

# **The Cuban Remix: Rethinking Culture and Political Participation in Contemporary Cuba**

**by**

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom, La Sander Steele Saunders and my grandmother, Gladys J. Saunders.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

In the winter semester of 2008, I taught a course entitled “Afro-Cuba: Race, Revolution and Culture.” I showed the class *La Fuerza del Tambor* (2006), a film about the importance of West African drums in the non-commercial cultural traditions of Cuba’s public sphere. The film focuses on the usage of drums in Afro-Cuban<sup>1</sup> religious practices, in which particular drums are used in summoning the *Orishas*, or deities, of Cuba’s West-African-based religious traditions such as Santeria.

In the film, Alfredo Calvo, an elder of the Egwado branch of Santeria, comments that on the night of Cuba’s independence from Spain, there were celebrations across the island. He recalls that for miles and miles across the island, the sounds of various African drums could be heard. The sounds, he notes, were much louder than the drums often used in today’s commercialized music. As he spoke, I began to imagine how that moment must have looked. I began to imagine the light-skinned Cuban Creole elite celebrating in their bars and courtyards in late nineteenth century Havana. They probably fired shots in the air, sang songs, and toasted with bottles of rum, whisky and wine.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Afro-Cuban” is hotly debated on the island. While scholars such as Jean Stubbs [English] and Pedro Pérez Sarduy [Afro-Cuban] use the term to describe their experience and political agenda, the usage of the term is seem as problematic by some Cubans who resist the idea that there exists a particular type of Cuban. In order to fight racism, they focus on acknowledging the existence of Blacks.

Meanwhile, Black Cubans celebrated the beginning of the newly independent nation with drums, dancing and religious festivities.

The nation-state is a nineteenth-century invention in which notions of citizenship and nation became conflated with biology, race, geography, culture, linear progression, civilization, and social advancement. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Cuba's light-skinned elite debated the validity of the newer fields of social scientific racism emerging from the United States and Western Europe. A race-based account of modernity conflicted with the reality that the majority of their compatriots were non-White and mixed.<sup>2</sup> Race could not be used as the primary lens for social organization, though many elites' internalized racism meant that race always lurked just below the surface of national debates. These elites were invested in making sure that their emerging nations would become as civilized, or as European, as possible. One way they sought to accomplish this task was to focus primarily on culture and skin lightening as a path of development, while rejecting a notion of race based on hypodescent<sup>3</sup>.

As I reflected on this tenuous moment of independence, however, I also imagined the uneasy excitement of the light-skinned elite as they heard another form of singing, dancing, and drumming nearby. I imagined them hearing the loud thunderous booms of distant drums – Lucumi Bata drums, drums representing war and peace, and drums calling various deities in celebration of freedom and independence. I imagined them listening to people singing in languages other than Castilian, in Creole languages that mixed Spanish with Yoruba and other West-African languages. Hearing this, in the

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<sup>2</sup> I use *modernity* to refer to a cultural, economic, and corporeally-based project in which regional European capitalist interests sought to organize other populations and resources for their own productive interests. Because many of the populations from whom European capital wanted to obtain resources had different cultural logics – differing notions of time, ideas about ownership, systems of value – the modernist project is the imposition of one cultural logic over another as a means of obtaining material resources.

<sup>3</sup> Hypodescent refers to the “one drop rule,” in which one drop of African blood made a person non-White.

company of other light-skinned creoles, in predominantly White courtyards and elite parties, must have been a reminder to many that despite four hundred years of Spanish colonial rule, Cuba was still as much an African nation as a European one.

The presence of West African traditions in Cuba at this moment of inauguration can also be read as a sign that anti-colonial struggle in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be waged over culture – namely, over which cultural tradition would become the basis of social organization throughout the island and the region. Would the emergent Latin American and Caribbean nations be African, indigenous, European, or a mixture of all three? If the nation was to be a mixture, which culture would lose hegemony and on what terms? Would Latin America and the Caribbean settle into social organizations such as a capitalist or socialist democratic nation-state with a functioning civil society as conceptualized under European notions of development, freedom and equality? Or would the region complete a regional integration as promoted by thinkers such as Simón Bolívar and José Martí?

Perhaps Fidel Castro's more recent claims that the world is now facing a battle of "ideas" offer some insight into these historical elements of the Cuban revolutionary project, as well as foreshadowing what was to come. But whereas Castro has sought to highlight the novelty of this battle over ideas, this dissertation seeks to examine the cultural struggles that have characterized social life and driven social change in Cuba since the very beginning.

The relationship between cultural and social development has been a hotly debated topic at state and local levels from Cuba's independence to the present. Between 1902 and 1959, the debate focused primarily on the relationship between culture and

criminology, race and social atavism. Since 1959, however, there seems to have been a turn in the conceptualization of culture, linking it instead to social change, social revolution, and the potential emergence of a utopian society. This shift in the understanding of culture can be linked to several converging factors: Marxist theories of social change; the Bolshevik, Chinese, and Cuban Revolutions; the ideological contributions of Lenin and Trotsky; the ideological interventions of Gramsci; the post-colonial movements of Afro-diasporic and indigenous peoples; and the emergence of repressive post-colonial and neo-colonial regimes throughout the world. These dynamics have spurred radical conversations and intellectual exchanges between the global south and the global north, challenging the hegemony of European modernism as a cultural project with “global designs” (Mignolo 2000). In Latin America, many of these dynamics were reflected in the theoretical contributions of anti-neo-colonial actors such as Che Guevara.

There are several key components of Cuba’s revolutionary project that have profound implications for a theory and method of social change. First, I will frame the central aspects of Cuba’s project and then discuss the implications of these processes for a theory of social change. The theories underlying Cuba’s revolutionary project are drawn from several ideological frameworks: Martían, Leninist, Gramscian, and Guevarian. In this section I will focus on the first three since Che Guevara’s contribution will be discussed extensively later in the dissertation.

In many ways the ideas of José Martí represent the modernist, egalitarian ideals of the Latin American and Caribbean elite. These ideals center on intense suspicion of U.S.

American imperial ambitions<sup>4</sup> and the rejection of Western European racial scientism – a cultural logic that defines the nation as civilized or backward based on cultural attainment and racial intermixture. These ideas, with their basis in Enlightenment thought regarding national independence, civilization, and social equality, were taken up and redefined in Latin America and the Caribbean as a means of reasserting the modernity of their emergent nations, despite large non-White populations. This rearticulation centered on racial intermixture or *mestizaje*, as well as on material enfranchisement and changing the social capital of non-White populations, as a means of creating civilized nations that would not descend into violence as eighteenth-century Haiti had. Building the social capital of non-White populations largely involved the cultural assimilation of all Afro-descendent populations into a notion of *Cubanidad*, as defined by Eurocentric Cuban elite (Arroyo 2003).

Another theoretical current that frames the Cuban revolutionary project is Leninist ideology. In Leninist ideology, the state represents the centralization of social power and is the mediator of class-based social inequality. Through usurping the state, revolutionary activists or a revolutionary party can disrupt the unequal distribution of power within a society, and use the state as a tool to set the citizenry of a nation on a course to complete independence, equality, and social development. While it is not clear what that final goal will look like under Leninist ideals, it is accepted that taking control of the state and using it to eliminate social inequality is key to stimulating the development of an egalitarian society. However, for many Marxists like Lenin, the

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<sup>4</sup> In this dissertation, *America*, or *American* refers to José Martí's regional notion of Nuestra America: Latin America, Central America, and the Caribbean. I use U.S. American, United States, United States of America, or U.S.A. to differentiate, ideologically, between Nuestra America and the ideological agenda represented by the United States of America.



question remains of how to change the consciousness of people as a means of ending the reproduction of social inequality. Material redistribution is only one solution; the other involves the production of ideologies themselves. Lenin offered his own thoughts on the role of the intellectual, as a professional class who holds ideological power, in encouraging a revolutionary society.

Lenin argued that in order to stimulate revolutionary ideological production, that there should be a complete erasure of the distinction between workers and intellectuals. He thought that a revolutionary consciousness needed to be brought to the masses via the revolutionary party whether it is composed of former workers or members of the preexisting professional or “bourgeois” intellectual class. In his writing Lenin tackled the question of whether or not bourgeois intellectuals could produce revolutionary social ideologies, or if those ideologies should come from working class individuals with a revolutionary consciousness or organic intellectuals.

The problem with the working class intellectuals is that they may not have had the extensive training afforded to the professional or “bourgeois” intellectuals. So they were possibly limited in their ability to produce ideologies that challenged the ideologies of the professional intellectuals, who produced the hegemonic ideologies for the bourgeois class. Lenin argued that organic intellectuals could be found either in the revolutionary party or the working class, as well as among professional intellectuals. Therefore, the ideas for a new revolutionary society may emerge from the bourgeois class or the working class. However, Lenin felt it was the job of the vanguard or the revolutionary party that took control of the state, to foster a revolutionary consciousness.

Gramsci, on the other hand, held two views of intellectuals; first, that intellectuals were reflective of established class interests since they were educated through the formal educational structure; second, that organic intellectuals were not determined by their professional status -- they could be bourgeois or working class-- but what made organic intellectuals unique was their function in directing the ideas and interests of the class to which they belonged. Gramsci challenged Lenin's idea that the role of the revolutionary was to channel the activities of organic intellectuals and provide a link between the classes and certain sectors of the traditional intelligentsia (Hoare and Smith 2005). This tension between Lenin's and Gramsci's conceptualization of the role of intellectuals and of the revolutionary party in social change is reflected in the artistic debates that took place in Cuba in the 1960s.

The central focus of this dissertation is to consider the ways in which the contemporary cultural struggles and debates in Cuba relate to broader theories of culture and social change. I focus on Cuba's attempt to institutionalize culture as a means of "socializing ideological production," and trace the contemporary effects of this move in Cuba's contemporary counter-cultural, music-based social movements – in particular, the Cuban underground hip-hop movement.

### **1.1 Cuban Underground Hip-Hop**

Over the last decade, there has been significant academic and media interest in the Cuban underground hip-hop movement (UHHM) (Perry 2004; West-Duran 2004; Joffe 2005; Fernandes 2006, 2007; Armstead 2007). The UHHM has garnered much attention because of its artists' public criticism of the numerous social difficulties that many Cubans face. In fact, the term "underground" refers to lyrics that challenge the

hegemonic discourses that continue to make everyday life difficult for the average Cuban citizen. These hegemonic discourses include Cuban state-centered, homogenizing, socialist discourses, which reduce the analysis of culturally-based social inequalities such as racism, homophobia, and sexism to a focus on economic inequality alone. This limited perspective restricts citizens' ability to represent social oppressions that are ideologically based, and which cannot be completely resolved by redistributive policies.

While much of the work on the Cuban UHHM has noted the racialized and economically turbulent context in which the movement emerged,<sup>5</sup> very few pieces have located Cuban underground hip-hop in relation to post-1959, music-based counter-cultural movements which emerged during Cuba's move to institutionalize a politicized, grassroots-based cultural sphere. This move coincided with the intensification of global challenges to the ideological division between politics and aesthetics, between art and political activism. Such challenges have opened the way for the emergence of hip-hop as a socially critical, counter-cultural movement.

Cuba's politicized musicians have used the cultural sphere as a means of representing the needs of Cuba's marginal populations, while challenging the state to fulfill its promise to create an egalitarian society. The ability of counter-cultural artistic movements to effect social change is a product of Cuba's own social and political history: the new revolutionary leaders sought to combine an economic focus with an ideological-cultural mechanism that would encourage artistic production in every aspect of cultural life and in all sectors of Cuban society. This process has been referred to as the "socialization of culture" or the "institutionalization of culture" by many in Cuba's

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<sup>5</sup> Cuban UHHM emerged during a severe economic downturn in the country from 1989 to 1998, a period commonly referred to as the "Special Period."

revolutionary leadership. Institutionalizing culture as a means of encouraging social change has helped citizens -- especially those commonly excluded from civil society -- to make claims for social inclusion. Consequently, this process has fostered a unique merging of cultural and political participation in the Cuban public sphere.

In what follows, I trace the origins of the Cuban UHHM to the transnational counter-cultural currents coming out of the U.S., Latin America, and Cuba. I then consider how the Cuban UHHM, as a critical music culture fueled by Black and Mulato youth, is the ideological and institutional outcome of 1960s counter-cultural artistic movements, and state-level debates concerning the role of culture in Cuba's revolutionary society.

## **1.2 The Organization of the Dissertation**

In this dissertation, I contextualize and analyze a key aspect of Cuba's socialist model: its approach to culture, and the effects of this for social change at the grassroots levels and at the level of everyday life. Cuba's approach to culture and to the arts in particular, has significant implications for theories of social change and democratic participation. The social and political significance of art and culture is often seen as separate from or supplementary to the politicized social organizations that constitute social movements. Rarely are aesthetic challenges seen as constituting or contributing to social movements; yet, they provide an ideological conduit for "democratic counter-strategies" that allow artists, as agents of change, to mobilize and lead political movements (Reyes Matta 1988).

Attempts to theorize the relationship between culture, political movements, and social change have focused primarily on the aesthetics of art as iconography, symbolism, and expression of the structure of social life. Marxist analyses of the relationship

between aesthetics and social change have largely centered on art as a representation of class interests, ideologies, or as an “epiphenomenon of social structure” (Tanner 2003, 36). In studies considering music, the focus is generally on popular culture, commoditization, and how aesthetic structures represent larger social trends. Academic work on popular culture, in general, tends to take a Gramscian approach, which focuses on popular culture and popular subcultures as a counter-hegemonic impulse that challenges hegemonic ideologies. Yet, with few exceptions, this body of literature does not articulate *how* art can be *consciously* taken up and used as an agent of social change.

With regards to the institutionalization of culture, scholars working from Marxist perspectives tend to assume that once cultural movements become institutionalized within state structures, the movements are incorporated and defused by hegemonic power structures. Thus, there is little hope for fundamental change, as a form of pacification operates to maintain hegemony (Williams 1977). Other analyses of popular culture consider it from the perspective of commoditization, and the effects of profit-driven interests on the production of culture and on cultural workers themselves (Fernandes 2006). Sometimes this approach assumes that the institutionalization of cultural production at the state level is a form of social control, such as a form of propaganda or the incorporation of discourses as a means of social control. Another approach is that the institutionalization of cultural production is a form of catharsis in a repressive society, or another form of profit-driven commercialization. However, since the Cuban revolutionary project sought to restructure the state and its relationship to grassroots level political processes, the institutionalization of art within this context *initially* challenged

the idea that the institutionalization of art means that critical cultural movements have been commoditized or incorporated.

In order to highlight these complex dynamics, I attempt to embed the relationship between culture and social change in Cuba within its appropriate revolutionary context. Starting from the perspective that cultural movements are sites and agents of social change (Eyerman and Jamison 1998, David and McCaughan 2006), I consider the democratic and revolutionary possibilities available to societies that support and value cultural movements as legitimate political voices at the state and grassroots level. I explore the social possibilities posed by critical artists and intellectuals who consciously reject the separation of culture, art, and aesthetics from social movements, grassroots movements, and national political processes. Using the Cuban underground hip-hop movement as a case study, I consider the implications of Cuba's approach to culture for grassroots democratic processes and macro-level processes of social change.

Numerous scholars have sought to move beyond the separation of art and aesthetics from political processes. For example, Herbert Marcuse (1978), Howard Becker (2003), and Peter J. Marin (1997) have sought, in various ways, to interrogate the relationship between the ideological, the communitarian, and the revolutionary natures of art and culture. Using the work of these scholars as a starting point, I begin with the premise that artistic aesthetics are nodes of power within social structures, and that challenges to aesthetics are also challenges to social and political structures (Marin 1997).

In Cuba, the empowerment of grassroots institutions to provide artistic literacy is a key aspect of a basic education program that has helped to create a highly politicized

population. This has resulted in the creation of generations of artists who are able to articulate the relationship between culture, politics, art, and social change. Socially-critical artists have come to define their role in the new revolutionary society as revolutionary agents of change who work at the level of ideological production.

In order to address how these dynamics have played out in a Cuban context, this dissertation is divided into three sections. In Section I, I consider several key theoretical and ideological influences on the development of the contemporary Cuban state. I include a literature review that addresses Cuba's particular socialist model, which is still in a process of emergence and change. I draw upon existing bodies of literature concerning art and revolution in Cuba in order to describe the uniqueness of Cuba's cultural sphere, and the relation of this sphere to Cuba's grassroots organizations and state institutions. I discuss the emergence of Cuba's alternative music scene -- a socially-critical music scene that includes hip-hop -- as exemplary of Cuba's approach to grassroots activism.

Section I also addresses the creation of grassroots institutions that center on providing neighborhoods access to artistic literacy. These grassroots institutions provide the material resources necessary for individuals to produce art. Grassroots organizations are, in turn, linked to municipal and national institutions which provide resources for artistic production, and which seek to orient those with talent towards service in political and ideological processes at the national level. Next, I address the history and social impact of Cuba's post-1959 artistic movements. I highlight a central contradiction in Cuba's model: that it encourages the development of a highly politicized, socially-critical consciousness, but then discourages that same critical consciousness when citizens attempt to act on it (Vitier 2002). I discuss the effects of this contradiction for the

democratic potential of Cuba's cultural sphere, but I also consider how and why this sphere continues to be a site of political and social critique, despite normative pressure from the Cuban state.

In Section II, in order to frame my understanding of contemporary artistic movements in Cuba, and contextualize the important intervention hip-hop artists are making into hegemonic discourses concerning race and social inequality, I offer an extensive analysis of specific aspects of social life that are relevant to these artists' lived experiences. Put another way, this section focuses on the experience of being "Black" in Cuba. I then establish the relationship of hip-hop to the reemergence of a Black subjectivity in Cuba, and to Cuba's critical music traditions, such as *Nueva Trova*. I address the relationship between art and activism in Cuba by analyzing how underground hip-hop artists have attempted to resolve some of the inequalities that they face at the local and national levels through their participation in the cultural sphere. I link these efforts to Cuba's historical debates surrounding culture and revolution. Throughout this section, my analysis will have also examined the specific implications of gender and sexuality for these processes.

Finally, in Section III, I focus specifically on the intersections of race, gender and sexuality in order to frame the lived experiences of the most marginal populations -- such as lesbians, in particular Black lesbians --who are rarely publicly acknowledged, but who are represented by Cuban hip-hop artists. In all three sections, I draw from ethnographic data to discuss some of the key issues facing Black people, and Black women in particular, in Cuba.



The goal of Sections II and III is to demonstrate how Cuban artists and intellectuals locate their work within grassroots activism, “among the Cuban people.” Because their work is not state-centric, but is linked to grassroots structures materially supported by the state, the important work that they do to improve social life in Cuba continues to go ignored and undervalued in foreign accounts of political life in Cuba. It is assumed that since the materials come from the state, all the ideas must originate within the state as well. Such a flat analysis of social life, ideological production, and political life in Cuba is a result of residual Cold War politics and ideologies, as well as the coloniality of knowledge,<sup>6</sup> in which the experiences and ideas of Black and Brown populations throughout the Americas are either ignored, misunderstood, or when recognized, assumed to be products of foreign (European) ideologies. At this point, I would like to address these issues as they provide an important context for my approach to revolutionary Cuba.

### **1.3 Contextual Considerations: Latin American Politics and the Coloniality of Knowledge**

In the fields of Latin American and post-colonial studies, among scholars such as Ernesto Laclau (2007), Greg Grandin (2004), Jossianna Arroyo (2003), Leonardo Avritzer (2002), Walter D. Mignolo (2000) and Achille Mbembe (2001), there seems to be a common underlying critique: that the notion of the nation-state is a colonial/modernist project with a regionally-based European capitalist system as its cornerstone. The nation-state subordinates the practices and forms of knowledge of

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<sup>6</sup> The coloniality of knowledge is the imperial epistemic perspective that does not admit other epistemic perspectives, except for accounting for the diversity within Western histories of thought from the Greeks and Romans to the Germans and French. (Mignolo 2006; 324) I will discuss this further later in the dissertation.

subaltern populations in order to organize populations for capitalist production.<sup>7</sup> Key to this colonizing project is the de-legitimization of the methods used by subaltern populations to represent themselves and their worldviews.

Leonardo Avritzer argues, for example, that political processes proceed from a ground-up approach in Latin America: people living in this region tend to address their needs at the local level in town squares, and then expect that local level needs will be addressed at the state level. What count as deliberative processes in these local level spaces? The southeastern U.S. coast, Latin America, and the Caribbean are largely inhabited by people of African and indigenous descent, who use dance, music, poetry, and other cultural-artistic forms as key aspects of social/political deliberative processes; yet, these practices are not considered integral to legitimate politics within the region.

Walter D. Mignolo (2000) addresses this tension when he summarizes Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano's (1997) notion of the "coloniality of power." Mignolo writes:

Coloniality of power is a story that does not begin in Greece; or, if you wish, has two beginnings, one in Greece and the other in the less known memories of millions of people in the Caribbean and Atlantic Coast, and better known memories (although not quite as well known as the Greek legacies) in the Andes and in Mesoamerica. The extended moment of conflict between people whose brain and skin have been formed by different memories, sensibilities, and beliefs between 1492 and today is the crucial historical intersection where the coloniality of power in the Americas can be located and unraveled. Quijano identifies coloniality of power with capitalism and its consolidation in Europe from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries... Quijano constitutes the coloniality of power by way of which the entire planet, including its continental division (Africa, America, Europe), becomes articulated in such production of knowledge and classificatory apparatus. Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of the subaltern. From the epistemological perspective, European local knowledge and histories have been projected to global designs, from the dream of an *Orbis Universalis Christianus* to Hegel's belief in a universal history that could be narrated from a European (and therefore Hegemonic) perspective. Colonial semiosis attempted to identify particular moments of tension in the conflict between two local histories and knowledges, on responding to the movement

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<sup>7</sup> The term "subaltern" refers to the perspective of groups who are not located within the hegemonic power structure, and whose bodies and knowledges are used as markers to define the limits of hegemonic power - it is the people and the perspectives that hegemonic power is defined against.

forward of a global design that intended to impose itself and those local histories and knowledges that are forced to accommodate themselves to such new realities. (2000, 17)

The coloniality of power refers to the drive of the European modernist project to impose its knowledge and culture on non-European populations. This process has global designs in which the world is divided and labeled according to European perceptions and experiences, which are projected outwards and recast as universal. The process is fraught with tension, however, as populations with differing forms of knowledge and experience resist the imposition of a Eurocentric worldview.

Mignolo uses the term “cultural semiosis” to describe the process of forced cultural assimilation at the basis of the European drive for global hegemony. Mignolo explains the term as follows:

I am more interested in critically reflecting on coloniality and thinking from such an experience, than in identifying national (or sub continental, e.g. ‘Latin American’) distinctive features. This is the main reason why I prefer the term colonial semiosis to transculturation, which, in the first definition provided by Ortiz,<sup>8</sup> maintains the shadows of ‘mestizaje.’ Colonial semiosis emphasized, instead, the conflicts engendered by coloniality at the level of social-semiotic interactions, and by that I mean, in the sphere of signs. In the sixteenth century, the conflict of writing systems related to religion, education, and conversation was a fundamental aspect of coloniality. Colonial semiosis attempted, although perhaps not entirely successfully, to dispel the notion of “culture.” Why? Because culture is precisely a key word for colonial discourses classifying the planet, particularly since the second wave of colonial expansion according to sign system (language, food, dress, religion, etc.) and ethnicity (skin color, geographical locations). Culture became, from the eighteenth century until the 1950s approximately, a word between “nature” and “civilization.” Lately, culture has become the other end of capital and financial interests. (2000, 15)

For Mignolo, cultural semiosis refers to the conflicts that are produced at the level of everyday meaning-making and social interactions. It is a product of the coloniality of knowledge, which during its first phase in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries centered on dominating the systems of representation related to religion, education and

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<sup>8</sup> Fernando Ortiz was a world-renowned Cuban anthropologist known for his theories of cultural development and cultural transmission. Ortiz’s work focused primarily on Cuban-African culture. While in Cuba doing fieldwork, I worked at the Fernando Ortiz Foundation and interviewed one of Ortiz’s students – Grammy-award-winning musicologist Maria Teresa Linares.

conversation. Through gaining control of these hegemonic systems of representation, the colonial project moved to the next phase, expanding beyond Western Europe to name and reorder the rest of the world.

Mignolo argues that colonial power dispelled the notion of culture because modernism is the product of the worldview of a particular culture. If it were acknowledged that colonialism was a culturally-specific project, a project based in the realm of contestable ideas, then the professed universality and legitimacy of the project would be undermined. More significantly for Mignolo, colonization was a means of ensuring constant profitable production. He prefers the notion of colonial semiosis to Fernando Ortiz's notion of transculturation because the latter remains linked to the intensely debated notion of "mestizaje." For Mignolo, though transculturation refers to a power dynamic in which multiple ethnicities contribute to an emerging hybrid culture, there are still biological implications to the idea. Jossianna Arroyo (2003) makes a similar point when she writes:

En Latinoamérica, la definición de la cultura y del sujeto cultural se complementó, desde sus orígenes, con el perfil del sujeto colonial, lo que creó una serie de diversiones y desplazamientos en la unidad 'homogénea' de los discursos nacionales... Este desplazamiento concibe una temporalidad ambivalente donde la modernidad se narra desde puntos de vista distintos y en donde tanto los que están en el poder como los subalternos: 'a través de medios culturales distintos y para fines históricos muy diferentes demuestran que la fuerzas de la autoridad y la subordinación sociales pueden emerger en estrategias desplazadas, incluso, descentradas de significado...' El siglo XIX Latinoamericano escribe su imaginario cultural de la identidad desde la ambivalencia racial y sexual que le crean sus otros -indígenas, negros o asiáticos- con el fin de definir el proyecto de integración política de sus naciones y, a la vez, subvertir la concepción de que las naciones "mestizas" no pueden acceder a la modernidad. Entre los proyectos que definen esta nueva visión se destaca el de José Martí en su ya canónico ensayo 'Nuestra América', donde define el futuro proyecto político de América como el de una 'América mestiza', como un espacio diferenciado del 'vecino del norte'. De este modo, crea un nuevo cuerpo representativo del nuevo orden político, social y cultural del futuro: el hombre natural. Este tipo de hombre llega a sustituir el saber letrado, asociado a la cultural europea, por un discurso natural: 'Por eso el libro importado ha sido vencido en América por el hombre natural. Los hombres naturales han vencido a los letrados artificiales.' (13-14)

In Latin America, the definition of culture and the cultural subject has complemented since its origins, the profile of the colonial subject, which in turn creates a series of distractions and displacements in the homogeneous unity of national discourses. This displacement conceives an ambivalent temporality where modernity is narrated from different standpoints from which the ones that are in power as well as the subaltern: 'through distinct cultural media and for very different historical ends shows that the forces of authority and social subordination can emerge in displaced strategies, even, decentered of their significance. The Latin American nineteenth century writes its cultural identity imaginaries from within racial and sexual ambivalence created by its others—indigenous, Blacks or Asian—with the purpose of defining the project of the political integration of nations and, at the same time, subvert the conception that 'mestiza' nations cannot gain admittance to modernity. Amongst the projects that define this new vision José Martí's stand out with his already canonical essay 'Our America,' where he defines the political future of America as the one of an "America mestiza", as a space differentiated from the 'neighbor of the north'. In this way, he creates a new representative body of the new political, social and cultural order of the future: the natural man. This kind of man comes to substitute written knowledge, associated with European culture, for a natural discourse: 'For that reason the imported book has been defeated in America by the natural man. Natural men have defeated the artificial intellectuals.' (13-14)

Arroyo argues that Western European definitions of "culture" and the cultural subject were, from their origins, a complement of the colonial subject. The ideology of a homogenized nation caused ruptures and tensions within Latin American and Caribbean constructions of the nation and the national body. The elite of Latin America and the Caribbean were part of a subaltern modernist project: in the face of a U.S. American and European project that defined nation, civilization, and progress in racial, sexual, gendered and cultural terms, the elite of the non-White Latin American and Caribbean nations struggled to define a modernity that included their culturally- and racially-mixed nations. It is in this way that mestizaje represents a biological and cultural ideal, as it is this ideology that, Mignolo argues, still operates in the shadows of Ortiz's notion of transculturation.

Further complicating the imposition of European and U.S. American notions of "the nation" in Latin America and the Caribbean, were the anti-colonial challenges of internal subaltern populations such as the Black, African, indigenous and mixed populations who continued to resist cultural domination and struggled to maintain their

own histories, knowledges and cultures. However, through the work of elites such as José Martí, the Latin American modernist project became defined according to a notion of racial and cultural mixture or mestizaje that would also produce the “natural man.” This natural man would challenge the hegemony of European intellectual production through his rejection of the “book.” When Martí discussed “the book” and “text book races” in his work, he referred to the emerging U.S. American and European body of academic work commonly referred to as “scientific racism.” Thus José Martí was rejecting newly hegemonic European and U.S. American ideologies concerning race and nation. It is in this way, however, that Latin American and Caribbean elites would form their own modernist discourses and internal colonial projects in turn.

These tensions between the colonial project of European capital interests and the challenge posed by subaltern groups have continued throughout the twentieth century and into the present. It is in these moments of rupture within hegemonic discourses that the voices and alternative social agendas of other non-Western interests can challenge and change the direction of political thinking and social development.

However, the Latin American and Caribbean challenge to hegemonic discourses and colonial projects did not go unnoticed by the post-WWII face of European capital interests, the United States. The post-WWII Cold War truncated the efforts of citizens in Latin America and the Caribbean to define nation and citizenship according to their own terms. Greg Grandin writes the following about the Cold War in Latin America:

Secular ideologies of nationalism, socialism, Marxism, and communism - those dangerous scions of liberalism - did motivate and give solace to people’s lives. But this gift did not merely satisfy an abstract or innate desire for meaning in an increasingly uncertain world, as some theorists would now dismiss the appeal of socialism and communism. Rather, by providing the fuel and steel needed to contest the terms of nearly intolerable conditions, it combined the stuff of mundane survival with the more sublime advance of democracy... While on one level the Cold War was a struggle over mass utopias -ideological visions of how to organize society and its accouterments- what

gave the struggle its transcendental force was the politicization and internationalization of everyday life and familiar encounters. Politics took on a startling immanence, manifesting itself... in the internal realms of sexuality, faith, ethics and exile... [The Cold War] was not only an event (what diplomatic historians usually call superpower rivalry) or a cause (as in the Cold War did this or that to this or that country) but also an intensified phase of a larger conflict, an “international civil war” not only between the United States and the Soviet Union or between capitalism and communism but between different views of the shape that social citizenship would take. (2004, 16-17)

For poorer countries, siding with either superpower served as a means to gain resources and weigh in on the global debate. For many countries in the “developing world”-- Eastern European countries, as well as those of the global south -- either superpower represented what Mignolo refers to as colonial semiosis. This struggle over utopias, as Grandin calls the Cold War conflict, manifested itself in the non-aligned movement and alternative democratic movements such as the Cuban Revolution. Grandin argues that culture is at the core of this international conflict.

This international conflict involves a rebellion against the global designs of the European modernist project, of which European socialism was a competing modernist project to the capitalist vision of modernity. This conflict over culture, ideology, and ways of thinking, knowing, doing, and representing is at the basis of social organization including the global distribution of labor and material resources. These dynamics also played out in the internal realms of race, gender, and, according to Grandin, “sexuality, faith, ethics and exile” (2004, 17). While this international civil war played out externally in social organization and everyday interactions, it also played out internally in terms an understanding of “self” and one’s place within one’s social context.

After the failure of the Soviet project, it became accepted within Europe that a strictly material-based approach does not work, and that there was something about culture and the freedom of human expression that needed to be addressed within socialist projects. Nonetheless, European and U.S. American socialists have been grappling with

their post-socialist malaise, as they continue to ignore the socialist and egalitarian movements happening in other parts of the world. While there have been recent cultural and linguistic “turns” in European theories of revolution, social inequality, culture, and the economy, these topics have been debated in Cuba since before even the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. José Martí, speaking at Marx’s New York City memorial service in the 1880s, warned against the Americas taking on the history of repressed anger that is at the center of European socialism. He argued that the Americas, initially including the United States, should take on the egalitarian projects that are best for their particular social ills (Martí 2002).

Suspicious of the Soviet project the Cuban revolutionary project centered on liberating laborers and reclaiming man’s ability to express his own human nature through culture and art. How does this approach play out at the level of everyday life in Cuba? What does it mean to reclaim “culture and art?” In the Cuban model, what is the relationship between culture, art, and social revolution that leads to human emancipation? By analyzing the role of culture in Cuba’s socialist project, my goal is to contribute to the rethinking of culture that is underway within cultural studies, and to evaluate the implications of this project for regional theories of social change.

#### **1.4 Contextual Considerations: The Cuban Revolution and the Aesthetic Debates**

Cuban artists, intellectuals, and politicians describe Cuba as an Afro-European nation. Though the 1959 revolution is commonly described as a socialist/communist revolution, the current political system in Cuba is a more complex reflection of internal socio-cultural logics and a pragmatic geopolitical national policy aimed at ensuring maximum sovereignty. During the Cold War, pragmatic alliances with either the United



States or the Soviet Union were necessary for impoverished, politically and economically vicarious nations such as Cuba.

Locating Cuba's socialist model as solely a product of the European socialist tradition de-centers Cuba from the role it has played in *global* discussions of socialism, liberation, self-governance, and self-determination. This common practice in European and U.S. American scholarly work repositions European notions of freedom and governance at the center of global discourse, while pushing Cuba, as well as other regional African, Asian, and indigenous discourses to marginal discursive positions from which the possibility of social change is approximated by a nation's successes in adhering to European models of freedom, equality, and social progress. This Eurocentrism silences and renders invisible the significant global critiques of socialism, specifically critiques of European socialism, as well as critiques of Marx's theory of social change.

Leaders such as Che Guevara argued that Eastern European versions of socialism, with their focus on the material basis of all social life, have led to a restricted analysis of human experience, and to the impoverishment of Marx's theory. The result is that the "human" side of society, such as human expression, feeling, and experiences, has been reduced to the "economy." This critique was certainly shared by disaffected European neo-Marxists and cultural studies scholars who began to focus on the relationship between language and culture as a means of relinking human agency, thought, and feeling to social change.

The Cuban Revolutionary government has extraordinary powers; it curtails the freedom of action of organizations and of individuals to a far greater extent than any of its predecessors have ever attempted. Yet, in part through deliberate policy and in part through the resilience of citizens, not everything has changed that the government wanted changed, and some things have changed in spite of opposition from the

government. The processes that account for change in Cuba are primarily related to modernization but have also resulted quite generally from the experience of the revolution itself, at times changing structures unexpectedly; these processes often began outside government policy and are likely to remain independent of it. (Domínguez 1978, 465)

As Jorge Domínguez notes, though the government may have its own agenda, it is not the overarching power on the island. The multiple actors located in the construction known as “the Cuban people” have been able to influence government and social policies, though change happens very slowly. Because of the continued contestation of the cultural sphere in Cuba, those who differ with the official government position do have limited power to press for change. However, this change does not happen as fast as many Cubans would hope as the constant state contestation and government intervention into the public sphere slows the process of change.

The general assessment of Cuba as a repressive society in which the state targets specific groups is based on two factors. The first concerns the neoliberal model of citizenship and freedom -- a model based on a rights-based notion of a free-market economy, a virtually powerless state, and the presence of a civil society. Civil society is understood as a sphere of political participation and debate where citizens are able to organize and meet -- independent of state institutions. It is from these meetings that sociopolitical consensus and subsequent political action are derived. Additionally, civil society is a space where individuals can also organize to directly challenge or influence state power.

The second factor contributing to characterizations of Cuba as repressive involve the early policies of the Cuban state. During the first twenty to twenty-five years that Cuba was allied with the Soviet Union, there were numerous human rights violations, such as imprisonment, censorship, and social isolation of any person or organized group

viewed as a threat to the survival of the Cuban state and nation. The Cuban state has thus frequently intruded into the cultural sphere; time after time, the state has demonstrated its willingness to censure critical public discourses either directly or indirectly. While the Cuban state has actually been less than encouraging of critical political discourse, Cuban artists and intellectuals did not embrace the civil society/political participation model of society commonly encouraged by the United States and Western Europe, given this model's history of supporting social exclusion. Instead, Cuban artists and intellectuals continued to struggle for the creation of alternative approaches to political participation and ideological production that would encourage broader, grassroots based participation. While state actions account for some of the tensions in Cuban society, they also offer a limited understanding of everyday life in Cuba. Taken together, they do not account entirely or adequately for Cuba's dynamic cultural sphere, and they fail to speak to the sociopolitical changes that have occurred since four key economic and generational watershed periods -- 1959, 1975, 1980, and 1998.

There is a notable analytical silence on the critical public debates that occur continuously within Cuba's cultural sphere. Within the last year, two notable books have been published in the United States - Sujatha Fernandes' *Cuba Represent: Cuban Arts, State Power, and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures* (2006) and Robin D. Moore's *Music & Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (2007) -- both efforts to problematize how we think about civil society, everyday lived experiences, the cultural sphere, and repression in Cuba. Both books show that Cuban citizens face a multitude of social issues that are irreducible to the realm of the state, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, global isolation, as well as a stigmatized national identity -- given Cuba's

own status as a marginalized and alienated nation. These books address how contentious social issues have been politicized within Cuba's cultural sphere.

Media and visual arts scholars such as Chanan (1996, 2000), Craven (2002), Camnitzer (2003), Fernandes (2006) and Moore (2007) argue that with the progression of the revolution's educational programs and given Cuba's traditional usage of the cultural sphere for social critique and insurrectionary activity, the cultural sphere has come to serve many of the sociopolitical functions associated with the notion of civil society (Moore 2007, Fernandes 2006, Lane 1998). I argue that this was made possible by three factors:

First, during the colonial period, Cuba's particular national culture developed into a sphere of expression and representation that existed outside the realm of the state (e.g., the colonial Spanish Crown) and "official culture." Like the U.S. American black public sphere, Cuban culture is a politicized culture that initially developed in secret as a means of ensuring unfettered social critique and debate among citizens, without State infringement (Helg 1995, Lane 1998, Ferrer 1999). The development of culture as a site of public debate and critique intersects with Cuba's West African oral and musical traditions, in which particular forms of expression also served as tools of public entertainment and as sources of community information and social critique.

Second, the revolution's investment in a broadly based education system that would integrate cultural literacy into citizens' training seems to have empowered Cuban citizens ideologically by providing them with the tools to understand multiple aspects of human expression. Cuban citizens have also been encouraged to develop a critical understanding of their particular historical and cultural context. Cuba's artistic

aficionados movement (amateur cultural movement) and literacy campaigns were key elements in socializing Cuban culture. These educational and artistic programs enabled more Cubans to present their experiences and their ideas through a broad range of newly legitimated, expressive tools. Because of the socialization of culture, more Cuban citizens are able to understand and interpret social critique through multiple modes of human expression, even while the Communist Party has come to dominate economic and state discourse.

Third, the emergence of Cuba's contemporary cultural sphere has its origins in Cuba's pre-revolutionary history. It began to take an ideological and institutionalized form beginning with Cuba's post-1959 national debates concerning the government and the role of culture in the larger public sphere. This debate occurred between those who could be described as "followers of Che"<sup>9</sup> – actors for whom there is never a justification for sacrificing any form of human freedom or expression, versus self-interested politicians who used the Soviet Union's discursive and economic power to influence state policy as a means to pursue political goals -- this group includes the anti-U.S. American reactionary elements who feared a U.S. American invasion. (Howe 1995, 2004). While I refer to the first group as "utopian," I refer to this second group as "Soviet," "hard-liner," or "Soviet hard-liner" elements.

In his speech "*Palabras a los intelectuales*" at the National Library in 1961, Fidel Castro outlined the revolutionary policy towards Cuban culture which would endure until

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<sup>9</sup> Using the term "followers of Che" does not mean that people who share the utopian ideals of the Cuban revolution are in complete agreement with all of Che Guevara's ideas. It is important to note that Che Guevara was staunchly homophobic - see José Quiroga, *Tropics of Desire* (2000). The term refers to the utopian ideology that Che Guevara has come to represent on and off the island. In Cuba, discussions of "Che" and the "vision of Che," seem to be a way in which people differentiate between the utopian ideals that emerged during the early years of the revolution, and what the contemporary state (circa 1971 to 1998) has come to be.

the late 1970s and early 1980s. Culture was an important site for instituting and maintaining social change. Much of the revolution's approach to culture was based on a tenuous debate within the revolutionary ranks over what Marx meant when he argued that the capitalist mode of production survived through the reproduction of its social conditions. These debates were very much influenced by Gramscian, Guevarian and Martían ideologies that were critical of European modernism (Chanan 2000).

By focusing on culture, the revolution sought to end the reproduction of the social conditions believed to be a manifestation of the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo 2000). However, there was disagreement among leaders about how to go about achieving this goal of social equality: should there be a material-based approach to ending social inequality, while maintaining control over discourses through the revolutionary vanguard by which should the Communist Party, through the domination of the state, would work to eliminate what the Party called the "capitalist mentality"? This option assumed that control would allow time for the natural evolution of Cuban citizens to a communist consciousness (i.e., modernist Soviet discourse).

Central to this debate was whether the state should monitor critical discourses as a means of protecting the country from terrorist attacks, or if the cultural sphere should remain an open space of discussion and critique, so that social issues could be continuously recognized and addressed. The latter, Che Guevara argued, would allow the revolution to be a continuous process wherein potentially harmful discourses would be challenged by emergent, organic discourses in favor of socially progressive ideological change (Guevara 1965).

Nonetheless, during much of Cuba's Soviet years, the result of these debates was

more or less that the hard-liners of the revolutionary government sought to incorporate counter-discourses into hegemonic revolutionary discourse. The strategy reflected revolutionary leaders' awareness of culture's insurrectionary potential; it also derived from reactionary elements' ability to argue persuasively that *any* negative social critique, even in the realm of culture, could be used as a justification for U.S. American intervention. After the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion, Cuba's Soviet-inspired hard-liners gained political strength as their utopian counterparts could not guarantee Cuba's independence without Soviet support. Importantly, however, the government's attempts to homogenize discourse did not occur without serious challenges and state concessions.

Regardless of where one stood on the debate, whether one supported the control of public debate as a means to limit critique, or the incorporation of independently-produced discourses as a means of ensuring a socialized approach to social change, it was clear that the cultural sphere was to be a contested site in which highly contentious issues would be debated among everyday Cuban citizens, and between citizens and the State. Through continuous struggles against state intrusion, Cuban citizens have been able to maintain the cultural sphere as a realm in which they can develop and deploy their own discourses through critique and reason. I argue in this dissertation that it is the form and function of the emergent cultural sphere in Cuba, combined with an institutionalized system of grassroots activism that is Cuba's unique contribution to global discourses of socialism and to theories of anti-colonial and anti-modernist forms of social change.

## **Chapter II**

### **Methodology**

Russell Simmons once noted that hip-hop was about doing the unexpected. That unexpectedness constitutes the par excellence feature of hybridity: unexpected encounters lead to unexpected productions.

- Imani Perry (2004, 13)

When I first began going to Cuba in 1998, I did not know about grounded theory, nor had I learned about qualitative research methods. As a senior at St. Mary's College of Maryland, I had taken the mandatory social science research course, which centered on multivariate statistics. During my senior year, St. Mary's College began a pilot run of its "St. Mary's Project" – a senior thesis program. For one academic year, a student could work closely with a faculty member as a mentor, develop a research agenda, and turn in a senior thesis at the end of the academic year. I decided to fulfill a long-standing dream of going to Cuba. Before discussing my research agenda and the methods that I undertook to complete my research, I would first like to start with some background about why I became interested in Cuba, and why I decided, at first unknowingly, to take a grounded theory approach to my doctoral research.

#### **2.1 Background**

Growing up during the 1980s, I remember my uncle telling me about the accomplishments of Fidel Castro. Castro was someone he greatly respected because he



“stood up” to the United States and helped to end discrimination against Blacks in Cuba. For my uncle, Cuba was the best place for Blacks to live because, according to him, it was a Black man’s country run by a Black man. I have often heard my uncle, rappers, and politicized African-American intellectuals make similar comments. I wondered if Cuba was as racially integrated as my uncle professed. When I had the opportunity to visit Cuba as an undergraduate in March of 1998, I immediately took advantage of the offer.

In the process of finishing my dissertation, I realized how fortunate I was back at St. Mary’s. My advisor was a good friend of the internationally-renowned Cuban scholar and writer Miguel Barnet, the director of the Fernando Ortiz Foundation. My advisor also prepared me for doing research on ‘sensitive’ topics in Cuba: the first thing he told me was, “If you want to do any work on contemporary race issues in Cuba, you have to frame it either historically, or within the realm of culture.” Taking his advice (at that age I did not think to ask why this was the case), I framed my project as a study of Afro-Cuban culture in pre-revolutionary Cuba. In the field, I enjoyed my day-to-day interactions with Cuban citizens and I did not experience any harassment from the Cuban state. I met many renowned Cuban and foreign academics such as Aline Helg and Tomás Fernández Robaina at conferences and symposia. I moved through my research “space” fairly easily. However, the harassment that I did face in my daily experiences in Cuba related to racism from both Cubans and foreigners.

With regard to my work, I felt comfortable in being open about what I was there to study, and people were very open in addressing any question that I asked about racism. In reflecting back, I believe it is quite possible that part of the openness was a result of

the time period, the end of the Special Period; there had been a considerable amount of ideological opening within Cuba's cultural institutions, in comparison to the 1970s.

Another factor, which I will discuss later, might also have been my own personality and the way in which I conducted myself in the field.

During my week and a half in Cuba, I was able to attend several conferences about Afro-Cuban topics. When I returned to St. Mary's College, I began to process my experience in Cuba and to go over some of my notes from the trip and the literature I had read as part of my literature review. In 1998, there were few print materials that focused on contemporary life in Cuba. Much of the material based its analysis on events that took place between 1965 and 1980. Materials about the tremendous amount of change occurring during the Special Period had yet to be published. Much of the literature I had read described a repressive country, but from my experiences there, I was not quite clear on how problems within Cuba were particular to the state, and which issues pertained to racism.

What I did know was that the published accounts of social inequality and race, did not explain many of my experiences in Cuba. I decided after that first trip in 1998 that, once I began a graduate program, I would try to go to Cuba as often as I could in order to focus on understanding the issue of race, so that by the time I arrived at the dissertation stage, I could develop a research project based on my own familiarity with life on the island. A year later, in 1999, I started a master's program in Public Policy, and, true to my commitment, I went to Cuba again. I continued to go to Havana specifically, one to two times a year from 1998 2006 (excluding 1999 and 2002). During these trips to

Havana, little did I know that I was actually laying the foundation for what Kathy Charmaz (2005) describes as “constructivist grounded theory.”

## **2.2 Developing a Research Agenda**

Grounded theory is a method of inquiry in which the researcher goes into the field with a set of analytic guidelines. This enables researchers to focus on data collection while building theories through various levels of data analysis and conceptual development (Charmaz 2005). Some of the benefits of taking a grounded theory approach are that it encourages the researcher to remain close to the worlds that they study, and helps them to develop an integrated set of theoretical concepts through synthesizing and interpreting their data while they collect it. Grounded theory also establishes the procedural relationship between data collection and analysis in which both processes inform each other.<sup>10</sup>

Charmaz further argues that grounded research offers particular insights and benefits for scholars working on social justice projects. Citing Feagin (1999), Charmaz describes social justice as an area which focuses on “furthering the equitable distribution of resources, fairness, and eradication of oppression” (507). A social justice approach describes a goal of research: one in which the researcher contributes to established bodies of literature in the hopes of improving social life in one’s own social context, as well as in the context where one is working. My own orientation towards social-justice-based research is linked to my identity as a Black, American woman from the southern U.S.,

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<sup>10</sup> I draw here on Charmaz’s description of data as a term that: “Symbolizes (a) a fund of empirical materials that we systematically collect and assemble to acquire knowledge about a topic and (b) an acknowledgement that qualitative resources hold equal significance for studying empirical reality as quantitative measures, although they differ in kind (2003, 530).

who is also a member of the U.S. hip-hop Generation. Bakari Kitwana (2002) describes the hip-hop generation as follows:

*The Hip-Hop Generation* explores new attitudes and beliefs of young Blacks, examines where we are going, and analyzes the sociopolitical forces that have shaped us...During the mid-1990s, as head editor of *The Source: the magazine of hip-hop music culture and politics*, I began to use the term 'the hip-hop generation' to define our generation...In response [to the usage of the term Generation X], those of us at *The Source* began to use the phrase "the hip-hop generation" to refer to our specific generation. It was our attempt to bring critical focus to the issues that defined our time and that went beyond simply rap music. I have established the birth years 1965-1984 as the age group for the hip-hop generation. However, those at the end of the civil rights/Black power generation were essentially the ones who gave birth to the hip-hop movement that came to define the hip-hop generation, even though they are not technically the hip-hop generation' (2002, xiii).

Kitwana argues that hip-hop is the major achievement of our generation. It is the means by which our generation has identified and discussed the race-related social issues that we still face. Through hip-hop, we have been able, at the ideological level, to address many of these issues, while working as professionals or communicating across class and educational lines -- without suffering the institutional backlash that the civil rights and Black Nationalist movements faced in the 1960s. Hip-hop is a product of the benefits of the civil rights and Black Nationalist struggles, as members of the hip-hop generation enjoy access to a class mobility that was not available to their parents. However it is also a product of some losses and unfulfilled promises, such as the loss of affirmative action and the continued lack of opportunities for poor Blacks. In her analysis of youth of color in San Francisco, Adrianna Clay (2006) offers an empirical analysis of how hip-hop has come to shape the political consciousness of post-civil-rights-era youth. For Clay, the critical social messages in socially conscious hip-hop encouraged youth to think about their own oppression, and imagine ways to work for social equality.

I would describe my research process in the field as having three phases. I will briefly describe each phase and then give detailed examples. The first phase was just

trying to understand the context. I literally just hung out and moved through space; my goal was simply to learn how to navigate Havana by myself. I used my time at the Fernando Ortiz Foundation during the first trip to learn more about Cuban history and culture, but from the perspective of Cuban scholars and academics. From 1998 to 2003, I frequently went to the island to attend conferences and to work independently. Interestingly, the Cuban-run conferences were moments in which people would just ‘talk’ about social issues affecting them, when they felt safe among conference participants and/or when no foreigners were present. Another space for critical discussions was the Cuban peso-taxi rides. Some days, I simply rode in the taxis, just to hear what people were talking about. The rides totaled about 1500. In the crowded Cuban peso taxis one learns a lot about current events, contemporary social issues, and how people feel about them.

The second phase involved conceptualizing the project. This occurred during the 2003-2005 period. Once I felt that I could at least navigate the space, and that I was familiar with the relevant scholars who worked on race in Cuba, I sat down with them and asked them what type of project they would like me, as a foreigner, to undertake. Again, such a question involves being aware of one’s context and the internal dynamics of doing research in Cuba. This process of building the project from data and experiences in the field is what Charmaz (2005) describes as “constructivist grounded theory.” The third and final phase is using grounded theory methods to conduct research. I utilized grounded theory methodology for the basis of this dissertation.

### **2.3 Phase One**

Cuba has remained a highly politicized place to conduct fieldwork, though perhaps less so in very recent years. Within the U.S. American academy, much work on Cuba has been forced into a repressive vs. non-repressive paradigm that is reflective of U.S. Cold War politics. Within the social sciences, Cuba is marked as a particularly dangerous place to do empirical work. Studying topics related to race, gender, or sexuality in Cuba is considered particularly risky. Nonetheless, U.S. Americans have flooded Havana, in particular, as a field site. Locals there have grown used to frightened researchers from the U.S. who has arrived to experience or witness “the repression.”

This situation, combined with the politicized environment surrounding U.S. American policy towards Cuba, has resulted in a limited understanding of life in Cuba. These limitations also affect the perspective taken by the researcher (Brock and Castañeda Fuetes 1998; Fosado 2004; Lee 1993). As Lee (1993) writes:

...because only a relatively narrow range of information about Cuba is available, government officials<sup>11</sup> become de facto “experts” on the Cuban situation. It is these officials who then shape important aspects of the political and media agenda surrounding US-Cuban relations. By shaping knowledge production about Cubans in this way, government sources re-enforce state power. (Lee 1993, 22)

In essence, until the late 1990s, the politicized environment of U.S. American research on Cuba encouraged the production of academic work that often lacked the type of critical analysis needed to prevent the constant recycling of a state-centric U.S. American standpoint that implicitly equates life in Cuba to life in the eastern bloc during the time of the Soviet Union. My ability to collect data in Cuba was related to five key aspects of my self-presentation as a researcher in Cuba. They are:

- 1) My ability to pass as Cuban. This was a comment I heard almost daily. Friends and colleagues often commented that my appearance was the only reason why they felt comfortable taking me to places where foreigners were normally hustled

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<sup>11</sup> The same could be said, I would argue, for the few researchers who complete work on contemporary Cuba.

out or simply not present. Since I “passed,” they often commented, it decreased the likelihood that I would be harassed, that they would be arrested, or that I’d have to pay the “foreigner price” to enter events.

- 2) My tendency to learn as much as I could about a given situation before acting or speaking. According to colleagues, they liked taking me out and about because I knew “when to be quiet.”
- 3) My self-presentation as an educated Black woman. Professional Blacks often commented that they felt that they had to work twice as hard as Whites to get ahead. By working so hard myself (learning Spanish, going to do archival research everyday), professional Blacks related to me and felt that I could be taken seriously.
- 4) Finally, my self-presentation as American (when appropriate) helped me to have a limited pass among White Cubans.

### Passing as Cuban

In 2003, I remember waiting at the corner of Hotel Inglaterra, in Central Havana.

There’s an area where Cuban taxis stopped to pick up Cubans heading to El Vedado. It was late. I had just had a great time with some friends, I was tired, and I knew at this hour, you needed to wait a long time for a taxi. Ten minutes went by. “La Linea?” I asked, as the taxi drove by the corner. “No!” Those of us waiting for taxis heading along La Linea, a bus route, did not bother running to the taxi. We let the others have it. There were only a few of us. There were about five to six people waiting for taxis. All of them took the taxi, I waited. Another taxi drove by and yelled, “La Linea!” The three of us ran to the taxi and jumped in.

I sat in the back seat of the small Russian Lada. The car was super-small; which two people, the driver and passenger, were crammed into the front of the car. I sat in the back seat that could hold three thin persons, if they crowded into the car. Tonight, the taxi driver was sitting with his son who was about seventeen or eighteen. He was showing his son his taxi route. My two co-occupants in the back were two young men, who seemed to be friends. They were dark-skinned, but had straight, short hair that was gelled back on the sides, and curly on top. It was three o’clock in the morning and they

were still wearing sunglasses. They had on tight spandex Black shirts and really nice jeans-- Calvin Klein. They were really excited.

“You see what I did?!” The one said to the other. “No, how did you do that?” The friend asked. The one then said, “Well, if you are going to try to meet tourists you have to know how to talk to them in their language. For example, first you say, ‘Speakie English?’ Then if they keep walking, next try Italian.” He imitated a greeting in Italian. I believe they had this conversation in front of me because they thought I was Cuban. From my experiences taking taxis, Cubans tend to be quiet when a foreigner is in the car, or they code switch. They rarely talk about foreigners when they know one is sitting in the car.

There are several factors that I attribute to my ability to “pass.” One is that whenever I travel abroad, or even in the States, I do not wear a lot of jewelry. This was one of the first fieldwork strategies I learned as an undergraduate. Until one knows any country well, it is wise to not appear to be a rich tourist, I was told. The other factor is that I have a personal distaste for visible name-brand items. As a result, my style of dress seemed to correspond to “typical” dress for young Cuban adults. Additionally, I believe the class codes associated with my race also supported people’s assumption that I was Cuban. So that, for example, when I was out with a Black Cuban friend who wore brand-name clothing, people generally spoke to me in Spanish, and would address her in English. However, my status as American could also confer a class privilege that was akin to passing as White. As a result of all of these dynamics, I found my ability to move through space to be a function of how I performed certain identities.



For example, I was able to go to places where foreigners were not allowed, particularly during the 1998-2003 period. In fact, if I spoke, that was the only way people would be clued into what was going on. Sometimes if I hesitated, people would pause and get suspicious. I am not Cuban, so I clearly did not always understand what was going on, but I devised a strategy of getting through those situations in which I knew had missed some social cue or that I was supposed to respond to something, but I did not know what. What I did was to change my attitude, pretend that I just could not be bothered with the situation; in fact, I tried to seem as if I was just annoyed or slightly bothered by the fact I had to be present. It was something that I had noticed other people doing in line to get to events, or when they were just hanging out with friends. So, if, for example, I was at an event that was a primarily Cuban party and I wanted to get in with friends, I would deploy this attitude when things got a little difficult, and the person would settle down and let me pass. But whatever I did, I had to do it in silence because the moment I spoke, the performance was over.

Once I identified these dynamics, I could choose when to perform “U.S. American tourist” – a role that allowed certain privileges in some situations, and when to be quiet, moving easily through Cuban space. In short, I played with these dynamics as a means of trying to understand how power worked within Havana social space, at least. For example, when hanging out with a group of Black Cubans, if we were not permitted to enter into a restaurant, or if we were stopped by the police, I would get a knowing glance from friends. These were moments where I knew not to say anything, because everyone would get into trouble. These were moments of convergence with Black Cuban colleagues: it had gotten to the point where I started experiencing racial discrimination

too, when folks were not aware of my status as U.S. “American.” It was during those moments afterwards, when colleagues and I critically compared “Black” or “Black woman” experiences, that I was able to learn more about the particular experiences of Black Cuban women. These experiences made my ethnographic field notes a very important part of my data.

Because I am not Cuban, when something happened, there would be a follow-up discussion in which we all compared notes. For colleagues who could not travel outside of Cuba but wanted to do so, our interactions became an opportunity for them to engage with someone from another social context; they wanted to know how issues of racism, sexism and homophobia affected my life in the United States. Sometimes folks wanted to know if some situations happened in the U.S., and if so, how racial situations went down in a U.S. American context. It was during those moments that *I* felt that there was truly an exchange.

## **2.4 Phase Two**

As a result of my experiences on the island, I started realizing some of the limits of pre-existing research on everyday life in Cuba. The problem of race in contemporary Cuba has yet to be addressed in an empirically-based, ethnographic account that includes considerations such as current SES indicators, social perceptions, and accounts of lived experiences. There have been some articles and chapters in books that have addressed these issues, though in the case of book chapters in particular, the material is still largely framed within a Cold War paradigm. Even as recently as 2006, I have witnessed this discourse at play in the field.

There were many times, for example, that I witnessed U.S. Americans directly ask Cubans, “What is it like to live in a repressive society? You know, where you don’t have freedom to organize and freedom to speak?” This automatically sets the path for the discussion that will ensue. For many people, such questions indicate that the researcher is not there to learn about what it is like to be Black or poor in Cuba. It is a sign that the researcher has entered into the situation with a predetermined idea of what everyday life is like.

For Cuban citizens who spend their time focused on a myriad of issues affecting their everyday lives, direct questions about state repression almost amounts to an insult: they are expected to talk about the difficulties they face in everyday life, but the conversation is already set up to focus *only* on Castro and the Cuban state. Thus when an artist such as Alexay of Obsesión says, “Well actually things are not that bad in the way that you think...” his thoughts are ignored by the researcher who wants to find folks who will only discuss their lives as it relates to a pre-existing framework. For example, when Alexay expresses his ideas, the expectation that a researcher should interpret ‘what he really means’ in reference to a pre-existing assessment of social repression, could mean that some of the data available in his account of everyday life is ignored. As a result, folks outside of Cuba may not realize that the underground hip-hop movement is contesting the profound racism which continues to be so rampant in Cuban society, and that racially-based social censorship and social inequality have a significant impact on Black Cubans’ self-determination. It is for these reasons that I decided to undertake what Charmaz describes as “constructivist grounded theory.” She writes:

A constructivist grounded theory... adopts grounded theory guidelines as tools but does not subscribe to the objectivist, positivist assumptions in its earlier formations. A constructivist approach emphasizes the studied phenomenon rather than the methods of

studying it. Constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive stance on modes of knowing and representing studied life. That means giving close attention to empirical realities and our collected renderings of them - *and* locating oneself within those realities. It does not assume that data simply await discovery in an external world or that methodological procedures will correct limited views of the studied world. Nor does it assume that impartial observers enter the research scene without an interpretive frame of reference. Instead, what observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as the research context, their relationships with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording empirical materials. No qualitative method rests on pure induction-- the questions we ask of the empirical world frame what we know of it. In short, we share in constructing what we define as data. Similarly, our conceptual categories arise through our interpretations *of* data rather than emanating *from* them or from our methodological practices... Thus, our theoretical analyses are interpretive renderings of a reality, not objective reportings of it (Charmaz 2001, 509-510).

In this second phase, I had to learn how to determine what “data.” From the literature I had read, there seemed to be a dearth of data points and language in explaining everyday life in Cuba. Thus my goal during this period, now that I realized that there was something about race that affected Cuban citizens profoundly, was to learn how to identify data. In an effort to do this, I had one idea: knowing that I had some privilege as a U.S. American to ask certain difficult questions, and those Cuban academics would know more about their context, language, and social issues, I decided to undertake an informal survey among colleagues. I asked Cuban academics: if you could undertake an empirically-based research project on some aspect of social life in Cuba, what would you focus on? The answer that found the most resonance among the scholars I knew was a research project that focused on the experiences of Black lesbians.

The idea behind asking this question was based on a central commitment of mine - namely, that if I were to undertake a research project in Cuba, I would want to do something that would be of use to Cuban scholars. Unfortunately, social scientists who are foreigners often have more access, increased mobility, and greater resources to undertake research projects that could be deemed by the state to be “of interest” in one moment and “subversive” in another. Because foreigners can leave and publish outside

of Cuba, they have an ability and authority to speak that has been truncated within the Cuban academy since the 1970s. By talking with scholars and lesbian activists, I developed a research project that engaged my own interests of race, gender, sexuality, marginality, and social change; at the same time, though, folks knew I was at least attempting to undertake a project that would be relevant to Cuban scholars.

### **2.5 Phase Three**

I returned to Cuba in the fall of 2006 with a well-organized research project. I was prepared to work with Centro Nacional de Sexología y Educación CENESEX, however, my plan fell through as the organization was reeling from a dispute it was having with some researchers from a London-based university. I was left scrambling for a research institution. I could not establish an affiliation with one, however, and I had been told that such an affiliation was a requirement of researchers at the University of Michigan. I remembered chatting one day with a friend who is a researcher at the Fernando Ortiz Foundation. I was trying to decide whether or not to head back home when he stopped me and said, “Tanya, you’ve been here enough. You know the field. You don’t need us anymore. Why don’t you just start collecting interviews and finish already?”

I went back to my apartment and thought about what he had said. There actually was no mandate that one had to be affiliated with a research institution to finish fieldwork in Cuba; it was only suggested in terms of having access to institutions. I had an established relationship with independent researchers and scholars; I had a library card, so I could obtain whatever archival data I needed for my work. But I also needed to think through the questions that would guide my research. I had a hard time finding a

cohesive lesbian community and I knew that this would be important for my research.

It was later that night when it clicked. I should return to my focus on culture. I remembered my undergraduate experience and began to wonder what it was about culture that was so interesting in this context. Also, I knew that the absence of a lesbian community, in comparison to the ever-present gay male community, was an important piece of data as well. However, when looking back over some of my field notes, I realized that much of the public social critique that I had been hearing actually came from my peers in the underground hip-hop movement. Some of the folks I had interviewed for the initial graduate project focusing on Cuban lesbian life were key figures and active participants in the underground hip-hop movement. During my time outside of the library and formal research structures, I had frequented hip-hop shows and underground lesbian parties since 1998. I maintained field notes during those years which have come to serve me well during the dissertation-writing phase.

It was then that I decided to shift to framing my questions within the realm of culture. I wanted to know how the artists who talked about issues such as race, gender, and sexuality thought of these issues within a Cuban context. I also wanted to understand more about the context in which these critiques emerged. When I discussed the change (or rather the return) to my focus on race, culture, and social change, many of the established scholars I worked with pointed me to articles, posed questions, and helped to point me in the direction of data. It was through their help that I was able to piece together some of what I was noticing and experiencing in the field. The result of this work is presented in this dissertation.

## **2.6 Data Collection**

Much of my ethnographic data is centered on Havana, supplemented with brief visits (three to five days) to Camagüey, Holguín, Santa Clara, and Trinidad. The formal interview data is drawn from interviews with hip-hop artists (N=20; nine women, eleven men), Cuban Agency of Rap Officials (President and Vice President), prominent musicologists (such as Maria Teresa Linares), and academics in the field of cultural studies/music (N=10) from 2004-2006. My empirical data also included archival research and textual analysis. My focus on the cultural sphere is a result of my field trips from 2000-2004, in which I used a grounded theory approach to learning about the social concerns of contemporary Cuban citizens. I initially focused on the topic of racism in contemporary Cuba, and I worked with prominent scholars in this area. I worked with researchers and intellectuals who work independently and/or at independent research institutes, such as la Fundación Fernando Ortiz, la Escuela de Cine en San Antonio de los Baños and la Biblioteca Nacional, to state institutions such as the University of Havana, the Ministry of Culture, and the National Center for Sex Education.

These were in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted in Havana during the years of 2004-2006. The interviews lasted two to three hours each. The interviews were a formal opportunity to ask artists about their work. Since their work is centered on everyday lived experiences, the interviews also served as an opportunity to clarify questions I had concerning their (and my own) experiences with racism, material inequality, sexism, and homophobia in Cuba. One of the strengths of my study was that it was semi-longitudinal. I had been going to Cuba for six years before I began the interviewing in 2004. By the time I completed my study in 2007, I had been going to Cuba for nine years.

When I interviewed the artists, I tried to make it as clear as I could that I was sincerely interested in hearing about their thoughts. I did not want to fall into the trap of previous researchers who just came demanding answers to questions they felt were important in learning about Cuba. In contrast, I tried to present themes that I thought seemed important to the context. I tried to frame the questions in a way that would encourage the artists to talk about what was important to them, and that would enable me to learn about their work and their reasons for becoming hip-hop artists. I started every interview by explaining, “Sometimes I may ask a question that seems like a stupid question, but I am asking because sometimes I really just don’t know since I am not from here.” When I asked a question about specific topics, I tried to phrase the questions in the following ways: “*Alguna gente dice...*” (Some say that...) or “*Me aparece que...*” (It seems to me that...) “*No sé si estoy pensando bien sobre ese tema pero...*” (I don’t know if I am thinking about this topic well but...)



The other thing that I did was to hand the interviewee my digital recorder. If they had never used that kind of recorder before (every digital recorder seems to have its own special format), I pointed out how to record, stop, rewind, and erase materials. I told each artist, “Pretend this is your mic. Say what you want when you want. If there’s a point you want to make off record, turn it off, make your point and start it again. If you say something you want erased, erase it.”

In January 2006, for example, I interviewed Alexay of the underground hip-hop group Obsesión. “OK, here you go,” I said, as I handed the recorder to Alexay. The recorder was small, slender, Black, and palm-sized. It was long enough for someone to wrap their hands around it, as if holding a microphone and, in fact, the actual microphone was on the top of the recorder, not on the side. “This is your mic,” I said to Alexay. “Here is the pause button.” (The pause button was tiny. One had to make an effort to search the thing out on the machine and then press it.) “So this is how we’ll do the interview. This recorder is your mic. If there is a question you don’t want to answer, don’t answer it. If you *do* want to answer the question, but don’t want it recorded, just hit pause, say your piece, and then start the recorder again. Is that cool?” “Yeah,” Alexay said. “Cool. So Alexay, what’s your history with hip-hop?” I asked. Alexay smiled, sat back on his sofa, crossed his leg, hit the record button, and started talking.

I also asked the artists to pick where they wanted to have their interview. One of the good things about the hand-held digital recorder is that we could walk through the neighborhood, look at graffiti, and really just talk easily. I found that giving the recorder over, and giving the interviewee control over the recording of information, made a big

difference in the types of responses I received from folks. They seemed to feel comfortable.

I have constructed the following data chart to highlight the various kinds of data I collected and how I collected it.

**Figure 2a: Sample**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Method of Collection</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Dates Collected</b>	<b>Description/ Research Method</b>
Newspaper Articles About Cuban hip-hop	Archival Research at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí	150 articles	2005	Photocopies and notes from microfilm and original materials.
Newspaper Articles about Rock	Archival Research at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí	50	2005	Collected data from the years 1995-2005
Newspaper Articles about Nueva Trova	Archival Research at the Biblioteca Nacional José Martí	50	2005	Collected data from the years 1995-2005
Interview Data	Digital Recording	20 interviewees: 11 men, 9 women (ages 23-28)	2005-2006	2-3 hour semi structured, in-depth interviews with hip-hop artists

<b>Data</b>	<b>Method of Collection</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Dates Collected</b>	<b>Description/ Research Method</b>
Interview Data	Digital Recording	10 (8 women, 2 men age unknown)	2005-2006	2-3 hour semi structured, in-depth interviews with scholars and Ministry of Culture officials
Taxi Rides Ethnographic Data	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 1500	1998-2006	Field Notes
Queer Sites Ethnographic Data	Participant observation	n/a	1998-2006	Field Notes
Underground Lesbian Parties	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 35	1998-2006	Field Notes
Underground hip-hop Shows	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 20	2003-2006	Field Notes
Rock Shows	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 10	2004-2006	Field Notes
Nueva Trova Shows	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 8	2005-2006	Field Notes
Fusion Shows	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 8	2005-2006	Field Notes
hip-hop After Parties	Participant observation	n <sub>≥</sub> 30	2002-2006	Field Notes
Unpublished Manuscripts and Unpublished Survey Data Results	“Asocio” Scholars and Independent Researchers	n <sub>≥</sub> 45 materials (articles, power point documents, dissertations)	2000-2006	Print materials/CDs/f lash drives

<b>Data</b>	<b>Method of Collection</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Dates Collected</b>	<b>Description/ Research Method</b>
Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual CENESEX	Video	2 hrs	2004	Arranged an independent conference with sexology researchers and a student from the University of Illinois-Champaign Urbana graduate student

My discussion of hip-hop is limited to Havana. I acknowledge that Havana is not all of Cuba. However, I do hope that my work will broaden the language and perspectives used to analyze Cuba. I hope my work will provide an opening for scholars, artists, and intellectuals whose work focuses on millions of people living in cities and provinces outside of Havana. Within these chapters, I will draw upon interviews with artists, my own experiences on the island, and textual analyses of the music of several artists. This will be useful in addressing areas of everyday lived experiences that have been commonly critiqued -- those areas concerning people's experiences with race, gender and sexuality -- and in thinking critically about their implications for theories of social change.

# Section I

## Chapter III

### **Public Spaces, Cultural Spheres: Rethinking Theories of Political Participation, Civil Society and Social Change**

In this chapter, I focus on the question of whether cultural movements, particularly music movements, are social movements –whether they serve to relink art and culture to processes of democratic deliberation in ways that can have direct influence on state policies and social life. I focus on music because culture is one area in which differences in notions of democratic political participation and social change within “the West” elucidate the continued struggle against the legacies of colonialism. To this end, I analyze one of the hegemonic ideologies of social order and political processes: what constitutes legitimate political participation in terms of practice and location. I consider the relationship of social movements to notions of the public sphere and civil society, and how art worlds and artistic and cultural movements have been delegitimized as authentic political practices that cannot achieve policy change as a central goal.

Within Western discourse, hegemonic notions of political participation and social change have been used largely to promote social advancement and “civilizing practices” – in short, modernity. I focus on civil society and the public sphere in order to frame hegemonic ideologies concerning political participation and social change. My

investment in social change is based on a notion of social justice -- I believe thinking about social change can help to think about actions people can undertake to end inequality. To this end, I will discuss the key elements of the U.S. American and European epistemology of social equality and governance. Margaret Somers refers to this as the “Anglo-American metanarrative of citizenship.” In order to address how this epistemology affects contemporary neoliberal discourses and neoliberal analyses of Cuba and Latin America generally, I will consider some critiques of neoliberal notions of equality and government. Finally, in order to provide some context for how these issues play out at the local level in Cuba, I will explore literature and films that analyze everyday life in Cuba since the revolution. These offer an important point of departure for analyzing social issues, specifically race, gender, and sexuality.

### **3.1: Subaltern Critiques of Cold War Politics**

The goal of this literature review is to contribute to the robust analysis of life in Cuba that has emerged during the last ten years (Chanan 2000, Fernandes 2006, Moore 2007). This body of literature works to reconnect pre-revolutionary culture to post-1959 social life and political processes. Because of the intensity of Cuban-American politics as well as U.S. American Cold War politics, the intense focus on the non-democratic aspects of the contemporary Cuban state has yielded a skewed view of everyday life before and after the revolution. Life in post-1959 Cuba has often been presented as estranged from pre-revolutionary social life. From the 1970s to the late 1990s, there was little discussion of the various ideological influences that culminated into the 1959 Revolution. David Craven (2002) writes the following about James Petras’ assessment of the particular socio-historical context of the Cuban Revolution:

The uniqueness of the Cuban Revolution after 1950 was a consequence of Cuba's uniquely underdeveloped situation before the 1950's. No one has explained more deftly, than James Petras, the unusual circumstances that allowed the Cuban Revolution to chart "unknown" terrain throughout the Americas. He did so in terms of workplace democracy, cultural democracy, and popular democracy: "Cuba was the last country to overthrow Spanish colonialism--- and the first to encounter U.S. imperial aspirations. In the 1930's, Cuba became the first country in the Western Hemisphere in which workers temporarily established soviets. It was the first country under the Good Neighbor Policy to have its government overthrown by the U.S. policy-makers without the direct use of U.S. military force.... Cuba thus came into the modern period with two political experiences, which profoundly shaped its political development: an aborted national revolution and an aborted social revolution... The Cuban Revolution of 1959 telescoped both phases of Cuban history: the national revolution merged and, under the conditions of twentieth-century capitalism, produced a socialist revolution. Failing to complete the struggle against nineteenth-century colonialism, Cuba was the first Latin American country to succeed in overthrowing twentieth-century imperialism, lacking a bourgeois revolution led by an entrepreneurial puritan elite. Cuba experienced a social revolution by which prepared the way for realizing the goals of a highly productive developing society guided by a collectivist ethic... For both reasons, the Cuban Revolution from the beginning took shape as a mass social revolution..." As such, the Cuban Revolution became the over-determined historical juncture at which these postponed developments were first able to re-emerge, converge, and be realized independently. (91-92)

Cuba was never able to achieve independence long enough to develop a solid bourgeois class, and meanwhile, much of the nation, particularly outside of Havana, remained impoverished. Cuba's incomplete social revolutions and independence movements of the nineteenth century merged with Cuba's twentieth-century experience with neocolonialism, constant economic instability, and the Cold War to yield what was to be named a socialist revolution.

Before Castro's announcement that Cuba was a communist revolution, Cuban political leaders had been openly skeptical of European socialism. While it is true that Cuba had an alliance with the Soviet Union, it was just that-- an alliance (Vitier 2002, Craven 2002, Camnitzer 2003). Where the Soviets expected to find an ideological vacuum waiting to be filled by Soviet-style socialism, they found instead a history of revolutionary thought ranging from Simón Bolívar, to Marcus Garvey, to Antonio Maceo, to José Martí, to Che Guevara (Thomas 1971, Fernandez Robaina 1998, Vitier 2002). In essence, at the onset of the strategic alliance with Cuba, the Soviets

encountered a revolutionized citizenry with its own history and ideas concerning what constituted socialist revolution, democracy, nation, and human emancipation.

These ideals are centered on the ethical and political principles of José Martí -- namely, “anti-imperialism, solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, the ‘Republic of the workers,’ ‘the integral exercise of self, and the respect, as a kind of family honor, for the integral well-being of others’” (Vitier 2002, 251). These Martían ideals are compatible with the ideals of socialism, but not completely compatible with the ideals of *Soviet* socialism.

Cuba’s socialist project differed from the Soviet project in a number of ways. The Soviet project was a colonial project: the Russian state dominated the political, economic, and cultural life of the Eastern Bloc. Additionally, the Russian revolution did not emerge in response to Western European colonialism (of which capitalism was a keystone). It emerged as a result of internal economic dynamics that resulted in the overthrow of an indigenous hegemonic power, the monarchy. Latin American leaders such as Che Guevara theorized about the need to correct the “colonial mentality,” or the set of habits and interests developed under colonialism, and late capitalism (neocolonialism) (Guevara 1965). This focus on the colonial mentality was seen as a means of reviving the egalitarian and communitarian nature of people. Another aspect of Che’s work that distinguished him from his post-colonial and Soviet peers is that he was skeptical of adopting any form of capitalist instrument as a means of undertaking a social(ist) revolution. In *Man and Socialism in Cuba* (1965) Che Guevara rejects “the commodity as the economic cell, [and] profitability, individual material interests as a lever” (Guevara 1965). In this statement Che criticizes the Soviet Union. The repressive



nature of the Soviets and their prioritization of the economic as a means of human development at the expense of freedom of expression was something of which Che and numerous leaders in the global south were very critical.

Che's ambivalence towards capitalism and the world economy was a response to U.S. economic and military preeminence in the region as a neocolonial power. One only has to consider Cuba's 1902-1959 position within the region as an example. Following the U.S. American occupation in 1902, as a result of the Spanish American War, Cuba's position was hardly that of a sovereign state. Through the Platt Amendment (1901), Cuba was to be forever dominated by the will of the United States. Because of its economic dependence on the U.S., it was Washington, not Havana that dictated much of Cuba's internal and external political agenda. Here are some excerpts from the transcript of the Platt Amendment (1901):

Article III. The Government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty, and for discharging the obligations with respect to Cuba imposed by the Treaty of Paris on the United States, now to be assumed and undertaken by the Government of Cuba.

Article IV. That all Acts of the United States in Cuba during its military occupancy thereof are ratified and validated, and all lawful rights acquired there under shall be maintained and protected.

Article VII. That to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States lands necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points to be agreed upon with the President of the United States.

VIII. That by way of further assurance the government of Cuba will embody the foregoing provisions in a permanent treaty with the United States.

While the United States dominated Cuba economically, politically, and culturally, there were several facets of this relationship that sowed the seeds for the 1959 Revolution. The first is that the United States invaded Cuba just as it was about to win its independence from Spain. There was resentment on the part of Cuban leaders, particularly Cuba's elite leadership of color, about Cuba's inability to continue the pursuit of its own destiny.

Notably, the U.S.' racist social policy excluded Cuba's population of color, which excluded the majority of the Island's population from equal participation in Cuba's public sphere. Cuba's minority White population initially welcomed the U.S. American intervention since they still feared that Cuba's large population of color would revolt and establish a Black republic similar to Haiti. However, as the island's poverty increased, the United States supported dictatorships whose rule produced increasing civil unrest.

What also makes Cuba's project different from the Soviet project is that Cuba's revolutionary ideology is an emergent discourse that has its basis in pan-American revolutionary ideology, as well as in Enlightenment notions of civic republicanism. American thinkers such as Cuba's national hero José Martí, the Venezuelan Simón Bolívar, Antonio Gramsci, and Che Guevara have had *more* of an influence on the ideological development of political leaders within Cuba than figures such as Karl Marx. Additionally, Cuba's Black and Mulato population, during the colonial and pre-revolutionary period, were very much involved in the intellectual exchanges occurring with the United States South and the Caribbean. In addition to Marcus Garvey, other leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Toussaint L'Ouverture, Michael Manley, and Malcolm X have influenced Cuban ideologies concerning revolution, social change, racial identity, and equality. Thus Marxist ideology is but one of numerous ideologies which Cuban academics, intellectuals, and politicians have integrated in their ideological development.

Additionally, Cuban thinkers did not uncritically analyze Marx and Engel's work. While Marxian thought was a key twentieth-century intervention into discussions of how societies are structured and how everyday life is reproduced in conditions of oppression

and inequality, Marx and Engels were not the only theorists and activists thinking about this problem even within European socialist traditions. Esther Allen writes the following about Cuba's national hero José Martí:

In the twenty-seven volumes of Martí's *Complete Works*, he mentions Karl Marx only twice outside of the following evocation of the famous memorial meeting in New York City: once in a citation from a French author that he copied into Notebook 8 and a second time in an article discussing the formation of trade unions in the United States, published in *La Nación* on February 20, 1890. There he wrote: 'Each nation finds its own cure, in keeping with its nature, which either requires varying doses of medicine, depending on whether this or that factor is present in the ailment--- or requires a different medicine. Neither Saint-Simon, nor Karl Marx, nor Marlo, nor Bakunin. Instead, the reforms that are best suited to our own bodies.' (Allen 2002; 130)

José Martí was skeptical of the ideological project of Marx and other influential thinkers from Europe's leftist radical traditions. While Martí respected the work of those thinkers for their particular contexts, he argued that their approaches should not be generalized to every context, especially the contexts of the Americas. In his piece "Tributes to Karl Marx, Who Has Died" (a eulogy given in New York City in 1883), José Martí wrote the following about the European socialist movement:

Through the gloomy taverns, boxing clubs, and dark streets the youthful throng makes its way with broad shoulders and hands like clubs, which can drain the life from a man as if draining the beer from a glass. But cities are like bodies; they have some noble viscera and some that are foul. And the angry army of workingmen is full of other soldiers, as well. There are some with broad foreheads, long disheveled hair, skin the color of straw, flashing eyes, and an air of rebellion about them, like a blade of Toledo steel: they are the ones who lead, mobilize, anathematize, publish newspapers, organize meetings, and speak. There are others with narrow foreheads, shaggy heads, prominent cheekbones, high color, and eyes that are motionless, as if doubting, hearing distant winds and scrutinizing, or that swell and become bloodshot, like the eyes of one who charges to attack: they are the patient and suffering multitude, who listen and hope. Some of them have become fanatics out of love, others are fanatics out of hatred. All that can be seen of some is their teeth... On these fields, the Frenchman does not hate the German or the German the Russian, nor does the Italian abominate the Austrian, for all are united in a shared hatred... The future must be conquered with clean hands. The workmen of the United States would be more prudent if the most aggrieved and enraged workmen of Europe were not emptying the dregs of their hatred into their ears. Germans, Frenchmen, and Russians guide these discussions. The Americans tend to resolve the concrete matter at hand in their meetings, while those from abroad raise it to an abstract plane. Good sense and the fact of having been born into a free cradle make the men of this place slow to wrath. The rage of those from abroad is roiling and explosive because their prolonged enslavement has repressed and concentrated it. But the rotten apple must not be allowed to spoil the whole healthy barrel - though it could! The excrescences of monarchy, which

rot and gnaw at Liberty's bosom like a poison, cannot match liberty's power! (Martí 2002, 130-131)

In this piece Martí describes the unity of the Europeans in their shared oppression: they have endured the longest slavery under tyrannical despots - the European monarchies. He stated that the German, the Frenchman, the Russian, the Italian and the Austrian have united in their shared frustrations. However, before Martí became critical of his European contemporaries, before his disillusionment with the United States, Martí warned the U.S. Americans not to let the Europeans' anger and hatred ruin the free society that they were building for themselves. For Martí, since the United States had overthrown the monarchy, the United States' national project developed differently than the national projects of their European counterparts. For Martí, the U.S. Americans had the freedom to reason and solve their issues through open, honest deliberation, and then to move on with policy making. Here he distinguished the European experience with feudalism, monarchy, and unfettered capitalism from the experiences of citizens in the U.S. in particular, and throughout the Americas more generally.

In later years, José Martí became disillusioned with the United States. He was appalled at the rampant racism directed towards Black citizens and Latinos. As a result Martí began to focus his writings on problems that were particular to Latin America, such as imperialism, possible U.S. neocolonialism, and the continuation of race-based slavery and its effects on the development of unified independent nations throughout the Americas. He noted the geographical, political, historical and corporeal differences of Europeans, U.S. Americans, and "Our Americans" (people from Latin America and the Caribbean). Given Martí's correspondence and the writings of other revolutionaries of the period, it seems that from the nation's beginnings, the Cuban analytical eye has been

turned inward in order to understand and address the problems it faced as an emerging nation, as well as to address the issues that other nations shared throughout the Americas.

In addition to his skepticism regarding European radical traditions, and his articulation of the specificity of the European experience, Martí also wrote about what he saw as U.S. America's emerging imperial ambitions. In his 1894 piece, *The Truth About the United States*, he wrote:

It is a mark of supine ignorance and childish, punishable light-mindedness to speak of the United States, and the real or apparent achievements of one of its regions or a group of them, as a total and equal nation of unanimous liberty and definitive achievements: such a United States is an illusion or a fraud. (Martí 2002, 330)

In this piece, Martí described the U.S. as a greedy, broken and wicked nation. Martí argues that the rest of the Americas should be aware of the U.S. as a failed nation, that the rest of the Americas should look to themselves to develop a free, just, and equal society. It was only by doing this, Martí argued, that "Our America" could defend itself against U.S. American imperialism. Thus, before the beginnings of the Cold War, or even the twentieth century, José Martí – in establishing some of the foundational discourses that have been claimed by every Cuban leader who has followed – expressed his rejection, disappointment, and distrust of the European socialist project and of U.S. American imperialism. Just two years after writing this, José Martí died in Cuba's second war of independence. Just two years after José Martí died, the United States would occupy Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines in what is considered the culmination of the contemporary U.S. American Empire. It is because of Martí's foresight that he is contemporarily referred to as the "Prophet" or the "Apostle" in Cuba.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, during the Cold War, political leaders such as Che Guevara and numerous leaders of post-colonial and neocolonial

societies expressed their own skepticism of Soviet and U.S. American imperialism and ideologies. The Soviets did not favor Fidel Castro and Che Guevara – the latter, in particular, was staunchly dismissive and critical of the Soviet project. After the Bay of Pigs, however, Cuba came to develop a strategic relationship with the Soviet Union in order to maintain Cuban political and economic security (Thomas 1971). Nonetheless, the tension between the Soviet Union’s socialist agenda, and the particular type of revolution emerging in Cuba did not cease as a result of this alignment with the Soviets.

One area where this tension between Soviet-influenced Cuban-socialist policy and indigenous Cuban ideals of anti-imperialism, self-defense, equality, and socialism is manifested is within the Cuban cultural sphere (Craven 2002, Navarro 2002, Camnitzer 2003). Within the post-1959 Cuban public sphere, there was worry about the possibility of invasion by the United States. This is often credited as the reason the revolution decided to ally itself with the Soviets (Thomas 1971, Vitier 2002, Craven 2002). Conservative, Soviet-supported hard-liners within the Cuban government often attempted to use this very real possibility as a means of imposing a Soviet-inspired economic and cultural agenda (Craven 2002, Vitier 2002). The 1961 prohibition of Saba Cabrera Infante’s film *P.M.*, for example, is one moment when these tensions culminated into the first public debate concerning Cuban-socialist policy (Castro 1961, Navarro 2002, Craven 2002). The question was posed, “What kind of revolution is this? One that supports freedom of expression, or one that censors it?”

Since the beginning of the revolution, civic freedom within Cuban society has been debated within the field of culture. During his 1961 speech, “Palabras a los intelectuales,” Fidel Castro outlined the revolutionary policy towards Cuban culture that

would endure until the late 1970s and early 1980s. Given the revolution's Martíán, Gramscian, and Marxist philosophical leanings, culture was an important site for instituting and maintaining social change (Chanan 2000, Martí 2002). Together, "Palabras a Los Intellectuales" and Che Guevara's "Socialism and Man in Cuba" are the two fundamental documents that framed cultural policy during the post-1950 period (Portuondo 1979).

### **3.2 Post-Socialist? Neocolonial? Republican Socialism? Reflections on Cuba's State Project**

What makes the Latin American variety of anti-modernism particular, in comparison to European and Asian anti-capitalist social movements, is Latin America's experience with U.S. neocolonialism. Cuba was one of the first countries to become the object of U.S. American imperial ambitions, and it is one of the first nations to articulate and enact an ideological challenge to what Fredric Jameson refers to as "late capitalism." In essence, there is an awareness of the cultural logics that are at the basis of European political and material interests.

Therefore, after five hundred years of coming to terms with the European modernist project, the peoples who have been displaced and disenfranchised by regional European capital center their critiques in two areas that have been at the core of their oppression: cultural and material disenfranchisement. Regionally-based European capital could not mobilize the threat of violence through the use of the same cultural logics it used to organize European populations for production: the colonial authorities were in a different geographical location and interacting with people who possessed a different world-view. For example, it is difficult to reward people with particular possessions when the underlying system of value is different. How does one privilege a few, so that

they will work harder, when one is interacting with a culture where one shares with one's community before monopolizing resources for oneself? Colonial authorities used large-scale violence to organize non-European peoples and their societies into a social order that the colonial authorities could recognize (Mbembe 2001). However, in order to further differentiate Cuba specifically, and the Caribbean and the Latin American region in general, from post-colonial/neocolonial societies in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, it is important to differentiate the post-socialist and the post-colonial from the neocolonial.

Post-socialist theory is an emerging body of literature which has developed within the European and U.S. American academies as a result of the ideological crisis the European Left faced after the fall of the Soviet Union. Post-socialist theorists are generally focused on analyzing the social changes in post-Soviet Eastern Europe.<sup>12</sup> The problem that many of these scholars face is the issue of generalizability. Their focus on the European socialist experiment and its dissolution is unable to account for the changes occurring throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Non-European socialist states and socialist movements still influence national and regional politics.

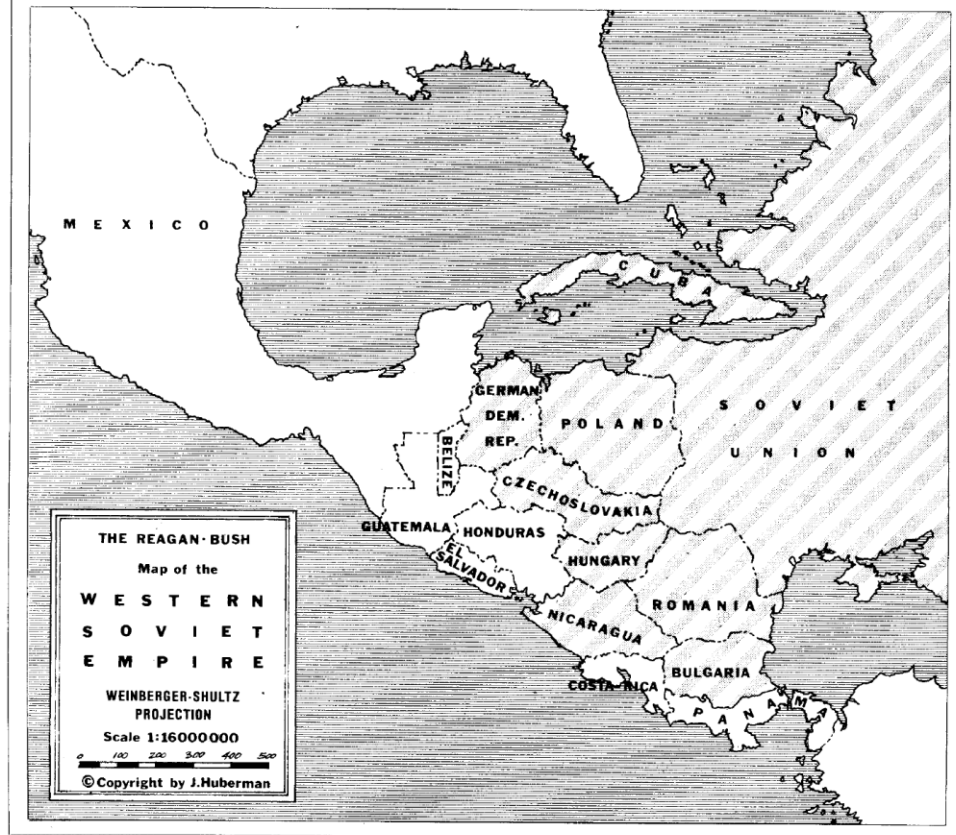
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<sup>12</sup> See Brandtstader (2007) and the special AJS Volume 106 No. 4 (January 2001), which is dedicated to post-socialist theory.



# Cold War Cartography

JACK HUBERMAN



**Figure 3a: Cold War Cartography: The Reagan-Bush Map of the Western Soviet Empire. First published by Jack Huberman in *The Nation*, in 1985. Published again by David Craven (2002)**

Early in the post-colonial and neocolonial movements of the global south, the experiences of the Eastern Bloc countries were mapped onto socialist movements and governments throughout Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. After the end of the Soviet project, if there were explicitly socialist states still in power, it was assumed that the end was near for these societies. It was assumed that it would be only a short time until other socialist societies would face the same type of thawing that occurred within the Soviet Union. Scholars published works asking “What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?” (Verdery 1996); the academy moved on. Socialism was over and

there was a consensus on the need to develop new theories of social change in order to find an alternative to the existing capitalist system. However, anyone who discussed the continued possibility for socialism to emerge as a viable socioeconomic project – especially the self-proclaimed socialists in the global south – were assumed to be “populist,” daft, or simply behind the times. It was assumed that they would catch up eventually.

Nineteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Asian communist states still exist, and in the case of the Americas, one socialist state is still in power after fifty-five years, and there are at least seven more states that have shown broad-based, popular socialist tendencies or are still fighting a prolonged Marxist-inspired conflict: Bolivia, Nicaragua, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Colombia. This has certainly caused a conundrum for post-socialist theorists who bring a global perspective to their analyses, as they do not know how to account for these movements in their models; others just avoid the topic altogether. Even as China has moved from a vigilantly protected, state-dominated market system to a participant in the global capitalist system, analyzing the Chinese experience does very little to conceptualize what is emerging in the Latin American region, nor can it be lumped into the post-socialist experience of the former Eastern Bloc.

What this crisis in theory should indicate is that, at the very least, there should be a regionally- and culturally- specific approach to understanding the effects of capitalism and the processes of social change. In order to understand these complex systems of social relations, it is important to understand the context and systems of logics in which these dynamics are based. For example, Latin American neocolonial experiences are

often lumped into the post-colonial experiences of African and Asian societies. Ella Shohat (1992) differentiates between the neocolonial, the post-colonial, the “third world” and the “hybrid” in her piece “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial.’” She, as well as Arif Dirlik (1997), argues that the notion of the “post-colonial” obscures many of the complexities facing non-European nations. Shohat writes:

Contemporary cultures are marked by the tension between the official end of direct colonial rule and its presence and regeneration through hegemonizing neocolonialism within the First World and toward the Third World, often channeled through the nationalist patriarchal elite. The “colonial” in the “post-colonial” tends to be relegated to the past and marked with a closure --- in an implied temporal border that undermines a potential oppositional thrust. For whatever the philosophical connotations of the “post” as an ambiguous locus of continuities and discontinuities, its denotation of “after”--- the teleological lure of the “post” --- evokes a celebratory clearing of a conceptual space that on one level conflicts with the notion of “neo.” The “neocolonial,” like the “post-colonial” also suggests continuities and discontinuities, but its emphasis is on the new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices, not on a “beyond.” Although one can easily imagine the “post-colonial” traveling into Third World countries (more likely via the Anglo-American academy than via India), the “post-colonial” has little currency in African, Middle Eastern and Latin American intellectual circles... Perhaps it is the less intense experience of neocolonialism, accompanied by the strong sense of relatively unthreatened multitudes of cultures, languages and ethnicities in India, that allowed for the recurrent usage of the prefix “post” over that of the “neo.” (1992, 106)

The notion of a “post-colonial” society gives the illusion that colonialism has ended, and that it is the responsibility of the post-colonial state and its citizens to move forward from the colonial period. The term “neocolonial” refers to the continuities and discontinuities of the colonial project. It is for this reason that I view José Martí as one of the first anti-neocolonial thinkers; early in his writings, he linked the U.S. American imperial project to the continuation of a colonial European project (Martí 2002). He was also invested in challenging the underlying logics of the Western European colonial project of race, material resource allocation, freedom and equality.

The notion of the “post” is a reflection of the linear, non-repetitive sense of time that Western epistemology imagines as a means to create a notion of progress, change, difference, innovation, movement forward, and movement “beyond.” Fredric Jameson

notes the importance of such a temporal slip in his 1984 article, "Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." Jameson argues that while numerous intellectuals and artists have announced the end to modernism, history, ideology, art, socialism and so forth, while announcing the emergence of a "post-modernism," there actually has not been an end to many of the modernist phenomena, but rather, a re-articulating/ redefining/repackaging of Western logic. The idea that there is something different happening hides the face behind the horror, terror, poverty, and the social inequalities associated with colonial legacies (Jameson 1984, 2005; Shohat 1992).

Jameson writes the following about postmodernism as the logic of late capitalism:

"Late Capitalism..." its qualifier in particular rarely means anything so silly as the ultimate senescence, breakdown, and death of the system as such (a temporal vision that would rather seem to belong to modernism than postmodernism). What 'late' generally conveys is rather the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all pervasive. (1984, xxi)

Reading Shohat, Dirlik, and Jameson together, one notes that, in the case of the post-colonial as in the post-modern, "post-colonial/post-modern" assumes that there has been an end to the colonial institutions (economic and militaristic) and an end to modernity (the Western cultural logics at the basis of Western social organization). One thing which is superficially "different" about late capitalism is the emergence of U.S America as the contemporary face of "the West," "freedom" or "the new world." The ideology of "the new world" allows for the continuation of a colonial/modernist agenda, whose execution is carried out from a new center of power, the United States of America. This current center of power has ideologically allied itself with past powers that are now

“lesser economic and cultural hegemonies,” but which are powers that continue their colonial agenda as allies to the U.S. American cultural and economic agenda. (Jameson 1984, Mignolo 2000)

Another term that implicitly directs attention away from the continuation of colonialism is the notion of hybridity. Shohat writes:

Negotiating locations, identities, and positionalities in relation to the violence of neocolonialism is crucial if hybridity is not to become a figure for the consecration of hegemony. As a descriptive catch-all term, "hybridity" per se fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity, for example, forced assimilation, internalized self-rejection, political co-optation, social conformism, cultural mimicry, and creative transcendence. The reversal of biologically and religiously racist tropes - the hybrid, the syncretic- on the one hand, and the reversal of anti-colonialist purist notions of identity, on the other, should not obscure the problematic agency of "post-colonial hybridity." In contexts such as Latin America, nationhood was officially articulated in hybrid terms, through an integrationist ideology which glossed over institutional and discursive racism. At the same time, hybridity has also been used as part of resistant critique, for example by the modernist and tropicalist movements in Latin America. As in the term "post-colonial," the question of location and perspective has to be addressed, i.e. the differences between hybridities, or more specifically, hybridities of Europeans and their off-shoots around the world, and that of (ex)colonized peoples. And furthermore, the differences among and between Third World diasporas, for example, between African American hybrids speaking English in the First World and those of Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians speaking Spanish and Portuguese in the Third World. (Shohat 1992, 111)

Here Shohat is arguing that a notion of hybridity can be productive. It can be a site of community building for diverse communities who have suffered the displacement and political and material disenfranchisement associated with European modernity.

However, at the same time, this can also function as an erasure tactic that supports unequal racial systems, which is how *mestizaje* has come to function in Cuban national discourses (Kutzinski 1993, Lane 1998, Arroyo 2003). Thus the term “hybrid” is useful only if it is situated within a critical framework that challenges the hegemony of ideologies that discriminate against and disenfranchise populations.

The term “post-colonial” is used in some regions and not others. The neocolonial experiences of Latin America were of a different nature and scale than the post-colonial

experiences of Asian and African countries such as India and Kenya. Thus a post-colonial experience may have more resonance in India, than in much of Latin America.

Mignolo discusses the usages of ‘post-colonial’ in Latin America when he writes:

Post-colonial nations after 1950, contrary to post independence nations in the early nineteenth century, defined themselves on the conflicting horizons of decolonization and Marxism, while post independence nations articulated themselves within the liberal ideology of the modern world system. “Decolonization” as a final horizon was still not available in the 19th century. ... it is only at the end of the nineteenth century that a self-conceptualization of the nation-state took place. For that reason, Bolivar’s idea of an American Union is what takes the place of the national consciousness. A ‘Creole’ republic, as opposed to the alternative of a ‘Creole’ monarchy, occupied the discourse of American intellectuals of the time. There is a second reason why independence in the Americas was not like decolonization in Asia and Africa in the geopolitical world order of the cold war... the fact that America... was constructed as the extension of Europe, and of Occidentalism, and not as the opposite. Jefferson did not hesitate in defining the location of the America in the Western Hemisphere. (Mignolo 2000, 133-34)

Mignolo refers to the states in Latin America as “post-independence” societies.

He uses this term to note the historical specificity of the emerging nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. These countries received their independence before a notion of the nation-state had been conceptualized. During the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the subjectivity of Creole subjects was intertwined with Western European revolutionary (Enlightenment) ideals. Even slave populations who freed themselves used Enlightenment discourse to assert their freedom and equality (Dubois 2004). Much of the American investment was in the continuation of the Western European ideals, and a look inward, but on their own terms. Given the continued U.S. American and Canadian national representation as European nations, I use the term Anglo-American to describe the U.S. America and Canada, and “Western” to describe the mutually reinforcing and supplemental relationship that the American United States has to Europe in the global division of wealth and power. As part of an ideological, geographic construction called “the West,” such self-representation allows that, discursively, many of these terms supplement each other.

However, there were other voices, notably those of Venezuela's Simón Bolívar – writing in the early nineteenth century, before the emergence of the contemporary notion of nation-state, and then José Martí – writing during the emergence of the nation-state as a hegemonic ideal. Both argued that the Americas should unite via a particularly U.S. American national consciousness. Thus while the American U.S. was attempting to unify “states” from the eighteenth century onward, during the same period many Latin American leaders promoted a notion of pan-Americanism that would eventually center on the unification of Latin America and the Caribbean, after it became apparent that the U.S. American imperial ambitions had become apparent. Thus, José Martí, writing approximately thirty years after Simón Bolívar's death, called for a break with European ideals after realizing the imperial ambitions of the American United States and seeing the rise of the socialist movements in Western Europe. Martí argued that there was a contradiction between European and American revolutionary ideals: the exceptional racism and greed of these nations belied any notion of national equality and morality.

In Mignolo's quote above, he notes that the early presidents of the United States of America were quick to ally the emergent nation with the “Western Hemisphere.” This was an indication of an emerging American ideology that constructed itself as a continuation of Europe. In comparison, early Latin American and Caribbean leaders located themselves within a larger world system, not as a particular nation seeking to establish a nation-state. Therefore, while the U.S. American imagination established itself as a “nation” that was an extension of Europe, Latin American discourse established itself as a union of diverse populations which also had produced hybrid cultures. Therefore, Pan-American discourse represents Latin America and the Caribbean as a

result of global processes that have yielded diverse and hybrid populations seeking to live without foreign interference. Meanwhile, most dictatorial regimes and repressive ideologies are often associated with foreign influences such as neocolonial European and American ambitions (Avritzer 2002, Grandin 2004).

Therefore, Latin America and some countries of the Caribbean never experienced a post-colonial phase, as the term post-colonial indicates that the goal of those seeking to overthrow colonialism is to produce an indigenously-based self-rule that would take the form of a nation-state. This is an example of oppressive hybridity in action: the notion of a nation-state itself is an ideology that emerged with organizing impulses of European capital. Using the term neocolonial to describe the Latin American and Caribbean experience during the rise and duration of American imperialism has important implications for Latin American and Caribbean attempts at mapping, analyzing, and resisting the repackaging of Western cultural and economic technologies of power.

One of the key contributions of the Cuban Revolution's approach to socialism as a challenge to its neocolonial condition is the integration of culture into its approach to understanding socio-cultural processes. Though struggling with the question of how to socialize culture and determine its role in socio-cultural processes, the structure of the Cuban socialist state and its politicized citizens are able to engage experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation, and which are not even comprehensible when using a strictly class-based analysis. In fact, given Cuba's history as a neocolonial society located within the Americas, a strictly material focus on inequality does not address the twin functions of cultural decimation and economic exploitation that are the hallmarks of the American colonial and neocolonial experiences. For the Brown, Black,



and Creole populations living in the Americas, the colonial state did not even feign to claim that these populations were representative subjects under colonial rule.

### *Republican Ideals within a Socialist State*

Artículo 1. Cuba es un Estado socialista de trabajadores, independiente y soberano, organizado con todos y para el bien de todos, como república unitaria y democrática, para el disfrute de la libertad política, la justicia social, el bienestar individual y colectivo y la solidaridad humana. (Constitución de la república de Cuba 2002, 4)

Article 1. Cuba is a socialist State of workers, independent and sovereign, organized by all for the good of all, as a unified and democratic republic, for the enjoyment of political freedom, social justice, individual and collective well-being and human solidarity. (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba 2002, 4)

Cuba is a socialist republic. In the first article of the 2002 constitution, the State uses socialist and republican discourse to describe Cuba's citizenry, origin, and purpose of the state. Adrian Oldfield (1998) describes the role of the citizen in the civic-republican tradition as an activity or a practice, not a status. To *not* participate fully in civic life is to *not* be a citizen. Oldfield writes:

Civic republicanism is a hard school of thought. There is no cozy warmth in life in such a community. Citizens are called to stern and important tasks which have to do with the sense of belonging, but that sense of belonging may not be associated with inner peace and, even if it is, it is not the kind of peace that permits a relaxed and private leisure, still less a disdain for civic concerns... far from undermining the individual's autonomy, institutional supports that motivate individuals to engage in the practice of citizenship enable them to reach a degree of moral and political autonomy, which a rights-based account cannot vouchsafe... Civic republicanism... holds that political life – the life of a citizen – is not only the most inclusive, but also the highest, form of human living-together that most individuals can aspire to... (1998, 79)

In civic republican discourse, to be a citizen is to be politically active, and political activity takes place in the public sphere. Thus, most of one's life is lived publicly. Republican citizenship cuts across religious and secular universalism and there is an expectation that, when required, one gives priority to one's political community over all other communities (Oldfield 1998, 81). Because citizenship implies an exclusive solidarity, it is not based on one's humanity as living human-being, but is based on

whether or not one is a fellow citizen. Therefore, citizenship may mean treating others, such as non-citizens or enemies, inhumanly. Within civic republicanism, the creation of citizens is also the creation of community. If the “conditions for the practice of citizenship are met,” then the conditions for the existence of the community are also met (Oldfield 1998). Thus, citizens are expected to take on duties and responsibilities that will ensure the survival of one’s (political) community. Additionally, community is found “wherever there are individuals who take the practice of citizenship seriously” (Oldfield 1998, 88).

Jürgen Habermas describes the notion of “politics” within civic republicanism as:

the reflective form of substantial ethical life, namely as the medium in which the members of somehow solitary communities become aware of their dependence on one another and, acting with full deliberation as citizens, further shape and develop existing relations of reciprocal recognitions on to an association of free and equal consociates under law. (1996, 21)

Habermas argues that in addition to the hierarchical regulations of the state and the decentralized regulations of the market, solidarity and orientation to the common good is a third source of “social integration” (Habermas 1996). He argues that the “horizontal political will-formation,” which is supposed to be an indicator of mutual understanding or consensus, is prioritized. This horizontal political will-formation or consensus is assumed to be genetic within civic-republicanism, but it is actually normative. Political opinion, mutual understanding and will-formation are a result of the structures of public communication, which are maintained by the state in the interests of “all.” Thus, in comparison to liberal democracies, it is dialogue, not the market, that is “a praxis of civic self-legislation” (Habermas 1996, 23).

The tendency within civic-republicanism is that public communication is given “a communitarian reading” (Habermas 1996, 23). The result is an ethical construction of

political discourse. As a result the democratic process becomes dependent on the virtues of citizens devoted to public life, and the state becomes the institutionalization of this ethical community. Thus democratic will-formation takes place in the form of an ethical-political discourse in which deliberation relies on a culturally-established consensus shared by citizens (Habermas 1996, 26).

Discursively, Cuba's political project is a result of the combination of republican notions of participatory citizenship and a tenuous merger of socialist – specifically, Leninist, Neo-Marxist, Stalinist, and Gramscian – political influences. The political project seems to be republicanism combined with a Gramscian socialist economic agenda of state-based material redistribution. However, as the nascent Cuban Revolution became more dependent on the Soviets for stability and national security, elements of the Leninist/Stalinist tradition began to be incorporated into the Cuban State's emergent egalitarian structure.

Leninist/Stalinist ideology views the state as civil society. This is based on the notion of the socialist state as a useful tool in reorganizing society as a means of moving society towards communism, as well as a tool to ensure the Communist Party's ability to maintain power and to complete its visionary political agenda. The conflation of Republican and socialist ideals remained present in Cuban state discourse, which posits that civil and political rights are the natural outgrowth of socioeconomic rights. The socialist leanings of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro centered on establishing material equality so that people would have the basic, ideally equal, resources necessary to freely and critically participate in civil society.

Martían ideology and socialist discourse viewed property rights and a free-market economy as the foundation of class difference and inequality. The goal of the 1959 Cuban Revolution was to eliminate class inequality as a means of creating an egalitarian society. While communist societies have often conflated state apparatuses and the public arena of citizen discourse and association, it is also apparent from Cuba’s civic-republican tradition that republican states also have the tendency to restrict citizenship discourse in very similar ways: to a focus on virtue, ethical concerns, citizenship as an activity based on participation and the diminution of individual interests for the sake of the common good (Fraser 1992, Habermas 1996, Oldfield 1998).

The Cuban state’s varying authoritarian tendencies throughout its forty-five year history is a result of the ebbs and flows of Soviet influence, the actions of a few opportunistic politicians, government attempts at controlling the public sphere as a means of establishing equality, and its attempts to homogenize discourse as a means of national defense (Fraser 1992). Ariel C. Armony (2005) summarizes the intersections of the non-democratic elements of Leninist/Stalinist traditions with Cuba’s civic-republicanism and strengthens Oldfield’s assertion that an effect of civic-republicanism is that “the practice of citizenship enable[s] [citizens] to reach a degree of moral and political autonomy which a rights-based account cannot vouchsafe.” Armony writes:

I begin with the premise that the Cuban political regime is non-democratic... From the standpoint of political procedures, Cuba does not meet the minimum requirement of a political society featuring free and pluralistic competition for the right to exert control over the state apparatus. It is also important to keep in mind that, from the standpoint of participation and representation, the Cuban system incorporates a number of characteristics associated with certain democratic ideals. These include the notion that achieving the common good takes priority over an aggregation of majorities and the notion that there are some sources of government legitimacy, such as an institutionalized system of grassroots participation, that are not necessarily present in the electoral system of Western democracies. (Armony 2005, 20)

It is argued that one of the major indicators that Cuba is non-democratic is that it lacks a civil society, in which “independent” non-governmental organizations exist (Armony 2005). This is based on the theoretical assumption, from a neoliberal perspective, that there is no civil society when there is no public sphere where the circulation of counter-discourses is permitted. It is true that there is a lack of formal institutions that exist in an autonomous space, vis-à-vis the state, and that the existence of these institutions are discouraged through a “tolerance by omission” – the state’s “passive” form of resistance (Alfonso 2005) – and outright physical restraint. However, when considering political activity outside of the cultural sphere, simply arguing that Cuba has no civil society ignores the structure, function and significance of Cuba’s institutionalized grassroots political structure that also allows for informal associations at the local level (Correales 2005, Armony 2005).

These associations, which many times intersect with the cultural sphere, are a safe environment where people can exercise free expression, and discuss the potential for change among people who they trust are not informants for the government (Correales 2005). These associations do not exist only among particular groups who feel marginalized, but in all realms of life in Cuba. Some examples from preliminary fieldwork range from private conferences given by people who are members of one of the many youth sub-cultures in Cuba, such as Rastas, Buddhists, “rockeros,” and young academics, to underground lesbian parties or community events supported by local state actors.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is this flexibility of life at the grassroots level that allows for seemingly illegal/taboo things to occur. One example is the film *Mariposas en el andamio* (1996). The Internet Movie Database (IMDB) website offers this summary: “After the Revolution, gays were not respected in Cuba, but in the small Havana neighborhood of La Güinera, a few courageous women came to power and encouraged the gay community.

Thus it is difficult to engage in a dialogue concerning civil society in Cuba when the discussion is confined to whether Cuba is simply democratic or non-democratic (Armony 2005). Narrowly defining the subject of debate, then using two *different* theoretical approaches to analyze the subject of the debate, and *then* debating about the subject ‘ad infinitum,’ obscures many of the dynamics that are currently at work within Cuban society (Armony 2005). Because there is no political diversity at the national level (no opposition groups or free press, for example), and because the existing informal associations often lack institutional allies who can support them politically, it is *difficult* for these groups to push for change (Corrales 2005). For this reason, the change stemming from these groups progresses slowly in Cuba, though there was a moment of exponential change during the Special Period.

Haroldo Dilla Alfonso (2005) describes a five-year period, 1990-1995, as a time when the government had no choice but to relax controls. Even though the government began to restrict the political freedom of these organizations during the economic recovery of the late 1990s, these groups continued to form and discussions continued to happen.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, one must be careful not to assume that these organizations alone can democratize Cuba, or assume that because they do not have the same type of political influence as well-organized political parties, that they are insignificant (Corrales 2005).

However, for Corrales, the existence of an associative sphere is a symptom of the “deeply rooted malaise in the country” (Corrales 2005, 54). Corrales writes:

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Glamorous gowns fashioned from grain sacks and eyelashes made out of carbon paper are the reality of drag in Cuba. In La Güinera, gay transvestite performers have earned respect and status through creative work for the neighbourhood. On stage action and backstage preparation opens out into insightful interviews with community leaders, families, and the performers themselves. the question; can you be gay and accepted in Cuba? Written by [gskinner@stanford.edu](mailto:gskinner@stanford.edu).” (sic) See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0115792/plotsummary> last viewed on Wednesday February 13th at 10:58 pm.

<sup>14</sup> Some examples are the independent libraries, which provided counter-revolutionary literature and were allowed to operate for a few years, but which were shut down between 2000-2004 and the materials burned.

Associationism arises when citizens feel severely alienated and dissatisfied with how institutions are functioning. They turn toward associations in a spirit of defeat. Rather than a sign of empowerment of society, associations are a symptom of its exhaustion. Associations are filled, not with citizens willing to join hands to address their issues, but with citizens who have given up, learned to distrust institutions, and have chosen to look for an exit route. They are driven by the principle of “any action is fine,” rather than by a desire to become integrated into the national life. (Corrales 2005, 54)

If these associative spheres function as Corrales suggests, then this has significant implications for the possibility of regime change in a post-Castro Cuba. Corrales believes that these associative spheres also have the possibility to reinforce people’s negativity, hostility, and general malaise, and that these spaces can be opportunistic recruiting grounds for groups that discourage productive democratic participation.

### **3.3 Citizenship, Democracy and Civil Society in the Anglo-American Metanarrative of Citizenship**

Within theories of labor distribution and material life, one globally hegemonic discourse is that of the Anglo-American metanarrative of citizenship. A core part of this metanarrative is the concept of individual social rights as codified in socially-based contracts between equals and the division of society between public and private spheres (Nakano Glen 2002, Habermas 1996. Within this context, society is seen as a “market structured network of interactions among private and equal persons” (Habermas 1996, 21). Sometimes public space is viewed democratically as the space for the “creation of procedures” by private and equal persons who are “affected by social norms and collective political decisions” (Benhabib 1998, 87).

This public space is often conflated with a notion of “civil society.” Within civil society, citizens can “have a say in the formulation, stipulation and adoption” of the social norms and political decisions that affect them (Benhabib 1998, 87). Cohen and Arato (1992) give the following working definition of civil society:

We understand “civil society” as a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalized and generalized through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentiation. While the self-creative and institutionalized dimensions can exist separately, in the long term both independent action and institutionalization are necessary for the reproduction of civil society... First it is necessary and meaningful to distinguish civil society from both a political society of parties, political organizations, and political publics (in particular, parliaments) and a distribution, usually firms, cooperatives, partnerships, and so on. Political and economic society generally arise from civil society, share some of its forms of organization and communication, and are institutionalized through rights (political rights and property rights especially) continuous with the fabric of rights that secure modern civil society. But the actors of political and economic society are directly involved with state power and economic production, which they seek to control and manage... The political role of civil society in turn is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussion in the cultural public sphere. (ix-x)

Thus, the goal of democratic processes within civil society (where the government and private individuals meet) is to accomplish the task of organizing government in the interest of society (Habermas 1996). In this view of democratic processes, the government functions in the interest of society, but only through the unfettered political pressure placed on it from other actors operating within civil society (Arato and Cohen 1992, Habermas 1996). Arato and Cohen briefly mention the cultural public sphere as a sphere of unconstrained discussion, but do not develop a theory of the relationship between the cultural sphere, political processes, and social change. In their definition, the cultural sphere is positioned as a “pre-political” sphere of dialogue, exchange, and debate, but there is no explanation of what this cultural sphere *is* and its relationship to or role in political processes. The contemporary notion of civil society and the public sphere is a result of what Somers (1995) refers to as the metanarrative of the “Anglo-American citizenship story.”

Somers states that this metanarrative of the Anglo-American citizenship story is “literally a story of the conditions necessary for popular sovereignty” (Somers 1995,



222). In this story, citizenship is assumed to be interconnected to a democratic political system and a capitalist market-based mode of production. The marker of a repressive or oppressive state within a nation is the absence of a democratic political system and an unregulated market economy. In the contemporary U.S. American model, the presence of a non-regulated market economy indicates that individuals have complete control over the pursuit and realization of their material needs or happiness.

Within this context, the social space allotted to the market economy is vigilantly protected. As a means of ensuring that there is no one power in society that could come to represent the interest of the few while dominating the interests of the many, other spheres of social life have been cordoned off as a means of protecting individual freedom through the disbursement of power. These liberal values – the vigilant protection of an individual’s ability to pursue their own material and personal interests, and the subsequent market vigilance associated with these values – have formed the basis of the ideological ideals exemplified by the political and economic policies of the gurus of contemporary neoliberal ideology known as the “Washington Consensus” (Dugan 2003). At the base of all of these assumptions is an exceptional distrust of sovereign power.

Somers writes:

The story is a Manichean one: The central antagonist and the constant threat to liberty in this story is the public realm of the administrative state --- a domain of potential unfreedom constituted by coercion, domination, and constraint, backed up with physical compulsion, and generative of arbitrary personal dependencies. The key innovation and the heroic protagonist of this story is the newly (seventeenth-century) invented capacity of the people to be self-organized and harmonious as a people in a fully functioning commercial community independent of the administrative state. The crucial innovation... is the extraordinary idea that an organized society (as opposed to Hobbes' war of all against all) can exist that is not identical with or defined by its official political organization. To be sure, through consent (in Locke) and developmental necessity (in the 18th and 19th centuries), this popular community must create a government. But it is a government that exists as nothing more than an outcome of the prior activities of the pre-political community. It is this self-activating notion of an autonomous pre-political society... that by the eighteenth century explicitly takes on the terminology of civil society. Civil society is believed to be the realm of popular freedom because it is

declared autonomous from and prior to the state, spontaneous in its workings, self-activating and naturalistic - a unitary entity whose normative roots lie in the idealized freedom of the harmonious state of nature... The full spectrum of categorical possibilities in social organization is limited to the great dichotomy between a vilified dangerous public realm of the state (always lurking behind the tamed government of the people) versus a non-coercive voluntary and pre-political (hence private) realm of (civil) society. (1995, 223)

Somers argues that the Anglo-American metanarrative is a story of a struggle between good and evil. It is about “the people”(the good), who were able to organize themselves and pursue their commercial interests without the intervention of the state(the evil). In her analysis of civil society, Somers argues that political sociology takes the empirical perspective that there are two key factors of modern social organization: the administrative state and the market economy. These factors have also been mapped onto notions of the public (the administrative state) and the private (the market economy – i.e., individual interests and needs). This is reflective of an implicit distrust of the state and faith in the free market economy as symbol of liberation – one can meet one’s material needs without worrying about a sovereign power stealing one’s resources. In the contemporary incarnation of this story, however, it is the administrative state that is the potential evil-doer or thief. Somers’ notion of civil society as the “third sphere” is used to describe the spaces of free association and deliberation that occur outside of the state. Somers argues that civil society emerges from an organic, autonomous community, a pre-political community. This pre-political community is “spontaneous” and “naturalistic” – in essence, it is mystical in its functioning. After the move to popular self-representation, this pre-political community takes on the form of civil society. The “will” of the people only becomes visible when this “will” is presented in the realm of popular representation.

Within the public sphere, what is considered official representation of self is restricted. Thus reading a poem is not considered as a legitimate form of representation

within national policy-making institutions. Such a form of expression is considered illegitimate or out of place in formal policy-making structures. Nonetheless, according to Somers, this third sphere located between public and private, the civil society, is often conflated within the two factors for social organization. She writes:

On one hand, the unfolding of historical events has precipitated a specific demand for a theoretical vocabulary able to grasp a range of participatory political activities and publicly articulated cultural solidarities of rights that now embody a normative conception of citizen politics and social interaction outside the domains of both the administrative state as well as the rationalized values and interests associated directly with market exchange... The consequences of this is that the empirical and normative conceptions of an intermediate form of social organization between state and society have been collapsed into the only available non-state alternative, namely the private sphere of individual values and rational interests where notions of citizenship are limited to public opinion and rational discussion about how the state should be restrained or used in the interest of the private good. Lost in this conflation of three spheres to two are the explicit connection of political culture and the public sphere with any actual practices of deliberation and powers of decision-making associated with the conception of civil society we have now inherited from the Eastern Europeans as the normative baseline of theoretical adequacy. (Somers 1995, 231)

Somers argues that there is a lack of vocabulary to describe the connection between political processes, the public sphere, and the practices of deliberation associated with collective decision-making. She argues that without adequate language to discuss society's range of participatory political activities and "publicly articulated cultural solidarities," society gets collapsed into two spheres: a "private sphere" of "individual/communal values and personal interests" and a "public sphere" of civic participation based on public opinion and rational discussion of how the state should be controlled for private good. The result is no clear understanding of the relationship between political culture, the public sphere, deliberative practices and the decision-making powers associated with civil society. These relationships are also in tension in Cohen and Arato's piece (1992).

In the work of Cohen & Arato and Somers, culture emerges in the description of pre-political processes of deliberation and solidarity building. Culture is the realm of the

irrational and the natural that becomes controlled and “rational” within civil society. However, this process of the transformation of the unintelligible (within a policy-making context) to the representative is mystified by this word “culture.” That allows there to be an apolitical base to social processes connected to “culture.” Before unpacking what is happening within this realm of culture, I will continue to discuss and critique other aspects of the Anglo-American notion of equality, which relies on culture remaining an amorphous concept.

Another effect of the ill-defined notion of culture is that struggle within Anglo-American democratic societies becomes one of the free-market (the protection of privacy and the individual good) vs. the repressive state (whose public agenda inherently infringes on the “private,” or the market). The 1980s democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe disrupted this dichotomy as Western political sociology was left without the tools to analyze adequately the non-state and non-market-based spheres of social life and the free associations that supported the Eastern European revolutions. There was no free market or private sphere that was free of state intrusion, or a civil society, where visible counter-state discourses could freely circulate or lay the foundations for counter-state political organizations. The public/private divide appeared to be based in a sphere of social and free associations that were not influenced by market exchange or the coercive state (“the absent civil society”) (Somers 1995, 231). Somers argues that this is a result of the fact that the Anglo-American citizenship narrative is “grafted onto an epistemology of social naturalism; and these elements combine in a metanarrative that continues to constrain empirical research in political sociology” (1995, 229). Thus the internalization of the Anglo-American narrative of citizenship as a natural evolutionary ideal for creating

free societies has resulted in the Anglo-American academy's epistemology being generalized to a "European" and the "human" experience. The emergence of the public/private sphere dichotomy was one way in which citizens – who were initially wealthy, White men in patriarchal societies – could be sure to retain the right to their property (land, wife, children, finances) under the cloak of privacy.

Thus, public sphere and civil society developed into a sphere of associations where men could organize to achieve their collective and individual interests.<sup>15</sup> Feminist scholarship has critiqued liberal notions of "civil society," and the organizing function of dividing life into public and private spheres – where women are assumed to take on a wage-free reproductive and care-giving role (Fraser 1995, MacKinnon 1994). Seyla Benhabib (1992), for example, argues that there is an ambiguity concerning the notion of "privacy" within the liberal theoretical tradition. But when analyzing some of the historical experiences that have led to the liberal division of society, Benhabib argues that privacy, in terms of privacy rights and the private sphere, actually consists of three dimensions.

The first dimension is privacy conceived of as a moral and religious right. This is the result of the history of the separation of church and state within Western European countries. In this dimension, privacy is a sphere of "moral and religious conscience"; people are able to develop their own conception of "rationally irresolvable" matters such as the highest good, the meaning of life, and matters of ultimate faith. In the second dimension, privacy pertains to the realm of economic liberties. This developed with the establishment of economic markets after the decline of subsistence-type household

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<sup>15</sup> Though, as noted by Somers and Benhabib (1992), these organizations can also occur in "private," because of the conflation of differing forms of social action with either public or private.

economies. In this sphere, “privacy” means the “noninterference by the political state in the freedom of commodity relations, and [the political state's] nonintervention in the free market of labor power” (Benhabib 1992, 91). The third meaning of privacy relates to the “intimate sphere.” This is the domain of the household, the area to fulfill the daily needs of life, the realm of sexuality, reproduction, and caring for the young, sick, and the elderly (Benhabib 1992). Thus, in Benhabib's construction, the private sphere includes: the moral arena – a demand for no state intervention into religious practice, which is related to a European experience of state and church entanglement that resulted in domination of the masses by an ideology of divine rule; the family – which, in patriarchal societies, was the foundation of a man's ability for economic self-determination; and, the ability to earn wealth and retain it - which, as noted by feminist theorists, has been predicated on the patriarchal domination of women. Women have been constantly excluded from the public sphere and their subordinate position is intertwined and in conversation with the division of social/political power (Fraser 1992, 1995; Brown 1994; MacKinnon 1994).

Another approach to the Anglo-American “liberal” view of democracy is the notion of the “public sphere,” as conceptualized by Habermas, as a discursive space where citizens, emerging from their private spheres with their private interests, can literally meet and talk about their common beliefs and concerns (Habermas 1995, Fraser 1992). This space is separate from the state as there is always the possibility of the production and the circulation of discourses that can be critical of the state. The public sphere is not the same as the official (privatized) economy. It is not an area for commodity exchange; it is an area for debate. Thus, the private realm is the non-state

domain. The public sphere is the space for “non-private” action, while civil society, also part of the public sphere, functions as the area “where ideas of autonomy, representation, and pluralism can publicly crystallize, and where juridical subjects enjoying rights and capable of freeing themselves from the arbitrariness of both state and primary groups (kin, tribe etc.) can come into being” (Mbembe 2001, 39).

The existence of a public sphere does not mean that a civil society exists, because people’s ability to organize in the public sphere does not mean that there is a “multiplicity of sources, independent of the state, that are allowed to publicly and autonomously articulate an idea of the ‘general interest’” (Mbembe 2001, 39). While the Anglo-American model may equate this to an oppressive state that intervenes and controls the market economy, for others, cultural/ideological constructs such as race, class, and gender, mediate one's ability to articulate a differing point of view to an economically and politically powerful group who may find differing points of view undesirable. By ignoring the influence of these repressive ideologies, such as racism, sexism, and homophobia, and linking them to the realm of pre-political deliberation and debate, the repressive nature of liberal societies are rendered invisible. Thus, those who are repressed within pre-political spheres are redefined as illegitimate citizens within public spheres. It is in this way that the notion of “citizenship” is an integral component of Euro-American constructions of (capitalist) democracies.

Through exploring discourses concerning citizenship within the Anglo-American model, the relationship between cultures, social inequality and social repression becomes easier to map. Citizenship, which maps out who is considered to be legitimate or even human, is based on pre-political notions of humanity that are acted upon in social and

political life. Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes that “citizenship has been a major nexus in the creation and maintenance of equality and inequality, it has been the site of contestation over who is included in the status and what rights and responsibilities are associated with this status” (Nakano Glen 2002, 20). The definition of citizenship is constantly debated. The two main approaches, within the European and American academy, have been based on T.H. Marshall’s (1998) tripartite approach in which citizenship is defined as a conferred status. It is through this status that one is able to make rights-claims. Another approach to citizenship theory is Jurgen Habermas’ discursive approach (1989), which describes citizenship as a discursive framework on which the distribution of rights, and one’s ability to make claims, is based.

### *Citizenship and Civic Participation*

Embedded in European-American notions of citizenship is the ideology of citizenry as socially equivalent subjects. At the basis of this construction is a notion of “freedom” that is heavily based on an “entrepreneurial spirit” (one’s ability to participate freely in an “open market”). Within the American national myth, for example, it is believed that freedom is realized when civil rights – the rights of the society’s individual *members*, and political rights – the rights of those individuals to make claims on the state or any other official institution – are constitutionally guaranteed.

The division and function of the differing spheres of society, and their relationship to citizenship, freedom, and the protection of the market-based economic sphere, has been canonized by T.H. Marshall’s (1998) definitions of civil, political, and social rights. T.H. Marshall defines civil rights as “the rights necessary for individual freedom – liberty of person; freedom of speech, thought and faith; the right to own



property and to conclude valid contracts; and the right to justice” (1998, 94). Political rights refer to “the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of political power” (Marshall 1998, 94). One of the many critiques of Marshall’s characterization of citizenship is the fact that while someone is conferred the status of citizenship, it does not mean one has the political power to make use of the privileges associated with the status.

A third set of rights that Marshall defines is social rights. Marshall defines social rights as “the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall 1998, 94). Social rights are often associated with institutions such as educational systems and social services (Marshall 1998, 94). Some argue that social rights are often not considered as a necessary component of citizenship in the U.S. (Fraser 1997, Fraser and Gordon 1994). This third aspect is ignored in liberal approaches to citizenship and democracy. This is because social rights are entangled in people’s beliefs about work and civic participation. There is a culturally-based ideology surrounding who is deserving of social aid, and who is not deserving. In the Anglo-American model, it is assumed that the status of citizen ensures that one has all the tools one needs to participate in society as an equivalent subject. The basic materials that one needs to survive are not guaranteed under this model. Adrian Oldfield (1998) refers to this as “liberal individualism”; he writes:

Liberal individualism accords the individual not only ontological and epistemological priority, but moral priority as well. Individuals as citizens are sovereign, not in the sense that they are sufficiently in control of their lives in significant and relevant ways, but in the sense that they ought to be. And the threat to their sovereignty comes just as much from society, and especially the state, as it does from other individuals. Thus to insist upon the rights of citizens is to endorse their claims to protection from threatening forces. As human beings, individuals require the freedom and security to pursue their lives unhindered. (76)

Within the liberal model, the culturally-based suspicion of sovereign powers, including the state, has resulted in a cultural process wherein, discursively, the sovereign power has been removed and placed with the individual. While such a move is discursive, and may not actually empower individuals to act as sovereign subjects, in theory this cultural move should allow for that to happen. Thus, there is a discursive element that is significant for the definition of freedom and individual sovereignty as citizen. While Nakano Glenn's definition of citizenship is based on the notion of a "status," Sonya O. Rose (2003) offers a discursive definition of citizenship. She writes:

Citizenship, I would suggest, may be usefully defined as a discursive framework explicating the juridical relationship between people and the political community. It is a multidimensional framework that provides the basis upon which people can make claims on the political community concerning juridical rights and duties, political and ethical practices, and criteria of membership. By suggesting it is a framework that serves as a basis for claims-making, I mean to suggest that citizenship is an idea that has been taken up and modified in different historical situations so that even those who traditionally were not imagined as citizens could use the framework of citizenship to demand certain protections or to secure certain benefits or to be guaranteed particular capacities. It is on the basis of citizenship that the state or community can expect reciprocity from its members. (Rose 2003, 16)

The discursive approach to citizenship is an important intervention in the debates surrounding what constitutes citizenship. Debates concerning who is to be included within notions of citizenship are intertwined with notions of marginalization, exclusion, and what constitutes "claims making." These notions of equality are based on underlying systems of morals that, Oldfield argues, are a key element in the constitution of the sovereign individual. Though one may have the "status" of citizenship, one may not be imagined as a "citizen" and thus may be denied the rights associated with being a citizen. Since, discursively, "citizen" is assumed to be defined as a bounded system of representations, the ways in which some are excluded from citizenship discourse is based on that which is not covered by liberal constitutionally-based rights: cultural norms

surrounding a notion of morality. Because of this, taking a discursive approach to a notion of citizenship – as opposed to a rights-based approach – allows for an analysis of how people are excluded from citizenship, even though they are formally understood to be part of the national community. It also aids in understanding how those socially excluded from citizenship also use the rights-based notion of citizenship to make rights-claims. Despite the critiques of a status-based approach to citizenship, often the political and economic elite of liberal-capitalist countries, such as the United States, believe that inclusive citizenship is based on simply conferring the status of citizen to an individual.

Nonetheless, a status- and discursive-based approach does not ensure the basic material and social conditions necessary for all citizens to have equal access to (civil) society. This is a key concern of the many countries impoverished by colonialism and imperialism. Many Latin American leaders argue that ensuring access to basic socioeconomic rights will enable an individual to participate fully in civil society. Ensuring basic material needs and an education will enable all individuals to develop the discourse necessary to be able to understand and express one's subjectivity, so that the citizen may have the basic tools necessary to be able to participate in public debates and in political claims-making. While these countries may seek to address the material basis for social participation, the question of who may be considered a citizen is heavily embedded in a country's material and cultural context; notions of morality and notions of normativity are crucial in constructing who participates in deliberative processes.

For example, in the Anglo-American ideology of citizenship, receiving a "handout," or public assistance, is seen as a sign of "dependence," a sign of weakness, as low morality (Oldfield 1998, Fraser and Gordon 1994). This weakness is often coded as

feminine and is racialized as “non-White” and “non-citizen,” as race and gender are invested with notions of inappropriate morality that are integral in the construction of the heterosexual White male as representative of “high morality” and “good citizen” (Fraser and Gordon 1994, Nakano Glen 2002). To be seen as a dependent is a negative descriptor because, in the U.S., women and “the non-White racial other” are assumed to be unable to care for themselves (Fraser and Gordon 1994, Nakano Glen 2002). Others who are also assumed to be unable to care for themselves are “children and the elderly.” People who are seen as “dependent and weak,” instead of “independent and strong,” are assumed to be unable to adequately perform American citizenship, and are not respected as rational, claims-making individuals within American civil society (Fraser and Gordon 1994, Nakano Glen 2002). Citizens are simply ignored if they are perceived as a disturbance to rational order, to rational conduct, and/or to civility. In essence, if someone is seen as a danger and a threat to individual citizens, those individual citizens and the state have the right to act against a perceived threat in order to protect themselves and/or public safety. If citizens are perceived as weak or feeble, stronger citizens have the authority to make decisions for them.

Feminist and critical race scholars have noted how the construction of “citizen” is riddled with cultural norms that have coded wealthy, White, heterosexual males as citizen, while everyone else is seen as “other,” non-citizen, or a flawed citizen. Critical race scholars, Black feminist, and queer of color scholars have interrogated the link between race, gender, class, sexuality, and colonial legacies in the construction of national identities. They also link the relationship of these social ideologies to capitalist modes of production: these ideologies are important in the construction of citizen, but

they also indicate which role the individual will play in a nation's distribution of labor. These scholars note that the relationship between social inequality and everyday lived experiences is that discourses circulating within the realm of everyday life are just as powerful – at times even more powerful – than law and official state discourses.

There have been numerous critiques of the exclusionary nature of Anglo-American theories of democracy. Many of the strongest critiques have emerged in areas such as cultural studies; critical race theory; queer theory; or any of post-colonial, postmodern, pan-Americanist, Black Nationalist, pan-Africanist, Third World Feminist, feminist, and U.S. Third World Feminist theories. These areas of scholarship have primarily leveled an epistemological critique of Anglo-American theories of freedom and democracy, which many have argued is intertwined with the colonial logics that operate at the basis of social organization within the Americas. To this end, the next section considers alternative approaches to social equality, and center on discourses surrounding racism, sexism and homophobia. These are social organizing principles that have been linked to colonial legacies by theorists such as neocolonial theorists, cultural studies scholars, queer of color theorists, as well as numerous Cuban artists and intellectuals writing about their experiences with the imposition of Anglo-American notions of freedom, citizenship, and governance in Cuba.

### **3.4 Discussion: 'Non-Western' Challenges to Social Change, Political Participation and Civil Society**

Given the “cultural solidarities” that occur within pre-political social processes, certain groups are able to spend the time and money to pursue their interests within the public sphere. Thus, there is a class basis to the structure and function of civil society.

The bourgeoisie, who share class and cultural interests, have been able to dominate civil society (Martí 2002, Brown 1995). Therefore, notions of liberation and equality are defined according to the experiences of this particular group. One way that this affects analysis of life in Cuba is that the construction of oppression in contemporary Cuba is defined as the result of the state's denial of particular political and economic (market) rights which are assumed to be guaranteed to those with the status of "citizen." While other systems of power and inequality, such as racism, sexism and homophobia are ignored, the non-politicized identity of "citizen" is a formulation that re-inscribes a White, bourgeois, masculinist ideal through its reflection of particular class (racial, sexual, economic) interests (Brown 1995, Fraser 1992).

Within this particular form of class rule, there has also emerged a social and economic hierarchy in which race, gender, and sexuality are the social formations that structure liberal capitalist modes of production as well as the very idea of "nation-state" (Ferguson 2004). One's status as a citizen is determined by racial difference, gender, and sexual conformity. Thus, it is exceptionally difficult for those who are ranked on the lower levels of this social hierarchy to have their needs articulated and attended to in the public sphere (Ferguson 2004, Brown 1995, Fraser 1992).

Numerous Caribbean scholars have analyzed this relationship between state police, race, gender and sexuality. In her 1997 piece, "Erotic Autonomy as a Politics of Decolonization: An Anatomy of Feminist and State Practice in the Bahamas Tourist Economy," Jacqui Alexander "demonstrates the ways in which the law forges continuity between White imperial heteropatriarchy – the White European heterosexual inheritance – and Black heteropatricarchy" (66).

Alexander argues that state policy towards tourism, and the state's move to criminalize sexualities that it deems a threat to stable heterosexual marriages, is a form of re-colonization. In this process of re-colonization, the post-colonial state, which represents the interests of global capital, attempts to control the psychic, sexual, and material self-determination of the Bahamian people? She makes her argument through an analysis of the state's tolerance and acceptance of the tourist sex industry, and the state's intolerance of female homosexuality.

Through its approach to regulating sexuality, the state is able to ensure the reproduction of citizens whose bodies continue to be available for the interests of global capital. Also, through regulating morality, the post-colonial state is able to demonstrate its ability to govern itself. Alexander argues that colonial legacies are at work on the island and continue the preeminence of Western global capital (domination) on the island and on the bodies of Black, Bahamian people. In this case, the post-colonial state attempts to re-colonize Bahamian bodies by taking on the role of the guardian and protector of the interests of Western global capital: they prepare the bodies of Bahamian people to be available for the consumptive interests of foreigners.

Alexander argues that Bahamian bodies are made available for consumption through three simultaneous processes: discursively, it operates through the continuation and elaboration of colonial law that links White heteropatriarchy to Black heteropatriarchy. Heteropatriarchy organizes sexuality and gender, discursively and juridically through courts decisions. Heteropatriarchy is also discursively constructed via religious discourses that draw links between the Bahamian civilization and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Linking the two is one way in which religion is

used to argue that the Bahamian civilization should be protected from homosexuals and other sodomites/sinners (sexually promiscuous unmarried women, wife beaters/husbands/adulterers etc. who threaten the stability of marriage) who can cause the destruction of the nation. What Alexander's piece elucidates is the role of morality in the construction of the liberal citizen. Public concerns of morality have been integral in determining who has a legitimate voice and who has the right to represent self and self-interests.

Moral panics also demonstrate the economic and organizing imperatives imbedded in a notion of morality. Sonya O. Rose summarizes moral panics:

... "moments which disturb a society's normative contours mark the inception of troubling times, especially for those sections of the population who have made an overwhelming commitment to the continuation of the status quo." The Birmingham researchers defined moral panic as a "spiral in which social groups who perceive their world and position as threatened identify a 'responsible enemy' and emerge as vociferous guardians of traditional values." (Rose 2003, 220)

According to Rose, moral panics emerge at moments when established social hierarchies and ideologies are threatened. During moral panics, witch-hunts, lynching and other such episodes, rituals are used as a means to maintain social order. Moral panics also occur during times when there is a perceived need to ensure unity within a nation or community (Vance 1984).

At times of crisis, such as war or economic crisis, self-interested actors can use moral panics to expand their power and/or to limit the powers of others. Thus, while moral panics often result in a wave of social and/or political action, at their core, they are struggles over the power to define power (Rose 1999). Therefore, as shown in Alexander's piece, in the post-colonial state there is a continued definition, organization, and ranking of bodies according to race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, citizenship, physical ability, and other categories commonly used in Western scientific discourse to



define and measure people and prepare societies for efficient capitalist production. Any challenges to this hierarchy, through non-reproductive sexual practices or practices that challenge established notions of the family, are met with social sanctions, legislative, and/or physically coercive action by the state.

Using a discourse centered on a notion of “civilization,” the colonial state justified its authority by arguing that its paternalistic and civilizing policies were humane and beneficial for the colonizer and the colonized. However, the policies enacted by the colonial power were not in the interests of “social well-being.” Through attempting to alter the “moral behavior” of the colonized, the colonial power attempted to ensure that they had subjugated the resistant subject and created a productive subject for capital interests. Thus, a host of social regulations governing areas such as the family, labor, marriage, sexuality, vagrancy, women, health and disease prevention came into place as a means of reorganizing indigenous and displaced societies (Mbembe 2001).

Given the particular experiences of Brown and Black people, gender and sexual deviants, and female-bodied people, contemporary notions of the public sphere, civil society and the ability to make claims within these spheres as citizens have not provided a mechanism for rapid and radical social change in which those marginalized in the public sphere can press for change. In the case of societies where notions of citizenship, democracy and political participation have been enforced as the rule of law, Achille Mbembe (2001) argues:

The notion of civil society cannot, therefore, be applied with any relevance to post-colonial African situations without a reinterpretation of the historical and philosophical connotations that it suggests: the indigenous categories used for thinking politically about conflictual and violent relations, the special vocabularies in which the political imaginary is expressed and the institutional forms into which that thought is translated, the anthropology that underlies both issues of representation and issues of unequal allocation of utilities, the negotiation of heterogeneity, and the refinement of passions. (39)

Thus, the application of a notion of civil society is not the best category of analysis to use to describe or critique political dynamics of a post-colonial, neocolonial, or pan-American neo-socialist state. Additionally, it is not an ideal tool for the post-colonial, neocolonial or American neo-socialist state as it does not address the particular type of social, political, and economic inequalities faced by citizenry. The usage of civil society as a means to eliminate inequality within post-colonial states *depends* on the presence of a market economy and a particular structure of economic exchange and individual conduct that leads to the “refinement of passions” or what others may refer to as “oppression.” Before applying civil society as a goal or a measurement of freedom or democracy, one must first consider the cultural logics of those who have not benefited from Western ideology.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Civil Society and Art Worlds: Rethinking Politics and Political Participation**

“Civil society” as a developmental goal ignores several important factors that cause the post-colonial, neocolonial and American neo-socialist state to develop and function differently than other states. One glaring difference is that people from post-colonial and neocolonial populations are largely, culturally, non-European. Their pre-colonial experience with government and inequality, and thus their worldview, differs from that within Europe. Europe itself is a heterogeneous geographical/cultural location in which many European cultures do not share the cultural and historical trajectory assumed by the hegemonic liberal model of equality. In fact, in order for the liberal model to work, there is a level of colonization that is required within a European context, to “refine European passions,” or to create a notion of “Europeanness” – a European collectivity and/or community. Recent failures of such an attempt to forge a pan-European ideology and identity have been demonstrated by the emergence and rising popularity of “dictatorial personalities” in Eastern Europe, the failure of numerous European Union referendums, and Britain’s continued hesitation to take on the single currency. Nonetheless, my focus is on post-colonial, neocolonial, and American neo-socialist states.

The founding of these states has been a result of violent experiences, which were predicated on the total subordination of the colonial population as a means of exacting goods and services for consumption by wealthier nations. There were no social contracts to be entered into, there were no rights for the non-European colonial subject, and there was no notion of reciprocity between the power holders and the citizenry. This trajectory was carried forth into the post-colonial state and the neocolonial state where, in terms of power, there was a shift from outright violence to institutionalized forms of control (Mbembe 2001, 42; Alexander 1992). Post-colonial rulers, as well as citizens, often did not place much credence in a notion of constitutionally acknowledged rights that should be protected. For the post-colonial and neocolonial leader, when incentives and gifts were not enough to ensure unconditional support from the subjugated, there was a resort to public coercion (Mbembe 2001).

The history of authoritarianism within post-colonial and neocolonial societies has affected their ability to break with the colonial past (Mbembe 2001). The attempt to break with such a past does not necessarily indicate a move to democracy, as it is often a “potentate” who continues to serve the economic interest of the colonial power or emergent neocolonial power that gains control of the state. Mbembe argues that it is important to go beyond binary categories such as state vs. civil society, totalitarian vs. democratic, and resistance vs. passivity, because they cloud our understanding of post-colonial and neocolonial relations. He writes:

In the post colony, the *commandment* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony... in the form of a *fetish*.<sup>16</sup> The signs, not merely to be

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<sup>16</sup> Mbembe defines the commandment as to “denote colonial authority--- that is, in so far as it embraces the images and structures of power and coercion, the instruments and agents of their enactment, and a degree of rapport between those who give orders and those who are supposed to obey (without, of course, discussing)

symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart from or challenge. To ensure that no such challenge takes place, the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of cultural repertoires and powerfully evocative concepts; but they resort if necessary, to the systemic application of pain. The basic goal is not to bring a specific political consciousness into being, but to make it effective. We therefore need to examine: how the world of meanings that are thus produced, is ordered; the types of institutions, the knowledges, norms, and practices structuring this new “common sense”; the light that the use of visual imagery and discourse throws on the nature of domination and subordination. (Mbembe 2001, 103)

The state authority seeks to legitimize itself, and to make its particular discourse hegemonic through the institutionalization of state discourse. Some of the ways the state attempts to institutionalize its discourse are:

- 1) Through economic coercion, by creating debts among the population. Provision is given for basic needs but unconditional support is expected in return.
- 2) Through cultural tools that appeal to emotion and to cultural myths in order to persuade people of the importance of state discourse.
- 3) Through the use of pain, as a last resort. In post-colonial and neocolonial contexts domination and subordination occurs at the level of feeling, as well as through physical pain.

In Cuba, however, there are two approaches to civil society that are at play in the analysis of public space and political participation. The first is the conflation of civil society with the economy (Somers 1995, Chanan 2001). Michael Chanan describes Gramsci’s description of this view as the following:

Thus, in one passage from the *Prison Notebooks* she holds that the distinction between political society and civil society, which is presented by the classic liberal theorists as an organic reality, is “merely methodological,” because “in actual reality civil society and state are one and the same” (Forgacs 1999, 210). Gramsci explains the closeness of his conception to Marx’s by adding that civil society is not “the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts” but “a form of state ‘regulation,’ introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means” (ibid.). Classic laissez-faire liberalism is itself a political program, a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends. (The same could of course be said of the neoliberalism of the 1980s.) (Chanan 2001, 392)

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them. Hence the notion of *commandment* is used here for the authoritarian modality par excellence” (2001, 134).

In one use of civil society, Gramsci described civil society and the state as one and the same. Civil society is not an automatic expression of economic life, but a form of social regulation maintained by the state through legislation and coercion. Chanan links this view to classic laissez-faire liberalism and contemporary neoliberalism of the 1980s. This view implies that political order is established through social contracts among citizens that are enforced through a state apparatus (Nakano Glen 2002). Individuals' access to social contracts are assumed to be free and equal (Nakano Glen 2002, Habermas 1995).

Gramsci's work arrived in Cuba in about 1958, the year his works were translated into Spanish (Chanan 2000). The work soon influenced some of the politicians and intellectuals who would find themselves in the middle of a massive social change.

Chanan writes the following about how Gramsci's ideas influenced the early years of the revolution:

... a radical shift in consciousness, in ways of thinking about social and political relations—appeared to be as much the motor of revolutionary change as any transformation in economic relations, perhaps indeed—heretical idea—its condition. ... the resonance that Gramsci found in Cuba has much to do with his emphasis on subjective factors in both society and the revolutionary process, and this was an emphasis that was also found in the thinking of Che Guevara, which left such an indelible mark on the Cubans. If the Revolution, for Che, primarily stood for social justice, he also believed—and this became the subject of an important debate in the early 1960s—that material incentives were incompatible with the social aims of the Revolution because they would weaken revolutionary consciousness, and, according to Che, revolutionary consciousness was the greatest asset of a socialist society...

Indeed, the first decade of the Cuban Revolution was marked by a such a strong degree of idealism and voluntarism that these qualities became integral elements of what became known as the "Cuban heresy," which centered on the advocacy of guerrilla warfare in Latin America and elsewhere as a means of creating revolutionary conditions and which so upset both *Washington* and *Moscow*. It was part and parcel of this ethos that the kind of Marxist thinking that flourished in Cuba in the 1960s was significantly removed from what Sartre called "lazy Marxism," the mechanistic approach that reduced everything to the effects of economic forces, and which was largely a product of the institutionalization of Marx's writing by official Communist ideology; an ideology that clamped dialectical thinking into rigid categories (and from which those who contested the orthodox interpretation did not by any means always manage to escape themselves). (Chanan 2000, 391-392; emphasis in original)

Because of the Cuban Revolution's focus on subjective experience and a radical shift in consciousness as a means to spur political and social change, the early revolutionary government focused on creating incentives based on a notion of altruism for the sake of the public good and humanity (Thomas 1971, Chanan 2000). As a means of destabilizing the existing system of value and exchange, the ideology at the basis of capitalist ideology, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara sought to focus attention on *lived* experience as a measure of success; they viewed a revolutionary consciousness as society's greatest asset. This train of thought, which included supporting guerrilla warfare in Latin America and Africa, was not supported by the United States or the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, these leaders were known for their move to "direct democracy"<sup>17</sup> in the early years of the revolution. It is in this way that public space was viewed democratically as the space for the "creation of procedures" by private and equal persons, who were "affected by social norms and collective political decisions" (Benhabib 1998, 87).

This is reminiscent of the second way in which Gramsci engages a notion of civil society in the *Prison Notebooks*. In this perspective, public space is often conflated with a notion of civil society. Chanan writes:

In this conception civil society is not so different from the public sphere: it is the realm in which power, authority, and the social elite seek to organize consent and hegemony, but also where consent and hegemony may be contested by the sectors they dominate. In this sense, civil society may indeed be counterposed to the political order, which ultimately rests on the state's monopoly of violence, whereby the rules of citizenship are enforced by means of the law and, where necessary, by coercion, or the threat of it. But these are not two separate realms, so much as the same social configuration seen under different aspects, because in actually existing social space political society and civil society exist in mutual relation, and thus interpenetrate each other. Both conceptions would imply that if the political regime is transformed, and a different economic system

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<sup>17</sup> Direct democracy refers to the idea that leaders are in constant contact with ordinary citizens. In theory, elected leaders at all level of government must have held a position where they were in constant contact with ordinary Cubans – such as doctors, owners of bodegas. However, as Bengelsdorf (1994) notes, in practice this does not translate into accountability.

is installed, then civil society will also change, and indeed Gramsci himself, discussing the theory of syndicalism, speaks of the idea of “a new kind of civil society” (although he criticizes the syndicalists in turn for their economism)...

In short, a collective response to economic, political, social, and cultural exclusion, which fostered among the excluded an alternative identity, that of vecino (neighbor), and an alternative, more democratic life-world. This, says Oxford (1995, 260–62) represents “an important element in the strengthening of . . . civil society.” (Chanana 2000, 392-393)

In the second description of civil society, citizens can “have a say in the formulation, stipulation and adoption” of the social norms and political decisions that affect them (Benhabib 1998). In this description of civil society as the public sphere, there are numerous actors vying for power within society. Those with different interests seek to dominate varying aspects of social life, but it is within the public sphere where they meet in their power struggle. It is this perception of public sphere and civil society that results in the revolution’s conflation of the public sphere with political processes. Fidel Castro argues this in his 1961 piece, “Words to the Intellectuals.” In an attempt to answer the question of whether or not the state would permit unfettered freedom of expression, Castro argues that people are allowed to argue what they want in the public sphere. However, according to Castro, the state as a participant in the public sphere, and as the guarantor of rights and moral integrity of the nation, has the right and the obligation to intervene in public debates as well. Clearly, a state that has control of social institutions capable of unleashing massive acts of violence and other forms of coercion will have greater ability to influence social policy.

However, by taking a nuanced approach to understanding how politics operate in Cuba, we can also understand why it is possible that Cuba’s heterogeneous cultural sphere is able to exist in the face of party monopolization at the state level. Additionally, by taking an approach that considers other aspects of Cuba’s social, economic, and political structures, as well as other aspects of social and political life in Cuba, we are



better able to understand contemporary democratization processes occurring on the island. In essence, Cuba's history of revolutionary actors, including the 1959 actors, had their own ideas about how society should develop. However, the repressive aspects of the government are certainly influenced by larger geopolitical relationships.

For example, to the ire of many Soviet leaders, Cuba did not consistently impose a form of artistic realism that denied the many contradictions and disagreements emerging within its model (Craven 2002). I say that they have not consistently imposed this system as there have been continuous struggles between Cuban artists, intellectuals, and other citizenry who have challenged the moments in which some politicians within the state and revolutionary leadership have attempted to impose elements of the Soviet model. Since the end of Cuba's strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, pro-Soviet elements within government have lost credibility on the island as the fall of the Soviet Union confirmed what many had known: that the repression of freedom of speech, and the Soviet focus on material life as the *only* source of inequality would lead to an oppressive system that was bound to fail.

Nonetheless, the tensions between the Cuban leadership, artists, and intellectuals are nearly as old as the revolution itself. When the revolutionary government came into power, artists and intellectuals were challenged to socialize culture, in essence to socialize ideological production (Craven 2002, Camnitzer 2003, Howe 2004). A division emerged between those who felt unfettered expression was healthy for the revolutionary process – I would describe those as the followers of Che Guevara – and those who were what some have called Soviet hard-liners – members of Cuba's pre-Revolutionary

Communist Party and anti-American reactionary elements (Sweig 2002). Craven (2002)

writes the following about the utopian perspective of art:

In the 1960s, a delegation of high-ranking officials from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe visited Cuba. While touring the Presidential Palace with revolutionary leader Fidel Castro, this group encountered a semiabstract mural by René Portocarrero, who was one of Cuba's leading artists until his death in 1985. Everyone stopped in front of this artwork and a member of the Soviet delegation asked scornfully: "And this, what does it mean? What does it have to do with the Revolution?" Fidel Castro responded, "Nothing at all. It doesn't mean anything whatsoever. It's just some crazy stuff created by a madman for people who happen to like this kind of craziness and it was commissioned by the madmen who made this Revolution!" This episode reflects the fresh New Left aesthetic of the 1960s that the Cuban Revolution sanctioned in the face of the orthodox opposition from the Soviet Bloc... Equally revealing about the above-noted "discussion" of art involving Soviet diplomats and the Cuban leadership was how it divulged yet again the tension between their respective social systems. In fact, the pro-Soviet PSC had been an outspoken opponent of the "ultra-leftist" insurgency in Cuba throughout most of the 1950s. Furthermore, the uneasy truce in the 1960s between the July 26th Movement [lead by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara] and the urbanized Soviet-backed party did not keep the orthodox Cuban Communists from repeatedly attacking the "revisionist" views and so-called "pathological adventurism" of Che (who resigned from the Cuban Government in 1965 to resume guerrilla warfare elsewhere, in Africa and Bolivia). Not surprisingly, in an interview. . . Che underscored his own deep dissatisfaction with the Soviet Union by saying, "We are going to be the Tito of the Caribbean." Such discontent with the "right-wing deviationism" of the USSR would increase on the part of this "pragmatic revolutionary" (as Che called himself when asked about his own lack of "orthodoxy"). ( 75-76)

In *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (1971), Hugh Thomas writes:

Thus Castro explained in 1963 that when "Russia's satellites in Havana" (presumably Escalante) had asked him to ban an abstract painting, as Khrushchev had done in Russia, he had replied: "Our enemies are capitalism and imperialism, not abstract painting." Guevara in 1965, in *Socialism and Man* described social realist art rather surprisingly as the corpse of nineteenth-century bourgeois painting. (1465)

From these quotes, one could argue that those who supported the approach of Che Guevara supported an approach to culture that fostered debate and deliberation, as art was seen as a way to spot and correct the reproduction of social inequality in everyday-life (Guevara 1989, Craven 2002, Camnitzer 2003, Howe 2004). The utopians rejected the Soviet approaches to art and culture, and even viewed the Soviets artistic practices as "the corpse of nineteenth-century bourgeois painting" (Guevara 1965). This was an implicit allusion to several aspects of the Soviet project such as: Russian imperial

ambitions via the Soviet Union, and the continuation of a commodity-based system of value and production. For radicals such as Che Guevara, the Soviet material project was an outdated replica of a bourgeois mentality masquerading as a universally liberatory revolutionary project. These debates over art and culture have produced Cuba's unique approach to revolution, which combines an economic focus with an ideological-cultural mechanism that encourages artistic production and deliberative participation in every aspect of social and cultural life in all sectors of Cuban society.

The possibility of this type of cultural sphere is largely a result of how the more humanistic elements of the revolutionary establishment (at the state level and artists working independently of the state) have viewed art. However, the institutionalization of this perspective on art has had to contend with two issues:

- 1)the prejudices of the utopians themselves

- 2)political ideologues who sought to homogenize discourse as a means of fostering the semblance of national unity within the Cuban model

The result has been limits on open discussion and debate about the elements of established “artistic aesthetics” that reinforce colonial social structures and ideological tensions. For some critical artists and intellectuals, colonial thinking is manifested in the entrenchment of pre-revolutionary discourses concerning “high” and “low” culture within revolutionary institutionalized artistic spheres. As a result, there has been a curtailing of artistic production and social participation among those considered socially and politically unfavorable, who are deemed to have “low culture” or “less talent” (Moore 2007). In the next section, I focus specifically on Cuba’s cultural model.

#### **4.1 Making the Connections: Art and Social Change**

The struggle can be simply stated as a conflict between the view of art as a servant of ideology and the view of ideas as the wellspring of art. Those who hold the first view

believe that they have found a way to understand and improve the world. From that conviction it follows that art should be based on the new ideology and that the artist should renounce any doubts, since they must be ill-founded. The first conception is that of Marxism-Leninism, of fascism and of all totalitarian regimes. The second is the traditional concept of art, which all Marxists call bourgeois. The history of literature in Cuba has reflected a confrontation between these two positions, their ups and downs and the imposition of the first. The vicissitudes of the two positions follow the fortunes and adversaries of Marxism-Leninism on one hand, and nationalist and humanist socialism (which characterizes the Revolution at the beginning) on the other. - Carlos Ripoll (cited in Howe 1995, 91-92).

During the first two years of the revolution, there was much concern about the government's censorship of the film *PM*, a documentary that, according to the state, idealized social life during pre-revolutionary Cuba. During the public debates that emerged, Cuban artists and intellectuals pointedly asked the new revolutionary state: 'What kind of Revolution is this? Is this a Revolution that supports freedom of expression, or one that restricts freedoms?' (Portuondo 1979). In his famous response "Las Palabras a los intelectuales (1961)," Castro replied: "For [those who support] the Revolution; everything. [For those] against the Revolution; nothing."

For those artists and intellectuals that were indifferent to whether art should be "a servant of ideology" or ideas should be the wellspring of art (Ripoll 2003, 456), Castro argued that revolutionary Cuba may prove a tough place to live. He argued that the social stakes were too high for indifference. Castro quickly added that this policy not only applied to intellectuals and artists, but to all Cuban citizens. Castro argued that while artists have the freedom to express themselves, the Cuban state, as the guarantor of rights and the protector of rights for the Cuban people, has a right to be critical of what enters into the public sphere. He argues that the state has just as much of a right to participate in public debates as Cuban citizens.

This policy marked the beginning of state attempts at intervention into civic, political, economic, and private life, which some argue also resulted in the Cuban citizenry's self-censorship. However, years later, writing from Bolivia, Che Guevara offered his thoughts in "Man and Socialism in Cuba." He wrote:

In the field of ideas that do not lead to activities involving production, it is easier to see the division between material and spiritual necessity. For a long time man has been trying to free himself from alienation through culture and art. While he dies every day during the eight or more hours in which he functions as a commodity, he comes to life afterward in his spiritual creations. But this remedy bears the germs of the same sickness: it is a solitary individual seeking harmony with the world. He defends his individuality, which is oppressed by the environment, and reacts to aesthetic ideas as a unique being whose aspiration is to remain immaculate... The superstructure demands a kind of art that the artist has to be educated in. Rebels are subdued by the machine, and only exceptional talents may create their own work. The rest become shamefaced hirelings or are crushed. A school of artistic inquiry is invented, which is said to be the definition of freedom, but this "inquiry" has its limits, imperceptible until we clash with them, that is, until the real problems of man and his alienation arise. Meaningless anguish or vulgar amusement thus become convenient safety valves for human anxiety. The idea of using art as a weapon of protest is combated. (Guevara 1989, 14-15)

Che argued that outside of the realm of material life, in the realm of ideas, one can see the differences between material and spiritual necessity. Human beings use art and culture as a way to express themselves, their ideas, feelings, and dreams of freedom. However, through the institutionalization of artwork among a non-state-affiliated, professional elite, oppressed peoples are disenfranchised as their expressions, feelings, and spirit are marked as de-legitimate, or of low quality. Only a few, who are deemed exceptional, are promoted and rewarded for their work. The framing of art as the production of exceptional work which emerges from individualized competition, encourages artistic expression to be narrowed to the work of a small number of people. When this happens, citizens feel disempowered as their ability to express themselves is discouraged, and by extension repressed, as their ability to express themselves through art is deemed illegitimate and of a lower quality. Guevara argued that as a result of the limits placed on education and socialized artistic production, humans are further estranged from the tools

necessary to understand their particular social contexts. For Guevara, this was manifested in the production of vulgar or meaningless art.

Che argued in “Man and Socialism” that the lack of education that people receive is also a part of this process of disempowerment. Humans need to be given the ideological tools necessary to make critical connections between feelings, everyday experiences, and the material world around them. In this way Guevara believed that man could begin to make the connections between spiritual and material needs, and begin to see himself reflected through the objects created and/or the work accomplished. One thing that Che was adamant about was that even if the result of freedom of expression is art that represents “vulgar or bourgeois thinking,” freedom of expression should never be repressed – even the production of “socially vulgar” work is useful for the revolutionary process as it can be an indication of what is happening within society. These two pieces, “Man and Socialism in Cuba” and “Words to the Intellectuals” are the foundational pieces that exemplify the tensions within the state - those who valued restriction and the utopians.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, as the revolution and the Cold War progressed, research institutions and the resources for intellectual and artistic production were heavily influenced by Soviet hard-liners (Cuba’s “ideological orthodoxy”) (Howe 2004). These institutions were not under the complete control of artists and intellectuals who wanted to socialize cultural work (Howe 2004). The debates continued throughout the 1960s in periodicals such as *Caimán Bardudo*, *Bohemia* and *Unión*. However, to the dismay of

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<sup>18</sup> Hugh Thomas notes that there was a power struggle during the early years of the Revolutionary process. The compromise between the varying perspectives within the revolutionary government was that Fidel Castro would be the representative of state level consensus. Thus, while Castro himself may have enjoyed abstract art, it is unclear whether or not all of his policy announcements are reflective of his personal perspectives, or the evolution of those perspectives over time.

state politicians, the overwhelming consensus of self-identified revolutionary intellectuals and artists was that their role in the public sphere should be one of critical participation (Navarro 2002). Others tried to strike a balance between their own aesthetic interests and political commitments (Howe 1995). This approach is also reflected in the work of Gramsci. George Steinmetz (1999) writes the following about Gramsci's approach to connecting culture to social change:

Yet Gramsci clearly believed that a prerequisite for the successful assumption of state power by a revolutionary party was the prior construction of cultural counter-hegemony outside the state, within the "trenches" of civil society. Contrary to the expectations of orthodox Marxism, the success of this counter-hegemonic project was, for Gramsci, far from guaranteed by any objective contradictions between the forces and relations of production. Nor were the contents of the counter-hegemonic cultural project a mere translation of fundamentally economic interests. According to one commentator on Gramsci, "the subjects of hegemonic practice understood at the level of their discursive constitution will not necessarily have a class character... to hegemonize *as* a class would simply imply either a limited or an unsuccessful attempt..." Successful hegemonizing agents must abandon their "sectional" class interests, organizing ideologies around more general signifiers such as nationalism, religion, or "the people..." (14)

Cuba's radical artists and intellectuals felt that their role as revolutionaries was to remain independent and critical of the state. These critical actors, and the more utopian elements within the Cuban state, did not want a counter-hegemonic cultural project to be reduced to class and/or economic interests. Socialist realism had become imposed on Soviet artists and intellectuals and this, for many Cuban artists and intellectuals, stifled free speech and the pace of radical social change. While socialist realism was not officially imposed during this time period, there were certainly moments in which the state explicitly attempted to impose firm restrictions on Cuban artists and intellectuals. On April 27, 1971, the forced public confession of the poet Heberto Padilla indicated to all Cubans, and to the intellectual world outside of Cuba, that a socialist-realist aesthetic was expected. Alejandro Anreus writes,

The cultural-political turmoil that began in 1968 with the publication of Padilla's *Fuera del juego* culminated in the poet's arrest and his public confession at the

Writers and Artists Union. Padilla called himself, as well as his wife and fellow writers, defeatists and ingrates, and concluded his confession exhorting his audience to be optimistic soldiers for the revolution. The worldwide reaction to the poet's public confession was negative for the regime; intellectuals such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Jean-Paul Sartre, Susan Sontag, Octavio Paz, Italo Calvino, Marguerite Duras, Heinrich Boll, and others signed letters of protest. The honeymoon between progressive intellectuals and the Cuban Revolution ended, even if an embrace of U.S. opposition to the revolution did not follow. (Anreus 2004)

Heberto Padilla was a writer and poet who initially embraced and supported the Cuban Revolution. However, as the project progressed he became critical of the path the revolution began to take after its first few years in power. In 1968, he published his book of poetry, *Outside of the Game*, which included lines such as: “The poet! Kick him out!/ He has no business here./ He doesn't play the game./ He never gets excited/ Or speaks out clearly./ He never even sees the miracles...” (cited in Caistor 2000). When he was awarded a poet prize in the 1968 National Poetry contest, public attention was brought to his work. As the power struggle between the state and artists and intellectuals continued to deteriorate, the government targeted Padilla in 1971 with a month long imprisonment, interrogation, and a forced public confession that he, and other writers, harbored “counter-Revolutionary sentiment,” ending much of the international support of the Cuban Revolution. *Guardian* reporter Nick Caistor writes:

A petition, signed by such prominent figures as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Susan Sontag, was organized to protest at Padilla's treatment. And, in a continent where the literary and the political were inextricably intertwined, a writer's position on the Padilla affair became an easy way of defining their sympathies. (Caistor 2000)

In this quote, Caistor notes the political significance of art, particularly literature, within Latin America and the Caribbean. A public outcry by preeminent scholars and writers, national and international, forced the hardline elements of the state to ease their approach somewhat, though the damage had been done. Padilla, like many other artists and intellectuals in Cuba, left the island. Exile was preferable to constant harassment and



possible imprisonment. 1971 marked the end of artistic and intellectual experimentation until the late 1980s. The 1970s was a period of tightened bureaucratic control that was manifested in stricter standards for cultural production. The Declaration of the First National Congress on Education and Culture, held the same year, was important in establishing the political and ideological criteria for staffing universities, mass media institutions, and artistic foundations. These policies included the barring of homosexuals from these institutions, tighter control on literary contests to ensure that judges, authors, and topics conformed to revolutionary ideology (Navarro 2002; see also Lumsden 1996).

The case against Padilla was a highly public example of the state's attempts to impose Soviet realism and complete ideological conformity on its artists and intellectuals. These policies were a reflection of the internal politics produced by Cuba's economic and geopolitical dependence on the Soviet Union. The future changes in Cuba's cultural policy demonstrate that Cuba's cultural policy - and the ability of Cuba's intelligentsia to socialize culture - was largely dependent on the external political climate. However, further putting pressure on the Cuban state was the first generation of Cuban youth who had reached adulthood during the 1970s and 1980s (Fernandes 2006, Howe 2004) . These highly educated citizens came of age during what many considered a stalled revolution: their parents had experienced large-scale social change, in some ways for the better, in other ways for the worse, but the first revolutionary generation had yet to see that level of change continue in such a way that they too could enjoy the benefits of the revolutionary process.

During the watershed of the 1980s, young, revolutionary visual artists born and raised under the revolution added to the stronger, and louder, critical voices of those who

rejected the revolution's attempt to implement a Soviet version of homogenous socialist realism that reflected the particular experiences of one universal image of the revolutionary citizen. Gerardo Mosquera describes the emergent perspective of the young visual artists involved in the emergent non-institutionalized artistic and intellectual production:

“One feels [in them] a great urgency to go ‘beyond art’ in order to bring it directly to bear on society’s problems, without making even the smallest artistic concession.” He adds that these artists are “advancing a very serious critical questioning of the problems of our reality that, although touched upon in hallways, rarely have moved from an oral discourse to a public discussion in print.”... “As strong as this expression turns out to be, it is a questioning that emerges within socialism and for socialism” (Mosquera, cited in Navarro 2002, 191).

During the 1980s there was a non-institution-based explosion of critical intellectual activity that centered on the social criticism of the problems persisting in revolutionary society (Zurbano Torres 1994, Navarro 2002, Fernandes 2006). These artists acted out, literally at times, the revolutionary ideal of art as a revolutionary weapon of resistance. Artists and intellectuals began to locate their work within Cuban society as a means to spur social discussion about how to rectify persisting social inequalities. These artists said out loud the many whispers circulating within the Cuban public sphere (Craven 1996, Camnitzer 2002, Navarro 2002, Alfonso 2005, Armony 2005). Roberto Zurbano Torres writes the following about the height of this period, the decade of the 1980s:

La tendencia sociológica que marcó los finales de la década del ochenta ha ido atenuándose en la medida en que esas subjetividades antes silenciadas van legitimándose en un campo literario cada vez más libre de prejuicios estéticos e ideológicos... El espacio poético cubano de los últimos diez o quince años ha sido un campo de batallas estéticas e ideológicas donde han logrado coexistir los más diversos estilos, temáticos y conceptualizaciones que expresan la cambiante realidad histórico-social y la movilidad del horizonte utópico e ideológico de esta etapa. Espacio donde se legitiman esos sujetos sociales que se erigen -cada vez más definidos y diversos- en este espacio de la cultura Cubana.

[The sociological tendency that marks the end of the 1980s has been the increase of the means in which those subjectivities, [that were] before silenced, have been legitimating themselves within the literary camp that has become increasingly free of ideological and aesthetic prejudices... The Cuban poetic space in the last ten or fifteen years has been a

field of aesthetic and ideological battles that have resulted in the coexistence of diverse styles, themes, and conceptualizations that express the socio-historical changes and the mobility of the utopic and ideological horizon of that period. [This was a] space where these legitimated social subjects that stand - each time more defined and diverse[ified] - in this space of Cuban Culture.] (Zurbano Torres 1996, 10-11)

Within the realm of poetry and literature, the 1980s was a decade of legitimation for subjectivities that had been previously silenced by revolutionary ideology. The ideological changes that occurred during this period broadened the utopic and ideological framework of revolutionary ideology. The effect has been the recognition and inclusion of diverse subjectivities, ideologies, themes, ideas, and ways of being. The changes that occurred during the 1980s affected nearly every area of cultural production, such as film (Chanan 2004); music (Fernandes 2006, Moore 2007); literature and poetry (ZurbanoTorres 1994, 1996); and visual art such as theater, painting, and sculpture (Craven 2002, Camnitzer 2003, Fernandes 2006).

However, critical areas of ideological production, such as the completion and broad dissemination of critical, empirically-based sociological work, which could quickly effect change at the intersections of cultural production and public policy, continued to be heavily influenced by the state's political discourse. The result of these changes within the realm of culture has been open discussions concerning race, gender, sexuality and increasing material inequality among Cubans, particularly darker-skinned Cubans. The most profound result of this history of constant negotiation, contestation, and the revolutionary interest in the *political* nature of cultural production has been the emergence of an approach to culture and social change that can be useful in increasing democratic participation in a society's public sphere. This has the possibility to emerge from the following conditions:

- 1) educating a citizenry whose understanding of their particular socio-historical context *includes* cultural expression as a means of social/political participation and ideological production;
- 2) critical artists and intellectuals' view of cultural production as a way to expose the contradictions persisting in (Cuban) society;
- 3) the State's continued political interest in the discourses emerging in the cultural sphere as a means of expanding legitimate forms of democratic participation;
- 4) a challenge to political processes based solely on elite competition between elite political parties in which the interests of one group, or several groups, could dominate social discourse to the detriment of others who may not have the ability/the means to challenge.

All of this actually expands the possibilities of creating a sphere in which those commonly excluded from a neoliberal style of civil society and/or larger public sphere can participate in the political life of society. Through Cuba's educational policy, an increasing number of Cuban citizens have received the critical intellectual and material tools necessary for the *critical* expression of their needs, interests, desires, and *social experiences*. If more societies took the *political* nature of cultural production as a *legitimate* representation of human need, as well as a representation of contradictions produced in society, numerous social ills would be addressed at the grassroots level, or at the very least, more citizens could participate within the political life of a society. If the revolution were able to end one-party rule to *ensure* that the continued interest in the cultural sphere is one of democratic support and political participation, Cuba could further establish itself as a truly revolutionary society.

Instead, however, the state attempts to manage critical social discourse (Navarro 2002). While there is state and popular recognition of the value of social criticisms in

advancing the interests of the revolution, the revolution is often slow to acknowledge the contributions of particular critical artists and intellectuals, if they are acknowledged at all. During the 1990s, for example, there was an attempt to reign in critical intellectuals through the restriction of exit visas and other forms of “politics by omission” (such as offering artists based in Central Havana performancespaces outside of the City of Havana, increasing the bureaucratic hurdles for the publication of manuscripts, and numerous other forms of passive resistance) (Navarro 2002).

In critiquing the conservative (Soviet) approach to social policy by some revolutionary politicians, Navarro describes the following key contradiction that has emerged in Cuba concerning the desire of a revolutionized citizenry to fully participate as critical actors in Cuba’s revolutionary process: “Meanwhile, in the bosom of Cuban socialism, Marxist criticism, among other forms of criticism, is expected to be less sociological, that is, *to be less Marxist or to cease to be Marxist*” (Navarro 2002, 195). Better put, the Revolution encourages the development of revolutionary subjectivity, but seeks to restrict revolutionary praxis. While one could debate ad infinitum about the reasons why conservative, Soviet-inspired elements decided to take a suspicious approach to social criticism – whether it involves concern surrounding U.S./exile interests on the island, a belief in Soviet orthodoxy, or some other reason beyond the purview of this piece – what is clear is that there are limits to the power of hegemonic revolutionary discourse itself, and that critical artists and intellectuals committed to the revolution are also committed to a revolutionary cultural aesthetic as a means of furthering the Cuban revolution. Underground hip-hop artists, and other cultural

workers<sup>19</sup> who were trained or inspired by visual and experimental artists have emerged as young adults who have internalized the ideals of the revolution and emerged as critical social activists.

It is clear that there exists a sphere of exchange and critique in Cuba, a sphere that many would not expect given how notions of freedom, equality, and political participation are presented within U.S. American discourse. Sujatha Fernandes (2006) accounts for these dynamics with the term “artistic public spheres.” She defines these as “sites of interaction and discussion among ordinary citizens generated through the media of art and popular culture” (Fernandes 2006, 3). She writes:

I propose the notion of artistic public spheres as a way of capturing the dynamics of contemporary cultural production in Cuban society, which represent new kinds of negotiation within and against the limits of state power and cultural markets. The specific interaction of these forces is dependent on the shifting coordinates of cultural policies, markets, and alliances between artists and the state. The state may shield cultural producers from the global market, just as it plays an important role in the external promotion and internal commodification of culture and artists. Likewise, commercialization provides opportunities and alternative strategies for artists as it submits them to new criteria of marketability and profit. It is in these contested and contradictory fields that cultural producers such as filmmakers, rap musicians, and visual artists have been able to carve out semi-autonomous spaces for expression. As spaces of cultural struggle and critique, artistic public spheres in Cuba are generally linked to forces, discursive spheres, and forms of cultural expression beyond the nation. Transnational cultural exchange existed in Cuba before the 1990s, but the collapse of the Soviet Union made possible new kinds of transnational linkages that facilitated closer contact with the non-socialist world. Scholars argue that in a moment of growing contact with the outside world, interpretive communities are increasingly detached from national referents. Solidarities and exchanges based on race, style, and other markers of cultural identity replace national belonging in the formation of “international communities of consumers” (Fernandes 2006, 14-15)

Fernandes describes artistic public spheres as an interplay between individual artists’ interests, state interests (cultural policies), and market interests (cultural production for consumption). The state plays a role in shielding the artists from the global market, while facilitating the production and commodification of art within Cuba.

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<sup>19</sup> In this dissertation, I define cultural workers as people who focus on changing minds and using consciousness-raising as a means of improving society.

She argues that it is through the marketability and the commodification of culture that artists have been able to carve out spaces for expression that are not centered on national identity or national discourse. Though transnational cultural exchange existed before the 1990s, Fernandes suggests that it was the collapse of the Soviet Union that allowed for contact with non-socialist countries. In this way, artists moved further from cultural production that centered on the nation, to the production of culture that reflected the needs of particular groups according to other identities organized around race, gender and style. In essence, through the integration of Cuba into the global community, artists are now participating in “transnational communities of consumers,” in which other markers of cultural identity replace national ones. Fernandes links much of the development of contemporary approaches to Cuban art to the fall of the Soviet Union, and traces much of Cuba’s artistic movements to Cuba post-1970, after Cuba began its strategic alliance with the Soviet Union and its global isolation.

Fernandes’ work is an important intervention into the empirical void that exists concerning revolution, politics, and social change in Cuba. She theorizes about a highly visible aspect of deliberation and critique that is happening in contemporary Cuba. This process of critique and deliberation is certainly an under-theorized aspect of empirically-based social science research in Cuba. Her work begins the process of giving language to a social process for which there is limited language in the European and American academy. In fact, the existing language used to describe freedom, democracy, and political participation is inadequate to describe the profound social processes happening within Latin American and Caribbean societies.

However, Fernandes is quick to note that underground hip-hop in Cuba is not a social movement. She writes:

The relative marginality of rap music, as a form of Black cultural production with little mainstream or commercial promotion, has made a greater degree of agency available to rap producers and consumers. As George Yudice... has argued, “agency succeeds to the degree that an individual or a group can make its own the multiplicity of venues through which initiative, action, policy, and so on are negotiated.” Although the nation may appropriate rappers’ calls for a “Black nation” in an effort to rebuild popular support and national unity, rappers’ demands and strategies are not reducible to the state’s agenda; hip-hop culture can actually have an impact on the ways in which racial issues are depicted in public discourse. Culture has become an important arena in which to make political demands and assert rights and agency. Yet at the same time, the agency of the artistic public sphere relies on citizens as cultural producers and consumers. Cultural contestation is easier to contain and incorporate than political action. Rap may be a vehicle through which a range of radical movements are nurtured, from Black activism to feminism, but its ability to translate cultural politics into a political movement depends on the ability of artists to build and sustain broader alliances with a range of social and political groups (Fernandes 2006, 133-134).

Here, Fernandes argues that cultural work within artistic public spheres has the ability to affect change at the discursive level. She argues that “cultural contestation is easier to contain and incorporate than political action.” She states that rap may be useful in nurturing radical social movements, such as Black activism or feminism, but its ability to translate cultural politics into a political movement depends on the ability of artists to build and maintain alliances with other social and political groups.

This assessment of Cuban underground hip-hop seems to reflect many of the assumptions about art being a complementary product that is used for social movements. This also reflects a material analysis of hip-hop in Cuba that obfuscates the significance of the national and transnational social and political groups with which Cuban hip-hop movements are affiliated. The State does not seek to incorporate artistic movements such as the underground hip-hop movement because of what they say about other social movements. Like the case of the Nueva Trova movement in Latin America, it is what the artists say and *do* that poses a threat to state political and discursive hegemony.



Fernandes' work is an important intervention for an analysis of challenges that artists and social movements face in "official" or "legitimate" realms of political participation and artistic production and dissemination. But many social movements occur without access to official means of dissemination or legitimized political participation. This notion of political participation is based on an assumption that social movements are part of networks of organizations whose work centers on affecting public policy and economic policy change at the state level. Howard Becker's notion of "art world" (1995) makes visible many of the structural, organizational, and political aspects of art. He defines "art world" as the following:

An art world, to give a technical definition, consists of the network of cooperative activity involving all the people who contribute to the work of art coming off as it finally does, using the conventional understandings they share. Most work gets made in art worlds. Some does not, whether it is the innovative work of art-world mavericks (e.g., a Charles Ives or Conlon Nancarrow) or the naive work of a Simon Rodia (the maker of the Watts Towers), who never heard of such a thing as the art world and wouldn't have cared much about it if he had.

As the conditions of an art world's existence—who gets recruited to the various roles, what kinds of resources are available, what kinds of audiences there are for its works—change, its internal organization and characteristic products change as well. Published fiction, and the organized world that produced it, changed radically when eighteenth-century England developed a new class of literate servants and business people who could read such work and wanted to. The modern novel was born. (Becker 2008)

Becker's analysis of art worlds embeds artistic productions and professional structures within their sociopolitical contexts. His central argument is that art is a social activity as it involves a number people that allow it to be produced, displayed, interpreted, and performed. Art worlds are a group of institutions which define the structure and function of the art world. For example, this organization is based on the audiences for the work, a system of professionalization that emerges to determine what is art or a particular aesthetic, and how it should be interpreted. An art world also includes the classes of

business people, professional artists, and servants (those who make instruments, play in music halls, repair pianos, etc.).

Given all of the productive processes that go into making “art,” to attribute the production of artwork to one individual mystifies the reality that art is not simply a piece to be consumed or, as I would argue, simply an idea to be incorporated. Art is a node within larger social processes and power dynamics. In the case where there is a material object produced, the process of recognizing the object as a piece of art is also part of a social and political process. One has to be taught to recognize art, and that is a social process as well. Such that if one considers art a form of human expression, then one’s ability to recognize “art” is also linked to the politics surrounding one’s ability to recognize particular forms of human expression as legitimate and as art (Martín 1997). Therefore, there is a range of activities normally taken for granted in the analysis of art, artistic movements, and their relationship to social change.

Becker also challenges the notion of art as being only a “reflection” of society. As he notes: “Remember that the creation of art works depends on the development of a world that provides artists with what they need to make the works they make. ‘What they need’ includes materials, ideas, traditions, workers, and so on”(Becker 2008). Art is embedded within an institutional structure.

Becker’s analysis of art as work implies that a song that is sung is not divorced from political processes and structures, nor is irreducible to the economic structures within society. It is through analyzing art as work that Becker is able to think through some of the institutional aspects of artistic production - not simply in terms of its profitability or its “representation” of society. It is in this way that some art forms,

particularly non-institutionalized or non-incorporated art forms, can be considered as constituting or contributing to social movements. Peter Martín (1997) writes:

The central idea, then, is that the realization of an artwork involves establishing a working relationship (however fragile) among what are often quite large numbers of specialists, and an orientation to the conventions which have come to be the basis of their activities. It is these conventions, normally taken for granted, which are, as we have seen, the “commonsense” principles which people have to take account of if they are to act effectively in the social order. Conventions can range from general fundamental principles, such as the use of the diatonic scale, to the smallest details of dress or demeanor, and it should be emphasized, as by Becker, that through them we can understand not only the production but the reception of music...Becker’s sociological perspective, then, leads to a position similar... where it was argued that to experience music as meaningful depends on membership to a cultural community in which customary practices concerned with the production and performance, and normally accepted modes of representation - in a word, conventions - have been established. ( 175)

Thus, art worlds are highly structured social institutions (social organizations) in which smaller groups of actors are constantly engaging each other for power to define the art world. These actors struggle to develop the norms and “commonsense” conventions that compose the formal structures within an art world. This includes small things such as dress, general principles of the art form, to what is defined as the conditions for high artistic standards. It is in this way, according to Becker, that an attack on an aesthetic is also an attack on “a morality” (Martín 1997). Peter Martín writes:

Howard Becker’s account of art as “collective action,” then, draws on and regenerates a more general model of social order - not as an external social structure (for such a view is considered metaphysical) but as the outcome of the actions of individuals and groups as they seek to pursue their interests and accomplish their projects within specific institutional contexts. Social institutions, in this sense, may themselves be understood as complexes of conventions which have become established and accepted as legitimate; none the less, they are sustained only by the constant actions and interactions of real individuals as they conduct themselves, in appropriate ways. In view of the persistent misunderstanding of the interactionist perspective, it is worth emphasizing once again that this view does *not* entail the neglect of power and conflict in social life. As Becker puts it, a pattern of conventions is also an “arrangement of ranked statuses, a stratification system.” Those who accept the dominant conventions, and become expert in their practice, may enjoy careers which bring them financial rewards, esteem and a measure of security; those who do not, as we have seen, may be marginalized or stigmatized. What is at stake is the power of some groups to impose authoritative definitions on others, to accumulate the resources with which to protect their positions and render them legitimate, and to resist challenges to their supremacy. Far from neglecting power, this perspective has a central concern with the ways in which some people are able to impose their definitions of the situation on others; the whole social order, moreover, is taken to

be the outcome of perpetual processes of challenge, competition and conflict (Martín 1997, 175 emphasis in original)

Within art worlds conflicts and coalitions develop between minor art worlds, so that the result is an over-arching change in definitions. However, art worlds are but one set of social institutions within a larger system of social institutions that attempt to influence a whole social order. Becker's concept of "art worlds" is important in several respects (Martín 1997). It can contribute to a general analysis of social order, or a notion of "social worlds," by focusing on the ways that institutionalized practices are generated, enacted, and transformed. It also leads to a reformulation of "social structure." In this way society is not simply of a set of political and economic institutions that control the lives of people. This allows for a reexamination of social change in which political movements are not based only on organizations that can challenge and change the functioning of these institutions vis a vis influencing the state or its economic "policy."

Through taking a "social worlds" approach, we can account for the many relationships occurring within and between various social institutions operating outside of the realm of state institutions and economically-based social interactions (Martín 1997). It allows for the consideration of other forms of political action that affect social change. It also allows for an analysis of actions in the realm of political life that Somers (1995) has argued are lacking in explanations of the fall of the Soviet Union. According to Martín, taking a "social worlds" perspective is not incompatible with recognizing the centrality of power and coercion in shaping the social order. Though all groups and individuals are a part of the struggle for power, it does not mean that everyone has equal access to resources.

Fernandes' book does account for important tensions between the state, global markets and artists, and the state's interest in incorporating artists. Her work centers on film and arts such as painting and photography, and she then generalizes her findings to music. Becker also generalizes some of his experiences from music, to film, painting, photography, and so forth.

I locate the art worlds that exist in Cuba as a part of a longer historical process that finds its origins in the initial moments of colonial conquest in the Americas and culminating, in Cuba, in the first Wars of Independence. The debate over the role of culture in Cuban society is pre-revolutionary in origins. It dates back to the Wars of Independence, wherein the White elite had to come to terms with the formative role that African cultural influences played in the development of Cuban national culture. It intensified during the Republican period with explicit aesthetic debates surrounding literature, poetry, film, as well as anthropological debates about the role of culture in social development (Ortiz 1993, Helg 1995, Moore 1997, De La Fuente 2001, Craven 2002, Chanan 2004). After the revolution, with the material support and institutional stability allowed by the revolutionary government, Cuban artists were able to focus inward and develop their art. This inward look was also a product of the encouragement of artists, and Cuban citizens in general, to always situate their subjectivities within a global context. Thus, while Cuban artists present their ideas globally even today, these ideas have their origins within the personal, ideological, geopolitical, economic, and historical context that one could describe as being particularly "Cuban." The ideological separation of specific cultural work, such as artistic and religious movements, from political processes has resulted in the delegitimization of some social interests and

political movements as “non-political.” I view the Soviet years in Cuba as a period of ideological restructuring, as it was a time in which Cuba, almost freed from its neocolonial status, had to quickly find an alternative path to address its vulnerability to American imperial interests.

When Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and the other utopian revolutionaries realized the seriousness of geopolitics and U.S. America’s economic interests in Cuba, they realized that they needed to find external support to protect Cuba’s sovereignty (Thomas 1971, Sweig 2002). During the years before Cuba firmly allied itself with the Soviet Union, the utopians, with the overwhelming support of Cuban citizens, began to work to build the society they had envisioned. There was an explosion of discussion and debate about what role art, culture, and the intelligentsia would play in Cuba. There was a move to reunite culture with politics.

Peter T. Johnson (1993) writes about the shift from a utopian approach to art and social deliberation to the restrictive approach to ideological production:

Inevitably, conflicts between the state and intellectuals arose, and it is the process of mediation as well as the outcomes themselves that reveal much about the relationships between the two parties. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the state’s political leaders often created policies that failed to receive the support of those responsible for implementing them, the cultural bureaucrats of the various ministries and agencies. State-mandated measures frequently stifled, rather than encouraged, the experimentation and innovation basic to the intellectuals’ role in and the responsibility to Cuban society. As intellectual commitments were increasingly defined by ideology, the very freedoms heretofore believed essential for independent inquiry and expression became elusive or simply nonexistent. Rather, innovation had to be channeled into meeting the political and often parochial needs of the state. To ignore such a call was to risk one’s position and state-awarded privileges. As a result, two different types of intellectuals evolved: the self-proclaimed ones dedicated to free thought and inquiry, and the publicly-espoused ones who adhered to state policies and objectives (138-139).

During this idealist moment that lasted through the first half of the 1960s, Cuba founded many of the most prominent and influential cultural institutions, magazines/journals, and cultural movements in the Americas (such as the film institute ICAIC, Casa de las

Americas). However, as the Cuban government began to realize that a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union was necessary for Cuba's survival, the government began to consolidate power with pre-revolutionary Communist hard-liners and with other revolutionary movements on the island – including Cuba's artists and intellectuals – under its fold: like the militarized social movements that existed during the early 1960s, critical artistic movements challenged the legitimacy of state policy (Johnson 1993, Sweig 2002, Camnitzer 2003). By the mid to late 1960s, various elements within the Cuban state sought to homogenize revolutionary discourse.

However, the revolutionary drive to reunite culture with politics was linked to a larger historical process in which cultural domination was a means of further disenfranchising African and indigenous populations living in the Americas during the colonial period. Independent American states faced the following issue: how does one take the nation-state as a governing logic and incorporate it into one's own cultural logic – a cultural logic that has had its own structures, and that has always operated outside of official state structures? Within the Western academy, scholars often marvel at how democratic nation-states in Latin America and the Caribbean end up with despots, dictators, oligarchies, and other forms of repressive rule. In the next section, I consider this question and its relation to art and social movements.

#### **4.2 Rethinking Cultural Logics: Culture, Political Participation and Grassroots Activism**

In post-emancipation, neocolonial societies with large Black and indigenous populations, cultural spheres of exchange and deliberation that are *national* in scope have generally existed outside of state institutions. It has only been since the 1960s that there has been a regional attempt at returning governance to the populations living within

regional spaces. However, given the ideological mix of the Americas, the spheres of social life, governance and the role of the state *will* take on a different form than that espoused by the neocolonial - or neoliberal - representatives of global capital.

Recognizing this, the U.S. America, as the leader of global capital, undertook a militaristic, economic, and political counter-attack in order to ensure that the interests of European global capital would continue to be served. Greg Grandin (2004) writes:

Young leftists inspired by the 1959 Cuban Revolution and frustrated by the inability of substantive democracy to take root broke with the electoral tactics of their nations' Communist parties and organized rural insurgencies in the hope of following Cuba's road to revolutionary sovereignty... Yet government repression did more than just first militarize and then vanquish the left. By the mid-twentieth century, peasant and working-class movements had become the primary carriers of not only democratization - a project Latin American liberals had long abandoned - but social democratization. They demanded that the state use its power to rein in the abuses of capital. Yet most governments in the years following World War II proved entirely unable to carry out such an undertaking with any consistency. Their sovereignty did not extend into the plantation or factory. Lacking not only a monopoly of legitimate violence but the necessary capacity for illegitimate repression to counter seemingly inextinguishable mass mobilizations, security forces imported from the United States (as well as South Africa, Israel, and France) new repressive technologies to nationalize violence... The prerequisite for the rapid economic restructuring that took place throughout the Americas beginning full throttle in the 1980's - lowering tariffs, deregulating capital streams, reducing government social spending, weakening labor protections - has as much to do with the destruction of mass movements as much as it did with the rise of a new financial elite invested in global markets. (13-14)

The 1959 Cuban Revolution was an inspiration to young leftists in the Americas.

Working class movement in the Americas sought social democratization in the face of a liberal state that did not defend its populations against the interests of foreign capital.

Economic liberalization went hand in hand with global capital interests, which used newly imported, repressive technologies of power to achieve their economic interests.

Though communism offered some useful ideas in relation to understanding how

European capital operated within a European context - in which implications could be drawn for a non-European context - communism was still embedded in a modernist framework.



Latin American countries pursued a democracy that was much more participatory and grassroots-based than the model of democracy encouraged by liberal capital.

Avritzer argues that established approaches to deliberative publics within elite-centered democracies are not applicable to how democracies are structured and function within a Latin American context. He writes: “Thus, deliberative publics become the central arena for completing democratization due to the way they manage to connect renovations within the public culture to institutional designs capable of transforming non-public and hybrid practices into democratic forms of decision-making” (Avritzer 2002, 14).

Whereas non-public and hybrid practices, I argue, such as song, poetry and dance are included into democratic forms of decision-making. Avritzer, like Grandin, argues that “Latin American democracy has always been more participatory and egalitarian than it was procedural and individualistic” (Grandin 2004; 14). Therefore, Avritzer argues, the “elite model” of individual and group competition for state control does not apply to how democracy is thought of, and functions in Latin America. Thus, electing a president or a group of political elite to make decisions for the good of the many is not the way many people in the region envision political processes. Avritzer develops a theory of what he describes as “participatory publics” to describe how participatory democracy functions in Latin America. He writes:

The conception of participatory publics involves four elements:

The first element is the formation at the public level of mechanisms of face-to-face deliberation, free expression, and association. These mechanisms address specific elements in the dominant culture by making them problematic issues to be politically addressed.

The second element is the idea that social movements and voluntary associations address contentious issues in the political culture by introducing at the public level alternative practices.

The third element involves the transformation of informal public opinion into a forum for public deliberation and administrative decision-making.

The fourth element is that they bind their deliberations with the attempt to search for institutional level issues made contentious at the public level. (Avritzer 2002, 7)

In essence, the Cuban Revolution became an inspiration for many in Latin America and the Caribbean because Cuba was able to achieve, during the emergence of late capitalism, some aspects of what other nations hoped to achieve with their democratic models.

Focusing on democratic deliberation at the level of *national* politics and with a focus *only* on government discourse limits our understanding of the many ways in which grassroots-based cultural workers are incorporated into Latin American and Caribbean politics. It especially limits our understanding of everyday Cuban citizens' commitment to the revolution, and their decision to do cultural work as a means to carry out revolutionary praxis in their everyday lives, despite the domination of national institutions by oneparty. This especially limits our understanding of social changes occurring *locally and nationally*, that are spurred by those who choose to carry out their activism within Cuba's large, expanding cultural sphere. In the next section, I consider some of the institutional aspects of the state's move to socialize culture.

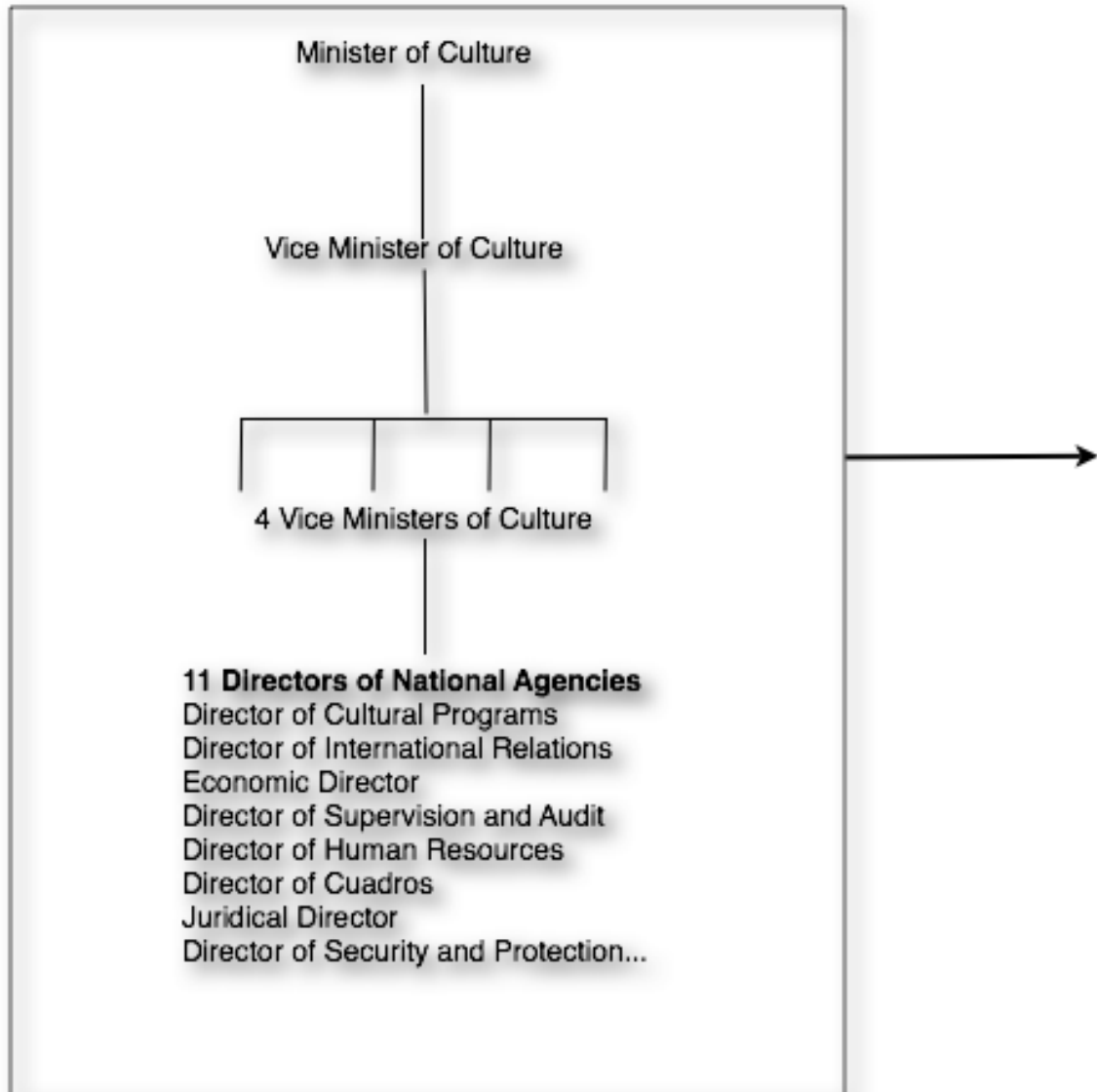
#### **4.3 The Base and Superstructure of Culture: The Institutional Structure of Cuban Culture**

The earliest institution created to oversee macro-level cultural production was the National Cultural Advisory (Consejo Nacional de Cultura (CNC)) in 1961 (Moore 2007). The CNC was initially part of the Ministry of Education. During those years, the CNC established world-renowned cultural institutions such as the Unión de Escritores y Artistas Cubanos, or Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC), and socially radical programs such as the Movimiento de Aficionados, or the Amateurs' Artistic Movement (Moore 2007). The goal of Cuba's Movimiento de Aficionados was to directly involve as many people as possible into the arts. Some of its visible examples were

neighborhood mural projects, the formation of theater and dance troupes, choruses, and amateur

**Figure 4a: Institutional Structure**

(<http://www.min.cult.cu/loader.php?sec=ministerio> last viewed Saturday, December 1, 2007).



music ensembles (Moore 2007, 85). Many of the material resources for these organizations were found in the grassroots-run Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR) and local cultural institutions. The movement was a direct challenge to the concept of art existing in its own sphere of influence within capitalist societies.

The Aficionado movement encouraged collective composition, downplayed the role of the “star,” and was so morally driven – art was created for free dissemination among Cuban citizens – that Amateur artists rarely took money for their work (Moore 1997). Hugh Thomas notes that there were numerous tensions artists faced given the state’s coercive encouragement of ideological incorporation, homogeneity, self-censorship and the artists’ and intellectuals’ impetus towards challenging efforts at censorship or incorporation. He writes the following about the effect of Cuba’s art policy:

Against this should be set the fact that the regime has spent a great deal on artistic promotion, and it can fairly claim to have brought poetry, ballet, music, traveling libraries and theatre to the countryside of Cuba... But new popular music seems to have died and Cuba which, during the “bad old days,” was for so long a source of new music and dances, from the conga, rumba, mambo and habanera to the chachachá, has not had any new rhythms to which to dance or to export... (Thomas 1971, 1464)

The Amateur Artistic Movement coincided with mass, grassroots literacy and health education campaigns of the 1960s. These campaigns drastically reduced illiteracy, infant mortality, and were integral in improving many of Cuba’s material well-being indexes. The fact that the Amateurs’ Movement was an integrated part of Cuba’s educational agenda, and just as important as Cuba’s health programs, indicates the central importance of artistic literacy to Cuba’s revolutionary project. The movement brought art into marginal, poor communities and into the countryside by developing the educational and material basis necessary for broader-based artistic production. During the 1960s and 1970s, several of Cuba’s most famous poets and musicians were factory workers, children of working-class families, and/or illiterate before the massive educational campaigns – artists such as poet José Yañes, Eloy Machado, and Nancy Morejón, the latter of whom was the daughter of dock workers (Craven 2002).

The artistic education included within Cuba's empowerment programs created a citizenry able to engage in critical analysis of art and culture. For those who chose not to pursue degrees in Cuba's formal institutions, the grassroots component of the artistic movement allowed for independent artists to also participate within the cultural sphere. As part of the Amateur Movement, individuals or groups were able to request the material resources necessary to undertake independent artistic production. In the case of Black Cubans, there was a notable increase in the amount of formally-trained Afro-Cuban artists who began to rise to national and international prominence during the revolutionary period (Moore 2007). At the same time, there was a decrease in cultural activity associated specifically with Afro-Cuban culture (Thomas 1971).

Numerous complaints arose as a result of the socialization of culture and the downplaying of the "star" or "the professional artist." During the 1960s, while a lot of impressive art emerged from the movement, a lot of "substandard art" was produced as well. There was a move by artists and intellectuals to encourage the state to pursue a process of standardization and a system of mass dissemination (Moore 2007). Between 1963 and 1967, the state sponsored a series of lectures, known as the Popular Music Seminars, as a means of educating "the masses" in music theory and history (Moore 2007). It was hoped that this would help to stimulate people's desire, and ability, to produce more socially-critical, and aesthetically-appealing art.

As a result of artists' protests, by 1968, there was an increase in the professionalization schools available to Cuban citizens, and shortly thereafter a system of pay was instituted (Moore 2007). The pay an artist received was based on their level of formal education and the social value of their work. To the dismay of many artists, many

of the incomes remained stagnant throughout the 1980s (Moore 2007). As part of the standardization process, the determination of the “value” of art, or the artists’ social significance was not based on their popularity or influence, or how much the artist contributed to Cuban society. Instead, it was tied to levels of institutional degrees and whether or not bureaucrats found one’s work to be aesthetically pleasing. Thus, if the artist did not have a high level of degree-based education and/or was considered to have produced work of little social value (even if embraced by Cuban citizens), they were not paid well or given additional resources beyond those guaranteed to all citizens (Moore 2007). The result was that some artists who were nationally and internationally renowned were paid less than obscure classical music instructors (Moore 2007).

During the first two decades of the Cuban Revolution, the nation lost a high number of its most talented cultural workers. Also, the new government did not appoint people to institutional positions based on their expertise, but based on their loyalty to the 26th of July Movement.<sup>20</sup> During the late 1960s and 1970s, the incorporation of hard-line elements as a means of appeasing Soviet interests caused further conflicts.

In 1976, the Ministry of Culture was created as a result of Soviet influence and given the mandate to streamline bureaucracy and standardize national institutions (Moore 2007). Figure 4a outlines the institutional structure of the Ministry of Culture. It is a centralized structure that seeks to establish ideological uniformity among independent cultural organizations and state supported institutions.<sup>21</sup> Typical of the early revolutionary

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<sup>20</sup> During the late 1950s there were numerous armed groups fighting for economic and political hegemony in Cuba. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara led one faction called the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement – a reference to Castro’s first, and failed, insurrectionary attempt against the Moncada Barracks in Santiago de Cuba on July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

<sup>21</sup> Later, when I discuss the Asociación Hermanos Saíz, and the Agency of Rap, I will note that one of the goals of the Agency of Rap, as an institution within the Ministry of Culture, is to bring independent artists

tendencies to place loyal political officials as institutional heads, though they had little to no training in the areas, Armando Hart, a lawyer who was not a trained artist nor an intellectual but was a key political figure, was appointed as the head the Ministry of Culture. In 1997, Abel Prieto, the former president of UNEAC, took office. As a key figure in the arts who often challenged the State in its treatment of critical artists and intellectuals, Prieto's appointment was seen as indicative of the state-level changes happening in Cuba (Moore 2007). However, during his time as Minister of Culture, Armando Hart came to represent, for many artists and intellectuals, the state bureaucrats who were arbitrarily placed in positions of power. Though he contributed much to the implementation of Cuba's national cultural program, he was not an artist or (initially) an intellectual and, at times, did not actively support artists and intellectuals who may have run afoul of the state (Moore 1997).

However, after his twenty-one years as Minister of Culture, Armando Hart has written much about the relationship between revolution and culture. His position as a policy-maker and head of the Ministry of Culture offers much insight into the institutional goals of the Ministry. He states the following goals of the Ministry of Culture during a 1980 speech entitled "Algunos aspectos de la política cultural Cubana (Some aspects of the Cuban cultural politic)":

- To strengthen the state authority in the cultural terrain.
- To facilitate the broadest social cooperation, collaboration, and public participation in the fulfillment of cultural work.
- To produce a politic that ensures that in every branch of art and literature, especially at its base, the participation of specialists of the greatest professional and ideological level.

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into the organization. This is an effort to establish more control over the competing discourses offered by the underground hip-hop movement.

- To advance and strengthen the scientific research of culture all of the country.<sup>22</sup>
- To develop a system of art education, to provide support of artistic education, and to promote the formulation and development of fitting quarters within the sphere of the state for culture.
- To achieve, through means of adequate technical and methodological instruments, the effective direction and control in the execution of politics oriented [towards culture].
- To create the conditions that effectively assure the application of a cultural politics oriented in agreement with the methodological guidelines outlined.
- To support, orient, and control the work of the specialized organs of culture pertaining to the Assemblies of the People's Power in the intermediate instances and to provide the direction necessary for the execution of [cultural] work. (Hart 1990, 33 my translation)

The goal of the Ministry of Culture is to standardize the criteria for critiquing and disseminating art. The move to “strengthen the scientific research” of culture reflects an interest in systematically studying art. In order for the Ministry of Culture to achieve these goals, as well as to stimulate the broadest participation in the arts possible, Hart argues that the state should take on a policy that ensures that artistic literacy is included in the educational agenda. This would be effected through the establishment of art institutes in every province and houses of culture (*casas de cultura*) in every community.

However, a key part of the goals Hart outlines is the development of space within the state apparatus for culture. This space within the state was the creation of the Ministry of Culture as one of Cuba's thirty state institutions.

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<sup>22</sup> Here “scientific investigation” refers to maintaining a level of standardized professional rigor in which people can critically engage each other, using standardized tools of analysis.



**Figure 4b: Cuban State Structure: the Council of State**














**Figure 4c: Ministries and Institutes**

<a href="http://www.cubagob.cu/ingles/default.htm">http://www.cubagob.cu/ingles/default.htm</a> last viewed Saturday, December 1, 2007.	
Economy and Planning	Science, Technology and the Environment
Interior	Information Science and Communications
Foreign Affairs	Domestic Trade
Justice	Foreign Trade
Armed Forces	Sugar Industry
Public Health	Finances and Prices
Work and Social Security	Construction
Agriculture	Basic Industry
Education	Light Industry
Culture	Auditing & Control

Higher Education	Fishing Industry
Central Bank of Cuba	Attorney General
Food	Cuban Civil Aviation Institute
Tourism	Cuban Radio and Television Institute
Iron, Steel and Engineering Industry	National Institute of Sports
Transportation	National Hydraulic Resources Institute
Cuban Minister of Government	

**Figure 4d: Description of Council of**

-  To attend to national defense, the maintenance of internal order and security, the protection of citizens' rights, and the safeguarding of human lives and property in the event of natural disasters
-  To manage the administration of the state and to unify, coordinate and monitor the activities of the central state administration bodies and of local authorities
-  To implement laws and agreements made by the National Assembly of People's Power, as well as decree-laws and provisions introduced by the Council of State, and when necessary, to pronounce corresponding regulations
-  To pronounce decrees and provisions based on and in fulfillment of current laws, and monitor their implementation.
-  To revoke decisions made by authorities subordinate to the Provincial or Municipal Assemblies of People's Power, adopted as a result of powers delegated by central state administration bodies, when these decisions contravene superior regulations, which are binding decisions.
-  To propose to the Provincial and Municipal Assemblies of People's Power that provisions adopted by subordinate provincial and municipal authorities as part of their specific function be revoked when they contravene regulations approved by central state administration bodies in the exercise of their powers
-  To revoke provisions made by the heads of central state administration bodies when these contravene the superior regulations, which are binding decisions
-  To propose to the National Assembly of People's Power or to the Council of State the suspension of agreements made by Local Assemblies of People's Power, when these contravene current laws and provisions, or when they affect the interests of other communities or of the country in general
-  To set up the committees deemed necessary to fulfill the tasks which it has been assigned
-  To designate and remove officials in accordance with the powers granted to it by law
-  To undertake any other function which is entrusted to it by the National Assembly of People's Power or the Council of State
- The Council of Ministers is responsible for all its activities and periodically reports to the National Assembly.

**FUNCTIONS OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

**Ministers**

## **COUNCIL OF MINISTERS:**

The Council of Ministers is the highest executive and administrative body and constitutes the Government of the Republic.

The number, designation and functions of the ministries and central bodies which form part of the Council of Ministers are established by law.






The Council of Ministers comprises the Head of State and Government, who is its President, the First Vice President, the Vice Presidents, the Ministers, the Secretary and the other members, as determined by law.

The President, the First Vice President, the Vice Presidents and the other members of the Council of Ministers selected by the President, make up its Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee may make decisions regarding matters pertaining to the Council of Ministers in the period of time between meetings of the Council.

## **FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS:**

-  To organize and direct the implementation of political, economic, cultural, scientific, social and defense activities agreed upon by the National Assembly of People's Power
-  To draft proposals related to general plans for economic and social development, and, once approved by the National Assembly of People's Power, to organize, direct and monitor their implementation
-  To direct the foreign policy of the Republic and its relations with other governments
-  To approve international treaties and submit them to the Council of State for ratification
-  To direct and monitor foreign trade
-  To draft the state budget, and, once it has been approved by the National Assembly of People's Power, take responsibility for its implementation
-  To adopt the necessary measures to strengthen the country's monetary and credit systems
-  To draft new legislation and submit it for consideration by either the National Assembly of People's Power or the Council of State, as appropriate

-  To direct the affairs and tasks of the Ministry or body for which they are responsible, pronouncing any provisions and resolutions necessary for this purpose
-  To pronounce, when it is not the express function of any other state body, the regulations required for the implementation and application of the laws and decree-laws which correspond to them
-  To attend sessions of the Council of Ministers, as voting members, and to present to the council draft laws, decree-laws, decrees, resolutions, agreements, or any other type of proposal which they consider appropriate
-  To designate, in accordance with the law, the officials for whom they are responsible
-  Any other function ascribed to them by the Constitution or the law

<http://www.cubagob.cu/ingles/default.htm> last viewed Saturday, December 1, 2007.

Coinciding with the 1970s push to streamline public institutions, there was an internal push to decentralize the state. In 1972, the Council of Ministers was created (Perez 1995). The Council of Ministers is responsible for the day-to-day operations and decision-making of government. In 1976, the Cuban state created some measures to develop democratic institutions; one of these measures was the creation of the Organs of People's Power (OPP). The goal of this institution was to provide a regular and systemic way in which people could participate in state-level political processes (Brigos 2001). The OPP instituted an electoral system in which municipal officials were elected locally, and these officials would, in turn, elect representatives to the decision-making structures of the state. In 1992, the Cuban state attempted to revise the system to allow for greater participation at the grassroots level. In 1991-1992, the State implemented the People's Council. Jesus Pastor García Brigos (2001) describes the political significance of the People's Council:

As modified in 1992, the OPP, "the representative bodies of the socialist state that is the Republic of Cuba," is structured in the National Assembly, supreme body of state power and the only constitutional and legislative authority of the republic, with its Council of State, and in the provincial and municipal assemblies as the highest local organs of state power and government at their respective levels. Thus, the OPP are the representative institutions of the Cuban state.

The members of the People's Power assemblies, "National Assembly deputies, and provincial and municipal assembly delegates," have a more authentically popular mandate than in any other democratic model because of how they are elected to their positions and because of the ties they develop with their constituents and, in general, their place in everyday life. A very distinctive element in the Cuban system is that these elective positions are unpaid, entailing no privileges or personal benefits of any kind. They are taken on in addition to other work and social obligations. This implies a high level of individual altruism and a spirit of sacrifice...

Any citizen not legally disqualified can aspire to exercise this responsibility. Elected by direct and secret vote of the citizens of the electoral district, from among candidates publicly selected by local residents in nominating assemblies, the delegate is a member of the municipal assembly or highest organ of state power at the local level. These assemblies are invested "with the highest authority to exercise state functions in their

respective districts and to operate as government within the framework of their authority and according to the law.”

The municipal assemblies are the closest state representatives to individuals. Electoral districts that make up the municipality nominate representatives of the municipal assemblies. Municipal leaders are selected by secret ballot and anyone can run, and win, as long as they are not forbidden for criminal reasons. Those elected then select the members of the National Assembly who, in turn, select those in higher positions of power such as the Council of the State and the President.

In the mid-1990s, when the Cuban State faced a legitimacy crisis as a result of the Special Period, the People’s Council was created as a means to increase popular participation. The councils also served to represent areas that had large populations, but had not yet been established as a municipal capital. The People’s Councils are made up of elected municipal officials, as well as local leaders from trade unions, other local organizations, and individuals who represented community interests.

Delegates other than the municipal delegates elect the Council’s president. While the municipal assemblies represent general municipal interests at the national level, the People’s Councils are charged with bringing together all interests, such as local economies, together to focus specifically on addressing local needs. Adhering to Cuban republican ideals of altruism and public service, elected officials were not paid. What is not clear is if the move to decentralize and democratize the state was a result of this crisis, was a continuation of previous initiatives, or possibly both. Regardless, the crisis provided a context for the reforms to happen quickly.

Initially, the creation of these institutions was met with excitement. It allowed for problem-solving at the local level (García Brigos 2001). However, a major problem

emerged as the non-democratic nature of the national structures did not allow for the needs and interests of those organized at the local level to create policy and social change at the national level. Unfortunately, the People's Councils have come to function as mechanisms whose standards of success are measured in local level participation in service projects (García Brigos 2001). Also, whose name was placed on the ballot at the municipal level was largely determined by party membership, and elected municipal officials rarely lost their position. The state's mode of "institutional improvisation"—quickly changing institutional structures and leaders – during the 1990s also affected the ability of these institutions to function in a democratic manner that could translate into influence at the state level. These councils often lack a professional political class, or are actually given influence in decisions at the state level, and as a result, these institutions have come to serve as a symbolic structure and are actually not very influential.

Though the political significance of these institutions may not be reflected in quick changes at the state level, they are influential at the local level. Depending on the community and the officials who come to power at the local level, change can happen at the grassroots level that eventually forces changes at the state level, though the non-democratic aspects of the state at the national level slows this process down tremendously.

The 1976 Constitution created a presidential system of government in which power was centralized in the president who presided over the Council of State and the Council of Ministers (Perez 1995). The acts undertaken by the Council of Ministers are influenced by the recommendation of the National Assembly of People's Power. The National Assembly of People's Power is also a product of the 1976 constitution. The



1976 Constitution established a popular, secretive voting mechanism for the election of municipal assemblies, which elect provincial assemblies who then choose the representatives that make up the National Assemblies. The Minister of Culture is included as an equal among the ministries that compose the Council of Ministers, which then informs the Council of the State. This is one way in which, at the national level, the issues presented by artists, intellectuals, and Cuban citizens are represented via the arts. Thus, electoral politics, material need, and cultural expression are present in state decision-making. However, at the local level, the interests of Cuban citizens are addressed by an institutional structure that attempts to engage citizens at the grassroots level.

#### **4.4 The Ministry of Culture**

The Ministry of Culture describes its cultural policy as follows:

La cultura como valor universal, es la vía más legítima para depurar y enaltecer las aspiraciones creativas del ser humano. Por tanto, la visión contemporánea de nuestra razón de ser como nación, con una proyección amplia que nos identifique cada vez más con lo que nos es propio, con nuestra cultura, constituye una prioridad del Estado Cubano.

En las condiciones históricas en que vivimos, donde predomina la dominación hegemónica sobre los medios de comunicación y se imponen modelos culturales alienantes; la política cultural Cubana se ha orientado, por una parte, a propiciar la participación de nuestro pueblo en los procesos culturales y su acceso a lo mejor del arte Cubano y universal y, por otra, a garantizar la activa intervención de los escritores y artistas en el diseño y la práctica de esa política. Los creadores Cubanos, comprometidos con nuestra Revolución, han tenido y tienen un peso decisivo en la proyección nacional e internacional de los valores de nuestra cultura.

La comprensión de nuestro compromiso social y de liberación, la visión Latinoamericana y universal y las posibilidades del desempeño dinámico e integrador de la cultura Cubana se reflejan en los principios que la sustentan.

Estos principios son inherentes a la esencia de nuestro modelo social, recogen la historia, el pensamiento y la cultura del país y conservan, de forma dinámica, su correspondencia con las condiciones socioeconómicas y político ideológicas de la actualidad.

[Culture, as a universal value, is the most legitimate way to purify and exhaust the creative aspirations of human beings. Therefore, the contemporary vision of our reason to be as a nation, with an ample projection in which we identify even more with that which is of ourselves, with our culture, it constitutes a priority for the Cuban state.

In the historical conditions in which we live, where hegemonic domination predominates through the means of communication and that imposes alienated cultural models; Cuban cultural politics has been oriented, for one part, to foster the participation of our people in cultural processes and to their access to the best of Cuban art and universal [art], for the other [part], to guarantee the active intervention of writers and artists in the design and the practice of this politic. The Cuban creators, committed to our Revolution, have had and have a decisive role in the national projection and international [projection] of the values of our culture.

The comprehension of our social and liberatory commitment, the Latin American and universal vision and the possibilities of the dynamic and honest fulfillment of Cuban culture is reflected in the principles that sustain it.

These principles are inherent in the design of our social model, that collect the history, the thought and the culture of our country and conserve, in dynamic form, their correspondence with the socioeconomic conditions and the ideological politic of today.] (Ministry of Culture 2007)

The Cuban cultural policy is situated within a Cuban (local), Latin American (regional), and universal (global) notion of liberation. The overall focus of Cuba's cultural policy is to ensure that the individual participates fully in the "sociocultural" development of the Cuban people (Ministry of Culture 2008). Contemporary government policy that is aimed at achieving this goal focuses on three areas:

- 1)The institutionalization of a broad, grassroots-based educational policy. This educational policy centers on the development of state-based formal educational institutions. It also centers on the development of grassroots-based educational programs that offers all Cubans the opportunity to self-educate, and offers the possibility that they can enter into formal institutions of education if they desire to pursue a professional career as a cultural worker;
- 2) The "Plan Turquino," a program that centered on bring art and literature to those living in rural or difficult areas to reach, such as Cuba's mountainous areas;
- 3)The role of art and culture in tourism;

The Ministry of Culture's institutional structure facilitates popular artistic involvement with the state. It functions as a node of power within the state apparatus, just as the National Assembly of People's Power, and other state institutions such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, in which the the reach of power is disbursed at the state level and at the local level. The usage of art within the tourist industry has

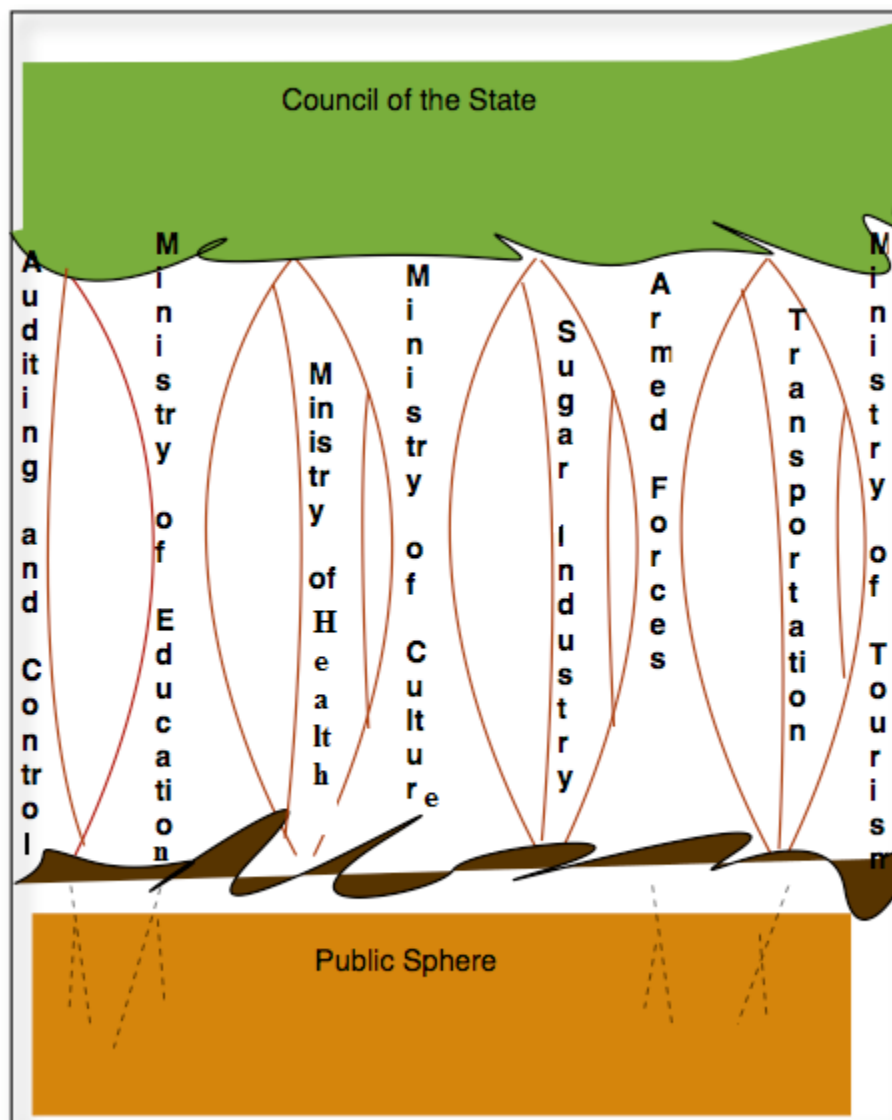
served to make the tourist industry more profitable. In Figure 4e, I use the image of trees supporting a forest canopy as a metaphor for the Cuban state structure. The usage of the trees is to illustrate how some aspects of the state structure are linked to popular action in the public sphere. In the end, the shape of the tree itself, and the structure of the canopy—how diffuse it is, for example—is a result of external factors such as larger geo-politics and the global economy. The tree itself is useful in the support and shape of the canopy, but the trunk of the tree also serves as a filtering process. This represents the structure's development as a mechanism to filter what comes from its foundation and what comes from outside of its structure. The usage of the image of the leaves is to note that even at the state level there is a filtering process, via one-party rule, which also attempts to further filter what comes from the base as well as what is present outside of the tree itself (i.e., the effects of larger geopolitical processes, the global economy, etc.).

While such a structure would have impressive implications within a completely democratic field—no party rule, freedom of speech, minimal material/socioeconomic inequality, in the current situation the filtering mechanisms within the system serve to support political attempts at discursive homogenization and one-party rule. However, at the grassroots level, what happens within the public sphere is somewhat obscure. The Cuban public sphere is very heterogeneous, and anything could be happening at a given time.

The roots of the trees represent the attempt of the state to filter and control what is happening at the grassroots level, so that, for example, there are informants that attempt to check any potentially “counter-revolutionary” critical discourse. Given the structure of Cuban political institutions, Cuba's political culture, the grassroots-empowerment

discourse which is a competing discourse to the centralizing, totalitarian elements within the Cuban state (the anti-imperialist reactionary elements and the Soviet-inspired hard-liners), and given the recent regional move to the “Left,” it has been difficult for the same type of Eastern European totalitarian system to emerge in Cuba – there is no longer enough external pressure and isolation to justify hard-line rule.

**Figure 4e: Institutionalized Grassroots Activism**



The result of Cuba’s institutionalization of grassroots activity is that there have been some social changes that are the result of popular mobilization at the grassroots

level. However, the one-party mandate and filtering system slows institutional change as leaders are chosen largely from the Communist Party of Cuba, or are critical elements who eventually tire, become frustrated with the system, and eventually choose to leave the country. These elements choose to work for social change in Cuba from the Cuban diaspora. As a result, this slows down the pace of deliberation and change *at the national level*. At the local level, this slow pace of change is often manifested in frustration, as Cuba's citizenry largely still support the ideals of the revolution, though they may not always support its actions and mandates. The Ministry of Culture's structure illustrates the relationship between the state and grassroots activity.

There is a highly centralized, institutionalized structure that attempts to serve as the node of power that carries out the national policy and to ensure ideological unity within the Ministry of Culture. For example, the Department of Inspection ensures that cultural activities are "ethical" and that they meet the objectives defined by official cultural policy; it also ensures that there is no corruption in artistic institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. Such a fluid policy leaves the Ministry of Culture open to the particular interests of the individuals that head the institution, as well as subject to the political conditions of any moment. For example, individuals can influence what is accepted as "ethical."

Also infused in this structure are mechanisms that prevent Soviet-style absolute homogenization of all public discourse. The Ministry of Culture also funds grassroots institutions such as Casas de Cultura, or Houses of Culture. Casas de Cultura are intermediary institutions between the state and local communities.

**Figure 4f: Casas De Cultura**

(<http://www.min.cult.cu/loader.php?sec=estadisticas&cont=casadecultura> last viewed on December 04, 2007)

Indicator	2004	2005
Casas de Cultura Total	333	341
Casas de Cultura en Servicio	319	326
Grupos	23229	23055
Integrantes	92593	140120
Actividades Total	576920	852184
Dentro de la Casa	216176	301998
En Extensión	360744	550186
Asistentes Total	49347	44333.2
Dentro de la Casa	15722.3	13685.4
En Extensión	33624.7	30647.8

The goal of the Casas de Cultura is to ensure that there is an artist center within every community throughout the island. There has been an increase in the number of these institutions over the last twenty years, with a notable increase of Casas de Cultura in rural areas and on the Isla de Juventud (Moore 2007). From 2004-2005, the number of Casas de Cultura in service has increased. The Casas provide artistic education for community youth, and those who test well during their elementary and secondary education are placed on a professional arts education track (Moore 2007). Those who graduate from specialized secondary arts educational institutions compete for the limited enrollment slots at Cuba's premier post-secondary arts education institutions (Moore 2007).

Once in the post-secondary institutions, students are expected to attend political rallies, be members of the Communist Youth organizations, and to participate fully in political life. They also are sent to work in Cuba's rural communities as sugar cane cutters as part of their sociopolitical preparation. Those who complete post-graduate degrees have a highly rewarding arts career in which they receive material and institutional support in disseminating their work.

It is in this way that the Casas de Cultura function as a mechanism to ensure that all of those with "talent," regardless of their material circumstances, have an opportunity to participate in sociocultural production at the national level. However, the politics involved in the selection process itself privileges those who support revolutionary ideology *and* the revolutionary political agenda. However, it is also important to note that this does not mean that all of Cuba's professional artists are ideological automatons, as there are numerous artists who participate within these structures because this is simply how the professional structures are organized within their country. Thus, at the national level there is an ideological mix of thought on appropriate artistic aesthetics. These artists support and are supported by another aspect of the Casas de Cultura, Cuba's Aficionado Movement.

At times, the Casas de Cultura provide space for independent cultural productions. The Casas de Cultura are also only one of nearly fifty institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Culture. These institutions are also home to numerous groups and associations that work at the community level. While they provide a venue for the state to target "talent," Casas de Cultura and organizations such as the Asociacion Hermanos Saiz (AHS) also serve as institutional options for artists who could not or decided not to

enter into state professional institutions, as well as others who want to engage in cultural productions. It is these spaces, which are controlled by local actors and supported by other locally-run institutions, that will often support cultural activities that even conflict with national ideology and cultural policy. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, even though the Cuban state and larger Cuban society may have found homosexuality “repulsive,” there were events such as drag shows that were locally supported (*Mariposas en el andamio* 1996).

Some of these activities occur because they are supported in poor, violent, and intensely marginal areas where people carry out events despite objections from officials. Also, events sometimes simply occur without any state-level attention, and sometimes state support of an event may represent policy and ideological changes at the local and national levels. However, institutions such as the Department of Inspection were created to ensure that grassroots cultural projects do not stray too far from national ideological interests. As shown in Figure 4f, there were about 852,000 (nearly 1 million) cultural activities that were sponsored only by the Casas de Cultura. The Casas de Cultura boasted of 23,055 groups in 2005. Cuba’s population is approximately 11 million people. There are several types of groups associated with the Ministry of Culture. Some are quasi-independent cultural institutions that have political affiliation with the state, though they are largely economically independent. Others are groups that are economically dependent on the state (Ministry of Culture), to groups that are directly integrated in the Ministry of Culture’s central institutional structure. The numerous possibilities for cultural participation at the national and grassroots level has helped to develop a sphere of human expression and social critique that has come to have some influence on public



policy at the state level. One example that has been cited in recent literature is the selection of Abel Prieto as Minister of Culture in 1997.

On the Ministry of Culture's website, it seems that traditional tensions between the state and artists and intellectuals continue to emerge. The first involves the utopian goals of the Ministry of Culture. On the first page of the website, one sees two descriptions of the Ministry of Culture. The first is what seems to be the state's official description of the institution; it states:

**Ministerio de Cultura de la República de Cuba**

Órgano de la Administración Central del Estado de la República de Cuba, encargado de dirigir, orientar, controlar y ejecutar en el ámbito de su competencia la aplicación de la política cultural del Estado y del Gobierno Cubano, así como garantizar la defensa, preservación y enriquecimiento del patrimonio cultural de la nación Cubana.

El Ministerio de Cultura se crea en 1976 dentro del proceso de institucionalización de los Órganos de la Administración Central del Estado, y de igual forma se constituyen las Direcciones Provinciales y Municipales, las que se responsabilizan en la aplicación de la política cultural a estas instancias.

El Estado Cubano orienta, fomenta y promueve la educación, la cultura y las ciencias en todas sus manifestaciones y particularmente preconiza la libertad de creación artística y la defensa de la identidad de la cultura Cubana, la conservación del patrimonio cultural y la riqueza artística e histórica de la nación y la protección de los monumentos nacionales.  
[Organ of the Central Administration of the State of the Republic of Cuba, it is charged to direct, orient, control and execute in the environment of its competence in the application of the cultural politics of the Cuban state, so as to guarantee the defense and preservation and the enrichment of the cultural heritage of the Cuban nation.]

The Ministry of Culture was created in 1976 within the process of the institutionalization of the State Central Administration organs, which also created the Provincial and Municipal directors, that are responsible for the application of the cultural politics in those instances.

The Cuban state oriented, formed, and promotes education, culture and the sciences in all of their manifestations and particularly recognizes the freedom of artistic expression and the defense of Cuban cultural identity, the conservation of cultural heritage and the artistic enrichment and history of the nation and the protection of national monuments.]  
(Ministry of Culture 2008)

The second description is attributed to Abel Prieto and reads:

La política cultural revolucionaria se ha orientado, por una parte, a propiciar la participación de nuestro pueblo en los procesos culturales y su acceso a lo mejor del arte Cubano y universal y, por otra, a garantizar la activa intervención de los escritores y artistas en el diseño y la práctica de esa política. Los creadores Cubanos, comprometidos

de modo entrañable con nuestra Revolución, han tenido y tienen un peso decisivo en la proyección nacional e internacional de las instituciones culturales.

[The revolutionary cultural politics has been geared, in part, toward promoting the participation of our public in cultural processes and their access to the best of Cuban art and [art] universally and, on the other hand, to guarantee the active intervention of writers and artists in the design and practice of these politics. The Cuban creators, and those closely committed to our Revolution, have had and have a decisive role in the national and international projection of cultural institutions.] (Prieto 2008)

Abel Prieto, Ministro de Cultura

Present in these two descriptions of the Ministry of Culture are the tenuous compromise between the state and Cuban artists and intellectuals. The first excerpt describes the Ministry of Culture in institutional terms: it is an organ of the Cuban state that was formed to promote the state's cultural policy. Prieto's quote describes Cuban revolutionary culture in universal terms – for the betterment of humankind. However, he also states that this revolutionary policy guarantees the “active intervention of writers and artists in the design and practice of these politics.” He states that these artists and intellectuals are committed to the revolution, and play a “decisive” role in the national and international functions of Cuba's cultural institutions. The state's institutional description is centered on the Ministry's functional utility for the Cuban state and for the implementation of cultural policy among the Cuban people. Here, the state argues that the implementation of “appropriate artistic policy” is the source of the enrichment of Cuban culture. At the end, the state's description briefly mentions that the state supports freedom of expression. But for the most part, much of the language is reactionary language centered on the state's ability to defend the nation – part of which is defending and supporting Cuba's cultural heritage. Here are the echoes of Fidel Castro's statements expressed in “Words to the Intellectuals,” that the state has the right and the duty to

intervene in national affairs as a means of ensuring the defense and well-being of the nation.

On the website, there seems to be a concession in which the Ministry of Culture extends the olive branch to its writers and intellectuals by acknowledging “freedom of expression” as a national virtue; the website also includes a quote from a key figure of Cuba’s intelligentsia, Abel Prieto, the Minister of Culture. Prieto takes this opportunity to mention the utopian view of Cuban cultural policy. He writes that ideas produce art and that writers, artists, and the public are key actors in Cuba’s cultural processes, not mere recipients.

#### **4.5 Discussion**

Cuba’s approach to culture also addresses a key problem in Anglo-American political theory. This is the question of how one links the deliberative processes in society which that seem supra-political or “culturally-based” to political processes at the state level and/or to larger processes of social change? The Cuban state structure is a unique model that socializes power through its focus on grassroots empowerment. Unfortunately, because of the state’s mandate of “one-party rule” and ideological unity, the democratic potential of this model has been eclipsed by the state’s homogenizing impulses. The incorporation of culture into national political processes and sociocultural development at the state level increases the possibility that Cuba’s public sphere can come to function as a space of free human expression and critical debate that possibly allows for a more inclusive public sphere than those of other western societies.

# Section II

## Chapter V

### Art and Revolution: Cuba's Artistic Social Movements and Social Change

The organic intellectuals of the working class are defined on the one hand by their role in production and in the organization of work and on the other by their "directive" political role, focused on the party. It is through this assumption of conscious responsibility, aided by absorption of ideas and personnel from the more advanced bourgeois intellectual strata, that the proletariat can escape from defensive corporatism and economism and advance towards hegemony. —<sup>23</sup>

The relationship between culture and social change has been hotly debated in Cuba's cultural sphere since the beginning of the revolution. A general consensus seems to have emerged, however, that gives art a key role in the creation and dissemination of critical discourses. In the following sections, I consider how these tensions play out in Cuba's music cultures. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork and a literature review, I seek to contextualize the work of underground hip-hop artists who are working for the social inclusion of Cuba's marginal populations. They offer a primarily racialized critique that confronts the incorporation of racial ideologies in Western notions of humanity, equality, nation, freedom, and citizenship.

Artists contributing to the Cuban underground hip-hop movement explore the way in which race serves as a "metalanguage" within Cuban society. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1995) writes the following about race as a "global sign":

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<sup>23</sup> Antonio Gramsci (Hoare and Smith 2005, 4)

Race serves as a “global sign,” a “metalanguage,” since it speaks about and lends meaning to a whole host of terms and expressions, to myriad aspects of life that would otherwise fall outside the referential domain of race... Race not only tends to subsume other sets of social relations, namely, gender and class, but it blurs and disguises, suppresses and negates its own complex interplay with the very social relations it envelops. It precludes unity within the same gender group, but often appears to solidify people of opposing economic classes. Whether race is textually omitted or textually privileged, its totalizing effect in obscuring class and gender remains (5).

One of the key contributions of the underground hip-hop movement to social change in Cuba is the self-recognition, among artists and participants, that race serves as a core ideological foundation for the organization of Cuban society. By moving beyond a solely material analysis of social life, the underground hip-hop movement offers a crucial ideological critique that can serve to destabilize the ideological foundation of “race” in Cuba. This radical potential is manifested in the movement’s challenge to aesthetics, and through its integration of cultural production and political activism. Higginbotham writes the following about the benefits and challenges of using “race” as a metalanguage in analyzing social life:

First of all, we must define the construction and “technologies” of race as well as those of gender and sexuality. Second, we must expose the role of race as a metalanguage by calling attention to its powerful, all encompassing effect of the construction and reproduction of other social and power relations, namely, gender, class, and sexuality. Third, we must recognize race as providing sites of dialogic exchange and contestation, since race has constituted a discursive tool for both oppression and liberation. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue, “the effort must be made to understand race as an unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Higginbotham 1995, 3-4).

Higginbotham argues that when focusing on race as a metalanguage, one must remember to critically engage its effects on the construction and reproduction of other social and power relations, particularly class, gender and sexuality. Underground artists view race as both an oppressive and liberatory discourse. Race has been a tool of oppression, but once artists come to recognize this, and to recognize their social position as *Black* Cubans, they feel empowered to fight for change; they finally understand what

is oppressing them and what they need to act against. It is in this way that the underground hip-hop movement represents a political struggle in Cuba, at the level of everyday life and “common knowledge.” By fighting for ideological change at the level of “the people,” the movement produces ripple effects throughout the rest of Cuban society – effects that extend to the state.

In order to frame the relationship between cultural movements, social change, and the racialized critique offered by underground hip-hop artists, I begin Section II with a discussion of the alternative music scene in Cuba, and focus Chapter Three on my experiences at a Nueva Trova Show in 2004. Much of my analysis will center on my perceptions of race within this particular public sphere, as a way to contextualize how Cuba’s critical music spheres address varying aspects of everyday life in Cuba.

As I will show in the context of the Nueva Trova show, the incorporation of the Nueva Trova movement into revolutionary institutional structures has truncated some of the radical potential of the movement, particularly its anti-racist discourse. The result, I argue, is that Nueva Trova has emerged as an overwhelmingly White, “light,” Mulato, or upper-class-Black Cuban phenomenon. This music scene seems to serve a role of promulgating a nostalgia for “Whiteness,” though it maintains elements of its radical roots. The shows are still transgressive to a certain degree, as Nueva Trova events form one of the few of the non-heteronormative public spaces in Cuba; however, the ability of Nueva Trova shows to establish inclusive space also seems to be based on their deployment of “Whiteness” as a universal sign for civility and humanity. This, in part, could be one of the reasons why underground hip-hop has caught the attention of older generations of Nueva Trova artists, and was originally included under the label “Nueva

Trova.” But unlike Nueva Trova, the UHHM is a music movement of a younger generation that radically challenges Cuban society to recognize and critically address the way in which a crucial issue, such as “race,” continues to oppress and marginalize Cuban citizens.

### **5.1 The alternative music scene: hip-hop and Anti-Modernist Aesthetics**

There are two sides to every crisis: one bodes extreme difficulty, while the other holds the promise of new possibilities. This is as true in the realm of theory as it is in daily life. The vision of Marxism-Leninism has been bound by 19th and 20th century Eurocentrism with assumptions of a linear progression from barbarism to civilization that has had much in common with mainstream Western modernization development thinking. The two combined in 20th century revolutionary experience to create serious obstacles to analysis of theoretical categories beyond nation and class, such as race and wider value systems within the socialist experiment. (Pérez-Sarduy and Stubbs 1993, 11)

Havana’s underground hip-hop scene is an integral part of Cuba’s contemporary alternative music scene (AMS). Cuban music critic Joaquín Borges-Triana writes, in his online journal, *Those of Us Who Dream Through The Ear*, that the term “alternative music scene” is an operative category.<sup>24</sup> This scene is not simply composed of a limited number of genres, though hip-hop, rock, jazz and Nueva Trova could be considered key genres. However, if there is one thing that characterizes all alternative music, it is its challenge to established revolutionary cultural institutions’ efforts at homogenizing Cuban citizens, their experiences, and their needs; it presses for the recognition and acceptance of the numerous particularities of Cuban society (Borges-Triana 2004).

Borges-Triana writes the following<sup>25</sup>:

Sí debe quedar bien definido que se trata de un nombre abstracto para designar un fenómeno que ha venido ocurriendo en Cuba desde mediado del decenio de los ochenta en cuanto al surgimiento de expresiones no convencionales de lo cultural, ajenas al poder

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<sup>24</sup> *Los Que Soñamos Por La Oreja* por Joaquín Borges-Triana, Boletín Num 01; Diciembre 2004 <http://www.oreja.trovacub.com/boletin.html>

<sup>25</sup> In December 2004, prominent music critic Joaquín Borges-Triana began the online journal *Los Que Soñamos Por La Oreja: Boletín De Música Cubana Alternativa*. Originally *Los Que Soñamos Por La Oreja* was a weekly column in the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. However, with the online journal, Borges-Triana stated he would focus more on promoting Cuba’s alternative music scene.

central y que nacen desde los límites de las estructuras institucionales llamadas a legitimar lo Nuevo que surge. Si hubiera una invariante en la Música Cubana Alternativa sería la diversidad, afirmación que aunque pudiera parecer demasiado axiomática es una tesis oportuna pues aquí no caben las intenciones de homogeneizar. Tal precepto se supone que sustente la aprobación por igual de una propuesta estéticamente revolucionaría de otra apoyada sobre pilares viejos en la historia del arte sonoro, sin reconsiderarlas apenas.

Yes, one ought to have well defined what one means by using an abstract name to designate a phenomenon that has occurred in Cuba since the middle of the 80's in which there was a surge of nonconventional cultural expressions, foreign to the central power and born from the limits of the institutional structures called to legitimate the newly emerged [cultural expressions]. If there were a constant in Alternative Cuban Music, it would be the diversity, the affirmation that although it could seem axiomatic enough it is an opportunity to show that the intention to homogenize do not fit here. In such a way that perceptions suppose that to supporting equal endorsement of a revolutionary aesthetic that support old pillars in the history of resonant art, without hardly reconsidering it.

Borges-Triana writes that the alternative music scene emerged with the 1980s cultural movements. Literature about these movements has tended to focus on visual artists and literary types who challenged hegemonic state discourses during the 1980s (Fernandes 2006; Howe 2004, 1995; Chanan 2004, 1986; Camnitzer 2003, Craven 2002). Borges-Triana's goal is to write critical music cultures into this history. For Borges-Triana, the 1980s cultural movements were born at the margins of what was considered legitimate. These cultural expressions were foreign, literally and figuratively, to centralized state power and centralized state discourse. These cultural movements, including the emergent alternative music scene, challenge the homogenizing tendencies of the revolutionary state's cultural politic. For Borges-Triana, the AMS is a result of a dialectic between the universal and the national, between "tradition" and the "vanguard." It is also a product of the trauma that has been experienced by some as a result of the opening of the economy which has influenced the development of twenty-first-century Cuban culture (Fernandes



2006, Borges-Triana 2004).

As a grassroots artistic movement, the AMS was facilitated by the Aficionado movement undertaken by revolutionary leadership. I use hip-hop as a case study of this larger artistic movement and as a lens through which to view the historical tensions surrounding (and the revolution's contribution to) the role of culture in social change. hip-hop, as one of the key movements in the alternative music scene, captures many of the social changes that have occurred in Cuba since the mid-1980s. The boom of rap in the 1990s paralleled the boom in the popularity of other music genres such as salsa and *reggaetón*, rock, and some renewed interest in Nueva Trova. Salsa and reggaetón are linked to the embracing of "fun." "Fun" describes music that is socially uncritical, non-politically correct, embraces sensuality and materialistic desires; it is useful as it is "fun," sounds good, and has a good dance beat. Fun music was initially discouraged by the revolutionary leadership because of its uncritical, nonpolitical and possibly "immoral" orientation (Moore 2007). The shift towards acceptance of fun and socially-critical music such as hip-hop is an example of the increasing social changes happening in Cuba, music that has been considered unrevolutionary is being, at best, tolerated by the state.

The AMS does not reject the egalitarian ideals of the revolution; indeed, it works for the furthering of revolutionary ideals through its advocacy of multiple discourses in service of social equality. The alternative music scene addresses one central critique of the revolutionary cultural aesthetic: that the revolution's hegemonic discourse of unity and sameness, originally constructed to ensure equality and defend against U.S. aggression, implicitly supports older pillars of artistic expression through limiting the

criticism of revolutionary discourse and social policy. The effect is that the classism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of social inequality associated with pre-revolutionary institutions continue un-addressed in many areas of social life. AMS musicians argue that there is not one experience of oppression, but multiple experiences of oppression that require multiple discourses aimed at challenging oppression (Zurbano 2006, Camnitzer 2003, Borges-Triana 2004, Navarro 2002, Vitier 2002, Craven 2002).

In relation to some of the other key genres of the alternative music scene hip-hop is considered one of the most critical of the contemporary art forms. It is also considered by Cuban artists and intellectuals to be the face of the new Black social movement in Cuba. However, before moving on to hip-hop, it is important to situate hip-hop within the alternative music scene, and Cuba's critical artistic social movements.

## **5.2 The Marginal Existence of Cuban Rock within Cuban Culture**

Pero a ver, yo creo que era un momento histórico. Yo creo que en aquel momento cuando empieza el rock, que es en los años 70, 80 todavía Cuba estaba más cerrado en la defensa del proceso revolucionario... Creo que la gente lo vinculó más al pelo largo, las drogas, los hippies. Era un movimiento muy difícil y creo que la gente éticamente le chocaba el pelo... Entonces, el rap creo que no. Son cosas más naturales, su vestuario, es otra estética y otra cultura. Y creo que chocaba menos.

[But let me see, I believe that it was a historical moment. I believe that in that moment, when rock began, it was in the 70's, 80, Cuba was still more closed in the process of the defense of the revolution... I believe that the people came more with long hair, the drugs, the hippies. It was a very difficult moment, and I believe that the people ethically clashed with the hair... So rap, I believe, not. They are something more natural, their dress is of another aesthetic and another culture. I believe it clashed less.]

- Interview with Grisel Hernández, musicologist and Vice President of the Cuban Agency of Rap, January 2006.

Rock music has had a difficult history in Cuba. As musicologist Grisel Hernández notes, rock came to Cuba during the late 1960s, and became popular during the 1970s and 1980s. The rock movement was the first counter-cultural movement of the post-1959 era (Manduly 2001, Rensoli 2005). It was, and continues to be, associated with gays and drugs. People were largely put off by the long hair, make-up, and queer

dress associated with U.S. American and European metal, mod, art rock, and punk scenes. Rock started independently as part of the Aficionados movement (Manduly 2001). Because much of Cuba's rock originated in Spain, the UK, and the U.S., rock became associated with imperialism.

Additionally, rock's central aesthetic is the rejection of established social norms whereby artists and fans explore and embrace aspects of society that are repressed, ignored, marginalized, or even considered satanic. Therefore, rock also has a side that embraced excess. It embraces sex, drugs, and other "fun" activities that are often associated with a shortened life-span. Thus, in a country that is staunchly religious (Santero, Orisha, Catholic), a country that was in the middle of a revolutionary process that sought to embrace everything "Cuban" while rejecting everything "of the imperio," Cuban rock faced a tremendous amount of social and political resistance. Maria Teresa Linares states the following about rock during a 2005 interview:

Bueno, estaba hablando del Rock y cómo se presenta el rock en muchas cosas diferentes. En este momento hay un montón de grupos nuevos y ya yo pierdo el nombre de ellos. Pero hay algunos que por televisión hacen una intervención, una declaración de qué es lo que hacen y están haciendo un disco, y ya hicieron dos o tres, que se oyó en algunos lugares y otras veces no se oyó. Entonces, están haciendo una música que le falta totalmente esa identidad Cubana que yo te digo que va en un cordón umbilical, en la base, en el substrato de la música. Entonces si hacen lo que le llaman fusión, una fusión de flamenco, pero no es flamenco español, sino flamenco de Las Ketchup [Spanish rock group].

OK, I was talking about rock and how rock is represented in a lot of differing things. In this moment there is a movement of new groups, and I have lost the names of them. But there are some that, from television, they make an intervention, a declaration about what they do and that they are making a disk, and they've already done two or three, you can hear them in many places, and other times you don't hear them. So, they are doing music that completely lacks a Cuban identity, I'll tell you that, and in their umbilical chord, at their base, in the sub-status of music. So if they do what they say is fusion, fusion of flamenco, but it's not Spanish flamenco, but flamenco from Las Ketchup [Contemporary Spanish Rock Group]. (Linares interview, 2005)

Maria Teresa Linares is a world-renowned musicologist. She is known for her Grammy-winning recordings of, and writings about, traditional and rural Afro-Cuban music during

the 1940s and 1950s. She is well-respected for her work tracing the development of Cuban music since the colonial period. She is very invested in studying and understanding Cuban music, even in its formative stages. For this reason, she has been an avid supporter of hip-hop. Known as the grandmother of hip-hop by some underground hip-hop artists, Linares believes that the incorporation of Afro-Cuban themes, rhythm, manners of speaking, and other cultural clues demonstrates that underground hip-hop is undergoing a process of Cubanization. For this reason she is very interested in the music. Her relative disinterest in rock, however, illustrates a train of thought that continues in Cuba – namely, that Cuban rock is not Cubanized, but still a foreign music. Rock musicians in Cuba have failed to incorporate aspects of Cuban culture into their music. The non-American aspects of the music tend to come from Spain (Manduly 2001, Linares 2005).

One of the few musical genres that is considered to be Cuban rock is “Fusion.” Fusion was created in the 1970s by the rock group Sintisis (Manduly 2001). As an art form, Fusion combines American rock with Afro-Cuban rhythms and themes. The racial composition of the group is largely White and Mulato. This also has symbolic significance: it represents Cuban mestizaje. This group stands in sharp contrast to the predominantly White groups that began to emerge in the 1980’s.

In contrast to Nueva Trova artists, rock musicians did not mobilize to organize their own social structures and institutions. Much of their activity was centered around listening to CDs or playing music in the home. There were concerts, but there was never a “rock music manifesto,” or a “rock music symposium” that sought to integrate rock music within Cuba’s social and political context. There were few causes around which

rock musicians and listeners rallied, though some artists who were incorporated into state-run music institutions often sang ballads that were based on hegemonic political discourse. In essence, part of the problem with rock was that it was apolitical, or at least not ideologically critical in a way that was easily recognizable to many Cubans. However, during the 1960s this unintelligibility of rock landed many *rockeros*, who were or perceived to be gay, in UMAP camps.

In contrast, as Linares and Hernandez note, there is something familiar about Underground hip-hop, something that is recognizable to Cuban citizens. This familiarity is a result of one artistic social movement that resulted in policy and ideological change: the Nueva Trova Movement. As a post-1959 youth movement, Nueva Trova had a different reception in Cuba.

### **5.3 Nueva Trova: The Cuban Protest Music Movement**

Nueva Trova, originally called Protest Music, emerged in the 1960s. Nueva Trova has its origins in European Trova, which originated as a form of peasant music that discussed everyday life (Díaz 1994). The music arrived in Cuba through multiple venues, through Spanish singers as well as through traveling minstrel shows. In addition to being influenced by European Trova, Nueva Trova was influenced by multiple forms of European and U.S. American youth music, including 1960s folk and rock music groups such as the Beatles. As a form of global Protest Music, Nueva Trova emerged during the turbulent 1960s when much of the folk- and rock-based world music was very socially critical (Díaz 1994, Moore 2007).

In 1967, Nueva Trova artists and enthusiasts organized the First International Meeting of the Protest Song. The resolution undertaken at the end of the meeting was a

rejection of racism, capitalism, and all social problems negatively affecting society (Díaz 1994). The participants declared that Protest Music was for the service of the people and not something to be co-opted, commercialized, and consumed (Díaz 1994). However, this movement occurred during a time in the revolutionary process when mass organizing had become suspect. Also, Nueva Trova fans and artists wore long hair and dressed like hippies. Given elements of its artistic aesthetic, it associated with the rock music scene. As a result, Nueva Trova artists often ran afoul of the state and faced social sanctions such as being sent to the UMAP camps or censored from public programs (Díaz 1994, Moore 2007).

Fortunately, while the political establishment in Cuba was suspicious of the Nueva Trova movement, Cuban Nueva Trova artists had become famous in Spain, Chile, Brazil, and other countries throughout Latin America. As Cuban officials came to recognize that their artists were becoming famous in a youth movement that was part of a larger global youth movement, officials moved to incorporate the music. At the First National Congress of Education and Culture in 1971, the state moved to identify and define young, talented *trovadores* (Nueva Trova musicians) (Díaz 1994). The state had realized that Nueva Trova could be a great public relations tool (Moore 2007).

Before 1972, Nueva Trova was referred to simply as Protest Music (Moore 2007). The usage of Nueva Trova was a means to link it to previous non-political artforms on the island, and to reduce its radical “protest” representation (Moore 2007). Nueva Trova emerged as a part of a Latin American transnational music movement called Nueva Canción. The Nueva Canción movement began in Chile in the late 1960s. Fernando

Matta (1988) writes the following about the transnational influence of Nueva Trova and Nueva Canción:

The period in which the Nueva Canción Chilena and the Nueva Trova were first becoming known was also an epoch in which people became conscious of the contradictions and conflicts inherent in their national situations and began to recognize them as features of a larger phenomenon: underdevelopment and economic and cultural dependency are pressing realities in all of Latin America. This continent has been one of the primary zones of expansion for capitalism in its transnational phase. The phenomenon cuts across the whole of society, affecting its political, social, economic, and cultural dimensions. It invades the process through which societies conceive of their development and define their history.(452)

Nueva Trova and Nueva Canción emerged as part of a political movement and a regionally-based realization that their nationally-specific struggles were part of a larger anti-neocolonial struggle. These struggles are interrelated in such a way that they affect every aspect of life. In referring to the institutional networks that allow for the popularity of the Nueva Canción, Matta writes the following:

The Nueva Canción Movement has generated its own independent dynamics to attain social significance, in spite of its being rejected or ignored by the recording transnationals and great regional networks. It has gained a position because its strength is derived elsewhere - from an identification with proposals for truly democratic change. Building on the continuing and reciprocal communication between the minstrels and their public, the movement finds expression in an increasing number of records and cassettes, in a kind of *counterstrategy of dissemination* only made possible through the support of students, workers, poverty-stricken city dwellers, rural workers, and many other grassroots and base organizations (1988, 449).

The Nueva Canción movement emerged in spite of being rejected and ignored by transnational music industry corporations. It was only through its networks with other social movements that it was able to survive. Nueva Canción and Nueva Trova artists faced one dilemma as artists: they became restricted by the political and aesthetic structure (or art world) that they created. In order to maintain their status as the vanguard activists of a social movement, they lost some room for experimentation: they felt tremendous amounts of pressure to produce what the audience had been trained to hear.

Matta notes that there were five functions and commitments of the Nueva Trova and Nueva Canción movement:

- 1) Synthesis: The texts interpret complex political theories and socioeconomic analyses and disseminate them in an accessible form.
- 2) Rupture: The new music opens the possibility for expression and creates gaps in the dominant discourse where the popular voice is being repressed by political and economic authoritarianism. These song movements open a gap for the voice of the neglected masses and for those who “have no voice.”
- 3) Anticipation: The varying expressions of the Canto Nuevo<sup>26</sup> Movement work for the construction of a more just and egalitarian society by synthesizing latent hopes.
- 4) Convocation to meet: for the popular masses, a music that refers to its struggles, hopes, and joys, its understanding of love and solidarity, promotes the possibility of an ardent meeting. One feels closer to those who share in the common struggle. Festivals and special live events pave the way for a symbol whose force and application extend beyond the song itself. Even in the most repressive situations, the song creates a space marked ‘Here we are.’ The summons enlarges and deepens the significance of the song. Emotions become collective and a phenomenon is created whereby the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- 5) A function of denunciation: The creativity of the artists and participants assume the responsibility of denouncing the existing conditions that are created both nationally and internationally by dominant systems. Aesthetically, the music stands on the line of being seen as a pamphlet for a movement, and a poem. It is when the State or transnational powers perceive that the line has been crossed, that artists and Nueva Canción fans faced repression.
- 6) Confrontation: The power of the music to organize masses of neglected people is especially terrifying to national political and economic institutions (Matta 1998; 449-450).

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<sup>26</sup> *Canto Nuevo* is another name for protest music. It was the name commonly used in Chile during the early years of the art form.



Matta argues that the Canto Nuevo movement fulfills these functions through its social praxis. It is in this way that music cultures such as Nueva Trova can facilitate the emergence of alternative forms of democratic participation that can, and sometimes do, destabilize existing economic and political structures.

In the case of Cuba, the relationship between the state and artists took on a different dynamic. Cuba was in a state of radical social change, in which artists and intellectuals were very active in debates over the vision, structure, and form of the new society that was emerging. Nueva Trova artists were eager to work with the state as a means of having access to Cuba's commercial structures. However, it seems that as Cuba began to ally itself further with the Soviet Union, the Nueva Trova movement was not institutionalized, but incorporated into the state structure and discourse. As Nueva Trova became more accepted as part of Cuban culture, Nueva Trova songs began to be used in ICAIC (state) films, there were national Nueva Trova festivals, and artists were given more access to national structures of mass communication (Moore 2007).

Nueva Trova's incorporation has led to ebbs and flows in the genre's popularity. There have been moments of compromise by the artists, truncating the music's socially-critical and radical tendencies. Increasingly, the songs have become nostalgic, focusing on very general topics such as love and world peace. Some critics have viewed this as a form of self-imposed censorship. The movement's incorporation has also truncated its utility as a socially-critical discourse that could be "used for the people, by the people." The incorporation of Nueva Trova is not necessarily a sign that the movement is no longer political, nor is it a sign that cultural movements are easier to incorporate than political movements. But like other political movements, Nueva Trova confronts

repression and incorporation as tools used to maintain hegemony. Self-censorship and the aging of Nueva Trova artists is also linked to the music's decline in popularity, and the sharp increase in the popularity of hip-hop among those who enjoy edgy and socially-critical music.

Early in its emergence as a movement, hip-hop brought the issue of race to Cuba's national attention. Because of its location "among the people," its protest tendencies, and its status as a non-incorporated independent music genre, Cuban underground hip-hop was initially known as "Nueva Trova." The issues discussed within hip-hop and the question of whether or not it constituted a (Cuban) artform captured the attention of Cuba's press. Articles about Cuban hip-hop have consistently appeared in premiere revolutionary publications such as *Bohemia*, *Revista Salsa Cubana*, *Cultura y Revolución*, *Juventud Rebelde*, *Trabajadores* and *Jiribilla*.

One of the effects of the Nueva Trova movement was the creation of *La Asociación Hermanos Saíz* (AHS). According to Susan García Amorós, state institutions such as the Asociación Hermanos Saiz and the Cuban Agency of Rap (created in 2003), was created to serve as quasi-independent and quasi-incorporated institutions (Amorós interview, Havana 2006). They were put into place as a means to address the needs of independent artists, but also as a mechanism to encourage them to consider becoming part of Cuba's formal institutional structures. These institutions were to function as a space for resources for artistic events, as a means for artists to meet and host their own independent events, and to serve as a space of reflection and theoretical discussion. They were to serve as a space for independent writers and visual artists, but

they have primarily been a space for counter-cultural musical genres such as rock, Nueva Trova, and rap.

#### **5.4 Reflections on My First Nueva Trova Show**

On December 9, 2005, I went to see my first Nueva Trova Concert in the Sala Avellaneda of the Teatro Nacional. I had been to smaller Nueva Trova shows, but this was my first full-on, massive concert-hall experience. I walked to the show to meet Marta and her friends. The concert was at the National Theater, so it was a short walk from my house near the streets 23 y G to the Plaza de La Revolución. When I arrived at the front entrance of the theater, it seemed to be empty. But as I got closer, I started to realize that there was a long line of cars dropping off people to the show. Now that I think about it, reviewing my notes today on December 11, 2007, I never saw that many cars dropping off people at the hip-hop concerts. There were usually two or three cars at the hip-hop shows, and a few taxis to take foreigners home. Most people had to walk to a main road to hail taxis, or to make their way home. During my walks to the hip-hop festivals, I do remember, however, long crowds of hip-hop fans spilling off the sidewalks into the oncoming traffic. I remember how grateful I was one night when I was walking along the street with some hip-hop artists, and Pablo Herrera, the hip-hop producer, stopped to give us a ride. We eagerly climbed into the air-conditioned van. I remember zipping past the long lines of concert-goers as we drove the last mile or so to the show.

However, on the occasion of the Nueva Trova show, when I saw all of the cars the outside the Teatro Nacional there was something very familiar about the sight. I remember feeling really excited. I now realize that there may have been some comfort in the recognizable class basis of the Nueva Trova show. Parents, friends, and taxis easily

dropped concert-goers off at the theater entrance and left. As I walked through the parking lot, I noticed that there were people hanging out by their cars. The parking lot was not packed, but there were easily ten cars parked in the lot. This was amazing in a city where cars were just beginning to line neighborhood streets after the gas shortages of the Special Period. This is not to say that there were not crowds of people making their way to the show on foot, as not everyone could afford some form of auto transportation. However, there was certainly a material difference at work between the hip-hop and Nueva Trova events.

I walked past the parking lot and the line of additional ten or so cars that were waiting to drop off concert goers. I turned the corner and saw a mass of people on the other side of the National Theater, close to the Plaza de la Revolución. There were well over two hundred people outside of the theater. The crowd was overwhelmingly White and Mulato, and filled with queer bodies. There were men with long hair, hippies, men dressed in drag, and a lot of lesbian couples. I walked into the crowd. “Surely there are Black people in this crowd,” I thought. There were some older Black women selling candies and peanuts on the street. I saw some Brown-skinned people, but realized that they were Mulato, not Black. From the crowd of hundreds attending the show, I estimate that there were probably about twenty Black people out of a concert hall filled with more than two hundred people.

I decided to stop looking for Marta and her friends. I thought it would be best to focus on where I was, and to try to understand what I was experiencing. Plus, I knew that it was useless trying to find them in the crowd. I knew I would bump into them before the show started. It seemed that this was definitely an alternative space. It was then that

it dawned on me: these spaces were reflective of the varying “publics” within Cuba. I had hung out in the salsa scene, the reggaetón scene, the underground hip-hop scene, and the rock scene. Each of the other scenes was missing something. For example, there were mainly Blacks and Mulatos in the hip-hop scene. There were gay people and women present at hip-hop shows, but not that many. After I attended events in the gay scene for many years, the few gay folks attending the hip-hop events started giving me a look, or a nod. It took a few times for me to realize what was happening. At gay parties, some hip-hop fans approached me and mentioned that they had seen me at shows. The way it often happened was that at a show there was a nervous look, a check just to make sure their suspicions were well-founded. If a smile or a nod was returned in exchange for the glance, a smile was sent. This was one of the ways that people “knew” without saying anything.

The rock scene has its share of lesbians as well, but then again, everyone looks queer in the rock scene. The tattoos, the shaved hairstyles, the piercing, the Black hair, the dark clothes; it is unclear if people were gay or not in that scene. The rock scene is one of the most marginalized music scenes in Cuba, so it draws a lot of varying people, though the scene is primarily White and Mulato; Black people tend to be absent from the rock scene. I did not spend much time in the salsa, Timba, and reggaetón scenes, though there was a greater presence of gay Black and Mulato people in these scenes than in the hip-hop scene. But it was in the Nueva Trova scene that I saw queer and gay people being affectionate with each other *publicly*. There were Black people present in small numbers, but though that may be reflective of very specific racial dynamics, it does attest to the Nueva Trova scene’s reputation of being one of the most inclusive spaces in Cuban

youth culture. Outside of the National Theater, people held hands, and everyone was fair game for a possible date or love interest.

Someone yelled my name while I was in the middle of that thought. I remember looking up to see that it was one of Marta's White/light-skinned friends, Rojelia. Happy to see a familiar face, I walked over to her and gave her a hug. “¿Y Marta? (And Marta?)” she asked? “I dunno,” I said and shrugged my shoulders. Marta was always late. Other friends started showing up. I really liked “the kids” (as Marta called them) a lot. They were younger, in their late teens and early twenties. They were very open about their sexuality. They seem to be part of a new trend that I have started noticing in Havana: although men dominate non-heteronormative public space, there seem to be increasing numbers of young lesbians who are starting to congregate within this scene.

Marta, who is one year younger than me, mentioned that that was why she liked hanging out with “the kids”: they were way more open-minded than people of our generation (mid-twenties and older). Marta acknowledged in the same breath that there were people our age who are really cool, and would go out parties, but these kids did not care whatsoever. She argued that no matter how cool one is – or rather, how comfortable one is with one’s sexuality – if you’re in our age group, one still has a little baggage. I understood what she was saying. There were many times I was out with the kids in El Vedado. If they saw someone they thought was hot, they asked the person, “Hey, you want to go home with me?!” Sometimes they got a date out of it. Other times a person would blush and say, “I’m not gay, sorry.” All in all, the kids seemed not to be bothered by it, and the passers-by seemed to shrug it off, even if the situation was a little uncomfortable. Similar dynamics played out in this Nueva Trova scene.

The kids definitely used the Nueva Trova event to cruise. What I noticed in this space was that there was none of the discomfort of someone being turned down for being gay or straight. In terms of cruising, if someone was not gay, or if they were not straight, there was some disappointment on the part of the interested party, but people seemed to move on to the next person. Marta showed up suddenly and hurried us towards the door. “Hey, I found five tickets, there are eight of us, if we rush through and the last person hands over the tickets, a few of us can get in free.” Without questioning Marta’s idea we headed towards the door and walked past the ticket person. “Hey!” the ticket person shouted. The four ahead hurried into the theater. I walked back over. “Were those other people with you?” the door person asked us. Marta shot a look at me. “What other people?” I asked and stared at the woman blankly. She looked defeated. There was no way she could catch the others, and there were still hundreds of people waiting outside to get in. She took our tickets and let us pass by.

We walked into the concert hall. The place was cold; the air conditioning was going full-blast. The theater was nice; nothing looked old or worn-down. It was a marked difference from the non-air-conditioned, hot outdoor venues where the hip-hop concerts and parties often took place. Our tickets were on the side aisle of the balcony section. We were far from the stage, but then again, we did get in for free. I was in a two-chair row by myself. Marta and her girlfriend sat behind me. I didn’t know where the others went. I looked around the theater and noticed that everyone was sitting in his or her fold-down cushioned seats. It was a multi-generational audience. I thought about something Julio Dos once told me. I asked him what he thought about hip-hop. “Noise!” he said. “It’s not like our music. You want to hear some good music, listen to Nueva

Trova. That's the music of our generation." Julio Dos ("Two") was about fifty years old, a married father of two. The family and I called him Julio Dos or "Two" because he was actually Julio Jr. He was also White, and had dual citizenship with a Western European country. His father had dual citizenship from his father who was an immigrant to Cuba back during WWII. Julio Dos told me that they kept the citizenship "just in case." Julio Uno ("One") owned a five-bedroom apartment that I stayed at in El Vedado. He and his wife also had a brand new car. They were wealthy.

His comments about Nueva Trova were sentiments I often heard from White Cubans in particular. hip-hop was a "foreign music" that was barbaric. In contrast, Nueva Trova, often linked to American 1960s hippie music and the Beatles, was something "different." It was "Cuban." For me, there was a lot of racism embedded in that statement, and it reflected a key argument of many of the Cuban hip-hop artists. hip-hop has its origins in the United States, but like other American music genres such as jazz and Nueva Trova, Cubans take it up and place a "Cuban" stamp on it. I looked down in the audience and imagined Julio Dos down in the audience with his wife.

The show started. Some older White/light Nueva Trova singers came out to sing with Liuba Maria; I believe one was Silvio Rodríguez. I tapped Marta's leg, "Why is she so popular?" Marta began to tell me about the artist. She was popular because she was a really good Nueva Trova singer, but she was especially popular with the lesbians because there is a rumor that she's gay. She said that women believed that her songs about love could be for anyone, including lesbian couples. A few songs later, a large projector screen descended onto the stage as a backdrop. A film began to flicker across the screen and a song began to play. Some women in the audience yelled in anticipation. Breaking



the formal structure of reception and appreciation, it was one of the few moments of rupture throughout the show. The flickers of the light and the shadowy look of the film reminded me of contemporary imitations of poorly produced celluloid films. That seemed to be the nostalgic aesthetic she was going after.

The woman, a White woman with long hair and a White, flowing, sleeveless dress, was running along the beach. The camera, I suppose representing her lover, followed her. She tripped and fell into the sand. She smiled and laughed, she was embarrassed. Then there were the sad scenes, the lonely scenes where she missed her lover. There were scenes where there were only women dancers – not women and men – dancing throughout the pieces. There were scenes of a clown taking off its make-up, a drag queen undressing, families being torn apart. These images seemed to correspond to issues facing Cubans, possibly the artist herself. They seemed to touch upon queerness, migration, and feelings of vulnerability. Whatever the case, the song that Liuba sang was slow and sad. I looked around the audience and saw couples, male, female and heterosexual, cuddling in the audience. Marta and her girlfriend were making out in the audience behind me. “*Ugh!*” I thought. I hated when they did that. They always did that stuff in public and I felt like a third wheel. But then I remembered that they usually only did this when we were at people’s house parties. I was trying to figure out how to not be annoyed that they were making out in this theater, but then I looked around and noticed they were not the only ones. I guess other people were pretty happy to be in a public space where they could enjoy a romantic performance and be affectionate with their partners.

After the song, Marta kicked the back of my chair. “You see!” she shouted loudly while the audience was clapping and whistling frantically. “What?!” I shouted back as the noise died down. She leaned over and whispered, “Sometimes people don’t talk about sexuality directly, but they talk about it within the context of music and art.” She was referring to the song and the film short. “Well, how do you know the camera was not a man?” I asked sarcastically. She laughed, “It doesn’t really matter. Did you see all of the dykes kissing each other? You think they thought the camera was a man?” I smiled. Liuba showed other audio-visual pieces and performance arts pieces that included a lone woman dancing with a man. Even if Liuba is a lesbian, she knows that she cannot do a full-on lesbian show because her older fans, the older hippies of her generation, would probably feel that a line of public morality had been crossed if there were two women kissing on stage, particularly while children were in the audience.

Overall, the show was interesting. There was no dancing in the rows or aisles. Everyone sat quietly in his or her seat. The event was a very formal presentation of what is described as “Cuban protest music.” They did not seem to be very passionate and protest-like to me. In the smaller Nueva Trova events that I have attended, people sat in circles, even though the event was very informal. At one such event, it probably seemed informal because the artist Silvio Rodríguez was performing in a classroom, in Havana, in the summer of 2003. There was no “order” to the room. People sat anywhere they could. Silvio was sitting on a bare metal school chair which had no arms. Someone pushed the desk back to the wall to give him more space. The feeling was very informal and there was easy access to the artist. There was no stage, no bodyguard, nothing that separated the artist from the people.

In contrast, the large public venue at the National Theater seemed a very bourgeois way to consume music. People paid to enter a large space where the artist, far away on stage, could not see the faces of her audience in the sea of people. The audience politely clapped after every song. Except for claps and a few whistles, no one jumped up and screamed, waved their arms, danced, or showed other forms of excitement. Everyone sat in his or her neat row until the show was completed. There was very little caller response, so the artist simply told a story on stage, or discussed the origins of the song. But the audience response was gentle laughter if Liuba or one of her guests told a joke. Or there was polite applause if she told a profound story about a song's origin. There were no quips from the audience that she heard and responded to either with laughter or a follow-up quip.

The show, like the crowd, was very orderly. It is interesting to contrast it with the dynamics of a jazz performance. Though there may be jazz shows in which the crowd is also sitting in their chairs the whole time, there are moments of improvisation among the jazz musicians. Whether such "improvisation" has actually been practiced or not is not of concern. The point is that, even when presented in a bourgeois context in which the skilled are separated from the illiterate, and the skilled do not directly engage the audience or spontaneously change the order of the performance, jazz still forms a rupture within this set-up. Jazz musicians talk, shout, and surprise the audience, incorporating audience participation into the show. They may be performing on stage, out of the reach of the audience, yet there is still an engagement that attempts to transcend the boundaries created by the structure of the performance space and the physical location of the event.

Even the pamphlets for the Nueva Trova show are very formal. The lighting of the photos is soft and nostalgic. Liuba's blond hair seems to be a more important centerpiece of the photos than her face, body, and musical instruments. It seems that the central focus of the format of the pamphlet is light skin and blond hair, though we do get a glimpse of her face in the upper left hand corner of the inner part of the pamphlet. But again, it is partially covered by long blond hair.

That being said, the event was a very special event as it was a concert for the fight against AIDS. Special events, such as international festivals that include well-known international artists such as Silvio Rodríguez, Liuba Maria Hevia, and the Roots, are held in formal concert venues such as the National Theater. Perhaps the photos were trying to capture a sense of compassion for the cause of HIV/AIDS as well. However, there was something so seemingly "White" about the concert and pamphlet to me. Perhaps it was the racial composition of the crowd (largely White and Mulato), or the way the show was performed (on a spacious stage where the musicians stayed within a few feet of their assigned spot on stage for the whole concert).

Perhaps the "surrounded by Whiteness" feeling which I experienced came from the fact that almost all of the artists were White, or that people were not yelling and trying to jump on the stage, but rather, sitting politely in their seats. Perhaps it was that the artists themselves never yelled into the microphone, or raised their voices in song. Or perhaps it was because all of the words were softly spoken or even whispered into the microphone. It was as if it was a learned, corporally performed aspect of Whiteness – a manifestation of an embracing of the corporal aspect of Whiteness, as defined against the stereotype of Black people as loud, unruly people with loud drums and loud voices, as

wild people who shout, scream, and dance uncontrollably. Certainly this structure could not be completely linked to Spanish heritage, as Flamenco and Spanish street performers are loud and shout as well.

This music stands in sharp contrast to rock, which some colleagues and friends in Cuba have referred to as “White trash” or *basura blanca* music. Using the term “White trash” has class connotations. In addition, rock is associated with drugs and other negative aspects of the 1970s counter-cultural movements (Hernandez interview 2006). Rock music is considered loud, uncritical, non-Cuban, drug ridden, and of lower culture. Among other genres, rock is also considered to be racist music. I have heard stories of rockeros yelling, in English, “White Power!” at rockero parties. Thus, for me, there is a class distinction between rock and Nueva Trova. Additionally, there is an element of Nueva Trova that reflects softness, White nostalgia, a nostalgia that is associated with the 1960s social movements throughout North America and Europe. It seems to be connected to a cultural history wherein disgruntled middle-class and upper-middle-class White kids realized that the world was unjust, and disassociated from the expectation that they would follow in the footsteps of their parents who blindly accepted an authority that was corrupt and inhumane.

Perhaps this is why hip-hop was referred to as a new version of Nueva Trova. Though well-intentioned, Nueva Trova as a relevant voice of social protest has diminished. For me, it sort of seems suspended in time. Though radical in its time period, the youth of the 1980s and 1990s face a different world, a different nation, and have a different set of social issues. Perhaps, for me, it is the worldwide dissemination of the Black Atlantic’s voice that is the key. Perhaps the profound social change, spurred by

light-skinned bourgeois peers who realized their complicity in social oppression, paved a way for White middle-class and upper-middle-class peer throughout North America and Western Europe to be more receptive to the discourses of those who have been the targets of colonial power. Though many of these White middle-class and upper-class youth – now adults with children of their own – may not agree with what is being said, they at least *hear* what is being said. These other voices are not invisible or delegitimized the way that they were in the past.

Perhaps, as a Black youth who is a part of this Black Atlantic turn in global discourse, what I am experiencing as an overwhelming feeling of “White nostalgia,” could be just that. Though some of Nueva Trova’s artists may still be radical, their audiences might just miss their youth, a youth located in the broader awakening of Western youth in the 1960s. But this awakening was still located within a context of American apartheid, and in Cuba, a young revolutionary movement that was explicitly challenging the racism, sexism, and material inequality of its own national and global context. Therefore, for someone like me to look back at a time period that I did not experience, I may be more critical of this nostalgic movement.

If some of the Nueva Trova listeners’ nostalgia was about remembering their fight against social exclusion and their challenge of social inequality, these music listeners would not be so quick to reject socially-critical, contemporary (Black) youth cultures. While some of the music listeners may unwittingly embrace Nueva Trova as a form of White nostalgia, the radical tradition of Nueva Trova is still embraced by many Nueva Trova artists and die-hard fans. It is probably for this reason, then, that hip-hop was initially referred to as Nueva Trova in early Cuban media coverage. Additionally,

perhaps the shift in Nueva Trova from activism to nostalgia – a nostalgia that does not challenge contemporary social issues, such as persistent racism and material inequality – could account for its decreasing significance among the 1980s and 1990s generations. This nostalgic turn could also be linked to the rise of the newer music genres, such as hip-hop, rock, fusion, and experimental music such as Noise, which have captured the attention of critical music listeners who now are part of Cuba’s alternative music scene.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Race, Place and Colonial Legacies: Underground hip-hop and a Racialized Social Critique**

This chapter engages the historical basis of contemporary racial ideologies circulating in contemporary Cuba. Cuba's contemporary approach to race, or the lack thereof, is linked to pre-revolutionary discourse that links race to economic disenfranchisement, the possible incitement of a race war, and the "absence" of races in Cuba. Understanding the cultural basis of race and race-thinking in Cuba is integral to understanding the limits of revolutionary discourse and to understanding the re-emergence of materially-based racial inequality in the present.

#### **6.1 Race and Cuba: Historical Considerations**

Slave mass rebellions occurred in Cuba throughout the colonial period. However, Cuba's small-scale forms of rebellion paled in comparison to mass uprisings such as the Haitian Revolution. The success of the Haitian Revolution, however, had significant repercussions in slave-holding societies throughout the Americas. In Cuba in particular, Whites feared that Cuba would 'become another Haiti' (Knight 1977, Helg 1994, Ferrer 1999, Scott 1995). White Cubans trusted neither Cuba's Mulato population nor Cuba's Black population. Whites feared that most non-Whites would aid Africans in establishing a 'barbaric African nation in Cuba (Helg 1994). During the late 1800s, a prominent planter named Cristóbal Madán wrote the following about Black Cubans:



The colored people scarcely contribute to the effective working class on the island, in proportion to their number. They do not dwell on their plots of land, but congregate in the towns and villages, where they degenerate more each day into a lazy and vicious bunch. Their women possess the most derated habits, and it can be said that the race is almost of no use, whether to itself or the country in which it lives; a significant portion is Mulato. (cited in Knight 1977, 59)

This quote from Madán illustrates the mentality of Cuban Whites during this period.

African and Mulato Cubans were seen as barbaric, lazy, and the source of many of Cuba's problems. Of the Cuban rebellions, the La Escalera Rebellion of 1844 is the most infamous (Scott 1995, Helg 1994). In 1844, a rumor circulated in "La Escalera" – the name of a sugar plantation – that slaves and Mulato persons were planning a "race war." This resulted in mass hysteria among Whites which led to the murder, arrest, and torture of numerous slaves and many free people of color.

Much of the nineteenth-century discussion of the intentions of Cuba's Blacks were linked to a central issue: Cuba's creole and Spanish elite began seriously considering independence from Spain. As discussions of what an independent Cuba would look like began to progress, the Cuban elite was forced to address the issue of race. In colonial Cuba the class/race delineation was not firmly established according to racial lines. Free Blacks could own slaves, and enslaved people could own property and slaves. Cuba's large Mulato and small White populations further complicated the relationship between race and class. Thus race has mapped onto class in two respects: cultural *and* material well-being. Instead of one's skin being linked to a particular kind of *being*, as it had become in Anglo countries such as the United States, one's skin color in Cuba indicated one's cultural and class status. This is linked to Cuba's development as an African and European colony. The national elite was unable to define itself according to notions of racial purity, though it embraced European notions of modernity which linked Whiteness to cultural and racial superiority (Helg 1995, Moore 1997, Arroyo 2003).

Additionally, the large number of people of African descent on the island necessitated that the elite address the political needs of the Black and Brown populations, if there was to be any independence from Spain.

The result was the emergence of an ideology of Cuban “exceptionalism” (Lane 1998). This combined elements of modernist ideology with elite determination and the embracing of the “positive aspects” of African cultural contributions to Cuban culture (Ferrer 1999, Arroyo 2003). The Cuban White elite’s struggle to reconcile their racial prejudices and racial fears was largely addressed within the field of culture (Lane 1998, Moore 1997, Ferrer 1999, Arroyo 2003). Unable to debate publicly what the future Cuban nation would looklike during the colonial revolutionary period, Cuba’s elite addressed these issues through Cuba’s cultural sphere that existed outside of the official public sphere dominated by the Spanish Crown.

Jill Lane (1998) analyzes how these tensions played out in *Teatro Bufo*, Cuba’s blackface theater. She argues that Cuba’s Teatro Bufo emerged in 1868 from earlier shows that centered on daily life in Cuba. During the years leading up to the first war of independence, blackface shows began to evolve into a highly political and socially-critical art form. Teatro Bufo plays were so socially-critical that the Spanish Crown considered them sites of anti-Spanish insurrectionary and political mobilization (Ferrer 1999; Lane 1998). In these plays there were several central characters: there were usually two *negros criollos* who were Cuban-born Blacks, one African-born Black (called *bonzal* or *congo*) and/or other characters such as the *mulata*, or free Black urban youths often called *negro curros* (Lane 1998). The first Teatro Bufo play emerged the year that Cuba fought its first war of independence, in 1868. The popular character in

these plays was the *negro catedrático* or the Black Cuban Creole who pretended to be so educated that he spoke nonsense.

The blackface characters became a way for Cuba's elite to see their racially-based social fears played out on stage. Through the usage of African music and culture, White Cubans became familiar and comfortable with a culture and race that they feared. Teatro Bufo is considered one of the first places where White Cubans were able to imagine and literally see the possibilities for a Cuba filled with Black and Mulato citizens (Lane 1998). This process was largely facilitated by the blackface characters who came to represent the Cuban nation. However, while the Cuban elite was going through their own process of embracing "the African," these plays allowed another slippery racialization process to emerge. Lane writes the following about Teatro Bufo and its relationship to national discussions of *mestizaje*:

The national romance of *mestizaje* can be summed up as: "No hay negritos ni blanquitos, sino Cubanos." What the national romance of Cuban *mestizaje* does not acknowledge is that the "negritos" and "blanquitos" were, in the era of anticolonial struggle, relegated to vastly different modes of participation in the formation of the "Cuban"--beginning with the fact that on stage, the "negrito" was represented by blackface proxy. As the bozal José's fate at the end of *Los negros catedráticos* indicates, real and imagined Africans were the currency on which the very nation was traded. At the end of the third act, after all of his money has been wasted, José--who has otherwise been the most sympathetic character of the play--finally decides to abandon the home, and return to his old life working on the docks. Rine Leal reads this as a certain vindication of Black people; José, he says, at the end is "true to himself," "forgets his catedrático desires" and chooses "honorable work" instead. But if White criollo audiences were gratified to find José returning to the hard manual labor of the docks--a gruesome job which Whites relied on only Blacks to perform--it was surely not because they found such work honorable, but because José was returning to his "appropriate place" on the social ladder. He is sympathetic precisely because he reinforces the logic of *catedracismo*, premised on the notion that Blacks should not and cannot have the same social mobility as Whites (1998, 38-39 emphasis in original).

Thus, although White Cubans began to consider Blacks to be Cuban citizens, Blacks could only be accepted as appropriate citizens if they fulfilled the social positions allotted to them by the White elite. Thus, in this particular Bufo play, the *catedrático* character

is embraced when he forgets his desires of social mobility, and returns to his job at the docks, doing the hard manual work that Whites did not want to do (Lane 1998). In essence, Blacks could be a part of the Cuban nation, but they could not have the same social mobility as Whites.

Much of pre- and post-colonial Cuban anxiety surrounding Black Cubans' intentions on the island have been tied to three important historical events: the Haitian Revolution, La Escalera in 1844, and population fluctuations wherein the number of Blacks and Mulatos exceeded the number of Whites on the island. However, at the end of the nineteenth century, the fear of a Black revolt was explicitly used by Spanish authorities to frighten White Cuban separatists from seceding from Spain (De La Fuente 2001, Ferrer 1999, Helg 1995, Knight 1970, Scott 1995). When preparing to fight for independence, White separatists were confronted with the question of whether Blacks could be trusted to be active participants in the creation of a Cuban nation without attempting to usurp the island to begin a Black republic (De La Fuente 2001, Ferrer 1999, Helg 1995, Knight 1970, Scott 1995)?

Eventually Blacks were encouraged to fight in the wars of independence (1868-1878, 1879-1880, 1885-1898) as White separatists needed their help to defeat Spain. However, the wars were not just about liberation from Spain; they were a negotiation of Cuban citizenship and the boundaries determining who would be included and excluded in the new republic. As the wars of independence progressed, the liberation of slaves and the inclusion of people of color into the revolutionary ranks were seen as moves by Whites to eliminate the racism of the past. Through struggling together to overthrow Spain – the Spanish Crown was labeled as the true oppressor of both Blacks and Whites –

another ideology began to emerge: that in Cuba there were no Blacks, no Whites, just Cubans” (Helg 1995, Ferrer 1999). Writers of the period, such as José Martí, wrote that “Our America” was one where Whites and Blacks lived together. For Martí, there were no races; he and other elites of his time, rejected the “text book races” of American racial discourse (Martí 2002).

Using the nationalist discourse of racelessness, inclusiveness, and unity, Black Cubans attempted to challenge politically the reality of racism in Cuba while trying to resist being considered Black insurgents intent on establishing a “barbaric Black republic” (Helg 1995). Blacks fought in the wars of independence with the hope of changing their social and economic situation. Some Whites, however, fought for the economic and political freedom of White Cubans, while others went into exile to avoid what they thought of as the inevitable Cuban race war. The wars of independence began in the eastern part of the island, where the majority of Cuba’s Black population lived.

Carlos Céspedes, considered one of the founders of the Cuban nation, is credited with starting the first war of independence when, on October 10, 1868, he freed all of his slaves, burned his sugar canefields, and proclaimed an independent Cuba. On October 28, other slave owners in the Oriente Province followed Céspedes’ call for immediate emancipation of all slaves and for the destruction of property. On December 28, a manifesto was ratified by the revolutionaries that began:

The revolution of Cuba, in proclaiming the independence of the country, has proclaimed with all of the freedoms, and would badly accept the great consequences of limiting some to only part of the country’s population. Free Cuba is incompatible with Cuba as enslaver; and the abolition of the Spanish institutions out to consist of and include the necessity and reason for the most high justices for slavery which is the most wicked [institution] of all.(Castellanos 1988, 143 my translation)

Although Céspedes advocated an end to racism, his moves were largely inspired by elite desires to limit Cuban economic dependence on Spain, and to curb the number of Blacks entering into the country. Many White Cubans believed they were dependent upon Spain for military protection from the race war they feared. Blacks, however, decided to fight because, by eliminating the oppressive presence of Spain for all of Cuba, Blacks could liberate themselves as well. Therefore, people of African descent, who made up sixty to seventy percent of the population, fought in large numbers. In the second war of independence, Blacks were again encouraged to fight on behalf of Cuba. However, throughout both wars, many fellow White revolutionaries refused to equip Black soldiers adequately, for fear that Black soldiers would turn on White soldiers. Additionally, Whites, used to having people of African descent in servile positions, refused to listen to Blacks in positions of authority. Even worse, some Black soldiers ended up serving their country by having to serve their White comrades at dinnertime.

Black revolutionary leader Antonio Maceo, also considered one of the founding fathers of the Cuban Republic, fought primarily in the eastern provinces. Again, there was much concern that he was actually waging a race war in the region. Congressman Rafael Montoro said the following about the fighting in the eastern province in 1897:

I speak as a Cuban, and as a Cuban I maintain that the present rebellion in the eastern department is a mistake and cannot triumph. It is principally the revolt of Blacks. In New York and elsewhere there are intelligent Cubans who are fierce nationalists...from a distance. But who are the *chieftains* of the revolt? The two Maceos, Blacks in their blood and in their affinities; Gómez, a foreigner suspected of following selfish interests in Cuba; Masso, the only White Cuban of some importance, a malcontent; Rabi Goulet, Miro and many others, all men of Color. (Montoro, cited in Helg 1995, 81; emphasis added)

White Cubans feared that solidarity among Blacks was much stronger than their own commitment to a racially-diverse Cuban republic. Because of this fear, there was always suspicion that Blacks were not truly Cuban.

During the wars of independence, Cubans of African descent faced an awkward situation. If they complained of racism, the White elite accused the accusers of being “the true racists.” It was assumed that the wars of independence had made everyone equal, and thus, there was no need to discuss race. It was believed that if a person of African descent mentioned race, their purpose was to incite a racial revolution on the island. Thus Black Cubans began to rely on a largely raceless discourse in order to press for social equality as “Cuban citizens.”

After independence and the American occupation of Cuba from 1898-1902, national political discourses were largely influenced by the Platt Amendment (1901), which stated that if the United States suspected civil unrest in Cuba, it would reoccupy the island. Thus, there was even more pressure for Black Cubans to be cautious about sacrificing “the nation” for their own political interests. From 1902 to 1912, the various attempts of Blacks in Cuba to address persistent racism through political organizing were met with legislative challenges that prohibited political organizing along racial lines. Unable to mobilize politically as a race, *and* marginalized within political groups because of race, several prominent Black leaders organized a protest. In 1912, Blacks took to the streets in the eastern, predominantly Black, part of Cuba in a large armed protest (Fèrnandez Robaina 1995, Helg 1995).

This protest was presented to the media as another Black revolutionary attempt, like that of the Haitian Revolution, and was violently repressed over a period of three days culminating in the murders of thousands of Blacks (Helg 1995). The result was a silencing of discussions concerning race which shaped intellectual thought and political actions through the 1920s, and signified the end of Black radicalism up until the mid-

1990s (Helg 1995). Aline Helg connects historical discourse on race to contemporary approaches to race when she writes:

Strengthened by the revolutionary government's claim that with the end of capitalism Cuba has become a classless and raceless society, the myth of Cuban racial equality continues to be used to prevent Afro-Cubans from voicing discontent or organizing autonomously. The myth also allows the new ruling elite to ignore the issue of racism in socialist Cuba. But the fact that Afro-Cubans even today remain largely underrepresented in the upper spheres of power and over-represented in the lower strata of society indicates that the Afro-Cuban Struggle for equality has yet to be won. (1995, 248)

Helg's analysis provides the historical context necessary to understand perceptions of race and identity-based political organization in contemporary Cuba. Her book starkly dismisses the myth of racelessness by examining an extremely violent event that occurred under a pre-revolutionary political and social regime that espoused a rhetoric of racial equality. This is important because the myth of racial equality has been (and continues to be) based on notions of racial and cultural intermixture, unification through the wars of independence, and guaranteed civic equality within Cuba's constitution.

## **6.2 American Occupation and the Creation of the Cuban Republic 1898-1912**

In April of 1898, the United States intervened in Cuba after President McKinley asked Congress's permission to intervene on the behalf of "humanity" and "civilization." When American forces arrived in Cuba they were shocked to see dark-skinned, barefoot, revolutionary forces in torn clothing. To Americans, Cubans were, as one United States Marine stated upon arrival, "little other than... turbulent and illiterate Negroes needing the government of a stronger race, indisposed to industry and quite unsuited for the independence for which they had been fighting" (cited in Helg 1995, 92). Because of the physical features of many light-skinned Cubans and their "generally cheerful outlook on life," as some Americans commented, White Americans determined that they were basically "Negroes" (ibid).



The initial interaction between Americans and Cubans demonstrates the differences in the two countries' perceptions of race. American White supremacy was based on the "purity of blood." If a person had someone Black in their family, no matter how far back genetically or how White their skin, they were considered Black. No matter how integrated one had become culturally and physically, if a person had "one drop of Black blood" in their family, they were considered Black and all the appropriate White supremacist racial stereotypes were applied to the person.

In Cuba, the situation was different. Because Spain sent single males to their colonies instead of whole families as the English did, and because the economy depended heavily on enslaved African labor, there was more intermixing between races. Also, some darker-skinned Blacks that were well-educated were able to acquire a limited amount of social status. In the United States, on the other hand, there was virtually no chance that Blacks would receive more esteem than a White person. In Cuba, the U.S.'s attempt to "civilize Cuba" was understood as a reason for the prolonging of the race-based social marginalization during a very important, early development stage of Cuban national identity.

After the wars of independence, the Black *Mambises* (liberation fighters) were not allowed to enter into liberated towns, including Santiago de Cuba, the town most of them had helped to free and where many had families. Additionally, Black liberation fighters watched as White American soldiers ignored them and fraternized with Spanish soldiers. With the permission of the new Cuban government, the U.S. dismantled the liberation army. The new American-dominated government established new voting laws, such as reading requirements, and the ownership of at least \$250 in property. Education

laws were also implemented that alienated poor Whites and a larger number of Blacks. Education and land requirements prevented Black advancement in important government institutions such as the rural guard: these military regiments were rewarded financially and politically for their role in the wars of independence.

The new educators of the Cuban Republic were White teachers who were usually trained at elite American universities such as Harvard University (Helg 1995). Blacks were denied jobs based on “merit”, while education requirements were waived for members of the rural guard and honorably-discharged liberation fighters. Meanwhile, propaganda continued to depict Blacks as something to be feared. Black Cuban leaders waited patiently for the American occupation to end. It was believed that once the Americans left, Cubans could continue working towards the development of their own nation.

The American occupation ended in 1902. The 1902 constitution declared universal suffrage, all Cubans equal before the law, and gave citizenship to Africans. The lax enforcement of many of the constitutional statutes, and the continued social persecution of Blacks resulted in the 1907 Manifesto. In 1907, Ricardo Batrell Ovideo and Alejandro Neninger published the “Manifesto to the people of Cuba and to the Raza de Color” (race of color). They continued pushing the agenda of previous groups like the *Sociedades de Color*, which had fought for the rights of persons of color during the last sixty years of institutionalized slavery. Intellectuals and social activists begin to write about the unrecognized contributions of Black Cubans to the creation of the republic, injustices of White Cubans against their Black countrymen, and the importance of Blacks in the development of Cuba (Fernández Robaina 1994, Helg 1995).

According to Batrell Oviedo and Neningen, Blacks had waited to pursue their social and political interests until the American occupation ended, but were no longer willing to continue waiting. Blacks were asked to do so by their White countrymen so that the U.S. government would not use the provisions of the Platt Amendment to extend their occupation of Cuba. After waiting for six months and not seeing any action taken in the interest of Afro-Cubans, Black Cuban leaders decided that White Cubans were racists who were complicit with the Americans. They wrote a letter to the U.S. Secretary of War about the injustices of White Cubans towards Blacks. When their protests went unheeded, they decided, along with other political organizations of color, to form the Partido Independiente de Color in 1908. The party's agenda included: integration between Blacks and Whites; an end to racial discrimination; equality with Whites in public and diplomatic corps; an end to the ban on non-White immigration; free education from eight to fourteen years; free technical, secondary, and university education; state control of private schools; creation of an eight-hour work day; reform of the legal system with the elimination of the death penalty; and the equal distribution of land to all Cubans. They adamantly opposed the Platt Amendment. Black writers often stated that if the United States should decide to intervene in Cuba again, the Black Cubans would create a new homeland somewhere else before acquiescing to renewed marginalization.

By 1910, the Partido Independiente de Color had begun to scare much of the White population. Several times *Provisión*, the newspaper of the Partido, boasted of a general membership of 6,000 citizens, 15,000 veterans, 12 generals, and 30 colonels. *Provisión* published articles describing the "moral lynching of Blacks" and included a list of Afro-Cuban grievances beginning with La Escalera. More Blacks and Mulatos joined

the Partido with increased circulation of the periodical. The renewed mass political participation of people of color caused White fears of another Haiti to surface. The party was considered racist under the Mouret Law, which stated that parties would not be considered as political parties if the groups centered on individuals of one race or color, and sought to “pursue a racist end”; ultimately, the Partido was banned by president José Gómez.

As the 1912 elections approached, the Partido Independiente de Color became restless, as none of the Party’s requests had received attention. The voting system had not been changed, and Party leaders began to fear that officials who did not care about the interests of the population of color would be elected again, and that the marginalization of people of color would continue to be ignored. President Gómez promised to lift the ban if Partido leaders removed the "de Color" (of color) part of their name. With the elections fast approaching, the change was made.

Upon changing the name to "Partido Independiente", Gómez lifted the ban on Partido meetings. Gómez also promised to enforce the Constitution and review the requests of the Partido. However, by May of 1912 there had been no change in the status of Blacks – politically, socially, or economically. There was no sign that the party would be allowed to participate in the November elections. The United States government continued to ignore the appeals of the Partido Independiente, as did the Cuban government, which hoped the party would eventually disappear. As a result, the Partido decided to stage an armed protest. The aspiration of the Party was to use the opportunity to gain access to the political institutions of their country.

On May 20, the protest began. By May 21, large numbers of Cuban military

forces arrived in the predominantly Black Oriente province, where the protest was taking place. In addition to four thousand soldiers, five hundred and eighty White volunteers were sent to the province. After approximately three months of repression, Cuban officials estimated that two thousand people of color had been killed. The reports from U.S. citizens in the area estimated between five to six thousand, while Esteban Estenoz (see Barnett 1966) reported five thousand, dead (Knight 1977). Most White Cubans and Americans expressed their relief that the government took action, even though some innocent people died.

The 1912 massacre silenced many Blacks in terms of visible protest against their situation. After the incident, many articles were written questioning the patriotism of Blacks in Cuba. These articles downplayed the role that Blacks had in the independence movements. Blacks continued to be discriminated against, murdered, and arrested for suspicion in sordid witch crimes – many Black Cubans continued to practice African religious traditions and such crimes were attributed to them as a sign of their “barbarity.”

As indicated by Rafael Montero’s quote, Blacks were not considered patriotic, and the possibility of a Black republic loomed in the minds of Whites. According to the constitution of the new republic everyone was equal. In addition to the equality established by the constitution, it was widely accepted that Blacks and Whites fought on equal terms during the wars of independence. Since White Cubans released Blacks from slavery, Whites reconciled – at least in their own minds – the moral dilemma of slavery with the fact that Blacks were emancipated. Given this thinking on the part of White Cubans, Blacks who spoke out publicly about their situation were considered unpatriotic and racist. Therefore, during the republican years, Blacks continued to be overrepresented

in blue-collar labor sectors, and underrepresented in professional jobs.

After 1912, any discussion of the social and political situation of Blacks in Cuba was carried out in literary journals, and there were very few public protests by Blacks. The writings of Cubans who lived during the republican years, such as poet Nicolás Guillén, Juan Bravo, Fabio Gronart, Ramón Guerra, and Fernando Ortiz, show how Fidel Castro's revolution provided the official framework for the implementation of an existing integrationist ideology based on economic reform. These authors were some of the first to challenge the accepted myth that there was racial equality in Cuba. During the last few years of the republic, Blacks were barred from political organizing, and were largely not accepted as participants in political parties other than the Communist Party.

Although these writers believed that all races should be treated equally, the writers pointed to the economic situation of Blacks as part of the reason for any continued inequality. Not only did Blacks suffer the effects of discrimination based on their skin color, they also suffered from an economic disadvantage that was the result of Spanish colonialism and American racism. The prominent writers during this time (about 1902-1959) came to the conclusion that improving the economic situation of Blacks would then improve their social situation. For example on July 12, 1916, *La Prensa* published an article by Juan Bravo called "El Negro Cubano," which discussed the "Black problem" in Cuba. According to Bravo, the Black problem was an economic problem. He argued that if Blacks had an improved economic situation and better education, then they could improve their social and political position. Bravo was not the only influential writer to take this position.

In the 1930s, Fernando Ortiz, an anthropologist and ethnographer dedicated to

Afro-Cuban studies, gave new insight to what it was to be Cuban through his writings. He was one of the first authors to credit Afro-Cubans, and Afro-Cuban culture as part of Cuban culture. Though he started out writing staunchly racist texts, which were typical of the period, he began increasingly to link Black Cubans' "backwardness" to culture, rather than "biological" race. In his book *Etnia y Sociedad* (1993), Fernando Ortiz described Cuba as not only an island or simply a geographic location. He argued, in the essay "Los factores humanos de cubanidad," that "Cubaness" was something that pertained to that "which is Cuban." Ortiz made a distinction between Cubaness and "Cubanisms." Cubanism is the performance of that which is Cuban. For example, certain types of food or idiomatic expressions are Cubanisms, but it does not mean that the person who is expressing a Cubanism is Cuban. According to Ortiz, someone can be Cuban culturally and in terms of national affiliation; however, if they do not want to be Cuban and are not proud of their country, then they are not Cuban. A person has to want to be a part of the Cuban "consciousness" if they are to be truly Cuban.

Ortiz then goes on to describe Cuba as an *ajiaco* or stew. He describes the ingredients of this cultural and racial stew as the *Tainos* (native inhabitants of Cuba), Blacks, Whites, and Asians. The *ajiaco criollo* or Creole stew created by many different cultures and races symbolizes the formation of their nation. Thus, to be Cuban is to accept all of the races and cultures that make up Cuba, including African culture.

In her book, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (1995), Aline Helg notes three sources of the fear concerning Blacks in the Cuban psyche: the Haitian Revolution, Afro-Cuban religions, and Black sexuality (as a symbol

of deviancy). These are linked to historical and contemporary fears of racial and cultural atavism in Cuba (Bronfman 2005).

After the Haitian Revolution in 1791, Cuba became the world's largest producer of sugar cane. Up to that point, Haiti (previously part of a larger island called Santo Domingo) was considered an archetype of sugar production. It had a small White population, and a large African slave population. Costs were low, and production was high. After the 1791 uprising, in which almost the entire White population was murdered or driven off the island, most colonies in the Americas, Cuba in particular, began to fear a large-scale Afro-Caribbean slave revolt. This specter of "another Haiti" was invoked at various moments in Cuban history (Helg 1995). These images were used as a means of racial repression, and repression of Black political mobilization (Helg 1995, Ferrer 1999, De La Fuente 2001).

The fear of a Black rebellion has been so entrenched in Cuban collective memory that Blacks who spoke about their experiences with racism were seen as the "true racists," as if by merely mentioning racial differences, they were attempting to instigate a race war. For many in 1902-1959 Republican Cuba, the problem with race had been solved in the wars of independence (Moore 1997, Fernandez Robaina 1998). Thus, until a decade or so before Fidel Castro came to power, reputable discussions about race and racism were conducted only by White academics and politicians who focused on social sciences, such as anthropology, in order to "understand" Blacks.

In addition to craniology and other body-oriented sciences, Afro-Cuban religions were heavily studied in pre-1959 Cuba. Practicing an Afro-Cuban religion was perceived as a sign of barbarism and moral degeneracy (Helg 1995, Bronfman 2005). A more



liberal interpretation of people who practiced these religions was supported by anthropologists such as Fernando Ortiz in the early part of the twentieth century. Ortiz believed that Afro-Cuban religions revealed a lack of civilization, but did not consider them a sign that Blacks were inherently different from Whites.

Another notion commonly accepted among academics and policy makers was that once the morally-misled practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions became civilized, they would not be as prone to moral degeneracy (Helg 1995, Moore 1997). Black sexuality was also seen as barbaric, primitive, and immoral. This has been supported by images of the sexually-aggressive Black male, the lusty Mulata, and *la negra*, roaming the country looking to rape and seduce (Helg 1995). Considering the myths of a possible violent Black republic forming in Cuba, Black moral degeneracy, and Black hyper-sexuality, the patriotism of Blacks has been continuously questioned.

In Cuba, during 1902-1959, discussions about the situation of Blacks were embedded in nationalist discourse. After the American occupation of Cuba ended in 1902, American presence in Cuba was manifested through U.S. capital investment and corporate ownership in the tourist and sugar industry, Cuba's largest sources of profit. Blacks were heavily discriminated against in American businesses and comprised much of the working class. As Cubans of all races began to resent their poverty, as well as American discrimination and cultural and economic influence on the island, there was an embracing of all that was considered to be Cuban. Cubans had come to resent U.S. political and economic domination on the island. The majority of Cubans lived in poverty, and the U.S. government sponsored numerous dictators. There was a reactionary move to look inward, for Cuba to understand itself in relation to the rest of

the world, especially the United States. It was in this way that Cubans felt that they could move to obtain their own independence from their neocolonial predicament.

With this newfound positive acceptance of Blacks, White Cuban interpretations of the Black situation still dominated racial discussions. Still, it was difficult for Blacks to speak out about their racial situation because of the threat of being called racist or unpatriotic. For White Cubans, racism was being packaged as an economic situation and a social problem that would be corrected once people realized that only one race and ethnicity existed in Cuba, the Cuban race. In this way, many of these writers equated the situation of Blacks with that of poor Whites, and that of the Cuban nation. It was assumed that Blacks understood very well what it was like to be an exploited working class; it was Blacks who felt U.S. imperialism the most as they were barred from working due to the racist U.S. American social policies that dominated the island. For Ortiz, as well as many White Cubans, the racial situation in Cuba was not an issue pertaining to Blacks, but something pertaining to all Cubans. A decade later, the Communist Party would pursue its agenda based on similar ideas.

The founder of the Communist Party, Fabio Grobart realized that Black Cubans could provide a solid base for party support. The 1940-revised Cuban Constitution included a provision for punishing racial discrimination; however, as usual the provision was not enforced, to the disappointment of Blacks. Realizing the political power of mobilizing the Black population to achieve political ends, the Communist Party took an active role during the 1940s to combat racial discrimination. Part of their national agenda included enforcing the laws against discrimination. In their newspaper, the Communist party started printing articles about various acts of discrimination against Blacks. For

example, they denounced a judge in 1944, who found in favor of a White shop owner's right to discriminate against people of color.

Social clubs in Cuba remained racially segregated until the 1959 revolution. Some clubs did not even admit General Batista (a former president of Cuba and a Mulato) into their clubs. In the pre-1959 Republic, as Blacks began to attend public schools in larger numbers, the number of middle- and upper-class White students in private schools increased. For example, in 1958, about fourteen percent of grade-school-aged children, and twenty-nine percent of high-school-aged children (the overwhelming majority of whom were White) were placed into private schools (Fernández Robaina 1994, 153). Nevertheless, a disproportionately low number of Blacks attended school at all as their parents were likely to take them out of school to earn money for their families.

Even given the writings of people such as Ortiz, and the continued publication of acts of racial discrimination against people of color, there continued to be denial of the racism by those in power. For example, in 1946, President Ramón Grau San Martín said this about racism in Cuba: "Dije en una reunión anterior que la discriminación racial en nuestro país está pasando a la historia y que no volverá a presentarse en el camino de nuestro progreso" ["I said in a meeting before that the racial discrimination in our country is passing into history and that it will not return to present itself in the path of our progress"] (cited in Fernández Robaina 1994, 153; my translation). However, Fernández Robaina writes that, "...en 1947 es el 20% de la población negra la que tiene ocupación fija y el 80% la que la tiene inestable" ["...in 1947 it is 20% of the [entire] Black population that have a stable job and 80% that has unstable [employment]"] (Fernández Robaina 1994, 156; my translation).

The 1902-1959 Republican period was a turbulent period. There were numerous revolutionary movements, coups, and insurrectionary actions. In some cases, government administrations only lasted a few months, or even only a few days. Cubans were certainly not happy about everyday life before 1959 (Thomas 1971). However, in 1959, a group of revolutionaries who called themselves the 26th of July Movement would ascend to political power, and usher in social, political, and economic changes that have played a formative role in the development of contemporary Cuban society.

Disappointment with the social situation led to the support for large-scale social reforms and paved the way for Fidel Castro's 1959 military victory. By targeting social and material inequality, the Castro administration hoped to rid the country of sexism, racism, and other social ills that were associated with imperialism. Within a few years after the revolution, the problem of racism and sexism was considered solved by the government. The government expected that over time, remnants of anti-social behavior would disappear and, consequently, discussion about issues that were seen as causing social divisions, such as racism and sexism, ceased. In fact, discussion of these issues was deemed anti-social or counter-revolutionary, and was subject to state criminal sanctions (De La Fuente 2001).

### **6.3 The Revolutionary State Attempts to Solve the Race Problem in Cuba**

The economic equality initiatives that targeted all Cubans during the 1960s used Blacks as a standard in judging the successes of the revolutionary economic reforms. After all, in the Cuban national imagination, Blacks were culturally the "true Cubans" and the most affected by American imperialism (De La Fuente 2001, Helg 1995, Moore 1997). This belief was based on the idea that Black Cubans were the first to develop their

own unique “Cuban” culture, since they were not under the direct control of indigenous African authorities while the Creole and Spanish subjects were culturally, politically, and economically controlled by the Spanish Crown. Additionally, during the 1902-1959 period, the Cuban political economy was controlled by the United States. Because of the racial discrimination that the Americans encouraged and/or supported during this period, Black Cubans came to be seen as the most affected by class inequality since Blacks were usually poor, uneducated and/or unemployed (De La Fuente 2001, Helg 1995, Moore 1997). Characteristic of the revolution’s stance on race, Fidel Castro says the following in 1959, the year of the revolution:

Esa conciencia está condicionada por muchos prejuicios, creencias y costumbres del pasado, que el pueblo, Si quiere superarlo, tiene que empezar por reconocerlo. ¿Y cuáles son las batallas que debemos ganar y en qué orden las debemos ganar? La batalla contra el desempleo, por la elevación del nivel de vida de los que ganan salarios más bajos, y una de las batallas en la que es necesario hacer hincapié cada día más, y que pueden ganarla, es que se acabe la discriminación racial en los centros de trabajo [...] que limita el acceso del Cubano negro a los puestos de trabajo.

Consciousness is conditioned by many prejudices, beliefs, and customs of the past, that the people, if they want to overcome it, have to be able to recognize it. And what are the battles that we ought to win and in what order should we win? The battle against unemployment, for the elevation of the quality of life of those that are paid low salaries, and one of the battles that needs insistence every day from now on, and they [the people] can win is to stop the racial discrimination in the centers of work that limit the access of the Black Cuban to the rewards of work.(Castro 1959, 106 my translation)

In contemporary Cuba, experiences of racial discrimination are attributed to the biases of individuals, particular families, or particular neighborhoods, and are not seen as institutionalized systemic problems (De La Fuente 2001, Helg 1995, Knight 1996, Pérez Sarduy and Stubs 2000, Scott 1995). Prejudice is understood as limited to experiences in private spaces, and as reflective of particular situations. The revolution’s limiting of discussions concerning race to pre-revolutionary class inequality and post-revolutionary dissidence makes it difficult to address persistent negative racial attitudes publicly (Helg 1995, De La Fuente 2001).

While it is clear that early revolutionary discussions of race were considered subversive as a result of the post-1959 official stance on race, the equation of discussions of race to class status, social equality, and subversive tendencies was firmly established in Cuba's pre-revolutionary national consciousness. By emphasizing the increase in interracial marriages and the increase of Blacks in professional positions of power, the revolutionary government began to prohibit discussions of "race" as if the problem in Cuba has been solved. John Clytus is an American Black Nationalist who went to Cuba in the early 1960s hoping to find a way to Africa. He became interested in going to Cuba after hearing about Cuba's foreign policy in Africa, and hearing that Cuba had solved the race problem. After arriving in Cuba illegally on a ship, he was immediately arrested and sent to jail. While he was in the immigration prison, he noted that most of the other inmates were. In his book, *Black Man in Red Cuba* (1970), Clytus describes Cuba as a racist society under the guise of equality provided by socialism. He states the following, noting the overwhelming majority of Blacks in the prison:

The jail was used by the immigration service, and in addition to me its guests included a number of Haitians and a Dominican. They were all Black, and waiting to be deported. I should have become suspicious then. After two days, I was released, and I stepped out on the streets of Havana with eighteen Cuban peso-dollars in my pocket, still determined to leave the capitalist United States behind forever. An official had given me a release slip from immigration, which he said would identify me in case the police should stop me for some reason... (Clytus 1970, 10)

After leaving jail, Clytus went to get a haircut. It was in the barbershop that Clytus was actually confronted with Cuba's raceless ideology. San Isidro, a Black Cuban and head of the neighborhood CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution, a neighborhood administrative council), met Clytus in the barbershop. Isidro made the comment that he had never experienced any discrimination in Cuba, he had experienced it only in the United States. He believed there had only been economic discrimination

before the revolution. Clytus was shocked at what he perceived to be Isidro's false consciousness. Nonetheless, Clytus remained optimistic about going to Africa from Cuba. Therefore, Clytus decided to stay in Cuba and teach English to government officials, as a means of making money for his trip. As he interacted with government officials higher in the power structure, Clytus noticed fewer Blacks filling the positions. Clytus made the following comment about Black identity and Cuba's "pro-Black" revolutionary stance:

It always amused us the way the Cuban revolutionaries were constantly mouthing their support for Black people all over the world, while in Cuba Black people were hindered from any identification with Blackness. Psychologically, this "mouth support" for other people prepared many Cubans to bear their deprivation with more equanimity, feeling that they were in a position to help someone worse off than they. (Clytus 1970, 44)

In this quote, Clytus noted the importance of maintaining a Black identity, especially in the fight against racism. His point: that denying Blacks the ability to have a Black identity is a form of disempowerment. At another point, Clytus was arrested again. During the interrogation, Clytus made a comment about "Afro-Cubans." Upon hearing this, the interrogating officer asked Clytus why he (Clytus) was a racist. The officer explained that there were "no Blacks in Cuba, just Cubans."

There are three key race-based ideologies or contradictions Clytus identified during his trip to Cuba. He noticed the immigration patterns of early Revolutionary (1959-1980) Cuba (Whites accepted, others rejected); the significance of identity politics in fighting oppression; and the continued myth of equality in Cuba. He points out that even after the revolution, if a Black person brings up the topic of racism in Cuba, they are considered to be a racist. The following are some of the key race ideologies circulating in Cuba during this period:

- "There are no races only Cubans"

- “Blacks are the true racists”
- “Blacks are not biologically inferior, just culturally backward”
- “Blacks are the true Cubans”
- Mulato-ness is the racial ideal

Books such as Maurice Zeitlin’s *Revolutionary Politics and the Cuban Working Class* (1967), Hugh Thomas’ *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (1977), and Jorge Domínguez’s *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (1978), address perceptions of the revolution among Black Cubans; again, this data largely focuses on the early revolutionary period. The primary argument has been that Black Cubans tend to support the Revolution. For example, after the revolutionary government had been in power for ten years, Zeitlin completed a study of attitudes towards the revolution according to race and found the following: that among Blacks, 80% were favorable towards the Revolution while 8% were indecisive and 12% were hostile; while among Whites, 67% favored the Revolution, 13% were indecisive, and 20% were hostile (Zeitlin 1967, 77). This could be interpreted as showing that the economic reforms implemented by the revolution were well-received by Blacks. However, the government was also heavily criticized for its economically-focused public policies. The main critique: although the Black Cuban situation has improved, Black Cuba has not reached full economic, social, and political equality.

According to Hugh Thomas, the “race question was used as a unifying tactic just as he [Castro] promoted “revolutionary instruction to train cadres for a united party”” (Thomas 1971, 1314). For Thomas, the revolution was nothing more than a “White national bourgeois victory” (Thomas 1971, 1433). After the revolution, Blacks did not play a greater role in national politics. For example, Blacks alone made up at least one-



third of the Cuban population in 1965, but only ten percent of the Communist Party was people of color. Thomas asks why we should believe the race question in Cuba has been solved, when the revolutionary government which is so purportedly liberal and accepting of differences has persecuted hippies and homosexuals for decades.

Jorge Domínguez, in his book *Cuba: Order and Revolution* (1978), questions the health improvements of Blacks that are hailed as a symbol of the end of economic discrimination. According to Domínguez, Blacks had disproportionately high unemployment during the 1970s and thus suffered from a higher incidence of diseases related to poverty than their White counterparts. For example, the Black population has a higher rate of tuberculosis, a poverty-related disease, in comparison to that of Whites. Though there has been some material improvement in the status of Blacks, discrepancies in their social status and health care still exist. Domínguez also discusses the religious persecution of the early revolutionary years. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews were not persecuted as horribly as those who practiced African religions.

The book, *Cuba in Transition: Crisis and Transformation*, by Sando Halebsky and John M. Kirk (1992) centers on the economic and political situation of Blacks during the 1990s. Because of the difficulties that Black Cubans face bringing their needs to the attention of political institutions, Blacks basically have no means of implementing beneficial political change for themselves. One of the key issues that the book addresses is the “dollar apartheid” or dual economy that exists in Cuba. With the majority of Cuban exiles being White, White Cubans often receive extra income from their families in the United States. Meanwhile, in the tourist sector, Blacks are usually discriminated against in employment, as it has been assumed that many tourists prefer lighter servants. Thus it

is the lighter Cubans who usually receive dollars from tourists. This has led to further inequality. In addition to facilitating dollar apartheid, the revolution has opened schools for children of government employees and dignitaries who live in Cuba, most of whom are White. In this way, the ruling class of Cuba continues to be drawn from a White elite.

However, time period and contextualization are important to understand these critiques. The 1980s were a time period where many of the racial differences finally narrowed, only to widen again in the 1990s during the economic downturn. Alejandro De La Fuente statistically analyzes differences among Whites and Blacks in the United States, Brazil, and Cuba. He writes:

The revolution's impact on racial equality and the singularity of the Cuban case can be understood better in comparative perspective (another possibility is to use pre-revolutionary figures as a reference, but this is not always possible). Using census figures, I have estimated a number of indicators that can be compared with similar results in Brazil and the United States thus putting the Cuban figures in a wider context. For instance, by 1981 life expectancy in Cuba was not only close to that of developed countries in absolute numbers, but this figure was actually as meaningful for the Black and Mulato residents in the island as it was for Whites. Although a White/non-White gap of one year still existed, it was significantly lower than in Brazil (67 years) or the United States (63 years). Life expectancy reflects broad social conditions, including access to nutrition, health care, maternal care, and education, thus the significance of these differences. This is true for educational achievement as well. Illiteracy was basically eliminated in the island in the early 1960s, but by 1981 inequality in education had disappeared all the way up to the university level. The proportion of Blacks and Mulatos who had graduated from high school was in fact higher than the proportion of Whites, an indication that Blacks had made good use of the opportunities created by the revolutionary government in this area. Conversely, in the United States (at the college level) and Brazil, in both high school and college graduation, large differences according to race remained... (De La Fuente 2007)

By 1981, Blacks in Cuba could expect to live longer than Blacks in the United States. In terms of educational attainment, by the 1980s there was virtually no difference between Black Cubans and White Cubans. Studies completed in the 1960s and early 1970s were unable to capture these social changes. Though there were clearly some persistent issues, to say that the materially-based approach to racial inequality had no significant social results is certainly misguided. However, the question remains, what happened during the

1990s that these gains seem to have stalled or have even begun to diminish?

#### **7.4. Making the Linkages: Discussion and Some Additional Thoughts**

Cuba tried to institute a policy of massive resource redistribution, institutional reform, and ethnic identity re-creation (the “Cuban race” instead of a nation of many races) in order to end racism in Cuba. The revolutionary government has sharply improved the material situation of Blacks through institutional reform, but the power of prejudice, racism, and self-identity lie in everyday interactions. Therefore, unless Cuba is able to change people’s perceptions of themselves, there will always be a division among races in Cuba. Ethnic re-definition will prove to be difficult as it is difficult to control informal ways of storytelling and communication.

Since communists view the problem of race and ethnicity in terms of class and the division of labor created by capitalist powers, efforts to solve the race problem in Cuba have relied primarily on resource reallocation. Given the reemergence of materially-based racial inequalities in the present, it seems as if the government’s policies failed to challenge the cultural basis of racism in Cuba. As a result, racism continued privately, only to reemerge when Cubans had increasing freedom to act on their racism.

One important point that can be drawn from the history of race and political organizing in pre-revolutionary Cuba is that there is an established discourse promoting the idea that no group should put their interests before the common good of the nation. But given the history of racism on the island, this discourse is mainly applied to socially-marginal groups such as Blacks. In revolutionary Cuba this was extended to *any* identity-based group that sought to organize publicly as a means of “pursuing their own agenda” as “a group” or as “a particular kind of citizenry” other than “Cuban.” Organizing around

identity interests in Cuba is considered a form of social divisiveness, and is currently used to prohibit any form of non-governmentally-sanctioned political and social organizing in the present.

Cuba's revolutionary focus on class inequality has addressed and disrupted the way that race is mapped onto material well-being. It has not eliminated this relationship altogether but, rather, has distorted it. One aspect that remains unchanged is the relationship of the three-tier racial categories to notions of social appropriateness. Cuba has a three-tier racial classification system, with about seventeen intermediary categories. Race is not based on a "one-drop rule" in Cuba as in the U.S., but hinges instead on the lightness of one's skin, and how one is perceived, or perceives oneself. Socially, Mulatos are treated slightly better than Black Cubans, though both groups are treated as "non-White." While there was fear of Black domination and a distrust of Mulatos, an interesting contradiction occurred: while Cuba implicitly depicted national identity as the dedication and work of the heterosexual, White family-man, there was an iconization of certain aspects of Blackness as authentic Cubaness. Thus, in the effort to define "that which is Cuban," there was an embracing of Afro-Culture and racial mixture. Vera Kutzinski discusses this tension when she writes:

And this community [the "Cuban imagined community"] encodes its national identity in the iconic figure of a mulata---that of the Virgin del la Caridad del Cobre, the coppery Virgin of Charity who is Cuba's patron saint---not to mention the countless images of mulatas that have been circulated in the island's literature and popular culture for roughly the past two centuries. In fact, by the early twentieth century, terms such as *Cubanidad* and *Cubanía* (which designate different versions of, or approaches to, Cubaness) were, for all intents and purposes, synonymous to *mestizaje*. Most saliently contradictory about such discursive entanglements is the symbolic privileging of a socially underprivileged group defined by its mixed race or phenotype, its gender, and its imputed licentious sexuality. (1993, 7)

Linked to these processes of cultural and racial negotiation was the emergence of the ideology of *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* is an ideology that advocated a Whitening of the island

phenotypically and culturally through racial intermixture (Arroyo 2003, Ferrer 1999, Lane 1998). When this ideology emerged in the late-nineteenth century, the Cuban elite began to accept that Cuba would never be completely “White.” The ideology of mestizaje was a psychological compromise for the elite whereby they could embrace the elements of “Blackness” that were clearly part of White creole culture. Elites could be White while, at the same time, being dismissive of elements that were perceived as being of a “backwards African heritage.” Mestizaje helped to delineate racialized social boundaries along “cultural” lines. In essence, this enabled, ideologically, the White elite to cultivate a uniquely Cuban civilization, while Africans were assumed to be unable to do so and assumed to remain in barbarism.

However, *la mestiza* – the nearly White Cuban subject – would emerge as representative of not only cultural and racial advancement, but also racial and cultural superiority and national unity. Kutzinski (1993) discusses how Cuba’s elite have attempted to address these issues through the hyper-sexualization of the mulata in much of Cuba’s poetry and literature from the colonial period until the late twentieth century. Through the sexualization of the mulata, Cuba’s elite not only has access to their desire for a racially-mixed and modern nation, but they also have access to this ideal through the sexual availability of the mulata’s body. If Blacks did desire social mobility, they could do so through having bi-racial children. In essence, the Mulato category works to create a stable racial system in Cuba.

An ideology of simple racial purity was not feasible in Cuba – the nation had too many people of color to be considered modern according *only* to rigid “biologically-based” racial terms. However, by incorporating Mulatos into an intermediary category of

Whiteness, culture and phenotype could again be used as markers in determining who was civilized and who was allowed access to particular types of social and material resources. Given the intersections of race, culture, and class in Cuba, I describe Cuba's particular racial system as a culture-class system. Thus, in pre-revolutionary Cuba, the culture-class system may have seemed something like this:

**Figure 6a: Race in Pre-Revolutionary Cuba**

Skin Color/Race	Class	Cultural Level	Social Capital
White	Upper/Wealthy	High	High
Mulato	Varies	Varies	Varies
Black	Lower/Poor	Low	Low

In revolutionary Cuba, economic programs disrupted the material basis for racial inequality such that Cuba's racial culture-class system began to seem something like this:

**Figure 6b: Race in Post-Revolutionary Cuba**

Skin Color/Race	Class	Cultural Level	Social Capital
White	Varies	High	Varies
Mulato	Varies	Varies	Varies
Black	Varies	Low	Varies

The Revolutionary process disrupted the material/race relationship in social relations, but did not disrupt the culture/race relationship in social relations. Through the revolution, wealthier people became poorer, and poorer people became wealthier. With the increase in educational opportunities, Black Cubans became better educated (De La Fuente 2001). Because the state dominated most social, economic, and political institutions, its merit-based policies allowed a larger number of Black Cubans to enter into the professional

classes: their increases in educational attainment prepared them to be just as competitive as Whites. Additionally, an informal racialized system of “private” social networks was also disrupted, making it easier for Black Cubans to enter into employment.

However, because of Cuba’s prohibition on public critiques of how racism continues to operate within everyday life in the realm of culture, Cubans have been limited in their ability to challenge racial discourse in another area of life that is just as important as the material basis of inequality: how people *think* about race. The relationship between race and culture continued unchallenged, only to publicly reemerge during the Special Period when resources were restricted and thus certain resources were distributed to people who were perceived as the most capable of using them appropriately – those with a “higher cultural level.” In essence, personal networks became increasingly important.

Cuba’s problems with racism, in particular, did not cease; in fact, by imposing state silence, the government created an environment in which racist thought was able to survive and flourish (De La Fuente 2001). De La Fuente writes:

Critics blame pre-Revolutionary society for the ignorance of practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions. As a result, they were to a degree exonerated from their faults. But ignorance, “low cultural level,” and religious obscurantism were deemed factors contributing to anti-social conduct, thus the subject of special attention from state organs charged with the prevention and repression of criminal activities...Whether they were considered ignorant or anti-social, religious practitioners were depicted by party officials as inferior members of society in need of uplifting and enlightenment. The environment was repressive enough for practitioners to hide the colors of their saints in ways that were not obvious to authorities, work colleagues, and society at large (292)...A mid-70’s movie portrayed Abukás [an Afro-Cuban religious organization] as groups that demarcated marginality and “a code of parallel social relations that is the antithesis of social integration.” In the early 1980s, epidemiological studies conducted by the Ministry of Health still identified participation in Afro-Cuban religions as “pathological behavior.” (2001, 295)

Efforts to weed out “anti-social” behavior, unify, and civilize all of Cuba, particularly Blacks in Cuba, have continued since pre-1959 Cuban national discourse. Post-1959 racialized and gendered perceptions of what is Cuban have been able to flourish with the

connection between the Cuban and Marxist ideal of the “New Man.” Though the notion of the “New Man” was mentioned in the writings of Cuban national hero José Martí, who described the New Man as a highly moral and ethical being, Che Guevara further elaborated on this ideal. For Che, the New Man was a critical actor with a historical consciousness; the New Man was aware of the historical and material factors that created “man’s” present conditions. Altruistic will was the center of the New Man’s revolutionary consciousness, and through the reunification of the creative being with his material environment, art and culture would become the reflection of “man’s” spirit, not his alienated shell.

The New Man is neither Black nor gay (Bejel 2001). He is the White heterosexual male, who is giving, kind, hard-working, and ready to defend his nation. The role of women is that of supporter and nurturer (Ferrer 1999). In recent years, there have been some changes at the social level. However, these changes have begun occurring since the latter half of the 1990s along with some liberalization of the economy. Examples include Fidel Castro’s visits with local Afro-Cuban religious leaders, the arrival of the Pope, and some liberalization of the government’s treatment of gay people.

Ideas and discourses about “lower cultural levels” or “respectable positions” in society have a very important social and legal history in justifying the social marginalization of specific groups. These notions are based in moral and cultural laws concerning appropriate public conduct. For example, republican laws banned the usage of African religious instruments such as drums, as a means to protect the public from “African barbarism.” Additionally, the enforcement of Cuba’s “public scandal laws”



surrounding sexuality (Lumsden 1996)aid in reinforcing the importance of appropriate morality – the idea being that people should not be doing perverse things in public, as morally upright citizens and children could be adversely affected. The policing of sexuality reinforces a notion of “national and collective social obligation” that is premised on the purportedly moral duty of maintaining a stable heterosexual family which is naturalized as the basis of a “healthy” community. This ideology is central to revolutionary and republican constructions of the citizen (Oldfield 1998, Arguelles and Rich 1984, Rich and Arguelles 1985). In the republican period, these laws never explicitly stated that they were to be applied only to people of color, but as they have been applied to sexual minorities in Cuba, perceptions of race, culture, and sexuality have ensured that people of color are the ones most often socially and legally disciplined for their “conduct.”Alejandro De La Fuente (2001) writes the following about the historical and contemporary effects of these laws:

The penal code of 1979 changed the legal definition of dangerousness, but it still allowed for the repression (including reeducation through internment) of individuals with a “special proclivity” to commit crimes. In other words, a person whose conduct was deemed to be “manifestly against the norms of socialist morality” could be deprived of freedom even without committing acts defined as crimes in law. Included among these pre-criminal behaviors were habitual drunkenness, vagrancy, drug addiction, and other forms of “antisocial conduct.” Such a broad definition of antisocial behavior created room for racialized notions of proper conduct to be enforced more freely than under the specific provisions of the penal code. (314)

In contemporary Cuba it is becoming increasingly difficult for the revolution to argue that it has solved complicated social issues such as racism, classism, and sexism through its economic reforms. While the revolution is just beginning to develop a more inclusive discourse surrounding homosexuality, there remains the issue of developing discursive and analytical tools that are useful in describing, and understanding, the particularities of the intersections of race, sexuality, and material wealth in Cuba.

Unfortunately, this discourse is not immediately available within existing Cuban socialist discourse, and these issues are not captured accurately using existing Euro-American sociological categories of analysis (Bejel 2001).

Within state-sponsored research, it is recognized that social prejudices have a negative effect on the ability of certain groups, such as women and homosexuals, to feel incorporated into society (Alvarez Suárez 1995, Guerrero Borrego 1998). However, there is virtually no focus on how racism affects the ability of Cubans of color to feel incorporated into contemporary Cuban society. As a result, the social discrimination that individuals experience is localized to individual, familial and community-based interactions. Discrimination is assumed to be a result of persisting prejudices that remain only at the local level. Through the revolution's (re)definitions of social phenomena such as racism, sexism, homophobia, alienation and marginalization, the government has been able to manipulate the discourses surrounding people's lived experiences of racism. The revolution has not been successful in eliminating this social ill, as it claims, but instead, has merely attempted to define it out of existence, at least until the 1990s. In the next section, I draw from ethnographic data to discuss some of the issues, including feelings of marginalization, that face youth of color in contemporary Cuba.

### **7.5. Ethnographic Notes: Racial Identity in Contemporary Cuba**

During my first trip to Cuba in 1998, I was able to attend several conferences given about Afro-Cuban topics. The late 1990s was a watershed moment in which people were holding public conferences and symposia about race in Cuba for the first time in twenty to twenty-five years. I remember that one of the conferences I attended was about Afro-Cuban culture, but it turned into a conference about contemporary

racism. I arrived at the conference on time, but no one had arrived yet. Having accidentally arrived early, before everyone else, I decided to pay attention to the people walking into the meeting. Most of them were what I considered to be Black. There were two White women present and one White man. Judging from their dress, and their accent when they spoke Spanish, I realized they were foreign also. The first speaker at the conference was a relative of Juan Guilberto Gómez. Gómez was one of the organizers of a march that turned into the infamous Black massacre of 1912.

After the cousin of Gómez finished reading her the paper, an older Black woman stood up and began talking about how children were not being taught about Gómez in school or that, if they were taught about him, he was referred to as a misguided racist. She emphasized the lack of Black political and cultural figures taught to Cuban children in school. She stated, "People are not taught about the severity of discrimination and the vicious racist acts inflicted on Blacks before the revolution. People think that there was not much racism before the revolution, and that there is little presently. "However," she continued to the agreement of the thirty or so present, "Cuba was very racist before the revolution, and it is still racist today." Once she mouthed the words, "and it is still racist today," the organizer of the conference quickly said, "You must be careful of what you say, you never know who may walk by and hear you." With that warning, the communist woman began to whisper.

After the Communist Party woman finished speaking, another speaker began. This speaker, a Black man about fifty years old, began to talk about "auto-racism." He described this as hating oneself for being of a certain race. He talked about how Cuba did not have any images of Black people in advertising, television, and that there were few

Black Cubans in prominent public positions. He asked if it was possible to conclude that the lack of visible, respected Blacks could be aiding in the self-hatred of Blacks. He then asked how we could create solutions to the self-hatred problem. The most interesting response came from an older, light-skinned Black woman whom I later realized was probably considered Mulata.

She passionately vocalized her belief that Cuba was not like the racist United States where Blacks had to sit in the back of the bus, and where there were groups like the KKK. According to this woman, the problem lay in a few individuals who were prejudiced. Shocked that someone still believed that Black Americans were *still* sitting in the back of the bus and forced into separate restaurants, I stood up and mentioned that that was not the case anymore. I commented that perhaps there was still racism in Cuba because people did not have the ability to express themselves. Perhaps if they had the ability to think out loud about racism, they would have been able to develop a counterdiscourse to challenge the prejudiced people who, collectively and given their domination of positions of power, created a particularly Cuban form of racism. Many people nodded in agreement. However, my comment seemed to infuriate the (possibly) Mulata woman and she stood in the back of the room adamantly shouting that there was no racism in Cuba, just some prejudiced people.

A younger Black Cuban man, a playwright about 25 years of age, commented that Blacks in the U.S. had their revolution as well, the civil rights movement. He, too, was annoyed that people were still describing Black Americans and Black Cubans using 1960s imagery. He argued that this was part of the problem, that Cuba was frozen in time and had not continued with its revolution. During the discussion, the lighter-skinned

Black woman returned to her point and started asking me if I had the right to a university education. Others present sighed and began to argue with her.

I turned to a younger woman sitting beside me and asked, “Is it true that there is no racism in Cuba?” I was curious to know what her response would be. She looked at me as if I asked an illogical question and said, “Of course there is, the problem is that when you mentioned that you were from the United States the conversation took on a different meaning.” Nonetheless, the conversation that carried on that day helped me to gain some insight into how some Blacks in Cuba viewed their situation.

What is interesting for me is that at that moment, when people were discussing the lack of a particularly Cuban discourse surrounding racism, Cuba’s new underground hip-hop movement was doing just that. Years later I learned that the young man, the playwright, was a part of the new artistic movement that challenged racism and other forms of social inequality. Later when he and I talked, he mentioned his difficulty in being able to have his plays – about Afro-Cuban culture – shown in theaters. He talked about being stopped and harassed by the police “for no reason” other than being Black. He then went on to point out how most government officials are White despite the large Black population. He stated, “ Although there are a few Blacks with positions in government, they do not have much political power.” “Still today,” he argued, “Antonio Maceo is the only Black national hero taught about in schools. there are many other national Black heroes considering most of the independence fighters were Black.”

It was then that I began to realize the significance of the generational difference, that perhaps for the few older Blacks who grew up in a different era, things *had* changed for the better. For example, Blacks have more access to public works and are guaranteed

socio-economic rights. However, the driver I had at the time, who was White, disagreed with the idea that there is racism in Cuba. He talked about how “the Blacks” just “happened” to live in predominantly Black areas. He argued that they could obtain the same measure of success if they worked hard. He told me that there were many Blacks that he knew who worked hard and were successful. The problem “is that some of them do not want to work.” It is a choice they have made on their own. He then commented on how Blacks were sometimes considered to be the true racists because they separated themselves from Whites. It was almost as if he were saying, “But they are not that way because they are Black, but because they choose that lifestyle. And most of the people who choose to live like that just happen look like that [Black].”

At the conference, those who agreed that there was no racism eventually began to speak about various experiences with “prejudiced people.” They talked about some moments in the street where someone might make a comment like “don’t get near that Black person, Black people smell funny; they’re a bunch of crooks.” They began to talk about the different experiences they or other Black people had encountered in dealing with “prejudiced people.” Somehow, based on my experiences and research to Cuba, this sentiment made sense to me. Because of the complexity of Cuba’s racial system, it is not always clear that “a person of color” will be discriminated against. However, the darker one is, the more one experiences prejudice. With the economic changes happening in Cuba, and the absence of organized national discussions about race since the Special Period into the present, it seems as though a more racist system is starting to emerge: Black people are becoming more economically disenfranchised.

However, there are moments in which racial tensions erupt. During the height of the Special Period in 1994, tensions erupted in primarily Black neighborhoods in Havana (Robinson 2000). These events reflect moments of intense frustration among the Black population. The economic downturn, constant prejudice that includes police harassment and the lack of political/institutional options to channel these emotions as a means to press for social change, can result in moments of spontaneous action.

In 2003, in terms of “spontaneous organizing and taking action,” I remember one time when I was with friends, a group of twenty youths (25-35 years of age), who challenged officials who were representatives of what they saw as continued systemic racism by representatives of the state. One night, for example, this resulted in challenging the police because of their constant harassment towards Black Cubans. In this particular instance, the crowd that I was with surrounded two police cars and refused to let the police arrest a friend who decided to question the police about their actions. There was a tremendous release of energy; one could feel that this was a moment when people, including the passersby who joined in, just needed to “be in the moment” and challenge the police. The result of that particular situation was a discussion that took the form of consciousness-raising on the part of the youths – the young adults began to educate the police about racism.

It is important to note that while institutions may be dominated by a small group at the state level, at the local level, there is flexibility for Cubans to challenge local level officials and community leaders. For example, African American anthropologist, Jafari Sinclair-Allen (2003), has commented on his surprise at Cuban citizens’ ability to negotiate with police officers. He argues that even though police stopping practices

target some because of race or sexuality, rarely in the U.S. could a Black man actually try to talk back to, and even argue with, a police officer to challenge a citation.

In 2005, another Cuban friend told me a story about how she was almost given a ticket for kissing her girlfriend. She said she asked the officer, “Why are you giving me a ticket?” He responded, “For public indecency.” She replied, “But I am gay and I was kissing my girlfriend. If it is OK to be gay in this country, then why should you give me a ticket? Do policemen give you tickets when you kiss your wife in public?” She said he looked at her, and said, “You’re right,” and moved on. She was telling me the story to show me how homophobia still existed among police officers, and how Cuba has really far to go in its acceptance of gay people. However, I was shocked that a Black lesbian woman who was kissing her girlfriend in public could actually think it was safe to reason with a male police officer about his homophobia. This is not to say that everything is perfect between the Cuban police and certain citizens, but there certainly seems to be an accepted level of speaking-back to authority at the local level, which is often not accounted for in descriptions of contemporary life in Cuba.





**Figure 6c: Photo of Author Challenging a Traffic Violation**

Out of curiosity, I decided to try and put these “reasoning skills” to use, as a means to see what kind of reaction I would receive from persons of authority. There seemed to be a practice in everyday life where “consensus making,” even at the individual level, is important: it is through reason and debate that one can come to a consensus that is for the common good. While I was in Cuba, I decided to try to understand the limits of my privileges as a foreigner – particularly as an African American woman who passes as a Cuban woman – and to try to gain some insight, however limited, into this culture of “debate.”

Whenever I was stopped by a police officer, or when a friend was stopped by an officer, I would try to challenge the officer about the situation. During the late 1990s, there were certainly times when it was better for me to keep quiet, and to try to pass as Cuban. Often, I ended up in spaces where being a foreigner could get myself or my

colleagues into trouble. But by 2002, restrictions on foreigners and Cubans interacting with each other had been eased. Black Cubans tended to be the ones who were penalized for being with foreigners, while White Cubans passed as “non-Cuban” foreigners who could not spend time with their Black Cuban colleagues, and Black Americans who were harassed by the police complained to such an extent that the rules were relaxed.

Still, there were limits to what I could “get away with.” Sometimes the energy of the officer or official seemed such that I did not push my luck. A few times, I was threatened with deportation: this happened during incidents when colleagues and I were stopped because we were Black and the public humiliation of the incident often embarrassed or annoyed the officer. Conscious of the international scrutiny of Cuba, officers do not want foreigners to complain about racism in Cuba. It is in those moments that I would let Cubans do the talking. But what is interesting is that they *could* speak back to policemen.

Figure 6c is a photo that was taken in January 2006, just after I had finished arguing with a policeman. I was trying out the “reasoning skills” that I had learned watching many Cuban colleagues in an attempt to get out of a ticket. The strategy: to point out to police officers how/why their reasoning for a ticket may have been flawed. In this photo, the officer was about to return my license and throw away the ticket he had begun to write. I was going to be given a ticket for having too many people in the car. My argument was that the guy who rented me the car did not tell me that, even if four people could fit in the back seat comfortably, that it was not acceptable since the back seat was designed to seat only three adults. In this instance, I was able to get out of the ticket and, consequently, a friend felt comfortable enough to take the picture. But I was unable to

get out of a speeding ticket from the night before; the officer argued, “If you are driving in another country, you abide by its rules. If you were unsure of the speeding limit, you should have asked.” He was right, so I didn’t bother arguing.

This reasoning or negotiating skill also plays out in other everyday contexts. In Cuba, if people have a telephone, they usually share the line with one or several neighbors. The norm among neighbors may be something like, if the phone rings two times and the person hangs up and then calls again, then it is for house X. If the phone keeps ringing beyond two rings, it is for house Y. One night I called a friend, a hip-hop artist. I asked for the artist. The person on the other end said that the artist did not live there anymore, and they hung up. Fully aware that it is customary for people to pass on new numbers of old tenants, I called back. I told the person that they were rude for hanging up on me like that, and that they should have offered me the new telephone number. The person commented that I should not be calling so late. I explained that I did not know that the older tenants had moved and that I normally call them late, so how was I supposed to know that I would wake the neighbor’s family. The person’s response was, “True, but why did you call back? It is still very late.” My response, “Well, if you had been polite and given me the new number in the first place, then I would not have called back.” The person responded, “Well that’s true. Look I don’t have the new number, but I know that they will be back tomorrow and I will tell them that you called. What’s your number?” I gave my number, and they passed on the message. The “discussion” lasted about ten minutes. This form of “debate until a consensus is reached” among the parties involved seems to be a common practice in Cuba.

This “debate until consensus” is key in understanding what unfolded when the group of youth (discussed above) surrounded a police car in order to challenge the police decision to arrest their friend. We were located in front of the Capitolio in Central Habana, and it was about five a.m.. Passersby who saw the incident unfold also came to surround the car. At one point, there were easily eighty people present. As the crowd of protesters grew, several other police cars arrived for back-up. No guns were drawn, but those of us present held our hands in the air in order to make sure that the police knew that we were not troublemakers.

The incident had begun when we left a farewell party for a colleague. He was a Cuban who married a White foreigner, and he was leaving the next morning. The police saw the racially-mixed group walking, stopped us, and asked all of the Black people in the group, including me, for identification. They did not ask the same of the Whites who were present, many of whom were Cuban. I waited, purposefully, and watched as they walked to every Black Cuban who had their identification out in order to obtain their personal information. They skipped over every White person present. Everyone remained silent. I stood apart from the group and waited until it was clear that they were only going to check the identification of every Black Cuban present. Realizing that they had one Black person left, me, the two officers both looked at me perplexed. I had not taken out any identification.

I waited a bit longer, until both of the officers became upset. They walked over to me and demanded that I present my Cuban identification card. It was then that I handed them my United States passport. When they saw my American passport, they did a double take; it did not take them long to realize what had just happened and how bad they

looked. Shocked and embarrassed, they quickly decided to ask everyone for the identification, and started checking the identification of the Whites present. By this point, there was a small crowd of people watching across the street and passersby were stopping to ask what was happening. After the police checked the White folks' identification, they returned to their police car. Everyone was sad about what had just happened, but suddenly, the Black newly-married friend walked over to the police car and said, "What you just did was racist, and not only did you embarrass us, you embarrassed your country." Quickly the police jumped out the car, and began arresting the young man.

Friends intervened and attempted to get the cops to change their mind. A mass of people surrounded the police car, and the large crowd (about thirty people) that had formed across the street ran over to give their testimony of the events. The crowd was also racially-mixed, and everyone seemed upset about the blatant racism. Another police car showed up, and the first car drove away with the newlywed. During the discussions that ensued while we tried to figure out where our friend had been taken, some of the police officers admitted that they, too, were frustrated with their job and frustrated at feeling pressured to harass fellow citizens by other police officers. They agreed that it was problematic that Blacks tend to get stopped, and some stated that they thought things were changing, though clearly there were still a lot of "assholes" in the department. The "jerks" in the police department were the source of their frustration, because they felt that "the jerks" gave the police a bad public image. I would like to emphasize that these are discussions that took place between Black and White Cubans and the police officers. They were separate from the tourists who were standing in front of the Capitolio,

bewildered. Hoping that the police and the passersby would not realize I was a foreigner, I stood close-by and listened in silence (when I spoke, that is when people usually realized that I was a foreigner).

After the conversations with the police, about twelve of us sat in front of the police station waiting to hear about our friend. At least ten of the twelve present expressed sadness (many of this mixed-gender group cried); they felt that “the state of things” in their society were such that the only option available to them was to leave. They supported the revolution, though many felt that the revolution did not support them. The Black Cubans were frustrated at the constant racism, the lack of options available to them as young, educated professionals, and the harassment by the police. One dark-skinned Black woman, an artist with dreadlocks who dresses dressed like a hippie, like her White friends, commented that she loved her country but she wanted to leave. She leaned over and said, “You know I love my country but sometimes people make me hate it. Do you know that sometimes when I am walking down the street people call me ‘nigger’? They call me a ‘nigger’ in my own country. Sometimes I just really want to leave.”<sup>27</sup> In comparison, White and Mulato Cubans were frustrated by a lack of options, the harassment they experienced when they were in groups of three or more, and the constant harassment of their Black friends.

While we waited and chatted in front of the Central Havana police station to figure out where our friend had been taken, there were two people who were quiet for most of the discussions. They were supporters of the revolution. When asked about their constant support, they would say, while shaking their heads with tears in their eyes, “it is the best option.” After waiting for a few hours, we went back over to the Capitolio.

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<sup>27</sup> She used the word *nigger* in English.

Some people started going home, but a few of us decided to wait. About four hours after the incident started, a police car came speeding around the corner. It stopped in front of us, and our friend stepped out. He shook the hands of the police. They said to him, “We understand where you’re coming from, but there are better ways to handle a situation like that than just putting us on the spot. But you’re right, though.” And they drove away. We asked our friend what happened. His response, “We drove to the other side of the building and sat and chatted for a few hours.” These moments provide spaces to promote social change at the grassroots level, and very slowly at the state level. However, it is also reflective of the contentious position of Blacks in contemporary Cuba.

In the next chapter, I argue that hip-hop is part of the (re)emergence of a black public sphere in Cuba. The underground hip-hop movement is one of several important nodes of discursive production that challenge existing social inequalities that have gone unaddressed by the revolutionary Cuban government. To put it simply, since the revolution, Black and Mulato Cubans have been unable to discuss racism. From the government’s standpoint, it was a politically-charged topic. This absence of discourse concerning racism has had an unfortunate psychological effect on many Cubans of color. Because ideas are embedded in cultural tools such as music and art, when Black and Mulato Cubans were first exposed to hip-hop, they connected with hip-hop on a psychic level. Through the images that they saw, they realized that American hip-hop artists were talking about an experience that they shared. Thus, I consider hip-hop to be a structure of communication that fosters the exchange of ideas among populations who are treated as if they are “Black,” and/or identify as Black.

#### **7.6. “Everyone Knows That Whites Exist, But No One’s Sure About The Blacks” Theoretical Perspectives on Art, hip-hop and Transnational Blackness**

After slavery, maintaining racial and economic hierarchies was accomplished through socially-based racial segregation and surveillance. The goal of these practices was to keep Black Cubans outside of the centers of power that might challenge these power relationships. This created the conditions for the development of what Patricia Hill Collins calls “Black civil society.” She defines this as: “A set of institutions, communication networks, and practices that help African-Americans respond to the economic and political challenges confronting them” (Hill Collins 1994, 275).

Originating during slavery, the Black civil society initially operated in secrecy in order to survive. Drawing also on Gramsci’s notion of civil society, I interpret Collins’ definition to include a notion of a black public sphere—a term I use to describe the type of public space that emerged in Cuba after emancipation. In the United States and many other post-slavery societies, after emancipation, these networks became more visible, as they were integral to the development of resistance strategies used to demand civil rights for the Black community. The Black Public Sphere Collective (1995) writes the following:

But the black public sphere is also an answer insofar as it is a transnational space whose violent birth and diasporic conditions of life provide a counter-narrative to the exclusionary national narratives of Europe, the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa. Thus the black public sphere is one critical space where new democratic forms and emergent diasporic movements can enrich and question one another. . . .The black public sphere - as a critical imaginary - does not centrally rely on the world of magazines and coffee shops, salons and highbrow tracts. It draws energy from the vernacular practices of street talk and new musics, radio shows and church voices, entrepreneurship and circulation. Its task is not the provision of security for the freedom of conversation among intellectuals, as was the case with the bourgeois public spheres of earlier centuries. Rather, it marks a wider sphere of critical practice and visionary politics, in which intellectuals can join with the energies of the street, the school, the church, and the city to constitute a challenge to the exclusionary violence of much public space in the United States... It extends the horizon of generosity, the politics of well-being, and the deepening of democratic values (1-3).

The writers of the Black Public Sphere Collective describe the public sphere as a space where those of African descent, who have often been excluded from the bourgeois public



sphere of previous generations, can organize to challenge exclusionary racial violence. It is a space where critical practice and visionary politics take place. This space does not rely only on magazines, coffee shops, and other spaces typically dominated by a “bourgeois” elite. These spaces depend on practices that are commonly and easily accessed by those who are excluded from hegemonic public spheres. Some of these practices/public spaces are represented by elements such as music, radio shows, churches, and actions on street corners. These spheres attempt to extend social inclusion, or what the Collective describes as “the horizon of generosity,” such that those often excluded from public spheres have the opportunity to address their needs in a democratic space.

In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues that Black musical expressions have played a key role in modernity’s counter-culture. Like Herbert Marcuse’s idealization of the arts, Gilroy argues that music serves the function of helping those who suffered the horrors of slavery to envision the sublime. Possibly linked to an African cultural import, music has served as a form of communication and the exchange of ideas within African cultures. Gilroy writes:

This is not a counter-discourse but a counterculture that defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual and moral genealogy in a particularly hidden public sphere of its own. The politics of transfiguration therefore reveals the hidden internal fissures in the concept of modernity. The bounds of politics are extended precisely because this tradition of expression refuses to accept that the political is a readily separable domain... I am proposing, then, that we reread and rethink this expressive counter-culture not simply as a succession of literary tropes and genres but as a philosophical discourse which refuses the modern, occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics. The traditional teachings of ethics and politics - practical philosophy - came to an end some time ago, even if its death agonies were prolonged. This tradition has maintained the idea that a good life for the individual and the problem of the best social and political order for the collectivity could be discerned by rational means. Though it is seldom acknowledged even now, this tradition lost its exclusive claim to rationality partly through the way that slavery became internal to Western civilization and through the obvious complicity which both plantation slavery and colonial regimes revealed between rationality and the practice of racial terror. (1993, 37-39)

For Gilroy, Black music cultures are reflective of a particular counter-culture based on the transatlantic slave trade. Black Atlantic consciousness continues to resist the dictates of European modernism – ideologies which led to the transatlantic slave trade. Black Atlantic consciousness also rejects the idea that art and philosophy, ethics and aesthetics, are separate from each other. It rejects the idea that culture and the arts are separate from politics. Emerging in a hidden public sphere of its own, this counter-culture expresses the rejection of the Western ideology of rationality: it views slavery and genocide as the systematic deployment of Western barbarity. Drawing on the history of cultural, material, and intellectual exchange between the African continent, the Americas, and Western Europe, Black Atlantic consciousness is inherently transnational. It challenges the politics of discreteness embedded in national identity politics.

Gilroy's piece addresses debates within cultural studies surrounding the question of "identity." His work attempts to account for a shared "Black" subjectivity. We know that race is a social construct, that it is not "natural" or biological or even universal. Without essentializing Blackness as a universal identity, Gilroy historicizes "the Black experience," and explores how larger economic and socio-historical factors or experiences have come to shape Black subjectivity. What he also does is to write Black counter-discourses into historical texts. Through recognizing intercultural exchanges between European powers, their former colonies, and those racialized as "White" subjects, Gilroy brings to light the transnational exchanges between those of African descent.

Gilroy also argues that the very notions of citizenship, Western capitalism, Western culture, and equality are based on the ideological binaries such as enslaved and

free, Black and White, barbaric and civilized. Gilroy argues that Black populations throughout the Atlantic region are very much aware of the contradictions embedded within European notions of equality, citizenship, and humanity. For Gilroy, one of the biggest contradictions is that although Blacks are a part of the West, given the racist ideologies that are a part of the development of Western nations, Black people have never really been “of the West.”

Drawing upon José Muñoz’s definition of Whiteness, I define Cuban notions of “high cultural level” as a form of “Whiteness” and as “an affective code” which is viewed “as law and as truth,” as well as the official national affective code (Muñoz 2000, 69). This official affect reads most ethnic (coded as Black in Cuba) affect as inappropriate, and those who fail to perform high levels of culture are seen as suspect. Citizenship is thus negotiated in a national sphere in which performances of affect can be described as either “official” or non-citizen. Muñoz is writing from the United States context about people of color.

Within the United States, and in much of the Americas, Whiteness was literally a status that was conferred through law (for much of the 1700s through the 1960s). One’s race literally determined whether one would or would not be conferred United States citizenship. Of the racial groups conferred citizenship, one’s social status was also legally conferred based on race.<sup>28</sup> During the centuries that Whiteness was used to define citizenship and social status, there was never a reason given to determine exactly what constituted Whiteness. For example, during the early 1900s, there were a series of Supreme Court rulings that revolved around the question of whether Arabs were White.

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<sup>28</sup> Here I am referring to the history of laws in the U.S. that targeted Blacks, Asians, Mexicans, Native Americans, and European immigrants. The most recent example of these laws was the U.S. Jim Crow system.

A 1914 ruling argued that Syrians were White, although scientific evidence categorized Syrians as not ‘Caucasian.’ The decision was based on ‘common knowledge’ of who was White and who was not. Thus, official discourses such as science – which argued that certain races were incapable of acting/being civilized because of race – could be trumped by the racial official discourse of the legal system. Thus, multiple everyday practices and discourses could have alternating influence in the determination of Whiteness. People were categorized into racial groups, but who was considered White continuously changed based on laws, science, and everyday knowledge.

A Syrian or a Mexican, for example, may not appear physically to fit in the racial system in the United States (either Anglo or African). Because race was used to decide who was a citizen, it was through law, science, and common knowledge, that those who did not fit into pre-established discourses were assessed and assigned to their place within America’s racial system. In a Cuban context, these dynamics also played out in racialized colonial legislation. During the post-independence period, whether or not one was considered to be a Cuban citizen was based on two factors:

- 1)The fact that races such as Blacks were simply not trusted and Whites feared that Blacks were continuously plotting to begin a Black Republic.

- 2)Whether or not Blacks acted of a high cultural level - i.e., as very European, or if they acted of a low cultural level -i.e., as very African. Acting African indicated that one was not ready for Cuban citizenship and should not be trusted (Arroyo 2003).

For this reason, Muñoz’s focus on the performance of Whiteness is important because, as he argues, the stakes of how one can adequately perform Whiteness are literally the terms of citizenship itself – in terms of how one is perceived within everyday

discourses concerning racial identity.<sup>29</sup> It is in this way that Whiteness is a status that is conferred through law and social codes such as corporal performance – how one physically moves through space, dresses, speaks, presents their religion and/or skin color. In discussing how identification operates in an exclusionary manner, Stuart Hall (1996) writes the following about identity:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally - constituted unity - an “identity” in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference...Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render “outside,” abjected. (Hall 1996, 4-5 emphasis in original)

According to Hall, identity works at both the level of psychic identity and the level of discursive formation and practice. Identity, for Hall, occurs at an intersection of several conflicting processes: the unconscious self and the self that is hailed through discourse – the difference between being hailed and recognizing when one is the subject of discourse. Identity is never stable because it is developed through notions of difference, and within any system of signification, there is something that is always left out of the definition. Thus Hall defines identity as the following:

I use identity to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to “interpellate”, speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes

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<sup>29</sup> Therefore, instead of considering the position of “Latinos” as an identity group in the U.S., a group that is difficult to define given its diversity, he considers how Latinos survive in a country that expects them to feel White, when they feel Brown. Non-Latinos have had a difficult time incorporating Black Latinos into their understanding of race. Many of the problems surface when non-Latinos encounter Black Latinos who do not identify as African-American, as well as multiracial Latinos who do not look like America’s stereotypical image of the straight-haired, cinnamon to White complexioned Latinos. Non-Latinos have a difficult time understanding Latino national identification which often crosses racial boundaries. For the U.S. American researcher who attempts to understand identity in Latin America, people whose identity does not conform to U.S. American understanding of identity and community affiliation are viewed as self-contradictory, possessing a false consciousness (Valentine 2003), or are just misrepresented by the researcher.

which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be “spoken”. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (Hall 1996, 5-6 emphasis in original)

Identity is based on the psychic process of identification with particular discourses, and the corporally-based social experiences that form that identification. So, for example, one develops a Black subjectivity through the existence of a discourse or ideology concerning “Blackness,” and through being treated as “Black.” By making identification historically specific, Hall historicizes the discourses that produce subjectivities. Since discourses are ever changing, so is subjective identification.

By taking identity-formation as a process in motion, as a subjectivity without a stable, temporally-unbound core, Black Atlantic consciousness is also a process in motion (Hall and du Gay 1996; Gilroy 1993). Black Atlantic consciousness is key to conceptualizing ideological exchanges that, beginning with the European slave trade, are transnational exchanges. For this piece, I consider hip-hop to be one node in this discussion and as a key communicative tool in Black Atlantic counter-cultural movements. The emergence of hip-hop during the 1970s in the multiethnic and multiracial Bronx communities, in de-industrializing New York City, the center of late capitalism, was an aesthetic turn in these transnational discourses. The emergence of hip-hop as a socially-critical artform is intertwined in the social utility of art, and the particularity of Afro-diasporic musical tradition.

These links between politics, culture, and the transnational exchanges within Black music traditions have been addressed in the emerging field of hip-hop studies (Rose 1994, Flores 2000, Pough 2004, Forman and Neal 2004, Rivera 2003, Pough et al 2006). hip-hop emerged in migrant and immigrant communities in the 1970s, in the center of global capital, New York City. New York City was in the middle of a severe

economic crisis when marginalized Black American, Caribbean, and poor immigrant youth began what has become known as “hip-hop,” as a means of entertainment and social critique (Rose 1994).

Because of this transnational context, hip-hop has been recognized as a transnational/transcultural art form that is linked to social critiques of modernity. In much of the academic literature on hip-hop, there has been some debate about whether or not hip-hop is considered “Black music,” given the influence of Latinos in its development (Perry 2004). However, scholars such as Raquel Rivera (2003) and Celianny Rivera-Valezquez (forthcoming) have used this debate to challenge American notions of “*latinidad*.” They argue that the Spanish-speaking Diaspora from the Spanish-speaking Caribbean is part of the African Diaspora.

Often in the U.S., Blackness is not associated with *latinidad*, even though the majority of the Latinos in the western hemisphere are of African descent. It is for this reason, these writers argue, that Caribbean Latinos were key contributors to hip-hop, much like their U.S. and English-speaking Caribbean counterparts, as Black English-speaking youth shared another language with Afro-descendent, Spanish-speaking youth. Also, the urban-centered, transnational critique of collective experiences of capitalism and “urban crisis” allows for hip-hop’s cross-cultural appeal (Gilroy 1991). These two connections could possibly serve to intensify, in the Americas at least, youth identification with hip-hop.

hip-hop should not be reduced to a purely anti-capitalist critique (Gilroy 1991). Gilroy does describe what he views as the four core anti-capitalist aspects of Black music. These are:

- 1) A critique of productionism; work, the labour process and the division of labor undercapitalism.
- 2) A critique of the state revolving around a plea for the disassociation of law from domination, which denounces state brutality, militarism and extremism.
- 3) A passionate belief in the importance of history and the historical process. This is presented as an antidote to the suppression of historical and temporal perception under late capitalism.
- 4) The experience of labour has, since slavery, been a central topic in Black expressive cultures. Their origins in slavery have meant that the relationship between unfree labour and the subtler imperatives of wage slavery has been long debated by Blacks in their music making and non-work activity (Gilroy 1991, 200).

Black music critiques notions of production/labor, the division of labor under capitalism, state-sanctioned violence, and the suppression of history under late capitalism. Through various themes, Black music challenges hegemonic notions of European modernity. It challenges the forced organization of bodies and passions for production as contradictory to notions of freedom. Gilroy argues that Black music traditions such as soul and reggae “associate freedom and justice with truth and have identified the pathological ruthlessness of capitalism’s inauthentic democracies as a key element in the subordination of Blacks.” (Gilroy 1991, 200) While there is a focus on a critique of capitalism in these musics, it is not directed at capitalism per se, but the cultural logics that allow European capitalism to function in the violent and oppressive fashion that it does (Cesare 2001).

Che Guevara, in critiquing European socialism, wrote the following about Russia’s approach to socialism and culture in 1965:

There is the danger that the forest will not be seen for the trees. The pipe dream that socialism can be achieved with the help of the dull instruments left to us by capitalism (the commodity as the economic cell, profitability, individual material interests as a lever, etc.) can lead into a blind alley...Meanwhile, the economic foundation that has been laid has done its work of undermining the development of consciousness. To build communism it is necessary, simultaneous with the new materials foundations, to build the new man. . . . It is still necessary to deepen his conscious participation, individual and collective, in all mechanisms of management and production, and to link this to the idea



of the need for technical and ideological education, so he sees how closely interdependent these processes are and how their advancement is parallel. In this way he will reach total consciousness of his social being, which is equivalent to his full realization as a human creature, once the chains of alienation are broken. This will be translated concretely into the re-conquering of his true nature through liberated labor, and the expression of his own human condition through culture and art. (Guevara[1965] 2003, 9-13)

For the Cuban socialist project, it is not enough to focus only on “economy.” In fact, Che Guevara is advocating a rejection of a monetized or commodity-based system of resource allocation. For Guevara, the commodity is an economic cell; profit and individualized interests are the source of inequality embedded in European modernist projects. It is in the experience of enslavement where these dynamics are starkly present: people were literally bought, sold, and forced to reproduce more commodities (people) who were considered as fixed capital.

Thus, Black music cultures, emerging after slavery, were infused with the commentary of people who saw and experienced the numerous contradictions of society. Black music cultures were open to discussing and critiquing work, leisure, as well as gender conflict, sexuality, and eroticism (Davis 1998, Gilroy 1991). Angela Y. Davis (1998) writes the following about sexuality as a central theme of the blues:

The historical context within which the blues developed a tradition of openly addressing both female and male sexuality reveals an ideological framework that was specifically African-American. Emerging during the decades following the abolition of slavery, the blues gave musical expression to the new social and sexual realities encountered by African Americans as free women and men. The former slaves' economic status had not undergone a radical transformation - they were no less impoverished than they had been during slavery. It was the status of their personal relationships that was revolutionized. For the first time in the history of the African presence in North America, masses of Black women and men were in a position to make autonomous decisions regarding the sexual partnerships into which they entered. Sexuality was thus one of the most tangible domains in which emancipation was acted upon and through which its meanings were expressed. Sovereignty in sexual matters marked an important divide between life during slavery and after emancipation. (4)

Blues emerged in the post-slavery period. Black Americans were not much better off materially, but they were certainly undergoing a post-emancipation psychological process. One of the areas in which African Americans had gained some agency was in the

realm of sexuality. Black people had regained some control over their bodies, and some choice in what they would do with those bodies. For women in the blues, their discussions of love and sexuality challenged and contradicted mainstream notions of femininity and sexuality.

While all women were expected to find fulfillment from their husbands and children, and to stay in the home, Black women, literally, could not afford such a luxury. They were forced to work in order that they and their families could survive. Open discussion of issues that were seen as taboo among the White majority were part of the social, economic, and cultural realities of Black Americans, who openly discussed topics such as homosexuality. While there are a limited number of Black male artists who have openly represented their homosexuality in music, lesbian and bisexual women have certainly been a visible part of Black music traditions (Davis 1998, Gaunt 2004).

Regarding the arts generally, Herbert Marcuse (1978) argues that it is easy to relegate love and hate, joy and sorrow, hope and despair to “psychology.” Though these feelings may not be “forces of production,” that which is experienced, felt, and believed are decisive elements of social life and they also constitute reality. Marcuse writes:

The critical function of art, its contribution to the struggle for liberation resides in aesthetic form. Art is not true or authentic by virtue of its content but *by* the content having become form. The result is the production of a counter-consciousness. (8)... Art is committed to that perception of the world which alienates individuals from their functional existence and-performance in society-it is committed to an emancipation of sensibility, imagination and reason in all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity. Aesthetic form, truth and autonomy are socio-historical phenomenon that also transcends the socio-historical arena (9)... The world of art is that of another reality principle, of estrangement - and only as estrangement does art fulfill a *cognitive* function: it communicates truths not communicable in any other language; it *contradicts*. (Marcuse 1978, 10)

For Marcuse, art is the tangible representation of how contemporary reality is felt and experienced. If that current reality is one of oppression or if it is one of freedom, art will

represent that. Marcuse argues that art can stimulate the rebirth of revolutionary subjectivity as it is part of the process of liberating subjectivity; it is through inward reflection that people are able to think through the histories of their own particular encounters, their pleasures, their sorrows.

The individual's ability to withdraw inward allows for the development of a historically-informed social critique, while being embedded within contemporary social life. It is for this reason that memory, whether collective or individual, is the foundation for contemporary art. Thus, it is the current state of alienation and repression, and art's representation of that reality or an alternative vision free of repression, that spurs people to act because they can envision (as the new Cuban revolutionary slogan notes) that "another world is possible."

The history of those affected by the global emergence of regionally-based European capital is determined by their material situations but also by non-material aspects of social inequality. However, the bourgeois notion of progression, of moving forward beyond the past, serves as a way to create a sense of collective or individual amnesia. The cultural logic of the linear movement of time, wherein looking back is seen as regression and as degenerative, enables amnesia because self-reflection and remembering the past is discouraged. Thus, art and material life in advanced capitalist societies have short memories; the focus, instead, is on the newest creation and the latest technology, thus encouraging constant productivity and consumption.

The invocation of history in Black music seems to address several issues surrounding the importance of history, or time, in Western European modernist projects.

The ability to reflect on history may help people of African descent to remember life, or even Africa, before colonialism and imperialism. Embracing history may give one access to discourses that describe the past, when those of African descent had agency, a sense of self and had power.

Thinking about history, or thinking about the passage of time, allows one the possibility of making sense of one's present predicament and envisioning a better future. Through a focus on history, or historical processes, one is able to see that culture is not static, and one's situation is not permanent. This can spur one to action, which would run contradictory to a system trying to establish psychological and corporal control over a person. The linear conception of temporality is a key logic of Western modernism. It serves as a way of managing one's subjectivity through control, but it also functions in other ways that result in the ordering of bodies for production.

Additionally, Western notions of temporality are crucial to liberal, colonial, and modernist discourses that devalue subjectivities and societies based on assumed "backwardness," regressive and repressive tendencies. Achille Mbembe writes:

... I started from the idea that there is a close relationship between subjectivity and temporality---that, in some way, one can envisage *subjectivity itself as temporality* (Mbembe 2001, 15 my emphasis)...

African social formations are not necessarily converging toward a single point, trend, or cycle. They harbor the possibility of a variety of trajectories neither convergent nor divergent but interlocked, paradoxical. More philosophically, it supposed the present *as experience of a time* is precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absence of those others that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future)... Moreover, to focus on *time of entanglement* was to repudiate not only linear models but the ignorance that they maintain and the extremism to which they have repeatedly given rise. Research on Africa has hardly stood out for its attempts to integrate nonlinear phenomena into its analyses. Similarly, it has not always been able to account for complexity. In addition, it has underestimated the fact that one characteristic of African societies over the *longue durée* has been that they follow a great variety of temporal trajectories and a wide range of swings only reducible to an analysis in terms of convergent or divergent evolution at the cost of an extraordinary impoverishment of reality. (Mbembe 2001, 16-17 emphasis in original)

Mbembe notes that African cultures follow a non-linear trajectory and that it is the lack of Western analysis of the relationship between linear temporality and subjectivity that leads to an “impoverishment of reality.” African societies are written-off because of their ability to integrate non-linear phenomena into their analysis. In essence, it seems that Africans’ approach to rupture and non-linearity accounts for the possibility and incorporation of change.

The relationship of time to subjectivity remains undertheorized within sociological and Marxian analysis of the individual and social life. In her book, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), Judith Halberstam interrogates how temporality is an integral part of (hetero)normative subjectivities. She writes:

I try to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality. And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and longevity modes of living that show little or no concern to longevity ... The time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples... Family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing. (Halberstam 2005, 4-5)

For Halberstam, reproduction and its corresponding biological clock is an important mechanism in determining individual subjectivities. For example, the biological clock and an estimated age of maturity is used to distinguish the child from the adult. The corresponding rule of respectability is based on the age of maturity and the reproductive clock. Additionally, social norms surrounding reproduction are naturalized and used to support heteronormativity. If one is not attracted to the opposite sex – an attraction presumed to be a “natural” product of reproductive impulses) – then one’s sexuality

becomes suspect. Those who engage in activities that do not promote life longevity are pathologized.

Many of these rules are linked to the productive interests of capital. Additionally, temporality has been used as a justification for the cultural and racial inferiority of certain groups. Particular groups have been described as “behind” Whites, for example, in human and/or civic evolution. As Mbembe and Halberstam argue in their work, this avoidance of theorizing about differing notions of temporality limits Western analyses of “non-Western” cultures, subjectivities, and systems of sexuality, gender, and race. This affects the articulation of the relationships between the global and the local, which are also tied to underlying notions of temporality. These temporal tensions are what Mbembe refers to as the “time of entanglement.”

Trish Rose (1994) discusses this temporal complexity in her analysis of the cultural politics surrounding repetition in the polyrhythmic layering of the Africandiaspora’s music, specifically within African American technologies such as “the cut.” Rose states that the key characteristics of African-derived music are: repetition, complex cross-rhythms accompanied by drumming or hand-clapping, and the “cut” and reconfiguration of rhythmic elements within repetition. Rose argues that these features are definitely present in hip-hop, in which sampling technology is used to give a “heightened attention to rhythmic patterns and movement between such patterns via breaks and points of musical rupture” (1994, 67). Christopher Small writes, “The repetitions of African music have a function in time which is the reverse of (Western classical) music--- to dissolve the past and the future into one eternal present, in which the passing of time is no longer noticed” (Rose 1994, 67).

Rose juxtaposes this technique, which she argues is one of the central frameworks for African and African-influenced music such as hip-hop, to the use of harmony and the harmonic triad within Western classical music. Obsession with linearity, progression, and the movement from the past to present to future as a sign of progress is reflected in Western European music, while the repetitious nature of Western European music is hidden. Rose argues that all of these features of culture are not simply stylistic approaches; they are manifestations of “philosophical approaches to social environments” (1994, 67). Rose posits that “‘rhythmic instincts’” reflect worldviews and are integral in understanding time and motion within Black cultures, which are manifested in the manipulation of technology in hip-hop. Snead (1981) argues:

... that repetition is an important and telling element in culture, a means by which a sense of continuity, security, and identification are maintained. This sense of security can be understood as, in fact, a kind of “coverage,” both as insurance against sudden ruptures and as a way of hiding and masking undesired or unpleasant facts or conditions... that all cultures provide coverage against loss of identity, repression, assimilation, or attack... He suggests that when we view *repetition in cultural forms we are not viewing the same thing repeated, but its transformation*, “repetition” is not just a formal ploy, but often the willed grafting onto culture of an essentially philosophical insight about the shape of time and history... Snead claims that European culture “secrets” repetition, categorizing it as progression or regression, assigning accumulation and growth or stagnation to motion, whereas Black cultures highlight the observance of repetition, perceiving it as circulation, equilibrium... (Rose 1994, 69; my emphasis)

Thus, for Black cultures, repetition is seen as a way to create circulation or equilibrium. These cultures do not see repetition as a force to be regulated or suppressed in order to achieve a limit, a summit, the end, or “a final harmonious goal” (Rose 1994, 69). Rose argues that music is “fundamentally related to the social world, that music, like other cultural creations, fulfills and denies social needs, that music embodies assumptions regarding social power, hierarchy, pleasure, and world view” (1994, 70). Perhaps this need to regulate repetition is linked to the rise of European capital and industrialization. If it is the case that every copy is never exactly the same as the original, as Halberstam

argues, then there is room for human error, faulty machinery, human agency, and a myriad of other reasons why production can change, become inconsistent or cease. In Western music, it is important to try and control these factors which may impede “progress.” But this does not seem to be the case in African-based music, as imitation and repetition provide a space for a new ideology or practice to emerge, and to be incorporated into existing processes. The likeness of the copy to the original is not what is valued; instead, the new changes that emerge at moments of rupture lead to practices or way of thinking which are valued. It is in this way that one could argue that African-based music, or other forms of music that have similar practices as a goal, are revolutionary.

African-based music, for example, is a space in which the seeming repetition, the starts, the stops, and the new emergent beats, emerge only to be recycled, stopped, and played again, while permitting another emergent beat to form. This is a way of creating moments of stability that provide space for an emergent critique. It is these moments of repetition that allow for the cut, the aperture, which provides the intellectual and/or emotional space for the new critique to emerge, with a newer beat or a counter-ideology, or an older beat or residual ideology, emerging on its tail. In this music, change is not viewed as a sign of instability.

Through their participation in the “call and response” tradition of the Americas, the youth of Cuba used the aesthetic of hip-hop to make a response, which was also another call. However, Cuban youth were only able to participate in these particular transnational discussions after Cuba’s reintegration into the Americas after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was only after Cuba’s reintegration that Cuban youth started to realize



that others were talking about experiences which they themselves shared, experiences such as racism. They realized that their ancestors were also part of these discussions. However, during the Revolutionary period, the institutional silence on discussions of race, compounded by Cuba's isolation, yielded a subjective experience that people experienced corporally and psychically: Black and Mulato youth experienced exclusion from hegemonic notions of Whiteness. However, the absence of a Black identification, in the overwhelming presence of White identification and increasing material inequality, resulted in a particular type of psychic marginalization for Black and Brown Cuban youth. There was no discourse available to understand and articulate what was being experienced. It is in this way that the Global hip-hop Movement has served as a response through which anti-modern, anti-racist discourse can be transmitted. This music transmits a discourse that historicizes, articulates, and critiques the experience of Blackness within the Americas. hip-hop helps to spur the (re)emergence and public articulation of a Black identity among Black and Mulato Cuban youth.

## Chapter VII

### **Racial Identity and Revolution: The (Re-)Emergence of a Black Identity Among Havana's Underground Youth**

The (re)emergence of a Black identity in Cuban underground hip-hop has been integral in offering a theoretical framework in which Black Cuban youth, artists, and intellectuals can understand and work to change their social predicament during and after the Special Period. Given pre-Special-Period racial dynamics, many Cubans did not see themselves as Black. As one Black colleague put it, “Everyone knows that White people exist and that Mulatos exist, but no one is sure that Black people exist.” Initially, I thought that my colleague was simply saying this to exaggerate his point, that racial identification in Cuba is complex. However, his point was a theme that came up in several other interviews. For example, Alexay of Obsesión says the following about the focus on race in hip-hop:

Alexay: Chica... nosotros tenemos nuestra opinión sobre la situación en Cuba con respecto a la racialidad. A nosotros nos parece que hay muchísima gente que... que no sabe que es negro. Los que saben que son negros, muchísima gente sabe que son negros, pero no quiere verse como negros. Para mí esto es un problema muy grande..., muy grande... que viene incluso desde que sabes... Tú no puedes imaginar la importancia que tuvo el hip-hop en nosotros. Tú no puedes imaginar, es como si yo hubiese nacido por segunda vez. Es como si yo hubiese descubierto... mira. Mi motivación para vivir la encontré a través del hip-hop. Antes del hip-hop yo no sé... Yo no sé que estuviera haciendo ahora. Yo estuviera o preso, o muerto o... en Estados Unidos... no sé, no sé... seguro, eso es seguro, porque mi vida antes del hip-hop... seguro no te puedo contar... Fui uno de los que por ejemplo intentó dos veces irse para los Estados Unidos en balsa... bueno terrible...

Tanya: ¿Y por qué el cambio?

Alexay: Sí voy a eso. Entra nos en el hip-hop todavía no conscientes de lo que estamos haciendo. Al principio fue una especie de hobbie... eh... vamos a ver... Yo pienso que

desde un principio estaba la voluntad de hablar sobre esos temas. De ¿cómo nos sentíamos? ¿Cómo nos veíamos como negros en la sociedad? Pero todavía eran como... me entiendes... Fue muy importante: uno el libro de Malcolm X y las clases con Tomásito... Porque hay muchos datos de la historia de Cuba que nosotros no conocemos. Y la medida que las personas negras sepan cuán importante fue su colaboración a la independencia de este país... a Cuba, yo pienso que la gente va a sentir mucho más orgullo por lo que es.

[Alexay: Girl... we have, in our opinion a situation in Cuba with respect to race. To us, it seems that there are a lot of people that... that do not know that they are Black. The ones that know that they are Black, many of these people know that they are Black but they don't want to see themselves as Black... You cannot imagine the importance that hip-hop has had on us. You cannot imagine, it's as if I have been born again. It is as if I had been discovered... look... My motivation to live I found through hip-hop. Before hip-hop, I don't know... I don't know what I would be doing right now. I would be either in jail, or dead, or in the United States... I don't know... I don't know... surely, that is for certain, because my life before hip-hop... surely I cannot tell you.. I was one of these who, for example, tried two times to leave for the United States in a raft... it was bad.

Tanya: And why the change?

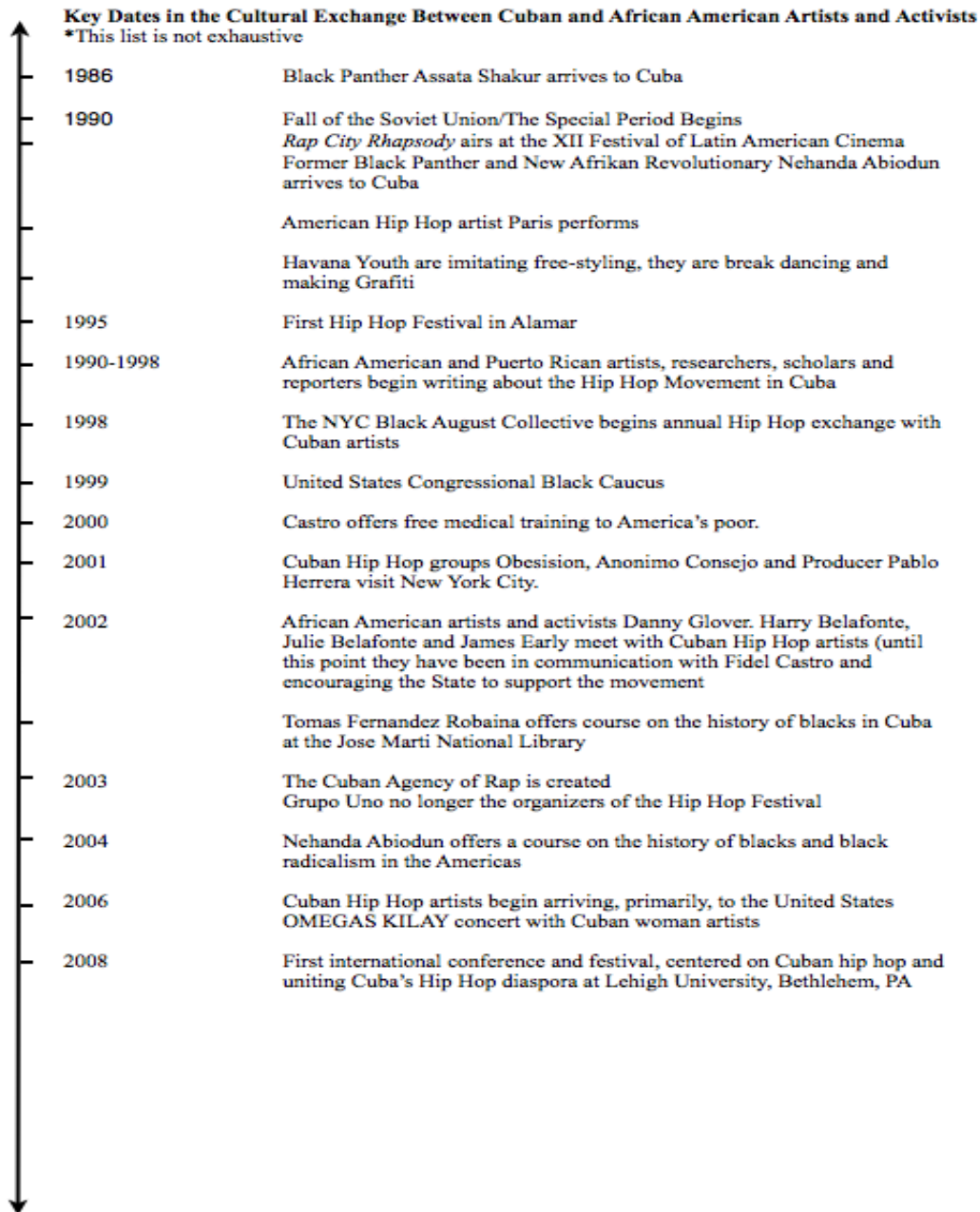
Alexay: Yeah, I'll get to that. We entered into hip-hop still not conscious of what we were doing. At first it was a kind of hobby, eh... let's see... I believe that since the beginning there was a voluntary discussion of these themes. Of, How are we feeling? How do we see ourselves as Blacks in society? But still it was like... you understand me... it was very important: one, the book of Malcolm X and the classes of Tomásito... because there is a lot of historical dates of Cuba that we didn't know. And the thing was for Black people to know how important their collaboration was in the independence of the country... to Cuba, and I think that people are going to feel more proud of this.](Alexay interview 2006)

Alexay discusses how important hip-hop has been in developing a completely different subjectivity. Before hip-hop, he says that he did not know where he could be. If it were not for hip-hop, he would have been in jail, or in the United States. Like all of the hip-hop artists with whom I spoke, Alexay says that the racial theme is important. Many Cubans either do not know that they are Black, or they know that they are Black but don't want to be considered Black. He had not realized how much the lack of a Black identity, and how the lack of knowledge about Black Cubans role in the independence of the nation, affected him psychologically.

At first, Alexay says, most Cubans did not realize what they were doing. They were imitating hip-hop as a hobby. But when they became more engaged in

understanding hip hop, largely as a means to develop their own style as hip hop aficionados, began to understand and to relate some of the themes that the U.S. American artists were discussing. As hip-hop artists began to take hip-hop seriously Alexay argues, two important events happened. The first was a course given by Tomás Fernández Robaina at the National Library about the history of Blacks in Cuba. The next was the availability of the Spanish version of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* in Cuba. Cuban youth identified with Malcolm X's quest of self-discovery: he started out in one of the most marginal situations that they could imagine, he was a Black man who was marginalized within a racist society, and he was further marginalized through his criminal activities. Starting out at the lowest point, in prison, he began a path of self-education that led to his emergence as an international civil rights figure. Another event, that Alexay does not mention here but which was formative for many Cuban hip-hop artists, was the series of courses offered by the exiled American, New African Revolutionary Nahanda Abiodun, in her apartment.

These classes centered on racism, racial identity, and the history of transnational Black Nationalist movements. Abiodun eventually ended the courses at the request of the Cuban state. The blockade has not prevented Black Americans and other people of African descent from continuing their artistic and cultural exchanges with Cuba. Since the slave trade, there have been significant political, cultural, intellectual and insurrectionary



**Figure 7a: Timeline of African American - Cuban Exchanges**

exchanges throughout the Southern United states and the Caribbean (Dubois 2004, Brock and Castañeda Fuertes 1998). Figure 7a is a timeline of African American exchanges with the island. Though artists and intellectuals of African descent, such as Jamaican Dub Poets, Brazilian and Venezuelan hip-hop artists have visited the island continuously

as well, I am focusing primarily on African Americans in this timeline as a way to relocate African Americans as part of the Black Atlantic.

The visit of African American artists and activists in 2002 was a critical moment for the artists as well. Harry Belafonte and Danny Glover spoke to Fidel Castro at length about the movement. They are credited with encouraging the Cuban establishment to support the hip-hop movement, which culminated in the Cuban Agency of Rap. There is debate among the artists about the utility of the Agency of Rap. Some see it as a useful tool in the professionalization of Cuban hip-hop artists, and a means of preparing them to compete in national and international markets. Some argue that the Agency of Rap was put into place to stifle the underground hip-hop movement through co-optation, and to slow the production progress of artists. In 2007, Cuban hip-hop artist Magia Lopez of Obsesión replaced the first director of the Agency of Rap, who was a member of Alamar's local political establishment, but not an artist. This shift has been seen by some as a move to ensure that the Agency meets the demands of underground hip-hop artists. hip-hop artists are still able to work independently, and to work with grassroots organizations that are a part of Cuba's Aficionados movement. Thus, it is not clear that the Agency of Rap has yet had the effect of stifling the Movement.

African Americans, through sharing their experiences with race in the United States, re-established a cultural and activist dialogue with Black Cuban citizens. The exchanges with Black American tourists and Black Americans exiled in Cuba, the access to hip-hop images, the important work of historians like Tomás Fernández Robaina and the publication of books about radical Blacks in Cuban history and in the Americas, all helped Black Cuban youth to develop and re-define a Cuban Black consciousness. These

exchanges actually helped them to feel a closer tie to the Cuban nation, and spurred them to work at the grassroots level as a means to help fellow Cubans to understand their experiences since the social changes brought on by the Special Period.

The effect is that youth such as Alexay, who has now traveled extensively internationally, and has returned home to Cuba after every trip, thus consolidating his commitment to staying in Cuba, has decided to stay in Cuba because he finally feels part of the Cuban nation. This is something that the lighter-skinned and/or White Cuban leaders have a difficult time understanding, as even those with the best intentions are starting from a position of power, from a position of already being included into society. It is because of their position of racial privilege that they continue to dictate the boundaries of “official” discourses concerning citizenship and national identity (Arroyo 2003).

There has been such an absence of a Black subjectivity, combined with an ever-presence of a historically-accounted-for Whiteness as a cultural and racial ideal, that many Cubans were not aware of how much they had internalized racism. Many Black Cubans did not realize how much they were being affected by Cuba’s subtle racism until the Special Period and the emergence of hip-hop on the island.

### **7.1 Cuban Underground Hip-Hop and Symbols of Blackness**

Album: *Asere # 2*  
Compilation CD: Cuban Agency of Rap  
Track number 6  
Title: hip-hop y pensamiento  
By 100% Original<sup>30</sup>

(Coro) 1 para el DJ  
2 para el Dj

[Chorus] One for the DJ  
Two for the DJ

---

<sup>30</sup> 100% Original, “hip-hop y pensamiento,” *Asere #2*, Cuban Agency of Rap

Y todo el mundo quieto en  
base diciéndolo así  
Hey Mr Dj  
hip-hop  
Hey Mr Dj

Revolución en Cuba tiene un nombre  
hip-hop  
Revolución es mi canción  
Con virtud es realista  
Trasmitiendo el pensamiento  
en un mensaje psicológico  
Al alcance de la población  
No sé qué sería de mi si no hago  
Este hip-hop  
Una razón de mi existencia  
Pura devoción  
Una manera de expresar mi sufrimiento  
Alegría sentimiento y dolor  
En cuerpo y alma  
Sentido de palabras  
disparadas contra el microphone  
Arma de fuego directo a tu corazón  
Sintiendo la fiebre de  
un artista de la nueva escuela  
La nueva era  
La educación completa  
Rompiendo las barreras  
de tu conciencia  
A base de high  
Y los ministros de cultura digan  
Ahí si hay  
Por eso mismo  
vamos a hacer música  
Hasta que el rap en Cuba  
coja un nivel cultural  
Ahí na' mas

[Coro]  
[Coro]

Una manera más esta expresión  
hip-hop  
Acontecimiento histórico de esta generación  
Y aunque hoy en día todavía  
No cuento con la radio ni con la televisión

And everyone be quiet Imma say it like  
this  
Hey Mr DJ  
hip-hop  
Hey Mr DJ

Revolution in Cuba has a name  
hip-hop  
Revolution is my song  
With a virtue that is realist  
Transmitting thinking that is a  
psychological message  
For the pleasure of the people  
I don't know what I would be if I didn't  
do this hip-hop  
A reason for my existence  
Pure devotion  
A manner of expressing my suffering  
Happy feeling and pain  
In my body and my spirit  
Feel the words firing against the  
microphone  
A weapon of fire directed at your heart  
Feeling the fever of  
an artist from the new school  
The new era  
The complete education  
Breaking the barriers  
of your consciousness  
A high level  
And the Ministers of culture say  
Ah that's it  
For this reason  
we're going to make music  
Until rap in Cuba  
reaches a cultrual level  
Where there is nothing higher

[Chorus]  
[Chorus]

Another way this expression  
hip-hop  
A historical account of this generation  
And although today still  
It isn't found on the radio nor the  
television



This song reflects a common sentiment of many hip-hop artists and participants: that without hip-hop, they didn't know where they would be. The song, entitled "hip-hop y Pensamiento" (hip-hop and Thought), the MC (short for Master of Ceremonies) argues that hip-hop is a Revolution. Based on everyday experience, hip-hop serves as a tool to deliver a psychological message to the people. For the MC, hip-hop is a way to express feeling, as well as to educate and strengthen the listener by preparing them mentally to understand and challenge the oppression that they face. It is in this way that hip-hop gives life: it offers meaning, and through understanding one's situation, one can work for a solution. As a historicized account of the current hip-hop generation that is found outside of hegemonic modes of ideological dissemination, the MC argues, hip-hop is still going to be recognized for its revolutionary contribution to uplifting society. One day this validation is going to come when the director of the Ministry of Culture recognizes the social importance of hip-hop, and that it is an art form. That is when the artist can claim; "Yeah there it is!" which will indicate that hip-hop has reached the highest cultural level "where there is no other." Regardless of whether or not this happens, the artist is going to continue forward with his or her devotion to the movement.

All of the artists I have interviewed said that hip-hop gave them life, a sense of being. It helped them to realize that they existed. Lack of discourse to articulate one's experiences and one's location within a particular historical or cultural context seems to have an impressive effect on self-esteem. Magia and Alexay of Obsesión once told me that after they began learning about racism, which was a result of their participation in the hip-hop Movement, they started to realize the subtle ways that their internalized racism manifested itself corporally. Both realized that they had learned to tightly press their lips

against their mouths as a way to make their lips appear thinner. Shocked that they had, at some point in their lives, trained their bodies to do something that was fairly uncomfortable, they began exploring and embracing other aspects of their physical features.

Another artist told me a story of how he gave his father a book about the Independent Party of Color and the Race War of 1912. He said when he arrived home one day, he saw his father crying and hitting his head against the wall. “Why didn’t I know this?” his father kept saying. The raceless discourse that emerged in Cuba meant that the state did not see race. It seems to have also meant that the state did not see Black people. In Cuba, the nation had become so discursively *raceless* that Blacks were not included in history courses and in national media. Thus, many Black Cubans, who received at least a partial secondary education after the Revolution, grew up without knowing about the social and political contributions of Black Cubans. Those who do not attend university are largely ignorant about the role of Black Cubans in founding the Cuban nation.

While there were some Cubans whose lives were structured by hegemonic revolutionary discourse, there were also many Cubans who had a racialized consciousness. Though their lives were dominated by a *raceless* discourse in the public sphere, at home, parents passed on stories about Blacks in Cuba and reminded their children to watch out for racism and self-hate. They taught their children that darkskin and African hair are beautiful, and to be wary of people who tried to tell them that they were uncivilized or backwards, because often times those people, no matter their race, were the problem. Rodolfo Rensoli says the following about his experiences with racism

and the unconditional support of his father, who helped him to feel unashamed of how he appeared:

...Pero, dado que se impone ese aspecto tan tradicional y de actitudes con el ser humano ante su mezquindad y mi propia imagen [he scoffs], que amo mi pelo..., O sea yo me crié en un ambiente cultural especial dentro de Cuba. Mi padre no aceptaba cuando en su centro de trabajo cuando le decían que su pelo era malo. Él solía decir mi pelo no está enfermo. Imagínate yo que me crié bajo esa influencia, yo desde niño me crié en el conflicto ese..., pero eso choca con una realidad tradicional que es muy amplia y cultural. Tampoco aceptaba cuando le decían que el más atrasado de sus hijos era porque tuviera el color más oscuro [points at himself]. Entonces, irónicamente consciente del problema decía... ¿pero cómo atrasado si todos están en la escuela en el grado que le corresponde por su edad? Entonces me he pasado toda la vida chocando con eso.

... Given that, they impose this aspect [that is] so traditional and of attitudes with multi-racialness being the view of humanity and my own image [he scoffs], I love my hair... or better, I grew up in a special cultural environment in Cuba. My father did not accept when at work they told him he had bad hair. He always told me that my hair was not sick. Imagine that I grew up under this influence, I from a child, I grew up with this conflict... but this conflicted with a traditional reality that is very broad and cultural. He also never accepted when they told him that the most backwards of his children was the darker one [points to himself]. So, ironically conscious of the problem he said, 'how could he be backwards if he is in the school grade that corresponds to his age?' So all my life I have been clashing with this. (Rensoli Interview, Havana 2005)

Rensoli talks about his experiences with racism as a teenager in 1980s. At school, people told his father that Rensoli was backwards. Rensoli was doing well in school, so his father, realizing what was going on, asked, "Well, how can he be behind when he is in the grade that he is supposed to be in?" This alludes to the idea of no matter how well dark-skinned Cubans do, no matter how much they are able to achieve, they are still considered to be inferior. Throughout the young Rensoli's life, his father, like many other Cuban parents – including light-skinned parents with dark-skinned children – continued to help his child to understand the importance of recognizing racism and embracing self.

Rensoli comments on how being Mulato or light-skinned is considered an ideal. This ideal is Cuba's version of multiculturalism. However, as a dark-skinned man with tightly curled hair, he does not fit this image, nor does he fit the ideal of Whiteness. But,

Rensoli is part of a unique group of Black Cubans: he is part of a family who continued to discuss race in the home, and to make their children aware of racism in order to empower their kids to not fall into some of the psychological traps that faced other Black Cubans.

Rensoli's father, with whom I had the opportunity to chat for about an hour over a cup of coffee, was part of the Cuban delegation that stayed at the Hotel Theresa in New York. It was the trip in which Fidel Castro met with Malcolm X in 1960. Castro arrived in the United States for his first meeting at the United Nations. Because his delegation included Black Cubans, the racially-segregated diplomat hotels refused to admit the Black members of the delegations. Malcolm X arranged a stay at the Hotel Theresa in Harlem, and Fidel Castro went there with his delegation. While at the Hotel Theresa, Castro hosted Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev. This had a lasting impact on African Americans' views of the Cuban Revolution. The fact that a prominent head of state chose to bring his delegation to stay in Harlem, and to host the leader of a global superpower there, was an empowering move for Black Americans. It was certainly a moment, as were earlier historical moments and like many moments to come, wherein those in the African (cultural) diaspora would influence the lives and history of Black Americans. Rensoli's father reflected on the experience. He was proud to have been part of this experience, and shared photos of the visit. I asked him what his thoughts were about the trip. He was surprised at how much racism Black Americans had to face. "Nothing like that," he said, "would ever happen in Cuba."

While the older generations of Black Cubans are able to reflect on the varying experiences of race between Blacks in the United States and Blacks in Cuba, they were

largely able to have this reflection because of the pre-revolutionary, Black–identity-centered, anti-racist political discourse that existed before the revolution. However, since the 1959 Revolution, there have been social movements throughout the Americas that have changed the situation of Black people for the better. Cuba’s isolation prevented the younger generations from participating in the cross-national, anti-racist, Black consciousness exchanges that continued throughout the Americas. Black Cubans continued to be socially, economically and politically treated “as Black,” and since the 1990s they have been without the social and material guarantees offered by the liberalizing Cuban state.

The relationship between Black subjectivity and hip-hop aesthetics has been recognized by the Underground hip-hop community. For this reason, hip-hop largely appeals to Black and Mulato youth, though anti-racist White Cubans are certainly present in the movement. Also, given the social justice or revolutionary orientation of Underground hip-hop, the discourses emerging within hip-hop are hotly debated within Cuban society in general. During the 1990s, this history resonated with young Black and/or poor youth in Havana, who not only lived in the resource-poor communities outside of the city of Havana, but also lived in a *country* which has, itself, been marginalized. These artists live in Cuba, a country written-off as delinquent, marginal; where the citizens are assumed to be so repressed that they are unable to determine their own history, nor able to think critically, much less to be *able to critique* their social realities publicly. In talking about the revolutionary potential of hip-hop, Odaymara of Las Krudas states:

I believe that this would be a super, super revolutionary posture that all these lost youth should listen to and to help the realization of a real revolution in the end. But a revolution that is complete, truthful, [that is] for real. I think that we are going towards

that, with the many economic problems of the entire globalized world and [that is] brutally divided between the rich, rich, rich, rich and the poor, poor, poor, poor. In Cuba it's the same. It is a country that is super, super, super blockaded, super eh, how do I explain this?... its super defamed internationally, and so we [men and women] carry this weight from all of this, but nonetheless we are here, for sure we are here and we are going to fight because our revolution continues forward with all of our losses and all of our demands. (Odaymara interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Odaymara articulates an experience that resonates with many of the issues that Cuba's youth of color face today. These youth want to achieve the *ideals* of revolution on the island. They work for a Cuba that fulfills its ideals of equality and human emancipation. They work towards this locally, nationally, and globally, but they also face a difficult economic situation and political isolation. Cuban youth growing up in this context, especially during the intensification of Cuba's isolation during the post-Soviet 1990s, had to learn to live and produce culture with very little material resources. Their struggles are connected not only to the U.S. blockade and to Cuban government policy, but also to larger issues of globalization, such as the global exploitation that manifests itself in sweatshops in some places and, specifically in Cuba's case, in tourism.

In the 1990s, during the Special Period, the Cuban government relaxed many of its social restrictions. The economic changes of the 1990s and the generational pressures of the 1980s resulted in a legitimacy crisis for the Cuban state. The state no longer had the political and economic support of the Soviets, and Cuba was forced to figure out a new way to obtain economic resources for its population. Most importantly, Cuba was forced to look internally and externally as a means to develop an ideological and political project that would enable the state and nation to achieve their national ideals and most importantly, stability. The government took a two-pronged approach to addressing this legitimacy crisis. The first was to liberalize social restrictions, and the second was to liberalize the economy.

Three aspects of the liberalization of the economy were:

- 1) Cuts in guaranteed social welfare programs. For example, food rations and state-based incomes were cut.
- 2) The allowance of private businesses, foreign direct investment, and a privatized tourist sector which quickly attracted foreign currency.
- 3) The creation of a dual economy.

Cuban citizens were paid in Cuban pesos, while tourists were sold Chavitos. The exchange rate was 26 pesos for 1 Chavito, from the 1990s until the approximately 2005. However, within the dual tourist economy, one peso was treated as one Chavito for Cuban citizens. Therefore, a Cuban citizen might pay 5 pesos to enter a theater, but a foreigner would pay 5 Chavitos. A beer in a local restaurant might cost 1 peso, whereas a beer sold in a commercial restaurant would cost 1 Chavito.

State-employed Cubans were also paid in pesos. For example, a doctor made about 480 pesos a month, which was roughly 18 Chavitos. Those who worked in privatized businesses and industries were paid in Chavitos. With tips and other informal ways of making chavitos, a taxi driver could bring home well over 20 chavitos a week. A meal for two in a privately-owned restaurant would cost 18 Chavitos, or a doctor's monthly salary. Therefore, in this mixed economy, uneducated taxi drivers and other non-professional service industry workers became wealthier than doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Those making money in chavitos, as well as Cubans receiving remittances from abroad, could enjoy the benefits of their new class privilege in commercial businesses and private shopping malls; while those without access to tourists, family members abroad, or the tourist sector tried to live off of state food, clothing, and other rations. With the cuts in the social welfare benefits, Cubans were forced to find

other ways to meet their subsistence needs, and a large informal market began flourishing during the Special Period.

The economic downturn affected Black Cubans the most (De La Fuente 2001, Perry 2004, Fernandes 2006). During the 1990s, Black Cubans began to face more public discrimination. They were the first cut from jobs, the least likely to be hired within the tourist industry, and the most likely to be employed by the state. White Cubans were also the most likely to receive remittances from family members abroad, as the first few generations of Cuban immigrants were primarily White. During the Special Period, the material disparities between Black and White Cubans began to increase. However, these changes did not go unnoticed among Black Cubans. For example, for much of the Special Period “Cubans” were not allowed to enter into tourist spaces. Those who were interpellated as “Cuban” in these spaces were Black people. Therefore, White Cubans had even more access to the tourist sector’s informal economy, while Blacks were prevented from talking to “foreigners” or entering hotels.

The majority of Cuba’s population was becoming increasingly impoverished while the turbulent political culture of the island offered few redistributive opportunities in the way of economic and political empowerment to address the effects of race and class. This reality was reflected in contradictory government discourse which stated that the government was providing the economic welfare and social security necessary for all citizens to participate fully, and equally, in society.

The liberalization of the economy during the Special Period created a major ideological rupture on the island. Rodolfo Rensoli, considered the founder of the



underground hip-hop movement, reflects on some of the ideological mistakes made during the early revolutionary period:

Durante el periodo después la revolución, nos dábamos cuenta de cuánto el exterior podía servirnos para abrir el diapasón de apreciar muchas cosas. Nosotros asumimos la teoría marxista, nos creíamos que teníamos las herramientas e la solución de todos los problemas y nos estábamos perdiendo muchos avances culturales que se estaban gestando por el mundo que son revolucionarios. Le puedes aplicar a todo ese el marxismo, y decir que desde el punto de vista del marxismo eso también le pertenece al marxismo. Pero todas esas corrientes tienen una propia idealización para sí misma y así se veía. Corriente de todo tipo, mística... hubo una ortodoncias...

During the period after the revolution, we didn't realize how much the outside could help us open the field to appreciate a lot of things. We took on marxist theory, we believed that we had the tools and the solution to all of the problems and we were losing a lot of the revolutionary cultural advances that were gestating in the world. You can apply that marxism to everything, and say that from this point of view of marxism, that also pertains to marxism. But all of these currents have their own idealization for themselves and here you see it. There is a current of every mystic type, there would be an orthodoxy...(Rensoli interview, Havana 2005)

Here, Rensoli discusses one of the key ideological crises facing Cuban artists, intellectuals, and politicians. Cuba had become so insular and had so reified Marxist theory as a means to achieve Martíán ideals that they did not engage in the ideological changes happening globally. A common social critique that emerged during the Special Period was that the emerging ideological currents in other parts of the world would have been useful in helping Cuba to move forward in its revolutionary processes. However, it took the Special Period and the fall of the Soviet Union to force the nation out of its ideologically-based hemispheric isolation. This process forced the Cuban state and intelligentsia to consider ideological alternatives to existing Marxist orthodoxy.

Though the Cuban revolution was far more radical and aggressive in its approach to a class-based civil rights movement, the measures used to analyze the successes of the revolution were constructed using Eurocentric notions of social advancement. Because of the silencing of critical discourses during the Soviet Period, those who sought to advance the interests of the revolution by challenging Eurocentric notions of morality

(such as heteronormativity) and human expression (such as notions of “high culture” and “low culture”) were limited in their ability to press for ideological and social change.

The artists of the underground hip-hop Movement, as a movement that has its origins in expressing the interests of “morally-suspect” populations who experience racial, gendered, and class-based inequalities, are drawn to the artform’s critical aesthetic.

Underground hip-hop artists draw on the residual values and meanings embedded in Afro-Cuban culture, as well as other discourses such as Black Nationalism, American civil rights discourse, Cuban revolutionary discourse, and feminism. Artists draw from these discourses in order to address one area in which there is an immediate need for discursive engagement: the issue of race in Cuba. From the beginning, it was the isolated Brown and Black youth in the Alamar housing project, on the outskirts of Havana, who began engaging these ideological limitations.

What emerged were Cuban underground hip-hop artists who are now part of a new generation of utopian critical artists and intellectuals. The goal of their work as artists and activists is to challenge these hegemonic discourses, locally and globally. These artists describe their goal as contributing to “a revolution within the Revolution,” that being the liberation of socially marginal communities, particularly Black and Mulato people. Their work centers on consciousness-raising as a means of encouraging Cuban citizens to work for their own empowerment. In their music, theater, and hip-hop performances, underground hip-hop artists attempt to interrupt hegemonic systems of representation, as a means to expand revolutionary discourse to include the citizenship demands of socially marginal groups.

### **7.1a Raperos, Activistas, Revolutionaries: Underground Hip-Hop and Social Change**

Many of the well-established underground hip-hop artists are very active within their local artistic communities and neighborhoods. For example, Alexis Rodríguez, a.k.a. DJ D'Boys, was the director of several programs at El Parque Almendares – where the International hip-hop festival has been held for four years. At the park, Alexis led youth environmental educational programs, Almendares river clean-up projects, and other community-based projects aimed at educating the public about the importance of maintaining a healthy environment. Before beginning their work within the hip-hop community, the hip-hop group Las Krudas were part of the internationally renowned street theater group Tropazancos. Their work centered on bringing theater to the poor communities of Central Havana. Rensoli was a key community cultural director in Alamar. A resident of the public housing project in Alamar, a poet, and a key figure in Alamar's Aficionados' Movement, Rensoli organized the first hip-hop festival in 1995 within his independent hip-hop production company Grupo Uno and Alamar's Casa de Cultura. Because these artists adhere to the revolutionary ideal of integrating their artistic work in community-based work, hip-hop artists identify as revolutionaries and activists.

Young Cubans' interest in hip-hop began when the song "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugar Hill Gang arrived on the island – possibly as early as in 1979 (Fernandes 2006). During the early 1990s, youths, who later became DJs and underground hip-hop artists, could be found on street corners imitating songs and making up words that sounded like the English words they were hearing. However, by the late 1990s, through the work of independent actors such as Rensoli and independent producers such as Pablo Herrera, Cuban artists began developing "Cuban underground hip-hop" as a socially conscious art-form that would reflect their experiences in Cuba. These moves are tied to

hip-hop's emergence as a Black social movement and as a source of discourse that has explained much of what people were feeling, and/or did not realize they were consciously feeling when they were drawn to the music. Given the focus on marginal populations in Cuba, underground hip-hop was initially referred to as Nueva Trova. Magia says the following about Underground hip-hop's link to Nueva Trova:

Magia: O sea, este tipo de movimiento que en un final trataba de representar los problemas conscientes de la sociedad, quizás un poco también de darle solución. Entonces lo llamaron la nueva trova de estos años del '96, '97.

T: ¿Nueva Trova?

Magia: Sí, decían que era como la nueva trova de los 90 que era una trova bastante de vanguardia. Y así se la llamó en aquellos tiempos al rap, por las letras que hacían, por los temas que sacaban a la luz. Así bueno, varios investigadores participaron de escribir sobre el movimiento, de plasmar un poco las historias de las agrupaciones. Musicólogos se interesaron en saber qué estaba pasando. [Magia: Or better said, this type of movement that at first represented the problems of society's conscience, maybe a little to give it solution. So they called it the Nueva Trova those years, '96, '97.

T: Nueva Trova?

Magia: Yes, and they would say that like Nueva Trova of the 90s that was a trova very vanguard. And so they called it in those times "rap," for the words that they did, for the themes that they gave birth to. So OK, many researchers participated in writing about the movement, to give it a bit of a history about the groups. Musicologists were interested in knowing what was going on.] (Magia interview, Havana 2006)

When hip-hop first began as an art form, Cuban society did not know what to make of it. As it gained popularity in the United States, the Cuban media began to take notice. One of the earliest articles written about hip-hop in Cuba was written on December 28, 1990, in *Juventud Rebelde*. Pedro Herrera Eschavarria wrote about the film *Rap City Rhapsody*, which had been shown at the XII Festival of Latin American Cinema. The piece provided an overview of the emergence of hip-hop in the United States and discussed hip-hop's anti-establishment and communitarian origins. The author discussed the African heritage of the movement, but also noted the important contributions of other races: hip-hop was not only for Black people. The author also

discussed the representation of women and men within hip-hop, and discussed the work of Tricia Rose before she published her ground breaking book on hip-hop, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (1994). Thus, from its beginnings in Cuba, Cubans were listening primarily to socially conscious, and socially critical hip-hop (Fernandes 2006). It is in this way that hip-hop in Cuba emerged as an utopian social movement that challenges social and economic oppression through grassroots consciousness-raising and community activism.

Following in the tradition of previous cultural movements in Cuba, underground hip-hop rejects the commercialization of art, a process in which it is believed that art becomes estranged from its social and communitarian utility. Cuba's first public discussions of hip-hop centered on its power of social criticism, its challenge to racism and capitalism. Early articles about the movement only mention artists such as Paris, Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions, Queen Latifah, and the Jungle Brothers, who were some of the most socially critical and anti-commercial artists of the time. In Eschavarria's piece, he mentions the emerging form of commercialized hip-hop, but does not bother to name any commercial artists.

The film *Rap City Rhapsody* was premiered in Havana, with a delegation of American film makers, musicians, musicologists, television personalities and journalists. During this trip, the Black Panther-inspired hip-hop artist Paris performed, becoming the first hip-hop artist to perform in Cuba. In comparison to the pieces aired and published in the United States at the time, Cuban media coverage of American hip-hop, including Eschavarria's piece, has offered some of the most well-researched and critically-informed discussion of U.S. American hip-hop. The film premiere was also one of the first

national events that centered on U.S. American hip-hop in Cuba. However, people had been rapping and breakdancing within Cuba's Aficionados movement for almost a decade (Fernandes 2006).

During the 1990s, every independent U.S. American film about hip-hop was shown in Cuba. U.S. Americans who began coming to Cuba frequently brought recorded hip-hop movies and music videos to friends and colleagues who eagerly awaited to hear the newest beats and newest lyrical flows. hip-hop artists later told me that they fell in love with, and craved, hip-hop because they related to the images they saw, and upon learning about the history of hip-hop, they valued the communitarian element embedded in the genre. Given how hip-hop was initially presented in Cuban national media, when Cuban artists began having their own hip-hop festivals five years later in 1995, and given the state's desire to incorporate socially-critical art forms, it is understandable that hip-hop was initially named Nueva Trova.

The following excerpt from the Final Declaration of the First Symposium of Cuban hip-hop in 2005, captures the spirit, aims, and social tensions of the previous generation of socially-critical musicians. The artists write:

DECLARACIÓN FINAL  
DEL PRIMER SIMPOSIO DE HIP HOP CUBANO.

...

Durante estos días revisamos, cuestionamos y fortalecimos la identidad de un nuevo movimiento cultural en Cuba, cuyas características no se agotan en una sola manifestación artística, ni únicamente en sus propósitos estéticos, sino también en los sociales. Razón que ha hecho difícil la ubicación del movimiento en el entramado institucional de la cultura Cubana. Este I Simposio ha demostrado las múltiples limitaciones de las formulas y respuestas institucionales creadas para encauzar el movimiento y nos pronunciamos por encontrar los espacios que puedan propiciar, desarrollar y promover TODAS las expresiones culturales del hip-hop en nuestro país. Dicha búsqueda tendrá lugar a través del dialogo responsable, anti burocrático y creador con las instituciones más cercanas a nuestros propósitos – Asociación Hermanos Sainz, Agencia Cubana de Rap, Instituto de la Música (incluyendo sus centros provinciales), UNEAC y Cultura Comunitaria.

...

Durante estos días disfrutamos el orgullo de un discurso propio, de un saber diferente que no se coloca de espaldas al conocimiento académico ni a las visiones tradicionales de la cultura, sino que les exige profundizar, actualizarse y comprometerse más. Los talleres de Construcción de Género, Educación Popular, Orientación Civil, Break-dance y Graffiti permitieron desmontar textos y prejuicios, compartir técnicas artísticas y otras cualidades estéticas del Movimiento así como incorporar nuevas herramientas para el trabajo en la comunidad, con la comunidad y para la comunidad. En estos días pudimos confirmar que nuestros propósitos son compartidos no solo por raperos, grafiteros, djs y bailadores de hip-hop; sino por muchos investigadores, periodistas, profesores, fotógrafos, maestros, funcionarios, pintores, estudiantes, niños, poetas y amigos que nos han acompañado. El evento propicio la búsqueda compartida de nuevas formulas y estrategias que nos permitan interactuar con diversos sectores de público: es nuestra petición mayor a la política cultural Cubana, pues los actuales diseños organizativos y promocionales de esa política no toman en cuenta la complejidad de nuestro movimiento.

El Simposio de hip-hop Cubano se convierte en un proyecto que pretende –a través de todo el año y de toda la isla- sistematizar una mirada crítica, autocrítica, creadora y comprometida de todas y cada una de las artistas Cubanas y Cubanos del hip-hop, que han demostrado su identificación con los presupuestos emancipatorios y sociales de la Revolución Cubana.

Leído y aclamado a las 7 p.m...m. del 27 de noviembre del 2005,  
En la Casa de la Cultura de Plaza de la Revolución.  
Ciudad de la Habana, Cuba.

#### [THE FINAL DECLARATION OF THE FIRST CUBANHIP HOP SYMPOSIUM

During these days we reviewed, we questioned and strengthened the identity of a new cultural movement in Cuba, whose characteristics are not exhausted in a single artistic expression, or only in their aesthetic purposes, but also in social [utility?]. [For this] reason that has made it difficult to locate the movement in the institutional fabric of Cuban culture. This I Symposium has shown the many limitations of the formulas and institutional responses created to stem the movement and we spoke to find spaces which may lead to the development and promotion of all cultural expressions of hip-hop in our country. That search will be held accountable through dialogue, anti-bureaucratic and creative, with the institutions closest to our purposes such as the Asociacion Hermanos Saiz, the Cuban Agency of Rap, the Institute of Music (including its provincial centers), UNEAC and Community and Culture.

During these days we enjoyed the pride in our own discourse, namely a different knowledge that is not found on the backs of academic knowledge nor a traditional vision of culture, but demanded in-depth study, to bring oneself up to date and to commit oneself to become more involved. The workshops on the Construction of Gender, Popular Education, Civil Orientation, Break-dance and Graffiti enabled us to clean off texts and to dismantle prejudices, [and to] share artistic techniques and other aesthetic qualities of the Movement as well as incorporate new tools for work in the community, with the community and for the community. These days, we were able to confirm that our goals are shared not only by rappers, graffiti artists, DJs and hip-hop dancers, but by many researchers, journalists, teachers, photographers, teachers, civil servants, artists, students, children, poets and friends have accompanied us. The event enabled the sharing of the quest for new formulas and strategies that will allow us to interact with various sectors of the public: it is our biggest request to Cuban cultural policy, well to the current organizational designs and promotional policy of this politic that does not take into account the complexity of our movement.

The Cuban hip-hop Symposium has converted into a project that pretends, during the whole year and in all the Island - to systemize the critical perspective, self-critical, creative and committed to all and to every one of the Cuban artists and Cubans of hip-hop, that have demonstrated their identification with the emancipatory and social proposals of the Cuban Revolution.] (First Cuban hip-hop Symposium 2005)

This declaration strongly resembles the “Final Resolution of the First International Meeting of the Protest Song,” held in the Casa de las Américas in 1967. Clara Díaz (1994) cites the following excerpt of the meeting of the Protest Movement:

...la canción es un arma al servicio del pueblo, no un producto de consumo utilizado por el capitalismo para enajenarlo. [...] La tarea de los trabajadores de la Canción Protesta debe desarrollarse a partir de una toma de posición definida junto a su pueblo, frente a los problemas de la sociedad en que vive [...]

[... the song is an arm for the service of the people, not a product for consumption used for capitalism for its estrangement... the work of workers of Protest Songs ought to be developed as a part of a seizure for a defensive position together with the public, to confront the problems of the society in which one lives [...]] (22)

Both declarations argue that music and song should be located within community activism. They reject art in its commercialized form, as they see music as a tool for community empowerment. For these artists, songs are to be used as a means to challenge the problems that society faces. In both cases, racism is a social ill that the artists seek to address. Both declarations mark the beginning of new social movements in Cuba. Both music genres share the ideals of the revolution, and work to see that they are achieved. Both forms of music also challenge the aesthetic debates that would describe these emergent genres as threats to established institutional and aesthetic structures, as being of “low culture.” However, in comparison to the protest song, hip-hop has a much more complex aesthetic. Some hip-hop artists note that this genre has the power to reach people and stimulate change using multiple aesthetic structures. Together, these multiple aesthetics (rap, break dancing, graffiti, DJ’ing) form a culture and a movement.

## **7.2 Notes on Language**



One of the ways in which Cuban citizens' integration of politics and culture is manifested within the 'social movement' terminology used by underground hip-hop artists. An important project that would help in empirically addressing this relationship would be a genealogy of some of following words commonly used by critical artists:

- Activism
- Activist
- Marginalization
- Marginal
- Revolution
- Revolutionary
- Protest
- Protesting
- Poverty
- Commercial
- Commercialization
- Institution
- Institutionalization
- Underground

A genealogy of terms surrounding social activism and how these terms have been infused with notions of culture as markers of social advancement, equality, political processes and social change, would aid in understanding many of the social processes underway in Cuba and other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Ernesto Laclau (2007) has undertaken this project in his analysis of the term "populism," while scholars such as Leonardo Avritzer (2002) have touched upon the differing meanings and expectations associated with "democracy" and "government" in Latin America. Without such clarification of terms when describing social life in Cuba, researchers can ask one question, while the interviewee answers an entirely different question using some of the same words or similar discourses which take on different meanings in a larger context.

I have noticed that certain terms in Cuba have a dual meaning. One meaning may be reminiscent of liberal discourses concerning freedom and equality, while the other may

be reminiscent of anti-modernist, Martíán, and possibly socialist discourse. A genealogy could be helpful in theorizing how and why these ideological tensions are at play in specific terms. My goal here is simply to bring attention to the phenomena.

### *Activismo/Activista*

También había un evento teórico en los Festivales que eran los Coloquios y que nos fue dando una dimensión un poco más amplia de toda esta repercusión que iba a teniendo el hip-hop dentro de la sociedad. Nos hizo un llamado en el sentido ese de que sí teníamos que tener una responsabilidad cuando nos subíamos a la tarima y decíamos algunas letras, en qué medida repercutía en las personas. A partir de ese momento fue bueno como esperar. Hay que pensar un poco más lo que tú quieres hacer, lo que quieres decir, lo que quieres proyectar. Fue como eso, no. No sé exactamente lo que he hecho dentro del movimiento de hip-hop yo creo que, o sea, tendría un poco sentarme y decir específicamente... He hecho muchas cosas, además, de rapear creo que ambos desarrollamos algo muy inconsciente que fue el activismo. El activismo fue algo inconsciente dentro del movimiento. Yo lo llamé así hasta que fuimos a los Estados Unidos por primera vez y que supimos, o sea, que eso era un activismo un poco ya consciente.

O sea, no lo supimos hasta que no llegamos en el 2001 a los Estados Unidos cómo era que se llamaba ese tipo de trabajo y cómo era que podía realizarse un poco más conscientemente con la comunidad, empezando con la comunidad del hip-hop. Pero en ese tiempo, antes, ya veníamos realizando ese tipo de trabajo que en aquellos tiempo no lo llamábamos activismo, sino que decíamos bueno esto es lo que a nosotros nos toca hacer. Había un grupo de gente que tenía un sentido de organización, que sabía que había que organizar a nuestra gente. Sabíamos que teníamos que establecer un diálogo entre las instituciones y el mismo trabajo que se hacía, que nosotros hacíamos. Hay que entender que aquellos tiempo no había una aceptación del género como tal. O sea, habían mucho lugares en que sencillamente no aceptaban el hip-hop como género, o sea el rap, como en aquel momento se llamaba.

[Also there was a theoretical event in the Festivales, that was the Colloquies and that gave us a broader dimension in which [to understand] the broader impact of hip-hop within our society. It was a call to us in the sense that, yes, we must have a responsibility when we take the platform and we say our lyrics, to what extent it had repercussions in the people. As of that moment it was good to hope. But it is necessary to think a little about what you want to do, what do you mean, what you want to project. It was like that, right. I do not know exactly what I would have done within the movement of hip-hop I believe that, that is to say, I believe that I had to sit with myself and to say specifically.... I have done many things, in addition, to rapping I believe that both we [she and her husband Alexay] developed something very unconscious that was the activism. The activism was something unconscious within the movement. I named it when we went to the United States for the first time and that we knew it, that is to say, that that was activism and we became a little more conscious.

That is to say, we did not know it until 2001, when we were in the United States and learned that it was what they called type of work [activism] was called and how one could become more conscious with one's community, beginning with the community of hip-hop. But in that time, before, we were already doing this type of work though we did not call activism, but which we said, good, this is what we were called to do. There was a group of people who had a sense of organization, that knew that there was a need to

organize our people. We knew that we had to establish a dialogue between the institutions and the same work that they did that we did. It is necessary to understand that those times there was not an acceptance of this genre as such. That is, there were many places which simply did not accept hip-hop as a genre, that is to say, rap, as it was called in that moment.](Magia interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Magia talks about when she and her husband, Alexay, became conscious of the word “activism.” Magia notes that underground hip-hop artists were already focused on social justice work. They were already working within their communities, as well as becoming more conscious of the social impact of their work as hip-hop artists. However, it was during their trip to New York in 2001 that they encountered the word “activism,” and decided that the term reflected what artists were doing within their own community. In exploring what activism meant within the United States, Magia and Alexazy also started to realize that successful activist work meant organizing and working within one’s own institution, as well as with other institutions. Magia notes that there were some people within the movement that had a great sense of organization, and they moved to organize a hip-hop journal, a purpose and mission for the movement, and symposiums as an educational component. These actors challenged established institutional structures for the recognition of underground hip-hop as a revolutionary artform, and they pressed for the creation of the Agency of Rap, so that artists would have an established mechanism within the state institutional structure to pursue the interests and needs of the movement.

Magia also makes reference to the time period in which Underground artists began to realize the utility of using the discourse of “activism” to describe their movement. It seems that 1998-2003 was a moment of rapid ideological development for the underground hip-hop movement. During this time period, Cuban artists and intellectuals, with greater access to the ideological changes that happened within the

Americas since 1970, were heavily engaged in accessing, discussing, digesting, and critiquing the works of theorists such as Michel Foucault, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, bell hooks, and Judith Butler. There was a push to look externally to find developments in social theory as a means to contribute in global intellectual and ideological exchange, as well as to rethink approaches to equality at home.

Another factor contributing to the development of “activist” discourse may also have been the exchange of ideas with the African diaspora outside of Cuba – for example, with people in New York City – but also with members of the African diaspora who visited Cuba. Underground youth increasingly began to engage Black radical activists with political asylum in Cuba. Additionally, for the majority of the first generation of Underground Artists, the visit of activists such as Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte to the island helped artists to think critically about their actions, and the potential power of the movement. Magia and other artists commented that the significant contribution of those meetings was when Danny Glover and Harry Belafonte said, “It’s not enough just to hope and want change. What are you going to do about it? You can’t accomplish anything without a plan.” The graffiti artist NoNo says the following about her decision to focus on graffiti within the movement:

Ya lo hacía porque tenía revistas y cosas pero no pensé que lo que yo hacía, esas letras que eran precisamente eran grafiti. Hasta que ya me fui instruyendo un poco más y no me dio pena, porque me gusta mucho el hip-hop. Entonces me integré y era un activista más en el movimiento. Y vi que no había ninguna graffitera, no hay nadie. Entonces, yo empecé en El Almendares: No, yo quiero pintar, yo quiero ir ahí. Y más o menos hacía cositas. No era tan fuerte porque, aparte de que me daba pena, no pensé que como hay gente que cuando ven un grafiti no los entienden. A veces cuando me paraba: No, pero no se entiende lo que dice ahí. No, pero es así, porque es así me entiendes.

[I was already doing it because I had the magazines and things but I did not think that what I did, that those letters were graffiti. Until whatever, kept learning a little more, and I was not embarrassed because I liked hip-hop. Then I integrated myself [into the movement] and was an more of an activist in the movement. And I saw that there was no woman graffiti artist, there was nobody. Then, I began in the Almendares: ‘No, I want to paint, I want to go there.’ And more or less I made small things. It was not so strong because, because I felt a little troubled, I did not know if there were people that when

they saw the graffiti would not understand it. Sometimes when it stopped to me: ‘No, but you do understand what it says there. No, but it is that way, it’s that way because that’s how I understand it.’] (Nono interview, Havana 2005)

It seems that for these artists, activism and being an activist means consciously orienting one’s work toward the goal of social change. Underground hip-hop has become a mechanism through which artists make an intervention into issues not previously recognized or discussed. Artists may also take on an activist role in an established area where artists are fighting for change, and offer their perspectives as a way to amplify the public’s and other artists’ perspectives on an experience. For example, there are many women addressing what it means to be a woman, particularly a Black woman, from multiple perspectives and from the intersections of multiple social experiences and social identities.

For Underground artists, there are two approaches to poverty. Some think of poverty in material terms, while others reject a materially-based analysis of poverty. However, all of the artists seem to associate poverty with personal attributes, such as having a poor conscience, being badly educated, or lacking high self-esteem, respect for themselves or their community. DJ D’Boys and Mikel El Extremo both give similar accounts of poverty: that one can be materially poor but not spiritually or culturally impoverished; alternately, one could be wealthy, but spiritually or culturally impoverished.

Ahí no hay diferencia. Dentro de la pobreza está lo underground y lo marginal. Ya con eso está dicho todo. Underground hay está lo marginal y la pobreza. La música no puedes venderla, pues es una música de mucha conciencia, me entiendes. Y hay más amantes a la música underground que a la comercial. Aunque tú no lo creas, como en el mundo siempre hay más pobres que ricos. Los que oyen música comercial son los que nacieron en cunas de oro y lo tienen todo y no están para oír una historia de pobreza, porque no conocen eso. Me entiendes. No es importante, me entiendes.

Es importante HH y underground. Para mí es importante que siga creciendo pues eso es lo que va a hacerme, es como una lucha, una lucha de que algún día yo tengo fe, me entiendes de buscar la igualdad de todo el mundo. Porque todos somos iguales, tú tienes

un poquito más un poquito menos, pero todos somos iguales. Que puedes tener mucho, pero a lo mejor no tienes salud y la salud no se da con dinero. Y yo soy pobre, pero tengo mucha salud. Yo te puedo ayudar a ti. El respeto para todos los underground, el respeto para los marginados, para todo el mundo.

[There there is no difference. Within Underground there is that which is marginal, and there is the poverty. Music you cannot sell it, because it is a music of much conscience, you understand me? And there are more lovers of underground music than there is of the commercial one. Although you do not believe it, as in the world always there are more poor than rich. Those that hears commercial music are those that was born in gold cradles and they have everything and they are not ready to hear a history of poverty, because they do not know about that. You understand me?

It is not important, you understand me? It is important to underground hip-hop. For me it is important that it continues growing that is what is going to do for me, is as a struggle, a struggle of which someday I have faith, you understand, to look for the equality worldwide. Because we are all equal, you have just a little bit more others a little bit less, but all we are equal. You can have much, perhaps you do not have health and health does not come with money. And I am poor, but I have much health. I can help you. Much respect for all those underground, and much respect the respect for the marginalized ones all over the world.] (Alexis/DJ D'Boys interview, Havana 2005)

Son gente, la mayoría de esos raperos son gente de barrio, son gente pobre. Estos son las raperos que no tienen poesía, que no tienen ritmo, que no son raperos los que me dan las ideas a mí. Ellos son prácticamente los compositores del sistema. Ahora yo estoy aquí sentado y viene uno y me dice: No, nosotros.... y ta, ta, ta me dice una cosa. Ellos lo dicen sin consciencia. Hay personas que son muy positivos por una parte, por otra parte son muy negativos, tienen una mente muy rara. En la calle pasa eso muy a menudo. Gente que son muy, muy, muy radiactivos, muy elementos, sin embargo, tienen unos sentimientos muy malos. Que tienen unos códigos, unos valores, una hombría... Hay mucha gente que tiene mucha más educación, tienen una vida mucho más holgada, sin embargo son personas que hacen más daño.

[They are people, most of those rappers, they are people from the hood, they are poor people. These are the rappers that do not have poetry, that does not have rhythm, they are not rappers that give me ideas. They are practically the composers of the system. Now I here am seated and one might come to me and says to me: No, we.... and ta, ta, ta says a thing to me. They say it without conscience. There are people who are very positive on the one hand, on the other hand are very negative, have a very strange mind. People that is very, very, very radioactive, very elemental, nevertheless, have very bad feelings. That they have codes, values, machismo... There are many people who have much more education, have a comfortable life much more, nevertheless are people who make more damage.] (Mikel el Extremo interview, Havana 2005).

Ideas surrounding poverty also map onto notions of marginality. The MC La

Yula says the following about being marginal:

De ser pobres, somos pobres. Realmente yo no pienso que aquí hay personas sean pobres, simplemente que uno tiene que desarrollarse, que explotarse a sí mismo... yo quisiera que hacer alguien en la vida, como qué, bueno como carpintero, o cualquier oficio que exista en la tierra. Lo que hay es personas que se estancan en sí, se encierran, se escoden, no se dan su valor... se siente que no es nadie... Lo marginal es casi lo mismo. Para mí porque son personas que no se dejan ver, que piensan nada más lo negativo, lo negativo, lo negativo. Entonces, no hay en ellos algo positivo, eso lo cubre todo lo

negativo. Porque toda una vida ha estado en casa que no tienen fin, que no tienen ni principio ni fin.

[To be poor, we are poor. But really, I don't think that here there should be poor people, only because one has to develop oneself, to exploit one's self... [someone who would say] I would like to be someone in my life, like a good carpenter, or whatever office exists in the land. What there are, are people that stagnate themselves, that enclose themselves, that hide themselves, they don't give themselves value... they feel that they are no one... That which is marginal is almost the same thing. For me because there are people who don't stop to look, to thing nothing more than negative [thoughts], negative things, negative things. So, they are those who are not positive, who covers everything in negativity. Because all of [their] life they have been in the house, and don't have any ends, they don't have a beginning or an end.] (MC La Yula interview, Havana 2005)

In this quote, MC La Yula implies that being in poverty is the basis of being marginal.

Among Cuban artists, marginal means to be outside of society, to not have access to an education, to completely be removed from society. It seems that embedded in notions of marginality are revolutionary discourses of social inclusion: all that one would need to participate fully in society has been guaranteed, and social discrimination is forbidden. Thus, it is assumed that people who are marginal actually marginalize themselves by not participating in society, or by committing crimes that remove them from society. If one is not criminal, one cannot be marginal unless one makes oneself marginal.

Also embedded in this discourse is the shadow of heteronormativity. Subjects such as Black lesbians or Orisha practitioners, who were at one point considered criminal elements, are included in this discourse of marginalization through their criminality. In the case of homosexuality, it is discursively described as decadent and possibly criminal because of its decadence – i.e., the rich are so corrupt that their sexuality is perverse. Such discursive moves set the stage for determining which battles should be fought: “race” is a problem in terms of social inequality, but homosexuality is not. For example, after the questions about marginalization and poverty, I often asked the artists questions about the work of the underground hip-hop group Las Krudas. Most

artists valued the work of Las Krudas because of their open and “real” critique of the issues facing Black lesbians and Black women. However, some artists did disagree with

Las Krudas’s work. Two artists said the following:

Artista 1: Esos son pasiones, esas cosas son pasiones. Yo no tengo porqué mezclar mi vida sexual, mi orientación sexual con mi música. Me entiendes. La mía no, no me importa te digo. Mi poesía es modestia, barrió. Eso es chisme, eso es de cada uno como es. Quien quiera tener una jeva que la tenga y el que quiera tener un tipo que lo tenga. A mí eso no me importa. Ahora que no me ponga el pie arriba a mí, porque ahí sí le tiro. Pero si tú quieres estar aquí con su tipo es su problema. No me gustan que maltraten una mujer delante de mí, tampoco me gusta que maltraten un hombre, me entiendes.

Tanya: Porque para mí es interesante que ellas, es un grupo conocido aquí, pero no puedo pensar de ningún grupo homosexual, y popular, de hip-hop afuera de Cuba.

Artista 2: Los Cubanos son machistas, pero también hay una pila de maricones, pero bueno, lo que creo es que están orientados hacia otro tipo de, de... se reservan para otras manifestaciones artísticas, no para el hip-hop.

Artist 1: These are passions, these things are passions. I don’t have to mix my sexual life, my sexual orientation with my music. You understand. Mine, no I tell you I don’t import it. My poetry is modest, from the streets. That’s chisme, that’s what every bit of it is. Whoever wants a girlfriend, she should have her, and whoever wants some guy, he should have him. But if you want to be here with your guy, that’s your problem. I don’t like to mistreat a woman in front of me, and I don’t like that they mistreat men, you understand.

Tanya: Because for me it’s interesting that they, it is a well known group here, but I cannot think of any homosexual, and popular, hip-hop group outside of Cuba.

Artist 2: Cubans are machista, but also there is a bunch of faggots, but whatever, I think that it is more oriented towards another type of... they reserve that for other artistic manifestation, not for hip-hop. (Havana 2005)

This illustrates one way in which critiquing race as a metalanguage can actually erase or render invisible how other social inequalities, such as class and sexuality, operate in reinforcing social inequality. The modernist agenda embedded within revolutionary discourse combines with other hegemonic discourses concerning race and material inequality to yield a discourse which argues that poor and marginal people are in their particular situations through their own fault.

Conflicting ideological currents are also embedded within the notions of “institutionalization” and “commercialization” in Cuba. hip-hop artists seek to work with



institutional structures that value and support their communitarian efforts. The organizations that are listed in the dedication of the underground hip-hop Symposium Declaration are institutions such as the Association of Hermanos Saiz, the Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba (UNEAC), the Cuban Agency of Rap, and the Casa de Cultura – all institutions that are quasi-institutionalized with the Ministry of Culture and/or are grassroots-based institutions that are key institutions of Cuba’s non-institutionalized Aficionado Movement. Though the Movement is willing to work with state institutions, it will only work with institutions that will allow the hip-hop Movement some degree of ideological autonomy. It is this autonomy at the grassroots level that has allowed underground hip-hop to emerge as a space for Black and Mulato youth to express the social ills that they face. It is the internal structure of aesthetics, values, and the articulated goals for social and institutional change that makes underground hip-hop a movement.

### **7.2.1 Underground hip-hop/Comercialización/Institucionalización**

Para mi underground es aquella persona que tiene sentimientos de humano, de un ser humano. ¿Me entiende? Que aparte de pensare en él, piensa también en darle a los demás, ¿Me entiende? Porque uno puede tener su yo, pero lo que le rodea forma parte de él, pues es lo que lo hace vivir y sentirse que está viviendo, porque él sólo si se encuentra en un lugar que está solo y nadie lo rodea ni hay personas ni hay na´, es un hombre muerto porque no tiene con quien comunicarse y entonces no puede tener en su propio yo pensando que todo es para él y para él sin poderle dar nada a los demás. Entonces para mí underground significa eso, una persona humana de sentimientos, una persona que sea capaz de saber ayudar o dar mensaje en un momento determinado a las personas que lo necesitan.

[For me underground is that person that has feeling of humanity, of human being. You understand me? That besides thinking of himself, thinks also in giving to the rest. You understand me? Because one an have themselves, me, but that which he surrounds himself forms part of him, well it is that, that thing that one does to live and to feel that one is living, because he is alone if he encounters a place where he is alone, and no one surround him nor are there people, there is nothing, he is a dead man because he has no one with whom to communicate himself, and then he cannot have his own think, so that all is for him and only for him without the desire to give something to the rest. So, for me underground signifies this, a humane person of feelings, a person that has the ability to know to help or to give a message in a determined moment, to the people who need it. (Yumpi interview, Havana 2005)

Underground describes an artist's work that is socially consciousness and empowering. Here Yumpi argues that someone who is "underground" is someone who is socially conscious, who wants to deliver a message that helps people. The Underground artist is someone who is altruistic, who is not selfish, and who realizes that man cannot survive alone. It is a person who feels love and respect for themselves and for their fellow human beings, and who devotes his/her energy to helping to empower others. These themes are also themes addressed in Che Guevara's "Man and Socialism in Cuba (1989)."

Underground hip-hop artists' understanding of "underground" is intertwined with Che Guevara's notion of a "New Man," as a socially-critical actor, who feels love and gives of himself/herself to help improve the lives of all members of their community.

Though many Underground artists consider reggaetón an example of commercialized hip-hop, or as an example of a commercialized music that lacks social consciousness, as Alexay of Obsesión mentioned during a 2005 interview, no one would think of telling reggaetón artists that they should stop producing their music. Alexay explains:

También quizás tenga que ver, que ha influido en algo el reggaetón. Pero yo veo el reggaetón como que ayuda dentro del movimiento a desgastar... O sea al principio, sí te confieso, al principio sí, pero esto es cosa de ellos y nosotros un poco incómodos. Pero después dijimos esto es una cosa que lo que tenemos que hacer es coexistir, tratar de que no..., de que a la gente si tú le pones reggaetón, reggaetón, la gente va a decir: bueno reggaetón. Pero si la gente puede escoger teniendo las opciones, bueno he ahí el problema. Que la gente pueda tener las opciones. Por supuesto estamos en contra de todos los mensajes esos raros que hay en el reggaetón. De igual forma también dentro del hip-hop también debemos luchar con los mensajes esos que se dan inconscientemente. Porque si no queremos que los niños oigan determinados mensajes en el reggaetón, tampoco quisiéramos que nuestros niños oigan otras cosas en el hip-hop que se están dando.

Also the fact that reggaetón has influenced some, may have to do with it. But I see reggaetón as something that helps the movement to wear away... . In other words, at the beginning, if I may confess, at the beginning, yes, but that's their thing and we [were] a bit uncomfortable. But then we agreed that this is the kind of thing with which we have to coexist, to try to not [let it take over], that if you play reggaetón over and over to the people, they are gonna tell you – ok enough already with the reggaetón. But yeah, if

people have the option, therein lies the problem. Of course we are against all of the negative messages in reggaetón. But in the same way, within hip-hop we should fight against all those negative messages that there are in reggaetón. At the same time, within hip-hop we have also had to fight with those unconscious messages. Because we don't want that our children hear those other things that they are doing in hip-hop.

Alexay argues that as parents and socially conscious actors, Underground artists should continue to ensure that healthy music is available for their children, themselves, and the general public. For many underground hip-hop artists, reggaetón encourages consumerism, self-disrespect, and the devaluation of women. For Underground artists, reggaetón is not critical and uplifting. Though Underground artists may be against the messages within reggaetón, however, Alexay believes that Underground hip-hop and the more commercialized forms of reggaetón have to coexist, Underground artists are not for censorship. Alexay argues that those who do conscious hip-hop must struggle to fight against those negative messages, even though commercialized music may start to outsell socially conscious music. The focus on embracing and respecting humanity does not center only on men and straight people, for example, it centers on embracing all human beings.

hip-hop artists' decision to incorporate themselves is also linked to people's need to survive – profit-driven commercialization enables one person to take care of their entire family. Commercialization also offers a way to disseminate socially conscious and empowering ideologies. In either case, the racially conscious discourse in underground hip-hop offers multiple ideological and material solutions to those who feel themselves to be among some of the most marginalized in post-Soviet Cuba. During my 2006 interview with DJ Leydis, she talked about when she first realized that non-Cuban “socially conscious” artists were using anti-gay discourse in their music, to the point even of advocating the murder of gay people:

Y nunca la puede entender hasta que un día lo vi en vivo, y se cuando se terminó la música, él dijo en inglés perfecto: fuego a los homosexuales. Y tengo este disco y me gusta y me encanta esa música, pero la letra no la soporto, entiendes... si yo me pregunto, no. Debe ser algo extraño porque gente como ellos, que son tan buenos dando tanta educación en su música, no creo porque deben pensar así. Porque es el mundo, no y ellos hablan para educar el mundo.

[I could never understand it until one day I saw it live, and when they finished the music, he said in perfect English: Fire to the Homosexuals. I have this disc, and I like it and I love the music, but the words, I don't support it, you understand... if you ask me, no. It ought to be something strange that people like them that are so good at giving so much education in their music; I don't believe they ought to think this way. Because it is the world, right, and they talk about educating the world.] (DJ Leydis interview Havana 2005)

As a DJ, Leydis and other DJs refuse to play music that encourages violence or harm towards other people. In this quote, she talks about how she was really surprised that a group she likes – a hip-hop group from Jamaica – which claims to offer socially conscious music, would come to Cuba and advocate killing gay people on stage. She decided never to play the group again. During my visits to Cuba, I have sat with Cuban hip-hop artists, especially DJs, for hours translating music from English to Spanish. Cuban artists who are not fluent in English make their decisions to play the music of non-Cuban artists based on socially conscious symbols and the aesthetic of the artists in question, as judged by things like the album artwork and CD inserts. However, as in the case of the group from Jamaica, one can never be too sure about the message. For Cuban artists, even though someone like Kanye West may not appear to be a materialistic, socially-problematic figure like 50 Cent, one can never be too sure that someone has not appropriated Underground symbolism to sell their music – after all commercial artists did appropriate and commercialize hip-hop.

I suggest that underground hip-hop can be defined in terms of the following distinctions: 1) commercialized vs. non-commercialized, and 2) institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized.

Because Cuban hip-hop artists see themselves as part of a global hip-hop Movement, they are aware of the differing economic contexts in which hip-hop operates. For them, U.S. hip-hop has become the prime example of what happens to hip-hop once it has become commercialized within capitalist economic structures. The music is co-opted and does not operate as a non-consumerist consciousness-raising mechanism. To term a form of music as “Underground” refers not simply to whether the music is mass distributed by profit-driven institutions, but also to whether the artist is delivering an empowering, socially critical message. It is believed that it is best to stay away from profit-driven institutions, as the amount of money offered can sometimes corrupt artists and compromise their ethics. For example, on the album *La FabriK*, a central theme is that of commercialization and the tensions which artists face when they attempt to engage commercialized institutions as a means to disseminate their music. The following is an interlude on the CD:

Interlude - “Vamos a ser juntos siempre” Track 3; *La FabriK*

[Words pronounced with a Canadian accent, there is no attempt at pronouncing the words in Spanish]

Interviewer: Buenas tardes [Good afternoon]  
 Um...Yo soy Stephanie Miller [I am Stephanie Miller]  
 Y estoy muy alegre con ustedes [I am very happy with you]  
 uh... haciendo esta entrevista sobre el proyecto nuestro [uh, doing this interview about our project]  
 Y yo estoy trabajando con Hot and Spicy Magazine [I am working with Hot and Spicy Magazine]  
 Artists: ¿Cómo? [Say that again?]  
 Interviewer: [Repeats] Hot and Spice Magazine,

[Artists still seem confused]

Interviewer: [repeats the name loudly in Spanish] caliente y especioso, una Revista [hot and spicy, it's a magazine]

¿Sí? [yes?] OK. Yo no sé. [OK. I don't know]

Y bueno estamos... Um... vamos a ver cómo va a salir este proyecto nuestro, tú sabes que ahora mismo no tenemos mucho dinero para hacer una ummm una presupuesto [And good we are... Um... we are going

*to see how it is going to go this project of ours, you know that right now we don't have a lot of money to make a contribution*

- Artists: Eh eh, *[OK OK]* and begin to speak
- Interviewer: pero cuando el proyecto salió nos vamos a tener muchos beneficios y vamos a ser juntos siempre. *[But when the Project comes out we are going to have a lot of benefits and we are going to be together always]*
- Artists: *[Murmurs]*
- Interviewer: *[Interrupts artists – speaks louder in order to continue her thought]* Es un proyecto muy bueno estoy muy alegre, *[it is a very good project I am very happy,]*
- Artists: *[Murmurs]*
- Interviewer: *[Interrupts artists – speaks louder in order to continue her thought]* entonces tengo unas preguntas... I'd like to ask you... Disculpa en español, sí. Ummm... Yo quiero saber desde cuando hay rap aquí en Cuba, *[So I am going to ask you some question-, then slips into speaking in English – I'd like to ask you.. Sorry in Spanish, yes. Ummm... I want to know from when there is rap here in Cuba?]*
- Artists: *[Begin to speak about their work, but are abruptly interrupted with the next question]*
- Interviewer: y es un genero aceptado ahora, *[and is it an accepted genre right now?]*
- Artists: *[Begin to speak about their work, but are abruptly interrupted with the next question]*
- Interviewer: estiste censura en sus textos, *[is there censorship in your texts?]*
- Artists: *[Begin to speak about their work, but are abruptly interrupted with the next question]*
- Interviewer: y como esta la vida de ustedes... *[and what is life like for you all?]*
- Artists: *[Begin to speak about their work, but are abruptly interrupted with the next question.]*

The interviewer in this piece is played by a Canadian friend who was visiting the island at the time. As the clip ends, one hears the artists begin to laugh because their Canadian friend has done such a good job imitating the interviews that so many artists have had to endure. The artists came up with the idea with their friend Lou Prensa, of the Montreal-based, French-Canadian underground hip-hop group *Nomadic Massive*, the members of

which are from Québec, Haiti, Algeria, and Iraq. I say this to emphasize the global and Atlantic-based exchanges that are happening within Cuban underground hip-hop.

In the mock interview, a woman from a magazine called “*Hot and Spicy*” requests an interview with the artist. Given her accent, she is probably North American. Given the name of the magazine, the allusion is that the reporter represents a highly-commercialized and seedy magazine. She then says that she is poor and does not have any money, she has nothing to offer them for the interview. Again, this is a common trope used by independent researchers, and those seeking to make profit from their interactions with the artists. The artists, seeking to take advantage of every possible moment of artistic dissemination, will often take their chances with people they know are highly likely to profit off of the Cuban artist’s work, without recognizing the Cuban artist either in credits, or in material resources. Additionally, the artists know that they are taking a chance with someone who could possibly take their words and misrepresent the Cuban artists’ attempts at self-representation. Nonetheless, they continue with the interview anyway.

The simulated interview reveals the biases and imbalances that Cuban artists face in typical interviews. The reporter claims to be interested in understanding the artists’ lives and experiences. Initially, the artists are very excited, as it is not often that people care enough to ask them their thoughts on their experiences and social context. However, once the interview begins, the interviewer bombards the artists with questions about repression and about the government. Not only are the artists not given an opportunity to respond, they are never asked questions about *their* experiences. The interview follows the typical trope of “going to Cuba to find repression.” This is an example of how,

globally, Cubans' attempts to represent themselves truncated as the nation has been alienated from the global community.

The distinction of "institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized" refers to the way in which some hip-hop artists define Underground music in terms of its relationship to the state. Institutionalized hip-hop is seen as suspect because the message of the songs is possibly co-opted to be representative of state interests. While it is true that the state dominates much of Cuba's material resources and public space (homes, cars, performance spaces), the government does not control every aspect of daily life. In fact, the state depends on grassroots mobilization concerning everything from recording public/official meetings (though there is often a consensus at these meetings that the recorder will be turned off during critical discussions) to carrying out community-based projects. Because there is so much reliance on actors at the national and local levels to carry out particular tasks, numerous spaces and opportunities emerge for alternative or counter-discourses.

So that, in essence, it is difficult for discourses to be policed, even within "official space," and "official spaces" can serve as "counter-public spaces" depending on the context. Linked to this are varying levels of "institutionalization," so that an artist who is not part of a state institution can perform in state-sponsored spaces, while other artists who belong to state institutions can deliver critical discourses in their artwork, but will never become institutionalized to a level where their work will be nationally distributed.

As artists work to ensure that the underground hip-hop movement remains non-institutionalized, and that it remains "Underground," they are, in effect, negotiating the form Cuba's re-emergent black public sphere will take. Referring back to the Black



Public Sphere Collective's definition of a black public sphere, the underground hip-hop movement is reflective of a black public sphere in the following ways:

- Public discourse and critique develops in the street, free of the State and the Market.
- Public discourse and critique is based on everyday experiences.
- Since hip-hop occurs in street corners, parks, Casas de Cultura and other public places, it is accessible to all members of the community.
- There is a focus on consciousness-raising as a means to obtain the sublime.
- There is a conceptualization of the sublime.
- There is a rejection of materialism, individualism, and other ideologies that fracture and disenfranchise the community.
- There is an effort to foster social change through democratic action at the grassroots level.

There were some artists who supported the idea of institutionalization. While there are state institutions, such as AHS and the Casas de Cultura, that offer some space and material support for artists to undertake their projects, not all of these institutions operate uniformly across the island. For example, the Casa de Cultura in Alamar offers a very different environment than the Casa de Cultura in Central Havana. Also, chapters of the AHS offer different kinds of resources and support in differing communities. The general effect is that from the origins of hip-hop, artists have depended on foreigners and their own local networks to obtain microphones, amps, turntables, speakers, computers and other technological equipment necessary to produce music. In fact, Vanessa Díaz (2006) notes that in the mid-1990s hip-hop pioneer Ariel Fernandez hand-cut and hand-tapped cassette tapes, and used rewired cassette players in the place of turntables, since early hip-hop artists did not have access to mixers (instruments that allow the DJ to change songs, overlap, or mix beats/songs such that there is no noticeable break in the different music used, unless the DJ creates the break).

Because of material limitations, limitations to national structures of professionalization and dissemination, and because of some of the successes of the Nueva Trova movement with institutionalization, some hip-hop artists pressed for the creation of the Agency of Rap, which opened in 2003. This caused some ideological differences within the underground hip-hop movement. Some worried that underground hip-hop was becoming incorporated like the Nueva Trova movement, a transition they worried would end their ability to be an independent movement for social change. Thus, through the usage of international networks, groups of underground artists began establishing their own underground studios as seen in the following figures.





**Figure 7b and 7c: Underground Studio in Havana, Cuba.**

A Havana-based, community-run, underground studio in a home. This room was the entirety of the house; I stood in the doorway to take this picture. This home housed five people, and was one of several other oneroom homes that formed a square. In the center of the square (just outside of every home's door way) was a communal hearth where people cooked their food over an open fire. There was a shared outhouse just outside of the courtyard. Photograph taken by Tanya Saunders, January 2006.

Many Cuban artforms, especially Afro-Cuban music and other cultural traditions, were not actively supported by the revolution during the 1970s and 1980s. During the state's campaign in the 1990s to "correct the errors of the Revolution," there was a move to demonstrate publicly that the Cuban state was inclusive of Afro-Cuban culture, as well as of the social practices of other groups deemed "anti-social."

However, it was with the profitability of Cuba's tourism scene that there was a public reemergence of Afro-Cuban cultural events. Tourists from Western Europe went to Cuba to hear Afro-Cuban music such as Son and Timba (De La Fuente 2001, Fernandes 2006). Through tourist demand, the state realized that tourism could be both a way to disseminate Cuban culture, despite the imposition of the U.S. embargo, and a way to generate profit. Sujatha Fernandes (2006) discusses the tension between the profitability of art and the utopian ideals imbedded in Cuban cultural policy. She writes:

Tourism and the international art market have encouraged the production of artwork and crafts that cater to those markets, and the promotion of individual artists has assumed unprecedented importance. A few highly mobile visual artists have assumed unprecedented importance. A few highly mobile visual artists have access to sums of money that most Cubans can only dream of. An article in the online magazine *Art and Antiques* reports that in November 2003 a foreign visitor paid Sandra Ramos nearly \$10,000 for some of her paintings. Since the average Cuban's income is between about \$15 and \$25 a month, it is not surprising that... most visual artists with transnational connections are seen as members of the upper middle class... As more established artists move up and out of Cuba, the visual arts movement is being sustained by those artists who remain working in Cuba. Whereas transnational artists focus on gallery exhibitions, paintings, sculpture and photography, arts students take art into the streets, much as the 1980's generation did. (Fernandes 2006, 146)

The emergence of tourism during the 1990s had an important effect on the cultural market in Cuba. Cuban artists found new sources of income through international contacts. As with other employment sectors associated with the tourism industry, material differences began to emerge among cultural workers, artists, and intellectuals. Some Cubans were paid thousands of dollars for one or two pieces. This was significant considering that the monthly salary of an average Cuban professional was about \$15.

Fernandes argues that the re-emergence of the art collectives in the 1990s was in large part a reaction to the art market that emerged in Cuba.

Again, I associate the emergence of the 1990s arts movements with a larger history of cultural movements in Cuba. These arts movements are also the result of several factors. Some of these factors are:

- 1) The success of the revolution in creating an educated, critical and politicized citizenry who developed a revolutionary subjectivity, and who sought to act in society as critical social actors.
- 2) The restrictive years of the 1970s and early 1980s. During these decades, the older generation of critical artists and intellectuals – who pushed for the socialization of culture in order to create critical social actors – were in exile, had died, conformed to political pressure or continued to fight for freedom of expression and were censored.
- 3) The particularity of Cuban culture as a historical site of resistance.
- 4) The tensions between the utopian elements of the revolution and the Soviet-inspired politicians, resulting in a compromise that created the state-supported social structures that fostered the creation of politicized citizens.
- 5) Contrary to the hopes of Soviet-inspired hard-liners, new generations of utopian artists and intellectuals have come of age during the 1980s, 1990s and today and, inspired by the fall of the Soviet Union, have posed a serious challenge to the hegemony of state discourse and political power. The Cuban state *had* to make changes to its policies in the 1990s if it wanted to remain in power.

Fernandes does note, however, that more artists of the younger generations are more willing to negotiate with state institutions. One of the main reasons for this relates to the way in which marketing and commercialization are understood in Cuba. This is another example of how important language is when analyzing social life in Cuba. In responding to a question about art in Cuba, Abel Prieto states the following:

**Interviewer:** And, what makes Cuba different than the rest of the countries, in terms of culture?

**Prieto:** I would say that in other places the market sets the rules, in Cuba, we only use it to promote our culture internationally. We think that the market is a great enemy of culture and true art. In fact, in the last decade, when an artistic manifestation appeared with a critical sense, the market has always tried to mutilate it. That is why we only approach the market as a means of promotion, but without making any concessions. Our cultural policy is not decided by the market as happens so many places, where the people may not know of a great writer or musician of their own country and, however, know perfectly well the intimacies of Michael Jackson. (Lippmann 2004)

Besides the explicit market interests and profitability associated with commercialized music, there are other artists and intellectuals, like Prieto, who think of marketing in terms of structures of mass dissemination. I first learned of this view of commercialization in 2005 during an interview with Alexay of Obsesión. After our interview, Alexay, Magia, and I took a boat over to Old Havana from Regla. During the trip, we talked about Cuban hip-hop and Black people in the United States. Once the ferry arrived to the dock, we started talking about Las Krudas and their work. As we walked along, Alexay got really excited when talking about how important Las Krudas are to the hip-hop movement. “You know,” Alexay said, “they really should think about taking their music the commercial route.” I repeated what he said. “Yeah,” he said looking at me smiling, as if there was “no problem.” I felt conflicted: how was it possible that an underground hip-hop artist could support capitalism? He went on about how Las Krudas could reach many more people if they went commercial. He argued that their message was really important. I smiled and nodded. I felt that maybe I was missing something, because it did not make sense, this contradiction – an anti-capitalist leader of a movement encouraging other artists to pursue profit? It just did not make sense.

I heard other artists make similar comments about how they were being censored like early American hip-hop artists. Given the history of censorship in Cuba, I wondered if the censorship that the artists discussed was anything like the censorship artists faced in the American United States – in other words, was censorship based on a racist culture or

direct state intervention? I wondered if their situation was so restrictive that it may be possible that they interpret their censorship the same way, though people in the States did not face arrests, or state intervention.

It was after a discussion with a colleague in 2006 that it began to make sense. He pointed out that the question facing artists in Cuba was not just about profit, but the ability to disseminate one's art through Cuba's state-run commercial institutions. Although it is "the market" that censors Black American and Latino hip-hop artists in the United States, in Cuba, it is the "taste" of individual officials that affects the ability to disseminate cultural work throughout the island.

In the United States, some cultural workers who may produce very good music are passed over because it is assumed that their work will not "sell." Others are encouraged to change their acts or to take on a different persona altogether in order to sell their work to "the market." As a result, cultural work loses its critical and expressive edge. It is in this way that people become alienated from their cultural work. If art is a reflection of the human spirit, they also become alienated from their spirit. The result is the constant recycling of uncritical, socially-detached information that may have very harmful messages, though it is very marketable. This, for many Cuban artists, is a way to create an oppressive society that is not moving forward to improve life for all people. Thus, the newer generation of Cuban artists and intellectuals are attempting to negotiate with state institutions because they feel that if they want to participate in Cuban society as revolutionary artists and intellectuals, their artwork must be geared towards the greater good. Access to the state's marketing institutions is important, even though in a Cuban context, artists will not become as wealthy as Jay-Z or other multi-millionaire American



hip-hop artists. Thus, while the opening of the economy and the decentralization of the state has led to alternative, and even profit-driven capitalist discourses, the collective arts movements of the 1980s and 1990s have emerged as powerful counter-discourses which indicate that there is still an independent, populist ideology in Cuba concerning cultural production.

Once underground hip-hop artists realized the potential for hip-hop to publicly address their needs, they became invested in understanding and discussing the structure and history of hip-hop. Aesthetically, hip-hop culture is composed of four elements: the DJ, the MC, break-dancing and graffiti. Other elements such as beat-boxing (vocal percussion) are also considered key parts of hip-hop culture. Unfortunately, Hip-Hop Feminism scholars have noted that the street form of the Double Dutch Girls (young women who jump double-dutch jump rope while creating and shouting witty rhymes) are disappearing as key aspects of hip-hop culture, given the hyper-masculinization of hip-hop in the commercialization process (Gaunt 2004). Nonetheless, even these two elements (beats created through vocal percussion and double dutch as performance art) are related to the four main elements of hip-hop. These four elements, I believe, correspond to the key elements of human thinking and expression.

Graffiti artists' work centers on the visual arts, the manipulation of the physical environment as a means of human expression. The DJ focuses on making "beats" and is responsible for the stimulation of *feeling* through music. The MC is the vocal articulation of feeling and thinking. The MC tells stories either as a means of entertainment and/or to teach lessons. The MC also discusses important issues facing individuals and/or the (local or global) community. Finally, break-dancing represents the physical or

performance arts element of hip-hop. There are additional elements of hip-hop culture that map onto these elements, such as hip-hop fashion and hip-hop theater.

Form	Function	Aesthetic
Rap ('MCing')	Rhetoric	Rhyme, Flow, Poetry
Graffiti	Visual Arts	Painting, Drawing, Sculpting
Break-dance/Double Dutch	Performance Arts	Caller Response, Dance
Disk Jockey (DJ)	Stimulate Feeling	Beats, Percussion, Music

**Figure 7d: The four elements of hip-hop: DJ, Break-dance, Graffiti, and Rap and their correspondence to human expressivity**

Together, these elements of hip-hop engage multiple aspects of human intellectual and material expression. Because of the materials used – i.e., public walls for graffiti, streets as a meeting space, shared community spaces, and the multiple talents and skills people utilize in hip-hop aesthetics, hip-hop is a communitarian and democratic art form in which different voices and differing manners of expression communicate with one other; a simultaneous conversation is enabled between hip-hop's listeners and participants (Perry 2006). The varying modes of expression, or the manner in which artists and participants are in conversation with one another, is reflected in the multiple ways that the music is experienced. At hip-hop shows, one may see people dancing, standing in front of the stage listening to the rapper, or standing directly in front of the large loud speakers, at times leaning against the speakers or even hugging the speakers, in order to feel the vibration of the beats and to feel the artist's voice in their bodies.

There are also two unique features of the Cuban underground hip-hop movement. The first is that it is one of the first racialized spheres of social critique to emerge since

the revolution. The second is that it emerged three decades after the emergence of the protest song movement. hip-hop artists are revolutionary subjects using revolutionary ideology and Black Atlantic consciousness to make an ideological intervention into contemporary social life after decades of ideological homogeneity.

### **7.3 Transmitting Blackness: Graffiti, T-Shirts and the Black Experience**

Many of the themes within Cuban underground hip-hop correspond to the global revolutionary consciousness that is at the core of Cuba's attempt to develop a revolutionary subjectivity among its citizens. Some of the themes reflected in Cuban underground hip-hop include: anti-pollution, the socialization of culture, the elimination of global poverty and inequality, women's equality, freedom of expression, anti-racism, and anti-homophobia. Given its status as an isolated island in the Caribbean, an island that will always be dependent on a stronger economy while European capitalism exists, Cuba's primary export, and defense, has been its ideology. Lacking the conditions to industrialize and/or to develop its own unique communist economy, the Cuban state has invested all of its resources into the ideological development of its people. At the same time, ideology has also been used to police and restrict criticism – again, this is a central contradiction/tension that the Cuban state has faced since the revolution.

In this section, I draw from graffiti, lyrics, t-shirt images, album covers, and interview data, to show how anti-racist and anti-modernist ideologies have been transmitted through hip-hop, and received, discussed and re-articulated by specifically Cuban hip-hop artists. As Paul Gilroy argues in his piece, "Wearing Your Art on your Sleeve: Notes towards a Diaspora History of Black Ephemera" (in *Small Acts* 1993), albums (CDs) should not simply be reduced to objects for consumption. He argues that

Black music cultures have historically served a cultural and political function. The African diaspora is largely a dispossessed and economically exploited population that has not had an opportunity to see itself and its experiences reflected in dominant visual, musical, economic, and political structures. Thus, the process of commercialization also offers the opportunity for marginalized populations to represent themselves. This is at the core of Abel Prieto's discussion of commercialization, cited and discussed previously.

Again, there are multiple discourses that are circulating within Cuba. Many times these diverse discourses are represented using similar signifiers, such as the dual meanings of "commercialization" and "marketing" in Cuba. In Cuba, marketing represents methods of dissemination. However, both in Cuba and outside of Cuba, marketing and commercialization also refer to profit-making as a productive goal. Artists must struggle to strike a balance between the interests of global capital and their desire to get "the word," or their message, out to Cuban citizens (Fernandes 2006). As Gilroy notes (1993), this issue of the common good versus profit is an issue that many musicians of the African diaspora face. It is in this way, Gilroy argues, that album covers come to represent a balance struck between artists who want to indicate particular messages, but must do so in a profit-driven industry that is either disinterested or ignorant about the power of such imagery.<sup>31</sup> Framing Blackness as a political identity based in lived experiences that challenge colonial legacies, I analyze Cuban hip-hop CD covers as discursive links to the (re)emergence of a Black identity as the manifestation of a regionally specific Black Atlantic consciousness.

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<sup>31</sup> Although within in the last fifteen years there has been a marked changed in this. Industry certainly has become more invested in the marketing possibilities of CD covers.

Additionally, in much of the literature on Cuban hip-hop, as in this dissertation, there is a heavy focus on the DJ and MC. Some of the Cuban DJs and MCs I interviewed have been break-dancers as well. However, I also focus on the work of NoNo, one of Havana's prominent graffiti artists as well as an MC. Normally graffiti artists prefer to remain anonymous, but after talking to me about my work, NoNo agreed to allow herself to be included in the photos. Her primary reason: so that others, particularly young women, could see that graffiti artists, particularly women graffiti artists, are working in Cuba as well.

In this section, I address the following question: How and why has Black identity and a black public sphere reemerged in Cuba, in the form of a hip-hop Movement? I will draw from Hall and Gilroy to argue that identity and ideology can be transmitted through music and other cultural tools such as t-shirts, CD covers, and music videos. During the Special Period, the state relaxed numerous restrictions regulating people's ability to pick up U.S. media broadcasts through illegal TV antennas. With the liberalization of the economy, the growing tourist sector began to host Americans who brought with them the latest music from New York, Los Angeles, and Miami.

When the first hip-hop videos and songs began arriving in Havana during the Special Period, most Cuban listeners did not know English. The artists I interviewed commented that they related to the music because there was *something* that resonated with them in the sound. Also, when they started seeing the music videos, the urban and rural landscapes resonated with them. Listeners felt that the artists looked like them and moved like them. Using Paul Gilroy's notion of a Black Atlantic, and Stuart Hall's notion of identity, I argue that one of the reasons why they were able to relate to hip-hop

was because they continued to be treated as “Black” in Cuba. It is Blackness, as a particular affective code that is a bi-product of the transatlantic slave trade, that is an ideology that is transmitted through images and symbols. It is because of the embeddedness of a Black identity and ideology in hip-hop that Black Cubans realized that there may be some utility in hip-hop to address their particular situation.

I remember one day, while I was at Alexis’s (DJ D’Boys’) apartment, the phone rang. Alexis put the phone to his ear, he smiled and looked at me awkwardly, perplexed. He listened silently. He put the phone to my ear for a few seconds to listen – there was a kid passionately rapping on the other end. Alexis returned the phone to his ear, and continued to listen. Suddenly and excitedly, Alexis began speaking. He gave the boy his critique on the phone, I heard the kid excitedly saying, “uh huh, uh huh!” At the end, Alexis told the boy that he had talent, that he should keep practicing and maybe one day soon Alexis would invite him to perform on stage. The boy got really excited, “Really! Thank you! Thank you!” The boy shouted and quickly hung up. I imagined the boy getting right to work on his next rhyme. I pictured him, sitting on the side of a tattered bed, hunched over a worn notebook in a small Havana apartment. The kid probably used every single White space available on its pages; one had to be sure to use every scrap of resources well, there were no materials to be wasted.

After Alexis hung up the phone, he looked at me with a curious look on his face, he was partially embarrassed, partially taken aback. “You see, Tanya,” he said, “Lately I’ve been getting more and more calls like that. I pick up the phone and a kid starts rapping. These kids don’t have anything else. hip-hop gives them a purpose, they want to try and become like us... and that is a lot of responsibility. We have to be here, Tanya,

to encourage and support our youth so that they choose a better life.”

With the economic changes occurring in Cuba, many underground hip-hop artists share similar concerns as their Black American, urban, working-class counterparts: securing opportunities for their children and addressing the needs of their communities. Unemployment and material inequality are linked to a modernity based on free market capitalism as a sign of social advancement. Economic cycles of boom and bust tend to disproportionately affect people of African descent.

DJ D’Boys spoke with me about Cuban youth’s interest in hip-hop. He explained that he got his start in the hip-hop movement as a break-dancer. After practicing in the parks, and making up background music with his friends in the 1980s, DJ D’Boys says the following about the Underground decision to learn about hip-hop:

DJ D’Boys: Después fuimos buscando más información, porque sabíamos que había más información. Había algo más grande en esta cultura. Y ya descubrimos, me entiende, cuáles eran los cuatro elementos de la cultura, cuáles eran sus nombres. Ya sabíamos que el bailar el break dance, se llamaba B-Boy, el que canta, se llamaba MC, el que escrachaba se llamaba DJ y descubrimos el elemento del grafiti, mediante una película que se llamaba *Wildstyle*.

Tanya: ¿Cuál sería?

DJ D’Boys: No sé, mi inglés es muy malo, pero bueno *Wildstyle*, Estilo Salvaje, puede ser algo así. Y es de grafiti y empezamos a tener conocimiento de esa cultura. Ya en los años 91, 92, producto ya del bloqueo de los EU con Cuba se empiezan a dificultar mucho más las cosas, como alimentación, para conseguir el dinero, hay muchos problemas y bueno como que ese movimiento de hip-hop se empieza como que a morir un poco. Siempre quedaron 2 ó 3. Pero después en el año 94, finales del año 94 empiezan, salió un grupo de jóvenes haciendo grupos de rap increíbles y gracias al grupo, a este Proyecto 1, que son los primeros que hicieron el festival de hip-hop, ahí fue que de nuevo comenzó a coger fuerza la cultura de hip-hop en Cuba y salieron muchísimos grupos de hip-hop, como Grandes Ligas, Obsesión, Jr. Klan.

[DJ D’Boys: Afterwards, we were looking for more information, because we knew that there had to be more information. There was something bigger about this culture. And there we discovered it, you understand me, that there were four elements of the culture, and what their names were. We already knew how to break-dance, they are called B-Boy, he that

sings, they call MC, he that scratches they call DJ and we discovered the element of graffiti from a movie called *Wildstyle*.

Tanya: Which was it?

DJ D'Boys: I don't know, my English is really bad, but OK, *Wildstyle*. [Translates *Wildstyle* into Spanish], it could be something like that. And it is from the graffiti, that, we began to have knowledge of that culture. It was already in '91, '92, produced by the U.S. blockade with Cuba things began to get more difficult, like food, how to find money, there were many problems and with this hip-hop movement began to die a little. There were always two or three. But after the year '94, at the end of '94 a group of youth began to come out that were making rap groups that were incredible and thanks to the group Proyecto Uno, that were the first that made the festival of hip-hop, there it was that the hip-hop culture of Cuba began to gain force and a lot of hip-hop groups came out like Grandes Ligas, Obsesión, Jr Klan.] (Alexis/DJ D'Boys interview, Havana 2005)

DJ D'Boys started out as a break-dancer. During the 1980s, people were imitating hip-hop, but eventually they started to realize that there had to be more to the music. After doing some research, they learned about the form and structure of hip-hop, which they came to view as a culture. During the Special Period, things got tough for people, and the movement began to die a little. But by the mid-1990s, during the height of the Special Period, the first generation of Cuban underground hip-hop artists emerged and had a huge impact locally and nationally. DJ D'Boys notes how difficult life had become during the Special Period. The U.S. intensified the blockade, further stressing Cuba's economy. Life became increasingly hard for Cuban youth, both socially and economically.

It is only through allowing a public discussion of race and *feelings* concerning race that Cubans can collectively come to a consensus about *Cubanidentity*. Yumpi, from the hip-hop group The Junior Clan, decided the best way to express his thoughts was through spoken word poetry. He states the following:

Bueno, dice así. Es un espoking word que dice así *hip-hop es quién soy. La voz universal reclamando un mundo mejor. El sentido común y a l reflexión de los jóvenes de barrios. La esperanza de los pobres, la valentía y la rebeldía invocando libertad. El*



*negro respecto, la paz, la unidad, el enemigo de la guerra. La lucha por la revolución de todos los pueblos buscando un mundo mejor. hip-hop soy yo, un símbolo de resistencia para mantener limpia la conciencia. Y hablando palabras, ¿que estás haciendo tú cerca de esto?... No te das cuenta que el mundo está en ebullición, de mal en peor. Y la solución está en nosotros mismos, cambiando esta mala forma de pensar, de actuar.*

[OK, it's said like this. There is a spoken word [poem] that says it like this *Hip-Hop is who I am. The universal voice reclaiming a better world. It is the common feeling and a reflection of the youth from the hood. The hope of the poor, the valiant, and the rebellious invoking their freedom. The Black [person is] respected, the piece, the unity, the enemy of war. hip-hop I am, a symbol of the resistance in order to maintain a clean consciousness. And asking words, what are you thinking about this?... Don't you see that the world is boiling, from the bad in the worst. And the solution is in ourselves, changing this bad way of thinking, of acting.*] (Yumpi interview, Havana 2005)

Yumpi is dark-skinned. His skin could be described as ebony, and he has fairly long dreadlocks. He said that he experienced a lot of racism, but before hip-hop, he could not understand what was happening to him. He just felt a general malaise. But with hip-hop, he was able to gain a better sense of self, and to develop a sense of purpose in life – to be successful as a *Black man*, and to support Cuban youth by helping them to understand the racial prejudices that they face. Yumpi's invocation of universal Blackness and a notion of a better world is possibly a reflection of his participation in a black public sphere. If ideologies about Blackness are transmitted through culture, and a black public space provides the location for the dissemination



**Figure 7f: Video Clip of Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel's "The Message" (circa 1983)**



**Figure 7g: Video Clip of Randy Acosta from "Jodido Protagonista" (circa 2006)**



**Figure 7h: Video Clip of Randy Acosta from “Jodido Protagonista” (circa 2004)**



**Figure 7i: Video Clip from Randy Acosta’s independent CD “Jodido Protagonista” (circa 2004)**

of ideologies of Blackness as a means to foster social change, then Yumpi definitely picked up on this dynamic.

In his quote, Yumpi invokes the sublime represented in hip-hop. He embodies hip-hop, he argues, and hip-hop embodies the solution to the world’s social ills. Therefore, the solution is within us. Yumpi describes hip-hop as a common feeling of hope from the poor; it is a feeling of rebellion that results in liberty for all. hip-hop is a symbol of resistance because it focuses on developing a clear consciousness as a way to stop people from reproducing the bad that results from thinking and doing.

For many artists, a lot of the images of 1970s and 1980s New York looked like poor parts of Havana. The figures shown above are video stills from “The Message” by NYC-based-artists Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel (1983), and “Jodido Protagonista”

(2004), by Cuban artist Randy Acosta. In the images from Grandmaster Flash and Melle Mel, we see them out in the streets, where they talk about the difficulties facing their communities: unemployment, crime, limited opportunities. At the end of the music video, while the artists are standing on the corner speaking to friends, a police car pulls up and forces them into the car – seemingly for no other reason than being Black men standing in public.

In the clips from Randy Acosta's video, we see some of the images of Blackness and social struggle that have been embraced within a Cuban context. In the second image, Randy is getting his hair braided. This is a about embracing oneself – in Cuba, Black hair is seen as “bad hair,” undesirable and ugly. But in this clip, not only is Randy getting his hair braided, but his hair is long, kinky, and he is respecting and caring for it by getting it styled. In the third image, Randy is also standing out in the street talking. In the next still, he uses parentheses to highlight a uniformed officer. In the song he talks about harassment by police for a young Black man, who does not overdress as a means of making larger society feel comfortable with his presence as a young, urban, Black male youth. In the next picture, there is the image of the child holding up a justice sign. Here, it is clear that Randy is not only talking to fellow Cubans and representing their experiences, he is talking to the larger hip-hop community: just in case one did not understand his spoken word in Spanish, he shows a picture of a young child of color, holding a sign that, in English, demands “Justice.”

When underground hip-hop artists first started seeing the video images, posters, movies, and t-shirts from American hip-hop artists, what struck the youth was how the artists in the videos looked like marginalized Cuban youths and they dressed like Cuban

youths as well. After awhile, these youths wanted to make their own contribution to hip-hop culture, and that was the point in which they began to study it intently as a means to start creating their own hip-hop. Reflecting on when he organized the first hip-hop festival, Rensoli says the following about his surprise at how many socially marginal people – who were also predominantly Black and Mulato – showed up to the festival:

Mira...El hip-hop.... Cuando yo estoy haciendo el primer festival de Rap, de pronto se me acerca, casualmente la mayor parte éramos negros los que estamos organizando eso, el amigo aquí y yo, y se me acerca Mery Matamoro que es uno de dos hermanos que fueron que asumieron esta idea de hacer el Festival y me dice: oye....te están gritando por abajo vivan los chardos. Aquí se le dice chardos a los negros. Y yo me quedé así y lo vi muy peligroso.. porque yo estaba acostumbrado a participar de ambientes mixtos de negros y yo no tenía conciencia de cuantos, grandes masas de negros se sentían muy marginaos y habían encontrado un lugar de expresión libre.

Además, vi blancos ahí también, porque tú sabes que aquí se ha mezclado más la cosa que en otros lugares. No se realizó el desarraigo social ese tan radicalmente dividido. Pero de pronto me doy cuenta que sí, de que le estoy dando oportunidades a muchos muchachos negros que no tenían otros espacios donde hablar sus propios intereses, sus propias perspectivas y con una alta cultura y con un alto lirismo. Y por ahí me fui porque siempre tuve conciencia del problema. También por mi padre, por mi mamá y por las experiencias que tuve de niño.

[Look... hip-hop.... When I am doing the first Rap Festival, suddenly dawned on me that most of us organizing this happened to be Blacks, a friend here and I, and I approached Mery Matamoro which is one of two brothers who had the idea of doing the Festival, and he said to me: 'Listen... they are yelling below 'long live the Blackies!' Here they call the Blacks Blackies. And I stayed right there and saw it as very dangerous .. Because I was accustomed to participate in environments mixed with Blacks [and other races] and I had no awareness of how many, of the large masses of Blacks who felt very marginalized and they had found a place of free expression.

In addition, there were also Whites there, because you know that here things have been mixed more than in other places. One doesn't realize that with so much uprooting that things were so socially divided. But suddenly I realize that, yes, I am giving opportunities to many Black youth who had no other spaces where they could speak to their own interests, about their own perspectives and with a high culture and high lyricism. And there I went because I was always aware of the problem from my father, my mother and the experiences I had as a child.] (Rensoli interview, Havana 2005)

This was a moment of inward reflection on Cuban history – on where they, as marginalized Cuban youth, fit into history; it was also a public articulation of forgotten residual discourses – discourses that were invoked symbolically and through hip-hop

beats (themselves residual African discourses). Together, this reflection and this articulation spurred the (re-)emergence of a Black consciousness among Black and Mulato youth. This initial communication of experience and feeling through music, without verbal intelligibility, is reflective of what Williams refers to in *Marxism and Literature*(1977) as “structures of feeling.”

Structures of feeling refer to those things that are experienced, those values and meanings that are felt, but are not yet consciously recognized or easily articulated. In *The Aesthetic Dimension : Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (1978), Herbert Marcuse praises the revolutionary potential of art. He writes:

The radical qualities of art, that is to say, its indictment of the established reality and its invocation of the beautiful image... of liberation are grounded precisely in the dimensions where art *transcends* its social determination and emancipates itself from the given universe of discourse and behavior while preserving its overwhelming presence. Thereby art creates the realm in which the subversion of experience proper to art becomes possible: the world formed by art is recognized as a reality, which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality. This experience culminates in extreme situations (of love... death... guilt... failure...) which explode the given reality in the name of a truth normally denied or even unheard. The inner-logic of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defies the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions. (Marcuse 1978, 6)

He locates this radical potential in art’s ability to envision “the beautiful image,” to envision liberation. Rejecting the Soviet imposition of artistic realism on its artists, Marcuse writes that a world formed by art is a reality “which is suppressed and distorted in the given reality.” However, even with the imposition of art as a means to shape the world, the transcendent nature of art even challenges this imposed reality. This is because art, as a product of man’s spirit and as a means of expression, exposes contradictions that are a part of lived (and felt) experiences. For Marcuse, and others critical of the European socialist obsession with material inequality and not both material

inequality *and* the cultural basis of everyday life, art essentially “represents reality while accusing it” (Marcuse 1978,7).

The notion of residual and emergent critiques is something that Raymond Williams alludes to in his 1973 article, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory.” In this piece, Williams argues against the over-deterministic interpretations of Marxian notions of base and superstructure. Williams approaches culture as ideology, as a system of meanings and values that affect human social interaction with themselves and the world. He is interested in art as social practice: art represents the feelings, the meanings, and the experiences of people in society. Its revolutionary potential is derived from the fact that art is only accessible through active participation (social) and interpretation (critique).

Williams argues that the base, as in the mode of production, should not simply be defined in terms of a notion of fixed economic or technological abstraction, and he argues that the base does not determine the superstructure. Human material conditions do not determine culture, politics, government, and all other aspects of social relations; rather, these different dimensions of the social world determine and reinforce each other. Additionally, a particular class is not able to achieve social dominance simply by imposing its will on others; if that were the case, according to Williams, there would be no use in talking about revolution or social change as the “masses” would have no agency. Building on Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, which Williams describes as the central system of practices, meanings, and values that are dominant and effective in structuring social life, Williams argues that within any given society, there are multiple hegemonies with their own internal logics. The arts contribute to dominant culture and



are a central articulation of it. It is also through the arts that people are moved, are changed, and are agents of change. It is through the constant negotiation and articulation of emergent ideologies that dominant cultures are formed and changed.

As a means of historicizing dominant culture, Williams divides culture into two types, residual and emergent. Residual cultures are cultures from the past. Often, dominant discourse has had to incorporate residual cultures into its discourse as a means of not allowing too much of a particular practice or experience outside of itself. Emergent refers to new meanings and values, the new experiences that are continuously created. As these are competing cultures vis-à-vis the dominant culture, there is an attempt to incorporate emergent cultures early on. For Williams, what is important is whether, in the end, the culture is alternative (able to coexist with dominant culture without threatening it and/or being incorporated into it) or oppositional (a direct challenge to dominant culture). Cuban underground hip-hop falls into neither category, but is a combination of what Williams describes as “residual non-incorporated” cultures and “emergent non-incorporated” cultures. Cuban underground hip-hop resists the efforts at its incorporation as a means of maintaining its honesty, integrity, its freedom to speak, perform, express truth, lived experiences and their contradictions.

Eventually, underground hip-hop artists have come to recognize hip-hop as a way for them to express themselves as women and men of visible African descent. For these artists, hip-hop is a way to challenge the ideologies that shape their realities and to help others to *feel* where they are “coming from” in their lyrical analysis of their lived experiences. Odaymara, of the underground hip-hop group Las Krudas, states the following about the themes of Krudas’ music: “We are not talking about something new,

but its something that people have forgotten, or are kind of aware of but forget, or things that make people think... ‘I have heard this somewhere before. But I don’t remember where I heard it’” (Odaymara, personal communication). The engagement of memory and structures of feeling as a means to spur individual and collective action are key features of hip-hop’s aesthetic.

Tricia Rose writes about rap music, one of three forms of youth culture that compose hip-hop:

Rap music brings together a tangle of some of the most complex social, cultural, and political issues in contemporary American society. Rap’s contradictory articulations are not signs of absent intellectual clarity; they are a common feature of community and popular cultural dialogues that always offer more than one cultural, social, or political viewpoint. These unusually abundant polyvocal conversations seem irrational when they are severed from the social contexts where everyday struggles over resources, pleasure, and meanings take place. (1994, 2)

While the polyvocal conversations within hip-hop may seem “irrational” or contradictory when severed from their social contexts, this is a key aspect of art; it has the ability to articulate truths not communicable in any other language; it expresses contradictions (Marcuse 1978). As an art-form, hip-hop expresses social contradictions that cause individual or collective social discomfort that is in the need of a resolution (Marcuse 1978). But the beat, the music of hip-hop, can, literally at times, cause people to *move*.

Alan West-Durán, drawing from the work of Tricia Rose and Cornel West, states that Cuban rappers “were themselves those demoralized, disorganized elements of society at one point, or still live among those marginalized sectors where this demoralization constantly surrounds them. They are using rap as a form of social pleasure and action for the expansion of civil society” (West-Durán 2004, 16). Gwendolyn Pough (2004) connects the emergence of American underground hip-hop to the end of Black

Nationalism and the Civil Rights Movements. This resonates with a key element of Cuban underground hip-hop: its appeal to marginalized populations of African descent.

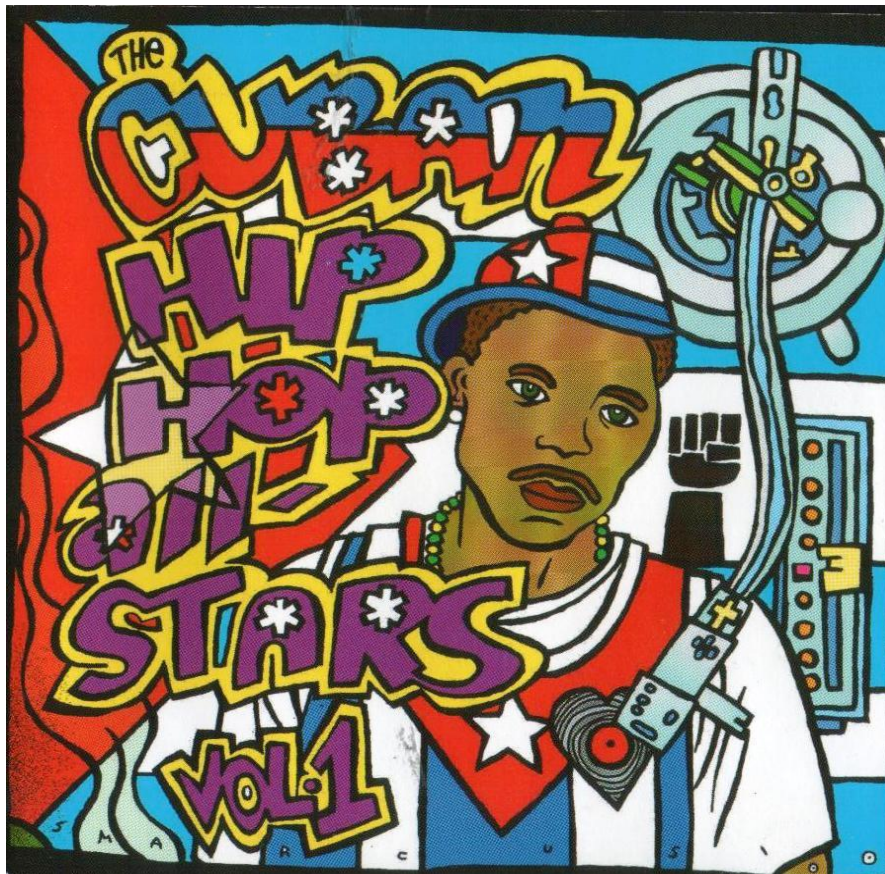
The Black Nationalist movement often viewed the U.S. American civil rights movement as a Black bourgeois movement. It was a movement for the Black middle and upper classes to enjoy their class privileges. It did not appeal to the poor and working-class interests of the impoverished and non-formally-educated Black “lumpen proletariat.” In fact, wealthy Blacks often discriminated against them and marked poor Blacks as inferior to the bourgeois “movement,” and the Civil Rights Movement were transnational in scope. These movements were in conversation with larger anti-colonial and anti-imperial movements in the Americas. However, they were also very much integrated into the pan-African, pan-American, and Black nationalist movements of the Americas. Jamaican Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey, for example, had a presence in Baltimore, Maryland, and Havana, Cuba. Black American leaders sought to unite across national boundaries, much like their enslaved African ancestors, to fight for social equality since “Blackness” was a Western social marker that disenfranchised, no matter where one was located within the West.

How are images of Blackness transmitted through the images of hip-hop culture? Paul Gilroy’s analysis of CD covers from English-speaking countries (primarily the United States and Britain) offers some insight into thinking about how Black identities are transmitted through music, as well as through the images that accompany the actual recordings, and other visual pieces associated with music cultures such as t-shirts and graffiti. Gilroy argues:

Apart from their use as a means to tell an audience how to hear and comprehend the music they enclose, sleeves have been developed as an agitational or educational tool which can, for example, encourage people to register to vote, to grow their hair a certain

way, to wear a particular garment or to employ a familiar item of clothing in an unfamiliar and 'sub-culturally' distinctive way... Most importantly for my purposes here, record sleeves have been employed to address the Black public and to induce that public to assess and possibly to share in the styles and symbols that constitute the idea of Blackness itself. The music facilitates the circulation of styles and symbols, creating an aura of pleasure and desire around them which is an important political phenomenon. This process has not always been a simple extension of the sale of records. (Gilroy 1994, 245)

Thus, album covers have become a way to discuss the idea of Blackness itself through symbolism. Album covers are tools in the modern period that facilitate identity formation. Using the educational and affective purpose of album imagery, artists dedicate their CDs to their target audience.



**Figure 7j: Album Cover, *Cuban hip-hop All-Stars, vol.1* (Papaya Records, 2001).**

Figures 7j through 7q are covers from five albums produced by Underground hip-hop artists. In Figure 7j, the image is of a young Black youth dressed in B-boy gear,

which was made fashionable in New York City. Behind him is a Black fist, representing the Black Nationalist Movement, and the “Black struggle” generally. The B-boy gear and the Black Nationalist movement are products of the intellectual and cultural exchanges of Afro-descendants throughout the Americas. There are a turntable and soundboard behind him, with the needle of the turntable placed over top of his heart, which is shaped like a record. This illustrates the importance of hip-hop in expressing what is felt, what is lived.

To interpretively reduce these aspects of Cuban underground hip-hop, such as the young man dressed in B-boy gear, to “African American culture,” disconnects African Americans from the rest of the Americas, and erases a long history of cultural, intellectual, and insurrectionary exchanges. It also implies that Cuban people are uncritical subjects who lack agency – that they are not participating in cultural exchange, but are simply uncritical receivers of culture. As evidence to the contrary, consider, for example, the fact that B-boy fashion actually started in Jamaica, only to be made popular in New York City by Jamaican immigrants. The burgeoning scholarship on hip-hop music, culture, and aesthetics has traced the genealogy of the Afro-diasporic origins of hip-hop images (Rose 1994, Pough 1994, Rivera 2003, Neal 2004, Perry 2004). The designer of this cover is letting the public know that this is a CD of Cuban hip-hop. The B-boy is wearing the Cuban flag on his shirt and his hat, and the flag is also incorporated into the background.

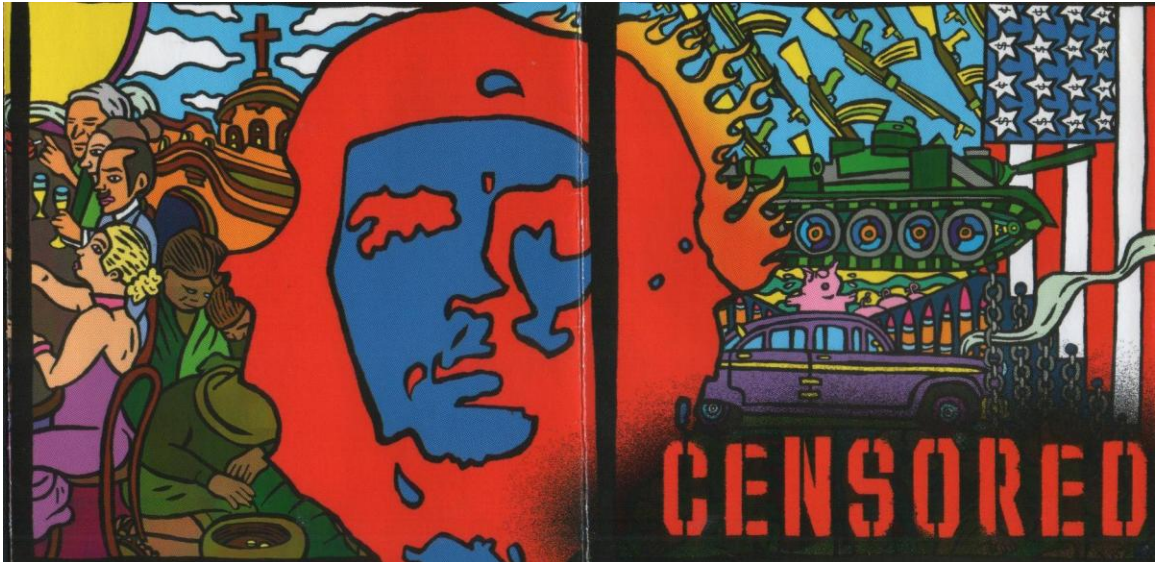
Figure 7k and Figure 7l are CD inserts included in the Cuban hip-hop All Stars CD. The inserts depict the process of colonization. The first image shows the Spanish colonizers on a slave ship. One is wearing a cross indicating the Catholic Church’s

complicity in the colonizing process. They are standing over long-haired indigenous people on a beach. The souls leaving their mouths represent the colonial genocide of indigenous populations. This image melts into the image of the slave ship. Showing the connection between the colonial encounter and the slave trade, one of the slaves is leaning onto the beach, and is staring at the dying indigenous person. The masses of people piled onto the slave ship are thinking of Africa. This picture is then melded with the American and Cuban colonial elite. The persons huddled on the ship are thinking about Africa. In the next image, we see White and light-skinned wealthy people in leisure time, drinking, smoking, and thinking about money. This could possibly allude to the emergence of the neocolonial class in Cuba.



**Figure 7k: First section of album insert, *Cuban hip-hop All-Stars, vol. 1* (Papaya Records, 2001)**

They are enjoying themselves, and eating well and thinking about profit, while poor people scramble behind the table looking for crumbs. Again, a cross and this time also a church are in the background, symbolizing Catholicism's support of neocolonialism.



**Figure 71: Second section of album insert, *Cuban hip-hop All Stars, vol. 1* (Papaya Records, 2001).**

In the next section of the CD insert, there is an image of Che. This symbolizes the Cuban Revolution. Behind the image of Che are fire, weapons, pigs (possibly associated with the Bay of Pigs), cars, and the American flag with dollar signs in the stars. This symbolizes American greed, aggression, and imperialism. Just below the chains at the base of the American flag is the word “Censored.” This possibly alludes to several forms of censorship. One could be the association of Cuba’s global isolation to a form of censorship that Cubans face for having attempted to overthrow U.S. neocolonialism, and Cuban resistance to American economic, political, and military aggression. This links Cuba’s recent experiences of global isolation to American imperialism.

In this CD insert, Blackness is linked to a larger, pan-American and transatlantic experience of genocide, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Blackness is also linked to the revolutionary struggle challenging these ideologies. This is represented by the figure of Che. Thus Blackness is a relational identity its emergence is linked to the

genocide of indigenous populations who share the experience of suffering that has its origins in profit-driven, European regionally-based capital. The United States simply represents the contemporary incarnation of European colonial agendas.

Other CD covers address the relationship between anti-modernism and Blackness by using other symbols linked to exploitation. *La FabriK* is both an independent production of Obsesión and Doble Filo, and the name of the two groups when they produce albums as a collective. Using the metaphor of industry, the first track of the CD argues that it is an independent production, made by human energy and ingenuity which is stronger and more productive than nuclear energy. Artists like La FabriK, through targeting the CD to “you,” the listener, use their CD cover as a means to speak to and educate “you” through the tracks on their albums and the imagery on the covers. The artists say that, independently, they have been able to make more CDs and produce more music than the Empresa de Grabaciones y Ediciones Musicales (EGREM), the state-run music corporation. The CD cover of *La FabriK* (a play on the word “fabrica” which means “factory”) is a rejection of industrialization itself. Behind the backdrop of a factory and a red, toxic-looking sky, there is a Black fist (a reference to Black nationalist anti-racist and anti-modern ideals), a peace sign, and a middle finger (symbolizing a “Fuck You” or a rebellious inclination). The last hand is an open-palm hand symbolizing “Stop!”

The dedication side of the insert reads: “To our parents, to the Cuban hip-hop Movement, to the people that have been waiting for this, and to you.”

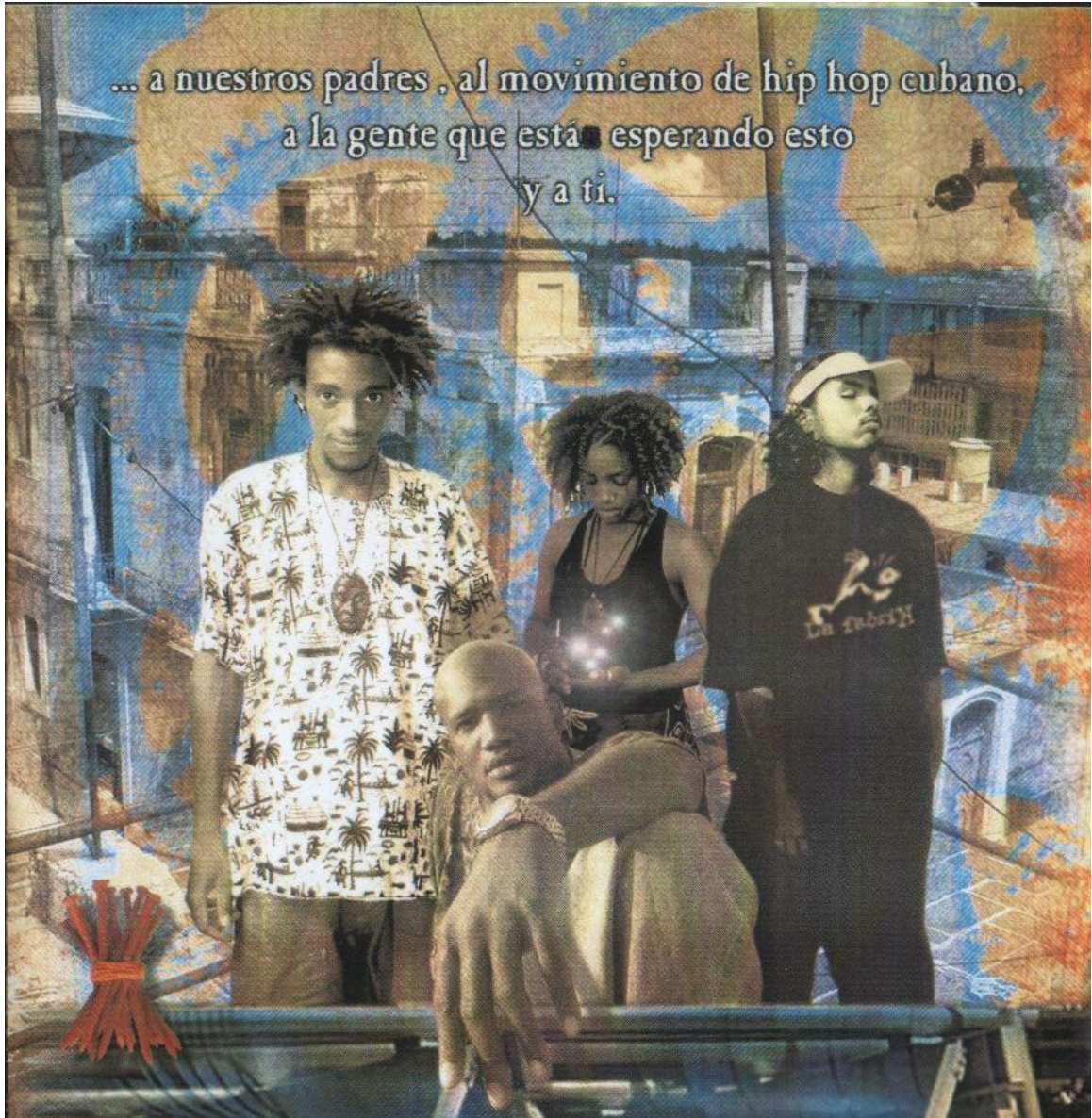




**Figure 7m:** Album cover, *La Fabrik* (La Fabrik, insert YEAR)

The dedication is to die-hard hip-hop fans, who live for the next CD. Acknowledging their ancestry, they also dedicate the album, to their parents. And finally, they also dedicate the CD to “you,” the listener. CD covers also serve as a response to the imposition of foreign “knowledge” about Cuban lived experiences. Cuban artists use their CD inserts to represent the nuanced experiences they face as Cuban citizens.

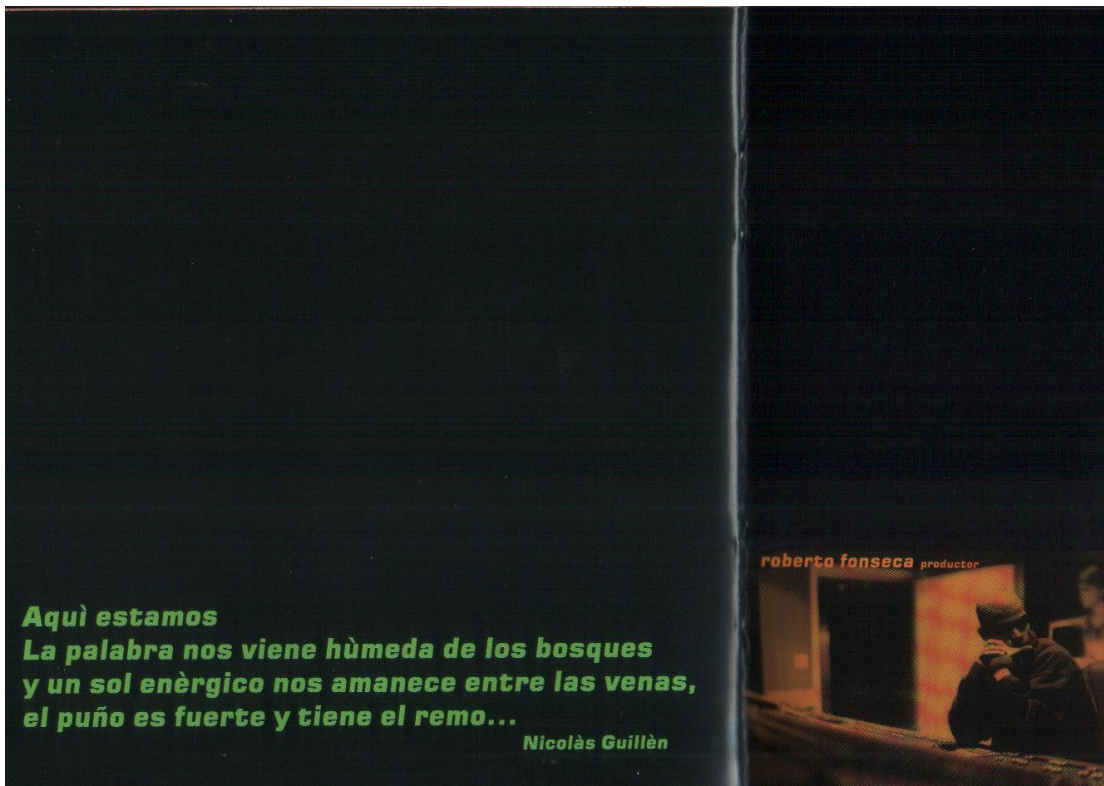
The next CD cover, of Obesesion’s album *Un Monton de Cosas* [A Bunch of Things], is hailed – among hip-hop artists and intellectuals – as one of the most sophisticated commercial feats in representing Cuban heritage as Cubans, and the social issues facing Afro-Cubans.



**Figure 7n:Album insert showing dedication, *La FabriK* (La FabriK, insert 2003).**

The images on the CD cover project urban living. They are able to convey the context in which the artists are representing themselves. In Figure 7p, *Magia of Obsesión* is wearing a White hat and white clothing, which are representative of Afro-Cuban religious cultures. There are two quotes in the CD inserts. The first is from Cuba's world

renowned national poet Nicolás Guillén – a Mulato, a famous adherent to Afro-Cuban cultural traditions, and a founder of Afro-diasporic-centered poetry. Without going into a detailed textual analysis of why the group chose this particular quote, I want to note how interesting it is that they chose to use a poem from a particular collection of Guillén’s poetry. This quote is from the poem “Llegada,” part of the *Sóngoro Cosongo* collection. This is one of the collections in which Guillén established his talent in using onomatopoeic words – in this case, imitating the sound of drums and the rhythm of the African-based rhythm of Son.

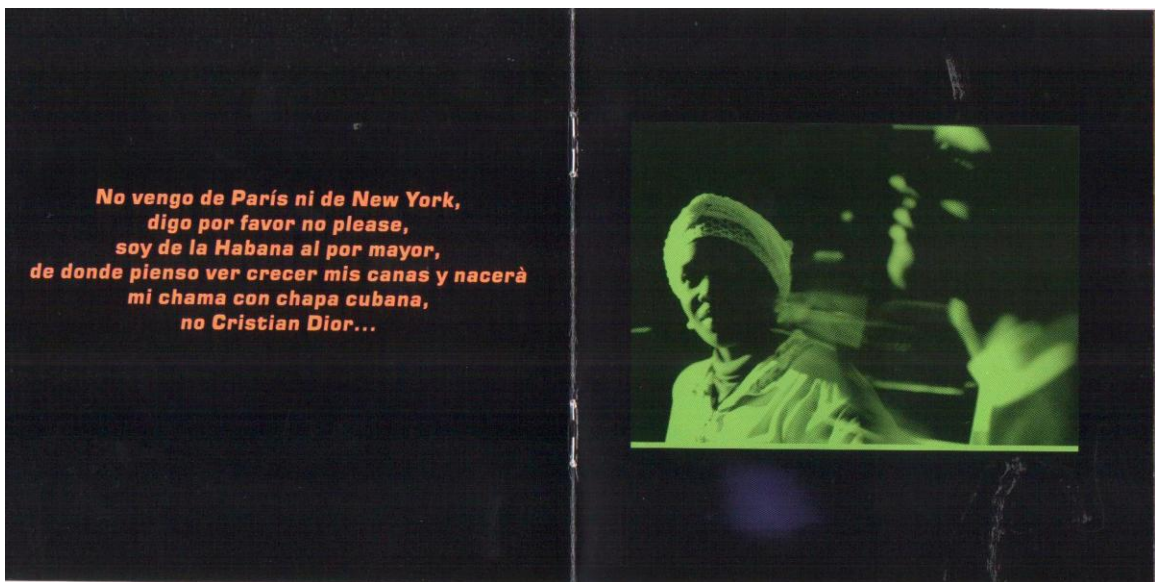


**Figure 7o.** First section of album cover, *Un Monton De Cosas*, by Obsesión (EGREM, 2002).

Obsesión has become increasingly known, and respected, for their incorporation of Afro-Cuban sounds, religious, and cultural imagery in their music and in their album inserts.

The usage of Nicolás Guillén is possibly linked to Guillén’s incorporation of African

rhythms and sounds into his poetry – he was one of the first nationally respected poets to do so. Obsesión is one of the first underground hip-hop groups to actively attempt to do the same. In the next quote on the insert, Magia states that she is “neither from Paris or New York. She’s from Havana, where she will grow her own hair and raise her children while wearing a Cuban broach, not one from Cristian Dior.” Here, Magia makes her point clear: she loves her country, she would not dream of leaving. She wants to raise her family and live her life in her own urban center, Havana. Rejecting the ritzy materialism of New York and Paris, she argues that Havana’s urban context is just as ritzy and beautiful in its own right.

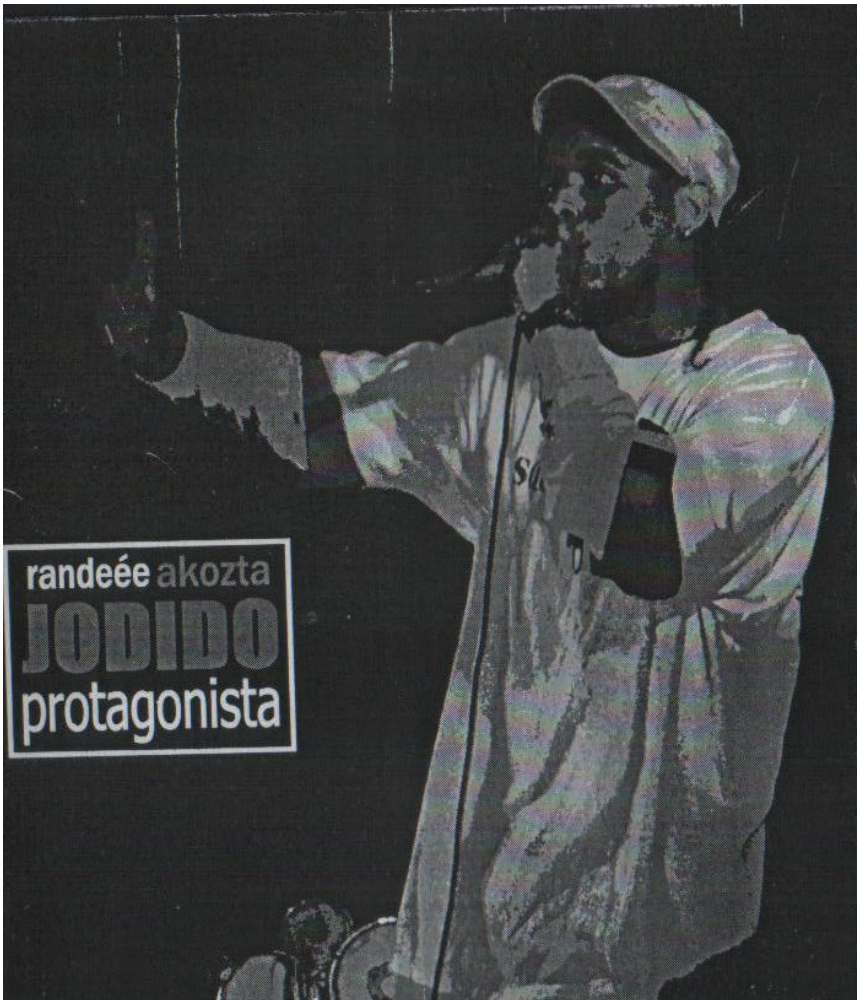


**Figure 7p. Second section of album cover, *Un Monton De Cosas*, by Obsesión (EGREM, 2002).**

This quote illustrates one key element of hip-hop: the African diaspora may be in a place that does not have the material and commercial resources associated with capitalist notions of abundance, but Havana is home for Obsesión. Havana is their context, it is the space where they have their familial and emotional ties. This is linked to Obsesión’s overall theme of embracing one’s heritage while remaining active in one’s community for

improvement. There is no need to dream of going “over there,” when one’s community – no matter its material condition – is home.

Another CD cover, that of Randeée Akozta’s *Jodido Protagonista*, is representative of the anti-institutional strain of Underground hip-hop. Randeée, among underground hip-hop artists, is considered to be one of the “most underground” artists. He produces his music independently, relying heavily on his one-gigabyte, secondhand laptop computer to mix his beats and make his videos. His CD cover is a photocopied photo of him rapping, though he looks as if he is actually lecturing to the public. He is wearing urban streetwear, indicating that he is from the streets. His braids, which show that he has embraced his super-curly hair and his African heritage, are hanging down from his cap. This CD cover, I believe, is, actually one of the most sophisticated independent CD covers I have seen in Cuba. It is simple: a cheaply-made photocopy that is cut and placed into a very inexpensive, plastic CD cover. His CD, like those of most independent artists such as Las Krudas, the Junior Clan, Los Paisanos, and Anonimo Consejo, is burned at home or by friends. Nothing about Randeée’s CD indicates incorporation on any level.



**Figure 7q.** Album cover, *Jodido Protagonista*, by Randeée Akozta (independently produced, circa 2004).

Though it appears simple, in reality, Randeée’s CD cover indicates the opposite: a technical feat accomplished through a community of friends and with very few resources. The photocopied CD cover is actually an insightful marketing strategy; he uses the “low quality” aesthetic of the photocopy, and the image of him rapping, to deliver a very complicated message: “Randeée Akozta is a man of the streets. He delivers knowledge based on his own experiences. And, since he is not incorporated by any means, you are guaranteed to hear the truth.” This CD cover helps him to sell himself as one of the most authentic Underground artists within Cuba’s underground hip-hop movement – and the

marketing strategy has worked. Among friends and fans, Randeée Akozta is known as “super Underground.”

Another effect of these CD covers is to deliver political messages that encourage independent grassroots work within one’s community. They also seem to encourage people to seek knowledge, to learn about themselves and their history as a means to empower themselves and to work to make their lives better. It also encourages those marginalized youth from economically-depressed communities, who live in an economically-depressed and “defamed” nation, to take pride in where they are from, to embrace one’s culture, to embrace one’s Black Cuban ancestors’ contribution to the nation, and to embrace one’s existence as a Black person.

However, if these messages are not made clear through CD covers, these messages are also indicated through style of dress. Underground hip-hop artists wear a lot of red, black, and/or green, colors that are reflective of pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism. T-shirts also serve as a means to convey and reinforce self-education and Black consciousness. In the following pictures of the group Junior Clan, we see Michael Oremas wearing a Black t-shirt that says, “Power to the People.” It shows the images and names of Black Panthers Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. In another image making this connection to pan-African and Black nationalist ideology, Yumpi of the Junior Clan wears a t-shirt that says, “The Black Revolution.” The artists also wear army fatigues; this, combined with the revolutionary imagery of the Black Panther Movement is impressive, especially when considering that these images are being deployed within a revolutionary context. This reemphasizes the theme of “a revolution within the revolution” – that “revolution within” being the challenge to the racist, sexist, and

homophobic colonial legacies that continue within Cuban culture. The Black Panther, pan-African, and Cuban revolutionary movements were all grassroots movements. While the Panther, pan-African, and Cuban revolutionary movements targeted inequality embedded in state and economic structures, cultural movements – including the underground hip-hop movement – challenge the socially repressive power of the multiple discourses circulating within Cuban society.





**Figure 7r. Michael Oramas of the Junior Clan, wearing a “Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale ‘Power To The People’” t-Shirt, during a concert in El Cerro, Havana, 2006.**



**Figure 7s: The Junior Clan in concert in La Madriguera, 2004.**

In the next section, I focus on the Black identity discourses conveyed in Underground graffiti.

#### 7.4 Underground Graffiti: NoNo La Grafitera<sup>32</sup>



**Figure 7t. NoNo in front of a mural in El Vedado, Havana, 2006.**

I visited NoNo in January of 2006 at her apartment. Her name seems to be a play on “No! No!” which embodies a sense of resistance. She says no, while at the same time refusing to accept “No.” During my interview with NoNo, she talked about how she was able to get a lot of practice doing graffiti, thanks to the people living in her building.

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<sup>32</sup> All photos taken by Tanya Saunders. The murals featured here are located in Havana, El Vedado.

They wanted to encourage the young artist, and allowed her to use their walls as canvases. She showed me one apartment where the neighbor told her no; it is the only facade that is not painted in the building. I asked her to pick some of her favorite pieces to show me. She took me to her apartment building to show some of her favorite murals. When one walks through the archways of her apartment building, all of the walls are covered with her work-- all the walls except for one section around one particular apartment. While no one owns the places where they live in Cuba, as long as NoNo had the permission of her neighbors she could paint wherever she wanted in the building.

Surprised that the state or some other official did not force her to take down her work, I asked her about her overall experience with being a graffiti artist. Her response was that the major problem is not having access to the resources, such as spray paint, necessary to do her work. She has been given permission to do her work in the streets; that has not been a major issue. It seems that given Cubancitizens' predisposition to respect artistic expression, particularly at the grassroots level, artists have more options and support in their work. Had Havana been New York or Philadelphia, NoNo would have either been arrested or denied the opportunity to be such a prolific, street-based, graffiti artist.



**Figure 7u. Raices or “roots,” “heritage.” Graffiti by NoNo. This is a reminder to remember and to embrace one’s African heritage. El Vedado, Havana, 2006.**

What is interesting to me is that first, she received the permission, and second, her work is perceived as art. There are also spaces around the city where she has been approved to do her large murals. While some Cubans may see this work as problematic, in the end she is an artist and there is space created for her work. She does not have to worry about her work being destroyed by the types of “anti-crime,” “graffiti elimination” projects that have been undertaken in New York and Philadelphia during the 1970s through to the present.

In Figure 7v, NoNo stands in the archway of her apartment building. In the foreground, the word “Underground” is written on the left side of the arch.



**Figure 7v. NoNo in front of a mural in her apartment building in El Vedado, Havana, 2006.**

There is a basketball painted behind the lettering of the word Underground. The word – written in English with the basketball behind the “U” – is a reference to the urban, U.S. American origins of the art form. To the right is the African blessing “Ache,” which is a key phrase in Afro-Cuban culture. This is symbolic of the Afro-Cuban influence in Underground hip-hop. In the background, there is a silhouette of José Martí sitting on the letters “Apostle.” José Martí is sometimes referred to as the Apostle for foretelling the development of U.S. American imperial ambitions. In this piece, NoNo combines the past and the present, and draws on cultural elements which have been influential in the formation of Cuban underground hip-hop as a revolutionary and critical artform which is firmly rooted within its own history, as well as being located within regional and global social movements.

The next image, Figure 7w, is a mural that reflects the Black Atlantic consciousness of hip-hop artists. In this mural, the images, from left to right, are: Fidel Castro, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Che Guevara, and Malcolm X. Some of the names written around the portraits are: Cuban War of Independence Hero (Antonio) Maceo – written in red and ending with a star; Nelson (Mandela); Martin Luther King, “Ho Chi Ming,” and Salvador Allende. The inscription in the center (written in black and circled in red) reads: “ All of the good is not foreign, nor do all of the angels fall from the sky, OK?” In this mural the national and transnational, American and African leaders in the anti-racism struggle are featured. hip-hop artists locate themselves within a larger Afro-American struggle for equality. It is a call to self-determination for a better life here on earth. The mural reminds the viewer that even men and women have the possibility to do good. It also challenges hegemonic state ideology that posits that anything that is foreign is not

revolutionary. This is an implicit commentary on some Cuban officials' and music listeners' assertion that underground hip-hop is not revolutionary because it originated in the United States.



**Figure 7w. Mural in the apartment building of NoNo in El Vedado, Havana, 2006. Mural by NoNo.**

The following mural, Figure 7x, says “The Real hip-hop [is in the] Highest Demand.”

This is reflective of Cuban youth’s claim to represent authentic hip-hop. Most underground hip-hop artists think that hip-hop is dead in the United States. This seems to reflect the “I got next!” of the caller-response mechanism in African-based music like hip-hop. Through contributing their own understanding of the relationship between art, political movements, and social change, Underground Cuban hip-hop artists see themselves as ready to take up the anti-commercial, communitarian, and revolutionary

aspect of hip-hop as means of maintaining the legacy and revolutionary core of the art form. Like those in the United States and elsewhere in the world, Cuban artists would like to see hip-hop realize its full socially critical, and socially transformative potential.



**Figure 7x: Mural in the apartment building of NoNo in El Vedado, Havana, 2006. Mural by NoNo.**





**Figure 7y: NoNo in front of a mural, painted on the entrance of her apartment building in El Vedado, Havana, 2006.**

In the last mural, the prose written on the wall states: “Every one knows that music is an art of Time and only can be prescribed by him, the DJ. In order to order time, the melody and the harmony [are added to the beats].” In the picture the DJ is working hard and shouting phrases such as “Let’s go!” This piece illustrates the importance of music as a social organizing mechanism, as an ideology. The DJ is important in this process as the

DJs provides structure, balance, and harmony in the music. (S)he is the one that has a major role in spurring the crowd to act.

## 7.5 Section Summary/Concluding Remarks

Up until the Special Period, Black Cubans could only contest discrimination as “Cuban citizens” but not as Black, gay, or female people. Because of the revolutionary government’s material equality campaign, which appropriated Blackness as its main slogan, many Cubans, especially Blacks and Mulatos, do not see race as *the* issue when, on the surface, they *are* the idealized image of “Cuban citizen,” both physically and culturally (Arroyo 2003). Furthermore, in post-revolutionary Cuba, challenging institutionalized marginalization that is based on race, gender, or sexuality is difficult since marginalization tends to be defined only in economic and geopolitical terms.

Given the government’s stance on material inequality, it becomes difficult to demonstrate systemic and commonplace discrimination, although in extreme cases such discrimination has been acknowledged.<sup>33</sup> Although there is social sanctioning of any identity-based community organization and social movements in Cuba, many marginalized and socially alienated Cubans are able to use the “unified Cuba” discourse as a means to press successfully for institutionally-based social change.

Since the Special Period, social ills facing women, religious leaders, gays and lesbians have been acknowledged and addressed at the state level, but race remains to be discussed. Since the 1990s, however, the issue of race has become increasingly discussed within the realm of culture. As a result of the underground hip-hop movement, the

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<sup>33</sup> For example, transvestites and transsexual women were specifically targeted for harassment by the police during the summer of 2004. Even in this particular situation, other state institutions mobilized to challenge the police policy within months, all the while providing resources for transpeople and sensitivity-training for the police.

racialized social issues addressed by artists are now being discussed in Cuba's public sphere: in newspapers, academic journals, magazines, and independent institutions at the grassroots level.

In this section, I have approached Blackness as an affective code. Blackness is not a culture, but a symbolic position within systems of power. Blackness erases any cultural specificity, as recognizing cultural specificity would blunt the power embedded within Western systems of signification. Drawing from the work of Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall, I have argued that hip-hop is a communicative structure that allows for transnational discussions of race-based social inequality among the African diaspora and/or those treated as "Black." Through recognizing how racial ideology is formative of Western identity and Western nations, we can trace the racialized global impact of regionally-based European capital. Such an approach demystifies the seeming specificity of social inequality in countries directly affected by European economic interests. It allows for a broad-based, transnational challenge to European global capital.

Approaching race as intertwined into the transatlantic slave trade and the emergence of Western nations, we are able to understand how and why Black and Mulato Cuban youth were drawn to hip-hop when they did not even speak the language of the artists. Cuban youth were able to relate to hip-hop because they were drawn to the symbolism embedded in the musical structures and images. Cuba's re-emergence into the hemisphere allowed Black and Mulato Cuban youth to participate in transnational discussions of racism, social inequality, their own country's colonial history. These are themes that are transmitted in hip-hop, and themes that affect the lives of Cuban youth. hip-hop is a conscious articulation of the experiences of Blacks and Mulatos for whom no

discourse previously existed to describe their particular experiences, and for whom hip-hop now offers a framework and discourse through which to represent themselves and their needs.

Though the limitations of revolutionary discourses concerning sexuality and gender are now being discussed at the state level, it does not mean that the issues facing women, gays, and lesbians have been addressed. In fact, it seems that at the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender identities, lesbian women, in particular, constitute one of the most marginalized groups in Cuba. The situation of Black lesbians is so hidden that there is no data on how race, gender, and sexuality affects their lives. If Blacks and lesbians are underrepresented or absent from discourse, Black lesbians simply do not exist within systems of signification. If Black heterosexual Cubans were not aware that they were affected psychologically by the absence of discourse on race, what are the experiences of Black lesbians? I pose this question because one of the most popular groups of underground hip-hop is a Black lesbian trio called Las Krudas. The underground hip-hop movement has created a space for the most marginal of Cuba's society to make their presence felt.

In the case of gay men in the film, *Looking For A Space* (1993), one gay male writer of color noted in a nationally televised interview at UNEAC, the state-sponsored writers' and artists' union, that one of the reasons people are revolutionary is because they believe in a process that will lead to a better society for all people. He also emphasized that in Cuba, one also has to think of oneself as a revolutionary in order to see oneself as a person (*Looking for A Space*, 1993). In essence, in Cuba, citizenship

discourse is conflated with the notion of being a revolutionary, such that one has to participate in public life as a revolutionary in order for one's humanity to be recognized.

In the case of women, while there is some discussion of their situation at the national level, there is virtually no focus on women's sexuality outside of discussions about the family or prostitution. In the following chapter, I focus on some of the existing literature on homosexuality in Cuba. The experiences of lesbians are largely absent from these analyses or are often surmised from the experiences of "women" as a general (read: heterosexual) category. In the chapter, I analyze the situation of women and lesbians in greater detail, as a means to address the feminist discourses presented by Cuban hip-hop artists. I show that the invisible "lesbian" is a complex subjectivity in and through which social mores concerning gender, sexuality, race, culture, and normativity are destabilized. Through focusing primarily on the experiences of Black lesbians, I highlight key issues facing women in general, lesbians in general, and Black lesbians in particular. To do this, I focus on the work of Las Krudas and its challenge to social inequality at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality.

# Section III

## Chapter VIII

### **Cuba's Sexual Revolution? Women, Homosexuality and Cuban Revolutionary Policy**

Before the Cuban Revolution, gays were socially marginalized (Arguelles and Rich 1981, 1984; Montero 1995; Fernández-Robaina unpublished). Gay men, in particular, often frequented areas known as marginal and crime-ridden (Montero 1995, Arguelles and Rich 1984). These were the only places where gay men could go without facing harassment. In pre-1959 Cuba, poor gay men often looked to wealthier partners as a means of financial security (Arguelles and Rich 1984, Montero 1995, Rich and Arguelles 1985). Wealthier gay men did not have as many social difficulties as their wealth and social standing buffered the effects of homophobia (Arguelles and Rich 1984). Given the silence surrounding women's sexuality, there is even less historical research on lesbian life in Cuba, although some information about lesbians has been inferred from literary texts (Bejel 2001).

In an unpublished article entitled "El proyecto revolucionario y los homosexuales" ["The Revolutionary Project and the Homosexuals"], Tomás Fernández Robaina argues that with the onset of the Cuban Revolution, many gays and lesbians joined revolutionary forces in droves. They believed that a revolution which represented

the interests of the marginalized in society was one in which they should participate. Initially, much like the beginning of other socialist revolutions (Healy 2001, FernándezRobaina unpublished), the government heavily supported artistic cultural expression, a policy which led gays to feel a part of Cuban society. The artistic movements of the first few years of the revolution gave gay Cubans the impression that they were welcome into the revolutionary vanguard (Fernández Robaina, personal communication). However, during this early revolutionary period, there were no references to gays as a marginalized group to be included in Cuba's social inclusion campaign (FernándezRobaina unpublished).

As the revolution progressed, anti-homosexual policies and rhetoric began to increase. This rhetoric culminated in 1965 with the creation of the Military Units for the Aid of Production (UMAP). UMAPs were Cuba's infamous work camps that sought to rehabilitate and socially reintegrate "social undesirables": gays, religious people, people who refused to participate in government programs, hippies, criminals, and drug addicts. Due to internal and international political pressure, the camps were shut down in the late 1960s.

There are accounts of the experiences of homosexuals in these work-camps, but these accounts center on the experiences of gay men. Because women's lives tended to be centered on the home, lesbian presence in these camps was small (Arguelles and Rich 1984). After the closure of the camps in the late 1960s, the revolutionary government's anti-homosexuality stance was institutionalized in 1971, during the first Congress on Culture and Education. During this meeting, homosexuality was defined as an "antisocial behavior" (Lumsden 1996). The Congress mandated that those who were "antisocial,"

and who could affect the moral development of the nation's youth, be excluded from positions of influence. Thus, though the UMAP camps were over, the state dictated that homosexuals should be socially isolated as a means of protecting the development of revolutionary Cuban society. As a result of these moves at the state level, the UMAP camps and the 1971 Congress on Education, homosexuality, until the mid-late 1980s, continued to be tied into determining who was a revolutionary and who was not. Homosexuals, and state dissidents, would become targets of social marginalization.

In the mid-1990s the debate on sexuality as an indicator of one's support for the revolution was addressed in the film *Fresa y Chocolate* (1994). *Fresa y Chocolate* is considered the revolution's most recent official (and reconciliatory) stance on homosexuality in Cuba (Bejel 2001, FernándezRobaina unpublished). This movie was pivotal in the revolution's assertion that its treatment of Cuban citizens was improving. The film was released during the 1990s, a decade in which the Cuban Revolution sought to address "the errors of earlier Revolutionary policies" as a means of solving the legitimacy crisis it faced during the Special Period. During the 1990s, however, officials began to argue that the major problem facing gays was the "macho" culture of Cuba, which prevented homosexuals from being respected by the general population (CENESEX 2005, Lumsden 1996, Leiner 1994).

After the scientific decriminalization of homosexuality in most of the Communist bloc in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was not until the 1980s and early 1990s that policies which targeted gays for social sanction shifted to advocate, instead, respect for those who were gay (Leiner 1994, FernándezRobaina unpublished). At the local level, however, some scholars note that pre-revolutionary cultural norms were simply



institutionalized at the state level (Smith and Padula 1996, Lumsden 1996). It has been argued that these “pre-revolutionary” cultural norms combined with the “Puritanism” of Marxism/Leninism. The result was the banning of anything that endangered the traditional family, or that was considered socially and/or culturally unproductive (Leiner 1994, Lumsden 1996).

Tomás FernándezRobaina disagrees with the simplicity of this “cultural” argument because, as he notes in his work on Santería, there are many sites of rupture within Cuban life left unaccounted for by this explanation. FernándezRobaina argues that there needs to be a more systematic exploration of why the Cuban Revolution decided to target homosexuality as a social problem, given the fact that during the onset of the revolution, homosexuality was not seen as a social problem. Again, this is a very important point given the state’s continued prohibition of homosexuality until the 1980s, despite the findings of its communist colleagues.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, scholars within Cuba note that because of the unique combination of oppressions, Black gay Cubans suffer homophobia on a larger scale than White gay Cubans (FernándezRobaina unpublished). Marvin Leiner (1994) weighs in on this cultural perspective by theorizing that Cuban homophobia is also linked to Cuba’s African traditions. Tomás FernándezRobaina in “Cuban Sexual Values and African Religious Beliefs” (1996) challenges this assertion. FernándezRobaina argues that in the African religious secret societies, *femininity*, not homosexuality was discouraged. Thus the issue was about gender presentation, not sexual acts. FernándezRobaina argues that it

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<sup>34</sup> Communist East Germany decriminalized homosexuality in 1968 after scientific research concluded that homosexuality was not a mental illness nor unnatural. (Healy 2001)

is for this reason that it was not shameful for men to have sexual relations with other men, as long as they were in the active role.

In Cuba, race and class operate in such a way that other social ills are intensified along racial and class lines. For example, the experiences of homophobia and social marginalization are intense among Black gay and lesbian populations. They do not have the material well-being or the social capital embedded in Whiteness to buffer the effects of social prejudices. Interestingly, according to Tomás Fernández Robaina and Ian Lumsden, the worst thing that someone could be called is a “Black faggot.” It is worse than being called “anti-revolutionary” – an accusation that could lead to one being questioned by state security or even arrested (Fernández Robaina unpublished). Another silence in the discussion of homosexuality and Cuban culture is the lack of theorizing about the role of Santería in informing cultural beliefs about homosexuality.

Recent work on the cultural significance of Santería – a religion composed of African and Catholic influences which is widely practiced in Cuba but is stereotypically assumed to be practiced primarily by Black Cubans – has shown that Santero communities generally do not exclude lesbians and gays (Fernández Robaina unpublished). For example, Vidal-Ortiz (2000)<sup>35</sup> has noted that in New York City, people with HIV have not been alienated by the Santero community, and community members have been actively involved in the care of other community members who have AIDS. Furthermore, gays and lesbians are influential leaders within the Santero community, and many non-homosexual members respect them as upstanding members of society (Fernández Robaina unpublished, Vidal-Ortiz 2000).

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<sup>35</sup> While Vidal-Ortiz’s work focuses on Santero spaces within the United States, much of his sample is composed of recent immigrants from a number of Caribbean communities; he has also focused on Santero communities that are predominantly composed of Cubans.

Some gay and lesbian members of Santero communities have noted that some fellow practitioners are uncomfortable around gay and lesbian members. Nonetheless, it is not uncommon for gays to be open about their sex lives during meetings. It is commonly understood that while there may be some tension among gay and straight members, in the end it is the person's commitment to religious practice and the community that is judged (Vidal-Ortiz 2000, Fernández Robaina unpublished). In Vidal-Ortiz's study, gay members do not see themselves as needing to be part of a "gay community" because of their sexuality, and generally think that organizing meetings for gay members deviates from the communal focus of religious practice. There are historical (pre-1959) reports that gays have organized around particular deities, and developed codes to identify each other during religious festivals (Fernández Robaina unpublished).

Despite the recent public discussions about homosexuality, there is still very little discussion of women's sexuality. In the film *Fresa y Chocolate*, the main characters are men. Outside of prostitution or adultery, White women have not had access to Cuba's public sphere apart from their roles as wives, family members, or members of private, elite women's groups (Stoner 1991, Smith and Padula 1996). The experiences of Black and Mulato lesbians are even more obscure. Though they have tended to be forced into Cuba's public sphere as workers, these women face a harsh reality at the intersections of race, gender, and class. They have the most limited ability for self-representation in Cuba's larger public spheres.<sup>36</sup>References to "macho culture" and "machista attitudes"—

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<sup>36</sup> Here I refer to Cuba's public spheres as there were numerous public spheres in Cuba that had their basis in race, class, gender and national origin (White U.S. Americans participated in Cuban public life in a particular way). These public spheres reflected the differing levels of economic, political, and social power of the varying groups divided by Cuba's particular social, economic and political hierarchies.

without a race-, class-, or gender-based critique or definition of what “machista attitudes” are – allow these terms to be used as *the* reason for homophobia and sexism. It does not allow for analysis of life at the intersections of the two.

A major area where research has been limited is in the analysis of the intersections of race and sexuality. Research on race and sexuality in Cuba has yet to empirically address why, for example, being called a “Black faggot” is worse than being called “anti-Revolutionary.” The material that attempts to theorize about this relationship states that African culture has had a tremendous influence on Cuban notions of maleness (Arguelles and Rich 1984, Leiner 1994, Lumsden 1996). There are two versions of this analysis. The first attributes machismo to the African influences in the development of Cuban culture (Leiner 1994, Lumsden 1996). The other analysis is that Cuban homophobia differs from its European and American counterparts because of Cuba’s “Iberian heritage,” which integrates notions of honor, dignity and chivalry, with an African focus on male solidarity and secret societies (Leiner 1994, Lumsden 1996). Smith and Padula take this a step further and link machismo to the effects of the Moorish tradition inherited by Spain. Thus, in either case, aggressive masculinity is linked to Cuba’s African heritage. This attribution of aggressiveness to African influences is a racial play that is found in the literature on sexuality in Cuba, and it is an ideology that continues to circulate at the local level in Cuba.

In Cuba, there is a popular stereotype that Black men and Black lesbians are more “macho,” aggressive and oppressive than White men. This belief is entrenched in a very complex relationship between race and class, in which Whiteness is a marker for a “higher cultural level,” and Blackness is a marker for a “lower cultural level”. Any

analysis of the relationship between race, gender, and homosexuality must theorize about the relationship between “machismo” (generally coded as Black or masculine aggressiveness) and class. Though the goal of the next section is to address the silence surrounding lesbian experiences in Cuba, it also addresses some of these issues concerning the intersections of race, gender, and class in Cuba.

### **8.1 All the Women Are Straight and All the Homosexuals are Men: Gender and Female (Homo-) Sexuality**

After the Cuban Revolution occurred in 1959, the state undertook what Fidel Castro described as a “Revolution within the Revolution,” that of ensuring women’s equal rights. In an effort to rectify the social, economic, and political inequality faced by women, Cuban women began participating in national projects that sought to eliminate the class and racial inequalities that divided women. The effects of the efforts to improve the situation of women as a group have been heavily discussed and critiqued (Smith and Padula 1996, Bunck 1994, Fleites-Lear 2003, De La Fuente 2001). However, regardless of where one stands on the issue of the origins and effects of the mass mobilization of women to address the inequalities affecting Cuban women, what is important to acknowledge is for the first time in Cuba’s history, an anti-racist, anti-poverty, and anti-class-inequality campaign was undertaken at the national and local levels.

Cuba’s approach to women’s equality is a result of a common experience faced by most poor countries in the global south: the effects of the intersections of race, class, and gender in poor countries, where political and economic structures are monopolized by a minority White/light-skinned elite, necessitates an intersectional (race, class, and gender-based) approach to challenging gender inequality. Early in the women’s revolutionary movement, feminist organizations were still active on the island. However,

by 1962 the state-supported Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) began to dominate discourses concerning women's subjectivity as the only women-centered organization on the island.



**Figure 8a: Image of the Federation of Cuban Women. As we see from this image, it is important for women to fight the revolution *and* to care for the offspring. From the official website of the Communist Party of Cuba:<sup>37</sup>**

For example, within the realm of material inequality, Cuban women are known for their astounding successes in their educational, reproductive health and economic empowerment programs. During the early revolutionary period (approximately the 1960s-1970s), the Federation of Cuban Women offered programs on topics such as how to sew, how to dress, how to cook, and how to type (Bunch 1995). They also opened daycare centers and taught courses on motherhood and personal hygiene. It is important to note that these programs did provide women with access to life prospects and resources that had been largely unavailable to them: a sewing machine and sewing skills *did* empower rural women with limited resources in 1962.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.pcc.cu/pccweb/organizaciones/fmc.php> - last accessed on Monday May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at 7:22 p.m.

The institutionalization of pre-revolutionary cultural discourse surrounding reproduction and women's role as mother, combined with revolutionary discourses concerning women "as workers" yielded a contradictory experience for women after 1959. Through the promotion of women-as-worker discourse, the subjective experiences of women were narrowed to only a few of the issues facing Cuban women: class inequality and their social effects (poor health, poor education, poor living conditions, and lack of control over reproductive health). These contradictory discourses are reflected in the logo of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), shown in Figure 8a. Women have control over reproduction, but they are also still largely responsible for what they reproduce. While photos of the revolutionary male tend to show the male with a gun, in positions of political and economic leadership, or a headshot of the male revolutionary subject as friend, protector and/or thinker, women are largely depicted as potential mothers or wives of revolutionaries.

At the state level, it is argued that women are to participate as equals to men in the revolutionary process. For the literacy programs of the early revolutionary period, the state sent young single women into the countryside to educate fellow Cuban citizens. This caused a lot of resentment among parents as women's lives in pre-revolutionary Cuba were largely centered on the home. Women were expected to take care of the family. Through the literacy programs, questions about women's chastity arose as parents were concerned about whether or not their daughters' virginity would be guaranteed while their daughters were not under the watchful eye of the family. However, as demonstrated by the logo of the FMC, "official discourses" surrounding femininity and women's revolutionary citizenship continue to be tied to women's

reproductive capabilities as “mother,” even though women had also gained total control over their reproductive capabilities, at least in terms of the reproductive health facilities provided by the state.

Though Cuban women’s educational attainment, reproductive rights, and financial independence increased during the early revolutionary period, Cuban women have not taken a broadly-based, women-centered approach that goes beyond material inequality as a means to target other aspects of social inequalities (i.e., racial, sexual, and gender-identity inequalities). Therefore, numerous issues concerning women continue to go unaddressed, effectively limiting the advancement of an egalitarian participatory citizenship agenda. These inequalities are interconnected, mutually defining and reinforcing one another. Smith and Padula write the following about the intersections of gender and sexuality:

This abhorrence of homosexuality displayed early on by the regime raised serious questions about women’s place in the revolution. If the revolution were “a matter for men,” where did women fit in? That homosexuals, men who embraced the feminine realm, were perceived to be so threatening that the regime imprisoned them reflected the historical rigidity of Cuba’s separate sexual spheres. (Smith and Padula 1996, 173)

After the revolution, (White) straight men continued to be considered the honorable and virile protectors of the family and nation, i.e., revolutionaries. Until the mid-1990s, effeminate women and men were assumed to be morally inept and unable to defend themselves or the nation through an armed struggle (Bejel 2001, Smith and Padula 1996, Leiner 1994). This may seem contradictory given Cuba’s approach to women as workers and revolutionaries, presumably equal to men. Given the slow pace of critique and change in Cuba, mainly a result of the government’s limits on social criticism and social organization, the revolution inadvertently reinforced many of the gender and



sexual stereotypes it sought to dispel. These gender and sexual stereotypes are at the center of Cuba's construction of "citizen."

Cuba's approach to women as workers, the worker as revolutionary, and the revolutionary as virile and male, revolutionary discourse effectively defined *women*, as a subjective group, out of existence. At the same time, the discourse yielded a feminine subject whose representation as a revolutionary became dependent upon her reproductive relationship to men. In the 1970s, the state noted the continued difficulties faced by women and passed the 1975 Family Code. Though the Family Code challenged the established norms surrounding the division of labor in the home and the rights of women within their marriages, it promoted monogamous, heterosexual marriage as an ideal (Chomsky et al. 2003). For example, on the first page of the document, under the title "The Objectives of this Code," the authors write:

Article 1. --- This Code legally regulates family institutions: marriage, divorce, father-child relations, the obligation to provide basic needs, adoption and trusteeship, with the principal objectives of contributing:

- to strengthen the family with respect to the bonds of caring, help and reciprocal respect between its members;
- to strengthen legal marriage formally and judicially recognized, founded on the absolute equality of the rights of men and women;
- to the effective fulfillment, by the parents, of their obligations with respect to the protection, moral formation and education of their children so that they are completely developed in every aspects like worthy citizens of a socialist society

Title I  
Of Marriage  
Chapter I  
Of General Marriage  
Section One

Of Marriage and Its Constitution

Article 2. --- Marriage is a voluntary union consecrated by a man and a woman, who has the legal aptitude for it, in order to make a common life.

Marriage is legally recognized only when it is formalized or when it is recognized within accordance with the rules and laws established within this Code (FMC 1977).

Thus long-term, intimate relationships, in which people wish to have a family are only recognized if they are between a man and a woman. The publication of an official

document that centers on the importance of maintaining a healthy conjugal relationship between a man and a woman, in the absence of a document that supports and encourages all relationships regardless of gender, is an explicit endorsement of heterosexuality. Much of the document, with reference to the rearing of children and how partners should treat each other, is based on “morality.”

For example, Article 85, section 3, states the following about the responsibility of parents:

To prepare their kids for social life; ingraining in them a love of the country, the respect of its symbols and have an understanding of its values, its international spirit, the norms and the norms of coexistence and a socialist morality and a respect for the “bienes patrimoniales de la sociedad y a los bienes y derechos personales de los demas...” (Ministerio de Justicia 1975, 37)

Nonetheless, there is no explicit definition of “morality;” it is assumed that one will know. However, the framework in which to understand morality was not completely left to the imagination of Cuban citizens. Other social policies enacted before the publication of the Family Code delineate the state’s stance on morality. One example is the 1971 Congress on Education and Culture. During this Congress, the government mandated that homosexuals were not to hold positions that had a direct impact on the moral development of children. Thus, any known gay persons participating in Cuba’s educational and cultural institutions lost their positions, and in the case of students, were prevented from graduating from educational institutions. Further delineating the state’s stand on “morality” were Cuba’s penal codes concerning “public scandals,” which explicitly stated that public homosexual acts should be fined (Lumsden 1996).

The revolutionary state has attempted to undertake social policy aimed at addressing the post-colonial and neocolonial legacies of social inequality. However, because of its approach to women, family and morality, the state has not been able to

destabilize morality as a mechanism for disciplining and regulating the social. In effect, morality continues to be a euphemism for sex (Alexander 1991, 134). Thus, at the core of morality are normative assumptions surrounding race, sexuality and, I would add, gender. What post-colonial/neocolonial states often ignore is that the very identity and authority of the colonial project rested upon the racialization, gendering, and sexualization of morality. These particular ideologies (gender, race, sexuality) are at the basis of social hierarchies that are integral in delineating who is an appropriate citizen.

Third World feminists such as M. Jacqui Alexander have written extensively about the relationship between the post-colonial citizen, the state, and morality. For example, in her piece “Redrafting Morality: The Post-colonial State and the Sexual Offenses Bill of Trinidad and Tobago” (1997), Alexander focuses on the discursive production of morality in legal texts and court cases in order to demonstrate how state managers re-inscribe sex as the basis of relationships between women and men, adults and minors. She argues that sexual re-inscription is not based on equal relationships, but a hierarchy based on the boundaries of illicit sex, which is then used to define licit sex.

She writes:

In other words, heterosexual practices carry the weight of the natural only in relational terms and ultimately, one might argue, only in its power to designate as amoral and unnatural those practices which disrupt marriage and create hegemonic notions of family. What is fundamentally at stake, therefore, in consolidating these moral claims is the institution of marriage and its patriarchal correlates: hegemonic masculinity, procreative sex, subordinated femininity, and vague but powerful notions of “consent.”(Alexander 1997, 140)

Alexander concludes that criminalizing gay and lesbian sex is a means of asserting the primacy of the heterosexual conjugal bed. Thus, for Alexander, morality has become a euphemism for *sex*. To be moral is to be asexual, (hetero)sexual, or sexual in ways that presumably carry the weight of the “natural.” In Cuba, “morality” continues to be a core

component in the construction of the “revolutionary Cuban citizen” and is used to police “public” displays of homosexuality.

Until the mid-1990s, Cuba had “morality laws” concerning sexuality, public scandals, and “immoral” conduct that specifically targeted lesbian and gay citizens. In recent years, as a means of addressing earlier state stances on homophobia and racism, these laws have been changed. In its efforts to create a more inclusive environment for gay citizens, the laws that directly equate homosexuality with perversion have been repealed. Today, however, there still exists one article concerning appropriate sexuality that is based on one’s notion of morality. As of the 1999 penal code, an infraction of Article 303 must pay a fine of 100-300 pesos. This article is divided into three parts: section a) states that if one sexually harasses another person one will be fined; section b) states that anyone “offending good customs through improper exhibitions or obscene acts” will also be fined; and finally, section c) states that the circulation of pornographic materials or any other materials that pervert or degrade good customs will also be fined. These laws are still used by police to fine gay, especially lesbian, couples who hold hands and/or kiss in public. This policing of sexuality reinforces a notion of national and collective social obligation that is based on the supposedly moral duty of maintaining a stable heterosexual family. This family, in turn, is naturalized as the basis of a “healthy” nation, but it also reinforces notions of gender, specifically femininity.

Thus, a notion of morality continues to be defined by what is assumed to be immoral. In past official documents, immorality has been framed as perverse sexuality, and homosexuality as a form of moral perversion. These ideas still persist as accepted notions of immorality and are heavily policed in reference to their potential negative

effect on Cuban youth. Though there may be some changes in perceptions of gay men, the “youth question” continues to be used as a justification to police homosexuality. For example, in addition to morality being defined according to abnormal sexuality, it continues to be defined according to a notion of marriage based on heterosexual conjugal relations in which families prepare children to be “moral revolutionary citizens.” However, notions of “public decency” continue to be used to police homosexuality. One way the issue of appropriateness is framed is reflected in the 1976 Family Code.

The Family Code was written in an attempt to address problems that women continued to face after seventeen years of revolutionary government. The goal of the document was to encourage (or, if necessary, force) men to take more of an active role in the home. The document interrogates what is considered feminine and masculine work. One argument is that taking care of the family is not an explicitly feminine task. However, while trying to advocate for a shared division of labor within the home, key parts of the document actually further essentialize women and men as sexualized and gendered subjects. In 1997, the FMC published “The Woman in Socialist Cuba” (1997), a book designed to let women know all of the legal obligations and social services available to them *as women*, and in which the Family Code was also included. The introduction to the book stated:

Esos objetivos, sin embargo, no pudo alcanzarlos sino después del triunfo de la Revolución. De esa manera quedó demostrado, con claridad meridiana, que solo la abolición de la propiedad privada sobre los medios fundamentales de producción y la construcción del socialismo, crean las bases para la realización de la igualdad de todos los ciudadanos y, consecuentemente, la igualdad real de derechos entre el hombre y la mujer.

En este libro se recogen las normas jurídicas que plasman las medidas adoptadas por la Revolución, dirigidas a la protección de la mujer, la maternidad, el matrimonio y la niñez...

[These objectives, nonetheless, we could not reach them without first the triumph of the Revolution. In this way it has been demonstrated... that only with the abolition of private

property as the fundamental means of production and [with] the construction of socialism, that the basis for the realization of equality for all citizens and, consequently, the real equality of rights between men and women.

This book recognizes the juridical norms that shape the means adopted by the Revolution, aimed at protecting women, maternity, marriage and children.] (Federation of Cuban Women 1997, 1)

Whenever women are discussed in Cuba, they are discussed in reference to heterosexual relationships, maternity, marriage, children, and morality. The FMC encourages the acceptance of collective gender interests that are uncritically heteronormative at their base, through their reduction of women's sexuality to production and exchange, and intimacy within conjugal relationships. Additionally the FMC's programs are based on a public/private divide that reinforces women's role in the domestic sphere and encourages a narrowly-defined presence in the public sphere. Women are still expected to be the moral and primary-care provider of children and the family.

Further mandating heteronormative social relations, the FMC also prohibited known lesbians from joining its ranks until the 1980s (Smith and Padula 1996). Thus while many of these projects were geared to empower women, they empowered women according to the assumed collective gender (and heterosexual) interests of the time. Even discourses surrounding women's reproductive health are male-centered.

Women's liberation was a central goal of the revolutionary government's material equality campaigns. The revolution considered sexism and feminism (until the late 1980s) to be products of pre-revolutionary, bourgeois, class inequality. Since the revolution argues it has eliminated class inequality, the assumption is that it has also eliminated sexism. According to some Cuban researchers who focus on domestic violence, Cuban institutions began addressing domestic violence in the late 1980s, when it was at epidemic levels. (CENESEX conference 2004). Until then, at the state level, there was resistance to even mentioning that gender inequality continued to exist because

the assumption was that *everyone* had become equal as a result of revolutionary policy. One institution in which there continues to be a virtual silence on the experiences of lesbians is within the Federation of Cuban Women. Among lesbians, the FMC has a reputation of being an organization of “straight women” and as excessively homophobic; known lesbians were banned from joining until the 1980s (Smith and Padula 1996). Within official Cuban institutions, “lesbianism” continues to be medicalized. For example, CENESEX, the sexological arm of the Ministry of Public Health, is one of the only state institutions to formally discuss, or offer “space” for, lesbians. Nonetheless, the space is advertised as a space of “reflection,” where lesbians can meet with a psychologist and “reflect on their feelings of social marginalization.” (Personal communication with a CENESEX psychologist).

In an attempt to theorize about the public silences concerning homosexuality, Arguelles and Rich (1984) write the following:

It is a closeted life but by no means a secret one. While the homosexuality of many men and women is a matter of common knowledge, it is never a matter of public record. Indeed, it is the complete absence of a public sphere that most clearly distinguishes the life of homosexuals in Cuba from any corresponding lifestyle in the United States or Western European urban centers. Most commentary on homosexuality in revolutionary Cuba has concerned itself strictly with legal or occupational prohibitions. However, within the private-sphere, there are a clear latitude and range of possibilities for lesbians and gay men that surprise the critical observer. The seeming contradictions in Cuba between homosexual expression and homosexual repression correspond quite clearly to the distinction made between private (excessive) and public (repressive) space. As delineated in a Latin American socialist setting, private space is far wider than in the United States, encompassing virtually all behavior outside the purview of official sanction or attention, while approved policy, published texts, and official stances compose the public-sphere. (1984, 696)

Arguelles and Rich argue that homosexuality in Cuba “is a matter of common knowledge.” Though there may not be an explicitly public gay movement in Cuba, it does not mean that gays and lesbians in Cuba are in the closet. Because others have primarily focused on laws to assess the state of things in post-1980s Cuba, one may get the

idea that “out” homosexuals cannot move through space at all. Arguelles and Rich argue that the structure of public and private space in Cuba is such that the government dominates much of public space; however, Cuba’s private space is much larger than that available in the United States. Therefore, social space exists for gays and lesbians, though it is not necessarily public space.

Writing for an online encyclopedia of “gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer culture,” Sierra-Madero writes this about studying sexuality in contemporary Cuba: “In contemporary Cuba, one cannot speak of a gay community. One can, however, speak of a homoerotic environment for meeting and socializing in Havana that is constantly moving and reshaping itself” (2004). Sierra-Madero’s invocation of the social significance of homoerotic desire, and not an identity-based community, is important in thinking about ‘lesbian life and community’ in Cuba. As a result of the government’s efforts at preventing any groups from organizing, there are no easily identifiable gay and lesbian identity-based communities in Cuba*if* one is approaching the study of this community from the perspective of assessing the number of formal social and political institutions that exist outside of those permitted by the government.

However, over the last three years, beginning with Cuba’s hosting of the 16th World Congress of Sexology in 2003, there has been an increase in foreign coverage of the “sexual revolution” occurring on the Island. A June 9th, 2007, *New York Times* piece entitled, “A Castro Strives to Open Cuban’s Opinions on Sex,” stated the following about Mariela Castro, the head of the National Center of Sex Education (CENESEX), which is seen as the leading state initiative to improve the quality of life of Cuba’s LGBT community:

“Sexuality does not just have a reproductive function,” she declared in an interview on



the front porch of a Havana mansion, where the center is located, noting that sex is also about love and pleasure and discovery and experiment. "Human beings are much more diverse than we think"... "I suggest you take a stroll on La Rampa to see how freely people express their sexual orientation," Ms. Castro said, mentioning a popular gathering spot for gays in Havana. "This doesn't mean we don't have to work in the political arena and in the education of all of society"... Her center helped produce a soap opera on state television last year featuring a married man who discovered he was attracted to other men. It was hugely popular... NO sex-related topic is off limits in the center's publication, *Sexology and Society*, which features artwork and poetry with sexual themes and academic articles dealing with subjects like gay bashing, domestic violence and hormone therapy for transsexuals. (Lacey 2007)

The central themes of recent media coverage are that:

- 1) Cuba's attitudes towards homosexuals have improved.
- 2) Women's control of their reproductive health has improved.
- 3) Cuba's treatment of HIV/AIDS has improved.
- 4) Things have improved so much for the LGBT community in Cuba that the government is now addressing the particular needs of transsexuals.

In essence, these pieces implicitly argue that the Cuban government seems to be attempting to fulfill its promise to create an egalitarian society for its citizens, including the ones it once marginalized. The result is that things have gotten so much better, as Mariela Castro states in the *New York Times* piece, that one simply has to walk down La Rampa to see the large numbers of gays, men who have sex with men, and transvesti (gay men who pass as women) who overwhelm the bustling tourist area where La Rampa is located. There is a link here to what Arguelles and Rich and Sierra Madero argue in their pieces: that there is a difference in the scope of public/private space.

However, while such public displays of non-heteronormativity may be interpreted as an indication of the progress of Cuba's "sexual revolution," if one looks for women when perusing La Rampa or walking along the Malecon (both popular gay areas where hundreds of people can congregate at anytime), or even when passing by the group of transsexuals who meet on the porch of CENESEX, as duly noted in newspaper coverage, one wonders "Where are all the women?" or, in the case of transsexuals, "Where are all

the transmen? Aren't those born female included in Cuba's sexual revolution? Aren't they also affected by social and state attitudes towards homosexuality and gender variance?" "Why have women been left out of Cuba's non-heteronormative sexual revolution?" The inability of Cuba's sexual revolution to include all female-born citizens is intertwined with Cuba's cultural tradition of machismo in which the male experience continues to be universalized as the human (or citizen) experience. As a result, this forecloses the possibility that a notion of social equality can be expanded to include those born female, despite revolutionary attempts to use egalitarian social discourse to promote women's equality.

While one could debate the benefits and limits of socialist and capitalist systems ad infinitum, what is clear is that the discouragement of a woman-centered analysis of Cuban social life and the encouragement of a "revolutionary" centered ideology, has limited the ability of the Cuban state to challenge the established traditions that affect the expansion of citizenship to include all people born female. If the revolution is to advance its agenda of equality by explicitly challenging machista attitudes, the best way to begin this project is to undertake a feminist agenda that seeks to understand, embrace, and make visible all aspects of female subjectivity, and that seeks to challenge Cuban heteronormativity such that women's subjectivity is no longer determined by women's relationship to men.

I address the limits of the woman=revolutionary=male=citizen system of signification by, first, interrogating the relationship between citizenship and machismo; second, I discuss recent research on Cuban women's sexuality that centers on lesbian subjectivity; finally, I discuss the brief existence and dissolution of the first state-

sponsored lesbian organization, OREMI, which lasted for approximately two months during the summer of 2005.<sup>38</sup> The group ended as a result of a combination of social pressure and disagreement between CENESEX and the group's leadership concerning the group's mandate.

## **8.2. Silent Women, Invisible Lesbians: Researching the Experiences of Lesbians in Cuba**

Larry La Fountain-Stokes writes the following about his trip to Cuba in 1998:

I was particularly struck by the limited gay and transgendered public sphere, which is dominated by the sexual trade. Lesbian visibility is somewhat limited; I have since heard interesting stories by lesbian travelers about their (fairly similar) interactions and am aware of the documentation available from sources such as Kelly Anderson's and Sonja de Vries's films on lesbianism on the island. What I found most remarkable was the (apparently) completely closeted existence of most gay expression and organizing that is not in some way related to the tourist trade or the arts. (La Fountain-Stokes 2002, 21)

La Fountain-Stokes notes the limited presence of a gay and transgendered public sphere. This reality is a result of two factors: in 1998, most Cubans believed homosexuality to be unnatural and disgusting, and the Cuban state had concerns about allowing large groups of people to congregate in one space. State officials have argued that limits on organizations are a result of a concern that counter-revolutionary activities have been planned in large groups (Arguelles and Rich 1984). It is for this reason that police in Havana will stop groups of Cubans in order to obtain information about the group's members or to ask the group to disperse into smaller groups of two or three. Therefore, gay public space is a limited space within Cuban public life. This observation is based on my experience of physically passing as Cuban and frequently being stopped with Cuban friends. There were numerous occasions in which friends reminded each other that we

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<sup>38</sup> I was invited to participate in OREMI in 2003 by a Cuban psychologist, who first started thinking seriously about forming such an organization after considering the data on Cuban lesbians presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress on Sexology in Havana, Cuba.

needed to split up into smaller groups, especially when the police were monitoring heavily-populated gay cruising areas.

La Fountain-Stokes also notes the lack of visibility of lesbians and can only surmise that there are some similarities between gay and lesbian experiences based on his experience, word of mouth, the work of Arguelles and Rich, documentaries, and other work about the experiences of lesbians. Films are important because, outside of literary analyses, there is virtually no print-based, empirical research that centers specifically on the particular experiences of lesbians. The information that exists about lesbians in contemporary Cuba continues to be found largely in independent film.

Much like La Fountain-Stokes' piece, information on lesbians is often extrapolated from pieces that center on the experiences of gay men. Even in those cases, the authors note the absence of lesbians and continue with their male-centered analysis. Ian Lumsden in his book *Machos, Maricones, and Gays* (1996) explicitly states he will not or cannot address the experiences of lesbians because of a lack of connection to the (largely invisible) lesbian community. He states that he would leave it up to someone else to address the unique situation of lesbians. Lumsden writes:

My interpretation of gay oppression in Cuba is influenced by this experience and particularly by my friendships and shared times with gay Cubans. Without such close contacts neither I nor anyone else could do justice to the issue. This is why I have deliberately not addressed the situation of lesbians. (Lumsden 1996, xxvi)

There is some mention of lesbians in books such as Smith and Padula's *Women and Revolution in Socialist Cuba* (1996); however, it is not uncommon for empirical work on women to completely skirt the issue altogether. For example in K. Lynn Stoner's seminal book *From the House to the Streets: The Cuban Woman's Movement for Legal Reform*,

*1898-1940* (1991), lesbian sexuality was not addressed in her chapter titled, “Legislating Morality,” which focuses on women’s sexuality.

Some researchers look to scholarship that examines the overall situation of women in order to gather information about the experience of lesbians. For example, Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich in their significant study of lesbian and gays in revolutionary Cuba note that during the 1980 Mariel boat-lift, thousands of gay men fled Cuba, but not very many lesbians. They attribute this to the increases in well-being experienced by Cuban women overall. In essence, because of their social improvement *as women*, lesbians did not flee the island. However, we do not know if things were simply better for lesbians because they were women, and for this reason they chose to stay in Cuba, or if as women their family obligations prevented them from leaving. The film *Looking For A Space* (1993) indicates that many gays and lesbians were unwilling to leave their family connections, and thus chose to work for change and to “stick it out” for as long as they could.

This may have been a realistic assumption in 1980; however, the experiences of lesbians are so understudied that there is no way to know how the lives of lesbians have changed, or stayed the same, after the revolution. What is clear, however, is that the post-Mariel generation is living in a very different social world than their older lesbian counterparts. Many young women see that their counterparts in other countries are able to marry and/or have civil partnerships. These women also watch the television show *The L-Word*, as well as independent lesbian movies, and want access to public space where they are able to socialize with women who share the same interests.

The dearth of work focusing specifically on Cuban lesbians is a reflection of how hidden Cuban lesbian life is. In the next two sections, I first summarize key aspects of “gay” Cuban life and address the particularity of lesbian women’s experiences. I include some recent data from independent Cuban researchers that address the precarious situation of lesbians on the island, while also drawing from my own ethnographic research on this topic.

### **8.3 Notes on Contemporary Lesbian, Gay Life in Cuba**

Pre-1994, homosexuality had important political significance for the Cuban nation-building project itself. Many right-wing organizations in the United States often cited the 1960s work camps and the experiences of gay Cuban exiles, such as those of Reinaldo Arenas,<sup>39</sup> as evidence that the revolution was a failed communist state and an oppressive dictatorship (Arguelles and Rich 1984, Almendros and Jiménez Leal 1983, Rich and Arguelles 1985). Because of the politicization of “Cuban gayness” in the U.S., homosexuals in Cuba who verbalized their gayness were considered perverse and/or potential dissidents until the mid-1990s. The organizers of OREMI, the first state-supported lesbian organization that existed for two months in Havana in 2005, write the following:

La vida de las homosexuales Cubanas permanecen en un anonimato que nos hace sentir relegadas. Como parte activa de nuestra sociedad poseemos problemas de aceptación de nuestra identidad que se hace evidente en las relaciones familiares y laborales, sufrimos de discriminación, despareció, rechazo y en el mejor de los casos indiferencia. Una sociedad homofóbica como la nuestra que no ha tenido nunca una educación de tolerancia y aceptación afecta notablemente el desarrollo social de aquellas personas que eligieron un estilo de vida “diferente.” . . . .En el caso de las mujeres que decidimos ser lesbiana esta homofobia se hace mayor. En una historia femenina de relegación a segundo plano con respecto al hombre donde se nos ha asignado un papel como esposas, madres de familia y dependiente del

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<sup>39</sup> Reinaldo Arenas is the author of *Before Night Falls*. His autobiographical book was turned into a popular film of the same name, released in the US in 2000. The film chronicles Arenas’ life, including the many times he was jailed and tortured on the island because he was openly gay and an outspoken critic of the Cuban Revolution. It also covers his escape from Cuba to the U.S. where he committed suicide after years of suffering from AIDS.

hombre, que existan mujeres que rechacen esos patrones para hacer su vida con otra mujer, “es casi una ofensa.”

In the lives of homosexual Cuban women there remains an anonymity that makes us feel relegated... there is the problem concerning the acceptance of our identity, which is manifested in our work and family relationships, we suffer discrimination, are despised, rejected and in the best cases we receive indifference. A homophobic society such as ours that has not had any education about tolerance and acceptance notably affects the social development of those people who decide upon a style of life that is ‘different...’ In the case of women that decide to be lesbian, this homophobia is the strongest. In a female history of relegation to second place with respect to men, where we are assigned the role of wife, mother, and dependent of the male, [the existence of] women who reject these norms in order to make their life with another woman, “is almost an offense.” (OREMI 2005)

The organizers note that social distain is the strongest for lesbians. They are relegated to second place “with respect to men” because of their rejection of the roles assigned to them (that of wife, mother and “dependent of the male”). The only women allowed to act “out of place” are prostitutes and mistresses whose only purpose is to fulfill the sexual needs of men. Thus, compulsory heterosexuality, feminine gender presentation, and passivity are expected of all women, no exceptions. These expectations are reflected in the lack of discussion concerning lesbians and/or any other constructions of female sexuality outside of (potential) heterosexual unions and adultery.

Officially, CENESEX has produced work that centers on female sexuality and homosexuality. However, these studies focus on women’s roles within relationships, female sexual dysfunction, the implications of feminine sexual health in family dynamics, domestic violence as a reproductive health concern, and *male* homosexuality. In the three documentaries about homosexuality in Cuba that include specific information about women’s experiences as a lesbian, *Not Because Fidel Says So* (1988), *Looking For A Space* (1994), and *Gay Cuba* (2000)), the particular difficulties facing lesbians are noted. For example, some lesbian interviewees comment that their parents are disappointed because they think that homosexuality is unnatural, and they feel that their daughters are not living up to being upright citizens; they are not living as women who

are “feminine” (read: attracted to men) and who will marry and have children. The point is driven home in the film *Not Because Fidel Says So* (1988), when one woman states that her parents would rather she was a prostitute (a socially and physically dangerous, illegal profession) than be a lesbian.

While there is limited “official” research on the topic of lesbians in Cuba, independent work produced by local health organizations, independent researchers, graduate students, and many others participating in Cuba’s public sphere tends to circulate informally. This data is present though often times it remains “unpublished” as it is circulated within Cuban society. One thing that this data points out is that much of the focus on male homosexuality is officially attributed to the global AIDS crisis. The founders of OREMI comment on this as well:

Somos un Grupo de Mujeres revolucionarias, lesbianas y bisexuales de la Ciudad de la Habana con heterogénea formación cultural, diferentes etnias y realidades, que nos hemos unido en este Proyecto porque compartimos elecciones sexuales afines y necesidades comunes... Después de la aparición del SIDA y el gran despliegue de recursos que hace el estado para la prevención del mismo, se crean centros de atención y prevención donde se desarrolla todo un trabajo con los grupos sociales más propensos de adquirir la enfermedad entre la que se encuentra la población homosexual. Es en esos encuentros; y en los distintos eventos que se realizan, donde se va evidenciando que las necesidades de los homosexuales Cubanos vá más allá de una atención médica y profiláctica a una necesidad afectiva, de apoyo y aceptación de su orientación sexual.

We are a group of Revolutionary Women, lesbian and bisexuals from the City of Havana, we are a culturally heterogeneous group of different ethnicities and different realities, that have united in this Project because we share unique sexualities and common needs... After the appearance of AIDS and the large focus of state resources towards its prevention, they [numerous Revolutionary institutions] created centers of attention and prevention where work was focused on the social groups within the homosexual population most likely to acquire the illness. In these meetings and at the distinct events they organized... it was evident that the needs of Cuban homosexuals was more than that of medical attention and prevention, it is about an emotional need of support and acceptance of one’s sexual orientation. (OREMI 2005)

Since the beginning of the AIDS crisis, or approximately the last twenty-five years, state resources have been mobilized to address the particular needs of HIV/AIDS-affected citizens, part of which has included raising public awareness about



homosexuality. In essence, the government has spent the time and resources necessary to give homosexuality a humane, respectable *and male* face, so that HIV/AIDS-affected citizens are treated well. Through the goal of inclusion, policy-makers hoped that men would stop participating in the types of clandestine unsafe sexual activities that occur in societies that are intolerant to male-to-male sexuality. Though there has been exceptional progress in the social acceptance of gay men in recent years, with the national release of the reconciliatory film *Fresa y Chocolate* in 1994, and the first prime-time airing of a gay telenovela in 2006, the main characters in these national productions continue to be men. In essence, male sexuality continues to dominate discourses concerning sexuality, and men continue to dominate public space, even non-heteronormative space.

In 2002, however, several journalists from Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer (SEM) completed a follow-up study to a public perceptions study called “Homosexuality in Cuba,” first conducted between 1993 and 1994 by *Juventud Rebelde*. The journalists published some pieces that centered on the data concerning lesbians, and presented their data at the VII Latin American Congress on Sexology in Havana, Cuba in 2003.<sup>40</sup>

Concerning public perceptions of lesbians, the results are summarized as follows:

- 1) Lesbians are more socially alienated than gay men.
- 2) Prejudice towards lesbians is more common among the women sampled than the men.
- 3) Women are judged according to physical presentation more often than men. Men are more often judged by their personality and behavior.

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<sup>40</sup> The data was based on a sample of 300 from different regions of the island, the City of Havana, Villa Clara, Camaguey, Holguín and Santiago de Cuba. The sample was split by gender (51.6% Female, with 48.3% male). 40% completed high school, while 31.6% had a university degree. The age of the sample was divided as follows: 13.3% were 14-18 yrs, 20% were 19-24 years of age, 29.3% were 25-30 years of age, 19.3% were 31-45 years of age, while 18% were 45 or older.

- 4) People are more likely to find gay men more pleasant to be with, while they overwhelmingly find lesbians to be rude, aggressive, unfeminine, irresponsible and anti-social.
- 5) Those sampled are more likely to associate with a gay man than a lesbian.
- 6) Gay men are twice as likely to be socially accepted as lesbians (31% accept gay men, 14% accept lesbians).
- 7) While there has been a notable improvement in the social treatment of gay men between 1994 and 2003, there is virtually no change in the social treatment of lesbians. (Acosta, Castro et al 2003).

The central finding of this data is that there is an overwhelming distaste for lesbians, while gay men are becoming increasingly tolerated in Cuban society and are clearly more respected than lesbians. Sara Más writes in her piece “Cuba: Lesbianas, las más rechazadas,” published in the March 3-10<sup>th</sup>, 2003 edition of the *Servido de Noticias de la Mujer* [Special Report About Homosexuality in Cuba], that more than half of the people in the study say they treat homosexuals normally, but almost all of the women are disgusted by lesbians. The study indicates that lesbians in particular continue to be the most obscure and marginalized population within the homosexual population. Women’s attitudes towards lesbians, in particular, is an area that deserves much attention. It is very likely that given the narrow framework for performing acceptable femininity, and the high social cost of inadequately performing femininity, that women are more likely to police gender/sexual boundaries than men.

Smith and Padula (1996) note that, as of 1996, there are about seven colloquial terms for lesbians while there are at least twenty-four for gay men. In considering the official terms available to describe female sexuality, the point is driven home as there are only three official classifications: heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbiana. The notion of heterosexual, bisexual, and lesbiana publicly correspond to their English translations of

heterosexual, bisexual and lesbian. They correspond to the point that married women, who have sex with other women *and* their husbands, are not considered to be lesbians, among heterosexuals at least. Lesbian, for the most part, refers to a woman who rejects having any sexual and/or intimate relationships with men.

The notion of bisexuality is a recent category among the Cuban population (CENESEX Presentation 2004, interviews). It is still uncommon for people to think of themselves as bisexual. Most women think of themselves as gay or straight. Those women who realize they have an attraction to both men and women have a hard time reconciling their gender and sexual identities (CENESEX Presentation 2004, interviews). Whereas for men, there are more terms that describe male sexual diversity: homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, men who have sex with men (colloquially referred to as a *bugarrón*<sup>41</sup>), and *transvesti* (gay men who pass as women<sup>42</sup>). However while Cuban men are able to explore various aspects of their gender expression and sexuality, there is a stricter protocol on femininity. For this reason it is common for lesbians to express feelings of marginalization. Drawing from my ethnographic data, in the next chapter, I

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<sup>41</sup> While *bugarrones* do not consider themselves gay, and often are not considered gay (they are a *bugarrón*), there is no expectation of secrecy, or a notion of being closeted as in the U.S. American narratives concerning male-to-male sexuality. While a parent may be unhappy that their son is a *bugarrón*, they are not as devastated as they would be if their son were gay. What makes the *bugarrón* different from a man that is on the “DL” or “down-low” (a term that is currently popular in the United States) is that men who are on the DL are assumed to be gay or bi-sexual and in “the closet” about their sexuality. Implicitly embedded in the DL is a notion of secrecy, assumed homo/bi sexuality, and an assumption that those on the DL hide their sexuality through their heterosexual partnerships.

<sup>42</sup> The terms *transvesti*, *transgender* and *transsexual* are complicated terms within Cuba. *Transsexual* is a recent identity/term. It is primarily used in state sexological institutions, such as CENESEX, that engage international sexological institutions. Within Cuba’s general population, the term *transvesti* is in common usage. A *transvesti* is a gay man who passes as a woman. Of the *transvesti* with whom I have spoken ( $N > 30$ ), most are horrified about the prospect of changing their bodies (removing their penis) while some ( $N \leq 15$ ) were interested in the possibility of obtaining breast implants. This is also very different from sexological notions of *transvestism*, as *transvestites* tend to be heterosexual men who like to wear women’s clothing. Thus it is not clear to me to what extent or whether *transsexuals* and *transvestites* are present outside of state institutions.

consider how the themes discussed in this section play out in the lives of some women from Havana's lesbian population.

## Chapter IX

### **“Siempre Hay Lucha/There Is Always a Struggle”: Black Women, Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba**

My first trip to Cuba in 1998 was the first and only trip during which I stayed at a hotel, which was called the Hotel Vedado. I was frequently prevented from entering into my hotel. One day, the guard became so infuriated that he first began to yell that I should leave the hotel and then, when I continued walking into the hotel, he began to yell some unbelievably condescending things to me. I stood and watched him, listening to what he was saying. It was when he grabbed my arm to force me out of the hotel that I said in Spanish, with my American accent, “No entiendo. [I don’t understand.]” Horrified, the second guard stared at me in disbelief. “Ella es extranjera, [She’s a foreigner,]” he whispered. The aggressive guard released my arm. Assuming that I really had not understood what was being said, he smiled and held the door open for me. It was during that first trip to Cuba that I learned what a *jintera*, a sex worker, was. The guard felt comfortable in speaking that way because I was a young Black woman entering into a hotel, and this apparently led him to assume that I was a *jintera*.

During that same trip, I hired a taxi driven by a White male in his early 30s. Every day I came downstairs and he was sitting in the hotel lobby under the air conditioning. One day, I invited a friend, a prominent academic at the University of Havana who is a Black woman, into the bar area of the hotel for drinks. The hotel would not permit her to step foot into the lobby. Even after showing the guard her recently

published book, she was still refused entry. By this point, I had realized what was happening with the hotels. They would not permit Cubans to enter, in order to ensure that the tourists would not be bothered by thieves and beggars. However, the only people who were categorized as Cuban for the purposes of this restriction were people who were Black. Having realized the power I had as a *Black American* foreigner, I asked for the hotel manager. When the manager, who was White, as were the guards, arrived, I asked her why my friend was not allowed to enter. She mentioned that Cubans were not allowed into the hotel, as if this was acceptable in and of itself. Mentioning that my taxi driver had been allowed to come in and sit down under the air conditioning when he felt like it, I bluntly asked why they were being racist. She smiled and said there was no racism in Cuba, that there were no races, only Cuban. However, she did apologize for the guards and let my friend in.

Black women, in particular, have to negotiate several significant factors that contribute to the development of their identities, such as skin color *and* gender, material well-being, racial identity, racial appearance, bodily features, sexuality, and marital status. The combination of revolutionary prohibitions on discussions of race, in addition to Cuba's cultural taboos on discussions of race, has yielded multiple subjectivities for Black women. The prohibitions on discussions of racism allowed for racists to be racist without fear of social sanction. Within revolutionary discourse, Black women have moved from being maids to occupying some of the top professions in the nation, ranging from affluent scholars and scientists to foreign ambassadors. However, in everyday life, Black women are still assumed to be "not quite feminine" and as potential sexual deviants.

Being a young Black woman in contemporary Cuba is a very complex experience. Living in an urban center like Havana, one is exposed to many of the influential local and global ideological currents circulating within everyday life. One could participate in the hip-hop movement and see Black women who self-identify as Black, and who wear Afros and dreadlocks – uncommon hairstyles as they’re considered masculine in comparison with straight hair. While at the same time, at the same show, one could see Black women and Black men encouraging each other to work for “good hair,” either by straightening their hair, or wearing styles that hide the kinky nature of their hair.

Another ideology that frames the everyday experiences of Black women in contemporary Cuba is the persistence of a pre-revolutionary discourse that encourages darker-skinned Cubans to marry lighter-skinned Cubans as a way to improve one’s social status. This is linked to notions of cultural and racial advancement; the lighter one is, the better opportunities available to you. Another contemporary experience is that as a result of the economic downturn, Black people, no matter how educated they are, are increasingly discriminated against in employment. During the first thirty-five years of the revolution, material disparities between Blacks and Whites were virtually nonexistent. This was because the state’s near total domination of public institutions allowed for Black Cubans to have more opportunities to excel professionally and economically, though they did not make it into the higher ranks of the national power structure.

The goal of this chapter is to present some of the varying discourses and experiences that frame much of the everyday lives of Black women in Cuba. I do this to account for the effects of gender in social experiences of race, as masculinity and femininity are also ideologies that inform racial ideology. I will also draw upon

experiences with lesbian colleagues and friends. I will also note some differences are linked to class position. Sexuality and class are also key factors that structure Black women's experiences as they reinforce and inform race and gender. While I center much of my focus on the experiences of Black women, I also highlight some of the ways that race functions in the lives of men as well. While race operates differently in the lives of women and men, there are points of convergence. However, historically these points of convergence and the experiences of men are assumed to represent a universalized experience of race. I approach this differently. I am attempting to write in the experiences of Black women, which are often left out of universalized discussions of racism, and to draw from male experiences of racism in order to illustrate points of convergence.

In order to frame my discussion of racial identity among Black women, I describe racial identity among Black women in terms of the following five categories: "No Particular Racial Subjectivity," "The Racially Conscious Race Rejecters," "The Recently Racially Awakened," "Racially Conscious Actors," and "Black Feminist Subjectivity." In this chapter I focus primarily on the first four categories, with examples that follow. Black Feminist Subjectivity, as well as other aspects of contemporary Black women's experiences, will be addressed both in this chapter and the next chapter on *Las Krudas* and the varying feminist discourses circulating in Cuba's hip-hop community.

### **9.1 (1). "No Particular Racial Subjectivity"**

I use this term to describe people who reject race and/or gender as key factors that form and influence their lived experiences. Among women, this identity describes two perspectives. The first is that there is no difference between men and women, and they



instead embrace a “Cuban” subjectivity. This is manifested in the assumption that there is no difference between women and men - race is completely eluded in this perspective as Whiteness is embedded in the universalized notion of woman and man; and gender is eluded as masculinity is imbedded into notions of universal subjectivity. Therefore, the implication is that there are no racial and gender differences between people. However, for men, this identity centers on a *raceless* discourse: in other words, “people are people,” there are no races in Cuba, “only Cuban.” However, embedded within this discourse is a form of sexism that has been key to the development of this discourse. For “citizen” and “revolutionary” are defined according to the varying experiences (according to race, class, age, sexuality, ability, etc.) of male participation in the public sphere. Thus, women are still seen as a particular kind of citizen (mothers, wives, sexual partners) by men.

The second perspective is the belief that there is no difference between Black women and Black men. There are only “Black people.” These women do not see, nor do they want to believe, that any aspect of their social experiences is linked to a particularly “female” experience. Their identity is a “Black” identity. These women have a range of social experiences that are problematic and are certainly linked to culturally systemic racism that is compounded by how race and gender produce a particular set of expectations for Black women, but they do not link the social problems they experience to racial *and* gender discrimination. An experience which informed my understanding of this perspective arose during an interaction with Alexandria, a prominent professional in Havana.

One day in 2004, I went to Alexandria’s apartment for lunch. We had met a year

earlier at an academic conference in Cuba and had kept in touch. When we met, she was in her late 40's. Alexandria is a dark-skinned Black woman with a short S-curved Afro. We met to talk about gender and sexuality, particularly the experiences of lesbians in Cuba. During preliminary fieldwork in Havana conducted during the summers of 2004 and 2005, I had spoken mostly to White-identified lesbians, who shared a belief that if one worked hard enough and supported the revolution, one faced less homophobia. It was argued that if one were "the best" at whatever responsibility one had, being a lesbian would not matter. This belief was also present among many Black-identified Cubans including Black lesbian professionals like Alexandria. The women who believe this tend to be financially secure professionals; in my interactions with poor Black lesbians, I did not encounter this same belief. The latter group felt that they faced homophobia no matter how hard they worked.

Alexandria mentioned that her racial consciousness had recently begun to emerge at the end of the Special Period. She showed me pictures of her family. Though one of her parents is White, Alexandria herself is a dark-skinned woman with thick, tightly curled, processed hair. Her hair texture was an issue for her. She had dark skin, but if she had had "better hair," perhaps she could have claimed to possess some socially positive traits that would indicate she is biracial. Though she was perceived as Black socially, since she had a White parent she considered herself Mulato and only had White friends. One of Alexandria's best friends, she told me, was a White girl with whom she (Alexandria) had become obsessed. The girl had long straight hair, she had light skin, and Alexandria only wanted to be friends with her or girls that looked like her. She did not understand why she felt that way, but she did. She mentioned that she did not think

about race while growing up, except one time: after the revolution, her younger brother was sent to a school that was to be racially integrated.

Alexandria had not realized that she had attended an all-Black school until then. But even in that situation, she did not think much about race. She had her White friends – she said that during this period she had not even realized that they were all White– but she remembers this as a period in which she was very happy. She went to college, graduated, and went on to graduate school. During the 1980s she became established in her field, and had no reason to think about any social limitations, including gender or racial limitations.

However, when Alexandria stopped receiving promotions in the 1990s, during Cuba's Special Period, she did not understand what was happening. She knew that she was in line for a promotion and was surprised when it was not awarded to her. She thought that maybe she did not receive promotions because she just needed to work harder. When she continued to receive praises for all of her hard work, but no promotions, she began to wonder if there was some reason she did not receive them. She assumed that it must have been her own fault, even though she knew that people who were 'less qualified' than she were getting promotions.

One day a man who was known for making serious mistakes was given a promotion. Infuriated, she asked her supervisor why the guy had received the promotion. She was told that it was a political issue, her managers were forced to do it whether they liked it or not. The managers assured her that the next promotion would be hers, but that next promotion never came. Finally, a Black colleague told her it was because of racism. Initially she refused to believe it. It had never occurred to her that she was Black; plus,

she did not hate White people. She thought, as many Cubans believed at the time, that the Black colleague was the true racist. If he were not the true racist, then he would not have brought race up, because race was not an issue in Cuba. It was only an issue for people who made it an issue.

One day, Alexandria discussed her Black colleague's comments with a White friend, who was also a co-worker. To Alexandria's surprise, her White colleague agreed with her Black colleague. Alexandria was the best in the organization and she should have received the promotions, but given the difficulties of the Special Period, the organizations were giving the job-secure positions to White colleagues first. It was then that Alexandria realized that race was a factor in her everyday life.

While she was telling me this story, I asked her if she felt that she was socially marginalized. Her answer was, "No." She argued that there were no laws preventing her from being able to improve her life. When I asked if she believed that she was marginalized because of her sexuality, as she is also a lesbian, she said "No." She argued, "Clearly I am not going to go walking down the streets holding hands, kissing my partner, and yelling that I'm a lesbian. There are a lot of crazy people out there and not everyone has an 'elevated consciousness.'" Like her White lesbian peers, she believed that if she worked hard, she could achieve whatever dream she envisioned. Even though she acknowledged that she had been discriminated against, and claimed that she had come to terms with the idea of racism, Alexandria still believed that race and homophobia are not issues that affected her.

She argued that there were "crazy people" in any society and that as long as she did not go around flaunting her sexuality, she would not have any problems advancing in

society or any problems in the streets. Therefore, even in the face of what some outside of Cuba would describe as marginalization – she has experienced racial discrimination, she has not been able to advance in her field with the same ease as her White counterparts, and she does not feel comfortable expressing her sexuality publicly for fear of social sanction – Alexandria did not see herself as socially marginalized.

Alexandria’s class position lends some insight into her identity: for most of her life, her ability to accomplish her goals has not been affected by racism and homophobia. The revolutionary government’s staunchly anti-racist stance was institutionalized to such an extent that one could not explicitly talk about race. Black Cubans moved into professional ranks quickly (De La Fuente 2001). Like many educated Cubans, her experiences with discrimination were recent, and only seemed to have occurred during the Special Period. Black Cubans who attended revolutionary educational institutions and obtained their professional degrees have the status markers of “Whiteness,” though they were not White, and were not treated as White as, perhaps, a very light-skinned Mulato would be. However, they certainly were not treated as “Black” as a poor Black Cuban is often treated. They were allowed to participate in predominantly White social activities.

Among Black professional and wealthy Cubans, “race” is hardly ever specifically discussed. “Black” tends to refer to darker-skinned Cubans who seem to be materially poor and poorly educated. In essence, because of their class position in post-1959 Cuba, many middle-class and upper-middle-class Cubans have not had to contend with race, as there are very few limitations in their ability to achieve their goals *professionally*.

## 9.2 (2). The Racially Conscious Race Rejecters

I use this term to describe those who have a Black identity and choose to reject it. The people in this group are fully aware of their racial status; they were raised with a racialized consciousness. They are different from the “No Particular Racial Subjectivity” or the “Recently Racially Aware” because these two identities reflect the experiences of people who sincerely did not know that they were Black. While they may have been consciously aware of their skin color or of “White people,” they never thought of themselves as *raced*. These cases are illustrated by my experiences with Alexandria and other women who have conveyed similar sentiments.

“The Racially Conscious Race Rejecters” are different from the “Racially Conscious Actors” because the latter do not question their racial identity, but strategically try to pursue a social agenda in which they can successfully manage the social significance of their race as a means to achieve some form of social advancement. “The Racially Conscious Race Rejecters” also have a racial identity, but reject their racial identity for several reasons I discuss in this section.

There are three perspectives that stand out from my experiences in Cuba. I see them as the following: there are Black people who psychologically want to be disassociated from Blackness - i.e. they do not want to be associated with the poor social status associated with Blackness, or the person may be consciously rejecting Blackness to make a political critique. In the case of the former, this may be manifested in people who undertake actions such as describing oneself as Mulato even though one is unquestionably interpolated as a Black person in nearly all social settings. These people may also show prejudice towards other Black people or have self-hate; for example, a

person in this category might think of herself as ugly because of her body (hair, skin color, facial features, thighs, hips etc.). Often, she/he is the person who has decided to walk in the hot sun with an umbrella so as not to "get *too* dark."

Racial identity is a very politicized topic in Cuba. While some Cubans may disassociate from being classified in a lower racial group, perhaps for psychological reasons, one's articulation of one's racial identity is politicized. Rejection of race is linked to a rejection of American neocolonial and Spanish colonial discourses. Many Black Cubans reject race because they want to focus on national unity. They feel that people of African descent, who have never been in the minority in Cuba, have been the key to the development of Cuban culture. In essence, Cuba was as much an African colony as much as it was a European colony. This discourse is largely a pre-revolutionary discourse. It was linked to the Cuban nation's efforts at eliminating racism and creating a sense of unity among Cuba's large Afro-descendent and small White population. It was in this pre-revolutionary context that White fears of Cuba's large Black population led to the notion of Blacks actually being the racists: there was an underlying fear that Blacks secretly desired to over-throw the White population in a Haitian-style revolution.

In the post-revolutionary period, this discourse combined with the revolutionary "raceless society" discourse. This produced an emergent discourse in which racism or a racial identity became associated with foreign influence or was associated with a pre-existing bourgeois mentality. One area in which pre-revolutionary and revolutionary discourse inform one another is in debates surrounding the term "Afro-Cuban," as was the case when the term was debated from 1990 to 2004. These debates centered on whether or not Black Cubans should refer to themselves as "Afro-Cuban." The term is

seen as a foreign term that was superimposed onto Cuba via American racial discourse. The American assumption, according to this argument, is that just as there are “African Americans,” there must be “Afro-Cubans.”

The argument is that the term Afro-Cuban, as opposed to simply Cuban, creates a dynamic whereby Black Cubans are seen as particular, foreign, or somehow outside the notion of the Cuban nation. In an effort to recognize the tremendous role that people of African descent have played in the formation of Cuban history and culture, these Cubans reject any racial specification as a means of challenging the power dynamics embedded within language. One key aspect of this discourse is the myth that African Americans suffered a harsher form of slavery than Cubans – one would assume that chattel slavery in whatever form was fairly harsh. But the belief is that African Americans are more estranged from their “African culture” than are Black Cubans.

While it is true that Cuban Blacks have more recent ties to their African heritage – slavery only ended in Cuba in 1898, arguing that African Americans have lost their culture, as opposed to seeing *American* culture as a product of African influences, buys into American racial discourse which suggests that Black Americans contributed very little to the formation of the nation. The effect is that the “all-American” things that Cubans embrace – ranging from rock music, to jazz, to Black nationalist discourse, to peanut butter, to hip-hop– are completely disassociated from Black Americans. Underground hip-hop artists imagine Black Americans to be what they are trying to avoid: a population that lacks recognition for its role in the cultural development of a nation, apart from being enslaved and subjected to racism.



Nonetheless, while debates over the term “Afro-Cuban” were common during the 1990s, the discourse has since changed and the term Afro-Cuban has gained greater acceptance among racially conscious actors. The term is seen as a way to capture the specificity of Black Cubans’ contribution to Cuban culture. It also makes visible the issue of racism and its continued importance. The term Afro-Cuban also invokes the African heritage, and Cuba’s connection to the pro-Black equality movements that have occurred throughout the Americas. Thus, the term Afro-Cuban has become a key term in the (re)emerging discourses critiquing racism and social equality. The Afro-Cuban debates on the island have largely shifted to a focus on how to end prejudice and discrimination against darker-skinned Cubans.

### **9.3 (3). The Racially Awakened**

The “Racially Awakened” describes those who have developed a racial consciousness through a consciousness-raising experience. This is an experience in which one becomes aware of racial discrimination, and discourses concerning racism and racial inequality resonate with one’s social experiences. Those who are Racially Awakened are usually younger (about 45 and younger) Cubans, of the middle or upper classes, who have come to realize that racism is a problem in Cuba, and that it directly affects their lives. This shift in perspective often results from an explicit incident in which the social limits to Blacks’ full acceptance as Cuban citizens has been demonstrated. Many of these moments began with the generational differences in the 1980s, when the first generation of highly-educated Cubans began graduating from revolutionary institutions, only to find limited work in their fields.

For many who graduated from revolutionary institutions in the 1990s, in the midst

of the Special Period, Cuban society already had to contend with two generations of Cubans born and raised under the revolution, who had begun to see the limitations of the promises of the revolution. They were the first generation to not do better than their parents who had greatly benefited from the revolution. In this context, many of the members of these generations started to realize that a lot of their limitations were linked to persistent racism, sexism and homophobia, though these manifested in various ways.

An example of someone from the most recent generation to come of age and feel this frustration is a friend named Marta. I remember a discussion that Marta and I had one night when we were walking home together in the fall of 2005. We walked all the way from Old Havana out to El Vedado. We stopped at the Che memorial on 23 y Avenida de Los Presidentes; this is where we parted ways every night. Marta started talking about the conversation which a group of us had had earlier in the night; the group had been composed of Black, White, and Mulato people who were also of varying class positions. The conversation started because someone was in a bad mood and the response from one of their friends was, “Get that Chinaman off your back!”

Apparently when one is having a bad day, or having bad luck, one uses this expression which means, “Cheer up!” or “Gee, you’re having a really bad day!” Shocked, I said, “That’s pretty racist.” “Cuba’s not PC [politically correct] like the U.S.,” someone said, and everyone chuckled. It was then that I realized that I had never heard any racial slurs about White people. I asked the group – there were about ten of us – “What are some other racial slurs?” They quickly started naming them one after another. Of all the slurs they mentioned, they never mentioned any about White people. So I asked, “What racial slurs do you have for White people?” They could not think of

any. Their expressions got serious, at that moment they seemed to realize that their inability to name racial slurs for *everyone* indicated their level of internalized racism. They could not think of *one* slur. We sat processing the particular power dynamic this highlighted. Embarrassed, one of my Black Cuban colleagues decided to ask me in a challenging tone, “Well, do you have any in the U.S?” What ensued was a long and interesting conversation about race in Cuba and in the U.S. We compared notes.

It was at that point that I began to understand a comment another Black friend made a few years earlier, namely that: “Everyone knows that White people exist, but no one is sure whether Blacks or Mulatos exist.” Given the silence around race in Cuba, where equality meant “not seeing race” or not seeing those who have been racialized, racial discourse continued and critiques of racial discourses halted. White people are still the standard against which everyone else is measured; they are taken for granted as simply “human.” Everyone else is “different,” “funny,” “less than” or “other.” Whites as a particular racial group positioned within unequal power relations, or even as a group with flaws, imperfections, insanities, or even weirdness, are simply not often imagined, thought of, or named. In essence, Whiteness as a racial category infused with power has yet to be critiqued or demystified within the Cuban academy. The focus, positive or negative, of race and social ills continues to be addressed via an analysis of Blacks and sometimes Mulatos.

Marta, who is Black and 27 years old, was intrigued by the conversation we had earlier. Marta was just starting to develop a Black identity. She had never thought of what it meant to be Black in Cuba, until she started working within the hip-hop community as a lawyer and met several Black American political exiles on the island.

Around this same period, she and her mother lost some of their material privileges as a result of the Special Period – most importantly, for her, they lost their car. All of Marta’s friends are White or Mulato. One day at her home, she showed me pictures of her quincera (an elaborate birthday party celebrating a girl’s 15<sup>th</sup> birthday). There were only three Black people in the pictures, Marta, her Mom, and a cousin. In all of the pictures of every major event in her life, everyone was White. As a young adult, out of her group of twenty or so friends, there were two other Black people who were also upper class Black Cubans, but the three rarely hung out together.

“So you think that Cubans are racist?” Marta asked while we stood in front of Che. “Yes, I do.” I said. “How can someone be racist if they don’t know any better?” she asked. “Just because you’re not consciously racist does not mean that you’re not racist.” I continued, “Racism is the belief –whether conscious or not – and the collective actions based on those beliefs. The worst racist person is probably the one who doesn’t realize that they are racist but acts out racist ideology. Like someone who works in the tourist industry who never ever thinks that a Black person is professional enough, but doesn’t realize that they are never going to think that because they think that an unstraightened Afro is ugly and unprofessional.” She became flustered, “Yeah, but that does not mean that they are *racist*. They could be very nice people, they just don’t realize that they are racist.” I shook my head no and made a grimace. She started becoming more upset. She continued, “Maybe they are not racist if they don’t know it. They could be very nice people. But just because they don’t know doesn’t mean that they are racist people. They just don’t know any better.” She was pacing in front of the Che monument. “Look, Marta. I don’t understand what is going on right now and why you’re getting so

upset. Could you help me understand what is going on?” I asked. She calmed down, walked over to me; she looked me in the eyes and slowly said, “Look, my friends call me ‘Nigger’ [she used the English word Nigger]. They are not racist. They just don’t know any better.” She sat down brusquely in front of Che.

It finally clicked for me. I realized what was going on. She was still struggling and trying to process her identity and her position in relation to her White and Mulato friends whom she had known all of her life. For many Cubans, racism did not happen in Cuba. It happens in the United States. For many, including Black Cubans, only Americans and possibly Europeans were racist, not their friends or family members.

While watching Marta sitting and processing in front of the monument of Che, I thought about how I was raised with a particular critical racial consciousness. Because there is a vibrant public counter-discourse concerning racism in the U.S., I was so used to thinking about these issues that I easily considered racism to be one of many possibilities for odd social interactions. Also, within the hip-hop community, people talked about race so much, and I was so used to hearing stories from people’s parents about persistent racism that I started to forget that there were still a lot of Black Cubans with other subjectivities that were starkly different – even if they professed “Blackness.”

For me, the hip-hop community functioned symbolically. Before the revolution came to dominate official discourse and counter-discourse, Black Americans and Black Cubans participated in intellectual and cultural exchanges with each other, as well as with Black people from other countries throughout the Americas. Fidel Castro continued this symbolically with his yearly visits to Harlem; so did prominent African American actors and artists when they made periodic visits to the island. But those visits, until the

emergence of the hip-hop movement, were restricted to symbolic actions at the national level; internationally, it gives the impression that these exchanges persist. However, the younger generations of Black Cubans were raised without this conscious memory, many of them were shocked to learn about the decisive role that Black Cubans had played in their own history. However, with the many different ideologies, memories and identities that people possessed within such a small space, I realized that there were still people coming to the hip-hop scene seeking to make sense of their experiences, still in the process of understanding how race affected their lives.

One effect of the embargo and the hegemony of revolutionary discourse was the creation of a discursive void in accounting for racialized subjective experiences. For those who were not raised with residual critical race discourses that were reproduced in families and other social networks, the rapid changes in Cuba allowed for a Black consciousness to develop from individual experiences or through interactions with foreigners who perhaps named a feeling which many Cubans identified with, even if they could not name it themselves. In the case of Marta, she hung out with a lot of foreigners and was very good friends with radical, Black American exiles living in Cuba. But it was when I realized how upset Marta was that I remembered the context in which I was located. Not everyone had been raised with or had yet comfortably developed a critical racial consciousness, if they had one at all. There are many for whom it is an emergent identity, while others believe Black people have already won their battle for full equality. For some Cubans the issue is clear: Cuba has a problem with racism. However, for Marta, this idea was new to her subjective experience, new to her interpretation of her reality. So, even though there are some who may talk of racism, they are still struggling

to understand what that means for their lives. For Marta and many other Cubans in the process of developing a racial identity while critically thinking about their experiences with racial prejudice, this process leads to an existential crisis.

Developing such an identity seems to be a major psychological relief as the artists have found a framework in which to make sense of the difficult and depressing social experiences they faced. The development of a consciousness that linked racism and felt social oppression, has led to a sense of agency and purpose for underground hip-hop movement participants. Artists, for example, felt empowered to make a change once they had a conceptualization of what they were struggling against. But at the same time, the very foundation of their subjective identities and their social networks were also called into question.

But during that conversation with Marta, I decided to drop the discussion. “I see what you mean,” I said. I didn’t want to press it any further. I felt this was something she needed to process for herself. I also felt this was something that was bigger than I could really fully understand. So I left it alone. It was a moment in which I realized that what is happening in Cuba’s Black community is much deeper, more complex, and more intense than any non-Cuban, myself included, can even begin to grasp.

In terms of my own experiences hanging out with Marta, there were numerous situations where I felt that the subtle racism she faced was painfully obvious. Though I did not explicitly point these moments out to her, there were times when I caught her eye and she would make a face and shrug; she was aware of it too. Whenever she brought up racial issues that bothered her, I decided that my role as a friend and as a responsible researcher was to provide a listening ear, support, and affirmation while she struggled to

process these issues herself. For example, she had a hard time finding a female partner even though she is widely acknowledged to be an exceptionally attractive Black woman. She is tall (about 5'11") and thin with meticulously-maintained dreadlocks. Her deep voice, reminiscent of Kathleen Turner, and her hipster eyeglasses and style, combined with her obsession with slender mini-cigars definitely gave her a chic, mod style. While I passed as Cuban, Cubans rarely spoke to her in the street as they often assumed she was a wealthy Black tourist, particularly when she sported ripped jeans and torn t-shirts – a European retro-80's style.

Even with Marta's class and chic style, every time we were out, someone always found a problem with her appearance. At one party we were at, out of about one hundred Cuban youth, there were about five Black people (Marta and myself included). Her friends walked over to her and commented on how good she looked, but told her she needed to lose some weight. At first I thought they were joking and I laughed, loudly. But they were serious. At least ten of Marta's friends walked by and slapped her on her stomach and called her a fatty. Shocked, I looked at her. "Are they serious, do they really think you're fat?" I asked. "Yeah, but it's the truth. I still need to lose a little more weight." "Where?" I asked. "Right here." She arched her back forward, and then reached down to her stomach (she was wearing an 80's-style, ripped t-shirt that was cut in half to make a crop top). She bent her torso and struggled to pinch together some skin on her abdomen. "See, right here," she said. I was taken aback. I had to take a step back and process what was going on. I was confused because one of the women who came over and called Marta a "fatty" was a Black woman. This woman was not nearly as thin as Marta; she had a larger butt and was curvier than Marta. But when I looked at her



again, I realized what was going on from her long, loosely-curved hair, the lightness of her skin, and the fact she was linked arm in arm with her White friend during the entire event. She was Mulata so she was not as harshly scrutinized.

It was a constant effort, on my part, to not get frustrated and angry with all of the comments Marta received when we were out with her friends in White- and Mulato-dominated spaces. But the critiques of “You look good but...” were painfully frequent for me. At some point, when I had been in Cuba for over a month, the comments began to bother me. The constant comments I received on the bus, in the streets, in taxis, when visiting friends at home, in research institutions: I started becoming self-conscious and I wondered what people thought of me. And one day I realized it when one woman felt comfortable enough to randomly poke my belly. But I also knew that because I was American, I was exempted from the verbalized scrutiny; at least that was what I kept telling myself.

Nonetheless, the development of “No Particular Racial Subjectivity” and “Racially Awakened” identities are heavily intertwined with class. Poor Black Cubans from poor parts of Havana are very suspicious of White people. Professionals who grew up in poorer areas, including people who benefited from the revolutionary educational system, understood that they had to work harder. Some professionals with emergent identities recalled some of their experiences of being exposed to class difference as a result of their education. One way that people began to rethink their situation was in higher educational institutions, when they realized that White peers who could afford better shoes, school materials, and those who were lighter-skinned and/or had a certain “language” or way of speaking when answering questions, did not have to work as hard to succeed.

One night in 2004, a Puerto-Rican colleague – who is light-skinned and considered White in Puerto Rico and Cuba, but “Latina” in the United States – and I went to visit a married couple in one of the poorer neighborhoods in Havana. The wife, Angela, was Mulata, and her husband, Maximilo, was a Black doctor. We arrived at the apartment and Angela’s cousin, a Black academic, was visiting. We sat at the table and talked about my project. Everyone was fascinated by it. We started talking about Cuban coffee, and it was at that point that Angela offered to make a snack. My Puerto-Rican colleague decided to help Angela in the kitchen. The conversation about coffee continued until the two were out of earshot. In the middle of my musings about coffee, Maximilo, the doctor, interrupted me. He grabbed my arm, “Tanya. You know that here in Cuba, we Black people have to work very hard. We have to work 100 times harder than Whites.” The academic scooted his chair closer and peeked into the kitchen to make sure that the other two were out of earshot. “Yeah, Tanya,” he whispered, “we like you because we can tell that you are very serious and you work very hard. But it’s always like that. Black people no matter where you are, have to always work to be the best, way better than...” Celiany and Angela returned to the living room to put some food on the table. The doctor and the academic sat straight up in their chairs and smiled. “Yey!!! The food’s here!” they said.

Angela left something in the kitchen. Celiany glared at me, she knew something was going on; she wanted to stay, but Angela requested her help in the kitchen. When they were out of earshot, the two men leaned over again, “Don’t believe the stuff that you hear here.” They said, “Life for Black people here is ‘fula’ [bullshit]. It’s the same ol’ thing that Black people everywhere have to deal with. It’s not very different here.” Hearing

the two women preparing for their return from the kitchen, the men both sat back in their chairs and started talking about the new Cuban TV station. There were now three stations to choose from.

In another instance, I was hanging out with another young woman who is very dark-skinned with dreadlocks, who is a performance artist. One night after she and I were stopped four times and asked for our ID cards, we decided to take a break and sit in a park near the Capitolio. “You know, when I walk down the streets, they yell “nigger” at me.” As a bohemian-type performance artist, she dresses like a hippie. Instead of being seen as an artist, like her White peers who are also artists, she is seen as unkempt and poor. “It is this kind of stuff that makes me hate my country,” she said. What is interesting is White and multiracial Cubans’ usage of the word “Nigger.” Just as there are residual critical race and pan-African discourses among some Black Cubans, there are residual White supremacist discourses among White *and Mulato* Cubans.

In fact, the rock music scene in Cuba is a rallying point for what some Cuban colleagues have referred to as literally “White trash [basura blanca].” For some hip-hop artists, rock music *is* racist. This is definitely linked to America’s commercialization of rock music as White, “all-American music.” At first I could not believe it, until one night at an underground lesbian party. At this particular party, the “look-out person” - designated with watching for the police to make sure that the party was not shut down - was a member of the rock scene. When we passed by her, she smiled, said hello and gave us kisses. When we continued walking, one of my Black friends whispered, “One time at a rock festival she walked around yelling “White Power! [in English].” These White supremacist discourses are certainly linked to Cuba’s colonial and neocolonial

legacies. Notably, Cuba also had its own chapters of the KKK (Helg 1995).

In these last few examples, several dynamics are operating. In the case of the doctor and the Black academic, they have become disillusioned. While taking advantage of the opportunities available to them, they have come to realize that there is a double standard, one that they can easily talk about. They continue to work hard, because they want to be successful and contribute to their country. However, they articulate a frustrating reality that they hope will change: “Even in a situation where award and advancement is based on merit, some have to work harder to prove that they are worthy of merit.” (personal communication with a Cuban MD, 2004)

The cases of Marta, the artist who dresses like a hippie, and the racist rocker, demonstrate another difficult dynamic. There is clearly awareness of the racism embedded in the discourses that they use. I say this because they have never attempted to call me any of those terms – not in person, at least. In fact, one of Marta’s friends asked if it was true that if one called an African American “Black,” that “could get you killed.” At the same time, what is clear is that the meaning is not *exactly* the same. However, these racialized discourses and the persistence of racist discourses (i.e., that Black people are violent, smell funny, are ugly, etc.) illustrate that there is certainly a significant amount of power embedded in Cuba’s racial system. This power affects people’s ability to enjoy the same modicum of respect and material well-being that is available to White or light Cubans.

Intertwined with the racial and the residual racist discourses in Cuba are notions of class status, which continue to operate symbolically, even if one has more material wealth in the contemporary period. The Black taxi driver, for example, who comes from

a family that was possibly poor and did not attend formal educational institutions before the revolution, but who makes more money than the Black lawyer, is still seen as of a “lower cultural status” than the Black lawyer. However, the White taxi driver who is uneducated and comes from a family that may have been poor before the Revolution and did not attend formal educational institutions, will be seen as of a higher cultural status than the Black professional who has obtained a high level of social capital *and* who also has access to significant material resources.

#### **9.4 (4). Racially Conscious Actors**

The development of this racial identity is based on residual racial discourses that circulate within the family and/or community. Women who are “Racially Conscious Actors” are raised with a critical race lens with which to interpret their social world. They analyze their social experiences with a racial consciousness, and see race as a key formative factor that they must contend with in everyday interactions. For example, one day in 2005, a Black colleague asked me to help her with her application for a foreign scholarship. The application had to be submitted in English. I helped her fill out the application. “Tanya, thank you so much for helping me with that application,” she said. “Not a problem. Your English is very good. You shouldn’t worry at all. Even though we should be practicing it right now,” I said. We both chuckled. “I know. I’m just so worried you know? I really want this scholarship. I LOVE this topic and to study in [foreign metropolis] is such a great opportunity,” she said and then smiled. We walked into the hallway. It was busy, people were walking around everywhere, and I thought maybe a conference or possibly a symposium had just adjourned. “I have to go pick up my son,” she said, realizing that it was the end of the workday. “You have a son?” I

asked, surprised. We had only chatted two or three times. She was trying to help me jump the administrative hurdles necessary to enroll in a research program at a Havana-based institution. “Yeah, I do,” she said. “Oh, he’s so lucky! He’s going to get to travel with his Mom,” I said excitedly. “Oh, I didn’t apply for his visa,” she said quickly. “Really, so you’re going to be away from him for like six months?” I asked. “Tanya,” she began, “you know how it is... all the bureaucratic hurdles. It’ll take months for everything to get approved and by the time it gets through they will say no anyway, and they will probably justify it by saying I am coming back soon anyway. You know Cuba loves its children.” “Yeah,” I said trying to show that I sympathized with her situation. “Besides, if and when they say no, or if it takes too long, I don’t want to have to deal with any questions from the people in [foreign metropolis]. It could make us look really bad. And you know how the Revolution is. They always want to show off us Black women to show how successful the Revolution has been,” she said flippantly and smiled. But just as quickly as she smiled, she caught herself. Caution flickered across her eyes and she became tense. She caught my shocked look. *Damnit!* I thought.

I didn’t officially know that bit of information, but it had always been strongly implied, so as a researcher, when I heard it from such a prominent Black woman, I immediately began processing. It was a moment in which I could tell she was remembering and thinking, “*Yes, Tanya is a Black woman, but she is still American.*” I picked up on her hesitation and wanted to maintain the connection. “Yeah,” I said quickly, “You guys are ambassadors everywhere, and I saw a Black woman the other day that I heard was an ambassador to Vietnam!” She relaxed, “Yeah, you know what I mean!” She smiled again. “Well,” I said, “anywhere we are, there’s a struggle... No es

facil! [It's not easy!]." I smiled and gave her a hug. "No es facil. Black women, we always have to struggle," she chimed in. "I know you have to get back to work, and if you ever need any help with anything else, just call me! Hopefully we'll see each other again soon!" I said and gave her another hug. "It was a pleasure," she said. "Equally," I said. She turned and started walking towards her office. I remember the sound of her heels clicking against the marble floor. Shocked and impressed that another person felt comfortable enough with me to break code, I walked down the stairs and out the door into the hot sun. I needed time to put some very important pieces together.

I continued reflecting on experiences such as these years after they occurred. Now I am at the dissertation stage, and I am piecing some of these experiences together with other conversations to help highlight this central point: there are many Black women who are very aware of what they represent in Cuba and realize it to be a factor they have to consider in their lives. While in pre-revolutionary Cuba, Black and Mulata women's bodies came to represent social progress through their reproductive capabilities – they could lighten the Black race and lighten the island, in post-revolutionary Cuba their bodies have come to represent progress in another respect - they were considered the sector of the population that had been largely relegated to domestic labor and sex work. The Revolution argued that the revolutionary process had succeeded in helping Black women to become strong leaders within Cuban social and political institutions.

Nonetheless, both are discourses that many ambitious Black women are aware of. These are also discourses that Black women must navigate and negotiate in order to obtain their vision of success. While the revolutionary discourse concerning Black women is an emergent discourse, the discourse relating the advancement of the race to

the lightness of skin is an older pre-revolutionary discourse.

I remember another time that I experienced these discourses in play. For me, this was probably one of the more personally influential experiences that I had in Cuba. It occurred during the period when I was meeting Celianny, a doctoral student at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, at the apartment where she was renting a room. She was sharing a place with an older Black woman who was about 68-years-old. This woman was really nice and really lonely. She reminded me of one of the babysitters I had when I was living in North Carolina. In all Black towns like the one my family lived in, there were older, retired women who took on the care-giving (and/or the business of caring) for the young children of working adults.

There was something about her that reminded me of an older, “old school,” southern Black woman. It was something I was trying to understand for myself; I continuously tried to understand why I had made this connection in my mind. There were moments when something she did would strike a chord. For example, she stayed awake into the late hours of the night, looking out the window, suspiciously, while waiting for Celianny to return home every night. She wanted to make sure that someone was not waiting “to rob Celianny or hit her in her head” – even though she lived in an extremely well-lit, hotel area in El Vedado. She lived in one of the few tourist areas not prone to crime. Hearing her make that comment one night, and seeing her wait in front of her window every night, was jarring for me. It was something that my grandmother would say and do in a similar context. My grandmother, when she lived in North Carolina, was a watchful woman who knew all of the gossip in her small town. She was always peering out the window, watching what was happening outside, and always



reminding us to be careful so that no one would “grab us and hit us in our heads.” That kind of watchful eye and knowledge of gossip is very customary in the Southern Black communities that I am familiar with. For middle class and affluent families in these communities, it was important to keep a clean house, to always dress well, and to always present one’s best appearance because the stakes were higher for Black folks. Another thing we were told growing up was to always wear our best clothes and that included clean underwear and socks. If there was ever an accident, God forbid, and one had on dirty socks, it would affect the medical attention that one would receive. Plus, if one’s house was dirty, everyone in the town would know.

But there I was visiting with this older Black woman in a major international city, Havana, while trying to make sense of what I was experiencing, what I was feeling. Her house was meticulous. Everything was clean and in its place, including her fake flowers and her plastic doily table cloth. She was short, about 4’11, dark-skinned, and wore a jet-Black, straight-haired wig that was cut in a 1960s style bob. Every time the doorbell rang, she reached for the wig, sometimes putting it on backwards. Even though she may have been wearing her housecoat and house shoes, one thing was certain: her hair was always “right.”

That was another way in which she reminded me of my grandma, who also wore a wig and did the same thing. Even if it is just to look out the window, she had her hair on. But this woman lived alone with her light-skinned son who is severely physically disabled. I used to watch as she picked up this 32-year-old grown man, who was about 6’0 and weighed at least 150 pounds, with ease. Every day she took him out of his chair. She washed him. She fed him. She talked to him. He responded happily to the attention

with grunts and screeches. He was certainly “there,” mentally; she said he had the mental capacity of a 12-year-old. I imagined he must have still gotten frustrated sometimes.

Even though I was tall, fat (in Cuban terms), and had a huge Afro, this woman took a liking to me. I seemed very responsible, hard-working, very put together according to her. She started to ask me to fix things around the house. Eagerly I helped her out – for some reason I was hard pressed for her approval. Perhaps it was because I was raised to respect older people – especially older Black women who clearly have worked hard their whole life. I was taught to respect older people at all costs, to be patient, and to listen to their life stories, which I actually enjoyed.

One day, while I waited for Celianny to get dressed, this older woman decided to show me her pictures. She showed me wedding pictures of her husband who was a White Cuban man. In the pictures he had a Desi Arnaz style, which I imagine must have been popular for men like him during this period, the early 1960s. She was so proud of her pictures. In the pictures, it was clear that she was happy because she had married a lighter-skinned man. This hunch would be confirmed later in our conversation. From the pictures, outfits, and poses of her parents, she definitely seemed to be from a middle class/upper middle class Black family: their hair and clothes were meticulous, their posture was perfectly composed, hands in the center of their laps. She was very happy in the photos and so were her parents. While I’m sure that the happiness was related to the event, the fact that their daughter was getting married, I imagine they must also have been very happy that they had married their family into a “higher racial group” via their daughter. The future looked bright for all those involved. With a daughter who would be financially taken care of by her new White family, her parents would be taken care of by

their lighter-skinned grandchildren.

I didn't see any pictures of her Black extended family, only her parents and one picture of her brother. I wondered if she became distant from them as she further integrated herself into Whiteness. She did mention that many of her new family members had left for Miami in the early 1960s. She missed them tremendously, as she used to go out and party only with her new sister-in-law and her new cousins – all White. I imagined that she was probably never really mean to her extended Black family. She probably just did not have time to hang out with them. Perhaps they understood her position. No one called the house.

She only had one child, her son. I asked her what happened to her husband. "He died," she said quickly. She did not want to talk about it. I got the feeling that it was probably because of her son's condition. She mentioned that he drank a lot and I assumed he was probably an alcoholic and probably blamed her for their son's condition. That was probably why she did not want to talk much about him.

She caught me pondering what happened. She decided to alleviate my curiosity. She started by saying, "You know, the baby was healthy. The problem started when he was born. They used the surgical clamps to pull him out by his head." She looked at me. She did not blink. "I thought that was strange, but what could I do? But the delivery caused brain damage." She stared at me blankly and continued. "You know that White doctor didn't care, I was just another Black woman to him. I tried to fight it. I tried to get help raising him. I was so angry. But they just didn't care. There's your Revolution, I had to figure out a way to take care of him all by myself. They didn't care what they did to me, I was just another Black woman to them." Her only light-skinned son was

someone she had to take care of for the rest of her life; he will never be able to take care of her. I can't imagine what she must think about when she gets up and looks at him every day, the history and the potential that he represented.

It was in the middle of that thought that I smelled a familiar smell. A comforting and horrifying smell at the same time – it was the smell of burnt hair and melted petroleum jelly. I heard the grease popping on the stove. I looked up just as she was coming from the kitchen, I saw the steam circulating up into the air from its tip – it was a hot comb. “Be still, I can make your hair look really nice.” I jumped up from the table. “No!” I backed away. Shocked and embarrassed, I never thought I would have this moment ever again. Growing up I got my hair permed straight to avoid it. When I went natural, I knew I would never feel THAT pain again, hot oil against my scalp, accidental burns and comb-shaped scars. The moment I saw her, I had flashbacks to those hot summer days in my mother's, grandmother's, and aunt's kitchens in Maryland and North Carolina. “I really appreciate your offer, but I cannot do this,” I said, moving away from her. “Why?” She asked sincerely. I felt bad, because this was one time I knew I had to be less accommodating to this older lady, but our bonding stopped at the hot comb. The thought, the vision of it... I headed for the front door. As I reached for the knob, Celiany came out of the bedroom. “I'm ready,” she said. I looked at her and quickly said, “Let's go!” We left.

These two women's lives are impacted by their awareness of the significance of race in their lives. As strategic actors, they look for ways to manage their positions as Black women within Cuba's racial hierarchies. Interestingly, they both possess a Black woman's subjectivity. One of the reasons, I believe, why they, as well as other Black

Cubans, possess such a Black subjectivity, is because of their transatlantic perspective of race. A comment I heard often, which initially surprised me, was, “For us Black people, there is always a struggle.”

### **9.5 ¿Y Que Paso Con OREMI?/ And What Happened with OREMI? Black Lesbian Subjectivity in Contemporary Cuba**

In the summer of 2005, lesbian activists worked with the Sexual Diversity Section (Sección de Diversidad Sexual) of the NGO, the Society for the Multidisciplinary Study of Sexuality (Sociedad Cubana Multidisciplinaria de Estudios de la Sexualidad (SOCUMES)). This NGO is situated in the National Center for Sex Education (Centro Nacional de Educación Sexual (CENESEX)). CENESEX is a state-run institution that is part of the Cuban Ministry of Health. OREMI was an attempt to address the limited social space allocated to women by starting the first state-sponsored lesbian group in late summer 2005.

For two months, CENESEX sponsored parties, art events, therapy sessions, and other events for lesbians to meet other lesbians. Unfortunately CENESEX was not prepared for the more than 150-200 women who took advantage of having a safe, lesbian-centered space away from the home, their family, and their neighbors. From the beginning of OREMI’s activities, residents living near event locations complained about women holding hands and kissing in public. As the group grew in popularity, and to the horror of CENESEX employees and the lesbian activists, many women also took the opportunity of a safe space to have sex with partners in hidden corners and on rooftops.

This put CENESEX in an awkward position: As a state institution, it had a mandate to provide the services necessary for the social acceptance and support of sexual and gender minorities; but as a state institution, they were also expected to police public

morality. Ill-equipped to deal with lesbians' need for social space and unwilling to endure public reaction to seeing non-heteronormative female sexuality, CENESEX narrowed the scope of its lesbian programs to private counseling services in small groups of twenty-five women or less. This has been accepted as the unofficial end of the group. Officially, the institution claimed that the group OREMI ended as a result of in-fighting among its lesbian leadership.

Lack of safe public space for socializing is a harsh reality for Cuban lesbians. Though there are virtually no specifically *gay clubs* in Cuba, gay men still populate public spaces and often turn public spaces, such as the walk-way along the Malecón (Havana's coastal highway), theaters, book release parties, and other events into informal cruising places. Such *public* cruising spaces for lesbians are virtually non-existent. Women depend on informal events in the home, or frequently attend underground lesbian parties. One has to call a secret phone number in order to find the party's location. This number changes as the locations of the parties change. In comparison, gay male parties are easily found; one simply goes to the corner, park, restaurant, section of the Malecón, or other public space that has been designated as the "gay [read: gay male] meet-up point" and ask, "Where is the party?" Usually informal taxis are waiting to take partygoers to distant party locations.

Attending a lesbian party is not as easily accessible. First, one has to find the ever changing secret number that gives the changing locations of the party. Then one has to figure out how to get to the "area" where the party is occurring, as an exact address is never given but a reference is given such as "the house close to the intersections of *x* and *y*, that has a woman with a small dog sitting outside." This then opens the way for hours

of transportation issues. If one is lucky or has the money, one may be able to afford a taxi to get to a party location. If not, one must be prepared to take several infrequently running buses and then walk to the newest party location, or choose to walk more than a few miles if one cannot afford to take the bus. This is a reality for many women who have become poorer as a result of Cuba's economic difficulties. Once in the "area," one may spend hours wandering down side streets in various barrios, looking for an obscure side street, and once on that street, find the inconspicuous person or object outside of the building.

These parties are "illegal" because they are often organized without a permit. They offer a money-making opportunity to a family, their neighbors, and/or a whole apartment building. Parties without a permit that are consistently loud and/or last longer than the hours of the standard noise ordinance, are shut down and the organizers are fined. Therefore, contemporary lesbian parties have an "illegal" feel to them because, in addition to the clandestine nature of finding one, permit rules are strictly enforced if police are aware that party attendees are gays and lesbians.

The parties themselves are often stratified by race and class. Those who attend parties in El Vedado, the tourist and theatre center of Havana, are primarily wealthy Whites and Mulatas who have ties to the tourist sector either as prostitutes, as wives of foreign men who live abroad, or as employees in hotels, restaurants, and other official businesses with access to chavitos.<sup>43</sup> The racial bias in the Cuban tourist sector has been well documented (De La Fuente 2001, Perry 2005, Fernandes 2006). Parties held in poor areas such as Central Havana and El Cerro are largely attended by poor, Black and/or

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<sup>43</sup> Chavitos are a currency which is in standard usage in the tourist sectors of Cuba's dual economy; see previous discussion in Chapter VIII.

Mulato participants who are often unemployed or employed by the state in non-tourist sectors.

At the largely White and Mulata parties, attendees wear brand-name clothing such as Versace and Tommy Hilfiger. They tend to dress very “mikki,” or expressing elitist and/or hegemonic forms of femininity. Black women have a hard time finding partners at these events, as social norms concerning femininity are the harshest within the lesbian community. The women at mikki parties want to date hegemonically “beautiful women.” Therefore, class and race continue to be important mediators in the lives of lesbians. Without an autonomous revolutionary feminist movement and, until the emergence of the hip-hop movement in the mid-1990s, an autonomous public critique of racism, women, and sexuality was virtually non-existent.

Hegemonic forms of femininity are strictly policed within the lesbian community, so much so that Wanda Krudas, who identifies near the femme end of the “butch/femme” spectrum, has a hard time finding the butch partners she desires. Because she is Black, she is assumed to be aggressive. Therefore, the women that tend to approach her are femmes looking for a butch partner. This issue, of being assumed to be “macho” by virtue of being Black, is one that Black lesbians face. However, at the predominantly Black and Mulata parties, there is more of a butch/femme presence than at the mikki parties. Given the particularity of how race and class intersect in Cuba, a study as to *why* “White” or mikki parties tend to draw a femme on femme crowd, while “Black” parties tend to draw a plurality of gender representations within the lesbian community, would be an enormous contribution to gender and sexuality studies in Cuba. However, given my experiences in Cuba and the existing research on how Black gender



and sexuality is represented as deviant within Cuba, Black lesbian space in Cuba seems to be a genuinely queer female-bodied space, while mikki parties heavily police hegemonic norms surrounding femininity. Thin, White, female-born bodies with long, straight hair are considered to be the normative standard for determining femininity.

Issues surrounding morality and visibility are key aspects of the lesbian experience in Cuba. The presence of Odaymara and Olivia's long-term relationship had an important effect on the hip-hop community's understanding of morality. Morality is continuously used as a reason to discriminate against those considered of a lower-cultural status, people such as lesbians, gays, those practicing African-religious practices, and even those within the hip-hop community. Olivia had an opportunity to leave for Canada, but Odaymara had difficulties getting her application approved in Cuba's bureaucracy. It was expected within the hip-hop community that Olivia would take the opportunity to live in Canada and stay, but instead she returned to Cuba to wait for her partner to have the opportunity to travel. This action, in addition to their ten-year, monogamous relationship and their continued work within the hip-hop community, earned them a lot of respect, and they were taken seriously and respected as an intimate couple. Their relationship challenged people's assumptions about non-heterosexual relationships.

However, this question of morality manifested itself in very subtle ways. For example, during one of my trips to Cuba, I was surprised to see a little girl, about three or four years old, entering into Las Krudas' apartment. Las Krudas lived in a large and crowded apartment building. Children always skipped past Krudas' apartment when they were outside playing and chatting with neighbors. The little girl, however, would enter

the apartment, sit on the bed, play, watch TV for a while and then leave. She always said hello to Krudas when passing by their apartment door. We joked that maybe she was a budding lesbian and that she had found her people. During subsequent trips, I would see the girl. Her visits continued for about a year and a half. They stopped sometime in 2005. During a later visit to Cuba that year, I sat with Krudas in their apartment. The little girl walked by the door but instead of stopping like she used to, she either quickly walked or ran by the door like the other kids. "Strange," I thought. A few weeks later, while I was sitting with Krudas in their apartment, the girl walked by the door but stopped this time, peered into the doorway, and stared at us. She did not come in. Apparently our in-jokes about the girl's lesbian future were also something that possibly concerned her parents. I realized that the moment I heard a woman yell the little girl's name, the girl promptly responded "No!" and started crying. The girl's name was repeated a second time, louder, and harsher, with a "Get away from there!" and the little girl ran away from the door. I heard her getting a spanking, her crying, and the adult loudly whispering something at her. "¿;Viste?! [You see?!]" Odaymara of Las Krudas said while we listened to the girl getting a spanking. It was then that the particular form of social isolation that Krudas faced as lesbians became clear.

People are very social in Cuba. Neighbors and their kids visit each other regularly, and in the case of musicians, like Las Krudas, musicians' houses are often crowded for jam sessions, loud songs, and dancing with neighbors and their children. During the four years that I have known Krudas (with a total of eight months' worth of visits with them in Havana), I never saw the neighbors or their children stop by to play congas or sing in Krudas' apartment. The little girl was the first and only one I had

witnessed do so. Thus, the issue of “morality” plays a key role in affecting and justifying the social isolation of lesbians. Parents are very hesitant to let their children be exposed to homosexual behavior for fear that their children maybe influenced by such “immorality,” as shown in the case of the little girl.

In my own work, I have also noticed that race and body type are important sources of stratification among lesbians. It is very difficult for Black lesbians to find partners; it is virtually impossible for a fat and Black lesbian to find a partner. Outside of the parties, I often did not see very many Black lesbians. It is common to see party attendees in public space, at the bus stop, concerts and throughout one’s busy day. However, I noticed that in comparison to White and Mulata lesbians, I did not see as many Black lesbians out and about. Olivia of the underground hip-hop group Las Krudas, says the following about being a woman in hip-hop, and about the precarious existence of Black lesbians in Cuba:

Entonces en el hip-hop hay muchos hombres y pocas mujeres. Para ser una mujer lesbiana y estar dentro del hip-hop hemos tenido que atravesar años de lucha, respecto y amor. Entonces, preguntamos siempre: ¿Por qué las mujeres lesbianas negras no se acercan a la comunidad del hip-hop y no les gusta? Y no tenemos muchas respuestas, pero realmente hay respuestas un poco tristes.

Es que, por ejemplo, a las mujeres negras lesbianas no tienen mucho tiempo para ir al hip-hop, tienen mucho trabajo para hacer, para sobrevivir, para buscar dinero. En el hip-hop no hay mucho dinero, no hay dinero y las mujeres negras lesbianas no tienen dinero, no tienen maneras de... Para muchas mujeres negras cubanas lesbianas es difícil su vida, muy difícil. Estas necesitan trabajar mucho, todo el tiempo. Y ya te digo, es difícil como unificar dichas cosas: mujer, lesbiana, hip-hop, negra, es difícilísimo. La mayoría de las mujeres lesbianas negras van a otro tipo de reuniones, a otro tipo de lugares donde pueden, no sé, conseguir para sobrevivir. O una nueva, mira, algo más entretenido. Hay pocas posibilidades para conseguir amor para una mujer lesbiana en el hip-hop, donde la mayoría de las personas son hombres. Nosotras estamos ahí con esos hombres, aprendiendo también mucho de ellos, de sus maneras, de su fuerza, de lo guerrero que son para enfrentarse a todos los problemas que puede tener el hip-hop...

[So in hip-hop, there are a lot of men and very few women. To be a lesbian woman and to be within hip-hop, we have had to go through years of fight, respect and love. So, they always ask us: “Why don’t Black lesbian women include themselves within the hip-hop community and why don’t they like it?” And we don’t have many answers, because really there are answers that are a little sad.

It's that, for example, Black lesbian women don't have a lot of time to go to hip-hop [shows], they have to work hard to make it, to survive, to look for money. In hip-hop there isn't much money, there is no money and lesbian Black women don't have money, they don't have ways to... [Pauses to think] For a lot of Black lesbian Cuban women it is difficult, their life, very difficult. They need to work hard, all the time. And like I told you, it is hard to unify said things: woman, lesbian, hip-hop, Black woman, it's the hardest. The majority of Black lesbian women go to other types of meetings, to another type of place where they can, I don't know, find a way to live. Or a new, look, something that is more understood between them. There are very little possibilities to find love for another lesbian woman in hip-hop, where the majority of people are men. We are there with other men, learning also a lot from them, from their ways, from their strength, from fighters that are confronting all the problems that hip-hop could have...] (Olivia interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Olivia discusses the difficult lives of Black lesbians. Black lesbians have to work much harder than other Cubans to earn a living. As a woman, there are still expectations that she will stay home and take care of the family. During the Special Period, the economic downturn resulted in job losses and women taking on an increased care-giving role. Though the state offered a gender-blind and a race-blind hiring practice, the Special Period allowed many of the unchallenged, yet repressed, racist and sexist discourses to reemerge. The liberalization of the tourist economy increased income disparity, while state downsizing and the state pay scale resulted in increased unemployment and underemployment for Black Cubans.

A friend who is an MD argued that even when the state could impose the race- and gender-blind hiring practices, Blacks still felt they had to work twice as hard as White Cubans because their White colleagues still held low expectations of Black Cubans. Given how pre-revolutionary race and gender discourses are restructuring a society that is dealing with a shrinking redistributive and race-blind state, successful Black Cuban women – the pride of the revolution – are now fighting to have equal access to the emerging public sphere. Black lesbians, in particular, are finding that they have to fight to survive.

Now that Black women are faced with increased care-giving responsibilities, large-scale, disempowering socio-economic changes, and the limited space for lesbians in general, Black lesbians are possibly the most invisible and marginalized population in Cuba. They have few opportunities for socializing, and they are heavily policed because of their physical appearance and sexual preference. When they do have the opportunity to enjoy themselves, they take advantage of the opportunity to enjoy time with their partners and/or to look for new partners. As Olivia argues, a male dominated hip-hop concert is one of the last places they will go; the same goes for a White, Mulato and/or upper-class dominated Nueva Trova show. It is for this reason that, perhaps, OREMI was such an important and special time for many Black women. Former participants in OREMI discussed how it was a transnational space. Lesbians from other areas of Latin America and the Caribbean who were living in Cuba helped to organize the group. The programs included a broad range of empowerment and community-building activities, such as self-esteem workshops, art shows, and music workshops. Former attendees told me that they were able to meet their long-term partners at the meetings. Professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, met other professionals. Older lesbians who met other women during OREMI kept in touch and have started playing cards and having game nights. But, as OREMI was an open space, women who were exceptionally isolated also attended the events. Because of isolation, lack of privacy at home – particularly from women who are responsible for taking care of elderly, sick and/or young family members – once at OREMI events, these women took the opportunity to engage in sexual activities. “Who knew when we would have another chance like this to be alone,” one former participant told me in the fall of 2005, after the organization ended.

Olivia's points in her quote also helped me to understand some experiences I have had over the years. There are two that stand out in my mind. One is an experience I had in 2002. I sat outside of 23<sup>rd</sup> and Avenida de los Presidentes. Gay people met there to hang out and socialize. As I walked through the space, a Black woman came over to chat me up. When I started speaking, she recognized my accent. "Ah! Americana! I have an American friend here." She introduced me to her friend, a Black woman, 19 or 20, who was visiting from California. We chatted. "So why are you in Cuba?" I asked. "To have a good time!" she said. Perplexed by the way she said "have a good time," I looked at her. "What do you mean?" I asked. "Are you kidding me?!" she asked and laughed. Confused, I said "No, I don't get it." "Hello! Cuba, hot sun, and hot women!" she said, laughing at me. I was so shocked that I did not know how to process what she was saying. Realizing that I was on the verge of believing her and laughing in her face, she looked over her shoulder and said, "Watch. I'll ask my cousin. Hey, Ty, why are we here?!" Her cousin shouted back across the park, "Cuba! Caliente and Sexy!" I was appalled and disappointed – here was a Black lesbian commoditizing Cuban women; but I continued hanging out with her. She knew lots of the Black women there, so I figured I could take some time to try to understand what was happening, and at the same time, develop some new contacts. I eventually gave up on my hope that there was some sort of radical consciousness hidden under a socially-critical joke. Toward the end of the night, her cousin came over to our bench and they started comparing how many phone numbers they had collected, and how many hook-ups they had planned for the night. Do Black lesbians come to Cuba just to hook-up and go home?

Another incident helped me to understand that there is something particular about lesbian social and sexual lives in Cuba. I went with some Mulata friends to a mikki party in El Vedado one night. It was on a ritzy street that I did not know even existed in the area. We walked into the party. Everyone was White and Mulata, with the exception of four Black women I noticed. Three were really tall (about 5'11), fat, stylish and very well-dressed Black women. I saw them talking to a short-haired, fat, Mulata woman who was dressed in an orange spandex top, orange jeans, and orange tennis shoes. She wore gold chains and gold rings, and seemed to be one of the women's girlfriend. They stood against the wall the whole night while the woman in orange walked through the room. A short Black woman (5'0) who was with them, but would often venture onto the floor, was not as well dressed. She had on jeans and an old t-shirt, and wore a handkerchief on her head. She walked over to me and started dancing in front of me. Nervous and taken aback, I began to move away. That is when the woman dressed in orange came over and said, "What's wrong? You don't like her? I have another one for you!" She clapped her hands. A slender, younger dark-skinned woman ran over and stood in front of me. The woman in orange clapped her hands again, "¡Put a baila! [Dance girl!]"<sup>44</sup>

My friends stood in the corner laughing and pointing at me. My facial expression of shock and confusion seemed to be entertaining to them. "Could I be getting hustled by a lesbian pimp [the woman in orange]?" I wondered. I decided to talk to her. What I learned was that she had organized a group of women, mainly Black and Mulato, to go to lesbian parties. By hustling foreigners at the party, they could go have a good time, and make some money at the same time. It made sense because when I walked away, the two

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<sup>44</sup> Within the lesbian community, women refer to very feminine women as "puta," which is slang for "bitch or whore."

women went over and started dancing with either their girlfriends, or their partner for the night. These women, it seemed, had found a solution to one problem, hanging out with very little money. They did so by combining work with pleasure, all the while meeting the Cuban lesbian tourist market which I assume exists, given my experiences with foreigners such as the woman from California. Besides sometimes attending lesbian parties, where do Black lesbians go to meet other women and to socialize? How do Black lesbians meet their economic and socio-sexual needs? That, is an important question that requires future in-depth research.

## **9.6 Conclusion**

The goal of this chapter was to descriptively sketch the varying discourses that Black Cubans, particularly Black women, have to navigate in everyday life. It also sought to contextualize the impressive intervention that women hip-hop artists are making within discussions concerning “women” in contemporary Cuba. Black women in Cuba face numerous difficulties at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Nonetheless, they find a way to negotiate the particular effects of these systems of power, in order not only to survive, but to have some self-determination, no matter how difficult their situations may seem.



## Chapter X

### **“No Soy Kruda”: Las Krudas, Cuban Black Feminism and the Queer of Color Critique**

As a popular underground hip-hop group, Las Krudas work to challenge hegemonic discourses within Cuban society that concern race, gender, and sexuality. They have been working to do so for a decade. Krudas describe their goal as contributing to “the third revolution within the Revolution,”<sup>45</sup> that of Black equality for Black women and lesbians. This is a very important intervention into public discourse, as several recent independent surveys (released in 2002 and 2003) have pointed out that lesbians remain the most socially marginalized and invisible group in Cuba (Acosta et al. 2003, Más 2003, OREMI 2005). These studies also note that women are overwhelmingly judged by their physical appearance, by how “feminine” they are.

Las Krudas’ work in Cuba, 90 miles off the coast of the American United States, has a transnational focus.<sup>46</sup> They are from Cuba, a nation that is economically and politically marginalized. It is also a place where Cuban citizens have resisted U.S. economic and political occupation, while struggling for political and ideological freedom

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<sup>45</sup> This is a reference to Fidel Castro’s 1966 speech in which he described the women’s movement as a “revolution within the Revolution” (Bunck 1994, 87). hip-hop artists use this expression of “a revolution in a revolution” to note that they, too, are participating in this international revolution –a revolution at the level of popular consciousness – through their critique of race.

<sup>46</sup> The majority of this chapter was written in 2006 before Las Krudas left Cuba for the United States. I include some excerpts from interviews with Las Krudas a few weeks after they arrived to Austin, Texas in the Fall of 2006 only as it relates to their activism at home. The focus of this chapter, is on their activism while they were in Cuba.

within their own nation, for over fifty years. By focusing on Las Krudas, I aim to demonstrate the kind of successful resistance that Cuban citizens have undertaken within Cuba's public sphere.

Existing studies on Las Krudas have focussed primarily on the group's contribution to Cuban hip-hop as Black feminists (Fernandes 2006, 2007, Armstead 2007, Joffe 2005, Perry 2005). These pieces have made important contributions by cataloguing the presence of women's voices and feminist discourses within Cuba's hip-hop community. However, these pieces have not critically engaged the connection between Krudas' Black feminist and queer activism. Some of these pieces do not mention Las Krudas' sexuality at all, nor do they analyze the effects of Krudas' anti-homophobia activism within the hip-hop community, and in Cuban society more generally. In order to address these important aspects of Las Krudas' work, I discuss Las Krudas' Black feminist and queer discursive contributions to Underground hip-hop, and the hip-hop community's reaction to Krudas' activism. I discuss Krudas' emergent "Kruda" identity, which constitutes an important intervention into contemporary discussions concerning "the queer of color critique." I also link their work as Underground artists to their social experiences as Black women and lesbians.

I begin this piece with a discussion of Krudas' work. Drawing from archival data and interview data, I will provide a brief discussion of their work as critical artists and activists within Cuba's cultural sphere. I will then address why they have chosen to work within hip-hop, an art form that is assumed to be male-dominated and extremely heterosexist. By including a textual analysis of Krudas' lyrics, I will discuss their discourses concerning race, femininity, and sexuality. I will discuss their hybrid "Kruda"

identity, which is constructed at the intersection of their identities as Black lesbians, Black women, and socially-conscious revolutionary artists. I will examine how Krudas' work centers on consciousness-raising as a means of encouraging Cuban women, particularly Black women and lesbians, to work for their own empowerment. Then, drawing from my ethnographic data, I will elucidate some of the social issues facing Black women and lesbians, by drawing from Las Krudas' intersectional experiences as Black lesbians.

### *Las Krudas CUBENSI: Background*

Las Krudas represent themselves as poor, Black, lesbian feminists from a marginalized and isolated nation – a context which also informs their challenge to capitalist ideological and economic structures. In their music and hip-hop performances, Las Krudas interrupt hegemonic systems of representation, as a means to expand revolutionary discourse to include the citizenship demands of socially marginal groups such as Black women and Black lesbians. By combining revolutionary discourses of inclusive citizenship with an Afro-Cuban, hip-hop, feminist consciousness that centers on embracing difference as a means to promote a socially-inclusive equality, Krudas' strategy as cultural workers is to challenge dominant discourses concerning “women” within Cuba's expansive cultural sphere.

Krudas' politics of a linguistic and ideological intervention into hegemonic discourses surrounding race, gender and sexuality, problematizes oppression through the critique of individual experiences that they link to systemic forms of social oppression. They focus on problematizing these issues within the cultural sphere, where they address the experiences of “everyday Cubans.” Their work centers on changing the minds of

fellow citizens as a means of spurring grassroots social change. They do not directly challenge the state and its institutions, but they do challenge hegemonic state discourses, as well as persisting heteronormative and racist discourses.

It is through their usage of tools such as poetry (hip-hop lyrics) and street theater performance, while working to institutionalize grassroots organizations such as the first Havana-based lesbian group OREMI, that Krudas have been able to work within Cuba's cultural sphere, a key component of Cuba's public sphere. It is in this sphere that they have been able to successfully challenge the hegemony of the sexist, racist, and homophobic discourses that continue to circulate within Cuban society. They have done so by successfully establishing themselves as one of the most talented and successful underground hip-hop groups. While their work consistently links their social contexts and activism to trends happening at the national and transnational level,<sup>47</sup> they began by centering their activism locally. They have gradually expanded their focus by first starting a street theater group in their community in Havana, then acting as national actors within the emerging Cuban hip-hop community, and then finally, working globally, beyond the barrios of Havana and beyond Cuba's borders.

Krudas believe that addressing oppression from a global Black feminist standpoint is key to addressing the various oppressions facing women. Central to their activism is their depiction of their everyday realities as Black women and lesbians while articulating their thoughts on a vision for liberation. Through their work, they reject the hegemonic models of political action that define politics as organized group demands on "the state" or some other "official institution." In these models organized protest,

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<sup>47</sup> Cuban artists' and intellectuals' self-positioning as local and global actors is a key element of revolutionary subjectivity (Howe 2004, Hart 1938)

boycotts, and public debates are seen as legitimate political tools while songs and performances are not (Rose 1997, Fraser 1992).

Through their activism, Krudas have been able to spur critical discussions of feminism and sexual diversity within hip-hop's male-dominated cultural sphere. They have been able to press for the recognition of social experiences that are often invisible or taboo, while challenging the exclusion of their subjectivity from public discourses surrounding appropriate "citizenship." Through expanding these discourses at the popular level, via their music and activism, they have been able to represent publicly their subjectivity as Black lesbians. They have been able to accomplish this at the local level in Havana as well as at the state level through their use of poetry and hip-hop performances, their street theater performances (which focus on Cuban youth) and in their work organizing women artists, intellectuals, and lesbians seeking access to Cuba's state and male-dominated public spheres.

Las Krudas have garnered much national and international attention for their work (Fernández 2007, Armstead 2007, Fernández 2006, Joffe 2005, Guillard-Limonta 2005, Hernández 2005, Duran 2004, Perry 2004, Plasencia 2004). They have also been recognized internationally: in 2005, their music was included in the soundtrack of the Cuban hip-hop documentaries *Venceremos* (2004), *Jovenes Rebeldes* (2005), and *Cuban Hip-Hop: Desde el Principio* (2006). In *Cuban Hip-Hop: Desde el Principio*, Las Krudas were described as one of the most important women groups in hip-hop by Cuban producer Pablo Herrera (a sentiment echoed in my interviews with prominent hip-hop

artists such as Los Paisanos, Junior Clan, DJ D'Boys, and Obsesión). The fanbase for Las Krudas has also expanded beyond Cuba<sup>48</sup>.

While they are Cuban, lesbian, Black, and feminists, they do not privilege one identity over another; all of these identities together inform Krudas' subjectivity. When I asked Odaymara of Las Krudas why they decided to talk about sexuality in hip-hop, she said:

We feel very comfortable, very relaxed, so very much at home that we decided to look at this theme also. Why not, if it's a part of me... I cannot leave it and defend women and not defend myself as a lesbian [and] that which I have suffered, not only in the world of hip-hop, but in all of the Cuban community... We decided to incorporate our themes as well. To speak of our sexuality, saying that you can liberally choose to be with who ever you want to be with, with whoever you want to go to bed with, that it doesn't represent a fault. It's the opposite. [We are] demonstrating to the world, that we have been together for almost 10 years, and that it's possible that two women love each other and show it to everyone, not just hip-hop, but, so that all of Cuba that sees with its false heterosexual morals! We've been here for nine years, together, loving each other and [we are] undetachable... So I think, like the community has said, this is an example...(Odaymara interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Odaymara states that she feels very comfortable discussing her sexuality in her work. Her identity as a lesbian is a part of her. As a Black feminist, she does not believe in silencing or ignoring one aspect of herself in order to focus on another. Also indicative of her queer of color critique, she and Olivia challenge established cultural norms, or the morality, surrounding heterosexuality. In this challenge to morality, Odaymara refers to her long-term relationship with Olivia. It is through living by example, by demonstrating the intimacy and long-term commitment that she and Olivia share, that she challenges the way people think about lesbian relationships; their partnership demonstrates that lesbians are able to have fulfilling relationships, that a woman does not need a man to achieve that.

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<sup>48</sup> : A French fan, Sandra Boero-Imwinkelried, independently started a website devoted to the group in 2005, while Krudas were living in Cuba (once the group settled in the U.S. in 2006, the website was taken off line. Las Krudas now manage their own site at [www.myspace.com/3krudas](http://www.myspace.com/3krudas)).

Also, as an underground hip-hop group, they draw from multiple perspectives to create work that is truly “underground,” meaning developing socially-critical discourse and ensuring that they present their social critique in a way that resonates with their audience as a consciousness-raising mechanism. In a country such as Cuba, where the state monopolizes political institutions and economic resources as a means of empowering citizens it feels are contributing to the betterment of society, it is important to be recognized as healthy contributors to society and not as representative of society’s faults (Hart Dávalos 1990). It is in this context that ideas, ideologies, and discourses have become exceptionally important to everyday life. Thus, it is through connecting with audiences at the level of everyday lived and felt experiences that Krudas have been able to challenge, and even alter, established discourses circulating within Havana, Cuba’s cultural and ideological capital.

### **10.1 Who Are Las Krudas?**



**Figure10a: One of the logos Las Krudas use on handmade t-shirts and handmade CD covers. The logo says “Wommyn In Resistance”**



**Figure10b:Las Krudas. From left to right: Wanda Krudas, Olivia Krudas, Odaymara Krudas.**



**Figure10c: Still Video clip of Las Krudas performing. This video clip courtesy of Krudas.**

Las Krudas are sisters Odaymara Cuesta (Pasita), Odalys Cuesta (Wanda), and Olivia Prendes (Pelusa), the long-term partner of Odaymara. Odaymara and Wanda are Black women from central Havana, while Olivia Prendes is White, and from Guantanamo, Cuba. Odaymara and Wanda see their mother as the main contributor to



their Black feminist identities. While their mother may not identify as a feminist, she worked hard to encourage her daughters to embrace their bodies, their hair, and their dark skin color.

While the hip-hop community attracts primarily Black and Mulato youth, it also draws White youth. In general, hip-hop draws people who want to see Cuban society become more inclusive of difference. However, White and Mulato are contextually significant categories. The Mulato category is a fluid racial category, and one's choice of race is, at times, a political choice. Mulatos' status can be one of honorary Whiteness. While Mulatos are not White, they sometimes have the ability, depending on their hair texture, skin color, and physical features, to be accepted as such if they choose to do so. Those who choose to identify as Black often do so out of solidarity; it is a recognition that racial inequality exists. In this spirit of resistance, an identification with Blackness is not only available to Blacks and Mulatos, but to Whites as well (Ferrer 1999, Arroyo 2003).

Olivia Krudas is a White Cuban woman who is staunchly anti-racist. The particularity of Olivia's anti-racism has its basis in the history of Cuba's anti-colonial and anti-capitalist social movements (Ferrer 1995, Moore 1997). It should not be assumed that Olivia's anti-racism is the *same as* the anti-racist consciousness of White U.S. women, as that would be analyzing her identity out of its particular context. While Olivia has her own perspective on the experiences of Cuban women, she works closely with Odaymara and Wanda to center their activism on elucidating the experiences of Black women. When Olivia speaks about the experiences of Black women, she speaks about the difficulties facing Black women, as she is acutely aware of the privileges she received

as a White woman in Cuba. However, she is very conscious not to speak *for* Odaymara and Wanda. She tends to focus on her intersectional experience as a poor lesbian who, though White, grew up materially poor and in a marginalized and isolated nation. When questioned about the particular experiences of Black women, she will say that one should talk to Odaymara or Wanda. When I asked Olivia about the history of Las Krudas, she says:

La historia de Krudas es lindísima. Dos mujeres negras, afrocubanas, hermanas, crecidas, con una madre maravillosa que les enseñó a ellas mucho orgullo y mucha pasión por su raza, y también mucha inteligencia en estas mujeres que desde niña, desde jóvenes se dieron cuenta que eran artistas, que eran excelentes filósofas, pensadoras, poetas. Entonces yo las conocí y nos apasionamos, fundamentalmente Odaymara y yo que nos enamoramos y hoy día llevamos casi 10 años de relación. Y Odaymara siempre desde que comenzó a escuchar esta música americana aquí en Cuba, no solamente Hip Hop, desde que se comenzó a escuchar funky, desde siempre, desde que ella era una niña escuchaba mucha, mucha, mucha música negra, de todas partes del mundo, no solamente de Norteamérica, de África, de Europa diáspora. Entonces yo que estudié un poquito de música, un poquito de teatro y que siempre también fui muy apasionada en la música étnica, cuando nos conocimos ya yo hacía un poco de teatro y decidimos empezar a hacer música juntas.

The history of Krudas is very beautiful. Two Black women, Afro-Cuban sisters raised by a wonderful mother who taught them to have a lot of pride and passion for their race, and also they were so intelligent from childhood that since they were young they realized that they were artists, that they were excellent philosophers, thinkers, poets. Then I met them and we were fundamentally excited. Odaymara and I fell in love, and today we've been together for almost 10 years. And Odaymara, since she began to listen to American music here, she didn't only listen to hip-hop, but she listened to funk and since she was a kid she listened to a lot, a lot, a lot of Black music from all over the world, not just North America, but Africa and the European Diaspora. So I studied a little bit of music and a little theater and I was always enthusiastic about ethnic music, when we knew each other I had done a little bit of theater and we decided to begin to make music together. (Olivia interview, Havana 2006)

Olivia met Odaymara and Wanda in the Havana arts-scene in the mid-1990s. She was struck by their talent, and their knowledge of music. With Olivia's background in theater and production, they decided to work together. It is sometimes difficult to get Olivia to talk about her racial status. She sometimes seems hesitant in answering the question directly. Nonetheless, the diversity of identities within Las Krudas is often glossed over in analysis of the group as a Black feminist group. Though the group presents as a Black

feminist group ideologically, the inter-racial solidarity within the group is also symbolically significant.

I asked Olivia about her experiences of being White in Cuba, and working within a predominantly Black and Mulato community. She says:

Mira, para mí..., o sea yo respeto mucho la afro descendencia y yo sé perfectamente que no soy afro descendiente. Yo soy una mujer latina y yo siento que puede en algún momento haber en mis raíces algo que me una de alguna manera a cualquier parte de la tierra. Pero yo nací en Guantánamo, que por densidad de población es la provincia de mayor cantidad de población es la provincia de mayor cantidad de población afro descendiente. Y desde niña estudié y viví entre gente negra y sentí mucho respecto, a pesar de que mi familia no se enseñó a respetar... mi familia es una familia de personas que casi todas sus amistades son blancas, o se casan entre blancos y blancas, su descendencia es casi siempre blanca. Yo me miro al espejo y veo mi nariz y veo mis facciones y me veo y me siento como diferente a muchas personas blancas que tienen rasgos finos, algo así. Yo tengo mis rasgos anchos y mi pie grande y, no sé, siento que hay algo así como dice [friend's name] que pudiera haber, quién sabe en alguna parte de las Islas Canarias que están tan cerca de África. Entonces, yo tampoco que gusta decir que soy mestiza, porque eso no me gusta, pero tampoco nunca diría que soy blanca, jamás.

For me... I respect afro-descendants very much. And I know perfectly well that I am not of African descent. I am a Latina woman and I know very well that I could have some kind of heritage from whatever part of the earth. But I was born in Guantanamo whose population density [makes it] the Province with the largest amount of African descendents. And from a child I studied and lived with Black people and I felt very much respect [for Black people]...that my family never taught me to respect... my family is a family of people that always had White friends or married between Whites, their descendents are almost always White. I look at myself and my broad features and my big features and I don't know, I feel that there is something, like [friend's name] says there could be something, who knows in what part of the Canary Islands, which are very close to Africa. So, I never like to say that I am mixed, because I don't like this, but never again will I say that I am White, never again. (Olivia interview, Havana 2006)

Interestingly, Olivia *refuses* to identify as Mulata, as doing so leaves open the possibility that she can choose to pass as White. She identifies with Cuba, with Black people, with life on the island. However, while being interpolated as a White person in Cuba, Olivia recognizes her subjectivity as part of a colonial racial hierarchy. In order to think beyond race, she and Odaymara also use the words “aboriginal” and/or “indigenous” to describe themselves.

Odaymara's activism did not begin with Krudas; she was interviewed in Sonia de Vries' 1996 film, *Gay Cuba*, in which she talked about her experiences as a lesbian youth in Havana. She has been very active in the LGBT community in Havana since 1994, when she and several other LGBT youths attempted to form Cuba's first LGBT organization and host Cuba's first Gay Pride Parade<sup>49</sup>. She continues her activism through her work in Tropazancos, Las Krudas, and small community projects. For example, Krudas were founding members of the group OREMI, the first official, post-revolutionary, Havana-based, lesbian group. The group was formed to address the particular needs of lesbians, whose needs were often rendered invisible by the male focus in contemporary discussions of homosexuality (OREMI 2005). One of the impressive aspects of Las Krudas as a group seems to be their ability to speak with a unified voice while drawing from the differing talents and perspectives of each member.

Odaymara strongly identifies as an artist. She is what I would describe as the artistic-intellectual: she thinks critically and theoretically, but expresses her ideas through interviews, and her lyrics. Disillusioned by her experiences at the post-graduate level, Odaymara rejects the idea of the academy, specifically print media, as being the only legitimate resource for intellectual production. Odaymara is integral to the group's critical and theoretical interventions into everyday discourses and lived experiences.

Olivia has a post-secondary degree in theater production. She is primarily responsible for helping the group develop and perfect their performances and sound. She is also a key contributor to the group's social critiques. While she is skeptical of the ideological monopoly held by the academy, she wants to obtain a post-graduate degree as she is interested in making an intervention into academic discourses concerning women.

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<sup>49</sup> T is more likely to represent Transvesti, or gay men who dress and sometimes live as women.

Wanda contributes to the group musically and to Krudas' professional network. Wanda is integral in maintaining the "raw," "natural" aspect of Las Krudas, through her particular subjectivity, and her investment in traditional Afro-Cuban music.

## **10.2 Las Krudas: Raperas Underground<sup>50</sup>**

Las Krudas have emerged as part of a new generation of underground hip-hop artists, alternative community actors, and other kinds of organic intellectuals seeking to advance the ideals of the revolution by contextualizing themselves within a critical understanding of contemporary Cuban realities, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and increasing material inequality (Vitier 2002, Navarro 2002, De La Fuente 2001, Camnitzer 2003, Craven 2002, Howe 1995, 2004). As part of Cuba's alternative music scene, their work challenges revolutionary efforts to homogenize discourse. In the case of the arts, this homogenizing impulse has led to an embracing of older, Eurocentric forms of artistic expression, allowing social issues such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and negative representations of non-European cultures to continue unchallenged. Through the employment of hip-hop as a revolutionary cultural aesthetic, Las Krudas has developed an emergent discourse that blends revolutionary, Afro-Cuban, and feminist discourses into Underground hip-hop.

By attempting to connect with audiences at the level of *feeling*, Krudas link lived experiences to discourses; they reject the generalized, abstract universalism embedded in most theoretical frameworks concerning social life, including canonized academic feminism. Like many of Cuba's formally-trained artists and intellectuals, Krudas are concerned about what happens at the level of *lived experiences*, as it is life at the level of

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<sup>50</sup> Translation: Las Krudas: Underground Women Rappers.

*feeling* that has been ignored or sacrificed in defense of the nation. Krudas connect the difficulties that they and other Cuban youths face in their everyday lives to the larger struggles of inequality. For Krudas, these struggles are connected not only to the U.S. blockade and Cuban government policy, but also to larger issues of globalization, such as the global exploitation that manifests itself in sweatshops in some places and, in Cuba's case, in tourism. But the most difficult struggle they face is the inequality that persists in Cuban society due to racism, material inequality, sexism, and homophobia.

Krudas' activism is based on four courses of action:

- 1) Raising the awareness of and increasing the respect for gender and sexual diversity among the hip-hop community.
- 2) Raising awareness of the particular social issues facing Black women such as issues of self-respect, independence, and beauty.
- 3) Helping to form a more cohesive lesbian community in order to address the particular social, psychological, and emotional needs of Cuba's lesbian population.
- 4) Strengthening international networks between non-commercial and socially conscious artists and intellectuals as a means of enhancing intellectual and spiritual exchange.

Before joining the hip-hop Movement, Olivia Prendes and Odaymara Cuesta of Las Krudas entered into the performance art scene in 1997 as the founders of the independent art troupe, Agrupación de Creación Alternativa CUBENSI, which is a precursor to their internationally acclaimed street theater group, Tropazancos (see Figures 10d and 10e). Odaymara's sister, Wanda Cuesta, joined the performance art troupe during its Tropazancos years. Olivia writes the following about their group:

en 1997 fundo la Agrupación de Creación Alternativa CUBENSI, junto a Odaymara Cuesta y otr@s artistas con intereses comunes: centrar en nuestra obra temas como el orgullo nacional, el cuidado a la naturaleza, el maravilloso deleite en las frutas y vegetales, el espíritu festivo, la educación ambiental, el respeto al amor, a la amistad, a la diversidad. En nuestra trayectoria investigábamos formas de llegar a las comunidades,

experimentábamos trabajos eminentemente visuales (concentrándonos en las artes plásticas), componíamos temas musicales, teatralizábamos historias y así buscando, encontramos para completar nuestro arte comunitario: los zancos y el rap. Estos recursos fueron de absoluta popularidad, recorrimos en la Casa de Cultura de Centro Habana y con la Asociación Hermanos Saíz muchos barrios y calles de La Habana y así rapeando y zaqueando llegamos en 1998 al IV Festival de Rap de Alamar.

...in 1997, I founded the Group of Alternative Creation CUBENSI, together with Odaymara Cuesta and other artists with common interests [in order] to center our work on themes of national pride, protecting nature, the marvelous delight of fruits and vegetables, festive spirit, environmental awareness, respect for love, for friendship and for diversity. In our trajectory we looked for forms of going out into the communities, we experimented with visual art,<sup>51</sup> doing theater performances of history and also looking for a way to do our community art: stilt walking and rap. The resources were popular resources, ranging from the Casa de Cultura of Central Havana to the Association of Hermanos Saiz, [we worked in] a lot of neighborhoods and streets in Havana and so [in] rapping and performing zancos we ended up at the 1998 Fourth Festival of Rap of Alamar. (Prendes Riverón 2006)

In this quote, Olivia is pointing out the communitarian orientation of their work as artists.

This grassroots, social justice orientation as artists is linked to revolutionary ideology.

While there are some artists who want to become commercialized, one of the outcomes of the revolution is that artists such as Las Krudas, who reject commercialized work that is not social justice-oriented, now have access to the basic educational and material resources necessary to produce their art. Tropazancos, an independent street theater group, follows the tradition of Cuban artists and intellectuals who moved to socialize culture after the revolution (Alea 2002, Navarro 2002, Vitier 2002, Caminitzer 2003, Craven 2002). This movement seeks to make art and theater available to all people, especially those who cannot afford to attend paid performances in closed theaters.<sup>52</sup> By locating their performances in the streets, as Olivia notes in the quote, they make an effort to bring culture to Cuban citizens, and to integrate art and alternative social

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<sup>51</sup> Visual art such as performance art and film.

<sup>52</sup> For example, in 2001, Krudas began working with performance artist Beth Ferguson of Austin, TX. Ferguson has worked with the Canadian (Toronto) troupe, the Bread and Puppet Theater (See their website at: <http://www.breadandpuppet.org/>)

perspectives into people's daily lives.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 10d: Tropazancos, April 2004. Photograph courtesy of Beth Ferguson.**

Besides street performances, Tropazancos also offer free art classes and workshops providing instruction in stilt walking, theater make-up, music, dance, costume making, acting, fire eating, and percussion. They have also organized public conferences on percussion rhythms, and popular and folkloric dance. These workshops serve several interrelated purposes:

- 1) Provide free fun and entertainment.
- 2) Provide education: Tropazancos encourage people to use the arts as a means to “think” and to use their own creative energies to express themselves and interpret their social world.
- 3) Encourage people to embrace diversity, especially in areas such as human expression, animal rights, and environmental rights.

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<sup>53</sup> Currently Celianny Rivera-Velazquez, a doctoral candidate in Communications and Media Studies at the University of Illinois-Champaign-Urbana, is completing dissertation work that includes a documentary on Krudas' work in Tropazancos and their emmigration to the United States in the Fall of 2006.



The only pay that they receive is in the form of donations from tourists and Cuban citizens who participate in performances and/or workshops. Unfortunately, foreign tourists who do not understand, or come from countries that share Cuba's approach to culture, often take them for beggars and refuse to give donations. Tourists take pictures and record shows, but will not offer money when Tropazancos requests donations. This is probably linked to capitalist valuation of art: if it is of value, then one would have to pay beforehand to attend the performance. Perhaps because the performances are free, they are not seen as social work that is of value. Street artists, in particular, are not seen as artists of worth.



**Figure10e: Olivia dancing with children in Central Havana, April 2004. After the street theater performance, Tropazancos dance and sing songs with children. Photograph courtesy of Beth Ferguson.**

In their street theater work, Tropazancos focus on pedagogical activities for children.

Their plays and performances leave children with messages to love the earth, or treat *all*

of your fellow human beings with care; they encourage children to embrace diversity in all its forms.

Tropazancos have received national and international attention for their work. They have been invited to international festivals such as Festival Cervantino in Mexico for 2005 and 2006, and national festivals such as the 2002 Festival del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba. They have been photographed and featured in journals in Bolivia (2005),<sup>54</sup> Italy (2002),<sup>55</sup> and photographed in Cuba's influential cultural magazine *Bohemia* (Cuba),<sup>56</sup> all of which represent official recognition of their work as a significant contribution to Cuban culture. Because of this official recognition, Tropazancos have received state permission to perform in areas of Old Havana that are frequented by tourists.

In 1998, Odaymara, Olivia, and Wanda emerged as *Las Krudas CUBENSI* in Cuba's underground hip-hop scene at the IV hip-hop Festival in Alamar. Known for their work as community-oriented street theater artists, they were asked to perform at the 1998 festival. They went on stage in Tropazancos costume, in stilts and make-up. In later work that emphasized the diversity and openness of Cuba's emerging hip-hop scene, Krudas have been referenced or described as those "stilt walking lesbians" who, to the disgust of the audience, talked about menstruation (Perry 2004, Duran 2004). Though their initial performance was not well received, they were encouraged by Pablo Herra – the most popular hip-hop producer in Cuba at the time – to perform again. Thus, Las Krudas did their first non-Tropazancos solo performance, as a trio, at the 2000 Havana hip-hop Festival.

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<sup>54</sup> "Tropazancos: La calle como escenario en Cuba" in *La Razon*, La Paz Bolivia, December 18, 2005: [http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20051218\\_005394/nota\\_277\\_230748.htm](http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20051218_005394/nota_277_230748.htm)

<sup>55</sup> Mentioned in the Italian travel magazine *I Viaggi di Repubblica*, February 7, 2002, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> May 2002, p. 14.

What struck them about the nascent hip-hop community was that it was part of a global phenomenon that lent itself to the creative energies of Cuban youth of African descent. Olivia writes:

Al conocer lo que en aquel entonces era un joven movimiento quedamos maravillad@s, hip-hop en Cuba, una gran masa de artistas y público de mayoría afrodescendiente se manifestaba, una cultura ! surgida y desarrollada en los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica, se había asentado en la isla y se aclimataba perfectamente, transformándose, convirtiéndose en voz popular de tantos jóvenes revolucionari@s de nuestra generación, la fusión de elementos heredados , la auténtica fuerza de nuevos creador@s era más que un resultado, una alucinación... estimuladas por las posibilidades de expresión que ofrecía la ocasión fundamos en 1998 **KRUDAS CUBENSI**, con la intención de saciar nuestras propias expectativas de representación y también para incorporar un discurso feminista a la ebullente propuesta de mayoría masculina, lo cual significaba un gran reto.

There we came to know a young movement that came to be marvelous, Cuban hip-hop, in which a great mass of artists and an audience that was mostly of African descent appeared, a culture that appeared and developed in the United States of North America, that had settled itself on the island and acclimated itself perfectly, [while] transforming itself, converting itself into the popular voice of so many revolutionary youth from our generation, [it became] a fusion of inherited elements, [it is] the authentic force of new creators that was more than a result of a hallucination...stimulated by the possibilities of expression that this occasion offered, we founded Krudas CUBENSI in 1998, with the intention of offering our own perspectives of representation and also to incorporate a feminist discourse to the prevalent discourses of masculinity, which signified a great challenge... (Prendes Riverón 2006)<sup>57</sup>

In this excerpt from her piece “Matriarching the Patriarchal: Women and hip-hop,” Olivia explains that they viewed Cuba’s hip-hop as the voice of Afro-Cuban youth. Krudas were inspired by their experience in the hip-hop community, which they came to understand as an open community for free expression. They were also bothered by the lack of women’s groups in the hip-hop movement, particularly the lack of groups that challenged stereotypes of women. Impressed by the artistic and revolutionary potential of underground hip-hop as a critical, anti-capitalist culture with a communitarian ideology, Krudas began performing at hip-hop shows. They felt that it was in this environment that they should organize Krudas CUBENSI as a means of offering their

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<sup>57</sup> “!Representando Grandeza De Mujer Cubana. Maternizando Lo Patriarcado. Féminas y hip-hop.” 2006 por Oliva Prendes)

perspective, a feminist perspective, to the critical discourses circulating within the hip-hop community. Las Krudas chose the name “Krudas” which means the crude ones. “Crude” refers to that which is natural, uncooked, unprocessed, or raw materials. Like uncooked vegetables, Las Krudas’ lyrics may be difficult for many Cubans to digest, but in the end, it is good for one’s health.



**Figure10f: Author with members of Las Krudas in La Madruga, 2004. From left to right: Odaymara Krudas, Wanda Krudas, Tanya Saunders, Celiany Rivera-Velazquez. Photograph courtesy of Celiany Rivera-Velazquez.**

Odaymara says the following about her impression of hip-hop:

I think as well that Cuban culture is in a moment of aperture towards cultural phenomena that... five years ago it would not have been possible that one could represent these methods of fusion. For example, rap, specifically hip-hop because I believe rap and hip-hop are two different things, I think rap is a way of doing it, to rap is like your flow, you can be a salsa [performer] or [use] whatever musical base to rap. But hip-hop, for me, is a culture, better said its politics or better a communitarian consciousness, or better, it’s a message is directed towards a certain group with a [particular] economic, political, racial,

sexual... specifically [sexual], situation. (Odaymara and Wanda interview, Havana 2004)<sup>58</sup>

During the early years of Cuban hip-hop (1995-2002), there were very few women participating in the movement who offered a positive, woman-centered, empowering message. There were a few groups such as Atómikas and Explosión Femenina, which earned much respect in the underground scene, while the only critically conscious female performers were Atómikas and Magía (who, with her husband Alexay, forms the group Obsesión) (Prendes 2006). Las Krudas found inspiration in Magía, who won critical acclaim in Cuba for Obsesión's song "Me Lllaman Puta" ["They call me a prostitute/whore"], a song about the dire material issues facing poor women who turn to prostitution and/or other activities in Cuba's underground economy. After Krudas' performance in the 2000 festival, where they were better received, they were again approached by the pioneering Cuban hip-hop producer, Pablo Herrera, who encouraged them to produce a CD and to pursue work within the nascent hip-hop movement. It was then that they realized that it was in this critical artistic and intellectual area of hip-hop, that Krudas could make a feminist intervention in hegemonic discourses surrounding women.

Krudas' music is very much informed by revolutionary ideology, as they were born over a decade after the Cuban Revolution. Their music is also influenced by African American, Black nationalist, and civil rights ideology; pre-revolutionary Afro-Cuban empowerment discourse; and their own feminist discourse that they use to create an emergent discourse, a "Kruda discourse," to address the theoretical limitations of Afro-Cuban culture and revolutionary theory in addressing social issues concerning

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<sup>58</sup> All three were present during this interview. While Odaymara spoke Olivia and Wanda were nodding as Odaymara spoke.

women. Through art and street performance, Krudas attempt to connect with a broad range of women. They especially seek to connect with poor and illiterate women, who may not have access to feminism through social networks (such as interactions with feminist tourists), or expensive resources such as foreign books, seminars, and/or conferences.

Krudas argue that they support a basic form of feminism, one in which women are liberated and *feel* in control of their lives and respected for the decisions that they make. Through focusing on *feeling*, Odaymara links lived experience to discourse. Odaymara states the following about the limitations of revolutionary discourse to address the particular needs of women:

At the triumph of the revolution, there was the primary project: to be a revolutionary [woman or man]... the causes of [particular] groups or communities were left until later. The most important thing was to unite all of the people to fight against imperialism... So causes like race, gender, sex, they were left on the shelf, not the second one, nor the third one, but around the 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> shelf so that now we are suffering the consequences of this because it was necessary to unify all of the people against imperialism, the enemy, the attacks, the terrorism and all of those things. (Odaymara interview, Havana 2005)

In this quote Odaymara argues that the problem with revolutionary culture is that it assumes that the state has solved the problems facing women through a focus on equal education and work. She argues that women are oppressed in all of the world's cultures, and simply focusing on women as workers is not going to end gender inequality. This limitation of the government discourse has been critiqued by numerous writers on women in Cuba (see Murray 1979, Bunck 1994, Leiner 1994, Smith and Padula 1996, Fleites-Lear 2001). During the early years of the revolution, social critique of social policy and discussion of the social inequality that could not be addressed by revolutionary ideology

were discouraged. Thus, many people could not speak out about the social issues that they were facing.

In order to ensure unity on the island, there was the heavy policing of ideology. This policing was not simply the state policing other Cubans, but Cubans policing themselves and others. Anything that fell outside of revolutionary discourse, even if it was not directly counter-revolutionary, was excluded from revolutionary discourse. Those who wanted to critique any aspect of social life which fell outside of the boundaries of revolutionary discourse took the risk that their demands would be considered counter-revolutionary. It was in this context that Krudas' feminism developed.

### **10.3 Krudas' Black Feminist Discourse**

The concept of the simultaneity of oppression is still the crux of a Black feminist understanding of political reality and, I believe, one of the most significant ideological contributions of Black feminist thought. We examined our lives and found that everything out there was kicking our behinds---race, class, sex, and homophobia. We saw no reason to rank oppressions, or, as many forces in the Black community would have us do, to pretend that sexism, among all the "isms," was not happening to us. Black feminists' efforts to comprehend the complexity of our situation as it was actually occurring, almost immediately began to deflate some of the cherished myths about Black womanhood... Although we made use of the insights of other political ideologies, such as socialism, we added an element that has often been missing from the theory of others: what oppression is comprised of on a day-to-day basis, or as Black feminist musician Linda Tillery sings, "...what it's really like/To live this life of triple jeopardy." (Smith 1983, xxxii)

Barbara Smith summarizes key elements of Black feminist identity: it is a hybrid epistemological standpoint that is composed of multiple subjectivities that borrow from multiple theoretical frameworks, especially personal experiences, in order to articulate itself. Personal experience is a crucial element of Black feminist thought because Black feminist subjectivity is located at the intersection of multiple subjectivities. Not one established theory or subjective identity has been enough to articulate a Black feminist

subjectivity. It is through personal experiences that Black feminists have come to realize that there is something particular about their subjective location. While Black feminist thought may diverge from standard academic theory in content, it may also deviate from standard academic practice and form, when it is expressed through poetry, music, and essays (Hill Collins 1994).



**Figure10g: A young man ponders Krudas' artwork. This was taken at the art exhibition during the 2004 festival at the National Theater. Photograph courtesy of Beth Ferguson.**





**Figure10h:Tropazancos painting on display at the art exhibition, National Theater, 2004. Photograph courtesy of Beth Ferguson.**

Thus, it is through borrowing from different theoretical frameworks as well as using experience as the basis of analysis in determining the applicability of specific theories, such as socialism, that one develops a Black feminist discourse. Black feminist thought does not privilege one identity over the other, as all identities simultaneously inform each other in producing the Black woman as a social being. These elements of Black feminist thought are at the core of Krudas' work as Black feminists. Odaymara and Wanda are highly skeptical of academic production and see themselves as artists; it is in the realm of music, painting, poetry, filmmaking, public theater, and so forth that they make their socially critical and theoretical interventions.

During my discussions with Krudas, I asked what feminism means for them. All three agreed with the following description by Odaymara. When I asked Odaymara how Krudas defined feminism, her first comment was, “We are not talking about the feminism of Gloria Steinem!!!” She went on to say:

What is feminism for me? It is a woman defending the reasons to live and the necessity that we have to be happy and respected in ...[every one] of the decisions we make in life. Or better, I'm talking about a basic feminism. I am not talking about the academic feminism of Gloria Steinem or none of those other White women over there. You understand me? I am talking about an elemental feminism that an illiterate woman could have. You understand me? So that an illiterate person can understand what I am saying. I think that to feel oneself to be a feminist woman, you don't have to sit for twelve hours in a university to understand it. Nor do you need to have a vocabulary of 2,603 words per minute, but feeling yourself to be a woman and feeling the things that happen to all us women and from that stand up and say, yes I am a feminist, that I am. Primitive, primary, raw, aboriginal, but always defending my thing because I think that we are at a super, super disadvantage. For me, that is feminism. (Odaymara interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Odaymara points to the importance of lived experience in forming feminist subjectivity. For Black Cuban women, one's identity and experience cannot be found in the canonized feminist texts of scholars such as Gloria Steinem. Because of the multiple forms of oppression Black Cuban women face, it is important first to have that moment of acknowledgement that, as Barbara Smith notes, there are multiple -isms that are kicking one's "behind." For Krudas, it is in the moment that one realizes there are multiple forms of oppression facing Black women *and* realizes that one should be happy, respected, and respecting oneself as a woman, that a feminist consciousness emerges.

Within Cuba, there is some skepticism concerning feminism. Feminism arrived in Cuba as a discourse concerning the interests of the elite, White women on the island. Many of these women were unabashedly racist and classist (Stoner 1991). Even within this elite environment, there were, anti-racist, and anti-classist feminists who joined the socialist movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Additionally, during the early Republic years, White feminists from the United States sometimes intervened in Cuban politics;

some U.S. American feminists tried to prevent universal suffrage in Cuba, as they felt that Black and Mulato Cubans were not fit to run their country (Stoner 1991).

Aware of this complicated history of global feminist identities, Las Krudas locate their work within the tradition of Black Cuban women, such as Gloria Rolando and Nancy Morejón, who have offered their social critiques through the arts. Also, when Las Krudas invoke the names of feminists, they are the names of women, often times Black women, who have been influential figures in Cuban and world history. They also include the names of the women ancestors of their families. Krudas do this in order to locate their work within social change spurred by the actions of everyday women and popular women who have not been written into Cuban history, while linking their struggle to the global struggles facing women, particularly Black women. Las Krudas center their critiques not just on Cuba, but on issues facing Black women regionally and globally.

Odaymara says the following about the goals of their feminist activism:

... our thing is working against the posture of the entire world, specifically that of Cuban culture, Latin culture, Caribbean culture. [These cultures] are very rich, very flavorful but [they are also] very *machista*, very *lebobhobica*. Very misogynistic are these cultures. So our project is to take all of this negative stuff, put it on the table, acknowledge that it exists and decide what we are going to do to resolve this problem. (Odaymara interview, Havana 2006)

In their particular position as Black Caribbean women from a Latin culture, Krudas are working at the intersections of their own culture(s) for social change. They hope that by pinpointing the problems within their culture, they can encourage people to work for a resolution. To this end, Krudas have decided to measure the success of their efforts by focusing on two areas: helping women to develop a feminist subjectivity, and bringing the particular issues facing Black women and lesbians into Cuba's public sphere.

Odaymara and Olivia are exceptionally well-read and well-versed in global feminist theory. Odaymara and Olivia have often worked with foreign tourists and artists who visit the island, and thus were able to receive books and videos from their foreign peers. In a 2006 interview, Odaymara explained, “You see, the blockade and the restrictions on information doesn’t stop the exchange.” However, I realized the differences between Krudas’ feminist experiences when I asked them about a quote on their website ([www.krudas.org](http://www.krudas.org)). In the description of Krudas, the author of the website states that Krudas’ music is reflective of the work of feminists such as Luce Irigaray and that: “Through their hip-hop lyrics, Krudas embody a feminism of difference, as purported by philosopher Luce Irigaray. In one of their songs, the chorus repeatedly affirms, ‘we [women and men] are just different.’” I asked Krudas why they chose to draw from Luce Irigaray work. Their response, “We have never heard of her. That’s just something that someone put on that website” (Krudas interview, Austin 2006).

Though Luce Irigaray has not influenced them, Odaymara and Olivia have read work by feminists such as Audre Lorde. Though Krudas had been somewhat disconnected from a larger global community during Cuba’s global isolation, they are very much in conversation with global feminisms and have been offering their critiques through their local work as performers. During this 2006 discussion in Austin, Texas, Wanda argued that her feminist consciousness developed differently. Wanda, insisted that her feminism developed in total isolation from global feminist discourses. Her notion of feminism was not developed through reading feminist theory, or discussions of feminism with tourists. Her feminism is very much informed by her experiences as a woman, particularly a Black woman on the island. Wanda Krudas clarified this point in

another discussion about her feminist development; she has not read any feminist texts and considers her feminism to be indigenous Cuban feminism. Wanda interpellates the world from her position as a Black woman. Her feminist consciousness, she has argued, developed through her own personal experiences as well as from the teachings of her mother, who raised Odaymara and Wanda to be strong, confident, and conscious Black women. Nonetheless, Krudas express solidarity with all feminists and all women working for social change. They reject the homogenizing impulses of feminism as well as hegemonic revolutionary discourse. This is central for Krudas, as they are clearly focused on the experiences of Black women, particularly poor Black women and lesbians, who are often left out of discourses concerning women.

An important theme in Krudas' songs is the empowerment of Black women. By drawing from their experiences as Black women, Krudas are able to relate to the numerous issues experienced by Black Cuban women, such as racism, sexism, and increased income inequality. Their message is to stay true to oneself, to work together as women for social change, and to raise one's own consciousness. To this end, Krudas have been very successful in re-defining feminism and encouraging a feminist consciousness among female, and male, members of Cuba's expanding hip-hop community.

I asked Krudas if the women mentioned in their songs identified as feminists. The collective answer was "No." I asked if they believed that a woman could be a feminist and not know it. Their answer was a resounding "Yes." Krudas state that feminism is about practice, not simply about theory. It is women making the best

decisions for themselves, and working to make society better for all (Krudas interview, Austin 2006).

I asked Krudas if they knew other feminists in Cuba. Olivia stated, with the others nodding in agreement, that they do not know a group of women who are organized in groups that discuss feminist theory or actively embrace a particular identity. They see feminism in practice among Cuban women in the high divorce rates, and in women's willingness to work for, and make decisions for, themselves. They know some lesbians who say they are feminist but, as Olivia stated, "To be a lesbian and to be a feminist is not the same thing" (Krudas interview, Austin 2006). In essence, lesbians can also have internalized notions of femininity that are linked to their disempowerment as women. Krudas did not want to give the impression that feminist identities did not exist in Cuba, but they noted that there has not been a sociological study undertaken to assess how many women self-identify as feminists. However, Krudas do not only identify as feminists; they also theorize about pushing the boundaries of feminism, by exploring other identities, such as a "mujerista," a key identity that forms part of their larger "Krudas identity." Olivia commented that feminism is simply a counterbalance to patriarchy, and that they both maintain and reinforce one another.<sup>59</sup> But a mujerista is completely outside of the feminism/patriarchy dichotomy, and focuses particularly on all things part of women's experiences, without limiting the analysis of women to their experiences of oppression under patriarchy. For Krudas, being a "Super-feminist" is not enough. Olivia argues that women have to be stronger, more assertive, and learn everything they can

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<sup>59</sup> I will not translate Krudas' particular feminist identity into English, because I do not want it to be confused or reduced to womanist identities. While Olivia and Odaymara have been influenced by exchanges with other women of color who identify as feminist and womanist, as will be shown in my discussion of Wanda's feminism, their mujerista identity developed within a particular cultural, political, and isolating context.

from men, since men dominate knowledge of music production within hip-hop. She emphasizes this point in the following quote:

... that for us it is necessary in this moment that we can show that we could exist and be colleagues, be competent and be the absolute best of male hip-hop [as] some women, in this case strong, lesbians, defending everything that is ours. A lot of times they say to us, *Krudas, you are going to the extreme. If you are criticizing machismo [it is because] you are so feminist.* In my songs, in my interviews and always in my attitude I try to make them understand that please, feminisms will never be enough to counteract the huge machismo, in the world. It will never be enough... Because there is so much machismo, that not even if all women were Super-feminists could we do anything, they [machismos] are really strong. We can achieve space, and having made [space], they have done many beautiful things and we have achieved some really good things from where we are in the movement, we have tried to unify women and do concerts with women only, there already are CD projects from women, right now we have our project Omega KILAY for concerts, for events, for [poetry readings] and stuff, we have a lot of projects, and we have achieved things, but... how much have men achieved in Cuban hip-hop, in world hip-hop? How much? How much? You don't have a comparison, or better, we have to keep working a lot, a lot, a lot and to be stronger everyday, stronger, stronger, stronger, [in order] for our men to listen and for our voices to rise. (Olivia interview, Havana 2006)

Thus, Krudas work exceptionally hard to be one of the best of Cuba's underground hip-hop groups, as they realize that there are social limitations for women. The presence of Krudas' in the UHH community shows that discussions occurring within Cuban hip-hop about how one should advocate for the continued liberation of women and how to fight against sexism and homophobia.

The following song is an example of some of Krudas' poetry (hip-hop lyrics). In the song, they ask the women in the audience how long they (Krudas) will be the only women on stage. This often drives the point home that there is a glaring absence of women in public life. The following excerpts are from their song "Eres Bella [You Are Beautiful]," from the album *Krudas Cubensi* (2003):

*Eres Bella by Las Krudas CUBENSI*  
*Yalode*  
*Tema dedicación*  
*Dedicado a todas las mujeres del mundo*  
*A todas las mujeres que como nosotras están luchando*  
*A todas las guerreras, campesinas, urbanas*  
*A todas las hermanas*

*Especialmente a las más negras  
Especialmente a las más pobres  
Especialmente a las más gordas  
Soy yo Pasa Mc  
Nunca nadie te hablo así  
Nunca aquí  
Me fui...  
Chardas, ...juguemos nuestro papel  
Es nuestro tiempo  
Artificios, desrises y postizos son  
Continuación del cuento colonialista  
No te cojas pa' eso deja esa falsa vista  
Tienes talento y pregunto  
¿Hasta cuándo seremos esta poca cantidad en tarima?  
Maldita y machista sociedad que contamina  
No es racismo  
Hip hop unión  
Y nosotras de punto en el mismo escalón  
No hay verdadera revolución sin mujeres  
No flojera, como eres  
Imperfecta  
Yo también como tu he hecho cosas mezquinas  
Yo también como tu he esperado por dos pesos sonados en cualquier esquina  
Yo también como tu he sido forzada y llevada a la brutal fornicación  
Y aun seguimos siendo objetos  
Desvalorización  
¿Qué nos queda?  
Prostitución, seducción  
Esto es solo una costumbre de dar para ayudar a nuestra gente económicamente  
En este mundo tan material  
No somos nalgas y pechos solamente  
Tenemos cerebro mujer  
Siente  
Siente  
[Coro]  
[Coro]*

*Necesitamos mujeres en la vida pública, en la filosofía, en la política  
Hemos estado en una larga siesta mítica creando seres reales  
Y en el mundo han ido aumentando los males  
¿Será que tenemos que seguir amamantando, alimentando, aconsejando a quienes joden esta  
realidad?  
¿O tenemos que tomar el mando de toda esta actividad?  
Hip hop vanguardias mujeristas marcando pautas  
Concretando manifiesto  
Acción más que palabras  
Guerreras de ébano llego el momento  
Rompamos las cadenas  
Guerreras de ébano llego el momento*



*Rompamos de una vez y por siempre las cadenas que oprimen y silencian nuestras almas*

*[Coro 4x]*

*Remember*

*Artificios, flojeras y postizos son continuación del cuento colonialista*

*No te cojas pa' eso charda*

*Deja esa falsa vista*

*Eres Bella – English Translation*

*This is dedicated to all the women in the world*

*To all the women that are fighting like us*

*To all the [women] warriors, rural [women], urban[women]*

*To all the sisters*

*Especially the most Black*

*Especially the most poor*

*Especially the most fat*

*It is me, MC Pasa*

*Never has anyone spoken to you like this*

*Never here*

*I left,*

*Black women, playing our role*

*It is our time*

*Artificial, without roots and artificial we are*

*A continuation of the colonial encounter*

*Don't you be fooled because of this,*

*drop this false consciousness*

*You have talent and I ask*

*For how long will be of a few of us on stage?*

*This evil and machista society that contaminates*

*It's not racism*

*hip-hop Union*

*We are on point on the same staircase*

*There is no real revolution without women*

*[I'm not] languid,*

*Like you [I am] imperfect*

*Also like you, I have hoped for two peso sounding in whatever corner*

*Also like you, I have been forced and brought into brutal fornication*

*And even we continue feeling like objects*

*Devaluation*

*Where does it leave us?*

*Prostitution, seduction*

*It is only a custom to give to help our people economically*

*In this world so materialistic*

*No, we are not simply tits and ass*

*We have a woman's brain*

*You feel it,*

*You feel it,*

*Chorus:  
being you  
The body is not your only virtue...  
You are beautiful being you  
Ebony in Bloom  
Black light  
You are beautiful  
being you  
The body is not your only virtue...*

*... We need women in public life, in philosophy, in politics  
We have been in the longest mythical sleep [while] creating real beings  
And in the world men have gone on rising up  
Who will we have to continue breastfeeding, nourishing, and advising youth about this reality?  
Or have we taken on all of these activities?*

*hip-hop vanguard, womanist making rules  
Creating manifestos  
Action more than words  
Ebony[Women] warriors of ebony the moment has arrived  
Let us break the chains  
[Women] Warriors of ebony the moment has arrived  
We are breaking at one time and for all ways the chains that oppress and silence our spirits...  
[repeat chorus]...  
Artificial, without roots and artificial are a continuation of the colonial encounter  
Don't fall for this Black women, drop this false consciousness*

Krudas begin with a Yoruba call to ancestral warrior women, and dedicate the song to all women, especially the poorest, Blackest, and fattest women, whom they consider to be some of the most stigmatized members of Cuban society. Odaymara says, “No one has ever spoken to you like this before.” Here, she refers to the fact that no one in Cuba, since the revolution, has publicly spoken with love and respect to poor, fat, and Black women. She begins the song with a temporal play, a key component of African-based music and culture (Rose 1994, Mbembe 2001). Odaymara states, “Never here [has anyone spoken to you like this], I left.” This temporal play definitely captures one’s attention, especially when seeing them on stage. It disrupts the linear temporal logic one may expect when hearing a song, and points to the fleeting nature of her presence, but her delivery of such an important message and her sudden departure seems to cause a rupture

in one's logic: she is here yet she says she has left. Such a temporal rupture may spur one to think about and try to understand what is happening at that moment. It is after this point that Odaymara tells the audience what they are doing: they are going to talk about a "colonial story."

As a disarming mechanism, temporal play allows Odaymara and Wanda, the main voices in this song, to draw from the past, from residual values and meanings, and to draw from the future where they envision liberation. Odaymara stated in a 2005 interview in Havana that she tries to draw on ideas that people may have heard of, or ideas that people have heard but may have forgotten. By drawing upon these residual discourses and popular discourses, Krudas attempt to develop an emergent discourse that helps people to understand their present predicament (Williams 1977).

The effect seems to be that their music anchors people in an understanding of how these factors – race , gender, class, sexuality – affect the present moment; it reveals the historical basis of a shared truth: racism and sexism. Krudas want the audience to be able to see that the realities of today are linked to a history of colonial oppression and anti-neocolonial struggle. Temporal shifts are used throughout the song. The reference to a "colonial story" is a call to remember the past, as it bears directly on the present. Through reflecting on past colonialism and framing the present, i.e., the lack of women performing on stage, they ask Black women to remember that they are beautiful, to envision a process of liberation, to work together, and to leave the false colonial consciousness behind. Towards the end of the song, Odaymara shifts to the future, in which women will be truly liberated by learning to value themselves and each other.

By focusing on how women are sexualized and devalued, Krudas direct men's attention to how male perceptions of women are part of women's oppression. They help men *and* women to see how their actions are responsible for women's oppression. At one point, Wanda slips in the line, "It's not racism." Here Krudas are making a claim about the particularity of Black women's oppression. There are particular issues facing Black women that are not summarized by racism. Men, particularly Black men, are also responsible for the oppression women face, as well as women themselves. Krudas address this wider responsibility by asking women not to see themselves as sexual objects or to compete with each other for successes that are based on the superficial criteria surrounding beauty. According to Krudas, these criteria are not based on embracing the complexity and diversity of women; rather, such criteria actually devalue the intelligence and the physical diversity of women. Instead, Krudas asks women to participate in socially significant arenas normally dominated by men, such as politics, academia, or the arts.

Krudas use the image of an ebony tree in bloom to describe women; they want women to remember that Blackness is beautiful, and that Blackness is feminine. Black women are often encouraged to straighten their hair in order to appear beautiful or feminine. Black women with well-defined hips and buttocks are assumed to be fat and careless about their appearance. Strangers on the street, usually other women, often feel comfortable in making hair and weight suggestions to women who they believe can make themselves more attractive. In Cuba, women are primarily judged according to their appearance (Más 2003). In my experiences in Cuba, passing as a Cuban woman exposed me to numerous comments that I often found shocking. Some of these comments ranged

from women on the bus who whispered that I should straighten my hair, to Cuban colleagues who commented that I would be a lot prettier with straight hair and a little less weight. These comments are often tied to the very corporal features that Black women are often reduced to: hair, buttocks, weight, hips, skin color. By focusing on the intellectual attributes of women, of women's potential to do for self and to be comfortable with themselves, Krudas also target the ways in which women police each other and compete with each other for beauty, hyper-femininity, and partnerships with men. Krudas' music is a call to embrace one's body while rejecting attempts to reduce oneself to corporality. The chorus of the song reaffirms that "you [Black women] are beautiful being you, beauty is not your only virtue."

It is through the embodiment of feeling, talking about poverty sexual violence, and arguing that Black is beautiful, that Krudas' music strikes a chord with the Black women and men of the audience. In the public sphere Black and fat women often do not often hear that they are beautiful, just for being a human being. In fact, they usually hear the opposite: that they are less human for being fat or Black. For many women, to hear their size and their color praised as beautiful is a profound statement to hear, whether in a large concert hall or at home on a recently purchased CD.

In their song, "120 Horas," Krudas focus on the theme of menses. This song is an attempt to bring another aspect of women's subjectivity – the functioning of women's bodies – out from the realm of privacy into public discourse. The argument is that women should reject hegemonic discourses that say women's bodies are disgusting. In other songs, such as their most recent popular song, "Gorda [Fat Woman]," Las Krudas reject the Cuban obsession with thin, female, White, European bodies.

The continuation of, what Krudas describe as, colonial thinking has been inadvertently allowed through government social policy centered on national health. For example, in an effort to promote a healthy population, the revolution has run numerous public service ads concerning obesity. This is not to say that the rejection of fatness arrived in Cuba with the revolution, but the public health campaign added “official facts” to people’s pre-existing biases towards fat people. People who are not thin are considered lazy and unhealthy. Most importantly, in a society where women’s bodies are assumed to be used for reproduction and male pleasure, a fat woman is assumed to be less feminine as she is assumed to be undesirable by men, and unable to maintain herself, much less a family.

Women’s access to material resources also affects their ability to *feel* beautiful, since it costs money to maintain straight hair, nails, make-up, fashionable clothes, etc. These factors, in addition to Blackness, which already marks Black women as outside of femininity and beauty, affect the ability of Black, poor, and/or fat women to see themselves as beautiful (Kutzinski 1993, Arrechea 1998, De La Fuente 2001). By focusing on the intellectual attributes of women, on women’s potential to do for self and to be comfortable with themselves, Krudas also target the competition that exists between women. They argue that women do not have to compete with each other according to male-centered values and beliefs that oppress women (such as the emphasis given to physical beauty, lightness of skin, passivity, and assumed heterosexuality – performing sexual availability to men); instead, women should leave behind false consciousness/colonial thinking, as a means of working together in solidarity to end oppression because, as Las Krudas sing in *Eres Bella*, “intelligence is *your* virtue.”

Las Krudas' identity is not only one of Black female subjectivity. They also have a lesbian subjectivity. Olivia says the following about their agenda:

Entonces cuando nosotras sentimos que había otras mujeres que tenían un discurso feminista, nosotras sentimos que ya podíamos subir a otro escalón. Y el otro escalón es el escalón de salir del closet totalmente, de abrirnos como raperas lesbianas y continuar subiendo la escalera que nos lleva a la emancipación absoluta de Krudas... en ese caso también tenemos una contradicción que también nos parece hermosa. Porque la aceptamos, es real y no podemos negarla... A nosotras que somos mujeres lesbianas nos gusta Hip Hop.

..Then when we feel that there are other women who have a feminist discourse, we felt that we could take it up another step. And the other step is the step of coming out of the closet completely, and come out as lesbian rappers and continue going up the ladder until we arrive at an emancipation absolutely Kruda... in this sense we also have a contradiction that for us is beautiful. Because they accept us, that is real and we cannot negate that... For us, we are lesbian women who like hip-hop. (Olivia interview, Havana 2005)

The contradiction that is “beautiful,” is that they are out as lesbian feminists who also like hip-hop, and are working in a music genre that is considered machista and homophobic; the irony is that the public would (and have) come to respect the women that they loathe (OREMI 2005). This attitude of machismo is not specific to hip-hop culture but is also an aspect of Cuban culture. As Las Krudas gained acceptance and respect as women artists who revealed much of the complexity of life surrounding women, they gradually began to come out of the closet.

#### 10.4 Como Existe La Heterosexualidad, Existe Homosexualidad/Just As There Is Heterosexuality, There Is Homosexuality

After Krudas spurred discussions of women's issues and increased women's participation in hip-hop shows through the creation of all-female collectives such as OMEGASKILY (which toured the United States in 2007), as well as organizing workshops on gender at Havana's hip-hop symposia, they decided to come completely out of the closet as lesbians. Odaymara says the following during a 2006 interview in Havana:

Ser lesbiana es un camino. Ser bisexual es un camino. Ser transgender es un camino. Cada persona tiene su camino y entre más diverso ser mundo, más rico, más rico y más variada ser la funda mundial. Entonces no podemos meternos en el drama que todo el mundo tiene que ser esta talla... oooooo!!!!? Tú te imaginas que fue el mundo igual? !CONO! riqueza variedad diversidad porque han diferentes criterios y diferentes maneras de vivir la vida entonces, la... como explicarte... la... la transcendencia de la especie humana es mas varidada porque su origenes es de diferente componentes que se mezclaron y entonces al final es una persona que es mas en talla porque tiene un open mind, un miente abierta hacia todos que venga porque estabien.

To be lesbian is a path. To be bisexual is a path. To be transgender is a path. Every person has their path and within the most diversity is the world, the richest...variety covers the surface of the world. So, we cannot focus ourselves on the drama that all the world has to be this [one] thing.... oohh!!! Can you imagine if the world were equal. Damn!!! [with] the varied richness, the [varied] diversity because there are different criteria and different ways of living life, then... the... how do I explain this to you... the transcendence of the human species is more varied because of the different origins of the different components that have mixed, and so at the end a person is more on point because they have an open mind towards all that comes because it's [all] OK. (Odaymara interivew, Havana 2006)

Krudas argue for the embracing of difference. In this quote, Odaymara envisions a future in which people can simply *be* without any requirements on what that *being* entails. For Krudas, and for the many artists working within the alternative music scene, that would mean true freedom, true diversity, real humanity. Given the difficult conditions facing lesbians, such as isolation, social sanctions, and the possibility that speaking about one's particular experiences may be seen as severe social transgression



(OREMI 2005), I asked Odaymara about Krudas' experiences discussing these issues publicly. Odaymara says the following about why Krudas focus on sexuality within their music:

Chica, mira nos sentimos tan cómodas, tan relajadas, tan en casa, que decimos mira esta tema también. ¿por qué no? .si es parte de mí. Yo soy también esta parte y no puedo dejarla allá y defender las mujeres y no defenderme a mí como lesbiana que lo soy y que lo sufro, no solamente en el mundo del Hip Hop, sino en la comunidad cubana en su totalidad. ¿Me entiendes? Y entonces, pues, nada. Decidimos incorporarlo en nuestros temas también. Hablar de nuestra sexualidad, de que tú puedes elegir libremente con quien quieres estar, con quien quieres irte a la cama y que para nada significa una falta. Todo lo contrario. Demostrándole al mundo, estamos hace casi diez años juntas, de que es posible de que dos mujeres se amen y demostrándole a todas las personas, no del Hip Hop, sino de Cuba entera de que mira que me vas a decir tú con tu falsa moral heterosexual! Yo estoy aquí hace nueve años juntas, amándonos y qué me vas a decir, intachable. qué quieres! qué pasa! Y entonces yo pienso que igual la comunidad ha dicho ese es un ejemplo. ¿Me entiendes? (Enero 2006)

Girl, look, we feel very comfortable, very relaxed, so very much at home that we decided to look at this theme also. Why not, if its a part of me. I am also this part and I cannot leave it and defend women and not defend myself as a lesbian, [that I should leave] that which I have suffered, not only in the world of hip hop, but in all of the Cuban community. You understand me? And then, well, that's it. We decided to incorporate our themes as well. To speak of our sexuality, saying that you can liberally choose to be with whoever you want to be with, with whoever you want to go with to bed, that it doesn't represent a fault. It's the opposite. [We are] demonstrating to the world, that we have been together for almost 10 years, and that it's possible that two women love each other and show it to everyone, not just in hip hop, but, to all of Cuba that sees with your false heterosexual morals! I've been here for nine years, together, loving each other and undetachable, what do you want?! What's up?! So I think, like the community has said, this is an example. You understand me? (January 2006)

Krudas feel very relaxed in discussing the difficulties they face as Black women, particularly as Black lesbians. Through her long-term relationship with Olivia and their contributions to Cuban society, Odaymara hopes to challenge established notions of morality that depict lesbians as morally inept and socially unproductive. This comfort in speaking is related to the opening that is emerging within Cuban society, as well as a result of Krudas' attempts at carving out a space for women's, and particularly lesbians', visibility within the hip-hop community. Krudas feel they can really be true to their underground hip-hop and Black feminist roots; they speak to experiences that resonate

for them as a means of raising awareness and increasing acceptance of human diversity.

The following is an excerpt from their song “Candela,” from their first album

*Cubensi*(2003):

[Voice of Olivia with Wanda and Odaymara Krudas sounding in agreement]

*Candela by Las Krudas CUBENSI*

*y aqui tambien me quemas una realidad muy dura,  
injusta y constantemente somos ignoradas,  
maltratadas, discriminadas  
casi nunca bien representadas  
caballero esa expression no my incluye  
el hombre esa expression no me incluye  
los humanos esa expression no me incluye  
somos hembras todo eso influye en lo que voy a explicarte aqui adelante*

[coro]

*Candela vanguardia mujerista haciendo escuela  
Candela removiendo tu techo y tu suela  
Candela le guste o le duela a quien le duela  
Candela Krudas las primeras  
Candela vanguardia mujerista haciendo escuela  
Candela removiendo tu techo y tu suela  
Candela le guste o le duela a quien le duela  
Candela Krudas las primeras*

*continuamos que en la resistencia  
defendiendo derechos  
educando a la audencia  
escucha audencia  
existe la diversida  
como existe la delgades  
existe la oversidad  
como existe lo claro  
existe la oscuradad  
como existe lo maculino  
exista la feminidad  
como existe lo heterosexual  
existe la homosexualidad  
todas y todos tenemos derecho a la libertad  
eschucha pero a quien se esta quemando  
convertude con defectos todo el mundo  
esta en candela ni perfectos ni perfectas*

*Candela by Las Krudas CUBENSI-English Translation*

*...and here it also burns me, a very hard reality  
Injustice and constantly we are ignored  
poorly treated, discriminated  
gentlemen, this expression does not include me  
man [as a universal term] this expression does not include me  
Human beings [the masculine universal sense] this expression does not include me  
We are women and all of this influences that which I am going to explain to you  
in a moment*

*On fire the womanist vanguard giving class  
On fire removing your roof and your floor...  
On fire Krudas the first ones*

*We continue the resistance  
Defending rights  
Educating the audience  
Listen, audience!  
Diversity exists  
As the thin exists,  
exists the oval shaped  
As the light exists,  
The darkness exists  
As heterosexuality exists,  
Homosexuality exists  
And all women and all men, we have the right to liberty  
listen but to who those who are burning converting...  
the world and all of its defects is on fire, neither perfect women nor perfect men*

At the beginning of this song, Olivia shouts, “Audience, listen!” After assertively commanding the audience’s attention, Krudas then directly plant a seed for people to reflect on: embracing human diversity also means embracing sexual diversity. In this song, they talk about their feelings of being poorly treated and/or ignored, because they are women (implicitly meaning lesbians). But their references to darkness and light may also be a reference to the issue of race, of which all or most of their audiences are aware. Their reference to skinny and to fat is a reference to the judgment of bodies, another judgment of which most of the audiences are aware. However, by stating these realities

first, and couching them in terms of persisting inequality, Krudas create the space necessary to assert a reality that is often invisible to most Cubans: that homosexuality and, particularly, female homosexuality exists. Their intervention in this song is a direct statement: just “as heterosexuality exists, homosexuality exists.” Again, Krudas draw from past and present discourses to elevate the consciousness of the audience in an effort to help them consider future discourses, to consider discursive change.

In the song, “Amikemiñongo,” on their upcoming album, *Candela*, is an example of this. In this song, Krudas directly engage the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and the relationship of these to Cuba’s colonial legacies. The following is an excerpt of “Amikemiñongo”:

Cojoba, taina, siboney	Cojoba, taina, siboney
Caribe, guanajatabey	Caribe, guanajatabey
Manicato...	Manicato...
¿Qué más?	What else?
¿Qué más?	What else?
¿Qué más tú quieres de mi,	What do you want from me
si todo yo te lo he dado?	if I have given you all of it?
Con las armas coaccionaron,	With the weapons they coerced,
se colaron	they squeezed
De África de adueñaron	They took control of Africa
y me trajeron aquí	and bought me here
Genocidio	Genocide
Llanto, lamento, sufrimiento en todo momento	Tears, moans, suffering in that
moment	
Siempre fue así, que violento	It’s always been this way, what
	violence
Hasta cuando permitir que me lo cuenten	When will I be permitted to tell it
500 años	500 years
Basta	Enough
...	...
Que te creías pequeña que el mundo	What do you think that the world is
	small
De estar organizado sería como tu cuarto	As to be organized like your room
...	...
Explotación discriminación	Exploitation, discrimination

pobreza violencia osorbadera  
...  
Saber que se mujerea y escuchar  
  
que se corea  
Que no habrá quien se desmaye  
Bruja, tuerca,  
Yo mujer, yo  
Libertad por siempre  
...

poverty, damn violence  
...  
you know that woman things are  
being done  
sing the chorus  
No one will faint  
Witch, dyke  
I am woman, I (am)  
Freedom forever

In the beginning of this song, Krudas call out the names of all the native Caribbean nations that suffered near or total genocide during the initial colonization of the Americas. They ask, to those representing the colonial legacies of genocide, “What else do you want, when I have given all?” The central theme of the song is “enough with the colonialism, it is time for those who have suffered for five hundred years to be free.” In this song, they focus on the social organizing agenda of colonialism; in essence, they focus on modernity. They ask “Do you think that the world is small, as to be organized like your room?” Krudas challenge that which represents colonialism.

But what represents colonial legacies? It is the capitalist state and its colonial ideologies (racism, sexism, homophobia, classism) that attempt to organize subjects, including “nature,” in an effort to prepare them for capital’s productive interests. Those persons who pursue a modernist agenda may do so through the continuation of colonial violence (imprisonment, legislation), or through ideological structures (social norms, notions of morality). However, ideological structures are not just embedded in social institutions such as the state and the family; every individual also perpetuates colonial thinking through their own internalized prejudices. In their music, Krudas are able to link sexual oppression to other oppressions. In this song, it is by directly focusing on women and making the call for women to fight to liberate themselves, that they also slip in the

word “tuerca,” which is slang for “dyke.” By naming exploitation and discrimination together, Krudas connect exploitation and discrimination to colonial violence. In this way, they are able to link race, gender, and sexuality to colonialization. Through making these connections between racism, sexism, classism, exploitation, and homophobia, Krudas attempt to help the audience to see that liberation is for everyone who has suffered as a result of the organizing impulses of modernity.

Olivia says the following about how their message about lesbian visibility has been accepted by the hip-hop community:

OK, really things have gone very well for us. To carry the weight that we are Krudas, and we always have had a strong projection, we have not been the strongest that we could have been, because our audience is very machista and we ought to go with periodically giving information that today is a lot for our audience, it's a lot for our public, for much of our people, [it is] strong information that we are women, musicians, rappers, mc, protagonists of the only artistic act that defends women, [that defends] all, heterosexuals, bisexuals, unemployed, workers, artists, all, but also, we are lesbians... and we believe in the absolute independence of women.

So this message is very strong for all of the world's communities. So, I think that we have had a lot of strength to continue. There have been days where the public receives us in silence, other days they applaud us a little more, other days they begin to identify a lot with what we have done and applaud us a lot. The other day they applauded us a lot, a lot, a lot, and they yelled at us: *Bravo, Bravo, Bravo*. And I don't know, every day the respect for us has been growing, because we have won it, because our work has been serious during these years, because really, we respect our community very much and all that we say, we say with a lot of love and a lot of respect. And I think that this has been the secret, they love us because we also love them. (Olivia and Odaymara interview, Havana 2006)

In this quote, Olivia attributes the success of Las Krudas to their hard work as artists, their efforts to develop a more inclusive message, and their efforts to reach out to other female MCs. Olivia says that, initially, they were very strong in their stage presentation. They felt they had to be “extreme” and tough in the delivery of their message. What they realized, however, was that if they were to truly try to elevate the consciousness of their community, they had to do some education first, in order to help their audiences to understand their experiences as Black women *and* lesbians. It is because they decided to

approach their work from a level of love and respect, Olivia says, that they began to receive love and respect in return. This, she says, is part of the reason why they have been so successful as artists.

### **10.5 Krudas and the Queer of Color Critique**

In order to highlight the specificity of Krudas' particular situation, I chose the title "No Soy Kruda" or "I am not Kruda" for this chapter. The title refers to a rumor that I heard within the hip-hop community that one female MC stated in an interview that she was a feminist, "but she was not Kruda." This statement is loaded with cultural implications. Some of the implications are: that she is not a man-hater; that she embraces femininity; and that her goal is to challenge established discourses that exclude Black women from hegemonic femininity. This statement is linked to Krudas being out as lesbians: Krudas' open lesbian identity in addition to their feminist identity is considered to be a confirmation that Krudas hate men. This MC's response was an attempt of a woman to maintain a feminist identity while distinguishing herself from the stereotypes surrounding feminism that were seemingly *confirmed* by the emergence of Las Krudas on the hip-hop scene. Krudas' embodiment of fatness, lesbianism, dreadlocked hair, Dashikis, Blackness, and femininity is a physical and intellectual assault on established, Cuban cultural norms surrounding heteronormativity. It is Krudas' focus on issues such as racism, homophobia, sexism, and colonialism that allows them to offer a Black feminist and a queer of color critique.

Roderick Ferguson writes the following in *Aberrations in Black Towards a Queer of Color Critique*(2004):

**We may even use this cultural form to deepen our understanding of the gender and sexual multiplicity that constitutes African American culture. If we were to relate this sort of integration to**

**queer of color analysis, we might say that queer of color critique employs cultural forms to bear witness to the critical gender and sexual heterogeneity that comprises minority cultures. Queer of color analysis does this to shed light on the ruptures in culture, ruptures that expose the restrictions of universality, the exploitations of capital, and the deceptions of national culture. (24)**

The queer of color critique is a hybrid identity located at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and national identity. The queer of color critique challenges the ideology that race, class, gender, and sexuality are distinct categories. Ferguson argues that the queer of color critique has its basis in Black feminism. He argues that it emerges as both radical liberal traditions and state-socialism link social disorder to non-heteronormativity. Focusing on the U.S., he links American racial formations to non-heteronormativity as well. It is in this way that the queer of color critique challenges “ideologies of discreteness,” the idea that racial, material, and national subjectivities are somehow disconnected. The uniqueness of the queer of color critique is that it is a critical discourse that links economic exploitation and social inequality to the organizing principles for contemporary society.

While Ferguson links race, class, gender, and sexuality to national ideologies, he has been critiqued for Americentrism. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (2005) pushed further beyond the Americentric focus with its interrogation of the relationship between race, gender, heteronormativity, the state, and queer pedagogy. The anthology challenged national boundaries; many of the contributors are non-U.S. Americans who offered non-U.S. centered critiques. However, I seek to push what characterizes the queer of color critique further, in order to argue that the challenge to ideologies of discreteness is also a challenge to the conceptualization of geographical borders.

An unspoken issue that underlies Ferguson’s analysis is how colonial legacies continue to serve as the basis of the organizing principles for national identities



throughout the Americas. What makes the queer of color critique distinct from a Black feminist critique is that it accounts for sexuality *and* coloniality in its analysis of Black and Brown oppression. Like Black feminism, it does not privilege one oppression over another, thereby allowing sexuality to be accounted for in one's subjectivity. But more specifically, the queer of color critique challenges the ideologies of discreteness that are supposedly bounded by national borders and the discrete formation of national identities. In essence, even though Spain, Portugal, England, France, the Netherlands, and Germany all participated in the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism, it is assumed that they are different nations with different cultures. By extension, the developments of American societies and social hierarchies are so distinct that Latin American countries, for example, are able to be understood as racial democracies while only the American United States is understood as the racially segregated, racist nation.

Such a perspective affects the ability of Brown or Black subjects in Cuba, Ecuador, Colombia, or the Dominican Republic, for example, to develop a critique of their experiences with race as U.S. American anti-racist, anti-sexual-inequality, anti-heteronormative critiques are understood as only necessary for the American United States. The effects of these nationally-bounded ideologies of discreteness is that the formations of Black and Brown subjects throughout the Americas, and the rest of the world, are seen as unrelated to particular modes of production that have their origins in the emergence of *regional* European global capital, of which the transatlantic slave trade was a product. Or even worse, when those connections are made, they are made by only using a particularly U.S. American framework, in which U.S. American discourse

becomes hegemonic, as opposed to being located as one node in a system of representation linked to the effects of a global European-modernist project.

Additionally, an analysis of racism, and its intersection with gender and sexuality, is difficult within Latin American contexts where racism is considered to be a core part of U.S. American national identity, while intermixture (or race erasure) is assumed to be key to Latin American and Caribbean national identities. The effect of this disjointed approach to race, gender, and sexuality within the Americas has resulted in the invisibility of Afro-Latinos, whose experiences with poverty and other forms of social inequalities are a result of racial, sexual, and gender ideologies.

By linking their analysis of social inequality to colonial legacies, Las Krudas' work is reflective of the queer of color critique in that it is a challenge to hegemonic ideologies that characterize national identities as exceptional and each inequality as disconnected and specific. Their "Kruda" identity is so reflective of a queer of color critique, as I have described it, that "nature" also has a subjectivity within their discourse. In essence, the work of Las Krudas hints at the possibility that a queer of color critique offers a far reaching anti-modernist and anti-heteronormative critique. With its focus on gender and sexual difference within, between, and among races, coupled with a material-historical, global, and anti-colonial/anti-capitalist critique, combined with a rejection of the foundational logics of modernity's organizing impulses (such as the existence of time and space, only one universal subjectivity, nature as without subjectivity, non-European scientific knowledge as irrationality), Krudas' critique has the possibility of yielding an anti-modern subjectivity. Instead of a queer of color critique emerging at the boundaries or intersections of varying theories, identities, and subjectivities, the Kruda subjectivity is

more akin to one line that is not a straight line, but a giant scribble that cuts, intersects, reaches back, forward, over, and under, marking the numerous elements that are hybrid products of the colonial project.

## 10.6 Reaction to Krudas' Work

**Figure 10i: DJ D'Boys! talking during a show in 2006. Behind him he has placed the Peace Flag (the Gay Flag) as a set prop for his equipment. He is an example of the artists within the hip-hop movement that support all people and are against any type of "racism" including homophobia. Photograph courtesy of DJ D'Boys!**

Besides producing and performing their music, much of Krudas' activism has centered on the development and empowerment of female hip-hop artists. Part of Krudas' strategy was first to present their experiences as Black women to the hip-hop community. The issue of race is an experience with which most of the hip-hop community identifies. This community also recognizes that there is a lack of perspective on women's experiences within hip-hop's overwhelmingly male-dominated sphere. Even though the community tends to be very machista, as a majority of hip-hop concertgoers are men, the artists themselves recognize the value of women's intervention.

Male hip-hop artists, such as Randy Acosta of Los Paisanos, Jumpi and Michael of Junior Clan, DJ D'Boys, and Alexay of Obsesión, when talking about solidarity among Cubans who are fighting oppression, will often cite the work of Krudas as the work of artists with tremendous insight into the experiences of oppressed people, particularly Black women and lesbians, whose experiences are often not included in solidarity work. As a result of their community work and their ability to use hip-hop as a consciousness-raising mechanism, Krudas are considered one of the pillars of Havana's contemporary underground hip-hop scene. While they have great support and respect within the hip-

hop community, the topics of their songs are considered socially, and by extension, politically, radical. Jumpi of the Junior Clan says the following:

OK, Las Krudas are, within the hip-hop community, something that is very important, primarily within the feminine branch... because this is the area in which they have advanced the most. It is with a force for women, so that they fight not just because they think that their life is a house, or having kids, but that they can have much more apart from being mothers. They can have much more than that. They can also be free in their thinking, so that man is not exploiting them and they say that they [women] have to do this and they [women] have to do this. They [women] can be capable of doing whatever men do equally. They can go, in any determined moment, if they have to and defend themselves for whatever reason because they are capable. You know what I mean? They don't have to be discriminated against, in any way, that they are objects of the home never again. This is the part that Las Krudas defend, the value of women in the entire world. (Jumpi interview, Havana/2006)

Jumpi of the Junior Clan echoes a sentiment felt by many male and female hip-hop artists, producers, and fans: that Las Krudas have been integral in pressing the issue of women's oppression, and in offering insight into how women have the power to liberate themselves. Their male counterparts are definitely listening and thinking about what Krudas are saying. The following is an excerpt from the song *Usted*, on Krudas' upcoming CD, *Candela*. This song features the all-male trio, The Junior Clan. The excerpt is an example of the collaborative work that Krudas have produced with their male peers:

*Usted*  
Las Krudas CUBENSI & Junior Clan

*You*  
Las Krudas CUBENSI & Junior Clan

...  
Haz más Revolución que  
yo siempre manifestó en mi tema  
El mensaje positivo  
Recuerde que el metro  
de los Júnior y las Krudas  
Recuerden que nosotros  
hacemos algo por la patria  
Seguidores del Che somos  
Si usted quiere darse  
censura a lo que hacemos  
Que esta bueno

...  
Making more of the revolution  
that I always have in my songs  
Positive message  
Remember the path  
of Junior and Las Krudas  
Remember that we are doing  
something for the country  
Followers of el Che we are  
If you want to censor yourself from  
what we are doing  
Then that's fine

Esto es piano pa usted...  
Krudas, Júnior Clan echando un están  
Reconciliando razón  
de intersexual communion espiritual  
Oiga usted dramático  
Será posible que podamos  
luchar con equivalencia aquí  
Vegetal conciencia  
recalcitrantes

This is the piano for you  
Krudas, Junior Clan making a stand  
Reconciling the view of intra-sexual  
spiritual communion  
Listen you dramatic  
Will it be possible that we can  
fight with equivalence here  
Vegetated recalcitrant  
consciousness

In this excerpt, Mamen “El Invisible” is the voice speaking. In the song, he notes that he is giving revolution, spurring social change with his songs. He asks the listener to remember the path of Krudas and Junior Clan, that they are contributing, through their positive message, something to their country. They follow in the footsteps of resistance leaders such as Che, who believed that all work, including artistic work, should be for the betterment of society. El Invisible tells the audience, especially those who have vegetated, recalcitrant minds, that they can stop listening if they want (that they can censor themselves). By saying this El Invisible is showing that he is so strong, and so centered in himself and his message that he does not care if the recalcitrants who are not interested in changing themselves ignore Junior Clan’s and Krudas’ message. It is the listeners’ problem if they (the listeners) do not want to listen to a positive message. He offers to give them the piano, in other words, to play the exit music, for them to leave/stop listening and to continue on in their ignorance. This comment is a challenge to the music listener. Hip-Hop draws people who view themselves as enlightened because they are seeking to elevate their consciousness through hip-hop. El Invisible is challenging the listener’s authenticity as someone who says that they are underground, but are recalcitrant as they are machista and refuse to listen to a positive message about women’s liberation.

El Invisible goes on to say that this song, a collaborative work between Las Krudas and Junior Clan, is a collaboration that redefines intra-sexual spiritual communion. In essence, men and women can have an intellectual connection, a solidarity-based connection. The spiritual connection between men and women can be one of mutual collegial respect; men and women do not need to connect to each other only through sexual intercourse. This directly challenges Cuban heteronormativity, women can be socially respected without being objects of male sexual desire. He says it is possible that men and women can equally fight together. El Invisible directly challenges the macho mind that assumes that men and women are not equal, and that the only respectful relationship men and women can have with each other is through sex. He is also directly challenging the men within the hip-hop movement who dislike Krudas' work. These men do not like the fact that Krudas are directly challenging their assumptions concerning women's relationship to men, they are also disturbed by the fact that Krudas are serious in their critiques of machismo. As lesbians, Las Krudas are off limits to men, they are sexually unavailable to men and demand respect. Artists such as Junior Clan support Krudas' work.

In another collaborative work called "Mujeres y Madres" (also on *Candela*), performed by Las Krudas and the all-male duo Anonimo Consejo, the latter group also directly challenge machismo. The following is an excerpt:

[Voice of Olivia]	[Voice of Olivia]
Lucha, Luchando contra el machismo del mundo... Siempre, siempre...	Fighting, fighting against the machismo of the world Always... always...
[Voice of Sekou]	[Voice of Sekou]
Minuto a minuto golpeada	Minute by minute beaten

por el bruto machista  
absoluto hombre diminuto  
Mujer no significa objeto, sexo, abuso  
Prostituto vienes de su fruto  
Escupo destupo oídos brutos  
Respecto absoluto a usted  
señora madre creadora  
Autoestima adora  
Siempre Luchadora  
Mirando cada hora  
Negra tu voz enseña  
Negra, princesa, dueña  
Negra belleza esa  
Negra mujer que sueña  
Negra purez eterna  
Negra mi madre

Bella, bella

...

!Mujer con tu autoestima  
siempre vencerás!  
!Mujer con tu autoestima  
siempre vencerás!

by a macho brute  
absolutely a small man  
Woman does not mean object, sex, abuse  
Prostitution comes from her fruit  
I spit, I unclog brute ears  
I absolutely respect you,  
miss creative mother  
Self-esteem [I] adore  
Always the fighter  
Looking at every hour  
Black woman your voice teaches  
Black woman, princess, owner  
That beautiful Black woman  
The Black woman that dreams  
Black woman eternal purity  
Black woman my mother

Beautiful, beautiful

Woman with your self-esteem you  
always will win!  
Woman with your self-esteem you  
always will win!

At the beginning of this song, Sekou of Anonimo Consejo addresses an issue that many men have had to witness: the abuse of their mothers, or other women who are dear to them. Together with Las Krudas, Anonimo Consejo relay the message that Black women with self-esteem are beautiful, while men who abuse women are disrespectful machos. There is nothing manly about beating down a woman's self-esteem. But Sekou also points out that women with self-esteem will always win, she will always be happy, because she will not be afraid to take care of herself. Many women feel that they have to have male partners in order to feel beautiful, to feel worthwhile. In the song, Krudas warn women against men who are controlling. They ask women to establish their independence as a way to avoid potentially abusive men. The solidarity that men have shown with Krudas' message is an attempt to show all women within the hip-hop

community that they have support within the hip-hop community. It is an attempt to show women and men that macho men will not be tolerated by anyone, including other men.

Of course, Krudas do not represent the voices of all lesbians in Cuba, although it is generally recognized among the UHHM that they have their finger on the pulse of the issues affecting many Black women and lesbians. Lesbians who see themselves of a higher social status than Las Krudas often disagree with Krudas' message. They see them as reactionary and crass. Part of this resistance centers on Krudas' open discussion of their sexuality, and the fact that they identify as fat, Black, poor women. For many of women, this is another sign of Krudas' lower class tendencies: they are not trying to lose weight, and they openly identify as feminists who are just as strong as men.

Though some women may be wary of Krudas' sexuality and feminist ideology, *none* of the female hip-hop artists I interviewed said anything against any of Krudas' social demands. Even those women who do not want to be allied with Krudas' particular agenda manage to find subtle ways of distancing themselves, without openly disrespecting Krudas' discourse and poetry. Nonetheless, Las Krudas have been able to foster a remarkable amount of solidarity among women within the hip-hop community, even among those who do not self-identify as feminist. Women's support is evident in the overwhelming participation of women (and men) in Krudas' workshops on gender during events such as the hip-hop symposia.

Since they began performing in 1998, there has been a notable increase in the presence of women at Krudas' shows. However, these women are overwhelmingly straight. Pelusa says the following about the social reality of Black lesbians:



Por ejemplo hay otras mujeres artistas cubanas lesbianas, que tienen una música más suave como trova... Que para la comunidad lesbiana ese tipo de música es más aceptable, se identifican con ese tipo de música. También es una música que atrae mucho a personas blancas y es un fuerte de la comunidad blanca, lesbianas. Entonces hay muchas mujeres que van a otro tipo de música, no al Hip Hop. Entonces en el Hip Hop hay muchos hombres y pocas mujeres. Para ser una mujer lesbiana y estar dentro del Hip Hop hemos tenido que atravesar años de lucha, respeto y amor. Entonces, preguntarnos siempre: *¿Por qué las mujeres lesbianas negras no se acercan a la comunidad del Hip Hop y no les gusta?* Y no tenemos muchas respuestas, pero realmente hay respuestas un poco tristes... Es que, por ejemplo, a las mujeres negras lesbianas no tienen mucho tiempo para ir al Hip Hop, tienen mucho trabajo para hacer, para sobrevivir, para buscar dinero. En el Hip Hop no hay mucho dinero, no hay dinero y las mujeres negras lesbianas no tienen dinero, no tienen maneras de... Para muchas mujeres negras cubanas lesbianas es difícil su vida, muy difícil. Ellas necesitan trabajar mucho, todo el tiempo. Y ya te digo, es difícil como unificar dichas cosas: mujer, lesbiana, Hip Hop, negra, es difícilísimo. La mayoría de mujeres lesbianas negras van a otro tipo de reuniones, a otro tipo de lugares donde puedan, no se, conseguir para sobrevivir. -Pelusa Havana, 2006

For example, there are other women artists that are Cuban lesbians that have softer music like Trova. For the lesbian community this kind of music is much more acceptable and they identify with this kind of music. Also it is a type of music that attracts a lot of White people, and it is very strong within the White lesbian community. So there are a lot of women that go to this type of music, not to Hip Hop. Then in Hip Hop there are a lot of men and very little women. To be a lesbian woman and be within Hip Hop we have had to overcome years of fight, respect and love. So, they always ask us: *Why don't Black lesbian women join the Hip Hop community? They don't like it?* And we don't have very many answers, but really we have answers that are a little sadder... It is that Black lesbians don't have a lot of time for Hip Hop, they have a lot of work they have to do in order to live, to look for money. In Hip Hop, there is not a lot of money, and Black lesbian women do not have money, they don't have a way to... For many Black lesbian Cuban women life is very difficult, very difficult. They need to work a lot all the time. And like I said, it is hard to unify these things: woman, lesbian, Hip Hop, black... it's very difficult. The majority of Black women go to other types of activities, other places where they can, I don't know, find a way to survive. Pelusa in Havana, 2006.

Some male artists have asked Krudas why only a few Black lesbians within the hip-hop community. Lesbian attendance to hip-hop shows is lower, than in other genres such as Trova or reggaetón which are the music genres that have historically drawn a larger lesbian population. Based on my preliminary research I find this is linked to the perception of hip-hop as an overwhelmingly masculinist, aggressive genre for Black males, and aggressive Black women. This speaks to some of the rigid expectations about femininity as well as racism, which are definitely a part of Cuban lesbian life. Among

poor Black lesbians, Krudas argue that life is very difficult for them in terms of family responsibilities and economic resources, and they work hard to find ways to survive.

Outside of hip-hop shows and other activities related to their work as artists, women artists rarely visit Las Krudas in their Havana apartment. Usually, the women who stop by Krudas' apartment just to chat either arrive with their boyfriends or husbands, or are out as lesbians. Often, the only women who speak to Krudas in public space are women with husbands or boyfriends, other lesbians, or those working with Las Krudas. The isolation that they face outside of work is definitely palpable. Nonetheless, the level of respect and solidarity that Las Krudas have within the hip-hop community does not exist on the same scale within the lesbian community. This may be a result of the high premium placed on performing appropriate femininity; openly talking about *gender* transgression via sexual deviancy is frightening for a lot of women, and many women are scared of being implicated in such acts by virtue of their association with out lesbians.

Olivia says the following about stereotypes of women rappers and their experiences with heterosexual female artists within the hip-hop community:

Look, for us it has been very nice because the history of women's rap in Cuba I think that, look, to be a lesbian woman doing hip-hop is something very beautiful. Because we have seen a lot of women doing rap, that to me seem very lesbian like because they appear, because a lot of time their project is very strong, they put on pants, because they make very masculine gestures, very masculine and very beautiful. But later when the act ends, they are very soft, and they speak very soft, and maybe, a lot of them don't talk to us because they know that we were lesbians and they only talk to their husbands or with other heterosexual women. So we began to surround ourselves with these women and with the intent to be their friends and at least their peers, and with a lot of strength, we came to be very nice to them, and to talk to them and to ask them questions about things. Later we also, with the words of our songs, they began to feel very included in our messages, they began to feel very respected by our words. Then the relationship began to get better between them and us, and we continue forward. (Olivia/Olivia interview, Havana2006)

At first, Olivia thought that the women artists were possibly lesbians, given their dress and their strong stage presence; part of her assumption was based on stereotypes about women hip-hop artists – namely, that they are gender transgressors and as a result, possibly gay. However, her assumption was also possibly linked to Krudas' isolation as lesbians: there was some hope that they could meet other women like them. However, after the performances, Olivia commented that the women spoke with soft voices, they seemed to be more passive than their stage presence. Other women did not speak to Krudas, or only did so when their husbands or boyfriends were nearby. Realizing that these were their peers as artists, Las Krudas worked hard to show that they were in solidarity with other female artists. They worked hard to create community with fellow women artists. When Las Krudas first started to perform as a group, they were very radical; their message verged on what some in the U.S. would consider to be radical feminism. However, they came to realize that they needed to be strategic about their songs and performances. The fact that they are lesbians and out of the closet was in and of itself a major social statement in Cuban society. They realized that though they wanted to stay true to their message and themselves, they had a lot of educating to do in order to create the foundation needed for their audiences to understand their complex identity as Black lesbians. Las Krudas did so by focusing on the aspects of their experiences that many Black women shared. They did so to begin to try to create solidarity among their female and male peers. It is for this reason that Krudas implemented their strategy of first addressing issues that affected Black women, and once they increased the representation of solo-women artists who focused on these issues, they then focused on their identity as lesbians.

## 10.7 Conclusion/Discussion

Together Las Krudas work to expand discourses surrounding women, with a particular focus on race, gender, material inequality, and sexuality through their music, performances, interviews, and writing. They elucidate the presence of Black women, particularly Black lesbians, who are virtually invisible in Cuba, and throughout the Americas. These women are not invisible simply because of the actions of their particular state to silence dissent, or simply because they participate in their own oppression. Their invisibility is rooted in the interplay of systemic social and cultural oppressions that are linked to the: colonial legacies and the continued interests of European global capital, which, in turn, are responsible for the global division of labor; the social hierarchies within states, particularly post-colonial and neocolonial states, and the emergence of heteronormativity as form of social organization. As both local and global actors, Las Krudas give voice to Black women's subjectivity, as well as make visible lesbian subjectivity. By centering their Black feminist and queer of color critiques within Latin, Caribbean, and global cultures, they challenge the silence on issues surrounding the interrelationship between race, gender, sexuality and material inequality that is justified by the discreteness of national boundaries in the Americas.

While many male hip-hop artists support Krudas' music and value their insight, not all male artists feel that Krudas' work is appropriate. These artists take issue with Krudas' discussion of homosexuality, but rarely publicly challenge Krudas, given the high level of respect Krudas enjoy within the hip-hop community. These men believe discussions of homosexuality do not have a place within hip-hop. They argue these discussions belong at gallery openings, ballet, and theater performances. In essence,

these particular artists still associate homosexuality with a type of White bourgeois culture that is disconnected from the culture of Cuban citizens, particularly socially conscious, Black artistic expressions. In short, while there are those who do not value Krudas' work and see it as a form of "chisme" (simple talk or gossip), there are many more who value the revolutionary implications of Krudas' activism. As a result, over the last three years, there has been a marked increase in the amount of women and men attending Krudas' shows.<sup>60</sup>



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<sup>60</sup> I have noticed from videos of Krudas performances that there are more women standing in the audience. The amount of women in the audience has increased from about ten women to over twenty. Additionally, the number of women who spoke to Krudas after shows, increased from two or three to at least ten. Also, from Krudas' own assessment they have noticed an increase in women at their shows, and they have mentioned that more women have started talking to them after shows, at their public workshops, and on the street. The discussion on gender at the first hip-hop symposium, of which Krudas and several other women were organizers, drew a room packed with women (and men), while at least ten to fifteen more stood outside of the room in order to hear the discussion.

**Figure10j:Krudas performing in 2005 in Havana. Fans show Krudas two thumbs up (left) and I love you (right). Video clip courtesy of Las Krudas.**

Las Krudas have engendered the respect of male peers. If there is a hip-hop show or festival, Las Krudas are on the informal list of underground hip-hop's best performers; they are must-haves at hip-hop festivals, and frequently headline underground hip-hop shows, including the shows that are being organized internationally. Additionally, their work is produced by renowned Cuban producers such as Pablo Herrera, who encouraged them to join the underground hip-hop movement in 1998. They have collaborated on CDs with groups such as the Junior Clan and Anonimo Consejo, are acknowledged in the work of popular artists such as Obsesión, Randy Acosta of Los Paisanos, and Papo Record. Even after moving to the United States in 2006 in order to seek opportunities to engage the global feminist and hip-hop communities, they have been included in Cuban hip-hop concerts, often times as headliners (for example, the East Coast and West Coast Tours of OMEGAS KILAY, during the spring and summer of 2007). One only has to peruse their MySpace page ([www.myspace.com/3krudas](http://www.myspace.com/3krudas)) to see that they are frequently touring and working within Cuban hip-hop's Diaspora. Additionally, they receive messages of love and support from their male and female counterparts who live in and outside of Cuba, many of whom, like Las Krudas, are also among Cuba's most famous underground hip-hop artists. While Krudas have moved on to a different phase of their artistic, activist, and professional careers, the goal of this chapter has been to document the intersections of the critical discourses circulating within Cuba's public sphere as a result of Cuba's underground hip-hop movement. It remains to be seen whether Las Krudas' "Kruda" discourse remains a salient discourse in Cuba's hip-hop movement, or

if another woman-centered group will fill the critical void left at the local level in Havana by Las Krudas.

## **Chapter XI**

### **Conclusion**

Cuba's underground hip-hop movement represents one of the many outcomes of the post-WWII global struggle against oppression. The Cuban UHHM is a result of the conscious aesthetic choice of Cuba's socially conscious, politicized post-1959 generation to spur social change by challenging the Cuban state and Cuban citizens to think critically about their role in social oppression, and to work for its solution. The work of the UHHM centers on the production of ideologies that can become the basis for an emerging utopian society. By challenging and altering the ideological orientation of everyday citizens, these artists hope to stimulate fundamental changes in all sectors of society. It is in this way that these artists challenge established approaches to social change: they do not consider the state or social policy to be the only arenas through which one can stimulate massive social change.

Through the UHHM, Black and Mulato youth combine several 1960s radical traditions: the ideologies of Che Guevara, the tradition of older counter-cultural music traditions such as Nueva Trova, post-1959 revolutionary ideology, and the Global hip-hop Movement. Underground hip-hop artists are working to effect changes locally and globally by expressing their particular experiences as racialized subjects in a marginalized nation. Underground Cuban hip-hop is one mechanism in which many voices, historically silenced because of racism, sexism *and* homophobia are now



participating in the socially critical national debates concerning politics and aesthetics. Through this participation, the UHHM compels a recognition by the state, and by society at large, that culture is political. Despite Cuba's isolation throughout the 1990s, Cuban youth have continued to engage in ideological conversations and exchanges with global movements for social equality. It is in this spirit that Cuban has been taken up and used as a particularly Cuban contribution to global discussions of social change.

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

In Section I, I interrogated the notion of legitimate political participation, and the idea that “civil society” is the only site for legitimate democratic deliberation. Though the absence of “civil society” is used as the marker for social inequality in Cuba, I argued that the Brown and Black populations living throughout the Americas since the colonial period have largely been excluded from civil society and the public sphere. These populations were the targets of an ideological agenda that, in conjunction with physical violence and legislation, would prepare them for production in service to European capital.

The particular type of repression, oppression, and marginalization that Afro-descendent and indigenous populations face cannot be addressed by using contemporary notions of civil society as the marker for liberty and equality, and as an assumed developmental goal. I argued that contemporary civil society is also often conflated with the free market and the public sphere in such a way that the normative role of civil society – its function as a filter for what interests are represent able and how those ideas are represented – is ignored or obscured. Through a focus on the artistic debates and the early counter-cultural movements of post-1959 Cuba, I considered how Cuba's

revolutionary leaders and politicized cultural workers attempted to address this issue of broadening democratic processes and political participation by expanding the range of practices that were considered legitimate forms of democratic deliberation.

In Section II, I looked at how the Cuban Revolution institutionalized art and culture as a means of socializing ideological production. Because of Cuba's colonial experience and majority-African population, the connection between culture, art, aesthetics, and politics, is ever present. Cuba is one of the places in Latin America and the Caribbean where the struggle continues over which worldview – indigenous, African, and/or European – will become the organizing logic of society. The worldview that becomes hegemonic determines how resources are produced and redistributed within society. In this section, I addressed the radical nature of Cuba's artistic traditions, and the difference between the two views – the utopian view and the Soviet hard-liner/anti-American view – that have come to dominate Cuban cultural politics.

In Section II, I also narrowed the focus to explore the ways in which social actors have taken up and used art, and its social effects. To this end, I explored the experience of being “Black” in Cuba. I then established the relationship of hip-hop to the reemergence of a Black subjectivity in Cuba, and to Cuba’s critical music traditions such as Nueva Trova. I addressed the relationship between art and activism in Cuba by analyzing how underground hip-hop artists have attempted to resolve some of the inequalities that they face at the local and national levels through their participation in the cultural sphere. Finally, I linked this to Cuba’s historical debates surrounding culture and revolution.

Section III focused on what interests are represented within the underground hip-hop movement, how they have been represented, and the social effects of the movement. The underground hip-hop movement is the successor to the artistic debates that took place during the early years of the revolution, and has largely been responsible for stimulating national discussions of race, feminism, and even homosexuality – all of which are topics that had been taboo for much of the revolutionary period. I privileged the experiences of Black lesbians and addressed the importance of sexuality in structuring (Black) women's lives. Finally, I explored the ways in which the UHHM in Cuba offers a challenge to established notions of political participation, and opens up new possibilities for considering how social change occurs within a society.

### **The Sociological Implications of My Research**

It seems that the institutionalization of a grassroots-based cultural sphere, which includes a humanistic education that includes artistic literacy, along with a massive redistributive project, is key to increasing democratic participation. This can be done by expanding our notion of what represents legitimate political participation to include cultural production. For example, it is because of the nature of the UHHM as a social movement, that women have a structure, support network, and the material base necessary to represent a feminist identity and a feminist ideology in Cuba, in the absence of a specifically feminist movement.

However, it does not seem to be enough that culture is recognized as politics. This is the reason why a humanistic education is also important. Cultural production can easily be appropriated within capitalist markets to encourage individualism and consumption. One of the reasons why underground hip-hop is able to offer an inclusive

social space is because the ideological specificity of each artist's discourse or "poetry" has so far had to meet the basic criteria of Underground discourse: that it is socially critical, intellectually and spiritually challenging, enlightening, productive, and encouraging of activism for increased social inclusion and for a better world. Ideologies that are materialistic, individualistic, and that do not center on helping people understand the difficulties they face, or that do not advocate for nature and for a notion of the sublime, are excluded from the movement. It is the deployment of "Underground authenticity" that allows for members of the community to challenge those – even fellow community members – who may be treating other people poorly because of internalized prejudices.

The inclusion of what European cultures consider "art" into democratic processes in the Americas is particularly important and necessary for societies that have large Afro-descendent and indigenous populations. The recognition of alternative forms of democratic practice, such as those found in cultural movements, music, and other artistic traditions, can finally acknowledge the influence of indigenous and African cultural practices that had been largely stifled by colonial repression. In the case of Afro-diasporic populations in particular, by situating hip-hop within the discourses of the larger Black Atlantic, I have also attempted to show how Black musical traditions have been an integral part of political processes within the African diaspora. Given state-based institutional support and grassroots-run cultural institutions, such traditions have the potential to function as a mechanism to broaden democratic participation within Western public spheres, as it increases the ways in which people are able to represent self and community.

**Appendix**  
**Discography, Interviews,**  
**IRB Forms &**  
**Supplementary Materials**

## Discography

- Agencia Cubana de Rap. Asere Volume 1, Compilation CD. Released circa 2004.
- Agencia Cubana de Rap. Asere Volume 2, Compilation CD. Released circa 2005.
- La FabriK (Doble Filo and Obsesión). *La FabriK*, Independent production by La FabriK, 2003.
- Las Krudas Cubensi. KRUDAS CUBENSI. Independently produced, 2003.
- Las Krudas Cubensi. Candela. Independently Produced, Forth Comming.
- Obsesión. *Un Monton De Cosas*. EGREM, 2002.
- Papaya Records. *Cuban hip-hop All Stars*, 2001.
- Randee Acozta. *Jodido Protagonista*. Independently Produced by Randee Acozta. circa 2003.

## Interviews

- Linares, Havana, 2005, 2006
- Hernandez, Havana, 2006
- Pasita, Havana, 2005, 2006
- Pelusa, Havana 2005, 2006
- Krudas, Austin 2006
- Magia of Obsesión, Havana, 2006
- NoNo, Havana, 2005, 2006
- Alexis/DJ D'Boys, Havana 2005, 2006
- Mikel el Extremo, Havana 2005, 2006
- MC La Yula, Havana 2006
- Yumpi, Havna 2006
- DJ Leydis, Havana 2005, 2006
- Rensoli, Havana 2005, 2006
- Randy Acosta, Havana 2005, 2006
- Alexay of Obsesión, Havana 2005, 2006



Date: March 22, 2008 12:47:58 AM EDT



## 1. General Study Information

All questions marked with a red asterisk (\*) require a response. Questions without a red asterisk may or may not require a response, depending on those questions' applicability to this study.

### 1.1 \* Study Title (limited to 256 characters):

Towards an Understanding of Marginality and Citizenship in Contemporary Cuba

#### 1.1.1 Full Study Title (if applicable):

### 1.2 \* Principal Investigator:

Tanya Saunders

### 1.3 Study Team Members: (Note: PI is listed below and other study team members must be added one at a time)

Study Team Member	Study Team Role	Accepted Role	Conflict of Interest	Edit Rights
Tanya Saunders	PI	yes	no	yes
Alford Young Jr	Faculty Advisor	yes	no	yes

### 1.8 3rd party services: (e.g., transcriptionists, lab work, data analysis, etc.)

### 1.9 \* Estimated Study Start Date: (mm/dd/yyyy) 7/3/2005

### 1.10 \* Estimated Study End Date: (mm/dd/yyyy) 2/15/2007

### 1.11 \* Select the appropriate IRB:

Behavioral Sciences

### 1.12 \* Type of Application:

Research project involving human subjects, their data, and/or their specimens, including requests for exemption

\* Required

## 1-1. Standard Study Information

### 1-1.1 \* Who initiated this study?

Investigator  
If other, please specify:

1-1.2 \* This application is being submitted by a:  
Note: Student submissions require a Faculty Advisor be included on the study team in question 1.3.

Select all that apply:  
Student for a dissertation/thesis

1-1.2.1 Indicate course number here:

1-1.2.2 Are any students working on this project being paid from a federally funded training grant?

Yes  No


1-1.3 This study is currently associated with the following department. To associate this research with a different department, click Select. If the department has defaulted to "Student," click Select to specify the department through which this application is being submitted.

Graduate School

1-1.4 \* Has this study been previously disapproved by any UM or non-UM IRB?

no


1-1.4.1 If yes, list all IRBs.

Attach the IRB documentation outlining the previous review outcome. 

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

1-1.5 Will the study utilize resources from the following centers?

Select all that apply:  
There are no items to display

1-1.6 \* Does this study require review by the UM Health System Comprehensive Cancer Center Protocol Review Committee or Cancer Prevention and Control Protocol Review Committee (PRC/CPC-PRC)? 

no

1-1.7 \* Has the scientific merit of this study already been peer reviewed (i.e., reviewed by one or more recognized authorities on the subject)?

no

1-1.7.1 If yes, list the peer-review organization(s).

\* Required

## Study Team Detail

1.4 Team Member:



Name: Tanya Saunders

Department: Students

Preferred email: tanyasau@umich.edu

Business phone:

Business address:

PEERRS Human Subjects Module Completed

Expiration Date

Human Subjects - Social &amp; Behavioral Sciences

4/25/2010

*The PI and any Co-Investigators and/or Faculty Advisors involved in this study must complete at least one of the PEERRS Human Research training modules.*

**1.5 Function with respect to project:**

PI

**1.6 Allow this person to EDIT the application, including any supporting documents/stipulations requested during the review process:**

yes

**1.7 Include this person on all correspondences regarding this application: (Note: This will include all committee correspondence, decision outcomes, renewal notices, and adverse event submissions. Faculty advisors are required to receive this information.)**

yes

**Credentials: Required for PI, Co-Is and Faculty Advisors**

Upload or update your CV, resume, or biographical sketch.

Name	Version
CV 2006.rtf 	0.01

**Conflict of Interest Detail: Required for PI, Co-Is and Faculty Advisors****C1 Do you receive income greater than \$10,000/year or have any other significant financial interest (stock, stock options, debt, security, or capital holdings, etc.) in or manage:**

- a business commercializing a product that the research is intended to evaluate or further develop, or
- a party whose financial interests would be directly and significantly affected by the research?

no

**C1.1 Where have you submitted a disclosure of Conflict of Interest?****C1.2 Has a management plan been formalized?****C1.2.1 If yes, attach the management plan here.**

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

**C1.2.2 If no, describe the financial interest in sufficient detail to permit the IRB to determine if such involvement represents a potential conflict-of-interest and/or should be disclosed to potential research subjects in the informed consent form.**

## Study Team Detail

### 1.4 Team Member:

Name: Alford Young Jr

Department: LS&A Sociology Department

Preferred email: ayoun@umich.edu

Business phone: 734/647-4444

Business address: Sociology 4150 LSA 1382

PEERRS Human Subjects Module Completed

Expiration Date

Human Subjects - Social & Behavioral Sciences

8/17/2009

*The PI and any Co-Investigators and/or Faculty Advisors involved in this study must complete at least one of the PEERRS Human Research training modules.*

### 1.5 Function with respect to project:

Faculty Advisor

### 1.6 Allow this person to EDIT the application, including any supporting documents/stipulations requested during the review process:

yes

### 1.7 Include this person on all correspondences regarding this application: (Note: This will include all committee correspondence, decision outcomes, renewal notices, and adverse event submissions. Faculty advisors are required to receive this information.)

yes

## Credentials: Required for PI, Co-Is and Faculty Advisors

Upload or update your CV, resume, or biographical sketch.

Name	Version
Young cv 	0.01

## Conflict of Interest Detail: Required for PI, Co-Is and Faculty Advisors

### C1 Do you receive income greater than \$10,000/year or have any other significant financial interest (stock, stock options, debt, security, or capital holdings, etc.) in or manage:

- a business commercializing a product that the research is intended to evaluate or further develop, or
- a party whose financial interests would be directly and significantly affected by the research?

no

### C1.1 Where have you submitted a disclosure of Conflict of Interest?

### C1.2 Has a management plan been formalized?

#### C1.2.1 If yes, attach the management plan here.

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

#### C1.2.2 If no, describe the financial interest in sufficient detail to permit the IRB to determine if such

involvement represents a potential conflict-of-interest and/or should be disclosed to potential research subjects in the informed consent form.

## 2. Sponsor/Support Information

Help

The following sections request details about the sponsorship/support of this study. Consider all of the choices below and complete the appropriate sections.

\* Note: At least one of the following sections must be answered. Multiple sponsors or sources of support must be added one at a time.

### 2.1 External Sponsor(s)/Support:

Only key fields are displayed. Click on the link below to view all details.  
Type Name Other Direct Sponsor/Support Support Type  
There are no items to display

### 2.5 Internal UM Sponsor(s)/Support: [Including department or PI discretionary funding]

Only key fields are displayed. Click on the link below to view all details.  
Type Department Sponsor Support Type  
There are no items to display

### 2.8 Check here if the proposed study does not require external or internal sponsorship or support:

\* Required

## 3. University of Michigan Study Functions

Help

### 3.1 \* Indicate all functions that will be performed at University of Michigan locations.

Select all that apply:  
Other

If other, please describe:  
My role is of data collection and data analysis.

If Coordinating Center was selected above, answer the following 3 questions. Otherwise click "Continue".

- 3.1.1 As the Operations, Coordinating or Lead Center describe the mechanisms in place to ensure that management, data analysis, and Data Safety and Monitoring systems are adequate for each site.
- 3.1.2 Describe the plan for communicating interim results (e.g. adverse events, unanticipated events or interim data):
- 3.1.3 Describe the plan for communicating any protocol modification by the site(s):

\* Required

### 3-1. Performance Sites

[Help](#)

**3-1.1 \*** Based on the information provided in 3.1, "University of Michigan" is listed below as a performance site. Click **ADD** to list non-UM locations (both domestic and foreign) where UM-related research activities are conducted including subject recruitment, interaction, intervention, study coordination, and/or data collection or analysis. Include all locations to which identifiable private information may be sent. *This section may or may not apply to certain industry/corporate sponsor locations -- see Help for important instructions.*

Location	Country	"Engaged" in the research?
Austin, TX	USA	no
Havana, Cuba	Cuba	
Sacramento, CA	USA	no
San Francisco, CA	USA	no
Toronto, ON	Canada	no
University of Michigan	USA	yes

\* Required

Performance Site Detail

[Help](#)

**3-1.2 \*** **Location or Institution:**

Austin, TX

**3-1.3** **Address:**

Street \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \* USA

**3-1.4 \*** **Function of this location with respect to this study:**


Select all that apply:  
 Observation of behavior (direct or indirect)  
 Qualitative research (e.g., "member checking", open-ended questions, etc.)

If other, please specify:


**3-1.5 \*** Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? *Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question.*

no

**3-1.5.1** If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.

**3-1.6** If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. (Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.) 

**3-1.7** If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).

**3-1.8** Upload any location site approval documentation here : IRB approval documentation and/or approval letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g, school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above. 

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

Performance Site Detail

 Help


**3-1.2 \*** **Location or Institution:**  
Havana, Cuba

**3-1.3** **Address:**


Street	El Cerro and El Vedado
City	Havana
State	
Postal Code:	----
Country *	Cuba

**3-1.4 \*** **Function of this location with respect to this study:**  
Select all that apply:  
Secondary data collection (e.g., medical chart review, data abstraction from existing records, etc.)

**If other, please specify:**  
Interviews

**3-1.5 \*** Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question. 

**3-1.5.1** If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.

**3-1.6** If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. (Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.) 

**3-1.7** If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).

**3-1.8** Upload any location site approval documentation here : IRB approval documentation and/or approval letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above.

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

Performance Site Detail

[Help](#)

**3-1.2 \*** Location or Institution:

Sacramento, CA

**3-1.3** Address:

Street	
City	
State	
Postal Code:	
Country *	USA

**3-1.4 \*** Function of this location with respect to this study:

Select all that apply:

Observation of behavior (direct or indirect)

Qualitative research (e.g., 'member checking', open-ended questions, etc.)

If other, please specify:

**3-1.5 \*** Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question.

no

**3-1.5.1** If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.

**3-1.6** If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. (Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.)

**3-1.7** If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).

**3-1.8** Upload any location site approval documentation here : IRB approval documentation and/or approval

**letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above.**

Name Version  
 There are no items to display

Performance Site Detail

[Help](#)

**3-1.2 \* Location or Institution:**

San Francisco, CA

**3-1.3 Address:**

Street \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \* USA

**3-1.4 \* Function of this location with respect to this study:**

Select all that apply:  
 Observation of behavior (direct or indirect)  
 Qualitative research (e.g., 'member checking', open-ended questions, etc.)

If other, please specify:

**3-1.5 \* Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question.**

no

**3-1.5.1 If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.**

**3-1.6 If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. (Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.)**

**3-1.7 If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).**

**3-1.8 Upload any location site approval documentation here : IRB approval documentation and/or approval letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above.**

Name Version  
 There are no items to display

Performance Site Detail

[Help](#)

**3-1.2 \*** Location or Institution:

Toronto, ON

**3-1.3** Address:

Street \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \* Canada

**3-1.4 \*** Function of this location with respect to this study:

Select all that apply:  
 Observation of behavior (direct or indirect)  
 Qualitative research (e.g., 'member checking', open-ended questions, etc.)

If other, please specify:

**3-1.5 \*** Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? *Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question.*

no

**3-1.5.1** If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.

**3-1.6** If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. *(Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.)*

**3-1.7** If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval *(e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).*

**3-1.8** Upload any location site approval documentation here : *IRB approval documentation and/or approval letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g, school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above.*

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

Performance Site Detail

[Help](#)

**3-1.2 \*** Location or Institution:

University of Michigan



**3-1.3 Address:**

Street \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Country \* USA

**3-1.4 \* Function of this location with respect to this study:**

Select all that apply: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If other, please specify:**

My role is of data collection and data analysis.

**3-1.5 \* Will this site be "engaged" in the conduct of the research? Note: "engaged" in this context refers to the regulatory definition and NOT the use of the "Engage" portal website. See Help for important information about responding to this question.**

yes

**3-1.5.1 If yes, indicate the IRB or its regulatory equivalent that has reviewed or will review this research and provide its approval.**

**3-1.6 If applicable, provide the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) number for this location. (Note: If federally sponsored, FWA is required for site in addition to IRB approval.)**

FWA00004969

**3-1.7 If applicable, indicate what organization, agency or government office has reviewed this research and provided its approval (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator).**

**3-1.8 Upload any location site approval documentation here : IRB approval documentation and/or approval letters from the appropriate administrative authority (e.g. school district office, prison official, nursing home administrator) as indicated above.**

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

## 4. Non-Technical Study Abstract

Help

**4.1 \* Non-Technical Study Abstract (400 words or less): Use non-technical language that someone without a scientific background could understand. Include a summary of the significance, scientific objective or research question, and specific aims.**

My work focuses on notions of citizenship, social inclusion and what it means to be 'Cuban' in contemporary Cuba. I consider this through the life histories of Cubans who have been born before and after the 1959 Revolution. I will focus primarily on the experiences of women of color and gay people of color, in order to understand how marginalized groups understand what it means to be 'Cuban.'

\* Required

## 5. Research Design

[Help](#)

**5.1 \*** Is there a stand-alone scientific protocol document and/or research plan associated with this application? [?](#)

no

If yes, click **ADD** to attach the document(s) electronically. [?](#)

*Important information about naming, editing, uploading, and downloading documents.*

*Use the [Edit] function to upload a new version of the document.*

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

**5.2 \*** Will the involvement of ANY subjects in this study be limited to analysis of their existing data or specimens (other than any potential informed consent process, there will be no DIRECT interaction/intervention with these subjects. Involvement for these subjects is limited to analysis of subject data in existing databases, data sets, medical records, and/or specimens from banks or repositories)?

Yes  No

**5.2.1** If yes, how many subjects are represented in the data or specimens to be analyzed? [?](#)

*(do not enter commas, dots, or special characters)*

**5.3 \*** Will the study involve recruitment and/or participation of subjects in order to produce new data (e.g., surveys, interaction, intervention)? *[Require sections 8-3 and 11-3]*

Yes  No

\* Required

### 5-1. Research Design

[Help](#)

This section covers the overall research design of the project. Later sections will ask more specific questions about benefits, risks, special review considerations, targeted populations, recruitment strategies, and experimental methodologies/procedures.

In this section, you will be able to answer the specific questions by:

- Referencing the relevant sections if a stand-alone scientific protocol and/or research plan was uploaded in question 5.1;
- Supplying additional information if a stand-alone scientific protocol and/or research plan was uploaded in question 5.1; or
- Providing a detailed response to each question below.

**5-1.1 \*** **Objective:** What is the overall purpose of this research study? *(Limit response to 1-2 sentences. If covered in attached document, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)*

Already included in approved application (see 5.6)

**5-1.2 \*** **Specific Aim(s):** What is (are) the specific aim(s) of this study and/or what hypothesis (hypotheses) is (are) to be tested? *(If covered in attached document, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)*

Already included in approved application (see 5.6)

**5-1.3 \*** **Background:** What prior information or knowledge exists to support the conduct of this study? *(Limit response to 5,000 characters, including references. If covered in attached document, indicate specific*

**location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)**

Already included in approved application (see 5.6)

This study will include re-contacts of artists that have already been interviewed in Cuba. These recontacts will take place in the U.S. and Canada. There will be no new subjects.

- 5-1.4 \* Briefly outline the special expertise and qualifications of the PI, Co-Investigators, and/or Faculty Advisors to conduct and/or oversee the particular procedures or activities involved in this particular study. This will supplement information provided in the study team CVs. (If covered in attached document, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)**

Already included in approved application (see 5.6)

- 5-1.5 \* Methodology: Describe the design and procedures to be used to accomplish the specific aims of the study. Describe the advantages of any innovative methodologies. Include a sequence or timetable of research activities. (If covered in attached document, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)**

I undertake qualitative project with a multi-methodological approach in order to: 1) develop a multidimensional description of life in contemporary Cuba, 2) integrate multiple perspectives, 3) describe the process of State institutions attempts at implementing inclusive policies, 4) learn about experiences of marginalization that are not necessarily the result of state policies, 5) identify variables and provide information for future research on this topic.

I will do this by:

a) Attending two women's groups, in Havana, who meet independently of each other to discuss what is happening in their daily lives. I identified these groups through attending the World Congress on Sexology, hosted by CENESEX [the Center for Sex Education] in Havana in 2003. During their panel presentation, the organizers mentioned that they would like to establish dialogs with researchers focusing on race and gender in other countries. I will contact the leaders of these groups via e-mail, introduce the project, and await an invitation to the meetings.

b) Conduct Interviews: Through snowball sampling, I will interview activists, members of the women's groups, government officials at CENESEX [who, during the World Congress on Sexology emphasized their open door policy for researchers], and people who self identify as women of color and/or gay people of color.

c) Archival research. I will conduct Archival research at the Federation of Cuban Women, CENESEX and the National Library archives.

My work will be centered in Havana, where I will focus on the barrios of El Cerro and El Vedado. El Cerro is known as 'the Bronx' of Havana. It is a racially mixed area with a large number of black people. El Vedado is a wealthy barrio and predominately white. It is where most of the tourist hotels, bars and restaurants are located in Havana.

In the following sample charts, I describe the persons I would like to interview. Being a foreigner that does research in Cuba, I must be prepared for the event that my work is confiscated by Cuban authorities. Though it is not likely this will happen, since I am focusing on a sensitive topic, I will take precautions just in case. Therefore, all of my interviewing will:

i. Not include the name of the participant.

ii. Be recorded via digital recorder and SFTP (secure FTP) will be used to immediately and safely transfer my data files to my AFS space.

iii. I will conduct 2 interviews (one in-depth and one follow-up interview) for Group one, who is my target population. I will conduct 1 interview with group 2 (whose perspectives will give me more insight into the complexities of life in Cuba).

iv. The interviews will be 1- 1? and take place at my apartment or in the home of the respondent.

Sample

EVENTS DATE OF ATTENDANCE

Attend Meetings of 2 groups July 1, 2005 - February 1, 2006

## INTERVIEW SAMPLE 1: (N= 12 )

## INTERVIEWEES IDENTIFIED DESCRIPTORS FOR AGE

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS RANGE

4 self-identified Black women >56, 35-55, 34-25, <25

4 self identified White women >40, 39-29, <28

4 self identified Mulata women >40, 39-29, <28

## INTERVIEW SAMPLE 2 (N= 8)

## INTERVIEWEES IDENTIFIED DESCRIPTORS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

2 buggerones [men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay]

1 self-identified heterosexual white-women

1 self-identified gay men

2 self-identified lesbian black women

2 self-identified lesbian mulata women

Interview 2 counselors from CENESEX

Since returning from the field, I have noticed that the Hip Hop community in Cuba has a large lesbian presence. There are three very popular "out" lesbian hip hop groups who have a large lesbian and straight following. They are well respected within the hip hop community, because they talk openly about their sexuality. Within the hip hop scene there is a high premium placed on groups who talk about oppression and their particular experiences with oppression. The hip hop community is a space where people are encouraged to talk openly about "life" and the factors that influence one's particular life experiences. The government supports the music of all hip hop artists. They government provides these groups concert space in large, state sponsored, public events. Therefore hip hop community also seems to be a space where lesbians gather and talk. I learned of the lesbian hip hop groups through the previous interviews; the lesbian artists are part of the sample of lesbians I interviewed, and were very involved in the formation of lesbian social groups. Therefore, in addition to the participants from the population previously outlined, I will conduct 25 additional: 10 interviews with hip hop artists, in order to gather their impressions of the effectiveness of the groups in raising awareness about homophobia, 10 interviews with heterosexual, female hip hop artists, in order to understand how homophobia and sexism intersect as systems of oppression, and 5 interviews with producers and representatives of the state run institution la Agencia de Rap (the Rap Agency) to learn about the government's support of hip hop artists. In addition to the interviews, I will conduct participant observation through attend hip hop concerts and symposia organized by the artists. Interviewees will be contacted through snowball sampling. The interviews will be semi-structured, and last ½-1 hour. I will use the same consent form, the interview questions for the artists and agency representatives are attached. Because many of the artists I have interviewed have left Cuba for North America (U.S., Canada), I will also contact artists for follow-up interviews in the U.S.

**5-1.6 \*** **Statistical Design:** Describe the statistical design of the research study, including methods used to analyze data. *Include (as appropriate) statistical or interpretive analysis methods, study stopping rules, etc. (If covered in attached document, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.)*

Already included in approved application (see 5.6)

\* Required

## 6. Benefits and Risks

 Help

**6.1 \* Are there potential direct benefits of this research to the subjects?**

yes

**6.1.1 If yes, describe the potential direct benefits. Indicate if all, or only some, of the subject groups may derive this potential benefit.**

The benefits of this research are:

1. There is no work that focuses on marginalization and notions of citizenship in contemporary Cuba.
2. This will be an important intervention to aid in Sociological, and more generally American, understanding of citizenship in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in Cuba in particular.
3. This will aid in understanding societies in the midst of rapid social change. For example, because of the dearth of theory concerning social change and citizenship in the Soviet Block, the West was completely unprepared for the sudden transition to democracies in these countries. Given the large scale social changes that are happening within the Americas, in which Cuba is considered the alternative to the American democratic tradition, this work will be integral in understanding social change in Cuba and in Latin America more generally.
4. Through working at the institutional and local level in Cuba, this work will increase American understanding of the structure and function Cuban political institutions in promoting an inclusive society, and their relationship to daily life in Cuba.

**6.2 \* Describe the potential benefits of this research to society (e.g., how might the research lead to improvement in management of a particular illness; health care cost reduction; increased knowledge of a social issue; improved safety; better health; technological advancement?).**

Already included in approved application (see 6.1)

**6.3 \* Provide a description of the foreseeable risks to the subjects. (Rarely is a study completely risk-free. Consider all types of risks, including for example: physical, psychological, social/reputation, legal, financial, privacy and breach of a promise of confidentiality risks, etc.)**

For EACH identified risk, include:

- Likelihood of the risk,
- Seriousness to the subject; and
- What measures will be taken to minimize the risk (for example, study design includes the substitution of procedures already being performed on the subject for diagnostic or treatment purposes, or in a study of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, the investigator takes steps to identify, manage, or refer as appropriate, subjects for whom the study may evoke very difficult emotions)

If possible, please use the following categories to assess the likelihood:

- "Common" (i.e., approximate incidence > 25%)
- "Likely" (i.e., approximate incidence of 10-25%)
- "Infrequent" (i.e., approximate incidence of 1-10%)
- "Rare" (i.e., approximate incidence < 1%):

Already included in approved application (see 6.1)

**6.4 \* Describe any direct risks to the public or community, which could result from this research (e.g. potential dissemination to others of transferred genetic material, exposure of others to radiation from radioisotopes administered to a subject.)?**

Already included in approved application (see 6.1)

**6.5 \* What is the highest level of risks of harm to the subjects, resulting from this research?**

No more than minimal risk

**6.6 \* Discuss why the risks to the subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.**

Already included in approved application (see 6.1)

The additional benefit to the additional sample is to 1) gain a better understanding of life for black and gay Cubans. It seemed as if it was just luck that my lesbian sample was involved in the hip hop community, but what I have come to realize is that there is something about the hip hop community in and of itself, that is more open and accepting of difference. Thus in order to understand how marginalization works in Cuba, it is important to 1) understand the participation of my sample within the hip hop community, 2) understand the dynamics in (non-gay) public spaces where lesbians are embraced. The additional benefit to the additional sample is to 1) gain a better understanding of life for black and gay Cubans. Originally, it seemed as if it was a coincidence that the lesbian sample was involved in the hip hop community, but what I have come to realize is that there is something about the hip hop community in and of itself, that is more open and accepting of difference. Thus in order to understand how marginalization works in Cuba, it is important to 1) understand the participation of my sample within the hip hop community, 2) understand the dynamics in (non-gay) public spaces where lesbians are embraced. There are two contradictions that have emerged in my study: Since it is often assumed that it is illegal to be gay in contemporary Cuba, it seems contradictory that the government has been supporting the LGBT community. Exploring the hip hop community will help me to understand what dynamics are operating in the contemporary Cuban context that may help to explain real changes in Cuban society, or to note new technologies of power the government may be using to maintain the status quo.

\* Required

## 7. Special Considerations

[Help](#)

- 7.1 \*** Does this study involve human tissue or biological specimens (use, collection, or secondary analysis) (e.g. blood, urine, bone marrow, skin, etc.)? [Require Section 18]
- no
- 7.2 \*** Will genetic analysis be performed on any specimens acquired in conjunction with this study? [Require Section 20]
- no
- 7.3 \*** Does this study involve the secondary analysis of a pre-existing data set, including data associated with any specimens identified in response to question 7.1? (Studies that are limited to retrospective review of medical records ARE considered secondary data analyses. Consultation of medical record information in conjunction with a study involving interaction/intervention (e.g., screening for eligibility) is not necessarily considered secondary data analysis. In either case, a request for full or partial waiver of informed consent and HIPAA authorization may be required.) [Require Section 24]
- no
- 7.4 \*** Will the research involve the access, collection, use, maintenance, or disclosure of University of Michigan protected health information (PHI)? PHI is:
- information about a subject's past, present, or future physical or mental health, the provision of healthcare to a subject, or payment for the provision of healthcare to a subject; AND
  - that is maintained by a University of Michigan school, department, division, or other unit that is part of the University's HIPAA-covered component (e.g. healthcare provider, healthcare plan, or healthcare clearinghouse).
- (Answer "yes" even if the information is de-identified or coded. See Help for a list of schools, departments, or units that are part of the UM HIPAA-covered component) [Require Section 25]
- no
- 7.5 \*** Is this study considered epidemiological or public health research? [Require Section 26]
- no
- 7.6 \*** Does this study involve UM-related research activities conducted or coordinated at sites outside of the United States? [Require Section 30]
- yes
- 7.7 \*** Is the intent of the study the development of a commercial product that may bring financial benefit to the investigators and/or the University?
- no

If yes, please consult with the University of Michigan Technology Transfer Office, if you have not done so already.

\* Required

## 7-1. Special Considerations (Continued)

[Help](#)

- 7-1.1 \* Will subjects receive payment or other incentives for their participation in the study? (e.g., free parking, course credit, health-care procedures provided at no charge, etc.) [Require Section 13]
- no
- 7-1.2 \* Will subjects undergo healthcare-related treatments or procedures (standard of care and/or experimental) as part of the study (e.g., medical, dental, therapeutic, psychological, etc.)? [Require Section 14]
- no
- 7-1.3 \* Does this study involve the deception of subjects? (I.e., the researcher intentionally does not reveal the whole truth to subjects, including elements of the informed consent process. Research involving deception typically requires waiver or alteration of informed consent, and a debriefing.) [Require Section 27]
- no
- 7-1.4 \* Excluding routine email correspondence, does this study involve the use of the Internet or email as an integral part of the research design or will sensitive information be transmitted by e-mail? [Require Section 28]
- no
- 7-1.5 \* Will the study collect data using surveys, interviews, or focus groups? (e.g., collected from individuals, patients, households, businesses, organizations, etc.) [Require Section 29]
- yes
- 7-1.6 \* Does this study require subjects to listen to an audio recording or view images (e.g. photographs, artwork, sketches, videos, etc.)? [Require Section 31]
- no
- 7-1.7 \* Will any drugs, biologics, nutritional (e.g., herbal or alternative medication) supplements or other material be administered, implanted, or applied to the subjects as the object of the study? (Please note, a fee applies if using UMHS IDS services) [Require Section 15]
- no
- 7-1.8 \* Will the study involve a placebo (drug, device, procedure, intervention, surgery, etc.) control group? [Require Section 17]
- no
- 7-1.8.1 If yes, is the placebo for a drug? [Require Section 15]
- 7-1.9 \* Will the study involve human embryonic stem cells (hESCs), human embryonic germ cells derived from fetal tissue, or hESC- or germ cell-derived test articles? [Require Section 19]
- no
- 7-1.10 \* Will the study have a Data and Safety Monitoring Plan (DSMP)? A DSMP is required for:
- GCRC-sponsored research,
  - FDA-regulated research,
  - Research where adverse events (AEs) are expected (e.g., physical, social, psychological,

*confidentiality/privacy, etc. and  
 • NIH-sponsored research involving human subjects.*

**Note: For Dental School Applications, See Help for more information. [Require Section 32]**

no

\* Required

## 8. Subject Description

**In Section 5 - Research Design, the following information was provided about subject involvement:**

Study involves recruitment and/or participation of subjects in order to produce new data

**8.1 \*** List the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this study population and/or data set. (If covered in attached protocol, indicate section)

INTERVIEW SAMPLE 1: (N= 12 )

INTERVIEWEES IDENTIFIEDDESCRIPTORS FOR AGE

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS RANGES

4 self-identified Black women >56, 35-55, 34-25, <25

4 self identified White women >40, 39-29, <28

4 self identified Mulata women >40, 39-29, <28

INTERVIEW SAMPLE 2 (N= 8)

INTERVIEWEES IDENTIFIEDDESCRIPTORS FOR IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

2 buggerones (men who have sex with men and do not identify as gay)

1 self-identified lesbian white-women

1 self-identified gay men

2 self-identified lesbian black women

2 self-identified lesbian mulata women

Interview 2 counselors from CENESEX

**8.2 \*** Indicate the age range (in years) of the subject population in this study.

Minimum Age: 25

Maximum Age: 999 If no upper limit, enter "999"

\* Required

### 8-1. Subject Participation



**8-1.1 \*** Please indicate the number of subjects required (from ALL study sources, sites, and locations combined) to achieve the goal of the study (the statistical "n" of the study):

20 (do not enter commas, dots, or special characters)

**8-1.1.1 \*** Of the number provided in 8-1.1, indicate the number of subjects from performance sites where UM-related research activities are conducted (see list of sites in 8-1.2, below).

0 (do not enter commas, dots, or special characters)

**8-1.2 \*** Apportion the number provided in question 8-1.1.1 using the grid below. This will represent the estimated number of subjects required from each site where UM-related activities are to be conducted, over all of the years of the study. To modify this list of study locations, use the "Jump To" list at the top of the page and return to Section "03-1. Performance Sites" before completing this section.

Location Or Institution	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3+	Total
<b>Sacramento, CA</b>				
Adults	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0
<b>Havana, Cuba</b>				
Adults	20	0	0	20
Children	0	0	0	0
<b>Austin, TX</b>				
Adults	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0
<b>University of Michigan</b>				
Adults	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0
<b>Toronto, ON</b>				
Adults	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0
<b>San Francisco, CA</b>				
Adults	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0

**8-1.3 \*** Will subjects' ethnic, racial, AND gender information be recorded? This is a requirement for studies utilizing General Clinical Resource Center (GCRC) resources, and for other NIH-funded studies.

no

**8-1.3.1** For GCRC and/or NIH-funded studies, please complete the NIH Targeted/Planned Enrollment Table, summarizing enrollment for all sites where UM-related activities are to be conducted, over all of the years of the study. The Ethnic Category Total of all Subjects and the Racial Category Total of all Subjects must be equal. See Help for regional and national demographic information. Enter values in whole numbers, not percentages.

Ethnic Category2	Females	Males	Total
Hispanic or Latino	0	0	0
Non-Hispanic and Non-Latino	0	0	0
Ethnic Category: Total of All Subjects**	0	0	0
Racial Category	Females	Males	Total
American Indian/Alaska Native	0	0	0
Asian	0	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0
Black or African American	0	0	0
White	0	0	0
Racial Category: Total of All Subjects**	0	0	0

**8-1.3.2** Identify any racial, ethnic, or gender group(s) that will be specifically excluded from participation in this research study and provide a compelling justification for such exclusion:

---

\* Required

## 8-3. Subject Recruitment


[Help](#)

- 8-3.1 \*** Indicate which of the following established subject pools, if any, will be used for recruitment. The following is not an exhaustive list. If an established subject pool will be used but does not appear in this list, check "other" and describe it below. If no established subject pools will be used, check "N/A."

Select all that apply:

N/A

Provide Related UM IRB Project Number or Subject Pool Description:

- 8-3.2 \*** Describe the manner in which potential study subjects will be recruited. List how, when, who will recruit and where they will be recruited. Include any provisions to protect or maintain subject privacy. List specific locations (e.g., Taubman Center, Cancer Center, Briarwood Mall). 

The original sample was collected through a snowball sampling through academic networks identified at the World Congress of Sexology held in Havana, Cuba 2003. I have the e-mail addresses of the contacts for follow-up interviews.

- 8-3.2.1** If applicable, how will prospective subjects' healthcare providers (e.g., physician, dentist, etc.) be involved in the recruitment and/or be notified of their individual patients' participation in the study?

No

N/A

- 8-3.3 \*** Explain how the recruitment strategy is equitable and represents the population required for the study. If the information is covered in the attached protocol, please indicate section.

Much of the American literature concerning marginalization and social exclusion in Cuba focuses on the first 25 years of the Cuban Revolution. American literature focuses specifically on the the experiences of black women and gays of color to argue that these groups in particular have been targeted by the government for marginalization. My target population will reflect the population that has been categorized as marginalized in Cuba.

- 8-3.4 \*** Does the recruitment strategy involve contacting individuals multiple times in an effort to secure their initial enrollment into the study?

yes

- 8-3.4.1** If yes, describe how frequently and in what manner individuals will be contacted. If the information is covered in the attached protocol, please indicate section.

Potential respondents will be identified through group meetings and academic networks established through CENESEX. They will be asked only once to participate in the study, and not contacted again.

- 8-3.5 \*** Indicate which methods will be used for recruitment?

Check all that apply:

Face-to-face contact (e.g. during a health care visit or an interview at a home address, etc.)


Email

Other

If other, please specify:

Snowball sampling through academic networks identified at the World Congress of Sexology held in Havana, Cuba 2003.

- 8-3.5.1 \*** Estimate the total number of individuals and/or households that will be contacted in the


-----  
**recruitment effort for all phases of the study. See Help for important information about responding to this question.** 

Individuals: 20  
 Households:

**8-3.5.2 How will any email, address, and/or telephone lists be obtained?**

The artists offered their information to me just in case I wanted to follow-up with them in the future. I will make use of the e-mail addresses they provided me during the initial interviews.

**8-3.6 \* What materials will be used for recruitment? The IRB must approve all recruitment materials.**


See Help for important information regarding the requirements for recruitment materials. 

Check all that apply:


Email messages

If other, please specify:

If Web pages will be used, provide the Web address (URL) for the location where the pages will be posted (also upload the content of the pages below):

Upload recruitment materials here: 

See Help for more information about working with documents (e.g. uploading, downloading, and editing).

Name	Version
E-mail script 	0.02

Check here if any of the materials are not available electronically.

**Note:** Study Teams are encouraged to scan and upload documents. See Help for a list of sites with scanning facilities.

\* Required

## 9. Survey Populations

 Help

**9.1 \* Is the study limited to a survey of either:**

- The general adult population (aged 18 or older); or
- A subgroup of the general population which does not specifically target
  - Pregnant women and/or fetuses
  - Lactating women
  - Women of child-bearing potential
  - Prisoners
  - Cognitively impaired adults
  - College students
  - Economically or educationally disadvantaged persons
  - Patients of the study team
  - Employees, students or trainees of the study team
  - Family members of the study team

where the survey is the sole interaction with the subject and does not pose more than minimal risk? (Interaction includes communication or interpersonal contact between the subject and the investigator.)

no

\* Required

## 9-1. Subject Populations

[Help](#)

### 9-1.1 Is the research designed to include or allow the following populations?

Select all that apply

- Normal, healthy subjects**
- Adults age 18 and older**
- Emancipated Minors under the age of 18 that have been granted adult status by the courts**
- Children (Minors under the age of 18) [Require Sections 33 and 41 or Section 33-1 for secondary analysis-only studies.]**
- Viable neonates [Require Sections 33 and 41 or Section 33-1 for secondary analysis-only studies.]**
- Neonates of uncertain viability and/or non-viable neonates (do not check this box if the research is solely retrospective. For retrospective research regarding neonates of uncertain viability, check the box for 'children'. See Help for additional information.) [Require Section 34]**
- Individuals and/or products involving human in vitro fertilization**
- Pregnant women and/or fetuses [Require Sections 35 and 41 or Section 35-1 for secondary analysis-only studies.]**
- Lactating women [Require Section 36 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Women of child-bearing potential [Require Section 37 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Prisoners (If the research includes a study population that is likely to become incarcerated during the conduct of the research, also select this category) [Require Section 38 for all studies. Require Section 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Cognitively impaired adults [Require Sections 39 and 41 studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- College students [Require Sections 40 and 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Economically or educationally disadvantaged persons [Require Section 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Patients of the study team [Require Section 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Employees, students or trainees of the study team [Require Section 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Family members of the study team [Require Section 41 for studies involving interaction/intervention.]**
- Unknown, unspecified population**

\* Required

## 10. Informed Consent - Adults

[Help](#)

### 10.1 \* What type of informed consent will be obtained from adults or emancipated minors? See Help for important instructions on selecting the appropriate category or categories.

Select all that apply:

 **Comprehensive written** (if accessing records prior to consent, also check "Request for waiver of informed consent")

#### 10.1.1 \* Describe the process to seek and obtain informed consent from adults (e.g., setting, timing, personnel involved, arrangements for answering subject questions before and after the consent is signed).


Included in approved application

I will use the same consent form since all of the interviews will be about sexuality. There are some artists who are straight in public, and are gay or "men who have sex with men." Therefore, given the general topic, and just in case any of these personal topics were to emerge in the interview, I will use

the same consent form.

**10.1.2 \*** Is the cognitive capacity of the subjects expected to change significantly during the study?

no

**10.1.2.1** If yes, describe the plan to re-consent the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative after the change in the cognitive capacity of the subject. 

\* Required

## 10-1. Informed Consent

 Help

**10-1.1 \*** Upload all informed consent, assent, permission, and/or debriefing documents, including oral scripts. If you are requesting a waiver of documentation of informed consent, provide a written description of the information provided to the participants. 


The UM HRPP OM requires that all consent documents contain all the required elements of consent (unless you have requested an alteration of consent in section 10). IRBMED templates, and IRB-Health and IRB-BehavSci guidelines include these elements or see: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/assurance/consentckls.htm>

*Informed consent documents must contain merge fields.*

*Important information about naming, editing, uploading, and downloading documents.*

*Use the [Edit] function to upload a new version of the document.*


Name	Version
Consent Form 	0.01
Forma de consentimiento 	0.01
Saunders%20Consent%20Form.doc 	0.01
Saunders%20Forma%20de%20Consentimiento.doc 	0.01

**10-1.2 \*** Will the subjects be audiotaped, videotaped, or photographed; or will recognizable images of subjects be recorded during the research? 

yes

**10-1.2.1** If yes, confirm that any required informed consent document(s) and/or debriefing document(s) seek explicit permission (e.g., separate signature) to record the subjects and/or use the materials for the purpose of this research.

yes

**10-1.3 \*** Is there a substantial likelihood that the research will be conducted among a non-English-speaking population? 

yes

**10-1.3.1** If yes, identify the language(s) expected to be encountered:

Language Translation Detail

I provided the translation. I am fluent in Spanish.

Spanish

I prepared and translated it from English. I have a B.A. in Spanish, and have been working and living in Spanish speaking countries since 1996.

**10-1.4 \*** Indicate which anticipated costs could be the full or partial responsibility of the subject.

Check all that apply:  
 No anticipated costs

If other, please specify:

**10-1.5 \*** Is the study designed to collect identifiable information from primary research subjects about other individuals (including family members) ?

no

\* Required

**Language Detail****10-1.3.2 Language:**

Spanish

**10-1.3.2 Who provided or will provide the translation of the informed consent document(s), and what are the qualifications or experience of the translator?**

I provided the translation. I am fluent in Spanish.

I prepared and translated it from English. I have a B.A. in Spanish, and have been working and living in Spanish speaking countries since 1996.

**11. Privacy/Confidentiality/Security****11.1 \*** Will any component of the research involve data that is linked to a subject's identity by name or other identifier or code? *[Require Section 11-1]*

no

**11.1.1 \*** Explain how the subjects' privacy will be protected. Consider privacy interests regarding time and place where subjects provide information, the nature of the information they provide, the type of experience they will be asked to participate in during the research, who receives and can use the information they provide.**11.2 \*** How will the research records and data be protected against inappropriate use or disclosure, or malicious or accidental loss or destruction? *Records and data include informed consent documents, case report forms or study flow sheets, survey instruments, database or spreadsheet, screening logs or telephone eligibility sheets, web based information gathering tool, audio/video/photo recordings of subjects, labeled specimens, data about subjects, subject identifiers, etc.*

Select all that apply:

Secure laptop

Individual ID plus password protection

Encryption of digital data

**11.2.1 Describe any additional measures that will be taken to protect the study records and identifiers from improper use or disclosure, or malicious or accidental loss or destruction.**

Details included in original proposal.

- 11.3 \*** Will the research generate information that, if revealed, might place the subjects at risk of personal safety, criminal or civil liability, or damage to their financial standing, employability, or reputation (e.g. sexual matters, use of alcohol or drugs, stigmatizing or discriminating medical or mental health information)? [Require Section 11-2]

yes

- 11.4 \*** What will happen to the data and/or any specimens at the conclusion of this study?

Select all that apply:

Destroy - requires 11.4.1

- 11.4.1** If the data and/or specimens will be destroyed, describe the specific plan that will be employed following the required retention period (e.g., destruction of research records; removal of identifiers; destruction of linkage code information). If the information is covered in the attached protocol, please indicate section.


Digitally deleted.

- 11.4.2** If the data and/or specimens will be retained for study recordkeeping purposes, describe the storage arrangements (e.g., expected duration, location, security, storage conditions, and monitoring). If the information is covered in the attached protocol, please indicate section.

\* Required

## 11-2. Certificate of Confidentiality

Completion of this section is required based on the response provided to question 11.3.

- 11-2.1** Will a Certificate of Confidentiality be obtained for this research? 

no

If yes, upload the certificate here.

Name	Version
There are no items to display	

Check here if the Certificate of Confidentiality is pending.

Note: All obtained Certificates must be forwarded to the Office of the Vice President for Research for signature by an appropriate institutional official. Principal investigators are not authorized signers.


- 11-2.2** Describe any measures or procedures, other than those listed in response to question 11.2, that will be employed to prevent others from learning about subjects' participation in this study.

In the interviews that I will conduct with the representatives of the Agency of Rap, additional artists, I will only ask them about the MUSIC of the group, the agency's support of the music, and about published articles on the topic of hip hop, and artists' work. In the final dissertation, I will do a textual analysis of these groups' music. As stated, the follow up interviews are a focus on the hip hop community, on the production of art, and music, and the public's reception of particular themes in music. I do recognize, from my past research experiences, that given my status as researcher, many of those in the follow up sample will feel comfortable in revealing personal (non music related) information about themselves to me. This information will be excluded from any written work, for the protection of the artists.

 Help

\* Required

## 11-3. End of Subject Participation

**11-3.1 \*** What specific criteria will be used to prematurely end a particular subject's participation in the study (e.g., predetermined safety endpoints, unexpected clinically significant findings, situations of distress or adverse events)? (If covered in attached protocol or informed consent, indicate specific location. Failure to do so may result in delays in the review process or return of the application.) 

Already included in approved application (see 6.1)

**11-3.2 \*** If a participant withdraws from the research, what is the plan to use, disclose, store, or destroy the participant's data?

If a participant withdraws from the research, the participant's data will be deleted from my files.

[Help](#)

\* Required

## 12. Exemption

Research that exposes participants to no more than minimal risk MAY be considered exempt from the need for ongoing IRB review and approval. Federal law details 6 categories of exempt research.

The study does NOT qualify for an exemption, if the research involves:

- Incarcerated subjects
- FDA-regulated agent or the off-label use of an FDA approved agent

Research limited to the following activities MAY qualify for an exemption determination by the IRB:


- Studying educational methods
- Interviewing public figures
- Use of publicly available data sets
- Use of existing data and/or specimens stripped of identifiers

[View Exemption Category Guidance](#)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

Exemption categories are very narrow in their scope and the entire research project must clearly fall within the boundaries of the definition. If the IRB determines that the study does not qualify for an exemption, the application will be routed for the appropriate expedited or full committee review.

Please contact the IRB Office if you have further questions about qualifying for an exemption.

**12.1 \*** Does the proposed research study qualify for exempt IRB review status? 

no

**12.1.1** If yes, which of the following exemption criteria applies to the study?

None of the above.

\* Required

[Help](#)



## 29. Survey Research

[Help](#)

Completion of this section is required based on the response provided to question 7-1.5.

### 29.1 \* Provide a list of all surveys and interviews used in the study:

Name	# of Questions	Duration	Sensitive?	Disturbing?
[View]			no	
Hip Hop Artists	13	.5 - 1 hr	no	no
Interview with Hip Hop Officials	9	.5 - 1 hr	no	no

### 29.13 \* Will the research involve the use of focus groups?

no

#### 29.13.1 If yes, how will the identity of individuals participating in the groups be protected?

If any material is likely to be disturbing, please answer the following:

### 29.14 Describe the arrangements made to provide professional counseling or support resources to any subjects desiring such assistance as a result of their participation in the study.

### 29.15 Indicate how the list of counseling or support resources will be provided:

If other, please specify:

\* Required

## Survey Detail

[Help](#)

### 29.2 \* Survey or interview name:

### 29.3 \* Is the design or development of this survey instrument dependent on receipt of funding or hiring of personnel?


If yes, scroll down and click OK.  
If no, answer the following questions.

### 29.4 In what manner will the survey or interview be conducted (e.g., in-person, Internet, mail, telephone, etc.)? *Special Note: For electronic surveys, the eResearch ID number must be included in the informed consent document (uploaded in section 10-1) or other material that serves as the informed consent.*

In person.

### 29.5 What is the predicted response rate? %



### 29.6 What is the total number of questions?

- 29.7 What is the anticipated cumulative amount of time required for each subject?
- 29.8 What is the total number of interviews/data collection interactions with an individual subject?
- 29.9 Does the survey or interview contain questions of a sensitive nature (e.g., mental illness, sexual abuse, illicit drug use, etc.)?  
no
- 29.10 Is the survey or interview likely to produce psychological discomfort or negative feelings in the subjects?
- 29.11 Has the survey instrument been validated or used in standard practice?
- 29.11.1 If yes, describe the origin of the instrument.
- 29.12 Upload the survey instrument here. 
- | Name                          | Version |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| There are no items to display |         |

## Survey Detail

 Help

- 29.2 \* Survey or interview name:  
Hip Hop Artists
- 29.3 \* Is the design or development of this survey instrument dependent on receipt of funding or hiring of personnel?  
no  
  
If yes, scroll down and click OK.  
If no, answer the following questions.
- 29.4 In what manner will the survey or interview be conducted (e.g., in-person, Internet, mail, telephone, etc.)? *Special Note: For electronic surveys, the eResearch ID number must be included in the informed consent document (uploaded in section 10-1) or other material that serves as the informed consent.*  
  
In person. The sample will be obtained through snowball sampling.
- 29.5 What is the predicted response rate? 100 %
- 29.6 What is the total number of questions?  
13

- 29.7** What is the anticipated cumulative amount of time required for each subject?  
.5 - 1 hr
- 29.8** What is the total number of interviews/data collection interactions with an individual subject?  
1
- 29.9** Does the survey or interview contain questions of a sensitive nature (e.g., mental illness, sexual abuse, illicit drug use, etc.)?  
no
- 29.10** Is the survey or interview likely to produce psychological discomfort or negative feelings in the subjects?  
no
- 29.11** Has the survey instrument been validated or used in standard practice?  
no
- 29.11.1** If yes, describe the origin of the instrument.
- 29.12** Upload the survey instrument here. 
- | Name  | Version |
|---|---------|
| Hip hop questions.pdf  | 0.01    |

## Survey Detail

 Help

- 29.2 \*** Survey or interview name:  
Interview with Hip Hop Officials
- 29.3 \*** Is the design or development of this survey instrument dependent on receipt of funding or hiring of personnel?  
no  
  
If yes, scroll down and click OK.  
If no, answer the following questions.
- 29.4** In what manner will the survey or interview be conducted (e.g., in-person, Internet, mail, telephone, etc.)? *Special Note: For electronic surveys, the eResearch ID number must be included in the informed consent document (uploaded in section 10-1) or other material that serves as the informed consent.*  
In person.
- 29.5** What is the predicted response rate? 100 %
- 29.6** What is the total number of questions?  
9

**29.7** What is the anticipated cumulative amount of time required for each subject?

.5 - 1 hr

**29.8** What is the total number of interviews/data collection interactions with an individual subject?

1

**29.9** Does the survey or interview contain questions of a sensitive nature (e.g., mental illness, sexual abuse, illicit drug use, etc.)?

no


**29.10** Is the survey or interview likely to produce psychological discomfort or negative feelings in the subjects?

no

**29.11** Has the survey instrument been validated or used in standard practice?

no

**29.11.1** If yes, describe the origin of the instrument.

**29.12** Upload the survey instrument here. 

Name	Version
Interview with Hip Hop Officials.pdf 	0.01

## 30. International

 Help

Completion of this section is required based on the response provided to question 7.6.

**30.1 \*** Will the principal investigator be traveling to another country to conduct the research?

yes

**30.1.1** If yes, will the PI be able to communicate with the IRB from the site?

yes

**30.1.1.1** If no, who will act as the representative in matters of communicating with the IRB to report any adverse events or other information related to protocol modifications or renewals?

**30.2 \*** Which research procedures will be performed at the foreign site(s)?

- All research procedures
- Only a subset of research procedures. Describe below.

**30.3 \*** Describe any special arrangements to protect subject confidentiality at the foreign site(s).

Included in approved application.

**30.4 \*** Describe the study team's knowledge of the local culture and community.

Included in approved application.

**30.5 \*** Describe any additional local or customary permissions required in order to contact subjects and/or conduct this research (e.g. tribal counsel)?

No

N/A

\* Required

## 44. Additional Supporting Documents

**44.1** Please upload any additional supporting documents related to your study that have not already been uploaded. Examples include, but are not limited to, data collection sheets, newsletters, subject brochures, and instructional brochures.

Name	Version
Hip hop questions.pdf 	0.01

< TR >

## 45. End of Application

The form was successfully submitted. Click 'Exit' or 'Finish' to leave the form.

### Forma de Consentimiento:

Mi nombre es Tanya Saunders. Soy estudiante de la universidad de Michigan en los Estados Unidos. Estoy haciendo un proyecto de investigación para aprender sobre la vida cotidiana en Cuba, y para entender porqué algunos cubanos expresan sentimientos de la marginalización en sus vida cotidiana. Para entender estos sentimientos, soy y pidiendo que la gente comparta sus experiencias de la vida con mí. Quisiera aprender porqué algunos tengan o no tengan sentimientos del marginalización.

Quisiera grabar la entrevista, pero si quisieras, no necesito grabarlo. Se me de permiso para grabarlo, cambiaré su nombre en mi trabajo para proteger su identidad, a menos que usted pida que específicamente mencione su nombre verdadero. Mantendré las cintas seguras hasta que se acaba mi proyecto, entonces yo destruiré las cintas antes de que yo salga de Cuba. Usted no tiene que contestar a ninguna preguntas que usted no desea a y usted puede terminar la entrevista o hacer preguntas en cualquier momento. Durante la entrevista le preguntaré algunas preguntas para la clarificación. La entrevista durará entre 1-1\_ horas. Podemos hacer la entrevista en un lugar que es lo mejor y tranquila para usted.

Podemos parar cualquier momento que usted desea. Su participación en este proyecto de investigación es enteramente voluntaria. No hay ventajas directas a usted de participar, ni hay cualquier riesgo además de los de la vida cotidiana.

Firmando al pie de la pagina, usted agrede a que esta informacion sea utilizada como parte de este proyecto de investigacion, y usted agrede:

Puedo grabar la entrevista.

Su participación en este proyecto es enteramente voluntaria.

Usted puede pedir que pare la entrevista en cualquier momento y que usted no tiene que contestar a ninguna preguntas usted no desea contestar.

Usted entiende que su identidad será mantenida confidencial.

Usted puede contactarme hasta el 31 de Agosto 2007 en:

El NÚMERO de TELÉFONO LOCAL ES:

Si usted tiene preguntas con respecto a las sus derechas como participante de la investigación, por favor contactar: The Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, (734) 936-0933, email: [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu). C/o Tanya Saunders- [tanyasau@umich.edu](mailto:tanyasau@umich.edu); o contactar el director del proyecto: Alford Young Jr. por: correo electronico: [ayoun@umich.edu](mailto:ayoun@umich.edu); tele: +01.734.647.4444; direccion: Department of Sociology; Room 3001 LSA Building; 500 South State; Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1382

Firma

Fecha

IRB: «IRB»

IRB Number: «ID»

Document Approved On: «ApprovalDate»

### Consent Form

The contents of this form will be provided in the native language to prospective volunteers. The form will be read to volunteers and their written consent recorded. My name is Tanya Saunders. I am from the University of Michigan in the United States. I am doing a research project to learn about everyday life in Cuba. The name of the project is: Towards an Understanding of Marginality and Citizenship in Contemporary Cuba.. I would like to understand why some Cubans express feelings of marginalization in their daily lives. In order to do so, I am asking people to share their life experiences with me, in order to learn about Cuban's daily lives, and why they may or may not have feelings of marginalization.

I will be asking questions about sensitive topics such as race and sexuality. I would like to interview you and to audiotape our discussion since I will not be taking any notes. The interview will be open-ended, I will ask a few questions for clarification, and the interview will last 1-1.5/ hours. We can do the interview at a place and time that are best for you. We can stop any time you want.

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. There are no direct benefits to you from participating, nor are there any risks besides those of everyday life. I will not use your name in my research report to protect your identity. Also to protect your identity, please do not say your name during the interview.

I will keep the tapes secure until my project is finished, then I will destroy the tapes before leaving Cuba. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to and you can stop the interview or ask questions at any time.

During this interview I will ask questions for clarification. This interview will last 1-1.5 / hours. By signing below you agree that:

I can record this interview.

You understand that your participation in this project is entirely voluntary.

You understand that you can ask me to stop the interview at any time and that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

You understand that your identity will be kept confidential if requested.

If you should decide that you do not want me to use your interview in my research, or you have any other questions, you can contact me until 30, 2007 at: LOCAL PHONE NUMBER WERE I CAN BE REACHED

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact:  
The Institutional Review Board, 540 E. Liberty Street, Suite 202, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2210, +01.734 936.0933, email: [irbhsbs@umich.edu](mailto:irbhsbs@umich.edu). C/o Tanya Saunders- [tanyasau@umich.edu](mailto:tanyasau@umich.edu), or contact the project advisor: Alford Young Jr. at e-mail: [ayoun@umich.edu](mailto:ayoun@umich.edu) or by telephone at +01.734.647.4444 or by mail at Department of Sociology; Room 3001 LSA Building; 500 South State; Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1382

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

IRB: «IRB»

IRB Number: «ID»

Document Approved On: «ApprovalDate»

**English Translation**

1. How has hip hop developed in Cuba?
2. How did your interest in hip hop develop?
3. What topics do you discuss in your music?
4. Why do you discuss these topics?
5. How has your music been received in Cuba?
6. Who are your favorite groups in the American hip hop scene?
7. Who are your favorite groups within the Cuban hip hop scene?
8. Why are these groups your favorite groups?
9. What do you think of Las Krudas, Yari and Lidies (lesbian hip hop artists)?
10. What themes do they focus on in their music?
11. How is their music received within Cuba?
12. How is their music received within the hip hop community?
13. What is an important think I should know about Cuba hip hop?

**Spanish Translation**

1. ¿Cómo desarrollo el hip hop en Cuba?
2. ¿Cómo empezó el interés tuyo en este campo de música?
3. ¿Habla sobre cuáles temas en la música suya?
4. ¿Por qué discute estos temas en la música suya?
5. ¿Cómo ha recibido, el pueblo Cubano, la música suya?
6. ¿Cuáles son sus grupos favoritos del hip hop Americano?
7. ¿Cuáles son sus grupos favoritos del hip hop Cubano?
8. ¿Por qué se gusta estos grupos?



**English Translation**

1. How has hip hop developed in Cuba?
2. How did your interest in hip hop develop?
3. Who are your favorite groups within the Cuban hip hop scene?
4. Why are these groups your favorite groups?
5. What do you think of Las Krudas, Yari and Lidies (lesbian hip hop artists)?
6. What themes do they focus on in their music?
7. How is their music received within Cuba?
8. How is their music received within the hip hop community?
9. What is an important think I should know about Cuba hip hop?

**Spanish Translation**

1. ¿Cómo desarrollo el hip hop en Cuba?
2. ¿Cómo empezó el interés tuyo el este campo de música?
3. ¿Cuáles son sus grupos favoritos del hip hop Cubano?
4. ¿Por qué se gusta estos grupos?
5. ¿Qué piensa usted sobre los grupos Krudas, Yari, y Lidies?
6. ¿Cuáles son los temas de la música de ellas?
7. ¿La música de ellas está bien reconocido ó no?
8. ¿La música de ellas esta bien reconocido en la comunidad de hip hop Cubano?
9. ¿Cuáles una cosita bien importante que piensa usted que yo debo aprender sobre el hip hop Cubano?

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