

**¡SI TE ATREVES!
COMPOSING MUSIC AND BLACK IDENTITY IN PERU,
1958-1974**

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*For
Mom, Dad, Lucy, Maria, and Dianne
(familia).*

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Introduction

Invisible or not: The Black Presence in Peru.

In the introductions of books, articles, and essays on Afro-Peruvian culture and history (as well as on the slipcases of Afro-Peruvian records, CDs, and cassettes), it is not uncommon to encounter one of two observations. One comes in the form of percentages or numbers which give readers a rough estimate on how many blacks there are or were in Peru. Many of the present day numbers estimate that Afro-Peruvians could make up anywhere from 6 percent to 10 percent of the national population (Luciano, Rodriguez Pastor, 271). In David Byrne's CD "The Soul of Black Peru", one artist notes how the country's "melting pot" or high rate of ethnic mixture, makes it difficult to define who is "Black" in Peru, but that it can nonetheless be said that people of African descent in Peru are a small minority. The other "hook" that authors use when introducing Afro-Peruvian history and culture, is the anecdote of how the first Blacks arrived in Peru: not just in slave ships, but actually with the first Spanish expedition to the land of the Incas, as slaves who assisted the Conquistadors led by Francisco Pizarro (Romero, 307). Some scholars even speculate that the first on this expedition to touch Peruvian soil was a Black man (Feldman, 2).

Both hooks are popular, because outside of Peru it is not common knowledge that people of African descent exist in that country. Therefore, what would usually come off as dry observations (generic questions on when and how Africans came to *x* New World colony, and how large the group became) in Peru's case, are exotic facts or anecdotes. Even if the answer to the first question is that Afro-descendants are but a small minority in Peru, the very assertion of

their existence to many comes as a shock, a feeling David Byrne playfully mocks on the back of his CD: “Black Peruvians? Yes, Peru was involved in the slave trade too—and this wonderful, funky music is part of that legacy.”

In fact, so important was the Atlantic slave trade to colonial Peru, that according to communications scholar Heidi Feldman, (author of “Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific) blacks outnumbered whites in Peru by the year 1650, a little over 120 years after the Spanish first set foot there (3). By the mid-eighteenth century, blacks still consisted of nearly half the population of the Viceroyalty’s capital, Lima (Estenssoro, 161). Nonetheless, Peru did not import anywhere near as many African slaves as did other Spanish and Portuguese colonies, and as historians José Luciano and Humberto Rodríguez Pastor note, slavery in Peru had a distinct domestic character: “Early in the viceroyalty almost the entire Afro-Peruvian population, some 93 per cent, was located on the coast, and close to 70 percent of this population lived in Lima, the capital, and other urban areas” (272).

Because the Afro-Peruvian population was highly concentrated in urban areas, they were in much closer and more frequent contact with Whites. Their services in the cities, particularly as domestic servants, facilitated their assimilation into White Peruvian coastal society (Feldman, 2). Of course in turn, coastal Peruvian culture was significantly influenced by the customs of blacks. However, the Eurocentric and racist mentality of dominant white society, in conjunction with the peculiarity of the caste system typical throughout Spain’s New World possessions (where not just skin color, but also one’s customs could often determine one’s perceived racial identity) encouraged black Peruvians to abandon many of their traditions, hoping that by seeming less “African”, they might be treated less like Africans. Furthermore, Luciano and Rodríguez Pastor tell us that

“...Africans who came to Peru were already somewhat used to European culture through their previous work or travels in other parts of the Americas. By the time they arrived in the colony they had largely lost touch with specific African ethnic identities and customs, and they more easily integrated into their new culture” (274).

Therefore, by the twentieth century, Black culture in Peru seemed to have disappeared, not simply because throughout the 19th century the number of Black Peruvians had significantly dwindled (due to military service, high mortality rates, intermarriage, and an end to the import of African slaves) but also because most of their customs and practices did not show a great deal of distinct traits. Rather, what Black Peruvians came to practice were *criollo*, or “creole” customs which urban Peruvians of several other races (whites, mestizos, and some Asians) practiced as well, and to which Africans contributed with their culture. The ethnomusicologist William Tompkins, who wrote a dissertation entitled “The Musical Traditions of the Blacks of Coastal Peru” (1982), explains the meanings behind the word *criollo* quite concisely:

The word “criollo” has had many meanings, and its use is not limited to Peru but is found throughout the Americas. Originally, it referred to the children of the black slaves who were born in the New World. Later, the term applied to anyone born in the colonies. More recently, a “criollo” has come to mean anyone who feels and practices cultural nationalism, or “criollismo.” Sebastian Salazar has defined it well: a criollo, he says, is a “native of Lima, or by extension, whatever part of the coast, who lives, thinks, and acts according to a given group of national traditions and customs, but not including those traditions that are indigenous” (91-92).

As previously mentioned, this coastal culture was something which was shaped by Black Peruvians as much as it was by White Peruvians, since after all these were the major groups which lived together in Peru’s coastal urban centers. As a whole, however, criollo culture was a culture that was taken for granted as a coastal and national in nature, and by no means perceived as “Afro-Peruvian” culture. Particularly from the late 19th century through the early decades of the 20th century, at a time when political leaders all throughout Latin America were seeking to “whiten” their respective nations and populations, the non-white elements of their national cultures would not have been emphasized or celebrated. Because a person of

African descent might be more socially mobile if he or she acted criollo as opposed to distinctly Afro-Peruvian (and had better chances of upward mobility if he or she had lighter skin), “many Black Peruvians demonstrated little sense of belonging to an African diaspora” (Feldman, 3). In the mid-1990s, Peruvian scholar Raul Romero even asserted that “In fact, blacks in Peru do not even constitute an ethnic group as it has been conceptually defined...”¹ Luciano and Rodriguez Pastor agree with this thought, noting that “Despite belonging to a racial group whose contribution to the nation and its culture has been highly significant...[Afro-Peruvians] tend collectively and individually to possess little sense of ethnic identity” (271).

Nonetheless, while Latin Americanist George Reid Andrews identifies a period of “whitening” in Latin America (1880s-1930s), when whiteness was simultaneous with development and progress, he also defines a period of “browning and blackening” (1930s-2000), an era when “instead of denying and seeking to obliterate the region’s history of racial mixing, [elites] embraced it as the essence of being Latin American...” (153). For its part, Peru saw the birth of the *indigenismo* movement in the 1920s, which celebrated the culture of Peru’s indigenous groups, as well as the revival and reconstruction of Afro-Peruvian culture beginning in the late 1950s.

There was, however, a great difference between both movements. Indigenous culture had remained a continuous (though still oppressed) entity in the high and remote Andes, where people were predominantly of Indigenous ancestry. In Peru’s multiracial coastal cities however, Afro-Peruvian culture as a distinct cultural entity was something that hardly existed by the mid-

¹ The conceptual definition of an ethnic group according to Romero is as follows: “An ethnic group has been considered a specific social group existing within a larger social system, unified by common traits such as race, nationality, or culture (Morris 1975, 253). The ideal type of an ethnic group, according to Fredrik Barth (1976, 11), consists of a community that must 1) self-reproduce itself biologically, 2) share common values, 3) communicate and interact, and 4) have an identity--that is, they must identify themselves as a group and the rest of the society should perceive them as such” (309).

twentieth century, since the number of Afro-Peruvians had greatly decreased, and because many ceased to practice customs which could distinguish them as “black” and hinder their social mobility. In order for such a thing as “Afro-Peruvian culture” to be celebrated, therefore, it first had to be revived.

Scholars cite numerous specific reasons as to why the revival movement began when it did. Vaguely, Tompkins first points out that the growth of folkloric studies, anthropology, and ethnomusicology in the twentieth century motivated new interests in, and attitudes towards, traditionally oppressed cultures (112). He elaborates even further, explaining that “contributing to the rebirth of Afro-Peruvian music is the popularity of other Afro-American musics, notably Caribbean tropical music and jazz and blues from the United States” (114). Writing in the early 80s, Tompkins was indeed correct in at least noticing the popularity that “Caribbean tropical music” (e.g. salsa, cumbia) was gaining throughout Latin America, and increasingly in Peru. Feldman though, cites a number of additional events that sparked the interest in Afro-Peruvian culture: African independence movements, international Black rights movements, performances in Lima by African and African-American dance troupes (this might explain the popularity of jazz and blues which Tompkins observed), the emergence of a leftist military government which supported Peruvian folkloric arts, and finally, the emergence of the “important charismatic leaders” who guided the movement (3).

Heidi Feldman expands on what Paul Gilroy identified as the “Black Atlantic” model by offering an additional model which she calls the “Black *Pacific*.” Gilroy’s Black Atlantic model identifies the ambivalent “double consciousness” of blacks in the Western Hemisphere, since they often self-identify as “Black”, and then as members of their respective Western nations. Feldman, on her part, suggests that “the Black Pacific inhabits a similarly ambivalent space in

relation to Gilroy's Black Atlantic" (Feldman, 7). She continues: "Whereas Black Atlantic double consciousness results from dual identification with pre-modern Africa and the modern West, the Black Pacific negotiates ambiguous relationships with local criollo and indigenous culture and with the Black Atlantic itself" (Feldman, 7). Feldman explores these relationships in detail in her book, and explains that multiple "memory projects" were launched by revivalist artists in Peru, "variously emphasizing 'Africa', the Black Atlantic, or Peruvian criollo culture as points of return," so as to calm the anxieties of multiple consciousnesses (Feldman, 9).

In the case of black Peruvians, double-consciousness was better described as a sense of double marginality, given their lack of a black identity, and their loyalty to a national culture which often discriminated against them nonetheless. This thesis explores how a small group of Afro-Peruvian artists from 1958-1974, sought to define (and in doing so revive) Afro-Peruvian culture and identity, and redefine criollo/national culture, in hope of providing Peruvians of African descent with identities and cultures which they could fully embrace and belong to. Revivalists first of all did so by exploring musical expressions which to them, seemed more "African" or "Black" and hence more authentic, and legitimately useable in defining their *Afro-Peruvian* identity. But as I imply above, revivalists also sought to claim criollo culture (and its musical expressions) as part of the Afro-Peruvian repertoire and identity. I suggest that ultimately, revivalists sought to distinguish an Afro-Peruvian musical genre/identity from the criollo genre/identity, not simply for the sake of separating the two identities ("black" from "national") and expressing pride in only the former, but in order to essentially create space and acceptance for a Black identity within wider national identity, to which they claimed they had contributed. In other words, revivalists sought the ability to claim belonging to Peru's national identity, without having to give up their sense of blackness. Since so many Peruvians of African

descent had already given up this sense (hence no black ethnic identity in Peru, according to Romero), the revival was about redefining blackness, but also about Afro-Peruvians' their right to belong as Peruvians and as blacks.

During the 1960s-70s, music was the leading avenue through which to explore Afro-Peruvian identity. During this time, few political or community organizations centered around black ethnicity existed, perhaps because the socio-economic situation of Afro-Peruvians was so dire that there were too many barriers, and too much to lose in trying to overcome them. Even today, few black professionals exist in Peru, though the number is slowly growing. Perhaps music became a significant avenue for blacks because it was one of the only avenues to prominence that was afforded to them, as an avenue that on the surface seemed less menacing, like other entertainment jobs, such as professional sports. It is probably no coincidence then, that professional sports clubs (like the soccer club Alianza Lima, which fielded all-black teams) were other important spheres for Afro-Peruvians.

The use of music as a tool to explore and define black Peruvian culture and identity will be the focus of this thesis. I will explore three specific artists/groups: Nicomedes Santa Cruz, Victoria Santa Cruz, and the music and dance performance group called Perú Negro. While all three entities sought to distinguish black Peruvian culture from national criollo culture so that Afro-Peruvians could belong to both, the ways in which they sought to define these identities (and how they legitimize themselves as people with the authority to grapple with these intimidating issues) were each somewhat different.

Chapter one is about Nicomedes Santa Cruz, widely considered the father of the Afro-Peruvian revival movement (Feldman, 83). I fully examine one of his poems and touch on another, paying attention not only to the content of the poems, but also to the implications of his

use of the very criollo style of poetry known as the *décima de pie forzado*. I also examine the implications of how he arranges his album “Cumanana”, which he calls an “Afro-Peruvian anthology.” The objectives and goals that he lists in the accompanying booklet, and the research it contains, is also addressed.

Chapter two covers the trajectory of his sister, Victoria Santa Cruz, and her album “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz”, a record which on one side plays criollo styles of music, and on the other delivers more distinctly “Afro-Peruvian” sounds. This arrangement is also significant, as is her method of defining blackness with “ancestral memory”, which potentially adds to her legitimacy, or possibly hampers it. Finally, chapter three deals with the methods of the musical group called *Peru Negro*, and examines their 1974 album (simply entitled “Peru Negro”) which on the slipcase, stresses highly patriotic themes, but in musical content and theme is distinctly *Afro*. I highlight the significance of their relationships with the government, and the importance of the group members’ rural origins. I also emphasize the importance of the fact that the group began a decade after Nicomedes and Victoria came on to the scene, giving Perú Negro somewhat of a paved trail.

Throughout the thesis, I try to stay away from debates on what is or is not authentic Afro-Peruvian culture. In the past, when I have written about history and culture, I have tried to remember the notion of “what is radical today could be habitual tomorrow” that some friends and I came to during a chat about the authenticity debates that are so prevalent in the world of capoeira, the Afro-Brazilian martial art/dance. When I was first trying to come up with arguments for my topic a year ago, I thought about trying to find out exactly what Afro-Peruvian musical traditions could be traced back in time, and confirmed to be “Afro-Peruvian” traditions as opposed to those I had heard were borrowed from Brazil and Cuba during the revival.

Thankfully, a professor in the law school talked some sense into me, saying that if I tried to do that, my head would blow up (her words, not mine). Today, I am especially aware of the fact that the road I considered taking for this thesis back then would have set me up to completely disregard the way in which culture and identity inherently work, the way these evolve. “Instead,” my professor said, “you should try to focus on the dialogue; on what these people [the revivalists] are really trying to say.”

Chapter 1

Nicomedes Santa Cruz

Throughout his lifetime (1925-1992), Nicomedes, a Black Peruvian born in Lima, had been a musician, producer, TV and radio personality, a journalist, and a self-trained ethnographer, who researched Afro-Peruvian culture and its contributions to national society. In addition, his own literary and musical deeds contributed to the Afro-Peruvian, national (*criollo*) Peruvian, and international (Afro-Latin, Pan-African) repertoires of art and culture. Feldman observes that “Nicomedes Santa Cruz was the sole voice of Peruvian *negritud* from the late 1950s until approximately the 1970s”, and furthermore, that “he is the only Peruvian representative in several anthologies and critical studies of Afro-Hispanic literature and Latin American *negritude*” (Jackson 1976, qtd. in Feldman, 86). So great were Nicomedes’ cultural contributions, that in 2006, the Peruvian government declared June 4th (the poet’s birthday) to from thereon, be known as “*Día de la Cultura Afroperuana*”, or “Afro-Peruvian Culture Day”.

Nicomedes was a promoter of Black culture and identity in Peru, but was also deeply interested in the experiences of other Black communities throughout the world (particularly throughout Latin America), in the cultures of Pre-Columbian civilizations, and in the very traditions in Peru which were considered *criollo*, or national.² The tone of Nicomedes’s investigative and creative endeavors (promoting unity and understanding among Peru’s multiple ethnicities, but always highlighting the African origins of national culture) demonstrates his will to reshape the relationship between national and ethnic identity in Peru. Typically, Peruvians of

² Though *criollo*, or coastal-Peruvian culture as understood in the mid-20th century was influenced by both African and European cultures, as a whole it was understood simply as “national” culture, with predominantly Spanish origins (Feldman, 9; Romero, 314).

African descent subscribed to *criollo* identity and behavior, and not to a behavior and identity which could obstruct their social mobility (i.e. an identity that attached them to stigmas such as “Blackness” and “Africanness”). Nicomedes’s work, however, promoted both *criollo* and black identity, suggesting that his work of *negritude*--in contrast to some other black movements throughout the Western Hemisphere--was not separatist or exclusive. He did not seek to define blackness as something just for people of African descent³, but rather sought to define blackness so that all Peruvians could acknowledge the “black” traits of their national culture, and be forced to, at least in theory, make space for such a thing as Black Peruvian identity and culture. By defining what exactly “Afro-Peruvian” culture was, Nicomedes gave space for Peruvians of African descent to identify as members of it, whereas prior to the revival, the most workable option was to identify solely as *criollo*. His three main avenues to defining and distinguishing Afro-Peruvian culture and identity were through poetry (specifically with a style known as the *décima*), musical arrangement and production, and through research, which was Nicomedes’s way of legitimizing his own creative cultural productions and innovations.

Nicomedes and the *Décima*

Nicomedes was a man of many artistic talents, but his main calling was undoubtedly poetry. In particular, he developed a strong relationship with the *décima*, a poetic style from Spain that caught on in the New World as early as the 16th century. These were passed down orally or through writing, but usually with the intent of ultimately performing them. Delivery is key, and a

³ For example, in his chapter “Browning and Blackening, 1930-2000” George Reid Andrews speaks of a more separatist Black movement in 1970s-80s Brazil, since in that country, “Samba, Carnaval, and other black cultural creations had been...thoroughly and successfully converted into symbols of national identity and ‘racial democracy’...” (172). Andrews suggests that as a result of the national appropriation of Black cultural creations, young-Afro Brazilians sought to “re-own” Blackness. They did so by subscribing to new models of it, particularly those from the U.S. associated with Soul, Funk, and Hip-Hop culture, which emphasized a distinct black identity (172).

performer is held in higher regard if he recites his own work, and respected even more if he can improvise a *décima* on the spot.

There are a variety of *décima* styles that exist throughout Latin America, and the most popular in Peru was the *décima de pie forzado*. This kind of *décima* begins with a four-line stanza (a quatrain), which is referred to as a *glosa*. The *glosa* introduces the topic of the *décima*, which traditionally falls into two categories: *a lo divino* (about divine or religious topics) or *a lo humano* (human affairs ranging from politics to romance). Following the *glosa* are four ten-line stanzas, and each of these stanzas ends with a line from the *glosa*. The first ten-line stanza ends with the first line from the *glosa*, the second ten-line stanza ends with the second line from the *glosa*, and so on. Because it is mandatory to end each stanza in this manner, the style came to be known as the *décima de pie* (*pie* literally means foot, but alludes to the ending of the stanza) *forzado* (enforced): roughly, a *décima* with an *enforced ending*.

By the twentieth century though, *décimas* in Peru had lost their popularity, save among the lower and working classes (Feldman, 88). In particular, Tompkins observed, black Peruvians were among the major carriers of poetic traditions such as the *décima*, and the *cumanana* and *amor fino*, two other major Peruvian genres of poetry (159-60). Further, as Nicomedes also belonged to a highly artistic family, it is no wonder that he developed into the highly talented *decimista* and composer that he was.⁴ His father, Nicomedes Santa Cruz Aparicio, was a playwright who made ends meet by working as a refrigerator repairman while his mother, Victoria Gamarra Ramírez, was the daughter of the famous painter José Milagros Gamarra, and

⁴ Some of Nicomedes's other siblings were also famous in their own right: Victoria, as a musician and choreographer (see chapter 2); Rafael, as Peru's most famous black bull-fighter; César, as a guitarist and authority on Peru's *musica criolla*, and especially the *vals*, or Peruvian waltz.

of an extraordinary *zamacueca*⁵ dancer, Benita Ramírez Olivares (www.nicomedessantacruz.com)⁶.

The art of *décima* composition, recital, and improvisation did indeed seem to be prevalent in Afro-Peruvian communities, and the way in which Nicomedes's relationship with the *décima* budded, exemplifies this history. He claims to have learned about *décimas* at the age of five, from a neighborhood friend: a ten year-old black boy named Pílade, who sought Nicomedes out at nights, and passed to him the *décimas* which he had in turn learned from his father (www.nicomedessantacruz.com). Nicomedes's other early influence was his mother, Victoria Gamarra, who learned *décimas* at a very young age as well. She allegedly had learned them from listening to railroad workers in her area recite them, and memorizing the lines in a *libreta* (booklet/journal) that was once left behind by a passing troubadour, who had too much to drink at the local tavern where people challenged each other to poetic battles (www.nicomedessantacruz.com). The railroad workers and troubadours may or may not have all been black; according to Nicomedes, the owner of the local tavern was Italian. Either situation would exemplify the process of how *décimas* became a prevalent form of creative expression within Afro-Peruvian communities, for as Tompkins notes:

Although a few writers have implied that the forms mentioned above belong primarily to the Afro-Peruvian tradition, it should be emphasized that these forms, unlike certain

⁵ *Zamacueca*: a dance said to be the ancestor of Peru's current "national" dance, the *Marinera*. The *zamacueca*'s origins, in turn, are highly debated as to the extent of African influence.

⁶ [nicomedessantacruz.com](http://www.nicomedessantacruz.com) is a website founded and maintained by the deceased poet's relatives. In light of how difficult it is to locate many sources pertaining to Nicomedes (old newspaper articles, books and albums that were long-ago sold out, out of print, and unavailable even at major libraries), his family members have created this website in order to make such sources more accessible to researchers. At this online location, the visitor can access a number of primary and secondary sources, such as: interviews, short biographies and autobiographies, newspaper articles about Nicomedes or written by him, photographs, and audio examples of the musical styles he investigated. Unfortunately, not all sources are cited properly, and hence, this complicates a researcher's ability to decipher the true origins of these sources. At times, some of these online sources seem to come from the same sources used by researchers who have had better luck obtaining these in original format, and who have cited them appropriately in their works.

strictly Afro-Peruvian genres, such as the *landó* and *festejo*⁷, are performed by all races inhabiting coastal Peru, and African influence in the *décima*, *cumanana*, and *amor fino* is somewhat disputable...Possibly during the colonial era some of the slaves from West Africa sensed a parallel between Spanish singing poets and the griots of their homeland who had improvised songs praising their chieftains or commenting on community events. In any case, like so many Spanish art forms, these poetic-song forms were eventually abandoned by many upper-class Spanish-Peruvians in favor of new modes, while the lower classes, principally blacks and mestizos, continued the tradition into the [twentieth] century (160).

At this point, it seems like the reader is left with a debate on how much—if any—African influence there was on the Peruvian *décima*. Perhaps this is not so relevant, as the answer may never be clear. What is relevant, and can be said for sure, is that while Afro-Peruvians may not have invented the *décima*, it did come to “belong” in a very real sense to Afro-Peruvian culture, as they became the bearers and preservers of this tradition. Hence, the story of how Nicomedes came to know and use the *décima*, is telling of the cultural exchanges and processes that shaped both the Afro-Peruvian and criollo-Peruvian cultures. By including recited *décimas*-- widely practiced by lower-class blacks, but still considered a “criollo” art form--in his “Afro-Peruvian anthology”, Nicomedes made the claim that *décima* composition and recital was a *black*, as well as criollo art form.

One of Nicomedes’s most famous *décimas* is “Ritmos negros del Perú” (Black Rhythms of Peru), which according to Feldman, has become a Peruvian anthem of *negritud*, and in fact was the first *décima* he performed in front of a live audience in a theatre (89). In this poem, Nicomedes narrates the trajectory of the slave trade from Africa, through the Atlantic, and to Peru’s Pacific shores. “Ritmos negros del Perú” is an example of how Nicomedes sought to bring Peruvians of African descent together and create a communal consciousness, by highlighting the common experiences of their ancestors as they arrived to Peru, and adapted to the local setting:

⁷ *Landó* and *festejo* are two musical, not poetic genres from Peru. They are introduced later in this chapter.

Ritmos de la esclavitud
Contra amarguras y penas.
Al compás de las cadenas
Ritmos negros del Perú.

De África llegó mi agüela
vestida con caracoles,
la trajeron lo' españoles
en un barco carabela.
La marcaron con candela,
la carimba fue su cruz.
Y en América del Sur
al golpe de sus dolores dieron los
negros tambores
ritmos de la esclavitud.

Por una moneda sola
La revendieron en Lima
Y en la hacienda "La Molina"
Sirvió a gente española.
Con otros negros de Angola
Ganaron por sus faenas
Zancudos para sus venas
Para dormir duro suelo
Y nadita de consuelo
Contra amarguras y penas.

En la plantación de caña
Nació el triste socabón,
En el trapiche de ron
El negro cantó la saña.
El machete y la guadaña
Curtió sus manos morenas;
Y los indios con sus quenás
Y el negro con tamborete
Cantaron su triste suerte
Al compás de las cadenas

Murieron los negros viejos
pero entre la caña seca
se escucha su zamacueca
y el panalivio, muy lejos.
Y se escuchan los festejos
que cantó en su juventud.
De Cañete a Tombuctú,
de Chancay a Mozambique
llevan sus claros repiques
ritmos negros del Perú.

Translated by the author.

Rhythms of slavery
Against bitterness and sorrows
To the beat of chains
Black rhythms of Peru.

My grandmother came from Africa
adorned in shells,
Spaniards brought her
in a caravel ship.
They marked her with fire,
the branding iron was her cross.
And in South America
to the beat of their pain
black drums played
rhythms of slavery

For just one coin
They re-sold her in Lima
And on the "La Molina" estate
She served Spanish people.
Along with others from Angola
In return for their chores received
Bruises on their veins
A hard floor to sleep on
And not a bit of consolation
Against bitterness and sorrow.

On the sugar plantation
was born the sorrowful socabón⁸,
at the rum press
the Black man sang the *zaña*.
The machete and the scythe
Stained his dark hands;
And the Indians with their flutes
And the black man with his drum
Sang their sad luck
To the beat of chains.

The old Blacks died
but in the cane fields
one hears the sound of their zamacueca
and the panalivio, far in the distance.
And one hears the festejos
They sang in their youth.
From Cañete⁹ to Timbuktu,
From Chancay to Mozambique,
Their clear drumrolls carry
black rhythms of Peru.

⁸ *Socabón* is a *décima* that is sung (rather than recited), and supported by guitar chords, with melodic flourishes between verses, which give the poet time to think about the next verse.

⁹ Cañete, as well as Chancay (next line) are cities in Peru with significant black populations.

Essentially, the argument that Nicomedes makes in *Ritmos negros del Perú*, is that forming a Black Peruvian identity was a feasible goal, given that Peruvians of African descent shared a common past. Early in the poem, except for—understandably—in the glosa, there is no mention of “blackness”. What brings Africans together, if anything, is the horrendous Middle Passage and the awful events prior to and preceding that voyage. What connects people of African descent, are the *rhythms of slavery*, the experience of enduring that oppressive institution. The poem tells us that a “black” identity could be formed based on the common context in which Peruvians of African descent found themselves, which resulted not only in shared experiences, but also shared though forgotten cultural products (musical styles which Nicomedes mentions: the socabón, zaña, zamacueca, panalivio, and festejo). Thus, at the end of the poem, we are introduced to the concept of *black rhythms of Peru*, or the idea of a shared black Peruvian culture, experience, and identity.

This was a revolutionary narrative, in the sense that previously, the specific Black Peruvian experience and identity had not been extensively promoted. In this poem, Nicomedes narrated that in fact, Peruvian Blackness existed; that black Peruvians could (and should not be ashamed to) identify as such. But the narrative was also revolutionary in the sense that it tried to establish a link with Peru’s other oppressed people, that is, the indigenous people of the nation: “together,” said the poet, “the Black man and the Indian sang their sad luck.” In fact, however, Peruvians of indigenous descent did not always get along with those of African descent. The former perceived the latter as assistants to the Spanish conquistadores, and perceived them to be just as alien to their lifestyle, since after all, blacks had arrived to Peru with the Spaniards. To indigenous Peruvians, Blacks and Whites on Peru’s coast lived culturally and geographically distant from Indian life in the Andes, though a popular assertion in Peru today, is that the

Spanish encouraged this hostility and segregation, so as to avoid the dangerous alliances that Blacks and Indians could (and sometimes did) forge if given the chance.¹⁰ Nicomedes' reason for narrating history in this amicable way, then, is similar to one of the reasons he narrated black history in the ways that he did: in order to underline the common experiences that could bring people together. Nicomedes's, simultaneous projects of defining Peruvian *negritud* and stressing fraternity among Peru's different ethnic groups, were projects which would be reflected not only in his poetry, but also in his musical arrangements and productions.

Cumanana: an Afro-Peruvian Anthology

Certainly, much of Nicomedes' work as a writer, musician, and investigator had a patriotic, fraternal schema that highlighted the cultural contributions of Peru's "base" ethnic groups (Spanish/white, Black, and Indigenous). The third edition of Nicomedes's album "Cumanana" (1970) incorporates a great deal of this sort of rhetoric, but as its title

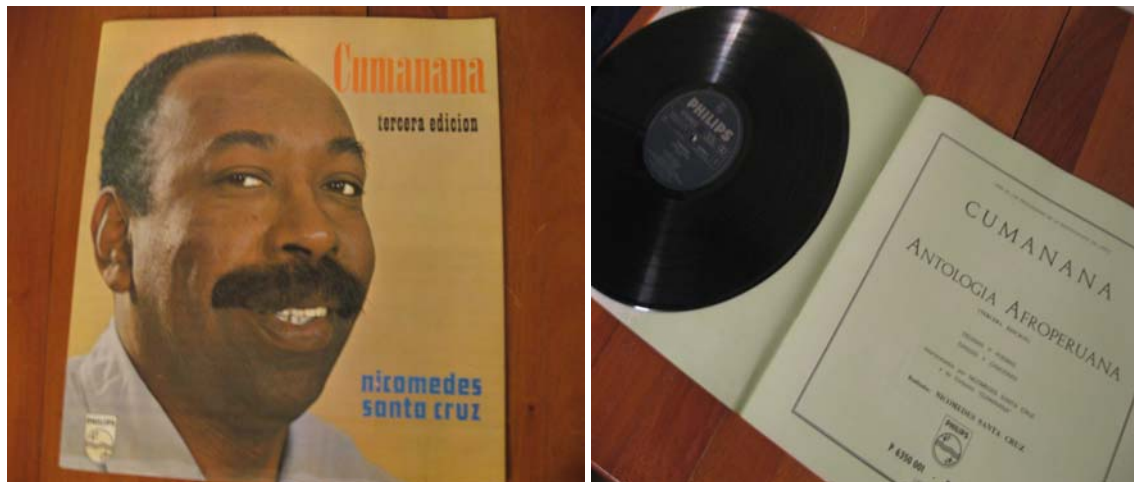


Figure 1. "Cumanana" 3rd Ed. (1970). Photos taken by the author.

¹⁰ For example, many of the armies sent to quell the indigenous rebellion of Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui (Tupac Amaru II) in the 18th century, were made up of black units (Bowser, 1974, 333; Feldman, 2). Nor was it unusual for Spaniards in colonial times to put their native-born Black slaves in charge of Indian workers (Baca, 14).

suggests, the album's greatest themes are African and Afro-Peruvian cultures and their strong influence on national culture. It is an impressive set, produced by Philips, which includes two LP albums. One of these (LP No. 6350 001) strictly plays décimas and other forms of poetry (most of which present themes of negritude, including "Ritmos negros del Perú"), while the other (LP No. 6350 002) plays an assortment of what Nicomedes identifies as Afro-Peruvian musical styles: the comparsa callejera, danza del muñeco, danza/habanera, panalivio, zaña, landó, the marinera, lamento, pregón, and the festejo.

This arrangement is significant, because it not only defines what Afro-Peruvian music consists of, but it also appropriates a traditionally perceived criollo practice (décima composition and recital) as an Afro-Peruvian cultural practice. As if highlighting that most of the decimistas in his time were black or mulatto were not enough (which he does in the accompanying booklet), he further justifies his appropriation of the décima by providing a selection of his own décimas in this "Afro-Peruvian anthology", and they are décimas which treat, no less, with themes of negritude. Besides "Ritmos negros del Perú", one such décima is "La Pelona", in which Nicomedes mocks the Afro-Peruvian women who try to imitate white women (in both behaviors and appearances) and who lose touch with other Afro-Peruvians in the process:

...
 Te cambiaste las chancletas
 Por zapatos taco aguja,
 ...
 Por no engordar sigues dietas
 Y estas flaca y hocicona.
 Imitando a tu patrona
 Has aprendido a fumar
 Hasta en modo de andar
 Como has cambiado, pelona.
 ...
 Deja ese estilo bellaco,
 Vuelve a ser la misma de antes.
 Menos polvos, menos guantes,
 menos humo de tabaco.
 Vuelve con tu negro flaco
 Que te adora todavía

...
 You traded in your sandals
 For some high-heels
 ...
 In order to not gain weight, you diet
 And you're skinny and big lipped
 Imitating your boss,
 You've learned how to smoke
 Even in your way of walking
 How you've changed, pelona
 ...
 Leave that slick style to a side,
 Go back to being the old you.
 Less makeup, less gloves,
 Less tobacco smoke.
 Come back to your skinny black man
 Who still adores you

... ..
Translated by the author.

Feldman notes that it was not until Nicomedes was in his late twenties that his *décimas* started to move in the direction of race and politics, and that at the time, he was alone in exploring that intersection through this particular style of poetry (89). One could say that once Nicomedes began to explicitly incorporate themes of negritude in his *décimas* (themes like the shared legacy of slavery in “Ritmos negros del Peru”, or commentaries on race and social mobility in “La Pelona”), this once perceived criollo style of poetry became inarguably a black tradition as well. Certainly, Nicomedes would have thought the *décima* a black tradition regardless of the content, but the fact that so many of the *décimas* and other poems in “Cumanana” deal with issues of Black culture and identity, should not be overlooked. Both the subtitle of the album (“Antología Afroperuana”) and the content of these *décimas* demonstrate Nicomedes’s determination to define Afro-Peruvian culture by distinguishing it from criollo culture, but at the same time trying to appropriate elements of criollo culture as trends that are also Afro-Peruvian. In other words, one can identify a struggle or a project on Nicomedes’s part to assert black Peruvians’ right to identify as distinctly black, without having to give up their national/criollo identity.

As mentioned above, the album also comes with a 60-page booklet. The first half contains Nicomedes’s research on “coastal singing traditions” and on the “black dances in Peru”, while the remainder of the book provides the words to the *décimas* and songs in the recordings. In the investigative part, the reader is introduced to the “coastal singing traditions” of Peru with the brief mention that the Spanish culture which arrived to Peru was one already engrained with Arab and African influences, because of Moorish dominance from the 8th to 15th

century: “Muslim Spain receives, through African influence, things such as romance, the tradition of oral narratives, bullfights, and string instruments” (13). In making note of this, he sets readers up to understand criollo/national culture as something that blacks can claim as part of their black heritage, not just because of the influences that black slaves in Peru and their descendants had on these traditions, but additionally because the *Spanish* elements that influenced criollo culture already had African influences to begin with.

Nicomedes makes a similar brief introduction to the “black dances in Peru” section, stating that “These facts are important because the ‘occidental’ culture which the Spanish and Portuguese bring us, were already influenced by the black element. This is especially true when it comes to singing, dances, and musical instruments” (17). Having established this, Nicomedes proceeds to describe a family tree of African and Afro-Latin dances that he has put together, in order to trace the origins of Afro-Peruvian dances such as the lando, zamacueca, and of the very criollo “marinera” dance, the national dance of Peru. After all, the central objective of the research Nicomedes did for the “Cumanana” book, was to prove the Africanness of the marinera, but as always, he quickly stressed inter-ethnic, national bonds as well:

We therefore channel our efforts towards detecting Africanness in the Marinera, which will, we believe, on the one hand salvage the last of what is truly salvageable, and on the other will catalyze the humanism of our people in our redeeming march towards national integration; for as long as there are those...who reject Black influences where they exist, we will still have Peruvians to educate in fraternal and indiscriminate love (11).

As his creative and investigative works suggest, Nicomedes saw the recognition of a distinct black Peruvian culture—and recognition of black influences on national culture—as critically linked to civil rights and integration. However, in order to recognize and celebrate a distinct black Peruvian culture, it first had to be defined, since discrimination against and among Afro-Peruvians had left them with little sense of what Afro-Peruvian culture and identity meant. If

nobody knew what Afro-Peruvian culture and community consisted of, then no credit could be given to this entity for its contributions to national culture.

Therefore, to Nicomedes, defining and distinguishing blackness from mainstream national culture was not the ultimate objective, as it had been for some other negritude movements throughout the Americas. Rather, to Nicomedes, defining and distinguishing black Peruvian culture from mainstream coastal Peruvian culture was a step toward giving Peruvians of African descent the ability to feel like they fully belonged to both an Afro-Peruvian community, as well as the wider national society. Other revivalists, including his sister, Victoria Santa Cruz (the figure of the next chapter), would use the same strategy. But given that Afro-Peruvian culture and identity were just beginning to be defined, revivalist artists showed varying ways of approaching these questions, and of legitimizing their answers. For some artists, Nicomedes's highly scholastic approach was not enough.

Chapter 2

Victoria Santa Cruz

Victoria Santa Cruz (b. 1922), is the second most famous Santa Cruz sibling after Nicomedes. This however, does not reflect a disparity in how much work each put into reviving and reconstructing the Afro-Peruvian identity and arts. The two siblings often collaborated in their creative endeavors, though each had different specialties. While both were exceptionally versatile artists and intellectuals, Nicomedes was drawn to writing poetry, essays, and songs, while Victoria's expertise was in songwriting as well as choreography and theatre. As it did on her brother Nicomedes (she is four years his senior), the artistic talent of her parents rubbed off on her at an early age, and so throughout her high school career, Victoria was choreographing dances and directing one-act plays (V. and N. Santa Cruz 1961, qtd. in Feldman, 54).

In the early 50s, the two siblings witnessed a show that would change their lives: "Victoria and her brother Nicomedes first decided to create a company of Black artists after they were inspired by a performance of dances from the African diaspora by the Katherine Dunham Company at Lima's Municipal Theatre in 1951...Nicomedes later described Dunham's show as the first positive publicly staged demonstration of blackness in Peru" (Feldman, 55). But before creating their own company, Victoria and Nicomedes joined, as cast members, a theatre group called "La Cuadrilla Morena de Pancho Fierro", named after the famous 19th century Peruvian mulatto artist Francisco Fierro. The company was run by a white Limeño, a historian by the name of José Durand Flores whom according to Tompkins, belonged to a family that often frequented the same *jaranas*¹¹ as some of the prime black singers and musicians of the time

¹¹ William Tompkins (ethnomusicologist that specializes in coastal and black Peruvian music) says that in coastal Peru, a *jarana* is a nighttime dance party, usually lasting from midnight to dawn, where by definition, only live,

(105). But while Durand's staging of black culture (the first attempt to do so in Peru) in the 50s was driven by what Feldman points to as "criollo nostalgia", the themes that Victoria and Nicomedes explored in their own theatre company named "Cumanana", which was launched in 1958 after the Pancho Fierro company dissolved, resulted in an "unprecedented public staging of blackness that emphasized racial difference and Black pride" (Feldman, 55).

In the introduction to his book "Caribbean Transformations", American anthropologist Sidney Mintz grapples with tough questions on ethnic and national identity. Specifically, Mintz asks what it means for someone or something to be "African", "American" or "African-American."¹² In the process of exploring these meanings, Mintz observes that the cultural fusion between African and non-African societies in the Americas

had a two-way character...not only did the cultures of the slaves come to implicate features of other, non-African origins, but the cultures of nonslaves also assimilated important materials from the African heritage. Such assimilation was especially strong in the expressive aspects of culture, as in Brazilian, Cuban, and North American music, dance, and folklore. So interpenetrated did the heritages of Afro-Americans and other Americans become, in fact, that in many cases it is difficult (if not impossible) to speak of an 'Afro-American culture' that is rigorously distinguishable from the wider national culture (12).

The case was similar in coastal Peruvian society, to the extent that musicologist Raúl Romero noted that in Lima, "black" music could hardly be distinguished from "white" or (perceived) predominantly Spanish-influenced "criollo" music (Romero, 314). The task of defining and distinguishing black from national culture was indeed (and still is) a difficult task. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, as George Reid Andrews notes, some negritude movements in the Americas, like that in 1970s-80s Brazil, focused on

national criollo music is played (Tompkins, 95-96). According to Tompkins, "the jarana and its music are integral parts of criollo life in Lima. In these criollo nighttime dance parties the personality type that characterizes the criollo is readily demonstrated. The criollo is usually an extrovert who loves wit and good humor and seldom fails to take advantage of an opportunity to demonstrate his ability as an orator, philosopher, musician, or dancer...The criollo spirit of wit and teasing, and even insult, is present in many of these forms, and is also often projected in the guapeo (emotional words and phrases) that accompanies almost all performances of music and dance in the jarana" (92).

¹² In using the term "American", Mintz does not strictly refer to U.S. nationality and/or culture, but refers to the peoples and cultures of the Western Hemisphere (North, South and Central America, and the Caribbean).

using foreign (usually African-American) symbols of distinct blackness--like clothing and music--to define local black identity and culture (172).

Thus, while artists like Nicomedes and Victoria sought to emphasize racial difference and black pride much like those who were a part of other black cultural movements, there are still contrasts to be drawn, and varying socio-historical factors to be noticed. The black cultural movement in 1970s-80s Brazil, for example, was one in which Afro-Brazilians sought to strictly carve out a black identity distinct from wider national identity. With the tremendous proportion of people of African descent in Brazil, Afro-Brazilian culture easily became undistinguishable from national culture (especially when nationalist politicians promoted this notion) and by the 70s and 80s, young Afro-



Figure 2. “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz” (1972. *Photo taken by the author.*

black identity and culture could gain “admission” into the national sphere in the first place. Therefore, while it is true that Nicomedes and Victoria sought to highlight racial difference and black pride in their works, it should also be noted that through these endeavors, they also hoped to claim their national or criollo identity.

Victoria’s LP album entitled “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz” (1972), exemplifies these intentions.

Side “A” is almost entirely composed of *valses* and other criollo musical styles such as the *marinera*, while side “B” includes a *zamacueca*, a *panalivio*, and a *festejo* (styles widely accepted

as Afro-Peruvian) and some habanera-style *pregones* (in Peru, these are songs based on the phrases that street vendors shout). In nearly no distinguishable aspect whatsoever do the vales in “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz” show supposed traits of African music. Rather, these songs are reminiscent of European waltzes mixed with polka. Indeed, the origins of the Peruvian *valse* are in the Viennese waltz, which made its way to Lima in the mid-19th century (C. Santa Cruz, 18). In Lima, it evolved into its own distinct style, which as Tompkins observes, uses more syncopation in the rhythm, shorter steps, and greater movement of the hips” than the European waltz (96). Despite these differences, the Peruvian valse is very European-sounding and strongly considered a criollo style. Therefore, it is significant that Victoria includes a number of vales in her album.

In the vals interpretations on side “A” of “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz”, a flute and soprano saxophone usually play the same melodic parts, supported by two guitars: the first, which plucks melodies and performs ornamental flourishes on the higher-pitched strings (the “punteo” part), and a second guitar which plays the bass line and offers chordal accompaniment (the *bordón*). There are also two singers: one main singer, and another who harmonizes with the main singer during the chorus. Only gentle, subtle knocks are heard from the percussion section; most likely they are the accompanying taps from the *cajón* (box drum). The most prevalent and distinguishable part to a valse then, is the *bordón*, which clearly marks the downbeat, marks the $\frac{3}{4}$ time in easy-to-follow quarter notes and repetitive but rich chord progressions, thus serving as both accompaniment, and as the “metronome” which keeps the ensemble together.

The lyrical themes of vales are almost always love stories of one kind or another (often about heartbreaks and betrayals), and the vals genre as a whole is regarded as very much a style that is criollo. The *marinera* is also categorized as a criollo genre, and is in fact widely perceived

as the national music/dance of Peru (the same which Nicomedes argued had some African roots).

A marinera’s lyrics can be about a number of topics. The marinera included on side “A” of the album, is one which maintains a very patriotic theme:

Muchacho, Vamos a luchar, al andar andar Arriba, bandera Peruana	Young man, Let’s go fight, step to it Hurray for the Peruvian flag
Muchacho, Vamos a luchar, al andar andar Sus hijos, hoy la patria llama	Young Man Let’s go fight, step to it The fatherland is in need of sons today.

Translated by the author.

Thus, it can safely be said that side “A” of Victoria’s album primarily focuses on the wider, national genres which revivalists such as Victoria also began to underline as part of “Afro-Peruvian” heritage. Side “B”, on the other hand, is characterized by musical styles which are indeed easier to define and distinguish as “Afro-Peruvian”, since the black elements or themes in these genres are much more prevalent and clear. The first track, “Ven a mi encuentro”, is a zamacueca composed by Victoria herself. In contrast to the vales on side A, in this song, the percussion section is more prevalent. The song begins with a cowbell pattern, followed by the cajon, and finally, a conga. The signature is 6/8, the tempo lively, and clapping hands offer an extra layer of rhythmic complexity: they are seemingly off-beat, but somehow fit with the rest of the percussion. Another trace of African influence is the antiphony, or call and response format of the singing. One lead singer calls: “Ven a mi encuentro si te atreves, ven muéstrame que puedes/Come to my gathering if you dare, come show me that you can”, to which a chorus responds: “Pa’ bailar conmigo riñones hay que tener!/To dance with me, you have to have guts!”

Significant in itself, is the fact that Victoria chose to include vales in her album, since the Santa Cruz siblings had not found satisfaction in only performing criollo styles for the Pancho Fierro Company. But it should be remembered that it was the context of

these performances that bothered two siblings, not necessarily the content. The way in which they both continued to perform criollo styles is telling of this, and telling of how they sought to redefine their relationship with criollo music and culture as Afro-Peruvians. As stated earlier, Victoria and Nicomedes sought to emphasize the difference between criollo Peruvian and Afro-Peruvian culture and identity, but this was done so that ultimately, there could be a space within the national framework for those who wanted to also identify as Afro-Peruvian.

Victoria seems to have deliberately made the choice of distinguishing what is criollo, but still claimable by Afro-Peruvians, on side “A” (vales and marineras), from what is Afro-Peruvian (but as *Afro-Peruvian* still a part of national culture) on side “B” (zamacuecas, pregones, panalivios, and festejos). To revivalists like Victoria, it seemed that in order for there to be a space for black culture and identity within the wider national culture, black culture and identity first had to be defined. An Afro-Peruvian identity and culture could only exist if it could be distinguished from national, criollo culture; the very same daunting task which Romero and Mintz perceive as difficult to impossible. Perhaps this is why many of the recordings in “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz” do not sound distinctly “Afro” except for a number of songs on side “B”. Nonetheless, the distinction between side “A” and side “B” that Victoria tries to make is clear. This distinction speaks to her intentions in defining Afro-Peruvian music and identity: through highlighting distinction, which requires comparison, ultimately two identities could be acknowledged and afforded to those who were once marginalized from both.

Establishing Legitimacy: Victoria and “Ancestral Memory”

Feldman notes that “ancestral memory” as Victoria defines and uses it, is not the same as the belief system in which spirits of deceased “watch over and intermingle” with the living. It is important to make this distinction, because as she furthermore notes, “in the religious rituals of many cultures, ancestors possess the bodies of the living when invoked through music, dance, and offerings” (67). Victoria’s ancestral memory, is a connection with her ancestors that she discovered by establishing an organic connection with her own body. “In this sense,” Feldman clarifies, [her] body itself represents a kind of ‘Africa’ where lost ancestral memories are stored (67). In an interview with Wills Glasspiegel and Simon Rentner from “Afro-Pop Worldwide,” Feldman, who in turn dedicated an entire chapter of her acclaimed book “Black Rhythms of Peru” to exploring Victoria Santa Cruz’s role in the revival, elaborates on her unconventional methods:

Essentially, Victoria would do things like turn out the lights and light a candle. Then, she’d have everyone reach inside themselves and try to hear the silenced voice of their ancestors. During the Afro-Peruvian revival, she re-created one of the most important dances that has lived on as a standard in terms of the genres that have come to embody and represent Peru’s African heritage, the *landó*. Victoria, according to what she told me, re-created the *landó* by remembering it with her body. Rather than looking at books and talking to elders, Victoria looked inside herself to try and hear or to feel what had been silenced for many years and to go back and retrieve it as a continued form of communication with her ancestors. This is a different way of referring to ancestral memory than, say, the way that the Negritude poets or people who refer to communicating with the ancestors in a ceremony of Afro-Cubans with Santería might use it. It’s a very personal sense, the way she talks about ancestral memory. This was a very liberating and empowering thing for many of her protégées.

(<http://www.afropop.org/multi/interview/ID/134/Heidi+Feldman,+Afro-Peruvian+Feature+Story>, 3/9/09).

Her methods, therefore, were quite different from those of her brother Nicomedes, whose approach to re-creating culture entailed a much more academic, or at least investigative approach. “To this day”, Feldman observes, “Victoria perceives a fundamental divide between those who approach knowledge with the intellect and those who understand organically with

their bodies. Academic pursuits, to Victoria, are how the mind colonizes the body” (V. Santa Cruz, qtd. in Feldman, 55). The implications of their differences in approach were quite drastic: while Nicomedes sought to define Peruvian “blackness” through the shared experiences and shared cultural contributions of Peruvians of African descent, Victoria believed that black Peruvians had the innate ability to “awaken” their blackness through this meditative remembrance.

According to Victoria, rhythm was an important tool to defining black identity and community, as it could transport blacks to the same ancestral homeland of their supposedly shared memories. As she herself states in her book “Rhythm: The Eternal Organizer” (2004): “This is one of the laws of rhythm that, once its experience is initiated, will give us the unmistakable flavor of *unity*, the *unity* we have lost due to an age-old disconnection” (27). Predictably, numerous scholars have pointed out the controversy in Victoria’s method, dismissing it as nothing more than invention or imagination, and not exactly “re-creation” of lost traditions, per se. Academics also took issue with the way in which she imagines Africa in a generalized sense, and with the stereotypical assertions that rhythm, dance, and other essential qualities are innate to Blacks (Feldman, 68).

Of course, Victoria had done some extensive research herself, or so the slipcase of the “...Con Victoria Santa Cruz” LP album says. It further notes that in 1962, she was awarded a scholarship by the French government to study theatre and choreography there. What exactly her research methods were is not clearly stated on the slipcase, but perhaps her ancestral memories, the highly “African” and exotic expressions which made their way into her work, were loosely based on that research. For whatever reason, she became disillusioned with the scholarly methods her brother used, finding them to be incomplete or inadequate. Yet ancestral memory

had a feel of atavism, the notion that socially learned behaviors (such as rhythm) were in fact innate genetic instincts linked to racial heritage. As Feldman notes in her interview with Afro-Pop, this was an empowering method. Indeed, her supposed ability to recollect and awaken her ancestral “Africanness” gave her an extra tool with which to achieve the overwhelming goal of distinguishing between black culture and criollo culture.

Chapter 3

Perú Negro

Perú Negro is the oldest, most enduring, and most recognized Afro-Peruvian dance and music company. In 1968, the group was founded by three men, including two former cajón players of the Pancho Fierro Company--Ronaldo Campos de la Colina (1927-2001) and his cousin Carlos “Caitro” Soto de la Colina (1934-2004). A third individual, a young *zapateo*¹³ protégé of Victoria Santa Cruz named Orlando “Lalo” Izquierdo (b. 1950), completed the trio of founding fathers. Perú Negro then quickly grew into a cultural institution, and overshadowed other individuals and groups as the most legitimate performing group of Afro-Peruvian music and dance.

Yet the members of Perú Negro were no strangers to the dual-battle of claiming criollo culture while simultaneously defining a distinct Afro-Peruvian culture and identity--they too sought explore these issues. But it helped, of course, that people (both locally and in some cases abroad) were somewhat more aware of Afro-Peruvian music and dance thanks to previous artists and groups, which is probably one of the greatest reasons why Perú Negro could explore and express symbols of Africanity and Blackness much more vigorously. However, while Perú Negro recordings may in many cases sound more “Afro-Latin” and include less of the styles that fall under the “criollo” heading, the company could still not afford to ignore patriotic themes of criollismo, for their support (and hence legitimacy) depended on it. Naturally, then, Perú Negro found an alternate way of incorporating national themes into their work. Specifically, they

¹³ Afro-Peruvian tap-dancing.

proposed that their Re-Africanized identity was one of many cultural “faces”, which in conjunction with other faces (Andean, Iberian, etc.) was what made Peru unique.

As Juan Velazquez, a former member of Perú Negro explained in an interview with Feldman: “Perú Negro was Perú Negro, period” (Velazquez, qtd. in Feldman, 126). The point Velazquez was making was that the Peru Negro Company was *the* embodiment of Black Peru’s identity and culture--or so the troupe claimed, and so listeners and viewers believed. Feldman attributes Peru Negro’s prestige in large part to the support it received from the new leftist-nationalist Peruvian government of the late 60s:

The birth of Peru Negro coincided with the dramatic political and cultural change that swept the country as a result of General Juan Velasco Alvarado’s military revolution, which had overthrown the previous government in 1968...Although Andean music received most of the government support, Afro-Peruvian music also benefited. In addition to funding the *casas de cultura* (cultural centers) and folklore academies (as well as the Conjunto Nacional de Folklore directed by Victoria Santa Cruz), the Velasco government actively financed and guided the early developmental period of Peru Negro. Thus, state patronage was a deciding factor in Peru Negro’s early formation and the nationalist character of its folklore (127).

Because of the government support it relied on, it is no wonder that Peru Negro’s repertoire maintained a very patriotic tone. It is possible that they were expected to fulfill the nationalistic expectations of their patrons, or at least that Peru Negro might have felt compelled to satisfy those sorts of likings. But it can also be said that Peru Negro saw this patronage as a perfect opportunity to prove, like revivalists before them tried, that wider national culture was a part of the Black Peruvian heritage. Nothing could support their argument more vigorously, than official support from the national government, who employed the company for nationalistic events, as well as to entertain foreign visitors. This privilege quite literally assigned the Peru Negro members as “cultural ambassadors” (the terms they nowadays use to describe themselves).

Yet if we pay attention to detail, members of Peru Negro in fact call themselves the “cultural ambassadors of *Black Peru*.”¹⁴ While support from the Velasco government was an opportunity for these Black Peruvian artists to lay claim to criollo culture, it also granted Peru Negro the opportunity to define a distinct Afro-Peruvian identity within that wider national space. Since Peru Negro was virtually the “official” Afro-Peruvian music and dance group of the nation (on page 127, Feldman notes that many of the members occupied salaried positions at other dance academies), their way of playing music and dancing to it, became *the* way to play and dance to Afro-Peruvian music, and their legitimacy became unquestioned.

In reviving and redefining *Afro-Peruvian* music and dance, the leaders of Perú Negro, much like Nicomedes Santa Cruz, chose an investigative route. But unlike the Santa Cruz family, who came from a Limeño “black aristocracy”--a family of humble means but rich in cultural capital-- Perú Negro’s founding fathers came from the poor, neglected towns of Chincha and Cañete, towns which investigators (and later, as Feldman notes, the Peruvian mainstream) imagined as “true”, or purer black cultural sites. The older relatives of Perú Negro members, inhabitants of these areas, thus became important resources to them, and further legitimized their interpretations of what Afro-Peruvian music and identity were.

In addition to some of the musical and choreographic traditions that older black community members could remember, Perú Negro also used certain traditions or symbols of blackness from other Afro-descended communities outside of Peru (León, 230). In reconstructing black Peruvian traditions, Perú Negro used these foreign definitions of blackness, and their own perceived definitions and creative interpretations, to fill in the large gaps left by

¹⁴ Their website (www.perunegro.org) and one of their latest recordings (“Sangre de un don”, 2000) for example, use this sub-heading.

the failing memories of old Afro-Peruvians. This was, of course, a very typical procedure for all revivalists, yet Perú Negro stands out as a group that heavily incorporated perceived notions of “true” or recognizable African cultural traits. Antiphony, “hot” rhythms, and sensual choreography (essentially the same characteristics which according to Tompkins, do not have to necessarily be present in black musical expression) became routine, traditional elements of Perú Negro, and hence, of Black Peruvian culture. Specifically, Perú Negro made extensive use of Afro-Cuban instruments such as the tumbadoras (conga drums) bongós, cowbells, and guiros (scrapers). Javier León notes that although Nicomedes Santa Cruz had used congas in his first edition of “Cumanana” in 1964, “Perú Negro featured tumbadoras and other Latin percussion more prominently and systematically in its arrangements, a practice that became quite common among later folkloric dance troupes” (230).

Perú Negro’s 1974 LP recording (simply entitled “Perú Negro”) demonstrates the group’s commitment to the dual-battle of claiming shared ownership of wider national culture, while wishing to carve out space within that culture to define a distinct Afro-Peruvian heritage. On the inside of the album’s case, a message reads:

<p>El folklore del Perú tiene infinitos rostros, tantos como los pueblos que nos construyeron, que nos dieron su esfuerzo, su heroísmo y su alegría.</p> <p>Entre los arenales de la Costa: el pueblo negro. En la Sierra de los Andes: el pueblo quechua - primera sangre de nuestra America - con sus danzas melancólicas y triunfantes. Y en la Selva Amazónica: las tribus que aun conservan su música extraña y primitiva...</p> <p>Nuestra también es la fuerza de Occidente, llegada desde España hace ya varios siglos, y convertida, por medio de la lucha y la razón, en lo que es ahora: no fuego que destruye sino que purifica e ilumina.</p> <p>De todos estos pueblos esta hecho nuestro</p>	<p>Peru’s folklore has infinite faces, just like the peoples that built us, that gave us their effort, their heroism, and their joy.</p> <p>Among the sandy beaches of the coast: the black population. In the sierra of the Andes: the Quechua people- the original people of our America- with their melancholic and triumphant dances. In the Amazon jungle: the tribes who still preserve their rare and primitive music...</p> <p>Our strength also comes from the Occident, brought from Spain many centuries ago, and turned into--by means of struggle and reason-- what it is now: not a fire that destroys, but rather one that purifies and enlightens.</p>
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<p>pueblo.</p> <p>Nuestros cantos y danzas son, por ello, las danzas y los cantos de todos los pueblos. De todos los pueblos que fueron sometidos y que ahora encuentran el camino de su dignidad.</p> <p>Perú Negro quiere contribuir a que ese camino sea recorrido cantando. A través de su arte, que no es sino uno de los infinitos rostros del folklore peruano, Perú Negro quiere contribuir a una mas alta comprensión, a una mas profunda amistad entre los hombres.</p> <p>Ese y no otro es nuestro deseo. Agradecemos a todos que, con su calida acogida, nos demuestran que ello es posible, que ello ya es una esperanzada realidad.</p>	<p>From all these peoples, our own society is made.</p> <p>Our songs and dances are, therefore, the dances and songs of all these peoples. Of all the peoples that were oppressed And who now find themselves on the road towards dignity.</p> <p>Peru Negro wishes that that road may be travelled by way of singing. By way of their art, which is but one of the infinite faces of Peruvian folklore. Peru Negro wants to contribute to a higher comprehension, a deeper friendship among men.</p> <p>That is our wish, and no other. We thank all who, with their warm openness, show us that that is possible, that it is a reality that is truly hoped for.</p>
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Translated by the author.

The message is reminiscent of the fraternal and patriotic rhetoric of previous revivalists: Perú Negro’s “want to contribute to a higher comprehension, a deeper friendship among men”, is comparable to Nicomedes’s mission which he states in the “Cumanana” booklet (“to educate [Peruvians] in fraternal and indiscriminate love”). This is not so surprising given that many of Perú Negro’s original members had worked with or under the Santa Cruz siblings. Hence, although Perú Negro came to differ greatly from previous dance and music companies in that they pushed further to distinguish Afro-Peruvian culture from wider national culture, Perú Negro, just like the revivalists before them, strived to uphold and promote an “incorporationist” or amicable formula for multi-ethnic Peruvian society.

However, what is critical about the Peru Negro album is that it does not include marineras or valeses as *Cumanana* and “... *Con Victoria Santa Cruz*” do. Rather, the songs are either clearly Afro-Peruvian (landó or festejo) or if they are less distinctly so, then the lyrics make up for it in content that has to do with Peruvian negritude. “Pobre Negrita” (“Poor Little

Black Female) and “Navidad Negra” (“Black Christmas”) are two clear examples of songs that evoke themes of negritude through the lyrics instead of the instrumentation and arrangement.

“Los Machetes”, is another example, interesting in that while it does not distinctly sound “African” or African-influenced, the lyrics recall plantation life, where the singer calls to a black male called Filomeno:

<p>Negrillo Filomeno, Agarra tu lampa, Vamo a trabajá, Yo estoy enfermo.</p> <p>Con el machete en la mano Tenemos que trabajá, Así lo quiere nuestro amo, sinó, nos manda a azotá. ...</p>	<p>Little black Filomeno Grab your lamp, Let’s go to work I am sick.</p> <p>With machete in hand We must go to work, That’s how our master wants it If not, he’ll have us whipped. ...</p>
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Translated by the author.

Throughout the song, you can also hear two machete blades hitting against each other. Possibly they are doing so rhythmically, though it is hard to tell if the beat is syncopated, or simply not rhythmic at all. In either case, the machete sounds play an important role: while they are not words, nor obvious instrumentation, the ghostly clinks of the blades plainly evoke themes of negritude, much like the lyrics themselves.

Likewise, “El Payandé” brings negritude to mind, even though it sounds much like a habanera. Although the habanera style (originally from Cuba) has African influences, to most people it sounds generically “Latin” or “Spanish”, in the same way that Peruvian criollo music does. However, if the musical arrangement in “El Payandé” does not call to mind the experiences and history of black Peruvians, then the lyrics certainly do. Possibly, the character narrating the song is of mixed African and Spanish heritage, as he points out that his mother was a black slave, which in turn determined his own status in colonial or early republican society:

<p>Nací en la playa del Magdalena Bajo la sombra de un payandé, Como mi madre fue negra esclava</p>	<p>I was born on the Magdalena Beach, In the shade of a _____ Since my mother was a black slave</p>
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También la marca yo la lleve. Ay, suerte maldita Llevar cadenas Y ser esclavo de un vil señor	I too had to bear that mark Oh, damn luck To carry these chains And be the slave of a cruel master.
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Translated by the author.



“Peru Negro” (1974). Photo taken by the author.

Another way in which Perú Negro incorporated “African” or seemingly African cultural traits in the recording was by peppering the lyrics with African-sounding words and phrases. This was also a tradition started by Nicomedes, but one

which he later regretted and ceased to use. The poet eventually requested other groups to likewise abandon this practice, but his plea fell on deaf ears (Feldman 152). Feldman further notes that these words were believed by some Perú Negro members to be real words in the African Yoruba dialect, words which some admitted they did not fully comprehend, but which certainly fulfilled an aesthetic purpose (152). In 2000, Orlando Izquierdo, one of the founding members, once confessed to her: “There is a song that ‘la lavandera’ sings that has a part in the Yoruba language... ‘a la mucurú.’ This obviously has nothing to do with a Black woman washing clothes, but since it sounds good as melodic content it has been put there despite the results” (Izquierdo, qtd. in Feldman, 152). In the 1974 recording, these “African-sounding” words are prevalent, particularly in two songs:

Pobre Negrita Pobre negrita, que triste está, Trabaja mucho y no gana ná Pobre negrita, que triste está Su mismo amo le va a pegá Ay, Sibirí kirí kinguangua, Sibirí kirí kiné Sibirí kirí kinegri guay!	Poor Little Black Girl Poor little black girl, she is so sad, She works a lot and doesn’t earn a thing. Poor little black girl, she is so sad, Her own master is gonna to hit her. Ay, [non-Spanish words]
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Li blanqui que esta endiablá ... Cancion Para Ekué Ekué, Ekué, Chabiaka mokongo má cheberé ... Los diablos se van, Ekué, Pero volverán, Ekué, Chabiaka mokongo má chévere	... Song for Ekué Ekué, Ekué, [non-Spanish words] ... The devils are leaving, Ekué, But they will return, Ekué, [non-Spanish words]
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Translated by the author.

It is curious to hear these songs, with distinct “black” or “African” sounds and messages (or perceived black/African sounds and messages), some which speak about uniquely black experiences, while reading on the slipcase that these songs belong to “all peoples.” But as with the albums of Nicomedes and Victoria, these seeming contradictions in fact reveal the importance to revivalists, of promoting patriotic unity, so that ultimately Peruvians as a whole could accept a *distinct* black identity within the larger national identity. Because Perú Negro had a more “worn-in” audience, already tested by previous Afro-Peruvian revivalist artists, and because of the legitimacy afforded to them by their association with the government and with older generations of Afro-Peruvians from rural areas, Perú Negro was able to push the distinction between criollo and black culture even further. Considering this, they have ironically made this more distinct black Peruvian identity more accepted and more established within national culture.

Conclusion.

In the attempt to steer clear from involvement in authenticity debates, I have tried to instead explore what the core, elite group (the most famous) of Afro-Peruvian artists of the 60s and 70s had to say about racial and national identity by means of their creative cultural productions. All three argued (through, for example, their lyrics, through the arrangement of their albums, through the networks they established) that it would be possible, for once, for Peruvians of African descent to identify proudly as black, while still maintaining, even fortifying their national criollo identity. Indeed, Nicomedes, Victoria, and Peru Negro asserted that by distinguishing what black Peruvian culture and identity were, Afro-Peruvians would even be able to feel like they belonged more fully to Peruvian society, a society which owed much to its African roots but did not openly acknowledge this.

Furthermore, the methods with which these artists defined Afro-Peruvian music and identity spoke to the ways in which they sought to legitimize their interpretations. Nicomedes, for example, placed himself as an expert on Afro-Peruviana and coastal culture by taking a highly scholastic and investigative approach, while Victoria, in addition to some research, called on her “ancestral memory” to awaken the African musical and choreographic expressions which she claimed were innate in her. Peru Negro struck an alliance with the new leftist-national government, which provided the group with financial support as well as with a powerful patronage in itself, which placed the group members as “cultural ambassadors of black Peru.” Peru Negro were further legitimized thanks to their connections with blacks from other parts of the coast, particularly in the neglected areas with predominantly black inhabitants, and thus perceived as sites of “purer” black traditions.

Each artist or group received a great deal of praise as well as a lot of criticism. Scholars in particular, took issue in the ways the artists went about researching and presenting Afro-Peruvian culture. In spirit of upholding the advice my professor gave me, I would have liked to include these characters in the dialogue of this study. It also would have been curious to include the direct dialogue between the artists examined here, as they surely had praises and/or criticisms to share with each other. Javier León found, for example, that many professional musicians were weary that Peru Negro's exotic (and successful) shows were distorting the Afro-Peruvian arts (see León "Mass Culture, Commodification, and Consolidation of the Afro-Peruvian Festejo"). León however, seldom mentions any specific names, and it would be interesting to read future works that place specific people's views and arguments (not just musicians, but journalists, politicians, etc.) in dialogue.

On the topic of dialogue, one other aspect that I did not address in the body of this work, is the speech used in the poetry and lyrics of these artists. The Spanish used in some of these poems and songs is a slurred Spanish (ex. dropping the "s" and "r" at the end of words) that some readers might want to identify as black speech. This is a reasonable assumption, and the only reason I do not address this, is because I myself am unsure of what to make of it. As I recall, none of the secondary sources I consulted for this thesis ever mentioned anything about black Peruvian speech patterns, although in the "Cumanana" booklet, Nicomedes cites an old *décima* whose wording he describes as "a lo bozal," or "bozal style". "Bozal" was the term used to describe slaves that had been born in Africa, as opposed to the "criollo" or "ladino" slaves born in the New World. The *décima* that Nicomedes refers to shows the same slurred speech that some of his poems do, and thus I would be weary to call it "black Peruvian" speech if Nicomedes essentially calls it "African" speech, since "black Peruvian" and "African" are not

necessarily interchangeable terms. On the other hand, part of the revival of Afro-Peruvian culture may have included using Africanized speech. I take the liberty to contemplate on speech here in the conclusion, because I do believe that it is a topic that deserves closer attention, since the pronunciation of words in these verses can say as much as the words themselves, as much as the instruments, the arrangement, etc.

Tompkins observes that not all African-derived music has to include those characteristics that we traditionally recognize as “African”: musical elements such as antiphony, “hot” rhythms, and sensual choreography. Instead, he asserts that “any serious study of black music culture will also reveal the admirable ability of the Afro-American to adapt to new physical and social environments and adopt new musical idioms in which to express his own ethos (9). We are seemingly presented with an irony then, in that revival of Afro-Peruvian arts intended to make black Peruvians more visible in national culture, and in a way it actually hid the more complicated cultural evolution of blackness in Peru.

While this is true, it is not so surprising if we recall that this “complicated cultural evolution of blackness” was precisely what revivalists wanted to distance themselves from. This “evolution of blackness” had led into a situation where a concept of blackness had disappeared (except in cases of discrimination), and into the situation Sidney Mintz describes in “Caribbean Transformations”, where black culture and wider national culture become so interpenetrated that they are hardly distinguishable from one another (12). In order to become culturally visible--a step in becoming culturally accepted--Afro-Peruvians had to be culturally distinct. But as we know, Afro-Peruvian revival artists also appropriated many of the traditions that were considered “criollo.” This complexity shows that ultimately, the Afro-Peruvian cultural revival “movement” cannot easily be spoken of as if it is one unified movement, but instead, must be understood as a

multitude of initiatives with varying intentions, goals, objectives, methods, and results. As musicians, choreographers, playwrights, poets, and other artists continue to interpret Afro-Peruvian culture through their art, and in the process define what Afro-Peruvian art is, they themselves become agents of the previously mentioned “complicated evolution of blackness in Peru.” Thus, the irony lies in that these distinct interpretations, product of the revival, in a sense become authentic by way of being part of that cultural evolution.

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