in the United States…the social meaning of race was codified in physical features in a binary system with little room for mutability and racial conversion (92).

Lusane's insight is instructive, and yet in light of this observation of the racial demarcation, the analysis of the exact degree to which the specter of race has haunted and followed the Cuban nation-building project is difficult to calculate as, "assessing the nature and contours of race relations in Cuba is complicated by the problem of identifying exactly who belongs in what racial category and by the conscious decision on the part of the post-revolutionary government not to gather racially-oriented data" (Lusane 86). Even in a loose three-tier system, plagued by binary tendencies, (self-) racial identification and its consequences are still open to subjective interpretation. The reimagination and rearticulation of blackness and the revolution, I will argue was carried

out in the shadow of, Cuba's international politics and policies—particularly as these concerned Africa, since the early 1960s. In addition Castro's international policies also entertained the externalization of racial issues and tensions.

Consideration of the paradoxical relation of blackness and the revolution must take into account the historical relation of blackness to the Cuban nation, from its inception, to independence, through the Republic and immediately prior to the Revolution; in addition, a discussion of this relation must consider the discreet comments on race made via official policies, speeches, discourses and the like on the subject. As Carlos Moore argues in his *Castro, the Blacks and Africa*,

> Three fundamental phases have marked racial relations in the history of Cuba: slavery, the independence wars, and the republican era. Three elements have interplayed in the Cuban racial process: a. economic exploitation, b. a cultural and psychological background purporting to justify the demeaning of, or discrimination against, the blacks, and c. the struggle for Cuban integration opposed by those anti-Cuban currents which attempt to divide us. The first two [elements] are discriminatory, while the last is egalitarian and anti-segregationist (Moore 8).

These three fundamental phases are key to understanding the social standing and psychological make up of Afro-Cubans, immediately prior to and directly after the Revolution. Ignited during a time not only of national upheaval, the Revolution came to power at a time when "race and politics had become inseparable in international relations. The countries of Africa and Asia were asserting their power, amid the Cold War waged by the US, and the USSR" (Moore 3). As nations of "otherness"--i.e. non-European, problematic subjects--the collective, chain-reaction uprising of these nations caught the world's attention.

When Fidel Castro assumed power, black Cuba was prepared for a change. Although Afro-Cubans had supported the prior regime of Fulgencio Batista, their frustrations with continued mistreatment and lower social-standing (being considered as something other than Cuban) had reached their boiling point. With Castro and the revolution, the promise of economic balancing and getting equal footing in Cuban society was more than appealing. Yet, in the face of these promises and goals of the revolution, an icy silence remained on the part of the Cuban officials with regard to the explicit mention of race.

> The man who assumed power in 1959 had done so without having ever made reference to Cuba's racial situation. Castro's silence on this issue was no mere oversight. On the one hand, it was consistent with a long-standing taboo in Cuban ethno-politics. (The Cuban communist party was the only political party in that country to consistently denounce racial oppression.) On the other hand, it followed tactical considerations (Moore 6).

This silence was not missed by black Cuba. Argued by some as a tactic to appease middle class Cubans (Moore, Thomas), the silence on a traditionally overlooked yet obviously evident issue did not sit well with Afro-Cubans. Racial discrimination and racism were well alive in Cuba before and during the initial months of the triumph of the Revolution, and as a result Castro would inevitably have to speak on this reality.

> The constitution of 1940 barred all race discrimination. This worked reasonably well. The situation was described by Castro in a press conference on 23 January 1959 when he said, in reply to a North American journalist, that 'the colour question' in Cuba did not exist in the same way as it did in the U.S.; there was some racial discrimination in Cuba but far less; the revolution would help to eliminate these remaining prejudices; on this topic, Castro added delphically, 'Our thoughts are the thoughts of Marti.' This was Castro's first comment of any sort on the question of race, though, later on, the Cuban revolution would emphasize race questions harshly. Castro might also have gone on to say that, in

> so far as it did exist, racial discrimination was chiefly a middle-class phenomenon (Thomas 338).

Addressed in such a way, Castro's position on the racial discourse and reality of Cuba was left open-ended and still unresolved. But the pressure to produce a definite stance could not be ignored. Afro-Cubans wanted an answer and reassurance as to what their new role and position would be in the revolutionary government and society. As such,

> …on March 22, Castro apparently felt the need to appease and reassure Black Cuba. In a nationwide televised speech, he now admitted that accumulated injustices and a legacy of prejudice against Blacks in Cuba. The revolutionary regime considered the eradication of racial segregation and the implementation of national integration to be one of its humanitarian duties. The drive for integration, he said, would rank fourth in the order of priorities of the Revolution and would focus on three clearly defined areas, labor, education and recreation (Moore 19).

With this speech, Castro had officially and concretely addressed Cuba's race issues, but also noted that the issue was not as pressing as other issues on the table, and only ranked fourth in terms of its importance.

Critics of Fidel Castro's approach to racial discrimination and racial discourse in Cuba, such as Carlos Moore, are particularly harsh in their critique of these two initial undertakings and articulations of a proposed solution and recognition of the race problem. As Moore states, in reaction to Castro's March 22 speech: "In other words, the government was intent on banning discrimination based on race or color, while racism itself could remain a sort of discretionary ethical question. Implicit in this policy was that Cuba's new white leadership tacitly condoned white supremacy but frowned on racial segregation" (Moore 28). Moore continues his critique of Castro and his future approaches to discussions and considerations of race in revolutionary Cuba,

> At no time between March 1959 and the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist party in February 1986, twenty-seven years later, did Castro or any of his top lieutenants attempt to open Cuba's racial Pandora's box again. Rather, from that point on, the Castro leadership would resist and even repress attempts by black dissenters to force the issue into the open (Moore 28).

If, as Moore argues, there were almost 30 years of official silence on the issue of race and the position of Afro-Cubans, how did this silence resonate in the formation and negotiation of Afro-Cuban identity? One way in which to understand this silence on the part of the Castro regime is to view it as a systematic deconstruction of a separate, articulated Afro-Cuban identity. By refusing to recognize Afro-Cuban identities, voices and needs as unique in comparison to those of the imagined homogenous nation, the Revolution in effect initiated an ongoing period of simultaneous deconstruction, construction and reconstruction of Afro-Cuban identity.

During the initial months and years of the revolution, attention was focused on the strengthening of the Cuban nation and the creation of a collective revolutionary identity- an identity which did not have room for sub-group collectives and solidarities such as Afro-Cubans. For that reason, government initiatives such as the Movimiento de Orientación e Integración Nacional were established in order to, "assist the revolutionary government in carrying out the 'racial reforms'" (Moore 47), and also further quell potential critics of the racial "problem".

Moore turns to Frantz Fanon to understand and explain black Cuba's initial and persistent infatuation with the figure of Fidel Castro:

> …Frantz Fanon, described the pathetic phenomenon of racial overcompensation. The oppressed, racially humiliated, and culturally alienated, he explained, hunger for even minimal justice. Blacks were therefore liable to overreact to whatever personal, social, or

> political gesture—no matter how trifling—was accomplished on their behalf by a member of the dominant group. 'The native is so starved for anything,' wrote Fanon 'anything at all that will turn him into a human being any bone of humanity flung to him, that his hunger is incoercible, and these poor scraps of charity may here and there overwhelm him. His consciousness is so precarious and dim that it is affected by the slightest spark of friendliness.' Cuba's new white revolutionary leaders would fully exploit this legacy of black oppression (Moore 44).

Under this explanation, Castro's mere mention of the topic of race was enough to cement his image as a "redeemer" of sorts into the minds of most Afro-Cubans. But not all Afro-Cubans were convinced.

While the majority of the Afro-Cuban community supported Castro and his plans for integration, not all were convinced of his promises. They were skeptical of the new leader and wanted more. As Moore states, "there was one sector of Afro-Cuba that tempered its 'thanks' to Castro with demands for long-denied political enfranchisement. Desegregation, for this group, was simply not good enough. Access to power, not beaches, was the goal of the black middle class" (Moore 45). Integration for middle class Afro-Cubans was more than just a buzz-word. It meant for them the possibility for real participation in Cuban society at the level of politics.

> The black middle class understood integration to mean inclusion into the State on an equal footing with its white counterpart. Once aware of the extent of the black middle class's autonomous political ambitions, however, the revolutionary regime undertook to destroy its only avenue for independent political action: the self-help, all-Black Sociedades de Color. This move was carefully camouflaged as part of the desegregation drive (Moore 48-49).

As such, under the guise of integration, these all-Black organizations were systematically persecuted as a means to maintain the silence of a potentially divisive Afro-Cuban forum

for social change.[6] Slowly but surely, the revolutionary government dismantled the Sociedades de Color forcing Afro-Cuba from a period of construction to one of rapid reconstruction.

> The first limitation imposed by the Castro regime was the restriction of the Sociedades' functions to parties held on Saturdays and Sundays. Then, ominously, the government went on to confiscate the proceeds of these festivities. The Sociedades were thus deprived of their only independent source of income…The coup de grace came when the national federation of these associations was abolished along with their provincial head quarters (Moore 49).

The systematic deconstruction of the Sociedades de Color also led to an inevitable reconstruction of Afro-Cuban identity in the face of the deconstruction of one of their most important cultural institutions.[7]

Although a strategic and successful blow to the political growth of the Afro-Cuban middle class, it also catalyzed a slow but steady rearticulation of the renegotiation of blackness and revolution.

Proposed initially by Walterio Carbonell, Cuba and Castro's interest in Africa was a fated love affair that, once piqued, would yield a fateful union. Carbonell recognized that allying Cuba's black population and Africa could be key to not only the revolution's survival but also to the resolution or continued silencing of the race issue.

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[6] Societies of color were founded in 1890 by Juan Gualberto Gomez. They were established with the mission of educating former black slaves, and were also powerful forums for the social and political agendas of Afro-Cubans. These societies had evaded the 1910 Morua Law's ban on black organization, but were not immune to the Castro administrations persecution (Moore 49). For more information on the origins of Sociedades de Color please see, Philip A. Howard's *Changing History: Afro Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century.*

[7] As Moore points out, "The destruction of the Sociedades was in line with the regime's determination to destroy all autonomous bases for dissent or protest. It was intended to be, and indeed was, a crippling blow to the political aspirations of the black middle class" (50).

> Cuba's population of African descent was, in the eyes of Carbonell, the greatest single asset the revolutionary regime possessed in order to build a special relationship with the black continent, though, as Franqui recalls, 'the ingrained contempt then reigning in Cuba for anything African, added to the prevailing ignorance about the African continent itself, provided a bad climate for the adoption of [Carbonell's] project (Moore 76).

Thus the combination of internationalism and externalism provided the basis for the reconstruction and renegotiation of the relationship between blackness and the revolution (1970s-80s). In the face of these two political tactics, Castro sought to portray Cuba as an "Afro-Latin" nation that supported and was sympathetic to its Asian and African brothers. By turning the spotlight from internal unrest in black Cuba and towards Africa, Cuba further silenced discussion on its race issues as black Cubans were urged to put their efforts and energies behind the liberation of their African and Asian brothers and turn their attentions away from their own issues at home.

In addition to the events of 1968, during Morejón's period of "rehabilitation" in the 1970s, William Luis also signals the intersection of local and international socio-cultural and political events that occurred during this period as part of the foundation of Morejón's poetic evolution. As Carlos Moore before him, William Luis points to Cuba's foreign policy initiatives of the early 1970s as key to the awakening of black consciousness and self-awareness in Afro-Cubans. Castro's visits to Africa, as well as visits to Cuba by Angela Davis and Miriam Makeba in 1972, were received enthusiastically by Afro-Cubans. Also, prior to the initiation of these policies and cross-cultural exchanges, the late 1960s witnessed the rise and suppression of Afro-Cuban study groups, which involved some of Cuba's most prominent Afro-Cuban artists and intellectuals.

Morejón's participation in the "Black Manifiesto Plot" during the late 1960s marked the awakening of her personal self-awareness and black consciousness. In concert with the Cuban Revolution's coming-of-age, so too did Morejón's poetic voice and vision mature; leaving behind an adolescent naiveté and incorporating her conclusions from her experiences as a participant in the short-lived Cuban "Movimiento Black Power". Although relatively silent creatively during the years following the dismantling of the "Black Manifiesto Plot" group, "Mujer Negra" represents a critical creative apex in Morejón's social development as a poet, as an Afro-Cuban woman and as a committed revolutionary. Morejón's "Mujer Negra" and her later poetry are representative of a version of a decisively Afro-Cuban aesthetic that promoted an integration of black popular culture and revolutionary culture. With this poem, Morejón redirects the interpretation of her work and also constructs an alternative artistic vision of poetry that demonstrates the fusion of her identity as a revolutionary, as well as her competing identity as a black Cuban woman. In addition, "Mujer Negra" also highlights the delicate and precarious balance that existed between these different sides of her identity.

The early work of Morejón then is representative of her constant process of negotiating the changing discourse of race, aesthetics and revolution. As William Luis argues, "For her, writing poetry has meant walking a thin line between the changing discourses of the Cuban revolution and maintaining a certain independence from them" (83). As the discourse and expectations of the Revolution changed, so too did Morejón's utilization of poetry to promote her own ideas of racial and aesthetic discourse—ideas that were also aligned to revolutionary discourse. And yet, even in her manipulation of racial and aesthetic discourse in the volatile revolutionary context, Morejón skillfully

balances various elements of revolutionary and identity politics, acknowledging the revolution in her work, but not allowing it to completely dominate and direct the course of her artistic vision.

In "Mujer Negra", Morejón explicitly examines not only herself, but takes a retrospective approach as well to the official and unofficial histories, traumas and cultural memories that together combine to inform her identity as a "mujer negra". It is a decidedly vocal and visible declaration of her black, Cuban and female identities and a pointed statement that for her at least, these elements cannot be separated and are inextricably linked.

Memory, silence and trauma in "Mujer Negra"

"Todavía huelo la espuma del mar que me hicieron atravesar…"[8] [I still smell the foam of the sea they made me cross] (Morejón 200/201). So reads the first line of the often cited "Mujer Negra", and with it, Morejón conjures up an abundance of emotions, feelings and memories. In the six stanzas that compose this poem Nancy Morejón expertly navigates the triad of memory, trauma and silence. For Morejón and in relation to, "Mujer Negra", the elements of memory, silence and trauma are interlaced and overlap to articulate the significance: past, present and future of the journey; physical, social, mental, spiritual, of the Afro-Cuban woman. "Mujer Negra" is a semi-autobiographical mini-epic poem and the epitome of this poet's overarching intellectual and social project at that point in her life.

To effectively narrate such a journey, Morejón invokes memory, trauma and exile as her tools of choice. Her main character, an anonymous "I", symbolically speaks for the

[8] All translations of this poem come from the Kathleen Weaver translation of "Mujer Negra" found in *Looking Within: Selected Poems, 1954-2000/Mirar adentro: Poemas escogidas, 1954-2000*. Ed. Juanamaría Cordones-Cook.

collective and silenced experience of all Afro-Cuban women. In voicing the silenced collective then, the "I" of Morejón upon superficial investigation, would seem to move alone through the course of history, but upon deeper inspection the "I" is accompanied by the elements of memory, trauma and silence. As presented in this poem by Morejón, these elements are interdependent and inextricably linked as one bleeds into the other.

The first stanza of the poem awakens not only the memory of the speaker, but also that of the reader, lending to the questioning of the silence that has surrounded the memory that Morejón's words have summoned.

> Todavía huelo la espuma del mar que me hicieron atravesar.
> La noche, no puedo recordarla.
> Ni el mismo océano podría recordarla.
> Pero no olvido al primer alcatraz que divisé.
> Altas, las nubes, como inocentes testigos presenciales.
> Acaso no he olvidado ni mi costa perdida, ni mi lengua
> Ancestral.
> Me dejaron aquí y aquí he vivido.
> Y porque trabajé como una bestia,
> Aquí volví a nacer
> (I still smell the foam of the sea they made me cross.
> The night, I can't remember it.
> The ocean itself could not remember that.
> But I can't forget the first gull I made out in the distance.
> High, the clouds, like innocent eyewitnesses.
> Perhaps I haven't forgotten my lost coast, or my ancestral language.
> They left me here and here I've lived.
> And, because I worked like an animal,
> here I was reborn) (Morejón 200/201).

Constant invocation of memory, signaled by the speaker's recollection of what she can't forget and the images and emotions that linger are telling. The smell of the sea, in addition to the first sight of a bird at sea, are carved into her memory, while in contrast, memories of her ancestral land and language are hazy, as the speaker is unsure of what she remembers of them. In addition, the allusion to the clouds and their role as "inocentes testigos presenciales" (innocent eyewitnesses) highlights the thundering silence that surrounds the inferred traumatic act of slavery. The use of the word "todavía" (still) would lead the reader to believe that although the speaker is removed from the event described by the forced crossing of the ocean, the memory still remains, fuzzy, but still very real and not yet silenced.

More often than not, we look to memory not only to orient ourselves but also society in the present day and potential future. The invocation and review of memories past contain not only insight into the present state, but also hints on how to proceed into the future. More importantly, memory provides insight into who we are, who we were and who we hope to become. It is on this last point that I wish to focus; the role of memory in the development, understanding and articulation of identity. In the case of the analysis of the articulation and representation of Afro-Cuban identity, the unraveling of memory is crucial to its success. Scholars have approached the tumultuous relationship between memory and identity on numerous occasions most notable are the seminal works of Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton.

In his work, *On collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs (who is one of the most cited authors in modern memory discourse) details the role of individual and collective memory in the shaping of individual and collective identity. He focuses primarily on the

affects of collective memory on the collective identification of a society and after providing the reader with a short discourse on the roots of his theories on memory and identity he moves into more detailed case studies of the role memory plays in religious, familial and social class situations.

Halbwachs' work is of significance because he builds on the foundational sociological work of Emile Durkheim, considered by many to be the father of sociology. Halbwachs expands on Durkheim's seminal work in the sense that his (Halbwachs) work incorporates the element of collective memory into his investigation of identity. Halbwachs argues that, "…everything seems to indicate that the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present" (Halbwachs 39-40). Or stated otherwise that when the past is revisited via memory it does not exist in a vacuum, but rather the memory of the past that is invoked in the present is one that has been altered or "reconstructed", thus lending to the past a certain artificial and/or doctored quality. Halbwachs explains this strange dialogue between past and present, in which the past is partially swallowed by the present:

> there is incongruity in many respects between the constraints of yesterday and those of today, from which it follows that we can only imagine those of the past incompletely and imperfectly. We can evoke places and times different from those in which we find ourselves because we place both within a framework which encompasses them all (Halbwachs 50).

This observation that the past is subject to the parameters of the present is insightful. No matter how hard we try to invoke a "true" past from our very fixed sense of the present, the task is futile. Our positioning in this very space and time prevents us from framing the past in a truly applicable and fitting framework. This inability to position the past firmly

in the present, or rather analyze the past from the position of the present, begs the question: What then is left behind or out of the narrative of the past told in the present if it is inevitable that the representation of the past will be incomplete due to the strange transitional trajectory of past to present? And also, in shaping a cohesive collective identity for a given society what memories will be left out of the stockpile of collective memories of that society?

With respect to these questions, Halbwachs posits not only that,"…the most painful aspects of yesterday's society are forgotten" (51), but that because they have been purposefully forgotten, they lose their operationality and as such, even when recalled run the risk of forever ceasing to be operative (51). Painful memories, such as slavery, war, genocide, and other traumatic events are then either erased from the collective memory of society and subsequently from society's resultant identity or altered in such a way that they become a virtual euphemism or less menacing shadow of the atrocity that they once represented. As Halbwachs contends, "society from time to time obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess" (Halbwachs 51). Although I utilize this quote in reference to large-scale atrocities and traumas, it is applicable at any level. Any stain on our memory that would lend itself to a not so pleasurable impact on our present self is readily altered or reworked to lessen the weight of its reality. In this sense then, in order to "better" the present, we resort to a selective editing of the past that will reflect positively on the here and now.

Speaking explicitly on the collective nature of memory and what factors lend themselves to the collective applicability of memories it is not, “that they are continguous in time: it is rather that they are part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, the group of people with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days” (Halbwachs 52). In elaborating on this point, Halbwachs points to the example of the family, as representative of a group. If we push this example further to consider the members of the Afro-Cuban subjectivity as a family then we move to the crux of the dynamics of the relationship between memory and identity and how the collective memory of Afro-Cubans has been erased from the larger collective memory of Cuban society.

Following Halbwachs’ theory, as a family, the memories of Afro-Cubans, although not identical, should resemble each other because members of this family have a vested interest in particular thoughts and views as it relates to them (Halbwachs 52). Memories, such as slavery and discrimination would be examples of common memories of the Afro-Cuban family. But at the same time, the similarities that exist among the memories of this family occur because the group’s members are, “able to call them to mind at the same time that they resemble each other” (Halbwachs 52). Taking a step back to survey the landscape, as a group within a much larger collective then, how much weight is given to the memories of Afro-Cuban subjects? What role if any does the Afro-Cuban version of the past play in the present of Cuban society? According to Halbwachs, not very much. As a minority group, the Afro-Cuban “family”, and its memories do not coincide with the collective memory of the larger Cuban society. As such, the Afro-Cuban version of the past and its corresponding memories, following Halbwachs’ earlier

statements are incompatible with the collective memory of the past established by society's present. Halbwachs states,

> A person who alone remembers what others do not resembles someone who sees what others do not see. He is in certain respects like a person suffering from hallucinations who leaves the disagreeable impression among those around him. As his society becomes impatient he keeps quiet, and because he cannot express himself freely, he forgets the names that are no longer used by those around him (Halbwachs 74).

Halbwachs provides useful insight into the erasure and amnesia associated with the Cuban society's attitudes towards the Afro-Cuban version of Cuba's past. Because the Afro-Cuban collective recalls such painful memories, long altered by dominant society, their attempts to voice those silenced memories are met with frigid disapproval and disbelief, as the collective memory of society has been so successfully doctored that slavery is remembered from a romanticized point of view. Due to the fact that Cuban and Afro-Cuban memories and identities are intertwined, despite selective amnesia and erasure, Afro-Cubans find themselves participating in both the family of Afro-Cuban collectivity and of Cuban society. This dual membership (similar to double consciousness) thus regulates the Afro-Cuban identity to a curious duality and yet also a position that pertains to two collectives, one which is swallowed up by the other. As a result, Afro-Cubans, "become mingled in society" and "accept remembering in the way society remembers" (Halbwachs 81-82).

Memory, counter-memory and identity

The Cuban Revolution sought to resolve societal imbalances, in particular racial inequalities and imbalances, via the correction of economic disparities. It has been argued that the paradoxical relationship between racial discourse and Cuban revolutionary

discourse has arisen out of Castro's own manipulation of race through his employment of the Marxist/Socialist framed discourse of nationalism. By focusing on the cultivation of a strong cohesive national identity as opposed to that of multiple identities (racial, sexual, religious, intellectual or otherwise) that could detract attention away from the overarching goal of nation-building, Castro was able to veil, or make invisible, voices and collectives based on alternative forms of solidarity. By labeling these groups as divisive and anti-revolutionary Castro was able to silence and crush internally, the possibility of the emergence of a Cuban identity that identified with blackness. For example, black clubs and mutual aid societies were forced to close and Afro-Cuban based religious groups had to register with the police (Sawyer 59).

The evaluation of the failure or success of Castro's project has been the topic of debate among scholars of Cuban race relations for decades. Supporters of the Revolution contend that racism, as a direct result of Marxist/Socialist Revolution, has disappeared from Cuban social reality. This belief is accompanied by the disclaimer of the "exception of individual racial prejudice, held onto by a portion of a disappearing elderly population…" (Lusane 86). In contrast, adversaries of the Revolution have taken two pronounced positions as to the role the Revolution has played in the proliferation of racism in revolutionary Cuba.

The first group, "the political right", represented by some more conservative Miami-based groups, has argued that, "to the degree that racism continues to exist in Cuba, it is because the overwhelmingly white leadership has introduced a fictive conflict as a means to exploit and divide what had once been a racism-free society" (Lusane 86). In contrast, the second group, represented by scholars such as Carlos Moore have

vehemently contended that, “racism always existed in the country and continues today” (Lusane 87).

The middle ground of this debate is representative of the position taken by many progressives. They maintain that although the Cuban Revolution has eliminated institutional racism (via constitutional laws), racial prejudice and individual discrimination are still manifest at other levels of Cuban civil society (Lusane 87). With those current views on the racial situation in Cuba in mind, Clarence Lusane’s brief article is insightful and reflective in regards to progressive ways to frame theoretically discussions of race in Cuba. Lusane contends that the double framework of Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory and post-structuralist consideration of the weight of narrativity are key to unlocking the mystery of racial identity formation and representation in revolutionary Cuba.

Linked to representation also is identity and identity formation. Afro-Cuban identity formation and its later representation are influenced by the mutable and unstable relationship between race and socio-political change and yet rooted in memory and cultural trauma.

In *How Societies Remember* Paul Connerton builds on Maurice Halbwachs’ seminal work of the connection between memory and identity. Connerton pushes Halbwachs’ conceptualization further in order to consider the discriminatory nature of the accepted memories to which society subscribes. Similar to Halbwachs, Connerton posits that the present is dictated in large part by the past and that “…we will experience our present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect that present. Hence the difficulty of extracting our past from our present… because past

factors tend to influence, or distort, our experience of the past" (Connerton 2). Most importantly, Connerton argues that the past and images associated with it are tools used to "legitimate a present social order" (3). In the consideration of collective memory and society then, the past constructed by the dominant present social order serve to authorize and legitimate power. It follows secondarily then, that the memories or version of the past of those in the minority is not only not privileged in the present society, but that the summoning of these alternatives to dominant accepted memory--although disregarded--are a necessary part of the dynamics of modern-day society, and as such play a decisive role in identity formation and the positionality of various subjectivities. The utility of these alternative memories or counter-memories lays in their ability to, "…produce yet another type of history: one in which not only will most of the details be different but in which the very construction of meaningful shapes will obey a different principle. Different details will emerge because they are inserted, as it were, into a different kind of narrative home" (Connerton 19). Thus the confrontation of (the discourses of) memory and counter-memory are not only inevitable as minorities clamor for voice and representation, but also a necessary component in the creation of a complete picture of society, as opposed to a decisively skewed social construction which privileges dominance and power and disregards minoritarian discourses.

Connerton's work is significant not only in his argument for the necessity of counter-memory, but also in his investigation of the interface/interdependence of individual and collective memory and identity, a point which Halbwachs glosses over. For Connerton, personal memory, whether dominant or counter, is just as important as collective memory as a whole. He argues that, "…the narrative of one life is part of an

interconnecting set of narratives; it is embedded in the story of those groups from which individuals derive their identity" (Connerton 21). Thus, for Connerton the individual forms a small, but significant part of the collective, as the past memories of an individual converge with those of others in order to inform the identity of the individual and later that of the collective. The individual memories of the past inform not only one's self understanding but also, "our self-descriptions because our past history is an important source of our conception of ourselves; our self-knowledge, our conception of our own character and potentialities, is to a large extent determined by the way in which we view our own past actions" (Connerton 22). Once the concept of self is established and accepted by the individual, it is within the framework of the group, or collective, that these individual memories find a discursive space for the articulation and situation of identity that results from the narration of these memories. Thus it is in the exploration of the interdependent relationship of individual and collective memories that Connerton diverges from Halbwachs.

It is the context of the Revolution, then, that lends a specific shade to the manifestation of these themes as well as the conclusions reached. In addition, because identity is not static, identity formation, identity and its subsequent representation are subject to changes that correlate with the distinct and diverse moments of the socio-cultural and socio-political sphere in which it seeks definition. The Cuban Revolution influenced and inspired an expression of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness that changed in tandem with the changing goals and tactics of the revolutionary government changed. In addition, the expression of this revolutionary inspired expression and consciousness is visible via the narrative arts of film and literature.

In “Mujer Negra”, in addition to the memory of the elemental details of the journey, Nancy Morejón also summons up the memory of the trauma associated with the journey across the ocean. She does not write, “el mar que atravesé” [the sea that I crossed], which would suggest an independent decision, but rather, “el mar que me hicieron atravesar” [the sea that they made me cross], thus pointing to a dominant outside force that directed and forced the narrator’s life in a direction that was not of her choosing, also indicating her lack of agency. The combination of memory, silence and trauma is placed at the forefront of this poem and is made a central point beginning with its first line. The silences surrounding the history of the Afro-Cuban woman that Morejón hopes to voice originate in the original memory of the first woman to make that dreaded journey.

In *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity,* Ron Eyerman focuses on the role of memory and cultural trauma in the identity formation of African diasporic people. Building on the seminal work of Cathy Caruth, who defines trauma as, “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (91), Eyerman views trauma as it relates to the black experience of identity, to be inextricably linked to the historic event of slavery. Although his study is focused on the role cultural trauma plays in the identity formation of African-Americans, because of the striking parallels between the Afro-Cuban and African American experiences of blackness in their respective socio-historical and political context, Eyerman’s conclusions are particularly relevant.

Eyerman differs from Caruth in that he proposes that cultural trauma and the collective memory and fractured identities that it yields can be resolved. He states, "…resolving cultural trauma can involve the articulation of collective identity and collective memory, as individual stories meld into collective history through forms and processes of collective representation. Collective identity refers to a process of 'we' formation, a process both historically rooted and rooted in history" (Eyerman 74). In addition, the resolution of trauma that Eyerman proposes via the articulation of collective memory and identity is subject to different manifestations and modes due to different socio political and socio historical circumstances (Eyerman 97-98). For Eyerman, slavery is more than a shared experience; it is a collective memory that constitutes the foundation of black identity (60). Thus, he employs the following definition of cultural trauma:

> …cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While some event may be necessary to establish as the significant cause, its meaning as traumatic must be established and accepted, and this requires time to occur as well as mediation and representation (Eyerman 61).

It is in light of this definition that trauma, and by extension, cultural trauma constitutes for Eyerman a cultural process linked to not only the formation of collective identity, but also to the construction of collective memory (60). This linkage necessitates and promotes the creation of a discursive space through which members of the Afro-Cuban collective are able to articulate their identity. For Eyerman, the erasure by dominant society of the counter-memories of minorities serves to legitimate the power of dominant

society. But Eyerman also notes the equal importance of both collective memory and amnesia in the society's self-understanding and self-reflection. He argues that, "…collective forgetting is as important as collective remembering for a society's self-reflection; it is in fact the role of youth or the new generation: to provide society with a fresh look at itself" (Eyerman 71). Reflection upon, and reconciliation with, the cultural trauma of the past that represents the collective memory of Afro-Cuban identity hinges upon a critical, reflective and deliberate consideration of the role of the past in the present. This reconciliation with the past then speaks to the identity formation of the collective. It is the reflection upon the collective memory of the cultural trauma of slavery (in addition to discrimination and racism), that yield articulations of Afro-Cuban identity that differentiate in accordance to the historical context in which they arise.

With this perspective on cultural trauma in mind, as "Mujer Negra" moves beyond this point of origin and tells the tale of the evolution of the personhood and identity consciousness of the Afro-Cuban woman, it is notable how Morejón works strategically and artistically to link together the past, present and pending future of the Afro-Cuban woman and the memory, trauma and silence that follow her and are integrated into her being. She tells of failed rebellions that led to subsequent generations being born into bondage by stating openly "me rebelé" (I rebelled) (Morejón 200/201). She tells of the labor she endured while in bondage, the fruitless endeavor, "Bajo su sol sembré, recolecté y las cosechas no comí" (Under its sun I planted seeds, brought in the crops, but never ate those harvests) (Morejón 200/201). Her story though, does not end. She tells of the results of successful rebellion and the home she found in El Monte, "Me fui al monte. Mi real independencia fue el palenque" (I left for the hills. My real

independence was the free slave fort…) (Morejón 202/203). But when she tells the reader in the middle of the poem that finally, "me sublevé" (I rose up), the story is saddened with the realization that in the process of rebellion, maroonage and freeing herself mentally, her memory has failed her. "Ya nunca mas imaginé el camino a Guinea. ¿Era a Guinea? ¿A Benin? ¿Era a Madagascar? ¿O a Cabo Verde?" (I no longer dreamt of the road to Guinea. Was it to Guinea? Benin? To Madagascar? Or Cape Verde?) (Morejón 200/201). She has forgotten the origins of her identity. In the quest for freedom, the original goal to return home has been lost. Initially the memory of her native land and tongue had not been silenced and obscured by the trauma of slavery, but moving closer to the turn of the 20th century, the distinct memories that link her to her origins have been muted. She no longer dreams of a return home because centuries of displacement from her origins have nullified any bond and thus the "I" has resigned herself to her new home, "aquí construí mi mundo" (here I built my world). And it is astoundingly significant that for this process to occur, language and origin must be muted. And so it is.

Successive independent declarations, separated aesthetically from the body of the poem, mark the passage of time, " me rebelé…anduve…me sublevé…trabajé mucho más…me fui al monte…bajé de la Sierra" (I rebelled…I walked…I rose up…I worked on and on… I left for the hills…I came down from the Sierra) (Morejón 200-203). The move from rebellion, to uprising, to *El Monte*, and coming down from the Sierra Maestra mountains, insinuate a constant motion that propels time forward from the colonial era to the turn of the 20th century and up to 1959 and revolutionary times. The declarations then also serve to mark the Afro-Cuban woman as a silenced witness to, and participant in, the

history of the nation. They also place her the embodiment of a sort of memory keeper, as her presence and not that of hegemony is what marks the passage of time.

Thus, in the midst of social change, the identity of the "mujer negra" and her connection to it have once again been altered. The elements on which her identity had previously been based have shifted and once again she must rearrange herself and initiate the transactions that yield identity. As time moves forward and the separation between the "I" and the place of origin broadens, she grows closer to a land which is still hostile towards her and has not fully accepted her, until she finds her "real independencia" (real independence) (Morejón 202/203) in the maroon communities of the Sierra Maestra mountains. The "I" takes residence in the mountains and it is not until 1959, when she declares, over 60 years later, that, "bajé de la Sierra" (I came down from the Sierra) (Morejón 202/203), that once again a drastic change has occurred.

Up until this point, the poem's discourse has been voiced by a first person singular witness; a voice that although speaking as an "I", symbolically speaks for the collective experience of the Afro-Cuban woman. When the "I" jumps from the colonial past into the near present, it is poetically exchanged for a "we".

Ahora soy: Solo hoy tenemos y creamos.
Nada nos es ajeno.
Nuestra la tierra.
Nuestros el mar y el cielo.
Nuestras la magia y la quimera
(Now I exist: only today do we own, do we create.
Nothing is foreign to us.
The land is ours.
Ours the sea and the sky,

The magic and the vision) (Morejón 202/203).

The collective "we" of the present, revolutionary moment is a testimony to the progress made and a poetic gesture to reposition and situate the previously invisible "nosotros" (we) in the narrative of the nation.

In the exchange of "I" for "we", the ignored, silenced and forgotten "I" of the past is symbolically assimilated and integrated into the "we" of the nation. The question remains though: Is the 'we' to whom Morejón is referring representative of only Afro-Cuban women or of all Afro-Cuban peoples? Considering Morejón's body of work as a whole, I would argue that the "we" that arises in the poem at the onset of the Revolution refers to Afro-Cuban people and not just women.

As Linda S. Howe argues, Morejón's poem is a useful addition to both the Africanist and womanist repertoires. Howe posits that, "…Morejón may be creating a double discourse, of simultaneous loyalty and dissent, in order to work through her own ideological desires which contrast with her situation as an Afro-Cuban in Cuba" (100). In addition to this, Howe also argues that this poem represents a pivotal point in the trajectory of Morejón's career as a poet. It marks the point of fusion between her political awareness and self-awareness. "In 'Mujer negra' we see that Morejón's poetry is a reflection of this politicizing process she experienced as an Afro-Cuban poet. As Morejón recently stated, 'this awareness of being a black writer did not come just like that; it came through a process in which my self-consciousness was in relation with my environment" (Howe 100).

Howe argues that this poem articulates two very powerful counter-discourses and as a result promotes a double agenda; feminist and racial. Howe repeatedly emphasizes the fact that in this work Morejón is highlighting not just an Afro-Cuban identity and

subjectivity, but rather the hyper-invisible subject position of the Afro-Cuban woman. Howe reads Morejón's acknowledgment of both her blackness and femininity as a counter-discourse within a counter-discourse. Stated another way, this poem diverts from the already counter-discourse present in a literary articulation of Afro-Cuban male subjectivity, and probes the counter discourse further by engaging the muted subject of the Afro-Cuban woman and providing those who had been silenced with a voice (Howe 102).[9]

By means of this double-layered counter-discourse, Morejón is able to challenge preconceived notions of the Afro-Cuban experience, and also present an alternative version of memory. This poem then serves to complicate the traditional characteristics ascribed to black identity, by incorporating an often overlooked element, that of the female perspective. For Howe, 'Mujer Negra' is an indispensable venture into an alternative experience of *Afrocubanía* that also complicates the significance and utility of previous cultural and literary expressions of Afro-Cuban consciousness, which were often distanced, romanticized and/or exclusionary of the female point of view.
As she states,

> Morejón's poetic voicing in Mujer negra; (and the recurrence of this device in 'Amo a mi amo') constitutes a critical rereading of gender and racial issues which have been ideologically constructed…Morejón reassesses these aesthetic and political interests by rewriting the notions 'black' and 'female'. In addition, her poetics voice Afro-Cuban concerns by means of a black female consciousness in the absence of an officially recognized black movement in Cuba (Howe 103).

[9] This trope of counter-discourse within a counter-discourse is also visible in Sara Gómez's *De Cierta Manera* (1977), which will be discussed later.

In “Mujer Negra”, Nancy Morejón artistically and poetically recovers a silenced memory. The project is organized around memory and is necessitated by the overbearing silence linked to public memory surrounding the trauma associated with the issue of race, color and its discussion. It is an interrogation of memory that seeks to recoup and correct it in order to raise consciousness. Thus Morejón deconstructs silence; traditionally used as a tool to manipulate and mold collective memory, and rewrites the timeline of official Cuban history by highlighting obscured details of Afro-Cuban and Cuban history, in effect redirecting the collective memory of the nation by voicing the silenced.

Chapter Two: Harmonic Dissonance: Cuban Points and Afro-Cuban counterpoints

"…for a counterpoint to exist, there must also be a point (of origin) to which it acts as an other, contesting the discursive value of said point"

In *Literary Bondage: Slavery in Cuban Narrative*, William Luis argues that, "…once a counter-discourse becomes dominant, it ceases to be counter and becomes central to maintaining itself in power. And as we have seen, any dominant discourse will produce its own counter-discourse" (19). With the triumph of the Cuban Revolution the ideals purported and championed as "revolutionary" quickly turned from marginal to central modes of thought. Upon converting itself from a counter-discourse to a hegemonic and dominant one, and achieving the shift from the periphery to the center, the Cuban Revolution was forced not only to leave behind certain elements of Cuban society but also to reshape collective memory in order to obscure the previous existence of these forgotten elements.

This shift in the social positioning of the ideals of the Cuban revolution was therefore accompanied by the creation of a new counter-discourse to its newly established position as a dominant discourse. In the case of Afro-Cuban identity and its expression and representation, a previous counter-discourse became even further removed from the national center, delegated to an almost counter-counter discursive space. The exclusion of Afro-Cuban identity from the central discourse of revolution and the nation was addressed in the 1960s and 1970s by two notable film pioneers: Nicolas Guillen Landrian and Sara Gómez.

This chapter explores the use of discursive counter-points in the articulation of race and identity in the early 1960s documentaries of Nicolas Guillen Landrian. In

addition it also investigates Sara Gómez's articulation of counter-discourses of identity in her film, *De cierta manera (1977)*. The significance of these works in their ability to express and represent imaginings of Afro-Cuban identity (and its representation) are doubly compacted, not only by the context of the Cuban Revolution, but also by the Padilla Affair of 1971. Due to the Padilla Affair, works by artists that were deemed "counter" revolutionary or promoted "counter" agendas were banned and/or heavily censured. The consequences of this censorship were further complicated when artists attempted to promote a racially conscious agenda. Guillen Landrian and Gómez's works allow for an in-depth investigation into the initial clash of not only revolutionary discourse and artistic expression, but also the clash of these two with racial discourse. Reading these works against this socio-cultural background then, they serve as an essential point of departure for the discussion of artistic Afro-Cuban representation in the 1970s and 1990s that follow in the subsequent chapters.

This chapter explains how official revolutionary discourse reshaped the collective memory of the nation with regard to the role of Afro-Cubans in the nation's formation. It also examines how both Landrian and Gómez sought to bring the margins to the center and reposition Afro-Cuban identity as central to the development of the modern Cuban nation. The revolutionary context, which limited artistic and racial expression as well as the discussion of identity politics, is explored by Landrian and Gómez through their presentation of revised memory and its subsequent reality. By utilizing strategic discursive counter-points to unravel the official national transcript of memory insisted upon by the revolutionary government, Landrian and Gómez move beyond the central 1960s/70s dilemna of the tensions between revolutionary and artistic discourses. In such

a way Landrian and Gómez force, first the consideration of the tensions between revolutionary and racial discourses and later the complex combative confrontation of the three; revolutionary, artistic and racial discourses.

Guillen Landrian

Born in 1938 in Camagüey, Cuba, Nicolas Guillen Landrian's contribution to Cuban film is virtually unknown to many due to heavy censoring of his films. Between 1962 and his 1989 escape to Miami, Landrian directed a total of 17 documentaries, almost all for ICAIC.[10] Included in this impressive resume are the following films: *Congos Reales* (1962), *Patio arenero* (1962), *El Morro* (1963), *En un barrio viejo* (1963), *Un festival deportivo* (1963), *Ociel del Toa* (1965), *Los del baile* (1965), *Rita Montaner* (1965), *Retornar a Baracoa* (1966), *Reportaje* (1966), *Coffea Arábiga* (1968), *Expo Maquinario Pabellón Cuba* (1969), *Desde La Habana* (1971), *Taller de Linea y 18* (1971), *Un reportaje sobre el Puerto Pesquero* (1972), *Nosotros en el Cuyaguateje* (1972), *Para construir una casa* (1972) and *Miami Downtown* (2002) (Landrian 2003). Unfortunately over half of his filmography has disappeared.[11]

As a vanguard filmmaker and early predecessor of Sergio Giral's negrometraje trilogy (to be discussed in Chapter Two), Landrian's filmic vision and representation of Cuba, and particularly Afro-Cuba, is at once nuanced and disruptive. Under the early tutelage of master Cuban documentary filmmaker, Santiago Alvarez, Landrian fine-tuned his personal style and craft.

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[10] ICAIC is the common acronym for Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, which is The Cuban Institute of Art and Cinematographic Industry. This organization was created in 1959, after the triumph of the Revolution to serve as the official government sanctioned body of film, art and culture.

[11] A large collection of Landrian's films including *En un barrio Viejo*, *Un festival*, *Ociel del Toa*, *Los del baile*, *Coffea Arábiga*, *Nosotros en el Cuyaguateje*, *Retornar a Baracoa*, and *Miami Downtown* can be found at http://www.veoh.com/search/videos/q/nicolas+guillen+landrian, www.youtube.com, and http://vodpod.com/watch/1344728-coffea-arbiga.

Santiago Alvarez (1919-1998), one of the founders of ICAIC, is best known for his 1965 film, *Now*. This film, a scathing critique of racial discrimination in the US, is considered groundbreaking in its original use of newsreel, its masterful use of music to narrate and its "syncopation of editing" (Chanan 219). Banned in the US, Alvarez's film matches footage of racially inspired incidents in the US in the 1960s with powerful images of the US Civil Rights Movement leader, Martin Luther King Jr., actress/singer Lena Horne and former president Lyndon B. Johnson along with a critically acclaimed soundtrack that includes songs such as "Hava Nagila." As Michael Chanan keenly observes,

> To say that Alvarez uses music to narrate is therefore to say that he uses the cultural associations of his chosen music (its iconography) to orient the viewer's frame of reference. What he is doing is to politicize the representation through aesthetic means that are at once highly articulate but nondiscursive. This, for Alvarez, is a central resource of political documentary, because it is a way of mobilizing popular intelligence, which is not merely informed by discursive intellect but, for this very reason, lies in danger of suffocation by the tricks of conventional commentary (Chanan 223-224).

This filmic strategy is readily observable in Landrian's films. Like Alvarez, in his political documentaries Landrian uses music to situate the viewer's frame of reference. In this way, Landrian adeptly creates highly charged, articulate and layered political films that force deep and sophisticated consideration. Landrian's filmic style is marked by his ability to expertly unhinge the official national image of its current social landscape, through a chaotic and deliberate mix of official and dissident images and sounds. Two films especially exemplary of Landrian's skill are 1963's *En un barrio viejo* and 1968's

Coffea Arábiga. These two films are representative of Landrian's production; they are a highly provocative and skillful combination of the discourses of race, revolution and art.

En un barrio viejo opens with a striking, full frontal, still shot of a black man in a straw hat staring into the camera while smoking a cigarette. Resounding drums of a traditional tambor[12] resonate in the background as the man stares penetratingly at the viewer and the film's title and opening credits flash onto the screen. Significantly shorter than *Coffea Arábiga,* Landrian's next film, *En un barrio viejo* is about nine minutes in length. In *En un barrio viejo,* Landrian shifts deliberately between binary discourses; from the public to the private, the sacred to the profane, and the revolutionary to the dissident, setting the precedent for his future films--blending and confusing perception and reality through the skillful positing of various discursive counterpoints; a technique which would continue to stretch and distort the frayed meetings of artistic and revolutionary discourses.

The opening scene of *En un barrio viejo,* depicts the rooftops of Havana as a lonely guitar strums a sad tune in the background. A guitar accompanies the camera as it pans across the rooftops of Havana, and finally rests on a young girl sitting atop a wall. It is here that Landrian begins his vanguardist project of challenging the limits between artistic and revolutionary aesthetics and discourses. The camera focuses an aerial shot on a cadre of plain-clothes civilians marching through some of the main streets of Central Havana and chanting revolutionary slogans. The camera then crosscuts[13] to a side street of Central Havana and depicts a group of men playing chess as a rumba begins to play. In

[12] A tambor is a party or gathering held in honor of orishas of the Santeria religion. They are also known as *Fiesta de santo* (party of the saint) (Gonzalez-Wippler 190).

[13] A crosscut is a method of film editing in which parallel action is shown in different locations, to suggest the simultaneity of the two actions (Bordwell 2006).

the first of many crosscuts, Landrian shifts the camera back to the group of marching revolutionaries and focuses in on their faces, highlighting the men as well as the women in the group. Landrian's juxtaposition of the model Cuban revolutionary citizen, represented by the marching revolutionaries, and the "lazy" dissidents, represented by the men playing chess and listening to music, creates a striking dichotomy. Landrian orients the viewer's frame of reference and sets the tone for the rest of the film as he lays out his first counterpoint; a comparative view of the model revolutionary citizen and the dissident who exists as his counterpoint.

The background music serves as an interesting focal point for the discussion of Landrian's probing of the meeting of these contrasting points and counterpoints in early revolutionary society. The film crosscuts between the sad strumming of a lonely guitar and the lively music of a Santeria tambor. The guitar accompanies shots of public and traditional daytime life, while the music of a tambor is matched to scenes that depict the private, radical and dissident nighttime life. The symbolic associations of the two musical styles should also be noted. The slow strumming guitar is associated with the Cuban genre of Nueva Trova and Cuban popular culture. In contrast, the tambor drums and rumba rhythms are associated with Santeria and Afro-Cuban counter-culture.

Around the midpoint of the film the associations attributed to these types of music are interchanged. The rumba and tambor of the night follows the camera as it depicts the quotidian lives of Cuban women as they walk through the streets and stand in line for their rations. In contrast, the sad guitar strums the soundtrack for Landrian's depiction of various Cuban children eating, playing and laughing. Finally, the two once parallel and separate trains of life collide--the salacious tambor and the steady guitar--as Landrian

once again returns to shots of Cuban people going about the motions of everyday life. As a man sits at a bar reading a newspaper the drums of a tambor thunder in the background, but a sad guitar accompanies an older man crossing the street. In this scene, the previous aural confusion bleeds into the visual realm, distorting the viewer's frame of reference, as Landrian rapidly deconstructs the aural/visual framework that he constructed in the opening scenes of the film. This approach of fusing music with deep associative connotations to appropriate images and then confusing the two allows Landrian to highlight the deep societal cleavages that exist between dominant and contrapuntal discourse. The collision of the two musical styles and accompanying images gives rise to an audiovisual confusion that only comes to a halt in the final sequence of the film.

The final segment of the film opens with a series of opposing images; Cuban points and Afro-Cuban counterpoints, presented in seamless progression. Landrian swiftly crosscuts from the image of a santera[14], to that of a statue of Jesus Christ on the cross, to the interior of a Catholic church, to the statue of a saint to candles of a Santeria altar, to the candles of a church altar and finally resting on a tambor in motion. All the while, the music of a tambor slowly but steadily crescendos in the background as the flurry of crosscuts merge to form one simultaneous shot.

Within this final, unified frame Landrian is keen to focus on the contrast and congruities of the points and counter-points that exist in the scene. He shows the variety of participants, men, women, children, black, mulatto and white—a visible representation of the revolution's goal of unifying the racial components of the nation, but a contradicted representation, due to the fact that "the nation" has been unified by a

[14] A santera is a priestess in the Santeria religion.

contrapuntal element of society; Santeria. In this frame Landrian also displays the mix of sacred and profane, private and public, revolutionary and dissident as he directs the viewer's gaze to Catholic saints, Santeria orishas, posters of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Cuban flags, highly demonstrative of the counterpoints that exist in conjunction to, and in spite of, the dominant discourse of the Revolution. With this the scene fades to black and the film ends with a seemingly decisive "FIN" (The End), but Landrian pushes the film further by adding another set of captions, which then state, "pero no es el fin"(But it isn't the end).

Via his expert crosscutting, Landrian re-directs viewers' critical perspective and forces us to question the fixity of the respective positionalities of dominant and contrapuntal discourses. That is, he constructs the final scene of the film in such a way that he directs the viewer to question not only if Santeria really is contrapuntal, but also the basis of Christianity as the dominant traditional element of Cuban society. Thus Landrian's technique of crosscutting between "traditional" Christian/Catholic symbology and contrapuntal Santeria imagery illustrates not so much the contrasts between the two, but the commonalities that exist between them. By pitting the contrasting images against one another in rapid succession, Landrian highlights the fact that in Cuban revolutionary society the dominant and contrapuntal elements no longer exist as separate entities, but rather bleed into one another. With his open-ended conclusion, Landrian ultimately posits that Cuban points and Afro-Cuban counterpoints are locked in an interdependent relationship that renders them inextricably linked.

En un barrio viejo deals primarily with the contrasting of artistic and revolutionary discourses. Landrian begins by keeping the two worlds separate, but later

depicts their inevitable collision, confusion and cohesion created by the binary discourse between dominant Cuban discourse and Afro-Cuban counterpoints. Landrian's contrasting of public and private, sacred and profane, revolutionary and dissident represent the function and relation of discursive points and counter-points within the context of the revolution. In this film, Landrian does not question racialized discourses nor their limits in regards to the artistic and revolutionary discourses that he chooses to problematize, but this questioning is implied as a critical subtext of the film, via his fusion of image and sound. Thus, Landrian works within the framework of revolutionary aesthetics to produce a biting critique of the frayed meeting between art and revolution and the both of them with race. *Coffea Arábiga* (1968) highlights various problematic relationships and social realities in Cuban revolutionary society, by means of coffee production. In a 2003 interview, Landrian revealed that the film was commissioned by ICAIC to highlight the *Cordón de la Habana* project of 1968 (Landrian 2003). The goal of the *Cordón de la Habana* project, or Havana Greenbelt, was to in essence, "deurbanize" the city of Havana, by creating a large greenbelt of fruit trees, coffee and pigeon peas that would surround the perimeter of the city[15]. Unfortunately, the *Cordón de la Habana* project was a disastrous failure and became a running joke in Cuban society. But it was one of the initial efforts that culminated in the proposed (but also failed) 10-million ton sugarcane harvest of 1970 (Scarpaci 141; Diaz Castro 2008). This project was initiated to offset the fact that by 1967, the 30% of the Cuban population that resided in the capital city of Havana disproportionately consumed almost half of the country's

[15] This initiative was preceded by the massive sugarcane cutting campaigns of the late 1960s.

agricultural production (Karol 439). The goals of the project were three-fold as Joseph Scarpaci explains,

> First, it sought to integrate habaneros into the agricultural push toward the unattained 1970 sugar-harvest goal of 10 million tons. Second, the Greenbelt would enable Havana to become self-sufficient in food (Gutelman 1967). Third, the new farm belt at the city's edge would absorb idle labor stemming from the drastic reduction in small businesses from the revolutionary offensive and clerical workers in the antibureaucracy campaign (Scarpaci 328).

The *Cordón de la Habana* project was an initiative that sought to dissolve the borders between country and city by actively integrating agriculture into the lives of Havana city-dwellers. The underlying belief of this project was the concept of deurbanization and the image of the city as a "parasitic and corrupt place" (Scarpaci 141).

In *Coffea Arábiga*, by means of a frantic and unsteady filmic rhythm, marked by jerky camera movements, Landrian combines images of and allusions to the interdependence of coffee and Cuban society before and after the Revolution, in order to create a subversive mix of revolution, race and art. Landrian plays with this conceptualization of the city and the relationship between city and country while presenting a symbolically fractured and schizophrenic visual register of a national culture in the midst of social upheaval. It is through this fractured vision that Landrian brings to the forefront the discrepancies between accepted dominant discourse and counterpoints of collective and cultural memory. In addition, Landrian proposes a series of counterpoints to dominant discourse that include not only blacks, but also women in the construction of the modern Cuban nation.

Landrian's participation in the alleged "black plot" of 1968, and also the initial events of the Padilla Affair coincide with the debut of *Coffea Arábiga (1968);* [16] a film, which was not only censored, but for which Landrian alleges he was charged with plotting to assassinate Fidel Castro (Landrian 2003). It is also rumored that Landrian's almost 20-year experience (1970-1989) of repeated jailing and alleged electroshock torture began on account of this film (Landrian 2003).

Filmed entirely in black and white, *Coffea Arábiga* opens with a blinding shot of the rising sun. A grainy textured, yet dazzling shot of the sun is coupled with the voice of a narrator reciting a poem by Landrian's uncle, Nicolas Guillen.[17] As the shot of the sun dissolves to a view of a stream, the voice continues as the camera once more flickers to a new image. From the onset, the film places coffee in a historical context as a voice narrates the origins of the first coffee plantation in the town of Wajay in Santiago de Cuba. The camera presents the viewer with images of the plantation as well as of the signs that point to Wajay. It is then that Landrian cuts the film to insert a contrapuntal social context with a black screen and white lettering reading, "Los negros en la cafetelera" ("Blacks on the coffee plantation"), and another with "los negros" ("Blacks"). He then presents an image of black Cubans, which is unceremoniously disrupted by the black screen and white lettering reading " ¿cómo? ("What?") and "¿¡¿¡los negros!?!?" ("Blacks?!?!?"). Presented as a conversation between two people, one screen factually makes the contrapuntal statement that blacks were present on the coffee plantation and

[16] The "black plot" of 1968 is discussed in the introduction. The details of the Padilla Affair are discussed later in the chapter.

[17] Por la orilla del mar/ tú que estás en fija guardia/ fíjate guardián marino/ en las puntas de las lanzas/ y en trueno de las olas/ y en el grito de las llamas/ y en el lagarto despierto/ sacar las uñas del mapa/ un largo lagarto verde/ con ojos de piedra y agua ("By the seashore/ you, that are on watch/ pay attention seaguard/ to the points of the spears/ and the crash of the waves/and the shout of the flames/and the lizard awaken/ take your names out of the map/ a large green lizard/ with eyes of stone and water") (Landrian 15-34s)

shows images of blacks working to produce coffee, while another screen questions the veracity of the previous screen's statement. The dialogue of the black screen and white lettering continues, as what the viewer can imagine to be the speaker in the first screen somberly answers the incredulous second speaker/screen with, "sí" ("yes") and "los negros" ("blacks"), after which the words end and the image prevails, bringing the reader an image of blacks dancing at a Santeria tambor.

From this image of the tambor, Landrian repeats the images and sounds from the opening shots of the film; he repeats the images of the sun, the stream and for the second time we hear Nicolas Guillen's poem. It is then that the opening credits roll, officially presenting the film as a production of ICAIC and directed by Landrian with Lupercio Lopez and Ivan Arocha. The words that appear between the opening shot and its repetition constitute a metaphorical representation of the internal debate that occurs in Cuban society about the involvement of blacks in Cuban culture. Landrian utilizes the industry and culture of coffee to explicate and complicate this point, as well as others, throughout the entire film.

The film then jumps to documentary footage of how the soil is prepared. This footage is yuxtaposed to images of farmers and machinery involved in the act of preparing the soil as well as a billboard of revolutionary propaganda promoting agriculture.[18] As the scene changes the narration continues, this time delving into the intricacies of sowing the coffee plants, as the accompanying image takes a vanguardist turn in its representation of the word.

[18] The billboard reads "Si ayer fue heroico combatir en la sierra y en el llano, hoy es heroico transformar la agricultura" (If in the past it was considered heroic to fight in the mountains and the plains, today it is heroic to transform agriculture) (Landrian 3:14)

Shot in relief, the screen displays a random splattering of letters and numbers in relief to variety of words, letters and symbols that become highlighted and enlarged in accordance with the narration of the requirements for sowing the coffee plant. For example, against a backdrop of random letters, Landrian enlarges a period or the word, “siembra” (“sow”), in order to emphasize the main points of the narrator’s monologue. As the narrator explains the particularities of coffee and the coffee plantation, the camera focuses its lens on a panoramic view of what appears to be a farm, but that is revealed, as the shot widens, as the city; a calculated nod to the *Cordón de la Habana* project. With this shot, Landrian shifts from his interrogation of the metaphor of coffee and broadens his artistic scope to include a questioning of the city and the nation itself. In this way he begins to articulate his views on the agriculture of society.

Landrian shifts gears once again as the camera encounters a woman on the busy streets of Havana and stops to interview her about her knowledge of coffee. This interview is telling in that it can be read as Landrian’s way of demonstrating how coffee production is common knowledge in Cuban society and that coffee and society, are actually inextricably linked. After her interview Landrian further yuxtaposes the Supremes’ 1966 song, “You Keep me Hangin’ On”. But more importantly the lines, “set me free why don’t ya baby? Get out my life why don’t ya, baby?” as the frozen image of the woman’s face is fractured, enlarged and distorted in various ways. This pairing of sound and image is a profound artistic statement on Landrian’s part and an important step in the building climax of the film.

This brief musical interlude is significant because of the song’s lyrics. After providing the viewer with substantial historical and societal background regarding the

interconnected relationships of land, culture and society via the symbolic vehicle of coffee, Diana Ross' "Set me free why don't ya baby," is much more than a superficial aesthetic nod to music and popular culture. The lyrics of the song are joined to a deliberately constructed critique of contemporary 1960s dynamics between the hegemonic structures that dominate society--namely, dominant concepts of nation, race and identity. Another interesting point about the chosen lyrics, is that they belong to a popular American song and not a Cuban song. This is an important critical aspect of Landrian's statement, especially because it comes at a time when Cuba is determined to separate itself from all things American and capitalist, as it works towards defining a new sense of nationhood. In this way Landrian questions the base and future of Cuban society, with illusions to Americanization and also the previous background of industry (coffee) although he doesn't readily offer up solutions. His political statement though is a resounding cry for a new societal structure, a structure free from the influence of a nefarious past that neglects the contribution of black Cubans and also seeks to maintain antiquated societal structures, despite the façade of Revolution and change.

Landrian then cuts back to the white words on black screens and images. The film frantically crosscuts between images of diseases that can affect the coffee crop as well as humans, black screens and white words emphasizing key elements necessary for the flourishing of the coffee plant, and yet another screen describing one of the worst plagues that can afflict the coffee crop (la pata prieta es una enfermedad terrible. "a black root is a terrible sickness").

As the words and images pulse and strobe, Landrian crosscuts between word and image, with scattered narration that at certain points appears to function independent of

the words and images. Revolutionary slogans precede a narration of the different types of coffee produced in Cuba; these words are spliced by the simultaneous narration and images of words associated with coffee terminology. These words and images are dropped and replaced with more revolutionary propaganda, which is immediately followed by an image of Fidel Castro. The frantic pace of this almost strobe-like sequence overwhelms the viewer, but it also induces the feeling of buildup and expectation as the strobing occurs faster and faster and the story contained within this sequence proceeds.

This sequence is multilayered due to the fact that Landrian not only underlines the core goal of the *Cordón de la Habana* project, but also expands on this element to explore, in contrapuntal form, the overlooked effect of this project on the individual and society. Landrian moves the discussion from a two-dimensional plane concerning city and country to a three-dimensional one that considers city, country and self. He accomplishes this by first equating the human body with the coffee plant and later by incorporating revolutionary slogans that stress the need for unity within the nation. This culminates in the consolidation of the "we" of the Cuban people into the image of the sole figure of Fidel Castro. Thus, the conclusion of this sequence is open to varied interpretations. But the climax produced in this sequence never fully climaxes due to the fact that Landrian slows the action of the film down considerably, transitioning from moving images to a progression of still shots that focus on a black woman listening to the radio and setting her hair in rollers. Having intentionally slowed down the action and focused the viewers' attention on this seemingly mundane act, the significance of this portion of the film is intriguing.

Hegemonic ideals of female beauty are often defined against and in contrast to blackness. It follows then that within the black community the definition of beauty has often been located at the opposite (read: lighter, whiter) end of the spectrum of blackness; i.e., lighter skin, eyes, straighter hair, thinner lips. Scholars such as Bertram Ashe argue that the straightening of black hair is a means to approximate white standards of beauty. I believe that this conclusion collapses a number of variables, which play a role in the decision to style black hair naturally or not. In addition, Ashe's view of the symbolic meaning of straightened black hairstyles reveals a skewed bias towards the US-centric black and white dichotomy of beauty, which is incongruous in many ways to the Afro-Cuban case. That is not to say that there are no parallels, as the shared experience of blackness creates a common ground between the two cultures, but historical and sociological contexts maintain the divide. As Kobena Mercer argues,

> …we require a historical perspective on how many different strands—economic, political, psychological—have been woven into the rich and complex texture of our nappy hair, such that issues of style are so highly charged as sensitive questions about our very 'identity'. As part of our modes of appearance in the everyday world, the ways we shape and style hair may be seen as both individual expressions of the self and as embodiments of society's norms, conventions and expectations (34).

Mercer continues his evaluation of the multivalent nature of black hair to posit that black hair styling can be viewed initially as political statement, but also as "creative responses to the experience of oppression and dispossession" (34). Viewed in such a way, for Mercer, "black hair-styling may thus be evaluated as a popular art form articulating a variety of aesthetic 'solutions' to a range of 'problems' created by ideologies of race and

racism" (34). The inclusion of this brief scene by Landrian is an important statement on blackness, beauty and how the two collide in a revolutionary context.

In Cuba, a whole taxonomy of terms exist to describe the various gradations on the scale of blackness, for example, *jabao*, *trigueña*, *tente en el aire*, *salta atrás*, *negro cepillado.*[19] Of all the elements that feed into a working definition of blackness, outside of skin color, hair is the most crucial element. As Mercer suggests, "Where race structures social relations of power, hair—as visible as skin colour, but also the most tangible sign of racial difference—takes on another forcefully symbolic dimension" (35). Viewing black hair as a symbol that carries a charged weight, a question arises as to how to interpret black hairstyles and the currency of their symbolism.

Carlos Moore states in his study of Afro-Cuba that "natural" black hairstyles such as the afro, cornrows and dreadlocks, which did not require chemical or other damaging processing of black hair were outlawed and labeled as counter-revolutionary and divisive, until a fortuitous visit to the island by Angela Davis in 1972 (259-260, 301-303). Afro-Cuban women who were considered revolutionary straightened their naturally tightly curled hair, either with hot irons or with damaging chemical hair relaxers. Thus the scene of the black women with straightened hair, meticulously setting her hair with rollers, is a profound one.

Hair styles such as braids and afros that leave black hair in its natural unprocessed and unstraightened state are coded within the revolutionary context as "ethnic signifiers" (Mercer 36) and carry dual meanings. For Black Americans who visited the island

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[19] In Cuba, because one's official racial identity is the result of a combination of visual racial signifiers; skin color, hair texture, and other phenotypic features, mulato is only one stop on the extensive Afro-Cuban color scale. These terms are euphemistic descriptions of blackness and exist as a result of the large spectrum of color graduations in Cuba. They can be translated as *soapy*, *wheat-colored*, *up in the air*, *a step back*, *groomed negro*. Translations are my own.

wearing natural hairstyles, their hair was interpreted as radical, while Afro-Cubans who sought to employ the same hairstyles, were deemed as divisive and counter-revolutionary. Conversely, Afro-Cubans who wore their natural hair straightened or chemically processed were seen as revolutionary, while Black Americans who did the same were viewed as conforming to the ideals of white standards of beauty. The combative associative properties ascribed to natural hair in the context of the Revolution are intriguing. With this intimate scene, Landrian posits that the very elements that constitute blackness have been altered and "revolutionized". But through the exchange of the essential components of blackness, revolutionary representations and expectations are evacuated of their original richness, depth and integrity.

To borrow from Mercer, viewed as a dual "cultural" and political activity, the choice to style one's hair natural or straight and the many hairstyles that lay in between those two extremes are marked. Because of these qualities and more, the act of black hairstyling is a loaded action, as black hair takes on a political, economic, sociological charge and more importantly an identificatory value and symbolic currency that directly correlates to the socio-historical and political context in which it operates.

The currency of hair that Landrian touches on in this piece is deeply insightful. Landrian challenges the authenticity and revolutionary value of straightened hair and also reevaluates the stigma and negative connotations of the natural characteristics of black hair; curl, kink and nap. In a brief scene he draws upon the historical treatment and interpretation of black hair, as well as posits new interpretations for expressions of "revolutionary" hair while questioning black beauty. In the context of the Cuban revolution, the implications of black hair and beauty were--and continue to be--

profoundly compounded. For black women, hair is a weighty topic, playing a significant role in the definition and self-perception of beauty and also societal acceptance.

Landrian then returns to the coffee plantation and proceeds to show via words and images women participating in the various steps in the production of coffee, such as harvesting and sorting; interjecting revolutionary propaganda regarding the woman's role in the agricultural movement. He also shows the requirements for women who work with the coffee beans themselves. In this interlude Landrian suggests another counterpoint to dominant discourse regarding revolutionary culture; the role of women.

Following this scene, the viewer is literally bombarded by an interesting succession of images. The processing of the coffee beans, more revolutionary propaganda, Cuban males waiting in line for coffee. Finally, the images from the opening sequence of the film are presented in reverse; the sign leading to Wajay, Fidel Castro and the Santeria tambor. A black screen follows these initial images with the following text in white "en cuba, todos los negros y todos los blancos y todos tomamos café" ("In cuba, all the blacks and all the whites, we all drink coffee"). Interestingly, Cuba is not capitalized and the words are followed by the moving image of a crowd cheering on Fidel Castro. This image is then followed by a brief introduction and then the playing of The Beatles, "Fool on a Hill". The song is accompanied by the image of open hands, which fades to a setting sun as the film comes to a close. This audio/visual pairing is a biting critique of Fidel Castro. Literally, the musical selection refers to Castro as the "fool" and the "hill" as the Sierra Maestra mountains, a nod to Castro's time spent with guerilla forces in the Sierra Maestra mountains during the years preceding the Cuban Revolution. This

association might be read as an illusion to Landrian's view of Castro's revolution as misguided or "foolish". As Landrian explains,

> Me pidieron que hiciera *Coffea Arábiga*, que fue el documental más problemático de los hechos por mí en ese período. Yo fui al departamento de documentales científico-técnicos como una concesión a la dirección del ICAIC, ya que me aceptaban de nuevo…Hay ironía pero no… Si ven burla, mucha burla, se me fue la mano. Yo quería ironizar con las cosas que sucedían alrededor del Cordón de La Habana, todo lo que se movía alrededor del Cordón de La Habana. También traté el café en otras partes de la Isla. Y yo lo que fui —creo— muy crudo al contar el modo de hacer de esa gente que trabajaba en el café, cómo vivían, cómo trabajaban, de qué modo lograban hacer el café: sembrar el café, trillarlo, el trabajo bajo el sol, que es un trabajo duro, y todo eso. Pero no había una intención de burlarme del plan del café porque eso hubiera sido funesto. Había ironía, sí. La reacción de la dirección del ICAIC, no sé de otros sectores, fue de elogio ante el documental. Le hicieron una premier de gala. Mandaron a hacer un afiche que me acuerdo hizo Raúl Oliva, un buen diseñador. El documental estuvo en el festival de Oberhausen, pero no lo premiaron, creo. Pero todo esto de *Coffea Arábiga* comienza de un modo abrupto. No había pasado nada desagradable. Nunca me dijeron nada, ningún personaje de la dirección del ICAIC dijo nada negativo de *Coffea Arábiga*. Entre los mismos espectadores oficiales, a alguien no le gustó la canción *The fool on the hill*, que funcionaba muy bien. Y parece que tuve que pagar a partir de eso. Algo que yo hice con tanta euforia y con tanto dinamismo, resultó irónico, una burla, para algunos, de lo que era el plan del café
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> ("they asked me to make *Coffea Arábiga*, which was the most problematic documentary that I made during that period. I went to the department of scientific and technical documentaries as a concession to the directors of ICAIC, as they had accepted me again…There is irony, but there isn't… If you see mockery, a lot of mockery then it got out of hand. I wanted to satirize the things that were happening around the Havana Greenbelt, everything that was moving around the Greenbelt. I also talked about/tried

> coffee on other parts of the island. And me, what I was—I believe—very crude to talk about the ways of these people that worked in coffee, how they lived, how they worked, how they ended up making coffee: sowing coffee, threshing it, the work under the sun, which is hard work, and all of that. But there wasn't an intention to make a mockery of the coffee plan because that would have been fatal. There was irony, yes. The reaction of the directors of ICAIC, I don't know about other sectors, was praise towards the documentary. They threw a gala for the premier. They had a poster made that I remember Raúl Oliva made, a good designer. The documentary was in the Oberhausen festival, but it didn't win, I think. But all of this about *Coffea Arábiga* began abruptly. Nothing disagreeable had happened. No one ever told me anything, not a single person from the ICAIC administration said anything negative about *Coffea Arábiga*. Among the same official spectators, someone didn't like the song "The fool on the hill" which worked very well. And it seems that I had to pay the price because of that. Something that I made with so much euphoria and with so much dynamism, became ironic, a mockery, for some, about what the coffee plan was") (Landrian 2003).

The film relates the processes involved in the production of coffee from start to finish and with it, the analogous processes that have arisen in Cuban society as a result of the fortuitous interlacing of the two. Similar to Fernando Ortiz's early 20th century inquiry into the role of sugar and tobacco in the foundations of modern Cuban society, Landrian posits that the meeting of Cuban society and coffee are at the root of the state of contemporary 1960s Cuban social life. Discrepancies among blacks and whites, be it societal, economic or political find their roots in coffee. Coffee serves as not only a unifying but also divisive tool.[20] The subjects who labor to produce coffee are not the

[20] Published in 1940, Ortiz's seminal work centers on the thesis that the relationship between the Cuban products of tobacco and sugar can be interpreted as metaphors for the sociocultural state of the nation. Tobacco as a native product is dark and male and in terms of its cultivation is regarded as creating an autonomous culture, synonymous to the Cuban nature. Sugar, in contrast is white and female and regarded

same as those who benefit from the production of coffee. But this is just one contrapuntal discourse that he employs. Just as the ailments that afflict the coffee plant can also be seen in the human population, the coffee plant requires meticulous care and attention if it is to flourish and produce a grade-A quality bean, similar to society. In order to flourish, the plants, in this case humans, need a certain amount of space, care and attention if they are to grow and develop. When they are denied their basic requirements, they become afflicted with the same ailments, such as rot, that can spread and destroy an entire crop or society.

In his documentaries, Landrian unveils the obscured image of the Afro-Cuban subject in film. His vision probes into the guts of 1960s Afro-Cuban, Habanero reality, thus engaging an exploration of not only the censured and regulated image of the Afro-Cuban but also its problematic relation to revolutionary and artistic discourse. He begins the Afro-Cuban artistic tradition of voicing the silenced, which is continued in the work of others such as Nancy Morejón, Sergio Giral and Sara Gomez. His films also contain a meta-narrative quality, as the censored images he conjures mirror his own personal experience as a censored subject within the revolutionary context. In addition, in his films images of censored Afro-Cuban social gatherings as well as religious practices are artistically juxtaposed to revolutionary propaganda, which is then joined to revolutionary images of Castro placed in relief to the experimental music of The Beatles, which forge an artistic alliance between seemingly contrasting elements of Cuban society.

From the margins to the center

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by Ortiz as representative of a monopolistic, foreign, invasive and "white" culture. In this way, the two products remain locked in a critical dichotomy that has shaped the course of Cuban history, as Ortiz draws numerous literal and figurative comparisons between the two (Perez Firmat 55-56). Coffee is then the point where tobacco and sugar culture meet. It is both autonomous and monopolistic in nature, native and foreign and male and female.

In 1961, and within the context of debates around the relationship between art and revolution, Fidel Castro met with intellectuals and launched a phrase that defined Cuban cultural policy for years to come, "*Dentro de la Revolución todo; contra la Revolución nada*" ("Within the Revolution everything, against the Revolution, nothing"). "*Palabras a los Intelectuales*" ("Words to the Intellectuals") (as they have been known from then on) was an intervention delivered at the conclusion of three days of meetings whose goal was to discuss and define the boundaries of artistic creation within the Cuban Revolution. They were inspired by the tensions between two artistic organizations of the early years of the Cuban revolution, Lunes de Revolución and the ICAIC. In this speech Castro not only laid the groundwork for the cultural aesthetics of the Revolution, but also set the precedent for future conflicts, which would inevitably arise between the tenets of the Cuban revolution and Cuban artistic expression.

William Luis discusses the tensions between *Lunes de Revolución* and ICAIC in *Lunes de Revolución: Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana*. *Lunes de Revolución* was the title of the weekly literary supplement to the newspaper, *Revolución*. With its first issue published on March 23, 1959, the magazine was short-lived, ending publication with its final issue (#129) on November 6, 1961 (Luis 12). Within the pages of this weekly supplement, readers encountered articles from international contributors on literature, politics as well as issues of national and international interest (Luis 10). Originally viewed as a pro-Revolutionary media organ, *Lunes de Revolución*, under editor Guillermo Cabrera Infante, published authors and critics such as Jorge Luis Borges, Jean Paul Sartre, Octavio Paz and others who inspired Latin American and world literature. With the influence of these writers, in conjunction

with local writers and critics, the Cuban readership witnessed an ample vision of the potential of national culture within the Revolution. In addition to scholarly contributions, the magazine included opinion letters from the Cuban public (Luis 34). This incorporation and open acceptance of local, international, scholarly and public views, is interpreted by Luis as *Lunes de Revolución's* commitment to modernity and true revolutionary change, by presenting the most current views from all over the world (Luis 22).

The tensions between *Lunes de Revolución* and the ICAIC originated largely from the censuring of the 1961 film, *P.M.* and, on a smaller scale, from debates over which organization should be entrusted with disseminating cinematographic criticism. *P.M.* was a short film directed by Saba Cabrera Infante (brother of *Lunes de Revolución's* editor, Guillermo Cabrera Infante) and Orlando Jimenez-Leal. In this film, the directors portrayed Havana's nightlife from the point of view of the city's Afro-Cuban population (Luis 37). As to the precise reasons behind *P.M's* censorship, Luis argues accordingly:

> P.M fue censurada por mostrar un aspecto supuestamente decadente de la vida nocturna habanera, algo que querían eliminar los ortodoxos oficialista en el poder. La censura de la película fue, sobre todo, un ataque dirigido a *Lunes*; este y *P.M*, al intentar encaminar la cultura cubana en una nueva dirección que abarcaba una interpretación amplia de la cultura cubana, se convirtieron en victimas de un periodo de transición que dio al Partido Comunista cubano una voz poderosa dentro del Nuevo sistema gubernamental
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> ("P.M was censored for showing a supposedly decadent aspect of Havana nightlife, something that the official orthodoxies in power wanted to eliminate. The censoring of the film was above all a direct attack on *Lunes*; this and *P.M*, by intending to take Cuban culture in a new direction that considered an ample interpretation of Cuban culture,

> turned themselves into victims of a period of transition that gave the Cuban Communist Party a powerful voice within the new gubernatorial system") (Luis 47).

ICAIC, the official organization of Cuban film workers supported the revolutionary government's decision to ban the film, while *Lunes de Revolución* did not. The positioning of these two groups on opposite sides of the fence with regard to the issue of artistic censorship helped to transform *Lunes de Revolución*, previously an ally of the Revolution, into an enemy.

Pitted against each other in this manner, the tensions between ICAIC and *Lunes de Revolución* brought to a head the previously veiled issue of the limits of artistic expression within the Cuban Revolution. The solution was a series of meetings held over three days to discuss these issues. The conclusion of these meetings was the now infamous intervention by Fidel Castro in which he succinctly stated, 'dentro de la Revolución, todo; contra la Revolución, nada. Contra la Revolución nada, porque la Revolución tiene también sus derechos y el primer derecho de la Revolución es el derecho a existir y frente al derecho de la Revolución de ser y de existir, nadie" (Within the Revolution everything; against the Revolution, nothing, because the Revolution also has its rights and the first right of the Revolution is the right to exist and before the right of the Revolution to be and to exist, no one) (Luís 52). On the surface, it would appear that Castro was stating that artists producing within the Cuban Revolution would be free to express themselves as they saw fit, but in reality, his statement was a warning to the intellectuals; your expression is free, as long as it falls in line with the official program of the Revolution. Carlos Franqui sums up perfectly the discrepancies that arose between the Cuban Revolution and artistic expression in 1961:

> Nosotros pensábamos que en Cuba hubo cambios grandes pero todos los cambios fueron arriba y no fueron abajo. Ese es el problema que existe en Cuba. Si haces una revolución en nombre del pueblo y eliminas todos los poderes anteriores, todas las riquezas, pero después lo pasas al poder del estado, el estado se convierte en un monstruo y el propietario de todo. No funciona más. Es necesariamente represivo, improductivo, etc. Lo único que sirve es para reprimir…
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> (We thought that in Cuba there would be great changes, but all the changes occurred at the top and not at the bottom. This is the problem that exists in Cuba. If you start a Revolution in the name of the people and eliminate all previous power, all the riches, but then you pass the power to the state, the state becomes a monster and the owner of everything. It doesn't work anymore. It becomes by necessity repressive, unproductive, etc. the only thing it serves to do is repress…) (Luís 189).

The problematic issue of artistic expression within the context of the Cuban Revolution becomes even more complicated when race is added into the equation. The tempestuous relationship between artistic and revolutionary discourses and aesthetics continued well into the 1960s, and a second key element in the historical context of this relationship is the Padilla Affair of 1971.

The events that culminated in what is known as the Padilla Affair of 1971, began in 1968 when Cuban poet Heberto Padilla's volume of poetry, *Fuera de Juego*, was nominated for and won the 1968 UNEAC[21] poetry prize. Although highly criticized for its controversial and counter-revolutionary rhetoric, the prize was not recalled. Instead, it sparked a firestorm of criticism from Jose A. Portuondo, a staunch and critical Cuban Marxist, who launched his attack on Padilla under the penname of Leopoldo Avila for the book's alleged lack of enthusiasm for revolutionary themes (Casal 8). Thus following

[21] Unión de escritores y artistas cubanas ("Union of Cuban writers and artists")

Portuondo's heavy criticism, the government laid down heavy regulations on artistic expression. But the situation did not end there. In March of 1971, Heberto Padilla was unceremoniously jailed, and this led to a resounding outcry from the international intellectual community.

In April 1971 Padilla signed a document in which he not only criticized himself but confessed to numerous counterrevolutionary activities, including being a spy for the CIA and also denounced well-known European Marxists Rene Dumont and K.S Karol (Casal 8). When Padilla was released in late April of 1971, he recited the contents of his signed confession in front of an assembly at UNEAC. This second confession sparked another outcry from the international intellectual community, this time marked by letters, protests and boycotts.

Following 1961's "Words to the Intellectuals" and also the *Lunes de Revolución* controversy, the Padilla Affair represented the apex in a series of events in which the tensions between revolutionary and artistic discourses and aesthetics came to a head. But interestingly it was not the details of the Padilla Affair that are significant, but rather the consequences. As Veronica Lombardo eloquently states,

> si hay algo que el caso Padilla permite ver claramente son los mecanismos de formación y consolidación de una intelectualidad orgánica a un sistema político. Este proceso pone en juego un debate mucho más profundo sobre los valores, los alcances y los limites del quehacer intelectual a la vez que apela a su responsabilidad estructural en la esfera de las transformaciones políticas y sociales. La pregunta sobre como ser intelectual coherente en la demanda y en la proclama, sobre cómo conyugar la actividad artística con la acción política y sobre las implicancias ideológicas de la libertad crítica son fundamentales para entender el debate que instala el caso Padilla. Se trata del desafió de mantener la

> autonomía, el criticismo y la voluntad de transformación al servicio de las causas mas justas
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> (If there is anything that the Padilla case brings to light, it is the mechanisms of the formation and consolidation of the organic intellectualism of a political system. This process sets in play a much deeper debate regarding the goals, hopes and limits of any intellectual and at the same time appeals to his structural responsibility in the sphere of political and social transformations. The question of how to be a coherent intellectual in the demand and in the announcement, about how to unite artistic activities with political action and how the ideological implications of critical liberty are fundamental to the understanding of the debate that the Padilla case insights. Its about the challenge of maintaining the autonomy, the criticism and the will of transformation to service of the most just causes) (Lombardo 219).

The Padilla Affair provided a face for the artistic repression that before had only been a silent rumor outside of Cuba. With the imprisonment of Heberto Padilla, the spotlight was placed not only on UMAP[22] camps, but also on the glaring incongruities between revolutionary and artistic discourses.

Sara Gómez: Voicing counter-discourses of identity

Against this background of artistic repression and in the midst of clashes between race, art and revolution, Sara Gómez is representative of one Afro-Cuban artist who not only incorporated, but also built upon the intellectual projects of Morejón and Landrian in her only feature-length film, *De cierta manera (1977)*. Gómez, born in Havana in 1943, began her career at ICAIC in 1961, under the tutelage of Tomas Gutierrez Alea. Between 1962 and 1974, she directed sixteen documentaries--among them, *Plaza Vieja* (1962), *El*

[22] Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción. These camps were rumored to be concentration camps for those deemed counter-revolutionary such as radical intellectuals, homosexuals and dissidents.

Solar (1962), *Solar habanero* (1962), *Iré a Santiago* (1964), *Excursión a Vueltabajo* (1965), *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia* (1966), *…Y tenemos Sabor* (1967), *En la otra isla* (1968), *Una isla para Miguel* (1968), *Isla del tesoro* (1969), *Poder local, poder popular* (1970), *Un documental a propósito del tránsito* (1971), *De bateyes* (1971), *Atención prenatal* (1972), *Año Uno* (1972), *Sobre horas extras y trabajo voluntario* (1973) (cubacine.cult.cu/realized/sarag.html).

De cierta manera, is a cinematographic collision of revolutionary and identity politics that explores the trauma associated with the compounded marginality associated with race, class and gender.[23] Set in 1962 in the newly constructed neighborhood and housing project of Miraflores on the outskirts of Havana, *De cierta manera* tells the tale of the complexities that arise in and around the budding romantic relationship between Yolanda and Mario. Feeding into love and complicating it are also an assortment of incompatible identity politics as well as revolutionary beliefs; those of a lower-class, black, male revolutionary worker which collide with those of a middle-class, petit bourgeois, mulata. It is the interface of race, class and gender--that is, identity politics and the constraints of revolutionary ideals that are at the center of this movie.

The dialectical relationship that arises between the two combating discourses is represented by the counterpoints that Gómez highlights in the film's development between different elements of dominant discourse. Borrowing from Santiago Alvarez and Nicolas Guillen Landrian's cut and paste method, Gómez grafts fiction into reality with her measured blend of documentary footage, newsreel and her own footage. In addition

[23] This film left unfinished in 1974, due to Gomez's untimely death in June of 1974, and was not released until 1977, after editing by Tomas Gutierrez Alea, Julio Garcia Espinosa and Rigoberto Lopez.

to “cut and paste”, Gómez also incorporates aesthetics of the “imperfect cinema” genre/movement and a nuanced socio-spatial discourse.

Based on a 1969 essay by Julio Garcia Espinosa entitled “Por un cine imperfecto,” imperfect cinema is a theory of cinema in which the goal is not technical and artistic perfection, since these would be incongruent to the resources available in a third world developing country. The goal of imperfect cinema according to Garcia Espinosa, is to “engage with its audience by imaginatively inserting itself and them into social reality, to film the world around it without makeup, to make the kind of film that remains incomplete without an actively responsive audience taking it up” (Chanan 305). The full effect of imperfect cinema then depends wholly on active audience participation. The viewer must not only sit through the film but actively engage with it in order to grasp its full concept. Passive observation on the part of the viewer, leaves the film’s goal incomplete. As Michael Chanan argues just as happens with Brecht,[24] imperfect cinema is preoccupied with deconstruction of the traditional relationship between viewer and cinema, but as it applies to developing countries, Garcia Espinosa’s theory goes further than deconstruction and falls in line with Caribbean scholars such as Frantz Fanon in that it calls for “cultural decolonization” (Chanan 306).

[24] Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a German poet, playwright and theatre director who deeply impacted modern film with his groundbreaking theatre techniques and most importantly his theory of “epic theatre.” Epic theatre posits that “ a play should not cause the spectator to identify emotionally with the characters or action before him or her, but should instead provoke rational self-reflection and a critical view of the action on the stage.” In this way Brecht sought to deconstruct not only traditional spatial boundaries between the audience and the play, but also to reinvent the relationship between the two by forcing the active participation of the audience. His goal was to have his audiences “adopt a critical perspective in order to recognize social injustice and exploitation and to be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change in the world outside.” To this end, Brecht emphasized the “constructed nature of the theatrical event” in hopes of highlighting the similarly constructed nature of the audience’s reality. (http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/brecht.htm)

With the use of these stylistic, aesthetic tools Gómez is able to construct a critical body of work that revolves around the question of "who are we in and in spite of the revolution?" The drama debates the angles and contours of the meeting of revolution and identificatory politics, bringing to the center the stories of those who were marginalized before and after the Revolution. This strict focus on those subjectivities marginalized despite the theoretical advances of the Revolution, allows Gómez's film to represent the revolution's dark side and to question the true, practical manifestations its theoretical hopes. She disperses the fictions of revolutionary agenda by dialectically placing them vis-à-vis reality of the marginalized.

De cierta manera opens in media res, in the midst of a worker's meeting in which a fellow worker, Humberto, is being accused of lying about why he missed a week of work. The camera first pans across the faces of the workers assembled for this meeting—they are all men--and focuses on the intent concern that manifests on their faces. The camera then comes to rest on the accused who rises to give a short testimonial to absolve himself of any wrongdoing. He remorsefully states as his alibi that he was visiting his sick mother in Camaguey, a town almost two days journey from Havana. After this blatant lie, one of the protagonists, Mario, angrily jumps to his feet in order to denounce Humberto as a liar, as disrespectful of his fellow workers and as lacking in revolutionary zeal, because he knows that he was not visiting his sick mother, but rather a lover from Camagüey.

After this outburst, the camera abruptly shifts to newsreel footage of the demolition of a building--the old Miraflores housing projects. As the footage rolls, the bass line drums of a Cuban rumba are heard in the background as the opening credits

begin to roll. The drums turn into a full rumba beat as the camera crosscuts from the footage of the demolition, to that of a slum, and then to the construction of a new housing project on the site of the recently demolished one. At this point, while the rumba still plays, the voice of two narrators, one male and one female, enter the film dispensing numerical and statistical facts about the effects of capitalism on the Cuban nation, the history of the Miraflores housing projects, and the marginalized populations that still exist despite the "progress" of the Revolution and how they (the marginalized) have maintained their "traditional" ways.

In this extensive opening factual exposition, the narrators are keen to focus on the triumph of the educational revisions of the revolution, which include the theoretical success of the integration of schools and the progress of the literacy program. They note repeatedly that education is now the Cuban nation's best weapon. In conjunction with this voiceover then are images of a collection of multiracial, diverse schoolchildren filing orderly into school. Gómez also includes a foreshadowing shot, which lingers intently on a mulata schoolteacher, who the viewer will shortly come to know as another key protagonist of the film, Yolanda.

The camera then transitions to the next scene, which finds the schoolteacher Yolanda partaking in a long-awaited lunch with an elderly couple; Mario's parents. As the three exchange pleasantries and small talk over lunch, Mario breezes in from work unaware of Yolanda's presence until alerted by his mother of his rudeness by not greeting their visitor. He humbly doubles back and exchanges brief pleasantries with Yolanda and disappears into a back bedroom to change for lunch. When he emerges again to eat at the

kitchen table, the family has finished and has moved to the living room and from here, Mario and Yolanda begin to exchange meaningful glances.

The movie then accelerates to the new couple enjoying each other's company on a beautiful afternoon in a park. They share details of their childhood and family, and their conversation highlights the stark contrasts that exist between the lovers, which before the revolution would have kept them apart in different social networks. Yolanda discloses that she comes from a family with "recursos," that is she comes from a family of means, and also had a good education, which included university training. Mario, in contrast, confides that his life experiences were completely opposite those of Yolanda. His family was very poor and he only attended primary school. Before and after that he was in the streets, where he acquired his current life experience. When Yolanda asks him what happened after he finished grade school, Mario simply responds, "vino la revolución" ("The revolution came").

At this point, a narrator interrupts their tête-à-tête with details of the 1960 literacy campaign and images of the literacy brigades who went to the farthest and most isolated corners of the island in order to ensure the success of this project. After this break in Mario and Yolanda's conversation, the camera returns to the two lovers, whose conversation is still in progress. The viewer returns to the film, as a privileged insider, while Yolanda asks Mario to tell her about ñañigos and the secret all-male Abakua society. Just as quickly as the viewer was returned to the immediate action of the film, the continuity is ruptured again by the intervention of a documentary filmic essay. This time a narrator enters to discuss the history, legacy and present day status of the Abakua society, disputing common-held beliefs about the group. There is footage of secret

ceremonies and images and symbols that pertain to the society, as the myths that founded the Abakua are grafted onto these images.

The Abakua society, in its guarded secrecy, represents a contrapuntal element of Cuban society on many levels. Therefore Gómez's inclusion of Abakua is also an interesting entry into the discourse of masculinity, machismo and social prejudices. Although the Cuban Revolution called for a balancing and equalization of the discrepancies between the demands of male and female gender roles, traditional conceptions of these roles still persisted in the years immediately following 1959. While the Revolution called on Cuban men to be exemplary of the "New Man", Cuban women were organized and officially integrated into Cuban society with the creation of the Federation Of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1960 (Luciak 14). Revolutionary gender roles were also regulated by 1975's Family Code (which although the film predates, still maintains an interesting dialogue with), which ordered in Articles 27 and 28 that,

> The partners must help meet the needs of the family they have created with their marriage, each according to his or her ability and financial status. However, if one of them only contributes by working at home and caring for the children, the other partner must contribute to this support alone, without prejudice to his duty of cooperating to the abovementioned work and care. Both partners have the right to practice their profession or skill and they have the duty of helping each other and cooperating in order to make this possible and to study or improve their knowledge. However, they must always see to it that home life is organized in such a way that these activities are coordinated with their fulfillment of the obligations posed by this code (Luciak 18).

Despite the fact that the code was not enforced, its ratification is significant in that it served as a benchmark for the goals of gender roles within revolutionary Cuban society.

As an all-male, all-black secret society, the Abakua society, although an example of traditional Cuban machismo and “manliness”, was deemed divisive and anti-revolutionary in the early years of the revolution (Leiner 22). Gómez’s revelation of the society’s secrets is at once intriguing and disturbing. Intriguing, in that she provides insight into a secret world that had been off-limits for years, and disturbing because by revealing some of the secrets of the religion and also by even broaching the subject and crossing into the zone of masculinity, as a woman she is violating societal, Cuban and Abakua, taboos.

The main storyline of the film then continues with Yolanda telling Mario of her previous marriage. As she tells him of how perfect it was in theory, due to their similar familial and educational backgrounds, but how in practice it was doomed, a collage of photos of the seemingly perfect couple is displayed across the screen.

It is on this last point that the two end their conversation and start to leave. An interesting detail of their conversation is that it takes place not only in an isolated spot, but also that it takes place by a river. The inclusion of this symbolic space/location is indicative of Gómez’s incorporation of sociospatial discourse as a contrapuntal device in this film. In Afro-Cuban religion, the river is representative of Oshún who is not only the orisha of love, but also the patron saint of Cuba. She is often represented as La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, a beautiful mulata saint surrounded by three fishermen, one white, one black and one Indian/Chinese, or by the river. As a mulata of mixed heritage, she is often, especially in revolutionary times representative of the inherent hybrid nature of the Cuban nation.

This extended scene of Mario and Yolanda's heart-to-heart then is bursting with counter-points to the revolution's points that yield a harmonic dissonance between itself and the discursive value of the revolution's hegemonic points. Although the revolution's revisionist approach to Cuban society has provided the opportunity for Mario and Yolanda's relationship to exist, Gómez highlights the social, cultural and economic disparities that exist between the two. Mario and Yolanda are worlds apart, and yet the revolution has thrust them into a new space where the expectation is that they can meld their two life experiences and find common ground. But it is the explanatory ruptures in the film that occur over the course of their conversation at the riverside that act as a counter-point to the revolution's discursive points. Despite their newfound, almost imposed common ground as revolutionary Cubans, a perpetual disconnect that originates in pre-revolutionary Cuban society remains between Mario and Yolanda; divides that the Revolution theoretically has resolved, but in practice remain, primarily in terms of their social class. Although they are both black--mulatto and negro, not quite black and not quite white—Yolanda and Mario come from very different segments of society. Yolanda led a life of privilege before the revolution and chose to come to work in the neighborhoods of those marginalized in Cuban society. Mario on the other hand, was poor before the Revolution and has relatively remained in the same place. He has steady work due to the revolutionary order that all Cubans must work, but he still lives in the same neighborhood and still remains a marginalized member of Cuban society.

By problematizing the theoretical and practical application of revolutionary ideals for Cuban society, and also probing the forgotten history of the marginalized that exist on the outskirts of revolutionary social structures, Gómez confronts marginality, while

simultaneously constructing a discursive space for its contrapuntal discourse. Gómez stresses a number of scenarios, which highlight the tensions between Mario and Yolanda on a micro and macro scale and emphasize the intrinsically linked nature of the class, racial and gender-based differences that exist between them. It is Gómez's emphasis of these contrapuntal realities then that lend to this film a unique feel. She uses the filmic device of rupture and continuity to symbolize the rupture and continuation that marks the lives of the marginalized (those in and outside of revolutionary society).

One example of Gómez's focus on contrapuntal realities is the side story of Lázaro, one of Yolanda's troubled students. Lázaro's story begins with Yolanda reprimanding him in class for misbehaving and not having the appropriate materials for class. Lázaro's lack of remorse for his indiscretions draw out Yolanda's buried frustrations with the shortcomings of the revolutionary education system. As her voice raises, Lázaro instinctively recoils, waiting for Yolanda to strike him; a move which surprises Yolanda. After removing Lázaro from the classroom, the camera crosscuts to Yolanda having dinner with her friend, a black woman, discussing her frustrations with Lázaro and explaining how he recoiled from her as she was yelling at him as if Lázaro expected Yolanda to hit him. At this point their conversation is ruptured by a short clip of "insider" footage which shows Lázaro being beaten at home by his mother. When the film returns to the two friends, Yolanda's friend explains to Yolanda the dynamics of Lázaro's home situation and why he behaves the way he does. Not only is Lázaro the oldest of four children in a dirt-poor family, but he is mentally challenged, the offspring of a single-mother who struggles to make ends meet and who also has never been to school. She further explains that children like Lázaro need compassion and

understanding, as their circumstances are strikingly dissimilar from those of Yolanda. He has no role models at home to look up to and therefore no one to ensure that he does his homework or that he has the necessary materials to attend class and actively participate. Following this eye-opening talk, Yolanda meets with Lázaro's mother to discuss his behavior in her class. She soon learns firsthand that Lázaro's problems run deeper than she could have ever imagined. As the mother divulges to Yolanda the details of the family's circumstances--lack of schooling in spite of the literacy campaign, poverty, and too many mouths to feed with too little money--Yolanda makes direct contact with the dark side of revolutionary progress, as Lázaro's mother's story is indicative of the alternative and marginal histories that still abound in Havana. Just because the revolution has bestowed upon the poor the tools for progress such as access to education, better jobs, and social equality, it does not mean that they have been taught how to make use of them. Gómez's inclusion of Lázaro's story underlines the fact that tools of progress must be accompanied by active energy and invested compassion and action in order to see true results.

Michael Chanan argues that Lázaro's story is an example of male chauvinism, due to the fact that as the film's narration states, "Around 53% of families in a group of 341 were headed by women, a characteristic of marginal families whose marital instability indexes are high" (348). I believe that Lázaro's story is not that, but in fact a directed contrapuntal highlighting by Gómez of the clash between traditional gender roles and expected revolutionary gender roles.

Yolanda then, upon the advice of her friend, resolves to take a hand in Lázaro's development. She begs his mother to stop abusing him and takes him to a hospital to be

physically and psychologically evaluated. The doctor confirms the reflections of Yolanda's friend, that children like Lázaro will flourish with the involvement of not only parents but also teachers in their development. As he is explaining this to Yolanda, the camera cuts to footage of Yolanda leaving the hospital with a changed Lázaro. Not only is he smiling, but he is also radiant from the effects of the attention and compassion bestowed upon him. This scene instills in the viewer the direct sense that Lázaro will "be ok". Now that he has received the help he needs, he will go on to be a productive and successful member of revolutionary society.

Gómez then shifts from Lázaro's success story to underscore once again the lingering disparities that exist between the theory and practice of revolution and their effects on the marginalized. In this second example of Gómez's highlighting of the discrepancies between the ambitions and realities of the revolution, Mario and Yolanda join a couple who are friends of Yolanda on a double date at an upscale restaurant. Accompanying an introductory opening shot of the two couples engaged in their joint venture, the camera centers on Mario and directs the viewer to his blatant discomfort. His eyes search the restaurant in awe of its luxurious surroundings, his body language of slouched shoulders, rigid stiffness and minimal speech betray his normally macho bravado and reveal his discomfort in his present surroundings. The camera reveals Mario second-guessing himself as he ponders the proper fork to eat his salad with and studies his table companions to ensure that he is holding his knife and fork properly.

From his actions and the deliberately focused camera shots, the viewer can deduce Mario's uncertainty and intuit the lingering disconnect that exists between Yolanda and Mario. The ladies excuse themselves to the bathroom and it is here that

Yolanda's friend reprimands her for consorting with Mario. She reminds her that although we are all revolutionaries, "todos no somos iguales" ("We are not all equal"). Simultaneously, this woman's boyfriend is also making the inequalities between Mario and Yolanda plain to Mario. He is very upfront and quick to inform Mario that Yolanda, "no es una cualquiera" ("she is not a whore"). With this statement he not only stereotypes Mario's expectations for Yolanda, but also Mario's character because of his class and racially linked markings in Cuban society as a poor black man. These simultaneous counter-punctual ruptures underscore the harmonic dissonance that abounds in revolutionary society. Namely, that although in theory the revolution equalized disparities of race, class and gender, in reality pre-revolutionary prejudices concerning identity politics still exist.

Gómez then shifts the action of the movie to Yolanda giving a testimonial about her experience as a teacher in the newly integrated schools, and also her thoughts on the future perspectives for the students she works with. Looking directly into the camera's lens, and (by default) the eyes of viewer, Yolanda confides that she is truly worried about those who get left behind by this newly integrated system due to the old-fashioned mentality that the Revolution has failed to erase. The marginalized to whom she is referring are the girls, who Yolanda states are destined to a fate of pregnancy, marriage and a 5^{th} grade education, not for lack of opportunity, but rather for lack of example. Although the revolution has "leveled the playing field," as Yolanda enumerates the odds working against these girls, she does so from a distanced position. Mentally she has not and cannot place herself on the same level as the children she teaches. In spite of and

despite the revolution, their realities remain worlds apart. This is highlighted in the next scene.

Following this bold testimonial, the camera moves to a parent-teacher meeting between Yolanda and the mother of one of her students. Yolanda voices her concerns to the mother regarding the possibility of her child having to repeat the year because they are not doing their work at home. The mother replies to Yolanda's concerns that she cannot be there to monitor her child's schoolwork because she leaves for work at 6 am and often does not return home until 9 pm or later because she is a single parent. Frustrated with this response and what she perceives as the mother's indifference to her child's precarious academic situation, Yolanda begins to yell at the mother, who can only look back at her in disbelief. This is yet another example in a series of skillfully placed scenes, which highlight the disparities between class, race and gender that linger in spite of the revolution.

Although Yolanda is doing her revolutionary duty of providing children with education, the greatest weapon of the revolution, she still lacks one of the most important skills that a teacher must have: the ability to relate to her students. Due to her personal, social, academic and economic upbringing, Yolanda will never understand the idiosyncrasies of the day-to-day lives of her students and their families. She is reminded of the unbridgeable gap between herself and her students when her superiors reprimand her for her outburst.

The next scene finds Mario waiting for Yolanda impatiently outside of the movie theater. When she finally arrives flustered from her earlier confrontation at the parent-teacher meeting, he roughly escorts her inside, informing her that she is over an hour late.

She attempts to apologize, but he dismisses her and starts yelling at her. Yolanda storms out of the movie theater and their fight spills onto the street. In the heat of the moment, Yolanda scolds Mario for his low-class macho handling of her at the movie theater and Mario retorts that she is just a spoiled rich girl.

In this moment the emotions and thoughts that they keep hidden, spill over and out in the open, and they realize that their differences are too great. The class and race based prejudices that the revolution was supposed to resolve threaten to rupture the bond between rich and poor that only the revolution could have made possible. They reveal the emotions that weigh on their minds, despite what their hearts feel and this episode serves as a strategic counterpoint to their entire relationship. Up until this moment they have ignored or dismissed the critiques and concerns of friends and family. But as both Mario and Yolanda voice the very real concerns that shouldn't, but do, overshadow the potential future success of their relationship, this revelation is indeed telling. Once the impact of their words is revealed through a look of mutual understanding, they decide that they should end things because they are too different. As Yolanda turns to walk away, Mario runs to her and implores her to give them another chance. In the middle of his imploring, Guillermo, a friend of Mario interrupts them and once again the action of the film is ruptured with a side story.

The rupture sequence at this point in the film revolves around the story of Guillermo and his rise and fall, or rather his move from the margins to the center and back to the margins of Cuban society. Melancholically sung over the strumming of his acoustic guitar, Guillermo, in his own words, tells of his humble beginnings and his early success as a champion boxer. A narrator then takes over and provides an overview

Guillermo's triumphs and rapid rise to fame as newspaper headlines, articles and clippings are presented on screen. As the narration climaxes at the peak of Guillermo's fame, the newspaper clippings flicker to a re-enactment of Guillermo's downfall. As Guillermo was struggling to defend himself from a late night robber with a knife, the two men fell to the ground and in the midst of the fray the knife plunged into the robber's chest, killing him. The camera lens of the re-enactment shifts focus from the corpse of the robber to the now distraught Guillermo and then flashes to more newspaper headlines announcing not only the unfortunate events of the re-enactment but also Guillermo's resultant imprisonment and the demise of his boxing career. Just as quickly as the rupture in the storyline began, it abruptly ends after the screening of these last few headlines and returns to the busy street where Mario and Yolanda ran into Guillermo. He (Guillermo) bids the couple farewell and soon after Mario and Yolanda exchange tense farewells as the scene ends.

Feminist critic Annette Kuhn, understands the filmic rupture and continuation that is perceived in the film as a "form of deconstruction". Kuhn argues that Gómez "works by setting up expectations and then cutting them off, leaving the film with 'no single internally consistent discourse.'" (Kuhn 163). I believe that while Gómez's use of rupture and continuation can be read as deconstruction *De cierta manera* does include several consistent and complimentary/interlocking discourses. For example, the overarching discourse of marginality is buttressed by highlighting of discourses of masculinity, race, the intersection of race, masculinity and marginality, as well as the intersectional discourses of gender and race, class and gender and race, class and gender.

The next scene finds Humberto, the man who Mario denounces in front of the worker's assembly in the film's opening scene, approaching Mario after his fabricated stay with his sick mother. As the two men greet each other a supervisor approaches them and asks Humberto where he has been. When he replies with his well-rehearsed lie, Mario becomes annoyed by Humberto's flippant attitude towards the revolutionary value of work and storms off. He goes to speak with Guillermo at his gym where he trains young black boxers like himself. As the two men settle into conversation to discuss Mario's problems with Yolanda, the film is ruptured by a flashback to a public emotional guitar performance by Guillermo attended by Mario and Yolanda. Guillermo's performance is so moving that it brings an embarrassed Mario to tears.

The camera pans out from Mario's tears to capture the faces of the diverse audience, and the effect is astounding. All the faces of the audience members hold the same emotion, nostalgia and a deep sadness. This scene is striking because it highlights the fact that in spite of the many differences between the members of the audience, the only thing that is universal to all of them is emotion. With this realization then the film jumps back to Mario and Guillermo ending their conversation.

A narrator enters the film again as the footage of the destruction of the old Miraflores housing projects runs across the screen. He narrates the reasons for the destruction of these "zonas de marginalidad" ("zones of marginality") and also runs off a number of statistics regarding the effects and characteristics of marginality, such as delinquency, early pregnancy, and over-population. But this scene is cut short as the rumba drums from the beginning of the film reappear and the camera scans a CDR[25] sign and then various shots of the "marginalized" working collectively to beautify their new

[25] Comite de la defensa revolucionaria ("Committee of Revolutionary Defense")

re-built neighborhood and homes in Miraflores. The shots depict the people of Miraflores gardening, painting, and cleaning. In this way the earlier rupture of the demolition of the old zone is destabilized by the perpetuation of the cycle of marginalization in the new zone of Miraflores. Despite the rupture of demolition and literal destruction of the marginalized, the condition of marginalization continues in Miraflores. The same problems of marginality that existed in the now demolished buildings of the past still exist in Miraflores, but have been dressed up.

Thus the final scene directs the film to a cyclical end. The viewer returns to the worker's assembly that opened the film, and witnesses Mario once again denounce Humberto as a liar and a failed revolutionary to his fellow workers. The repetition of this opening scene is particularly significant as the viewer now understands the background that accompanies Mario's outburst. The return marks the ultimate confrontation of diametrically opposed versions of masculinity, traditional and revolutionary. In this scene, Humberto embodies the traditional outdated masculinity that is representative of marginalism, while Mario, although imperfect represents the progressive revolutionary masculine identity. Mario's denunciation of Humberto before the workers assembly is powerfully symbolic. It is not only indicative of Mario's own inner conflicts between traditional and revolutionary visions of his masculinity, but it also represents his decisive choice to renounce the old traditional conceptualization of masculinity that privileges the individual man over the collective. In his choice to move toward becoming a more perfected representation of a revolutionary male, Mario chooses to keep moving forward. Michael Chanan attributes Mario's confusion and his denunciation of Humberto as the culmination of a "conflict of loyalties" (348), old loyalties to traditional masculinity that

would call for him to keep Humberto's secret and new loyalties to "the new social code of the Revolution" that requires loyalty to the Revolutionary cause and his fellow "compañeros." As Chanan keenly observes,

> Humberto is in many ways Mario's alter ego. Different aspects of the old marginal culture survive in each of them, but more rigidly and individualistically in Humberto, for who the pursuit of personal whim justifies the evasion of social responsibility toward his fellow workers and dissimulation in the interests of private gratification. In Mario's case, the predominant survival of marginalism is found in his adherence to the code of loyalty—not giving Humberto away. But in the assembly, Mario feels provoked by Humberto's behavior and spills the beans… (Chanan 348).

And yet, while focusing in on the collision of the old and the new, the underlying theme of loyalty and its link to masculinity is intriguing. Mario is conflicted and caught between the clash of his old and new loyalties, just as in a parallel manner, Yolanda finds herself at the crossroads of old and new.

The film ends as Mario storms out into the newly built Miraflores neighborhood and the movie pans out to reveal that what appeared to be individual homes in earlier shots of the neighborhood are actually large housing projects, not at all dissimilar from those that were demolished. The film ends on this shot, a final testimony to the central role of rupture and continuation in the lives of the marginalized.

The use of rupture and continuation to highlight discursive counter-points underscores the impact of the past on the future and present—with flashbacks to Guillermo, and the demolition of the slums of the past, to create the present neighborhood. The film's conclusion brings everything full circle, as we end were we began, in the workers assembly and the denunciation of Humberto, as well as the footage

of the demolition of the slums of the past. I believe that this emphasizes Gómez's insistence on the incongruities that exist between the theory and practice of revolutionary ideals as the facts of race, class and gender are very real and impede an immediate surmounting of identity politics.

Through her introspective counterpoints then, Gómez critiques the plausibility of not only the expectations of the Cuban revolution, but also that of the utopic expectations of the Cuban people. She brings the margins to the center, by providing voice and image to subaltern and marginalized subjects. In order to do so, she underlines the reality of those who remained marginalized in and in spite of the revolution; those who progress have left behind.

Read in conjunction with the work of Sergio Giral (discussed in Chapter two) and Nancy Morejón's, "Mujer Negra," the works of Nicolas Guillen Landrian and Sara Gómez suggest that the revolution served as not only a spark for, but also an unintended introduction to a nuanced way to examine and express the frayed meeting of blackness and Cubanness within the context of the Cuban Revolution. Landrian, Gómez and Morejón can be viewed as vanguards who paved the way for further probing of race and identity in a revolutionary context which was hostile to such utterances. In light of the groundwork laid by Morejón, Guillen Landrian, and Gómez, the question lingers, what is left unsaid?

Chapter Three: Rethinking Caliban: Sergio Giral, negrometraje and Afro-Cuban consciousness

"In each grain of sand there is a landslide"
Anonymous

The most radical social commentary on the contemporary reality of Afro-Cubans in 1970s revolutionary Cuba lies within the *negrometraje* trilogy of Sergio Giral. *Negrometraje* is a derogatory yet popular term that translates euphemistically as "black feature film" and more realistically as, "nigger film". This is the term applied to the 1970s films of Sergio Giral and others whose cinematic work dealt with themes of slavery and slave rebellion in 19th century Cuba. This term was used, as opposed to the general term of "*largometraje*", which translates as "feature film" that is applied to all other films, excluding documentaries, commonly referred to as "*cortometraje*" or, short film.[26]

In this project, I am approaching the term and genre of "*negrometraje*" as a revolutionary revision of the 19th century Cuban anti-slavery narrative. As a revision of the genre, "*negrometraje*", follows the goal of the original 19th century discourse in that it seeks to, "challenge history and rewrite in narrative discourse a different version of the same history" (Luis 2). But "*negrometraje*" differs from its 19th century roots by corresponding to the specific temporal and social context of the Cuban Revolutionary period.

The significance of Giral's films--*El Otro Francisco* (1974), *Rancheador* (1976) and *Maluala* (1977)--is compounded by the climate of the 1970s; the Padilla Affair of 1971, the crushed "black manifesto plot", as well as Cuba's internationalist policy

[26] Other films that pertain to the *negrometraje* genre in Cuban film include, Tomas Gutierrez Alea's, *La Ultima Cena* (1976) in addition to Humberto Solas' *Cecilia* (1982) (Hidalgo 82).

towards Africa that was discussed in the introduction and the first chapter of the dissertation.

In Giral's *negrometraje* trilogy Shakespeare's Caliban from *The Tempest* serves as a vehicle for his probing interrogation of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness in 1970s revolutionary Cuba. Through this intriguing series of three films he seeks to not only deconstruct the symbol of Caliban and his resultant associations with Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness, but also to expand the interpretive possibilities of this allegorical figure.

Giral is not the first to engage the idea of Caliban as a metaphorical symbol for black (Caribbean) identity and consciousness. Caribbean intellectuals such as Roberto Fernandez Retamar, Aime Cesaire and George Lamming also posited this idea. These represent the dominant intellectual viewpoints regarding the utility of Caliban as a vehicle to interrogate black Caribbean identity and consciousness in the context of emergent post colonization. Of these three, George Lamming's conclusions and explanations of the connection between Caliban and the black Caribbean subjectivity are the most fitting to what Giral tries to portray in terms of Afro-Cuban consciousness.

Borrowing from Lamming's interpretation of Caliban, Giral's films, *El Otro Francisco* (1974), *Rancheador* (1976), and *Maluala* (1977) constitute a probing filmic inquiry into Afro-Cuban consciousness and potential positionality through the successive deconstruction of the allegorical symbol of Caliban. Operating in such a way, Giral's *negrometraje* trilogy achieves an insightful interrogation and expansion of William Shakespeare and George Lamming's visions and boundaries of Caliban.

Sergio Giral projects his examination onto the past, situating the drama in the early to mid 19th century; during the period of Cuban slavery. Placing his films in this time period is in and of itself particularly significant. By projecting his visions of the present and potential future possibilities of Afro-Cuban subjectivity (via Caliban) onto the past, Giral not only problematizes stereotypical notions of the components of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness, but also engages in an intriguing dialogue with cultural and collective memory. He thus attempts to revise cultural memory and reexamine its dimensions and repercussions by revisiting the trauma of slavery. In this way, Giral seeks to rearrange the potential boundaries of slavery and in effect contemporary Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness, allowing for one of the most significant examinations of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness by an Afro-Cuban artist.

Sergio Giral's final vision of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness then is complex and fractured. His films demonstrate that no one single image can comprehensively encompass the full scope and complexities of Afro-Cuban consciousness and identity. They indicate that Afro-Cuban identity is not monolithic, but rather prismatic, dynamic and protean in nature, responding to and in spite of socio-historical and socio-political change. Building on a stereotype of the docile slave, Giral systematically works in each successive film of his trilogy and beyond to deconstruct the image of the Afro-Cuban and also to reimagine the possibilities for this subjectivity, previously unimagined by hegemonic discourse. By placing the Afro-Cuban at the center of the Cuban narrative and historical transcript, in a move similar to Morejón's "Mujer

Negra", Giral aids in the redirection and rewriting not only of the definition of Afro-Cuban identity and consciousness but also its representation.

Although born in Havana on January 2, 1937, Sergio Giral was raised in New York City and returned to Cuba in 1959. In 1961, he began his work at ICAIC, and remained in Cuba until 1991. While in residence at ICAIC, Giral directed six films, four of which dealt exclusively with Afro-Cuban identity, among these were his *negrometraje* films (Lopez and Humy 274). He returned to the US in 1991 because, as he claims "the government banned him from making any further films because they thought the images of high-level corruption he was portraying were not politically proper" (Carillo 22). He currently lives in exile in Miami, FL.

When asked in a 2005 interview about the importance of his *negrometraje* films, Sergio Giral is quoted as responding,

> My film does two things: it analyzes the history and it rescues the images of Afro Cubans for the sake of the nation. It was important to prove that the slaves were not tame, that they wanted to fight for their freedom. When people see Black people as tame, it makes them think that Black people were somehow willing to conform themselves - that they didn't have aspirations. As if we were people who didn't care about things and didn't want to improve our lives. I believe that my films became part of the learning process for Afro Cubans," said Giral. "It was a way to teach Blacks in Cuba about their history… films are more direct; they're even more direct than a book (Carillo 22).

From the filmmaker's personal reflections on the impact his films have had on Afro-Cuban consciousness one can deduce that Giral had more in mind than simply producing films about slavery when he embarked on the task of bringing this trilogy to cinema. Giral explicitly notes that his intended audience consisted of black Cubans. His recognition of the specific need of popular examples of black consciousness and history

during the 1970s should be noted. Although he was operating within the government institution of ICAIC, Giral's intentions with his film are clear, "to teach Blacks in Cuba about *their* history" (emphasis is mine, as it would seem that Giral directed his films solely towards black Cubans). And yet, although he made plain his intentions and target audience in this interview, in an earlier 1993 interview Giral is quick to assert his discomfort with being pigeonholed as strictly a black filmmaker who deals with black issues and positionality. He says,

> "It is very difficult for me to see things from the perspective that is implied in statements such as 'black issues' or 'the position of blacks' in the Cuban cinema because our social reality is one that does not make such a phenomenon possible. Such issues do not come up because the problems underlying those issues do not exist here. That I am black and a film director does not differentiate me in the least from other directors. Perhaps what I may be able to address more directly are the topics that I have addressed in my films, because here there is a direct relationship between my personal experiences as a black man and filmmaker and the films that I have made"(Lopez and Humy 278).

His stance is revealing then in its inconsistency with his previous statements. Despite his stated purpose of highlighting Afro-Cuban history and awakening Afro-Cuban consciousness in the 1970s, he is well aware of the stereotypes that do abound. Giral's inconsistency seems to follow Tommy Lott's argument of the key characteristics of Third world cinema that "what makes third cinema third (i.e., a viable alternative to Western cinema) is not exclusively the racial make-up of a filmmaker, a film's aesthetic character, or a film's intended audience, but rather a film's political orientation within the hegemonic structures of post-colonialism" (qtd. Martin 3). It is possible that Lott's explanation of cinema produced in the third world can account for Giral's perceived inconsistency. While presenting an alternative version of Cuban history to Afro-Cuban

audiences Giral is highly conscious of the effects that 1970s stereotypes of Afro-Cubans had on their self-awareness during this time period. He is also highly aware of the political environment in which his films were being produced and for that reason he consciously situated himself and his films within the context of Cuban revolutionary discourse. By attempting to extract his blackness from his occupation as a filmmaker while acknowledging that his position of blackness provides him with a unique insight into the positionality of Afro-Cubans, Giral asserts that his blackness and art are not inextricably linked. One does inform the other, but he is also signaling that neither is a finite definition of Sergio Giral the man. With this declaration then, Giral posits that for him blackness is not a "condition" that one must surpass as contemporary Cuban history would have Afro-Cubans believe, but rather that it is a fact, a multivalent fact that plays an intricate, if underappreciated, role in contemporary Cuban society.

In *El Otro Francisco*, *Rancheador* and *Maluala*, Giral probes the previously delineated limits of Afro-Cuban identity, meaning conceptualizations of Afro-Cuban subjectivity which confined the potential social, political, and cultural growth of the Afro-Cuban subject to rigidly limiting parameters, marked by damaging stereotypes and discrimination. He also interrogates the symbol of Caliban and slavery as an insurmountable condition. Taking into consideration Giral's stated goals, the context of revolution, and the significance of the figure of Caliban, many questions come to mind: what can we take from an Afro-Cuban filmmaker (who acknowledges himself as such) who made a series of deeply impacting films about what he calls Afro-Cuban history, and yet is reluctant to be categorized as strictly an Afro-Cuban filmmaker? What are the possibilities for Afro-Cuban consciousness that Giral posits with these films?

From Giral, we receive an example of the cinematic imaginings of the Afro-Cuban subject by an Afro-Cuban and also a coded critique of the positioning of the Afro-Cuban subject in contemporary Cuban society. In his filmic trilogy Giral does offer possible alternatives to the Caliban condition. But what Giral does not offer is a definitive resolution to the issues surrounding the Caliban condition. He does not pretend to conclusively resolve all the issues that plague the Afro-Cuban subjectivity in revolutionary Cuba. That being said, I do not believe that it is Giral's intention to explicitly resolve the trauma of slavery or the resultant Caliban condition, but rather to deconstruct it and present one or more possible options that move beyond the traditionally imagined parameters of Afro-Cuban identity.

In the chapter that follows, I venture into a joint exploration of the economies of power and desire operating in each of these films via the triangular relationships between its characters as well as the relationship of the films characters to popular constructions of hegemony. In addition, this chapter takes into consideration George Lamming's post-colonial deconstructivist reading of the figure of Caliban in Shakespeare. Together they will aid in the elucidation of Giral's role in the awakening and encouragement of Afro-Cuban consciousness via film in revolutionary Cuba of the 1970s.

Rethinking Caliban

In the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s and early 1970s the "Third World" began to identify as a collective voice in world affairs. The triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 as well as the emancipatory actions of other Latin American, African and Asian peoples had lit anew the spark of interest in detailing and defining a national

and international identity, and more specifically a black identity that was independent of its previous associative properties or lack thereof under colonialism. In the newly emerging post-colonial Caribbean, especially, this quest for identity played out in literary and socio-political spheres by revisiting, revising and reappropriating Shakespeare's, *The Tempest (1623)* and also the associative properties assigned to the character, Caliban.

The Tempest tells the tale of the European, Prospero who becomes shipwrecked on the island of Caliban. Caliban, perceived by Prospero as a half-human monster, is no less the rightful owner of the island which was given to him by his mother, the witch Sycorax. Despite his inherited claim over the island he becomes the slave of Prospero on his own island, (joined by Ariel, another native of Caliban's island). Prospero is joined by his daughter Miranda, and later a host of shipwrecked nobles and seamen, who together bring about one of the most trenchant critiques of the colonial condition.

Throughout the play, the reader sees the evolution of the consciousness of Caliban with regards to his colonized, subject position. In the beginning of the play, Caliban and Ariel are faithful subjects to the foreigner and colonizer, Prospero. Yet as the plot progresses, we begin to see a more vocally rebellious Caliban, who begins to question not only his authority on and off the island but also his subjectivity with regards to Prospero. In addition he questions the value of learning Prospero's civilization, i.e. his language and customs. He notes that civilization, which Prospero has equipped him with, has only enabled him to curse him (Prospero) in his own tongue. Finally, Caliban's consciousness evolves to the point where he voices his doubts of Prospero's inherent authority to the recently shipwrecked, Stefano and Trinculo, and forges a plot to overthrow Prospero. When the island's other native Ariel reveals the plot to Prospero, Prospero sets a pack of

spirits on them in the form of dogs, dissolving the potential revolt and foiling his potential overthrow.

With this short synopsis of Caliban's role in the play, it is not far-fetched that colonized people of the Caribbean should feel a deep association with the character of Caliban. Analogous to the story of Caliban, Afro-Caribbeans had been placed in a subordinate position to a foreign ruler on their own soil. In spite of their being men, Afro-Caribbeans, were viewed as less than human and uncivilized by their European colonizers. As a result of this mistreatment many Afro-Caribbeans harbored bitter feelings towards their European colonizers and sought to overthrow them. *The Tempest*, although a text of the colonizer, thus served as the vehicle through which a distinctly Caribbean and colonized subjectivity was voiced. As Rob Nixon argues,

> …these Caribbeans and Africans adopted the play as a founding text in an oppositional lineage which issued from a geopolitically and historically specific set of cultural ambitions. They perceived that the play could contribute to their self-definition during a period of great flux. So, through repeated, reinforcing, transgressive appropriations of *The Tempest*, a once silenced group generated its own tradition of "error" which in turn served as one component of the grander counterhegemonic nationalist and black internationalist endeavors of the period (Nixon 558).

By reappropriating the text and the character of Caliban from a distinctly Caribbean and colonized perspective, writers transformed Caliban into a metaphor of the Caribbean and colonized subject position.

George Lamming, Aime Cesaire, and Roberto Fernandez Retamar have actively explored this association of Caliban with the colonized subject position. George Lamming tackled the symbol of Caliban in his 1960 text, *Pleasures of Exile*; Aime

Cesaire rewrote the character in his play, simply titled, *Une tempete [A Tempest](1960),* and Roberto Fernandez Retamar interrogated the symbol in his essay *Caliban (1971).*

In *Une tempete,* Aime Cesaire directs his critical gaze to the specific case of the black colonial subject via a transcription of the play. In his rewrite Cesaire specifically associates the character of Ariel with the mulatto and Caliban to the field slave. His text is a very vocal denunciation of colonialism as well as a critique of the effects of colonialism on the black colonial subject. Cesaire's adaptation however, is limited by its form in that, by utilizing the same genre as Shakespeare to explore the symbol of Caliban his critique can only go so far, as he is bound by the limits of the play's original framework. Instead of utilizing his adaptation as a possibility to expand the interpretive possibilities of the symbol of Caliban, his play, although full of interesting and impacting monologues that reveal a more contemporary and revolutionary consciousness in the character of Caliban, is stunted by the fact that it ends in much the same way as the Shakespearean original. As Laurence Porter argues, Cesaire's adaptation is stirring and warrants deep investigation, but similar to Shakespeare's work "dramatizes all four possible courses of action for the slaves: collaboration, opposition, resistance, and separatism" (373) and is unable to move much further. Prospero crushes Caliban's revolt and furthermore, he opts to remain on the island and not return to Europe when the offer is presented him.

In contrast, Roberto Fernandez Retamar's *Caliban,* focuses his assessment of the Caliban symbol on the example of the revolutionary Cuban subjectivity in the face of imperialism, both European and North American. He expands the Caliban symbol to be representative of the Cuban people while linking the character of Prospero to North

American and European imperialism. Retamar acknowledges the multiethnic roots of the Cuban nation and argues that is the diverse nature of these roots that prevent Caliban, in the Cuban case, from being representative of solely the black subject in Cuban society. Retamar collapses Caliban into an all inclusive "nosotros", or "we" as he asks, "¿qué es nuestra historia, qué es nuestra cultura, sino la historia, sino la cultura de Caliban?" ("what is our history, what is our culture if not the history, or the culture of Caliban") (Retamar 32). This interpretation of Caliban is interesting, but is also limited by its lack of consideration of the intricacies of the Cuban population in the face of revolution. Retamar's Caliban is Cuban, not black Cuban or Chinese Cuban or any other. As a result, a great portion of the trauma traditionally associated with the appropriation of the Caliban symbol is glossed over and Caliban's symbolic energy is focused on his ability to eradicate the plague of imperialism.

On the other hand, George Lamming's collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), conducts an acute interrogation of the intricacies of not only colonial subjectivity, but also black colonial subjectivity. His analysis of the Caliban symbol goes beyond that of Retamar and Cesaire and is directed toward Caliban's association with not only Caribbean and black colonial subjectivity, but also its link to the figure of the slave. Lamming's assessment of Caliban is all encompassing in that he examines not only the societal impact of the symbol but also its psychological implications on the development of cultural and identificatory consciousness in the black colonial subject.

Caliban and Language

In Shakespeare's, *The Tempest*, Caliban delivers his most memorable lines regarding Prospero's imparting his language upon him: "You taught me language; and my profit on't is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!" (Act I, scene 2). Evident in this angry outburst are Caliban's moment of awakening and his realization of the power and stranglehold that language, as a function of hegemony, now has on his self-expression and, by default, his processes of identification. In George Lamming's post-colonial deconstructivist reading of *The Tempest*, language is read as a metaphor and tool for the maintenance of hegemony and the dominant discourse of the colonizer.

Webster's dictionary defines the term hegemony as " the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group." In this type of relationship, control is achieved "through consensus not force." In this project, the concept of hegemony that I am utilizing is based on Antonio Gramsci's understanding of the term and its link to language, as it is explored in Peter Ives', *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*. Virtually ignored during his lifetime, the scholarship of Gramsci, according to Ives was only rediscovered and truly appreciated in his death as scholars began to revisit his complicated writings on the various dynamics of hegemony. Although he was not the first scholar to address the concept of hegemony in his writing, Gramsci's understanding of the term is continues to resonate. The term 'hegemony' has its roots in the Greek word, 'hegemon', which translates roughly as a "combination of authority, leadership and domination" (Ives 47). Gramsci analyzes the term from various angles in his *Prison Notebooks*, a compilation of his more than 3000 writings during his 8-year imprisonment (1927-1934) under the Italian Fascist regime.

Other scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan have made similar connections between language and different areas of ideological investigation, but Gramsci's relation of language to hegemony is particularly relative to this project. While language for Saussure, Levi-Strauss and Lacan yields the insights of structuralism, sociology and psychoanalysis respectively, for Gramsci, language is virtually a metaphor for hegemony. For Gramsci, language is "intricately connected to how we think about and make sense of the world. Thus it is central to politics and hegemony" (Ives 72). Language then becomes an integral part of hegemony, shaping the way that individuals interact in society. It is language that acts as a portal to hegemony and inclusion or exclusion from its structure is a metaphorical representation of one's place within societies structured in dominance.

Subsequently, with Caliban, his domination or rather integration into Language, which from this point will be used interchangeably with hegemony, serves as a tool and route to his own self-awareness. As Lamming argues, "Colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian's cultural awareness" (35). Never does Caliban utter or mention his native tongue, and this point is telling. He has become so fully integrated into the language of his colonizer Prospero, that he has in essence become 'lost' and can only express himself in the foreign language of Prospero, the colonizer. Lamming argues:

> "…there is no escape from the prison of Prospero's gift. This example of deformity was a challenge to Prospero's need to achieve the impossible. Only the application of the Word to the darkness of Caliban's world could harness the beast which resides within this cannibal. This is the first important achievement of the colonizing process. This gift of Language is the deepest and most delicate bond of involvement. It has a certain finality. Caliban will never be the same again. Nor, for that matter will Prospero" (109).

Explained in such a way, because of their fated interaction, Caliban and also Prospero are forever changed. Caliban can never return to his pre-colonized state and Prospero cannot return to his pre-colonizer state. But extraordinarily, rather than accept hegemony as a terminal finality, Caliban, in the moment of his open questioning and damnation of the language of Prospero, recognizes that an alternative to this language exists; an alternative to submission. The films of Sergio Giral's *negrometraje* trilogy explore, in part, these alternatives to hegemony.

An underlying theme of the filmic genre of *negrometraje* is the role of language as a tool of hegemony--its integrationist potential, and resulting self-awareness within the sphere of hegemonic discourse. By undertaking a reevaluation of the symbol of Caliban and simultaneous reconsideration of his identificatory potential, Sergio Giral's *negrometraje* films are found to be constructed in part around an exploration of language, its possession, interpretation and full integration or exclusion from all that it entails.

Sergio Giral, Negrometraje and Afro-Cuban identity

Viewed as a whole, the films of Giral's *negrometraje* trilogy illustrate the progressive chronological evolution of Afro-Cuban consciousness and its contrapuntal relation to hegemony. Each movie introduces viewers to a progressive conceptualization of Caliban. In the first film, *El otro Francisco*, Caliban is a victim embedded in hegemony. In the second film, *Rancheador*, the viewer encounters a Caliban who straddles both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic cultures. Finally in the third film, *Maluala,* Giral introduces a Caliban who is deeply situated in a counter-hegemonic

culture, maintains contact with hegemonic culture, and is also confronting the possibilities of a post-hegemonic culture.

Echoing Michael Chanan, the alternatives of Caliban that Sergio Giral presents in these films move from individual desolation and desperation to collective resistance and challenging of the oppressor. In each of Giral's films, the viewer witnesses this progressive exploration of the consciousness and identificatory potential of Caliban represented through the deconstruction of the figure of the slave, which stands in as the allegorical symbol of Caliban.

From the collective consideration of these reinterpretations of and alternatives to the Caliban figure, by Aime Cesaire, George Lamming, Roberto Fernandez Retamar, it is clear to see how the symbol of Caliban can be metaphorically transcribed onto the body of the slave, the subject of Sergio Giral's negrometraje films. In the films of Giral, this argument is rearticulated and reconfigured with a focus on the positionality and consciousness of the Afro-Cuban subject; a move which is reflective of the 1970s questioning of black Cuban positionality and consciousness in Cuban revolutionary society.

When Sergio Giral's first film, *El Otro Francisco* premiered in 1974 it was received with mixed reviews from the public, while *Rancheador* and *Maluala* received overall good reviews. *El Otro Francisco* is a revisionist adaptation of Anselmo Suarez y Romero's 1880 novel, *Francisco*, a classic Cuban anti-slavery romance novel and presents Giral's interrogation of the figure of the Caliban embedded in hegemony.[27]

[27] William Luis argues that these literary works are representative of, "the first cohesive movement to describe blacks and slaves as a dominant element in Cuban and Latin American literatures" (2). In addition, Luis posits that these works represent a "counter-discourse to power" and also a "counter-writing of fiction and history" that "proposes a counter-reading of narrative discourse" (Luis 3). Included in the genre of

In the novel, Suarez y Romero depicts the ill-fated romance between a black slave and a mulata slave, Francisco and Dorotea, which is impeded by the jealousy of their master's son, Ricardo Mendizábal. While portraying the evils and hardships of Cuban slavery and the treachery of the slave master, crazy with power, the novel is in and of itself a romanticized view of the institution and reality of slavery.

Portrayed from the beginning of the novel as a submissive and obedient slave, Francisco is presented to the reader as the unfortunate recipient of undeserved ills. His treaty to marry Dorotea is denied by Sra. Mendizábal, and although he and Dorotea promise never to raise the subject of their love or marriage again to their mistress, their continued love is discovered at the birth of their child, Lutgarda. As punishment for their disobedience, Sra. Mendizábal sends Francisco to work in the sugarcane fields under the watch of her son Ricardo, who holds Francisco in contempt because he too is in love with Dorotea although she has denied him numerous times. Meanwhile, Dorotea is sent to work for a French household. Due to the combination of Dorotea's rejection and his subsequent hatred of Francisco, Ricardo acts out his frustrations on Francisco's body, whipping him within an inch of his life, working him until he is ill and ridiculing him at every chance. Despite these torments, Francisco and Dorotea are able to reunite briefly and reignite their passion. When Dorotea realizes that all of Francisco's mistreatment is an indirect result of her rejection of Ricardo, she submits herself sexually to Ricardo,

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Cuban anti-slavery novel are Felix Tanco y Bosmeniel's, *Patrona y Rosalia* (1838), Juan Francisco Manzano's, *Autobiografia de un esclavo*, Gertrudis Gomez de Avelleneda's, *Sab* (1841), Antonio Zambrana's, *El negro Francisco* (1873) and Cirilo Villaverde's, *Cecilia Valdes* (1882). The works of Tanco y Bosmeniel, Manzano and Suarez y Romero were commissioned by Domingo del Monte, with the goal to " bring an end to slavery and the slave trade" (Luis 4).

hoping to end her lover's misery. When she tells Francisco of what she has done, he becomes distraught and in typical romantic fashion kills himself.

Giral's film roughly follows this plot in the first five minutes. After presenting in summary the story of the love between Francisco and Dorotea, there is a break in the film as the voice of an omniscient narrator enters and questions the authenticity of the Francisco that Suarez y Romero presents in his novel. Giral presents the possibility of "el otro" Francisco--that is, of another Francisco. With this statement, Giral sets the stage for the continuous dissolution of the romantic views of Suarez y Romero by exploring further not only the relationships between the characters in the novel but also the implications and consequences of said relations. At the root of his dismantling of Suarez y Romero's novel is not only a critique of the character of Francisco, but more importantly a critique of the national romance, a concept which Doris Sommer explores in *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*. *Foundational Fictions* is a study of romance novels of the 19th century and how they played a central role in the structuring and imagination of the modern Latin American nation.

In this work, Sommer argues that romance novels and Latin American nationalistic history are inextricably linked. Together, the 19th century romance novel and corresponding nation-building sentiments, "fueled a desire for domestic happiness that runs over into dreams of national prosperity; and nation-building projects invested private passions with public purpose" (Sommer 7). Sommer's analysis of the 19th century Latin American romance novel includes, but is not limited to, discussions of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's, *Facundo* (1845), Jose Marmol's, *Amalia* (1851), Gertrudis Gomez de Avelleneda's, *Sab* (1841), and Jorge Isaacs's, *Maria (*1867).

For Sommer, these novels, under the guise of love stories, demonstrate, “the inextricability of politics from fiction in the history of nation-building…” (Sommer 5-6). The genre of romance allowed authors the flexibility to not only insert themselves into history, but also to play an active part in its shaping, thus becoming key architects of the modern Latin American nation as their “writing” of the nation often influenced the popular imagination of citizens (Sommer 10). In addition, national romances presented fictive resolutions to the issues that plagued the modern nation such as slavery, class and ethnic clashes—aside from allowing the lettered city to articulate a national identity. As Sommer says, “ The local romances did more than entertain readers with compensations for spotty national history. They developed a narrative formula for resolving continuing conflicts, a post-epic conciliatory genre that consolidated survivors by recognizing former enemies as allies” (Sommer 12).

Suarez y Romero’s *Francisco* can be viewed then as a national romance that sought to assert an abolitionist stance, while romanticizing the extent of the atrocities of Cuban slavery. Giral’s film not only revisits the national romance, but he also begins to unwrite it as he is clear to illustrate that the romanticized “foundational love affairs” of Suarez y Romero’s *Francisco* are actually acts of rape in addition to abuse of economies of power and desire. Thus although national romances such as *Francisco* sought to contain, “the racial, regional economic and gender conflicts that threatened the development of new Latin American nations” (Sommer 29), they in fact lay the foundation for cultures structured in dominance; cultures that thrive on the hierarchies constructed around difference- racial, regional, economic and gender based. The core function of these texts is to paint a “romantic” picture of the idealized nation. For that

reason potentially problematic social members such as blacks, Indians and women were erased, subdued and/or substituted, lending hope to the creation of a national solidarity between those members of society who were representative of the ideal citizen of these budding nations.

Because national romances revolve around the dynamics as well as the uses and abuses of economies of power and desire, Sergio Giral interrogates the parameters of these dynamics in the text by highlighting and exploring more deeply the triangular relationship between Francisco, Dorotea and Ricardo. As a post-revolutionary revision of a classic Cuban anti-slavery novel, Giral's, *El Otro Francisco*, corresponds to the particular circumstances of his contemporary, 1970s revolutionary time and context. Giral not only deconstructs the romantic and nationalistic sentiment of the national romance in this film, but he also probes the authenticity of the composition and dynamics of these relations. Giral places these relations at the forefront of his film for a deeper investigation of the reality of Cuban slavery, the positionality of the black subject during slavery and, in effect, the 1970s position of the black subject in revolutionary Cuba.

In his discussion of the characteristics of the Cuban anti-slavery narratives of the four "synchronic" time periods of the Cuban nation, slavery, post-slavery, the Republic and The Cuban Revolution, William Luis argues that the anti-slavery narrative of the Revolutionary period "follow closely the political events reflecting the time in which the works were written. The reevaluation of the roles of blacks in revolutionary Cuba, for example, became a significant issue for the new revolutionary government, and the elimination of pre-Revolutionary structural inequities led to a questioning of social and cultural values" (9). Considering Giral's, *El otro Francisco* as not only a narrative, but

also a revision of a 19th century slavery narrative, it follows that in this film Giral is utilizing the genre of negrometraje to articulate and problematize the contemporary positionality of the Afro-Cuban subject in the context of revolutionary Cuba.

Giral creates a densely essayistic film, for which Suarez y Romero's novel merely serves as a point of departure that begs the question: what is left when you deconstruct the national romance? Giral focuses his deconstructive history lesson on three major intersectional and guiding themes from the novel; love between slaves, treatment of female slaves and the rivalry between Francisco and Ricardo. Giral uses these themes from the novel to deconstruct the romantic view of slavery painted by Suarez y Romero, and also to interrogate black consciousness and reflect on and critique the state of Afro-Cuban consciousness in the 1970s.

In the opening of the film, as discussed earlier, Giral presents a short synopsis of Suarez y Romero's plot. He then breaks the action of the film to interject his first in a series of systematic breaks from the storyline of the novel to deconstruct the romantic view of the author and redirect the viewer's perception of the reality of slavery and towards a counterhegemonic black Cuban view. Giral disrupts the reality and 'consciousness' of the film in order to rupture the viewer's consciousness. This first break deals with the theme of love between slaves. After presenting a frame in which two lovers (black slaves) meet secretly in the forest and make love, the voice of an omniscient narrator interjects offering up the sobering corrective that such a scene is not congruent with the reality of slavery and that in truth love between slaves was rare, not only because of the disproportionate number of female to male slaves, but also because of the presence

of the slave master who would often rape female slaves. This is Giral's first calculated stab at the national romance and the nation's foundational myths and memories.

During the voiceover, as the narrator explains the reality which counters Suarez y Romero's portrayal of love between slaves, the viewer is forced to inadvertently question the dynamics, trials and consequences of the original 19th century presentation of romance between Francisco and Dorotea. This counter-discursive shift also serves to acquaint the viewer with the economies of power and desire that are operating in the text and film, the intersectional triangular economy (of power and desire) between Francisco, Dorotea and Ricardo.

In his 1961 text, *Mensonge Romantique, Vérité Romanesque* (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure, trans. 1966*), Rene Girard lays forth the theories for triangular desire on which this portion of my argument is based. In this work, Girard argues that human desire is neither autonomous nor linear, but rather dictated by the constraints of economies of power and desire. Stated otherwise, Girard argues that what we desire is actually only desirable because it is possessed by or could be potentially possessed by an Other that is not ourselves. Therefore the desire we feel for an object, whether it be a person, object or goal, manifests as a triangulated relationship between ourselves, the Other and the object. In relation to *Francisco*, the linear relationship between Dorotea and Francisco is triangulated when Ricardo becomes envious of the fact that the object (Dorotea) is possessed by an Other (Francisco). Because an Other possesses Dorotea, Ricardo's desire to possess her is increased and he moves to acquire it, thus triangulating the relationship between the three characters. The

triangular relationship between the three main characters is complicated and bound together by the degree to which power and desire operate within these bonds.

Cuban novels of this period that include similar plots are Cirilo Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdes* (1882), and Gertrudis Gomez de Avelleneda's *Sab* (1841). In both tales, the dynamics of the triangular relationship are dictated by the economies of power that accompany slavery: that is the relationship between slave and master. In *Cecilia Valdes,* a triangle of desire exists between the main character, Cecilia Valdes, a mulata slave, Leonardo Gamboa, her master and Isabel Ilincheta, Gamboa's betrothed. The triangle is complicated not only by the fact of slavery, but also by the fact that Leonardo and Cecilia are half-siblings who share a father, Gamboa Sr. In Gomez de Avellenda's, *Sab,* a triangular relationship exists between Sab, a mulatto slave, Carlota, his mistress and Mr. Otway, Carlota's would be suitor.

In the relationship between Francisco and Dorotea, the elements of power and desire appear in varying degrees. In relation to each other, both Francisco and Dorotea yield the power to destroy the psyche of the other with their words or with the expression or denial of their love for each other. The strength and mere possibility of their bond is determined by outside forces, which speak to the reality of the black Cuban subject position. The livelihood of their relationship relies on the whims of the two major white characters in the movie, Señora Mendizábal and her son, Ricardo Mendizábal. Sra. Mendizábal seeks to block the official union of Francisco and Dorotea because she feels that Francisco is not worthy of Dorotea and she does not want her faithful handmaiden and servant to become distracted from her work. In this case, the relation of Francisco and Dorotea is directed by the magnitude of the power and desire of Sra. Mendizábal.

Because of her deep desire to maintain her power over Dorotea and Francisco she abuses her power and denies them their happiness. When Francisco and Dorotea defy her orders for them to not marry and to forget about each other and continue their relationship, which yields a child, Sra. Mendizábal again utilizes her power in order to reinforce and maintain her position in the economy of power and desire between slave and master.

The problematic relationship between Dorotea and Ricardo is presented as an underlying subtext in the movie and novel, although it is one of the key catalytic elements that lends itself to the drama of the plot. From the outset, the relationship between Dorotea and Ricardo would seem to be a traditional slave and master relationship. But as Giral is quick to point out in one of his interjections into the film's story line, relationships between slaves were often derailed by the powerful lust of the slave owner who was known to take female slaves at will. As previously discussed, this pointed interjection into the film reveals one of the hard truths that national romances seek to camouflage or assuage; the fact that romance, more often than not, was actually rape. The movie is interesting in that in its portrayal of the lustful desire of Ricardo towards Dorotea, he first comes to her as an equal and seeks to win her over with reason and logic, placing aside the accompanying privileges of his position as a white, male landowner in the relationship. When she denies him repeatedly on account of her love for Francisco, it is then that Ricardo turns to force. As narrated in the novel, although not fully illustrated in the film, when Ricardo tires of pleading for the heart and devotion of Dorotea, he turns on her.

> Dorotea, ya basta para contemplaciones! La culpa no la tienes, sino yo, que me he rebajado a enamorar a una mulata, como si fuera blanca….Cachimba, tu debías hasta besarme los pies cuando yo te mirara. ¿Sabes la diferencia que hay de ti a mi? tu eres una

> cachorra mulata, mi esclava, y yo soy blanco, caballero, y puedo hacer de ti lo que me de la gana. ¿Qué se habrá figurado esta tonta? Ven acá; tú me querrás y tres más quince. Esta Pascua, esta misma Pascua, me ha de salir con mi gusto; no te valdrá el servirle a Mamita, porque en mi poder tengo a tu querido Francisco, a ese borrachón, ladronazo; el me lo pagará todo…todos los días le darán un bocabajo a Francisco, hasta que te me rindas, cachorra; o si no, tendrás el gusto de ver salir por el batey a tu Francisco, entre dos cepas de plátanos, sobre un mulo, para el Camposanto del potrero. Aquí, quien manda soy yo, y nadie mas… (Suárez y Romero 149-151).
>
> (Dorotea, enough with the contemplation! You're not at fault, but rather, I am, for having lowered myself to fall in love with a mulata as if she were a white woman. …Bitch, you should kiss my feet when I look at you. Do you know the difference between you and I? You are a whore mulata, my slave, and I am a white man, a gentleman and I can do with you whatever I please. What did you think, stupid girl? Come here; you will love me three times fifteen. This Easter, this very Easter, will turn out the way I want; it won't do you any good being in my mother's service, because your beloved Francisco is in my power, that drunkard thief will pay for everything… everyday they will whip Francisco until you yield to me, whore; and if not, you will have the pleasure to see Francisco attached to the batey, between two plantain stumps, on top of a mule, headed for graveyard. Here, I rule, and no one else…)[28]

He not only forces himself on her, but he also acts out his frustrations with the unwillingness of Dorotea on the body of Francisco; thus engaging in a doubly charged manifestation of both power and desire.

The relationship between Ricardo and Francisco is fascinating in that it is the one bond of this triangular relationship in which the characters never converse face to face. The interaction between Dorotea and Francisco is mostly carried out one-on-one as is the

[28] All translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

confrontation between Ricardo and Dorotea with very few intermediaries. In contrast, the confrontations between Ricardo and Francisco always occur through an intermediary; the violence enacted on the body of Francisco. This telling detail can be read in two ways. One, that Ricardo is so assured of his power over Francisco that he needs not worry himself with the actual physical labor of carrying out his punishment. Second, and what I believe to be most veritable, that Ricardo never laid his hands on Francisco because Francisco represented a very real threat to him and the maintenance of his power over the reality of both Francisco and Dorotea. As George Lamming so poignantly describes in his analysis of the interdependent relationship of Prospero and Caliban, "It is his (Prospero's) relation to Caliban, as a physical fact of life that we are allowed to guess some of Prospero's needs. He needs this slave. Moreover, he must be cautious in his dealings with him, for Caliban contains the seeds of revolt" (98). In *The Tempest*, just as in *El otro Francisco*, direct interaction between Caliban and Prospero is rare, as most correspondence between master and slave occurs through the intermediary, Ariel. In a similar fashion, the overseer, Carlos, mediates interaction between Francisco and Ricardo. By not having to face his rival, Ricardo was able to continue to imagine himself as being in complete control of the reality and fate of both slaves and yet it also indicates that he is fully aware of the dangerous potential that lays dormant in Francisco despite his physically, mentally and spiritually weakened state. Feeding into this relationship also then, is the deep-seated fear of black masculinity.

Traditional ideas of black masculinity tend to center around its sexual and physical expressions. As Patricia Hill Collins explains, "… 'real' men are primarily defined as not being like women. Real men are expected to be forceful, analytical,

responsible, and willing to exert authority, all qualities that women seemingly lack" (188). The physical characteristic of masculinity is then customarily expressed sexually, as constructions of black masculinity then also focus on the physical expression of sexuality. But often it is the black male who is sexualized as opposed to him sexualizing an Other due to the fact that black males,

> were depicted primarily as bodies ruled by brute strength and natural instincts, characteristics that allegedly fostered deviant behaviors of promiscuity and violence. The buck, brute, the rapist, and similar controlling images routinely applied to African men all worked to deny Black men the work of the mind that routinely translates into wealth and power. Instead relegating black men to the work of the body was designed to keep them poor and powerless. Once embodied, black men were seen as being limited by their racialized bodies (Hill Collins 153).

In this way the black male becomes an object in his narrative, as opposed to an agent. In an effort to assert his agency and ownership of his masculinity, the black male must reclaim the elements which would objectify him, namely his sexuality and his physicality.

Giral approaches the reclaiming of masculinity and sexuality by tackling the pillars of heteronormativity; whiteness and white womanhood. In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism*, Patricia Hill Collins offers up the following explanation of the interdependent relationship and construction of the binding binaries between black and white subjects, expressed via racism and heterosexism:

> Such thinking relies on oppositional categories. It views race through two opposition categories of Whites and Blacks, gender through two categories of men and women, and sexuality through two oppositional categories of heterosexuals and homosexuals. A master binary of normal and deviant overlays and bundles together these and other lesser

> binaries. In this context, ideas about 'normal' race (whiteness, which ironically, masquerades as racelessness), 'normal' gender (using male experiences as the norm), and 'normal' sexuality (heterosexuality, which operates in a similar hegemonic fashion) are tightly bundled together. In essence, to be completely 'normal', one must be White, masculine, and heterosexual, the core hegemonic white masculinity. This mythical norm is hard to see because it is so taken-for-granted (96-97).

Diametrically opposed in such a way then, the black male constitutes the deviant nemesis of the normal, traditionally heroic white male. Historically, the deviance of the black male has been represented by his deviant sexuality (promiscuity) and physical strength. Often the two are merged in a deviant display of strength and sexuality that is the act of rape.

In *El otro Francisco* however, Giral highlights the inversion not only of the triangular relationship between Francisco, Dorotea and Ricardo, but also assigns new discursive values to the characters. A normalized and heroic black male replaces the sexually and physically deviant black male. Meanwhile, a sexual and physically deviant white male who threatens rape displaces the traditional normal and heroic white male. In this love story, the ideal lover is the black slave, Francisco, as opposed to the rich, white Ricardo. In addition, a mulata slave, Dorotea, replaces the traditional white female love interest.[29] It is through these vehicles of reclamation that the examination of this film becomes truly engaging, as Giral offers different modes and constructions of refuge available to the black male, although the modes are bodies, physical and political.

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[29] William Luis (Literary Bondage) reads this inversion of triangular desire as a changing of the signs in which the slave becomes the master and the master becomes the slave and victim. He argues that in his desire to acquire the love of Dorotea, Ricardo inherently wishes to become Francisco and thus exchange his place as an agent in the triangle of desire, for that of a mediator, the space which Francisco occupies. On the contrary, I argue that although there is an inversion of the triangle, it does not grant Francisco agency. Francisco transforms from mediator to agent in his narrative through the rebellious act of suicide, and that it is through this act and not the inverted desires of Ricardo that Francisco reclaims his racialized and sexualized body and subjectivity to claim agency.

In addition to the fear of Francisco's black male sexuality, Francisco's positionality in Giral's film is further highlighted by the very conceit of removing his voice (that is, Francisco does not speak in the film). Giral very literally strips Francisco of his agency and visibility with the removal of his voice. With this brazen act, Francisco is not afforded the opportunity to voice his views or discuss the factors behind the rivalry between himself and Ricardo. As the embodiment of the symbol of Caliban, Francisco then "…is never accorded the power to see. He is always the measure of the condition which his physical appearance has already defined. Caliban is the excluded, that which is eternally below possibility, and always beyond reach" (Lamming 107). Transformed from trusted hand servant, Francisco becomes another nameless and expendable field slave, by his complete submission, but remains a latent threat to the reign of Ricardo over the plantation. Ricardo's ability to order the destruction of Francisco's body and consequently his spirit thus feeds his self-assurance of his continued reign over the plantation and helps to assuage his ego, which had been bruised by Dorotea's rejection.

Thus Francisco is the Caliban who is excluded from and kept on the outskirts of language, existing in parallel to the Caliban who is integrated into hegemony, never granted the tools to fully realize his identificatory potential within the dominant hegemonic sphere. This Caliban who is excluded from language represents one of many alternatives to Prospero's hegemony offered up in Giral's trilogy. Francisco's portrayal as this type of excluded Caliban is evidenced then not by his lack of mastery of the language, but his lack of voice in the film. Francisco is not only never afforded the opportunity to speak for himself, but he is also never granted the opportunity to defend himself, his love for Dorotea, or his integrity. All of Francisco's interactions with others,

especially with his masters, Señora Mendizábal and her son Ricardo, are narrated by an outside omniscient narrator. Even in his interaction with other slaves, Francisco remains mute; either signaling his response through gestures or his voice is strategically blotted out by the musical score of the film.

This physical removal of Francisco's voice even in Giral's film--which claims to be a revision of the original--reveals much about the Caliban that exists on the border of hegemony. Denied inclusion into the realm of language, Francisco is portrayed not only as mentally, physically and spiritually tortured subject, but also as a character that lacks agency. Without the ability to speak and directly express his thoughts, feelings and desires, Francisco is rendered a lost, tragic non-subject in his own story. His fate is manipulated not by his own acts or reactions, but rather by outside forces, i.e. his masters. By not reacting to his mistreatment, Francisco's torment is increased further and further, until he reaches his breaking point under the pressure of all the mental, physical and spiritual stress he is experiencing and commits suicide. Ironically, it is only through his tragic act of suicide that Francisco acquires agency. It is through this act that he reclaims his body and subjectivity.

Ricardo simultaneously hates and depends on Francisco, not only for his labor but for his presence as an arch-nemesis. He defines and exerts his power, authority and subsequent identity against the black slave. Without his slaves Ricardo is not a slave-owner, he is not a property owner, he is not a member of high society. And yet, with them, he feels the pressure of the ever-present threat of the rebellious potential of his slaves and the fear that one day they too will realize their potential.

Thus through a series of systematic breaks with the romantic view of colonial slavery, that explored the overlapping relationships in *El Otro Francisco,* Giral is able to critique, interrogate and problematize the Cuban national romantic view of slavery and black Cuban subject positionality.

While setting the stage for the next two installments in his trilogy, Giral rejects a simple revision of the sentimentalism implied by Suarez y Romero's national romance. Giral instead turns to a calculated deconstruction of the national romance and he is then able to create a counter-discursive space which allows for the large-scale critique of the Afro-Cuban subjectivity that follows in the next two films of the trilogy.

Rancheador, released in 1976, continues the *negrometraje* tradition. In this film, Giral explores another element of the reality of slavery, the figure of the slave catcher, *el rancheador*. Although the film appears to revolve around the *rancheador,* Francisco Estevez, it also meditates on the elusive symbol of *El Monte* ("The mountain")[30] and the *palenque* ("maroon community") through the figure of the *cimarron* ("runaway slave"), Mataperros. Together, these characters and symbols allow Giral the opportunity to reflect

[30] *El monte, ibo, finda, ewe orisha, vititi nfinda: (Notas sobre las religiones, la magia, las supersticiones, y el folklore de los negros criollos y del pueblo de Cuba) (1954)* is Lydia Cabrera's seminal anthropological work which explores the African based religions, folklore and beliefs of Cuba's black population. In addition to her detailed investigation of the folklore and rituals of Afro-Cuban religion, Cabrera explores the symbolic power of "el Monte" (the mountain) in the lives and rituals of practitioners and followers of Afro-Cuban religion. As she explains, El Monte is sacred, because it is the home of the divinities of Afro-Cuban religion (Cabrera 13). The significance of El Monte is summed up by one of Cabrera's informants, "Figúrese que Eggo, el Monte, es como un templo. El blanco va a la iglesia a pedir lo que no tiene, o a pedir que Jesús-Cristo o la Virgen María o cualquier otro miembro de la familia celestial, le conserve lo que tiene y se lo fortalezca. Va a la casa de Dios para atender a sus necesidades…porque sin la ayuda de Dios, ¿qué puede un hombre? Nosotros los negros vamos al Monte como si fuésemos a una iglesia, porque esta llena de Santos y de difuntos, a pedirles lo que nos hace falta para nuestra salud y para nuestros negocios. " [Imagine that Eggo, the mountain is like a temple. The white man goes to church to ask for what he doesn't have, o to ask that Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary o another member of the celestial family conserves what he does have and strengthens him. You go to the house of God to attend to your needs…because without God's help, what can man do? We blacks go to the mountain as if we were going to a church, because it is full of Saints and the dead, to ask them for what we lack, for our health and for our businesses"] (Cabrera 14-15)

on another angle of the social network created by slavery. The film explores the complicated position of the slave catcher during the late 19th century by focusing on the triangular relationship between Villega, who represents the interests of the government, Francisco Estevez and Mataperros. This examination doubles as a metaphoric investigation and deconstruction of the dynamics of the interdependent relation of Prospero, Ariel and Caliban (Villega, Estevez and Mataperros, respectively).

Francisco Estevez is at once an asset and a liability, powerful and powerless, as he is both independent from and dependent on those he would hope to dominate, in addition to those who dominate him. He serves the vital function of helping to maintain order by rounding up runaway slaves and also striking fear into country peasants and policing the outer limits of *el campo* ("the country"), which lies between the city and El Monte. In ways that are similar to those of Shakespeare's Ariel he occupies the space in-between. Estevez becomes a liability when his power to police, granted by his "owner" and benefactor Villega leads him to destruction and murder. He is the "clean up man", at the beck and call of Villega. And yet, once he employs the *cimarron*, Mataperros, to aid him in his quest to ascend *El Monte* and capture the other runaways living there, he finds himself at the mercy of Mataperros; one whom he would hope to dominate.

An independent contractor of sorts, Estevez is dependent on his benefactor Villega to mediate his mistakes and also on Mataperros to lead him to what would be his big bonanza. And yet, although revolving around the delicate position of the slave catcher, not quite free and not quite a slave, another character draws the attention of viewer, that of the *cimarron*.

In *El Otro Francisco*, the figure of the *cimarron* is briefly alluded to, but in *Rancheador* this elusive figure becomes flesh and blood in the character of Mataperros. He presents another "type" of Caliban, diametrically opposed to that of Francisco. Unlike the submissive Francisco, who received his unwarranted punishment without complaints and committed suicide in romantic fashion in order to end his misery, Mataperros employed resistance, via rebellion and maroonage. As a result he is the embodiment of the Caliban who straddles both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic cultures. In the film Mataperros is an enigmatic character, mostly silent but deeply aware of not only the motives and intentions of Estevez but also of the ever watchful eyes of *El Monte*. Mataperros has few lines in the film, but his significance lies not in the few words he utters but in what his gaze reveals to the viewer. Through clever film shots the viewer is privileged to "see" what Mataperros sees and what Estevez is unable to see; the fierceness and secrets of *El Monte* and other runaways who have resisted domination. By employing a counter-discourse of resistance via maroonage, Mataperros represents the conscious but not yet physically liberated black subject. He has been to *El Monte* and is aware of the identificatory potential that his rebellion has initiated, but has fallen into the hands of his white oppressors once again.

Mataperros serves as an intermediary figure between the rancheador, Francisco Estevez and Nature, or *El Monte*, which Estevez seeks to conquer. As a recaptured runaway, Mataperros has not only been to *El Monte*, but he also has learned its secrets; its routes, tricks, treasures, and promises. He then is not only Francisco's slave, but also his guide. In this way, Francisco as both Ariel and Prospero is doubly dependent on Mataperros, but Mataperros desires nothing from Francisco. Mataperros, just as Caliban

in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is the keeper of the secrets of his island, in this case, El Monte. And similarly he has been asked to reveal *El Monte's* secrets to his Prospero. But unlike Shakespeare's Caliban, Mataperros retains knowledge of his native tongue, the language of his mother (in this case the language of *El Monte* and Yoruba which exists as a counterpart to Prospero's hegemonic language).[31] Thus Mataperros is able to incorporate not only elements of Prospero's hegemony but also those of *El Monte* into his subjectivity; a fused identity born of a concrete understanding of the operationality of hegemony and its counterpoints. As Lamming insightfully proposes,

> this gift of Language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way. It is this way, entirely Prospero's enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities (109).

Taking this a step further, Mataperros' knowledge beyond that which Prospero's language makes known, in addition to the knowledge of his native tongue, makes him

[31] Included in Lydia Cabrera's *El Monte*, is an extensive discussion of the properties of plants of El Monte and most importantly of their supernatural powers and function as an intermediary between Afro-Cuban practitioners and their African roots. In the Yoruba religion, trees and plants are highly revered beings as, "son seres dotados de alma, de inteligencia y de voluntad, como todo lo que nace, crece como todo cosa existente"(they are revered beings with a soul, intelligence and free will, just like everything that is born, they grow just as all things in existence do) (Cabrera 16). Endowed in such a way, the plants and trees of El Monte, "speak" to the followers of Yoruba, as they have not only medicinal properties but play an integral role in many Yoruban religious ceremonies. Also, through informants, Cabrera writes that within each herb, tree and plant can be found the essence of Yoruban saints. It follows then that through El Monte and respectful and guided contact with it, practitioners maintain a deep connection with the Yoruba saints and their African roots, a connection so deep that it acts as a link between the Africa and her new world ancestors in Cuba. As one of Cabrera's informant's states, "…nuestros negros, en espíritu, no han dejado de ser menos africanos. No han podido renunciar a sus creencias ni olvidar las secretas enseñanzas de sus mayores. Continúan fielmente sus viejas practicas mágicas y para todo siguen recurriendo al monte, dirigiéndose a las primitivas divinidades naturales que adoraron los antepasados y les legaron vivas, alojadas en piedras, en caracoles o en troncos y raíces y a las que, como aquellos, siguen hablándoles en africano, en yoruba, en ewe o en bantu" [We blacks, in essence, haven't stopped being any less African. They haven't been able to renounce their beliefs or forget the secret teachings of their elders. They loyally continue to practice their old magics y most of all they continue to return to the mountain, steering themselves towards the primitive natural deities that their ancestors adored and that came to them alive, living in rocks and shells or in trunks and roots and other similar elements that continue speaking to them in African, Yoruba, in Ewe or in Bantu] (Cabrera 19).

fully aware of the possibilities that exist outside of the realm of language and hegemony. In this film Giral emphasizes that language is a function as well as manifestation of hegemony, as hegemony dictates the boundaries and limits of societal knowledge. Mataperros is able to take the possibilities of Shakespeare's Caliban; collaboration, resistance, and separatism, beyond the fixed limits covertly stipulated by the boundaries of Prospero's concept of hegemony. Mataperros' knowledge of his native tongue expands not only the possibilities for his expression but also for his identificatory possibilities. With his knowledge of his native tongue, Mataperros has the opportunity to become more than a one-dimensional Caliban to Francisco's Prospero, he has the opportunity to reclaim his native land, *El Monte,* from Francisco and become its rightful ruler. Representing a type of Caliban with potential for liberation and ability to take charge of his agency, Giral constructs via Mataperros a case for a conceptualization of a Caliban on the brink of realizing his independence and liberation from Prospero's dominion.

In 1970s Cuba, the acknowledgement of the identificatory possibilities for Blackness and the Caliban condition that existed beyond hegemony was profound for Afro-Cubans. At this time Cuba had extended its internationalist policies towards African and Asian nations, such as China and Angola. Also there was an influx of a politically important and considerable group of black Americans and their Black Power ideologies that had come into the island.[32] All of which provided Afro-Cubans with a rich store of models and possibilities for representation of Afro-Cuban identity. The new counter-hegemonic language of Black Power that was rising in 1970s Cuban society manifested in art, clothes, hair and other realms of popular culture.

[32] Included in this group of black Americans are, Brent Lee Williams, Robert F. Williams, Assata Shakur, Eldridge Cleaver and Angela Davis. Some, such as Robert F. Williams and Eldridge Cleaver, came to Cuba seeking political refuge, while others, such as Angela Davis, visited and toured the island.

But as Cuba extended itself in solidarity to black and brown third-world nations, internally, the treatment of Afro-Cubans was in direct opposition to Cuban external policies. By focusing on the cultivation of a strong cohesive national identity Castro was able to veil voices and collectives based on alternative forms of solidarity. By labeling these groups as divisive and anti-revolutionary Castro was able to silence and crush internally the possibility of the emergence of a Cuban identity that identified with blackness. For example, black clubs and mutual aid societies were forced to close and Afro-Cuban based religious groups had to register with the police (Sawyer 59).

The adoption of a policy of internationalism in the later half of the 1960s allowed Castro's regime to effectively externalize the discussion of race. As Mark Sawyer argues,"…racism was seen not so much as an internal Cuban problem as an expression of US imperialism. Thus the revolution's early dialogue on race ended in 1962, when the problem was declared officially solved" (60). In effect, the spotlight was placed on the US and other countries publicly plagued by racial problems, while detracting attention from Cuba's own contradictions. In the context of its internationalist policy, "Cuba positioned itself as the head of the cause of the anti-colonial struggle, both militarily and discursively…" (Sawyer 60). As a result, Castro went so far as to declare in 1975 that, "Cuba was an 'African Latin' nation that embraced both the black population and the cultural heritage of the former slaves" (Sawyer 61).

Despite these overt external alignments to black peoples and causes internationally, again the paradox of Cuban Marxism constituted an ideological impasse. Castro simultaneously supported anti-colonialism, provided asylum to US black radicals and declared Cuba an "African Latin" nation, while smothering nascent Afro-Cuban elite

and popular movements and expression in addition to anti-Revolutionary artistic expression. The internal censorship of blackness alongside its external support highlighted the glaringly contradictory racial practices in which, “religious believers, gays and blacks with strong cultural or Black Power beliefs- all seen as ‘different’, as threats to Cuban unity, and as signs of weakness that might be exploited by counterrevolutionaries- were targeted by the security forces of the regime” (Sawyer 66). Basing these practices on an ideal of nation over individual identity provided the political and ideological justification for this silencing.

Giral’s *Rancheador*, presents an interpretation of Caliban that lies somewhere between Shakespeare and Lamming’s visions for this figure. Although a slave, unlike Francisco in *El Otro Francisco*, Mataperros is afforded a voice, and that in and of itself complicates the situation that is to unfold. Superficially the relationship between Mataperros and the slavecatcher, Francisco in *Rancheador* would appear to follow the parameters regulated by the norms of economies of power and desire in operation. Upon deeper inspection though, the relationship reveals itself to be wrought with numerous complications and dialectics playing to and around each other, and at other times doubling back on themselves. Francisco orders Mataperros and appears to direct his steps, but it is really Mataperros who is the grand puppeteer in this relationship. As the context of the drama changes so too do the dynamics of power. In the discursive space of colonial Havana, the order of the distribution of power between the protagonists was as follows: Villega, Francisco and Mataperros. Villegas gave Francisco orders and Mataperros carried them out. But once in the space of *El Monte* the balance of power shifts and Mataperros stands atop the hierarchy. He is not only the embodiment of

Caliban due to his connection with his “island” (El Monte) but also because it is in this film that Giral first provides voice and active agency to the character of the slave. Closer inspection of the complicated economies of power that Giral works through in this film yield yet another perspective and possibility for Caliban; one that moves beyond the one-dimensional submissive subject presented in *El Otro Francisco,* and in the direction of a more well-rounded subject who is conscious of its identificatory potential and future possibilities.

In translating the action of the film from the normative to the heteronormative context: that is, from colonial town center to El Monte, not only does the balance of power shift, but so too does the level of consciousness exhibited by Mataperros. His escape from the shackles of slavery that forever bound Francisco has made Mataperros aware that there are identificatory options available to him outside of suicide and slavery. Thus despite returning to the site of his brief liberation as an enslaved man, his demeanor upon reencountering El Monte is that of a man who has glimpsed his future potential. He is conscious not only of his enslaved past and repressed present but also of his potential liberated future; and this constitutes a significant turning point in the film.

Upon entering the realm of El Monte, the shift in Mataperro’s persona cannot be ignored. He shifts from the original shadow of Caliban, represented by Francisco, to a Caribbean reflection of Shakespeare’s Caliban and finally beyond these initial points of departure towards Giral’s vision for Caliban. Mataperros aids Giral in the realization of his goal, which is to illustrate the progressive chronological evolution of Afro-Cuban consciousness via the deconstruction of the symbol of Caliban.

Thus Giral's final installment in the trilogy, *Maluala* (1977), is of particular importance given the politically contentious environment of 1970s Cuba. Beginning in 1965, the Cuban government became actively embroiled in the emancipatory activities of the West African nation of Angola from Portugal, allegedly training independence groups in guerilla war tactics (Mallin 3). When the Portuguese officially withdrew from Angola in November of 1975, there were three major Angolan liberation movements in operation: MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) and FNLA (National Front for the Liberation of Angola). In a country divided by civil war, the FNLA and UNITA joined forces against the MPLA, which had the support of Cuba and the former Soviet Union.

Between November 1975 and January 1976 approximately 6,000-7,000 Cuban troops were deployed to Angola in support of the MPLA liberation movement (Mallin 6). In addition, in the 10-year period between 1975 and 1985 Castro reported that over 200,000 Cuban troops had served in Angola. During this time period Cuban troops aided the MPLA in various campaigns to win control over the Angolan nation. While the alliance between Cuba and the MPLA was successful in keeping the MPLA in power, it was not successful in definitively defeating the UNITA guerillas (Mallin 7). With troops exhausted, Cuba finally withdrew from Angola in 1991.

Against this background, in *Maluala* Giral explores "the least documented area of the history of slavery" according to Michael Chanan (271). *Maluala* tells the story of the *palenques*, Maluala and Bumba, and their infiltration by and confrontation with the Cuban colonial government. The leaders of the palenques are Gallo and Coba, respectively. *Maluala* presents the third alternative to Caliban, that of the fully conscious

and liberated *cimarron*. Similar to Giral's previous films in the trilogy, the main characters relate to each other in a triangular relationship. In *El Otro Francisco*, Ricardo, Dorotea and Francisco formed the obvious triangle, while in *Rancheador* the triangle existed between Villega, Estevez and Mataperros/*El Monte*. In *Maluala*, the most complex economy of power and desire is presented in the triangular relation that develops between Coba, Gallo and the Betrayers. Each side of this triangular relation can be read as a representation of a different path that can be taken once one arrives at the third alternative.

Maluala explores the intricacies and subtleties of the aftermath of the condition of slavery. The specter of this condition persists even in politically sensitized and free subjects. In this film the Caliban presented by Giral is one who has exhausted the resources of Prospero's Language and stands at the crossroads of identity. This third alternative is evidenced in the characters of Gallo, Coba and the betrayers. All are faced with the dilemna of what to do once freedom is achieved, once the shackles of Prospero's Language have been removed. They are confronting the question of: what happens next? According to George Lamming,

> Caliban can go so far and no farther. Prospero lives in the absolute certainty that Language which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban's achievements will be realized and restricted. Caliban can never reach perfection, not even the perfection implicit in Miranda's privileged ignorance. For Language itself, by Caliban's whole relation to it, will not allow his expansion beyond a certain point (Lamming 110).

The characters of *Maluala*, Gallo, Coba and the Betrayers, represent three versions of the third alternative to Shakespeare's Caliban. The crisis that faces this third alternative to Shakespeare's Caliban is that they have exhausted the possibilities of Language and are

operating in the "hinterlands" of hegemony. *Maluala* centers on Giral's vision for the post-slavery, emancipated Caliban. Through the characters of Coba, Gallo and the Betrayers, Giral does not present resolutions to the Caliban condition, but rather options that look beyond anything Shakespeare or Lamming could have imagined for this figure.

Both Gallo and Coba are runaways and leaders of the palenques, called Maluala and Bumba, respectively. Having liberated themselves from the physical prison of being in Prospero's servitude they represent alternatives to Shakespeare's Caliban, but they still remain, as Lamming states, locked in the prison of Prospero's hegemony. All of their correspondence occurs within the confines of Spanish, which is here equated to Prospero's language. Their identity is so coupled with this foreign language that even when they attempt interaction with their native tongue via religious ceremonies and spiritual consultations, their understanding is limited and an interpreter is needed.

The Betrayers are members of the palenques of Gallo and Coba, and have also been liberated from Prospero's prison, but unlike Gallo and Coba the boundaries of their linguistic prison are determined by different parameters. Unlike Gallo and Coba, the betrayers cannot read. They can speak and understand Prospero's tongue, but because their connection to the language is limited to orality, they are not able to officially engage with it via writing.

They have achieved physical freedom, established their own societies and yet remain bound to hegemony, as the expression of their post-Prospero identities still maintains structured bonds to Prospero's hegemony. The result of the independent and dependent nature of the relation of these three versions of Caliban, is almost schizophrenic. They play to and against each other, striking harmonies and simultaneous

dissonance. In the cacophony of post-Prospero identities striving for voice, agency and acknowledgement, the key to understanding the goal of Giral's final film as social commentary lies in understanding the options presented to each of the characters, their decisions and the repercussions of these. *Maluala* is an introspective nod to the contemporary dilemna that faced Afro-Cubans in the 1970s. The Cuban revolution supposedly liberated Afro-Cubans by providing opportunities for economic, political, scholastic and social improvement and by removing the boundaries of pre-Revolutionary discrimination that limited the parameters of Afro-Cuban identity and potential within Cuban society. Paradoxically though, it is the theoretical inclusion of Afro-Cuban identity by the Cuban revolution that results in its exclusion from revolutionary society as the specific interests of ethnic and racialized subjects are eclipsed in order to enhance the development of a cohesive, homogenous and hegemonic Cuban identity.

Maluala opens with a series of impressive overview frames of the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, in which the camera pans out to show the accompanying forest and river of this region. The camera continues to focus on the river, and comes to rest on three rafts carrying runaways from the *palenques* slowly navigating its waters. The first and only face that the camera focuses its lens on is that of the palenque leader, Coba. The shots of these opening minutes of the film focus on the immensity of "El Monte" as well as on its seemingly impenetrable nature. Accompanied by a Yoruban song, the initial moments of the film are at once breathtaking and tense.

The opening scene of the movie marks the arrival of Haitian traders--in addition to a country peasant, who acts as an intermediary--who bring food and goods to trade with Coba. It should be noted that during this interaction Coba is dressed in traditional

colonial garb, while other members of his entourage are dressed in little more than loincloths. This costuming implies a reappropriation of the norms of the society the members of Coba's *palenque* escaped, rather than a decisive break with its customs. After taking inventory of the items requested, Coba and his entourage return to the *palenque* with the goods they have acquired. At this point, a break occurs in the film as Giral returns to a frame of *El Monte*. It is against this frame that a narrator's voice enters and begins to narrate the history of the *palenques* of Maluala and Bumba as well as the background of their leaders. With the histories of Maluala, Bumba, Gallo and Coba appropriately explained, Giral then shifts the audience to the interior of the governor's palace where the governor is engaged in an intense conversation with the Captain of his troops about the menacing existence of the *palenques*. They debate various methods to bring about the demise of the *palenques*, until the governor finally decides on a plan. He resolves to draft a treaty with the *palenque* leaders. The conditions of the pact are such that Coba will be granted official freedom while the other members of Bumba will work for the government to earn their freedom if they agree to turn in the members of Maluala. Coba rejects the offer, and once the contents of the letter are revealed to Gallo, he also rejects it. Three men, (the Betrayers) members of Bumba dispute the rejection of the letter and argue that they should go down to the city and speak with the Governor in person.

The characters in Giral's *Maluala* move beyond the traditional and conventional possibilities originally imagined for the black Cuban subject in the 1970s. The decisions they make reflect not only on the extent of their own agency, but also the mutable and yet crushing confines of hegemony. Thus, it is through the exploration of the different paths

that these characters embark upon, that Giral interrogates the interpretative possibilities for Caliban and the Afro-Cuban subject; not only in colonial times but in the revolutionary era as well.

Coba and Gallo are presented with the option of retaining their individual freedom at the expense of the freedom of the other runaways in their *palenques*. Coba remains conflicted when faced with the choice of continued individual freedom in exchange for the freedom of his comrades or engaging in a seemingly endless battle with the government until sooner or later he and all of his followers are recaptured or killed. His indecision leads members of his *palenque* to lose faith in him and turn to Gallo for leadership. In the search for answers he consults a babalao. When it is almost too late, he decides to fight for not only his freedom but also the freedom of the other members of his *palenque*.

Gallo is presented with the same offer as Coba, but he promptly rejects this offer and chooses to go to war with the army of the colonial Cuban government. As a result, he retains the respect of the members of his *palenque* and simultaneously creates a rift between himself and Coba. Gallo's choice to defend the collective freedom of his followers as well as his individual freedom are telling of Giral's exploration of a Caliban who has not only achieved freedom from Prospero and his language but is also willing to die for the preservation of that freedom.

The Betrayers are presented the choice of "official" freedom by the Cuban colonial government if they agree to turn over their comrades and the location of the *palenques*. They agree to betray the confidence of the *palenques* and reveal the many

secrets of not only Maluala and Bumba but also of other *palenques* hidden in *El Monte*.[33] Via the Betrayers, although killed in the battle that ensues between the governor's army and Maluala, Giral explores yet another possibility for a liberated Caliban; collaboration, evidenced by their return to the false comfort of the bosom of hegemony and the choice to forsake not only the cause of runaways but also the very real freedom that they had attained in a counter-hegemonic society, in exchange for the shackles of hegemony.

In this film, Giral shuns the previously delineated boundaries of Shakespeare's Caliban and grants him the freedom to choose. Giral also presents Caliban with a variety of options which complicate the possibilities that Giral himself imagines for Caliban and in effect the contemporary Afro-Cuban subject. The potential that Giral imagines for Caliban reveals that Giral himself is at times subject to the expectations of hegemonic discourse for Afro-Cuban subjectivity and consciousness. And yet, the alternatives to Caliban that Giral posits in these films do not condemn him as a victim of his own system.

The fact that Giral is even able to imagine options beyond those dictated by hegemony is significant. But still the possibilities that he imagines are limited. Moving progressively through the counter-discursive acts of submission, rebellion and resistance, Giral finds that he, like his characters, arrives at the crossroads that exists at the edge of dictated identity. The options Giral presents are death (either self-inflicted or by outside forces) or a return to Prospero's hegemony. Absent from his proposed options are the possibility of a successful counter-hegemonic cultural identity.

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[33] Crucial to this film is also the notion of secrecy, as much is revealed visually, as opposed to orally. Giral utilizes a number of pointed deliberate shots in order to craft the viewer's interpretation of the action of the film.

The limitations of Giral's conclusions do not indicate failure. Giral's quest and intention is not to resolve identity or present solutions to the Caliban condition and contemporary Afro-Cuban positionality, but rather to highlight the indelible fact of blackness and its essential role not only in the future of the Cuban nation, but most importantly the encouragement of Afro-Cuban identity consciousness. He then moves blackness from the periphery to the center of Cuban discourse by first deconstructing the national romance and then cutting up and dissecting its pieces over the course of his trilogy. Giral employs the symbolic figure of Shakespeare's Caliban, represented as the slave, to explore possibilities for Afro-Cuban identity that lay outside of those prescribed by hegemony and to posit the idea that the boundaries of Afro-Cuban identity are not now, nor ever have been, finite and fixed.

Chapter Four: (Re)Defining Memory and Difference: Notions of (Afro)Cubanidad in the Special Period

"como somos cubanos…"
-Gerardo Alfonso

The previous three chapters of this dissertation considered the development of Afro-Cuban consciousness and aesthetics in the late 1960s and 1970s. The works of Nancy Morejón, Nicolas Guillen Landrian, Sara Gómez and Sergio Giral, together form a critical cohesive base for the exploration of these themes in the early years of the Revolution. During this time period Afro-Cuban expression of Afro-Cuban reality had been largely evacuated from literature and was relegated mainly to the genre of film. More importantly, the heavy dependence on film to interrogate Afro-Cuban subjectivity is marked by a reliance on history to reconsider this subject. This chapter focuses on contemporary Afro-Cuban cultural praxis after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and includes a discussion of the first two documentaries, *Oggun: Eternal Presence (1991)* and *My Footsteps in Baragua (1996)* by filmmaker Gloria Rolando. In Rolando's works Afro-Cuban themes of representation and expression are still being debated via the genre of film, however Rolando's examination is marked by a noticeably heavy focus on religion. Together, these chapters bring together a group of artists who have never been studied in unison but provide unique perspective of and vision into Afro-Cuban cultural production during the past 50 years of the revolution.

The "Special Period in Times of Peace" is the term coined by the government in order to describe the situation of the Soviet Union in 1989 and Cuba's subsequent plunge into deep economic crisis (Whitfield 3). Until its official end in 2005, the "Special Period" marked (and continues to mark) a critical time not only in Cuba's economic

history but also in its socio-cultural development. For Esther Whitfield, "resolver"(resolve) and "inventar" (invent) are the verbs that embodied the spirit of the "Special Period in Times of Peace" (3).

In the works of Gloria Rolando the spirit of the Special Period that Whitfield describes manifests itself as not simply resolution and invention, but rather resolution and re-invention; a resolution of previously muted issues and the re-invention, via re-imagining and re-articulation, of Afro-Cuban identities in the face of dynamic socio-cultural and socio-political change of the era.

Both of Rolando's works systematically peel back the layers of amnesia distinctly associated with the discourses that revolve around national memory; namely, the fundamental role of Afro-Cuban religion in the fabric of the Cuban nation as well as the role the complex and painful history of West Indian migration to Cuba in the early 20th century played in the formation of the dynamics of contemporary Afro-Cuban community. In answering the overarching question of how do Afro-Cuban artists articulate Afro-Cuban identity within the context of the Cuban Revolution, Rolando is faced with the unique task of producing within the climate of the Special Period. Literature and cultural production of the period is marked by a keen understanding of the deep internal socio-economic and socio-cultural changes of the era. As Cuba opened itself up to the international community, there were reciprocal changes to internal policies. Under these uniquely advantageous circumstances, the probing of memory conducted by Rolando and other artists facilitated the creation of new discursive spaces.

Because the Soviet Union accounted for approximately 80% of Cuba's foreign trade, upon its disintegration, as Cuba plunged to economic lows previously unseen the

country was forced to seek alternative means to stimulate and sustain its floundering economy.[34] This resulted in the legalization of the US dollar, from 1994 to 2004, which was integrated into the Cuban economy in the form of remittances and tourism (Whitfield 6). This strategy, implemented to jump start the Cuban economy had profound effects on Cuban society and culture. The influx of US dollars from abroad in the form of remittances resulted in the devalorization of the Cuban peso and also the symbolic renewal of the US presence on the island via its currency.

US remittances to Cuba originated in the US Cuban émigré community. This community has been characterized by scholars such as Alejandro Portes (1987) and Alejandro de la Fuente (2001), as white, upper-middle class, and anti-Castro. Because remittances were issued by such a concentrated group of Cuban immigrants, it follows that the recipients of these monies were also members of a select group. The variables that provided accessibility to US dollars were determined by circumstances of class and race and how they had manifested in distinct opportunities at the onset of the Cuban revolution. As a result, US dollars that entered the Cuban economy remained in the hands of the few privileged that had access to them, namely white Cubans. In this way, the dollarization of the Cuban economy resurrected internal class divisions that the Revolution had initially sought to eliminate.

Tourism, on the other hand, introduced new peoples and monies from across the globe to Cuba's beaches and newly created resorts. This newfound revenue brought to the island vacationers from Europe (Spain, France, Italy, Germany), and Canada as well as new world views that did not always gel with Cuban ideology. The dollarization of the

[34] Cuban foreign trade revenues were provided by the Soviet-run Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Upon the fall of the Soviet Union, the council was also dismantled (Whitfield 3).

Cuban economy thus initiated a chain-reaction. While opening Cuba up to the international community, the dollar also acted as an internally divisive symbol.

In addition, and most importantly, the new exposure to the international community that was a direct result of the dollarization, created an "apertura" ("opening") for Cuban culture and cultural production. While the economy continue to flourish from new investments, Cuba's cultural networks had bottomed-out at the beginning of the Special Period. Lack of resources, such as paper and ink, made it extremely difficult for writers to publish their works with Cuban publishing houses. They were forced to look outside of the boundaries of the island for (material) support for their creative endeavors. In a brief article entitled, "Truths and Fictions: the Economics of Writing, 1994-1999," Esther Whitfield explains that during the Special Period, Cuban writers initiated joint ventures with foreign publishers in which, "the Cubans tended to perform editorial work while their partners provided material and printing facilities…" (Whitfield 25). Similar inventive strategies were employed in other Cuban industries in order to resolve the setbacks of the Special Period. For example, Cuban filmmakers often found economic backing through partnerships with Spanish and Latin American production companies, while visual artists began to travel abroad to showcase their work. Exposure to and acceptance by the international community allowed Cuban artists to challenge the boundaries of artistic expression previously delineated by the Cuban Revolution.

The interests of international corporations, producers, and sponsors in Cuban cultural production presented a unique opportunity to explore ideologies and identities that had been previously deemed divisive. As these new industries became intimately involved in the processes of Cuban cultural production during the Special Period, themes

that had been omitted from cultural discussion, such as sexuality, religion, and race were provided new opportunities for debate and dissemination, lending to the exploration of alternative avenues of Cuban identity.

Religion and metaphors of Afrocubanía

In his 1940 text, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, Fernando Ortiz introduced a number of neologisms that would forever impact the ways in which Cuban identity was discussed. Among these neologisms are the now commonly used words, "cubanidad" and "cubanía". Generally understood as "Cuban-ness" and "Cuban-ness or spirit" respectively, the two ideologically compacted terms have become analogous to the Cuban subject over the past seventy years, and particularly in the years of the Cuban Revolution.

Gustavo Perez Firmat does an expert job of unpacking the terms in his seminal text, *The Cuban condition: Translation and Identity in modern Cuban literature*. As Perez Firmat asserts, Ortiz introduced a number of neologisms in *Contrapunteo*, words which would be inculcated into the Cuban vernacular for years to come. For Ortiz, as Perez Firmat argues, "what characterizes Cuban culture is mutability, uprootedness" (23). It is this destabilized, constantly fluctuating nature of Cuban culture, or to borrow Perez Firmat's term, the "Cuban condition" that lends Cuban identity its unique flair. For this reason Ortiz chose to describe Cuban culture and society as an example of "transculturación,"[transculturation], yet another neologism meant to, "expresar los variadísimos fenómenos que se originan en Cuba por las complejísimas transmutaciones de culturas que aquí se verifican" ("express the highly diverse phenomena that originate

in Cuba because of the very complex cultural transmutation that take place here") (Ortiz 80; 1999). [35] As Perez Firmat further explains, the term "transculturation",

> "…underscores the processual, imperfective aspect of culture contact, and hence it is more apposite to Cuba. More than a comprehensive rubric for the sum or result of culture contact, transculturation is the name for the collision of cultures, for that interval between deculturation and neoculturation that defines a vernacular culture in its formative phase…For this reason 'transculturation,' a coinage that denotes transition, passage, process, is the best name for the Cuban condition" (23).[36]

Stated in this manner, transculturation is a term that attributes a certain incompleteness to the Cuban condition and that Cuban culture is still "in process" due directly to the fact that the Cuban condition consists of various, and at times competing elements; namely, its African and European components (Perez Firmat 25).

The imperfect and incomplete nature of Cuban society becomes for Ortiz a "distinctive feature of its culture" (Perez Firmat 25). Perez Firmat furthers this argument as he concedes, "Cuba is always cooking. Cubans are always cooking. Occupying a liminal zone or 'impassioned margin' where diverse cultures converge without merging, Cuba lives in a *trans-*, in a trance. In Cuba, transience precedes essence. In Cuba, the raw and the cooked give way to the half-baked" (26). Therefore, for Ortiz as well as Perez Firmat, Cuban culture or "the Cuban condition" benefits tremendously from infusion and removal of new elements. It is always renovated and renewed, and it is this constant

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[35] Translation is from Gustavo Perez Firmat's *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in modern Cuban Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pg. 22.

[36] Deculturation and neoculturation are terms used primarily in anthropology and sociology to describe the results of the cultural synthesis of two or more cultures. Deculturation involves the "shedding of certain elements from the culture of origin"(Perez Firmat 21), while neoculturation is "the new cultural synthesis created by the merging of elements from the old and new cultures" (Perez Firmat 21).

(re)adjustment of its elements and the precedence of certain of these at distinct times that lend it its distinct flavor.

However, the essence of "Cuban-ness"; *cubanidad* and *cubanía*, are not to be confused. Ortiz stresses that *cubanidad* does not automatically yield *cubanía*. As he explains,

> La cubanidad plena no consiste meramente en ser cubano por cualesquiera de las contingencias ambientales que han rodeado la personalidad individual y le han forjado sus condiciones; son precisas también la conciencia de ser cubano y la voluntad de quererlo ser
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> ("Full cubanidad does not consist merely in being Cuban because of any of the environmental contingencies that have surrounded and shaped the individual personality; the consciousness of being Cuban and the will to want to be Cuban are also necessary") (Perez Firmat 30).[37]

Although commonly used interchangeably with *cubanidad*, the two terms, *cubanía* and *cubanidad* are not completely synonymous. *Cubanía* is an extension of *cubanidad* or the spiritual component of Cuban-ness. Perez Firmat unpacks the convergences and divergences of the two terms in the following manner:

> Unlike *cubanidad*, which is essentially a civil status, *cubanía* is a spiritual condition but a spiritual condition identified by an act of the will, one that is fundamentally a desire, a wanting. As the product of desire, *cubanía* is given to those who want it; but this means, also, that it is given to those who don't have it…to want *cubanía* is already to possess it (Perez Firmat 30).

[37] Translation is from Gustavo Perez Firmat's *The Cuban Condition: Translation and identity in modern Cuban Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 30.

Therefore, *cubanidad* is a birthright that can be relinquished, while *cubanía* is desired and strived for.

Afro-cubanía, in tangent to *cubanía,* is the manifestation of this spirit in the Afro-Cuban community where it undergoes another transformation or "trans"/trance as it responds to a unique set of socio-cultural and political realities that are particularly associated with the Afro-Cuban experience. Gloria Rolando's first film, *Oggun: Eternal Presence* deals in part with the discovery of *Afro-Cubanía* while interrogating its misinterpretations and the misunderstandings that surround it.

From another perspective, Rolando's film also tackles the fraught relationship between Afro-Cuban religions and revolutionary discourse. As previously stated, the Special Period of the 1990s led to an "apertura" in Cuban society. During this time there was a readily observable exchange of economic and cultural ideas and values between Cuba and the international community. Cultural products such as literature, film and art experienced great change, but structures of civil society were also greatly impacted during this period, namely religion.

Prior to the Cuban Revolution, influential scholars such as Fernando Ortiz had associated African-based religions and practitioners with criminality in Cuban society. In addition, religions based on African beliefs were discouraged and some organizations disbanded, as these groups were deemed divisive and counter-revolutionary. As a result, throughout the majority of the revolutionary period, Afro-Cuban religions have been held in a despective light. With the advent of the Special Period though, these attitudes began to change. The rituals and ceremonies of religions such as Santeria and Palo Monte captivated visitors to Cuba. Viewing this interest as a means to further its push into the

global economy, Cuban officials capitalized on this sentiment thus packaging Afro-Cuban religions for commercial consumption (Perera Pintado 161).

Despite the contentious relationship between Afro-Cuban religions and the revolutionary government, African-based religions have maintained a place within Afro-Cuban and Cuban society. The permanence of these religious structures is a testament to the function of religion as an arena to explore and also assert individual and collective identity. In particular, Afro-Cuban religions are exemplary of a unique space to explore individual and collective Afro-Cuban identities, especially when juxtaposed to the variables of the Cuban Revolution and the Special Period.

Masked as a celebration of the legend of the Santería[38] orisha, Oggún, Gloria Rolando's, *Oggun: Eternal Presence (1991)* is a multi-layered and complex film. Between the recounting of *patakines*[39], reenactments, the song and dance of famed *akpwon*[40] Lazaro Ross in the corresponding tambores, Rolando spins a dizzying web of visual, aural and emotional images throughout the film that help to reimagine the legend of Oggún. The reappropriation of the legend of Oggún is by extension the recovery of Afro-Cuban and Cuban history and more specifically an interrogation of the stereotypes surrounding the Afro-Cuban male. In addition, Rolando also incorporates the bisecting spheres associated with the agenda of transnationalism and the issue of popular consumption of Afro-Cuban religions. The combination of Ross's narration, personal

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[38] Santeria, which translates as "the worship of saints," is an earth-based, syncretic religion that originated in Nigeria. In Cuba, the religion is also known as Lucumí or simply, the Religion. Brought to the island of Cuba by Nigerian slaves, early practitioners syncretized their orishas (guardian angels and children of the divine being, Oloddumare) to Catholic saints in order to hide their religious ceremonies and beliefs from Spanish slave owners (Gonzalez-Wippler).

[39] The patakines are the fables of the Santeria religion. They often involve the lives and times of the various orishas and serve as a means of moral grounding, wisdom, and insight for practitioners. For this project, the word "patakin" will be used as opposed to the English translation of "fable."

[40] The akpwon is the lead singer in the Yoruba religion.

stories, and footage of tambores served to disperse the previously exoticized view of the religion and re-cast it in a humanizing light. Rolando not only puts a face on the religion of Santería with Ross, but also shows that the religion was, is and continues to be a point of unification throughout the Cuban nation.

At a time when dominant structures and means of articulation in Cuba were disrupted, *Oggun: Eternal Presence* represents not only a possible point of unity, but also a deep and deliberate reflection on the histories previously silenced in a fractured Cuba. With this film, Rolando skillfully re-casts the religion of Santería as a national religion. As a result, she not only re-invents popular opinion of the religion, but also of the Afro-Cuban male.

Oggun: Eternal Presence, opens with an eye-catching dedication in red script over a black screen that reads "to my mother, to my grandmother, to my African ancestors." As African drums sound softly and slowly in the background, the dedication dissolves into the black screen as a quote from Jacques Stephen Alexis[41] appears on the screen. The quotation reads, "Africa does not leave the negro in peace, no matter from which country he is, the place from where he comes or goes." This quote constitutes the first of many nods to the transnational aspirations of this film in two ways. First, the quote itself stresses the transnational nature of blackness and that although it has diverse manifestations, Africa is the shared common root between members of the diaspora. Secondly, Jacques Stephen Alexis was an activist of Haitian origin and not Cuban. The inclusion of such a symbolic quote from a writer of different national origin speaks to the

[41] Jacques Stephen Alexis (1922-1961) was a Haitian writer, activist and poet. He is a descendant of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and best known for his novels and mysterious death. In 1959, he formed the Parti pour l'Entente Nationale-PEP (People's Concensus Party), but was ousted and exiled by the Duvalier regime. When he returned to Haiti in April of 1961, he was apprehended by Duvalier's police force the Tontons Macoutes, tortured in a town square, placed on a boat, and was not heard from again (Schutte-Aine 100).

desire on the part of Rolando to open this film up to black people outside of the geographical confines of one island.

The drums continue and are joined by words sung in Lucumí, as the words of Alexis dissolve. While the opening credits run various images with specific symbolic value in the Santería religion are presented to the viewer; for example, an altar of red and white flowers with a single white candle, coconuts, mangos, plantains and a mask.

In Santería, each orisha is associated with different attributes, such as colors, foods and implements. For example, red and white are colors generally associated with the orisha, Changó. But, according to Santería lore, the color red was originally associated with the orisha Oggún. The materials present in this altar are representative of a traditional *ebbó,* or sacrificial offering, to the orishas. *Ebbó* is one of the two basic concepts that ground Santería, the other being *ashé* (González-Wippler 5). As Migene González-Wippler explains,

> Ashé is a Yoruba word that means, literally, 'so be it', but it is also a symbol of divine power. It is the power with which God almighty—Oloddumare—created the universe. Everything is made of ashé, and through ashé everything is possible. The orishas are repositories of Oloddumare's ashé. All the invocations, propitiations, spells, and rituals of Santeria are conducted to acquire ashé from the orishas. With ashé, all problems can be solved, enemies can be subdued, love and money can be acquired. Ashé is also authority, power of action. Ebbó, on the other hand, is the concept of sacrifice, the way in which the orishas are propitiated so that they will give us their ashé. All the rites and spells of Santeria are part of the ebbó concept (5).

The camera zooms in on the mask and then the frame dissolves into a shot of the forest and the more detailed shot of the views of the tree. Through deliberately focused shots such as these, Rolando is able to convey the relatability of various elements of Santería to

her viewers. The movie then opens as the camera pans down from this shot of the tree, which is actually the holy ceiba tree,[42] to rest on Lazaro Ross who is seated at the foot of the tree with a cigar in hand.

Ross begins to explain the significance of the *patakines* within the Yoruba religion. As he begins to speak, subtitles in English scroll across the bottom of the screen. The consistent use of English subtitles throughout the film is another example of the transnational aspirations of the film. The use of English subtitles indicates that Rolando's anticipation and perhaps goal of this film involve reaching an audience outside of Cuba and the Spanish-speaking world. The subtitles are also linked to the distribution of this film. An independent, foreign-backed Cuban company, Video America, S.A. distributed *Oggun*. As a result it was not subject to many of the parameters placed on films produced under ICAIC. The partnership of Spanish and English therefore, points to the possible expansion of Rolando's core audience. English subtitles also indicate perhaps the desire to reach a specifically American audience, which would be a profound and bold move, not only in business and art, but politically, especially during the critical era of the Special Period.

The *patakines*, as Ross explains, tell of love, war and also serve as a blueprint for the expectations of initiates into the Yoruba religion. The *patakines* also help to explain and account for the characteristics of the various orishas in the Yoruba religion. With this backdrop set, Ross begins to narrate one of the better known *patakines* of Oggún in which he committed an offense against his mother. In repentance, Oggún went to his

[42] Within the Santeria religion, the ceiba tree is one of, if not the most sacred trees. In Africa, it is known as the Iroko, a gigantic species of Mahogany tree that grows along the coast of Guinea. Because this tree is not native to the Caribbean, the ceiba represents its New World substitution. Highly respected, it is regarded as a saint, and many of the most powerful spells and implorations are conducted with the help of ceiba tree. Also, many ebbós are either placed or buried at the foot of this tree (Gonzalez-Wippler 133-134).

father Obatalá and asked him not to punish him, but rather to let him (Oggún) punish himself by working day and night. This narration is then crosscut by images of crude metal tools and fire and a visually stunning reenactment of Oggún (characterized as a strong, heavily bearded black man) slaving day and night in the forest over metalwork.

As the reenactment comes to an end Ross launches seamlessly into the narration of the next *patakin* in the chain of foundational *patakines* regarding Oggún. This particular *patakin* tells the story of how the orisha, Oshún, lured Oggún out of the forest and back into the world after his self-imposed exile. The previous *patakin* narrated by Ross told of how Oggún's self-imposed punishment was to work day and night in the forest, but because Oggún was the only person in the world who held the secret of metal, things in the world started to crumble in his absence. Therefore the orisha, Oyá was sent to find him and bring him back. When Oyá went to find Oggún he treated her badly so the orisha Yemayá sent Oshún, the orisha of love to find him. At this point in the film, the action shifts to the reenactment of Oshún entering the forest to find and seduce the secret of metal out of Oggún.

Calculated shots focus in on the orisha, Oshún, a stunning woman of dark complexion dressed entirely in yellow as she enters the waters of the river to bathe herself. An accompanying cross cut shot focuses on the meeting of the forest and the river as Oshún's laughter is heard in the background. This shot is symbolic in that it foreshadows the fated meeting of the two orishas, Oggún, who represents the forest and Oshún who represents the river.

As Oggún's ceaseless hammer sounds, the camera shifts to find him painstakingly at work. As Oshún's laughter echoes through the forest, Oggún pauses and,

sensing that something is amiss, he grabs his machete and moves towards the sound. As the camera follows Oggún's deliberate movements through the forest on his quest to find the source of the disruption, a drum accompanied by Lucumí chant begins to sound while the camera shifts to shots of makeshift altars dispersed throughout the forest. When Oggún finally arrives at the river in which Oshún was bathing, she sneaks up behind him and smears honey across his lips, instantly captivating him as she mysteriously disappears. Honey is one of the foods associated with Oshún. It is told that she uses honey to seduce her lovers. To emphasize this point in the reenactment, Rolando deliberately slows down the action of the scene as Oshún smears honey across Oggún's lips.

The scene then shifts to Oshún covering herself with honey as Oggún once again spots her. The camera moves to focus in on a mesmerized Oggún. As the drum and song that has accompanied the reenactment to this point changes, Oshún appears again, this time dressed in her yellow and white dress and dancing through the forest with her bowl of honey as Oggún follows her, still mesmerized by her charms. When he is not looking she swipes more honey across his mouth and he continues to follow her as the reenactment fades to black.

For Rolando, the figure of Oggún in this film serves as a metaphor for the Afro-Cuban male. As the film progresses, so too does Rolando's deconstruction of the stereotypes surrounding Oggún and the Afro-Cuban male. The stereotypes that Rolando explicitly deals with include the conceptualizations of the Afro-Cuban male as brute, savage, criminal and violent. These stereotypes are explored allegorically via the orisha Oggún. These first reenactment sequences that deal with the foundational *patakines* of

Oggún represent Rolando's first attempt to address the stereotypes of savageness and brutality attributed to Oggún and to the Afro-Cuban male. By emphasizing the ruin and chaos that befell society when Oggún departed and secluded himself in the forest, Rolando points to the importance of his role, and by extension the role of the Afro-Cuban male, in Cuban society.

The next scene jumps to an altar dedicated to Oggún and then to a fiesta de santo[43] for Oshún. The followers of Oshún that are present perform ritual greetings of one another and to Oshún's altar as the camera passes over the many offerings of sweets, statues and fruit that make up the altar. The shot then moves to the tambor with the initiated sons and daughters of Oshún dancing and chanting at the fiesta and Ross performing his role as akpwon. Rolando then presents crosscuts of the followers of Oshún singing in unison in response to Ross' call and images of symbols attributed to Oshún, such as sunflowers, honey, cakes and gold.

Rolando then returns to Ross sitting under the ceiba tree, recounting his initiation into Yoruba as a young boy, which is reenacted in the film. He recalls the role his neighbor played in his initial interest as well as his family's initial negative reaction to his involvement and the misconceptions they held about Yoruba. The negative sentiments of Ross's family toward Yoruba are reflective of the stereotypes held by many in regards to the religion. The most prominent of these stereotypes concerns the misconceptions that Santeria is a barbarous religion and that practitioners worship Satan. Rolando, working through Ross and her captivating imagery, systematically dismantles these thought processes. The following scene is illustrative of this.

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[43] Fiesta de santo (party of the saint) are parties held in honor of the orishas. They are also known as tambores. (Gonzalez-Wippler 190).

In a cyclical motion, the film returns to a fiesta de santo, but this time it is one dedicated to the orisha Yemayá. As before, Rolando's cinematic eyes capture the visually stunning details of the participants singing and dancing in unison, as well as the intricacies of the altar dedicated to Yemayá.

Rolando then shifts back to Ross who explains the origins of the fiesta de santo and the previous generation of *akpwons* who taught him his craft. He recalls the elders by name: Liberato, Maximiliano Ordaz, Otilia Mantecón, Mama Celina Samá, Felix Palucha and Olu Fandei. The inclusion of the history of the *akpwon*, as well as the cyclical format of the film, is a nod to the crucial role narrativity plays in identity formation. Of her focus on the figure of the *akpwon*, Rolando says,

> It is my belief that the men and women of Lazaro's generation and others much older, are the bridge tying us to the Africa that gave birth to its roots in America since the time of slavery…My belief in this project relies on the fact that it is necessary not only to film the dances and songs, but also to reveal the essence of this culture. We must recognize that it contains legends and universal values that explain the world (http://afrocubweb.com/rolbio.htm).

As a "deviant" narrative, Rolando's repetition of elements detailing the history of Santería and her use of figure of the *akpwon* in the place of an omniscient narrator is a move towards neutralizing the "counter", or "deviant", element of Afro-Cuban religions and history. Rolando accomplishes this by centering her film on the universal human aspect of Santeria and highlighting its role in the perpetuation of Afro-Cuban history.

Rolando then presents two more fiestas de santo, one for Oyá and another for Obatalá before returning to Ross. In this segment Ross discusses what you first learn upon initiation into the Yoruba religion, which includes the "Pillars of the Ocha". The

"Pillars of the Ocha" refers to four of the most important orishas in Santería: Ellegua, Oggún, Ochosi and Osún. Ross describes in detail their individual and interdependent attributes and characteristics. He then moves into a hauntingly beautiful traditional Lucumí invocation of Oggún which he half-sings, half-talks. The camera then transitions to reenactment shots of Oggún's metal shop and eternal fire in the forest and his labor. This reenactment is then seamlessly crosscut by contemporary footage of modern day metal work conducted by large machines moving chunks of scrap metal. Rolando then proceeds to crosscut between images of Oggún's fire in the woods, modern day manipulation of fire and metal, and finally to the original shot of Oggún's cauldron filled with his tools.

Continuing the established cycle, Rolando returns to Ross who begins to speak on the common misconceptions of the orisha Oggún. Oggún is generally associated with brutality, roughness and callousness, similar to the Afro-Cuban male. But Ross argues that the true nature of Oggún is the complete opposite. Oggún, in spite of his general aggressive associative properties, is representative of peace, tranquility, happiness and music. In addition, Ross mentions how even in the songs of the Yoruba faith, there are mentions of Oggún's happiness and contentment with music and how Oshún utilized the power of music to seduce him.

These misinterpretations of Oggún's character and that of the Afro-Cuban male can be attributed in part to studies such as Fernando Ortiz's *Los Negros Brujos*. Originally published in 1906, this now infamous work catalogues Ortiz's in-depth investigation and analysis of Afro-Cuban religions and culture in Cuba. Ortiz posits that Africans were inferior to whites as a result of their lack of morals and civilization. This

lack of morals and civilization was also at the root of their propensity for criminality. Arguing that Afro-Cuban religions were an example of "fetichismo" ("fetish"), Ortiz supported not only the criminalization of Afro-Cuban religion, but also the movement to avoid black immigration to Cuba in order to prevent further delay in the progress of the nation.[44]

Rolando returns to Ross who begins to reflect on his personal relation to Oggún. He explains that he has been initiated in Oggún for forty years and how Oggún is represented in his life via his dislike of arguments and his love of music. He also explains that many people mistakenly focus on the prototypical characteristics of Oggún and the other orishas, forgetting that they are multidimensional and complex. In an allusive manner then Ross, via his relationship with Oggún, conducts a deeply personal inventory of himself as an Afro-Cuban male. In light of this realization, Ross explains that he only feels similarities between himself and Oggún via song and his love for music and his ability to transmit emotion via song.

The final scene of *Oggun: Eternal Presence* is fittingly a fiesta de santo in honor of Oggún in which Ross is acting as the akpwon. Rolando crosscuts between footage of the *tambor* and the reenactment of Oggún cutting his way through the forest with his machete. Rolando continues to cut between footage of the *toque de tambor* and the reenacted flashbacks of Oggún's *patakines* until the two separate shots fade into a single simultaneous one and all the images left are those of the forest, and various altars, machete chops from a mounted initiate at the *toque de tambor* and those of Oggún. The

[44] It should be noted that Ortiz's views on the Afro-Cuban subject shifted dramatically in later years. He renounced his earlier views of the Afro-Cuban as criminal and savage subject and shifted to a more anthropological appreciation of their contribution to the Cuban nation as a whole.

camera finally comes to rest on a metal mask which sits on an altar and the film comes to and end.

There are many noteworthy aspects of Gloria Rolando's first feature film. Although it appeared at a critical time in the history of religion and the Cuban state, Rolando does not explicitly bring politics, race or any other "sensitive" issues to the forefront of this film. As Rolando states,

> Oggun's primary value, however, lies in its preservation of cultural forms that were the province of a generation that is now dying, and whose legacy is only now being captured in its original form. Arguing the oral tradition which Ross practices as an akpwon reflects a communal history, drawing as it does upon the words of many others before him, Rolando presents the legend of Oggun through the spoken and sung words of Ross, combined with striking visual reenactments from the rich mythology of Santeria (Ebrahim 245).

But in this film the issues of politics, religion, race and identity do exist as vital subtexts. In an article discussing and summarizing the representation of Afro-Cuban religions in the films of Sara Gomez and Gloria Rolando, Haseenah Ebrahim raises a particularly poignant question with regards to Rolando's film: how does "Oggun: Eternal Presence" address the role of Santería in Cuban society? In a simple answer, the film does not. But this question warrants a more complex answer.

In her description of Rolando's film, Ebrahim focuses on the folkloric content of the film by emphasizing the dazzling visual effects as well as the mesmerizing song and dance sequences and the interplay of the reenactments of the patakines narrated and sung by Lazaro Ross. The swirling combination of all of these elements unite to produce a

cinematic piece in line with a trend of Cuban films that highlight Afro-Cuban religions and religious practices. But as Ebrahim states,

> the recent documentaries, *Oggun* and *Mensajero de los dioses*, clearly reflect a recent trend in Cuban cinema to celebrate Afrocuban religious practices but they do so without providing any type of social, historical or political contextualization of the roles played by Afrocuban religions as sites of resistance, both during slavery and later. Nor do any of these films present an analysis of racial inequalities or racial discrimination in post-Revolution Cuba (247).

With the absences of explicit social criticism the value of Rolando's film and others that fall into this genre is called into question. Does it simply celebrate and condone the precedent in Cuba society to celebrate the ahistorical folkloric representation of the Afro-Cuban subject of the past while ignoring the contemporary manifestation? Or is there something else to this film?

As stated earlier, I believe that the presentation of this film as "folkloric" and even the use of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional to play the tambores, while on the one hand signal the commodification of Afro-Cuban religion and blackness for revolutionary and international consumption, on the other hand, it serves Rolando's overarching goal of voicing this deviant narrative of blackness, and also making it accessible to a transnational audience. Additionally, I believe that the framing of this film as a folkloric piece is a strategic device on the part of Rolando to aid in the film's distribution and second, to provoke the viewer's active participation and connection with the film's many subtle subtexts.

In this film Rolando not only disrupts stereotypical views and understandings of Santería, but also explores the intricacies of the religion, its secrets, and richness and

reveals its potential as a unifying factor in contemporary Cuban society. Although Video America, S.A. is an independently-owned company with foreign backing, it still operates out of Havana and is still subject to many of the restrictions that films produced under ICAIC would face. In light of this and the very deliberate structuring of the film on Rolando's part, I do not believe that Rolando brought this film to fruition ignorant of its potential as a politically and racially charged cultural product.

Critics such as Ebrahim question the fact that Rolando does not explicitly make mention of the role Santería plays in Cuban society or rather the positioning of the religion and its followers within Revolutionary Cuba. On the contrary, I would again argue that these issues are ever present in this film, but exist as a subtle and yet glaring undercurrents. In this film Rolando examines and disperses myths about not only the inner-workings of the oft-misunderstood religion, but also of its practitioners. She details a stigmatized segment of Afro-Cuban culture, but approaches it from a different angle. She avoids the usual route of exoticized, anthropological/sociological spectacle and approaches Santería, its practices, legends, customs and practitioners, from a place of deep respect and consideration. Evidenced in her delicate and attentive presentation of the fiestas de santo, as well as her deliberate coupling of these scenes with the informative narrative of Lazaro Ross serve to highlight the intricate beauties of the religion. In this way, Rolando provides a fortuitous opportunity for discourses previously deemed divisive or anti-revolutionary to be heard. In this film then, Rolando takes advantage of the gaps created by the fall-out of the center, and is able to capitalize on this opportunity.

Translating Blackness: Intraracial definitions of Afrocubanía and Afrocubanidad

Rolando's second film, *My footsteps in Baragua* (1996) centers on alternative Afro-Cuban narratives or rather, alternative definitions of *Afrocubanía*. In this film, Rolando tells the diverse and interlaced tales of the inhabitants of the small town of Baragua. With roots in Cuba as well as other islands of the Caribbean, the townspeople of Baragua over the years have founded a vibrant and thriving microcosm. To examine this unique community, Rolando focuses her interview segments on the following themes: language, customs, and legacy. Through the exploration of these themes, Rolando not only re-imagines but also reinvents conceptions of the quintessential elements of Afro-Cuban identity to reveal the complex dimensionalities that exist and continue to thrive within the Afro-Cuban community.

My footsteps in Baragua, is a very nuanced film where, Rolando looks beyond the seemingly mutually exclusive categories of black and Cuban and focuses on the role migration plays in the expression and representation of alternative and diversified Afro-Cuban identities. The subjects of this documentary have roots not only in Cuba, but also in Panama, Barbados, Jamaica and other predominantly Afro-Caribbean islands. Their experiences, highlighted in the 1990s, represent not only alternatives to traditional representations of *Afrocubanía*, but also an example of the complex dimensionality and possibilities of Afro-Cuban identity.

My footsteps in Baragua opens with a dedication that reads, "Nicolas Guillen, George Lamming and Rex Nettleford through whom I discovered the fantastic world of the Caribbean man." These three men represent prominent Cuban, Barbadian and Jamaican intellectuals and social critics, respectively. Their life's work was focused on

Caribbean identity, not only in their countries, but throughout the region. They sought to make connections between and sense of the geographic and ideological disconnects within the Caribbean. This striking dedication is followed by the sound of a church psalm being sung by a congregation as the camera pans over the weathered sign of a church that reads “Ejército de salvación” (“Salvation Army”). The camera then pans out to bring into focus the dilapidated wooden building of the church as the opening production credits scroll across the screen. As the church psalm continues, Rolando joins the sound to the corresponding image of the singing black parishioners of all ages. In addition this opening scene is interrupted by early 20th century photos of the townspeople of Baragua which are joined with the contemporary camera footage.

The next scene of the film focuses on two elderly black women gardening and conversing. The younger of the two asks the older woman, “when did you come from Barbados?” to which the older woman replies “the 8th of August, 1920.” The younger woman then asks her what she used to eat there and she replies, “Cucu and flyfish.” The scene the shifts to another elderly black woman who is asked by an unseen interviewer what Jamaicans used to eat. She answers, “plenty yam,” and the camera abruptly returns to the two women from the previous shot. The younger woman asks the older woman if she can remember the name of the boat she came to Cuba on, but before she can answer, the camera returns to the second woman profiled who is answering more questions about food. Just as quickly the camera returns to the two women who were gardening as the younger woman asks the older woman if she would like to return to Barbados, to which the older woman replies she would like to return right now. Rolando then returns to the second woman profiled as the interviewer asks her if she is Cuban or Jamaican. The

woman replies that she was born in Jamaica, but since leaving Jamaica, she has remained in Cuba.

These two opening scenes draw attention to Rolando's manipulation of language and the fluidity of its use within Baragua. Unlike *Oggun: Eternal Presence*, *My Footsteps in Baragua* is filmed in English without Spanish subtitles. Rolando's interviewees speak both English and Spanish. Interestingly, when they code switch from English to Spanish, English subtitles appear, but the reverse does not occur when they speak English. The exclusive use of English could be a result of the film's production goals. Gloria Rolando's independent Cuban film production company, Images of the Caribbean (Imágenes del Caribe), which has international distribution, produced the film.

Rolando then cuts to a shot of an enormous tree as carnival drums sound in the background and images of multiple flags of the British West Indies are displayed including Jamaica, Barbados and Antigua. The camera then moves to silent shots of the three elderly women who were previously interviewed, followed by shots of the ocean. Rolando then cuts to one of the three folkloric groups, who are singing and dancing on a boat.

A bell sounds in the background signaling the scene's end and the camera moves across images of the town and its people as an omniscient female narrator, whom the viewer can suspect is Rolando, tells of the mystique of Baragua. She says

> every time I come to Baragua the past comes to my mind. I remember a past that determined the lives of my parents and my grandparents. That path is also my past being a Cuban of Jamaican and Barbadian parents. Maybe you share the remembrances of my family and you're not very familiar with parts of them. In the early years of this century, 1915-1920, men and women from all over the West Indies came to Cuba hoping to make

> a decent living and with the hope of one day returning to their places of origins. However, many years went by and many of those immigrants didn't leave Baragua.

As the narration ends, the camera comes to rest in the middle of church service in Baragua in which the psalms are being sung in English. Throughout the film, religion and the physical setting of church creates an interesting socio-spatial discourse. Although Rolando later highlights the fact that there are denominational differences among the inhabitants of Baragua, religion serves as a point of unification among its residents.

The narrator then begins a monologue on the tenuous relationship between the residents of Baragua and England. This monologue initiates a series of short interviews concerned with the relationship between the black residents of Baragua, England and the English language.

Jamaican immigrants reportedly first arrived in Cuba in 1900 after a push to increase the labor pool when Cuba's sugar production rose (de la Fuente 33). Introduced to Cuba, along with a myriad of other black Caribbean immigrants including Haitians Barbadians and Panamanians, this immigrant group was thrust between native black Cubans and Spanish immigrants as both a buffer and a scapegoat. As Alejandro de la Fuente contends,

> …immigration was designed to lower salaries not only by increasing the labor supply but also—perhaps primarily—by creating a multiethnic and multinational labor force divided by linguistic, cultural and national barriers. Race operated along with and was subsumed by these national and ethnic divisions weakening considerably workers' bargaining capacity…race was construed as a line separating native and foreign workers, rather than native workers of different racial background among themselves (de la Fuente 31).

In this way, race was a key factor manipulated not only to control the immigrant labor population, but also the black population; black and foreign.

During the early years of the 20th century, Cuban officials promoted white immigration to the country as a means of "bettering" or "improving" Cuban society. This sentiment was based on popular eugenics-derived beliefs of the time that whiteness was equivalent to progress while blackness, in contrast was commensurate to inferiority (Helg 1990). Unfortunately, white Spanish immigrants did not provide a reliable labor pool. In 1913, repealing the previous ban on black Caribbean immigration to Cuba, the United Fruit Company was authorized to import 1,000 West Indian immigrants to Cuba. In 1917, the immigration of West Indian workers was fully legalized (de la Fuente 34). De la Fuente argues that this change of heart is attributed to sugar demands spurred by World War I and the decline of Spanish immigration (34). As a result, "between 1917 and 1931 some 300,000 Haitians, Jamaicans, and other workers from the Caribbean region entered the island to work in sugar plantations" (de la Fuente 34; 1997). The introduction of culturally and ethnically diverse groups of West Indians deeply impacted the development of Cuban society and in particular the Afro-Cuban community.

The Cuban government as well as sugar plantation owners instigated the division of labor and immigrants along racial and ethnic lines. De la Fuente explains,

> Both employers and the Cuban state worked to deepen and reinforce the barriers that separated native and foreign workers, as well as those separating foreign workers of different origin among themselves. Employers promoted open hostility through a policy of ethnically based distribution of employment, promotion, and compensation, as well as by using foreign labor to break native worker's resistance—or vice versa (de la Fuente 31).

In this way, isolation and alienation of black Caribbean immigrants was propagated and encouraged. As a result, many black immigrant workers disassociated themselves from Cuban society and pledged allegiance to their respective metropolis (England), and strove to maintain their respective cultures. The maintenance of the English language was critical to this strategy.

Thus, these interviews highlight, among other things, the light and dark aspects of immigration to Cuba, and the difficulties of maintaining one's home culture in a foreign land. It also illuminates the struggles of the people of Baragua to assimilate to Cuban culture while maintaining autonomy. For example, one interviewee, who begins his interview in English but later switches to Spanish, discusses the allegiances citizens of Baragua held to the British flag and how this allegiance helped them to avoid potentially problematic situations. Conversely, another interviewee discusses the dark side of claiming British and not Cuban nationality. Citizens of Baragua were often dismissed as mere Jamaicans by Cubans of the region, another way of saying that they were not real Cubans and therefore didn't matter. These two contrasting views highlight the fact that even within the minority group that West Indians represented, their experiences were not synonymous.

Despite the ebb and flow of migration and labor opportunities by the early 1930s "there were between 150,000 and 250,000 Caribbean immigrants (antillanos) in Cuba" (Carr 83). During the roughly ten-year period of Gerardo Machado's presidency, not only did West Indians face harsh discrimination, but they also confronted government repatriation campaigns along with forced deportation (Carr 84).

Additionally, during this time the social positioning of West Indian immigrants had shifted from buffer to scapegoat. Prior to 1925 West Indians fulfilled an important role as buffers between white Spanish immigrants and native Afro-Cuban workers, but as their numbers grew within Cuban society, so too did fears of the potential threat to *cubanidad* that this varied and foreign population represented. As Barry Carr signals, "…the neocolonial republic contained a strident critique of the forces that were 'diluting' Cuban national identity. Anti-imperialism and defense of cubanidad were, therefore, often accompanied by opposition to black immigrant labor because Cubans linked (correctly) the drive to recruit antillanos to United States sugar capital" (Carr 84). In addition, during this period tensions between native and foreign black populations were at an all time high. This was due to the fact that during this time there was large-scale unemployment due to the Great Depression. In addition there were anti-imperial sentiments linked to a search for collective Cuban identity in a time of distress and also the US companies who imported West Indian immigrants. These tensions manifested in the continuous and systematic discrimination and exclusion of black West Indians from Cuban and Afro-Cuban society. But even within the West Indian immigrant community there were marked differences.

In an attempt to explore further the roots of the people of Baragua, another series of interviews follows in which the interviewees discuss how they came to live in the site. One interviewee, who answers in Spanish, reveals that although her parents are both from Jamaica, she was born in Baragua. Another woman who was born in Guadeloupe, reveals that she came to Cuba in 1923, but does not divulge the circumstances surrounding her immigration.

The most memorable of this collection of interviews is one of an elderly woman who comments on how she learned Spanish. The woman reveals that she learned Spanish as child from the other children that she played with in Guaro, Oriente province. Because she learned Spanish so well, she forgot English completely and as a result her aunt sent her back to Jamaica to relearn in. Matching her experience in language to a timeline it is discovered that she came to Cuba around 1918, went back to Jamaica in 1921 and finally returned to Cuba for good in 1925. This corresponds to documented migration patterns of West Indian immigrants during this time period. Between 1912 and 1927, 110,450 West Indian immigrants arrived to Cuba (McLeod 607). Despite the combination of deportation, repatriation and circular migration, in 1930 there were 65,000 British West Indians working in Cuba (Carr 90).

Her intriguing story is interlaced with the story of Kenneth Whitaker a man with roots in St. Vincent's and Jamaica from his father and mother, respectively. In his interview, Mr. Whitaker discusses his staunch belief that he thinks that it is better for the descendants of immigrants to write and speak in English. His opinion is particularly interesting as it is juxtaposed to the elderly woman's history and experience in language, as she begins her interview in English and ends in Spanish, while Mr. Whitaker gives his entire interview in English.

This short segment raises the question of the importance of language in the maintenance of an identity separate from that of Cubans. For Mr. Whitaker, maintenance of the English language is a means to preserve not only his West Indian roots but also a positive way to distinguish himself from the Afro-Cuban community. For the elderly woman, in contrast, her relationship to English is understood negatively as a hindrance to

her assimilation into both Cuban and Jamaican culture. In Cuba, knowing too much English ostracized her from the other children, while in Jamaica, not knowing enough English prevented her re-integration into the culture. As a result, her relation to English and Spanish is a loaded element of her concept of *Afrocubanía*. While for Mr. Whitaker, his relation to English and Spanish characterizes his resistance of *Afrocubanía*.

This segment is then followed by an interlude composed of footage from Baragua's carnival in which flags of the different island nations of the Caribbean are proudly represented. The following segment focuses on the idiosyncrasies of Baragua as well as the differences between inhabitants of different origin. The segment opens with two contrasting scenes, one of a game of cricket in progress and the other of men engaged in a game of dominoes; pastimes symbolically representative of West Indian and Cuban cultures respectively.

Rolando then launches into a series of interviews that focus on the demographic and religious make-up of Baragua. One man, Stanley Homely, of Barbadian and Montserratian origin, who himself was born in Panama reveals in his interview that there were about five or six Montserratian families in Baragua when he arrived, but that the majority of the inhabitants of Baragua were Barbadian, followed closely by Jamaicans and, to a lesser degree Antiguans and immigrants from other islands. Homely continues his interview to discuss the importance of God and religion in the daily life of Baragua's Afro-Caribbean citizens. He explains that there were four churches, all in English and led by West Indians. They were the Army, the Pentecostal or Christian mission, the Anglican church and finally the Seventh Day Adventist church. Homely goes further to add that even Cubans joined these churches and as a result, today services are held in

Spanish and English. This is a very intriguing detail as religion united West Indian immigrants, and also highlighted the separations between West Indians and Afro-Cubans. As Marc McLeod notes,

> The many British West Indians who participated in the Episcopal Church on the other hand, affiliated with the cultural practices of white North Americans a dominant socioeconomic group in Cuba. In other words, through membership in the Episcopal Church, British West Indian immigrants distinguished themselves from the more 'superstitious' (i.e. more African) Haitians (611).

In the next segment, Rolando focuses her interviews on the maintenance of customs and the conservation of culture. This segment also reveals the blended nature and unique syncretism that exists in Baragua between Cuban and West Indian cultures. In one interview, a woman discusses how all the practices of the Caribbean could be found in Baragua. She explains that the uniqueness of Baragua lies in the fact that people didn't lose their customs when they came there. To exemplify this point even further, Rolando returns to Kenneth Whitaker who discuses how West Indians wanted their children to learn trades, so he is by trade a shoemaker and his sisters are seamstresses by trade. But due to lack of work, he was forced to take a job in a sugar mill where he worked for 42 years. Another man is interviewed who explains that the educational system of the inhabitants of Baragua was strictly British. As a result, they knew more about British history and culture than their own, could find Novia Scotia but not Venezuela on a map and even learned the British money system of pounds, schillings and pence.

The next segment, introduced by footage of passports and still shots of old photos of families and older homes focuses on the histories of the first generation of Afro-Caribbean migrants to Baragua. A series of interviews reveals the varying circumstances

under which these migrants arrived in Baragua. Of the push and pull factors associated with early 20th century West Indian immigration, Marc McLeod posits the following factors,

> Perhaps most importantly, the massive influx of U.S. capital in the early twentieth century resulted in the rapid expansion of the Cuban sugar economy, with production increasing nearly tenfold between 1900 and 1913. State immigration policies which sought to promote 'racial whitening' attracted nearly 900,000 Spaniards to Cuba between 1900 and 1929, but Spanish (and native Cuban) workers consistently demonstrated an unwillingness to labor in the cane fields. Sugar company managers thus turned to Afro-Caribbean immigrants as a source of plantation labor, convincing Cuban government officials that the economic 'necessity' of cheap labor outweighed the supposed evils of black immigration (McLeod 600).

One woman discusses how her father came from Panama first and then she came, while for another woman her mother came from Panama with her two sisters and she was born in Baragua. Yet another woman reveals that she came with her grandmother while her mother and father remained in Panama. These diverse stories reveal the common thread of Panama, and just as the question arises in the viewer's mind about a potential connection between Panama, Afro-Caribbean migration and Baragua, the narrator enters to speak on the Panama connection.

Layered over footage of the construction of the Panama Canal, the narrator explains that many men went to Panama in order to make money and provide a way for their families. This narration is followed by two interviews of men who tell of their father's experiences in Panama. The first man tells the story of his father, William Stoute who was born in Barbados but went to Panama to work as a schoolteacher for the canal worker's children. His father was also a union leader and would tell his son of the

deplorable work conditions in the Panama Canal project. His father returned to Baragua in 1920 because he was forced to leave Panama when he was laid off from his teaching position for presenting a 14-point worker's strike program. Another man briefly tells of how his father worked on the Canal for two or three years and came to Cuba alone, while he and his mother remained in Panama. In 1919 his father sent for his family.

In addition to the pull of Panama, there is question of the pull of Baragua in particular. This question is answered when the narrator reveals that the Baragua sugar company, established around 1917 encouraged the migration of Haitians and other West Indians. Immigrants were hired primarily as servants, such as cooks and gardeners, but they didn't live in Baragua. As the camera pans out to illustrate, Afro-Caribbean migrants to Baragua generally lived on the other side of the train tracks that divided Baragua between blacks, poor whites and Americans. This sole mention of Haitian migration to Cuba is a stirring detail, due to its placement in the film. In his analysis of the parallel, but divergent histories of Haitian and British West Indians in Cuba, Marc McLeod poignantly states, "While all Afro-Antilleans confronted and struggled against race-and class-based oppression…Haitians and British West Indians also came from distinct national and sociocultural backgrounds, characterized by languages, literacy rates, and religious practices different from Cubans and from each other" (599). Due to differences in language, religion and education, Haitians and Anglophone West Indians although sharing a common bond through "racial discrimination and economic exploitation" (McLeod 599), had drastically different experiences.

Language was one of the most important dividing factors between Haitians and British West Indians. British West Indians had the advantage of speaking English, a

common language among US sugar mill owners and upper and middle-class Cubans. The French creole of the Haitians, conversely, placed them at a disadvantage as this language was not spoken by Cubans or Americans (McLeod 607). Linked to language, were differences in education that yielded better job opportunities for British West Indian immigrants. As McLeod argues,

> … Cuban immigration statistics for the 1916 to 1927 period, 15.1 percent of all British West Indian entrants claimed prior training in artisanal trades such as carpentry or smithery. Only 3.5 percent of Haitian arrivals held similar non-agricultural experience. British West Indian women in particular carried with them the occupational skills which would allow them to compete favorably in the Cuban labor market: 16.7 percent of all British West Indian migrants—and probably much more than half of all female British West Indian arrivals—had worked as seamstresses or domestic servants before sailing to Cuba. Just 4.4 percent of Haitian migrants, on the other hand, possessed a background in these female-dominated trades (McLeod 608).

Religion was another divisive factor between the two groups. Again, McLeod provides useful insight,

> Religious practices especially distinguished British West Indian from Haitian residents in Cuba. Haitians generally maintained their traditional practices of vodou, a syncretic or 'symbiotic' religion whose gods derive from the union of African deities and Catholic saints…British West Indian immigrants, on the other had, flocked to the Episcopal Church in Cuba…White Cubans thus came to differentiate between the two Antillean immigrant groups with regard to one important icon of fear—religion. Since the nineteenth century if not earlier, white Cubans had denigrated Afro-Cuban religious practices such as Santeria as witchcraft. Haitian vodou and Cuban Santeria shared a common heritage in Catholicism and West African religions; consequently, practitioners of vodou confronted a legacy of racial intolerance (610).

Together then, these elemental differences joined to form starkly divergent concepts of British West Indians and Haitians, which served to further fracture the foreign immigrant community and also the Afro-Cuban community.

As a result of the contrasting conceptualizations of Haitians and West Indians, drawn from their cultural differences, in addition to the intraracial divisions constructed between the two groups in Cuban society, " by mid-September [1937], Cuban authorities had banished nearly 25,000 Haitians; in contrast, only 253 British West Indian immigrants had also left the island" (McLeod 599). The striking contrast in these numbers as well as the conditions of their departure from Cuba, explain the modern-day composition of the black West Indian population in Cuba, and its almost negligible Haitian component.

The final segment of the film centers on the juxtaposition of the first generation and the future generations of Afro-Caribbeans in Baragua. It opens with the older generations of Baragua residents discussing their lives and the old ways. When asked why her mother came to Cuba, one women answers that she came for the fun of it and that she had heard good things about Cuba and wanted to better her life. Yet another older woman reveals that she is 89 and has worked hard her entire life and that this is the first time in her life that she is not working. A elderly man reveals that his father never had any intention of returning to his country because all of his family was in Cuba, but others went back to their islands of origin because their families were still in there.

A church psalm is sung low in the background as the narrator returns to discuss how her parents and relatives never spoke of going back. This monologue is carried out

over images of faces of the elderly and shots of graveyard headstones of all the immigrants who stayed in Baragua and never returned home.

The narrator then asks the elderly women from previous segments of the film how many children they have. One replies six, but that she doesn't know how many grandchildren she has. Another replies that she has nine children, but has no idea how many grandchildren or great grandchildren she has. An elderly woman explaining the story of the large tree that is located in Baragua follows these responses. The woman explains that the tree that exists now is actually the result of two trees that grew like twins from separate roots into one giant tree, just like the inhabitants of Baragua who came from many different roots but have become one. To illustrate this point, the final interview is of a little girl who reveals (in Spanish) that her grandmother is from Jamaica, but she was born in Ciego de Avila. When asked how is her English, the little girl replies, "more or less. " Rolando then cuts to the dance group from earlier interludes singing West Indian songs on the beach and closes the film with this scene of all the people of Baragua dancing on the beach.

Although *My Footsteps in Baragua* is a compilation of interviews from a diverse group of subjects, the concept of intraracial solidarity is a common motif throughout the film. Rolando presents many views on one theme, whether it be language, food, or religion, to reveal the unity that exists despite the diversity of the responses. The united diversity of the town of Baragua is what lends it its unique flair, it is also by translation what lends the Cuban nation (in the face of socio-cultural upheaval) its uniqueness. Additionally, the representation of the united diversity of the people of Baragua, lends

itself to the re-imagination of Afro-Cuban identities and the question of what constitutes and how to measure Afro-Cubanness and *Afrocubanía*.

The town of Baragua retains a separate but unique concept of cubanía and *Afro-cubanía*. It is ever-changing and protean in nature as it is influenced by insight from past generations and prospects of future generations. Although many of the interviewees are 1st and 2nd generation Cubans, they each have built very different relations to Cuba and constructed complex understandings of cubanía as the lines between Afro-Cuban and British West Indian are blurred and have begun to bleed into one another with subsequent generations. And although this film is focused on one particular segment of society, it is not divisive. On the contrary, it is inclusive in many ways. *My Footsteps in Baragua* is not only about Cuba and Afro-Cubans, but in a larger context, concerns diaspora; the African diaspora.

Rolando does not necessarily resolve Afro-Cuban identities. But she does re-examine the popular narratives surrounding them, which leads to an involved re-invention and re-imagining of these subjectivities. In addition to re-inventing and re-imagining the internal view of Afro-Cuban identities, Rolando also expands the external perception of Afro-Cuban identity by presenting a film that is accessible to a broader audience who can familiarize themselves with another facet of Afro-Cuban identity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to answer two questions. First, how does Afro-Cuban artistic expression of Afro-Cuban reality change from the 1970s to the 1990s? and second, how can we reread works from Afro-Cuban writers and filmmakers within the context of the Cuban Revolution in light of the ideological disconnects between Revolution, racial discourse, and artistic expression? To answer these questions I looked to a diverse group of Afro-Cuban artists who produced groundbreaking works during the 1970s and 1990s.

The 1970s and 1990s were chosen specifically to frame this project on account of two critical events; the Padilla Affair of 1971 and the Special Period of the 1990s. The Padilla Affair called into question the incongruities between revolutionary discourse and artistic expression. Both periods are marked by critical interrogations of the relationships between the tenets of the Revolution, artistic expression and racial discourse. During the Special Period, the parameters of artistic and racial discourse were re-imagined and re-invented as Cuban national identity was renegotiated in the face of economic depression.

In the 50 years of the history of the Revolution, few dissertations have considered such a broad range of works over this large time period, and specifically Afro-Cuban narrative. This project deliberately moves chronologically from the early years of the revolution into the 1970s and finally into the 1990s; providing a unique perspective on the trajectory of Afro-Cuban cultural production and the development and varied manifestations of an Afro-Cuban aesthetic. Beginning with Nancy Morejón as an example of a well-known literary figure in Afro-Cuban arts, the dissertation delves deeper into the evolution of Afro-Cuban aesthetics with the cinematic works of Nicolas

Guillen Landrian in the 1960s, Sara Gómez and Sergio Giral in the 1970s and finally Gloria Rolando in the 1990s. These are all artists whose work has previously never been considered in concert, but together, their works engage in an interesting dialogue and provide a collective answer to the research questions on which this project is based.

Chapter one utilizes Nancy Morejón's 1975 poem, "Mujer Negra" as a point of entry into the exploration of interconnected themes of narrative, memory and racial identity formation. This poem is exemplary of an expert balancing of the often-contentious relationship between the discourses of revolution, race and art.

Chapter two deals with the works of documentary filmmaker Nicolas Guillen Landrian and Sara Gomez. Both of these artists skillfully employ contrapuntal discourses of identity politics during the years leading up to and immediately following the Padilla Affair of 1971; a time in which the limits of artistic expression were under debate.

Chapter three focuses in on the *negrometraje* trilogy of Sergio Giral produced in the 1970s. Within the films of this trilogy, Giral constructs a progressive and systematic deconstruction of the symbol of Caliban, via the figure of the slave, in order to posit a series of insightful alternative representations of and identificatory possibilities for the contemporary 1970s Afro-Cuban subject.

Finally, chapter four examines Afro-Cuban cultural praxis during the critical years of the Special Period and the 1990s. This chapter relies on the first two documentaries of Gloria Rolando and nuanced re-imagination of the concepts and manifestations of Afro-cubanía. She (re)approaches both the Santería orisha Oggún and black Caribbean immigration in a unique way, and crafts bold and unique pieces which

provide further insight into the prismatic and multi-dimensional aspects of the Afro-Cuban community.

The heavy reliance on film in this dissertation is a salient point to consider. The extensive focus on film aids in the expansion of the literary imagination, as well as broadens the idea of what constitutes narrative, as I am arguing via its use that film is an extension of literature. An expansion of the concepts of literary imagination and narrative not only influence the way we think about literature, but how we talk about it. The theoretical expansion of these concepts is crucial to the continued growth and development of literary discourse as consideration of alternative narratives provides a unique lens through which to examine seemingly disconnected discourses.

For these particular artists though, the consistent use of the genre of film to explore issues of race, artistic liberties and revolutionary constraints is interesting in and of itself. The relationship between the revolution and artists, in particular writers, was a complicated one. Writers who were supported and encouraged by the revolution (with the exception of Nicolas Guillen, who represented and continues to represent for many one literary figure who successfully forged a bridge between revolution and race in his literary works), typically belonged to an older and "whiter" group of artists, i.e. Alejo Carpentier, Jose Lezama Lima, and actively supported the revolution. In contrast, the younger and "blacker" artists, such as Nancy Morejón and others who participated in the El Puente movement and the Black Manifiesto Plot, who explored themes that did not align fully with the revolutionary agenda were dispersed and "rehabilitated". With the outlet of writing obscured, I would argue that Afro-Cuban artists turned to the genre of film, an extension of writing and literature as an alternative and viable means to express

their experiences and perceptions of Afro-Cuban reality in revolutionary Cuba. This is not to say that film was the only genre utilized by Afro-Cubans in this aesthetic project, as evidenced by the visual art of Wilfredo Lam, Jose Bedia, Manuel Mendive and others. The absence of a tangible and readily available store of literary narrative by Afro-Cubans during the years of the revolution that this dissertation covers is a point of supreme concern. Even in the works of artists who continued to write, such as Morejón, there is a gap in their production that one can not disregard, as well as a perceptible ideological shift in their work as the revolution progressed. Thus, it is clear, the political situation of Cuba had and continues to play a marked role in the question of Afro-Cuban aesthetics and cultural production.

From the late 1960s to the 1990s, there is a consistent trend among the artists explored in this project to engage, in concert, racial, artistic and revolutionary discourses, but to different ends. For Nancy Morejón, the engagement of these discourses is a means to promote a doubly compacted racial and gender-based agenda, similar to Sara Gomez. In contrast, Sergio Giral utilizes film to employ these discourses against the overarching theme of hegemony in order to examine alternative expressions and representations of Afro-Cuban identity in the 1970s. Finally, Gloria Rolando delves even deeper into Afro-Cuban reality by examining the role religion and immigration have played in the formation and re-imagination of Afro-Cuban identity in the 1990s.

It should be noted that while both Giral and Rolando approach Afro-Cuban identity and reality from an historical perspective, their works are very different. Giral focuses on the connection of Afro-Cubans to Africa in his *negrometraje* trilogy. Rolando touches on this connection in *Oggun: Eternal Presence*, but centers Africa in Cuba,

providing a transnational view of *Afrocubanía*. In *My Footsteps in Baragua*, Rolando expands her transnational view of *Afrocubanía* to include the West Indies and the English-speaking world. Rolando also moves away from Africa by inscribing black subjectivity into religion, while Giral's investigation of blackness remains strictly inscribed in 19th century history. These distinctions between foci are telling of the time periods in which their respective works were produced. Both Rolando and Giral take advantage of the circumstances of the critical socio-cultural events of the moment. For Giral, the development of the Padilla affair, provided an opportunity to revisit the Afro-Cuban perspective of slavery and simultaneously critique the 1970s situation. For Rolando, the Special Period, created an "apertura" that did not exist previously to discuss in-depth the connection of blackness and religion to cubanidad. But, although distinct, their projects both engage in an interesting dialogue across time and present alternative means for exploring *Afrocubanía*.

These particular artists (Morejón, Guillen Landrian, Gómez, Giral and Rolando) and their works were chosen for further investigation in this project because I believe that it is important to be open to and consider other forms of narrative. Alternative narratives provide different perspectives from which to analyze the official narratives and help to fill in the gaps of history. Individually, each artist interrogates a different perspective of Afro-Cuban reality. As a collective these artists deconstruct essentialist notions of the foundations of Afro-Cuban difference. In consideration of the broad picture of Cuban identity, the African diaspora and concepts of hegemony, the works investigated call into question the parameters of hegemony. In essence, these works can be classified as projects of revision, in that they explore difference to the end of emphasizing unity and

forging solidarity, not only within the Afro-Cuban community, but also within the Cuban community as a whole. They do so by taking centralizing themes, or points of Cuban solidarity and reconstructing and reshaping them through the articulation of revised memory (counter-memory) and the exploration of Afro-Cuban difference. In effect, they insert themselves into the role of architects of popular representations of Afro-Cuban subjectivity and culture.

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