PALARA

Fall 2019 • Issue 23

Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association

Special Issue: Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx Cinema

Publication of the Afro–Latin/American Research Association (*PALARA*)

The Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (PALARA), a multi-lingual journal devoted to African diaspora studies, is published annually by the University of Texas at Arlington Libraries and Mount Holyoke College. *PALARA* is multidisciplinary and publishes research and creativity relevant to diaspora studies in the Americas. Manuscripts should conform to the latest style manual of the *Modern Language Association* (MLA) or *Chicago Manual of Style* and may not exceed twenty-five pages in length. Effective November 1, 2017, all articles for review must be submitted through the open access system at *https://journals.tdl.org/palara/index.php/palara/index*. In order for your manuscript or book review to be considered for publication with *PALARA* in the fall, then that manuscript or book review must be submitted by July 1 of that same year. Book reviews should be 1500 words and follow MLA or Chicago Manual of Style. All correspondence regarding subscriptions as well as manuscripts for submission should be addressed to: Dr. Sonja S. Watson and Dr. Dorothy Mosby @ swatson1@uta.edu.

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Call for Essays *PALARA* 24 (Fall 2021)

The Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (PALARA) is a multi-disciplinary journal that publishes research and creative works relevant to African Diaspora Studies in the Americas. Currently, the journal is a partnership between the University of Texas at Arlington and Mount Holyoke College.

Publication Guidelines for PALARA:

1. Effective November 1, 2017, all articles for review must be submitted through the open access system at https://journals.tdl.org/palara/index.php/palara/index.

2. In order for your manuscript or book review to be considered for publication with PALARA in the fall, then that manuscript or book review must be submitted by July 1 of that same year.

3. Manuscripts must include an abstract of 100-200 words. The abstract should provide the major objectives, methods used, findings, and conclusions. The abstract should not include references or footnotes.

4. The minimum number of text pages for a manuscript is 18 and the maximum is 25. In addition, the manuscript should follow publication guidelines of the latest edition of the Modern Language Association (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)or Chicago Manual of Style (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/)

5. Use endnotes and not footnotes.

6. Book reviews should be 1500 words and follow MLA or Chicago style.

Editors' Note

Sonja Stephenson Watson • University of Texas at Arlington

Dorothy Mosby • Mount Holyoke

Welcome to the twenty-third issue of the *Publication of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association* (PALARA), a multi-disciplinary journal that publishes research and creative works relevant to African Diaspora Studies in the Americas. This issue is a double one comprised of articles on various themes on Afro-Latin American cultural and literary studies as well as a thematic issue on *Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx Cinema* hosted by guest editor Vanessa K. Valdés, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese and Director of the Black Studies Program at The City College of New York—CUNY.

The special issue of PALARA centers research on contemporary film in the Afro-Latin American Diaspora and explores black subjectivities from a cinematographic lens. The authors present film of the present and engage with past themes illustrating in some cases the advancement of the cinematic portrayal of blacks in Latin America/Hispanic Caribbean. In other instances, it conveys that more needs to be done. Most importantly, the authors shed light on films not typically analyzed and bring awareness and attention to new works in Mexico, Colombia, and Cuba.

The second issue of this volume comprises analyses of works primarily from the Southern Cone. Valérie Benoist's "Sister Ursula de Jesús' Equal Economy of Salvation" expands knowledge and narratives of seventeenth century nuns in Colonial Latin America through the analysis of the vidas (spiritual autobiographies) of the little known black Peruvian nun, Sister Ursula de Jesús. Benoit argues that Sister Ursula's *vida* "differs from more conventional ones by defining her blackness as an essential ingredient in the construction of her trope of suffering."

Alain Lawo-Sukam's "African Immigrants in Argentina Post-Slavery: An Old-New Odyssey" analyzes African immigration in Argentina by expanding it to include not only Sub-Saharan African immigration but also North African immigrants as well as those from South Africa. Lawo-Sukan's analysis is comprehensive and spans centuries of African immigration to a nation that has historically denied the presence of Afro-descendants.

The issue features two timely book reviews, one of a manuscript and the other of a collection of poetry. *Afro-Asian Connections in Latin America and the Caribbean*, edited by Luisa Marcela Ossa and Debbie Lee-DiStefano, brings to the forefront the little research that has been published on the Afro-Asian Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean. In her comprehensive review, Christine Lee notes that the co-edited volume "expands on current notions of mestizaje by focusing on the personal and communal bonds that were forged between subjects of African and Asian descent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards." The co-edited volume promises to be a current and future resource for those who desire to engage with the Spanish-speaking Afro-Asian Diaspora.

Warrick Lattibeaudaire's review of Dr. Paulette A. Ramsay's *Star Apple Blue and Avocado Green*, spotlights the poetry of the well-known African diaspora scholar. Filled with images of fruit and products of the Caribbean landscape as the title suggests, the poetic volume is populated with several female characters that highlight the experiences of women throughout the diaspora.

Finally, as we close the decade and look forward to next year, we would like to highlight an important upcoming milestone. ALARA (Afro-Latin/American Research Association) will celebrate its 25th anniversary in 2020 and this moment promises to be a special year as we recognize the work of the association's founders, namely Marvin A. Lewis and the late Laurence Prescott. *The Publication of the Afro/Latin American Research Association* was an important intellectual creation of the association and as we move into our twenty-third year of continuous publication we wish to honor this important legacy. The commemoration of the founding of ALARA will start with the Thirteenth Biennial International Interdisciplinary Research Conference that will be held August 4 – 8, 2020 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. This year's theme will be "Resilience, Climate Crisis, and Social Justice," which relates to the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the overwhelming strength displayed by Afro-descendant communities across the island. We look forward to great conversations and proud celebration of ALARA's twenty-five-year history.

The Editors

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Guest Editor: Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx Cinema

Vanessa K. Valdés • City University of New York—CUNY

I thank Sonja S. Watson and Dorothy Mosby for the invitation to serve as guest editor of *PALARA* 23 (Fall 2019). I received the invitation to work in this capacity as I was preparing to teach a class dedicated to Caribbean film; fairly certain that a cursory search would result in an abundance of scholarship dedicated to Cuban cinema, I decided instead to focus my course on films from the Dominican Republic. Given that I work in the same building as the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, the only repository of its kind outside of the island of Hispaniola, I thought it would be fairly easy to find work in this area. I was surprised, therefore, to learn that the nation's film industry has grown only in the last three decades, beginning with laws passed under the administrations of Leonel Fernández, from 1996 to 2000 and from 2004 to 2012. Tax incentives have spurred film production there in recent years, and yet scholarship about these films remains scant.

In the course of editing this issue, I came to understand the extent to which the analysis of Latin-American film particularly that which is focused on *afrodescendientes* in Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, remains rife with possibility as a specialty. I am excited to introduce the essays which make up this issue. First, Ebony Bailey and Talia Weltman-Cisneros provide a vibrant discussion of *La Negrada* (Mexico, 2018); with "Codings of Blackness in Mexican Cinema: An Analysis of *La Negrada*," Bailey argues that in spite of its attempt at valorization of the Afro-Mexican population, the film reproduces images of Blackness present in popular culture since the seventeenth century. In her essay "Cinematographic Landscapes of Blackness in Mexico: (Re) Framing Afro-Mexican Lives and Futures," Weltman-Cisneros contends that *La Negrada* (2018) and *Artemio* (2017) both offer alternate visions of Blackness within a Mexican context, presenting nuanced portrayals of a populace long-ignored by the Mexican state.

With "Black Agency and Aesthetic Innovation in Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco*," Philip Kaisary examines the first of Giral's trilogy of films focusing on enslavement in Cuba, the others being *Rancheador* (1976) and *Maluala* (1979). Released in 1975, Kaisary argues that this adaptation of Anselmo Suárez's nineteenth-century novel salvages Afro-Cuban autonomous efforts for liberation. Dawn Duke's "So What if She Can't Dance and Sing: A Testimony from the Afrohabanera" underscores how *Si me comprendieras*, a 1998 documentary about the lives of eight Afro-Cuban women, perhaps unwittingly repeats problematic renderings of women of African descent first made popular in *negrista* poetry of the early twentieth century while simultaneously making space for these women to serve as protagonists of the film.

Next, Ana Lucía Mosquera-Rosado examines governmental representations of Afro-Peruvians in "Marca Peru: Representations and Exclusions of the Afro-Descendant Population from the Official Narratives of the Peruvian Government." She asserts that Black Peruvians continue to disappear within depictions of *peruanidad* that emphasize its *mestizaje*. Sarah Ohmer's "Afro-Latin American Documentary Resistance from the Pacific Coast: How *Voces de Resistencia* (2017) Changes the Landscapes of Aesthetics, Academia/Community Collaboration, and Black Feminist Activism During the Colombian 'Peace Process'" maintains that this documentary centers Black women's agency in their efforts to survive continued threats of displacement. Finally, Amilcar Priestley details the history of the Liberación Film Festival with his "Cultural Heritage and Citizenship: Curating the First Afrolatino Film Festival in the US." Taken together, these scholars give us a fascinating glimpse at the current state of cinematic representations of peoples of African descent in Latin America. In smaller markets, it appears that documentary and films that incorporate documentary techniques are the genre of choice; one wonders at what point narrative film with fully-developed Black protagonists will be a viable cinematic option in the Americas.

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Codings of Blackness in Mexican Cinema: An Analysis of *La Negrada*

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Abstract

In a country whose national identity revolves around the idea of *mestizaje*, Blackness has been omitted from official discourses surrounding *mexicanidad*. As a result, Afro populations in Mexico have been subjected to codings that render them invisible, otherized and inferior. This paper analyzes the codings of Blackness in Mexico as reflected in the space of art and cinema, specifically the film *La Negrada*, the first feature fiction film to introduce an all Afro-Mexican cast. On one hand, there is an attempt to reclaim and make visible Mexico's African roots. On the other, the film also walks the line of reproducing a colonial vision of Blackness in Mexico that has existed throughout history. I apply Joaquin Barriendos' concept of "coloniality of seeing" to analyze historical representations of Blackness in Mexican cinema, and to analyze *La Negrada* in relation to those films.

La Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero is a region in Mexico with the country's largest concentration of African-descendants. The first time I traveled there, I did so in an act of soul-searching. As a *Blaxican* woman born in the United States, I wanted to visit the place that represented the ultimate affirmation of my identity. As a filmmaker, I had hoped that my visit would give me some inspiration for a new project on Afro-Mexican identity.

During that visit, a woman in the *mercado* asked me what I was doing in La Costa Chica. I told her I was looking for ideas for a new documentary. She replied in a tired, "*Otro* documental?" Clearly, I was not the first one who would embark on this mission to document this woman's home. Her comment caused me to reflect on my place there. I thought about the colonial implications of documentary filmmaking. Though I did feel a shared identity with this community, I was still from the United States, an outsider. What were my intentions for filming this community? How would I represent this community differently from the documentarians and ethnographers before me?

In cinema, Blackness in Mexico has been represented as an exotic spectacle. In the mid-20th century, Mexican films that addressed Blackness painted Black people as foreign and problematic, using techniques such as blackface and the "tragic mulatto" narrative. The contemporary film *La Negrada*, filmed in La Costa Chica with an all Afro-Mexican cast, attempts to counter this. As a fiction film with the intentions of a documentary, it positions itself as a champion for Afro-Mexican visibility. However, this aspiration for visibility does not absolve the film from representing Blackness through a colonial gaze.

Coloniality of Seeing, el mestizaje and the Erasure of Blackness

Defining Coloniality

Coloniality is a residual legacy of colonialism, referring to the "modos de conocer, de producir conocimiento, de producir perspectivas, imágenes y sistemas de imágenes, símbolos [y] medios de significación" (Quijano 12). Quijano describes coloniality as a consequence of colonialism, "el modo más general de dominación en el mundo actual" (14). Coloniality can be considered a "technology of power" in the foucauldian sense, a device that functions in modes of power and knowledge. As Santiago Castro points out, "la colonialidad de poder debe ser vista como una tecnología de racialización de los cuerpos" (91). "Race" is not a biological category of humanity; rather, it is a tool that functions as a "technology" to hierarchize human bodies according to the tone of their skin. This hierarchy is what Walter Mignolo and Pedro Pablo Gómez call "la herida colonial" and it influences

"los sentidos, las emociones, el intelecto" (6). Furthermore, colonality in history has worked to take away the determination of colonized populations. In discussing the case of Africa, Quijano states that European colonization stripped away the "reconocimiento en el orden cultural mundial dominado por los patrones europeos. Fueron encerrados en la categoría de 'exóticos'" (13). This "exotic" category has been brought upon Africans and the diaspora throughout history. Mignolo and Gómez elaborate on coloniality´s effects on colonized populations:

> Se quiere decir que los europeos tienen la confianza de afirmarse en sus propios valores, mientras que en América del Sur, Central y el Caribe (como en otras regiones del mundo no-europeo), se suele no tener las agallas para afirmarse en sus (o en nuestras) propias tradiciones, y estar más seguros si nos apoyamos (como si camináramos con bastón) en algún nombre europeo (y actualmente en algunos nombres, bien sean norteamericanos o que laboran en Norteamérica), que nos asegure que pisamos terreno firme. (Mignolo and Gómez 10)

In essence, coloniality is a series of modes of thinking, knowing, representing and seeing that operates under a structure of power that maintains the hierarchy of racial difference. In the realm of cinema, we can observe how coloniality works through modes of seeing and representing that interact with our knowledge and thoughts on racialized people.

Coloniality of Seeing

Coloniality of seeing is a concept developed by Joaquín Barriendos that builds upon Quijano's concept of coloniality and expands it into the realm of visuality. The author describes coloniality of seeing as "los procesos de inferiorización racial y epistémica que han caracterizado a los diferentes regímenes visuales de la modernidad/colonialidad" (Barriendos 14). It refers to the visual structures of racial oppression, objectification and exotification — the invisible images and gazes that occupy our everyday spaces. In Latin America, an historic example of coloniality of seeing are the casta paintings, images from the 17th and 18th centuries that categorized bodies according to their "races." These illustrations ranged from "pure-blood" Spanish to "half-blood" *mulatos* (Black with Spanish) and *mestizos* (Spanish with Indigenous), among many other categories. The paintings operated to execute and preserve racial barriers in the colonial era and also illustrated how the contamination of Black blood lowered one's status in the racial heirarchy.[1]

Barriendos mentions that in the colonial era, the colonial gaze helped to cultivate the racialized visions of the transatlantic slave trade and economic exploitation of Indigenous people (18). In the twentieth century, cinema has become a structure under which the coloniality of seeing operates. Through ethnographic cinema, this colonial gaze materializes itself through a series of manipulated images and sounds. Fatimah Tobing Rony writes about the role of cinema as an institutional structure that shapes our perceptions of racialized populations. "Cinema has been a primary means through which race and gender are visualized as natural categories" (9). Many early films that are praised for their cinemagraphic innovation — such as *Nanook of the North* and *Birth of a Nation* — have worked to inferiorize and otherize racialized populations. In Mexico, the Afro-Mexican communities documented in La Costa Chica are constantly subject to this colonial gaze. The country's colorblind notion of racial harmony, *el mestizaje*, has had an impact on the way Black and Indigenous populations are represented.

Coloniality in the Mexican Context

Coloniality in Mexico is rendered through *mestizaje* — a national ideology that inferiorizes and invisibilizes human bodies according to the color of their skin. *Mestizaje* describes the majority of "mixed" Mexicans, thus becoming a national identity for Mexico and a fundamental pillar of *mexicanidad*. In the colonial era, "mestizo" belonged to the casta category that described one as Indigenous and Spanish. One hundred years later, after the Mexican Revolution, the term "mestizo" was readapted to form this ideology of *mestizaje*, highlighted in *La Raza Cósmica* by author and educator José Vasconcelos. His text points out the "mixing" of the different racial categories in the "New World." Under this thesis, it is the destiny of Latin America to achieve this "ethnic mission" that will carry society towards modernity (Vasconcelos 10):

> Su predestinación, obedece al designio de constituir la cuna de una raza quinta en la que se fundirán todos los pueblos, para reemplazar a las cuatro que aisladamente han venido forjando la Historia. En el suelo de América hallará término la dispersión, allí se consumará la unidad por el triunfo del amor fecundo, y la superación de todas las estirpes. (Vasconcelos 15)

This vasconcilian idea of *mestizaje* is representative of colonality because it attempts to paint the concept of mestizo as a colorblind racial fusion. However, *mestizaje* was still founded on modes of knowing, seeing and representing that privileges whiteness, inferiorizes Indigeneity and silences Blackness. It does this in a few ways: first, in his discussion and use of terms like "fusion," "ethnic mission" and even "cosmic," Vasconcelos romanticizes the history of sexual violence in Latin America, choosing instead to focus on these notions of racial fusion and ethnic harmony. Yet, this fusion is not equal, as Vasconcelos implies in his text that whiteness has the most value in this creation of a cosmic race. He describes the white man as having a "clear mind" and makes declarations such as "quizás entre todos

los caracteres de la quinta raza predominan los caracteres del blanco" and "aceptamos los ideales superiores del blanco" (Vasconcelos 23). In various parts of the text, the author glorifies the triumphs of the white man, such as his capacity to transform nature into industrialization or his contributions to science. And while Vasconcelos gives more value to whiteness, he rarely mentions Blackness in his text. When he does, it is in such a way that essentializes and makes Blackness exotic. For example, when discussing the role of Blackness in the cosmic mission, he describes Black people as "ávido de dicha sensual, ebrio de danzas y desenfrenadas lujurias" (Vasconcelos 19). What we understand as *mestizaje* today is a strategy of white supremacy: the Vasconcilian narrative of *mestizaje* continues with racial and colonial hierarchies, while at the same time operating under the myth of colorblindness. Under this myth, Afro-Mexicans are erased and displaced.

This adopted "mestizo" identity at the time extended itself into the arts, including cinema. In the mid 20th century, the film industry in Mexico boomed as a consequence of the lack of North American films due to World War II. This period was marked as the Golden Age of Mexican cinema[2]. Films from this era often took on nationalistic themes. Genres ranged from comedies, dramas, and musicals, with *Rumbera* films being quite popular. I will focus on films that dealt with Blackness during the end of the Golden Age and the years that followed it.

Representations of Blackness in the Golden Age

Representations of Blackness in Mexican cinema have been few and far between — movies from the Golden Age that were about race often linked Blackness in Mexico with foreigners, primarily from the Caribbean. As Roberto Ortiz points out, Black actors often acted in music pieces such as urban and tropical cabarets. "There is a racial division of labor in these musical numbers – the dancing bodies of light-skinned women who photograph white are usually at the forefront, privileged by the camera" (Ortiz 7). When Black characters had protagonistic roles, they were usually stereotypes. We see the *Mammy* trope portrayed in *Angelitos Negros*, *El Derecho de Nacer*, and other movies. Despite the presence of some Black actors in this film, we still see an excessive use of blackface. We see actors in blackface in "anti-racist" films such as *Angelitos Negros* (1948) and *Negro es mi color* (1951). It can be argued that the use of blackface in these films is harmless because Mexico does not have the same history of racism as the United States, but Latin America has its own history of racial parody. What role does racial parody play in films that are supposedly anti-racist?

Blackface became known primarily through the minstrel shows in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century, but its tradition in Latin America also has a long and nuanced history. Nineteenth-century Cuba saw the birth of the *teatros bufos*, a genre of comedy that often mocked Black people in Cuba through the use of blackface. Francisco Covarrubias was considered the "father" of *teatro bufo* and debuted the first character in blackface in 1812 as part of a stage play, thirty years before the first formal U.S. minstrel show (Moore 29). The caricatures of blackface in *teatro bufo* took many different forms, but some popular figures are *el negro bozal* and *el negro categrático*. *El negro bozal* was a recently arrived African who was made fun of for his primitiveness and broken Spanish. *El negro caterático* was the "upper class" Black man who was ridiculed for living his life as white. "The *catedrático* represented an aspiring social climber who nevertheless fell short of integration into white society" (Moore 36). In Colombia, we see another manifestation of racial parody through *La Negrita Puloy*, a burlesque figure who is associated with both objective sexuality and white servitude. At the Carnaval de Barranquilla, women paint themselves darker and dress in red polka dots to become *La Negrita Puloy*, who is now a feminine symbol of the carnival. She is folklorized as a source of Afro pride under this myth of racial harmony; meanwhile, racial inequality in Colombia thrives, as Afro-Colombians and Indigenous people are among the most socio-economically marginalized groups in the country.

Danielle M. Roper calls the use of blackface in North America, South America, and the Caribbean "hemispheric blackface," as each region shares traditions of racial parody. Her theory decenters U.S. blackface and suggests that regional parodies of blackface "belong to global economies of representation" (Roper 1). Roper points out that hemispheric blackface in Latin America depends on the colorblind discourse of racial harmony (e.g. *el mestizaje*) to justify its parodies. "Hemispheric blackface is a form of regional parody that fuses aspects of blackface from the minstrel shows of the US with traditions of racial parody in Latin America" (Roper 6). Roper calls this form of racial parody "hemispheric" to imply that racial impersonation in Latin America and the Carribean belong to larger iconographies of global representation, and are not unique or specific to any individual nation-state (Roper 6).

To illustrate the concept of hemispheric blackface in her dissertation, Roper uses the example of *Memín Pinguín*, a popular Afro-Mexican comic book character (1). In 2005, Memín received protest in the United States after postage stamps came out in its image. The Mexican population responded with defense, declaring Memín as a symbol of national pride. I attribute this defense from the Mexican public to the colorblind discourse of *mestizaje*. Mexican author Carlos Monsiváis wrote in *El Universal* that the U.S. reaction to Memín was due to "la gana de transferir el racismo propio a la sociedad ajena" (par. 17). While he is right in the sense that each country has its own context in the codification and construction of racialized bodies, it is also valid to consider that Memín is an importation of those racist imaginaries and codifications of Blackness from

around the hemisphere. Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas elaborates on this, stating that Memín Pinguín reproduces U.S. stereotypes of the Sambo[3] and the Mammy:

> La imagen del negro en Memín Pinguín deshumaniza al negro mexicano y lo despoja de su historia. Al igual que las violentas imágenes del "picaninny" o Sambo intentan minimizar el sufrimiento del negro en los Estados Unidos de América, Memín trivializa la experiencia del negro en México. La caricatura de Memín (un Sambo o picaninny) y la de su madre Eufrosina (una Mammy) son réplicas de personajes estadounidenses de la época de Jim Crow. (55)

Memín exemplifies hemispheric blackface by continuing the traditions of racial parody in Latin America, influenced by other racial representations on this side of the world. His image is actually inspired by Afro-Cuban children that creator Yolanda Vargas Dulché saw during her travels. Even if the blackface of Memín didn't have harmful intentions, it nevertheless codifies a certain image of Black people and contributes to the inferiorization of Black bodies.

Like in Memín, the use of Blackface in *Angelitos negros* and *Negro es mi color* also represents an importation of codifications and stereotypes of Blackness. Afro-Cuban actress Rita Montaner, who stars in both films, is quite literally portrayed as the Mammy in *Angelitos negros* — she is an older, dark-skinned and overweight woman who lives to care for a white family. In *Negro es mi Color*, the actress is not quite a Mammy, but her darkened skin is associated with stereotypical codifications of Blackness -- poverty, ugliness, etc. In "Performing Blackness in Mexican Cinema," Roberto Ortiz points out a contrast in Montaner's roles as "tragic" Black women in these two films versus her musical performances in other Mexican films, such as *Ritmos del Caribe*. When cast as a poor woman, her skin is darkened, but when playing a singer or dancer, her skin is left in its natural, light state. In this case, blackface is used as a tool to associate Blackness and darkening with undesirability, poverty, and ugliness.

Angelitos negros is perhaps the most known Mexican film of its time that addresses themes of Blackness. All of the "Black" characters featured in the film are actually in blackface, with the exception of Chimmy Monterrey, who plays the best friend of protagonist José Carlos. He is a character capable of enduring open discrimination, without complaint. On one occasion, José Carlos, played by Pedro Infante, dresses up in Blackface in a peculiar act of solidarity, but in doing so, he instrumentalizes it as a tool for exotic fetishism. While performing in Blackface with his ensemble of dancers (who are also in Blackface), it is hard not to think of the U.S. minstrel shows of the 19th century. The presence of Blackface is so abundant that it contradicts the anti-racist message this film is trying to convey. As Theresa Delgadillo points out, "the role of blackace in this film is the reverse in its function…blackface represents the desire to absorb blackness into the Latin American ideal of the *mestizaje*" (415). The blackface used in this film continues a tired narrative in Latin America that invisibilizes and silences Blackness. Blackness is reduced to a performance for the enjoyment of white and mestizo audiences. In analyzing the presence of blackface in *Angelitos negros*, B. Christine Arce calls upon Saidiya Hartman's theorization of the role of melodrama and minstrelsy for white audiences in the United States. Arce says that blackface "abstracts the very material nature of blackness," separating the body from the person and the "person from the reality of the social conditions that surround them" (209). Arce also notes:

> Blackface becomes a "vehicle" for white self-exploration; it stops being about black people at all, and is more about creating a space for white self-reflection…In his minstrelsy, José Carlos performs the very commodification of blackness that the film is trying to critique, but in this case, instead of providing a safe haven for white reflection, it transforms it into an ironic place for mestizo reflection. (209)

Often times, the narratives of these racial "tragedy" films often paint Blackness as just that, a tragedy. They usually involve a mixed heritage character who has overtly racist views towards Black people throughout the movie, but comes around to being sympathetic at the end. Mixed heritage becomes a plotline. Hernández Cuevas and Richard Jackson point out that this is the "tragic mulatto" stereotype; the "mulatto" character faces an issue for not fitting completely into the "white world" (81). This is specifically the case for Luna in *Negro es mi color* — she is a light-skinned woman with a Black mother, ungrateful for her African heritage and with a steady desire to enter the white world. While Luna has known all her life of her mixed heritage, in other movies such as *Angelitos negros* or *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*, the tragic mulatto character has their heritage revealed to them. Ana Luisa in *Angelitos negros* despises everything Black — she won't even accept her Black daughter — and is unaware of her mixed heritage for most of the movie. She doesn't develop sympathy towards Black people until her Black caregiver, Mercé, finally reveals to her on her deathbed that she is in fact Ana Luisa's mother. In *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*, Thomás is revealed to have a Black father as part of a tactic to break him up from his girlfriend. When the reveal happens, it provokes histeria and tears, once again demonstrating Blackness as an obstacle. Although Thomás does not represent the tragic mulatto in the traditional sense that he does not openly disdain Black people, his reveal proves to ruin lives and the ending of the movie becomes a "tragedy," provoked by this obstacle in his and Beatriz's relationship.

It is also interesting to note the way Blackness is treated in the dialogue of these films. Luna's mom says to her in

Negro es mi color, "llevas a las venas sangre mezclada y puede volver atrás" — reminiscent of the "Salta pa' Tras" casta from the colonial era. In *Dios sabrá juzgarnos*, Thomas's father tells him, "los negros manchamos hasta nuestros propios hijos." In *Angelitos negros* (1948), Mercé hardly challenges Ana-Luisa's treatment of her, although she raised her. On the contrary, Mercé seems highly troubled throughout the movie by this secret burden she has left with Ana Luisa, even crying when she sees that Ana Luisa's baby is Black. There is a lack of agency in the Black characters of these films -- they internalize the shame that the tragic mulatto characters (and society in general) have imposed upon them. Their lives revolve around whiteness.

So even if these movies tried to give "anti-racist" messages, coloniality still worked to portray subordinate images of Black people: the Mammy, the burden, the "tragedy." Blackface is used to characterize and reinforce this imaginary of Black people, and the dialogues among the characters take away the agency of the Black characters.

The Coloniality of Ethnographic Film: *La Negrada*

This history of Black representations in Mexican cinema leads us to reflect on a more contemporary piece: *La Negrada* de Jorge Pérez Solano. Filmed in La Costa Chica de Guerrero y Oaxaca, *La Negrada* is the first feature-length fiction film with an all Afro-Mexican cast of local, non-professional actors. Its Black actors are not foreigners like in many films of the mid 20th century. There is no use of Blackface and no narrative involving the "tragic mulatto." In this sense, the film can be seen as a milestone, as it does not depend on tired tropes to construct a narrative about Blackness in Mexico. However, the absence of these tropes does not relieve the film of veering into coloniality. The coloniality in *La Negrada* is reflected in the way the film treats the Afro-Mexican population as an ethnographic study. The film itself is based on *Cuijla*: *esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro* by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, an ethnographic account written in 1958 of the Afro-Mexican population. Aguirre Beltrán was a Mexican anthropologist whose work is some of the earliest anthropological accounts on the African presence in Mexico. Although lauded for bringing visibility to Afro-Mexicans, Beltrán also works in attempt to place Blackness in Mexico under the myth of *mestizaje*. In his text, *La población negra de México*. *Estudio etnohistórico*, he writes:

> Extraño constatar que en todos los casos en que se habla de mestizaje en México, sus autores hacen exclusiva referencia a la mezcla de la población dominante con la americana vencida. Nadie se cuida de considerar la parte que toca a los negros en la integración de una cultura en México (Aguirre Beltrán 9).

He critiques *mestizaje* for its exclusion of Black people, but does not interrogate the concept as a representation of racial hierarchy. In fact, he seems to defend *mestizaje* in his text, calling it "la base biológica de la nacionalidad mexicana" (153). In calling for the integration of Blackness in Mexico, he does so in hopes of absorbing Blackness within this realm of cosmic mixing that is *mestizaje*. Under this ethnography, Blackness is not its own entity — it is a sector that is blurred within this imaginary of racial harmony. But even within this "harmony," Blackness holds a position of inferiority in the color spectrum. As Richard L. Jackson points out, "racial blending does not necessarily mean an absence of racial prejudice" (4). He adds that within *mestizaje*, those who possess more African features will be subject to more descrimination and aesthetic prejudice (Jackson 6).

Indeed, *La Negrada* manifests itself as a visual representation of these early ethnographic efforts of Afro-Mexican visibility. In characterizing *La Negrada* as an ethnographic film, I employ Fatimah Tobing Rony's understanding of the term. She describes ethnographic cinema as a matrix of films that racializes Indigenous peoples and situates them in a "displaced temporal realm" (Rony 8). *La Negrada* is a visual callback to earlier anthropological projects on Afro-Mexicans — a desire to absorb Blackness into the *mestizaje* project rather than represent them as a *pueblo* with its own self-determination.

The coloniality of the director's intentions with this film is evidenced in his comments about Afro-Mexicans in an interview in the Mexican newspaper, *La Jornada*:

> El tono de piel que utilizo en la película no llega a lo totalmente negro que yo hubiera querido. Me dijeron que si me metía más iba a encontrar más negros, pero son más salvajes. Igual lo hago la próxima vez, allá se les llama azules o rojos, porque a cierta hora del día parece que desprenden un haz con esos tonos; bien bonito. Pero, o eran muy tímidos o muy salvajes, o no querían ni que me les acercara o me decían que les daba pena. (Pérez Solano)

In referring to Black Mexicans as "savage," the director mimics the rhetoric of early anthropological studies on racialized populations. Under this perspective, Black Mexicans are "savages" that need to be civilized under the project of *mestizaje*. He speaks about Blackness as a prop, a device to be used to advance his narrative. In this sense, we can assume that the historical constructions of Blackness in Mexico — the exclusion of Afro heritage in the "official" history, the representations of Blackness in the Golden Age movies — have had an impact on the way the director views Afro-Mexicans. His understanding of Blackness in Mexico is based on an exoticization of dark skin tones. Fatimah Tobing Rony touches on how this exoticization works in ethnographic film:

> The people depicted in an "ethnographic film" are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only recently were categorized by science as Savage or Primitive, of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives. (Tobing Rony 6)

While Afro-Mexicans are not explicitly called "savage" in *La Negrada*, it is through this lens of viewing them as "savage" and "exotic" that the director constructs his film. *La Negrada* clings to the narrative that Mexicans of African descent do not have their own history. Even in its promotional materials, the film treats Blackness in Mexico as an exotic spectacle. "There are Mexicans that nobody sees" is a key phrase that we see both in the trailer and the movie poster.

The film tells the story of Neri, a *queridato* who has a wife, Juana, and a *querida*, Magdalena. In the film, Neri is seen going back and forth between his lives with the two women, assisting with Magdalena's restaurant business and tending to the health of Juana, who is terminally ill. This causes Magdalena to be left wondering what will happen with her relationship with Neri once his wife dies. Between these plotlines, we see shots of common places and activities in La Costa Chica — women making and selling fish in the open air, people traveling in the transportation terminal of Pinotepa Nacional, the local beach and laguna in Corraleros. Before every chapter, an older man recites a verse, typical for the region, to advance the overall narrative of the film. We see this type of verse reciting in two other scenes: one in which Magdalena's mother reminds her of a verse that was recited to her as a child, and another scene in which a group of women each recite a verse at a table in Magdalena's and the other mother's restaurant. These scenes give homage to the history of oral tradition in Afro-Mexican communities. *Corridos* about love, violent deeds, the coastal landscape and other themes have traditionally accompanied the Artesa and Chilena dances of the regions. In turn, "the corrido became an expressive mechanism for narrating the history of the Afro-Mexican residents of the Costa Chica" (González 26).

These particularities of La Costa Chica are meant to give ethnographic glimpses to the viewer, images that show how life is in the region. I can see how these mesmerizing shots can be nostalgic for someone who is from or has been to La Costa Chica, but they also attempt to fit several different social and cultural aspects of La Costa Chica into one single movie. This film's attempt to capture the entirety of La Costa Chica leaves little room for a more-developed story arc and characters. As a result, the narrative in *La Negrada* falls somewhere between wanting to be a romantic drama and an ethnographic portrait of La Costa Chica. The Black characters in the film are stripped of their own agency and remain on a superficial level of an ethnographic study. We see this from the production, to the development of the plot and characters, to the attempts of visualizing the Afro-Mexican struggle.

As mentioned before, *La Negrada* was filmed with an entire cast of non-professional actors, all local of La Costa Chica. But the participation from the community stops there. This differs from other examples of documentaries in which the director is not from the community they document. In filming French West Africa, French film director Jean Rouch engaged community members in the cinematography, script writing and other production duties, which Fatimah Tobing Rony describes as "an effort to get beyond scientific voyeurism" (8). By contrast, *La Negrada* was not made with behind-the-scenes collaboration with the community that it represented. The director mentions in an interview with *El Oriente* that he did not know a single soul when arriving to La Costa Chica. Through contacting organizations, he was able to know more about the region and host a casting for local community members, but the actors of the film played little role in the production and narrative side of the film. A more collaborative approach would have allowed in some ways for the community to tell its own story, giving more agency back to the Afro-Mexican population.

A collaborative approach would also have possibly allowed for a more nuanced interpretation of *el queridato*. The *queridato* is an arrangement in La Costa Chica that involves domestic relationships outside of the traditional institution of marriage. Gabriel Medina Carrasco suggests that the *queridato* may have come from a dissidance of racialized populations to seek relationships outside of the ones imposed by the Catholic church during the colonial era: "Sería posible suponer que las comunidades de la Costa Chica poseen arreglos en el plano de la vida sexual y del matrimonio" (155).

In *La Negrada*, as mentioned before, Neri is the *queridato* and Juana and Magdalena are his wife and *querida*, respectively. The women are aware of each other and their arrangement seems to be generally accepted. In *El Oriente*, the director describes the *queridato* as "algo que sucede en todo país de manera velada, solo que en la costa es de manera abierta" (Pérez Solano). Here, he compares the *queridato* to Western standards of matrimony. In his eyes, the *queridato* is just an open form of adultery, rather than a socially recognized institution. In the film, the *querdato* is constructed from the man's experience. The women's lives revolve around their relationship with this man, which is implied by their unity through the *tono*. *El tono* is a traditional concept in Afro-Mexico that involves a spiritual relationship between humans and animals. When an individual human is born, they are taken to a hill and left there for an animal to greet them. Once an animal arrives and interacts with the child, that animal is designated the child's *tono*. From then on, the human and the animal share a common destiny. Your *tono* is your animal "alter ego," representative of your physical and spiritual resistance (Lupo 17). "*El tono*/*tonal*,

which, in conjunction with the body and soul, is believed to be a fundamental part of the existence of each human being" (Weltman-Cisneros 143). The human-*tono* relationship is one that reminds us that humans and animals must exist in mutuality with nature in order for us all to survive (Weltman-Cisneros 144).

It is said that when a person's *tono* dies, they pass away along with it. *La Negrada* plays with this, as Magdalena wonders what will happen to her status as querida when Juana passes away. When Magdalena was born, her family took her to the mountain and waited for her *tono* to arrive. Instead, a young Juana greeted Magdalena. This encounter confirms that the women share a common destiny. It is not clear that a specific animal is their *tono* — it is implied that their common destiny is Neri. While the idea of inserting this aspect of Afro-Mexican spiritually in the film seems like a good concept, the execution is weak, as it uses the spirituality as a narrative device in the arc of this romantic drama.

Although the arrangement of the *queridato* involves control and regulation over a woman's sexuality, Gabriel Medina Carrasco provides some understanding of the *queridato* from the experience of *la querida*:

> "El 'queridato' provee a la "querida" un mayor estatus social debido a su autonomía económica, en cambio la esposa depende de la economía de su pareja. En el "queridato"...la mujer no está expuesta al escarnio público sobre su virginidad, ni debe someter su cuerpo al humillante ritual de comprobación y reconocimiento social de tal condición" (156).

This type of autonomy by part of Magdalena is not explicitly expressed in the film, though it could be interpreted as such by some viewers. After Juana passes away toward the end of the film, Magdalena asks Neri if he is going to live with her now. The viewer is left to assume that Magdalena desires that prestige status of marriage.

The film also interprets the *queridato* with the assumption that this arrangement of privileged masculinity is justified by the community, without question from its members. Indeed, the *queridato* is a social institution, but it does not come without critique. In my third trip to La Costa Chica, at a forum for issues of Afro-Mexican women in Collantes, the *queridato* arrangement was discussed by women from the community. Afro-Mexican activist Julia Acevedo stated, "Tenemos que cuestionar la existencia del querido... si tuviéramos queridata, tal vez sería otra historia." The various forms in which Afro-Mexicans construct and reflect on their own communities — the forms in which they express their self-determination — is absent in the film.

Additionally, we see some instances where whiteness seems to be a desired trait in the characters, for example when Sara dyes her hair blonde or when her sister steals her blonde highlights. In other instances, characters distance themselves from Blackness. In a scene in front of Magdalena's restaurant, two African-Americans are seen ordering food (we assume they are American because they order in English), one of Magdalena's sons makes a joke about them, saying "ese parece chocolate se puede derretir por el calor". The scene seems irrelevant to the rest of the plotline, and leads the viewer to interpret that Afro-Mexicans do not want to be Black.

The film also employs codified stereotypes about Black Mexicans. Magdalena's daughter seems uninterested in anything that is not dancing and flirting, to a point where people make fun of her for being "just like her dad," reinforcing the stereotype of "la Negra caliente." Neri is painted as "el Negro flojo" throughout the film, half-completing tasks and scolded by the women in his life for doing so. Certainly, it is human to be flirtatious or to feel lazy, but the film does not develop these traits of the characters in the context of nuance. Rather, these traits are developed from what the producers understand as characteristics of Blackness.

La Negrada does attempt to give a glimpse of the treatment and discrimination towards Afro-Mexicans, but without giving much agency back to the Afro-Mexican population. White Mexican tourists are shown taking pictures of the characters, without much question or resistance from the characters themselves. This lack of agency is especially evidenced in the scene where Sara is racially profiled and asked to sing the national anthem by a migration officer because she does not "look" Mexican, which is a real and common occurrence for darker-skinned Mexicans. She obliges, singing the anthem word for word. The agency she has to challenge the officer is taken from her and she gives in to the powers of the State. The scene is a moment that demonstrates the film's desire to absorb Blackness into the State-sponsored idea of *mestizaje*. Black Mexicans are Mexicans, above all, and singing the national anthem is the ultimate expression of their *mexicanidad*. But this type of submission to patronage is not characteristic of all Afro-Mexicans. In the short documentary, *Así Somos: Afro Identities on the Coast* by Andy Amaya, an Afro-Mexican man recounts a similar story of being stopped by migration and asked to sign the national anthem. However, unlike Sara in *La Negrada*, this man challenges the officer in a sarcastic remark, asking him "¿Cómo lo quieres? ¿Platicado? ¿Cantado?" This is the type of gesture that gives agency back to Black people, and the director's decision to share this testimony in the film is powerful.

The struggle for visibility within the Afro-Mexican community is addressed once in the film, when a young girl is shown handing out flyers for a forum that discusses the fight for Afro-Mexican recognition in the national constitution. Afro-Mexicans have been campaigning to be recognized in the constitution for decades, and this is something that could have been developed more throughout the film. Because of this underdevelopment, the flyer scene feels a bit

forced, done by the director from a place that feels more like obligation rather than motive. The fight for visibility takes many forms in the Afro-Mexican population. With more development on this front, the film could have integrated these diverse forms of *lucha* as a natural organic part of the film, further capturing the nuances of the Afro-Mexican experience.

Conclusion

Mexico's construction of *mestizaje* as a national identity has impacted the way Blackness is represented in the structures of visuality. Coloniality has operated to represent Blackness in some of the most common spaces in Mexico, such as comics, music and cinema. These references in popular culture have aided in rendering Blackness in Mexico as something invisible yet problematic. In the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, films represented codings of Blackness through blackface, the "tragic mulatto" and dialogues that took away from the agency of the Black characters. *La Negrada*, on the other hand, does not use blackface or the tragic mulatto to construct a narrative on Blackness in Mexico. However, the coloniality in *La Negrada* exists in more subtle ways, primarily in its role as an ethnographic film. In analyzing the film and looking at the ways it interprets different aspects of *afromexicanidad*, we can propose strategies in film that aim for emancipation from the colonial gaze.

NOTES

1. The casta "Salta pa' tras," translated to mean "a step back" was used to categorize people with Black and Indigenous blood.

2. The Golden Age, or La Época de Oro de cine, is commonly said to have spanned from the mid 1930s to the early 1960s.

3. The term Sambo actually comes from *zambo*, a Spanish casta that described people with mixed Black and Indigenous heritage)

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Cinematographic Landscapes of Blackness in Mexico: (Re)Framing Afro-Mexican Lives & Futures

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Abstract

The legacy of historical invisibility and socio-cultural marginalization and rejection have marred contemporary Afro-Mexican lives, silencing their stories, customs, traditions, and cosmologies, while also denying them a sense of belonging and place within the visions of the present and futures of Mexican landscapes. Mexican films have often echoed this estranged relationship between blackness and *Mexicanidad*, portraying black characters as stereotyped figures who have most often been marked as exotic, primitive, and alien or anachronic in Mexico. However, these subaltern imaginaries of blackness and of *Afro-Mexicanidad* are challenged in the recent films *La negrada* (2018) and *Artemio* (2017). This article reflects on these films' critique of Afro-Mexican real-life and cinematic inequality and subalternity through the lens of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts, which I suggest offer counter-futures of black lives and foreground black protagonists as individuals and communities who can now "see their own" and stand as stakeholders in Mexico's present and future.

Saudi Arabia's selection of the film *Black Panther* to be the first movie screened after the country's 35-year cinema ban marked a significant shift and renewed engagement with Afrofuturism. While this literary and musical movement is by no means new in its interrogation of cultural spaces as a means of highlighting and challenging the absence of black identity in the portrayal of futuristic landscapes (Mark Dery pointed his interrogation to the sphere of science fiction when he coined the term in his seminal essay "Black to the Future" in 1993), myriad cultural critics, scholars, and media outlets are now pointing to the current global success of *Black Panther* as a blockbuster-size reflection of the renaissance of Afrofuturism and the exploration and visualization of black identity, culture, struggles and triumphs in diverse futuristic landscapes (Fitzpatrick, "It's Not Just *Black Panther*"). That is, in a nod to *Black Panther*, scholars, artists, and critics are calling attention to current manifestations of and renewed interest in Afrofuturism, in order to facilitate connections between new generations and popular culture that echo the longtime calls for black communities to "see our own superheroes and the power that they can have on all of us in society" (Combs).

This renewed interest in Afrofuturism that has been stimulated by recent films such as *Black Panther* is not just about superheroes in the classical sense, but more importantly, recharges this movement's objectives in envisioning concrete connections between black individuals seeing "their own" as powerful protagonists and leaders who are integral stakeholders and power-brokers. It is a movement and discourse seeping into expanded spaces of reflection and resistance. In describing the first Afrofuturism Festival in Memphis Tennessee, held in April 2018, the event organizer and award-winning science fiction writer Sheree Renée Thomas described this festival as "an opportunity for the community and creatives across the Mid-South and beyond to think beyond the balcony, to use the arts and our imagination to explore different Memphis futures, [since] in many ways, to be black in this country is to be alien, and to be living in a dystopian society, so it's not an unnatural response to reach for science fiction to help deal with that experience" (Beifuss). For Thomas, this festival again stresses Afrofuturism's emphasis on *seeing* black futures (in this case, as an integral power-broker and stakeholder in Memphis futures), in order to critically interrogate the alien-ness or absences that are often related to the experiences of black individuals and communities, and to explore diverse articulations of black protagonism through the arts.

Thus, whether in Saudi Arabia or in Memphis, Tennessee, USA, we can clearly observe the resurgence of this visionary, transdisciplinary and transcultural movement that continues to critique the global status quo of inequality and respond to the challenges of the representations of heritage, present, and, more importantly, futures as related to black identity and black lives. That is, this renaissance of Afrofuturism, or what Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones refer to as *Afrofuturism 2.0*, is once again providing for a useful platform and analytical lens with which to interrogate the representations of blackness across the black diaspora.

With this renewed interest, vis à vis "Afrofuturism 2.0," it has been interesting to see how other artists, scholars and critics have continued to incorporate or appropriate the core projects of Afrofuturism, and are now extending them to a more diversified notion of black diaspora in other socio-cultural contexts, artistic spaces, and in a multiplicity of geo-political spheres, where the power of voice, agency, representation, and futures is being re-envisioned, re-imagined, re-framed, and re-appropriated by black communities and allies across the globe.

For example, Kodwo Eshun extends Dery's conceptualization of Afrofuturism and posits that the movement is "a program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afro-diasporic projection" (301). Here, Eshun explicitly links histories with futures via the notion of recovery. That is, the recovery of black histories (an echo of Dery's insistence on "other stories to tell"), simultaneously serves as a "counter-future" or as an-other projection of black futures. Similarly, Lisa Yaszek goes further in her approach to Afrofuturism as "a larger aesthetic mode that encompasses a diverse range of artists working in different genres and media who are united by their shared interest in projecting black futures derived from Afro-diasporic experiences" ("Afrofuturism"). Thus, while both of these scholars align with Dery's challenge to and call for the (re)imagining, imaging, and projecting of black futures, this direct emphasis on historical recovery as counter-future (Eshun) and the foregrounding of experience (Yaszek), positions these extended threads as the main loci of enunciation through which black agency and black protagonism (superheroes) of the diverse Afro-diasporic sphere give voice to the myriad "other stories to tell" and futures to envision.

In addition, I would further suggest that Yaszek's articulation of Afrofuturism as a "larger aesthetic mode" is particularly useful as it allows us to move beyond the contexts of technoculture and science fiction, as originally focused upon by Dery, and instead foreground Afro-diasporic *experience* in its plethora of forms and expressions as the base for the imagination, enunciation, and representation of black futures, or counter-futures. In fact, in centering on experience as a means of imagining and articulating historical recovery and projecting futures, we are truly able to see how Afrofuturism is a movement that can be applied to a variety of works, genres, and subgenres produced across the Diaspora. This mirrors the growing diversity of contemporary expressions of Afrofuturism that are "emerging in the areas of metaphysics, speculative philosophy, religion, visual studies, performance, art and philosophy of science or technology" (Anderson and Jones ix). That is, thinking Afrofuturism in a myriad of expressions and aesthetic modes, and in a global, diasporic framework that takes into account shared heritage along with diverse socio-cultural experiences, permits this movement to be transformed into a pluriversality of transcultural, transborder and transdisciplinary voices, actors, and agents that challenges the stereotypical, alien, or absent representations of black lives, heritage, and presence in different spaces, and in turn projects "counter-futures" and "imagines alternative roles in the future" that are unique to their geo-political and cultural diasporic identity (Elia 84; Yaszek, "An Afrofuturist Reading" 299).

Therefore, in applying this theorization and expanded understanding of Afrofuturism to diasporic experiences across cultures, borders, disciplines, and genres, I suggest that this specific movement serves as a formative and foundation theoretical framework in which Black Speculative Arts in general, moves beyond place and genre, and "includes ALL people of the Diaspora, and places their culture, experiences, and THEM at the forefront of these imaginative works. For a people who have been told constantly that they have no history or future, that they can never be super or a hero, and that their very existence is a nightmare," Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts enable and empower black individuals and communities across the Diaspora to "imagine themselves outside of what the world has told them they must be" (Haynes "Black Speculative Fiction").

Afrofuturism Speaks Against the Denial of Afro-Mexicanidad

In this essay, I charge us to engage the lens of Afrofuturism in its core projects and nuanced conceptualizations in order to examine cultural production produced in particular Afro-Diasporic spaces where black lives and black futures have not only been racialized and marginalized, but have been "deliberately rubbed out" (Dery, *Flame Wars* 180). This is the case of Afro-Mexican communities, who have been historically and socially removed as stakeholders in Mexico's present and future landscapes. Black lives in Mexico have been represented as alien at best, but utterly absent at worst. In fact, the historical amnesia and the denial of belonging and of the mere presence and futures of black identity in Mexico is so pronounced that it is common for one to hear the phrases "no hay negros en México" and "son cubanos," declarations that speak volumes about the relationship between *Mexicanidad* (Mexican national and

cultural consciousness) and blackness. This racist disconnect between blackness and *Mexicanidad* also echoes within powerful social and cultural spaces. For example, Mexican cultural institutions and museums carve little to no space for the contributions of Afro-descendant populations in Mexico's history, current cartography, and future landscapes.

Even Mexico's most-famed expert on blacks in Mexico, anthropologist Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, who did extensive ethnographic work on Afro-Mexican populations, described the black presence as a "closed" pathway from Mexico's past to present. As he states in his seminal work, *La población negra de México*:

> En la actualidad no existen en el país grupos verdaderamente negros…aún los grupos que hoy pudieran ser considerados como negros, aquellos que, en virtud de su aislamiento y conservatismo, lograron retener características somáticas predominantemente negroides y rasgos culturales africanos, no son, en realidad, sino mestizos…Es del consenso general que los esclavos que contribuyeron a dar color a la carga genética de México quedaron integrados en el mestizaje de modo tan completo que resulta difíficl, para el lego, distinguir los rasgos negroides en el conjunto de la población actual. Lo anterior implica aceptar que la integración negra es un hecho consumado en el tiempo histórico. (7-8, 277)

This quote has a very poignant significance in relation to the tenets of Afrofuturism, which aims to recover histories and in doing so, project "counter-futures." Here we see how this foundational work has written black history out of Mexico's contemporary and future landscapes, framing it entirely within the narrative of colonial slavery (not enslavement), as we see in Aguirre Beltrán's text, rubbing blackness out of the present, and denying any future of black identity and agency in Mexico. Moreover, what is further concerning about this passage which denies black presence (and I would thus argue, futures as well), is that it is singularly Aguirre Beltrán's voice that defines black identity and black consciousness. There are no other voices heard in this imagination of blackness, nor visions of "how we see ourselves," which speaks directly to Marcus Haynes' reflection on the importance of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts, as movements "for a people who have been told constantly that they have no history or future."

This marginalization of black voices in Mexico's history and the denial and invisibility of black presence can also be seen in official spaces of representation in the Mexican national census and in the Constitution. The year 2015 was the first censorial recognition of the black presence in Mexico, a year when the interim census finally added a category for Mexicans of African descent. Prior to this time, these populations literally *have not counted*. In addition, the approval of Constitutional recognition has only fully transpired in the year 2019, as a result of Afro-Mexicans and their allies campaigning vociferously for constitutional recognition, a move that would position these black communities as equals with other formally recognized ethnic groups, and would thus be afforded the investment and resources that come with juridical, constitutional standing. In essence, as a result of their own resistance and push for recognition, Afro-Mexicans are attempting to construct counter-futures through juridical and constitutional amendments.

Thus, as we consider the landscapes of Afro-Mexican identity and experiences at the intersections of historical denial, contemporary invisibility, and impossible futures, I argue that engaging Afrofuturism becomes a strategic tool with which to re-articulate, re-imagine, re-image, and re-position blackness in Mexico. More specifically, in analyzing films that I suggest serve as strategic tools with which to re-frame blackness in Mexico, and also speak to the objectives of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts, we are able to recover Afro-Mexican histories, tell other stories, reflect upon diverse Afro-diasporic experiences, and construct counter-futures as a result of re-imagining the past, present and future and "altering the power dynamics that we are accustomed to in order to illuminate hidden histories and silenced voices" (Djèlí Clark).

As I will illustrate in this article, this means that not only is there a recovery of Afro-descendant voices and histories within contemporary Mexico, which in turn places these black communities and lives as members to be equally and equitably included within the frameworks of belonging in Mexico, but more importantly, this re-imagining of black history and the articulation of presence and belonging also facilitates a vision of futures, or "counter-futures" that project black stakeholders, powerbrokers, agents, and superheroes as integral to the future landscapes of this particular geo-body and geo-political space. This essay engages these broader, central objectives of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts, and applies them to a particular Afro-Diasporic experience, that of *Afromexicanidad*.

Visualizing a Future Denied: The Erasure of Blackness in Mexican Cinema

Through the dominant logic of *mestizaje* that has pushed blackness aside in Mexico in order to privilege whiteness and whitening, we can reflect upon the estranged place of blackness in Mexican popular culture, particularly film. Specifically, we can observe how these visual spaces have echoed this logic and located black lives and black identity elsewhere, limiting representation to marginal and anachronic spaces, or completely erased from the Mexican geo-body. For example, if we look to perhaps the most formative and economically vibrant era of Mexican film production known as the *Edad del Cine de Oro,* or Golden Age

of Film (1933-1964), we can clearly view the alien-ness and dystopic relationship that marks the connections between blackness and *Mexicanidad*. This time period is labeled as a "golden age" for its prolific productions and global successes in cinematographic arts, so much so that the film industry was Mexico's third largest contributor to the economic sector by 1947 (Fein 103). However, I bring this particular moment into the conversation because it is perhaps the most influential time period in imaging and imagining narratives of *Mexicanidad* that aligned with State projects to unify the country following the Mexican Revolution. In fact, Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas labels this period as the "cultural phase of the Mexican Revolution," precisely due to the strategic use of arts and culture to reflect the national imaginary of cohesion after the tumultuous social divisions and fragmentation of Revolution. Thus, it is no wonder that during this "Golden Age" we see a visual push for cohesion that is imbedded in a cinematographic mirroring of the logic of *mestizaje*, when characters and protagonists literally reflect the national image that speculates Mexico's future reliance on the importance of maintaining an affinity towards ethno-racial mixture. However, it is also within this filmic imaginary that we can simultaneously observe a bending towards whiteness/whitening, and a marginalization of blackness. For example, in the highly popular film *Angelitos negros* (1948), we observe the uneasy preoccupation with racial mixing and its connection to national identity, as it plays out in the home of a wealthy and successful actor, played by the iconic Pedro Infante, and his wife, a school headmaster, played by the charming blond actress, Emilia Guiú. The film outlines their romance, but more so highlights the question of blackness in Mexico's genetic and historical past. That is, the film attempts to respond to the question of what to do with the "black grandma in the closet" (as referenced by Henry Luis Gates, Jr. in his film series "Black in Latin America"). This aspect of the plot unfolds when the child that is born to these main characters is a *mulata*. Her mother (Guiú) rejects her, questioning this "*mala sangre*" and asking "Por qué Dios no me dio una hija blanca y rubia?" What we later learn is that the black maid Nana, played by Rita Montaner, was actually Guiú's mother. When this truth is revealed, the characters played by Guiú and Montaner clash, with Guiú's character violently striking her "Nana," thus causing this helpless maid/mother to fall down the stairs, and eventually succumb to her injuries. Guiú's character does eventually accept her familial heritage, and her dark-skinned daughter, a symbolic nod to the acceptance of blackness within Mexico's family tree, albeit, after an act of violence forces her skeptical reconciliation with her ethno-racial heritage.

What I would like to highlight here is that the speculative nature of this scene in which the black character eventually dies, reflects the dominant logic of *mestizaje* in which blackness has ended, and faded into brown or whitened through mixture (the *mulata* grandchild of Nana). And, while the protagonists ultimately accept the link to this black grandma in the closet, she is clearly represented as an alien figure in Mexico's familial present, and excluded from the image of the national family's future. Hence, she dies. This echoes the strategic State narrative of that era following the Revolution, aimed to silence separate and fragmented ethnic identities as a result of the assumptions that Mexican society "had been divided by years of discrimination that now needed to be put behind, and that the priority at the time was for the nation to be one" (Serra 135). In essence, within the *mestizo* backdrop to post-Revolutionary unification, black voices are silenced and black lives are denied as protagonistic stakeholders in this cinematographic projection of Mexico's future family, which itself aimed to serve as a mirror to Mexico's actual future as a nation.

Furthermore, we can also see this alien-ness and dystopic relationship between blackness and *Mexicanidad* in the fact that all of the actors that played Mexican black characters used blackface in the film. That is, both the Nana (played by Rita Montaner) and the *mulata* child used blackface, an interesting detail especially in the case of Montaner, who herself is of Afro-Cuban descent. This brings up the question about the cinematographic need to "darken" characters of African descent, even those who do align themselves with this heritage (Montaner). Moreover, it is telling that the black Mexicans donned blackface, alluding to the notion that no Afro-Mexican actors were available to fill these roles.[1] Needless to say, we do "encounter" other black characters in the film, who play the roles of Pedro Infante's band members from Cuba.[2] However, these secondary characters do not don blackface. I suggest that their "Cubanness" permits a different association with blackness as opposed to the Mexican association with blackness. To be a black Cuban is possible. To be a black Mexican is not.

This notion of the black presence in Mexico as being of Cuban origin is similarly found in the film *Al son del mambo* (1950), a production that traces the comic adventures of three Mexican musicians who travel to Cuba to find rhythmic inspiration. The urban musicians travel in a mule-driven cart in search of a primitive and rural landscape, where "se respire un aire puro" in the "País de la vida." This lens that frames the rural countryside as primitive and pure is where their musical inspiration can be found, surrounded by the sensual dancing and exotic rhythms of the countryside's inhabitants. These inhabitants are black, and led by the iconic Cuban bandleader and musician, Dámaso Pérez Prado, the "King of the Mambo." The central Mexican protagonist, Roberto Dávila, who is played by Roberto Romaña, is fascinated by the primitive rhythmic sounds, despite his critique of their lack of finesse and logical organization. He describes the music as a "ritmo distinto, formado por los elementos más primitivos y sencillos de la naturaleza que excita e incita a la alegría y a la danza." Here we can observe how

the characterization of the music and the black musicians and black island inhabitants is framed as fetishized elements that belong within a primitive space. I would like to point out that this is very similar to Vasconcelos' characterization of black identity in the *La raza cósmica*, "el negro, ávido de dicha sensual, ebrio de danzas y desenfrenadas lujurias," which also fetishizes blackness and aligns it with exoticism as expressed through sensual dance and unbridled lust (61). Thus, while this imaginary of blackness is not one of denial and rejection as we can see in *Angelitos negros*, it does fit the racist stereotyping of blackness as primitive, exotic, and fetishized by the white male gaze that is represented by the three Mexican musicians.

In the end, Dávila takes on a managerial role, agreeing to connect Pérez Prado and the other black Cuban musicians with his wealthy Mexican business associate who will contribute the necessary funding needed to "save" the Cuban compound from impending closure. Thus, not only do the light-skinned Mexicans "discover this exotic and primitive music and refine it to serve more civilized tastes, but their characters also serve as figures who rescue the rural, black musicians from financial doom. That is, the Mexican adventurers paternalistically guide the black Cubans out of their "arrested development toward their idealized form of social and cultural progress" (Garcia 517). Within this overall framework, I suggest that we can again observe the logic of *mestizaje* playing out in a cinematographic representation of the speculative futures of blackness that must "leave behind [its] own backwardness," and be guided out and saved by whiteness (Serra 139).

Despite the fact that *Angelitos negros* and *Al son del mambo* debuted more than 65 years ago, I would argue that both films serve well in representing what was and what has become and still is the most common and dominant cinematographic landscapes of blackness in Mexican film. They are landscapes in which an uneasy gaze looks upon black bodies and black lives, not knowing what to do with them, and often rejects the black blood that runs through its national family's past and present (*Angelitos negros*). And, if finally accepting the inclusion of the historical, cultural, or genetic lineage of blackness, it is male whiteness that serves to "discover," tame, civilize, and rescue these black bodies. These tropes are equally as present today as in the film production of this Golden Age. In fact, blackness is more absent in today's cinematographic landscapes, and are most commonly represented in period-pieces (harkening back to the colonial era), in which black characters exclusively play the role of servants and slaves. This is very common in contemporary Mexican telenovelas, and continues the placement and roles of black characters singularly within "occupational frames, as servants, comedians, musicians and dancers," thus reflecting the notion of a supposed "natural racial order" in a society that links race, economy and occupation (Pieterse 124). In turn, the film industry in Mexico has echoed and reinforced the role of the light-skinned, paternalistic State that, despite its attempt to ease the nation's tensions via the visual and social discourses of ethno-racial and cultural mixture and unification (*mestizaje*), black agency and the voices of black lives have continued to be suppressed, distanced, and silenced, absent as stakeholders and power-brokers in framing *Mexicanidad* in its contemporary and future articulations.

Re-framing Black Presence and Futures in Contemporary Mexican Film

We have observed how these tropes of fetishization, stereotyping, alienation, marginalization, and invisibility have limited or silenced black protagonism in Mexican film production. However, at this very strategic moment, especially within the last five years, in which the calls for the recognition, articulation, empowerment, and celebration of Afro-Mexican lives, heritage, culture, and consciousness have grown and strengthened, we are also able to observe how very recent cinematographic production is now, finally, after all these decades, aiming to challenge, critique, undo, transcend, rearticulate, and reposition the presence and the futures of black identity in Mexico. In fact, as visual technoculture has merged the access of visual production with the reach of global audiences through digital platforms such as YouTube, we have seen a shift in the framing of Afro-Mexican lives, culture, and history. From formal productions created by researchers at culture institutes such as the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), and universities such as the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), to videos produced and uploaded by community activists and local musicians and artists, the presence of Afro-Mexican protagonism and visual agency has increased enormously over the last decade. YouTube searches reflect this growing database of visual technoculture that aims to reconstruct and strengthen black voices and black agency. In fact, we can clearly note the interest in producing and accessing these sites and productions not only as a means to disseminate information about these communities, their history, culture, and daily lives, but also to carve a space in which black stakeholders are re-claiming their place and space in Mexico's cinematographic and visual-cultural landscape. Equally important, I would argue, is that this shift in the representation of blackness in Mexico is precisely mirroring and echoing the tenets of Afrofuturism and the Black Speculative Arts Movement, as Afro-Mexicans are now able to not only *see* themselves, but also to "imagine themselves outside of what the world has told them they must be" (Haynes). Seeing oneself is so critical in deconstructing a history and presence marred by invisibility. And to imagine "counter-futures" and to tell other stories is now strengthened, as the spaces of visual production have opened up

avenues in which to express, re-image, and re-imagine black history, culture, and identity in Mexico.

Two recent films that re-frame the relationships between blackness and *Mexicanidad* are *Artemio* (2017) and *La negrada* (2018). Both films connect with Afro-Mexican communities in Mexico's Costa Chica region along the Pacific coast, *La negrada* being the first full-length feature film to include an all-black cast. In addition to framing the specificity of black lives within this region, these films combine general thematic narratives such as freedom, love, and perseverance with the challenges and re-thinking of the discourses of belonging, difference, and self-consciousness. Produced and directed by Jorge Pérez Solano, *La negrada* mixes documentary-style segments with a fictitious plot that successfully tells the stories of contemporary Afro-Mexican lives through the fictional relationship between two best friends, Juana and Magdalena, who share the love of the same man, Neri. The film not only trails their estranged relationship, but also the connections between their extended families—grandparents and children—thus, presenting an intricate view and vision of multi-generational experiences that ring true to contemporary Afro-Mexican lives.

The shared love of Neri between Juana and Magdalena, who both have children born by him, reflects the occurrence of polygamist-style relationships and co-parenting that are common in this coastal region. Known as "*el queridato*," where a man has his main house with a wife, but also resides and has children with other women, this relationship structure is often the result of economic hardships and the frequency of migration in and out of this region, especially by men. As women are often left to fend for themselves in terms of securing income sources and child-rearing support, I would argue that this style of socio-economic relationship has served as a survival mechanism, providing families and especially single mothers with a collective support network in which the proportion of males to females is often uneven. It is interesting to note how the film projects different gendered and generational viewpoints towards *el queridato* and co-parenting. For example, the film echoes male perspectives that place no negative judgment on this form of marital relationship and cohabitation. After Juana's sickness and eventual passing, Magdalena asks Neri if he will now finally come to live with (or even marry) her. His response is one that disregards her question/request, as he states, "Mientras yo cumplo aquí, no tienes porque decirme nada. Así ha sido y así será." That is, as long as he continues to provide for her and their children that they share together, the idea of monogamy has no place nor need according to him. Magdalena is obviously angered and hurt by his response, lashing out at him for continuing to begin new relationships with other women, and stating, "Tú quieres seguirte cabrón." Even the younger males of the community share Neri's perspective. As the young women critique Neri for being with five women along the coast and having children with all of them, their young male friend, Noe says that he will also be like Neri when he grows up, since "la tradición no se pierde tan fácil."

In addition to the incorporation of this real-life portrayal of contemporary marital and parental relationships in these communities, the inclusion of other realistic elements of Afro-Mexican life also abound throughout the film. Beautifully detailed frames of common community occupations such as those connected to the fishing and tourism industries, similarly intersect the fictitious storyline. In fact, we see the intergenerational collaboration between grandparents, parents, and grandchildren in fomenting economic well-being, or just plain economic survival. For example, several cuts include grandmothers and their grandchildren working together in the family's beach-side restaurant, or sons and fathers diving and fishing together to gather the catch-of-the day and sell it at local markets. The fishing industry is of vital importance to these communities along the Costa Chica. Moreover, the film also includes several references to important traditions in Afro-Mexican communities, such as that of the *tono/tonal*, a concept that connects humans and animals in a spiritual bond. It is said that when a person is born, they are assigned a *tono* or *tona*, an animal that is forever linked to them. If the animal gets sick or dies, so does the person, and vice versa. I posit that this concept constructs an important philosophical and existential relationship between humans and nature, one in which the mutual care of each other is necessary for the survival of both. Magdalena's mother illuminates the tradition of the *tona/tonal*, bringing the history of this important concept to bear on the present identity and cosmology of Afro-Mexicans: "Ellas tenían ideas viejas, y cuando tú naciste, querían que tuvieras tu tona, tu animal guardián, el que te ayude y te cuide toda la vida." In addition to recounting stories of the character's tona, it is further effective and unique how the film also uses this concept as a means of understanding, narrating, and envisioning the interconnectivity between Magdalena and Juana, whose relationship is one of a similar, symbiotic connection. As Magdalena's mother continues, "Hay veces que eso de la tona se cumpla y otras no, pero en esta historia, una sola cosa está clara, tu destino y el de Juanita están unidos desde que nacieron. Están tan unidos que tienen el mismo gusto y quieren al mismo hombre, y que quién sabe lo que vaya a pasar cuando ella [Juana] se muera." Here we see how the concept of the *tono* is used as a framework to understand the interconnected relationship between these two women and their mutually dependent destiny.

Furthermore, the film also includes segments that reference that discrimination faced by Afro-Mexicans on a daily basis. A poignant scene takes place when Sara, Juana's and Neri's daughter, travels to another city in search of homeopathic medicine for her ailing mother. On the bus ride back to her home, the bus is stopped by officers at a

migration checkpoint, a common occurrence that often takes place throughout Mexico as a security measure. Sara is one of the few passengers who is ordered off the bus. One of the officials looks at Sara and states, "Tú no eres mexicana, ¿verdad? ¿De dónde vienes, negra? Me van a cantar el himno nacional desde el ´más si osare`." At this point in the film, Sara starts singing this particular segment of the Mexican national anthem, a common reality and actual experience that Afro-Mexicans recount as they travel throughout the country. Her singing is followed by alternating images of the different faces of Afro-Mexicans, as if they were passing through a cinematographic representation of a police line-up. I suggest that this scene not only reflects the harsh reality of Afro-Mexicans in the fact that their place and belonging within the nation is consistently questioned or outright denied (an echo of what I previously describe earlier in this essay), so much so that their belonging is criminalized: they are viewed as foreign, *cubano*, illegally present in the county, and thus must prove not only their legitimacy, but also their *Mexicanidad*, by singing the national anthem.

In fact, this film introduces the topics of discrimination and race/racialized consciousness from the very beginning, as it starts with a written definition of the term "*la negrada*." It says that it is a "término que los negros se aplican a sí mismos, surgió del disgusto que les produjo y produce el descalificativo racial." I posit that the interjection of this definition at the very start of the film not only serves to position the (re)framing of blackness front and center, but to also interrogate the representations of blackness from various vantage points, especially in terms of its relationship to Afro-Mexicans themselves, and to Mexico's present and future landscape. In an interview in which the director describes his own Indigenous background and his own feelings and experience of being "excluded in my own country," the reasons for him creating this film include the desire to "create awareness of marginalized sectors of our society. I make these communities visible in my films. My intention was to make a film to raise awareness of the plight of Afro-Mexicans to increase their visibility and start a dialogue about our national identity" (Jappie). As we can see, the film clearly makes visible the marginalization and discrimination that Afro-Mexicans experience in their daily lives. However, it also inserts an ownership of blackness from within these communities, a re-articulation and reification of what it means to be *negro/a* in Mexico according to Afro-Mexicans themselves, and a representation and communication of the histories, stories, and traditions that are shared among these communities (for example, the foregrounding of the concept of *el tono/tonal*), which in turn project counter-futures in which they are no longer invisible and discriminated against. Instead, the film includes various instances where recognition, resilience, and empowerment are foregrounded. For example, when Sara walks through the local bus terminal, she passes by another young woman who is handing out flyers about the fight for constitutional recognition. She sings out to the crowds passing through the terminal,

> Les estamos invitando para que se unan a nuestra lucha para obtener el reconocimiento jurídico de los pueblos afromexicanos en la Constitución Mexicana. Hermanos, asistan al séptimo foro de la negritud en donde escucharemos lo que cada uno de ustedes tiene que decir para lograr la atención y el reconocimiento que nos han negado.

It is true that several *foros* or town halls and forums have been held throughout the Costa Chica in order to boost support for the fight for the Constitutional recognition that they have historically been denied.

Similarly, throughout the film and especially at the end, several Afro-Mexican elders recite *versos costeños*, or poetic verse, that are common oral traditions and past times in these communities. A *verso* sung by Magdalena's mother towards the end of the film is as follows: "Si por negra me desprecia, no desprecia mi color, porque entre perlas y diamantes esta negra es la mejor." This poetic recitation acknowledges the way Afro-Mexicans have been looked down upon, yet simultaneously re-positions blackness and color consciousness into a frame of empowerment and beauty, whose value is "like pearls and diamonds, this black woman is the best!" In other words, Black is beautiful.

Moreover, it is interesting to note the intersectionality of race and gender in this film, especially in relation to the role of women. I suggest that it is the fictional story of Magdalena and Juana that reflects so poignantly upon the realities of Afro-Mexican life---from socio-economic hardships and marital relations, to entrepreneurship and sustainability. In fact, I would argue that it is the role of women in this film that offer the most powerful visions of presence and place in these communities, and of counter-futures as well. We see the innovative entrepreneurship of Magdalena, who through her own resourcefulness, is able to purchase a refrigerator for their house and business. The women elders also represent a stance of strength against the challenges of daily life, singing versos throughout the film and reminding their adult daughters to rely on each other and the networks that they have forged in order to support their families. Furthermore, we see a clear counter-future through the eyes of the young women, the younger daughters, who challenge concepts such as *el queridato*, clearly holding this relational practice in a negative light. And finally, Sara, Juana's daughter, who refuses to accept her *madrina's* offer to lend her money in exchange for Sara being impregnated by her *madrina's* husband. While Sara needs money in order to pay for her mother's medical treatments, she takes a stand against her *madrina's* choice of repayment. The *madrina* has asked her to be impregnated by her husband since the couple cannot have children of their own. By doing this, it would serve as

a repayment of the money lent to Sara by her *madrina*. In her strength and self-determination, Sara refuses to commit to this pact. In essence, this young woman re-imagines her future: she will not be sexually exploited as a loan repayment plan. Nor will she follow the pathway of many other young women in these communities, who become mothers at a young age. Sara, as she states it, will find another way, using the cosmetic business that she runs to forge a different trajectory, a counter-future, one of empowerment and self-determination.

This vision and expression of counter-futures and black women's empowerment and self-determination, together with an exploration of blackness and belonging are equally prevalent in the other film that I will discuss, *Artemio*, produced and directed by Sandra Luz López Barroso. This international award-winning short film is not a fictional feature, rather a weaving together of documentary-style segments that tell the story of a young boy, Artemio, who was born in the United States and goes to Mexico with his mother, Cocco Zárate. After living as an undocumented immigrant in the United States with Artemio and her two other, older children, Cocco is deported back to Mexico, and returns to her small, rural hometown of Cacalote, Guerrero, also located in the Costa Chica region. When Cocco returns to Mexico with Artemio, she adds a baby daughter to the family that is born out of her relationship with her boyfriend Luis, who also lives in Cacalote.

Similar to *La negrada*, this film also presents a beautiful cinematographic perusal of the Costa Chica, and the small black towns that cradle Afro-Mexican lives along the country's Pacific coast. Numerous scenes present glimpses of daily life in this region, from the maternal homemakers busy in their daily routines, to farming, and the slower pace of rural past times, something that is a challenge for Artemio, whose only frame of lived experience is the busy, cosmopolitan culture of his life in the United States. Now in rural Mexico, he has to contend with constant power outages that leave him wistfully wandering around the house or just playing *fútbol* outside. He cannot play the video games that he wants, "*se fue la luz otra vez.*" Life definitely is different in Cacalote, especially for Artemio. The film allows us to follow him through this exploration of difference, newness, and questioning belonging, as he learns about and is exposed to Afro-Mexican daily lives and traditions. For example, we join him and his baby sister and mother as they walk home one evening. As the sun sets, they pass by a house that seems to be having a party. Traditional music is playing in the distance as house guests sit along the edges of the house's patio. Artemio asks Cocco, "Why are they celebrating?" And she answers,

> They are not celebrating. Actually someone died there. But it is a celebration because, uh, it's like when someone dies, in your house you have to bring the music to celebrate that this person passed to another realm, to another stage. So, it's a sad episode but it's happiness too, because it's advancing spiritually, going forward, So it's something good.

Here we can observe a teaching moment, when Cocco serves as a cultural translator for Artemio as he learns about the unique traditions of this Afro-Mexican community, particularly about their customs as related to death and dying. As Cocco continues to explain, "Dying is not totally bad. It's something good because it means that you already completed your mission here on earth, so you're ready to move on to the next stage. Sad but good at the same time."

We also accompany the family to a local wedding, joining the celebration, watching Artemio uncomfortably wade through the dancing guests, and bride and groom, as typical music, *banda* and *chilenas*, play in the background. Artemio's discomfort once again is a result of his lack of familiarity with the customs and the people of this small town. His mother does her best to foster a sense of belonging, teaching him and explaining the customs. It is fitting that Cocco plays the role of a cultural ambassador and translator, for in actuality her grandmother was one of the most famous dancers of the *son de Artesa*, a dance and music style that is perhaps one of the recognized and celebrated art forms that is unique to Afro-Mexican identity in the Costa Chica. Catalina Noyola Bruno, fondly known as Doña Cata, was Artemio's great-grandmother, Cocco's grandmother, was known throughout the region as one the last great Afro-Mexican "*bailadoras*" of this particular style of music and dance. Even into her late years, with limited strength and mobility, Doña Cata would ascend upon the wooden *artesa* and pound her feet with such strength and prowess, matching the rhythmic beat or *son* that accompanies the *baile de la artesa*. It was during an interview with Doña Cata that the director/producer, Sandra Luz López Barroso, was able to meet the extended family, particularly Artemio and Cocco. In fact, in getting to know Cocco, the director/producer was mesmerized by this granddaughter's life stories, her travels across the globe, and her hopes and dreams. It was then that this project and film was conceived. When López Barroso speaks of Cocco and her young family, she shares that "Me pareció que había encontrado a una Doña Cata joven…Sería ella la que contenía todo aquello de lo que quería hablar: las mujeres afros, costenas, fuertes, sensuales, independientes" (Bacilio). Similar to the other Afro-descendant women portrayed in *La negrada*, Cocco Zárate also most definitely reflects the strength, resilience and self-determination of black women in Mexico, forging a new life for herself in Cacalote after deportation, serving as educator and strong-willed matriarch to her son and new baby daughter, and always thinking ahead in her pathways to accomplish her goals for a better life for herself and her family.

Thus, the film *Artemio* also presents us with a re-framing of *Afromexicanidad*, learning about the specificities of daily life, the customs and traditions lived throughout the black towns in the Costa Chica, and the nuances and challenges of these communities. At the same time, the film also sheds light on experiences that are shared among Mexicans across the country, regardless of heritage and ethno-racial background---those experiences related to migration and the transborder/translingual identities that are now very much a part of the fabric of *Mexicanidad* in general. We sense an uneasy restlessness throughout the film, both by Artemio, his mother, and other characters as well. This restlessness is a reality that not only matriculates in the Costa Chica, but also abounds throughout the country as individuals contemplate and engage the option of migration in search of more opportunities and a better life. This aspect of *Afromexicanidad* and *Mexicanidad* is addressed from the very beginning of the film, when Cocco is speaking with a family friend about her plans to move on from Cacalote to Cancún in search of a better job and future. In this conversation, her friend concurs with Cocco's plans to move at the end of the month, "La cosa es ésta, si te vas a mover de allí es bueno, es bueno porque en el monte no haces nada y él [Artemio] tampoco…Qué bueno, digo que sea bueno para mejorar porque él necesita estar fuera de este monte." To which Cocco responds, "Todos, todos en algún momento necesitamos salir." This notion that "we all" need to leave at some point paints a very poignant and realistic picture of the feelings and perspectives toward migration within Mexico and beyond its geopolitical borders, especially for those in poor, marginalized, and rural settings, where underdevelopment continues to mark the socio-economic landscape throughout the country. Moreover, during the film's climax and turning point, this issue of staying or leaving comes up again, now in a conflictual nature, when Cocco has a fight with her older daughter, Sharlyn, about Artemio's planned return to the United States. Sharlyn expresses her anger and frustration with her mom in this scene, stating that she is working multiple jobs so that she can earn enough money to help bring Artemio back to the U.S., as they had originally planned. However, Cocco exclaims that at this time he does not want to go back, he wants to stay in Mexico with her, and she cannot force Artemio to return there to live with his older siblings. The shouting match ends as Sharlyn hangs up, cutting off the dialogue across geographic borders that has been made possible by an old telephone that has served to connect the family while they are geographically segregated. This climactic turning point reveals the raw emotions that accompany migration and family separations. Artemio immediately calls his sister back. While we never see or meet Sharlyn in this film, we get to know her through these telephone calls, and in this moment we can hear her sobbing and can sense the sadness and challenges that come with these aspects of movement and migration. Artemio asks her, "Are you crying for realzies or are you crying for liezies?" She replies, "No, I'm crying 'cause I miss you and I want to see you." Thus, through these dialogues, we are able to access the feelings and experiences that run across the lives in consistent flow or plan of movement. Similarly, towards the end of the film, Artemio asks his mother about their plans to move to Cancún. He did not realize that they would be moving so soon, and he subsequently asks if they will be able to return to Cacalote…and to Utah as well. Cocco responds to his inquiries, "Claro que vamos a regresar [a Cacalote]… No estoy muy segura de Utah, pero si todo sale bien, vamos a encontrar la forma de conseguir mi visa y vamos a regresar." These declarations and the questioning about returning to one's *homes* (home in the plural sense as it takes on a notion of multiple networks of being and belonging due to this constant migration) reflect the realities and challenges of lives intimately linked to patterns of migration. At the film's close, both Cocco and Artemio sing the popular children's song "Down by the Bay." The lyrics echo this restlessness, this uneasiness of belonging, which simultaneously seems somewhat natural to those who live with this notion of "*el irse o el volver,*" (Bacilio). The lyrical exchange goes as follows:

Cocco.	*¿Te recuerdas la canción que cantamos el otro día?*
Artemio.	No.
Cocco.	"Down by the Bay." *¿Qué te parece si la cantamos ahorita? ¿Sale? Tú empiezas y yo te sigo porque no me recuerdo cómo empieza.*
Artemio.	[Singing together with Cocco] Down by the bay, where the watermelons grow, back to my home, I dare not go…

This very poignant line closes the film, leaving the viewer with the sensation of sadness mixed with hope, taking on a role as witness to the adaptability and strength that marks these characters, individuals, and families that lead lives of migration or constant movement.

I suggest that López Barroso successfully represents the macro and micro identities and experiences of Afro-Mexican communities. Her film, which she classifies as "cine documental," where "la realidad siempre supera cualquier expectativa o plan de rodaje," makes visible the intricacies of daily life and serves as a visual testimony of the customs, traditions, and experiences of black lives in the Costa Chica (ibid). Furthermore, similar to *La negrada*, it also offers a speculative glance and vision of futures: futures that connect with migration and wandering, futures that look to opportunity and innovation, and futures that engage transborder and translingual identities (the dialogue in this film easily

alternates between Spanish and English, requiring a certain level of bilingualism on the part of the viewer).

Conclusions: An Afrofuturistic Re-framing of Afromexicanidad:

As we observe in both films, *La negrada* and *Artemio* portray a re-framing of Afro-Mexican lives and a re-articulation of the cinematographic representations of blackness in Mexico. Both works offer much more comprehensive, in-depth, and nuanced visions of these communities, their histories, customs, worldviews, challenges, hopes, and dreams. I would argue that these cinematographic landscapes of blackness in Mexico as represented in these two films bring into focus the fact that these lives have been "rubbed out," denied, rejected, and marginalized. And in doing so, both *La negrada* and *Artemio* critique and re-frame the historically uneasy relationship between blackness and *Mexicanidad*. That is, both films position black lives and black identity as so much more than a stereotyped, fetishized, and alienated construction, which we have commonly seen in other popular films, such as in *Angelitos negros* and *Al son del mambo*, from an era in which cinema so strategically and profoundly marked national consciousness and influenced how black heritage has long been framed and represented in Mexico film and society.

La negrada and *Artemio* speak against and undo the longstanding subaltern placement of blackness in Mexico. Simultaneous, they also present a telling of and visualization of other stories, as told by and through the voices of Afro-Mexicans themselves, thus addressing the broader questions of voice and agency (power-brokers and stakeholders and Dery delineates), which lie at the core of Afrofuturistic projects. Moreover, both of these films also echo the calls of other artists that are engaging and expanding upon Dery's conceptualization of Afrofuturism and Black Speculative Arts in order to interrogate, critique, and re-frame the status quo of black communities and black lives in diverse geopolitical locations and in a variety of global contextual and cultural spheres. That is, while neither film falls within the genres of science fiction and thus do not exactly match Dery's original notion of Afrofuturism as "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture", these films do indeed reflect the nuanced and extended definitions as described earlier in relation to the theorizations of Eshun and Yaszek: they tell other stories, foregrounding experience and the diversity of Afro-diasporic lives; they rescue these stories and histories, which have been denied and hidden; and in turn they offer a re-imaging and re-imagining of black history, black presence, and black counter-futures ("Black to the Future" 736).

Finally, I would also suggest that the films *Artemio* and *La negrada* serve as very effective examples in thinking about the unique expressions of Afro-futurism in a Mexican context. For communities of African descent in this country, futures are very much tied to current-day demands for socio-political recognition. That is, the fact that these films foreground the declarations by Afro-Mexicans that, "we exist, we see ourselves, and that you see us," both *La negrada* and *Artemio* serve as very effective examples of imaging and imagining the building of futures based on the full and equitable participation and inclusion of Afro-Descendants in Mexico's present. The characters, plots, and themes that are woven throughout these two works push the question of recognition to the forefront by creatively and strategically building upon notions of self-consciousness, self-reflection, and self-recognition that are represented in ways that envision black futures in this particular geopolitical space that has historically denied their presence and contributions. Both *La negrada* and *Artemio* present us with an Afrofuturistic re-framing of *Afromexicanidad*: their respective use of imagination and creativity serve a "sources of hope and transformation," in which the "potential for a different future is brought forward to consider" (Johnson Lewis, "Afrofuturism: Imagining an Afrocentric Future"). Now through the visualization and representation of these Afro-Mexican voices, stories and histories, we see black protagonists, stakeholders, mothers who are superheroes, and youth who challenge racialized, prescribed visions of themselves, and instead "imagine themselves outside of what the world has told them they must be" (Haynes).

NOTES

1. The use of blackface during this era of Golden Age Cinema can also be observed in the film *La negra Angustias* (1949), another excellent example in which Mexican actors were "darkened" in order to play the role of a Mexican of African descent. This film, which is based on the novel by the same name written by Francisco Rojas González in 1944, similarly takes on the notion of revolutionary heroes that uphold the fight for national unity during and after the Revolution. In this film, which was adapted by a female director, Matilde Landeta, it is a *mulata* heroine that takes the charge to fight for the poor and marginalized populace. However, despite her blackness being strategically deployed as a tool of rejection and marginalization (for example, because she

is black she is rejected by the light-skinned man whom she admires), her "blackness in both the novel and the film gets lost in the rhetoric of Mexican nationalism and class struggle" (Arce 1086). That is, race, particularly black identity, is subsumed into class struggle, and becomes a product of the nationalistic logic of mestizaje in which racial difference is ultimately submerged into class difference as a result of this rhetoric of cosmic mixture. This has also been a dominant narrative tied to the Mexican Revolution: that it was not about race/racism, but purely about class and class struggle. Clearly this does not engage the intersectionality of race and class. Moreover, when the director herself was asked about making a feature film about a black Mexican, she "claimed that the role played by blacks in Mexican history and culture was insignificant, a fact supported by her choice of a non-black actress who wore blackface" (Arce 1087).

2. The inclusion of Cuban musicians and Cuban popular music styles was common and highly influential in the films of this Golden Age. For example, in the film *Al son del mambo*, Rita Montaner (an actress but renowned Cuban singer as well) in addition to the "Mambo King" himself, Dámaso Pérez Prado, both highlight the famed contributions of Cuban musicians in the Mexican film industry of this time period. This influence even extended to the popularity of the more specific *cine de rumberas* sub-genre, which incorporated Cuban and other Afro-Caribbean music and dance styles. The Cuban actress Amalia Aguilar, who also starred in *Al son del mambo*, was known for her contributions to this sub-genre.

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Black Agency and Aesthetic Innovation in Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco*

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Abstract

In 2013, Henry Louis Gates lamented the tradition of whitewashing and the passing over of slave stories which has become commonplace throughout cinematic history: "there have been all too few films that have captured, or even attempted to convey, the truth of the experience of slavery, from the slave's point of view" and even fewer "worthy of recognition." While it is true that there have been some high-profile films produced in the last decade – *12 Years a Slave*, *Django Unchained*, and *Birth of a Nation*, among others – that have endeavored to represent slavery from the "slave's point of view," Gates' assessment remains largely apposite within the contexts of Hollywood and English-language productions. However, Afro-Latinx cinema and the history of post-revolutionary Cuban cinema in particular tells a very different story. To evidence this difference, this article will explore *El otro Francisco*, which was originally released in 1975, and is the first in a searing trilogy of films focused on slavery in Cuba in which perspectives of the enslaved are foregrounded and the traditional representation of slavery – which has to a great extent elided the rich history of slave resistance – is rigorously undermined.

In 2013, Henry Louis Gates lamented the tradition of whitewashing and the passing over of slave stories which has become commonplace throughout cinematic history: "there have been all too few films that have captured, or even attempted to convey, the truth of the experience of slavery, *from the slave's point of view*" and even fewer "worthy of recognition."[1] While it is true that there have been some high-profile examples produced in the last decade – Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave* (2013), and Nate Parker's *Birth of a Nation* (2016), which defiantly challenges D.W. Griffith's notorious version of 1915, among others – Gates' assessment remains largely apposite within the contexts of Hollywood and English-language productions. However, Afro-Latinx cinema and the history of post-revolutionary Cuban cinema in particular tells a very different story and one in which a sustained attempt to represent slavery from the "slave's point of view" can be detected. To evidence this difference, this article will explore *El otro Francisco*, which was originally released in 1975, and is the first in a searing trilogy of films focused on slavery in Cuba in which perspectives of the enslaved are foregrounded.[2] The effect of this foregrounding is to dramatically undermine the central tenets of the traditional cinematic, literary, and historiographical representation of slavery – which has to a great extent elided the rich history of slave resistance – and also typically includes such contradictory themes as black passivity, the construction of black males as quintessentially vengeful, violent, and sexually threatening to white women, and the romanticization and/or sanitization of slave society as essentially benign.[3] "Fantastic product[s] of white anxiety" such as these, to borrow Aisha K. Finch's phrase, became, in different ways, important instruments in the maintenance and justification of slave societies and have profoundly marked the cinematic and cultural archives generated by Atlantic slavery.[4] The director of *El otro Francisco* and the trilogy as a whole is Sergio Giral, a prominent Afro-Cuban-American filmmaker whose works have not received the same degree of critical attention as that of his more celebrated contemporary, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (1928–1996), with whom Giral collaborated in the making of *El otro Francisco*.[5] Born in Havana in 1937, Giral moved with his family to New York City towards the end of World War II so that his father could pursue a business opportunity. In New York City, Giral came of age in Greenwich Village at the height of the Beatnik generation; his "idols" were Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac,

and Jean-Paul Sartre was his "guru."[6] However, inspired by the Cuban Revolution and eager to contribute to its early program of social justice, in 1961, Giral accepted an invitation to return to Cuba to work for the newly founded *Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* ("ICAIC" – the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry).[7]

Giral's filmography spans feature films, 'shorts,' and documentaries, and reveals an adept ability for manipulating genre and reworking historical, literary, and cultural materials in order to offer commentary on the subjects of race and Afro-Cuban identity and heritage. For example, his 1986 film, *Plácido*, narrates the story of the Afro-Cuban poet, Gabriel de la Concepción Valdés – "Plácido" – who was executed following the ferociously suppressed black rebellion of 1843-44 known as "Conspiración de La Escalara" ("conspiracy of the ladder"), and who subsequently became an emotive folkloric symbol of resistance.[8] Consider also Giral's much overlooked 1991 film, *María Antonia*, set in the pre-revolutionary 1950s in Cuba, which reworks Eugenio Hernández Espinosa's landmark 1965 play of the same name, and presents the figure of Mariá Antonia as a creolized Carmen.[9] However, it is Giral's "slavery trilogy" for which he is most known, and although it has received limited critical attention within the North American and European academies, it is notable that *El otro Francisco* was recognized by the award of the FIPRESCI Prize at the 1975 Moscow Film Festival.[10]

Giral's trilogy as a whole, recovers the marginalized history of slave resistance in 19th century Cuba, asserts black subjectivity, and narrates a counter-history of slavery and abolition in Cuba. However, *El otro Francisco* in particular offers a socio-economic analysis of slavery and class struggle in Cuba by explicitly undermining and critically retelling the first anti-slavery novella in the Americas, Anselmo Suárez Romero's sentimental and sensationalist *Francisco*, which was written in 1838–39, but was proscribed by Madrid and unpublished until 1880. In this manner, in a docudrama format, Giral narrates a story of black subjectivity in relation to the history of black Cubans' struggle for freedom and equality. Black subjectivity is also at the fore in *Rancheador*, which offers a principled statement on the necessity of pre-emptive defensive violence in the context of the structural violence of 19th century Cuban slave society, while *Maluala* elaborates a story set in Cuba's *palenques* (communities of runaway slaves) in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra. Giral's trilogy is striking for its aesthetic and narratological innovation: for example, *El otro Francisco* employs Brechtian techniques, including freeze frames and the use of a critical, didactic narrator who directly addresses the viewers. By this didactic exposition, the film serves as a rigorous historical and sociological examination of the ideological thrust of Romero's novella. By way of contrast – and in order to demonstrate the range of Giral's filmic aesthetics – it should be noted that the second and third films in the trilogy employ radically different approaches for foregrounding black agency. For example, *Rancheador*, the second film in the trilogy, conjures in filmic language the co-existence of the past and the contemporary, the rational and the magical, while *Maluala*, the final installment in the trilogy, can more easily be interpreted as an "adventure film." Nevertheless, despite their varied aesthetic registers, the trilogy as a whole is unified by the foregrounding of black agency and an insistence on the formative role slavery has played in the creation of the modern self, as well as Cuban and global modernity. As such, Giral's trilogy elaborates a representation of Atlantic slavery not as aberrational, but as fundamental to a rapidly expanding capitalist world-system, while evoking a radical conception of anti-capitalist freedom borne of the highly contingent experience of the African slave trade and the plantation system in the Americas.

El otro Francisco: The Prologue

El otro Francisco, shot in black and white, opens in dramatic fashion: we see the eponymous Francisco [Fig. 1], an enslaved black man, and Dorotea, an enslaved *mulata*, gazing longingly at each other before they rush towards each other and embrace passionately in a riverside forest clearing. Immediately, it is apparent that Francisco and Dorotea's emotional anguish is an instance of the cruelties inflicted by slavery on enslaved families longing for romantic love. Dorotea is unable to hold back her tears as she reveals to Francisco that she allowed their master, Ricardo, to rape her in order that Francisco be saved. Wracked by guilt and punished by patriarchal slave society, Dorotea declares that she did everything for Francisco but that she now must travel to Havana with their mistress, Ricardo's mother, and that she cannot bear to see Francisco ever again. This news devastates Francisco, and seeing this, Dorotea, unable to bear the pain, rushes away with tears streaming down her face. Francisco, alone with his feelings of despair in the forest, runs between trees and lashes out with his limbs at the tall grasses and tree branches; he eventually collapses to the ground in agony and, with dramatic orchestral mood music in the background, Francisco resolves to hang himself. Some days later, drawn by the buzzards that were circling a tree, the master and the plantation overseer discover Francisco's body. Francisco's suicide is thus presented as an instance of death as a form of freedom from pain and suffering – a well-rehearsed trope in black diasporic cultural production.[11] When Dorotea learns of Francisco's death – the news reaches her via a letter from Ricardo to his mother, who then relays the news to Dorotea – she is overcome with grief, "wastes away" and dies only a few years later.

This narrative of enslaved lovers whose relationship is thwarted and their fate doomed by the behaviour of a depraved master is one that would be familiar to readers

of sentimental anti-slavery writing.[12] And indeed, at this juncture the film reveals that this is precisely what this opening has been: the film cuts to a well-to-do and fashionable Havana literary salon where the novelist Anselmo Suárez Romero is reading from his freshly completed manuscript, *Francisco*. The narrator then declares that the film will proceed as a Brechtian investigation into the ideas presented by, and critical limitations of, this celebrated sentimental anti-slavery novella. The narrator informs the viewer that Domingo del Monte, a bourgeois intellectual, social reformer, and the host of the literary salon, had suggested to Suárez Romero "a novel to lay bare the plight of the slaves." Suárez Romero's reading is met with adulation, applause, and a standing ovation. He is warmly embraced by a number of men present at the salon, including del Monte, and he receives the praise of a number of women; the appearance of these finely dressed and fastidiously coiffured participants in del Monte's literary salon could not form a more striking contrast with the simple and worn attire of Francisco and Dorotea. Champagne is served on silver trays and the narrator informs the viewer that the novel's overwhelmingly positive reception in this circle leaves no doubt that it satisfied the demands of these bourgeois reformist ideologues. At this juncture, Giral leaves it to the viewer to discern the hypocrisies of this well-meaning bourgeois collective, but the narrator explicitly poses the fundamental question that will animate the rest of Giral's film: "Is a real view of the slave provided by the author through his character, Francisco? Let us see if the rejoicing over the novel was justified or if it failed to show *un otro Francisco*." In this critical, Brechtian fashion, Giral begins his inquiry, explicitly framing the film as sociological and materialist whilst also drawing attention to the sociopolitical context of Cuba's literary history via its focus on Romero's original novella. Notably, this ideological thrust can be identified as one that accords with the ICAIC's commitment to the critical examination of Cuban history and culture, and to the Revolution's cultural goals. After this prologue, the opening credits appear and, in an expression of pan-Caribbean revolutionary solidarity, "The Haiti Group" (Cuba's Haitian residents) are thanked, and this linking of Cuba's national history to Haiti's anti-slavery revolutionary heritage has the effect of making visible the closeness of Cuba and Haiti. The histories of slavery and abolition in Cuba and Haiti superficially appear radically different, since Cuba was one of the last territories in the Americas to abolish slavery (in 1886) and Haiti the first to do so as a result of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804. However, Giral's film draws the histories of these two Caribbean nations closer together, emphasizing revolutionary affinities. The effect of minimizing the differences between Haiti – memorably dubbed by Aimé Césaire as "the most African of the Antilles"[13] – and Cuba is to emphasize that black agency in resistance in Haiti was not singular or exceptional, and that Cuba too is "African". Giral's film thereby, from the outset, unsettles the identification of Cuba as an exclusively or predominantly *Latino* or *mulato* society rather than as a black diasporic site, and Giral's granting prominence of place to Cuba's Haiti group in the opening credits is also consistent with the film's situating of slavery in Cuba in its wider Caribbean and global contexts, rather than in its narrower Spanish colonial context. This comparative perspective encourages an understanding of slavery and slave resistance in transnational terms, and makes clear that Cuba and Haiti should both be understood as locations of historical black agency and that more binds these two territories together than drives them apart.

Ricardo's Plantation

With the sentimentality of Suárez Romero's version established, the film proceeds to narrate the story of 'the other' Francisco. Giral's script brings the viewer up to speed quickly: through a conversation between Ricardo and the plantation overseer, we learn that Dorotea is Ricardo's mother's favourite slave and that she serves her as a seamstress and her maid. Ricardo has just discovered that Dorotea is pregnant with Francisco's child and this provokes Ricardo to instruct his overseer to mete out abominably cruel tortures: sadistic whippings and the rubbing of urine, alcohol, salt, and gunpowder into Francisco's wounds. This opening recalls the narratorial approach of the unorthodox black British Marxist writer and political activist C. L. R. James, in the opening chapter to his classic history of the Haitian revolution, *The Black Jacobins*.[14] There, in a chapter accurately and ironically titled, "The Property," James documented in a matter of fact style, the innumerable, inventive, and cruel means and methods of slave torture. Wanton and barbaric, this catalogue of tortures serves as indisputable evidence that slavery was founded on an intricate system of terror, and that apologists for empire cannot explain or excuse slavery as benign, paternalistic, or civilizing. The impact of this strategy in *El otro Francisco* is highly comparable: without subjecting the viewer to gratuitous horrors, Giral unequivocally conveys the physical traumas and coercive violence on which slavery depended, without losing sight of the *structural violence* endemic to slavery.

The camera then cuts to Francisco among a group of slaves cutting sugar cane in the fields while singing a work song, when, suddenly, Francisco collapses from exhaustion – later the overseer will claim that he "staged a faint" in order to escape working – such everyday forms of resistance being a commonplace frustration for the planter class. However, Francisco's queasiness and exhaustion are clearly conveyed. This unequivocal representation of the mundane harshness of slave labour is worthy of comment since it is either elided or romanticized in so many other films focused on slavery. Moreover, this elision and/or romanticization has occurred

for many years – from the 'Golden Age' of Hollywood to the twenty-first century – and in films of widely varying aesthetic tenor and ideological intent. Consider, for example, the 1939 classic, *Gone with the Wind* and also Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*.[15] Following this scene, the narrator interjects to provide information on both Francisco and Dorotea, and their roles on the plantation. We learn that Francisco was taken from Africa at the age of 10; he is a house slave who stands out for his excellence, his malleability, loyalty, and good nature. He is, the narrator proclaims, "free of vice." Then the narrator formally introduces Dorotea: we learn that her mother nursed the young Ricardo, and that her beauty, innate goodness, and kindness made her seem to Francisco, "an ideal companion to lighten his slave's burden." This phrase recalls a notion that was in circulation in the wake of the Haitian Revolution: that the companionship and physical intimacy that female slaves could provide to male slaves would decrease the probability of slave uprisings. Accompanying this description are startling beautiful portrait shots of Dorotea and Francisco that are perhaps indications of Giral's early training as a painter. [Fig. 2] The narrator continues, informing the viewer that Francisco had requested his mistress's permission to marry Dorotea but that such permission was refused, a historically unlikely refusal since marriage was encouraged for reproductive and moral purposes. We then learn that Francisco and Dorotea embarked on a clandestine affair for two years, at the end of which Dorotea became pregnant. In response to this flouting of her orders, the mistress commands the whipping of Francisco and, contrary to the slavery codes which stipulated that slave owners should keep slave families together, sends Dorotea to a French mistress in Havana where she is to work as a house slave assigned to the laundry. Throughout this narration, the romantic aspect of this story is accentuated by soft flute music, but then, the picture freezes and the music abruptly stops: Giral rouses the viewers from the dreamy, uncritical state into which he has strived to inculcate them. Suddenly, the viewer becomes aware that s/he has been manipulated and that the intense drama of this romance, the soft music, and the beautiful portraits of these star-crossed lovers had lulled them into accepting an extremely limited understanding of the realities of slave life. As Francisco assists Dorotea in climbing into an ornately decorated carriage, presumably to be taken away to her new mistress, the Brechtian narrator asserts: "Francisco and Dorotea act in keeping with the novel's romantic selling point; but the 'real facts' of slave life and love were different." During the narrator's voiceover, Giral proceeds to show us – in brief self-contained episodes, and by further more detailed description and analysis from the narrator – *how* slave life differed from Romero's depiction. The picture unfreezes and cuts to a scene of a black slave woman on a riverbank being assaulted by a white man – the lack of sound estranges the viewer from the scene and renders it more shocking. Meanwhile, the narrator continues, explaining that slave relationships and slaves' sexual lives were profoundly circumscribed and limited by their condition as slaves: there were far fewer slave women than there were slave men, and the sexual abuse of slave women by the planter class was rife.[16] Then, immediately following the provision of more sociological information from the narrator, is a scene that shows a slave woman preparing a homemade remedy that she drinks to abort a pregnancy; save for tribal sounding music that evokes Africa – drums and flute – the scene takes place in silence. The effect is to shock without numbing the viewer's capacity to understand as well as to feel. The scene concludes with the enslaved, pregnant woman collapsed on the ground, convulsing with agonizing uterine contractions. It is a powerful depiction of female agency that recalls both Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (which would appear in print some twelve years after the release of *El otro Francisco*) and Cuba's decriminalization of abortion in 1965, which lifted the intensive bureaucratic administrative processes that had the effect of criminalizing women's reproductive decision-making.[17] We see the slave woman asserting control over her own body and fate, yet the trauma and pain of the abortion is communicated powerfully. Yet, this is anything but an emotionally manipulative and theatrical staging of slave suffering designed to arouse mere sympathy (such an approach is a common one in abolitionist literature and is also the approach emphatically taken in McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*).[18] Instead, in Giral's hands, the suffering of this enslaved pregnant woman is used to make the viewer aware of multiple levels of culpability: the institution of slavery itself is indicted and held responsible for the slave woman's act, since she is aborting the fetus in order to avoid bringing a new life into the conditions of slavery. But we can presume – given the earlier sequence showing the assault on the riverbank – that the slave woman was raped and, therefore, the individual rapist's culpability is not absolved. Giral thus subtly reveals the systemic horrors of slavery without losing sight of individual suffering, nor the culpability of individual members of the planter class, their overseers, and plantation managers for their actions.

Another Ricardo

Dorotea's resistance of Ricardo's advances drives Ricardo into a frustrated frenzy. This culminates when, in a fury, Ricardo shoves, pushes, and slaps Dorotea before giving her an ultimatum that unless she submits to him, he will ensure that Francisco is tortured to death, this threat revealing that Ricardo is willing to delude himself into believing that an absence of resistance from Dorotea would signify desire. As Dorotea continues to refuse her master's advances, true to his word, Ricardo ensures that Francisco is treated ever more severely with frequent whippings and punishments. When one day Dorotea accompanies her mistress

to the plantation infirmary and discovers Francisco lying prostrate in agony from his prolonged tortures, Dorotea is overcome with grief and guilt. In the following scene, she approaches Ricardo and allows herself to be raped by him to spare Francisco further agony. In the midst of the rape scene, Giral freezes the frame and there is a Brechtian interjection from the narrator: "In the novel, Ricardo is moved only by his passions, but was that the reason he set out to cause pain to Francisco and Dorotea? Millowners of the times had other motivations. There's *another Ricardo* [*un otro Ricardo*] whom the author does not show us." We can here identify another commonality with C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins*; Giral's project can in part be understood as an attempt to render in filmic language the following argument that James so strikingly articulated: "There were good and bad Governors, good and bad Intendants, as there were good and bad slave-owners. But this was a matter of pure chance. It was the system that was bad."[19] Giral thereby problematizes the focus on individuals as an explanation for the injustice of slavery and exposes the limitations of Suárez Romero's approach.

So, who is this 'other' Ricardo? In the words of the narrator, he is, like other members of the planter class, "a slave lord," entering modern capitalism with a "deep class consciousness" and a keen sense of the possibilities afforded by technological advances. The "Ricardo" Giral presents us with is a capable manager of a business, one able to enter into dialogue with engineers, economists, and priests, and produce a cogent defense of the political economy of slave-based sugar production premised simply on what he regards as the absolute necessity of increasing productivity. So, as Ricardo strolls through his plantation with other members of the planter class, he is quite at ease discussing costs and savings, and entering into debates over the merits of taking advantage of technological advances.[20] It thus comes as little surprise that Ricardo is visibly excited by the prospect of replacing his ox-driven mill with an English Fawcett & Preston steam driven mill when it is presented to him by an English company agent. This scene, which clearly influenced Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's presentation of a similar scene in *La última cena*,[21] demonstrates that technological advances serve merely to intensify the exploitation of the slave class while also revealing the transnational dimensions of the Atlantic slave-system. Here Giral is at pains to inform the viewer that just as Suárez Romero's production of a sentimental anti-slavery romance fails to communicate of what Atlantic slavery was an instance, the emphasis on British abolitionism in the early 19th century as philanthropically motivated fails to understand England's economic interests in breaking down the colonial mercantile system in order to open up more markets for English businesses.[22] Thus, with great clarity and concision – the point is not labored and the running time of *El otro Francisco* is a mere 100 minutes – Giral presents his viewers with an argument that the deep causal explanation for the misery and abomination of slavery is not fundamentally the lust and violence of individual masters – so called "bad apples" – but slavery's essential role in an international economy of trade and exchange in which the beneficiaries of slavery are sometimes hidden by complex production and commodity chains , and sometimes the beneficiaries of slavery hail from a jurisdiction such as England that proclaims itself to be a crusader for abolition. Thus, far from being an outmoded relic of a feudal order, slave labor, Giral shows us, was an integral part of Atlantic capitalism that generated extraordinary profits throughout Europe and the Americas. The ideological thrust of Giral's vision must, therefore, be situated alongside not only the works of his fellow Cuban filmmakers at the ICAIC – especially Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, and specifically *La última cena* – but also alongside the writings of C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Walter Rodney whose works collectively constitute a radical Black intellectual tradition in which slavery is rigorously treated as a system of capital accumulation.[23]

Giral's elaboration of this 'other' Ricardo continues in a dinner scene at which there is some spirited discussion among members of the planter class as to whether advancing technology will eventually render slave labor entirely unnecessary. The notion of paying the blacks for their labor is discussed, and it is argued whether it would be more efficient and hence profitable: strikingly, ethics and consideration of the slaves' well-being have no place in this discussion, although some of this is perhaps explained by the gap between the legal discourse surrounding slavery and the actual practices of slavery. The situation of the ex-slaves in the English colonies is considered with the conversation revolving around one question only: which is the more efficient mode of labour exploitation and of extracting surplus value from the labour force – the formal 'freedom' that 'free' labour grants is entirely incidental to the debate. It is also noteworthy that the lingering aftermath of the Haitian Revolution makes itself felt during this scene: the lone advocate for 'free labour' and 'economic progress' is rounded on by the others, all of whom fear that such 'progress' will usher in the end of their privileged positions as slave lords in Cuba. The specter of Haiti haunts them and the example of the once "flourishing" colony of Saint Domingue that has become a fearful "republic of blacks" is used to put a definitive end to all talk of free labour and abolition as conduits to progress.[24]

Black Agency

Following the dinner scene, Giral provides another Brechtian direct address from the narrator. Francisco's narrative is about to be shown in a dramatically new light, and the narrator informs the viewer that, true to his word, Ricardo halted Francisco's tortures. The film then replays, without the sound, the scenes presented earlier in the

prologue: Francisco and Dorotea's passionate embrace, Dorotea's anguished revelation of how she has gone to bed with the master to save Francisco, and Francisco's consequent despair and suicide. The narrator then boldly asks us to consider – as a means of opening the film's most explicit examination of the theme of black agency and resistance – whether "a typical slave of the time" would have reacted as Francisco did. The film then cuts to a scene in which Suárez Romero is being interviewed on the subject of his novella. In response to the question, is Francisco "a typical slave," Romero's response is striking: "Absolutely not typical: how could a slave suffer as much as Francisco and not be rebellious? He's a freak, a singular exception who helps me denounce the horrors of slavery by contrast with the cruelty of the masters." In sum, according to Giral's Romero, Francisco has a remarkable "mildness and Christian resignation so hard to find in slavery." Romero's words reveal Francisco to be a rhetorical device and the mirror image of the lusty, sadistic Ricardo: Francisco's goodness forms a contrast with the cruelty of the slave owners and overseers. The veracity of all this, Giral will challenge. Having used Romero's own words to establish the historical improbability of the virtuous Francisco's docility, the narrator opens the next segment of *El otro Francisco* with the following words:

> Maybe behind the good intentions of Suárez Romero and other sincere anti-slavers there moved class interests that pursued with the ideal image of the slave, not only an improvement in the owners' conduct. Perhaps the real aims of the capitalist ideologists and the British Empire in suppressing the slave trade weren't only philanthropic. Let's take the novella as the starting point to look at the real situation of slavery and the true picture of a slave mill of the times.

"The real situation of slavery" is immediately presented as one of unending resistance on the part of the slaves, a critique that first emerged in the late 1930s and was then taken up with gusto by revisionist historians in the 1950s and 60s.[25] The camera cuts to a new scene: it is Ricardo's plantation again, shot from a camera positioned high above the plantation buildings. The camera then focuses on a would-be maroon named Crispín who has been captured, bound in ropes, and is being returned by a *rancheador* on horseback to the plantation overseer for punishment. Unlike the meek Francisco, the slave's face is a portrait of simmering indignation and defiance. He is placed in the stocks but then released to cut cane the following day. During a brief rest break that day, Crispin is eager to spread the word among the enslaved, and he tries to persuade Francisco that resistance is their duty and will in the end be fruitful. Though unsuccessful in escaping, Crispin's determination to break the chains of his bondage is entirely undiminished. Crispin talks rousingly of Guinea as a place just beyond the mountains, and of a place where blacks are free, equal, able to marry, raise children, and live peacefully in the absence of masters and overseers. When Francisco mocks him, retorting that this idyllic place is as fictional as the myth that Guinea can be reached in death, Crispin urges his companion to come to a meeting that evening where plans for a rebellion will be laid. During the slaves' nighttime meeting, the film's ambience and aesthetic register embarks in a dramatically new direction: numerous slave voices are heard, African drumming and dancing takes place, and a current of insubordination and refusal is unmistakeable. Now Suárez Romero's sentimental love-triangle novella will be juxtaposed with a very different account of slavery, one in which black agency and resistance is central, an ever-present threat, and animated by a vision of not just emancipation but also of social justice.

At the meeting there is song, dance, ritual, and speeches – an intricate and rich living culture is on display. While Ricardo and his fellow planters considered the slaves only in terms of their labour value, at the meeting they are individualized, demonstrate a capacity for creativity, solidarity, and an awareness of occurrences of slave resistance from beyond Cuba's borders. At the meeting, the chief orator exclaims to his enrapt companions: "Deh's a land dat the blacks call Haiti. where we's free already, de massas gwan run away over de ashes o' dey houses." It is a powerful representation of the impact of the Haitian Revolution spreading across the region, transcending linguistic barriers and inspiring enslaved populations throughout the Americas.[26] As such, it is a further attempt by Giral to tease out the influence of Haiti's revolutionary history on a praxis of Cuban anti-slavery resistance. The following night, there is a further meeting at which there is more singing, drumming, and dancing, but this time it becomes apparent that the ringleaders have carefully planned an uprising: a vanguard group of slave rebels have set the plantation buildings alight, and during the ensuing chaos, they escape. Yet, in an intense sequence, the next day *rancheadors* on horseback with hunting dogs pursue and capture two of the runaways in a scene set to more tribal, percussion-based music that evokes Africa. Slave society, it appears from this representation, will never be settled and calm, and should be understood as a constant struggle against repression.

Then, the narrator interjects to explain why this tradition of Cuban black resistance was not a subject of interest to Suárez Romero, Del Monte, and the island's bourgeois anti-slavery reformers: the dependency on free blacks, and even some poor whites, was so great that it was feared that news of black resistance might destabilize the colony's social hierarchy. To further explain the domestic complexities of anti-slavery politics in Cuba at this time, Giral then stages a brief conversation between Del Monte and Richard Madden, an Irish doctor and ardent abolitionist who, as British consul in Havana, was, *inter alia*, tasked with reporting on observance of the Anglo-Spanish Treaty of Madrid of 1817 which

had granted the British navy the right to inspect Spanish ships suspected of slaving.[27] In their conversation, Del Monte explains to Madden that there was no appetite in Madrid for abolishing slavery in Cuba (or anywhere else in the Spanish Empire), and that among the colony's reformist population, a fear of the potential for black insurrection was holding back the cause of independence. Little wonder then that Suárez Romero elected to focus the attention of his anti-slavery novella on romantic themes and a Christ-like, meek, male slave protagonist rather than seek to recuperate the tradition of slave resistance in the colony. Following this conversation, Giral conveys the tragic reality of almost all slave rebellions: Crispin has been captured and is dead, and the overseer mutilates the rebel's dead body "so that he has no interest in coming back to life" – a barbaric act and comment that suggests the attempt to torture and immiserate the slave rebel in any afterlife, thereby thwarting any paradisial freedom to be found in death.

Yet Crispin's capture and murder are far from the end of the representation of black resistance in *El otro Francisco*. In the remaining 25 minutes, Giral's unwavering focus is on slave resistance in order to definitively demonstrate the limitations of Suárez Romero's novella – and, from Giral's perspective in the mid-1970s in Cuba, the profound mistake of turning the history of abolition into one centered on morality and sentiment. While Ricardo is raping Dorotea, the slaves begin to put a carefully planned rebellion into action, and this time Francisco is a key conspirator. The insurrection begins when Francisco sabotages the sugar mill grinder by thrusting a machete blade into the cogs; the mill is badly damaged and no longer functional – it will take a few days to fix. Ricardo hurries to examine the scene and orders the overseer to identify the slave responsible; he singles out Francisco who is whipped savagely. Giral presents this torture and the context of endless slave resistance as crucial missing pieces in Francisco's story as presented by Suárez Romero. The narrator describes these omissions in the novella as "censorship" and asserts that thwarted romantic love is an insufficient explanation for his suicide. Moreover, the narrator seeks to persuade the viewer that Francisco's suicide should be regarded as a form of resistance: "Suicide was one form of slave resistance. But there were others."[28] These words are the prelude to the dramatic finale of *El otro Francisco*: the drum and percussion music resumes, and another slave uprising begins, and this time there are many rebels. [Fig. 3] The rebels set the cane fields alight and the rebellion quickly gains momentum: the overseer is assaulted and strangled. The narrator then establishes that an insurrection such as this would not have been an isolated event:

> Long before and then after the Suárez Romero novella, a wave of uprisings shook plantations across Cuba. 1812: uprisings in mills at Puerto Principe, Holguin, Bayano Trinidad, and Havana led by Josè Antonio Aponte; 1825: rebellions at mills and ranches in Matanzas, 24 estates sacked and burned, 15 whites and 43 blacks killed; 1830: uprising at a coffee plantation near Havana; 1835: uprising at the Carolina Mill and a coffee plantation; 1837: insurrection in Manzanillo and Trinidad mills; 1842: uprising at the Loreto Mill near Havana and a coffee estate in Lagunillas; 1843, January 27 and 28: uprising in the Alcancia mill in Matanzas, followed by a coffee estate, and a ranch, and four other sugar mills, plus the builders of the Cardenas-Jaruco railroad; November 5 of the same year: uprising at the Triunvirato mill in Matanzas that spread to the slaves at four other mills.

Immediately following these words of the narrator's, there are brief, appalling scenes of retaliatory punishments and executions committed by the planter class. But these scenes are immediately countered with further scenes of slave resistance before Giral cuts to a final panoramic shot of the lush Cuban hills: a landscape in which, as Giral states in the film's last title card, many more atrocities would come to pass before the eventual liberation of the Cuban nation.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

NOTES

1. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Utter Darkness," *12 Years a Slave: Production Notes*, (Fox Searchlights Pictures, 2013). Available at: www.samdb.co.za/filmproductionnotes/1760.

2. The second and third films in the trilogy are: *Rancheador* (1976) and *Maluala* (1979).

3. Among the most notorious and racist examples, consider: D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915), and the novel on which it was based, Thomas Dixon Jr.'s *The Clansmen: A Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905, rpt. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970). However, also consider Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with Wind* (London: Macmillan, 1936) and the film adaptation it generated, Victor Fleming (dir.), *Gone with the Wind* (Selznick International Pictures / MGM, 1939), both of which appear to remain beloved and reviled in equal measure.

4. Aisha K. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841-1844* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 183.

5. Cuban directors Héctor Veitia and Julio García Espinosa are also listed as collaborators. In addition, Giral cast many of the same actors that would appear the following year in Alea's *La última cena* ("The Last Supper"); Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, dir. *La última cena* (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, 1976).

6. Sergio Giral interview with Pablo Velez, "Close-Up on the Background: A Conversation with Sergio Giral, The Father of Afro-Cuban Cinema," *Abernathy Magazine*, https://abernathymagazine.com/sergio-giral/. Accessed September 25, 2019.

7. Thirty years later, in 1991, Giral would once again leave Cuba. In a recent interview, Giral explained: "The romantic ideals that had brought me to the island as a young man had slowly evaporated over time. I found the country's double standards perpetuated the racism, social inequality, and political repression that it pretended to cure." Ibid.

8. Sergio Giral (dir.), *Plácido* (ICIAC, 1986). The *escalera*, the name by which the rebellion became known, refers to a simple wooden ladder to which captured rebels were tied and then tortured. See: Aisha K. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba: La Escalera and the Insurgencies of 1841-1844* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

9. Sergio Giral (dir.), *María Antonia*, (ICIAC, 1991). For commentary, see: Nadia Sophia Sanko, "Creolizing *Carmen*: Reading Performance in *María Antonia*, Cuba's Overlooked Carmen Adaptation," *Camera Obscura*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (2012): 157–91; Leo Cabranes-Grant, "Possession, Gender and Performance in Revolutionary Cuba: Eugenio Hernández Espinosa's *María Antonia*," *Theatre Research International*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (2010): 126–38.

10. *FIPRESCI: Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique* [International Federation of Film Critics]. See: http://fipresci.org/awards/1975.

11. For a detailed examination of the cultural and political significance of death in the black diasporic Atlantic world, see: Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

12. For example, this trope is also prominent in Steve McQueen's adaptation of Solomon Northup's narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave:* Steve McQueen (dir.) *12 Years A Slave* (Fox Searchlight, 2013). For analysis see: Philip Kaisary, "The Slave Narrative and Filmic Aesthetics:

13. Steve McQueen, Solomon Northup, and Colonial Violence," *MELUS*, (Vol.42, No. 2, Summer 2017): 94–114.

14. "An Interview with Aimé Césaire Conducted by René Depestre," in *Discourse on Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire, trans. Joan Pinkham, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000): 90.

15. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* [2nd ed. rev. 1963] (New York: Vintage, 1989).

16. Victor Fleming (dir.), *Gone with the Wind*, (MGM, 1939); Steve McQueen (dir.), *12 Years a Slave*, (Fox Searchlight, 2013). For analysis of the representation of labour in *12 Years a Slave*, see: Philip Kaisary, "The Slave Narrative and Filmic Aesthetics: Steve McQueen, Solomon Northup, and Colonial Violence." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*. Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017): 94–114, 106.

17. Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion in Cuba*, p.40. Moreover, Finch notes that the sporadic available accounts, and the population imbalance along gender lines, also suggest that "black women also had to be vigilant about sexual exploitation from black men." (41)

18. Cuba became the first Latin American country to legalize abortion in 1965 although in practice access to abortion remained limited until 1972. See: Elise Andaya, *Conceiving Cuba: Reproduction, Women, and the State in the Post-Soviet Era* (Rutgers University Press, 2014): 42–3.
19. For analysis of the harrowing – and brutalizing – depictions of slave torture in McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*, see: Kaisary, "The Slave Narrative and Filmic Aesthetics," *MELUS*. Vol. 42, No. 2 (2017): 94–114, 106–108.
20. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, 35.
21. This glimpse of slavery as a thoroughly modern system that is here offered by Giral is elaborated much more fully in Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugar Mill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba*, 1760–1860, trans. Cedric Belfrage, (New York & London: Monthly Review Press, 1976).
22. For analysis see: Philip Kaisary, "The Haitian Revolution and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena*," in *Racialized Visions: Haiti and the Hispanic Caribbean* ed. Vanessa K. Valdés, (SUNY University Press, forthcoming).
23. This British strategy drives the narrative in Gillo Pontecorvo's cult classic film about slave revolution and Machiaevellian colonial manipulation in the 19th century Caribbean. See: Gillo Pontecorvo (dir.), *Quemada! / Burn!* (Alberto Grimaldi, Produzioni Europee Associati, 1969).
24. For consideration of this radical tradition in light of the re-emergence of slavery and capitalism as a flourishing academic subfield, see: Peter James Hudson, "The Racist Dawn of Capitalism: Unearthing the Economy of Bondage," *Boston Review*, March 14, 2016. Available at: http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/peter-james-hudson-slavery-capitalism.
25. For an analysis of the retrenchment and intensification of slavery in Cuba as a consequence of the Haitian Revolution, see: Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Also see: Dolores González-Ripoll Consuelo Naranjo, Ada Ferrer, Gloria García, and Josef Opatrny, *El rumor de Haití en Cuba: temor, raza y rebeldía*, 1789-1844, (Madrid, 2004).
26. The earliest examples of this historiographical tradition are: Hebert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts (Columbia University Press, 1943) and the preceding journal article: Herbert Aptheker, "*American Negro Slave Revolts,*" *Science & Society*, (Vol. 1, No. 4, 1937): 512–538. Also see: C.L.R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (Independent Labour Party, 1938), revised and republished in 1969 as: *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Drum and Spear Press, 1969).
27. For an account of the transnational networks that transmitted news of the Haitian Revolution and other insurrections and mutinies in this period, see: Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Verso: 2018).
28. Gott, *Cuba: A New History*, 60–61. Madden's memoranda of his visit to Cuba was published as: Richard Madden, *The Island of Cuba: Its Resources, Progress, and Prospects, Considered in Relation especially to the Influence of its Prosperity on the Interests of the British West India Colonies*, (London, C. Gilpin, 1849).
29. For an examination of suicide as a form of Cuban slave resistance see: Louis A. Pérez Jr., *To Die in Cuba: Suicide and Society,* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012): 25–64.

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So What if She Can't Dance and Sing: A Testimony from the *afrohabanera*

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Abstract

From the early 1990s, a new film gained momentum in which there were no actors, i.e. contracted, paid, and famous, rather ordinary people, residing at the fringes of society, who momentarily were on camera, guided by a director determined to film realistic images. *Cidade de Deus* (Brazil), *Pixote: a lei do mais fraco* (Brazil), *La vendedora de rosas* (Colombia), *Rodrigo D* (Colombia), and *Ratas y ratones* (Ecuador) are examples. There is little footage about Cubans during the Special Period (1989-1995). Further, until then no production had directly and realistically focused on Afro-Cuban women. Rolando Díaz's 1998 production, *Si me comprendieras* (If You Could Understand Me) offers an opportunity to contemplate her version of the Special Period. Havana comes alive, embedded in that artistic technique of presenting the black female body as the medium for navigating issues such as culture, revolution, and nationhood. While music and dance serve as the point of entry for displaying the fabric of society, they transition into tools that assess how empowered Afro-Cuban women have become during and after the Revolution, especially at the time of the filming thirty years later.

Si me comprendieras (If You Could Understand Me) is a 1998 testimonial documentary-film (or *docudrama*) by Cuban director Rolando Díaz that takes us into the lives and thoughts of at least eight women of African descent who reside in Havana. It is a film that provides us with an opportunity to examine the cultural presumption at the core of this cinematographic display with regard to the Afro-Cuban woman – that she has an innate ability and inclination to sing and/or dance, that she is spontaneously provocative and sensual, and that she usually is part of those social classes facing economic and financial challenges. The director makes it clear that this was a planned selection, even as he seems not to have recognized that his idea was the result of preconceived ideas rooted in relations of colonialism and in the tendency to fantasize about her body, envisioned as a site of talent and exoticism. This study argues that such an approach is not new, as illustrated by character sketches of similar figures in the Spanish Caribbean poetic movement of the early 20th century known as *negrismo*, and also by the deployment of *rumba*, known as the sensual, rhythmic, and widely popular dance with African roots.[1] Critical perspectives on these two cultural phenomena assess to what extent they were coopted into the revolutionary agenda in its determination to build a sense of national pride. By way of a woman-centered perspective, it becomes possible to argue that *negrista* poetry, *rumba*, and this film, share the same problematic rendering of black female portrayal, even as this is the first film that facilitates the voicing and representation of a spectrum of Afro-Cuban women who, in their own way, are critical and question the toll that revolutionary ideals have on their lives.

Flamboyant, colorful imagery, rhythm, percussion, and words or phrases representing Afro-Cuban and popular Cuban language styles converge in *negrista* writing and are critical components for its success as representative of Afro-Cuban culture. The use of exaggeration as a literary technique created distorted poetic images even as these symbolized an important breakthrough in a literary legacy that, until then, had never included in a significant way the Afro-Cuban subject. Given the playful, often dismissive tones of the poetry, there are tensions between poetic form and the central character's social existence, marred as it still was at the beginning of the twentieth century by the legacy of slavery. Equally troubling is the way in which, in various verses, configurations of Africa's contributions to the formation of national racial identity take shape through the

objectification of the black female body. In similar fashion, the song-dance premise that drives the film's storyline resuscitates such bodily focus, a pillar in this film's provocative version of what it means to be black towards the end of revolutionary idealism.

Cuban *negrista* poetry provides a frame of reference in the way it portrays the black body. There are a wide range of poems that attest to the link between the Afro-Cuban female body and visions of nationhood. These include: Nicolás Guillén's "Mulata," Alfonso Hernández Catá's "Rumba," Emilio Ballagas' "Elegía a María Belén Chacón," and Marcelino Arozarena's "La comparsa del maja."[2] What stands out is the masculine gaze on the female Other, her physical attributes, rhythmic gyrations, facial features, and skin color. These patterns are contagious and repeat themselves in several poems, appearing in close connection with the Afro-Cuban dance *rumba*, known for its implied flirting and the sensuous movements of the female dancer. On one hand, the *negrista* poetic tradition is rich in its recovery and expansion of Cuban folkloric representations and the promotion of a tropical vision of national self, on the other it has a damaging effect given the role the female figure must play. Poetry invents a figure that is pleasurable to the masculine gaze, one he will potentially desire and perhaps ultimately possess. Alfonso Camín's "Danzón de María Belén," José Zacarías Tallet's "La rumba," José Antonio Portuondo's "Rumba de la negra Pancha," and Ramón Guirao's "Bailadora de rumba" are poems whose imagery clearly illustrates the ambiguous play between cultural celebration of folklore and the exploitation of the woman of African descent.[3]

Explicit and sensual verses reveal a literary rebelliousness not previously visible in poetry. *Negrista* poems bring to center stage the gyrating figure of the black or mulatto woman. For special effect, animal-like imagery together with use of onomatopoeia and nonsense words implies the naturalistic tendencies of the persona, even as they seek to capture the rhythms of percussion instruments. Williams critiques the depiction as part of a legacy of degrading perception of the African woman's body, dating back to eighteenth-century European thought. She describes poetry as reverting back to ideology that places the black female body in direct negative contrast with the white woman, simultaneously lowering her to the status of female animals and associated with sexual misconduct and barbarism.[4] There is consistent correlation between female aesthetic depiction and nationalistic sentiment. Williams (63) and Mansour (172-81) point to the exploitation of the black female body to promote a nationalistic discourse of Cubanness, by way of Africa. Young critiques the inevitable objectification that accompanies the nationalizing intention. She sees it as contributing to a long tradition of poetic appropriation and abuse, for the woman continues as "one more natural resource, sought after, cultivated and exploited for the pleasure and satisfaction of the master" (Young 140). It proves to be no more than "the establishment of a relationship between writers and poetic subjects based on voyeurism and sexual desire" (Williams 69).

In style and objective, the film displays similar characteristics. Portrayals of these Afro-Cuban women take place against the rather difficult backdrop of life in Cuba during the early 1990s known as the Special Period, a detail that has implications for the perspectives and Havana landscapes that are filmed. It is a well-intentioned and strategic production that has gained value over time, now serving as a visual record of those times marked by dire economic circumstances. As the camera zooms in and out, we meet these women individually and as a group, in a process of singular and collective voicing from which their diverse meaningful stories emerge as verbal manifestations coming from those who are very rarely heard. These stories are problematic in the way they clarify weaknesses within the nation's ideological agenda. As life stories, they aptly reveal women's historical and cultural vulnerabilities that even revolutionary Cuba did not address. Strategically, they uncover systemic shortfalls and failures that, over time, continue to detrimentally impact this community (Madrazo Luna 2).

A cinematographic production funded by ICAIC (Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry), it displays certain characteristics that mark that country's film industry (Cicero Sancristóbal 320). The set is of course the iconic space of the capital city Havana. The camera moves around freely and intrusively, filming places and people, listening in on conversations, taking liberties with people's appearances, actions, habits, words, and lives. The moving images are supported by a narrator who sardonically describes the city landscape and explains why he chose to film there. Reality and fiction combine in a production that is both revelatory and critical of contemporary Havana, even as public spaces are the spheres of choice for this production. It is a unique film, potentially theatrical, an effect achieved by the way it cultivates the ongoing myth that everything in Havana finds resolution in song and dance. It is spontaneous, yet it is also staged. Intermittently throughout the production are excerpts from a play with an all-black cast. The main layer comprises the selection, training, and engaging of those candidates who will form the group, and whose stories are featured. The filming thrives on spontaneous revelations about their lives, their dreams, and their day-to-day challenges (Pérez and Rodríguez-Mangual, 192). Havana comes alive through the experiences of these Afro-Cuban women, in many ways reproducing that deeply-rooted literary, potentially stereotypical technique of presenting them physically, as if this were the medium for arriving at certain conclusions about broader, more urgent matters of importance, such as those related to territory, nation, and ideology. Yet, there is something beyond that in this production. For while music and dance serve as the initial point of entry for penetrating the fabric of Havana society, it becomes possible to assess

just how empowered they are at this moment in time, positioned at the intersection of race, class, and gender during a critical period of revolutionary decline.

Howe analyzes current changes among critics, writers, and artists, in what she prefers to describe as Cuba's post-revolutionary historical phase (14).

> With the advent of the Special Period, intellectuals still residing on the island audaciously began to explore the chasm that separated the seedy reality they inhabited from the ideal socialist island depicted in the government's propaganda. Cuban intellectuals were increasingly unwilling to deny that the economic and social crisis was real and that its impact was transforming cultural expression. (3-4)

Cicero Sancristóbal confirms the liberating effect such loss of government financial support had on ICAIC, for it forced the agency to subsidize its own existence and seek alternative, often international, funding and technical support that, in turn, led to a reduction in State-imposed vigilance, censorship, and sanctions.

> Además de las mulatas y los paisajes tropicales inevitables, algunas de las coproducciones de la época cargaban la mano en la crítica de la situación social, y el panorama del séptimo arte en la Isla, de cierta paradójica manera, se revitalizó extraordinariamente. (320)

Such changes represent a new approach, one that today is less fearful of challenging the government-mandated restrictions, being placed on open artistic critique and discussion of diversity issues, racism, and LGBTQ+ experiences in Cuba. When interviewed, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea examined the relationship between the more orthodox wing of the State and ICAIC (Chanan "We are Losing" 49). During that period, certain cultural patterns and behaviors not conforming with the preferred national identity were condemned as revolutionary digressions or problems of sovereignty. Such cultural patterns, including Afro-Cuban identities, homosexual identities, and political non-conformism, are integral conflictive issues that can no longer be ignored, for as *Si me comprendieras* indicates, encroaching changes have caused the resurgence of socio-economic difficulties re-introducing class-based distinctions between those who are thriving and the masses that are not, which is where most Afro-Cubans tend to be located.[5]

When interviewed on October 12, 2018 by Dean Luis Reyes of Altercine Productions, Rolando Díaz declared, "Soy un cineasta cubano de Cuba" [I am a Cuban filmmaker from Cuba] (Díaz "Interview with Dean Luis Reyes"). A longstanding Cuban director, Díaz has left his mark on ICAIC and is fully recognized as one of the prominent film producers of the revolutionary period (Chanan, *Cuban Cinema* 32, 410-412). He spoke about state-driven censorship of his major cinematographic projects during the Special Period (1989-1994). Cuban authorities and ICAIC have over the years displayed political doubt of his intentions and nationalism, stemming from his status as a repatriated citizen, returning home after a successful sojourn in Spain during which his documentary *El largo viaje de Rústico* was nominated for the distinguished 1994 Goya film award, albeit, as a Spanish (not Cuban) production. In many ways, this questioning of his loyalties has marked his professional career as a film director.

He does recall how refreshing it was to film in Spain, an experience that allowed him to bask in a sensation of freedom; "me permitió absorber, como una esponja, cómo funcionaban las cosas en otros mundos, me había animado a concebir la idea de ser independiente" (Díaz "Interview with Dean Luis Reyes"). His interview describes the challenges he faced upon returning to Cuba to work under the directorship of ICAIC. His overwhelming difficulty was the censorship of his film *Melodrama* released in 1995, probably his most successful production. He speculates that he was marked back then as "disobedient", having made the decision to produce Cuban film while living and working in Spain (Díaz "Interview with Dean Luis Reyes").

Díaz identifies *Si me comprendieras* as the first independent Cuban film produced in Cuba and it had a very spontaneous trajectory. In 1997 in Havana, he was offered the opportunity to produce and direct a television series called "Cómo se hace el cine en Cuba" (Díaz "Interview with Dean Luis Reyes"). Under the umbrella of this project (to a certain extent, unauthorized), he put together a second and separate team that filmed what later developed into *Si me comprendieras*. He describes it as a spontaneous endeavor arising out of a personal desire to film the confluential topics of race and the Afro-Cuban female experience. Filming was completed with a tiny crew and in fourteen days of intense shooting in 1997. Díaz views his title as allegorical in nature, and the plot as providing Cuba's inhabitants with a chance to contemplate their reality.

It proved to be groundbreaking and innovative, a huge success. An important contribution to contemporary Cuban film industry, *Si me comprendieras* was presented at the 1999 Amsterdam Film Festival, the 1999 Toronto Film Festival, and the 1999 Berlin Film Festival. It was nominated for a prize at the 20th International Film Festival of the Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (New Latin American Cinema) held in December 1998. Known as the Premio Coral (Coral Award), it is an annual independent film festival held in Havana. In his interview with Reyes, Díaz indicated subtle tactics and forms of censorship worked to shroud the film's prominence, even as, going by audience and jury reactions, it was a favorite of the crowd. In the end, it received the Jury's Special Mention, a prize he was not allowed to climb on stage and accept ("Cronología de Festivales del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano"). The film subsequently participated

in more than twenty international film festivals receiving various awards and recognitions; however, it was never shown in Cuba again. He admitted that he never gave ICAIC a copy for local distribution and showings, skeptically believing that it would not have been used anyway (Díaz "Interview with Dean Luis Reyes").

In many ways, Díaz's role as director allowed him to impose and project his perspective of his country's reality on screen, even as he remained behind the camera. The nature of the questions put to passersby and the imaging of Havana – buildings, neighborhoods, families of the female actors – designed a discourse of difficulties, challenges, human potential, and sentimental nostalgia. He commissioned the band *los Van Van* to produce the main musical theme to which the girls danced. Running for 87 minutes, the production is special, given that the narrating style, while light-hearted and entertaining, is at the same time strategic. Irrespective of the challenges, the voice of the narrator insists on preserving his original plan, i.e. to make a film about music.

There are three juxtaposed cinematographic levels that appear randomly throughout the film. The first level consists of a panoramic perspective of the urban space sustained by popular commentary. It reinforces the idea of a collaborative production, supported by the spontaneous participation of many unidentified individuals who simply seemed drawn to a camera, as it captured their concerns, warm spirit, and perseverance. The narrator's voice is light-hearted, the city dweller's not always. The *malecón*, the decaying buildings, the *bicitaxis*, even the now defunct *camello* (a very uncomfortable form of public transportation shaped like a truck-trailer on wheels) are brought together in a landscape that is tropical, attractive, romantic, and varied, even as it is challenging for its permanent inhabitants.

The film thrives on live footage; indeed the narrator declares that there is no established filming site, script, or professional actors, and very limited resources. In the end, it is his presence behind the camera and his voice that will hold the action together. Images of ugliness and difficulty (poor wages, precarious water supply, bad housing, and food shortages) intermingle with displays of frustration and discontent as speculations of corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency are laid squarely at the door of those in office. Are these counterrevolutionary manifestations? They are manifestations of disgust at the low levels to which legitimate citizens have sunk. The lack of overt anti-revolutionary rhetoric finds compensation in the very visible human distress that speaks for itself; it is visually evident that the system has failed them.

The second level engages screen with performance. Embedded in the film is a fictional representation of *teatro negro* [black theater], and sporadically the film releases excerpts from a play that is very critical of racism in Cuba. The company seems to be associated with Flor, one of the women featured in the film. The actors are all Afro-Cuban and, by way of caricature, irony, and exaggeration, stubbornly defy the odds and subvert officialdom's posture of color-blindness to engage the topic and their creativity to do what they most love, i.e. perform. The plot is simple; it's about a group of actors criticizing the fact that very few Afro-Cuban actors are allowed to participate in the professional performing arts. There is a definite process of intra-textuality here, for the very art world within which they operate is the one that marginalizes them, even as they use it as a mechanism for critically declaring their awareness of it, their willingness to fight this exclusion, and the autonomy they enjoy doing so. The message has a deeper purpose, given the way it uncovers a serious problem in the performing arts in Cuba by way of satirical enactment. They are not allowed to produce a theatrical production about racism. Sarduy and Stubbs describe the similar experiences of actress Elvira Cervera, actor Alden Knight, and film director Gloria Rolando, all of whose stories follow a similar line, yet who by their own efforts and perseverance have managed to develop their art (11-12). *Teatro negro's* performance is a critical social commentary, involving lines such as "hay fear en el ambiente!", interspersed with rhythmic movements and chants in a corporal manifestation in defiance of censorship and silencing. This staging of racialized discourse feeds into the third and central level of the film that focuses on the interviews, the dance practices, and home visits.

The venue selected for dance practices also serves as film studio and morphs into a site of close contemplation of the actors' talents (or lack thereof) and their emotional state. *La rumba* is the preferred music for the choreography, and a *bolero* song with the same name as the film is selected to test their vocal skills. The confluence that is literature, Havana, music, and dance, provides a wealth of thematic possibilities for a film, but the decision to focus on women of color was strategic, as confirmed by the narrating voice: "La negra y la mulata cubana es la síntesis de tantas cosas ...el resultado de la exageración. Sensuales, habaneras, profundas, misteriosas, directas, musicales, imprescindibles. Un refrán popular dice que son seis meses ángel, seis meses diablo" (*Si me comprendieras*). Riding on the waves of historical and aesthetic objectification, these words reproduce deeply engrained myths of beauty, desire, and sensuality associated with these female subjects. This centuries-old construct unravels only partially, thanks to the film's nuanced portrayal of the reality they face in post-revolutionary Cuba.

The first interviewee is Alina, *la rumbera*. The director knows she can dance very well for she is by profession a cabaret performer. But can she sing? Actually, he is about to find out that she cannot. Alina is a physically very shapely and attractive mulatto woman who exploits this resource to its fullest, by virtue of her career. She is very much aware of the broad social perception of her as morally loose, visible in her reaction to the above-mentioned popular proverbial

saying regarding women of color, but ignores it and displays self-confidence and pride in what she does. She knows the value of her physical attributes and is comfortable being who she is. Rather than allow public opinion dictate her life, she is unapologetic of her achievements, loves her work, and intends to keep dancing as long as she can.

In the midst of this demanding career, Alina, a single mother, raised a child with great difficulty, often taking her baby daughter to the cabaret where she performed at night. Now married to a white Cuban, she has a son whose skin color contrasts sharply with that of her daughter. Alina speaks candidly, explaining that most of her friends, like her daughter's father, are black. Alina has traveled abroad as an entertainer; while interviewing, she lost her place in a show which would have given her another such opportunity. She does nothing to hide her desperation in a very emotional scene in which she argues with the manager of that show, fighting for an opportunity during the hardest of times as the main income earner for an extended family that depends on her financially. Alina and her children continue to live with her parents, a situation in which many young couples find themselves.

In conversation at home with her family, Alina does not see herself as racist, utilizing as proof her own ethno-cultural mixture – "isleña, español, congo, carabalí" (*Si me comprendieras*). Her wavy hair, brown-to-fair complexion, straight nose, and thin lips blend with her very shapely body to produce the Latin American *mulata* phenotype so celebrated as the feminine symbol of this region's identity. She represents miscegenation, especially *mulatez*, and therefore appears as perhaps the most favorable in appearance among this group of women. She calls her father a racist for admitting that he does not like blacks and did disapprove of her first relationship. At this point, the camera, rather ironically, zooms in on the father whose features and skin color potentially indicate deep ancestral African, and maybe even Indigenous roots. Alina's daughter sits nearby, serious, quiet, unsure, clearly psychologically touched by the fact that she is different. Probably ten years old, she perceives how different she is from the rest of her family and, even though her mother tells her she is beautiful, at this tender age she is processing a distinctive social experience that, unfortunately, is not dealt with systematically. She faces difficulties in school where she is attacked or confronted with queries as to why she is so dark when her family is practically all white. Roberto Fandiño emphatically praises the production as a direct testimony revelatory of the racism that continues to permeate the country, even blaming it on the revolutionary government that for decades deactivated and censured all developments on race and racism. Attention to race as a cultural phenomenon in Cuba is a twenty-first century initiative (227).

The camera will continue this trend, highlighting the talents and lives of seven other women - Joanni the model, Flor the actress, Anais the unemployed young woman, Belkis the working girl, Doris the nurse, Alicia the classical dancer, and finally Ivete the Soviet-trained engineer. The diverse range of talents, in terms of their ability or inability to both sing and dance, contrasts with the relative evenness in their socio-economic circumstance. The lack of sufficient housing means that the majority continue to live at home with their parents and extended family. As individuals, they are not really cushioned from the effects of socio-economic difficulty, yet in the midst of difficulty, there is no lack of hope and potential, for they are still relatively young and not disillusioned by the state of affairs.

The idealistic dark-complected Joanni poses nude in spite of her disapproving grandmother. Joanni's interview reveals her ambitions and determination to be a famous professional; indeed she dreams of becoming a supermodel like Naomi Campbell. She is convinced that, with her looks, she can attain the ultimate dream of "divisa" and "poder."[4] Flor is the one who seems to devote her life to the greater good. Her theatrical group and her immediate project of staging a play about racism in Cuba suffer constantly from the lack of basic resources, funding, government support, approval, and recognition. Her question "¿cuál es el miedo?" (*Si me comprendieras*) confirms how race and racism continue to be taboo, even as they (black women) are surrounded by evidence of differentiated treatment and discrimination. Candidly, Flor declares that there is a huge gap between the discourse of the state and a consciousness and need among the people. Belkis, the failed entrepreneur who used to operate cranes, lives with her partner who is a white Cuban. They poured all their resources into a business venture and took a loan to invest in a *paladar*, or small family restaurant, which they enthusiastically operated until, faced with low profits and an inability to repay the loan, they declared bankruptcy. Indebted, jobless, and financially in the red because of the taxes, Belkis is in a state of despair.

A Soviet-educated engineer, Ivete lives in a small apartment with her children, and is about to make the radical yet practical decision to work in tourism, abandoning the engineering profession for which she so diligently prepared by spending six years in the USSR. Her obligations with the government have restricted her ability to seek alternative opportunities, and she simply cannot raise her family on the pittance she earns as a professional. Ivete's circumstances are not uncommon. Educated behind the Iron Curtin during the Cold War era, she was directly impacted by Perestroika, the demise of global Communism, and the dismantling of the Eastern Block of countries. Her education, by force of historical change and international ideological turn-about, is now obsolete. But she is resilient; her symbolic act of boarding a train that will take her to the tourist resort is both nostalgic farewell and apprehension, as she starts a new and hopefully more promising chapter in her life. The filming of Ivete's story ends here and does not reveal the reality facing

blacks within the tourism sector. During the early nineties, this was the most profitable, sought after, and controversial job market, with the added layer that Afro-Cubans were less likely to gain employment or receive the more lucrative jobs. The reality is that Ivete's chances at prosperity are, at best, very slim.

Anais and Alicia, among the youngest members of the group, are not working, reside with extended family, and seem emotionally traumatized. They appear to be protected, in Anais's case, by her doting grandmother, in Alicia's case by her mother who dreamed of her becoming a prima ballerina and, to this end, sent her to the famous national school of dance. However, Alicia is Afro-Cuban and, as her mother suggests, this along with her low socio-economic status, makes it impossible to attain the social distinction and connections needed to be among the selected and favored performers. The grandmother and mother describe their lives, difficulties, and their relationships with their girls, among the most moving moments of the documentary, for they are the words of Afro-Cuban women who invested in the national promise, never to achieve the prosperity or success imagined. They managed to raise their girls in challenging situations; Alicia and her mother are somewhat estranged, while Anais never had the opportunity to connect with hers.

Anais was raised by her grandmother, and her interview reveals the deep and continuing hurt she feels growing up as a child with no parents. She met her father once and never again, while her mother, because of her criminal record and apparent opposition to the regime, was among those dispatched in the 1980 Mariel boat exodus to the United States. Anais was just three years old when her mother departed and was never the same again. Difficult, rebellious, stubborn, perhaps even violent, are the words her grandmother uses to describe her, and indeed, her expression seems to combine loneliness, a stubborn nature, and a hidden anger. She admits to the tremendous impact this sensation of being alone has had on her, one she continues to experience even as she tries to be normal and socialize. She struggles with commitment and trust, as seen during the dance rehearsals when, repeatedly for no apparent reason, she suddenly gives up and leaves, driven by internal bitterness, uncertainty, sadness, and an inability to endure any activity that demands too much from her emotionally. Her mother returns, but Anais cannot connect with her as too many years have passed. The lingering need for parental affection hampers her capacity to mature and develop the confidence to make something of her life. Her disengagement explains her inability to feel comfortable and relaxed in the group of girls as they go through their paces. Yet, as the camera selects her, we sense that there is tremendous potential and something very different here. Her candid explanation of her personal life, fears, and emotions uncovers a deeper awareness of internal struggles and her shortcomings. She is told that she must make a final decision whether to remain with the group or leave. Her appearance in the final performance scene is perhaps indicative of a growing maturity and steadfastness.

Remitting back to the primarily corporal portrayal of the Afro-Cuban female figure in the *negrista* poetry of the 1920s and 1930s, this literary movement serves as the source of all subsequent aesthetic and cultural interlacing of *rumba* and women of color whose body parts (the hips, the behind, the legs) are garnished in support of nationalistic sentiments and agendas at various moments in history. Díaz's film represents one more moment, as periodically the camera captures their gyrating bodies while they execute the *rumba* steps. Only partially does the inclusion of their life stories (i.e. their voicing) counteracts this process of objectification. Their stories are moving, and yes, the myth of the *mulata* or black female entertainer becomes partially undone by the sheer force of the circumstances in which these women find themselves, and more importantly, by their own words and actions. Their multiple stories do somewhat counteract such body gazing as they describe themselves openly and in ways that emphasize their sense of personal worth in spite of economic downturn or personal trauma. The undoing of the myth of the sensual dancer thus occurs through the depictions of realistic circumstances for, as the camera shows, the glamour of filming is but a brief moment of fame. It is the women themselves who, as they describe their lives, will undo the fantasy and, while resolution of their circumstances is not possible, they do celebrate the moment for the way their voices are heard. There is a liberating effect, not in terms of an ability to change socio-economic circumstances, but more as a successful move to bring onto the screen their stories in their own words. Their empowerment through dance comes in the way it allows for their own voicing.

The practices become spaces for rupturing narrow assumptions, such as the belief that all black women are in tune with rhythms, or that the ability to dance is one of the few aspects of value that can possibly be associated with the Afro-Cuban woman. Individual circumstances vary, for while some participants place a high value on their ability to dance, others do not, and others simply cannot (dance). A shift occurs as the days go by. The individual and group practice sessions gain a greater significance. On the one hand we are made to appreciate the popular emphasis on dance as a form of entertainment, interpersonal contact, socialization, relaxation, and professional gain. On the other hand, dance transmutes into a tool facilitating our appreciation of their life stories and the positive value of this experience. As the *docudrama* progresses, dance becomes less meaningful as art and more as an activity for psychological healing. It provides a community, a purpose; it becomes meaningful as commitment, integrity, and enables these women to face their fears, their failures, and themselves.

The nobleness of this filmmaker's cause is not without its pitfalls. His spontaneous association of this female figure with singing and dancing reproduces the debilitating cycle

of stereotypical profiling, i.e. domesticates or sensualizes her body, objectifies her, reduces her to a visual pleasurable manifestation for male satisfaction, or places her in the mold of an entertainer. The cinematographic strategy used to condemn conditions of life in Havana, when applied to black female characterization, is problematic in the way it materializes as a tool of her potential exploitation. His choice of how to enter her world is, therefore, a continuation of historically debilitating forms of perception; the process of Othering thus continues. He does not celebrate her intellectual potential, her yearning for success and prosperity, nor does he attempt to arrive at a deeper understanding before embarking on physical imaging and strategies consistently used in her portrayals. The filmmaker's intention, while bent on justice and truth, is incapable of escaping that mouse trap of a historically formulated white male perspective associated with Romantic abolitionist literature and *negrista* poetry. Sensuality is once again embedded in a worthy intention to display who they are, i.e. women whose lives are filled with challenges, resulting in a skewed cinematographic display that, labeled as a documentary, is difficult to challenge, counteract, or deny as viable and true.

The ethnographic eye of the camera singles out what men would find attractive in the enticing female contours that women like Alina and Joanni possess. Rather than condemn the male stares, comments, and catcalls these women provoke as they walk through the streets, the camera is intent on capturing the play between their image and popular street-level responses to it. The film seems to divulge and celebrate such potential irreverence as a trait of *cubanía* or Cubanness. Further, the women are not offended by it rather they seem to thrive on the attention, thereby giving the obvious sexual innuendos and such forms of socializing a life of their own. They cultivate their image for the way it gets them the attention and fame they seek, while, as their interviews later indicate, in no way do they deem themselves to be insulted, immoral, or socially incorrect for doing so. Consequently, there is a feminine appreciation of such public male acknowledgement of their attractiveness, even though for other women or in feminist spheres it could be deemed rude, insulting, and politically incorrect. It is a public unfiltered form of appreciation that advises them of their physical attractiveness and seems to boost their self-esteem. Further, there is a practical financial purpose, as the sensual self-imaging that they seem to be buying into offers concrete possibilities for economic gain, even prosperity. Of course all this cultural interplay does nothing to erase the problematic side to all this, which is that, for women like them, it is but a temporary state of being, with limited financial gain. Additionally, it undermines possibilities for a more serious form of socio-economic politicizing which would ultimately help them demand those structural changes needed to improve their overall state of well-being.

Race and racism are themes behind this production, however they appear controlled by state policy that encourages minimal engagement. Also, even though the film focuses on the Afro-Cuban woman, no attempt is made to directly include this topic in conversations with pedestrians or the girls and their families; rather it is the interviewees themselves who may or may not actually bring it up, revealing to what extent they are aware, and whether they feel it is an important part of their current situation. Howe's question is therefore quite relevant: "Does cultural production in Cuba reflect the reality of blacks' societal integration, or does it merely mimic revolutionary rhetoric on ideal racial harmony?" (68) One can question the local preferences, definitely in relation to certain biases, in terms of economic status and aspects of gender expectations. As this documentary indicates, there is no doubt that it is more difficult for the Afro-Cuban woman to achieve prosperity, and she is less likely to participate in spheres marked by discourses that critically engage issues of race, gender, and economics. By belonging to an environment that avoids such engagement, she is therefore silenced, prevented from addressing an issue that definitely has an impact on the quality of her existence. The process of an "erasure of color" de-politicizes the possibility of race as an issue of national debate, thereby reducing the effectiveness of artistic productions as tools for developing social consciousness and enlightenment (Howe 69).

This film serves as a reminder of where Cuba was with regard to race and racism in the 1990s, and is a good measure to assess what gains have been achieved since its release. The success of this filming project rests less on the images of Havana that remain with us and more in the way the camera was able to defy the odds as it were and zoom in on a particular female experience. The external restrictions and political processes that seem to have neutralized class and race differences in Cuba, thereby making such ventures more difficult in this sense, were overcome in a very simple and direct way. The employment of *rumba* offered the mechanism needed to initiate the process and guide the project beyond the focus on the external and the physical, towards the subjective, very personalized situation of these female subjects. As the film ends, we hear Omara Portuondo's version of the bolero song, "Si me comprendieras." Further, we are entertained by the dancers whose final performance to the spicy music of the popular Cuban band, *los Van Van*, takes place not on a stage or on an artificial movie set, but in the midst of that very space that is theirs. The densely populated street of a typical working-class Havana neighborhood is their stage, and their audience are the very people with whom they dwell. There is no triumphant socio-economic resolution or drastic transformation of their circumstances, indeed this was not the original intention. Yet, at the same time, there is a sensation (and hope) that not only have they moved on from that initial moment when their words and actions were captured on film, but also that they may have been impacted in some

meaningful way by this small but focused interest in their lives.

NOTES

1. A Spanish-Caribbean literary movement that flourished between 1926 and 1940, *Negrismo* or *negrista* poetry celebrated the Afro-Cuban verses of predominantly Hispanic (white) male writers. (Mansour 135).

2. Morales sel. e intro., *Poesía afroantillana y negrista.* Puerto Rico, República Dominicana, Cuba (Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, 1981); Guillén, Nicolás Guillén. *Obra Poética* 1920-1958. *Tomo 1* (Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1972); Tallet, *Orbita de Jose Z. Tallet*, sel. y notas Helio Orovio (UNEAC, 1969); Ballagas, *Obra poética* (Mnemosyne, 1969); and Guirao, *Orbita de la poesía afrocubana* 1928-1937 (Ucar, García y Cía., 1938).

3. Ballagas, *Antología de la poesía negra hispanoamericana* (M. Aguilar, 1935); Guirao, *Orbita de la poesía afrocubana* 1928-1937 (Ucar, García y Cía., 1938); and Mansour, *La poesía negrista.* (Era, 1973).

4. Williams, *Charcoal and Cinnamon. The Politics of Color in Spanish Caribbean Literature* (U. of Florida P.s, 2000), 53.

5. Carlos Moore (1988), Tomás Fernández Robaina (1994), Aline Helg (1995), Alejandro de la Fuente (1998, 1999, 2001), William Luis (1999, 2001), Pedro Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (2000), and Linda Howe (2004) have in-depth studies that discuss and analyze the broad cultural impact that issues of race have had on the Afro-Cuban community and on the nation as a whole, from abolition to date.

6. Foreign currency and power. The word *poder* in this context is not so much "power" rather a combination of "independence," "prosperity," "enrichment," and the overall well-being that comes with financial stability and comfort.

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Marca Peru: Representations and Exclusions of the Afro-Descendant Population from the Official Narrative of the Peruvian Government

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Abstract

The article will examine the representations of Afro-Peruvians in the video "Peru Nebraska," a documentary produced as part of the launching of the advertising campaign of *Marca Peru*, a national branding project elaborated by the Peruvian government in 2010. By examining the participation of the Afro-descendant population in this audiovisual piece, the document will relate these representations to the discourses of diversity, race, and citizenship in Peru. The article will also explore the nature of the discourses of ethnic and racial diversity in Peru in the new construction of the national and will evaluate the construction of the social imaginaries to represent Afro-Peruvians and construct blackness in a nation that has maintained mestizaje at the center of its identitarian process. In order to do so, it will focus on examining how Afro-Peruvians (dis) appear in the new narratives of *peruanidad* and how these images differ with the uprising official discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. By examining the famous short film "Peru, Nebraska," the article will analyze issues related to citizenship and inclusion of the Afro-Peruvian population, related not only to the acknowledgment of their existence, but also to their position in the construction and development of the national identitarian processes.

Peru is often portrayed as a mestizo nation, inheritor of the ancestral Inca past and full of traditions and cultural expressions that make it exotic and unique. The narratives that built this national discourse were focused on the merge of different ethnic traditions and the portrayal of Peruvians as a culturally hybrid and homogeneous people.

This is the country that I was born and raised in, a country with established social structures that privileged *criollo*[1] white elites and vanished the opportunities for non-white groups to highlight their own culture or construct their own identities. In Peru, *el país de todas las sangres "the country of all bloods,"* miscegenation discourses are used to diminish the empowerment chances for racial minorities and ignore the inequalities that affect them.

These discourses also influenced Peruvian media, which constantly fails to address all Peruvians in their multiple and diverse identities and sells an idea of beauty and success related to a color of skin to which most Peruvians hardly identify with. For centuries, the media has determined how we are supposed to be, and from being exposed to this, we have learned what to do to be better, smarter and prettier.

The popular media has shaped our ways of seeing our society, our country and ourselves. But it has also shaped the ways in which the state visually constructs *peruanidad*, and how a government that is supposed to represent all its citizens contributes to making us even more invisible, while appropriating specific cultural elements and exoticizing its ethnic minorities.

The current essay will examine the representations of Afro-Peruvians within the new official national narratives centered under the national brand *Marca Peru* through the video "Peru, Nebraska." This national brand was created in 2010 as a "tool that seeks to boost tourism, exports and attract investment; and effectively transmit the value proposition of our country" (Promperu, 2010). The promotion of Marca Peru did not only include the creation of advertising pieces, but also the entitlement of ambassadors of the brand, that are usually famous figures in the country with a visible presence in the arts, the cuisine, and the Peruvian culture.

The video "Peru, Nebraska" is a part of a nation branding project proposed by the Peruvian government to promote the assets of the nation and bring the attention of the world to the multiple commodities the country has to offer.

By examining the famous short film "Peru, Nebraska," I will analyze issues related to citizenship and inclusion of the Afro-Peruvian population, related not only to the acknowledgment of their existence, but also to their position in the construction and development of the national identitarian processes. In order to do so, I will focus on examining how Afro-Peruvians (dis)appear in the new narratives of *peruanidad* and how these images differ with the uprising discourses of diversity and multiculturalism.

Media Representation of Afro-Peruvians and the National Identity Formation

The representation of Afro-descendants in the media has been addressed by scholars that focused on the images and depictions of ethnic minorities and relate these to the racial and ethnic discourses generated in the Americas. While most of this work focuses on other countries in the region, they provide an important overview of the relationship between media, race and citizenship.

In relation to institutionalized media discourses, N'bare N'Gom evaluates the ways in which African heritage has been depicted in the media and how these representations have influenced the construction of the "peripheral otherness" that affects black people in the Americas. In the essay "The Kidnapping of Identity: Media Discourses and Trans Africanism in the Americas," N'Gom evaluates the construction of discourses of otherness and its relation to the dominance of hegemonic groups, who had the power to construct and determine the position of the non-dominant minorities in a national context.

Consequently, these discourses have influenced the ways in which Afro-descendants in the Americas form their identities and integrate into a big national sphere. Referring to what Frank Ukadike identifies as "fragmented identities," he examines the ways in which these populations have been incorporated into the national spheres as insignificant and irrelevant subjects.

The dominant discourses that perpetuated the negative representations of Afro-descendants were created under Eurocentric ideologies and incorporated into the national discourses, which caused the disconnection of the Afro-descendant population from the nation-state formation, through "a systematic process of banalization and historic responsibility liberation" (N'Gom 19).

In this context, N'Gom evaluates the responsibility of the media in the promotion of these discourses, the negative representation through the perpetuation of racist discourses and the distortion in the depictions and images of the people of African descent, by evaluating the images of blacks associated with intellectual incapacity and lack of articulation, identified as common characteristics of the way in which they are represented throughout the Americas.

According to the author, the Afro-descendants in the region are positioned as inferior subjects, disconnected from history, dispossessed from their own culture and silenced in social and institutional spaces. This discourse, identified by N'Gom (23) as a "discourse of omissions and distortions" has become a structural representation without any possibility of modification.

Another scholar that examines the relationship between media and race is Salome Aguilera, who provides an interesting overview of the role of the media in the process of racial representation in Latin America. In her article, "Las cargas de la representación: Notas sobre la raza y la representación en el Cine Latinoamericano," Aguilera provides a close approximation to racial representation, through the analysis of audiovisual material to address the concepts of race and ethnicity in Latin America.

In order to do so, she positions Latin America as a very diverse and multiracial region, where the projects of ideological whitening were used as a strategy to build national identities that blurred the existence of distinct ethnic groups. These new national identities, then, had as an objective "to unify a heterogeneous and unequal population under a unique nationalist flag that resignified the supposed source of shame as a positive symbol of distinctiveness" (Aguilera, 137).

With this in mind, the author focuses on the analysis of racial formation in Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil, examining the ways in which cinematographic productions address race and ethnicity from a historical perspective, to show how these countries' racial ideologies influenced the way media represents minorities.

Aguilera uses racial formation theories to develop her analysis, she also focuses on addressing cultural appropriation –mainly of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations- not only as a part of the national identity formation process, but also as a way to dispossess these populations of their cultures and therefore, the possibility to constitute as an ethnic group and claim a distinctive cultural identity.

Taking films from the three countries previously mentioned, the article gives a critical reflection on race representation in the media and most specifically, on historical films. In this essay, the author is critical about the fact that these films, mostly historically set in the colonial period, locate racism and racial tensions in the past, without acknowledging its contemporary manifestations. For Aguilera, this is not an exclusive characteristic of historical films, since most of the Latin American media avoid addressing these issues and perpetuate the construction of imaginary social scenarios that privilege whiteness and do not include racial and ethnic minorities.

Aguilera also shows the way in which racialized subjects appear in contemporary cinematographic productions, and how these appear as a symbol of national identity to avoid the addressing of racial issues affecting their lives (Aguilera 143). The analysis proposed by Aguilera, thus, allows the reader to understand the consequences of the discourse of mestizaje and its penetration in the construction of media images that vanish racial tensions and appeal to the construction of a national consciousness instead.

The contradictions of these representations, then, rest on the fact that the use of racial and ethnic minorities as symbols of national identities and oversimplify their presence in the aims of recognition and resignification, as a strategy to dismiss the addressing of racial discrimination and hide a difficult socioeconomic reality.

The relationship between blackness and citizenship in Peru is an issue addressed by very few authors. However, there is remarkable work written about the ways in which Afro-Peruvian identity is located within the frame of nationalism and *peruanidad*. One of the authors who analyzes how the discourse of multiculturalism and inclusion results in the exclusion of the Afro-Peruvian population is Shane Greene, who presents a detailed analysis of the place that this population has in the national identity in "Todos Somos Incas, Todos Somos Iguales: Dilemmas of Afro-Peruvian Citizenship and Inca Whiteness in Peru."

Greene evaluates the practice of multiculturalism as a new discourse that uplifts racial and ethnic diversity and recognize it as an important component of the national identity. However, he argues that the issues regarding the Afro-Peruvian citizenship are not fully addressed by this new approach and leave this population outside of the national spectrum.

By examining the ways in which the national discourse in Peru has been drawn, Greene is able to establish a relationship between the prevalence of the Inca culture when defining the national identity, making the Afro-Descendant population invisible and unrecognized. To the author, the Peruvian national identity positions the indigenous populations as authentic representatives of Peruvian past and are, therefore, the ones who represent Peru as a nation and Peruvian People (Greene 138). The Afro-Peruvians, thus, are represented as not Incas and not Indians, in an ambiguous position in which their contributions to the nation are not recognized as they appear as isolated actors to the national development process.

Tanya Golash-Boza also analyzes the discourses of *mestizaje* and its impacts in the conception and understanding of blackness in the country in *Yo soy negro: Blackness in Peru*, a work that resulted from her ethnographic fieldwork in rural and urban Afro-Peruvians communities.

To Golash-Boza, Afro-Peruvians have participated in the nation in different ways than the indigenous population, and these differences are necessary to understand the conceptualization of blackness in the country (Golash-Boza 60). To her, while *mestizaje* involved indigenous ancestral knowledge, it sought to erase black cultural forms progressively, transforming their present into non-transcendental for the national identity.

Because of it, the notions of indigeneity and blackness are drawn with completely different objectives and had opposite outcomes, since black identity was restricted to racial and physical features and the Afro-Peruvian culture was unacknowledged. Thus, the national identity construction processes used acculturation to dispossess the black population in Peru of their own forms of culture and include them in the hegemonic *criollo* identity, while appealing to assimilation processes to civilize and integrate indigenous people.

These strategies were accompanied by processes of whitening and unofficial black eradication policies that reduced the black population in very few years, proving how the national project intended to eliminate them from the country and imagined them "out of the nation" over the course of some decades (Golash-Boza 64).

These construction processes also influenced the way in which the black population is portrayed in the media, and the depictions that affect the current dynamics of identity, representation and recognition among Afro-Peruvians. In the chapter "Black is beautiful or white is right?" Golash-Boza gathers the experiences of the people of El Ingenio, an Afro-Peruvian rural village, in relation to race, racism and the invisibility of the black population in the popular media.

To her, Afro-Peruvians are misrepresented, folklorized and associated with positions of surveillance, since, as she states that "Blacks are often portrayed on Peruvian television as subservient, unintelligent, and exotic" (Golash-Boza 166). For instance, telenovelas –considered as one of the most popular genres of Peruvian television– reproduce the established hierarchies portraying blacks in positions of submission, since these representations reflect the normalization of race dynamics and the uplifting of whiteness.

These representations have been internalized and accepted by the Afro-Peruvians, which complicates the identification of these negative depictions in the media and normalizes the common association of blacks with surveillance.

In relation to other sources of popular media, the scenario is not different. Golash-Boza addresses the issue of the advertising industry in which 70% of the participants are white; despite the fact that, in Peru, white people would be considered an ethnic minority. However, she highlights that the access Afro-Peruvians have to international media allows them to associate blackness with success and beauty; and to identify with prominent figures.

Finally, she references the media representations to analyze their influence on the common beliefs that the Afro-Peruvians have about themselves, referring to some testimonies that equated blackness with ugliness and lack of

intelligence. These prejudices also affected the way Afro-Peruvians saw uncommon representations that located blacks in power and professional positions (Golash-Boza 163).

The Images of the Afro-Peruvians as a Part of Marca Peru

As these authors previously mentioned, the popular media often present distorted images of Afro-Peruvians and function as a means to reproduce racial stereotypes and negative representations of these populations.

In contrast with this, the Peruvian government has focused on promoting multicultural policies that recognize and valorize the ethnic and racial diversity of the country, considering it as an asset for development. This official discourse, however, has not fully addressed this diversity, thus maintaining traditional national discourses and ignoring the contributions of the non-indigenous ethnic minorities.

Taking this into consideration, this essay will present an analysis of the video "Peru, Nebraska," a piece created as a part of the national government campaign *Marca Peru* to promote the Peruvian cultural heritage and to evoke the national sentiments and identities of Peruvians, becoming into one of the most memorable and popular pieces over the last decade.

The video documentary was a huge success in Peru and outside of the country, and it presented an innovative idea: the ad is set in Peru, a small town in Nebraska, United States, with 589 new Peruvians that needed to learn about their country. By promoting the cultural assets of the country, the video sought to promote Peru in the international sphere and at the same time appeal to the national sentiments of all Peruvians.

Likewise, the reception of the video and the campaign was positive among Peruvians, since the appeal to common cultural elements generated an emotional attachment and reinforced the national identity. As Mathias Schmitz states, the campaign was created to appeal to the collective identification of Peruvians, as the creators expected for it to have a positive impact on national pride, trust and perceived internal coherence (329).

The video was divided into sections, dedicated specifically to the things Marca Peru wanted to offer. The first scene shows the city of Peru, Nebraska resting quietly and a red and white bus –like the colors of the Peruvian flag- making its way into the town to show its inhabitants what it feels like to be Peruvian. When the bus gets to the main square of the city, the bus door opens and the ambassadors start to get off, one after the other. They all are identified by their names and their professions, but the first scenes show a homogeneous representation of the Peruvian white elites: is it possible to identify famous chefs, actors, comedians and athletes with similar phenotypical characteristics that adjust to white standards of beauty.

After the first frames, the famous Quechua actress Magaly Solier makes her way down the bus, and after her, the famous indigenous singer Dina Paucar and her harpist appear in the scene. They are all identified with name tags digitally inserted next to their faces. The next people to get off the bus are the musicians of Peru Negro, the most popular Afro-Peruvian musical group in the country, but none of their names are mentioned in the video, not even in their later appearances.

In this very first moment, they appear as outsiders, as they are not identified as a part of the group of ambassadors, participating as an accessory figure and not having a leading role like the rest of the ambassadors. Moreover, the tag introduces them as "Musicians and dancers of Peru Negro," a detail that further deepens their placement as others, since they appear as an unrecognized element that does not need to be specified.

When the rest of the ambassadors get out of the bus, they proceed to read the new Peruvians their rights as such. The first thing that comes is the right to eat delicious food. And the first dish they try, is, paradoxically, the *anticucho*, a dish with a recognized Afro-Peruvian origin (Chocano and Rospigliosi 24). The food is shared with the other Peruvians and the white ambassadors lead most of the dialogues and explanations about the origins of the food, interacting with the people to make sure they like what they are eating. Afro-Peruvians appear in these frames delivering the food, but their faces are not shown, and they do not have any dialogues.

Throughout the 15-minute documentary, it is possible to see how the elements of Andean and Amazonian indigenous cultures are presented to the Peruvians as an exotic element that should generate pride and a sense of belonging. However, despite the inclusion of three people who identified themselves as indigenous, there are very few moments in which they are leading the interaction and sharing their culture with the people of Peru, Nebraska.

The video continues with the new Peruvians enjoying traditional food, cultural expressions and even sports that are representative of the country. As a part of the interaction, the narrator introduces the scene in which the Afro-Peruvians appear: they are presented as the group of people who would change the quiet Sunday afternoons in Peru Nebraska, and fill them with "rhythm and flavor". For this to happen, they would do an exchange taking the city sheriff to better the traffic flow in Lima, and bringing Peru Negro to "better their blood fluid."

The following frame shows a dancing club in which a group of people is doing a line dance of country music, and in which the dancers and musicians of Peru Negro burst in abruptly to invite them to dance Afro-Peruvian music. The

scene continues with alternate scenes between the dancers making a presentation while the people in the club stare at them, the new Peruvians receive lessons to learn to play the *cajón*[2], and a final scene in which the dancers of Peru Negro integrate the new Peruvians and do a dance together.

Despite being devalued and minimized by many, music has been a weapon of resistance and existence. As a consequence of the enslavement process, Africans and descendants of Africans who arrived in Peru were stripped of an African culture of their own due to processes of Hispanicization and acculturation, and therefore, lost the opportunity to continue with African cultural traditions. Because of it, one of the most important manifestations of people of African descent in Peru is their art, which allows them to exist and express themselves in a unique way to tell their story, to be a means of expression and protest and to leave indelible marks of their own existence.

However, without taking this into consideration, the scene is set in a vibrant environment in which Afro-Peruvians appear as an exotic group of people to bring joy and entertainment with any allusion to the cultural meaning of the Afro-Peruvian music.

After that short scene is over, there are a couple more scenes in which it is possible to see Afro-Peruvians. They are included in the frames almost as extras, without any type of participation or dialogues. Even in the scene of the performance of Peru Negro, none of the members of the group gets to read the Peruvians their rights, like in the other scenes, and the description of their intervention is led by the narrator, who does not provide any type of context or specification in relation to the performance they are about to make.

In this context, it is possible to note a slight difference in the way in which Afro-Peruvian culture is represented and portrayed, in relation to the level of detail that these two cultural expressions – the performance of Afro-Peruvian *festejo* and the *cajón* lessons- have when compared to the indigenous traditions.

For instance, traditions like the preparation of ancestral *pachamanca* are fully addressed in their connection to the land and the indigenous history; and the famous singer Dina Paucar gently introduces *huayno*, a popular Andean music genre. Moreover, the indigenous traditions are fully addressed and explained in a more interactive dynamic in which the new Peruvians are allowed to acquire new knowledge about the significance of these practices in the country.

The video, thus, does not only fall into the stereotyping of Afro-Peruvians but also in placing them as silenced and isolated actors without significant participation in a nation's branding commercial video. The way in which Afro-Peruvians are portrayed is a sign of a lack of intention to adequately and pertinently depict an ethnic minority population that has been traditionally misrepresented in the media and invisible in the national history and identitarian processes.

The black Peruvians are represented as exotic pieces that bring flavor and joy, but do not possess significant cultural elements worth mentioning, thus reinforcing the stereotype and folklorization of Afro-Peruvians that relates them exclusively to music and dance. As Matthew Hughey refers, "visibility and acceptance are not a guarantee of legitimacy or decency" (544). The false inclusiveness of the Afro-Peruvian population responds, in this case, to the need to represent diversity in a superficial way to maintain the idea of *mestizaje* as the main characteristic of the Peruvian.

In this piece, the Afro-Peruvians appear as outsiders in an already established national discourse that recognizes its mestizo and indigenous roots, but denies the specific cultural forms and traditions of the people of African descent.

The blurry presence of Afro-Peruvians in this video is one of the effects of the intentional disappearance of Peruvians of dark skin from the images of my country. To the Peruvian people, our blackness must be dismissed and diminished, and our existence should not be addressed or explained, leaving us in a state of permanent invisibility.

Out of the Images and Out of the Society: An Existence of Multiple Exclusions

If you are an Afro-Peruvian, it is not difficult to feel a stranger in your own land. Being an Afro-Peruvian means being frequently questioned about your belonging, your existence and your importance in a place in where your ancestors contributed despite being dehumanized and diminished in their dignity and their rights.

Many of the scholars that study racism in Peru coincide when affirming that most of the representations of the Afro-Peruvian population is associated with negative characteristics and that they are seen from a biased perspective based on stereotypes and prejudices. According to Suzanne Oboler (62), this negative appearance in the social imaginary is recognized by Peruvians regardless of their race, ethnicity, class, gender, age or level of interaction with Afro-Peruvians. In this same line, Mercedes de la Cadena addresses the contradictions of a mestizo identity that is not officially recognized, but rather operates implicitly in the understandings of *peruanidad*, defining mestizaje as a complex ideology created to diminish the visible presence of racialized systems of differentiation and a project that never sought to "uplift the inferior races" (De la Cadena 4).

This imaginary is maintained through the reproduction of negative images of Afro-Peruvians in the media and the lack of recognition of their cultural asset, their history beyond slavery and their participation and contributions to the formation of the nation.

In this context, the publicity campaign of *Marca Peru* and the video "Peru, Nebraska" are located on the logic of stereotyping images of the Afro-descendant population and seem to be the result of a last-minute addition or an official requirement in concordance with the multicultural approach that must be implemented inside of all the governmental agencies.

The short-film , that is supposed to portray the value of the multiculturalism and multiethnicity of Peru, fails to include this characteristic in a constructive, representative way; and continues to position the Afro-Peruvians as an accessory made for the collective entertainment of the others, whose relevance must be limited to their natural abilities to bring rhythm, color, and flavor to the Peruvian society.

In the few minutes in which they appear, the Afro-Peruvian bodies are exposed as a means for entertainment, reinforcing the prejudices that lay the foundations for the spreading of racist ideologies that place them as capable of performing trades strictly related to the use of their bodies, and that historically "condemned them to certain social places that they could not cross" (Arrelucea, 164).

The portrayal of the Afro-Peruvians in "Peru, Nebraska" contributes to the constant exoticism that identifies the Afro-Peruvian population as picturesque, colorful and vivid, and that should always be ready to please the needs for fun of the rest. In this piece, the Afro-Peruvian culture is presented detached from its meaning and its relevance to the survival and resistance of our peoples, and is restricted to an isolated action that does not respond to historical processes and collective identity construction of the Afro-Peruvian population.

Unfortunately, this depiction is not far from the social imaginary that is created around us: in this video, the Afro-Peruvians appear as isolated actors that do not seem to blend in with the discourses of *Peruanidad* and coexist separated from the rest of the nation.

This video is a sample of how Peruvians think of the Afro-descendants as Others, and how the new discourses of diversity seem to give them visibility, but actually depict them superficially, recurring to the classic stereotyping images that have identified them for decades.

The commodification of Afro-Peruvian cultural identity is an example of this. Contradictorily, while the video embraces the cultural traditions like the traditional dances and the food to appeal to icons to promote the national identity, it silences the Afro-Peruvians and takes away the opportunity to be those who transmit the expressions of their own culture.

The intercultural discourse transmitted through this publicity piece destined to reinforce national pride is a perfect example of the shortcomings in the recognition of a population that seems to be on the margins of society and that is selectively visible at the convenience of the interests of a State that has failed to grant us a place in the perfect picture of Peru.

The commodifying way in which the Afro-Peruvians are depicted is a sign of our lack of recognition in a country that was built on our shoulders and at the cost of our pain, that hides our invisibility with images that stereotype us and denies us the possibility of being seen as active agents in the development of the nation.

Marca Peru has continued to develop campaigns to promote the identification with the cultural heritage of the country and to evoke national sentiments in Peruvians. Since many of these campaigns maintain a standard representation of Peruvians and focuses on depicting Peru as a mestizo nation, some of the last actions have included Afro-Peruvian music as an integral part of the Peruvian identity. However, the number of Afro-Peruvians that appear or lead these videos is still low and, in some cases, null, thus continuing with the logic of commodification of the cultural expressions of the Afro-Peruvians without including them as an important part of the visual narrative of *Marca Peru*.

Because of it, it is important that the future research should focus on the development of *Marca Peru* and the use of Afro-Peruvian characters as figures of *peruanidad*, to evaluate the development of the intercultural approach in the production of national branding advertising visual material that appeals to the reinforcement of national identity.

NOTES

1. Though there are many definitions of criollo that have changed over the decades, it is necessary to define criollo in accuracy with the development of this research. In Peru, *criollo* has been used as a form of both racial and social categorization since the 16th century, as a criollo was a person born in the country that descended from Spaniards. However, this criteria was complemented with a social component since the existence of *criollos* allowed the configuration of a social hierarchy that distinguished not only as racially superior -as they descended from white Spaniards- but also contributed to the location of the non-white minorities in the very bottom of the social pyramid (Nugent 42). During the years after the independence of Peru and the construction of the new Republic, criollo remained as a socially accepted concept that described the predominantly white elite that set and determine the cultural traditions and social dynamics of the city.

2. The *cajón* was recognized as an Afro-Peruvian origin instrument by the Ministry of Culture in Peru.

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Afro-Latin American Documentary Resistance from the Pacific Coast: How *Voces de Resistencia* (2017) Changes the Landscapes of Aesthetics, Academia/Community Collaboration, and Black Feminist Activism During the Colombian "Peace Process" Peruvian Government

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Abstract

Voces de Resistencia, Capítulo 1, is a short documentary film with an original soundtrack composed and performed by Black Colombian female folk a cappella chorus, or *alabadoras*. The multimedia product makes use of Black feminist pedagogy and resistance: it portrays a silenced and oppressed group in Bojayá, Colombia. The focus on *alabadoras* singers and composers promotes self-definition and exposes the power of self-determination in songwriting, an *a cappella* chorus performance, and documentary filmmaking.

The following analysis of the documentary *Voces de Resistencia, Capítulo 1*, presents the film as a holistic and Black Feminist project as well as the product of transnational community building. The multimedia project connects a small group of Afro-Colombian women with U.S.-based Ford Foundation and Cali-based Center for African Diaspora studies (CEAF). The production process includes the singer-songwriters' experiences and perspectives, and the finished product represents their authentic worldview as survivors of guerrilla warfare, deterritorialization, forced displacement, as capable of healing themselves and communities via song. The analysis of the film focuses on the aesthetic and the production of the multimedia project. I argue that *Voces de Resistencia: Capítulo 1*, as a film *and* as a community-building project, offers four contributions to Afro-Latinx cinema and Afro-Latin American Studies: 1) a method for documentary production infused with Afro-Latin American Studies and Black Feminist concepts of self-determination (Butler 1998 5, Hill Collins 2000; 3-5), intellectual work and self-definition (Hill Collins 2000 xiii), and Afrodiasporic conspiracy (Figueroa Vergara 2017); 2) a documentary film aesthetic centered on Blackness, femininity, and ritual; 3) an audiovisual cinematic witnessing that aims to heal communal trauma; 4) an example of community building that includes a) the Pacific Coast residents who were displaced and massacred during the war, b) the Cali, Colombia ICESI University's Center for Afrodiasporic Studies (CEAF), and c) grant institutions in Colombia and abroad such as the Ford Foundation. Throughout the article, I include anecdotes from project director Aurora Vergara Figueroa to illustrate how one can make use of U.S. funded federal grants to build transnational networks for the self-representation of Black women in Afro-Latinx cinema.

The Black (Media) Colombian Revolution

At the time of writing this article, Colombia is making headlines on PBS Newshour, for being the nation with the most disappeared individuals in the world (April 29, 2019 episode). And yet, the reality of the impact remains unseen on many Latin-American news channels, while the current intellectual, political, and artistic Black Colombian revolution, remains suppressed (Vergara Figueroa et al. 14 2017; Chaves Maldonado 19).[1] The systemic oppressions manifest in racialized geographies as well, with the Pacific demonstrably one of the poorest regions of Colombia, a reality which, some will argue, demands reparations (Mosquera

Rosabo-Labbé et al. 17), and presents an urgent national and global situation of genocide wherein Black Colombians have been disconnected from their native Colombian lands, and their ancestral knowledges (Arboleda Quiñones 474).

The genocide of Colombians of African Descent is the focus of Sociologist Santiago de Arboleda at the Universidad Andina in Ecuador, who recently presented his findings on qualifying the violence against communities of African descent as genocide, at the "Empire and its Aftermath" Conference at the University of Pittsburgh (April 3-5, 2019). At the same time, Colombia is witnessing a boom of intellectual production by scholars of African descent, including but not limited to the 2018 publication of *Demando mi Libertad!*, an edited volume on the agency and resistance of Black Colombian women in the 16th century, and on the importance of archival research by women of African descent in the 21st century, some of them descendants of *palenqueras*—or African descended women who established communities independent of the plantation economy—women from maroon communities. *Descolonizando mundos*, published in 2017, also edited by Aurora Vergara Figueroa, is an anthology of scholarly publications by intellectuals of African descent from Colombia representing multiple disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and the arts.

In this context of Afro-descended intellectual resistance, Ladino state mandated political violence, and centuries-long Black revolution, the civil war against communities of African descent has not ended. The term Ladino is used in Colombia to refer to a section of the population that has overtime been favored with the bulk of the economic wealth and governmental power. Originally supported by the Spanish during the colonial era, and then referred to as "Criollo" or Spaniards born in the Americas, today the Ladino population is the sector that does not identify as Black or Indigenous and typically lives in/is from the better served topographical and geographical parts of Colombia – the plateaus and valleys such as Bogotá, Manizales, etc. One would add that in this context, the Black Colombian Revolution would not be televised. Yet, here comes *Voces de Resistencia, Capítulo 1*. The multimedia, institutional, and communal project circulates as a YouTube televised documentary, also available in DVD format, with a 12-song LP of the traditional Afro-descended a cappella singing group *Alabadora*. The documentary depicts Black intellectual and artistic resistance, denounces state mandated violence and its cruel, deadly impact on African descended groups in Colombia, and foregrounds the Black revolution that unfolds in our sisters' communities on the Pacific Coast.

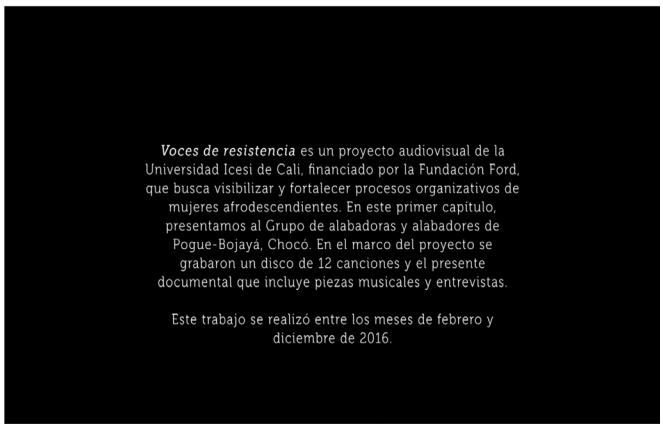
A Claim to Epistemic Justice, or #elpueblonoserindecarajo

Halfway into the United Nations' International Decade for People of African descent, a few years into the Colombian Peace Process, and one year after the presidential elections in Colombia, this project puts the Colombian Pacific Coast's Black subjectivities at the center, as they stand behind and in front of the camera, and use U.S. Federal grants and Colombian institutional grants to self-represent and defend peace in the Pacific Coast in song, cinematography, and healing ritual.

Voces de Resistencia Capítulo 1: Cantadoras del Pogue (2017), directed by José Varón, with general coordination by Aurora Vergara Figueroa, Lina Jaramillo López, and Lina Mosquera Lemus, involved a large team of African descended faculty and students in the Center for African Diaspora Studies at the University of ICESI in Cali, Colombia, and was partially produced in the kitchens of the mothers and daughters of the Quibdó community and other towns. The 25-minute short documentary film is audiovisual proof that the people will not give up, like their hashtag states unapologetically.

Live sound editor Mario Hernández, drone camera director Jairo Rodríguez, and film editor Federico Castañeda frame the documentary with cricket sounds on a black background, with a logo created by the community of women represented in the film, designed by María Paola Herrera Valencia. A brief script description of how the film came to fruition follows.

In the first few seconds of the film, a tranquil sound accompanies a crisp and colorful logo of a blue bird, and an inscription that connects the University ICESI of Cali, the Ford Foundation, the group of *alabadoras* and *alabadores* of Pogue, the province of Bojayá, and the region of Chocó. Script on the screen describes that this is an audiovisual project which includes a 12-song LP, and presents the film as a documentary featuring some of the songs and some interviews. A time stamp appears: February-December 2016.



To gain more context on the making of the short documentary film, I interviewed Dr. Vergara Figueroa, Director of the Center for Africana Research at ICESI in Cali, Colombia, in the middle of an afternoon in January 2019. There were no cicadas, crickets, or frogs that we could hear in the background, though there was sun. We sat on a bench after a long and productive workshop—the Taller Internacional "Praxis de investigación y conexiones transnacionales: estudios afrodescendientes en las Américas" — on the University of Florida campus in Gainesville. I did enjoy the same sounds as in the opening of the documentary, at dusk, overlooking a swamp and watching a bright colored U.S. Southern sunset in Gainesville.

Voces de Resistencia, Aurora Vergara Figueroa explains in the interview, was not originally conceived as a chapter of a larger multimedia project. Unaware of the larger project at the time, the production team had agreed to make this a participatory project. It was imperative, she explains, to involve and tell the stories of Black women who had witnessed the most terrorizing violence in their communities, to tell their stories how they wanted them told, and to say what they wanted to share about their traumas, their resistance, their lives, their lost ones:

> Es decir…. este proyecto empezó, eh, *Voces de Resistencia* inicialmente era un video documental con las mujeres de Pogue, vamos a contar su historia, pero vamos a trabajar con *ellas*. Para ver qué quieren, cómo sale, cómo se lo imaginan y vamos a ver qué sale. Entonces al principio, lo pensamos como un ejercicio de investigación y acción participativa.

She explained how the project unfolded, and the amount of conversations that were dedicated to ensuring that the production would fit the ethics of the project. The impetus, for Dr. Vergara Figueroa, was epistemic justice. That is to say, it was important to make up for the discursive erasures of Black women's opinions and experiences during the war, and to redress the portrayals of Black women as unworthy or unable to create meaning out of the violence and the lived history. Being a sociologist of African descent from Latin America from a certain part of Colombia whose native language is Spanish, and with extensive research in Black Feminisms and decolonial theory, Vergara Figueroa had not stopped fighting for epistemic justice since she started to participate in the academic world of higher education and social science research, including her graduate studies at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. She explained her journey to make a case for the importance of epistemic justice in this particular project. As a researcher, editor, Africana studies director, as a daughter and a sister, her purpose was to work *with the women*: to see what they wanted, for them to see how it came out, how did they picture it, and from there, see what happens. She remembers how, in the beginning, the project was an exercise, that, for her, was an exercise of epistemic justice:

> Pero al mismo tiempo lo que usamos *en mi caso*, creo que era como un tipo de justicia epistémica. Porque yo entré al mundo académico, cuestionándome muchas situaciones que yo veía allí, especialmente la manera en cómo es que se concibe la vida de la gente negra.

In other words, instead of turning to a history that was written by the Ladino Columbian sector, or by individuals and groups typically understood as authoritative experts, and instead of contributing to the erasure of Black women's experiences or the portrayal of Black women as victims or as objects of study, epistemic justice sets the record straight, and describes a community's history from their perspectives, as they are self-represented in a project that became a striking documentary. This article follows this model and strives for epistemic justice, too. With a Black feminist analysis of the documentary, anecdotes include perspectives from project director Aurora Vergara Figueroa on how to successfully produce a documentary with international funding and build transnational networks for self-representation in Afro-Latinx cinema.

With this in mind, the hashtag earns a dimension wherein activist-scholars and scholar-activists can tag the work that they do, not necessarily out in the streets or in strategic meetings. Striving for epistemic justice in collaborative research that leads to self-definition and self-determination is a means of raising our fists in the air too, and another way to mobilize and yell, " thepeoplewillnotgiveupdamnit, #elpueblonoserindecarajo."

Black Feminist Self-Determination, Intellectual Work, and Afrodiasporic Conspiracy in Documentary Production

As an act of epistemic justice, the project invokes the role of the intellectual as Patricia Hill Collins defines it in

Black Feminist Thought, as any Black woman that has attained an authentic worldview or keen awareness of how oppression affects all of the demographic sectors of society (5-8). Hill Collins teaches that any Black woman who has gone through a process of self-conscious struggle, from a marginal position of society, yet with some access to the dominant sectors of society (as a domestic worker, a student, a professor, etc.) can contribute thought provoking knowledge as an intellectual. Which is to say, any woman of the Quibdó and surrounding communities could provide their take on struggles against injustice, and their understanding, their beliefs, or their episteme, to a larger academic project on Colombian culture and history.

Furthermore, the title of the project could not limit itself to one specific community or problem. It needed to contain more, as Black feminism advocates for multiplicity and heterogeneity, and epistemic justice calls for inclusion regardless of complication. Vergara Figueroa notes how the project developed; as she came back from scout locating and conversations with community members in the Chocó, she recalled being at the airport and, "con el equipo de grabación, esperando allí, se me ocurrió que podríamos hacerlo como una serie; que no solamente contáramos esa historia sino la historia de muchas otras mujeres… en el país y quizás, en la diáspora" (Vergara, 2019 interview). There was more to this one community, and this would be chapter 1; she could continue to tell the stories of Black women and aptly address epistemic injustice through film.

With a few questions to prepare ahead of the interview, Vergara Figueroa reflected on whether one could define the documentary film, or the project overall, as a holistic form of Black feminist intellectual activism. The film puts forth the women of Bojayá as knowledge producing individuals, rather than objects of study, or even subjects who were a part of a study. The *alabadoras* (singers) play a central role in their community and teach us, the viewers, strategies to heal from collective trauma. The *alabao*, a traditional song of mourning, borne out of African rituals that remained a practice, a knowledge, and a skill handed down through the generations, are portrayed as a strategy for transgressive resistance (*Voces de Resistencia* 0'0"47). This is not passive, ornate, folklore; it's a revolutionary weapon.

In the first minute of the documentary, the crickets continue to chirp and the script describing how the Project came about cuts to the title of the documentary:

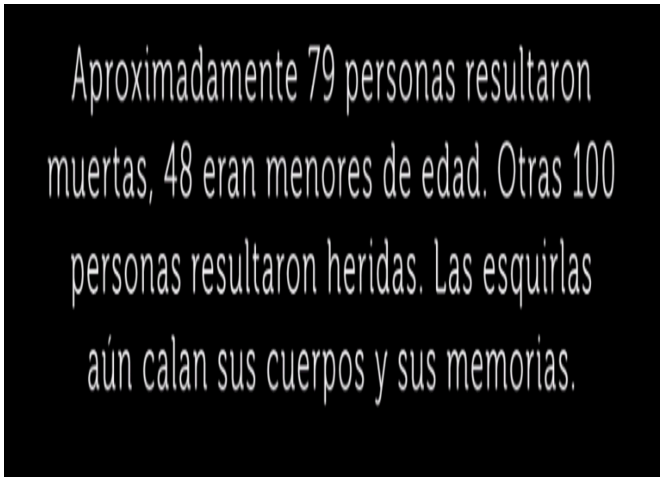
The cicadas and crickets are joined in by frogs, while the image cuts to a map that inscribes the often-overlooked region as front and center to this documentary available on YouTube.

The aesthetic of self-determination in this documentary comes forth in the first minute, first with the bright colored logo. The logo came from a workshop, led by designer Claudia Patricia Buitrago who participated in the project and prompted the women of Bojayá to make their traditional dolls with the documentary production team. The blue bird is a wink to one of the dolls created in the workshop. Self-determination from a Black feminist perspective continues with the black and white logo and title of the documentary: *Voces de Resistencia, Capítulo 1*. The appearance of the title can be read as a reference to one central mode of construction of the documentary. It is created with the idea that this documentary will be the first of many more depicting black women self-defining and self-determining their resistance: "Voices of Resistance, Chapter 1," or the first set of many more voices to come.

When the map cuts in, after the title, the brightest color on the map stands in the middle, and for the Chocó region. The color and centering of the region underline geographic self-determination in the film. The design of the cut out brings the Chocó to the forefront, and officially front *and* center, to frame the thematic self-determination in the film. In this powerful image, a literal act of self-definition adds to the self-determination.

A note in the bottom left, contrasted with the Pacific Ocean in the background—not a coincidental placement—describes the region that rarely comes with a definition: Bojayá is a Colombian town located in the district of Chocó, in the central area of the Atrato River, where Bellavista is the main township. The "corregimiento de Pogue" is located in Bojayá. Notice how all of the geographic points are in all caps. This map remains on the screen for 10 seconds, with crickets, and more frogs, as the sound in the background.

The *alabaos* make possible the witnessing of a traumatic event. With their songs, what happened is named, denounced, and with this witnessing, healing can occur; healing from traumas such as the bombing of the Pablo Apóstol church, where dozens of families that had taken refuge from the civil war were massacred by a cylinder bomb dropped in a church that was clearly a civilian refuge. 70 community members, including 46 children, died in the *Iglesia Pablo Apóstol*. This happened on May 2, 2002, during a face-off between José María Córdoba, of the FARC, and Elmer Cárdenas from the ACCU (Peasants' Self Defense Campaign of Córdoba and Urará) (*Voces de Resistencia* 0'1").



With lyrics that include a connection to Jesus, community's stories, and direct critiques of the paramilitary and guerrillas' gratuitous violence, and with interviews that allow women and men to speak for themselves, the film inspires viewers to learn from, acknowledge, and perceive the Bojayá women as thought-producing individuals, sociologists, peace-makers, conflict negotiators, singers, songwriters, designers, dressmakers, chefs, cooks, and strategists. The *alabadoras* are intellectuals and healers looking to heal their bodies and their memories. When I asked about how to label the documentary, I suggested if we could call it a Black feminist project of holistic intellectual activism:

Dr. Sarah Soanirina Ohmer: "Quiero hablar del documental o del proyecto—como tu quieras definirlo. ¿Se podría hablar de ello como una obra de activismo intelectual holístico negro feminista?"

Dra. Aurora Vergara Figueroa: "Bueno, creo que es una categoría bastante profunda y creo que pensarlo así nos ayudaría mucho a pensar y a comprender qué fue lo que hicimos."

The Africana studies director from Cali agrees that thinking of the film or project as a "Holistic Black Feminist Intellectual Project" is a profound category that allows one, actually, that helps *us, a lot*, she says; it helps the research team but also Black feminists and Black women to think about and understand what dynamics were at work during the making of the project.

The project and documentary's focus on *alaboas* singers and songwriters presents a clear mission to "conspire." To conspire, or *conspirando*, is a strategy of Afrodiasporic and Black Colombian feminist resistance coined by women of the Chocó in a gathering that led to their manifesto for feminist conspiracy. The poetic justice, the epistemic justice, the cultural justice, and the spiritual renewal, along with the placing of women of African descent and their underrepresented communities as the focus of the camera and the production of the film, make up a work of Afrodiasporic conspiracy.

In the 2016 Latin America-focused issue of *Meridians: Transnational Feminisms*' "Afrodiasporic Feminist Conspiracy: Motivations and Paths forward from the First International Seminar" article, scholar-activist Katherine Arboleda Hurtado and Vergara Figueroa claim that the "conspiracy started in Cali, Colombia," June 24-25 2011, in the Chontaduro Cultural House, with the women participants of the Universidad del Valle's Afro-Colombian Group (GAUV) and Black women from various cities of Colombia. The Chontaduro Cultural House is a group of independent scholars and activists and a community center or "cultural house" in the historically and predominantly Black district of Aguablanca, in Cali. The group hosted the conference, where they collectively agreed their gathering was a conspiracy: a political plot wherein women of African descent would engage in conversation, complicity, exchange, knowledge production, and political strategy (Vergara Figueroa and Arboleda Hurtado112). In this historical event, a group of women wrote a manifesto, which reads:

> We make the case for conspiracy as a way to reject sexual violence against women; the reconfigurations of racism, sexism, and lesbophobia; and all forms of intolerance. We conspire because we claim a place of dignity in written, spoken, and artistic history. We want public policies and projects to include Black/Afro-descendent women as part of what counts as public. (120)

Voces de Resistencia is an act of Afrodiasporic conspiracy that claims a place of dignity in written, spoken, and artistic history, all the while demanding and making use of public funding and producing a project that centers on and includes Black/Afro-descendent women as part of the YouTube public media, as part of public intellectual projects, and as part of Colombian history, as well as Colombian and Afrodiasporic and Black feminist culture and thought, all of which count as public.

The fourth image in the first two minutes of the documentary also frames the Afrodiasporic conspiracy behind and represented by the documentary. In white font on black background, we read: "La comunidad de Pogue se ha dedicado a

proteger y valorar el arte de los *alabaos* para quienes estos cantos representan la transición entre la vida y la muerte." This means that the documentary reminds the viewers that the Pogue community itself conspires by claiming its dignity in life and death, and in the transition from life to death.

The *alabaos* songs have been intentionally preserved in the Pogue community to protect and to value, to offer respect to all of the souls in between life and death, and to offer respect to all of those (living or dead) who understand what the *alabaos* represent. The songs serve as political chants of resistance while they recall the cultural connection to orality and the importance of collective mourning. At the same time, Black Women from the Chocó find in the *alabao* an obligation to use the song as politcal act of denouncing the State's injustice and their local history.

The dark background cuts to an aerial pan over a forest, and once again we are reminded of the location: Chocó-Colombia District, North Occidental Colombia, with a map, this time, superimposed over the forest—not a coincidental background. The location graphic fades out on the right side of the screen, and another graphic fades in on the left side of the screen, while the aerial pan shot over the forest continues: "Capital: Quibdó; Population: 542,960; Pacific Region." A woman's voice comes to the foreground of the soundtrack, singing a cappella. The generic information fades out, and at the bottom left, more precise demographic information appears, as a church and other buildings come into the pan aerial shot: "Population of African descent: 87% / 472,375; Indigenous: 9% /48,866; Mixed: 4% /21,718." The woman's voice sings the first song of the film, connecting the living and watching audience (the represented population in numbers on the screen) to the transitioning audience, and to those who have passed. A collective cinematic ritual of mourning and resistance begins.

A Documentary Film Aesthetic Centered on Blackness, Femininity, and Ritual

As the lead singer is joined with the chorus in the first song of call and response typical of the *alabao*, we reach the edge of the forest, and the first building we see is a church. To the bottom left of the church, an explanation of the local economy and the land: "46,530km²; temperature above 27C; economic activities: mining, forest exploitation, fishing, agriculture, ranching."

The aerial pan cuts to a different angle, a traveling shot, moving towards the main entrance of the church. The editing and focus of the beginning of the documentary, along with the lyrics of the *alabao*, clearly mark the spiritual components of what can be interpreted as an aesthetic of ritual of mourning. The traveling shot cuts to, finally, a static general shot, facing straight onto the subject of the image. A very large group of *alabadoras* and *alabadores* singers and songwriters, some sitting, some standing, face the camera, all wearing matching dresses and headwraps, the men in button up shirts and white hats. In the background, the ruins of their community (Quiceno Toro, et al 2017, 181-186).

The striking image is colorful, yet dark, and it reflects the nature of the *alabao*. As they sing the traditional song of ritual of transition from living to dead, we see the ruins of a massacre, and can imagine the spirits roaming, the bodies left behind, while, at the same time, the singers take all of the attention towards the spirit of song, and its healing powers.

What drives the camera to this point? Rufina Chaverra García is leading the traditional *alabao* "La Virgen Se Azará Mucho" with the same costume except for a blue necklace. The birds can be seen on the medium shot of Rufina, the same bird as the logo, as the dolls, as the species from the land from which they were torn away during the civil war. This is the first scene after the introductory credits, and it seems to lead to the massive group of Black women singers and their leader who gets the first close up as she sings the solo parts of the *alabao*.

"La Virgen se azará mucho, cuando un alma va para allá sé que ha llegado un alma, sin Dios mandar la llamada...."

As they all sing about the tragedy of the children gone without God, calling for their lives to be over, and ask for the Virgin to take care of them; as sad as she was when Jesus was taken, she can take care of the little children who were called early to Heaven ("la Virgen se azará mucho, cuando un alma va pa'allá"). The camera pans across the group of

alabadores, and in close ups of groups of three or four, we notice that aside from singing the lyrics, each singer mimics the meaning of the words. The gestures and embodied story, with the spiritual component of the story, complete the ritual of healing story-telling in another layer of witnessing. The song "Siempre Seas Bendito," composed by Ereiza Mosquera Palomenque, witnesses the following traumatic event:

> "El día de (sic) de mayo, una pipeta cayó, a las diez de la mañana, la iglesia la destruyó, ... Bojayá lo condenaron... Y esto quedó en la oscuro, de la (sic) explotada, como corría en el agua, la sangre derramada..."

The witnessing of the trauma occurs through song, through lyrics, and through gestures for all audience members to understand the impact of the story, and to dignify those between life and death with a safe and respectful transition to the other side.

The song continues, and the images switch to filmed portraits, medium shots, not close-ups, that allow the viewer to "meet" each *alabadora* and *alabador*, and see more of the community in the background. The bulk of the documentary takes place on the ruins, and in the neighborhoods of the *alabadores*, and they are interviewed, asked about what they do, what the *alabaos* mean to them: "to conserve the tradition of our ancestors, today more than ever, we see how much this culture is worth conserving," says one of the *abaladores*.

The aesthetic of the film meets the ethical responsibility of conserving a tradition of a people that is target of genocide. Black women's femininity is represented with respect, they are shown as the center of the community. The faith that binds them and binds the songs and the tradition marks the aesthetic of the documentary, leading me to argue that *Voces de Resistencia* presents an aesthetic centered on Blackness, femininity, and ritual.

The centeredness includes nature, constantly in the background of every shot, quietly oppressed along with the African descended peoples. The shot above exemplifies the aesthetic used throughout the documentary. On each side, a window open to the forest, with the green of the trees, stands as a stark contrast to the church's ruins. The cut out of the cross in the center of the image and the top of the church allow the sky and sunlight to pierce through. We can see the water, and some palm trees in the background, yet not faded away; they are placed strategically in the composition to have enough of a presence. Finally, the women's white skirts have to be noticed in any setting, as a body of sanctity; striving to resist among ruins and lost souls, the women are very much alive, and well, and singing loudly.

Each scene is paced by a song, and centered by a lead singer. A close-up of the lead singer lets us see her adornments: her head wrap, earrings, bracelets, rings, and a firmly focused gaze punctuated by the spiritual trance of chants.

"Cómo corría el agua, de la sangre...." How the blood flowed in rivers....

An Audiovisual Cinematic Witnessing That Heals Communal Trauma

This next scene in the documentary mourns while critiquing and calling the State for its neglect and the injustice against a community of hardworking peasants. The images do the work of mourning visually, while the *alabadoras* sing, on a fishing boat, a song of their own creation: "Para Siempre Seas Bendito." "May You Be Blessed, Always" has a cynical moral and an antithesis to call on those who have not blessed the community, and instead have punished them unfairly: those who came onto the land of the workers and peasants and massacred innocent civilians; and those who silenced the traumatic massacre in Bojayá.

The *Cantadoras de Pogue* provide a history lesson with morals of equity and resistance in the face of class and race-based oppression. After the first stanza, the lyric explains: "We the peasants have been mistreated, we paid the heaviest price"—meaning that in the class struggle for land rights

and drug market ownership, they had to pay with their lives and got nothing in return. The *alabadoras* go on to ask: "Respect our rights and stop violating our rights; on our own land, you come to massacre our people?!" The lyric reinforces how their nation functions with a logic that fits the genocidal neoliberal regime; still frames of the church that was bombed are shown while the song continues. One of the images depicts the list of names of all who died during the bombing, printed on a colorful fabric, hung in the church. We see empty chairs, where church goers once sat, and where on a later date, government "leaders" would come to perform a political charade of an apology, to ask for the Bojayá community's forgiveness. This is not a lesson in helplessness, and this community has no affective need of closure from government leaders. They know what their purpose is here, and they clarify it as the song builds to an important message on accountability: "To all of the presidents, you better keep your word; what happened in Bojayá better not happen again." The chorus repeats and emphasizes that they will hold their leaders accountable:

> They better receive their punishment
> We have been mistreated, us, the peasants, and paid the most violent price
> Respect our rights; do not violate our rights,
> They came to our own land, and massacred us.
> Presidents, you better be honest,
> And claim that what happened in Bojayá, will not happen again.
>
> *"Para Siempre Seas Bendito," Oneida Orejuela, 2014.*

With poetically stunning movements, the camera pans towards and around abandoned structures: a school, a nursing station, a church, each building more strikingly void of human presence. The vines, trees, and moss, covering over the cement that has been left behind, emphasize the institutional abandonment and need for access, equity, redress of genocidal practices. The images show the consequences of the state-mandated violence, while the chants describe and mourn the lives lost, and condemn the State and the justice system. At this point, two female *alabadoras* describe how much, to them, the *alabao* serves a political purpose.

The singer-songwriters go on to call on those in power to own up to their cruel neglect: presidents, soldiers, and the press.

"Don't you ever come back here."

In "Décimoquinto aniversario," (15th Anniversary) a lyric by Luz Marina Cañola, the *Cantadoras de Pogue* emphatically declares that the press cannot erase their memory. The massacre of their community will never be forgotten, they claim, it remains a part of history. Then they address the men of the armed groups: "Don't you ever come back here."

"Sirs, with your armed groups, don't you ever come back here. We are tired of singing about you. Stop the violence in the Bojayá region."

Aside from the direct claims and assertiveness, they remind their audience that though children are the future, in their situation, the future was killed. The lyric implores, "Why did our children have to die?" The chant answers, "Because they are workers and peasants." The lesson in class struggle continues, and once again the song reinforces how their nation functions with a logic that fits the genocidal neoliberal regime, this time with the press as a consenting party in the regime: "This was a hit, a hard hit, that terrorized all of us. They created this war, and the peasant was the one who suffered." "They" remains undefined, and the war is depicted as an irrational and cruel event; with striking hand gestures and the use of the demonstrative pronoun "*esta* Guerra."

At the end of the song, they address their attackers—"Señores"—directly, but also address History and, in

turn, epistemic justice: "And this, goes into history, and will never be forgotten. Sirs, with your armed groups, don't you ever come back here. We are tired of singing about you. Stop the violence in the Bojayá region." The assertive chant leads to the next scene, with images of the community that continue to live on, neighborhoods, young adults walking and smiling in the streets, the future, and the hope for the future that remains alive. Two *alabadoras* explain the role of the *alabao* has changed: "Because of the State's abandon of our region and all of the violence, we decided to compose, as women, lyrics that denounce the violence of our communities. We have to let the world know how terribly we have been hit by the cruelties of war. We sat down, as women survivors of the violence, and wrote songs." "The *alabao* has made our stories more famous; it's no longer a familial ritual."

A ritual of mourning originally conceived for families has become collective and global in the context of hypercapitalism and state violence ignored nationally and globally. The healing becomes collective for the community as they, *alabadoras*' words, are punctuated by a vertical pan shot of the next soloist, who stands on one leg, survivor of the violence, composer of "Santa María Dadnos La Paz," Ana Oneida Orejuela Barco sings to the Virgin Mary to offer peace, or that the peace treaty go well.

"We ask that peace and education reach our lands."

"We report with joy that the FARC guerrillas will put down their weapons. They didn't let us fish, or work," the group sings, and advocates for peace, and explain that with peace would come labor, education, and the freedom to work: "We ask that peace and education reach our lands." In other words, peace would provide them with their basic rights, and improve their stifled economy. The group is filmed in the same aerial shot from the beginning, as they slowly walk into the church at the edge of the forest. The end is bitter, not sweet, since some of us in the audience know, that as much as they felt joy to share the news of the peace treaty in the song, their communities have remained a target of kidnapping, planned assassination of community leaders, young black men's deaths, and altogether a continuation of the State's neglect, now paired with eco-genocide, the pollution of the River Arroyo, the lands limited to coca leaf monoculture, etc.

The sound fades back to the quiet crickets of the very beginning of the film, and the image aesthetic returns to the declaratory tone of the beginning of the documentary: "The *alabaos* were declared Immaterial Patrimony of the Colombian Nation by the National Council of Patrimony in August 2014." The cricket sounds fade out and the credits run, showing the names of each of the *alabadoras* and *alabadores*, along with the institutions that contributed to the production, including the Center for Democracy and Ethics, the Center for Afrodiasporic Studies, the ICESI University, and the Ford Foundation.

Public Funding, University Funding, Local Economy, and Black Women

With grants received from the Ford Foundation, the university, departments, and personal funding, the production team spared no expenses—it was important to use the best equipment and best conditions with the least disturbance to the lives of the women of Bojayá. With this in mind, the film production team brought their very best microphones, and recorded multiple times on location. The costume designer Claudia Patricia Buitrago hand designed each costume. The resources also trickled down to support the community's economy. For example, they used grant funding to pay for the groceries and the labor that went into cooking meals for the production team in Bojayá. The funding went directly to community members and fed the local economy. And at each stage of the production, the singer-songwriters gave their input.

"The project involved many layers of our lives, many people, a lot of reflection, discussion, revisions…" and for that reason, Vergara Figueroa states, it is really quite lovely to think of the project as a holistic form of Black feminist intellectual activism. Throughout the interview, she gave me several examples of the multilayered components of the project that, indeed, made it holistic, and Black feminist, intellectual activism. For example, in order to distribute the funding, she turned to the women and asked them, "What would you like to do, and how would you like to do it?" And from their needs and their perspectives, she started to plan the budget of the project.

In terms of the logistics and planning of the project, a level of trust among Black women was central to the development and management of *Voces de Resistencia: Capítulo 1*. The team visited the communities multiple times, for different reasons, one being that in the context of violence, Black women play the role of gatekeeper, or "Bisagra." They are the

point of communication for whoever enters, from outside, and whoever lives in the community. And they protect their loved ones.

The gatekeepers received the best equipment, and to make a statement on the equipment used for them, the boom microphones were left in many of the large group shots, and some of the close-up shots include a microphone on a stand. The sound recording and the songs were also done in a living room turned into a sound booth, with the best equipment they could travel with, to produce a high-quality LP of the original score and some traditional songs. The Ford Foundation grant, the ICESI University funding, and the Afrodiasporic Center's funds—U.S. Federal, Colombian, and institutional monies—all fed into the lives of the Bojayá women and their families. They were exposed to a level of respectability that continued the dignity work they were already doing with their songs. The production turned into an Afrodiasporic feminist conspiracy that supported the existing Bojayá feminist conspiracy.

For the premiere of the documentary, open to the public, a large portion of funding needed to be secured for the entire group of singers to fly, many of them for the first time, stay in a nice hotel, where they could also receive the best treatment as Black Colombians—this was not easy to find in Cali. And so, from the macro mechanisms of applying to federal grants, to the micro negotiations in gazes with the hotel staff that determined a need to change hotels and support a business that would not be covertly racist, the multimedia project *Voces de Resistencia* quickly became a long-term enactment of holistic Black feminist intellectual activism. A future article on this topic will unveil the full interview with Dr. Aurora Vergara Figueroa to uncover more strategies on how to negotiate the academy, public funding, and participatory research with African-descended communities.

Conclusions

The short documentary film promotes self-definition as community members took part in the production, and self-determination as it portrays Black female community members as agents of their history. In different songs, it is clear that the *alabadoras* have a multi-dimensional function in their community: they call attention to erased parts of history, denounce injustice and governmental neglect, and recall the important lives of their loved ones. As a whole, the act of songwriting and performing creates an embodied response that heals the traumas of state-mandated violence, and addresses the depth, breadth, and reality of genocidal wounds. The documentary embraces the aesthetic of the *alabao* folklore, an art handed down generations that channels ancestral wisdom, creativity, and resistance. The analysis of the documentary notes the connection to nature, spirit, and emphasis on Black women's agency and community-building, thus demonstrating a Black feminist critique of film. The laser-focused details and consistent care in the production of *Voces de Resistencia* led to a production in line with Afro-Latin American scholarship that supports and engages our communities towards self-definition and self-representation, honoring the ways that Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Dandara, Aqualtune, and other foremothers who walked the lands. In the face of genocide, there are multiple ways to resist: in film, in higher education, through song, in the community, in our kitchens, with Ford fellowships to sustain our economies, to redress the narratives that have silenced us, voices of resistance call out the inhumane practices of the government and the press censorship, and raise fists against epistemic violence. On various levels, despite what has happened, we will not forget and we will not give up, damn it, #elpueblonoserindecarajo.

NOTES

1. The introduction to *Afro-reparaciones: memorias de la esclavitud y justicia reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales* (2007), *Descolonizando Mundos* (2017), *Demando mi libertad* (2018) present the current state of suppression and omission of Afro-Colombian intellectual, political, and artistic production, including the omission of women's work in each field (Vergara Figueroa et al. 14; Chaves Maldonado 19)

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Cultural Heritage and Citizenship: Curating the First Afrolatino Film Festival in the US

Amilcar Maceo Priestley • The Afrolatin@ Project, Inc.

Abstract

The Liberación Film Festival which launched in 2017 is the first large scale curation of a film festival in the US which centers the experiences of 150-200 million Afrolatinamericans and Afrolatinxs. In this paper, we discuss the sociological and political framework of the Festival's existence and share the Festival's film selection process which aims to reflect and connect cultural and artistic expression with important aspects of Afrolatinamerican and Afrolatinx historical and contemporary social movement building. The working principle behind the Festival's curation process, "culture as politics", is based on the idea that we can best utilize cultural heritage to contest anti-blackness in Latin America when it is presented with historic, social and political context. The Festival serves not only as a showcase of cultural heritage, but is itself cultural heritage, challenging the narratives of citizenship and belonging seen in traditional visual representations of Latinidad. The Festival also provides a space to showcase and celebrate upcoming Afrolatinx and Afrolatinamerican filmmakers, actors, actresses, documentarians, storytellers and others in the field of film.

> "As proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 68/237, the theme of the International Decade is 'People of African descent: recognition, justice and development.' The international community, international and regional organizations, in particular relevant United Nations programmes... should give high priority to programmes and projects specifically tailored for combating racism and racial discrimination against people of African descent... and should, inter alia:
>
> (a) Take measures to raise awareness about the International Decade, including through awareness-raising campaigns, and organizing and supporting other activities, bearing in mind the theme of the Decade;...
>
> (h) Support initiatives and projects aimed at honouring and preserving the historical memory of people of African descent;..."[1]

In July 2018, the Afro-Latino Festival NYC, an annual event celebrating Afrolatinx cultural heritage preservation and political, socio-economic advancement organized the 2nd annual Liberación Film Festival. This festival within a festival included a full day of screenings, director Q&As and panel discussions, as well as vendors and music celebrating Afrolatinidad. The Festival screened more than 15 films including a First Look, a World Premiere, and 5 US premieres hailing from 7 countries. It was the first time something of this scope had been done in the US. We reached this point because of the groundwork laid over the last 8 years.

This paper explores the political positioning of the Festival and the curation process and the political context of the film tracks and selections within the framework of contemporary Afro-Latin American social movements. As we enter the halfway mark for the U.N. International Decade for Afrodescendants (2015-2024), the Film Festival aims to highlight the principle of "recognition".

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The U.N. International Decade for Afrodescendants was declared in 2013. Following a 15 year push by many organizations which devised and implemented the Durban Plan to combat racism globally, this was established following the 2001 World Conference Against Racism Discrimination and Xenophobia in Durban South Africa. Historically, geopolitical

agendas have driven the development of film festivals, especially in Europe. While these agendas are "powerful forces driving and shaping festivals, they are also shown to intersect with cultural objectives, economic interests and specific (inter) national historical circumstances."[2]

In Latin America, this takes on added importance in how Afrolatinamericans are represented, given how the concept of national identity has been constructed. Nation- states are often created and fortified based on cultural norms and practices which are established by certain experiences which are deemed to be specific to a given community. Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community".[3]

White supremacy and racial caste systems in the region were critical to colonial era economic development and societal formation. They were also foundational to the formation of the nation-state in a region as vastly heterogeneous as the Western Hemisphere. In contrast to the racial hierarchy created by the one-drop rule in the US, several racial ideologies developed in Latin America contributing to the concept of national identity; in Mexico, Jorge Vasconcelos developed the concept of the raza cosmica, in Brazil, Gilberto Freyre developed lusotropicalism, in Cuba the ideology of race mixing was deemed superior,[4] while indigenismo flourished in both Mexico and Peru.[5]

These racial theories helped consolidate national identity around the idea that race mixture or "miscegenation" would lead to the eventual whitening of Latin America. Thus, national identities of most Latin American countries until recently have been designed to celebrate an imagined cultural homogeneity, while rejecting or folklorizing their African, as well as indigenous roots.[6,7] This "rejection" is best evidenced in the cultural realm by the ways in which national tourism boards throughout the region generally and historically promoted a white/mestizo image of their respective countries.[8]

The "folkorization" is best evident in the ways in which cultural heritage is exported including music, film, television and sports talent. One of the key ways culture is used to reinforce nationalism is through the creation of a set of cultural markers deemed to be symbolic of the nation. Those markers are often designed to reinforce social hierarchies and cultural homogeneity. The entertainment, advertising and museum industries in turn provide the means of dissemination of the official narrative of the national culture.[9]

It is within this framework that the Liberación Film Festival intends to reimagine the cultural markers through its curation of films that tell the stories of black Latin America.[10]

The mediums of film and increasingly the digital, serve an important role in memorializing cultural heritage. "[T]he historicity of heritage needs to be formalised through material symbolism, which makes the intangible and ephemeral into something that has material form, be it on paper, a book, an audiovisual recording, particular elements of a festival, or an archive".[11] The Festival should thus be viewed as a celebration of both the inherent preservation and storytelling value of film, as well as the experiences and intangible cultural heritage the films depict.

UNITED STATES AND LATIN AMERICA FESTIVAL LANDSCAPE

In Latin America, the largest exporters of film have been Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Chile.[12] More recently Panama, Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, have entered the marketplace of cultural cinema.

Over the last eight years we have watched to see if anyone would present a film festival that could share our stories. A brief survey shows other festivals have a spattering of films on black issues or even with black protagonists but none, at least those in the US, have centered Afrolatinx experiences (we did not delve into the behind the camera personal so this critique is limited to the representation in front of the camera).

Until recently, Latino film festivals in the US, often organized according to country, rarely had representation of Afrolatinx or Afrolatinamericans. Interestingly, the Dominican Film Festival in New York has sought to tackle tough racial issues that resonate on the island including the 2013 decision by the Tribunal Courts of the Dominican Republic to revoke the citizenship of certain Haitians, a debate often framed in terms of nationalism and national sovereignty. More recently, they have included films with Afro-Dominican protagonists or that delve into issues of race and identity. Within the US, some black festivals have sought to incorporate more diaspora perspectives which included others of African descent in the Western Hemisphere. For example, the African Diaspora International Film Festival (ADIFF) held in several cities nationwide has consistently sought to include some representation of films about the Black experience in Latin America. The Blackstar Festival in Philadelphia in 2017 awarded its Favorite Documentary Short Award to Baobab Flowers a film by a AfroBrazilian/Peruvian director Gabriela Watson. The Pan African Film Festival and Arts Festival in Los Angeles and the American Black Film Festival in Miami have both screened Toussaint L'Ouverture," Jimmy Jean Louis Goes to Tijuana on the migrant crisis of Haitians in Tijuana, Mexico.

In Latin America, there are several festivals which have emerged in recent years in direct response to the call of the Decade for greater "recognition". In Brazil, historically, representation of Afro-Brazilians has been invisibilized[13] or relegated to portraying the black maid (1960's and 70s); the loyal bodyguard (1980s); the super-obedient slave or non-thinking slave (1980s and 90s).[14]

Since the Decade began there have been a number of film festivals in Latin America focusing on more representative depictions of the black experience; these tend to be country specific with some selections from the rest of the diaspora also shown. For example: in Brazil, the "Mostra de Cinema Negro" (2016-2017)[15]; in Argentina, "Festival Nacional de Cultura

Afro, la Plata" and the "Festival Mandinga" organized by the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti (2014-2017)[16] In Colombia there are several, the "Muestra Afro" in Bogota[17], the "Festival de Cinema Afro Kunta Kinte" in Medellin[18]; and the "Festival de Cine Afro Ananse" in Cali[19]. In Panama, there is the "Muestra de CineAfro."[20]

Many of these are organized by members of the black community, although a few are organized by national or regional governments or under their auspices. Through the Liberación Film Festival we will contribute to this list of Festivals that share the Black and Latinx experience, while also centering Afrolatinidad in a way not previously done in the US.

LIBERACIÓN FILM FESTIVAL CURATION PROCESS

The subject matter of the Festival tracks are designed to: a) highlight pressing matters that our community faces, b) demonstrate the commonality in experiences across borders, and c) assist in highlighting up and coming Afrolatinx creatives and talent. The purpose of curating this specific set of themes is to highlight storytelling that contextualizes the historical and political narratives. We first develop the tracks that will be used to decide on the various films. These are based on the conversations that are being held within the movement in Latin America as well as those being held by Afrolatinxs in the US seeking to mobilize. In 2015 we presented *Afrolatinos: The Untold Story* an important primer on understanding Afrolatinidad. This was the launch year for the U.N. Decade and the film provided a general overview of Afrolatinidad. In 2016, we screened *Nana Dijo*. This occurred at the height of the Black Lives Matter Movement and its corresponding "Jovem Negro Vivo" campaigns in Brazil and the "Las Vidas Negras Importan" efforts elsewhere in the region. In 2017, during our Women of the Diaspora celebration, we presented three films, two by women directors from Brazil (*Afrotrip*, Dir. Gabriela Watson) and Curação (*Sombra di Kolo*, Dir. Angela Roe), and one which discussed border politics, race and violence on the island of Hispaniola (*Death by a Thousand Cuts*, Juan Mejia).

In 2018, in addition to expanding beyond documentaries to include shorts and fictional works, the screenings were a reflection of our theme, Identity and Beyond. They included short film tracks on Displacement & Resilience, Brazil, Social Movements, Identity and Cultural Heritage. Our goal has been to connect the existing movement in Latin America with Afrolatinxs in the US who seek to develop a US based movement. By highlighting the issues faced by Afrolatinamericans in Latin America, we hope to broaden the renewed conversation in the US beyond this current phase of identifying as Afrolatinx to develop a better understanding of the implications in asserting Afrolatinidad from a socio-political angle.

The films shown during the 2018 Social Movements track included *Awakening*, on Black youth from Ferguson, MO and Buenaventura, Colombia, embark on a journey to discover what it means to be Black in different corners of the world. The documentary explored the construction of race through interviews with academics and the average person on the street in various countries in the region. In *Braids: The Politics of Aesthetics*, women involved in the natural hair movement in Panama shared how the movement embraces the aesthetics of hair itelf, but also addresses socio-economic issues of employment opportunity and public discrimination which arise from those aesthetics. In the Displacement and Resilience track, films explored issues of displacement as a result of natural disaster, *Jimmy Jean Louis Goes to Tijuana* (2010 Haiti earthquake) and *AfroFuturos* (Hurricane Maria, Puerto Rico 2017) or development, *Drums of Resistance Boquilla*, Colombia (hotel developers displacement of black communities in coastal Cartagena, Colombia 2018). Many of these issues resonate in black and brown communities in the US and throughout Latin America.

The Festival also serves to celebrate and provide networking and skill building opportunities for on and off-screen talents. In 2018 we had two upcoming Brazilian director premiere their works and we also screened *Awakening* as a First Look which provided a platform for the films' producers to seek additional production funding.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Liberación Film Festival serves an important role in communicating shared experiences, breaking the narrative of belonging by revalorizing black cultural heritage and providing a platform for Afrolatinx talent who may otherwise not receive such opportunities. In the Decade for People of African Descent, documenting and showcasing these audiovisual works which explore contemporary and historic narratives of race in Latin America will ultimately serve to strengthen the movement in Latin America and also help harness a renewed energy here in the US that has emerged in the last five years.

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Sister Ursula de Jesús' Equal Economy of Salvation

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Abstract

The article examines the diary of Peruvian sister Ursula de Jesús, the first known spiritual journal produced by a black woman in colonial Spanish America. The account, written in first person and consisting of fifty-seven folios, mainly describes sister Ursula's visions and her life inside the Lima convent where she came to be highly revered as a mystic during the seventeenth century. The recognition that this black woman gained was particularly high considering that she lived at a time when most people in the Ibero-transatlantic world associated Afro descendants with the Devil. This fact along with the richness of sister Ursula's spiritual diary has resulted in some merited scholarly attention identifying her work as part of the emergence of a discourse on black religious exemplarity in Lima in the sixteen hundreds. The examination adds to this scholarship by presenting how sister Ursula carefully crafted her *vida* as a discursive space to argue for a more equal access to the economy of salvation and more solidarity between black catholic women such as herself. The theoretical tools that help guide the analysis are the concepts of economy of salvation, the link between an individual's mystical experience and their dialectical relation to society, and the mediation in textual agency found in spiritual diaries.

Like many Afro-Peruvians during the seventeenth century, Ursula de Jesús was born a slave in the viceroyalty of Peru, Lima, but one accident changes the course of her life and transforms her into a renowned mystic.[1] In 1617, her mistress, a wealthy mystic by the name of Luisa de Megarejo Sotomayor, sends Ursula to the Convent of Santa Clara (Lima) and pledges her to the service of Inés del Pulgar, a nun who is related to her.[2] Ursula remains Pulgar's slave until 1645, but in 1642, while hanging laundry on a platform mounted on top of a well, the platform collapses. It is only after she prays to the Virgen del Carmen that she finds the strength to lift herself. Believing this to be a miracle, Ursula decides to devote herself to God. Her increasingly time-consuming spiritual exercises irritate her mistress, who accuses her of having little time left to perform her more worldly duties. Tensions mount between mistress and servant, and the latter requests to be allowed to leave the convent and find a new mistress. To prevent Ursula's departure from the community, Doña Rafael de Esquivel -- one of Santa Clara's black veiled nuns -- purchases her freedom. Choosing to remain in the same convent, she becomes a *donada* —a term used to refer to black or indigenous religious servants living in convents (Van Deusen, "Ursula" 89-94 and *The Souls* 1-5) . It is in this capacity that she first comes to be recognized as Sister Ursula, and then eventually grows to be highly revered as a mystic at a time when most people in the Ibero-transatlantic world associate blacks with the Devil, and when black women therefore are not allowed to become nuns (Velasquez 388).

As is customary for nuns and mystics in the seventeenth century, sister Ursula's confessor asks her to record her visions and sister Ursula complies by dictating them to other nuns.[3] Her account is written in first person and consists of fifty-seven folios that mainly describe the mystic's visions and her life inside the convent.[4] This narrative constitutes the first known spiritual journal of a black Catholic woman in colonial Spanish America.[5] This fact, along with the richness of sister Ursula's spiritual diary, results in some merited scholarly attention identifying her work as part of the emergence of a discourse on black religious exemplarity in Lima during the seventeenth century.[6] My objective is to conduct an analysis of Ursula's religious discourse using the theoretical concepts of economy of salvation, the link between an individual's mystical experience and their dialectical relation to society, and the mediation in textual agency found in spiritual diaries. My examination reveals

how, despite issues of textual agency commonly found in nuns and women mystics' spiritual writing, sister Ursula carefully crafts her *vida* as a discursive space to argue for a more equal access to the economy of salvation and more solidarity among black-Catholic women.[7]

SISTER URSULA'S BLACK VIDA OF RACIAL EQUALITY

Sister Ursula's spiritual journal reveals the limitations in textual agency that usually accompanies *vidas*; the fact that Ursula dictates her journal to other nuns probably intensifies the process of mediation that typically accompanies this kind of confessional writing.[8] Indeed, like other nuns and mystics, sister Ursula does not choose to tell her story. Instead, she is obeying her confessor's request to record her mystical visions and experiences. Confessors often order nuns and mystics to compose their spiritual diary because they want to be persuaded of the women's exemplarity and special standing with God (Gunnarsdóttir 10). These writings allow confessors to regulate their religiosity (Donahue 231). Because of these two different purposes, women write from a position of strength and weakness, and they develop narrative strategies for both. Some of the "stratagems of strength" include drawing legitimacy through the women's mystical union with God and claiming that God, the Virgin, or a Saint speak through them (Arenal and Schlau 25-29). Other important strategies of authorization reference Santa Teresa's words and reconfirm the legitimacy of the "mother tongue" by associating their writing with maternal roles, in particular with the Virgin Mary (Saint Teresa of Avila 25-32).[9] They also combine those narrative devices with "stratagems of the weak" such as a lack of agency, an affirmation of inadequacy, and a discourse of self-deprecation (Gunnarsdóttir 10, 25).[10] Because sister Ursula does not write her *vida* herself, but instead dictates it to other nuns, her process of textual agency is even more complicated. She first has to craft the narrative of her spiritual life considering that her confessor will use it as a tool to assess her religiosity. Moreover, in her case, the nuns who serve as scribes are another intermediary who also has some agency on her text when deciding how and what to transcribe, and how to best make it fit the form of a conventional *vida*.

At first sight, sister Ursula's spiritual journal fits well *vidas*' conventions as it includes a summary of her visions, one of the two most common topics of these writings. It also contains the typical "stratagem of the strong" of the woman's union with God and combines it with a discourse of lack of agency. When describing her visions, she specifies: "when I ask those questions I do not do so because I want to but, just as soon as I see them, they speak to me without my wishing it to happen, and they make me speak without wanting to... I should thank God for the gifts He had given her..." (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 80).[11] By stressing that God has given her "the gifts", the text positions Ursula as a woman with special standing with God. Yet, at the same time, by emphasizing that it is not her choice to "see" visions or to "speak" her own words, it also underscores her lack of agency and control over what she is asking and saying.[12] More specifically, the *vida* contains the common notion where female mystics' bodies are understood as "readable spaces", places where God can communicate through and where the mystics can find refuge from the scrutiny of their confessors (Van Deusen, "Reading" 5-16). Among the more famous of these mystics, Saint Teresa of Ávila represents herself as a humble servant of God whose body God selected as a conduit of His will and word. In *The Way of Perfection*, she insists on the importance of mortification and suffering of the human body in order to reach complete abandonment to God: "Let us remember our holy fathers of the past... What suffering they endured!.. Do you think they were made of steel? Well they were as delicate as we. And believe, daughters, that when we begin to conquer these wretched little bodies, we will not be so troubled by them... abandon yourselves totally for God" (81). She also stresses that humility needs to accompany body detachment and suffering: "Here true humility can enter the picture because this virtue and the virtue of detachment it seems to me always go together" (76). Insisting on body detachment, humility and suffering of the body helps Saint Teresa gain some protection from the accusation of heresy in her position as a woman mystic in the early modern period in Spain. It provides her a way to distance herself from her female body, which is perceived as sinful and dangerous (Arenal and Schlau 29-30). Since Saint Teresa is the best-known model for colonial women's *vidas*, many nuns and women mystics adopt her language.

Following Saint Teresa's example, sister Ursula's *vida* underlines the importance of humility, self-deprecation, and suffering as conditions to obtain true religious exemplarity and union with God. The text calls attention to sister Ursula's humility when other nuns treat her badly in her convent: "On Wednesday morning, doña Antonia de Serrantes sent her slave to ask me to cook for her. I told her black slave, 'Go with God, your owner only remembers me to give orders'. But then, I called her again to do what she asked me" (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 96). It also lays emphasis on her self-deprecation when sister Ursula states that she does not deserve salvation: "I hurriedly asked Him for His blessing, although I know very well I did not deserve it. I deserve to go to hell" (*The Souls* 97). As importantly, it describes the suffering she endures to get closer to God when she performs acts such as "cleaning out the drainage ditch in the infirmary" where she gets "spattered and soiled" (*The Souls* 87). Finally, it establishes that sister Ursula finds "solace" in doing these painful acts because she does them for God (*The Souls* 87). The voices from purgatory in her visions reinforce that her torment will bring her closer to God: "the voice said,

You did such dangerous and extremely difficult tasks, all for God. It will be seen then how good it is for us, and how grateful He is" (*The Souls* 87).

However, sister Ursula's *vida* also differs from more conventional ones by defining her blackness as an essential ingredient in the construction of her trope of suffering as *imitatio Christi*. When depicting that a particular nun is constantly scolding her, her text explains that sister Ursula turns to God to find the strength to endure her suffering: "I go to our Lord and ask Him to give me patience, teach me how to suffer for others, and grant me peace of mind so that I do not criticize another in my heart." (*The Souls* 104). When insisting on her willingness to endure pain, and asking God to help her to become better at it, the *vida* is employing a trope that Saint Teresa and Saint Rosa of Lima already used to underscore their special connection with God. What is different in this narrative though is that the first quote is immediately followed by: "I am such a bad black woman" (*The Souls* 104). The text therefore closely connects sister Ursula's abnegated torment not just to her female body, as Saint Teresa and Saint Rosa had previously done, but to her black female body, a radical shift from the discourse usually found in *vidas*.

An even more notable difference between sister Ursula's *vida* and customary nuns' spiritual diaries is the inclusion of blacks as members of purgatory and heaven. In many of her visions, sister Ursula recounts former conventual Afro-Peruvian servants approaching her from purgatory and asking her to intervene with God for their entrance into heaven. Her description of Afro-Peruvians in purgatory is audacious, since in seventeenth century Peru, most readers consider the idea of blacks going to heaven upon death surprising and unlikely.[13] Probably aware of this general perception, sister Ursula portrays herself in her spiritual journal as uncertain on the topic. She asks a black woman who is in purgatory the following question: "I asked whether black women went to heaven and she said if they were thankful and heeded His beneficence, and thanked Him for it. They were saved because of his great mercy." (*The Souls* 80).

Even though the trope of the blacks' redemption and salvation is bold, especially coming from a black woman, it has already been proposed in a few religious writings, such as Alonso de Sandoval's treaty on African slavery. Alonso de Sandoval is a Jesuit priest who lives and serves in Cartagena de Indias, a major slave trading port entry, and hence, as a missionary, Sandoval has ample contact with African slaves. He is the author of the first book on African slavery in colonial Latin America, a manuscript originally titled *De instauranda Aethiopum salute* (1627). Sandoval believes that the Apostles preached in Africa before the arrival of the Europeans and that the Jesuits need to help Africans return to their lost Christian state. Hence, he hopes that his book would encourage other Jesuits to join him in his work of preaching and baptizing slaves (Von Germeten, "Introduction" xv-xxiv). In his treatise, Sandoval also proposes that black slaves should endure their slavery with submission because God sent them corporal pain as an avenue of redemption (75). Indeed, many of the time's biblical scholars believe that blacks stem from a malediction, and that the color of their skin and their slavery is God's punishment to Ham for exposing Noah's nakedness (Carrera 11; Martínez 158).[14] By accepting their torment and imitating Christ's abnegated suffering on the cross, black slaves free themselves of the sins of their race and enter heaven.[15]

While this portrayal of black Catholics as members of heaven coincide with Sandoval's writing, it conflicts with the more common written characterizations of blacks in religious writings. In their *vidas*, when nuns describe their temptations of the flesh, they often report the Devil appearing to them as a black man (Brewer-García 10). Saint Teresa herself describes being attacked by an "abominable little black man" in her spiritual autobiography (quoted in 340).[16] Religious paintings replicate the same idea. For example, in an eighteenth-century painting of Saint Rosa, the attributed author Miguel Cabrera represents the Devil as an enormous black man who pulls Saint Rosa towards his chest (Jaffary 119). Therefore, by making black Catholics central characters of her spiritual journal and characterizing them as capable of salvation, the text distances itself from conventional religious representations of Afro-Peruvians as a group associated with immorality, and instead poses their equality in the afterlife. In it, black Catholics who have not committed irremediable sins, go to purgatory like other Christians: "I said, 'How is that such a good black woman, who had neither been a thief nor liar, had spent so much time in purgatory?' She said she had gone there because of her character, and because she slept and ate at the improper time" (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 80).[17] The black Catholics, such as the convent's slave in the quote above, are in purgatory because they are purging their sins through terrible torments, a purgation which eventually allows them to enter heaven. As the diary indicates, despite the suffering, purgatory is a space preferable to Earth because of its purifying nature: "Despite the terrible torment, those in purgatory would never wish to return here, even as lords of the land –because of the danger of losing God" (*The Souls* 113).

Sister Ursula's spiritual journal also depicts God as one who perceives and treats Afro-Peruvians as equal to His other children. God considers all humans His children, as when Ursula asserts: "Although He raised us as different nations the will of blacks and whites is the same. In memory, understanding, and will, they were all one. Had He not created them all in His image and likeness and redeemed them with His blood" (*The Souls* 151). Since Africans and their descendants are His Children, God treats them equally: "the voices told me how much in particular the insignificant and humble ones of this house please God. Florencia Bravo and Antonia de Christo are outcasts, and no one pays any

attention to them. The first one is a wretched *mulata* and the other a blind, black woman." (*The Souls* 93-94). God is portrayed as differing radically in His treatment of Africans and their descendants from that of sister Ursula's own religious community. Indeed, by dismissing Florencia and Antonia and not paying attention to them, her convent replicates colonial society's marginalization of Afro-Peruvians. The text therefore subtly establishes that the behavior of those governing her religious community goes against God's example.

While the Peruvian Catholic Church does not generally promote the idea that God sees blacks and *mulatos* as equals to His other children, two other clergy men from Lima share this conviction and include a similar language of racial equality in their texts. It is worth pointing that, by the seventeenth century, Lima is a uniquely black city, and that maybe as a result of that presence, it also is a particularly welcoming city for religious black figures; by 1636, the Africans and their descendants reach 54 percent of the whole population (Bowser 339, 341). Lima becomes the religious capital of the viceroyalty of Peru and seat of the Archbishop and Holy Office of the Inquisition in the region. The city is also the hometown of Saint Martín of Porres (1579-1639), who later becomes the first *mulato* saint in the Americas (Tardieu 633). Lima houses a large number of religious orders, and ten percent of the city's inhabitants are members of a monastic or conventual order (Sánchez-Concha 320; Van Deusen, *The Souls* 7).

The two contemporaries of sister Ursula, both priests in Lima, argue that Afro-Peruvians are as worthy of salvation as those possessing purity of blood. The first clergyman, Diego de Córdoba y Salinas, like Ursula, is a Franciscan. He publishes his chronicle about the Franciscans of Peru in 1651 and in it includes the life account of sister Estephania, a *mulata* descendant of a slave mother and a Spanish father. Sister Estephania professes as a *beata* of the Order of the Franciscans and vows to live a holy life (Córdoba y Salinas 189-191; Wood 290).[19] Córdoba's biography on Estephania, titled *Life and Death of the Humble Mother Estefania de San Joseph, Professed from the Third Order of our Father, S. Francisco* (1651) echoes the idea that based on their merits, blacks can obtain salvation as much as whites:[20]

> ...in the court of Heaven, where only merits are considered, who is noble and who is not are equally rewarded; the rich man and the poor one; the black and the white man when their deeds deserve it, because as Saint Paul said, writing to the Romans, God ... does not exclude anyone, He calls everyone to His house and He invites all to His wedding. He honors the merits of the Greek, the Jew, the White, and the Black and He receives them in His favors. This was very well verified with mother Estephania of Saint Joseph.... (949)

By underscoring that God invites his children into heaven, not based on their race or *casta* but on their religious merits, Córdoba constructs a compelling argument about the religious exemplarity of his Afro-Catholic subject very similar to the discourse about "blacks and whites" being "all one" in their potential for salvation found in sister Ursula's *vida* (151).

Also published in 1675, is Bernardo de Medina's hagiography about Saint Martín de Porres (1579-1639), a mulatto Dominican lay brother from Lima, Peru, who dedicates his life to the poor and becomes the first *mulato* to be beatified in the Americas in 1837. In his hagiography, Medina argues that Porres "was *pardo*, as they say, not white in color as everyone admires. But God, who does not consider accidents of color, but only the merits of the subject, makes no exception of persons, but cares equally for everyone" (quoted in Wood, "Chains" 174). Like Córdoba, Medina insists that God judges His children on their merits and not their skin. Because of her vision about Afro-Peruvians in purgatory, sister Ursula joins the few members of the Peruvian clergy who believe that black Catholics can be equal in their religious merits to white ones. Aligning her language to Córdoba's and Medina's religious rhetoric is particularly important for sister Ursula since she is presenting her spiritual diary to her confessor from the position of a marginal Afro-Peruvian woman, whereas Córdoba and Medina write from a much more authoritative position as white male Peruvian clerics. For the nuns who are serving as the transcribers of her oral spiritual diary, and who themselves live and write under the patriarchal umbrella of the colonial church, framing this discourse as part of the larger male ecclesiastical rhetoric of Córdoba and Medina is safer as well.

Even with the precedents of Córdoba and Medina, recording visions of blacks in purgatory is audacious, and so the diary also insists that sister Ursula's work was consistent with the values left by the founders of her order:

> Another time, after I had taken communion the voices told me to commend the spirit of a black woman to God. She had been in the convent and had been taken out to be cured because she was gravely ill but died a few days later. This happened more than thirty years ago, and I had forgotten about her as if she had never existed. I was frightened and thought to myself, "So long in purgatory?" The voices responded, For the things she did. Here, the voices led me to understand that she had illicitly loved a nun and the entire convent knew about it, but that my father, Saint Francis, and my mother, Saint Clare, had gotten on their knees and prayed to our Lady to secure the salvation of that soul from her Son. That is because His house is in good faith. (88)

In her role as a supporter of these subaltern members of her society, sister Ursula is characterized as a true follower

of San Francisco and Santa Clara, the founders of her order. Both San Francisco and Santa Clara strongly predicate that no brother or sister should have control or authority over another one, regardless of class (Lachance 70). By citing their example and aligning her conduct to that of the father and mother of the Franciscan order, sister Ursula's work in favor of the marginalized Afro-Catholics of her community is framed as one of the tenets of her order. Moreover, by including the example of San Francisco and Santa Clara kneeling to secure the salvation of a black sinner, her work is legitimized as an intermediary of salvation of the African blood community.

AN ALTERNATIVE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

When further examining sister Ursula's work on behalf of black women's salvation, religious scholar Richard Woods' theory that the evolution of an individual's mystical experience is linked to the individual's dialectical relation to society may prove useful as it reveals that the service that sister Ursula performs for the community of black Catholics can serve a social dimension (158). Indeed, by looking at the mystical experience not as a purely inner experience but as one that connects the mystic with a wider community, some scholars such as Janet Ruffing are able to avoid the separations between "contemplation and action, theory and practice, mysticism and ethical behavior" (2). A consideration of sister Ursula's mystical experience under that light allows for her spiritual journal to be read as a call for social reform. Since sister Ursula is herself a black Catholic woman servant in her conventual community and a subaltern in her society at large, her visions may replicate her dialectical relation to her society. More precisely, they may call attention to the essential service that members of African descent perform in the convent and its larger community, as well as their service to God, and the social and ethical needs for a change to their unequal access to the economy of spiritual salvation.[21]

In the seventeenth century, the economy of spiritual salvation is clearly more accessible to the wealthy. The economy of salvation can be defined as the accumulation of acts of piety, prayers for indulgence and for the soul's salvation. These can be purchased through donations or money, and serve as remedies for a spiritual debt that the individual acquired through his or her sinful conduct while alive. The access to this economy of salvation open to families and friends of the departed is intrinsically connected to their financial means. Richer individuals have more time to pray, and more money for charity and masses. The wealthy also have better access to indulgences and can devote themselves more easily and efficiently to saving the souls of their departed ones and expediting their entrance into heaven (Fogelman 1-26).

As Jacques Le Goff demonstrates, the concept of purgatory is born at the end of the twelfth century as a third space between hell and heaven. It is meant to give an afterlife space to people who are not saints (and who therefore cannot go directly to heaven). In purgatory, the souls of those who have sinned, but are not irremediably condemned, can find salvation (Rodríguez 195). The creation of purgatory by the Catholic Church responds to the new needs created by the transition from a feudal to an incipient capitalist economy that transforms salvation into a series of arithmetic operations (Mártinez i Alvarez 47). As a consequence of the birth of the notion of purgatory as an economic transaction, starting in the thirteenth century, the relationship between the society of the living and the dead drastically changes. Families or friends of the dead begin approaching nuns requesting that they pray for their souls (Rodríguez 279). By the early modern era, it becomes common for families to intervene financially in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of their departed ones and to accelerate their entrance into heaven. Some of the most commonly used methods are the purchase of indulgences and masses (Sánchez-Concha 319; Van Deusen, *The Souls* 36).

In the spiritual journal, through her mystical visions, sister Ursula's actions on behalf of the impecunious black women can be seen as a call for a more equal access to the economy of salvation. The fact that many of the departed ones who contact sister Ursula from purgatory are black Catholic women who were marginalized inside and outside the convent, and consequently did not belong to the rich and powerful communities who could afford to financially participate in this economy of salvation, constitutes an important element of her mystical experience. Sister Ursula's role as intercessor in their favor serves the social role to resist the inequality of the economy of salvation. Whereas in colonial society the departed black Catholics are quickly forgotten and do not have rich families or friends who can pay for masses and prayers or provide church donations on their behalf, they can rely on sister Ursula who works hard on their behalf. Sister Ursula intercedes with equal fervor for all members of her society-men and women, poor and rich, black and white. She offers to suffer for well-known deceased figures, such as the friar who "appears and asks that I commend his spirit to God." (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 79). Similarly, she intervenes for elite women, such as doña Polonia who "had endured terrible suffering" (*The Souls* 82). Yet, she serves equally well the marginal and forgotten women, such as the black and the *mulata* servants who spent their lives serving others (*The Souls* 82, 91).

In most of these appearances, the text underscores that sister Ursula and her religious peers have completely forgotten the African descent women who request her service with words such as "had no one who would remember her" (*The Souls* 82) or "one of the things most forgotten for me in this word" (*The Souls* 80). Since society

has completely forgotten those approaching her, it is highly likely as well that nobody is financially contributing to the economy of their salvation. By breaking that pattern, sister Ursula infringes on the economy of salvation that prevails in colonial Lima during the seventeenth century. She offers an alternative method to counteract the financial contributions for salvation, one that requires no money or elite position in society, and one that therefore does not support the privileged access of the rich to salvation.

A NEW BLACK WOMAN "IMAGINED COMMUNITY" BASED ON SOLIDARITY

By detailing sister Ursula's work on behalf of the black women incapable of contributing to their economy of salvation, the spiritual diary also presents her as advocating on behalf of a community of African descendants and calling for a more equal economy of salvation based on solidarity amongst black women. Mixing her mystical experience with a socio-political discourse is not a radical departure since other mystics, such as Saint Teresa, have already done so based on their own social identity. As Alison Weber successfully demonstrates, Saint Teresa wrote for a dual audience: male readers who were expected to scrutinize her writings and fellow nuns. She therefore constructed a dual rhetoric for her different readers. She suggested that learned men have more important concerns and therefore should perform a cursive reading of her text. At the same time, she encouraged nuns, her true community of readers, to perform a close reading of her text, which introduces them to an "impassioned defense of the spiritual rights of women" through a "rhetoric of solidarity" (82, 84). Through her visions, sister Ursula's *vida* advocates for similar spiritual rights and concepts of solidarity for black women. Indeed, by serving as an equalizer in the access to spiritual salvation at the service of the African descendant community, it constructs a more inclusive community of black Catholic women based on the Christian principles of equality and solidarity.

Interestingly, the principles behind this alternative model of access to salvation on earth also parallel the founding principles of *cofradías* in colonial Peru. *Cofradías* are one of the few European institutions that subaltern groups appropriated to fulfill their own needs (Vega 137). *Cofradías* are religious and economic guilds that originated during Roman times and spread throughout Europe during the Middle Ages with an objective to form communities of solidarity (Black 8; Corilla 18). *Cofradías* arise in Spain during the twelfth century, and flourish during the fourteenth and fifteen centuries. In time, they mainly become religious guilds with complex and varied relationships with orders that are imported to colonial Latin America. There, they also become places of formation and solidarity for sub-ethnic communities for the entire society, including indigenous and Afro-populations (Lockhart 290). In colonial Latin America, *cofradías* serve important economic and social functions that center around the concept of solidarity amongst people of the same ethnic community. Economically, they are communities of financial support where members can secure loans from other members of their community (Vega 138). Two main values of *cofradías* include cooperation and high solidarity amongst members; thus, they also form a community that empowers them socially in their larger colonial society (Vega 140-149).

By 1619, Lima is home to fifteen *cofradías* of black Catholics, all patronized by religious orders. Six of those are exclusively composed of black members. Three only welcome *mulatos*, and six include both *mulatos* and blacks (Corilla 20). These *cofradías* provide support for their community and help the inclusion of their members into aspects of the hegemonic culture, such as religious processions (Sánchez 21). At the same time, *cofradías* also foster a strong sense of unified and unique African descent religious identity by creating their own brown representation of Christ. However, even though blacks and *mulatos* have their own religious and social communities, which in theory are supposed to work on the principle of solidarity, in practice the black and *mulato cofradías* often face internal divisions and practices of exclusion. Since holding a leadership position inside a *cofradía* is often the only recourse available for blacks to achieve power and recognition, members of the same community often fight for the highest administrative positions. Ironically, these institutions reinforce the differences of power between free *pardos*, *ladino* slaves, *bozales*, blacks, and *mulatos*, and hence replicate the hierarchies established by the colonial society (Corilla 23-25).

In her spiritual diary, through her role as a mystic at the service of black -Catholic women, sister Ursula recreates the system of solidarity that is the founding principle of *cofradías* but is jeopardized. Sister Ursula is familiar with *cofradías* since she founded the *cofradía* of Santa Carmen (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 37). By advocating for solidarity amongst descendants of Africans, sister Ursula also proposes an imagined Christian community for whom she serves as an intermediary to God. According to Benedict Anderson, who coins this term while analyzing the birth of nationalism in American colonies, people who perceive themselves as part of a group create "imagined communities". Anderson argues that the members of a community do not need to all know each other to still feel part of the same group; while their actual relationships might be defined by inequality and exploitation, they envision their community as a horizontal relationship of partnership and comradeship (5-7). In her imagined community detailed in her spiritual diary, sister Ursula redefines the conflicted relationships between black Catholic women that prevail around her, even in religious spaces such as convents and cofradías. To replace them, she offers a new black Catholic imagined community with members who

share three elements: their service to God as black women, their desire for salvation, and their lack of access to the conventional economy of salvation.

Sister Ursula's imagined community includes fellow servants who approach her for help in the convent, such as the *mulata* who enters the kitchen "upset because each time her owner's mother came, she mistreated and chastised her, lying to her daughter about her" or Florencia Bravo, the tawdry *mulata* who pleases God so much (Van Deusen, *The Souls* 91, 94). It also encompasses the dead *morena* who she entrusts to God (*The Souls* 110) and the living *morena* Luisa who comes asking for her incarnation (*The Souls* 82). And finally, it is also composed of the black women who call her for guidance during her final hours of life, and the multiple black women who contact her from purgatory to lessen their stay there (*The Souls* 100, 125). By serving both, the dead and the living black Catholic women, sister Ursula creates an imagined community that transcends into the afterlife. She also proposes a model where all good Afro-Christian women form one community, working together, and practicing service, support, and solidarity for each other.

Although sister Ursula's imagined community is characterized by inclusion and solidarity amongst all good Christians from African descent, her work at the service of a more equal economy of salvation focuses on black Catholic women. Her focus on women is evident when examining the gender of those requesting her assistance. While it is logical that the black Catholics who come to her in the convent are all female since she lives in a community of women, it makes less sense that only black Catholic women request her intervention from purgatory. In contrast, from within the white population, both male and female individuals seek her help. Considering that the evolution of an individual's mystical experience is linked to the individual's dialectical relation to society, Ursula's identity might explain this gender difference. As a black Catholic woman, her mysticism concentrates on working against the marginalization of those members who are closest to her, that is, black women.

When considering sister Ursula's special service to black Catholic women, it is also important to realize that the male ecclesiastical institution conceives purgatory as a masculine space since its creation at the start of the Middle Ages (Mártinez i Alvarez 47). Sister Ursula's work on behalf of black women also redefines purgatory in gender terms. Because the imagined community she proposes particularly advocates for the solidarity between God serving women of African descent, she promotes a more feminine vision of purgatory as an afterlife space that treats not only people of different skin colors equally, but also men and women.

Sister Ursula's biographical account is therefore quite unique, not only because it is the first known-to-date spiritual diary dictated by a black Catholic woman in colonial Spanish-America, but also because it reveals the ability of an Afro-Latin American *donada*, who was born a slave, to use the spiritual writing imposed onto her by her confessor as a space of negotiation *vis à vis* the dominant *criollo* male ecclesiastical culture. While it is clear that sister Ursula does not have full agency over the production, transcription, and framing of her spiritual life into a *vida*, a close analysis also reveals that she is able to use her text to propose an alternate definition of black religious exemplarity, as well as a more empowered black Catholic community, and an alternative model of economy of salvation. In doing so, the Afro-Peruvian *donada* follows the example set by some Spanish and *criolla* nuns who appropriated a form of writing meant to regulate their religiosity and redefined it as a space of empowerment. However, instead of using her spiritual diary to only negotiate her individual identity as a black Catholic woman in a subaltern position, she ultimately crafts it to propose more equal relations between those in power, usually Spaniards and *criollos*, and black Catholics as well as between men and women through an alternative economy of salvation.

NOTES

1. I would like to extend my thanks to the anonymous reviewers of PALARA and Diane Niebylski for their comments and sugestions on previous versions of this article.

2. A high number of female slaves were present inside convents. Indeed, when wealthy women entered the convent, they often took with them a female slave (Burns 115).

3. Ursula had several confessors. The first one was the Jesuit Miguel de Salazar. He was most likely the one who first ordered her to record her visions. Considering the different types of penmanship present in the spiritual journal, it appears that several nuns wrote down what sister Ursula dictated to them. For more information, please see Van Deusen, *The Souls*, pp. 4-5.

4. Parts of her diary have survived and can be found today in Lima's Monastery of Santa Clara.

5. To my knowledge only two black Catholic women left writings about their spiritual lives in Latin America. The African born Maria Egipciaca da Vera Cruz (*ca* 1719 - *ca* 1765) was the second one. For more information, see McKnight, *Afro*, pp. 202.

6. In 1997, Alicia Wood compared Ursula's narrative to those that *criollo* male clerics wrote about her and about Estephania, another religious woman of color in colonial Lima. In 2004, Nancy Van Deusen published an outstanding edited translation of Ursula's spiritual autobiography as well as a later article examining how, despite her identity as an Afro-Peruvian slave, Ursula was able to become such a highly respected mystic in colonial Peru. And finally, in 2013 Larissa Brewer-García considered Ursula's spiritual diary as an example of the emergence of a discourse of "sacred blackness" in Limeño seventeenth-century society. A number of commendable studies have appeared examining the autobiographical and biographical narratives of/about nuns and female mystics as well as their complicated relationships with the Church and their confessors. For additional examples of representative works in the field of spiritual life writings, see Arenal and Schlau; Lavrin; Ludmer; Myers; Van Deusen; Schlau (1998 and 2013) and Weber.

7. At that time, race was much more fluid and was articulated in terms of "lineage" and "calidad" rather than as a fixed biological marker as it would become during the nineteenth century. See Carrera, pp. 6.

8. *Vidas* were spiritual autobiographies carefully crafted around the act of confession. These writings, which were often scrutinized by the women's confessors, also became discursive spaces for these women to build themselves as religious heroines. See McKnight, *The Mystic*, pp. 29-33.

9. For an excellent study of Saint Teresa of Avila, see Weber.

10. As Ludmer has explained in her "Respuesta a Sor Filotea", Sor Juana uses this combination of words to be able to write from her subaltern situation. Because she was a woman responding to a male superior, Sor Juana constantly represents herself as a subject who "does not know how to say" or "does not know what to say". See pp. 47-54.

11. This quote is a translation provided by Van Deusen. In this article, all quotes of Ursula's *vida* come from her edition. The original unabridged text dictated by Ursula in Spanish can also be accessed online at: http://www.benditasalmas.org/admin/files/Ursula%20de%20Jesus%20diario.pdf.

12. Religious women writers often used this rhetoric, including Saint Teresa of Avila.

13. Most Spaniards and *criollos* perceived Africa as a land full of monstrous animals and people. Because Africans lived in such a monstrous land, Spaniards and criollos also considered them "savage pagans" at the Devil's service. For more information, see Gómez pp. 146; and Fra-Molinero, *La imagen,* pp. 6-7.

14. That explanation was based on a reading of the Ninth book of *Genesis*. See v. 21-28.

15. For more information, please see Olsen pp. 110-121. This idea is also present in the spiritual biographies of two other Afro-descendent religious women: sister Juana Esperanza and sister Chicaba Teresa. See Paniagua pp. 60 and pp. 100 and Gómez de la Parra pp. 311-314. For more information about black-Catholics workship, see Graubart and O'Toole.

16. The original quote reads "un negrillo abominable". The translation into English is mine.

17. Another possible reading of this quote points to a sort of "internalized oppression". Indeed, the first sentence, which establishes that sister Ursula is surprised that

an Afro-Peruvian woman who had "not lied or stolen" had gone to Purgatory implies that she thought that she was a good Christian and should have gone to Paradise. However, the following sentence explains that the woman went to purgatory "because of her character, and because she slept and ate at the improper times", which reflect that her lack of obedience and proper slave conduct was perceived as sinful.

18. "Limpieza de sangre" referred to the concept of "purity of blood". In the Covarruvias dictionary, "limpio" is defined as "old Christian, free of Jewish or Muslim blood" (my translation). Converted women of African heritage, such as Ursula, therefore did not satisfy the requirement of "limpieza de sangre".

19. A *beata* was a lay pious woman who took informal religious vows. See Van Deusen, *The Souls* pp. 194.

20. The translation of this title from Spanish into English is mine as well as the quote that follows.

21. Van Deusen reaches a similar conclusion. She proposes that by empowering the marginalized subjects of the convent and making them actors of her visions, Ursula was making them central actors at the level of the convent, Lima, and colonial Peru. For more information, see Van Deusen, *The Souls* pp. 56.

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African Immigrants in Argentina Post-Slavery: An Old-New Odyssey

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Abstract

In this interdisciplinary article, I address the less known migration of Africans in South America, especially in Argentina. This is significant because studies on African migrations have focused mainly on European and North American routes (north-south), living aside south-south paths. The complex experience of the first African immigrants in Argentina relates to a certain extent and also contrasts with the recent migrations of the twenty-first century. Because of (post) colonial history, collective/personal experience and stories, African immigrants are finding new homes in Argentina. However, recent changes in immigration policies relaxed under previous governments could jeopardize this *el dorado*. This article also intends to re-frame studies on African immigration in Argentina that have concentrated their attention on Sub-Saharans and left aside North African as well as South African (Boers) experiences. I argue that to talk about African diaspora (hi)story in Argentina is to embrace Africanness in its totality and complexity, as well as embracing Pan-Africanism beyond Pan-Negroism. This study takes into consideration the framing questions on migration raised by Hasia Diner, Kim Butler, Caroline Brettell, and James Hollifield which includes the reasons for and conditions of the dispersal. The article is also based on eclectic sources combining personal experience, interviews, archival sources, history, and critical analysis.[1]

Argentina is one of the whitest countries in Latin America due to the successful implementation of the *blanqueamiento* (whitening) policies that promoted European immigration after independence and throughout the twentieth century. Despite the effort made by other countries such as Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil to develop the ideologies of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) as a nationalistic move to respond to the questions of race and nation, Argentina's political and intellectual elites decided to construct national identities that were exclusively Eurocentric. As a consequence of the whitening ideologies, Argentinians of African and indigenous descent were progressively erased from national consciousness. Blackness in general ceased to be an official marker of demography and national identity.[2]

In the face of widespread denial or ignorance about the survival of Argentinian African heritage, scholars such as George Reid Andrews, Dina Picotti, Marvin A. Lewis, Alejandro Solomianski, Alejandro Frigerio, Marta Maffia, Eva Lamborghini, Alex Burucki, and Erika Edwards, among others, have examined and documented for more than thirty years the life and experience of Afro-Argentinian communit(ies) in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty -first centuries.[3] The (hi)story of Afro-Argentinians is also intertwined with African diasporic migrants from Uruguay, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, and Cuba. Those migrants, especially from Uruguay and Brazil, have spearheaded the fight against racism and the invisibility of Blackness in the national discourse since the second half of the 1980s. They were also responsible for the recognition of the African heritage and contribution to Argentine history and culture (Frigerio 2008, Andrews 2004 and 2010, Lawo-Sukam 2015). The presence of Afro-Latin Americans in Argentina has not only enhanced black Argentinian militancy, but has also slowly reinvigorated the physical and cultural Africanization of the country through cultural activism (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2011, Lawo-Sukam 2015).[4] The efforts made by Afro-Latin Americans to reconnect the society with its African past have not only contributed to the resurgence of Afro-Argentine identity, but have also opened the door to a

critical rethinking of African migration in Argentina after the abolition of slavery established by the constitution in 1853.

Walking the neighborhoods of Abasto and Flores in Buenos Aires a few years back (2013 and 2016), I was astonished to see Africans selling jewelry, belts, and watches. Those street vendors reminded me of other Africans I met on the streets of Madrid selling similar merchandises. My curiosity led me to meet three vendors who reluctantly spoke to me, since they were busy selling their goods. Recognizing their struggle with the Spanish language, I decided to converse in English, although it was in vain. I then switched to French which proved to be the key for openness and further interactions. From our conversations, I discovered that they were Senegalese and Malians who have lived in Buenos Aires for half a decade. They also reported on the presence of migrants from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Congo, Cameroon, and other Sub-Saharan African countries. I was puzzled by the shift in migration pattern for those Africans whose typical travel destinations are Europe, North America, Asia, or Australia. During my journey, I also met Moroccans and South Africans who chose to migrate to Argentina mostly for business and academic reasons. The encounter with African migrants gave me the opportunity to think about new spaces of African migration.[5]

The present analysis follows the trend of studies on Blackness and African identit(ies) in Argentina. Specifically, it examines and analyzes the demography and (hi)story(ies) of African migrants in Argentina post-slavery, as well as immigration policies. Contrary to the majority of studies that focus particularly on segments of Sub-Saharan African migrants (Marta Maffia, Paola, Monkevicius, Miriam Gómes, Bernarda Zubrzycki, Boubacar Traore, and others), this work uses a holistic and inclusive approach that covers African migrant communities in general, adding the "forgotten" layers of the Maghreb and Southern Africa. I argue that the discourse of Africanity and African diaspora in Argentina has to go beyond the sole experience of Sub-Saharan to encompass the ethnic-racial plurality and complexity of the continent. The history of African migration in Río de la Plata (post-slavery) is not only the stories of Sub-Saharan (or Black) Africans, but of North Africans and South African Boers as well. I also argue that African immigrants ended up in Argentina for different reasons, which include colonial /postcolonial history and experiences, the changes in migration patterns influenced by major world events in Europe and America, the flexibility of immigration laws in Argentina under Néstor and Cristina Kirchner's presidency, and by unfortunate circumstances that prevented them from reaching North America. It is impossible to understand African migration to Argentina without considering those parameters.

On the other hand, the complex experience of African immigrants from Morocco, Cape Verde, and South Africa in the second half of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries is parallel to, and to a certain extent contrasts with, the recent migration of other African communities from Senegal, Cameroon, Angola, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria, among others, who arrived mainly at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Once in Argentina, Africans forged "imagined" communities that catered to the needs of their constituents. Nevertheless, this ethno-racial centrism might also endanger the very basic notion of Pan-Africanism in its continental and global sense. Furthermore, the denial of African root or Afro-descendant identity is one of the factors that contribute to the erosion of a collective Pan-African identity.

I want to clarify and emphasize that this study focuses on the history of Africans who arrived in Argentina after the abolition of slavery, and not on the experiences of slaves during the colonial period. It elaborates a unique history of African migrants through the same census data which historically privileged and highlighted European immigration. This study also takes into consideration the following questions on migration raised by Hasia Diner: "'Who moves?', 'Why do some human beings get up and shift residence?', 'How do they get there?'," and those raised by Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield: "'How do those who move experience departure, migration, and settlements?'" (Diner 33, Brettell and Hollifield 4). These questions guide social scientists and humanists in their analysis of population movements, and are aligned with the quest for the reasons and conditions of population dispersal as mentioned by scholars such as Kim Butler (195). Why Africans leave their homeland, how they leave, arrive, and survive in the hostland are important factors for a better understanding of African migrations. The reasons of the dispersal are personal or collective, voluntary or involuntary.[6] As an interdisciplinary endeavor, this paper is based on eclectic sources combining personal experience, historical methods that rely on archival sources (mostly census data), newspapers, and interviews made in Buenos Aires during my trips in 2013 (May-June) and 2016 (September). Archival work was important to access the census data from 1869 to 2010 in order to analyze the history of African migration in Argentina. The cultural immersion in the African immigrant communities gave me a vantage point to observe and interact with members of the dispersed population. Those interactions, often through interviews, provided information helpful to better understand the experience of immigrants. Some of the data used in this study were collected through interviews done by journalists and published in newspapers, among other media outlets.

THE PROBLEMATIC USE OF DEMOGRAPHY (CENSUS)

The few scholarly studies on African migration in Argentina have primarily focused their attention on recent migrations of the late twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Even though the vast majority of African migrants came to Argentina in the twenty- first century, it is important to state that the first waves arrived at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Marta Maffia suggested that Cape Verdeans were the first Sub-Saharan Africans to migrate to Argentina ("La migración subsahariana hacia Argentina" 67). Furthermore, Pedro Marcelino and Marcela Cerrutti revealed not only the presence of Cape Verdeans but also South Africans (123). While researching in the archives, principally the National Census conducted by the Comisión Directiva del Censo Nacional (CDCN) on May 10th, 1895 under the administration of President Saenz Peña, I came across other African nationalities from Morocco, Egypt, and Algeria. Thus, not only Sub-Saharan Africans arrived to Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century, but also North Africans.

The statistic about the exact number of African immigrants in Argentina has been shrouded in mystery since the nineteenth century, when the authorities vigorously implemented policies to whiten the country. In 1857, Argentina started to collect statistical data on immigrants. The first national census of the population, conducted in September 1869, registered 211, 993 foreigners, among which numbered 43,663 Americans, 167,158 Europeans, 1,172 Asians, and others (De La Fuente, *Primer Censo* XXXI).[7] The census didn't mention immigrants from Africa. We don't know if Africans were implicitly among those considered as "others."

Twenty-six years later, the second national census of 1895 was conducted by the Commission CDCN (Comisión Directiva del Censo Nacional). It included African immigrants as "foreigners". The CDCN classified foreigners in several categories, among which were *raza* (race), *sexo* (sex) and *nacionalidad* (nationality). What the CDCN considers *raza* (race) in the census charts is more related to national/geographic identifiers, not traditional racial categories such as White, Negro, Mestizo, Mulatto, and etc. Race is a social construct and its definition has changed overtime. For the purpose of this study, I use the racial terminologies of the census Commission of 1895.

In terms of race and sex, the "raza Africana" (African race) totaled 454 members, with 290 males and 164 females (De La Fuente, *Segundo Censo* XLV).[8] The 454 members of the African race are also categorized by nationalities. According to the census chart, Moroccans numbered 75, Egyptians 39, Algerians 35, and "Africanos sin especificación" 305 (XLIV & CLXVI). Using the census charts of 1895, I suggest that the Commission provided some information that officially confirm the presence of African immigrants in Argentina in the second half of the nineteenth century. In addition to the African race", the census charts also provided data on other components of Argentinian "foreign" populations dominated by the Latin race, Germanics, and Anglo-Saxons, among others: "La raza latina forma, pues, la inmensa mayoría de la población, con el 975 por mil sobre su total; pero las germánicas, anglo-sajonas, escandinavas con el 25 restante, contribuyen al mejoramiento de ella…" (XLV).

If, as George Reid argued, statistical data on the racial composition of Latin American countries are scarce, and countries such as Uruguay and Argentina over the course of the nineteenth century eliminated race from their census forms , the Argentinian census charts of 1895 show otherwise (205). Not all "races" were eliminated from the census. Some racial categories such as "Latina", "Germánica", "Anglo-sajona", "Esclava," "Escandinava," "Asiática," and "Africana" appeared on the tally. Some of these national/geographical markers used by the Commission as racial categories are part of a macro-racial identification. For example, European immigrants belong to the "raza blanca": "Habiendo llegado al país desde 1857 dos millones y medio de europeos, …, se comprende que casi la totalidad de la población pertenece a la raza blanca" (De La Fuente, *Segundo Censo* XLVI). Even though the members of the Commission use expressions such as "raza blanca" and "raza negra", they mainly construct their racial categories around national/ethno-geographical markers.

If African immigrants are represented on the census charts, it is not the case for Afro-Argentinians who have been part of the country's demography for centuries. Commenting on the concept of race, the Commission reported that there were 8,000 Blacks and Mulattos registered in the city of Buenos Aires in 1887, among which 3,300 were males and 4,700 were females (XLVIII). Even with this data in its possession, the Commission didn't put it on the census charts. The Commission justified the decision to exclude the "raza negra" from the 1895 census based on their rapid decrease and their subsequent fusion/absorption into the White race. (XLVIII). The Black race could not expand and remain pure enough to survive over time (XLVIII).[9] It suffices to suggest that the desire to whiten the nation facilitated the (quick) disappearance of Afro-Argentinians from the 1895 census charts. There was a deliberate political attempt by the state to praise, favor, and facilitate mass immigration of Europeans who were considered superior and necessary to the whitening and modernization of the country. According to the Comisión Directiva del Censo Nacional (CDCN) of 1895,

> Habiendo llegado al país desde 1857 dos millones y medio de europeos,…, se comprende que casi la totalidad de la población pertenece a la raza blanca…no tardará en quedar su población unificada por completo formando una nueva y hermosa raza blanca producto del contacto

> de todas las naciones europeas fecundadas en el suelo americano. (XLVI-XLVIII)

Even though the Afro-Argentinian population was decreasing as the Commission stated, it couldn't have been less than the African immigrant population of 454 reported in the 1895 census chart. The fact that the Commission (CDCN) omitted the native black population from the census charts (using the pretext that they were disappearing fast), but mentioned explicitly the presence of Africans from the Maghreb, shows the preference of the Commission to move away from Blackness. Coming from "whitened" North African areas at that time, Moroccans, Algerians, and Egyptians were more desirable than native Afro-Argentinians. Those North Africans could have easily passed for White or identified themselves as such in a country poised to whiten itself.[10]

Contrary to European immigrants who were ethno-racially classified as Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, Slav, Scandinavian, and "Latinos de otros idiomas", the census grouped Africans in a single racial unit: "Africano" (XLV).[11] The ethno-racial complexity of Africa was not taken into consideration. The racial generalization of Africans can be interpreted as the politics of marginalization that symbolically depreciates the ethno-racial plurality of Africa, but gives recognition and appreciation to diverse European identities. The myth of Africa as an ethno-racial singularity could also be linked to the nineteenth- century Eurocentric conceptualization of the continent as a monolithic entity. As Cemil Aydin put it:

> Only in the 19th century, together with the development of a continental scheme of world geography, did Africa begin to be conceived of as a continent with distinct characteristics, especially with a Black race, that separate it from Europe and Asia. Thus, despite the cultural and ethnic differences between the north and Sub-Saharan Africa, a fact that was especially emphasized by medieval Muslim geographers, a metageographic myth of the African continent became universally accepted during the globalization of Eurocentric knowledge categories. (15-16)

If the Commission collapsed African immigrants (495 people) into one racial category ("Africano"), it was not the same for nationalities. The simplified metaracial myth of Africa didn't extend to nationalities since the census made official allusion of Moroccans, Egyptians, and Algerians. In this context, the border between race and nationality is more explicit. The concept of "Africano" as a racial category in the census was not automatically translated as "Africano" in terms of nationality, except for those African immigrants whose nationalities could not be established. They were classified as "Africanos sin especificación". These African foreigners without nationality were 305 people (De La Fuente, *Segundo Censo* XLIV, XLV). It is possible that they arrived straight from Africa or through a third country. It is unclear why the Commission could not specify the nationalities of these immigrants. I suggest that the lack of nationality reference could derive from the political (de)construction of Africa by European imperialist nations. In the second half of the nineteenth century, most territories in Africa were not consolidated as a nation. They were either no man's land, kingdoms, indigenous lands, colonized, disputed, or divided among powerful European nations after the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885.

The third national census of June 1914 revealed the total number of African immigrants to be 1,838, among which there were 802 Moroccans, 258 South Africans, 130 Egyptians, 125 Algerians, and 523 unspecified Africans identified as "Africanos no deternimados" (397). From that data, 103 immigrants (50 Moroccans, 30 South Africans, 7 Egyptians, and 16 others) were "naturalizados" or naturalized citizens (Martínez 417).[12] Contrary to the national census of 1895 that mentioned specifically the presence of Algerians, Moroccans, and Egyptians, this third census included South Africans as a new category of African immigrants.

It is important to state that despite the presence of Cape Verdeans in Argentina in the late nineteenth century, they were mentioned neither in the census of 1895 nor 1914. It is hard to tell if they were included in the category of Africans without specification since they were coming from the African continent. It is also possible that they were counted as Portuguese because they migrated with Portuguese nationality (Monkevicius and Maffia, "Memoria y límites étnicos" 119).

The fourth national census of May 1947 did not provide the number of African immigrants. According to the Dirección Nacional del Servicio Estadístico that conducted the census of 1947, there were 2,435,927 foreigners living in Argentina, among which 87,272 were primarily from Africa and Asia (LXIV). There was no clarity on the number and nationalities of African immigrants. The fifth national census of 1960 reported a total of 2,827 Africans, without detailing their nationalities (Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos 14).[13] The sixth, seventh, and eighth censuses of 1970, 1980, and 1991 respectively do not mention the number of African immigrants. The ninth national census of November 2001 reported 1,883 Africans ("INDEC").[14] The majority of those migrants were born in Egypt (328), Morocco (287), and South Africa (213).[15]

The tenth and most recent national census was conducted on October 27, 2010. This census considered a category for Afro-descendants. According to INDEC (2012), the census of 2010 reported that 149,493 people self-recognized as Afro-descendant; 76,064 were males and 73,429 were females. 92% (137,533) of Afro-descendants were born

in Argentina and 8% (11,960) were born elsewhere. From the 8% of Afro-descendants born abroad, 84.9% were born on the American continent and 8.7% in Africa (296-299). If we consider the INDEC statistics, around 1,041 Afro-descendants were born in Africa before migrating to Argentina. This number of African born immigrants seems to contrast with the overall population of those born in Africa, which totaled 2,738 people (96). Since those who identified as Afro-descendant and born in Africa totaled 1041, the remaining population of 1697 did not identify as Afro-descendant or as people of African origin. This portion of the population from Africa that doesn't auto-identify as Afro-descendant problematizes the very notion of "Afro-descendiente".

Why is that African immigrants born in Argentina do not identify as Afro-descendents since, generally speaking, the expression refers to a person of African descent or origin? An explanation could be found in the approach or the terminology. Afro-descendant is often linked with black Africa and/or descendant of slaves, for example, in the Americas. In that perspective ("Afro-negroid"), non-black ethnic-racial migrants born in Africa might not necessarily identify themselves as Afro-descendant but African. This was the case of one (Indian) South African who told me that he is African and not Afro-descendant, since he associated Afro-descendant only with Blackness and could not recognize himself as such. Furthermore, few individuals from the Maghreb preferred to be called Arab or Middle Eastern rather than African, running away from the negative stereotypes associated with the African continent. Moreover, not all African immigrants would consider themselves Afro-descendant if they could pass for White (the census relies mostly on self-recognition), and benefit from white privilege. In a country where *blanqueamiento* is favored and encouraged, it is possible for some African descendants to hide their Africanness if they can.

This misrepresentation of the continent might have affected the view of the 1,697 people born in Africa who did not identify themselves as African descendants. This exclusivist idea leads to a reductionist mentality that is not only prejudicial to a proper conceptualization of African diasporic identity, but also jeopardizes the very basic notion of Pan-Africanism defined by Mario Azevedo as "the multifaceted movement for transnational solidarity among African people with the purpose of liberating and unifying Africa and peoples of African descent" (173). The ideal of concretizing the bond between Africa and its diaspora and strengthening the relation among Africans everywhere in the world would be more difficult and problematic if there is not an inclusive approach to the concept of Pan-Africanism in its unifying meaning. In this regard, the goal of unifying Africa and its diaspora is achieved by incorporating all the diverse geographical and ethnic-racial components of the continent. African descendant people from the Maghreb and Sub-Saharan Africa partake in the discourse of Pan-Africanism and the building of better/stronger African/Black communities around the world.

If the national censuses give us a historical statistical idea about the number of African immigrants in Argentina, data from the Comisión Nacional de Refugiados (CONARE) and the Dirección Nacional de Migraciones (DNM) add more details. From 1991 to 2010, the CONARE listed 430 African refugees from 26 countries.[16] Census on immigrants and ethnicity is always an arduous task, hard to establish and very controversial. It is difficult to know how many African immigrants were not registered because of the lack of a fixed home address, or did not want to be registered for being undocumented or for personal reasons. Furthermore, not all African immigrants view themselves as African descendant and may pass for White in the census. This form of *de-Africanization* of African people also applied to the first generation of Cape Verdean migrants in Argentina who saw themselves more Portuguese than Africans. As controversial and contentious as these statistics can be, they highlight at least the importance of the African immigrant population. The next national census of 2020 will give more input and update on the migration of Africans to Argentina.

THE (HI)STOR(IES), POLICIES, AND CHALLENGES OF MIGRATION

According to the second national census of 1895, Moroccans, Egyptians, and Algerians are considered early African immigrants. Nevertheless, the presence of Cape Verdeans who were not formally included on the census also shows that they were among those early African immigrants. As we can see later, their disassociation with *Africanness* could have been a reason for this exclusion. In the first quarter of the twentieth century, new immigrants from South-Africa and Tunisia would join the movement of African migrants to Argentina. Those early African immigrants, like recent immigrants, benefited from the open and generous migration policies implemented by Argentinian governments (although the policies were more intended for Europeans).

Kim Butler (2001) and Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield (2008), among other scholars of migration, have stated the importance of unveiling the identity of the migrants and the rationals of dispersal as one of the frameworks of migration studies. The reasons for the migration of North Africans, South Africans, and Cape Verdeans to Argentina are diverse, personal or collective, known or unknown. As mentioned in the censuses, Moroccans, Algerians, and Egyptians were at the forefront of the African migration to Argentina that started in the 1860s. Those North African immigrants were multiethnic and comprised of Arabs, Christians, and Jews. North African

Arab immigrants were part of the vast Arab migration to Argentina that constituted the major Argentine-Arab cultural exchange in the history of the country (Heb 129).[17] They left their homeland mainly for economic and political reasons. According to Noberto Ivancich, North Africans migrated to Argentina because of the Hispano-Moroccan war of 1859 (Heb 125). Diana Epstein revealed that Moroccan immigrants, mostly composed of Sephardi Jews, landed in Argentina in three waves depending on their objectives and characteristics. The first group arrived between 1870 and 1930 from Northern Morocco, especially from the Spanish region of Tetouan and Tangier (Heb 48). They escaped poverty and sought better economic opportunities. A few numbers of Hispanic Jewish teachers who immigrated to Argentina were recruited from Morocco by the Alliance Israelite Universelle to teach Spanish to the children of the first settlers (Heb 48). The second wave came between 1950 and 1970. These immigrants left mostly for political reasons linked to the independence of Morocco and the creation of the State of Israel (Heb 48). Since 1986, the strengthening of political, commercial, and economic relations between Argentina and Morocco has also intensified the migration of documented and undocumented Moroccans.

The Algerians and Egyptians started migrating to Argentina in the second half of the nineteenth century in search of better economic opportunities. The number of migrants rose a little bit in the twentieth century due to internal and external factors, such as unfavorable economic situations that affected both nations; collateral damage from the French occupation and the war for independence in the case of Algeria; and political and demographic pressure in the case of Egypt, combined with the wars of 1967 and 1973. The small number of Egyptians who migrated before 1974 included primarily professionals. To alleviate the pressure on domestic employment, the government lifted all restrictions on labor migration after 1974 (Zohry 129-149). Moreover, the official trips of presidents Carlos Menem to Morocco in 1996 and Egypt in 1988, as well as Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to Egypt in 2008, have not only solidified the economic ties between the countries but also facilitated the migration of Egyptian professionals and students to Argentina. Below is the estimation of the 2013 Argentina Trade Balance in Thousands of Dollars (INDEC, *Comercio exterior* 70).[18]

	EXPORTATION	IMPORTATION	BALANCE
Algeria	1,664,310	10,000	1,664,229
Eqypt	1,317,458	49,686	1,200,914
Morocco	516,054	511,206	466,418

The immigration of North Africans in Argentina in the first decade and half of the twenty-first century is limited and does not seem to significantly increase compared to the immigration of Sub-Saharan Africans.

Like Moroccans, Egyptians, and Algerians, Cape Verdeans arrived in Argentina in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were hired by North Americans as mariners to hunt whales in the Argentinian southern seas (Maffia, "Migration and identity" 169). Another group arrived as "members of board crews, or as stowaways" during the first decade of the twenty-first century (169). The migration intensified in the 1920s and 30s when Cape Verde faced one of the worst famines in its history, coupled with the negative impact of the Great Depression. Another important wave of migrants started in the 1940s, during the large famines of 1940-1946 and after the Second World War. Because of their skill as sailors and fishermen, Cape Verdeans settled mostly in port cities such as Rosario, Buenos Aires, San Nicolás, Bahía Blanca, Ensenada, and Dock Sud. The migration flow toward Argentina decreased in favor of European countries such as Portugal, Belgium, Italia, and Holland. In 2006, the journalist Jorge Palomar estimated the population of Cape Verdeans living in Argentina to be between 12,000 and 15,000 (*La Nación*). Most of them have been naturalized.

Cape Verdean migrants originally came to Argentina with Portuguese passports, since their homeland was still a Portuguese colony (until July 5, 1975). Their disassociation with *Africanness* and *Blackness* is manifest in the following report done by the anthropologist Marta Maffia after interviewing Argentinians of Cape Verdean descent in 1998:

> Different reasons, not always explicit, were determined through the interviews. On the one hand, there were those whose memory of their place of origin was so traumatic that they preferred to eliminate any element that triggered it. Others denied their African, Black, Cape Verdean origin calling themselves Portuguese, to the point that they refused to be censused for not considering themselves Cape Verdeans. And finally, those who, having acquired better social conditions, did not want any contact with those of lower social positions. ("Migration and identity" 171-172)

The problem with the *de-Africanization* of Cape Verdeans is also common to other African diasporic communities around the world. The rejection of *Africanness* in favor of *Portugueseness* in the specific case of the Cape Verdeans in Argentina is rooted in the history of the archipelago. Under Portuguese rule, Cape Verdeans shied away from their African identity. After decades of colonization and miscegenation, most of them were proud to acculturate and adopt Portuguese values and identity. They were eager to hide or de-Africanize themselves.

> We should bear in mind that 'in Cape Verde, the struggle for making the traits of an African heritage *invisible* became particular relevant in the so called Barlovento islands . . . considered free zones of African ethos . . .' (Fernándes 2002, p. 90). As it is clearly expressed by Alejandra, a Cape Verdean descendant: 'First of all, Portuguese colonization was devastating . . . that we are different, that we are more intelligent, that we are prettier, more educated, that we have nothing to do with the continental Africans, all this story is believed and repeated by all Cape Verdeans, even by the most ignorant of all (qtd. in Maffia, "Migration and identity"173).

With this Eurocentric mentality and Portuguese nationality, the "old" Cape Verdean immigrants in Argentina did not want to associate with Blacks or other minorities. The desire to isolate themselves from the Black diaspora community and associate with Portuguese and Europeans was not successful in many cases. Marta Maffia revealed that:

> The rest of the population did not recognize them (not even today) either as Portuguese or as Argentinean: 'There are no Black people in Argentina' and were even less recognized as Cape Verdeans: they are 'from Brazil', 'Central America', 'Cape Verde?' Where is that? Southern Africa? Ethnic labels and stereotypes activated and became relevant in face-to-face social interactions. (174)

The "African-phobia" of Cape Verdeans would not last forever. The ideological shift occurred after the independence of Cape Verde in 1975 and the visit of President Aristides Pereira to Argentina in 1987. These two events cemented the rapprochement between the island and its diaspora, restoring the link that was once broken. Furthermore, the airline connections between Buenos Aires and Sal, as well as telephone communication, the Internet, and social media have increased interrelations between Cape Verdean natives and descendants, thus creating a fluidity and renewal of cultural interaction and a profound desire to reconnect and share experiences. By the 1990s, the new generation of Argentinians of Cape Verdean descent started to redefine their identity, embrace blackness, and consider themselves "Black Cape Verdeans born in Argentina, considering their culture as Cape Verdean with African influence" (Correa 90-91). Argentinian commercial trade with Cape Verde is minimal, and only relates to exportation that reached 5,041 in thousands of dollars in 2012 and 3,704 in thousands of dollars in 2013 (INDEC, Comercio exterior 70).

2013 Argentina Trade Balance in Thousands of Dollars (INDEC 2014: 70).

	EXPORTATION 2012	EXPORTATION 2013
Cape Verde	5,041	3,704

Besides the Cape Verdean community, South Africans are also among the early Sub-Saharan immigrants to Argentina. They first arrived between 1902 and 1908 following the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War in which they lost wealth, farm and freedom. They came mostly from the Transvaal Province and Orange Free State and settled in Argentinian province of Chubut as farmers and ranchers. According to Mg. Eugenia Arduino, the first wave of eighteen immigrants arrived in 1902 and was directed toward Pico Salamanca, Río Chico and Pampa Pelada where they received 625 hectares of land. A new contingent arrived in 1903, which prompted the creation of a religious community called Nederduitsch Geref Kerk and directed by Pt. Vorster (56-58). This second wave must have had around 240 people since the census of 1914 recorded the population to be 258. A third group came in 1905, and a fourth in 1908. The immigrant population had grown to 800 people in 1908 (58-61).[19] Some Boers living in Argentina have estimated the number of South Africans living in Argentina in 1909 to be around 3000 people (Davies, "End of an Era"). Many Boers returned to South Africa after the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 and mostly after 1924 when the Afrikaner national party rose to power in South Africa. South Africans remaining in Argentina became citizens and created a new identity or a third space that resulted from the fusion of the original culture to the Argentinian one.

The abolition of Apartheid opened a new era in Argentina-South African cooperation. Recent migration of South Africans to Argentina involved mostly students and business professionals from different ethnic-racial backgrounds (White, Black and "Coloured"). The Argentine-South African Chamber of Commerce has and continues to enhance/ strengthen the bilateral trade relationship between the two countries. The table below shows the volume of trade with South Africa in 2012 and 2013.

2012-2013 Argentina Trade Balance in Thousands of Dollars (INDEC *Comercio exterior* 70).

	EXPORTATION		IMPORTATION		BALANCE	
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
South Africa	1.030.103	733.107	238.116	242.534	791.987	490.573

It is also important to underline that the early migration of South Africans to Argentina complicates the European immigration narrative that Argentina celebrates. Contrary to other early African immigrants, the Boers were welcomed to Argentina by the government of President Roca, who gave them lands in the Patagonia region. As white skilled farmers and ranchers, the South Africans fit the profile of the immigrant that the Argentinian authorities was looking to whiten the population and modernize the country. Europe as a geographical location has continuously been viewed as the site where migration to Argentina was encouraged and celebrated. The whitening of the Argentinian population and the modernization of the country are framed as the result of European immigrants. The migration of white South Africans to Argentina proves (symbolically) that the African continent and not only Europe contributed to the whitening of Argentina as well as its agricultural development. If Argentina celebrates her whiteness, the narrative should not only look towards Europe, but also Africa (White South Africa).

In contrast to North Africans, Cape Verdeans, and South Africans, other African immigrants arrived in Argentina in the 1990s and 2000s. They were mostly undocumented, seeking asylum or refugee status. Those immigrants came from West, Central, East, and Southern Africa. The majority are Senegalese, Sierra Leoneans, Liberians, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Bissau Guineans, Cameroonians, and Ivorians. In order to understand the recent African migration to Argentina, it is imperative to know the internal, external, and international factors that led them to leave their homeland. These factors are mutually inclusive. Contrary to Europe and North America that tightened their immigration policies because of ideological threats of transnational terrorism after September 2011 (and the devastating effects of the Wall Street financial meltdown of 2008 on their economies), Argentina has loosened them over the last two decades (Marcelino and Cerrutti 2012). The openness of immigration laws became even more progressive during the socialist presidencies of both Néstor Kirchner (2003-07) and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (2007-15). The progressive migration Law 25.871 represents an improvement of migrants' human rights. The new law recognizes the fundamental right to migrate, promotes social and labor integrations of immigrants and also guarantees that the undocumented migrants will not be prevented access to fundamental rights. Law 25.871 stipulates in article 3 that any person who requests to be admitted permanently or temporarily to the country, enjoys the right to non-discriminatory criteria and procedures in terms of rights and guarantees established by the National Constitution, international treaties, bilateral agreements and laws. The government has the obligation to implement measures that promote the legalization of foreigners, and should guarantee the right to family reunification of immigrants.

In 2006, the congress approved and promulgated the Refugee Law 26.165 that recognizes and protects refugees. Moreover, as Pedro Marcelino and Marcela Cerrutti put it: "The principle of non-refoulment is followed in both countries, and Argentina in particular does not practice repatriations (even when they are sometimes ordered)" (120). Article 2 of Law 26.165 precisely prohibits the government to repatriate, sanction or discriminate against immigrants who came into the country illegally. According to Article 8, a refugee can be repatriated only in exceptional cases when he/she is a danger to national security or public order. Even in this case the refugee has the right to use all the administrative and judicial resources to exonerate him/herself.[20,21] Immigrants are also granted access to health care and education regardless of his/her immigration status. Due to these laws, the weakness of government to control and monitor undocumented migrants and visa overstaying, as well as the flexibility to obtain temporary and provisional resident permits and citizenship, lead Sub-Saharan Africans to migrate to Argentina in the 21st century, mostly illegally, and in large numbers.

Since Argentina's economy itself has declined sharply in the last decade and half, it has become harder to claim refugee status solely on economic ground. The concept of refugee as written in article 4 of Law 26.165 applies mostly to those individuals whose life, security, or freedom has been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, and massive violation of human rights. It also applies to those persecuted for their social group or political beliefs, race, religion, and nationality. Some undocumented immigrants would rather claim political, religious persecutions, or humanitarian reasons to make their asylum case stronger.

The majority of Sub-Saharan immigrants in Argentina enter the country illegally or as transitory residents, but overstay their visas. They are mainly refugees or asylum seekers who arrive by plane with a tourist visa through Brazil, then cross illegally through the triple border between Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina. The transit into Argentina is done through smuggling and trafficking networks.[22] The majority of immigrants are male, and bachelors in their twenties and mid-thirties. Some of them are even teenagers whose age varies between 12 and 17. For example, the first African came to Rosario in 2004 and was a 12 year old boy (Arach, "Los expulsados de la tierra").[23] Other immigrants also arrived in Argentina hidden as stowaways (*polizones*) on container ships, and survived on water and biscuits.[24] If immigrants cannot stay in containers, they take the extraordinary risk to hide inside the ship's rudder as the Argentinian immigration director Fernando Manzanares explained, "We've seen cases where they arrive hidden inside the rudder of a ship…Imagine what it's like to cross the Atlantic hidden in such a small space, trying to evade the crew" (qtd. in Henao, "African immigrants").

Some migrants board the ships with the intention of sailing to North America and the USA specifically. Unfortunately, they end up in Argentina due to possible reroutes, mechanical problems or other "unknown" reasons. That was the experience of Sierra Leonean Ibrahim Abdoul Rahman and Liberian Emmanuel Danso, reported in 2011 by the journalist Luis A Henao: "'One night I went to the seaport. I was thinking I was going to Europe. Later I found out I was in Argentina,' said Sierra Leone immigrant Ibrahim Abdoul Rahman, a former child soldier who said he escaped his country's civil war by sneaking into a cargo ship for a 35-day voyage" (quoted in Henao, "African immigrants"). The experience of this immigrant corresponds to what Silvia Costanzi from the Argentinian Catholic Commission for Migration told the daily news *La Nación:* " Cuando llegan, muchos no saben que vienen acá. ´¿Dónde estoy? ¿Qué es Buenos Aires?´, preguntan" (qtd in Quiroga, "Africa en Buenos Aires"). This unfortunate circumstance causes trauma to those migrants whose dream and aspiration to reach the wealthy shores of North America are shattered. They find themselves stranded in Argentina.

According to Law 26.165, those who are seeking refugee or asylum status must apply to the Office of the National Commission for Refugees (CONARE). They receive a temporary certification/provisional residence that allows them to obtain a Labor Identification Code (CUIT/CUIL) and work legally according to the labor guidelines. The provisional residence is valid for 180 days. It can be renewed until the immigrant application is finalized. The petitioner also received basic financial support of the government for six months (at most) as well as psychological and medical aid when needed. Those who finally obtain refugee status receive the temporary residence from the National Direction for Migration (DNM) and the National Identity Document (DNI). They can apply for naturalization within two years of residency if they see fit. If the CONARE rejects an immigrant claim, he/she can appeal the decision before the Minister of Interior. If it is not successful, the petitioner can then request a judicial revision of the decision with the assistance of a lawyer.

It is important to underline that many Sub-Saharan immigrants who came to Argentina illegally (and mainly before 2008) have regularized their migration status either as refugee or were given asylum. As Barbara Hines points out, those who entered the country before 2008 have greatly benefited from the government implementation of Article 17 of Law 25.871 which at first was reserved for citizens from Mercosur, and now included non-Mercosur population:

> In June 2004, the government implemented Article 17 of Law 25.871, which mandates that the government establish mechanisms to legalize the status of irregular immigrants, by decreeing a legalization program for non-Mercosur citizens…The decree grants temporary status for two years to anyone residing in the country as of June 30, 2004, and provides for subsequent permanent residence status under Law 25.871. As of 2008, 12,062 applications had been granted…. (Hines 506)

Despite Argentina's pro-immigration laws, the "El Dorado" has been converted for many immigrants into a trap where they face daily unemployment, low paying jobs and poverty. Congolese Celestine Nengumbi Sukama who has lived in Argentina for almost two decades and chairs the Institute for Equality, Diversity, and Integration, argues that "The (government) open arms stop short of giving any form of helping hand once settle in the country…They let you enter. If you can manage to survive, that is Ok" ("African Immigrants"). Nengumbi's remark underlines not only the problem between the laws and their effective implementation, but also loopholes in the laws that can make it harder for undocumented immigrants to receive equal treatment. As Hines suggests:

> 'Article 5 (Law 25.871) contradictorily requires that "the government guarantee . . . equal treatment . . . so long as they [foreigners] satisfy the established conditions for their entry and stay [in the country], according to the laws …' A literal reading of the text of this article could lead to the conclusion that some type of disparate treatment might still be permissible against persons in irregular status… Article 28 also clarifies that citizens of countries with whom Argentina has entered into a specific migration agreement shall enjoy the most favorable treatment, either under the immigration law or the migration agreement.' (490-91)

According to these provisions (Articles 5 and 28), immigrants whose status is not regularized and who do not come from countries that have migration agreements with Argentina might not have equal access to all rights and privileges afforded to citizens. It is even harder for undocumented immigrants who are not allowed to sign leases since the implementation of "Law 25.871 that also prohibits the renting of housing to persons in irregular status and imposes administrative fines for any violation" (496). They are forced to live on the street, share cheap hotel rooms with other immigrants or live in crowded apartments that were rented by documented immigrants.

Besides poverty, immigrants are facing incipient racism and persecution. For being Black and a minority, Sub-Saharan Africans are victims of racism and discrimination that they were not accustomed to in their homeland. The phenomenon of immigration has fostered the *othering* of foreigners and mostly those coming from third world countries. Even though there are laws against racism and discrimination, they are seldom enforced. Suspicion of theft

and slurs on the streets are frequent/common signs of discrimination against Blacks. As Nengumbi Sukama states in *Reportaje America TV Argentina:* "They have called me 'negro de mierda/nigger' thousands of time until today. I filed numerous complains in vain" ("Los argentinos"). Coping and dealing with racial discrimination is a very traumatizing experience for many first-generation Black African immigrants. The National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism (INADI) created in 1995 by Law No 24.515 and under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights has been instrumental in combating racism, but more work still needs to be done.

African immigrants from North, South, West, Central, and East Africa, documented or undocumented, are the new faces of the African diaspora in Argentina. As diverse as they can be in terms of ethno-racial, religious beliefs, and nationational of origin, they are challenged by their new environment and the Argentinian socio-cultural normativity. Northern Africans, despite their limited number, are also facing discrimination like Sub-Saharan Africans and other immigrants from Latin-America. Northern Africans are mostly Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Semitic, Berber. Even though some of them can pass for White on the street, they are discriminated against because of their immigration status, ethnicity, and religion, labeled "Immigrant-African Origin-Arabic-Muslim". Not all Northern Africans can pass for White; there are some of darker phenotype who easily fit within the Black communities. The same goes with South African immigrants. Contrary to the early immigrants who were all White and Afrikaners, today immigrants are Black, "Coloured", and non-Boers White.

In order to survive as an African diaspora community, North Africans, Sub-Saharans, as well as Black and "Coloured" South Africans, need to foster a more inclusive partnership and relationship among themselves, as well as create more mixed associations that are not just ethno-racially, religious, or nationality based. The resurgence of the spirit of Pan-Africanism, at least in its ultimate objective of unifying and consolidating the African diaspora, is essential to achieve unity, prosperity, and security in a society that is becoming more xenophobic. North African, Sub-Saharan, and South African (Black, "Coloured") immigrants should embrace and be proud of their *Africanness*, instead of disavowing or excluding themselves from it. By embracing and celebrating their African origin, those African Immigrants as a whole will contribute more to the (re) *Africanization* of the Argentinian society, as well as encourage the ideals of multiculturalism that are voiced by the authorities and a new image of the country. The *Africanization* of the Argentinian society is not a new phenomenon since Argentina has a rich history of African influence through the socio-cultural, economic, and political contributions of slaves and Afro-Argentinians. Even though these contributions have been silenced for centuries in the national consciousness, they have resurfaced in national discourses in the past decade and a half.

The increased number of recent African immigrants will have the potential of reshaping the socio-cultural landscape of Argentina as they did in European countries, especially in France, in the last 50 years. The *Africanization* of Argentinian society is being noticed in music, sport, academia, and gastronomy. For example, among the renowned Argentinians of Cape Verdeans descent who have impacted the culture are movie actors Luis Medina Castro (1928-1995) and Diego Alonso Gómez (1973-), singer and composer Juan Carlos Cobos (1928-1999), football player José Manuel Ramos Delgado (1935-2010), Antonio Custodio Méndes, and intellectual/activists Miriam Gómes and María Fernanda Santos, among others. In 2005, Abdulaye Badiane founded the music and dance school Dara Chosan, and later, Cheikh Gueye founded the school Daaradji Gaynde Djembe. These schools promote Senegalese culture, and have attracted and taught many Argentinians. Furthermore, physical spaces are also testament of the African influence on Argentinian diversity. For example, the "cantero central Africa" (African median strip) is located on Av. San Isidoro Labrador and was inaugurated in 1988. Some arenas and streets in the province of Buenos Aires are named after Cape Verde. La Plaza República de Cabo Verde is located in the Triángulo de Bernal. Cape Verdean street names are found in Dock Sud and Ensenada. Besides dance and music, gastronomy is also a marker of African identity in Argentina. For example, Cape Verdean dishes like "cachupa" (in its diverse form *capucha rica, pobre, frita, refogada o guisada*), "Canja de galinha", and "Jagacida" are making their entrance in the Argentinian culinary industry.

Even though these Africans cultural influences are small in scale, they will grow with time as the seed is already planted. Furthermore, the creation of African associations, such as the Casa de Africa de la Argentina founded in 1995 by Irene Ortiz, help promote cultural exchange between Africa and Latin America. The Asociación Civil África y su Diáspora founded in 1999 and the Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Afro de la Argentina (CONAFRO) created in 2010 have spearheaded cultural and political activities aimed at making the African diaspora more visible in Argentina. These movements participated in Africa Week in 2007, renamed African Diaspora Week in 2008, and organized by the Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana. The cultural and political practices of these associations are having some impact on the visibility and recognition of African subjects in the socio-political arena. This activism has caught the attention of the INADI (National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism) since 2006. In July 2007, INADI organized a month-long series of cultural activities to celebrate the first Argentinian Congress about people of African descent. One month later, the Institute organized a seminar on Africa and its

diaspora. In 2008 and 2009, they promoted awareness sessions entitled "Argentine is also Afro", where Africa and African diaspora cultural practices were presented. In July 2010, the autonomous city of Buenos Aires created the EPIIA (Space of Promotion, Integration, and Exchange with Africa). African organizations are not only incubators and promotors of African cultural practices, they also infused those practices in the society. For African immigrants, they constitute a homestead, physical and symbolic spaces of affirmation and resistance. As bell hooks articulates it, they constitute "homespaces", or spaces for identities and communities of resistance in white supremacist societies (42). Beyond resistance against racism and affirmation of ethnic identities/ affiliations for its members, ethnic associations also provide mutual aid and the first step of integration into the web of the migration process.

This analysis is ultimately an invitation for more in-depth studies on recent African immigrants in Argentina, the reasons for leaving their homelands, how they arrived in Argentina, their problems and success (his)stor(ies) as they embark on the transformation of the Argentinian society. Furthermore, the particular examples of Northern African (Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Semitic, Berber) and Southern African (Black, "Coloured", White) immigrants highlight the need to rethink the way we discuss the African diaspora in the twenty-first century, so as to foster a larger dialogue in such a way to avoid falling into a false paradigm that equates Pan-Africanism solely with Pan-Negroism.

NOTES

1. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Rebecca Hankins (TAMU) for her insightful comments on the paper.

2. The manifestation of the historical amnesia of Blackness is widespread among Argentinians as reporter Rosario Gabino stated in BBC Mundo (2007): "'En Argentina no hay negros'. Esta frase está instalada en el imaginario popular." ["'There is no Black in Argentina'. This sentence is engrained in popular imaginary." ("¿Hay negros en Argentina?"]

3. George Reid Andrews. *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*, 1800-1900 (1980); Dina Picotti (comp). *El negro en la Argentina: presencia y negación* (2001); Marvin Lewis. *Afro-Argentine Discourse: Another Dimension of the Black Diaspora* (1996); Alejandro Solomianski. *Identidades Secretas: La Negritud Argentina* (2003); Alejandro Frigerio, and Eva Lamborghini. "Los Afroargentinos: Formas de comunalización, creación de identidades colectivas y resistencia cultural y política" (2011); Paola Monkevicius, and Marta Maffia. "Memory and ethnic leadership among Afro-descendants and Africans in Argentina" (2014); Alex Borucki. *From Shipmates to Soldiers: Emerging Black Identities in the Río de la Plata* (2015); and Erika Edwards. "The Making of a White Nation: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina" (2018).

4. Because of the effort of activists and the Black communities, the government of Argentina has declared November 8th as "Day of Afro-Argentine and Afro Culture."

5. The African immigrants I spoke with couldn't let me use their names or nicknames. In this paper, I relied mostly on interviews done by journalists.

6. This study doesn't intend to discuss migration theories and methodologies, but uses some of the framing questions and ideas/framework stated by Kim Butler, Hasia Diner, Caroline Brettell and James Hollifield to better understand African migration to Argentina.

7. *Primer censo de la República Argentina* (1869). The census was conducted under the supervision of Diego G de la Fuente and published in Buenos Aires in 1872.

8. Besides "African" as a racial category in the census of 1895, other categories included the Asians (414 members), the Scandinavians (3085), Slavs (15170), Anglo-Saxons (23200), Germanic (47615) and Latin (3,800,537) (Fuente XLV). The Commission didn't specify the difference between Germanic, Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons.

9. The Commission reported that the Blacks "no pueden propagarse puras en proporción bastante para perpetuarse, cuando los varones están en semejante minoría, puesto que las mujeres por su contacto con el elemento blanco, van produciendo cada vez mayor número de mestizos, mientras que disminuyen el de los

negros puros" [they can not increase pure enough to last long, when the number of males are small as well, since females are giving birth to a growing number of Mestizos because of their relation with Whites, while the number of pure Blacks are diminishing] (Fuente XLVIII).

10. North Africans are not all "White", they are ethno-racially and religiously diverse (Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, Semitic, Berber, Arabs, Jews, Muslim, Christian etc.). Those who migrated to Argentina could have been people who easily passed for White.

11. In the category "Raza latina" (Latin race), the Commission made a distinction between Argentines, Spanish America and Latin of other languages. The latter included Italians, Spaniards, French, Portuguese and other European nations.

12. Alberto Martínez, Alberto. *Tercer Censo Nacional. Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Talleres Gráficos de L.J Rosso y Cía, 1916.

13. The total number of Africans was 2827, among which 1471 were males and 1356 were females (Dirección Nacional de Estadística y Censos 14).

14. The total number of Africans was 1,883; among which 1,083 were males and 855 were females (INDEC, *Censo Nacional de Población Y Viviendas 2001*).

15. Marta Maffia ("La migración subsahariana" 71).

16. The majority came from Senegal (71), Sierra Leona (71), Liberia (67), Nigeria (54), Ghana (26), Bissau Guinea (24), Ivory Coast (22), Mali (16), and Angola (15). The rest of the refugees arrived from Congo (10), Zaire (7), Burundi (6), Cameroon (6), Ethiopia (6), Guinea Conakry (5), Somali (5), Soudan (4), South Africa (3), Central Africa (2), Eritrea (2), Mauritania (2), Zimbabwe (2), Kenya (1), Rwanda (1), Chad (1) and Togo (1). According to the DNM database from 2004-2010, Africans with permanent settling totaled 231 including immigrants from Senegal(69), Nigeria (37), South Africa (28), Cameroon(21), Ghana(17), Sierra Leon (15), Angola (11), Burkinabe (9), Kenya (7), Ivory Coast (7), Mali (6) and Congo(4) (Maffia, "La migración subsahariana" 73). Those with temporary settling were 292 divided among Senegal (81), Nigeria (53), Ghana (40), Sierra Leon(33), South Africa (30), Angola (28) and Cameroon (27). These data were compiled by Marta Maffia ("La migración subsahariana" 72).

17. Gustavo Dalmazzo stated that Arab immigrants started to arrive in Argentina in 1860 (20).

18. INDEC. *Comercio exterior argentino 2013*. Buenos Aires: Centro Estadístico de Servicio, 2014.

19. Richard Davies also revealed that "up to 800 Boer families trekked by ship to this lonely spot on Argentina's east coast, about 1 500km north of Tierra del Fuego" (*Mail&Guardian*).

20. If the expulsion of the refugee is definite, the government must give him/her enough time to legalize his entry into a third country that will guarantee his right to life, liberty and security (Law 26.165 article 8).

21. However, Article 29 of Law 25.871 prevents the entry into Argentina or the residency to people who have altered or presented false documentation; those jailed abroad or in the country for human and arm trafficking, money laundry; those who have committed terrorism, genocide or crime against humanity among other crimes.

22. The visa to come to Argentina from Africa is obtained through Argentina embassies only in Algeria, Angola, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia and South Africa. Many Senegalese immigrants obtain tourist visa from the Brazilian embassy, and once in Brazil some decide to stay indefinitely and other migrate to Argentina.

23. In December 2008, the journalist Evelyn Arach also reported in the newspaper *Rosario 12* that the ship Centaurus arrived in the port of Timbués with 3 Nigerian teenagers of 15 and 16 years of age. For the past three months, three ships have docked in Rosario's port with 2 teenagers on board. These teenagers are hosted by reverend Tomás Santidrián who before has received 13 years old John Opara and 15 years old John Friday from Nigeria. In 2007, 40 undocumented Africans arrived in Rosario and in 2008 the number grew to 70 ("Los expulsados ").

24. Anne Herrberg in "African refugees turn to Latin America over Europe" (2011) reports on the case of the Ivorian Koaku Bu Date Rodrigue who came to Argentina in 2009: " 'It's cold," says one of the vendors, rubbing his hands. The 25-year-old came to Argentina two years ago. 'My country is in a civil war. I was forced to fight in a rebels' group,' ... 'One morning I managed to escape. I made my way to San Pedro port and hid in the container room of a ship.' Koaku doesn't remember just how long he had to hide for. When the ship stopped moving he was in Argentina." (*Deutsche Welle*).

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Book Review

Afro-Asian Connections in Latin America and the Caribbean. Edited by Luisa Marcela Ossa and Debbie Lee-DiStefano

Christina H. Lee • Princeton University

New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019. 256 pages. $95, Hardback. ISBN: 978-1-4985-8708-2.

Afro-Asian Connections in Latin America and the Caribbean is an eye-opening volume that challenges established paradigms of national and religious identities in Peru, Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Trinidad. This collection of essays, co-edited by Luisa Marcela Ossa and Debbie Lee-DiStefano, expands on current notions of *mestizaje* (racial mixing) by focusing on the personal and communal bonds that were forged between subjects of African and Asian descent from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. As Lisa Yun reminds us in her introduction, in spite of the increasing number of publications on Afro-Asian connected histories in Latin America and the Caribbean, "these interethnic connections are still largely unacknowledged or obscured" (xii). The editors of this volume and their contributors not only succeed in bridging this gap in scholarship with thematically compelling material, but they do so with intellectual rigor and purpose.

The book comprises nine essays clustered in three sections. Each of the three sections begins with a prelude by Kathleen Lopez that underlines the common *motifs* connecting the essays in the respective section. The first part, "Identity and National Discourses," contains essays by Debbie Lee-DiStefano, Mey-Yen Moriuchi, and Malathi Iyengar. In "Afro and Chinese Depictions in Peruvian Social Discourse at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," Lee-DiStefano proposes that while José Carlos Mariátegui's discourse of Peruvian *mestizaje* attempted to redeem the debased condition of native Peruvians, it did so by deriding Black and Chinese Peruvians. Lee-DiStefano points out that Black and Chinese Peruvians complicated the merits of *mestizaje* because, according to Mariátegui, neither group had anything to contribute to the formation of nationality in terms of cultural values or progressive energies.

In "Locating Chinese Culture and Aesthetics in the Art of Wifredo Lam," Moriuchi draws our attention to Chinese influences in Cuban art and culture. She examines the case of the Afro-Chinese Cuban artist Wifredo Lam, whose work has been recognized in intellectual circles for its synthesis of European cubism, surrealism, and Afro-Cuban religious practices, but not for its Chinese-Cuban aesthetics. Moriuchi rereads Lam's works, such as *The Jungle*, *Tropic*, *The Eternal Presence*, among others, in the context of Lam's upbringing in the Chinese community of Sagua la Grande, with an artistically inclined Chinese father, and demonstrates that Lam's Chinese-Cuban context is key in understanding his artistic productions. Iyengar's essay also draws attention to unrecognized Asian influences in the Caribbean. Her "Afro-Asian-Caribbean Connections in Transnational Circulation, *The Harlem Ashram* as Chronotope," shows that the history of Puerto Rico's independence movement cannot be fully appreciated without the consideration of the anti-colonial activism that resulted in the diasporic political confluences of the Harlem Ashram.

The second part of the collection, "Contact Zones, Solidarity, and Syncretism," begins with Zelideth María Rivas' "Merging the Transpacific with the Transatlantic: *Afro-Asia in Japanese Brazilian Narrative*." Rivas traces the genealogy of interracial intimacies between Afro-Brazilians and Japanese Brazilians in fictional narratives written both in Portuguese and Japanese between 1950 and 2011. She finds in these literary works "interactions, trysts, friendships, and love that are ostensibly absent from historical narratives," but that are more mimetic of Brazil's complex multi-racial communities (96). Indeed, interactions between people of African descent and of Asian descent tend to be discussed as asides or as exceptional instances that do not warrant inclusion in national histories. Luisa Marcela Ossa's "Parallels and Intersections: Afro-Chinese Relationships and Spiritual Connections in *Monkey Hunting* and *Como un mensajero tuyo*" makes a convincing argument for examining the experiences of the Chinese, Blacks, and of their progeny as integral to Cuban Society. Ossa, more specifically, examines the spiritual beliefs shared by the African slaves who practiced Lukumí

(Santería) and the coolies who followed Chinese beliefs in Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* and in Mayra Montero's *Como un mensajero tuyo*.

Similar to the role of the Chinese coolies, the role of the Indian indentured laborers who participated in anti-colonial movements in the British Caribbean has been overlooked. Linda Aïnouche addresses this gap by examining the impact of Hinduism in the development of Rastafari practices in the 1930s in Jamaica, where thousands of Indian indentured laborers were forced to migrate (1845-1917). Aïnouche's essay challenges readers to further explore the Afro-Indian convergences in Jamaican cultural practices, such as Rastafari, which in the national imaginary is "purely" African. Aïnouche highlights, in particular, the influence that Indians had in Rastafari's conceptualization of personal divinity, its natural diet, its use of cannabis in rituals, and the styling of Rasta hair into dreadlocks.

Part III of Ossa and Lee-DiStefano's volume, "Bodies, Genders, and Identities," opens with Dania Abreu-Torres' "Body of Reconciliation: Aida Petrinera Cheng's Journey in *Como un mensajero tuyo*." Abreu-Torres delves for the second time in the volume into Montero's novel, but her focus is on the subversive figuring of the *mulata-china*, a stereotypically fetishized body in Cuban and Caribbean cultures. Abreu-Torres reads Montero's *mulata-china*—Aida—as a subject who resists fetishization. According to Abreu-Torres, Aida is aware of her own historicity as an Afro-Chinese subject and has the agency to construct her own history. Like Abreu-Torres, Anne-Marie Lee-Loy discusses literary responses to racialized stereotypes. Lee-Loy's focus, however, is on Asian men. In "I Am [sic] Like One of those Women: Chinese Masculinity as Feminist Strategy in Three West Indian Novels," Lee-Loy analyzes alternative models of Asian masculinity in the works of Kerry Young, Margaret Cezair-Thompson, and Elizabeth Nuñez. In these three novels—located in Jamaica and Trinidad—, Chinese men are feminized and androgenized, not for the purpose of perpetuating Western stereotypes, but as a means of arguing for the viability of a non-western type of masculinity that is not defined in terms of violence, oppression, and hegemonic power.

The last essay of the volume follows the others in this collection in showing how literary and cultural practices can be utilized to unsettle notions of East Asians as passive and marginal to the construction of national identity and personhood. More specifically, Martin A. Tsang sheds light on how mixed Afro-Chinese Cuban women have embraced their Chineseness to respond to dominant notions of Chinese *mulataje* as negative and superficial. In "*La Mulata Achinada: Bodies, Gender, and Authority in Afro-Chinese Religion in Cuba*," Tsang surveys representations of Afro-Chinese Cubans in the context of Lukumí practices in a diverse range of sources; among them, literary texts, anthropological studies, theoretical texts, performative arts, and field work. He argues that in Cuban spiritual practices, the Chinese and racially mixed Chinese-Cubans may function as conduits of supernatural power that sort out social and religious conflicts. Tsang ultimately proposes that the Afro-Chinese in Cuba have been intrinsic in defining current practices of Lukumí religion. As many other authors in this collection, Tsang believes that the legacy of the Chinese presence in Cuba should not be treated as discretionary, but rather as central to the formation of Cuban identity.

Ossa and Lee-DiStefano have produced an excellent book that contributes to the fields of Latin American Studies, Caribbean Studies, Global Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies, and Religious Studies. The essays in this collection should be accessible to undergraduate students with little experience in the specific fields, but should also be useful to more seasoned scholars who might appreciate the exceptional close readings and the more field-specialized bibliography. I myself read this book in sequence, from beginning to end, not by intention, but simply because I could not put it down once I started. The intermingling of more strictly literary essays with essays that used a diverse range of sources had the effect of staving off the kind of fatigue readers often experience when reading multi-authored collections. As a reader, I particularly appreciated the care and effort the editors have placed in controlling for evenness in the quality of research, style, and organization of each essay. All of the contributors clearly articulated the purpose of their essays early on, provided context for better understanding the period they examined as well as their sources, and stated their findings and their implications upon closing.

The only minor observation I would make regards the confusing use of the term "syncretism" in the collection. The term appears in the heading of Part II ("Contact Zones, Solidarity, and Syncretism"), even though Moriuchi and Ossa highlight in their essays its problematic use in the context of Cuban religious practices and, instead, recognize the merits of using Martin Tang's concept "interdiasporic cross-fertilization" (47, 127). This detail, however, is incidental and should not detract from the quality of this highly readable volume that sheds a bright light on the impact of Afro-Asian connections in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Book Review

Star Apple Blue and Avocado Green By Paulette A. Ramsay

Warrick Lattibeaudaire • University of Technology

Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2016. 102 pages. $10.95, paperback. ISBN: 978-9-76637-918-6.

Ramsay's collection of poems she names *Star Apple Blue and Avocado Green* adds to her extensive and decorated literary treasure grove. This well-cultivated orchard forms a canopy with branches into poetry, prose and literary criticism. She again, with this, one of her latest sprouts, embarks in her comfort zone and area of farming expertise: poetry. Her garden flourishes in metaphor, wordplay and allusions to cultivate the readers' interest and delight their fancy. With these mulches, Ramsay fertilises larger issues of self, interaction with other, and the Caribbean global context and, for readers close to her work, the undying concerns of women. The collection comprises 62 poems with four headings organic to a Caribbean, particularly Jamaican, setting and the interplay among these: the local and global, and the possibilities for a 'glocal' space, a hybridity that acknowledges the Caribbean not just for being Caribbean but for being a product of global Western, Asian and African processes of syncretisation. This 'glocal' space further highlights the power of the local that goes on to now affect the global.

Ramsay, both a feminist and one who relies heavily on Postcolonial discourse in teasing out issues of identity and belonging, reinforces much of the narrative contrived in the works of contemporary Caribbean female writers in her collection. These writers, under the larger Postcolonial agenda seek to proffer Caribbean women's struggles as different to the focus of Euro-American feminist movements largely defined around gender. Ramsay examines the unique and complex status of women born in a region out of the colonial process. Understandably, she probes not only gender inequality but issues of race, sexuality and imperialism. She strongly focuses on the social and historical context of the region and, specifically, the land of birth and, in the spirit on writing women in the Caribbean, highlights womanhood to encompass a multitude of experiences that define women. Further, her reliance on things Caribbean buttresses the belief that feminist ideals do sprout and blossom locally from regional knowledge and the unique Flora of the region. Of equal import is the Caribbean female writer's objective to dispel the notion that storytelling and the relay of oral tradition is a function of males.

The title of the collection grabs the reader's attention and signals the author's intention to name her collection off two Caribbean and familiarly local fruits, avocado and star apple, one blue, the other green. As she tells us in her first poem, using metaphor: "she smiles wistfully at the foaming purple blue and avocado green waves, *her colours of laughter and life*." The poet, through this, signals that there is more to the issues she sets out to raise than meets the eye. What is certain: her choice of fruits prepares the reader for a mouth-watering and adventurous read, redolent of one climbing a star apple tree known for its great height and for delectable fruits that never fall to the ground, and eaten by themselves. Though not as succulent as star apples, avocados, otherwise called pears, are rarely eaten singly, and, therefore, better known for bringing out the taste in a whole range of accompanying foods. These fruits, like apples to oranges, differently constituted, coexist and grow in the same Caribbean space, and now on the same leaves of Ramsay's collection. Hers, though, are talking trees, those that "tell stories of two different generations in a family that celebrates our tropical trees with great spirit.

Her collection opens with "Closing Doors," poignant at the individual level, being first poem, but also at the level of subheading which bears 17 poems. But as these doors are closed, many more open. In this section, the poet reconciles and puts closure to many issues raised on the individual level. Where one sees a major character, invariably it is a woman, as the cover picture reveals, and even when she evokes a man, it is to treat with the experiences of women which, in the spirit of contemporary Caribbean women writers, are very diverse. Ramsay feels an acute need to represent the cause of women, as her other works, such as *October Afternoon and Aunt Jen*, demonstrate, especially given, what is commonly referred to as the doubly colonised female status, which articulate women's concerns through racial and gendered lens. The feminine theme reverberates both in the title of these poems, but more so in the body of them. "Potiphar's Wife", "An Angry Woman", "The Way She Was", "I Learned to Dance", "Un(like) Lot's Wife", "I Have Loved and Lost", her legendary reflections

on the "Dirty Dishes in the Sink" she dedicates to a female Heather Bowie, "Beijing Salutes a Black Woman in China", "Remaking Self", "Naissance of Sexism", and "The Girl with the Big Heart", are but a sampling of the poems that treat with and allude to female concerns cleverly woven around "I", the self, the woman and arguably Ramsay's autobiographical concerns. In more ways than one, she heralds the female struggle, making feminist ideals front and centre of this section that sets the tone, or opens to the remaining three quarters of the collection: Speaking in Halves, Mama's Handbag, and Caribbean Global.

Like many prodigious works of fiction, her poetry brims with intertextuality and pastiche, which shine even brighter as they are couched in metaphor and other figures of speech. It is truly difficult to separate Ramsay from her Christian heritage, which is a part of a larger historical context of colonisation upon the Antillean psyche. The Bible, so revered in the region, is a centrepiece work whose stories Ramsay has not only alluded to, but reworked in a relatable and appealing manner insofar as she addresses local and regional concerns. Much of this kind of doublespeak occurs in the section, Speaking in Halves, though it runs throughout the whole collection. She takes from the canon, citing "Jordan Crossing", "Old Men Dream Dreams", "On the Edge of Hell", and "Caleb's First Day in Heaven", and plays with these issues, then moves between the fairy tale world of mermaids to the real world. These and her preoccupation with the great Colombian writer, Gabriel García Marquéz, presents a way to read her complex reality, a creolised space that draws on different discourses and meta narratives. Yet, it produces a unique Caribbean space that tells its own stories singly through star apples and doubly through pears, and "the old star apple tree is happy to find friendly support in the strong trunk" of the avocado tree. Ramsay thus shows how religion helps to deeply contextualise women's experiences in the Caribbean.

Ramsay again solidifies her preoccupation with women, with specific focus on the mother figure who, for all intents and purposes, is hers. She dedicates this entire section, privileging the mother figure, which stands out even more in the absence of a father or male figure in her entire collection. The section, Mama's Handbag, evokes Vassanji's Postcolonial work, *The Gunnysack*. Like the contents therein that tell a story, the mother figure is indispensable to Caribbean reality, and challenges any discourse that seeks to silence women or deny their integral role in storytelling. Mothers make magic, as the eponymous title of the first poem in this section highlights. Her individual treatment of mothers can be seen as an invocation of the Motherland to whom the Caribbean owes much of its identity, and not to be overlooked this section passes as a panegyric on her mother, all mothers, grandmothers who interact with their daughters now turned mothers to prolong a female tradition and discourse.

She continues her Postcolonial and global discourse in the final section, Caribbean Global, where she now moves from the level of individual to global and back, creating a unique 'glocal' Caribbean space. From this local space arise women who she not just defines locally as Jamaicans but as both Caribbean and international. "Beijing Salutes a Black Woman in China" and "Encounter with a Canadian Border Security Guard" gave an earlier allusion to how the local Caribbean Jamaican woman is constituted internationally. Within this 'glocal' space lies womanhood and its privileging of an awareness of the multitude of global experiences that define women. "The Middle Passage" and "Caribbean Global" with its appeal to Walter Rodney that to be colonised is to be removed from history, set her on a path to decolonisation, while rehashing international historical marks that make the local a global reality. She further mixes the local dialect with standard English in poems to capture the diglossia that speaks to the language reality in the Caribbean. A key aspect of this idea of a 'glocal' space is the far reaching influence of Jamaica and the Caribbean on the world, as she highlights in 'Caribbean Global' "the cool Jamaican bass artist strumming his favourite reggae song on a stage in Johannesburg" and a "migration from Kingston, Georgetown, Bridgetown to London, New York, Amsterdam, Brussels," as well as, a "the gifted Grenadian student at the library of an Ivy League University..., writing new identities."

Ramsay's seeds germinate with satiric and feminist fingers, individual hands that celebrate a national then pan Caribbean culture, one that interacts with global reality. She narrates her stories, stories with stories, stories based on stories, stories stored in trees, trees that communicate with each other, trees that talk with the voice of great ancestral spirits, to bind past up with present, the old and the young, the mother and grandmothers. Amidst realities hard to negotiate, her colours green and blue signal laughter and life, a signal of hope she finds in the language of poetry, one that lies, in Bakhtinian terms, on the borderline between oneself and the other, and whose word is always half someone else's.

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