

Identifying (with) 'Carlota':
Myths, Metaphors and Landscapes of Cuban *Africanía*,
1974-1980

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Abstract

The thesis expands the field of scholarly enquiry on the Cuban intervention in Angola beyond the frame of geopolitics into the area of cultural politics. It considers the relation between Africa as a cultural and political 'territory' in the Cuban imaginary and the epic internationalist mission known as Operation Carlota. By focusing on representations and manifestations of 'Africanness' in discursive practices ranging from culture and the arts to domestic and foreign policy, the enquiry illustrates how the notion of Cuba as Latin-African evolved in relation to changes in revolutionary ideology during the period known as the *quinquenio gris*, and with regard to the swell of liberation movements throughout the African Diaspora.

My approach proceeds from Victor Turner's theory of liminality, which discusses how ritual behaviour and symbolism – *rites de passages* – may be used as concepts for an understanding of social structure and processes. With this view in mind, I construct a theoretical framework that conjoins the notion of ritual in Cuba's Africa-derived religious practices with the more general idea of war, or in this case internationalism, as a social ritual. In this way, I demonstrate that the Angolan Experience was essential to the transformation of Cuban collective identity from Latin American to Caribbean by the 1980s. This shift, I claim, was sponsored, on the international level, by the symbolism of the military mission as an epic re-enactment of the West African Diaspora/Caribbean myth of return, and, on the national level, by slave iconology. The methodological technique used combines a critical hermeneutic reading of cultural productions with postcolonial styles of social and cultural analysis.

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List of Abbreviations

ACRC	Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CORE	Congress of Racial Equality
CUC	Peso Cubano Convertible
FAR	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias
FNLA	Frente Nacional para a Libertação de Angola
INTUR	Instituto Nacional de Turismo
LANIC	Latin American Network Information Center
MININT	Ministerio del Interior
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola
M-26-7	Movimiento 26 de Julio
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OLAS	Organization of Latin American Solidarity
ORI	Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas
OSPAAL	Organización de Solidaridad con los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina
PCC	Partido Comunista de Cuba
PIC	Partido Independiente de Color
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

INTRODUCTION

There are certain places on earth that inflame great passions in the hearts of women and men: regions of myth, peopled by dreamers. The archipelago of Cuba is just such a land – its national apostle, José Martí, a conjuror of metaphors, a poet. The Revolution's slogan "Patria o muerte, venceremos," whilst expressing the same self-sacrificing sentiment as Revolutionary America's rallying cry "Give me liberty or give me death," differs most saliently in its implicit connection with a specific landscape. Numerous scholars and analysts of various disciplinary backgrounds have focused attention on the contested aspects of this landscape, above all in relation to the intricate and problematic relationship between Cuba and the United States (see Pérez Jr., 1990, 1999, 2008; Paterson, 1994; Franklin, 1997; Morales Domínguez, 2008; Schoultz, 2009; etc.). In November 1975, however, Cuba's epic military intervention in the Angolan civil war brought Western Africa to the foreground as a territory with its own unique claims upon the Cuban imaginary.¹

Beyond a mere problem in military or political history, Cuban 'internationalism' in Angola was, and continues to be, a cultural and social event. Its geopolitical significance has already been the subject of several studies, including those by Edward George (2005), Isaac Saney (2006), and Wayne S. Smith (1989); however, the present thesis involves a shift in emphasis from politics alone to "the domain of *cultural politics*

¹ In the thesis, the term 'territory' is used explicitly to describe the moral geography of a place. In turn, moral geography opens a landscape up to its ideological significance, and lays emphasis on the role of the geographical imagination in the production of notions of insidedness/outsideness. See David Atkinson et al *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (2005) for wider definitions of these terms. Also Joël Bonnemaïson usefully explores the territory as a paradigm for human geography, effectively setting out the differences between political and cultural conceptualisations (2005: 113-119).

where meanings are negotiated and relations of dominance and subordination are defined and contested” (Jackson, 1989: 2). This approach places the relation between culture and society in the foreground, while drawing attention to those areas of intersection with national and international politics.

The investigation of notions of meaning and identity in the context of the Cuban experience in Angola forms a special focus of the thesis through alertness to the politics and poetics of Africa as a sacred site, and to the roles of Africanist spirituality and mythology as forms of resistance.

Due to the anaphoric link between ‘blackness’ and ‘Africaness,’ Fidel Castro’s formulation of Cuba as a Latin-African nation a few months into the military mission known as Operation Carlota raises a number of interesting questions, particularly when considered against the incongruous perception of the country as the ‘most African’ but the ‘least black’ of the Caribbean nations.² In this context, the question that arises is twofold: (1) what was the significance of internationalism in Africa for race relations at home? and (2) what was its effect on transnational ties with black/West African diasporas? The thesis aims to answer these questions through a critical hermeneutic reading of representations of Africaness/blackness between 1974 and 1980, with the goal of registering and interpreting any relevant changes.

² This is a popular view within the Caribbean region; however, in the United States, African Americans, as a group, have traditionally drawn attention to the number of Cubans who display apparent African ancestry and, equally, have emphasised the anti-racist component of revolutionary policy in order to incorporate the Cuban Revolution into the diaspora-wide struggle for black liberation.

This kind of critical reflection, as an instrument of analysis, involves considering the internationalist mission as a text:³ a perspective which corresponds with Paul Ricoeur's theory that human actions, just like works of literature, "display a sense as well as a reference" (Thompson, 1981: 16), or, in other words, an internal as well as external logic, which facilitates both interpretation and explanation. Thus, it becomes possible to construe social life as a text because it too is a social and cultural production. Consequently, in the same way that literary products reflect and represent a set of encoded practices whose meaning may be deciphered through a process of 'opening out' onto other things (*ibid.*), likewise the significance of actions may be disclosed through the language of cultural signs. It is a view of interpretation which highlights the role of imagination in human actions. As John B. Thompson explains:

The role of imagination is evident both on an individual level, where action is projected in accordance with an anticipatory schema, and on a social level, where individuals relate to one another and to their collective tradition through the figures of ideology and utopia. These figures are not mere distortions of social life, but rather are, according to Ricoeur, constitutive of the social bond itself. If utopian thought expresses a critical distance from social reality, such distance is possible only because that reality is first integrated through an ideology which precedes critical reflection and which transmits a collective tradition. (*ibid.*)

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Since a nation's mythology constitutes one of the most imaginative and articulate carriers of ideology, my enquiry centres on an interpretation of the myths, metaphors and iconology in Cuban discourse on *africanía*.⁴ As I illustrate, these mystical and

³ I use the term 'text' in the Cultural Studies sense, throughout this thesis, to refer to any original and discrete cultural product or formation, produced or shaped by human design and activity.

⁴ I distinguish iconology from iconography to the extent that the latter is predominantly concerned with discerning and identifying motifs and images, while the former emphasises the icon as a carrier of

mutable conceptualisations of Africa are tied up with, and transfer meaning from and to, Cuban cultural, social and political relations.

I

Conceptualisations of Africa: Race Relations

An analysis of race in modern-day Cuba is not a simple undertaking: it demands a bringing together of multiple elements – historical, political, cultural, and economic – to be considered as features of a complex, and often perplexing, narrative of nation-building. Race is without doubt the most problematic attribute of that highly contested quality known as *cubanidad*, and the debate continues today over the role of blackness in the full realisation of Cuban destiny or *cubanía*. At the heart of this conversation lies the specific problem of how to mobilise, and even glory in, the dynamic racial admixture upon which Cuban society is founded, while at the same time safeguarding against the insidious by-product of a multiracial society – racism. Hence, any feasible study of race in post-revolutionary Cuba requires not only an examination of government policies and actions to eradicate racial discrimination, but also an assessment of the lived experience of ordinary black Cubans, and of how they have sought to raise awareness of their situation and demands.

The temporal frame of the thesis posed a serious challenge for my attempt to compile a portrait of race in Cuba from academic sources because an unsettling lack of

meaning. Whereas in both cases the icon is considered as a representation of a group's values and worldview, iconology goes beyond the idea of reflection or expression inherent in iconography to assign an active role to the icon as generator of collective consciousness. In this view, I am following Joël Bonnemaïson, who wrote that icons "carry a meaning, which they bestow on those places where they provide roots to a people" (2005:43). This perspective allows for the concept of change or transformation in relation to iconic symbols, by ascribing to them a generative principle.

data existed on the 1970s in the work of most scholars of *el tema negro*. For a number of reasons, much of the foreign academic research conducted on the history of race in Cuba has overwhelmingly concentrated on the centuries, decades and years preceding 1959 (Helg, 1995; Ferrer, 1999; Brock and Fucres, 1998; etc.). Mark Sawyer's *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (2006) stands out as a notable departure from this trend, but his analysis of the 1970s draws heavily on Carlos Moore's *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* (1988), in the absence of less polemical sources of information.⁵ Perhaps most troubling was the discovery that Alejandro de la Fuente's unique and well-regarded study, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (2001), circumnavigates the decade in question, with scant commentary. What inspired this evasion by one of the foremost scholars of the race question in Cuba? Could it be reflective of a wider, government-sponsored censorship of the pernicious topic of race within Cuban society in that period? Or, conversely, was it evidence that in the 1970s race had ceased to be a burning issue – that *el problema negro* had in fact been solved? Correspondingly, what if anything was implied by the fact that, after the Second Declaration of Havana, government policy on race remained unchanged until 1976? Suggestively, an unpublished paper written by Cuban social scientist Esteban Morales Domínguez (2007a), which I came across in the early stages of my research, referred to a

⁵ Moore's book, which is highly critical of the Revolution's record on race relations, has come in for significant criticism, and the author has been charged with overstatement, *misrepresentation*, unwillingness to take into account the unique circumstances of his homeland's social history, and even with outright lying. (See the brilliant online resource *AfroCubaWeb* for a selection of Moore's writings, as well as critiques of both the man and his message.) While undoubtedly flawed, Moore's book, nonetheless, raises timely questions about the gap between heady revolutionary ideals and the harsher realities of life for black Cubans as a group. It also remains the most comprehensive historical account of race consciousness among black Cubans in the 1970s, and, consequently, as in the present study, is routinely cited in scholarly works.

'taboo' on racial issues in the early 1970s, a claim which received some support from social researcher David Booth's (1976) report on the Cuban racial situation at that time.

Overall, the richness of Booth's findings contrasts markedly with the lacuna that appears in historical studies, perhaps highlighting the 'partial' knowledge acquired by traditional historical methodologies which do not register cultural practices. For example, although de la Fuente acknowledges "the heavy presence" (2001: 303) of Africa and the West Indies in Cuban life from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, and hints at the changes this engendered at the national and international levels, neither the sources nor the processes of these changes are explained, and it remains unclear how they were manifested. For a fuller understanding of how the meaning of Africa was constructed and produced, the present thesis would, therefore, need to consider a variety of disciplinary approaches to investigate the unavoidably 'fuzzy' concepts of identity, culture and experience.

Race and the Revolution

Until 1959 the old colonial idea of white superiority still prevailed in Cuban society and practices of racial discrimination, including open segregation in some places, regulated the lives of blacks and whites, particularly in the urban centres. De la Fuente summarises the situation thus:

Blacks and mulattoes were routinely discriminated against in luxury hotels, restaurants, cabarets, bars, beaches, and social clubs. Their children could not attend the best private schools even if they had the financial means to afford them. Segregation was also evident in some public spaces, such as the central parks of several towns across the island. Blackness remained a formidable barrier against social ascent and mobility, particularly in the higher strata of society. (2001: 260)

According to this description, the conclusion might be drawn that the situation of black Cubans was not dissimilar to that of many urban black Americans, who demanded access to the trappings of middle and elite lifestyles enjoyed by neighbouring whites through “education, access to skilled employment and professional jobs, hotels and other social spaces” (*ibid.*). However, the very real economic divisions between life in the countryside and in the towns meant that the majority of black Cubans lived in dire conditions of backwardness and poverty (Pérez Jr., 1999: 352). Similarly, while it is sometimes claimed that Cuban blacks flourished under the rule of Fulgencio Batista, himself of mixed parentage, and evidence may point to improvements for blacks and *mestizos* in certain cases (see de la Fuente, 2001: 243-248), in sum Batista’s administration served the interests of the white Cuban elite.⁶ On the one hand, the claim that Afro-Cubans benefited from Batista’s rule neglects the more significant role played by the Cuban Communist Party in the struggle for racial equality,⁷ and on the other, it ignores the extent to which Batista’s co-opting of much of the Grau revolution’s agenda, while simultaneously suppressing collective action, contributed to the continued silencing of Cuba’s black population.⁸

De la Fuente cites a number of studies to demonstrate that while middle-class professionals and students from the cities comprised the majority of M-26-7

⁶ Ironically, his mixed-race parentage meant that Batista himself was excluded from upper-class social clubs.

⁷ Many of the Communist Party delegates to the constitutional convention which preceded presidential elections in 1940 were black or *mestizo*, as were a great number of the Party’s candidates. De la Fuente reports that the Communists came fifth in the national elections, and in Santiago de Cuba, some sectors of the predominantly white propertied class interpreted the communists’ unexpected success as “nothing short of a black assault on the structures of power” (*ibid.*: 216).

⁸ De la Fuente states that although “Batista’s initial position toward the Communists was not openly confrontational [...] given the cold war environment, he was soon forced to adopt stringent measures against them since nothing short of strident anticommunism would guarantee U.S. support” (2001: 250).

(Movimiento 26 de Julio) supporters – “groups in which Afro-Cubans were poorly represented” (2001: 251) – the number of blacks and mulattoes in the movement increased steadily, especially once support was sought from the labour unions. However, it is likely that the explanation for reduced black support lies in the fact that the movement, while not completely ignoring race, referred to it at best in the vaguest terms. The shadow of Martí loomed large over the ‘Program-Manifesto of the Movement,’ unveiled in Mexico in 1957, which stated that for the sake of national unity, “no group, class, race, or religion should sacrifice the common good to benefit its particular interest” (*ibid.*: 253). In short, there was no indication that the 1959 Revolution would mean a change in the fortunes of the black proletariat, and it could even be argued that black professionals stood to lose the piecemeal privileges they had gained under Batista.

Early in the Revolution, Castro appeared on television to outline his racial policy: the eradication of racial segregation and the implementation of national integration. The drive for integration would rank fourth in the order of revolutionary priorities, and would target three principal areas: work, education and recreation (Moore, 1991 [1988]): 19). Early emphasis on racial desegregation was a key political strategy aimed at Castro’s most indomitable opponents. Astutely, Castro had perceived that the racial question had the capacity to alienate and ostracise the adversarial elements among the white Cuban population. As Carlos Moore recalls, the upper classes in Cuba were strongly opposed to integrationist ideas: “They were indeed the product, and modern representatives, of the ideology and economic class interests of the slave-holders in Cuba’s immediate past” (*ibid.*: 60).

According to de la Fuente, discussions on race and the place of Afro-Cubans in the revolutionary project began in the Revolution's earliest days:

Race and racism did not become issues only when Castro spoke about them. Rather, these issues were brought to public attention by various social and political actors who perceived the revolution as an unprecedented opportunity to redress previous inequities. In the process, they exercised pressure on the government to adopt concrete antidiscrimination measures. (2001: 261)

Prominent among these groups were the Communists, who, Richard Gott claims, had secured a strong position within "the entourage of the Castro brothers" (2004: 171). According to Moore, Castro was driven to confront the issue of discrimination to prevent the outbreak of a full-scale race war (More, 1964: 199),⁹ and, given what may be characterised as the historically self-destructive force of race in the Cuban struggle for self-determination, this assessment is not without validity. Above all else, unity was the new government's priority. As de la Fuente acknowledges: "The revolutionary program had already started to elicit powerful opposition from within and without and could only be implemented with massive popular support" (2001: 265). So, while, on the one hand, calling for an end to racial discrimination, Castro simultaneously, and controversially, called on black Cubans to be more "respectful" than ever before, and asked them not to give any excuses to those who opposed the revolution's integrationist goals (Moore, 1991: 25). He also argued that racist attitudes would not change overnight but gradually through education and persuasion.

⁹ Moore appears as More in the original publication. I have chosen to retain the misspelling for the purpose of accurate referencing.

Juan René Betancourt, president of the Federación Nacional de Sociedades de Color, expressed support for Castro but also prescribed a course of action to effectively tackle the race problem in his 1959 book, *El negro: ciudadano del futuro* (also see Sawyer, 2006: 56-57; Moore, 1991: 16-17). However, after assuming power, the Castro government discouraged the formation of Black solidarity organisations, such as those proposed by Betancourt, closed down many Afro-Cuban cultural societies, and confiscated materials on race (Hernández, 2002: 1137). Meanwhile, members of the national committee of the Cuban Communist Party quickly convened their first meeting since being banned under Batista. They issued a public letter to then president Manuel Urrutia enumerating sixteen measures that the revolutionary government should implement. Prominent among these was the demand for an official antidiscrimination policy and for concrete steps to guarantee the access of black Cubans to “all jobs, the armed forces, and state institutions, including the diplomatic service” (de la Fuente, 2001: 261). Nevertheless, Castro remained opposed to passing antidiscrimination legislation and refused to use legal channels in the fight against racism (*ibid.*: 266). Likewise, he vehemently opposed the notion of quotas in employment – a position that the Communists continued to defend in the early 1960s. Instead of manipulating the law, Castro constructed an anti-racist revolutionary ideology. Revolution and racism, he stressed, were incompatible concepts: “Not only was discrimination wrong, but also it was anti-Cuban and counterrevolutionary” (*ibid.*). Castro called for a public debate on racism and, with one eye cocked towards the ‘neighbour to the north,’ described discrimination as “a national shame that ought to be eliminated in the new Cuba” (*ibid.*). There followed a plethora of state-supported

events, spearheaded by groups taking advantage of the new official attitude to draw attention to the intertwined issues of race and social marginalisation.

The first and second Agrarian Reform Laws (in 1959 and 1963) improved the lot of black farmers and agricultural workers, and the Urban Reform Law (1960) guaranteed the right to decent housing for black Cubans who lived in the cities. Furthermore, the move to nationalise private schools in July 1961 “destroyed one of the most enduring pillars of racism in Cuban society” (de la Fuente, 2001: 275), further alienating the white elite and upper middle-class groups. Anti-Batista Cuban elites were appalled and obviously felt betrayed by Castro’s call for a new ‘anti-racist’ Cuba, reflecting a traditional fear that independence (be it from Spain or the USA) would lead to black revolution. Meanwhile, the working classes rallied in support of the Revolution and its leader: in a 1962 study, more than 70 per cent of workers held favourable opinions of the Revolution (Zeitlin, 1967: 97). Approval among black workers was higher still: 80 per cent declared themselves in support (*ibid.*: 77). Anti-racism became instrumental in strengthening the Castro revolution and discrediting the opposition. The white elites reacted in typical fashion by fleeing to the United States, leaving the government in a strong position from which to successfully exploit the process by which Cuban national identity had become linked with the rehabilitation of black culture.

While making strong efforts to include Afro-Cubans in the revolutionary project, Castro felt compelled to assure his white supporters “that blacks would not take over the country” (Sawyer, 2006: 55). To this end, he emphasised the debt of gratitude that blacks would owe to the Revolution, which would modify their attitudes and behaviour. Castro also reassured white Cubans that they would not be forced into

unacceptable social interaction with blacks (*ibid.*; de la Fuente, 2001: 265-266; Moore, 1991: 24). Contrary to Sawyer's (2006: 55) claim that Castro's televised statement that black men would not go to white clubs and seek to dance with white women was aimed at elite Cubans, a case can be made that it was more likely aimed at racially prejudiced white liberals whose support for the Revolution was essential. Furthermore, although Sawyer's (*ibid.*) assessment that Castro appeared to perceive blacks as clients of, rather than participants in, the Revolution holds some validity, this may relate to the Cuban leader's discernment of the primary allegiance of race; in other words, that, for many black Cubans, the Revolution was a means to an end. Nonetheless, by focusing on the 'Cubanness' of its citizens, the revolutionary government inadvertently transformed antidiscrimination into an ideology that perceived discourse about race matters to be a threat to the nationalist agenda.

Elizabeth Sutherland reported that in 1967 racism in Cuba was a thing of the past:

It was over, finished; socialism ruled out any such form of oppression. The Revolution had put the impoverished masses in power – and most blacks belonged to that class. The basic needs to which the state addressed itself were the basic needs of black Cubans for the first time. And whites began to be free from whiteness. (1970:140)

However, despite the obvious signs of improvement, she concluded that “something was still wrong” (Sutherland, 1970:141). In fact, Sutherland's research found that the institutionalisation of racial equality had not completely removed racist attitudes and social practices:

Officials often acknowledged that remnants of prejudice existed and that the economic position of blacks, as well as their participation in leadership, could stand improvement.

But with less than a decade of equal educational opportunity, they argued, it was too soon for blacks to have overcome all past disadvantages. A generation or two of equality would wipe out that heritage. White prejudice, they said, was mostly to be found in older people. The youth were growing up free from such attitudes. As for the current leadership, one white *comandante* pointed out that most of it had inevitably emerged from the struggle against Batista and particularly from the July 26 Movement – which happened to be dominated by whites (often *criollos*, first-generation Cubans like Fidel whose parents emigrated to the island from Spain). The old leaders would be supplemented by new ones, including black ones, in due time. (Sutherland, 1970: 146)

Articulating a widely-held opinion, one of Sutherland's Cuban contacts explained: "The race problem here is mainly cultural, a matter of aesthetic standards" (*ibid.*).

The particular characteristics of the system of racial discrimination that existed in Cuba until 1959 and beyond may be summarised under Booth's rubric of "color-class system" (Booth, 1976: 134). According to this general framework, it was possible for other factors such as talent (e.g. musical, athletic), education, wealth, and military prowess to mitigate the negative social impact of black skin. Booth perceived connections between colour and social advancement, finding that in this area "a dark skin was sometimes a very serious impediment indeed" (*ibid.*: 144). Meanwhile, in professional or civic spheres, Booth noted that skin colour was often passed over in silence. Such contradictions illustrate the fluctuating and negotiable meanings of blackness in the Cuban imaginary, connected to the historical experience of the plantation slave system.

Race and Cuban National Identity

The entangled issues of slavery and colonialism have for centuries overshadowed all aspects of Cuban life. Internecine conflicts over the highly-contested idea of self-determination have repeatedly weakened Cuban movements for independence. This in turn can be traced back to the way in which Cuban society developed. Although Cuba shares the conditions of its colonial history with the other Spanish-American countries, its indigenous population was almost completely eradicated in the drive to settle the island. Spanish settlements were firmly established by 1510, and the island was used as a base for further military conquest of the region. Keith Ellis writes that it was only when Cuba developed from a military base into a full-fledged plantation colony in the late 1700s that the “idea of enslaved African labour as the most economical form of manual labour emerged because the indigenous population had been nearly wiped out by the brutal conditions imposed on it by the Spaniards” (1983: 25).¹⁰

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The shipment of African slaves to Cuba continued until 1866, long after slavery had been abolished in Britain and France, which meant that cultural links between Cuba and Africa were “kept alive in the twentieth century to a degree not approached in the rest of the Caribbean” (Sáinz-Blanco, 1987: 28). When Cuba-born Spaniards or *criollos* began to press for independence from Spain and greater control over the island’s politics and economics, their efforts at times intersected with slaves’ struggles against bondage: sometimes these dual claims found common ground, but at other times they ran counter to each other. Whereas some *criollos* saw independence and the abolition of slavery as desirable, the authorities kept many of them loyal by warning of the

¹⁰ While Ellis may be correct that the importation of slaves on a grand scale was motivated by sugar plantation economics, the first enslaved Africans were brought to the island in the 1500s.

'Africanisation' of Cuba that would result. The fear of black insurrection has reared its head at the time of all revolutionary movements in Cuba, seriously constraining efforts to make the full integration of blacks a prominent feature of patriotic struggles, beginning with the case of national hero Antonio Maceo, 'the Bronze Titan.' Maceo's outstanding military career began with the outbreak of the first War of Independence, known as the Ten Years War, in 1868. Slavery was finally abolished in 1886, with the result that black soldiers soon outnumbered white troops in the revolutionary armies of the second War of Independence which lasted from 1895 to 1898. Before long, Maceo's political objectives became the subject of suspicion. He was charged with harbouring designs for black rule, rumours that persisted until his death in 1896.¹¹

Parallel to the military campaigns against Spain in the late nineteenth century, a number of Cuban intellectuals were engaged with the construction of 'racelessness' as a defining feature of national identity. Efforts to transmute the inherent violence of a socially-stratified plantation society advanced the all-embracing concept of *cubanidad*. Political essays and speeches by intellectuals of all colours expressed the view that the experience of war against Spain "had united forever black and white and had converted both into nothing more or less than Cuban" (Ferrer, 2000: 61). According to this view, all men were considered equals. José Martí went even further by denying the existence

¹¹ Maceo was killed in an ambush, amid rumours that he had been betrayed (Ferrer, 1999: 168-169). The son of Marcos Maceo, described as a Venezuelan mulatto and a free black Cuban woman, Mariana Grajales, Antonio Maceo was born in Santiago de Cuba, and joined the nationalist cause at the start of the Ten Years War. His refusal to accept the terms of the Peace of Zanjón, signed on February 11, 1878, because, among other reasons, it failed to abolish slavery completely, only heightened the suspicion that his ultimate goal was the establishment of a black republic. However, popular interpretations of Maceo's position revere his commitment to equality for *all* Cubans. In her well-regarded and ground-breaking study of race in the struggle for Cuban independence, US-based historian Ada Ferrer (*ibid.*: 72-89) gives a detailed account of Maceo's anti-Zanjón Protest of Baraguá and describes his role in the second insurrection which followed in August 1879.

of races. In his most famous essay, 'Nuestra América,' he declared: "There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races" (Schnookal & Muñiz, 1999: 119). Two years later, in an essay published on April 16, 1893 in *Patria*, his New York-based newspaper, Martí wrote that there was no threat of a racial war because: "Cubano es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro" (1963: 299). Therefore, he claimed: "Insistir en las divisiones de raza, en las diferencias de raza, de un pueblo naturalmente dividido, es dificultar la ventura pública, y la individual" (*ibid.*: 298).

Martí's legacy has seen every subsequent Cuban revolution pursue a policy of silencing race and, simultaneously, "subsuming [...] racial identities under the rubric of *cubanidad*" (Guerra, 2005: 134). At the same time, popular nationalist readings of Martí's ideals of racial fraternity and social unity among Cubans have resided at the heart of all independence struggles. As a result, conflicting interpretations of Martí have contributed to struggles between bourgeois elites and marginalised populations.

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Alfred López quotes the final sentence of an early piece entitled 'Recomendaciones' in which Martí commends his compatriot workers for their laudable qualities: "Callados, amorosos, generosos" (2006: 14). López finds 'callados' ('silent') to be "the damning word here, the single descriptor that most clearly exemplifies how a hegemonic bourgeoisie likes its proletariat – affectionately supportive (as in "loving"), pliant (as in "generous"), and most important, *quiet*" (*ibid.*). Since Afro-Cubans made up a substantial section of the working-class, this view overlaps with historian Ada Ferrer's argument:

This absence of racial labels [...] can be (and has been) interpreted as the natural outcome of a multiracial movement that had, over the course of thirty years, succeeded

in transcending racial categorisation and racial animosity. When this absence, however, is uncovered and tracked, it begins to appear as anything but natural. Instead, it emerges as a conspicuous – and at times purposeful – silence produced at a particular moment in the history of Cuban nationalism. To understand this apparent silence of race [...] is to contest traditional interpretations of the relationship between race and nationality in Cuba. This was not a silence indicative of a resolution of “the race problem”, but a silence symptomatic of profound conflicts about the role of different social groups in a society undergoing the simultaneous transition from slave to free labor and from colonial to national status. The silence was active: It was an argument, a slogan, a fantasy. (2000: 61-62)

In particular the silence delineated the parameters of, and contributed to the difficulties of, independent black Cuban mobilisation, beginning with the brutal crushing of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) rebellion in 1912.¹²

After independence from Spain, *cubanidad* developed in response to prevailing sentiments in the United States that the ‘mongrel societies’ of Latin America were incapable of managing their own political affairs. For many white Cubans, the country’s progress was tied to the notion of *blanqueamiento*, the gradual whitening (and thus, elevation) of society through a second wave of white emigration. Thus, the origins of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* may be traced back to “nineteenth-century Latin America’s search for a positive identity in the face of encroaching European and Anglo-American eugenic judgments and values that associated the prevalence of non-Whites in Latin America with [...] backwardness” (Hernández, 2002: 1108).

¹² The uprising took place in response to government attempts to outlaw the party as divisive when calls for racial equality were deemed to be too strident. The excessively violent suppression resulted in the death of thousands of black Cubans. For a detailed history see Helg, 1995.

By 1930, however, this new national paradigm began to celebrate the cultural contributions of Blacks and claimed *africanía* as the very essence of ‘Cubanness.’ In a process that corresponded with movements in the United States and France (the Harlem Renaissance and *Négritude* respectively), black culture in Cuba was celebrated by artists and intellectuals responding to the rallying call of ‘Afrocubanism.’ In the early thirties, poet Nicolás Guillén intoned: “el espíritu de Cuba es mestizo. Y del espíritu hacia la piel nos vendrá el color definitivo. Algún día se dirá: ‘color cubano’” (1974a: 114). Several years later, in his speech entitled ‘Los factores humanos de la cubanidad,’ delivered at the University of Havana on November 28, 1939, social scientist Fernando Ortiz set himself the task of deciphering the ineffable but distinct quality of Cubanness or “la cualidad de lo cubano,” which he likened to the national dish – *el ajíaco* – a stew that incorporates elements from each of the human tributaries that merge together in the island – European, African and Indigenous. Ortiz’s speech employed the convention of the *mestizo* narrative of Cuban history, beginning with a description of the dish as the staple of the Taino Indians, and then explaining how over time the nature of this stew – a medley of locally-found ingredients – changed with the successive culinary influences from Cuba’s various races and cultures. Ortiz imaginatively projected this metaphor of the simmering reduction of separate elements into the unique conditions of Cuban society:

Pero pocos países habrá como el cubano, donde en un espacio tan reducido, en un tiempo tan breve y en concurrencias inmigratorias tan constantes y caudalosas, se hayan cruzado razas más dispares, y donde sus abrazos amorosos hayan sido más frecuentes, más complejos, más tolerados y más augurales de una paz universal de las sangres; no de

una llamada “raza cósmica”, que es una pura paradoja, sino de una posible, deseable y futura desracialización de la humanidad. (Suárez, 1996: 13)

One of the guiding lights of ‘Afrocubanism,’ Ortiz’s anthropological exploration of black Cuba had been inspired by an interest in black criminality, as evidenced by his earlier works, *Los negros brujos* (1906) and *Los negros esclavos* (1916). These first investigations later led him to study the African influence on national cultural expressions, such as music, dance, language, and cuisine. By the 1940s, Ortiz’s various scholarly explorations had brought him to the conclusion that “without the black, Cuba would not be Cuba” (de la Fuente, 1998: 57). The groundwork of the, at times, contradictory process to simultaneously rehabilitate and integrate the African element in Cuban society was laid during this period.

De la Fuente challenges Vera Kutzinski’s formulation that the Afrocubanista movement functioned as “the site where men of European and of African ancestry rhetorically reconcile[d] their differences and, in the process, [gave] birth to the paternalistic political fiction of a national multiculturalism in the face of a social system that resisted any real structural pluralism” (1993: 11), by contending that the movement effectively empowered black Cubans by providing an ideological foundation to their political struggle for equality:

It is clear that blacks’ capacity to challenge the social order was limited by this nationalist discourse, but, like Martí’s republic “with all and for all,” the new rhetorical reality was an ideal that could be reinterpreted to their advantage. [...] As Ramon Guirao (1938: xv), himself a notable member of the movement, stated in 1938, the search for blackness “made us think [...] about the possibility for blacks to acquire their equality of opportunities” and recognized that “these incursions” had not “altered the social destiny of the black man.” (de la Fuente, 1998: 58)

According to this view, the ideal of a race-less nation serves to illuminate and advance debates about equality and social justice, and can, in fact, prompt black Cubans to seek deeper levels of meaning around the issues of race and identity. As such, de la Fuente's perspective matches the approach taken in this study, which, as I have already stated, foregrounds the role of imagination as an instrument of collective action.



The 1959 Revolution was a watershed event for race in Cuba. However, despite the huge changes the revolutionary project made to the racial landscape, many characteristics of a unique racial framework continued to exist and exert their influence on the lives of black Cubans. We cannot ignore the improvisational nature of the race ideology constructed under Fidel Castro's leadership: early policy responded to the unfolding circumstances of the moment, and sought to combine a new antiracist vision for Cuba with an emerging political ideology. Nevertheless, "unequal pre-revolutionary access to education and economic resources, pre-existing Cuban attitudes toward race, inequality in housing and labour markets, [...] all established the conditions for ongoing racial inequality" (Sawyer, 2006: 49). Moreover, as we have seen, the Latin American race model *per se* maintains a distinctive approach to racial group identity formation: individuals are overtly or implicitly discouraged from identifying collectively along racial lines. The rationale underlying this approach is the ingrained conviction that a focus on race and distinctive racial identification is "socially divisive and without a redeeming value" (Hernández, 2002: 1108). This line of thinking, more than any other factor, has

contributed to national iconology, in particular to the symbol of *la mulata* as a carrier of socio-cultural ideals.¹³

Historically in Cuba, efforts to ‘rehabilitate’ the black/African component in society have contributed to such troubling ideological practices as *blanqueamiento*, composed around the problematic concept of *la casi blanca mulata*.¹⁴ By contrast, in the 1960s, black activists in the United States addressed the degraded status of blackness by linking the elevation of political consciousness with a reassessment of the aesthetic value of African features and dark skin. The ‘Black is Beautiful’ movement disrupted racist stereotypical thinking by radically asserting that blackness could be equated with the finer virtues and qualities traditionally associated with whiteness or lightness. The movement had a profound influence on black liberationist thinking in other parts of the world, including the Caribbean.

II

Conceptualisations of Africa: International Relations

Resistance to efforts by Washington to isolate the Revolution and contain the island within an exilic geopolitical framework underpinned the development of Cuban foreign policy. It is important to understand Cuban internationalism in Africa inside this wider context. After a vigorous campaign spearheaded by the United States, the Organization

¹³ It is interesting to note the different usages of the terms *mestizo/mulato* and their female equivalents in Cuban society. Whereas women of mixed ancestry are positively identified as *mulata*, albeit often with sexual overtones, men with similar racial characteristics are often called *mestizo*, with the term *mulato* reserved for those associated with street culture or criminality. In this way, racist, colonial perceptions of Africanness (promiscuity, anti-social behaviour, etc.) endure through interchangeable, yet strictly-coded, terms of reference.

¹⁴ See Gema R. Guevara’s (2005) analysis of this subject in the essay ‘Inexacting Whiteness: Blanqueamiento as a Gender-Specific Trope in the Nineteenth Century.’

of American States (OAS) voted in early 1962 to revoke Cuba's membership, casting the island adrift diplomatically (Gott, 2004: 197). Castro's response to the vote was the 'Second Declaration of Havana,' in which he voiced the credo that "the duty of every revolutionist [was] to make the revolution" (Castro, 1998), and thereby initiated the drive to create favourable 'environmental' conditions for the revolution to survive within the hemisphere. Motivated by this goal, Cuba embarked upon a mission to instate guerrilla *focos*, according to the Sierra Maestra model, for the purpose of assisting revolutionary groups throughout Latin America. A few years later, the Organization for Solidarity with the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAL) was launched in the wake of the Tricontinental Conference, which was held in Havana in January 1966. According to Jorge Domínguez, "OSPAAL was Cuba's first stable 'front organization' to support revolution" (1989: 271). The twenty-seven Latin American members of the Tricontinental Conference voted to form a separate organisation, the Organization of Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) (*ibid.*: 270). The short-lived organisation was headquartered in Havana, and was a key outlet for Cuban support for Latin American insurgents. Commitment to the idea of *foquismo* on a global scale would lead Ernesto 'Che' Guevara to embark upon missions in both Africa and Bolivia in 1967. Following his death in Bolivia in 1967, OLAS was absorbed by OSPAAL.

Despite official efforts to maintain an ideological faith in Cuba's vanguard role on the continent, evidence had increasingly demonstrated that, even by the time of the OLAS conference in 1967, the guerrilla strategy had failed (Domínguez, 1989: 270). The radical movements in Peru and Argentina had effectively been defeated, and Cuban support for revolution in Colombia, Venezuela and Guatemala had been undermined by

internal conflict and clandestine efforts by the United States to support counterinsurgency forces (Rudolf, 1991a). Without Guevara, this branch of the revolution struggled to remain active and committed. A period of reorganisation ensued, which included the strengthening and expansion of the FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias). Military collaboration in the failed drive to reach *la zafra de los diez millones* was consigned to the history books because increased Soviet involvement meant a reduction in FAR's direct involvement in the state economy (Rudolf, 1991b).¹⁵ Furthermore, in addition to its primary role of defending the country against attack by external forces, the diplomatic function of the FAR was reinforced, as Cuba continued its early commitment to provide assistance to national liberation movements fighting to establish socialist regimes.

The concept of the "civic-soldier," bearer of the traditions and ideology of the Revolution, carried increasing weight as Cuba's identity on the international scene was forged by its military engagements (Rudolf, 1991c). Although Gott has described the twenty years after Che Guevara's death as a time when Cuba "was to subject itself to a make-over in the Soviet image" (2004: 234), I would argue that, in fact, a deep-rooted preoccupation with identity and *cubania* persisted during this era, and found expression through international solidarity efforts. In this view, to counterbalance growing conformity with the Soviet model in the domestic realm, internationalism emerged as an increasingly important channel of the Cuban spirit, the ideals and utopian values that drove ideology. This idea finds support in Antoni Kapcia's conclusion that "the one critical element of ideological continuity both within the Revolution and between the

¹⁵ Although listed as James D. Rudolf in the electronic format available at *HighBeam Research*, in the original publication the author's name appears as James D. Rudolph.

post-1959 period and the preceding periods [is] the constant search for identity” (2000: 246). Indeed, this intersection between internationalism and the quest for identity forms the crux of the present enquiry.

1975-1980

During the latter half of the 1970s, Cuba extended its global reach into Africa, providing military and technical support to revolutionary groups in Algeria, Angola, Zaire, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Madagascar, and Mozambique. Cuban assistance was also provided in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and, in Latin America, to Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada, and Suriname. It came as no surprise, therefore, when Castro was chosen to become leader of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979, and Havana selected as the site for that year's summit meeting (Gott, 2004: 264).

Within this framework, the Angolan War was the benchmark for Cuban foreign policy in the 1970s. Operation Carlota, the deployment of between eighteen and twenty-four thousand troops from November 1975 to March 1976 in support of Agostinho Neto's Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) was a military, ideological and psychological triumph for Cuba. It upheld the idea that the Revolution was now firmly established, and proved that Havana was more than able to come to the rescue of liberation movements in their struggle against imperialism anywhere in the world (Mestiri, 1980: 136). Moreover, the Cuban campaign in Angola exposed the limits of détente as a geopolitical strategy to maintain order and balance between 'spheres of influence' governed by the USA, the USSR and China. By raising the

spectre of a militarised third-world alliance beyond superpower or hegemonic control, Cuba's African policy raised fears of disorderliness that ran deep within American discourses on security. According to David Campbell, although post-World War Two texts of United States foreign policy identified the Soviet Union as the principal source of danger, Americans "always acknowledged that the absence of order [...] was their initial concern" (1992: 32).

From Washington's point of view, the collapse of Portuguese rule in Angola was just such a 'disorderly' turn of events that demanded U.S. control. However, Havana considered that Cuba's intervention in the civil war, to restore order in what had become a chaotic *mêlée* or 'free-for-all' of competing liberation movements and their backers, sprang from a more morally defensible position based on postcolonial third-world solidarity. Prior to the Cuban action, the MPLA was already widely considered to be the most efficient and organised of the Angolan fighting forces. Moreover, the movement's emphasis on class rather than ethnicity had gained it supporters across the country. According to U.S. consul general Everett Briggs, the MPLA was "the only Angolan (rebel) organization that had any national representativeness, that could be considered an Angolan-wide organization" (Gleijeses, 2002: 237). The U.S. State Department went one step further, claiming in 1975 that, not only did the MPLA stand "head and shoulders above the other two groups in terms of skills, education, and knowing what to do and how to do it," but that the movement commanded "the allegiance of most of the best educated and skilled people in Angola" (*ibid.*). Members of Castro's government agreed with the State Department's estimation, and similarities in outlook and culture added to the appeal of the MPLA for Havana. Cuba had

established ties with the MPLA in the early 1960s, and the movement had received the endorsement of the 1966 Tri-continental Conference. By then Che Guevara had already held talks with Agostinho Neto, and had assured him of Cuban support. From Havana's standpoint, then, the military intervention was a simple matter of honouring a pledge.

As the Angolan war intensified, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger persuaded President Ford that, after the humiliations of Vietnam and Cambodia, it was essential to draw the line at communist expansion in Africa (Andrew, 1995: 413). On July 18, Ford approved a CIA plan to finance the military campaign of the FNLA in order to prevent an MPLA victory by the deadline of November 11, 1975. The Portuguese had promised to relinquish proprietorship of the colony to whichever liberation movement controlled the capital by that date (Stockwell, 1978: 162). The CIA began to report the presence of "a few Cuban technical advisers" in Angola from late August, but Washington paid no particular attention. By then around 230 Cuban military advisers had joined the MPLA effort (Garthoff, 1994: 562). In the meantime, unbeknownst to the CIA, U.S. administration officials had begun secret negotiations with Cuba in January 1975, focused on four key areas: the U.S. trade embargo, the future of the Guantánamo base, a reunification programme for Cuban families, and the release of political prisoners. Kissinger and his advisers were incredulous that Cuba would spurn détente with its superpower neighbour in order to launch a major military campaign in a remote African nation, and by November the secret talks had come to a halt (Gott, 2004: 262). The U.S. policy of 'linkage' was incomprehensible to members

of the Cuban government who perceived no contradiction between their support for an African ally and efforts to improve relations with the United States.

Looking back on Cuban military interventions in Algeria, Zaire, the Congo and Guinea-Bissau, a Cuban official once remarked: “You can’t understand our intervention in Angola without understanding our past” (Gleijeses, 2002: 9). While demonstrably placing the Angolan mission in a political line of precedence, at a subtler level the remark alludes to the sociocultural antecedents that contributed to Cuban engagement on the African continent. By overlooking or underestimating the continuing narratives of Africa in revolutionary discourse, the United States failed to consider the idea of Africa as an operational concept in Cuban policy. As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Edward Mulcahy, an early advocate of the CIA covert campaign in Angola, admitted: “Cuba didn’t even enter into our calculations.” Kissinger, who was effectively running the intelligence services at the time, would later write that: “The intervention of Cuban combat forces came as a total surprise” (*ibid.*: 8).

On October 14, a column of South African soldiers entered Angola from Namibia (*ibid.*: 298). Recently declassified documents show that at the same time that South African troops attacked Luanda, CIA-sponsored forces that included Western mercenaries arrived in Angola, invading via neighbouring Zaire. The presence of South African forces prompted a massive military response from Cuba. Large scale Cuban involvement in turn guaranteed an escalation in U.S. efforts: the previous strategy of impasse and containment was quickly shelved in favour of a drive to win the war. In short order a CIA working group was charged with designing a programme to win the war. The proposals included: the formal introduction of American army units, a show

of the fleet off Luanda, and outlines for an overt military manoeuvre against Cuba to force Castro to bring his troops home to defend the island (Stockwell, 1978: 216). Kissinger visited Moscow in January 1976 in a last ditch effort to complete a SALT II treaty before the upcoming presidential election. His insistence that Angola should be discussed was met with refusal from members of the Soviet leadership who remained unwilling to put pressure upon Cuba for a few benefits of U.S.-Soviet negotiations. Cuba's intervention in Angola may have improved and strengthened its relations with the Soviet Union. However, by maintaining that the socialist camp led by the USSR was "the natural ally" (Shultz, 1988: 176) of the Third World, Castro risked alienating those non-aligned nations who staunchly defended a neutral line in foreign policy. This issue was brought to the fore after the decision to send troops to fight in Ethiopia against a former revolutionary ally, Somalia. As William LeoGrande observes:

In Ethiopia the ideological lines of the conflict were much less clearly drawn [than in Angola] and the geopolitical dimension of the conflict loomed much larger. Cuba was thus much more vulnerable to the charge of acting as a Soviet proxy. (1980: 35)

Suspensions about Cuban-Soviet motives in Africa were brought to light in two notable incidents in the summer of 1978. The first occurrence was at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) meeting, when the Nigerian representative thanked the Cubans for their aid to Africa, but warned them "not to overstay their welcome in Africa lest they be regarded as the instruments of a new imperialism" (*ibid.*: 47). The second took place at the meeting of foreign ministers of the Non-Aligned States hosted by Yugoslavia. This time Egypt attempted, but ultimately failed, to organise a boycott of the Non-Aligned Summit scheduled to take place in Havana (*ibid.*). The intervention

in Ethiopia was another decisive victory for the Cuban military; however, in terms of foreign policy, the campaign laid bare a distinct fault-line in the articulation of danger in Ethiopia; that is to say, how, in the absence of an identifiable imperialist threat, the border of the 'imagined community' of international revolutionaries was defined. For, if unity was based on ideology, as the poster displayed at a rally to welcome Fidel Castro during his visit to Luanda in March 1977 declared (see fig. 1), then there was little to distinguish the Ethiopian cause from the Somalian. Kapcia (1979: 152) has suggested that defence of the inviolability of colonial borders – one of the basic tenets of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) – might have influenced the Cuban decision to protect Ethiopia against what Castro had termed the “mad idea of a greater Somalia” (*ibid.*). However, it is equally plausible that policy in Ethiopia was simply propelled by the momentum of success in Angola, or put differently, that victory knew its own code.

Previous claims that Cuban troops acted in Angola as a mercenary force for the Soviet Union have been conclusively discredited by scholars of Cuban foreign affairs (see for example Domínguez, 1978 and 1989 or Gleijeses, 2002). Nonetheless Soviet weaponry and economic assistance was instrumental to the execution of policy in collaboration with Moscow in Angola and in Ethiopia. In the latter case, while Cuban policy seemed more clearly linked to Soviet strategic goals for the region, nevertheless, as Domínguez confirms, “Cuba’s margin of autonomy was still considerable and its actions un-coerced” (1989: 158).



FIGURE 1



Cuba's African policy sprang from a revolutionary ideology which, from the outset, emphasised the duty to support international revolution. Furthermore, Cuban history itself bequeathed a legacy of internationalism, in that, were it not for the United States, Spanish domination of Cuban society would have continued, and, in turn, without Soviet assistance the Cuban Revolution was unlikely to have survived assaults from the United States. In a speech delivered at the end of 1977, Castro detailed the practical benefits which Cuba derived from an international activist policy:

We have a reserve of many doctors. And we are faced with a high demand for doctors from other countries. Some of the poorest ones must be helped at no charge. But others are offering to pay for our support. This is one way for a non-oil-producing country such as ours to generate income.¹⁶

In this way, success in Angola contributed a model of internationalist solidarity that could be applied to other nations.

As we have seen, the principal axis upon which Cuban foreign policy turned in the 1970s was the construction and reinforcement of relations. The military missions in

¹⁶ This is my translation of an excerpt from an interview published in *Granma*, January 1978, cited by Mestiri (1980: 137) in French.

both Angola and Ethiopia improved ties with the Soviet Union. While Cuba's intervention in Ethiopia could not be legitimised according to the principles of shared history that applied in the Angolan case, from a pragmatic perspective, it safeguarded Moscow's provision of arms and financial support to sustain Cuba's commitment to the MPLA. As a result, internationalism in Africa protected the Revolution from isolation by forging and promoting alliances – ideological, economic, diplomatic, and military – to an extent not achieved by Cuban efforts to claim a vanguard role in the struggle against imperialism in the Americas.

Notes on Methodology

Research tools utilised in this project include historical study, critical discourse analysis and structured and unstructured interviews. The aim was to combine the analytical and hermeneutical techniques proposed by Ricoeur (see above) with the ethnographic field practices of cultural geographers to produce an exegesis of Operation Carlota as a cultural text,¹⁷ formed around the essential elements of historical contextualisation, cultural theory and self-reflexivity. The methodology centres on the critical reading of a corpus of texts related to the African component in Cuban culture and politics in order to explore social and cultural values, and, above all, to examine how *africana* was tied to a sense of place. The corpus comprised films, periodicals and political speeches from the period between 1974 and 1980, supplemented by poetry, testimonial writings and other literature.

¹⁷ As I have stated earlier, this view is based upon the proposition that a text is a group of encoded and meaningful practices. Consequently, these practices may be 'read,' that is to say, analysed and interpreted, especially with respect to symbolic and metaphorical value. The idea of a cultural text centres this reading according to the themes and characteristics of a discretely defined cultural system.

The naming of the military mission 'Carlota,' for reasons described in the chapter entitled 'Rituals of War,' indicates a point of dynamic interaction between the mythic and historical imaginations, in other words where national mythology and national history, related to the experience of slavery, intersect. Consequently, an exploration of both the mythical and historical dimensions of Cuban *africanía* requires isolating and analysing the three principal tropes articulated in discourse on Africa: (1) slavery, (2) *folklorismo/syncretic* religions, and (3) internationalism. These three aspects of *africanía* will be explained through the following: cultural memories of slavery, including how these are passed on from generation to generation; the often implicit and coded political message embedded in cultural forms; the untidy correlation between left-wing views among blacks in the West African Diaspora and the commitment to pan-Africanism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The thesis argues that Cuban identity was transformed through the experience of Angola. Thus, the principal themes of the thesis are: identity, race/Africa and change. I shall now outline the theories and approaches that shape the study of each theme in turn.

Identity

Each chapter experiments with tactics that highlight the link which Stuart Hall (2000) identified between discursive strategies and social practices. According to this view, representations shape and influence culture to the extent that they convey shared values

which, in turn, shape the images, notions and belief patterns concerning other groups (Nash, 2006: 41). After all, identities are not formed in isolation, but in relation to other individuals and groups: in other words, against every 'us' must be constructed a 'them.' As anthropologist Hassan Rachik explains: "Lo que importa en una identidad colectiva no es sólo lo que es común (cultura, lengua, nacionalidad, religión, etc.), es necesario además que lo que es común traduzca diferencias, trace fronteras culturales con el Otro" (2006: 18). However, since identities are liable to shift over time, we can expect that the 'others' against which they are constructed will also change. This is where the notion of a difference between 'hard' and 'soft' collective identities gains force:

Cuanto más selectiva es la identidad colectiva, limitándose a algunos sectores de la vida social, más blanda es y más débil es su poder de imposición. En este caso, para reivindicar una identidad colectiva, las personas no se sienten obligadas a endosar día y noche toda una cultura. Algunos objetos, ritos, símbolos, etc. son suficientes para remitirse a la misma. Las emblemas identificatorias son sin duda necesarias para la supervivencia y la cohesión de un grupo social. Sin embargo, cuanto menos numerosas son estos emblemas, más blanda será la identidad colectiva que debe asumirse y mayor será la identidad de las personas que reivindican una identidad común. (*ibid.*: 18)

In general, when we speak of shifts or transformations, it is these 'softer' cultural expressions that are invoked because the 'harder' – more deep-rooted – aspects of collective identity present a considerably more difficult challenge to dislodge. One reason for this difficulty may be that the attributes of hard identities contribute to discursive strategies that create what Mary Nash (2006: 55-56) defines as hegemonic identities. 'Hegemonic' implies that these identities are deeply embedded in cultural and social hierarchies, and that, furthermore, they preserve (and disseminate) ideological

systems that have been naturalised to the group in question. To reformulate Rachik, we could say that hegemonic or hard identities both reflect and reproduce “los conceptos naturales, homogeneizadores y purificadores, imperativos y totalitarios” (2006: 9) that exist within discrete systems of social classification. For this reason, while the thesis sets out to demonstrate how Operation Carlota helped to cement the construction of an anti-racist national identity against the external (‘objective’) forces of racism – the ‘other’ here represented as racial antagonisms in the United States, the apartheid regime of South Africa, and those Angolan liberation movements decried by Havana as black Zionists – it confronts a unique challenge to connect this process to the possibility for change in Cuban race ideology.

The first part of the thesis presents the idea that in early 1970s Cuba the concept of Africa was expressed in a dialectics of modernity and tradition inherited from the past. This dualism developed out of a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis other social groups, or members of other societies, that often occurs in the post-colonial world. Political scientist Mehran Kamrava explains this as “a result of interaction among unequals” where, for one reason or another, a social group, or even an entire nation, reacts against feelings of social and cultural inferiority:

Insecurity about one’s worth, whether individual or collective, arises when values ascribed to others are idealised and are striven for. A constant attempt is made to become or at least to emulate those whose values appear to be appealing. In so far as the Third World is concerned, a society-wide inferiority complex is extremely acute at both the international and the intranational level, but, perhaps not surprisingly, is rarely admitted or discussed by Third World scholars or political leaders. (Kamrava, 1993: 127)

Historically in Cuba, feelings of social inferiority, both at the national and intranational level, have centred on the complex and often contradictory subject of race, tied to European conceptions of blackness as debased. African political scientist Ali Mazrui asserts,

The black man is neither the most brutalized, nor the most deprived of the racial specimens of the world. He has simply been the most humiliated. The black races have historically been looked down upon more universally than almost any race. (Mazrui, 1977: 215)

So, based on these two ideas – first, that ‘hard’ identities in general are more resistant to change, and, second, that Cuba’s ‘hard’ identity links to deep-seated ambivalence towards blackness – we must acknowledge the potential difficulty in connecting any transformation in consciousness related to internationalism in Africa with changes to the existing social structure.

Race/Africa

The thesis utilises an Africa-centred methodological framework to circumnavigate the limits to research posed by the silencing of racialised discourse in Cuba during the 1970s. From a theoretical perspective, this approach had the effect of diminishing the relevance of the ‘black Atlantic’ to my investigation, despite the initial potential that Paul Gilroy’s paradigm offered as an instrument for conceiving the cultural significance of Operation Carlota. The black Atlantic’s focus on ‘routes’ as a strategy “to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity” (Gilroy, 2002 [1993]: 19) is clearly carried in Havana’s commitment to ship waves of internationalists across the ocean in a transnational act of solidarity with

Angola (a policy that was framed within an, at least implicitly, pan-Africanist discourse). Nevertheless, Gilroy's apparent ambivalence towards Africa in the construction of his theoretical lens – as he strives to integrate the 'black experience' into the modernist canon – obscures the significance of *africanity* as a strategy of resistance, cultural coordination and even national integration. What is more, this perspective tends to minimise the idea that Africans arrived in the New World not solely as slaves, but as former members of societies, with all the 'codified' elements of social praxis signified by this status. While many outer manifestations of former ways of thinking were eroded more successfully in the English-speaking plantation colonies, in countries like Cuba and Brazil, where the Atlantic trade in Africans continued for longer, these were dynamically preserved to a remarkable degree. Consequently, in those countries the articulation of "pre-slave history" (Gilroy, 2002: 58) must be understood differently from the 'rescuing critiques' which Gilroy dismisses as the means used by some cultural activists for "both mobilising memories of the past and inventing an imaginary past-ness that can fuel their utopian hopes" (*ibid.*: 57). For I have discovered, at least in the case of Cuba's black population, the possibility of a vital and generative Africanity that fuses a transgressive political consciousness with modernist conceptions of national identity.

In the end, francophone writers and theorists have been the most useful to the Africa-centred approach of my enquiry, perhaps due to the perceived alliance between the French language and the anticolonial movement. This link derives from three main factors: the first relates to the simple matter of numbers, the second can be traced to

practices in the French educational system, and the third involves the influence of the Communist Party on French politics. In the first case, as Mazrui explains,

As for the French language, the majority of individuals who speak it are in Europe: but the majority of states that have adopted it as their official language are in Africa. It is true that there are many speakers of French in the Americas, especially Quebec, and in parts of Asia, especially Indo-China. But Africa has more than fifteen countries that have adopted the French language as their official language. That means that within the United Nations most of the states that have adopted French as their own language are black states. (1977: 92)

In consequence, a survey of the leading figures in the early anticolonial struggles – those who shaped, defined and guided the newly-independent states – reveals that the majority share a common French colonial heritage, and a number of them, including the influential Senegalese leader Léopold Senghor, received their tertiary education in France. This links to the second condition, which relates to the French educational system's more philosophical orientation (in comparison with the British system) which possibly contributed to French African nationalists' "fascination with ideas and abstract analysis" (*ibid.*: 30). In turn, this comfort with abstract formulations in metropolitan France may, at least partially, account for the greater tolerance towards the ideas of Marxism-Leninism.

During the colonial period French Africa felt the influence of Marxist ideas sooner than British Africa did. A major reason was that the French Communist Party was much larger than the British Communist Party. French communists could therefore influence domestic politics in France and in the French colonies far more than British communists could ever influence events in Britain and the British Empire. (*ibid.*)

As we might expect, similarities existed in the French Caribbean, where Senghor had his counterpart in Martinican writer and politician, Aimé Césaire.¹⁸ Césaire had a profound influence on the intellectual and political development of his countrymen Frantz Fanon and Édouard Glissant. The thesis adapts a number of Glissant's formulations, including 'point of entanglement' and 'poetics of relation,' for the purpose of the present investigation.

My attraction to Glissant and other francophone writers on race might also be attributable to the fact that they have been the most willing to engage with the role of 'mixedness' or *métissage* in the construction of national identities. Their approach, which tends to focus on the complexities and problems of the mixed-race dynamic in post-colonial societies, diverges sharply from the celebratory constructs of *mestizaje* symbolised in Latin American formulations. For the most part, the francophone response centres on the chameleon or trickster element present in the etymological root *metis*, which was the "pre-philosophical word for intelligence in Greece" and, according to Dudley Young (1992: 202), carries the sense of "cunning, craftiness, quick-wittedness, and deceit rather than the capacity to think abstractly." Rather than eulogising *métissage* (*mestizaje*) as a simplifying and homogenising national ideal, these writers seek to explore and expose the complex challenges in constructing cross-cultural, non-hierarchical relations. The important qualifier here is 'non-hierarchical,' since it encapsulates the essential differences between the Latin American and francophone models. For, while the former implies a colour-coded status system (see earlier reference

¹⁸ Senghor and Césaire, together with Léon Damas of French Guiana, collaborated in the production of *L'étudiant noir*, during their student years in Paris. The journal, first published in 1935, established the foundations for the black cultural movement that became known as *Négritude*.

to *la casi blanca mulata*), the latter evokes a 'memory culture' focused on the notion of cultural continuity. Memory cultures are concerned with the preservation of collective knowledge for the purpose of reconstructing fragmented cultural identities. The francophone perspective on race and Africa may, thus, be likened to a project or process rather than a rigid construct, and, therefore, conveys the sense that transculturation remains on-going as opposed to the idea of a historically determined and fixed system. Similarly, it is with this dynamic character of *africania* that the present thesis engages, as it demonstrates the foundational power contained within the Cuban idea of Africa with respect to military action in Angola.

Barbara Webb (1992: 6) finds similarities between Glissant's belief in the primacy of locality ("specificity and difference") in cultural analysis, and Fanon's rejection of homogenising or universalising narratives. Webb describes the literary project of Glissant as the task to "reveal the hidden traces of historical experience erased from the collective memory of an exploited and oppressed people, so that history may be reconceived as a future history to be made, *l'histoire à faire*" (*ibid.*: 7, emphasis added). It is an approach that foregrounds the role of myth as "historical memory and speculative inquiry intended to provoke consciousness" (*ibid.*: 6), which differs from the Western tradition's concept of myth as a legitimising instrument of power and control. Due to this emphasis on the generative character of cultural memory, the use of these francophone ideas as a method of investigating the influence of *africania* on the Cuban intervention in Angola appears as a compelling strategy.

Change

Victor Turner's theory of liminality conjoins the study's Africanist perspective with the overarching theme of transformation. Turner's conception of the attributes of ritual subjects was founded upon his anthropological studies among the Ndembu tribes of Central Africa. Ndembu culture is structured around a set of complex initiation rites that demand lengthy periods of secluded training (Turner, 1969: 4). These phases of separation from the daily life of the tribe are characterised by Turner as 'liminal,' and the present thesis applies the characteristics of liminality, especially the concept of '*communitas*,' to gain understanding of the Angolan experience as a social phenomenon "betwixt and between" (*ibid.*: 9) the normal modalities of Cuban sociohistorical consciousness.

Turner contrasted transitory liminal periods of *communitas* with the structured arrangement of social status systems.¹⁹ While drawing a classificatory boundary between the two social formations, Turner simultaneously stressed that they are mutually determinative (1969:127). Ritual experiences, whether sacred or secular, both interpret and shape the way that a community defines the world, and in a way that "establishes its primary values, affects, behaviors, and choices" (Rodríguez & Fortier, 2007: 4). We could, therefore, infer that the principal function of *communitas* is to filter meaning into collective behaviour. In this way, *communitas* mimics the role of religion as a force for heightening the collective experience and connecting the group to a higher order. By

¹⁹ Turner's concept of *communitas* has been challenged, most recently in Eade and Sallnow's collection of essays on pilgrimage *Contesting the Sacred* (1991). However these theoretical critiques appear mainly to contest the usefulness of the paradigm for understanding certain specific religious rituals. I am happy to use the concept in terms of the broad view of *communitas* as a temporary phase of transition away from mundane social structures characterised by a sense of communal (non-hierarchical) bonding and shared feeling.

conceiving the Angola experience as a 'threshold' or ritual experience, the thesis proposes that Operation Carlota was naturally in dialogue with Cuban social structure, and that, consequently, discourse produced during this liminal period contributed to the ritualization of social relationships, whereby ritual operated to cloak conflicts inherent in the society. This process of ritualization, I suggest, was channelled through the cult of the African ancestor.

THESIS STRUCTURE

The thesis is organised in three parts according to intersecting chronological and thematic principles. Thematically, the sections follow the three stages identified in rites of passage: separation, transition and integration, and chronologically, the sections correspond to the timeframe of the release dates for the films in Cuban director Sergio Giral's slave trilogy: *El otro Francisco*, 1974–1975; *Rancheador*, 1976–1978; and *Maluala*, 1979–1980. The thesis considers the rebellious African slave to be an important cultural representation of Cuban revolutionary identity, and thus the films, as performances of the historical experience of Africa, are considered central to the production of shared meanings. A theme taken from each film forms the organising framework for a wider critical hermeneutic reading of materials relevant to an Africa-centred understanding of culture and politics.

Writing Style

I employ a mixed-method approach to writing in the thesis that is motivated by Michael Taussig's view that writing itself is a ritualistic practice. According to this notion, the

writer may play with the “mimetic magic” that words possess by pretending that “they are what they refer to” (2006: x). Consequently, the writing itself can be the theory. The thesis applies this strategy in a number of ways. For example, Part One seeks to reflect the disconnected, and often antagonistic, nature of Cuban discourse on Africa prior to the Angolan Intervention. This quality is mirrored in the fragmentary style of exposition in the first chapter, ‘Slave Nostalgias,’ while, in the second chapter, ‘The Public Lives of Santeria,’ the notion of dualism is captured by the use of distinctive fonts to express the two different approaches (historical and cultural). As the thesis progresses, so the style of narrative, in turn, moves toward an expression of synthesis.

The final chapter of each part adapts a style taken from the subgenre of ethnographic writing known as the self-reflexive fieldwork account:

Variouly sophisticated and naïve, confessional and analytic, these accounts provide an important forum for the discussion of a wide range of issues, epistemological, existential, and political. The ethnographer, a character in a fiction, is at center stage. He or she can speak of previously “irrelevant” topics: violence and desire, confusions, struggles and economic transactions with informants. These matters (long discussed informally within the discipline) have moved away from the margins of ethnography, to be seen as constitutive and inescapable. (Honigman, quoted in Clifford and Marcus, 1986: 14)

The concept of the ethnographer as “a character in a fiction” has been employed by Taussig to brilliant effect in many of his works, and forms an important element of the postmodern style of scholarly writing, sometimes termed fictocriticism, that has greatly influenced my approach to the present investigation.

Fictocriticism

Scholars of the Caribbean, in seeking to make contact with collective meaning, must make do without the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History that runs throughout the Western canon, for Caribbean discourse is bound up with the theme of fragmentation, and, hence, comprises multiple interrupted histories. As a hybrid form of writing (part critical, part theoretical, part creative) that tells a story while making an argument, the form of feminist writing known in Australia and Canada as fictocriticism, which has its counterpart in postmodern (particularly postcolonial) writing styles, appears as the most apt response to the problem of the fragment, as it engages with the sustained links between history and literature that scholars such as Hayden White (1973) and Édouard Glissant (1981) have underscored. Indeed, Glissant (1981: 71) traces the earliest link between a historical consciousness and the writing instinct back to myth, which reinforces the significance which I assign to the mythic imagination for a meaningful interpretation of the Angolan intervention.

A brief survey of the origins and key concepts of fictocriticism is necessary to contextualise my argument that it offers an important methodological solution to the problem of 'writing the Caribbean.' It must first be clarified, however, that the term fictocriticism is indeterminate, and in fact, it sets out to encourage indeterminacy.

Research fiction or fictocriticism has evolved into a newer genre of academic writing that has been institutionalised as a research methodology predominantly in Australia and Canada. In Australia the movement most likely grew out of debates in the 1980s over the politics of form in feminist and critical writings. It has included such scholars and writers as Anne Brewster, Moya Costello, Anna Gibbs, Heather Kerr, Stephen Muecke,

Amanda Nettlebeck, Katrina Schlunke and Ros Prosser. In Europe, competing narratives about the origins of fictocriticism attribute the genre either to French feminist ideas of embodied writing practices or to male postmodernists (notably Barthes and Derrida) through ideas of hybridity, intertextuality and pastiche. More recent manifestations of fictocritical work produced by feminists and others is “often in the service of examining racism and whiteness where origins don’t necessarily matter but bodies and the politics of writing do” (Bartlett, 2006). In this category we must also include the work of Michael Taussig, who recounts that the essays in *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* were written “from within instead of standing outside pointing” (2006: ix). In all cases, the fictocritical approach emphasises a process that attempts to conjure up an aura and a sense of redemption in a manner that is often linked to Walter Benjamin. In fact, a number of ‘post-critical’ (the US variant on fictocriticism) scholars demonstrate ethico-political positions that have been informed by Benjamin, two of the most prominent being Avital Ronell and Steve Shaviro.

Caribbean intellectuals and writers, in their efforts to plumb the deeper truths of the archipelago, have employed similar techniques, often examining with equal attention a plethora of artefacts, rituals and documents. In this regard, we need only recall the works of Alejo Carpentier, Octavio Paz, C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant and Wilson Harris, among others. These writings encompass a wide range of topics and combine a number of literary genres as they delve into the underworld of the collective unconscious in search of the fragments that might comprise a collective destiny. The use of the fragment is common in fictocriticism because it enables the creation of commentary from juxtaposition and facilitates the formation of relations

between things that previously had none. It allows for gaps and discontinuities and for the use of silence. One might think of it as a written form of montage.

It is perhaps in fictocriticism's use of the personal voice that the strand of feminist writing interweaves with the postcolonial, in that writing on gender and race requires self-reflection, or at least locating the writer as gendered and raced. Both ideological positions are based on a politics of difference and it makes sense for the writer to be located in the institutional, corporeal and cultural histories which produce and contest that difference (Bartlett, 2006). Writing on race in Cuba as a woman of African-Caribbean descent, I have found myself inexorably drawn to employing a writing style that acknowledges the ability of historical and theoretical material to stir the ever-present ghosts I carry within. The importance attached to 'disembodied forces' draws upon the sense in which fictocriticism is considered a 'haunted' writing serving explicitly feminist agendas of locating the writer, be they male or female, and of documenting and contesting the fiction of the disembodied scholar (*ibid.*). Within this frame of reference the body offers itself as a site of social research. Whereas from a traditional academic viewpoint the introduction of autobiographical detail suggests a subjective response that cannot be verified, in fictocriticism autobiographical references situate the other (small) stories while refusing the position of a grand narrative. The geosymbolic and mythic significance of Africa to Cuban identity is, at the same time, conceptually pervasive and elusive. It is also provocatively multivocal. By entering the Cuban experience of Angola through fictocriticism, the meanings of internationalism in Africa may be charted in their multivalent complexity.

PART ONE

Separation

1970-1975

The five years before Cuba's military engagement in Angola, in November 1975, coincided with the restructuring of the political system and economy along Soviet lines. During this time, discursive treatments of Africa crystallised into three primary themes: slavery, folklore and geopolitics. The chapters comprising this section apply these themes as interpretive frameworks for the study of Africanness in Cuban identity in the period prior to Operation Carlota. What each work detects is the presence of a tense dualism deeply-rooted within the idea of Africa, compounded by an ambiguous nationalist *poética de resistencia*. This dualism – lurking at the heart of this and all post-slaving and postcolonial societies – stemmed from, I claim, on the one hand, the clamorous thrust to dislocate (through specific discursive and legislative practices) the violations of history for the sake of social and national cohesion, and, on the other, the quiet endurance of illusions created at the birth of the colony and plantation economy. Another way of saying this is that the concept of race (conjoined with the cultural practice of racism) inevitably introduced a 'shadow-discourse' into the subject of Africa. This made it possible for race to become twinned with or even substitute for the idea of Africa in the national imaginary.

The first chapter introduces this notion of dualism by examining how the Revolution's emplotment of the African slave into the narrative of nation failed to displace the persistence of the structures of feeling I refer to as "circles of memory" within works by Afro-Cuban artists, including filmmaker Sergio Giral, and poets Nancy Morejón and Nicolás Guillén. In the second chapter, the question to what extent the Revolution had managed to dislodge or supersede the old race ideologies frames a study of the conflicting perspectives on the practice of African-based religions. The

contrasting themes of history and culture are utilised to offer a dialectical exploration of marginalisation and inclusion. Scientification of Afro-Cuban culture according to the Soviet model, I suggest, tapped into deep-seated anxieties surrounding the presence of Africans in Cuba. However, showing how Sergio Giral represents the idea of dualism within the 'performative-community' of slaves, I make the case that tapping into doubleness as the expression of a return (history) to an African worldview (culture) offered the prospect of both personal and socio-political synthesis. The final chapter refashions the trope of the colonial explorer narrative or travelogue into a tool for measuring the spatial or geographical concept of Africa in Cuban society before Angola. It aims to answer the question: which specific locations, whether inside or outside of Cuba, were most associated with the idea of that continent before November 1975? This chapter, the first instalment of the investigation mapping the imagined territory of Africa in Cuba, takes as its frame of reference the eighteenth century geographic idea that African society appeared nobler the further away one travelled from the slave trading posts along the West African coastline. The narrative, which continues in the second part of the thesis and concludes in the last, surveys the imagined landscape of *africanía* from the perspectives of three individuals: Fidel Castro, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara and this researcher. Che Guevara's contribution is taken from the memoir of his guerrilla activities in West Africa in the 1960s, while Fidel Castro's 'memories' are recreated from press coverage of his first visit to the African continent in 1972. These 'historical' entries are counterbalanced by excerpts from 'field notes' taken during a two-month research visit to Cuba that I undertook in the spring of 2008.

SLAVE NOSTALGIAS

It was a radical and vigorously challenged idea at the time, but the Doctor held fast to his belief that Africans had memory.²⁰ For the masters who entreated his medical skill and counsel on behalf of their human chattel the notion that slaves possessed the capacity to recall a homeland, a familiar landscape, or even a sweetheart's cherished features, and that the recollection of any of these could bring forth feelings of love and loss – or nostalgia – bordered on the revolutionary. Nonetheless the Doctor remained steadfast in his advocacy of the only certain cure for the melancholy that wasted first the spirits and then soon after the bodies of the enslaved men and women under his care, that is, the recovery of memories deeply rooted in each individual's biography.²¹

At a glance the Doctor's position bears the mark of the Romanticism that sixty years later would gild the dark-skinned savage with noble European sentiments in the literary creations of colonial-era emancipationists, such as the Cuban antislavery novel Francisco, and certainly the accusation that arrogance – “of English, French, Americans, Dutch, and some Spaniards” – gave rise to slave nostalgia appears to court the attention of abolitionism without directly advancing the cause. The Doctor makes this claim in the monumental tome

²⁰ I have presented the unnamed Doctor as a semi-fictitious character by whom to introduce the twinned concepts of slaves and sentiment, but he is in fact based upon a real historical personage, the Spanish physician Francisco Barrera y Domingo, who practised medicine for almost two decades throughout the Caribbean, finally settling in Havana in the early 1780s. Barrera started life in a rural hamlet in the Aragon region of Spain, and went on to study medicine in Zaragoza, before finding employment with the Spanish Royal Navy. A more detailed biographical record including background information about the study *Reflexiones* can be found in López Denis (2005).

²¹ Flouret (1985) advances the idea of *Reflexiones* as a forerunner of psychosomatic medicine (cited in López Denis 2005).

of slave medicine in the Caribbean entitled Reflexiones histórico físico naturales médico quirúrgicas, a widely disregarded 894-page account of his eighteen years of professional practice in Nueva Granada, Puerto Rico, Saint Domingue and Havana. However, by that time melancholia had already been identified as a common enough affliction of slaves in the New World, attributable to harsh treatment at the hands of cruel overseers and masters. What was significant about the Doctor's ascription of memory to Africans arises from the highly subversive suggestion that slaves were emotionally developed beings capable of experiencing their enslavement not simply as a painful personal and temporal condition, but as a collective tragedy. A diagnosis of nostalgia therefore involved "an exploration of the clinical meanings of freedom, justice, and fraternal love" (López Denis, 2005:183).

I

The second death of Francisco in Sergio Giral's cinematic exploration of love, freedom and justice in the time of slavery, *El otro Francisco* (1975), articulates a set of ideas that have shaped Cuban origin stories throughout history – the virtues of martyrdom and self-sacrifice prevalent in nationalist discourse from the time of the independence movements against Spanish colonialism to the present, post-Soviet, period. Although similar in melodramatic rendition, his first and second deaths diverge at the point of symbolic meaning. The image of the star-crossed lover and slave, Francisco, hanging from a tree several minutes into the film serves as the point of departure for the Cuban director to challenge the original novel's *criollo* emancipationist project which endowed the African-born protagonist with the most impeccable and consummate of bourgeois values, that is the yearning for the romantic Other or beloved. This sentimental view of

slavery, emerging from the anticolonial salons of the era²² and represented by Francisco's suicide, is what Giral sets out to disrupt by demonstrating how unlikely it was, given the quotidian inhumanity and brutality of the Cuban plantation slave's often brief existence, that the 'real-life' Francisco would have taken his own life over so maudlin a matter as a thwarted love alliance. Later, by presenting Francisco's second death (*otra muerte*) – under the whip of the white overseer and his black slave driver – in the light of historical authenticity, Giral brings his artistic revisionism into alignment with the Revolution's characterisation of slaves as patriotic, nationalist symbols conveying the antagonistic qualities of loyalty and recalcitrance, strength and suffering, courage and despair, individual sacrifice and group survival, reflective of the deep complexities within the revolutionary moment, that is to say the struggle, both personal and at the wider socio-political level, between the new ideals and the old order.

In this way, films such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *La última cena* (1976) and the films of Giral's trilogy – *El otro Francisco*, *Rancheador* (1978) and *Maluala* (1979) – appear to corroborate Fredric Jameson's hypothesis that third-world narratives are "necessarily allegorical" because the personal and the political or the private and the historical are not so easily divided inside the colonial frame:

Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic– necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society [...]. All third-world texts [...]

²² The original novel, *Francisco* (written in 1838-39 and published in 1880), came out of the literary salon of Cuban landholder, Rodrigo del Monte. It was commissioned by the British ambassador to Cuba, Richard Madden, who hoped that an abolitionist novel would assist his efforts to put pressure on Spain to abolish slavery. As Giral depicts in the film, Madden's campaign was inspired more by the desire to create new markets for British agricultural innovations than by humanitarianism.

are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. (1986: 69)

On the surface, these films conform to Jameson's model to the extent that they are involved with the rectification of ideological distortions and neglect from the colonial and Republican periods regarding the history of slavery in Cuba. In other words, we could say that they inhabit the same rhetorical environment. However, it appears to me that the films of Giral and Gutiérrez Alea are rhetorical acts sprouting from separate cultural *humis*. By this I mean that, although the 'post-racial' public culture of 1970s Cuba required the 'bracketing' of inequalities of social status, these disparities nonetheless found expression in the individual allegorical creations of filmmakers and other artists with different sociohistoric backgrounds. I am referring here to what may be termed the 'dual consciousness' of post-slavery *mestizo* societies, often expressed as a dissonance or distortion in the seamless reflection Jameson proposes.

²³ For slavery, as Francis Bacon once said of human understanding, "like a false mirror, receiving rays irregularly distorts and discolours the nature of things" (Seliger, 1977: 30).

Consequently, within the artistic creations of black Cubans engaged with the subject of slavery, at times remains discernible the murmur of an 'under-discourse' (a 'muttering' beneath the official 'uttering') resonant with the "nostalgia of the Negroes" which our Doctor of slaves once defined as "a melancholic sadness that attacks them

²³ In *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) Frantz Fanon discusses the way in which identity in the public sphere and identity in the private sphere can become dissonant and lead to what he calls dual consciousness. His examples deal with issues of colonialism and the way in which colonised subjects are forced to publicly adopt a foreign culture while privately they maintain their identity as defined within their original culture.

without delirium, furor or fever, born out of a strong aversion to anything that could distract them from their fantasies, unless it is the return to their beloved patria” (López Denis, 2007: 183). In the case of *El otro Francisco*, the Afro-Cuban Giral subsequently depicts two “beloved patrias,” the first imagined and the other mourned, thus exposing the unresolved tension within post-slaving societies, whereby any venture to historicise slavery under the mantle of nationalism risks exposure to the undermining influence of racial memory. For, if we accept that the unifying project of Cuban revolutionary nationalism has often sought resolution of the race problem through the poetic re-description of violence and trauma in the era of slavery, it remains the case that while the positional descendants of slave-owners maintain an important social (moral) investment in that re-description, the descendants of slaves retain an equally vital cultural (emotional) commitment to the mourning of enslaved ancestors.

II

In a sense, every Cuban film about slavery – and indeed each discursive act on the subject of slavery – performs within a magical playground or ‘transference space’ of myth and symbol. Michael Taussig uses the term ‘transference space’ to connote a place in which two histories are “brought into serendipitous overlap for a certain, small period of time” (2006:54). This idea is demonstrated in José Luciano Franco’s article ‘Africanos y sus descendientes criollos en las luchas liberadoras, 1533-1895,’ published at the end of 1975 in the periodical *Casa de las Américas*. First, Franco places Cuba’s *tradición rebelde* into historical context by tracing the roots of the present-day *lucha revolucionaria* back to the wars of independence. Then, to add political weight to his

account, he quotes from a speech given by Fidel Castro in Matanzas on July 26, 1974, in which the slave rebels at the Triunvirato *ingenio* in 1843 were referred to as “precusores de nuestras revoluciones sociales” (Franco, 1975: 16). The Cuban leader then went on to sanctify the “sangre generosa” which Africans and their descendants had ‘given’ to liberate Cuban soil. Roger D. Abrahams reminds us that the “national life stories of modern nation-states [...] commonly turn not so much on the story of the founding by heroes, but on the stories of service, sacrifice, and death of those who die for ‘the cause’ at moments of rupture, revolt, and revolution” (1993: 23). When located within the ‘transference space’ manifested in Franco’s article, the bloody struggles of African slaves for their individual and (race-based) collective emancipation become transformed, through the magic of *la poética de resistencia*, into national historic events. The idea of the transference space underscores the performative aspect of discourse which must always take place in time and space, while also highlighting the transience and mutability of this very performativity. In this regard, words such as *precusores* and *nuestras* perform the feat of obscuring socio-cultural divisions, while the uneasy image of *sangre generosa* still reveals the instability of the alliance.

III

So, to return to Giral’s film, if Francisco and his two deaths belong to history and the wider nationalist project, wherein does the alternative discourse of melancholy and nostalgia lie?: the one which I have claimed is discernable in the creative works of black Cubans. In my view, it is the killing of the *cimarrón* and, above all, the mourning of his death by fellow slaves that transports us from the ‘transference space’ into the ‘circle of memory.’ ‘Circles of memory’ in general arise out of the dual imperatives to hold – as

in to shelter and keep sacred within the circle – and to protect, with the meaning of defence or keeping outside of the circle. The integral moment of the slaves' grief contributes an added dimension to *El otro Francisco* to the extent that the historically-centred discourse on slavery, that ignites feelings of national pride, is joined by another that reproduces melancholy. It is important to emphasise that the two discourses counterpoise rather than contradict one another, a dynamic richly illustrated by this emblem from the African religious *Abakuá* brotherhood (see fig. 2):

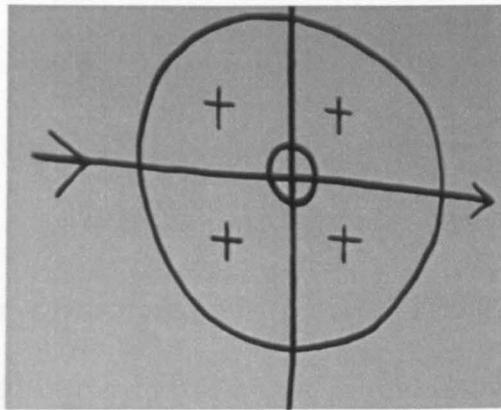


FIGURE 2. It is quite easy to discern within the esoteric symbolism the principles I have outlined: the circle of memory partitioned by the lines of personal and collective history. The vertical arrow of time, representing an individual lifespan, crosses the horizontal arrow of chronological or historical time, and both appear to pierce two circles, which I have referred to as 'circles of memory.' The larger circle, according to this interpretation, corresponds to collective or group memory (in this case, African slaves and their descendants in Cuba), whilst the smaller circle of individual recollection is positioned simultaneously at the heart of the larger 'circle of memory' and at the intersection of the two arrows, because personal memory contains elements of all the different treatments of time. Finally, inside each quadrant is placed a 'cross of matter,' the universal sacred sign for human consciousness.²⁴

IV

When we first encounter the *cimarrón*, Crispin, in *El otro Francisco* he is being returned to the *finca* after another unsuccessful escape attempt. Almost naked and in chains, his defiant strength captures our attention first because it contrasts so sharply with the

²⁴ *Abakuá* members might well give an alternative interpretation of the sacred symbols in this emblem, but I consider my version to be sufficiently informed by Central African cosmology (especially the cosmograms of the BaKongo ethnic group, located in the modern-day region of Angola) and other esoteric symbolism to claim some validity. See Delgado de Torres (2006) and also Ballard (2006) for more information on the history and interpretations of *dikenge* (cosmograms).

work-weary pragmatism, or in some cases defeatism, we have witnessed in the other slaves, but then also because it somehow remains undiminished even though it is clear that he fears the retribution that awaits him. As it turns out, he avoids violent punishment in favour of humiliation in the form of a cowbell that is fitted around his neck to be worn at all times. Not only are his whereabouts constantly monitored in this way, but he is also forced to identify himself aloud as a maroon when in the presence of an overseer. Unsurprisingly, Crispin finds it difficult to settle back into plantation life, and soon starts to plot his next escape together with a few accomplices. On the day of the planned escape he approaches the downtrodden Francisco, and urges him to join the venture, enticing him with tales of a land on the other side of the mountain that resembles the Guinea of Francisco's birth. In this paradise, blacks live freely ("with their women and their children") and work the land for themselves, growing only the crops they wish. Francisco mocks Crispin's vision as only existing in his head, and sneers at the old folktales of Africans committing suicide so that they can return to Guinea. Crispin, it appears, is indulging in slave nostalgia. It is only when Crispin tells him that the well-regarded spiritual leader André Lucumí had at one time lived in this "big big and pretty pretty" *palenque* "up high where the whites cannot go" that Francisco's scepticism softens. All the same, he stubbornly resists Crispin's entreaties to participate in the rebellion. Later on, after starting a fire in one of the outbuildings as a diversionary tactic, the three male slaves flee the plantation. Not long after, we see them pursued by men on horseback and snarling dogs. Of the three *cimarrones*, one succeeds in evading capture, the second is seized after a fierce struggle, but Crispin is killed and his corpse delivered back to the plantation.

The exalted notion of self-sacrifice in articulations of white *criollo* identity cannot be understood separately from the sanctification of death in the cultural life of the enslaved African population in Cuba. For hundreds of ethnic groups in west and central Africa, the worship and embodied remembrance of ancestors (through rituals of spirit-possession) play pivotal roles within the community and inform wider social and political practices. Just as ancestors in the African way of thinking signify continuity between past, present and future, so the image of the slave in post-revolutionary discourse in the early 1970s served as a rhetorical tool to mark connections between a subjugated past riddled with inequalities and the revolutionary promise of social justice for all Cubans. Accordingly, a case can be made that the prevalence of tropes regarding slave resistance in Cuban cultural production derived from a pre-existing epistemological commonality between the traditional African cultures that had flourished in the previously marginalised black communities and the ‘martyrcentrism’ of revolutionary nationalist discourses. Nevertheless, I have observed that the smooth progression of these intertwined narratives is halted at two separate but related junctures, which may be characterised as, firstly, the problem of value and, secondly, Martinican author and critic Édouard Glissant’s idea of ‘the point-of-entanglement.’²⁵ In the first case, value presents a problem for national myth-making when the dominant discourse assigns stature and worth to the slave only as an agent of social change, while the slave *per se* is revered as an ancestor among Cubans of African descent. We might say that the former

²⁵In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant exhorts, “We must return to the point from which we started. [...] not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; that is where we must ultimately put to work the forces of creolization, or perish” (1989:26).

refers to the 'use-value' of slaves and the latter to an 'inherent' virtue. Thus, slave iconography in Cuban identity formation divides into two, the personal and the social. Furthermore, the particular value ascribed to the slave icon (whether 'use' or 'inherent') is in turn conditioned by the perceived locus of 'the point-of-entanglement.' By this I mean that, if Africans enter into the formation of Cuban nationality through narratives of rebellion against the institution of slavery, it then follows that *cimarronaje* is recognised as 'the point-of-entanglement.' While, on the other hand, a focus on the practice of slaving as human strategizing relocates 'the point-of-entanglement' to a configuration encompassing the slave trade centres of the West African coast and the trans-Atlantic slaveship crossings, in other words, history *prior* to the slaves' arrival in Cuba. Both narratives carry an acknowledgment of the past into the present, but the dominant perspective contains an insularity of focus that derogates the transnational in the pursuit of an authentic home-grown *cubanidad*.

VI

In Sierra Leone, on his first visit to Africa, Fidel Castro made reference to the ties of blood and history which linked the peoples of Africa with Cubans, stating how, centuries before, numerous people from the very same region where he currently stood had been sent in chains to Cuba:

Muchos de los descendientes de los hombres de estas tierras – dijo Fidel – después derramaron su sangre por la independencia de Cuba. De manera – puntualizó – que son pueblos hermanos en el más cabal sentido de la palabra. Para nosotros tiene un contenido emotivo el día de hoy en que los líderes de estos dos países soberanos por

primera vez en la historia tienen la oportunidad de celebrar este encuentro. (*Verde Olivo*, 1972: 8, emphasis added)

It is well-known that magic is much emphasised among the *ñdíngos* – members of the *Abakud* secret brotherhood. They employ trickery to induce metonymy, the sense of physical connection that surpasses metaphor as a means of entering into communication with the Divine.²⁶ Such rhetorical magic or trickery is identifiable in Fidel’s oratorical performance in Sierra Leone, where words are used to demarcate the territories of ‘insidedness/outsideness’ (Taussig, 2006: 169). In this regard, I am following Taussig’s definition of trickery as “subterfuge but also something that highlights nature’s mysteries as well as those inherent to social institutions and personal relationships” (*ibid.*: 155). According to Taussig, trickery requires three key elements: “inordinate skill, inordinate technique, inordinate empathy with reality” (*ibid.*). For, though it went without saying that Africa and Cuba shared a history which was clear and quantifiable and enshrined in the recent political, diplomatic and economic ties, a quality of uncertainty still lingered about the past, bound up with the insecurities, inconsistencies and irregularities of memory, until Fidel’s evocation of sacrifice alchemised with other myths of blood and kinship to create a ‘transference space.’ “Sacrifice, pronounced *Bataille*, consecrates that which it destroys” (cited in Taussig, 2006: ix) – a perspective that conjures the double-bind of slave nostalgia, the compulsive repeating of group histories that reduces the past to dust and ashes. By assigning the

²⁶ Whereas metaphor, as a device of poetic or ritual speech, contains an element of alienation, that is, the linking of entities that are basically dissimilar, metonymy is a mode of association whereby the part has come to stand for the whole (as in synecdoche). Furthermore, metonymy is sequential (implies cause and effect). Therefore, we could say that metonymy in language is always used to create a chain of events or continuity (e.g. Jesus Christ as the Son of God).

function of sacrificial victims to slaves and their descendants, Fidel both facilitated the trope of “pueblos hermanos” (insidedness) and simultaneously, by use of the third person plural ‘son’ removed any inference of an Africentric Cuban identity (outsidedness). Emphasis on biological rather than cultural links to Africa brought two distancing mechanisms into operation – the historicising and the relational. In this view, the use of *son* connected the afore-mentioned *descendientes* to the past of some, though not all, Cubans. The declared emotional component of the visit for the Cuban contingent thus resided in the commemoration of the sacrificial act itself, which Fidel invoked simply as the ‘encounter.’ Slave nostalgia from this perspective performed the dual function of obscuring and highlighting the mystery of the blood shed for the cause of liberation, that is, the heinous racism that incited black participation.

VII

The scene begins and ends with Crispin laying dead centre of the frame and with the camera high above, so that his whole body is offered up for our visual consumption in the same way that his life had been offered up or sacrificed for a taste of personal and collective freedom. First the corpse, bare save for the soiled and ragged remains of a pair of shorts and the frayed remnants of a rope coiled around the neck, rests alone face down upon the dusty ground until the overseer’s boots stride into the frame and kick it over. This act brings us abruptly back down to earth as the camera simultaneously abandons its high perch to resume the conventional eye-level viewpoint. A heated exchange between the overseer and the plantation owner’s son follows, with the latter particularly exercised at the loss of manpower through repeated incidents of *cimarronaje*.

We learn that the previous year two other escaped slaves had never been recaptured.

The overseer responds with a series of bellicose threats to the gathering of slaves whose eyes throughout the diatribe never leave the prone Crispin. However, the proprietor is above all concerned that an example be set to deter all forms of escape: “And make them forget the tale about killing themselves and swallowing their tongues so that they come back to life in Africa. You chop them up fine! We’ll see who wins here...,” he menaces. “Don’t worry. This one won’t have much interest in coming back to life,” replies the overseer, removing a knife from his belt. Then, with one sharp stroke, he castrates Crispin. The camera reels away to settle first on the face of the spiritual leader André Lucumí whose gaze reflects horror and defiance in equal measure. The camera then performs a slow pan across the arc of assembled black male slaves who remain muted by doom and mourning.

Suddenly the other runaway, who was captured alive and delivered back together with Crispin’s body, shouts a vigorous exhortation to his fellow slaves, in an attempt to rally them for some indecipherable action. He speaks an African language that is not translated in the subtitled version of the film, thus rendering his words unintelligible to the majority of viewers. An older slave woman makes a plaintive response with African words among which the only ones identifiable are “Crispín” and “Guinea.” Her status as an elder enhanced by the presence of a walking stick, she treads with a slow rocking gait towards the desecrated corpse, all the while continuing her lamentable call, punctuated by the mournful hummed response of the circle of slaves. From above once more we watch her kneel at Crispin’s side and lovingly stroke his brow. Giral’s remarkable use of camera position – moving up and down among the earth, heaven and

man lines²⁷ – and intersecting sounds combine to create a uniquely powerful effect, shuttling us, the viewers, along and across a myriad invisible lines of association and disassociation, identification and objectification, ‘insidedness’ and ‘outsidedness.’

Within the frame once again we see the bare earth with Crispin laying dead centre, only this time the old woman kneels by his side. The closed-eye stillness of the deceased slave’s face produces a harsh juxtaposition with the piercingly dolorous gaze that the old slave woman casts upwards, heavenwards, towards us situated above the action but yet, like them, at the heart of the circle/frame. Arms outstretched in supplication (of us or of the gods?), she repeats her chant, then breaks off to caress Crispin, then once again turns back to us, and so on. Layered over the sound of the African words and the sorrowful humming we hear from off-camera the overseer’s strident – yet apparently futile – commands for the slaves to return to work: “Bury him! And the rest off to the cane, damn it! To the boilers, to the mill, to the dryers... Get goin’!” Precisely by eliminating the overseer (whose threatening visual presence has dominated the film thus far) from view, his story, by which I mean the historical focus he represents, is discernibly reduced, if not completely removed, and what traces remain, that is his barked orders, sound discordant against the melancholic refrain of African memory.

²⁷ The Japanese philosophy of design, expounded by the Ikenobo approach to flower-arranging, holds the tree-line design representing heaven, man and earth as the most important. Heaven (Shin) is the line that towers over the rest. At the base is the earth line (Tai or Hikae). In between the two, as in between heaven and earth was the Man (Soe) line.

VIII

On that blisteringly hot Spring day at the stadium, on his visit to Guinea in 1972, was Fidel remembering Che? Held within the great circle of sixty thousand spectators dressed all in white and waving white handkerchiefs (a blinding, heaving ocean of white cotton), his thoughts surely must have turned to the *compañero* who had struggled and suffered for the liberation of Africa. Now he too had finally made the long voyage across the Atlantic in diplomatic support of freedom. First to Sierra Leone, only three weeks after his country had established diplomatic relations with the newly-independent West African nation, and later to Algeria where Cuban support had been established for well over a decade. But, for that moment, he remained standing on the podium, flanked by his friend, President Ahmed Sekou Touré, whom he had last seen in Cuba back in 1960, held within the circle of white which, according to local custom, symbolised goodness, purity, and holiness, and was worn on joyous occasions such as naming ceremonies and rituals of remembrance. Many years later, recalling Ernesto Guevara, he would say: “There are people who, to you, don’t die; they have a presence that is so strong, so powerful, so intense that you can’t manage to conceive that they are dead. Mainly because of their continuing presence in your emotions, in your memories” (Castro, 2007: 306).

IX

In the memoir of his childhood, *A Berlin Chronicle*, Walter Benjamin wrote: “Language shows clearly that memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie

interred" (quoted in Taussig, 2006: 23). Or even dead African slaves. When Giral goes digging in the humus (or memory) of slavery the language employed to describe his findings is not that of his nationally-constructed self – Spanish – but the tongue of his ancestors. The powerfully directed scene of the dead *cimarrón* imparts to the viewer the received wisdom that trauma is always bodily inscribed, and that trauma cannot be put into (everyday) words. The *lingua franca* of Giral's circle of memory is an African dialect, mournfully accompanied by the wordless drone. In this way language serves the purpose of cultural marker, defining group membership as the act of grasping linguistic and/or semiotic meaning.²⁸ In the 1970s, principally in Matanzas province but also throughout the island, there still lived black Cuban men and women conversant in *fongbé*, *maby* and *gen* – the languages of the *fon*, *magino* and *mina* peoples (Martínez Furé, 1979: 203-205, 215). For artists such as Giral this allowed the construction of narratives about *el tema negro* that suggestively employed the lexicon of cultural memory, since African dialects in the New World perform the function of preservation – first of the self and then of the culture. Through art, especially impressionistic and lyrical artforms such as poetry, one may 'double-speak' with a certain degree of impunity. Therefore art is the perfect vehicle for both hiding and pretending, or as Glissant would put it, *dissimuler*. Hiding and pretending are the legacies of slaving.

²⁸ Giral explained to this author that it was a directorial decision not to translate the African dialogue in the subtitles, but regretted that it was so long ago he could no longer explain the impetus for the decision (personal communication, 2009).

It is worthwhile to consider why in the early 1970s the need to hide and pretend persisted. After all, Cuban ethnographers and anthropologists during this period were deeply involved in state-sanctioned efforts to collect and study these same linguistic traditions in order to determine the diffusion and purity of African vestiges in contemporary Cuba. Artists and social scientists alike were actively invested in constructing and presenting cultural markers (emblems and symbols) for the new nation. As part of this “practical activity of the revolution” Giral made a documentary in 1967 on the life of Esteban Montejo, the 107-year-old subject of Miguel Barnet’s ground-breaking but highly controversial study *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Lesage, 1985).

²⁹ Barnet’s book sought to redress the historiographical silences and misrepresentations surrounding slavery during the years of the Cuban Republic. Between 1902 and 1958, the agency of slaves, that is individual and collective acts of rebellion, including the formation of slave communities (*palenques*) and slave participation in the independence wars with Spain, was never discussed in Cuban history books. Therefore individual treatments of the subject by Giral and Barnet carry the attributes of a shared ideological framework. It is interesting to note, nonetheless, that while the ethnographer Barnet finds sufficient reason to celebrate his book simply in terms of what has been salvaged or recovered from the past,

²⁹ Most of the controversy stems from the book’s contentious assignment to the literary genre of testimonial. In particular, criticism has centred upon the unequal nature of the collaboration between Barnet and Montejo, and on questions of authenticity. For a highly informative treatment of some of the salient issues, I recommend Kutzinski (1994), especially pp. 289-295.

Este libro no hace más que narrar vivencias comunes a muchos hombres de su misma nacionalidad. La etnología las recoge para los estudiosos del medio social, historiadores y folkloristas.

Nuestra satisfacción mayor es la de reflejarlas a través de un legítimo actor del proceso histórico cubano. (1966: 12)

Giral, during a later interview, lamented how much knowledge had been lost: “any treatment of the *palenques* would have to be almost exclusively fictional because there is no extant written material of archaeological evidence; nothing has survived to show us how the runaways lived” (Lesage, 1985). The *palenque*, in this context, exists as an imaginary as opposed to imagined community, accessible only through the mechanism of fantasy. So we see that, although the works of artists and social scientists often converged around themes from African cultural traditions and the aesthetics of African cult religions, particularly *Regla de ocha* (or *santería*) and *Abakuá*, black Cuban artists, like Giral, engaged in explorations of the meanings of freedom, justice, and fraternal love during slavery, had an enhanced sense of nostalgia.³⁰ This was because for Afro-Cubans in the 1970s the experience of blackness was still strongly linked to the experience of slavery as a collective tragedy or loss, and what is more, it was the experience of slavery as a collective tragedy that constructed blackness as a moral imperative. By necessity this view points to an *a priori* – and potentially threatening – link between the expression of black cultural nationalism and full-blown black political nationalism.

³⁰ Booth (1976: 151) reports that in the decades after slavery large numbers of white Cubans of all social classes became practitioners of *santería* and *palo*, which has contributed to the continuous impact on Cuban culture and society of African religions.

Despite the popularity that *santería* and *palo* enjoyed within Cuban society at large, African religious cult activity was actively repressed by the government during the general climate of conformity during the period known as the *quinquenio gris*.³¹ At the same time, the exclusively historical representation of African culture and religion in public discourse encouraged a negative equation at the social level between black identity and a capacity for progress and civilisation. As a result, it was easy to dismiss the viewpoints of those black Cubans daring enough to speak out on issues of race as expressions of an anachronistic theoretical framework. Moreover, because of the ideological equivalence drawn between discussion of the taboo subject of race and the discriminatory act itself, such outspokenness could in turn be labelled as racially-divisive and therefore counterrevolutionary (Hernández, 2002). So we come to an understanding of how, when viewed under the uncompromising spotlight of race, the interrelated socio-political projects of Giral and Barnet reveal quite distinct epistemic modalities – that is to say, for the former ghosts are real, and for the latter they categorically are not.

XI

During a recent interview with this researcher, white Cuban Africanist Reinaldo Sánchez Porro described a clear conceptual line of demarcation between *el tema negro* and Africa. He related to me how prior to arrival in Cuba the slaves were Africans, however, after setting foot on Cuban soil they ceased to be African. They had been stripped of all

³¹ The term was coined by Cuban intellectual, Ambrosio Fornet, to describe the bleak era of artistic and ideological repression beginning in 1970 after the failure of *la zafra de los diez millones* and the subsequent tightening of political and economic ties with the Soviet Union. Controversy exists over the exact length of the 'greyness,' with some scholars suggesting that it persisted for a decade or more.

cultural, geographical, historical, and societal connections (in other words, all identity) through the Middle Passage. The process of 'transculturation,' he emphasised, began the moment the African slave was 'processed' by the slave market because that is where Cuba was born (Sánchez Porro, interview, 2008). Sánchez Porro's thesis, while less maroon-centred than the 1970s position, still counteracts the idea of a black Atlantic culture that transcends ethnicity and nationality (see Appendix I).

The Ortizian roots of Cuban nationalist discourse have contributed to an overwhelming emphasis on the role of the slave as 'acculturative agent.' But the slave narratives of Afro-Cubans perform an additional function of recovery or rescue, as though, alongside the slaveships, memories, stories and other intangible detritus had also magically washed up onto the Cuban shore, transporting the precious spores and seeds of an original culture. This divided focus brings to mind what Antoni Kapcia has noted as the constant tension in Cuba, since at least the eighteenth century, between two essentially different perspectives of the island's national identity or *cubanidad*:

between, on the one hand, what we might call an 'externally-oriented' (or 'externally-focused') perspective, seeking inspiration, guidance and legitimacy in essentially exogenous criteria and models, and, on the other, an 'internally-oriented' or 'internally-focused' perspective, seeking the same things in endogenous criteria and models. (Kapcia, 2000: 135)

Acts of recovery repeated by the descendants of slaves over generations take on an increasingly abstract guise as memories of the 'real' Africa fade away to be replaced by a fictitious or 'imagined' past. Consequently, over time, the external orientation Kapcia mentions is fixated not on the idea of return to a physical landscape, but rather centres on the experience of loss, on the spirits of dead ancestors, and the psychic wounds of

slavery, that is to say through feelings of slave nostalgia, the cure for which, to repeat the Doctor's counsel, involves the recovery of memories deeply rooted in each individual's biography (López Denis, 2005: 192).

XII

Slavery in West African societies, such as among the Malinké or Mandinga, was most often a means to connect individuals to a family where no biological or marriage connection existed (Jones, c.2003). Although the strategy of slaving in the New World forced Africans into false 'imagined' communities in contrast to the kinship communities that bound individuals together in their homelands, these enslaved men and women nonetheless brought with them long-established social strategies for ordering social relations and personal histories – in other words, ideologies – to recreate feelings of belonging. Social isolation equates to death among African peoples, and thus arouses greater fear than physical extinction (Miller, 2008). In fact, among the Igbo slaves, suicide was just as often an attempt to rejoin the communities left behind as a form of resistance against European domination. Therefore, when considering the African dimension in post-slavery societies we must never overlook the drive for belonging.

XIII

The memorabilia attached to the family histories of black Cubans always include at least one or two (and usually more) bills of sale for deceased relatives. This common feature of the black experience informs Nicolás Guillén's poetic reinscription of slavery into the

revolutionary project, *Esclavos europeos*, published in 1972 in the collection of poems entitled *El diario que a diario*. In the poem Guillén playfully manipulates the language of slavery by substituting 'white' for 'black' in the dehumanising context of slave advertisements:

Blanca de cuatro meses de parida, sin rasguño ni
una herida, de Buena y abundante leche, regular lavandera,
criolla cocinera, sana y sin tacha, fresquísima
muchacha: EN 350 PESOS LIBRES PARA EL
VENDEDOR, EN LA CALLE DE LA PALOMA,
AL No. 133

Una pareja de blanquitos, hermanos de 8 y 10 años
macho y hembra, propios para distraer niños de su
edad. También una blanquita (virgen) de 16. En la
calle de Cuervo, al 430, darán razón y precio. (Guillén, 1972: 18)

The result of this technique of substituting race is the negation of the normative conceptual structure of slavery, and that in turn encourages the reader to consider the concomitant absurdity of racism. However, the power of this particular 'trick' resides in the contrast between real and fictional histories. By imagining a past in which white bodies were bought and sold, Guillén challenges the idealised image of the slave without memory. For, in nationalist constructions slaves were continually represented as beings without the ties of blood or love, inspired almost exclusively by an unquenchable thirst for freedom, in contrast with the dynastic connections of white Cubans. Guillén's dystopian vision of white enslavement has the impact, therefore, of emphasising the sense of horror and loss inside the 'circle of memory.'

XIV

The story of Cuba is the story of the African encounter with Europe. All stories are about battles, of one kind or another. They struggle towards an end, when the outcome – victory or defeat – will be known (Berger, 2005: 21). It is only when seen through the lens of time, however, that stories confer meaning. The problem I see is that meaning in the European sense travels forward through linear time, while time in the African dimension is cyclic.³² Where the two meet becomes a sort of ‘transference space.’ The case for a ‘transference space’ follows from the implication that post-slavery societies, for their survival, must transmute the painful experience of their violent beginnings into personal power. Benítez-Rojo (1996: 11) has engaged with this idea of endemic violence at the heart of all plantation societies, that is the threat of chaotic destruction or ‘apocalypse’ that for him is successfully “conjured away” by performance, whether the disorderly and subversive antics of Carnival or the “certain way” of walking of “two Negro women.” Here, too, masquerade (or performance) is informed by what Glissant has identified as the Caribbean native’s social imperative to *dissimuler* (pretend). The ‘transference space’ thus diffuses tension through (the) play, by offering a view of the personal past through the *camera obscura* of historical remembrance.

XV

“And so, I suddenly had something like a vision of a slave woman in front of me, who was somewhat showing me her life in scenes which I was watching,” recalled Nancy

³² The idea that traditional conceptions of time conform to the effects of the cyclical rhythms of nature (such as the seasons) is central to African Studies. See Adjaye (1994) for a more detailed treatment of this subject.

Morejón (quoted in Miller, 2005). “And then I wrote a poem. The poem speaks in a first person voice that is not autobiographical. Presumably it is an ‘I’ which is at the same time a ‘we,’ as the great American poet Walt Whitman suggested. So, when I talk about ‘me,’ it is ‘us,’ and it is the story of an epic vision” (*ibid.*). It is possible that Morejón’s ambiguous usage of ‘we’ and ‘us’ without qualifying referent, say ‘we Cubans’ or ‘us blacks,’ is formulated within the discursive strategies of homogenisation of difference precipitated by the Revolution and reinforced during the repressive years of the *quinquenio gris*: strategies that set in motion processes of standardisation and uniformisation to support the creation of a hegemonic national identity. Within this context, it would appear that the poem ‘Mujer negra’ indeed served the cultural and political demands of the post-revolutionary moment as Marilyn Miller (2005) has described. However, Miller also allows that the trans-temporal setting of the poem alludes to a reading that supplements, and possibly even challenges, the “paradigmatically pro-revolutionary” position more usually emphasised by critics:

the insistent presence of the enslaved woman in the poem obliquely calls into question the radically ‘new’ environment instituted through revolutionary events and rhetoric, and nakedly celebrated in the poem’s famous final lines. In ‘Mujer negra,’ revolutionary idealism emerges from the shadows of a darker, earlier history that has not been fully erased, despite the promises of a new age marked by radical societal reorganization and systemic social change. (*ibid.*)

If it is assumed, therefore, that ‘we’ and ‘us’ are employed to articulate the historiographical principle of Morejón’s poetic project, I find that, in contrast, it is her use of the first person throughout the poem that conjures the ‘circle of memory.’ Miller too has detected the presence of a project of remembering in the poem that, just as in

the scene I have described from *El otro Francisco*, brings to the forefront the question of language. The poem 'Mujer negra' appeared in the *Casa de las Américas* commemorative issue to celebrate *el año internacional de la mujer* in early 1975, pressed between Alfonso Sastre's prison ode 'Carta a mi hijo Juan en octubre' and a short story from Antonio Benítez Rojo (1975a) entitled 'Sitiadores sitiados.' The first stanza goes as follows:

Todavía huelo la espuma del mar que me hicieron atravesar.

La noche, no puedo recordarla.

Ni el mismo océano podría recordarla.

Pero no olvido al primer alcatraz que divisé.

Altas, las nubes, como inocentes testigos presenciales.

Acaso no he olvidado ni mi costa perdida, ni mi lengua
ancestral.

Me dejaron aquí y aquí he vivido.

Y porque trabajé como una bestia,
aquí volví a nacer.

A cuánta epopeya mandinga intenté recurrir.

Me rebelé. (Morejón, 1975: 119)

Due to the cultural force of classical Greece in the Western critical tradition, Miller has put forward the inevitable comparison between Morejón's literary voyage and Homeric epic. Her critical analysis found that, whereas the *Odyssey* derives the poetic impulse through the desire for homecoming, 'Mujer negra' "moves forward from the point of a permanent and irrevocable home-leaving," a position Miller has termed "anti-nostalgic" memory – "Nostos or nostalgia is thus revealed as untenable," she wrote:

The first stanza presents us with a portrait of a protagonist torn from her cultural milieu as much as her homeland. Forced to work "like an animal," she also struggles in another way, trying to remember both her language and her epic tradition. Already in the first lines of the poem, we see that memory is invoked in terms of both its absence and

presence. The unusual use of the adverb "still" at the start of the poem immediately alludes to activities of memory and remembering, and establishes a logic of connection between past and present that will be exploited throughout the text. (Miller, 2005)

However, reliance upon a classical reading in this regard impedes access to the wider significance of 'double consciousness'³³ in the Black Diaspora experience, according to which it is precisely within the indefinite fear or unhappiness that we understand as melancholy that the culture of resistance takes shape. For example, it is after the black woman has looked back into a half-forgotten and seemingly irrelevant past (that is to say Mandinka epic) that she begins her fight for freedom – "Me rebelé." This idea may also be perceived in Glissant's acknowledgment of two strategies for dealing with the traumatic memory inherent in post-slaving societies. The first, which he calls reversion, refers to the Caribbean native's longing to return to the homeland. The second, defined as diversion, is more inchoate but generally encompasses strategies for hiding the former culture within the framework of the new. According to Glissant, diversion is only effective when combined with an impetus to return to the point of entanglement. In the case of 'Mujer negra,' Morejón posits the African homeland as the 'point of entanglement,' but only in the context of a Caribbean present. Consequently, the Mandinga oral history serves not only to inspire but also to fortify the present-day struggle for liberty. Once more, as in the scene from *El otro Francisco*, we find the theme of language works to define the borders of identification inside and outside of the 'circle of memory.'

³³ This notion, in the context of the United States, was first expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois. Also see Sawyer (2005) for a highly relevant comparative analysis with reference to Cuba.

XVI

During the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as many as a third of the Mandinga or Malinké population of West Africa were shipped to the Americas as slaves. As a result, we can reasonably assume that a significant number of the early slave population in Cuba were descended from the Malinké people. At the time of Fidel Castro's visit to Guinea, an excerpt from the most famous Mandinga epic – *Sundiata* – was published in the Arts and Literature section of the cultural magazine *Bohemia* on May 12, 1972 to provide a cultural and historical background to the Cuban premier's visit. In fact, as we learn from the preceding notes on Guinean culture, although the African classic had been previously translated into French, English and even Russian, the Cuban version was the first known attempt at a 'Castilian' Spanish translation (Peñalver Moral, 1972: 31).³⁴ The significance of this project for Cuba-Guinea relations is captured in the closing paragraph of the introduction:

Guinea y Cuba están unidas en la Historia y en el presente. Muchos cubanos actuales somos descendientes de fula o peul, de mandingas o de gangá kissí, como ha demostrado Don Fernando Ortiz en sus obras: Hombres que el tráfico negrero arrojó sobre nuestras costas. Sus danzas, su música, su poesía y sus tradiciones mitológicas han dejado profundas huellas en nuestras artes. Sus brazos ayudaron a levantar la riqueza azucarera cubana. Hoy ambos pueblos luchan contra el enemigo común, el imperialismo, pero cantan con tambores, con koras, flautas, guitarras, balafones, claves, maracas y uasacumbas su canto eterno de amor a la libertad. (Peñalver Moral, 1972: 32, emphasis in original)

How strange that Morejón's *mujer negra* should remain aloof from such exultant music-making. Towards the poem's end she stands aside and watches others dance

³⁴ Rogelio Martínez Furé translated both the *Sundiata* and the poetry that appear in this section.

around the tree of political and social equality – “Iguales míos, aquí los veo bailar, alrededor del árbol que plantamos para el comunismo” (Morejón, 1972: 120): the tone remains indefinitely muted, even melancholy, perhaps at the sheer human misery and suffering of her pre-emancipation equals. What for me marks the single most important difference in Morejón’s description of slavery is that the theme of rebellion and revolution serves the project of ancestral memory, while this is reversed within the pages of *Bohemia*. In official discourse, Africans and their descendants never have memory – they are never homesick. Morejón’s Black Woman, on the other hand, bursts into song just prior to an act of resistance – “pero canté al natural compás de los pájaros nacionales. Me sublevé” (*ibid.*). In place of an “eternal song of love for liberty” her solo act combines the themes of traditional Mandinga culture, whereby music and song are used to impart deep learning, with the suggestion that the modified behaviour (she sings along with rather than ‘calls’ the tune) is in itself a form of reversion. Yet the Black Woman’s subdued silence is perhaps not so perplexing in light of Guinean president Sekou Touré’s remarks at the time of Fidel Castro’s visit: words which resonate with the sentiments of the thirteenth century Mandinga epic: “I have come back, and as long as I breathe Mali will never be in thrall – rather death than slavery” (Niane, 1965: 56). A timeless sentiment echoing down through the ages and across continents: ‘Rather death than slavery,’ ‘Patria o muerte.’ The bleakly heroic language of self-sacrifice that has organised black liberation struggles throughout history.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that in the early 1970s slave narratives in official discursive practice were built upon certain abstract concepts to do with gifting. For example, Cuban diplomacy in West Africa, as we have seen, involved the idea of gratitude for the blood 'donated' by slaves and their ancestors for the nationalist cause. Likewise, the struggles and self-sacrifice of slaves were commonly represented as the historic origins of Cuba's proud *tradición rebelde*. However, theorists such as Marcel Mauss (1990 [1922]) have alluded to what may be considered the gift's darker side. According to this view, far from a completely altruistic, disinterested activity, the true nature of gifting is to initiate, in a veiled fashion, a relationship of exchange. In this manner, the gift disguises the true motives of those engaged in the exchange (Hall, 2006: 191). We might also consider the ramifications for post-slavery social relations of Pierre Bourdieu's notion that the gift, like the economy in general, is an example of "social practices through which systems of domination/authority are established and maintained" (*ibid.*). After 1959, the self-sacrifice of slaves and their descendants was compellingly represented as a gift to the national project, thus implying a set of virtues – kindness, generosity and forgiveness – that, since they are usually considered the prerogatives of power, performed an ennobling function. However, nationalist discourse made no distinction between moral and political power, an ambivalence which served to maintain an idealistic vision of the slave at the same as it obscured questions of social justice and equality. Subsequent manifestations of slave nostalgia in the public sphere reflected this Janus-faced articulation: nostalgia *for* the slave in one direction, and in the other, nostalgia *of* the slave.

Slaves were simultaneously engaged with two struggles – *against* dominance and *for* belonging (Miller, 2008). The location of ‘circles of memory’ in the cultural productions of black Cubans is evidence of how the strategies of slaves and their descendants have varied according to context. The lived experience of exploitation and insecurity demanded that black men and women should make the most of the debased conditions in which they found themselves. Consequently, a prominent survival strategy was for slaves to embed themselves solidly in their societies, at times through opportunism and manipulation. Furthermore, cultural pluralism has been recognised as a central feature of West African identity that slaves brought with them to the New World, and therefore distinct from the ‘dual consciousness’ Frantz Fanon insightfully ascribed to the subjugated colonial subject (*ibid.*). In the face of ideological and political mechanisms to impede solidarity along racial lines, the works of Giral, Guillén and Morejón exhibit this ancestral propensity for seeking community everywhere.

THE PUBLIC LIVES OF SANTERÍA

“hasta hablar en público del negro era cosa peligrosa” (Ortiz, 2001).

“Los dioses más fuertes son los de África” (Esteban Montejo quoted in Barnet, 1966: 15).

On December 17, every year since the Revolution, tens of thousands of Cubans from across the island make the journey to worship at the Santuario de San Lázaro, an imposing white church situated next to the site of a former lepers' hospital in El Rincón, a little town about 35km from Havana. In tribute to the biblical leper raised from the dead by Jesus Christ, some pilgrims drag themselves along the ground towards the holy shrine, while others shuffle along – kneecaps scraping the asphalt – in mimicry of the abject humility and woundedness personified by the iconic figure. Images of San Lázaro, whose counterpart in Cuba's African religions is Babalu-Ayé, depict an old man scantily dressed in rags, and on crutches, with legs covered in sores, and often surrounded by still another symbol of misery and wretchedness – a pack of 'perros callejeros.' So perfectly have the African and Christian faiths bled into each other that it is often impossible to distinguish between those devotees who come to attend the Yoruba deity and those who come to honour the Roman Catholic saint, and this lack of distinction may often also be applied at the level of the individual. Consequently, Lázaro/Babalu-Ayé is regarded as a saint for all Cubans irrespective of race or cultural background, and the exuberant outpouring of religious faith exhibited each year on the day of his festival reasserts the primacy of syncretic religiosity, as an active participant in forming the complex and fluid 'imagined community' of cubanidad.³⁵

³⁵ A notable feature of Cuban emigration, exile and resettlement outside the island, particularly in the United States, has been the popularity and durability of African 'syncretic' religiosity within these diasporic communities. For example, in *I Love Lucy*, the hugely popular 1950s American comedy show, 'Babalu' became the signature song of Santiago-born Desiderio Arnaz y de Acha, a Cuban American actor and musician known as Desi Arnaz. At a time of racial segregation, many of the millions of white American viewers would have been scandalised at the hinted miscegenation behind the Spanish lyrics.

INTRODUCTION

Despite a tradition of resistance to Catholic dogmatism and an associated disregard for the clergy in general, from one historical period to the next, Cuba has remained a nation of believers. In fact, religious beliefs were deemed of sufficient social and cultural significance in the early years of the Revolution for the government to assign a dedicated staff and office within the ORI (*Organizaciones Revolucionarias Integradas*). In the absence of legal measures prohibiting religious worship, department head and Afro-Cuban lawyer Felipe Carneado's main responsibilities related to the delicate reconciliation of religious leaders' concerns with mandates issued by the *Ministerio de Cultura* (Ayorinde, 2004: 97). Yet, notwithstanding an official attitude of tolerance

When questioned, Arnaz reportedly claimed the conga was 'a savage prayer to Changó, an African god of war,' a response considered by some critics to be evidence of the performer's ignorance about *santería* (Ocasio, 2005: 104). However, it is equally feasible that Arnaz's misleading response simply continued the exotic 'showboating' of the performance itself (see Arnaz, date unknown). The conga was based upon the following lyrics:

Yo quiero pedí
Que mi negra me quiera
Que tenga dinero
Y que no se muera
AY! Yo le quiero pedí a Babalú 'na negra muy
santa como tú que no tenga otro negro
Pa' que no se fuera.

Babalú
Babalú
Babalú ayé
Babalú ayé
Ta empezando lo velorio
Que le hacemos a Babalú
Dame diez y siete velas
Pa ponerle en cruz.
Dame un cabo de tabaco mayenye
Y un jarrito de aguardiente,
Dame un poco de dinero mayenye

Pa' que me de la suerte.

[CHORUS]

(Babalú, date unknown)

towards spiritual practice, adoption of the Soviet methodology of scientific atheism in the early 1970s generated an atmosphere of hostility that, in turn, encouraged a religious variant of *la doble cara* or *el doble moral*, that is, the public performance of conformity to the prevailing ideology so as to avoid political or social censure of privately-held beliefs and opinions (Diantell, 2000: 11). Therefore, it is true to say that the drive towards institutionalisation of the Revolution, set in motion by the failure to reach governmental targets set for *la zafra* of 1970, had a profoundly transformative impact on all aspects of black cultural life, as burgeoning social conformity created a new set of demands and anxieties. In the case of Africa-derived belief practices, the government's desire to offer a rigorous and comprehensive historical representation of Afro-Cuban culture, through the scientific methods of investigation, collection, cataloguing, and exhibition of artefacts and other elements of worship, meant that matters of religious rights became uneasily entangled with the larger issue of race. Ethnographers' painstaking research into what were considered to be the final vestiges of a dying and anachronistic lifestyle, associated with the decadence of the old social and political order, provoked indignation among those black Cubans for whom the religions served as a still-vital tradition connecting them to an original culture. For some believers, the modernist-atheist zeal to historicise and rationalise the sacred justifiably trailed disquieting whiffs of European imperialism's 'civilizing mission,' nowadays discredited as a disingenuous justification for indigenous and African enslavement. Most certainly that zeal continued, and may even have magnified, what over time has become the enduring feature of a fluctuating discursive legacy surrounding race, that is, the estrangement of the languages of

culture and history.³⁶ In order to focus the eye (and thereby the mind) on the importance of this concept for the discussion that follows, the antagonistic relationship between these two perspectives henceforward in this chapter manifests itself in the use of different fonts for the cultural and historical segments.

INTERPRETATION, PERFORMANCE

In her essay 'Rethinking the Public Sphere,' Nancy Fraser put forward the concept of 'subaltern counterpublics' formed by repressed groups within a society, that operate as "parallel discursive arenas where members [...] invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990: 67). Whereas Fraser's reformulation of Jürgen Habermas' idea of the public sphere specifically describes the characteristics of bourgeois society, the historically counterdiscursive element in African religious syncretism allows for an analogous reading in terms of Cuba's Marxist-Leninist example. At the same time, however, any stress upon the referent 'counter,' activated by the ascription of oppositional interpretations to subaltern discourses, runs the risk of inhibiting a more nuanced understanding of the function of liminality in the sacred and social practices of Africa-derived religiosity. For, although *la doble cara* generally carries the deceptive or sinister connotation of duplicity, African-based religions throughout the diaspora share a common acceptance of, and indeed reverence for, the idea of possession of a second 'head' or entity (whether a *god/orisha* or ancestral spirit), for the purpose of accessing higher states of consciousness or wisdom (e.g., Blakely *et al*, 1994; Fernández Olomos & Paravisini-Gebert, 1997). Doubleness, with this assigned meaning of redoubling, is therefore perceived as the reinforcement of power – an idea that finds expression in the widespread use of sacred masks in African healing and worship ceremonies. One promising way to deepen our engagement with the concept of liminality, that builds on Fraser's work, is to study what may be termed the systematic folklorisation of Afro-Cuban themes after the Revolution according to two distinctive but intertwined

³⁶ This idea builds on Kerwin Lee Klein's (1997) analysis of frontier mythology in the American imaginary.

conceptual frameworks, namely interpretive-public and performative-public.³⁷ Performative-public here refers to the threshold between the private (in the sense of the 'counterpublic' or local community) and public spheres, while interpretive-public points to a process of romantic reinterpretation.

Central to the interpretive-public approach is an understanding of the level of interaction and sharing between folklore as a 'negotiated code' and individual and collective social-cultural experiences (Hall, 1992: 137). For if, according to this view, a historical event must first become a narrative event or story before it can become a "communicative event" (*ibid.*: 129), we are called, for the purpose of our analysis, to consider the attributes of language – i.e., form, content and intention – as a system of 'transformation.' In this light, we might perceive *folklorismo* and most significantly its practitioners, the modern-day *griots*³⁸ (journalists, directors, ethnographers and others), with respect to two additional models of communication: the 'ritual or expressive' and the 'reception' models. Media theorist Denis McQuail informs us that elemental to the first model is the function of satisfaction (the pleasure principal) rather than any instrumental objective:

Ritual or expressive communication depends on shared understanding and emotions. It is celebratory, consummatory (an end in itself) and decorative rather than utilitarian in aim and it often requires some element of 'performance' for communication to be realized.

Communication is engaged in for the pleasures of reception as much as for any useful purpose. The message of ritual communication is usually latent and ambiguous, depending on associations and symbols that are not chosen by the participants but made available in the culture. Medium and message are usually hard to separate. Ritual communication is also relatively timeless and unchanging. (2000: 52)

Meanwhile the second model, conceptualised by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, proposes that meaning is attributed to media texts through a process of encoding and decoding:

Communication originates within media institutions whose typical frameworks of meaning are likely to conform to dominant power structures. Specific messages are 'encoded,' often in the form of established content genres [...] which have a face-value meaning and in-built

³⁷ This idea builds on Abrahams' description of the imaginative-community and the public-community (1993:22).

³⁸ The role of the *griot* is part-historian and part-royal orator. *Griots* act as intermediaries between the kings and the rest of the population: "the griot has the power to speak, and the noble has the power to act. Since wider action requires the communication of the noble's will, the griot plays a crucial role in motivating an entire population to coordinated effort" (Jones, c.2003).

guidelines for interpretation by an audience. The media are approached by their audiences in terms of 'meaning structures,' which have their origin in the ideas and experience of the audience. (McQuail: 2002: 73)

Fundamental to Hall's theory is the assumption that media messages carry a multiplicity of messages, and, furthermore, that individuals from different 'interpretive communities' will extract different meanings from the range of densely ambiguous messages. Both these models tap into important dimensions of the relationship between cultural difference and cultural integrity, particularly with regard to folklorist Roger Abrahams' perspective that nationalism and pluralism "come into conflict [...] in places where there are [ethnic] populations who are not in the ascendancy" (1993: 106). With this view in mind, I propose the idea that efforts to construct a unifying official culture after the Revolution not only involved the complex but critical negotiation of conflicting historical meanings (cultural difference), but that these meanings were inextricably bound up with questions of heritage and authenticity (cultural integrity).

THE REVOLUTION ON BLACKNESS

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In 1972, five years after Ernesto 'Che' Guevara was killed in the Bolivian jungle, and appropriate to its designation as 'The Year of Socialist Emulation,' Cuba joined COMECON and began the process of closer collaboration with the European communist nations. During the following year Fidel Castro's administration received a string of important dignitaries from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, culminating in the August 1973 visit by Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu, during which Cuba gained a sixty-five million dollar loan for a new cement factory (Mesa-Lago, 1978: 22). Soviet-style socialisation moved beyond restructuring the economy, however, to force a simultaneous re-evaluation of political doctrine. The Cuban Communist Party (PCC) instructed its membership to criticise idealism and the spontaneous development of *conciencia* as unscientific, in favour of the Soviet line that

social consciousness evolved in line with the material base (Mesa-Lago, 1978: 28).

Failure to reach idealistic agricultural and economic goals thus prompted a reassessment of the revolutionary project's overall progress, including the achievement of social ideals.

By this time institutional racism had officially been consigned to the scrap-heap of pre-revolutionary history; however, by implication, Castro's declaration, in August 1970,

that the revolution had entered a more sober and mature period, and his critical

reassessment one month later regarding the length of time required for profound

cultural change, brought into focus the general state of social (including race) relations:

Perhaps our major idealism has been to believe that a society which has scarcely left the shell of capitalism could enter, in one bound, into a society in which everyone would behave in an ethical and moral manner. (Fidel Castro quoted in Mesa-Lago, 1978: 26)

Negative reappraisal of Guevara's idealistic formulation of the 'new man,' together with

an emphasis on the relationship between economic structures and social problems,

reintroduced a narrative of 'retroversion' into official discourse, that considered race

consciousness as an archaic form of racism.³⁹ With greater material development, so

went the argument, socio-cultural prejudices of *all* kinds were bound to diminish.

In his analysis of the conflict between race and radicalism in the United States,

Wilson Record noted:

The Communist party is a bureaucratically controlled power center; because it is also a monolithic structure, it must necessarily politicize all aspects of life. Negro art,

literature, theatre, or sports can claim no pluralistic values in themselves. They are

³⁹ I borrow this term from narratology, according to which retroversion refers to a phrase or sentence that marks the beginning of a character's usually lengthy and detailed recollection of past events.

judged in terms of their contribution to the realization of immediate – and vaguely ultimate – Party goals.⁴⁰ (1971: 292)

Applying Record's theory to Cuba, we should anticipate that during periods of diminished Soviet influence, the Revolution's insistence on a purely class-based analysis of race would cede to a more balanced view that took into account the myriad ways that colour prejudice operated within society. Conversely, at times of stricter conformism, we would expect to find black Cubans' ability to address systemic forms of racism severely impaired. The government's official position, which asserted that racial distinctions had been displaced alongside the removal of class divisions, meant that black Cubans were unable to use race to demonstrate the existence of economic and social divisions that corresponded to racial difference (Hernández, 2002: 1137, 1143).

How this conflation of race awareness with racial discrimination impacted on black Cubans was demonstrated at the time of the World Cultural Congress in January 1968, when a group of black artists and intellectuals, responding to what they felt would be an incomplete representation of the national art scene by the overwhelmingly white Cuban delegation, sought to present a position paper on race and art. Carlos Moore reports that, at a meeting with the Minister for Culture a few days before the event, members of the group were roundly chastised for inciting racial divisions. Three were immediately arrested –Walterio Carbonell, Nicolás Guillén Junior and Wichy el Negro – while others were confined to their homes for the duration of the Congress (1991:

⁴⁰ Although Record's basic assessment holds validity, we must not overlook the pioneering contribution of the Cuban Communist Party to debates on *la cuestión negra* at the First Latin American Communist Conference held in Buenos Aires, 1929. For an interesting and detailed account of this effort see Ricardo Melgar Bao's study, 'Rearmando la memoria: El primer debate socialista acerca de nuestros afroamericanos' (2007).

308-309). Moore claims that in each case the level of punishment was determined by the perceived militancy or stridency of the accused, with those most disposed towards reconsideration of their original position receiving the lighter sentences. He also reports that in later months a number of the artists were granted positions in government agencies (*ibid.*: 310).

A noteworthy aspect of the so-called Movimiento Black Power,⁴¹ which had started to emerge spontaneously and casually around the time of the World Congress incident, is the ease with which it was crushed by the government in 1971. Likewise, the 'Afro-Cuban Study Groups' that had begun to form in 1974 were hastily disbanded after a series of police raids and mass arrests (Moore, 1991: 316; Martínez Furé, interview, 8 May 2008). I attribute this apparent fragility to the relative isolation of both movements from the mass of black Cubans, and to their failure to develop outside a small collection of black artists and thinkers, mainly based in Havana, with an interest in certain extraneous forms of West African diasporic culture. As such, it is likely that outside Havana, black intellectuals manifested a less self-consciously Afrocentrist response to the pressures of Soviet-inspired social conformity.⁴² Ethnologist and art historian Raúl Miyares Ruíz, for instance, has no recollection of similar groups or

⁴¹ Carlos Moore's controversial term for a social phenomenon that has been verified by other witnesses (such as Rogelio Martínez Furé) although not designated in the same manner.

⁴² A compelling reason for this idea relates to Havana's position within the 'zona blanca' of Cuba's imaginary atlas of ethnicity described by Santiago historians Rafael Duharte Jiménez and Elsa Santos García (1998: 203) in their analysis of enduring racial prejudices on the island. The identified 'white zone' includes the provinces of Pinar del Río, La Habana, Villa Clara, Ciego de Ávila, Camagüey, Las Tunas y Holguín, regions which due to the paucity of plantations historically had very low slave populations, and where the researchers found 'en la actualidad la mayoría de sus habitantes son blancos.' In contrast, the 'zona negra' comprises Matanzas, Santiago de Cuba and Guantánamo. It may be assumed that Afro-Cuban intellectuals within a 'zona blanca,' due to their greater isolation, are more likely to seek out and construct outlets for black cultural expression, whilst simultaneously drawing greater scrutiny and more pressure to conform socially than those residing in the 'zona negra.'

movements being formed in his native Santiago de Cuba. Whilst aware in his young adulthood of the routine, but clandestine, performance of African-based religious ceremonies during the 1970s, Miyares Ruíz pointedly emphasised that the secretive atmosphere surrounding such rituals was solely in reaction to fluctuating official interpretations of the scientific atheist ideology, and not out of any overt concern to safeguard black culture. Religion had come under attack, but not Cuba's African heritage. In fact, Miyares Ruíz stressed, ever since the original ethnographic studies conducted by Fernando Ortiz, the African dynamic in Cuban culture and identity, though embattled and undervalued in official discourse before 1959, had never been disputed in the society-at-large. Consequently, the back-to-Africa imperative, advanced by black cultural and political movements in the United Kingdom, the United States and other nations of the West African Diaspora, which strove to tie racial consciousness to African cultural expressions, held scant relevance for an already heavily-Africanised Afro-Cuban population (Miyares Ruíz, interview, 2008). On the one hand, Miyares Ruíz's statements can be read as a rejection of Black Nationalism's fervid grasping after African roots in terms of an appropriate strategy for the Cuban situation, yet his emotionally poignant memories of the redemptive power of reggae music, above all the protest songs of Bob Marley and the Wailers, alerted this author to the possibility of a deeper vein of consciousness which drew (and still draws) Afro-Cubans into the cultural formations which Paul Gilroy has described as "communities of interpretation and sentiment"(1993: 201).⁴³

⁴³ In the course of casual conversations with black Cubans, this author registered on numerous occasions similarly emotive reminiscences pertaining to Marley's music that hinted at connections to a wider

FOLK CULTURE AND THE NEW MAN

From the 'interpretive-public' perspective, the process of folklorisation instituted under Fidel Castro's government emerged from the political repertoire of the *quinquenio gris*, considered retrospectively as a period of cultural impoverishment – *una época pobre*. This widely-held view reasserts a traditional propensity in Western nations to equate Africanness with impoverishment at many levels, including resources; landscape and the environment; social organization; cultural and aesthetic sophistication; morality; and even consciousness. The nationalist bent of revolutionary cultural policy, however, had encouraged the creation and rediscovery of authentic Cuban forms of expression to counterbalance dominating influences from the United States and Europe, a perspective which radically re-categorised the Republican (neo-colonial) period as an era of cultural impoverishment.

Roger Abrahams informs us that measures to promote a politics of culture based on nationalist perspectives *per se* invoke a higher principle of rebellion:

Folk culture stands in contrast at every level with the construction of official culture, even in those situations in which reigning political ideologies are said to derive from *das volk*, or the common man. (1993:6)

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The central problem for nationalist folklore in the Cuban case was that it inspired two distinctive oppositional imaginaries: on the one hand, a space of resistance to American neo-colonialism, and, on the other, the drive to eradicate ideas of white supremacy, indirectly connected with neo-colonialism, but also deeply ingrained in the national psyche. Inasmuch as it defined a set of preconditions for greater revolutionary *conciencia*, 'Che' Guevara's concept of 'the new man' had forged a link between these two oppositional elements by integrating "the individual thematic and the collective thematic" (Augé, 1995: 62) of race and nation in one symbolic figure, while at the same time, capturing the transformative power of vernacularity. I detect something of the revolutionary project's vernacular vigour or thrust, at least at the socioeconomic level, in Abrahams' description of "the conservationist mood that seeks to resist consumption and to privilege recycling, remodelling, renovating, repairing, restoring, customizing, and humanizing mass-produced objects and environments" (1993: 6).

(diasporic) community. Although anecdotal, this evidence is not without merit in the context of our description of subtler (imagined) social constructions.

Spatially, this concept of vernacularity was reinforced by the ideological centring of *Cuba libre* in *el campo* (Kapcia, 2000: 141). Thus, in a manner redolent of early Romanticism's celebration of all things pastoral, qualities associated with the *campesino* lifestyle, such as frugality and unselfishness, became exalted as noble revolutionary virtues.⁴⁴ In part, this may be traced back to the personal experiences of the Sierra Maestra guerrilla fighters who had dwelled among, and shared the lives of, the peasants who had rallied to their cause. Observing at first hand, and for an extended period, the day-to-day struggles of impoverished villagers, who had generously created spaces for lodging and had shared food and other provisions with the band of bearded strangers, it was easy for the revolutionaries to merge understandable feelings of indebtedness and gratitude with a kind of essentialist socio-political reading of their hosts' modes of life. In time this essentialist typology would duly be extended to all members of Cuba's economically marginalised sector, overwhelmingly composed of blacks and *mulattos*. However, a kindred strain of Romanticism touched even those revolutionaries who had not lived the mountain story, such as photo-journalist Ernesto Fernández Noguerras, who had documented the revolutionary project beginning in its earliest days.

A colleague of Alberto Korda, the photographer responsible for the iconic image of 'Che' gazing towards *la victoria* entitled 'Guerrillero Heróico,' Fernández Noguerras, in the course of our conversation about Cuba and Africa, bade me to keep in mind that he and his contemporaries hail from *la generación josemartiano* –"muy romántico, muy sentimental" (interview, 2008). The Revolution, he reminisced, only heightened this tendency towards sentimentality and romanticism. Deeply inspired by the American photo-essay magazine *Life*, Fernández, and his colleagues Korda, Salas, Corrales, Joya, and others, captured on film not only the misery of the countryside prior to the Revolution, but produced the inspiring images of social improvements, in sanitation and housing, nutrition and education which appeared in the pages of magazines like *Cuba* and *Cuba Internacional* (see fig. 3 to 6).

⁴⁴ The five major precepts of the early Romantic period that transformed European perceptions are: (1) Imagination as the primary faculty for reading the symbolic world and comprehending dualism; (2) The elevation of Nature, especially as a counterforce to social artifice; (3) High value attributed to symbolism and myth; (4) The importance of the individual; and (5) Emphasis on emotions in general, and specifically intuition and instinct (*Introduction to Romanticism*, 2001).



FIGURE 3. Before the Revolution: Impoverished and unsanitary housing conditions in the slums surrounding Havana.



FIGURE 4. After the Revolution: Crispily-attired children and their teachers celebrate outside the newly-constructed local schoolhouse.



FIGURE 5. Before the Revolution: Elderly black woman picking over hills of trash.



FIGURE 6. After the Revolution: Smiling black woman poses before huge steaming pots of food in an open-air kitchen in 1962.

The act of photographic documentation served as a means to connect individual Cubans to a historical project that transcended ethnic and cultural divisions by introducing key metaphors of cultural integrity, in other words, what it meant to be both Cuban *and* revolutionary:

Photography was judged to be the most direct and convincing medium of "reality," by contrast, art – meaning all other known artistic manifestations – was necessary but carefully sifted, given its frequent role in the conscience. Photography and art therefore took separate paths. The former became the image of the Revolution, published full-page in the main dailies, shown widely in movie theatres and promoted in commemorative travelling exhibitions as part of the so-called 'Journeys in solidarity with Cuba,' sponsored by Cuban diplomatic headquarters in every corner. (Wride & Vives, 2001: 96)

By this means, the self-confessedly sentimental or romantic ways in which photographers like Fernández Noguera viewed and represented the social transformations sweeping the country became a sort of visual *argot* through which Cubans read and made sense of the revolutionary process. Since black Cubans, as a group, had experienced the most dramatic changes to their material conditions as a result of the Revolution, images that narrated aspects of their particular story, such as the destruction of shantytowns, conveniently served as allegories for the entire nation's efforts at social and political reconstruction.

However, national allegories may unite at the same time as they highlight divisions between social groups, and this simply because, as in the case offered by the aforementioned example, not every Cuban had lived in a slum or in conditions of extreme poverty prior to January 1959. While photographs such as those shown here assisted in the construction of national memories through their dissemination and broadcast (because mediated images intrinsically belong to the masses), the deep pathos they evoked was instrumental in creating a sense of social responsibility in those Cubans who had not escaped the slums. Yet this notion of responsibility implicitly endowed those more affluent Cubans, whose struggles had benefited their poorer compatriots, with a sense of moral largesse, at the same time as it raised the expectation that those on the receiving end should be subject to enduring feelings of indebtedness which, in effect, relegated them to an indefinite subordinated social context. Hence the emotive content of these photographs carries the dilemma of relativism, appearing differently depending on whether we are concerned with ideology or the wider relationships among unequal individuals.

THE SCIENTIFICATION OF FOLKLORE

Interestingly, folkloristics in Cuba departed from a more general connotation of popular culture to signify, almost exclusively, Africa-derived forms.⁴⁵ According to this convention, the pre-eminent national institution of popular culture, the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, established in 1962 as part of the drive to rehabilitate the traditions of previously marginalised groups, from the outset presented a repertoire of dance and musical performances based on Africa-derived religious practices. Founded by Afro-Cuban musicologist and ethnographer Rogelio Martínez Furé, who had studied under both Fernando Ortiz and Argeliers León, together with Mexican choreographer Rodolfo Reyes Cortés, the Conjunto Folklórico, since its first performance in Matanzas in the early 1970s, quickly earned a worldwide reputation for high production values, even as detractors criticised the theatricalised representations of sacred ritual (Ayorinde, 2004: 113). Martínez Furé belonged to a new generation of ethnographic researchers, including Rafael López Valdés and Jesús Guanche, affiliated with the Departamento de Etnología of the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales, created in 1973 to replace the Instituto de Etnología y Folclore. Some members of the Departamento de Etnología underwent training in the Soviet Union, which had a profound influence on their work. All were encouraged to apply the methodology of scientific atheism to the study of Cuba's African roots, with the result that, just as in the era of Afrocubanismo during the 1920s and the 1930s, features of Afro-Cuban culture were assessed and subsequently designated as fit or unfit for the nationalist project. As Christine Ayorinde writes:

⁴⁵ This is generally attributed to the tremendous social influence of research into Afro-Cuban religions by Lydia Cabrera, Fernando Ortiz and René Lachateñeré. See the introduction to this study for details of the historical context of these early ethnographic investigations, and also Wirtz (2007), especially pp. 63-66.

“What is clear is that folklorists and cultural theorists were engaged in a delicate balancing act: the enchantment and wisdom of Afro-Cuban mythology was to be extolled while at the same time the negative and alienating aspects of Afro-Cuban religious beliefs were to be revealed” (2004:110).

‘Las imágenes del sol en el folclore cubano’ by Jesús Guanche was published in the influential monthly magazine *Revolución y Cultura* in the Spring of 1975, and, while admittedly lengthy, the introduction is worth reproducing here in full for its incisive presentation of the motivations and ideological principles which guided revolutionary mythmakers such as its author during this period:

El presente trabajo, del que reproducimos una pequeña parte sintetizada, constituye una necesidad de sistemización para el estudio científico sobre las artes plásticas en el arte popular cubano: Folclore, como parte integrante de nuestra cultura a partir de la influencia de elementos externos y de la confirmación nueva de elementos autóctonos que necesitan ser valorizados, al igual que se ha venido haciendo con las tradiciones, el teatro, la danza y la música popular de donde podemos citar innumerable autores, con el Dr. Fernando Ortiz a la cabeza.

No es el hecho de reconocer valores plásticos inherentes a nuestro arte popular; sino analizar de dónde proceden, cómo se insertan en nuestra cultura, cómo son deformados y subvalorados por el capitalismo y cómo hoy, producto de nuestra Revolución, se convierten en un reto para la investigación científica: el de situar en su lugar histórico una fuente interminable de creación plástica popular, productos de una toma de conciencia real de dichos valores.

Este trabajo es solo un pequeño inicio que no pretende dar conclusiones definitivas; pero sí, contribuir a sentar pautas para la sistemización futura de este ámbito cultural no estudiado y a la vez aportar, consecuentemente, elementos que han participado en la integración de nuestra nacionalidad. (Guanche, 1975: 34, emphasis in original)

The reference to Fernando Ortiz “a la cabeza” which comes at the end of the first paragraph acts as an oblique signpost to the Afro-Cuban context of the article. In fact, were we to replace ‘folclore’ with ‘Africa’ in the phrase “Folclore, como parte integrante de nuestra cultura,” it would be easy to imagine the words issuing from the pen of the father of Cuban ethnography himself.⁴⁶ Despite the fact that, as I have mentioned, by the mid-1970s folklore had generally become synonymous with Afro-Cuban culture, Guanche, like Ortiz more than twenty years before him, laboured under similar sociopolitical intentions, that is, to align *africanía* with nationalism.

It is important to clarify the matter of context at this juncture, since I do not wish to exaggerate the significance of Afro-Cuban or African themes with respect to the wider culture. In fact, a survey of the editorial content in *Revolución y Cultura* during the first half of 1975 finds only isolated references to *el tema negro*, and among these the overwhelming majority relate to music: for example, an interview in April with *soneros* Feliz Chappotin and Miguelito Cuni (*Revolución y Cultura*, 1975), and Leonardo Acosta’s (1975) ‘Constelación del Caribe’ in the May issue. The January edition notably departed from this tendency with a review of the Conjunto Dramático de Oriente, whose theatrical repertoire featured plays that referenced Africa-derived religious practices and mythology, including Raúl Pomares’ celebrated and popular, ‘De como ña pompa bajo a Santiago de pedestal (Boudet, 1975a).⁴⁷ The Soviet/European influence

⁴⁶ See, for example, Ortiz’s *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (1950).

⁴⁷ José Millet (2008) writes:

En 1974 el Conjunto Dramático de Oriente, que había dado inicio en 1961, sufriría una consolidación absoluta de un método de creación colectiva recién adoptado. Se estrenaba ‘De cómo Santiago Apóstol puso los pies en la tierra’, sobre el texto de Raúl Pomares y la dirección de Ramiro Herrero. Se adoptaba, definitivamente el “teatro de relaciones”, recuperado del carnaval santiaguero, como línea de trabajo que permitiría romper con el modo clásico de

on Cuban 'high' culture remained strong throughout the second half of the year: July's issue, a special edition dedicated to the thirtieth anniversary of 'la derrota del fascismo en Europa,' focused exclusively on Europeans such as German playwright Bertolt Brecht, or on Russian poets and authors, with no space at all devoted to Africa or Afro-Cuban culture, and September's Vietnam issue replicated this pattern. In fact, *africanía* in any guise only appeared twice in this period – in the August and September issues. The former comprised a special edition dedicated to East German and Soviet writers, perhaps conceived as a supplement to include those omitted in July, and the latter commemorated the Año Internacional de la Mujer. Rosa Ileana Boudet's (1975b) account of touring the Escambray mountains, 'Creación popular,' which appeared in the August issue, employs the romantic-pastoral terminology of contemporary Africanist discourse to narrate events surrounding the author's 'discovery' of an isolated choral group, 'El coro de claves,' (a photograph of the predominantly black and mixed-race Cubans comprising the group accompanies the piece) whilst traversing the sharp peaks and deep valleys of the south-central region of the island. As a celebration of the organic development of authentic culture, the piece conforms to the conventional taxonomy that regarded syncretism as a manifestation of *cubanidad*. The following month's commemorative women's issue published Francisco A. Pardeiro's (1975) essay, 'Mujeres en la lucha antiesclavista en Cuba.' The piece details at substantial length the

escenificación y dar entrada a corrientes vanguardistas del teatro contemporáneo, como la procedente de Brecht. El montaje resultó de alta calidad sobre la base de una excelente escenografía, música sonera y carnavalesca y un rico y ágil movimiento escénico. Se removió la comunicación actor/espectador, para dar lugar al cambio de los propios actores y a la participación activa de los que recibían el mensaje. Nació un tipo de trabajo de necesidades expresivas del pueblo que implicaba como escenario los barrios en que había surgido la relación o, al menos, el contacto directo con escenarios abiertos, como las calles y plazas.

contribution of enslaved African women to the emancipatory cause and features a Congolese statue of a female figure as the prominent lead image. However, this abstract, stylized and 'Africanised' representation of the black female body contrasts starkly with the rest of the illustrations – lush, romantic, more naturalistic images, almost exclusively of white women – taken from fine art paintings and sketches. Further on in the same issue a single desultory photograph of black women performing a dance for Yemayá at the seashore illustrates a general article on dance (*Revolución y Cultura*, 1975b). To sum up, of the twelve issues of the important cultural magazine that were published in 1975, each comprising between eighty and ninety pages of content, an inconsequential minority of the articles and features is in any way related to black Cuban culture. Moreover, blackness was written, within these pages, as a very narrow and rigidly-defined subplot, perhaps little more than background detail, to the grander, more vivid tale of the Revolution's re-shaping and reinterpretation of European culture.

BLACKNESS AS A CULT VALUE

Once poor, illiterate Afro-Cubans had become identified in the national imaginary as carriers of folklore, those blacks conceptually connected to the land in small and self-enclosed communities (for instance *palenques*) became sacralised along with the landscape they inhabited.⁴⁸ What must be kept in mind, however, is that under conditions of social and political subservience, public representations of sacralised objects (including, in this case, individuals) tend to reform in accordance with the 'ritual-expressive' model of communication already mentioned. In the case of impoverished black Cubans, this meant that their sacred status at the level of political ideology – or 'cult value' – slipped into a more uneasy modality

⁴⁸ I use 'sacralised' here to mean reinscription into the national myth or 'sacred story.'

of expression (a renegotiated 'exhibition value') in the media.⁴⁹ What happened was that the association of blackness with a set of characteristics connected to the land and nature confined its *mediated* expression to what the 'ritual-expressive' model defines as celebratory, consummatory and decorative, and furthermore subjected Afro-Cubans to a form of 'deep' stereotyping in the public sphere.⁵⁰ By 'deep stereotypes' I am explicitly referring to the following set of common traits shared by all ethnic groups designated as folk:

1. Earthiness and naturalness (including in a more derogatory direction, reinterpreted to mean savage, backward, uncultured, animalistic).
2. A strong sense of cooking and eating, but not related to refinement.
3. A way of speaking that is plain and unembellished (translated, in negative terms, to mean "murdering the language" or forms of unintelligible speech.
4. A basic fecundity and a liberated attitude toward matters sexual (reinterpreted, negatively, as a deficiency in the rules of sexual access, a failure to exert moral control, etc.). (Adapted from Abrahams, 1993: 28)

While it exceeds the scope of this study to provide more detailed analysis of how these stereotypes were represented in the public sphere, the point I would like to emphasise is that, according to these terms, a Cuban of any colour or cultural background could (and can still) operate socially, that is to say publicly, in line with the vernacular ideal through the 'performance' of any or all of the above characteristics. Of course, unless the individual in question is black or, synonymously, is from the land, the performance holds no purpose beyond the symbolic: in other words, it carries no transcendental value in the sense implied by 'performative-public.' Instead, the display has more to do with the ability to translate one set of cultural codes into another for a purposive objective (often theatrical, or otherwise connected to entertainment) in the manner of interpretation (see fig. 7).

⁴⁹The notions of 'cult value' and 'exhibition value' were developed by Walter Benjamin in his influential essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' which appears in the collection *Illuminations* (1999).

⁵⁰Abrahams employs the term 'deep' to highlight the coexistence of various characteristics in combination.

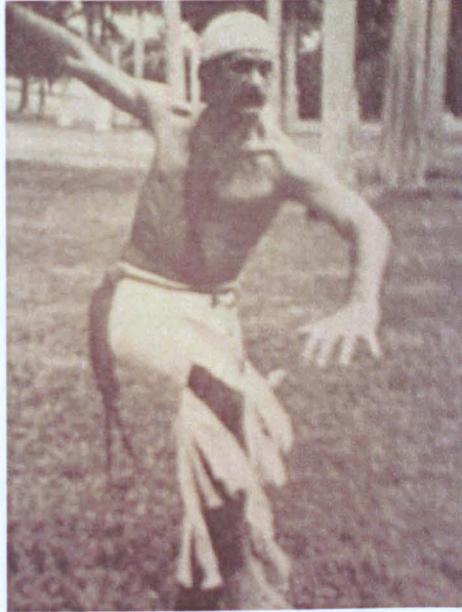


FIGURE 7. White actor from the Conjunto Dramático de Oriente playing the role of Esteban Montejo, «El Cimarrón.»

RACISM AND AFRICANÍA

In the early to mid-1970s, David Booth carried out a singular and comprehensive study of the racial situation in Cuba. Of the myriad ways in which racial discrimination still operated on the island, Booth found “private racism” to be the most deeply embedded and the “most heavily mystified” (Booth, 1976:172). He attributed this to the complex nature of the ‘color-class system of discrimination’ particular to societies in Cuba and Brazil. One of the most interesting aspects of Booth’s findings was that these systems of racial classification, bequeathed by plantation slavery, in no way undermined the power African-based religiosity continued to hold for all Cubans, beginning in the decades after slavery when large numbers of Whites of all social classes became practitioners of *santería* and *palo*. Calling attention to the continuous impact on Cuban culture and society of Africa-derived religions, Booth observed:

Among modern specialists on the “transculturation” of African beliefs and religious practices in the New World, there is a consensus that, in spite of being, and remaining

during slavery, one of the “whitest” societies of Plantation America, Cuba is one of the most striking examples of continuing African cultural influence in the region. (1976: 151)

As is generally acknowledged, some African religious cult activity was actively repressed by the government in the early 1970s (C. Moore, 1991: 102; R. Moore, 2006: 208; Morales, 2007). With this in mind, Carlos Moore’s claim that the repressive policies sprang from the government’s failure “to understand that black Cubans were indeed the embodiment of a distinct culture” (1991: 102), nonetheless, serves to highlight some of the limitations of interpreting the Cuban situation within the framework of the North American race model. For it appears to me that underlying Moore’s view is the troubling assertion that the ‘separate-but-equal’ race ideology of the United States, because it had led to the establishment of the black church as a powerful social organiser and given rise to long-standing black political organisations such as the NAACP and the Urban League, demonstrated the superior racial sensitivity of that nation’s white rulers in comparison with the Cuban government. Yet, given the brutal suppression of Afro-Cubans’ efforts to organise in the past,⁵¹ it seems more likely that the measures reflected the revolutionary government’s acute sensitivity to black Cubans’ frustration at the failure of racial policies to lead to social equality. Similarly, we might consider to what extent officials’ reactions reflected fears of an *a priori* link between the expression of black culture (above all within social formations) and the full-blown expression of black political nationalism – an anxiety that has lingered in Cuban society since slave emancipation was first debated.

⁵¹ For example the 1912 massacre of members of the PIC. See Helg (1995) for a full account.

In any event, while the existence of a deliberate policy to eliminate organisations that could potentially manipulate black discontent – and thus encourage divisions amongst the populace – remains contested, it behoves us to consider the consequences of undermining the value of Africa-derived religions for the reinforcement of associations between blackness and uncivilised culture in the national imaginary. In this regard, efforts to encourage Afro-Cubans to limit their range of Africanist cultural expression contributed to the maintenance of a pre-existing negative equation in Cuban society – a leftover from the colonial and Republican eras – between black identity and a capacity for progress and civilisation. The highly complex, dualistic notion of blackness as, on the one hand, carrier of nationalist cultural reference points, and, on the other, oppositional (that is, against white privilege) expression of Africanness, motivated Cubans of all races to suspect the presence of the latter in manifestations of the former. Subsequently, the few black Cubans who did speak out on issues of race were in turn labelled racists “because of the ideological equivalence drawn between discussing the taboo subject and performing an act of discrimination” (Hernández, 2002: 1144).

ONCE THE HEAD REJOINS THE BODY...

In his cinematic narrative of slavery, *El otro Francisco*, Sergio Giral illustrates the dual potentialities – for duplicity or empowerment – which inhabit New World articulations of West African cultures with deft directorial finesse. The concept of ‘performative-community’ is evoked, in particular, at two important turning-points at the level of dramatic denouement. At a key moment in the film, André Lucumí, the spiritual leader of the slave community, ‘rides’ – by literally mounting the back of – a worshipper who has been possessed by one of the warrior *orishas*. The two form a specimen of double-headed totem pole or channel of sacred ancestral power. In an African tongue, the embodied *orisha* utters his counsel, which André

Lucumí in turn translates into the vernacular Spanish (*bozal*) which the slaves have developed to communicate across divisions of tribal and regional origin. The slaves are exhorted to rise up against their captors in revenge for the desecration of the body of Crispin, a proud *cimarrón* who had been hunted down and killed, his corpse subsequently returned to the *finca* and mutilated in the presence of the other slaves, in contempt of traditional African beliefs regarding the afterlife.⁵² The second scene which attracts our attention takes place at an earlier point in the drama, when Crispin and the other maroons take flight from the plantation. The escape plan is set in motion under the cover of music and dance, as the men pretend to participate in one of the secular and recreational gatherings permitted, and in many cases encouraged, by the slave-owners. Through a series of encoded gestures – glances, nods and jerks – masquerading as dance moves, the *cimarrones* relay to each other their plans for insurrection.

According to the performative-community view the first scene portrays the epistemic violence (desacralisation or desecration) that African-based religious practices suffered as cult value was replaced with exhibition value in the public sphere, effectively severing the head (*poiesis*) from the body (*mimesis*) of Afro-Cuba. What remains is the “celebratory” yet meaningless drumming and shuffling of the escape scene. Through Giral’s representation we recognise how the folklorisation of Afro-Cuban themes was experienced as a repressive process of cultural deracination that enforced a synthetic separation of the African *imago mundi* or worldview from its performativity.⁵³ The film seems to make the case for enforced separation as a deliberate repressive tactic because, once the head rejoins the body (poetry re-inscribed into action), the effects are incendiary. *Defiance is intrinsic to poetry*. What I mean to suggest by this is that the reinsertion of poetry (by which I mean an African cosmology) into performance conjures a space of transcendence that folkloric display lacks. This is because “poetry rises towards the universal” (Ricoeur, 2003: 44). As such, poetry diverges from the historical perspective through the ordering principle of poetic composition:

⁵² Slaves believed that they could return to their villages after death provided their corpses were prepared according to certain religious rites.

⁵³ African worldview here refers to an aggregate system of reference for the philosophical systems of different, mainly sub-Saharan, African peoples. While the term may seem uncomfortably broad to some readers, I have confidently relied on the analysis and comparative studies of several esteemed Africanist scholars, including John S. Mbiti (1969, 1970 and 1975) and Noel Q. King (1986).

“It is this function of ordering that allows us to say that poetry is ‘more philosophic [...] than history.’ History recounts what has happened, poetry what could have happened” (*ibid.*). Or, *is yet* to happen.

RACE ON FILM: A SHORT OVERVIEW

Scholarly emphasis on the 1970s as a time of closer economic, cultural, political and ideological cooperation with the Soviet Union has often overshadowed United States-based aggression as a motivating factor in the national drive for greater social cohesion. For Cuban sociologist and political analyst Esteban Morales, the spate of chemical, biological and other terrorist attacks which began in 1971 amounted to a full-scale “war of aggression” that further intensified the already deepening silence on racial issues: “el tema racial pasó entonces a ser considerado como algo que podía dividir a las fuerzas revolucionarias ante las difíciles batallas que debían ser enfrentadas” (2007: 2).⁵⁴ Michael Chanan has described cinema’s unique ability to break Cuba’s “culture of silence” (2004: 208), and it is true that ICAIC has always enjoyed a position of relative autonomy in the field of cultural production. However, a brief assessment of the limited number of films released between 1970 and 1975 on *el tema negro* reveals that, even in this less-restricted environment, pre-existing social structures determined cultural content and not the other way round. Of the twelve films in this category, ten comprised short films with running lengths of under thirty minutes (in fact half of these ran for ten minutes or less), and eight were documentaries – either profiles of musicians

⁵⁴ Incidents ranged from a devastating CIA-orchestrated outbreak of swine fever in 1971 to the single most violent attack of the decade, the blowing-up of a Cubana airlines passenger plane on 6 October 1976, which killed 73 on board including the entire Cuban fencing team (Blum, 2004: 188-191). Cuban scholar José Luis Méndez Méndez refers to 1974 as “El prelude del terror” (2006: 7), the start of a three-year period during which extremists reportedly carried out 202 attacks against Cuban interests in twenty-three different countries.

such as Benny Moré, *Qué bueno canta usted* (1973), or recordings of dance performances, *Okantomi* (1974) and *Sulkary* (1974). As a matter of fact, through Santiago Álvarez's acknowledgment, when quizzed on his professional contribution to the revolutionary project as head of ICAIC's newsreel production, that for him there was no difference between art and politics, we enter an understanding of the process by which political and ideological currents of the day implicitly took on aesthetic forms.

AN AFRICANIST PERSPECTIVE ON *DE CIERTA MANERA*

In this climate, Sara Gómez, the country's first female film director, was forced to abandon her documentaries on the persistence of racism in post-revolutionary Cuba.⁵⁵ However, against more subdued opposition she succeeded in treating the themes of race and marginalisation in a quasi-fictional style in her only full-length feature, *De cierta manera*. A life-long asthmatic, on June 2, 1974 Gómez died before completing the final edit; however, her mentor and collaborator Tomás Gutiérrez Alea oversaw the final production process, and was instrumental in securing the controversial film's release in 1977.⁵⁶ *De cierta manera* applies an experimental cinematic methodology – the montage-juxtaposition of documentary footage and voice-over tracks with fictional film sequences – to portray the complex and complicated love-affair between two Cubans *de color*, Mario and Yolanda. The resulting effect mirrors the ruptures and connections, continuities and discontinuities, of the revolutionary society in flux. Yolanda, a

⁵⁵ The truth regarding the circumstances involved in the delay in the film's release have been variously debated, acknowledged and denied: the present claim is based on information recounted by Michael Chanan (personal communication, 2007), as well as drawn from his book, *Cuban Cinema*, 2004: 8.

⁵⁶ For interesting commentary by a significant number of experts and analysts on the production and legacy of *De cierta manera*, as well as anecdotes regarding the filmmaker's life and work see the special edition of *Cine cubano*, Sumario 1989, edited by Antonio Conte.

schoolteacher from a middle-class background who has taken up a new post in a marginalised community, starts a relationship with Mario, a local factory-worker raised amid cultural values which Yolanda finds alien. Gómez stitches scenes of Africa-derived religiosity here and there, seemingly at random, throughout the entire length of the film. Whereas the religions carry the motif of timelessness (or, alternately, resistance to change), elsewhere in the film instability and transformation abound. Old, dilapidated buildings are razed to the ground to make way for modern structures; workers debate new revolutionary codes of practice; moral and behavioural incompatibilities threaten ties of familial, fraternal and romantic love. Everywhere the old ways collapse or come under threat; only the rituals and drums of Africa remain constant.

Although frequently cited and analysed for the film's perspective on machismo and gender relations (Baron, 2009; Davies, 1997; Kaplan, 1988; Kuhn, 1982; Lesage, 1979), it is *De cierta manera's* more ambiguous treatment of African-based religions that informs our study. For, inasmuch as the film, mainly through the prism of Yolanda's experiences, asserts a critical stance towards some of the pernicious elements that, despite improvements to material conditions in the areas of housing, sanitation and education, remain unchanged within marginalised cultures (absenteeism from workplace and school, low social expectations, and so on), I believe that Gómez also offers a deeper meditation on what Benedict Anderson has identified as "the great weakness of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, that is to say, the inability to explain human frailties and corporeal misery: 'Why was I born blind? Why is my best friend paralyzed?'" (2006: 10-11):

At the same time in different ways, religious thought also responds to obscure intimations of immortality, generally by transforming fatality into continuity (karma, original sin, etc.) In this way, it concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation. [...] Again, the disadvantage of evolutionary/progressive thought is an almost Heraclitean hostility to any idea of continuity. (*ibid.*)

Published at around the same time as the film's eventual release date, 'Sobre la lucha ideológica' articulated the government's position on religion, as presented at the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in December 1975. The final resolution adopted by the Congress, 'Sobre la política en relación con la religión, la Iglesia y los creyentes,' held first of all that "nuestro pueblo por principio revolucionario, practica el respeto al derecho de los ciudadanos a participar o no de alguna creencia religiosa," but emphatically concluded that "los avances en la construcción de la nueva sociedad, la elevación consciente del nivel de vida, material y cultural, de los trabajadores, junto con la propaganda científica materialista, conducirán paulatinamente a la superación de las creencias religiosas" (*Granma*, 1975).

ONLY THE RITUALS AND DRUMS OF AFRICA REMAIN

Against the backdrop of this ideological schema, which remained consistent for approximately the next decade, Tomás Fernández Robaina interviewed a number of long-standing practitioners of *Regla de ocho* or *santería* about their experiences before and since the Revolution. The resultant collection of testimonies addresses important questions regarding the negotiation of faith with revolutionary *conciencia*. One point of particular note for our study is how frequently the notion of continuity, previously

mentioned in relation to *De cierta manera*, re-emerges throughout the testimonies. In the following excerpt, one of the *babalawos* explains how the deeply-ingrained African religious impetus found expression in the daily lives of ordinary Cubans:

Todos en mi centro saben que soy babalao, los invito a las fiestas que doy; no trata de llevarlos a la santería; entre nosotros eso no es necesario; la nuestra no es como la católica u otras iglesias cristianas que tú ves constantemente tratando de captar adeptos. A la nuestra, viene la gente por sus propias necesidades, cuando tienen problemas de salud, de casa o de pincha. Pero no son muchos los que en cualquier oficina, o ministerio, dicen públicamente que frecuentan casas y fiestas de santo, o cuando lo hacen, lo cuentan como si fuera algo de especial, una visita al teatro o al cine. Hay mucha gente que tiene desenvolvimiento, que viajan, tienen buenas casas y nunca van a casa del santero, del palero o del babalao, al menos eso piensan mucha gente. Otros, por el contrario, se resguardan, es decir que van a esos sitios a buscar protección, pero por supuesto, tampoco lo dicen. Esa es la verdad y yo no podría decirte lo contrario, lo pones o lo quitas, pero so te digo que es mentira que la santería se acabe; [...] ¿Cómo puede alguien imaginar eso? Si con todas las prohibiciones de los españoles durante la colonia, todas las costumbres, cantos y rituales pudieron mantenerse y trasmitirse de generaciones en generaciones, ¿cómo va a ser posible que ahora que hay más libertad y se respeta cada vez más la creencia de cada cual va a extinguirse la santería, el palo, y todo lo demás que nos vino de África? (Fernández Robaina, 1994: 36)

Certainly, not everyone interviewed by Fernández Robaina shared this optimism for the future longevity of Africa-derived religions. In fact, one or two interviewees believed that with the simple passage of time the faiths would attract fewer and fewer devotees.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, one opinion held consistently by all the adherents was that the practice of African religiosity had never contradicted the tenets of revolution. As the interviewee identified as María related: “La Revolución tiene sus leyes y los santeros las

⁵⁷ This opinion was asserted in spite of the higher regard enjoyed by African syncretic religions since the mid-1980s (Diantell, 2000: 7).

respetan. No hay problemas” (Fernández Robaina, 1994: 37). More explicitly she added: “Los santeros estamos en los Comités de Defensa de la Revolución, en la Federación de Mujeres, en los sindicatos, en las milicias. Lo único que deseamos los santeros es vivir con tranquilidad y que la haya también a nuestro alrededor para servir como se debe al santo, para cumplir con ellos, mostrarles nuestro amor, nuestra entrega” (*ibid.*).

FROM DUAL CONSCIOUSNESS TO *DOBLE MORAL*

The performativity of African-based religions is central to folklore's liminal placement between history and culture, and at the interstice of word as the master and image as the slave (Mitchell, 2008). Firstly, the collective performance of ritual bridges the gap between private expressions of faith and social interconnectedness: “The notion of performance can integrate transaction and structure: the performing individual or subgroup in its performance sets itself apart from but at the same time defines itself as an integral part of society” (Blakely *et al*, 1994: 13). Secondly, ritual performance must be considered within the context of the overall ‘action-orientedness’ of African-based religions: “In Africa, religion means performing or otherwise doing something: consulting a diviner, offering a sacrifice, praying, talking about a problem, enthroning a chief, falling into a trance, making magic, and dancing with masks at a funeral” (Ìdòwu cited in Blakely *et al*, 1994: 17). The more accurate term for *santería*, *la Regla de ocha*, emphasises the practice as a system of codes or laws that guide behaviour. In this way, religiosity accrues no elevated status or value to itself above and beyond the satisfaction of accomplishing everyday tasks. As a result, since faith cannot be separated from action, social participation, service and all forms of community activity offer possibilities and opportunities for the channelling of religious feeling. Therefore, according to this scale of reference, the only impediments to African religiosity are measures or processes that either, (1) separate transaction from structure, or (2) inhibit action. Critics of folklorisation charge that the selection, presentation and interpretation of the artefacts and practices of religious life are activities that eviscerate the “social lives of [these] things”

(Cherry & Cullen, 2008: 2). As one *babalawo* has stated, “Las religiones afrocubanas no pueden ser valoradas como algo puramente folklórico, eso es un grave error; las religiones afrocubanas son dinámicas, están vivas” (Fernández Robaina, 1994: 87). Controversial measures such as the removal of objects of religious value from *casas de santo* for display in museums,⁵⁸ even with curatorial attempts to replicate the authentic or traditional contexts from where they came, focuses attention on already mentioned tensions in the relationship between cultural difference and cultural integrity: tensions that follow, in this case, from the substitution of ethnography for religion, whereby museum visitors are forced into an ethnographic response to religious items.

Folklorisation performs a memorialising function that, as we have seen, is at odds with practitioners’ view of a still-living tradition. Furthermore, the systematic suppression of the multi-voiced expression of polytheism into a unifying, monologic historical narrative symbolically recreates European colonialism’s violent suppression of the African worldview. Anthropologist J. Lorand Matory has written of the critical difference between the cultural mores of Europeans (or Abrahamic peoples) and the Afro-Atlantic:

The Abrahamic religions tend to advocate a homogeneous set of behavioral injunctions, while condemning outsiders as inferior. The Afro-Atlantic religions, on the other hand, tend to acknowledge a multiplicity of divine personalities and a multiplicity of rule sets surrounding each. Virtue lies in the deft management of social and divine heterogeneity, rather than in the rigid imposition of a single divine will or rule set[...] Just as the gods must get along, so must their followers, and a single person must often harmonize the demands of the multiple gods and spirits, who inhabit their bodies and their communities. (Matory, 2007:401)

Consequently, at least in terms of African religious practice, *el doble moral* serves the performative-public function of integrating or synthesising the multiplicitous expression of *I/We* or *Self/Others*.

⁵⁸ Ayorinde (2004: 115) recounts how the San Antonio *cabildo* in Guanabacoa had its *fundamentos* seized by police in the 1970s after the death of its leader, a renowned *santero* named Arcadio.

SCIENTIFIC ATHEISM AND AFRICAN RELIGIOSITY

Research findings publicised during the 1971 Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura supported the view that religious faith did not impede the full development of revolutionary *conciencia*, with the exception of Christian sects such as the Seventh-Day Adventists or Jehovah's Witnesses, where "a more structured representation of the supernatural" rendered followers "less likely to participate in social tasks" (Ayorinde, 2004: 106). Members of Afro-Cuban syncretic cults, on the other hand, could make legitimate claims for participation in a nationally-conceived cultural practice that, furthermore, did not contradict the theories of scientific atheism:

Scientific atheism identifies several categories of religion, one of which is mass religious consciousness (*conciencia religiosa masiva*). It is characteristic of polytheistic religions and is defined as spontaneous, chaotic, and unsystematic. It has no structured dogma and offers an emotional relationship with supernatural objects that is palpable and concrete. Scientific atheism normally associates such practices with the workers and the exploited, as contrasted with a higher level of religious practice, which is called "religious ideology." The latter expresses systematic theories known as "theology." (Ayorinde, 2004: 106)

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However, general recognition that *conciencia religiosa masiva* posed no ideological threat to the revolutionary project did not safeguard African-based religions from attack by an enduring set of scientific beliefs related to psychology. Beginning with Fernando Ortiz's early studies into the problem of black criminality,⁵⁹ successive investigations into Africa-derived religiosity have claimed links between certain practices within *santería* (particularly spirit-possession) and insanity. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, Soviet-influenced ethnographers and other intellectuals used a wide

⁵⁹ Ortiz, 1906.

array of media publications, such as *El militante comunista*, to disseminate theories emerging from such research projects as the 1967 study by the Departamento de Psiquiatría Transcultural of the Academia de Ciencias and the Departamento de Salud Mental which found a behavioural basis for psychosis among practitioners of *santería* and *espiritismo* (Ayorinde, 2004: 116). Findings of this nature remained unchallenged well into the 1980s when Jesús Guanche, in his notorious essay ‘Los trastornos psíquicos,’ described *santería* “as a disease and believers as paranoid” (Moore, 2006: 211). In a footnote, Guanche underlined that paranoid schizophrenia was “a serious morbid process characterized by mental incoherence and dissociative thought” (cited in *ibid.*).⁶⁰

While it is generally accepted nowadays that reports connecting African belief practices to symptoms of psychiatric morbidity have been discredited, mainly due to their cultural bias and lack of contextualisation, we should not hasten towards a complete disregard of claims of disproportionately high incidences of various types of mental disorder among the marginalised populations studied. For, nowadays a growing number of studies have documented evidence of links between racism and psychological trauma, or what we may term as ‘dislocation’ of the psyche. *Racism and Racial Identity* sheds light on some of the most recent findings regarding race-related psychological syndromes, and features Harrell’s identification of six types of stress connected to individual, institutional and cultural racism, including Post-Traumatic Slavery Disorder and racism-related Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (see Blitz & Pender Greene, 2006). Understanding how it is possible for racism to manifest as psychological abuse or trauma

⁶⁰ Fernández Robaina (personal communication, 2008) told this author of Guanche’s more recent recantation of this view.

permits an assessment of the socio-political functions of *santería* that surpasses the “material or ideological crisis” view asserted in the early 1970s (Ayorinde, 2004: 118). In other words, acknowledgment of the therapeutic function performed by West African diasporic religions for a traumatised population links the cults’ eventual demise, not with improvements to the material base, but to the disappearance of the source of racialised harm.

TRAUMA, FAITH, *PATRIA*: A CONCLUSION

What might the field of trauma studies teach us about the function of syncretic religiosity in the formation of Cuban identity? For it seems to be the case that, thus far, our historical analysis of the cultural impact of the folklorisation of Africa-derived religions has uncovered little more than a series of fractures and dissections; wounds and scars; dislocations and disassociations – remembered, recorded, and re-imagined. In *Trauma and its Representations*, Deborah Jenson recounts that cults of the wound are “especially relevant to post-traumatic historical periods” (2001: 217). In Cuba, the symbolism of Lázaro /Babablu-Ayé epitomises the many levels of suffering in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution. Although Jenson’s study concerns the resurgence of Catholic fetishism in the wake of the Commune (the civil war that raged in Paris in the spring of 1871, setting workers and their sympathizers against the ruling clergy and state), I am struck by the range of similarities to the Cuban situation in the 1970s. Anticlerical intellectuals of the Third Republic, for example, viewed the resurgence of cult activity with an equivalent degree of disdain as scientific atheist scholars in Cuba a century later. Furthermore, both groups regarded popular religion “as a hoax at the expense of the people’s intellectual integrity and autonomy” (*ibid.*). However, I am more intrigued by the parallelism between these two eras and the possibility of a formal connection between social mimesis and trauma (Jenson, 2001: 255).

From the scientific atheist point of view, mimesis in ritual practice indicated a form of neurotic repetitive action severed from all earlier associations, and therefore senseless.

However, we learn from Cathy Caruth that trauma, as a pathological symptom, "is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history" (1995:10). Trauma, Caruth insists, cannot be separated from the question of truth; however, she adds, "what trauma has to tell us – the historical and personal truth it transmits – is intricately bound up with its crisis of truth" (Caruth, 1995: 8). The crisis which Caruth identifies refers to the belatedness of the traumatic event, in other words, that trauma, as Freud discovered, occurs after a latency period. Suspicious that belatedness indicated incomplete healing or "non-forgetting" of the original wound, Cuban intellectuals, working within the framework of scientific atheism, were driven to remove the poetic perspective of "violent pleasure," horror and death from African religiosity, and replace it with the "real world of utility" (Taussig, 2006: 91). Meanwhile practitioners have countered that devotion to the wound addresses the existentialist crisis of the human condition, which is eternal, and transcends divisions of culture and ethnicity.

All nationalisms are fictional formations, and all anti-colonial nationalisms are predicated on a 'wound.' In a very real sense, an individual's stake in the post-colonial nationalist project is determined by how the original trauma is imagined in relation to personal experience and memory. The difficulty for post-slaving societies is that since the tale of the original wound, for the sake of social cohesion and healing, is narrated according to the symbolism of nationalist mythology, meaning often yields to expression, with the result that the figures of speech (allegorical devices and so on) employed to explain history – that is to say, the mechanics – supersede the demands made by the moral compulsion, with the inevitable vulnerability of the state to charges of deception and duplicity. We witness this dynamic in the appropriation of the term slavery to describe other, less drastic, forms of oppression – a practice which has been popularized since the French Revolution (Jenson, 2001:198). In Cuba, official discourse re-cast the ritual practices of Africa-derived religions as anachronistic reformulations of the noble struggles by slaves as a political class against imperialist domination, rather than as integral survival strategies to resist racial aggression, thereby converting syncretic religions to simple repositories of the past. However, isolating the expression of social trauma (poetry) from mimetic African religious practices removes the

instructive element which conveys vital knowledge about the links between personal and social integration.

EL ÁTLAS DE AFRICANÍA: PART ONE

'Yo nací del África.'⁶¹

"The contemporary cartographer is not focused on the literalness of the map but more interested in the expressiveness and abstraction of the map, making visible the invisible ideas that constitute an idea of place" (PROJECTLINK, 2008).

Geographical accounts written in the mid to late eighteenth century, for example Michael Adanson's 'A Voyage to Senegal, the Isle of Gorée and the River Gambia (1759), established in Britain the idea of a primitivist and idyllic Africa. By offering comparative analyses of coastal settlements and the African interior, these narratives contributed to anti-slavery debates of the time the theory that the farther away from the coastline, where the slave trade was centered, the more 'civilized' African culture became. Spatialisation of the slave controversy in this manner produced 'imaginative geographies' that represented West Africa as the noble and potentially lucrative counterpoint to the degraded practices and looming impoverishment of the West Indian colonies (Lambert, 2009).

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FIGURE 8. Admit one to the Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo.

⁶¹ 'Yo nací del África' (I was born of Africa) is the title of a popular song recorded in 1960 by Arsenio Rodríguez, the blind, Afro-Cuban *tresero* from Matanzas province. The lyrics affirm "his African identity as having been "born" from the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and the ideology of white racial supremacy" (García, 2006: 12).

INTRODUCTION

Before setting forth to chart the contours of Cuba's African imaginary, I made careful preparation of an itinerary comprising those geographic locations generally considered repositories of the African presence. These ranged from the sprawling, crumbled ruins of an *ingenio* in Matanzas province where the winds still carry the mournful calls of enslaved Carabalí, to a narrow urban throughway in Havana, riotously enshrined with emblematic expressions of African cosmology. The final list looked like this,

Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo (en el Castillo de San Severino), Matanzas
Triumvirato sugar mill, Matanzas
Jovellanos
Regla
Guanabacoa
Casa de África, Ciudad Habana
Museo de los Orishas, Ciudad Habana
Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón, Ciudad Habana
Callejón de Hamel, Ciudad Habana
Sections of Marianao
Casa del Caribe, Santiago de Cuba
Casa de las Religiones, Santiago de Cuba
Cementerio Santa Ifigenia, Santiago de Cuba
Museo-Casa Natal de Antonio Museo, Santiago de Cuba

Havana was designated as the point-of-departure: from there I would travel the ninety-five kilometres east to Matanzas to spend several days exploring the region, before returning once more to the Cuban capital. Thereafter, the plan was to conduct a series of exploratory tours to the places which I had identified in the municipality and provincial environs, before embarking on the seven hundred and sixty kilometre journey to Santiago de Cuba, at the south-eastern end of the island. A few of the buildings, such as the Castillo de San Severino, were only designated as cultural landmarks in the late 1970s or early 1980s, and thus, strictly-speaking, did not form the 'official' landscape of

Latin-Africa prior to the Angola Intervention.⁶² Regardless, these sites often housed a collection of artefacts that had previously been scattered throughout a wide labyrinth of private locales, each object (whether a ceremonial drum, embroidered sash or faded crown) keeping record of a hidden discourse on Africa. They allow us to imagine how, during the days of Fidel Castro's very public, political pilgrimage to Guinea in May 1972, back in Matanzas province, it was normal for followers of la *Regla arará* to carry offerings for *Shakpata (Babalú Ayé)* and *Naná Burukú* into one of the many private homes discreetly conserved as *centros de culto*.

Earlier preparations for my journey had anchored me in a local archive where, after many dust-filled hours of investigation, I had unearthed two remarkable documents which, taken together, conveyed the key political features of Cuba's imagined landscape of Africa prior to Operation Carlota: specifically these were two issues of *Pensamiento Crítico*, the monthly journal of social theory, both published in the late 1960s. These journals had provided me with a sort of spatial representation of the political-public idea of *africanía* at the time. Working from the 'map' they provided, I was able to depict (and construct interrelationships between) features of that imagined space, including people, themes and regions. The first of the journals, published in the spring of 1967, was in fact only the second volume of *Pensamiento Crítico*. Its theme was African liberation, and the two leading articles were written by Amílcar Cabral,⁶³ Secretario General del PAIGC (el Partido Africano de la Independencia de Guinea y Cabo Verde). The first presented an excerpt from his discourse on national liberation

⁶² The castle was declared a National Monument in 1978. It was subsequently chosen to house the Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo in Matanzas.

⁶³ Cabral was murdered by Portuguese Secret Police in 1973.

and social structure delivered at the Conferencia de los Pueblos de Asia, África y América Latina, held in Havana in January 1966 (Cabral, 1967a), while the second, an abbreviated version of talks he gave at a seminar convened in May 1964 at the Centro Frantz Fanon de Milán, illuminated the social structure of Portuguese Guinea (Cabral, 1967b). The remaining articles included a lengthy analysis of 'El pensamiento político de Patricio Lumumba' by Jean-Paul Sartre, taken from his book *Situations, V*; an assessment of the legacy of Frantz Fanon written by left-wing sociologist Maurice Maschino; and a section entitled 'Notas sobre África' (*Pensamiento Crítico* 1967) which included a variety of charts and lists containing information on national liberation movements, African trades unions and *el mercado africano*, partially reproduced here:

MOVIMIENTOS DE LIBERACION NACIONAL

Angola.....	Movimiento Popular de Liberación de Angola (MPLA) – Agostinho Neto/Frente Nacional de Liberación de Angola (FNLA) – Holden Roberto
Camerún.....	Unión de la Poblaciones de Camerún (UPC) – Crisis de dirección
Congo (Kinshasa).....	Consejo Supremo de la Revolución (Salido del CNL: Consejo Nacional de Liberación)
Guinea llamada portuguesa y Cabo Verde.....	Partido Africano de la Independencia de Guinea y Cabo Verde (PAIGC) - Amílcar Cabral
Mozambique.....	Frente de Liberación de Mozambique (FRELIMO) – Eduardo Mondlane
Niger.....	Partido Sawaba – Djibo Bakary
Sao Tomé y Príncipe.....	Comité de Liberación de Sao Tomé y Príncipe (CLSTP) – Thomas Medeiros
Senegal	Partido Africano de Independencia (PAI) – Majhemout Diop
Sur Oeste Africano.....	South West African People Organization (SWAPO) – Hassan Gouled/John Nauku
Unión Sudafricana.....	African National Congress (ANC) - Albert Luthuli /Pan African Congress (PAC) - Robert Sobukwe

Curiously, while the texts focused on the contemporary issues of anticolonial resistance and political and economic development in national and regional contexts, the graphics – adaptations of well-known drawings depicting slaves – invoked the presence of quite a different Africa-related subtext. The cover illustration, for example, featured a variation on the image entitled ‘A Rebel Negroe Arm'd and on his guard’ (1794), an engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi, after a watercolour by J.G. Stedman, for Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796). This choice of illustrations (and I must emphasise the word ‘choice’ here in order to draw attention to the plethora of alternative images available, for example from stock photographic archives, which could have served to symbolise the contemporary and continental African struggles) denoting the historical and New World variation of *africana*, directly engages the pan-African perspective that assimilates both time and space into a transcendental experience of racialised identification.

I encountered this theme again in the second of the journals, *Pensamiento Crítico*, No. 17, 1968 – the Black Power edition. Let us consider, for instance, the very first article, ‘Para el capitalismo es imposible sobrevivir’ (Barnes & Sheppard, 1968) which reproduced an interview with Malcolm X together with a speech he presented before the Militant Labor Forum in early January 1965 (X, 1968).⁶⁴ When asked how much influence he thought revolution in Africa had exerted upon North American Blacks, the radical Muslim leader replied, “Toda la influencia del mundo. No se puede separar la militancia en el continente africano de la militancia de los negros

⁶⁴ Malcolm X had played an instrumental role in relocating the Cuban delegation to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem in September 1960, and had held a private audience with Fidel Castro after the latter declared his admiration for the black leader.

norteamericanos” (Barnes & Sheppard, 1968: 8). In the second article, explaining his decision to separate himself from the Black Muslims (Nation of Islam), Malcolm X drew attention to the fact that Islam had not recognised the group as a religious organisation, and denounced the organisation’s apolitical stance and ambivalence towards civil rights. He informed his interviewers that, in the interim, he had established two groups: The Muslim Mosque, Inc., a religious group and then,

conscientes de que este problema transcendía a la religión, formamos otra organización no religiosa, llamada la Organización de la Unidad Afroamericana. La idea de esta organización surgió al examinar el éxito de nuestros hermanos de África en su lucha por la libertad. [...] En el continente africano los imperialistas, los poderes coloniales, habían siempre dividido y conquistado. La práctica del ‘divide y vencerás’ había evitado la alianza de los pueblos de África y Asia. Debido a eso, surgió la Organización de la Unidad Africana [...]. Y puesto que nosotros, en Norteamérica, nos enfrentábamos a las mismas tácticas de división de nuestro enemigo, decidimos llamarnos Organización de la Unidad Afroamericana, en un acto que se deriva del espíritu y el sentido de la Organización de la Unidad Africana. De hecho, nos consideramos un vástago del organismo paterno en nuestro continente materno. (X, 1968: 17, emphasis added)

All together, Malcolm X visited the African continent three times in his lifetime:⁶⁵ “Visité Egipto, Arabia, Kuwait, El Líbano, Sudán, Kenya, Tanganyka, Zanzibar (ahora Tanzania), Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Guinea y Argelia” (Barnes & Sheppard, 1968: 8). Two of the journeys were made in 1964, the same year that Che Guevara travelled to Algeria, the Congo, Guinea, Ghana and Dahomey (now Benin): “Durante ese viaje,” Malcolm X recalled, “tuve entrevistas con el Presidente Nasser de Egipto, el Presidente Nyerere de Tanzania, el Presidente Jomo Kenyatta (entonces Primer

⁶⁵ Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965 in Manhattan’s Audubon ballroom by members of the Nation of Islam.

ministro) de Kenya, el Primer ministro Milton Obote de Uganda, el Presidente Azikiwe de Nigeria, el Presidente Nkrumah de Ghana y el Presidente Sekou Touré de Guinea” (*ibid.*). In undertaking these journeys non-African leaders seemed to be questing after a kind of enlightenment. Malcolm X himself explained, “Para mi los momentos culminantes fueron las entrevistas con estas personalidades porque me ofrecieron la oportunidad de examinar su pensamiento. Me impresionaron sus análisis del problema negro y muchas de sus sugerencias contribuyeron en gran medida a la ampliación de mi propia perspectiva” (*ibid.*).

By the time I had finished reading this article, some of the interconnecting features which linked the ‘pilgrimages’ undertaken by Malcolm X and Che Guevara in 1964 with Fidel Castro’s journey to Africa in 1972, were readily discerned. These linkages were brought further to the surface in some of the other pieces, including the references to Africa, Ghana, Angola, and Mozambique made by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in the short excerpt taken from their book *Black Power* entitled ‘Poder blanco’ (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1968), or when Minister of Defence for the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton, praised the revolutionary vanguard example of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara in ‘Para ser un nacionalista revolucionario se debe necesariamente ser socialista’ (Newton, 1968). In fact, altogether, Newton gave mention to (and paid substantially more tributes to) Fidel Castro than to any other foreign leader.

The Newton article, taken together with another piece by James Forman (1968) the Black Panthers’ Minister of Foreign Relations, drew me to ponder the symbolism of black radical Angela Davis’s visit to Cuba a few months after Fidel Castro had returned

home from Africa and Eastern Europe.⁶⁶ On the surface the visit amounted to nothing more profound than a continuation of the courtship of Black America that the Cuban government had initiated in the early days of the Revolution, in other words, that it was a diplomatic display of political allegiance (based upon shared values of internationalism, proletarianism, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism and so on) between a revolutionary state and a revolutionary movement of *nuestra América*. However, I strongly suspected that the particular grouping of radical black political thinkers presented by the editors of *Pensamiento Crítico* under the rubric of Black Power hinted at an explanation for the visit that waded beyond the shallow waters of rhetoric and symbolic gesture straight to the emotional depths of the contested notion of Black Nationalism. If Black Power was the name for various associated ideologies, it was essential for me to try to discover the nature of that association in terms of the Cuban imaginary, for to do so promised to yield substantial insight into the social and political implications of Africa for Cuban internationalism in Angola: Africa, in this regard, not so much as a continent, but as a nation, in the sense of “a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history” (Renan, 1996: 18).

To this end, it seemed to me that one potentially enlightening strategy was to recover the ancient practice of amateur mapping – “a way of imagining the world when maps were used to tell stories and impose ideas, to interpret the world and not simply to describe its physical character” (Macintyre, 2008). According to this idea, the individual journeys made by Fidel and Che to Africa on the one hand, and by me to Cuba on the other, although separated in time, could be conceived as separate mappings within a

⁶⁶ Forman describes a brief airport meeting with Malcolm X who was leaving West Africa just as the Panthers began their visit.

single cartography of Cuban *africanía*: a record of exploration that navigated outwards from the sociocultural and historical departure-point of European colonialism.⁶⁷ So, I have drawn upon accounts of the earlier voyages made by Che and Fidel in order to help make more visible the faintly traced lines of meaning, symbols and images that shaped the idea of Africa in Cuba before November 1975. The reader will find passages from these accounts woven into the following record of the first leg of my expedition – the journey to Matanzas.

NARRATIVE

Day 4. Matanzas (Ciudad de los ríos) I feel compelled to walk these streets, but cannot articulate what I expect to find. If UNESCO has declared this area a World Heritage site⁶⁸ because, as the taxi driver from the station told us, it has the best preserved expressions of African traditions, or as Nilson Acosta Reyes of the Consejo Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural put it, “Su ubicación obedece al importante legado de la cultura africana presente en cada rincón de Matanzas, donde más allá de las evidencias materiales perdura la memoria histórica de su pueblo a través de su religión, música, oralidad, cocina, etc.” (date unknown), then surely the evidence must be all around, and

⁶⁷ It is an interesting question whether Che Guevara, as the early architect of Cuban policy for Africa, had contributed a post-colonial rather than a post-slavery perspective given the fact that although black African slaves had at one time outnumbered white colonists in his country of origin and had made up a significant percentage of the liberation armies, (as they had elsewhere in Latin America), by the time of his birth, the black/African presence in Argentina had become so reduced (some would even say obliterated) that the country had become known as the ‘whitest’ in South America. See U.S. scholar, Hishaam Aidi’s (2009) article on the ‘disappearance’ of Argentina’s African descendants. The absence of a sizable black population has meant that Argentina has been able to sidestep the race question as a problem of national and international identity in a way that Cuba has not. On the other hand, Cuba’s geographic location and historical legacy places the island firmly within the triangular framework of the ‘black Atlantic,’ with all that this implies for the national project. An argument could be made, therefore, that, under the influence of Guevara, revolutionary foreign policy, from the very beginning, derived from an exogenous model.

⁶⁸ This designation was applied to Matanzas in 2006, but I believe that it has subsequently been lost.

it just takes a keen eye and an open engagement with one's surroundings to uncover its presence. But, except for the unabated stench of urine (from pig, horse, dog, and human), I detect nothing for all my striving. Still, perhaps even this non-finding contains its own peculiar wisdom. I recall reading that two years ago, in May 2006, a delegation of officials representing Aruba, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic visited the Castillo de San Severino and other so-called 'Sitios de Memoria' as part of an event bringing together experts on 'La ruta del esclavo' in *el Caribe Latino*. It was the title held by one of these officers that immediately captured my attention: Dra. Marta Arjona, "presidenta de la Comisión Nacional para la Salvaguardia del Patrimonio Cultural Inmaterial" (translated in the published proceedings as "president of the National Commission for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage" (*UNESCO Portal of Culture*, date unknown, emphasis added). If what I was seeking was 'intangible,' then how would I be aware when I had found it? And of even greater concern, once found, how was I to record, capture or transport *lo inmaterial* back home with me?

CHE

Havana, Cuba. In a story of this kind, it is difficult to locate the first act. For narrative convenience, I shall take this to be a trip I made in Africa which gave me the opportunity to rub shoulders with many leaders of the various Liberation Movements. Particularly instructive was my visit to Dar es Salaam, where a considerable number of Freedom Fighters had taken up residence. Most of them lived comfortably in hotels and had made a veritable profession out of

their situation, sometimes lucrative and nearly always agreeable. This was the setting for the interviews, in which they generally asked for military training in Cuba and financial assistance. It was nearly everyone's leitmotif.

I also got to know the Congolese fighters. [...] I made contact with Kabila and his staff; he made an excellent impression on me. He said he had come from the interior of the country. It appears he had come only from Kigoma, a small Tanzanian town on Lake Tanganyika and one of the main scenes in this story, which served as a point of embarkation for the Congo and also as a pleasant place for the revolutionaries to take shelter when they tired of life's trials in the mountains across the strip of water. (2001: 5)

We talked at length with Kabila about what our government considered a strategic flaw on the part of some African friends: namely, that, in the face of open aggression by the imperialist powers, they thought the right slogan must be: "The Congo problem is an African problem", and acted accordingly. Our view was that the Congo problem was a world problem, and Kabila agreed. On behalf of the government, I offered him some 30 instructors and whatever weapons we might have, and he was delighted to accept. He recommended that both should be delivered urgently, as did Soumaliot⁶⁹ in another conversation – the latter pointing out that it would be a good idea if the instructors were blacks. (*ibid.*: 6)

⁶⁹ Gaston Soumaliot was President of Supreme Council of the Revolution, and a political rival of Kabila.

FIDEL

Conakry, Guinea. Son las 10:55 de la mañana del miércoles 3 de mayo, hora de Conakry, cuando el majestuoso IL-62 se posa suavemente en la pista del aeropuerto internacional de Gbessia, en la capital de la República de Guinea. Sekou Touré, en su indumentaria Africana, se adelanta a recibir[me]. Seguidamente, en tanto Sekou Touré formula las presentaciones de rigor, [voy] saludando personalmente a los miembros del Buró Político, dirigentes del gobierno y el Partido, embajadores y diplomáticos. Se encuentran también representantes de los distintos movimientos de liberación del continente, entre ellos Amílcar Cabral, secretario general del PAIGC [...]. Después, agotado el programa de la recepción oficial de ceremonia y protocolo, se inicia la marcha hacia el estadio '28 de Septiembre,' para el primer contacto multitudinario con el pueblo hermano. [...] Conakry, bellamente engalanada, exhibe un aire de fiesta. Desde la noche anterior, trabajadores y milicianos han trabajado afanosamente vistiendo de colores calles, árboles y edificios. (Báez and Ferrera, 1972: 49)

Jamás habíamos presenciado un espectáculo tan hermoso y tan emocionante como el que tuvimos el privilegio de ver en compañía del camarada Sekou Touré al llegar a este estadio. ¡Qué fuerza! ¡Qué disciplina! ¡Qué belleza! (Báez and Ferrera, 1972: 50)

No se puede borrar fácilmente lo que acabamos de ver [hoy]. Esa uniformidad, esa disciplina, esa dignidad constituyen una cosa genuina. ¡Qué música, qué colorido! ¡Qué extraordinaria sensibilidad la de este pueblo!

¡Entendían hasta el español! Aquí se está convirtiendo en realidad todo lo que nosotros planteamos en el Congreso Cultural: la exaltación de la cultura autóctona, de los valores de la nación. (*ibid.*)

¡Qué bonito espectáculo, qué hermosas se veían las mujeres! Bailan por aquí, bailan por allá con un arte, un colorido, con naturalidad tremenda.

Tenemos que visitar el país. Yo digo que todo aquí es tan hermoso, tan homogéneo, tan unido, que esta comunidad ya tiene un alma, un alma sólida. Sekou Touré es, sin duda, el alma de este pueblo, el apóstol de todo esto. ¡Y esa frase que tienen de que prefieren la pobreza con dignidad a la opulencia en la esclavitud! ¡Y van a tener no sólo la dignidad sino el bienestar que no alcanzará ningún país neocolonialista! (*ibid.*)

Day 5. Reparto Pueblo Nuevo, Matanzas. Arrived home yesterday afternoon to find María, the *casa* owner, sitting in the shade of the patio, apparently waiting for me. After exchanging a few pleasantries, she informed me that a couple she knows, who practise *santería*, would be happy for me to visit their home shrine and talk with them about their faith. I asked how old they were, to which she replied, "In their early thirties." This naturally meant they were too young to have memories of the 1970s. Not wishing to offend with an outright refusal, I promised to consider the invitation, and then dragged myself upstairs towards the more mundane benedictions promised by the ceiling fan and the cold water tap. Later in the evening, I couldn't shake two disquieting feelings: first embarrassment at having foolishly wasted time traipsing up and down the sun-baked streets seeking after *lo inmaterial*, followed by an unshakeable suspicion

regarding my landlady's helpfulness. A second can of *Buccanero* soon diluted the shame, but only heightened my sense that María was at the hub of a slightly circumspect service-network that could provide for my every need – drivers, booksellers, historians, guides, salsa partners, and even *santeros*... I had been warned before leaving England about the '*babalawos* for hire' I might encounter, and began to despair that, aside from turning ethnographer and getting myself initiated, I would never uncover any evidence of the relationship between Angola and Afro-Cuban culture.

This morning I plan to visit the Castillo de San Severino and the Museo de la Ruta del Esclavo, perhaps finally to encounter whatever it is I am seeking.

CHE

Dar es Salaam. I had not informed any Congolese of my decision to fight in their country, nor did I now of my presence there. I had not mentioned it in my first conversation with Kabila, because I had not yet made up my mind; and once the plan had been approved, it would have been dangerous to reveal it until my journey through a lot of hostile territory had been completed. I therefore decided to present my arrival as a *fait accompli* and to go on from there according to how they reacted. I was not unaware that a negative response would put me in a tricky position (since I could no longer turn back) but I also reckoned that it would be difficult for them to refuse me. I was operating a kind of blackmail with my physical presence. An unexpected problem arose, however. Kabila was in Cairo with all the members of the Revolutionary

Government, discussing aspects of combat unity and the new constitution of the revolutionary organization. (2001: 10)

Day 6. Reparto Pueblo Nuevo, Matanzas. I was both startled and gratified to find that our guide for the tour of the castle and the museum was a black Cuban. Not only that, but he had the darkest skin of any museum guide I had encountered since arriving on this colour-conscious island almost a week before. His name was Alberto, and he was dressed in a luminous white Bermuda short-suit that contrasted with his ebony skin to theatrical effect. In his fluent Americanism-flecked English he related, by way of introduction, a few small details concerning his life as a priest of Ogún and as a very active member of the Abakuá society – the male-only secret religious organisation.

Back in the early seventies, the Congreso Nacional de Educación y Cultura had brought to public attention a number of studies naming the Abakuá as one of the so-called African cults contributing to the alarming persistence of decadent behaviour among marginalised populations (Ayorinde, 2004: 97). Of course this entanglement of African religious traditions with black criminality and social deviance can be traced back to Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz's original studies into Afro-Cuban cultures, beginning with *Las negros brujos* (1906), his biological determinist-inspired study of the 'black criminal psyche' among Havana's most indigent lawbreakers. Ortiz claimed to have 'discovered' links between some of the religious beliefs and practices of the Abakuá brotherhood and delinquent behaviour. This and later 'discoveries' in a similar vein contributed to the formation of an imaginary social map according to which Cubans of each ensuing historical era have navigated the fluid topography of African inheritance,

that is to say, those neighbourhoods, cities and regions associated with the highest concentration of African religious practitioners inherited multiple meanings associated with backwardness, primitivism and immorality.

As he energetically escorted us across and around the sun-baked ruins of imperial Spain, pausing at one moment to call forth the ghosts of long-dead garrison soldiers, and at another to conjure the misery of Africans chained in the dark and desperate dungeons, one image repetitively flickered in my mind. For some reason I envisaged a galvanised steel tub full of soapy water and white work clothes, set inside the inner courtyard of one of the sad dishevelled structures I had passed on my fruitless city walk the day before, with Alberto bent over, washing and scrubbing with that same keen intensity and vigour, laundering away the odour of marginalisation.

CHE

Kigoma, Tanzania. On the night of 22 April we reached Kigoma after a tiring journey, but the launches were not ready and we had to wait there all the next day for a crossing. [...] The nefarious influence of Kigoma – its brothels, its alcohol, and especially its assurance of refuge – would never be sufficiently understood by the Revolutionary command. Upon arrival, after a brief nap on the floor of the hut among backpacks and assorted tackle, we began to strike up acquaintance with Congolese reality. We immediately noticed a clear distinction: alongside people with very little training (mostly peasants), there were others with greater culture, different clothes and a better knowledge of

French. The distance between the two groups could hardly have been greater.

(2001: 11-12, 13)

Day 6. Reparto Pueblo Nuevo, Matanzas. After touring the imposing structure of the old fort, and appreciating its splendid strategic and scenic position on Matanzas Bay, we were led in the direction of a gloomy room, a sort of unanticipated antechamber, located just before the entrance to the slavery museum. Inside we found an exhibition dedicated to the Asociación de Combatientes de la Revolución Cubana (ACRC). Alberto's arm made a casual sweep towards the display cases and wall charts, but he remained poised by the doorway, clearly expecting us to make nothing more than a rapid and perfunctory stop before arriving at the main spectacle. What the bemused guide could not have anticipated was the quickened interest the room had awakened within our group; therefore a few minutes had passed before he finally relinquished his threshold position and jauntily entered to explain that the identification tags, medals and other military memorabilia had belonged to soldiers from Matanzas province who had died for the revolutionary cause. By the dim light I tried to make out the names of some of the dead, and noted the far greater number of *internacionalistas* compared with the other categories i.e. ejército rebelde, lucha clandestina, lucha contra bandidos, Girón, Activo FAR, Jubilado FAR, Activo MININT, Jubilado MININT, and Padres de Mártires.

Across the room, another display board traced the routes travelled by Cuban internationalists to missions around the world. Here is a detail showing the locations of some of the African engagements:

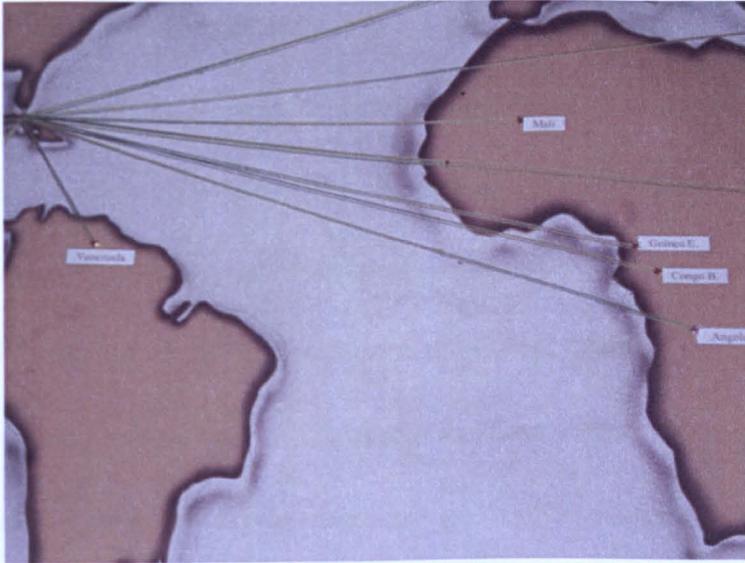


FIGURE 9.

FIDEL

Conakry, Guinea. No nos asombran la miseria y la pobreza de una aldea Africana. No veníamos aquí a ver aldeas ricas. Pero nos interesa ver las aldeas guineanas. La razón de la Revolución es precisamente esa injusticia y esa pobreza dejadas por la voracidad colonialista. (*Verde Olivo*, 1972: 7)

Day 6. Reparto Pueblo Nuevo, Matanzas. A brief chronology of slave rebellions in the Matanzas territory in the nineteenth century marked the entrance to the slavery museum. I quickly found the listing for the uprising at Triumvirato lead by Carlota and her two male accomplices in 1843. After the incendiary summer of 1825, when rebellions erupted during the months of May, June and August, almost a decade of muted rage ensued, until a pattern of more frequent (almost yearly) insurrections

commenced in July of 1832. If the 1825 rebellions could likely be attributed to the deteriorating working conditions for slaves as a result of the sugar boom between 1790 and 1820, to my knowledge no equally significant economic factor existed from the 1830s onwards. However, it is conceivable that passage of the Real Cédula of April 1804 would have altered the slaves' lifestyles so considerably that a greatly intensified thirst for freedom would result. The ordinance mandated, "Que en los ingenios y haciendas donde sólo hubiese negros, se pusieran también negras. Limitándose el permiso para introducir negros en esa finca a ese solo sexo hasta que estuviesen casados todos los negros que lo desearan" (Castañeda Fuertes, date unknown). As a result of this measure, at least half of slaves imported after 1830 were women. Reflecting on how this change might have contributed to an increase in insurreccional activity, two main factors come to mind: the first is connected to the new possibility for previously solitary males to start families, and the second takes into account the sociocultural position of women in slave societies. In the first case, we can easily imagine that male slaves would have been motivated to protect their partners and children from present and future acts of violence, while, at the same time, the hope and promise that all children embody would have acted as powerful incitements to create a non-slaving community. As far as the female slaves were concerned, the fact of their gender meant the additional burden of domestic tasks in addition to their production labour:

En el caso cubano varios historiadores coinciden en señalar que a principios del siglo XIX en ninguna colonia las condiciones fueron más brutales que en Cuba durante el período de fabricar azúcar porque los esclavos llegaron a trabajar hasta 20 horas diarias y, en la cosecha del tabaco de 15 a 16. Incluso se plantea que cuando finalizaba este

período se continuaba trabajando 14 o 15 horas diarias para preparar el terreno y sembrarlo. (*ibid.*)

This leads to the conclusion that the higher the number of females on a given plantation, the greater the concentration of overworked, sleep-deprived and, consequently, rebellion-minded slaves.

CHE

Congo. And the days passed. The lake was crossed by messengers with a fabulous capacity to distort any news, or by holidaymakers going off to Kigoma on some leave or other. (2001: 18)

Day 6. Matanzas. The rest of the museum mainly comprised a vast collection of *tambores*: big drums, small drums, drums in sets, individual drums, tall drums engraved with esoteric symbols, a squat humble drum preserved behind glass on a shelf below the faded photograph of its deceased owner – a former slave woman. Though bright, sunlit and airy, the atmosphere seemed oppressive.

What do the ancestral gods who accompanied the slaves across the terrifying Middle Passage (and whose intercession had to be summoned, cajoled and entreated through song, music and dance) have to do with this static and silent display?

CHE

Congo. Highly valuable shipments of weapons and equipment always turned out to be incomplete; supplies from Kigoma inevitably featured guns and machine-guns

without ammunition or essential components; rifles might arrive with the wrong ammunition, or mines without detonators... (2001: 18-19)

As the days went by, the picture of organizational chaos became more evident. (*ibid.*: 20)

Each morning we were given the same old tune: Kabila has not arrived today, but certainly tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow... (*ibid.*: 29)

Day 6. Matanzas. Lining the walls of the main exhibition room stood mannequins representing the most popular *orishas* in the Yoruba pantheon, beginning with the trickster element, *Eleggua*, represented as a little boy dressed in his associated colours of red and black. Alberto delivered an entertaining exposition highlighting a few of the key myths linked to each god, in particular the well-known rivalry between *Changó* and *Ogún* for the affections of *Ochún*, here (as usual) depicted as a *mulata*. I was familiar with the tales, and so asked, somewhat disingenuously, the identity of the dark-skinned goddess *Yemayá*'s lover. Alberto, equally disingenuously, replied that the creation goddess had none because she was the mother to them all. In the version I had learned, *Yemayá* had been raped by her son, *Orungán*.

At the exit we thanked Alberto warmly for his services. The other workers eagerly gathered around, eyes darting to register any quick hand movement towards purse, wallet or pocket. As we shook hands I pressed a minutely-folded twenty dollar (CUC) bill into Alberto's palm, which he expertly retrieved without drawing attention from his co-workers. I was certain that, after our departure, his complaints about the

stinginess of the British tourists would have been the most raucous and colourful of the group's.

CHE

Congo. Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert explained with a friendly, festive air that aeroplanes had no importance for them, because they had the *dawa* medicine that makes you invulnerable to gunfire. "They've hit me a number of times, but the bullets fell limply to the ground." He said this with a smile on his face, and I felt obliged to salute the joke as a sign of the little importance they attached to enemy weapons. Gradually I realized that it was more serious, that the magical protector was supposed to be one of the great weapons with which they would triumph over the Congolese Army.

This *dawa*, which did quite a lot of damage to military preparations, operates according to the following principle. A liquid in which herb juices and other magical substances have been dissolved is thrown over the fighter, and certain occult signs [...] are administered to him. This protects him against all kinds of weapons (although the enemy too relies upon magic), but he must not lay hands on anything that does not belong to him, or touch a woman, or feel fear, on pain of losing the protection. The answer to any transgression is very simple: a man dead = a man who took fright, stole or slept with a woman; a man wounded = a man who was afraid. Since fear accompanies wartime operations, fighters found it quite natural to attribute wounds to faintheartedness –that is, to lack of belief. And the dead do not speak; all three faults can be ascribed to them. (2001: 14)

I was constantly afraid that this superstition would rebound against us, that we would be blamed for any military disaster involving many deaths. I tried several times to have a talk about the *dawa* with someone in a position of responsibility, so that an effort could be started to win people away from it – but it was impossible. The *dawa* is treated as an article of faith. The most politically advanced say that it is a natural, material force, and that they, as dialectical materialists, recognize its power and the secrets held by the medicine men of the jungle. (*ibid.*: 15)

Day 9. Matanzas. For two whole days I've been sick, lying in a sweat, tangled in the sticky sheets, with the squeals and grunts from the next door neighbour's pig pen providing the repetitive accompaniment to my fevered visions. With no food and too little drink my body feels alien to me. After days of strained thinking I have finally come up with the *mot juste* to describe the *casa* and much of this city – the so-called Athens of Cuba: *insalubrious*.

We have arranged for a driver to take us to Triumvirato early tomorrow morning, well before the sun gathers its full-strength. From there we travel directly to the bus station for the journey back to Havana.

CHE

Congo. On 7 June I set out to return to Upper Base, having had a talk with Mitoudidi about the truth behind Kabila's *mañanas*. He tacitly gave me to understand that he was not expecting Kabila to return in the near future, especially as

Chou En-lai was visiting Dar es Salaam just then and it made sense for Kabila to go there to try to discuss certain requests with the Chinese leader. (2001: 31)

Day 10. Triumvirato, Matanzas. In the middle of nowhere I finally found Carlota. That is to say, I saw and touched the impressive and commanding statue commemorating the slave uprising she had led, on the dusty, neglected grounds of the former Triumvirato sugar mill and hacienda. On seeing our car drive up, the startled staff, clearly unaccustomed to visitors, appeared frozen between the urge to welcome us or chase us away. In the end they chose to observe us guardedly from a distance, just in case there were plans afoot to dismantle and haul away the gigantic monument.



FIGURE 10. Statue of Carlota located at the ruins of the Triumvirato sugar mill in Matanzas province.

FIDEL

Kindia, Guinea. En las primeras horas del sábado 6 [parto] hacia las afueras de Conakry, en unión del presidente Sekou Touré y otros dirigentes del Partido y gobierno guineanos. El objetivo es inaugurar el centro nacional de formación de cuadros de las milicias populares, a unos 36 kilómetros del centro de la capital [...] La escuela, concebida para formar a los jóvenes en el estudio, el trabajo y la defensa del país, recibió el nombre de 'Kwame Nkrumah' en homenaje al ex presidente de Ghana fallecido recientemente.

Este centro fue construido por cubanos, que contaron los domingos con la colaboración del trabajo voluntario de las milicias y los dirigentes del gobierno de Guinea, incluyendo ministros y miembros del Buró Político del Partido. La obra que consta de 40 edificaciones, está enclavada en un área de 12.5 hectáreas y fue construida en el tiempo récord de 59 días. Todos los materiales para la fabricación también fueron traídos de Cuba. Los cubanos que trabajaron en esta obra – 31 en total – demostraron un verdadero espíritu internacionalista. (Báez & Ferrera, 1972: 56)

CHE

Congo. After a while, when we had begun living communally with this original army,⁷⁰ we learnt some exclamations typical of the way they saw the world. If someone was given something to carry, he said: "*Mimi hapana motocari*" – that is, "I'm not a truck." In some cases, when he was with Cubans, this would become:

⁷⁰ This refers to the People's Liberation Army.

"Mimi hapana cuban" – "I'm not a Cuban." The food, as well as the weapons and ammunition for the front, had to be carried by the peasants. Clearly, an army of this kind can have a justification only if, like its enemy counterpart, it actually fights now and again. [...] this requirement was not met either. As it did not change the existing order of things, the Congolese revolution was doomed to defeat by its own internal weaknesses. (2001: 26-27)

Day 10. Triumvirato, Matanzas. The first thing that struck me was how far removed the mill was from any wood or stream or other natural feature to which an exhausted slave could quietly slip for a few hours of tranquil contemplation. I thought of the opening scene from Sergio Giral's *El otro Francisco*, when Francisco sits waiting for his beloved next to the soothing waters of the bubbling stream, and compared those lush surroundings with the stark landscape of Triumvirato. As Esteban Montejo, *el cimarrón* of Miguel Barnet's controversial (auto)biography, informed: "La naturaleza es todo" (1966: 15). As I stood within those empty ruins the stark truth of collective memory reverberated in the hot, still air:

Fuera del barracón no había árboles, ni dentro tampoco. Eran planos de tierra vacíos y solitarios. El negro no se podía acostumbrarse a eso (sic). Al negro le gusta el árbol, el monte. [...] África estaba llena de árboles, de ceibas, de cedars, de jagüeyes. (*ibid.*: 22)

I am reminded of the final scene of *El otro Francisco*, which offers a glimpse of this central quality of the slaves' psychological and spiritual connection with nature, without implying an association with primitivism. The stark contrast between the thick, vibrant vegetation of the Escambray mountains where the scene was filmed and the bare

earth of the *finca*, arena of the countless acts of cruelty and violence we have witnessed, offers a redemptive vision of landscape notably lacking from other treatments of the subject, such as Gutiérrez Alea's *The Last Supper*.

FIDEL

Conakry, Guinea. Al Instituto Politécnico 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' [respondí] a una de las primeras preguntas sobre las similitudes entre los procesos revolucionarias de Guinea y Cuba: "Cada revolución tiene que responder a sus características específicas." (*Verde Olivo*, 1972: 6)

[Los guineanos] tienen grandes riquezas. Hay que luchar contra la naturaleza, y eso es duro en países tropicales como los nuestros, pero es el único camino que conduce hacia el desarrollo. (*ibid.*: 7)

Day 10. Triumvirato, Matanzas Province. I've reached the end of this particular trail. It finishes at a wall, stained with mildew and dried raindrops, evoking the tearstained faces of the numberless survivors of Africa's wars of liberation, of vengeance, and of recrimination. Weeping letters spell out a message of love, delivered by Nelson Mandela, on the 16th or perhaps the 26th day (the first digit is missing) of July 1991 (see fig. 11). The unblinking sun stares down from a blazing sky, and there is nowhere to hide. No shade tree offers us its sheltering branches. So, we scramble back into the gleaming 1953 Packard Clipper Deluxe, perch our bodies gingerly upon the iron-hot leather seats, and start the careful drive back across the crushed-pebble path towards the single road leading out.

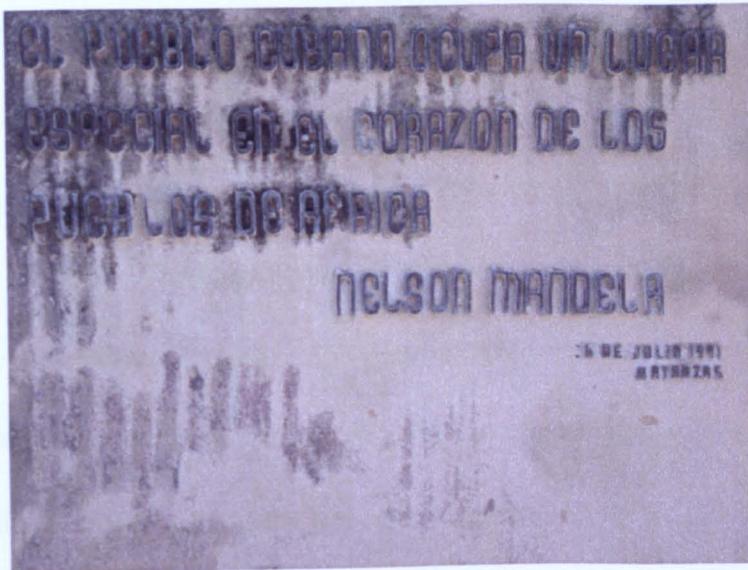


FIGURE 11. “el pueblo cubano ocupa un lugar especial en el corazón de los pueblos de África.”

FIDEL

Conakry, Guinea. Es lunes 8, Día final de la visita a Guinea, que se ha prolongado durante cinco días colmados de júbilo. Poco antes de partir, inaugur[ó] una autopista que lleva [mi] nombre. Durante la ceremonia [soy] acompañado por [...] Sekou Touré y por el primer ministro guineano Lansana Beauvogui. (Báez & Ferrera, 1972: 57)

Para llegar hasta el avión desde la sede de la casa presidencial [recorremos] 15 kilómetros, acordonados de pueblo a lo largo de la ruta. La despedida también es multitudinaria. Los “tam-tam”, maracas, guitarras e instrumentos folklóricos de distintas regiones del país crean un singular fondo musical a los coros y grupos de danzas que acompañan [nuestra delegación] hasta la escalerilla del avión que [nos] conduciría a Argel. [Abrazo] dos veces, con fuerza, al presidente Sekou Touré. La despedida se produce, cargada de emoción.

(*ibid.*)

Amilcar Cabral [...] y representantes de pueblos africanos que luchan contra el colonialismo y el imperialismo también acudieron al aeropuerto “Gbessia” [...] Sekou Touré, el primer ministro Beauvogui y otros altos representantes de la Revolución guineana, acompañados por el cuerpo diplomático y personalidades residentes en Guinea, permanecieron hasta las 11 y 32 minutos de la mañana (hora local) en la pista, hasta que el majestuoso Il-62, matrícula 86685, despegó con rumbo a la capital argelina.

Este es un pueblo digno. Esa dignidad se ve en todos sus actos. (*ibid.*)

CONCLUSION

I imagine that, putting to one side the inhumane practicalities of the slave trade, daily life on the coastlines and beaches of western and central Africa must have been taken up with one single all-absorbing occupation: waiting. Waiting for ships to arrive, for the holds to be filled, for just the right breeze by which to set sail across the Atlantic, and so on. In fact, waiting, like a morning mist in autumn that no amount of pale sun can disperse, must surely enshroud most of the activities in which residents of a borderland are engaged. This idea forms the crucial link between Che's early experiences in the Congo and my own first visit to Cuba in search of Africa. In both cases the series of delays which threatened to hamper the missions that had lured us to our respective areas of marginality could not have been anticipated. Che, armed and prepared for battle against the colonialists, awaited Kabila on the borders of the combat zone, only to be told, day after day, “Mañana.” In the claustrophobic environs of Matanzas I, too,

remained stuck in a limbo of confusion surrounding the uncertainties of my quest for *lo inmaterial*.

In his *History, Fable and Myth*, Guyanese author and cultural critic Wilson Harris regarded the limbo dance of Caribbean cultures as “the gateway of the gods” (1995: 24). “Limbo,” he wrote, “was [...] the renaissance of a new corpus of sensibility that could translate and accommodate African and other legacies within a new architecture of cultures” (*ibid.*: 20). Limbo, in this sense, can be considered as one of those unifying processes we find in societies of the Atlantic slave trade: societies which, it seems to me, always end up defined by the liminal spaces that they occupy on geographical, cultural and psychological borders. To be “in limbo,” according to this view, refers not to a static condition but rather to an oscillation – a movement, as cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) might say, ‘betwixt and between.’

Fidel’s experiences in Guinea, on the other hand, provide the counterpoint to the narratives of time spent languishing in neglected territories. The Cuban premier’s highly favorable response to the meticulous organisation of his official tour, and his spirited reactions to the vigorous welcome that he received from the Guinean people, stand out in marked contrast to the weariness and wariness discernable in the other two accounts. This difference raises the question whether to some extent it has remained the case that the farther away from the coastline one travels the more ‘civilised’ African culture becomes? Coastline proposed here as a metaphor for an African ‘borderland’ similar to Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of ‘Borderlands/*La Frontera*.’ Her theory of the marginal cultures found within the strip of land between the borders of Mexico and the United States throws up connotations with the ‘forgotten’ spaces which have been

rediscovered in the course of our cartography of imagined Africas: "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition" (1987: 3). The borderland's inhabitants, Anzaldúa writes, are the "prohibited and forbidden:" "*Los atravesados* live here: the squint eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal" (*ibid.*).

Border communities in the Americas and elsewhere are often places of neglect – unstable and transitory: repositories, simultaneously, of desires and the undesirable. The places where Che and I found ourselves certainly appear to match this description, but Fidel's Guinea is something else. While it is true that the populations of Guinea and the Congo had never been enslaved, the countries had nonetheless been colonised. What shaped the difference between Fidel's experience and Che's, however, was that by the time of Fidel's visit Guinea had already become independent, whereas Che was engaged in the Congo's war of liberation, that is to say, the transition from colony to self-governing nation had not yet been completed. The Congo was 'betwixt and between.'

Anzaldúa has put forward the idea of *mestiza* consciousness as a countermeasure against the harmful 'othering' processes endemic to the border region, thereby advocating an even deeper engagement with the liminal persona. With this in mind, I wonder whether, in the end, Che's mission in the Congo was doomed by his inability to engage with the complex world of myth and legend represented by *dawa*. As for myself, with the second leg of my journey through the liminal space of Cuban *africanía* underway, it has become increasingly apparent that this unstable territory can only be

traversed safely through activation of what Harris calls a “limbo perspective,” because limbo (the contorted dance of Africans confined to tight spaces aboard the slave ships of the Middle Passage) “reflects a certain kind of gateway to or threshold of a new world and the dislocation of a chain of miles” (1995: 19). To this cultural geographic idea of dislocation we must add the distortion or rearrangement of the psyche necessary to undergo the constricting liminality represented by the limbo stick. In this way, the limbo dance suggests that the disorientation of liminality is best overcome by the process of ‘re-member-ing.’

PART TWO

Transition

1976-1978

This section takes up a theme I have discussed briefly before, namely Turner's theory of liminality, and explores its potential for understanding changes in the mythology related to the central experience of slavery that connected the goals of Cuban internationalism with the project of Black Nationalism during the early stages of the Angolan intervention. This approach views the Angolan intervention as a transformative space sharing the attributes of liminality experienced by initiates in ritual ceremonies.

In the first chapter I begin with an overview of the interconnected themes of improvisation and extraordinariness in relation to the lived experience of war. I then introduce the ethnographic idea of rites of passage, and explain how the Angolan experience may be perceived according to this frame of reference. Descriptions of the military campaign and conditions in Angola during the early days of the civil war are used to highlight the liminal quality of events. The second part of the chapter moves from the ethnographic to the historical dimension of liminality. It addresses the influence of Cuba's slaving past on the concept of internationalism, and investigates a speech which Fidel Castro delivered early on in the Intervention for the symbols and myths which both justified and produced military action. The chapter also makes interpretive readings of two important films concerning slavery in Cuba through the lens of rites of passage – *Rancheador* and *La última cena* – in order to demonstrate the cultural dimension of liminality.

Chapter two moves from the national level to the international, as it considers the national myth of the slave ancestor in the context of myths related to black liberation in the West African Diaspora. It describes differences and similarities between the black nationalist concept of *ujamaa* (unity) and the ideological codes of Cuban

internationalism. Using the 'poetics of relation' as the principal thematic, the chapter attempts to account for the evocation of 'filiation' in discursive productions employing metaphors of solidarity.

The third chapter continues the geographical project to map the imagined territory of Cuban *africanía* which was begun in section one. In this instalment I interweave notes from the diary of my stay in Havana with excerpts from Cuban poet Emilio Comas Paret's memoir of his internationalist mission in Angola in 1976. This strategy in no way seeks to equate the rough inconveniences of social research with the mortal dangers of military combat. Rather it is an attempt to open up a space for contemplating themes from the two previous chapters, and as such usefully rearticulates liminality as a realm of disorientation, high emotion, and self-transformation.

RITUALS OF WAR

And if I fall,
what is life?
I already
gave it up for lost
when,
fearlessly,
I tore off the yoke
of the slave. (Castro, 2001: 115)

In many communities in equatorial Africa the cult of the ancestors has sought to bind together living and deceased members of a lineage through a series of sacred rites (Bongmba, 2007). Veneration of forebears allows for direct access to the ancestral realm where beneficent spirits work to protect and guide descendants. By invoking the ancestors, family members cross the Great Divide on a journey to the land of the dead. This experience holds great power as it is characterised as a connection with that which is not accessible to the senses – lo intangible. For their efforts those who cross over receive directives for action in the present time from revered men and women of the past in order to influence the future course of events. It is this passage between realms that carries the greatest potentiality as it reflects the metaphorical state of being simultaneously at the inception and the conclusion of life itself. Ceremonies of ancestor worship, therefore, allow for a symbolic 'rebirth' as individuals, now charged with wise messages sent by the deceased, return with augmented levels of personal power. Return stands out as the essential segment of a successful ritual, since it is only through the journey back that this power may be unleashed.

INTRODUCTION

It is possible to detect the hallmark of the nation's improvisational spirit in the earliest stages of Cuba's military intervention in Angola. Apostle of *cubanidad*, José Martí, at one time expressed a belief that the best ideas did not arise from reflection, but issued forth in an unpremeditated fashion (Butler Gray, 1962: 35). Back in 1956 a similar quality of impulsiveness had characterised the seemingly audacious decision to transport eighty-two members of the M-26-7 from Tuxpan on the Mexican coast to the beaches of Oriente province in a second-hand yacht originally designed to accommodate only twelve passengers. That the first stage of the nation's journey towards revolution should take place in a disconcertingly overloaded vessel that, later on, was found to be riddled with leaks appeared to barely concern the zealous band of guerrillas. Furthermore, despite a series of grave misadventures en route, the exhausted fighters managed to arrive at their destination, an almost miraculous achievement which only served to reinforce in the national imagination the Martíán doctrine of 'seizing the moment.'

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Twenty years later, Gabriel García Márquez travelled to Angola to gather first-hand information for a report on the Cuban intervention, and it is not difficult to discern echoes from the story of the *Granma* landing in his account of the early days of 'Carlota.'⁷¹

For nine months, the mobilization of human and material resources was a veritable epic of temerity. Almost incredibly, the decrepit Britanias, patched up with brakes from Soviet Illyushin 18s, maintained constant traffic. Although their normal take-off weight is 185,000 pounds, many times they took off weighing 194,000 pounds, violating all the rules. (García Márquez, 2001: 425-426)

⁷¹ The piece, entitled 'Operation Carlota,' first appeared in *Tricontinental*, No. 35, 1977 and was later reprinted internationally in a large number of publications.

Cuban soldiers transported to Africa in the country's only two passenger ships faced uncomfortable, overcrowded and risky conditions similar to those who were airlifted, although, in this case, circumstances were worsened by the length of time it took to sail across the Atlantic. According to García Márquez's report, every square foot of available space was commandeered for sleeping accommodation on board ships weighing four thousand tons, dangerously in excess of the recommended capacities. The 'inheritance' of improvisation is repeated in the following excerpt:

latrines were set up in the cabaret, the bars, and the corridors. Normal capacity, 226 passengers, was tripled in some trips. The cargo ships, with a capacity for 80 crewmembers, began to sail with as many as 1,000 passengers in addition to armoured cars, armaments, and explosives. [...] The weary engines of these old ships began to complain after six months of this arduous situation. (García Márquez, 2001: 427)

Improvisation cannot exist without two basic elements: the first of these is faith, whether this resides in a strong self-belief or appeals to supernatural forces, and the second is manifested as an acute sensitivity to timing, connected to the assumption that there is a 'right' moment for every action, irrespective of objective conditions, and only detectable through an inner sense or intuition. Above all, improvisation is connected to the idea that action possesses its own magic, but that this magic is fleeting and temporary. Improvisational actions, therefore, do not represent a strategy for the permanent resolution of a problem, but more likely serve as conduits between a position of crisis or stalemate and a final, or at least long-term, solution. We might say that improvisation responds to the instability of circumstances that have drifted outside of the borders of the routine or the predictable. Thus, the often chaotic impression left by improvisational acts arises as a consequence of this property of extraordinariness.

Wars, even those waged overseas that, as a result, do not directly imperil a domestic population, significantly impact on the daily lives of those at home. This was especially the case in Cuba, firstly due to the large numbers involved in the 'internationalist' mission (in the end around fifty-five thousand soldiers, medical personnel, educators, engineers and others served in Angola) in relation to the general population, but also, and most importantly, because the Cuban mission was without precedent.⁷² Never before (nor indeed since) has a small Caribbean island stepped outside the bounds of its peripheral position in the geopolitical world order to project its power and exert its influence in the international arena. So it was that for all Cuban citizens the extraordinariness of the Angolan intervention was simply inescapable.

One of the most notable changes that occurred in the country was an increased awareness in the area of world geography. Before the Revolution, Cubans, like most peoples of the Third World, had not often engaged in tourism outside the boundaries of their own country. Trips undertaken by Cuban elites to the United States or Mexico or even Spain were typically carried out within the context of transnational links related to occupation, education and finances.⁷³ For the rest of the population, mostly leashed by poverty to the close confines of the archipelago, the furthest away they would have been

⁷² Using figures from military expert Hal Klepak (2006) raises this estimate considerably. He claims that more than two hundred thousand Cubans have participated in at least one internationalist mission in Africa, of which the vast majority were in Angola.

⁷³ There are many books detailing the nature of ties between Cubans and North America. Pérez Jr. (1999) provides one of the most comprehensive historical overviews of the cultural connection with the United States. Two others worth mentioning are by García (1996) and by Anton & Hernandez (2003). A more recent diasporic perspective is provided by O'Reilly Herrera (2007).

likely to journey was to nearby Caribbean communities – in Jamaica, Haiti or the Cayman Islands – often beckoned by the ties of blood.⁷⁴ With the restrictions on personal travel instituted by post-1959 political conditions, this situation had continued unchanged into the 1970s. Anecdotal evidence points to a general ignorance concerning African geography prior to November 1975, with many Cubans hard pressed to locate such famous topographical features as the Zambezi River or Victoria Falls on a map of the continent.⁷⁵ We might conclude, therefore, that Operation Carlota launched Cubans on both sides of the Atlantic, internationalists and locals alike, into uncharted territory, and, as a result, how they thought about themselves, that is to say their national identity, became intricately bound up with the extraordinary experience of Angola.

The term 'extraordinary' here refers to the idea of the extraordinary from a psychosocial perspective which considers how lived experiences of being 'out-of-bounds' may lead to shifts in collective consciousness. From this perspective, I propose that a useful parallel may be drawn between the lived experiences of the extraordinary that I have touched upon in relation to the Angolan mission and two thematically-linked cases, one taken from history and the other from anthropology. The historical case relates to the experience of African slaves in the New World, who, as we know, were first loaded as human cargo into the holds of slave ships and transported across the Middle Passage, while the anthropological perspective draws upon studies of the experience of

⁷⁴Some of the most recent work by Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando concerns cultural and relational ties between Cuba and the Caribbean. Her *My Footsteps in Baraguá* (1996) and *Pasajes del corazón y la memoria (A History of Cubans and Cayman Islanders)* (2007) are both fascinating explorations of this theme.

⁷⁵ I learned this from Cuban Africanist Reinaldo Sánchez Porro (interview, 2008), who shared with me some of his personal experiences with students and associates.

ritual subjects, particularly initiates, who are usually held under carefully-designed living conditions for the purpose of arousing feelings of alienation. What these cases have in common with Cuba's Angolan experiences, I suggest, is the concept of liminality. In other words, the extraordinary Angolan moment conformed to the dynamic of the *limen* or threshold – the 'in-between' space in which cultural change may take place, or "the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated" (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2000: 130). Liminality is thus employed here to imply a process – or set of processes – of cultural transformation, and I intend to connect the concept of liminality with the idea that this extraordinary period in Cuban political and cultural life was a form of rite of passage.



Arnold Van Gennep's *Les Rites de passage* (1909) remains one of the best known of the books written about ritual that were published before the First World War, and his findings have subsequently influenced the work of many others. Van Gennep's major contribution, and the one that most interests us here, is the analytical framework of 'territorial passages,' based upon his observation that in all societies individuals observe rituals when they move across borders, or enter homes, or cross the thresholds of temples (Gluckman, 1962: 3). Victor Turner extended Van Gennep's proposal by focusing attention on the subjects of initiation ceremonies to develop a theory of liminality itself.

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to “death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or the moon.” (Turner, 1969: 95)

Two points which arise from this description are of particular interest for our present analysis, beginning with similarities between some of the metaphorical images which Turner employed and more recent descriptions related to Borderlands theory, including descriptors found in the passage from Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera* which I cited in the previous chapter. Since it is my intention to develop this theme of the border in a later chapter, it is sufficient for our present purposes simply to note the affinity between the two paradigms, before concentrating on the other significant attribute of liminality, which is the role played by symbols at times of social and cultural transitions. Following on from my suggestion that Operation Carlota should be conceived as a sociocultural rite of passage, it should be recalled that the mythical persons most associated with the experience of liminality in the contemporaneous national imagination were slaves. Subsequently, what I aim to examine is how the self-conscious promotion of the military campaign as ‘the return of the slaves’ allowed Cubans to think about themselves in metaphorical terms. By this I mean that the discursive transformation of the geopolitical entity of Angola into a place/space of spiritual relevance enabled Cubans – both civilians and soldiers – to cross the

treacherous and chaotic wastelands of war, safely enveloped in the soothing shadows of myth.

RANCHEADOR: THE EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE OF SLAVERY

To the extent that cultural products contain a refracted knowledge of the societies from which they emerge, it is interesting for us to note the many ways in which liminality as a defining feature of the Angolan experience is represented in *Rancheador* (1976), the second film in Sergio Giral's slave trilogy. Foremost is the matter of setting or location: much of the drama unfolds beyond the boundaries of the plantation, as we enter the workaday world of the slave hunter. For the reason that he is assigned the task of rounding up runaways, the slave hunter ordinarily only sets foot inside the *finca* when in pursuit of money and supplies to support his mission, including costs related to the upkeep of his posse. The only other instance is when he returns, for payment, the live maroons he has rounded up or, in the case of those slaughtered in the chase, their severed ears. If, in *El otro Francisco*, Giral encouraged us to enter the frame of ordinary everyday plantation life in order to investigate the nexus of disciplinary, technological, religious, and political practices (and their underlying beliefs and assumptions) which underpinned the slave system in Cuba, in *Rancheador* his aim seems to be to demonstrate how the moral perversion and violence at the heart of this system seeped through the borders of the plantation and pervaded the society at large, in the same way that runaway slaves refused to be contained within the physical confines of the *finca*, and, upon escaping, imbedded themselves into the surrounding landscape and communities.

“Los apalencados y los rancheadores fueron los extremos más agudos de la compleja lucha de clases [sic] entre esclavos y esclavistas que durante siglos sacudió la sociedad cubana,” observed Cuban historian Gabriel La Rosa Corzo (1986: 88). What these two adversarial groups shared, however, was a communal field of play within the cracks and fissures of the extant social system. “Liminality,” as Helina du Plooy (2007) has explained, “indicates that somebody or a situation falls between systems.” During the liminal phase the borders of the previous environment are no longer distinguishable, reality shifts, and the individual exists within a transitory condition between solid social structures. Giral brilliantly depicts this aspect of the plantation world by highlighting the many liminal features of his fictional *rancheador*, together with the runaway slaves he pursues.

Firstly, the slave hunter is represented as a type of outlaw, by which I mean that he has a tendency to exceed the strict dictates of the law in order to fulfil his duty. In fact, his entire socioeconomic role is shrouded in ambiguity: on the one hand, he is an enforcer of the law, even though at times he operates according to a different code from the plantation society that he serves, while, on the other, he is not above the law, and in fact faces prosecution when his personal programme (to stop the runaways by any and all necessary means) supersedes that of the landowners (the protection of property above all else). The slave hunter vacillates between two social worlds and, consequently, all his actions are subject to interpretation. This ambiguity of status becomes one of the film’s central themes. Moreover, it becomes clear as the narrative progresses that the more efficiently the slave hunter performs his job, the more he undermines the prevailing social order, as his uncompromising fixity of purpose threatens to expose the web of

complicity and duplicity spanning all levels of colonial society. Secondly, the slave hunter must hunt his prey in that hard-to-navigate territory 'betwixt and between' the plantation and the *palenque*, which may likewise be seen as a space of liminality. The land is heavily forested and provides deep cover for bodies and contraband alike. The area's inhabitants – dispossessed peasants bent on survival – adhere to yet another social code, and are as likely to assist as to thwart the slave hunter's efforts, depending upon their own most pressing needs. They lead marginal lives at the edges of the plantations, and are seen to have no scruples against trading or collaborating with their illicit neighbours, and fellow liminals, the *cimarrones*. In his lucid depiction of the nebulous and unstable societies, and the constantly shifting pattern of social relations brought into being by the plantation system, Giral has captured on film Africanist scholar Du Plooy's insight on the liminal aspect of postcoloniality:

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Interactions and encounters between different cultural groups inevitably and irrevocably force people to confront a specific type of liminal space, a border area or interface where they meet, trade and negotiate or fight and make war. They cannot avoid one another because they share the same geographical space. One could therefore argue that liminality is an inherent and, at times, a dominant feature of any colonial, postcolonial and multicultural community. (2007)

Slaves comprise the film's most liminal personages. This stands in contrast to *El otro Francisco* where the thoughts, feelings, plans, and actions of slaves direct the central narrative. In *Rancheador*, slaves, for the larger part, are silent figures seldom emerging from the shadowy peripheries: only two of them speak – one, a frail, bent, hollowed-out old man, is abused and whipped by the slave hunter and his gang until he confesses the hiding places and identities of the maroons, and the other is the runaway known as

Mataperro, whose life has been spared on the condition that he act as a guide for the slave hunter's gang through the unfamiliar forest terrain. Nonetheless, despite the marginal on-screen presence of the slaves, they indirectly command the film's denouement, in the same way that the *rancheador's* actions are directed by his obsessive commitment to capture the enigmatic runaway slave woman who thus far has eluded his efforts. One film reviewer has likened the *rancheador's* quest to Captain Ahab's all-consuming pursuit of Moby Dick (Dauphin, 1999), and it is true that Melchora, the formerly docile and compliant slave woman who has changed into a formidable maroon chieftain, in the increasingly deranged mind of the slave hunter, takes on similar associations with malevolence and monstrosity as Herman Melville's fictional sperm whale. The final liminal element comes at the film's close, as the hunter is transformed into the hunted. The *rancheador*, whose capture or death has been ordered by the plantation owners whom he once served, is encircled and then trapped by maroons from Melchora's *palenque*.

Melchora. In Hebrew the name means 'Queen of Light.' It sings of melancholy and longing. Did Giral have in mind the revolutionary Filipino warrior, Melchora Aquino de Ramos, when choosing his invisible heroine's *nom de guerre*? Out of the horde of liminal slaves, she, above all others, emerges as the most liminal – part-myth and part-real. According to legend she possesses supernatural powers which enable her to transform into a fish in a stream, a bird in the air, or a boulder tumbling down a mountainside, all to evade capture by her pursuers. As we know, stories about shape-shifting slaves have persisted throughout the West African Diaspora. For slaves and their descendants, the tales serve as a metaphor for the keen determination of some

among them to do whatever it took for the sake of freedom. Melchora's ability to transform, if understood in reference to this historical and cultural idiom, may be regarded as the film's most symbolic representation of the liminal dimension of Cuba's Angolan experience, as it captures the process of change in how Cubans saw themselves at home and in the world.

THE SECOND 'OPERATION CARLOTA'

On November 7, 1975 began the unprecedented and epic mobilisation of many thousands of Cuban troops to uphold the government of MPLA leader, Agostinho Neto. Over the next two months between four and five thousand soldiers travelled to the former Portuguese colony, and by February 1976 – at which time combined MPLA and Cuban forces had succeeded in overwhelming the allied opposition – that number had increased to around thirty-six thousand.⁷⁶ By the time the first Cubans arrived at the front-lines victory seemed remote, despite the MPLA rallying cry of 'A Victoria e certa!' Neto had waited until the South African army, fortified by Portuguese, UNITA and FNLA fighters, had reached almost within striking distance of Luanda, before making his last-ditch appeal to Castro for military support.⁷⁷ During the civil war, an

⁷⁶ The exact number of Cuban troops involved in the early missions is much contested amongst scholars. I have used averages derived from figures cited in studies by the following authors: Segal (1996), Gleijeses (2002), Saney (2006), and George (2005).

⁷⁷ Among other commentators Edward George has laid the blame for the late deployment of troops at the Cuban leadership's door, suggesting that national concerns, particularly the process of 'institutionalisation' of the Revolution and preparations for the First Communist Party Congress, delayed serious consideration of Neto's requests for help (2005: 77). However, Gleijeses has reported that relations between Cuba and the MPLA had decidedly cooled in the aftermath of the failed mission in the Congo-Brazzaville (1965-1967): "the Cubans were disappointed [in the African national liberation movements] and the MPLA resentful" (2002: 244). It seems likely, therefore, that the delay was in fact attributable to strained relations between the two groups. Consequently, Havana would have committed to action only after a period of cautious deliberation and consideration of the many facets of engagement, while the MPLA would have resisted appealing to the Cubans for as long as possible.

unconfirmed number of Cuban military advisers had been assisting with the training of MPLA troops in the run up to independence;⁷⁸ however, many of these men were killed in Benguela trying to hold a fragile line against the opposition's unrelenting advance towards the capital.⁷⁹ Thus, in a desperate last-minute attempt to stave off what appeared to be the inevitable collapse of MPLA rule before the formal declaration of independence on November 11, waves of Cuban soldiers were dispatched straight to the heart of battle. Journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, who was assigned to cover the transition to independence for the Polish news agency, PAP, has left us a hauntingly evocative memoir of life in Luanda in the early days of November 1975. In *Another Day of Life* (originally published in Polish in 1976), Kapuściński speaks of the day-to-day nerve-shredding existence, fraught with an unrelenting sense of uncertainty and fear, as conflicting and contradictory reports swirled among the city's last remaining inhabitants. The Portuguese term *confusão* Kapuściński considers to be the most apt description of the atmosphere during those times, everywhere in the country, whether at the front-lines or in the towns and villages. "*Confusão*," he writes, "is a good word, a synthesis word, an everything word. In Angola it has its own specific sense and is literally untranslatable. To simplify things: *Confusão* means confusion, a mess, a state of anarchy and disorder" (Kapuściński, 1987: 118). In summary, he adds: "*Confusão* is a state of absolute disorientation" (*ibid.*).

⁷⁸ There are conflicting reports in the literature concerning how many Cubans were operating in Angola before independence. For the most convincing data, I refer readers to the books by Gleijeses (2002) and George (2005) which are based upon archival research in Cuba, the United States and South Africa.

⁷⁹ Lying about halfway up the Angolan coast from the Namibian border, and only 600 kilometres from Luanda, Benguela, had been the heavily outnumbered MPLA's last line of defence. After its capture, it seemed only a matter of one or two days before the capital, too, would fall into the hands of the opposition.

Applying the theoretical framework of liminality to Kapuściński's record, we quickly detect a series of corresponding motifs in the wider situation: Angola, at the end of colonialism and on the verge of independence, remains suspended in a 'betwixt and between' state; the civil war, with its tangle of intrigue and hard-to-distinguish ideologies and factions has created an atmosphere of chaos; and Luanda, its struggle of MPLA defenders isolated from any military support, languishes on the brink of destruction.

Yet then, with less than a week before the feared outbreak of Armageddon on Independence Day, and just as the exhausted city rattled out its final gasp of hope, everything changed. Kapuściński recalls:

Wednesday 5 November (landing)

This evening I went to the airport with Oscar's friend Gilberto, who works in the control tower. Dark, a horrible downpour: we drove as if under a fountain, no visibility, only walls of water through which our Peugeot burrowed as if I were in a subway moving through the streets of a submerged city. The large glass airport terminal building – monstrously littered and dirty because no one had cleaned up after the half million refugees who had camped here – was empty. I stood on the second floor with Gilberto, looking at the illuminated runway. The tropical deluge had passed, but it was still raining. High up to the left, two spotlights suddenly appeared: A plane was coming in to land. A moment later, it touched down and taxied between two rows of yellow lights. A Cubana Airlines Britannia. Then more and more spotlights up above. Four planes landed. They manoeuvred into a row in front of us, the pilots switched off the engines, and it was quiet. The stairs were wheeled into place and Cuban soldiers with packs and weapons began disembarking. They lined up in two rows. They were wearing camouflage, which afforded some protection from the rain. After a few minutes, they walked towards trucks waiting near by. My shoulder felt sore. I smiled: Through the whole scene, Gilberto had been gripping my shoulder tightly.

Those soldiers went to the front the next day. (1987: 115-116)

Two interesting points emerge from this passage. The first relates to how objective circumstances appear to have absorbed the prevailing psychological conditions: in this way both the severe and unsettled weather and the dishevelled abandoned airport reflect, and even heighten, the overarching feeling of *confusão*. The second idea is in reference to the experiences of the Cuban soldiers, freshly arrived from the reassuring familiarities of domestic Caribbean lives, now hurtled straightaway into the chaotic fray of an African civil war. The question is: Where did their initiation into this strange new world take place? Rather than a specific geographic location, I suggest that the answer resides in the liminal space inhabited by the Cuban soldiers themselves. By this I mean that Cuban liminality, created, in one measure, from the chaotic conditions of the mobilisation itself, and, in the other (and as I shall demonstrate later) as a result of the country's slaving past, eased the passage into Angolan *confusão*.

LIMINAL ASPECTS OF OPERATION CARLOTA

Let us first of all focus on the lived experience of liminality in the initial mobilisation of Cuban troops. The following description of the airlift from the Cuban perspective, written by García Márquez, offers an interesting complement to the Kapuściński account cited before:

The route from Havana to Luanda is bleak and desartic. The Britania's [sic] cruising altitude is between 18,000 and 20,000 feet, but information on winds is nonexistent in this era of the jet. The pilots took off in every direction, without knowing the conditions of the route, flying at incorrect altitudes to economize on fuel, and without the slightest idea of what landing conditions would be. The route between Brazzaville and Luanda, the most dangerous, had no alternate airport. In addition, the soldiers

travelled with loaded weapons, uncrated explosives, and unprotected projectiles in order to reduce cargo weight. (1976: 426)

What is described here – the condition of being lost or in unfamiliar territory, surrounded by a host of uncertainties and perils – was surely an experience shared by almost every one of the thousands of volunteers (whether their voyage to Angola took place on a plane or a ship) because, aside from the fact that they had embarked upon a war mission with all the assumed dangers which that implies, for the vast majority of these internationalists the journey also marked the first time they had ever left Cuba. It is left to us to imagine, therefore, that the already acute sense of physical and mental dislocation inherent to all travel, and to first time travel in particular, was greatly magnified, firstly, by the general sense of crisis or urgency surrounding the campaign, and then also, as a result of the inordinately stressful travel conditions. Regarding this last factor, García Márquez has reported:

The pilots, with a normal flight time of 75 hours a month, flew more than 200 hours. In general, each of the three Britanias in service carried two complete crews who took turns during the flight.⁸⁰ But one pilot recalls that he was in his seat up to fifty hours in a round-trip flight, with forty-three hours of actual flying time: “There are moments when you’re so tired that you can’t possibly get more tired,” he said with no pretensions of heroism. In those conditions, and because of time differences, the pilots and stewardesses lost all track of time, and their only guidelines were the needs of their own bodies: they ate when they were hungry and slept when they were sleepy. (2001: 425-426)

⁸⁰ There is a clear discrepancy between Kapuściński’s report which states that four Cuban planes landed at the airport in Luanda, and García Márquez’s information that only three jets were in operation at that time. However, since further investigation of this matter exceeds the remit of this project, both practically and strategically, I am comfortable allowing the contradictory data to stand unchallenged in this study – a sort of tribute to the ‘science’ of doing research with the engaging and flawed products of memory, or, to use Taussig’s more inspired phrase, “the texts of lived speech of reminiscence (2006: 38).”

The situation of the flight crews, thus related, throws into sharper relief those linkages between the lived experience of extreme physical conditions and feelings of psychological alienation characteristic of liminal subjects. In fact, as Turner informs us, the physical and emotional ordeals to which liminal entities, such as neophytes, are subjected “represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them in advance from abusing their privileges. They have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society” (1969: 103).

We may draw further parallels between the attributes of liminal subjects and Cuban soldiers in Angola by considering the following description, likewise taken from Turner:

They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands. Their behaviour is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to enable them to cope with their new station in life. (1969:95)

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As I have already mentioned, for Cuban soldiers, their liminal status emerged from several sources: first, as the passage above suggests, a degree of liminality is shared by all those in uniform who submit to a higher authority, especially when these persons are removed from familiar surroundings (this view encompasses not only soldiers but others who have voluntarily separated from society, such as those who have taken up religious orders); in addition, the extraordinary conditions surrounding the improvisational

response to Neto's frenzied appeal for Cubans to 'save the day' in Luanda created yet another layer of liminality. One further element to be taken into consideration is what I refer to as the historical aspect to liminality, that is to say that, due to Cuba's historical links with Africa, and as the following excerpt demonstrates, Cuban soldiers were often difficult (if not impossible, depending upon the situation) to tell apart from Angolans:

It was less than twelve miles along the riverbank to the front. A soldier with very dark skin took me there in a car. I asked him in Portuguese if he was from Luanda. No, he answered in Spanish, from Havana. It was hard to tell them apart by sight in those days, because the Cubans had clothed many MPLA units in uniforms they had brought over. This also had a psychological significance, because the FNLA and UNITA troops feared the Cubans most of all. They turned and ran at the sight of units in Cuban uniforms attacking, even though there might not have been a single Cuban among them. External differences were further effaced by the fact that both MPLA and Cuban units were multiracial, so skin colour told nothing. Later, this all reinforced the legend of an army of a hundred thousand Cubans fighting in Angola. In truth, the whole army defending the republic came to not more than thirty thousand soldiers, of whom about two-thirds were Angolans. (Kapuściński, 1976: 124, emphasis added)

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García Márquez provides a contrapuntal view by offering a wry reflection on some of the unique physiological advantages which may, at least partially, have accounted for the eventual success of 'Carlota.'

In reality, Cubans found the same climate they knew in their own country, the same vegetation, the same apocalyptic showers, and the same afternoons fragrant with molasses and alligators. Some Cubans resembled Angolans so much that a joke soon made the rounds to the effect that it was possible to distinguish them only by touching the point of their noses, because the Africans have soft nose cartilage from the way they were carried as babies, with their faces pressed against their mother's back. (2001: 429)



FIGURE 12. Cuban and/or Angolan soldiers on foot patrol.

THE FIRST 'OPERATION CARLOTA'

November 5, 1975 marked the 132nd year anniversary of the slave rebellion at the Triumvirato sugar plantation in Matanzas province, led by a slave woman named Carlota. As one of the first acts in her liberation campaign, Carlota, accompanied by her captains, journeyed to another plantation, Arcana, where a number of co-conspirators were being held in captivity following an uprising there in August of that year's incendiary summer, when Africans and their descendants had risen up against their enslavers throughout the province. As word spread of Carlota's successes, one estate after another erupted in insurrection – San Miguel, Concepción, San Lorenzo, San Rafael (Rojas 2005). At the same time, the *cimarrones* organised raiding parties to attack the coffee and cattle estates of the area. Before much time had passed, Carlota and her companions were hunted down by heavily armed troops under orders from the Governor. Within a matter of a few months the rebel leaders were caught, and their pursuers decided to carry out the most horrible execution conceivable, to serve as an

exemplary warning and to demonstrate their pitiless resolve to dismember the body of revolting slaves – a still-living Carlota was lashed to horses facing in different directions and then drawn and quartered (*ibid.*). More than any other aspect of her story, it was Carlota’s sense of solidarity – her selfless commitment to the liberation of her fellows – which, more than a century later, provided a symbol of the military intervention in Angola, and, indeed, of the African component in Cuban identity.

THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

“La sangre de Africa corre abundante por nuestras venas,” declaimed Fidel Castro at the closing ceremony of the first Congress of the Cuban Communist Party on December 22, 1975 (Departamento de Versiones Taquigráficas, date unknown). Only seconds before, he had made the unprecedented pronouncement that Cuba was a Latin-African nation, and now the Cuban Prime Minister was seeking to remind his listeners and, above all, his adversaries in Washington, about the roots and responsibilities of those ties of African blood. Coming several weeks after the launch of Operation Carlota, this speech marked the first time that the military mission had been publicly acknowledged, and it introduced metaphorical and spiritual connotations into an internationalist discourse previously painted in harder political tones.

Y de África, como esclavos, vinieron muchos de nuestros antecesores a esta tierra. Y mucho que lucharon los esclavos, y mucho que combatieron en el Ejército Libertador de nuestra patria. ¡Somos hermanos de los africanos y por los africanos estamos dispuestos a luchar! (*ibid.*)

It is difficult to overestimate the emotional depth of force contained in the idea that Cubans harboured a unique, even sacred, biological inheritance which made engagement in Angola's civil war obligatory, not merely from the standpoint of a moral or political imperative, but even more persuasively, due to the inexorable call of blood to blood. For a society still haunted by the ghosts of a system of institutionalised violence predicated on physiological difference, this poetic re-description of reality promised nothing less than the possibility of a socially restorative atonement. By invoking the national body ("nuestras venas"), Cubans entered the world of myth, where the blood shed in history – "the blood that identifies, the blood that is traded, the blood that is spread in war, the blood that is even generated by love" (Vecchi, 2008) – converges into a mighty river of at-one-ment. Taussig informs us that "in many societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America it is not a sorcery substance but the spirit of a dead human through which notions of insidedness/out-sidedness are staged" (2006: 169). Similarly, the dead slave-ancestor is employed here to mark the perimeters of Cuba's socio-political body, so that African shared blood becomes indistinguishable from African bloodshed, and as a consequence of this 'blended' blood lineage, all Cubans, irrespective of sociocultural background, may be considered as "hermanos de los africanos."

This cult of the ancestors, like every mythology, is a unifying or harmonising force, since, as Joseph Campbell has stated, mythology's role is to integrate "the individual into his society and the society into the field of nature" (1988: 55). In order to accomplish this, myths suggest, on the one hand, the potentialities within a given society, and on the other, "the actuality that hides behind the visible aspect" (*ibid.*: 60). The language of myths is the metaphor. Due to its capacity to coactivate two domains,

metaphorical language may transcend the boundaries of time and space.⁸¹ Accordingly, myths may reveal some aspects of social truth only when understood metaphorically. It is possible that this dynamic explains poetry's importance during a society's liminal phases. Poetry, as a metaphorical language, trades on the tension of opposites, and thrives on dualism. This, in turn, may partially account for the high status bestowed upon poets in some colonial and postcolonial societies engaged in political processes of unification, such as Cuba and Angola.⁸²

THE ALCHEMY OF HISTORY

All the same, what remained after Castro's metaphorical immolation of the nation's slaving past in his symbolic incantation of the rites of ancestor worship was the 'hard bone'⁸³ of Cuba's race relations. In the face of claims made by U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and other members of the Ford administration that the Cuban mission in Angola was a Soviet war by proxy, and that, therefore, Cuban objectives were to be regarded with suspicion, the Castro government experienced a certain urgency to offer the counterclaim that it was only once the South African army had entered Angolan territory, with the tacit approval of the United States, that the decision had been made to send troops.⁸⁴ South Africa, as the bastion of apartheid, was much despised by the

⁸¹ In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson discuss, in fascinating depth, how metaphors "allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another" (2003:117).

⁸² I shall expand upon this idea later in the study, when I examine the significance of Neto's poetic background, as well as some of the poems written by Cubans in reference to the war.

⁸³ I borrow the term from an epigram by Antonio Machado that opens Octavio Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude* (1961): "The *other* refuses to disappear; it subsists, it persists; it is the hard bone on which reason breaks its teeth."

⁸⁴ In early 1975, U.S. president Gerald Ford declared a covert war against the MPLA, code-named IAFEATURE. Previously, United States policy had focused upon appeasing the unyielding Portuguese premier Caetano in order to retain control of the Lajes airbase in the Azores, from which American forces had launched a major arms lift to Israel in 1973. The strategic importance of the base to U.S. Middle

newly-independent African nations. Consequently, in view of the nation's history of African enslavement, it was intensely important for the Cuban government to establish a clear dividing line between the past and the present: to demonstrate not only that the legislative structures of institutionalised racism had been dismantled, but that the Revolution had also demolished the structures of feeling associated with the old racist ideology.

En nuestro país existía la discriminación. ¿Quién no lo sabe? ¿Quién no lo recuerda? En muchos parques, por aquí los blancos y por aquí los negros. ¿Quién no recuerda que a muchos lugares, centros de recreación, escuelas, no dejaban entrar a los descendientes de africanos? ¿Quién no recuerda que en el estudio, en el trabajo y en todos los aspectos existía la discriminación? ¿Y quiénes son hoy los representantes, los símbolos de la más odiosa, de la más inhumana discriminación? Los fascistas y racistas de África del Sur. Y el imperialismo yanqui, sin escrúpulos de ninguna índole, lanzó las tropas mercenarias de África del Sur para aplastar la independencia de Angola, y se indigna de que nosotros apoyemos a Angola, se indigna de que nosotros apoyemos al África, se indigna de que nosotros defendamos al África. ¡Por los deberes que establecen nuestros principios, nuestra ideología, nuestras convicciones y nuestra propia sangre, defenderemos a Angola y defenderemos al África! (Departamento de Versiones Taquigráficas, date unknown)

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First to be noted here is the confession of past transgressions, accompanied by an appeal for all Cubans to share in an act of collective remembering through repetition of the phrase, “¿Quién no recuerda?” Use of the impersonal imperfect tense (“existía,” “dejaban”) imparts the sense of continually repeated practices by anonymous antecedents in an imperfect (in the sense of a blemished or defective) past. Then,

East policy entered squarely into Portuguese calculations when the terms of the military base's lease came up for renewal. A pariah on the international stage following Lisbon's brutal suppression of liberation forces, Caetano had lobbied not only for sophisticated weapons as compensation for loyalty to America, but, more challengingly, for a public repudiation of the UN-mandated arms embargo. Kissinger had offered a sympathetic ear to Portuguese demands and drew up plans for a campaign to persuade Congress.

abruptly, we are wrenched away from the sordidness of long ago and brought into the present time with the question, “¿Y quiénes son hoy los representantes, los símbolos de la más odiosa, de la más inhumana discriminación? [emphasis added],” conjoined immediately to the declarative response that South Africa and the United States persist in the odious practices of institutionalised racism, thus transferring the locus of blame away from the Cuban sphere. However, it is only with the shift to the future tense – “defenderemos” – and the promise that Cubans will give their own blood for the Angolan cause, that the final transmutation is complete. In other words, the declaration that Cubans – especially the positional descendants of slave owners – are willing to sacrifice themselves for black Africans (the human group considered the most debased) purged antagonistic feelings of fear and pity at the same that it bore rhetorical witness to the complete transcendence of the country’s racist past.

In a sense these words perform a ‘seven veils’ dance of concealment and revelation, by which I mean that the simultaneous remembering and forgetting of Cuban history illuminates past racism while obscuring enduring personal and cultural links with the perpetrators of that racism. Only the shameful present-day racialsists – the United States and South Africa – are named, which is further evidence that we are now in the territory of myth, because, as Joseph Campbell has explained, this is a common element of sociologically oriented mythologies: “That is to say, love and compassion are reserved for the in-group, and aggression and abuse are projected outward on others. Compassion is to be reserved for members of your own group” (1988: 171). From this point of view, we might say that, by referring to Cuban racists indirectly, that is by revealing their deeds while concealing their identities, Castro was enacting the type of

compassion that Campbell had in mind. In this manner, by returning slaveowners to the fold, the history of racism in Cuba is reinscribed as social myth, and any leftover traces of racist deeds from the past can be washed away by the present and future shedding of Cuban blood.

LA ÚLTIMA CENA – THE BODY OF TRUTH

Liminality, as I have mentioned previously, is a period outside normal time. It is a transitory phase when the ordinary structures and hierarchies that constitute a social order break down. As such, liminality is differentiated from marginalisation to the extent that the latter implies a permanent or at least more settled social condition. We might say that marginalised peoples form part of the fixed social structure, whereas liminals are distinguished by their separation from accepted status systems. Hence, during liminal periods, the prevailing social order is inverted, and the highest authority is represented as a slave figure (Turner, 1969: 102). The connection between inverted social order and liminality, with respect to the national psyche in the early days of the Angolan intervention, is nowhere more powerfully illustrated than in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film, *La última cena* (1976). In its representation of a social modality where "an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion [emphasis added]" of temporarily "equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (or, in this case, who perform according to a set of Catholic beliefs), *La última cena* is concerned with that aspect of liminality which "implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (Turner, 1969: 96-

97). The result, I wish to suggest, is a film that may be read as a surreptitious deconstruction of the predilection for slave metaphors in official discourse – here exposed as a self-indulgent practice of elites. To that extent, we might say that the film ‘borrows the presence’ of the old colonial sociopolitical world in order to say something about the contemporaneous situation. Like his contemporary Giral, Gutiérrez Alea – who dedicated the film to his friend, the deceased filmmaker Sara Gómez – is unflinching in his portrayal of the brutal violence of the slave system, in this instance as he reflects upon some of the problematical aspects of the mythologizing process, in particular the dangerous consequences of, as Campbell puts it, “reading the metaphor in terms of the denotation instead of the connotation” (1988: 57).

Let us begin with an outline of the story before making a deeper investigation of the film’s commentary on the misuse of myth. The drama unfolds during Holy Week at a sugar mill in Havana at the end of the eighteenth century. On Ash Wednesday, it is discovered that a slave named Sebastián has escaped a short while before the Count arrives to visit his estate. Before long we learn that, aside from the task of overseeing his affairs, the Count’s visit also proceeds from his desire to perform a series of purifying rituals related to Catholic tradition. Twelve male slaves – including the unrepentant runaway Sebastián who, in the meantime, has been returned – are chosen to participate in a symbolic re-enactment of the Last Supper of Jesus Christ, with the Count playing the role of the (sacrificial) Lamb of God, and the slaves his disciples. The local priest expresses his concern that the, albeit temporary, disruption of social norms may have dire future consequences. But, the Count remains resolutely tied to his pious convictions, and, to the general consternation of his white employees, performs the

ritual act of washing and then kissing the feet of an incredulous slave, who erupts into uncontrollable laughter.

The Supper is held on the following day, Maundy Thursday, and most of the assembled group of slaves are perplexed by the symbolism of Christian ritual.⁸⁵ When the Count refers to the bread and wine of the Holy Sacrament as the body and blood of Christ, one of the slaves understands this in a literal sense to mean that Christ's followers were like the *carabali*, an African ethnic group with a reputation for cooking and eating people. Moments of miscommunication and misunderstanding continue to pile up as the meal proceeds. Then, before retiring to bed, the devout Count performs one final gesture of seasonal goodwill by giving his word that the following day, Good Friday, will be a day of rest – no slave will work in the fields.

The next day, unaware of the Count's promise, and anxious to carry out the mandate that crop yields be increased, the overseer rounds up the slaves for work. The former 'disciples' inform him that the Count has declared the day free of labour, but the overseer roughly dismisses their claims and, whip in hand, commands them to the fields. Angry that the promise has not been kept, the slaves rise up against the overseer and he is killed in the ensuing struggle. Alerted to the outbreak of violence on his estate, the Count becomes incensed and demands the cruellest retribution possible for the death of his employee and the destruction of his property. All thoughts of Christian charity are banished from his mind, as the Count leads the charge against the rebellious slaves. At the end of the film, twelve wooden spikes loom above the ruins of the *finca*, crowned

⁸⁵ One of the slaves is represented as more sophisticated due to the fact that, before being set to work in the fields, he had previously been a house-slave. As a result he is more familiar with European ways.

with the severed heads of the disciple-slaves, except for one which remains empty. In the final scene we see the *cimarrón*, Sebastián, fleeing up the mountainside.

The storyline is adapted from real-life events narrated in Manuel Moreno Friginals's landmark social history, *El ingenio* (1978). Consequently, the film has most often been compared to other cinematic projects of 'historical recovery' that are based on fictional or non-fictional written texts, such as Giral's adaptation of *Diario de un rancheador*.⁸⁶ In a recent essay, John C. Harvard strayed outside this convention by analysing the film within the context of liberation theology, according to which view *La última cena* "continues the work of the liberation theologians by virtue of its attempt to rethink and use religious tropes in a way that sheds light on social injustice" (2008: 60). According to Harvard, Gutiérrez Alea uses historical information "to incite awareness of racial and class politics in the contemporary audience by showing how such history informs the present" (2008: 61). While I agree with Harvard that the film is no simple investigation of the history of slavery, to my mind Gutiérrez Alea intended far more for his audience than that they "understand what he does with the count as a criticism of the duplicitous ideological nature of the aristocratic Christianity of colonial Cuba" (*ibid.*). For, seen from another angle, the film may be conceived as a project of demythologisation in dialogue, or more precisely, in confrontation with the official mythologizing project of the time. This implicit task is achieved through several different means, each of which relates to a particular nature of dynamic prevalent in

⁸⁶ The original diary kept by slave hunter, Francisco Estévez, was discovered by Cirilo Villaverde (author of the classic Cuban novel, *Cecilia Valdés*) in his family archives. The manuscript was published in Havana under the title *Diario de un rancheador* in 1982, several years after Giral's film appeared.

Cuban society. Specifically, four interrelated strategies can be identified through which this subnarrative is achieved: these include plot, characterisation, humour, and satire.

“ONLY A SLAVE KNOWS WHY A SLAVE CRIES!”

In order to bring these mechanisms into sharper focus, the lens of liminality must be applied, because, as I have inferred, it is within this conceptual framework that the film’s subnarrative is contained and sustained. Let us start by considering the plot. The Count’s conception of Holy Week as an extraordinary moment in time when “the underling comes uppermost” directly corresponds to our earlier description of the liminal phase (Turner, 1969: 102). It is recognisable by the displacement of the twelve slaves from their usual social and spatial contexts and temporary elevation to positions at the master’s table. This transitory change in status, although ostensibly set in motion by the Count’s personal religious beliefs, may also be seen as a manifestation of what Turner terms the “sacred characteristics” of the slave in the prevailing social structure. However, since an authentic reversal of roles would have required that the Count spend an evening in one of the slave barracks (which of course he does not do) the film appears to question the limits and complicities of ideology.⁸⁷ The point I would like to emphasise in this respect is that, given the remarkable degree of affiliation between the properties of liminality and revolutionary ideology at the time of Cuba’s experience in,

⁸⁷Turner, in fact, identifies three main categories of liminality. First the liminality characterised by *rituals of status elevation*, “in which the ritual subject or novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in an institutionalized system of such positions” (1969: 167). Secondly, what he describes as *rituals of status reversal*, according to which “groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; and they, in turn, must accept with good will their ritual degradation” (ibid). Finally, there are *rites de passage*, “which accompany any change of a collective sort from one state to another, as when a whole tribe goes to war” (ibid: 169).

and of, Angola, a case can plausibly be made that *La última cena* concealed a tacit commentary on the contemporary moment. This notion can perhaps be made more evident when considered alongside the following list of liminal characteristics adapted from Turner:

Transition
Totality
Homogeneity
Communitas
Equality
Anonymity
Absence of property
Absence of status
Nakedness or uniform clothing
Sexual continence
Minimization of sexual distinctions
Absence of rank
Humility
Disregard for personal appearance
No distinctions of wealth
Unselfishness
Total obedience
Sacredness
Sacred instruction
Silence
Suspension of kinship rights and obligations
Continuous reference to mystical powers
Foolishness
Simplicity
Acceptance of pain and suffering
Heteronomy (1969: 106-107)

The reader will notice that, with one or two exceptions (such as sexual continence), these attributes of liminality simultaneously interact with features of slave iconology as well as with the experience of Cuban internationalists, thereby blurring the temporal

division between the two historical phenomena.⁸⁸ In this way the plot may be seen to fuse together past and present into a seamless situation of timelessness.

Turning now to the mechanism of characterisation, it is conceivable that, as the film's most notable outsider figure, the sugar mill's engineer, Monsieur Duclé, has been assigned the most important role in Gutiérrez Alea's demythologising project. His subversive persona, which may be regarded as the trickster element, is represented in subtle yet discernible ways. Firstly, as a Frenchman, he belongs to the white power structure, whilst his foreignness renders him 'other.' The Count regards him with suspicion, and is presciently mistrustful of Duclé's loyalties.⁸⁹ This could be linked to the fact that, as a refugee from the black Republic of Haiti (formerly Saint Domingue), at the very least, his presence acts as a constant reminder of the fearful consequences of slave revolt, and, at the worst, he is a harbinger of black rebellion. However, it is Gutiérrez Alea's use of the liminal Frenchman to deliver some of the film's most pointed commentary that indicates his pivotal role in the subnarrative. The most important of these comes very early in the film when Duclé, who has perfected the art of producing a sugar that is pristine white, is questioned about the contents of the little bag of substances that he carries with him, and which he describes as the key ingredient in the

⁸⁸ A number of the attributes, such as equality, humility, unselfishness, and no distinctions of wealth, coincide with Communist values, especially as articulated in the Cuban ideal of the New Man. On the other hand, characteristics like uniform clothing, anonymity, absence of rank, and total obedience, refer directly to the experience of being a soldier. The acceptance of pain and suffering is frequently extolled in Cuban nationalist discourse, and internationalism is acknowledged as the most sacred expression of revolutionary spirit. Finally, throughout this investigation I have made (and shall make) reference to what I have termed the 'alchemical' techniques of political discourse (particularly with regard to Castro's speeches on the Angolan mission) which, in my view, may be compared with aspects of sacred instruction. In this way, the qualities of sacredness and mystical powers can also be identified as significant to the internationalist experience.

⁸⁹ The Frenchman plays an instrumental role in Sebastián's final escape by withholding information regarding the slave's presence in Duclé's quarters.

transmutation of the sugar cane liquors. The Count and his men are very amused when Duclé reveals that the highly-prized substance is in fact chicken manure, *caca de pollo*. He explains that adding manure to the dark green cane juice as it is heated first turns it black, before it becomes brown and then finally white. "It seems," he quips, "that what is to be white must first be black." This artful use of dialogic ambiguity produces the possibility that Duclé's character is addressing the issue of the Revolution's ideological embrace of the cult of the African ancestors.

This connects to the third device employed by Gutiérrez Alea, which is humour. The subversive use of humour is a widespread cultural practice in the Caribbean region, and Cuba is no exception. Like poetry, it is a way of hiding (I refer back to Glissant's preferred term, *disimuler*), or working out, the problematic constants of the colonial heritage. Throughout *La última cena* it is Monsieur Duclé, plus one or two of the slave-disciples, who perform this strategic function – the former through acerbic quips and asides, while the latter mock the Count's pretensions, whether directly (by laughing at his pious words and deeds) or indirectly, through the recitation of stories with hidden morals, or the performance of songs with ambiguous lyrics, such as "Only a slave knows why a slave cries!"⁹⁰ At a key moment in the drama, while the slaves take advantage of their incomprehensible good fortune to eat heartily and drink wine in abundance, the Count regales them with self-righteous justifications for their enslavement. The most important thing, he tells them, is to bear all pain, insults and ignominy for the sake of Jesus Christ. His maudlin pronouncement that "Sorrow is the only thing that is truly ours and the only thing we can offer to God with joy" sets the slaves howling in

⁹⁰ The lyrics of West Indian calypso songs traditionally use puns, double entendres, and other forms of word play to deliver scathing pronouncements on social and political issues.

laughter. While the Count is moved to a tearful catharsis by the poetic re-description of suffering as a noble, refined, even desirable, condition, the slaves, daily victims of plantation brutality and violence, find the notion ridiculous. In return, they relate a number of *patakin* or *orisha* tales that advance the Africa-derived worldview, including one related to the god Olofi that tells of an anthropomorphic Truth that goes around deceiving people by wearing the head of his rival, Lie. “The body of Truth with the head of a Lie!” the slaves chant while the inebriated Count slumbers at the table. The slaves’ humour and raucous laughter, sometimes to the point of grotesqueness, performs three dramatic functions: it humanises them, as it indicates an intelligence and playfulness of spirit not usually ascribed to enslaved Africans; it draws attention to their abjectness and daily suffering through contrast with the gaiety they express; and it serves as a weapon, overturning the image of meekness and docility fashioned by the European imagination.

The final device in our list, satire, is connected with its predecessor to the extent that the power of humour, in this context, resides in its capacity to provide a broader social commentary. According to my reading, Gutiérrez Alea appropriates the Count’s fanciful and abstracted attitude toward his plantation slaves to say something about the contemporary Cuban leadership’s whimsical, and perhaps insensitive, approach to the subject of race. From the start we are made aware of the Count’s aversion to the harsh realities of plantation life. For instance, when the maroon, Sebastián, is returned to the plantation, and one of his ears is chopped off as a punishment, the hardboiled overseers do not flinch, but the aristocratic Count turns away in disgust – an incongruously white handkerchief delicately pressed to his mouth – at the moment when one of the mangy

yard dogs begins to eat the severed ear. The early depiction of the Count as a rather effete individual, more concerned with matters of the spirit than the mundane business of plantation management, makes his later metamorphosis into a harsh and vengeful crusader, set on meting out a bloody justice to those who threaten his absolute authority, that much more disconcerting. It is as if we, the spectators, like the slaves, and despite our scepticism of the Count's motives, had failed to recognise the body of truth below the head of a lie. According to this interpretation, Gutiérrez Alea seems to be challenging his audience to break free from the false catharsis offered by the mimetic principle in metaphor and to ask themselves whether they are truly at ease with the concept of black liberation, given, on the one hand, the painful legacy of the past, and, linked to that idea, the traditional fears of black revenge. However, while the impetus to separate myth from history, or, as Gutiérrez Alea might have considered it, to sever the head of lie from the body of truth, can be conceived during ordinary times as an act of saving myth, this does not apply to the specific conditions of liminality.

From this standpoint, those who seek to demythologise the cult of the slave ancestors expose their discomfort with the "spontaneous, immediate" or chaotic representation of social relations during the liminal phase (Turner, 1969: 127). As Turner has put it, "from the perspectival viewpoint of those concerned with the maintenance of 'structure,' all sustained manifestations of [liminality] must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions" (*ibid.*: 108-109). The more appropriate response to liminality, according to this view, is an acceptance of its unique dynamic.

Liminality, marginality, and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems, and works of art. These cultural forms provide men with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man's relationship to society, nature, and culture. But they are more than classifications, since they incite men to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multivocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psychobiological levels simultaneously. (*ibid.*: 129)

In other words, myths, or productions based upon them, are not expected to provide an accurate account of history, and it is only once this idea is accepted that it becomes possible to move from concerns regarding the abuse of myth to an appreciation of "its role as *inventive* exploration of how things might be" (Kearney, 2004: 72). This transformative rather than reflective capacity demonstrates the open character of myth and its ability for regeneration, which, of course, serves as the animating principle of the liminal state. In this context, efforts to 'save myth' may, in fact, be conceived as working against the forces of renewal.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has proceeded from the starting point that war, like religion, is organised through a series of rituals (Sennett, 2009: 12). Its primary aim has been to connect the lived experience of the Angolan intervention with the notion of aura in the context of ritual, which Richard Sennett suggests as "mysterious in origin, veiled in operation" (*ibid.*: 12). The focus has been on examining the 'veiled' circumstances of the initial military mobilisation together with the mysteries of social myth imbedded in certain discursive practices of the time. The purpose of social myths, as Campbell has

explained, is to claim the land (2001: 93). In the Cuban nationalist context, this may lead to such political exhortations as 'Patria o muerte.' However, within the framework of internationalism in Angola, the myth was required to perform the double duty of justifying both the transgression of geopolitical boundaries and the loss of Cuban life. As I have related, this was achieved through the poetic re-description of slavery as the cult of the African ancestors, a social myth which successfully transcended the temporal and spatial divisions between Cuba and Africa. In her capacity as hero of the myth, or its icon, the mythologised historical slave, Carlota, through her dual credentials as self-sacrificing African ancestor, allowed Cubans to endow Angola with a certain spiritual significance. The important point to bear in mind, however, is that, as a liminal phase, Cuba's Angolan experience was transitory. Consequently, the nation's Latin-African identity must also be conceived as an impermanent or temporary designation.

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Imagining Latin-Africa as a space 'in-between,' peopled by archetypal characters related to the myth of the African ancestor, poses the challenge to set claims that Cuba 'became' more 'africentric' as a result of Angola against the backdrop of this impermanence.⁹¹

Nonetheless, since the task of myths and icons is to serve as guides during the confusion and anti-structure of the liminal phase, their effectiveness depends on the ability to unite elements of both the preceding and succeeding states. As we know from the first section of our study, the anonymous maroon had already functioned as a symbol of the

⁹¹ Mark Q. Sawyer (2002: 61) has suggested that the intervention in Angola opened opportunities for black Cubans. However, García Márquez has made the strongest claim that Cuban society was altered by the Angolan Experience: "I arrived in Havana in those days and even in the airport I had the definite impression that something very profound had been happening in Cuban life since I was there last. There was an undefinable but notable change not only in the spirit of the people but also in the very nature of things, the animals, the sea, and in the very essence of Cuban life. There was a new male fashion of suits made of light cloth with short sleeved jackets. Portuguese words had penetrated the language heard in the streets. There were new accents in the old African musical rhythms" (2001.435-436).

Revolution prior to the Angolan mission; although, as I have outlined, within the framework of Cuba's race ideology (with its roots in Latin American exceptionalism) the ambiguousness of this symbolism produced a number of socio-ethical problems. It was, therefore, to be anticipated that this same thematic would articulate the emerging consciousness of this liminal period of transition.



FIGURE 13. Two internationalist soldiers lay a war victim to rest in African soil.

RETURN OF THE SLAVES

To see life as a poem and yourself participating in a poem is what the myth does for you.

(Campbell, 1988: 55)

Cuando un buey es sacrificado a las almas de los antepasados reales en Dahomey, una cabra también es ofrecida por aquellos vendidos como esclavos. Los sacerdotes cantan:

<<Oh, antepasados, haced todo lo que esté en vuestro poder/para que los príncipes y los nobles que hoy gobiernan/nunca sean enviados lejos de aquí como esclavos./ Castigad a la gente que compró a nuestros parientes/ a los que nunca volveremos a ver. Enviad sus naves/ al Puerto de Whydah... ahogad a sus tripulaciones/ y haced que toda la riqueza de sus barcos regrese a Dahomey.>> (Herskovits cited in Martínez Furé, 1979: 79)

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I build on liminality as a conceptual framework for understanding the early phase of the Angolan intervention by examining the myths, metaphors and icons associated with the Cuban experience. This approach synthesises two interrelated propositions: firstly, that periods of liminality have “an existential quality”⁹² expressed through metaphor and analogy (Turner, 1969: 127), and secondly, that socio-political consciousness develops through ideological ‘codes’ – the symbols which comprise a society’s mythology. In this respect, it is helpful to gain an understanding of the relation between social formations and modes of consciousness.

⁹² I refer to Turner’s concept of existentialism as the whole individual in relation to other whole individuals.

Turner (1969: 95-96) differentiates between “two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness”: the first is characterised as “a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’;” while the second, relatively unstructured and more integrated social formation, “which emerges recognizably in the liminal period,” carries the Latin term ‘*communitas*.’ According to Turner, the structured and unstructured modes of social relationship alternate and juxtapose with one another, thus a society will function for a certain length of time according to one social formation, and then undergo a liminal period of *communitas*, before either reforming into the same type of social structure as before or into one that is different but based upon facets of the previous one. A notable element in periods of *communitas*, which is of particular interest to us, is that they are symbolised by “structurally inferior categories, groups, types, or individuals,” such as slaves (*ibid.*: 133). The “existential quality” of liminality, Turner discovered, differs from the classifications and ordering principles of structure: “structure tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly; while *communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas” (*ibid.*). The function of this appears to be connected to the need for, on the one hand, dissolving boundaries and social divisions, and, on the other, for building a consensual view of current conditions in order to inspire and guide collective action. In other words, in periods of *communitas*, individual consciousness must merge with group consciousness: a process of integration that is often created through reference to cultural metaphors.

Paul Ricoeur places metaphor at the intersection of poetics and rhetoric:

Thus, poetry and oratory mark out two distinct universes of discourse. Metaphor, however, has a foot in each domain. With respect to structure, it can really consist in just one unique operation, the transfer of meanings to words; but with respect to function, it follows the divergent destinies of oratory and tragedy. Metaphor will therefore have a unique *structure* but two *functions*: a rhetorical function and a poetic function. (2003: 12)

I would like to suggest that this dualistic function of metaphor links to Turner's description of *communitas*. If, as Ricoeur states, metaphor is "the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality" (*ibid.*: 5), then during periods of *communitas*, we would expect language to become more imaginative (metaphorical), and for meaning to slip in and out of aesthetic (poetic) and political (rhetorical) contexts. In other words, the aim of rhetoric, which is persuasion, will blend with and will be difficult to distinguish from the function of poetry, which is the purging of emotions of pity and fear (*ibid.*: 12). Consequently, any analysis of the image Cuba had of itself – its identity – during the liminal period of the Angolan Experience must take into consideration this idea of the framing of experience through metaphor or poetics.⁹³

Experience may be seen to connect to poetry to the degree that the latter extends the former into the realm of morality. By this I mean that poetry has the capacity to frame experiential facts according to 'human values, meanings and purposes' and that, accordingly, a poem may be conceived as a moral statement (Eagleton, 2007: 29).

However, as Terry Eagleton explains, "A poem does not only deal in moral truths; it

⁹³ The term 'poetic' here refers both to the technique and also to the characteristics of poetry. It refers to a discursive strategy that combines both the aesthetic and the political, and which comprises a dialectics between the real and the imagined, the past and the future.

deals with them in a fictional kind of way" (*ibid.*: 31). This "oblique relation to empirical truth" (*ibid.*: 32) endows poetry with its elasticity or, we might say, ambiguity. In the case of cultural productions, the bending of factual evidence in order to shape moral meaning does not necessarily imply a lack of truth. However, when political discourse appears to lay claim to poetics through an appeal to cultural metaphors the stakes become more troublesome. For, while rhetorical language in official discourse is prone to suspicion for its glib quality of persuasiveness, directly related to a material outcome, the poetic carries far deeper resonances, and promises much keener insight.⁹⁴ Another way of saying this is that poetry bears the "existential quality" we have attributed to *communitas*: it creates relations. To bring to light how this poetic principle in relation (and its inverse, the relational principle in poetry) worked in the case of Cuban internationalism, we will focus on a range of discursive acts that originated during the first two years of the Angolan Intervention.

I

Sergio Giral's historical drama *Ranchedor* (1976) is situated during a period in Cuba's slaving past when incidences of cimarronage had increased significantly. Economic factors contributed to the uncommon rise in slave rebellions, and stemmed, in the main, from the falling market value of coffee. Very early on in the film we hear from the *guajiro* Morales that low coffee prices have threatened his family's economic survival, and it soon becomes clear that, due to their financial troubles, the local *campesinos* are at

⁹⁴ In contrast to rhetoric, which is bound up with the idea of winning (e.g. an argument), poetry is considered to have nothing to prove. As a result, poetry is more associated with truth (see Ricoeur, 2003: 8-13).

the mercy of the sugar-producing aristocracy's rapacious land claims. Slaves are even more vulnerable to the market's whims, as coffee estate owners sell off their surplus workforce. In a scene indicative of this, a slave woman and her son are presented as a single lot at the auction block. Routine bidding ensues among the assembled crowd until the stakes are abruptly raised by a widow, dressed from head to toe in funereal black, who calls out a competitive offer for the woman alone. This bid seals the win, and the anguished slave woman is promptly wrestled out of reach of her child. Through this small cameo Giral indicates the reason why the higher incidences of slave rebellion occurred: the power of relation. Relation likewise explains why, as we observe in the film, maroons had the practice of returning to the plantation by day from their hideaways in the mountains: for if health, opportunity or other circumstance prevented loved ones from running away from captivity, relations could only be maintained in this manner.

In fact, the strategy of returning was an essential component of cimarronage. The West African Diaspora abounds with tales of African slaves who either risked being recaptured by going back to liberate those who remained in captivity (in the United States, the story of Harriet Tubman and her Underground Railroad is only the most well-known example), or else who slipped away to visit loved ones on neighbouring plantations only to return after a few days, a phenomenon known as *le petit marronage*.⁹⁵ Both cases reinforce the suggestion that slaves were less motivated by the goal to realise an individualised ideal of liberty than by the desire to maintain meaningful relationships and, where possible, to live within their own communities. Inevitably, however, since

⁹⁵ Price (1973: 3) reports that owners by and large made their peace with this form of cimarronage.

the struggle to maintain ties of kinship and affection involved the surmounting of numerous obstacles and perils, it developed among the descendants of slaves its own aura or romance, with the result that, even after slavery ended, unity became a mythological concept in the societies and communities of the West African Diaspora. Hence we find in discursive acts that combined revolutionary politics with African utopianism during the 1960s and 1970s various manifestations of what Édouard Glissant has defined as a 'poetics of relation:' "*La Relation, c'est-à-dire en même temps la Poétique, au sens agissant du mot, qui nous hausse en nous-même et la solidarité, par quoi nous manifestons cette hauteur. Tout réseau de solidarité est en ce sens une vraie Poétique de la Relation*" (1997: 249).

II

More than thirty years before Agostinho Neto travelled to Cuba as president of Angola he had been one of the leading figures in the Movimento dos Novos Intelectuais. Under the slogan 'Vamos descobrir Angola,' a multiracial group of young Angolan intellectuals had created the cultural movement and its literary organ, the periodical *Mensagem* (1951-1952). However, a mere four issues had been published before the paper and its organisation were closed down by the authorities. Eminent Angolan poet Viriato da Cruz had served as editor and leader of the movement, and his closest associates were two other poets, Mario de Andrade and Agostinho Neto. Ryszard

Kapuściński (1987: 139) stated: "The rise of the Angolan liberation movement is attributable to these three poets."⁹⁶

On July 26, 1976, Neto attended a mass rally in Pinar del Río to mark the anniversary of the Moncada attack, and an examination of the speech which Fidel Castro delivered on that day affords an opportunity to begin our study of the poetic principle in Cuban internationalism in Angola. The first mention is in relation to national history. "At times," Castro reflected, "history evolves before our very eyes, yet we fail to understand it in all its meaning. We Cubans can understand it best by comparing it with our own experiences" (2001: 127). After briefly sketching out a few comparisons between Cuba and Angola as colonies, respectively, of Spain and Portugal, the Cuban premier then set forth a list of the characteristics which Neto shared with José Martí. He began by recalling the Cuban patriot's distinguishing accomplishments:

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We have infinite admiration for Martí because of the gigantic tasks he assumed of forming a revolutionary awareness in our people. We admire Martí because he was a brilliant intellectual, a man of tremendous culture, a poet of exquisite sensitivity, who dedicated his life and pen to the struggle; he was a man of both word and action. We are grateful to him, and always will be, for what he meant and what he symbolized.
(*ibid.*)

Castro told his listeners that Cuban history at the end of the nineteenth century corresponded to Angolan history in the present day. Then, indicating Neto, he continued:

⁹⁶ The literary activities of these men are acknowledged by scholars such as Roberto Vecchi, Manuel Ferreira, and Salvato Trigo as precursors to the national liberation movement. In fact members of the "Movement of Young Angolan Intellectuals" made little distinction between their efforts to reshape the country culturally and politically.

And here we have a man who has also dedicated his life to the effort to free his homeland, who had to confront enormous difficulties; and to make the situations even more similar, Neto is also a man of tremendous culture, of great intellectual capacity, and an extraordinary poet who has dedicated his life and his pen to his people – to his discriminated against and enslaved brothers and sisters – to forge political awareness in the Angolans. *[Applause]*

Just as Martí wrote many of his best works, including much of his best poetry, amidst suffering – the inextinguishable suffering of one who is aware of the meaning of freedom and will not stand for man being treated as a slave – so did Neto write most of his best poetry amidst his suffering in prison and exile and as a result of the slavery of his brothers and sisters. *[Applause]* Martí and Neto have been the makers of countries. (*ibid.*: 127-128)

Beyond the clear parallels drawn here between the lives of the Cuban and Angolan leaders in terms of how each man combined poetry with nationalist politics and activism, another feature worth underlining relates to the manner in which memory enacted its own poetics through the “forming of meaningful sequences and ordered connections” (Thompson, 1981: 253). As John B. Thompson puts it in his study of Paul Ricoeur, to remember is “to be able to constitute one’s own existence in the form of a story where a memory as such is only a fragment of the story. It is the narrative structure of such life stories that makes a case a case history” (*ibid.*). While Thompson is referring to individual memory in this excerpt, it is easy to apply his thoughts to the realm of national life stories, and to do so leads us directly to a reflection on the overlap between the ‘ordering’ of life episodes or national events in the form of a story and the ‘generative’ function of ideology. By ‘generative’ I mean, for our purposes, the production of relatedness or, as Glissant might say, filiation – a dynamic process which

we have observed in previous speeches by Castro as the ritual of the cult of the ancestors.

In this regard, Thompson has noted:

This feature seems to be the specifically temporal aspect of ideology. It signifies that what is new can be accommodated only in terms of the typical, itself stemming from the sedimentation of social experience. This is where the function of dissimulation can come in. It occurs in particular with respect to realities actually experienced by the group, but unassimilable through the principal schema. (*ibid.*: 227)

Formerly, these 'unassimilable realities,' which I have previously referred to as 'the hard bone,' pertained to Cuba's slaving past and the differentiated experiences of slave and slave owner. In the present example, slavery once again takes on the mantle of poetic symbolism because, in reality, modern-day Angolans, while colonised, had never been enslaved, and, further, despite the claims of the Cuban premier, it was unlikely that thoughts of how to 'liberate' the New World descendants of African slaves had entered into the strategic plans Neto had constructed during his time in jail. In other words, slavery is used here according to the principles of poetry, that is, to foreground its moral value. As ethnographer J.L. Matony has found, this has become a common practice in post-slaving societies: "At many central ritual moments and in a range of non-ritual ones throughout the black and white Atlantic, 'slavery' has become a sacred 'model of and model for'⁹⁷ twentieth- and twenty-first century life" (2007: 420). Nevertheless, although these ambiguities and inconsistencies might hint at a questionable morality in a purely rhetorical analysis of the speech, our focus benefits from this polyvalent model of slavery for its ability to disclose the poetic principle underlying Cuba's policy of internationalism in Angola.

⁹⁷ See Geertz (1966), especially pp. 7-9.

Two powerful myths connect the theme of 'return' with ideas related to black liberation in the West African Diaspora: the first of these may be termed 'the myth of return to an idyllic African past,' and the second as 'the myth of return to traditional African values.' The myth of return to an idyllic African past is prevalent in the United States and many parts of the Anglophone Caribbean. It stems from the fraught quest for origins in the New World and is based upon a fundamental belief in the unprecedented perniciousness of Atlantic slavery. This myth has suffused numerous cultural productions by African-descended individuals, such as the depiction of tribal society in American author Alex Hayley's *Roots: The Saga of An American Family* (1976) which was televised as the series *Roots* in 1977, or as described in the 'redemption songs' of Rastafarian reggae musicians like Bob Marley.⁹⁸ The discourse of return in this context poses slavery as the moral opposite of freedom. As Matory explains,

⁹⁸ The musical genre known as Roots reggae enjoyed its highest period of popularity in the mid-to-late 1970s. Songs mourning the enslaved past such as *Slavery Days* by the Jamaican Rastafarian, Burning Spear, captured the alienated mood of a generation of West Indians in communities in the UK and North America. Taken from the album *Marcus Garvey* released in 1975, the lyrics went as follows:

Do you remember the days of slavery?
Do you remember the days of slavery?

And how they beat us
And how they worked us so hard
And they used us
'Til they refuse us

Do you remember the days of slavery?

And a big fat bull
We usually pull it everywhere
We must pull it
With shackles around our necks
And I can see it all no more

Do you remember the days of slavery?

For many contemporary African Americans (and particularly the intellectuals), slavery is then the foil against which our culture is believed to have developed or the mire that, through resistance, we have striven to rise above. Slavery is the lost progress from which we hope to recover and the nullification of personal and collective identity, which we have only gradually and partially reclaimed or replaced. (2007: 404)

While agreeing with Matory that this description of the image of slavery held by American blacks is oversimplified, I believe it carries sufficient psychic and emotional payload to be useful to our study. In brief, the theory posits a debased interlude of enslavement by Europeans between an idyllic ancestral tribal life in Africa and an emancipated future featuring a return to African geographical and/or psychological space. Returning to the previous point about the 'ordering' of life histories as a sort of 'generative' capacity, we may see this theory as a project of recovery.

The myth of return to traditional African values likewise is very attracted to the past, only in this case the geographic element is removed. Instead, what is longed for is

My brother feels it
Including my sisters too
Some of us survive
Showing them that we are still alive

Do you remember the days of slavery?

History can recall, history can recall
History can recall the days of slavery
Oh slavery days! Oh slavery days!

While I remember, please remember
Do you do you do you, do you do you do you
Oh slavery days! Oh slavery days! (Rodney, 2005)

In the Rastafarian movement Africa is often referred to as Zion and is considered not only a geographic but spiritual utopia. Elements of Rastafarian philosophy have been embraced in black communities around the world including Cuba. There are numerous books on Jamaican and international Rastafari, including one of the earliest studies by Jesuit priest Joseph Owens (1979 [1974]). Scholarly interest in the movement peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s beginning with British sociologist Tony Sewell's *Garvey's Children* (1987), and more recently has featured in-depth analysis of Rasta communities outside of the island of Jamaica, including Katrin Hansing's (2001) focus on Cuba.

a recovery of the old pre-colonial consciousness. In the postcolonial context, this poetic vision is mostly associated with Julius Nyerere, leader of Tanzania, which was the first African nation to gain its independence. In October 1960, Nyerere became head of the first independent government of Tanzania, and consequently an important component in Che Guevara's dream of an African alliance "to develop rearguard bases for revolutionary movements in the Congo, Angola, Rhodesia, and even South Africa" (Dosal, 2003: 205).⁹⁹ In Nyerere's view, traditional African society comprised a form of social organisation which could be adopted to counter the deleterious effects of capitalism and colonialism: he termed this 'natural African socialism.' His theory was based on the longstanding African tradition of the extended family, captured by the Swahili term *ujamaa*. According to this principle, membership in the family connotes specific rights. As Cuba's most eminent scholar of Africa, Armando Entralgo, explains in *El oro de la costa*: "La intención fue extender la protección social existente dentro de la familia Africana al ámbito más amplio de la sociedad en su conjunto" (2005: 149). The right to protect family members was considered just as fundamental as other social responsibilities and obligations, such as the duty to work no matter one's personal wealth (*ibid.*). Entralgo, who served as Cuban ambassador in a number of newly liberated African states, including Ghana and Tanzania, judged the Nyerere philosophy to be misguided, if not delusional, and berated the African leader for his failure to take into account just how many 'natural African' socialist customs had been eroded by

⁹⁹ Although scholars have often alluded to the Chinese influence on Guevara's brand of socialism, I find more convincing parallels with Nyerere's thinking. It is not possible to overlook the central place occupied by Dar-es-Salaam in the organisation of third-world revolutionary ideals and strategies. In particular I see important similarities between Che's idea of the 'new man' and the *ujamaa* conception of voluntarism. Both Guevara and Nyerere believed that the revolutionary project should strive to transform society by appealing to higher virtues of community spirit.

colonialism, and for overstating the lack of social differentiation that had existed in pre-colonial Africa – in other words, for idealising the past (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, the historicism of the cultural practice of *ujamaa* continued to influence the context of liberationist struggles for groups such as the MPLA a decade after Nyerere first expressed his views.¹⁰⁰ Above all, the restorative component of ideological *ujamaa* sought to repair the damage inflicted upon pre-existing social relations by the twin evils of slavery and colonialism. While this dynamic approach did not necessarily presuppose an African past free of inter-tribal conflict (except among the most utopian groups), it did (and continues to) trace intra-black violence back to malicious European influence. Elements of this view are detectable in journalist Ryszard Kapuściński's frontline account of the origins of the Angolan war, as narrated to him by the MPLA's

Comandante Ndozi:

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We didn't want this war, Ndozi insists. But Holden Roberto struck from the north and Jonas Savimbi from the south. This country has been at war for five hundred years, ever since the Portuguese came. They needed slaves for trade, for export to Brazil and the Caribbean and across the ocean generally. Of all Africa, Angola supplied the greatest number of slaves to those countries. That's why they call our country the Black Mother of the New World. Half the Brazilian, Cuban and Dominican peasants are descended from Angolans. This was once a populous, settled country and then it was emptied, as if there'd been a plague. Angola is empty to this day. Hundreds of kilometres and not a single person, like in the Sahara. The slave wars went on for three hundred years or more. It was good business for the chiefs. The strong tribes attacked the weak, took

¹⁰⁰ Dar-es-Salaam's significance as the geographical and spiritual hub for collaborative projects of African liberation remained undiminished into the 1970s. For example it was on December 31, 1974 that a crucial meeting took place in the Tanzanian capital between an MPLA delegation headed by Neto and two Cuban officials – Carlos Cadelo (representative for the PCC in Angola) and Major Alfonso Pérez Morales (veteran of the Guinean war of independence). Subsequently Neto authorised the Cubans to undertake a fact-finding mission in Angola to ascertain the level of Cuban support required. See George (2005: 56-58) for a more detailed account of this meeting.

prisoners, and put them on the market. Sometimes they had to do it, to pay the Portuguese taxes. The price of a slave was fixed according to the quality of his teeth. People pulled out their teeth or ground them away with stones in order to have a lower market value. So much suffering to be free. From generation to generation, tribes lived in fear of each other, they lived in hatred. [...] This is remembered by everyone even today because, in our thinking, the past takes up more space than the future. (2001: 33-34)

A preoccupation with the past, whether real or imaginary, is perhaps the single most defining characteristic of transnational black politics, reflective of what can be considered as a specifically “African cosmogonic view” (Henry, 2000: 58). In his renowned study *African Religions and Philosophy*, John Mbiti makes the claim that in traditional Africa time “moves ‘backward’ rather than forward, due to the conception of time as a “two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually *no future*” (1970: 17, 23). Versions of this idea have been repeated often enough by scholars and observers of Africa that it has become a commonplace; however its heuristic value to our study remains undeniable.¹⁰¹ For, what I wish to demonstrate now is how

¹⁰¹ In his highly informative and entertaining account of the many years he lived in Africa, *The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life*, Ryszard Kapuściński has provided one of the best explanations of this difference between the European and the African concepts of time. It goes as follows:

The European and the African have an entirely different concept of time. In the European worldview, time exists outside man, exists objectively, and has measurable and linear characteristics. According to Newton, time is absolute: “Absolute, true, mathematical time of itself and from its own nature, it flows equably and without relation to anything external.” The European feels himself to be time’s slave, dependent on it, subject to it. To exist and function, he must observe its ironclad, inviolate laws, its inflexible principles and rules. He must heed deadlines, dates, days, and hours. He moves within the rigors of time and cannot exist outside them. They impose upon him their requirements and quotas. An unresolvable conflict exists between man and time, one that always ends with man’s defeat – time annihilates him.

Africans apprehend time differently. For them, it is a much looser concept, more open, elastic, subjective. It is man who influences time, its shape, course, and rhythm (man acting, of course, with the consent of gods and ancestors). Time is even something that man can create outright, for time is made manifest through events, and whether an event takes place or not depends, after

the myth of return, expressed in the Cuban intervention in Angola, defined a third organising principle (and alternative to the two we have seen) – one that conjoined the discourse of unity and solidarity based on a shared historical experience to the future-oriented discourse of transcendence.

IV

Several months after the launch of Operation Carlota, in March and April 1977, Fidel Castro embarked on a sweeping tour of the African continent, making stops in Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, Somalia, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Angola. At the time of this – his second – visit to Africa,¹⁰² Cuba reportedly had troops or military advisers stationed in Guinea, Somalia, Southern Yemen, and Angola, while a June 13, 1976 Pentagon report alleged the presence of a network of Soviet “personnel, arms and money” that extended down from Algeria, Egypt and Libya in the north, to Mali, Angola, Nigeria and Guinea, in the west, and across to Uganda, Mozambique, and the Sudan in eastern Africa (Sobel, 1978: 122).¹⁰³ Although this was not his first visit to

all, on man alone. If two armies do not engage in a battle, then that battle will not occur (in other words, time will not have revealed its presence, will not have come into being).

Time appears as a result of our actions, and vanishes when we neglect or ignore it. It is something that springs to life under our influence, but falls into a state of hibernation, even non-existence, if we do not direct our energy toward it. It is a subservient, passive essence, and, most importantly, one dependent on man.

The absolute opposite of time as it is understood in the European worldview.

In practical terms, this means that if you go to a village where a meeting is scheduled for the afternoon but find no one at the appointed spot, asking, “When will the meeting take place?” makes no sense. You know the answer: “It will take place when people come.” (2002: 16- 17)

¹⁰² Castro’s first visit to Africa had taken place in 1972.

¹⁰³ Prior to the Cuban mission in Angola, the Soviets had shown scant interest in African affairs. As Aaron Segal (1983: 129) reports, “the sale or grant of military equipment” had formed the primary Soviet foreign policy tool in Africa.

Africa, it appears that the Cuban leader had only now grasped the significance of the continent from a political, rather than a predominantly cultural, perspective. "One could say that I discovered Africa," he is quoted as telling a reporter on a visit to Algiers (Gott, 2004: 158). On returning to Havana, Castro appeared impressed with the transformative potential he had witnessed, and referred to Africa as "imperialism's weakest link today." He reported: "Perfect opportunities exist there for the transformation from quasi-tribalism to socialism, without having to go through the various stages that were necessary in other parts of the world" (*ibid.*). Then, evoking the spirit of *ujaama*, he warned that, "Any attack against Angola will elicit a strong response. We will regard any attack against Angola as an attack against Cuba. Let this be clear: Along with the Angolan people, we will defend Angola with all the means available" (Castro, date unknown).

One year later, in a speech which Castro gave to Cuban internationalists in Luanda on March 30, 1977, the notion of inseparability between the Cuban and Angolan experiences continued to be represented in the terms of Nyerere's conception of imagined or metaphorical blood ties:

These feelings which we Cubans have already acquired will have to be shared by all people someday. Today it hurts us if a Cuban is hungry, if a Cuban has no doctor, if a Cuban child suffers or is uneducated, or if a family has no housing. It hurts us even though it's not our brother, our son, or our father. Why shouldn't we feel hurt if we see an Angolan child go hungry, suffer, be killed or massacred? [...] **We have gone beyond individual and family egoism, and we are beyond the borders of national egoism.** (Castro, 2001: 25-26, emphasis added)

What is most interesting about Castro's positive representation of the conquering of egoism, as highlighted, is how it corresponds with what we know about traditionally ego-critical African systems of thought. In *Caliban's Reason*, Paget Henry has explained how the traditional African conception of the self – formulated “in terms of a spiritual discourse” – has informed utopian philosophies and ideological constructions in the Caribbean and other diasporic societies (2000: 58-60). This way of thinking posits that in order to resolve tensions between the contracting energies of egoism and the expansive pull of the spiritual matrix – made up of ancestors, gods and other spiritual beings – ego must periodically “surrender to the correctives and directives” of spirit. The value of ego-displacement has shaped all aspects of African expression, from religious practices which facilitate visionary trance states to political discourses such as the afore-mentioned *ujamaa*. In terms of the latter, evidence may also be found in the political theories of such national liberation leaders as Kwame Nkrumah and Amilcar Cabral, for whom ideology and the heritage of African philosophy were inseparable (Henry, 2000: 64). The subjective and ideological significance of self-sacrificing unity formed the mutually-acknowledged basis of the principles of pan-Africanism, usefully defined by Ali Mazrui as a spiritual principle based on “important longings and emotions prevalent at a given moment in history across much of the African continent and the Black Diaspora” (1977: 82). Whether conscious or not, Castro's treatment of the subject of ego displacement, located the idealised Cuban self firmly within the framework of African consciousness.

V

At a later point in the speech, Castro links the experience of internationalism to a transformation in individual and group consciousness:

The day will come when these things I'm talking to you about have to be the prevailing feeling in every human family. You can't be utopian. I know that time has not come yet; there is still a great deal of egoism in the world; there is still a great deal of injustice and meanness. Part of humanity has freed itself and has started along this path, and we can feel that we are a part of this humanity.

We Cubans are now beginning to feel the problems of other peoples just as we feel our own problems. (2001: 26)

Here the revolutionary capacity for 'suffering with' – which we might term Cuban *Mitleid* – transcends the African context to encompass all of humanity. *Ujamaa* collides with *cubania* to produce not only an idealised but also a teleological model, an *afrocubania*, which projects beyond the past-embellishing projects of pan-Africanism towards the culmination of a universal destiny. It is, thus, a myth of return that bears the expressions and mimetic traces of the two previously-delineated formations ('return to Africa' and 'return to traditional African values') whilst categorically denying them any generative value within the Cuban context.¹⁰⁴ Internationalism is codified, first and foremost, according to the social experience of Cubans, and it is this perspective (perennially informed by slavery) which generates value (social capital) from the self-sacrificing practice of slaves returning to liberate their loved ones. A final but equally important point to note is how the Cuban president's use of the anticipatory present ("We Cubans are now beginning to feel") highlights the transitory aspect of the current

¹⁰⁴ The term 'generative' in this context refers to myth's capacity for guiding action through interaction with ideology. This stands in contrast to the 'reflective' quality of myth which explains reality but does not legitimise praxis.

project of identification, as if Angola (and therefore Africa) comprised a transformative or threshold experience, on the way to some other state of being.¹⁰⁵

VI

The critique of egoism, as we have seen, is related to mythopoeic notions of the self in Africa-centred ideologies. The idea I would like to share now is that in Cuba, as in other parts of the Spanish Caribbean, practices related to ego-displacement in African religious worship have encoded social existence according to archetypal consciousness, through the internalisation of “poetically constructed systems of meaning” (Henry, 2000: 104). An alternative way of saying this is that traditional African concepts and practices, propagated through religion and folklore, have become pervasive ways of making sense of many aspects of national life, and that, under this influence, Cubans have lived according to an Africanist metaphoric logic or poetics. From the early days of the Revolution, as I have already discussed, the important national metaphor became the slave-subject. However, as Matory has shown, the descendants of North American slaves – including the Anglo-Caribbean – embrace a different conception of the ‘situational morality’ of slaves than their counterparts in Brazil, Haiti and the Spanish Caribbean. He writes: “Black North Americans typically imagine the slave as the kidnapped and bloodily beaten man, the raped woman, the child sold off from the mother. The implication of bodily assault is emphasized” (2007: 403). On the other hand, in Afro-Latin religions of spirit possession: “Instead of being the opposite of the desired personal or social state, the image and mimesis of slavery become highly flexible

¹⁰⁵ The office of Prime Minister or Premier was officially abolished in December 1976 when the First Constitution went into effect and Castro became the Cuban president.

instruments of legally free people's aspirations for themselves and for their loved ones" (*ibid.*: 400). Such a view proceeds from an idea of slaves as embodiments of the qualities of proper personhood and moral rectitude (*ibid.*: 399). The metaphoric value of slavery in these communities lies, accordingly, in the notion of servitude as an instrument of spiritual efficacy. This, in turn, directly relates to the Cuban perspective on internationalism. Volunteers for the internationalist mission in Angola were motivated by an idea of themselves in relation to the cultural signs imbedded in national and social experience. The key point here is that, even when constructed under a Marxist-Leninist political influence, the slave-self as a social ideal displays traits of spirituality, and, furthermore, a form of spirituality which maintains a coherent rapport with the dead – the ancestors. At this point I would like to return to the theory of the Angolan intervention as a rite of passage, in order to explain how the ego-displacing strategy of identification with slaves directly relates to the philosophy of internationalism.

British anthropologist Max Gluckman has separated rituals into four categories: magical action ("connected with the use of substances acting by mystical powers"); religious action ("the cult of the ancestors, also acting in this way"); substantive or constitutive ritual ("which expressed or altered social relationships by reference to mystical notions, and of which *rites de passage* were typical"); and factitive ritual ("which increased the productivity or strength, or purified or protected, or in other ways increased the material well-being of a group") (1962: 23). Applying Gluckman's definition of the function of rites of passage – that is, the representation or refiguring of

social relations – to the use of slave imagery in Cuba, we come to an appreciation of the latter's restorative or healing role:

In fact it is a marked characteristic of all societies that persons belong to a series of different subgroups and relationships which associate them with different fellows, so that their 'enemies' in one set of relations are their 'allies' in another; and a diversity of distinct ties interrelates the members of a society, each set of ties striking into the autonomy and isolated loyalty of the members of another set. [...] and it is because social rules and values, established by diverse relations, themselves move individuals and sub-groups to dispute with their fellows in their main group of allegiance, that ritual operates to cloak the fundamental conflicts set up. (*ibid.*: 40)

With this point in mind, it is important to emphasise that metaphors utilised during rites of passage do not constitute a permanently desired condition. Given the temporary aspect of rites of passage, it follows that the metaphors and images associated with slavery in our examples were designed to prompt the group (whether religious or national) "to recognise and rediscover itself" (Thompson, 1981: 227). Identification with Angola was a precondition of the military intervention. Subsequently, the change in consciousness required to justify service to the MPLA cause required that Cuba 'interpret' the Angolan narrative according to its own ideological code. The ego-displacing component of slave symbolism in Cuban culture, already active in post-revolutionary mythology of the maroon, now needed to be reworked for the legitimatisation of action outside of the national context.

VII

Nicolás Guillén wrote a poem – or more exactly a *son* – on the theme of the internationalist mission, entitled *Son de Angola*.¹⁰⁶ It goes as follows:

Tevoyacantar un son
cubano en lengua española,
y es para decirte, Angola,
que estás en mi corazón.

¡Muera el gringo, viva el son,
viva Angola!

Muy alto dice mi son
cubano en lengua española,
que Angola ya no está sola
y tiene mi corazón.

¡Muera el gringo, viva Angola,
viva el son!

Arde en el viento mi son
cubano en lengua española,
un son diciéndote, Angola,
que tienes mi corazón.

¡Muera el gringo, viva el son,
viva Angola!

Escucha mi son, mi son
cubano en lengua española,
Él es de Cuba y Angola
corazón y corazón.

¡Muera el gringo, viva el son,
viva Angola! (in Augier, date unknown)¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Son is a musical genre that originated in Oriente province. Although a precise definition of the musical category is hotly debated, it is generally considered to form the basis of all contemporary Cuban music. It has also been compared to the blues in the United States with regard to its symbolic association with an indigenous black culture and way of life (see, for example, Robbins, 1990).

A *son* consists of four bars sung by a soloist, known as the *canto* or *largo*, followed by a choral refrain sung in response, the *montuno*. It is a pattern that incorporates features from Africa-derived religious ceremonies, in particular the Lukumí *cantos* which feature a lead singer or *akpon* who guides the song cycle. The dance which accompanies *son* is an improvisational pattern of movements for couples. Guillén transposes the dichotomies inherent in *son* (male/female, *canto/montuno*, Spain/Africa) into the poem's voice, by which I mean the moral statement it makes. On the one hand, the poem captures the sweetly ardent mood of a love sonnet, partly through the repetition of "corazón," which appears at the end of every *canto*, and partly due to the effect of addressing Angola in the familiar 'tú' form reserved for intimates. In this way, the country Angola appears as the Beloved. However, the lyrical warmth and familiarity created by these devices are disrupted by pointed references to the "lengua española."

Why does Guillén insist on making this distinction even though the Spanish element is implicit in 'cubano'? One idea is that, since culture is imbedded in language, by calling attention to the linguistic differences between himself and the object of his affections, Guillén is distancing himself as an Afro-Cuban from too close an identification with bona fide Africans – the notion that they do not 'speak the same language.' From this perspective, "lengua española" works as an alienating device and further contributes to the dualist dynamic I have mentioned. It is, however, equally possible that the poet's intention was to represent the transcendental quality of *cubanidad* ("mi son cubano"). "Lengua española," in this view, becomes simply one of many possible manifestations of

¹⁰⁷ Don Burness (1996: 61) reports that the poem was written in Havana on 22 July 1976. I have found no record of the poem's publication inside Cuba, except in this online version. However, it appeared in the Angolan journal *Lava & Oficina* in 1980 (*ibid.*).

cubanidad, and the invitation is extended for Angola to construct her own (Portuguese-speaking) version of the Cuban project. This idea more closely matches the meaning I have assigned to the transcendental terms used by Fidel Castro in his speech to the internationalists – a vision of Cubans in the vanguard of universality. The synthesising effect of the final *canto* (“Él es de Cuba y Angola, corazón y corazón.”) hints at still another possibility, however. Could the poet be speaking of himself as an estranged (that is to say Spanish-speaking) son of Africa? If this is so, then “lengua española” serves as both lament and apology – an instrument for explaining and, simultaneously, grieving the relations ruptured due to the Middle Passage. “Corazón y corazón,” meanwhile, implies a faith in ties that transcend history, as if Cuba and Angola were calling out to one another: from the one side “Muera el gringo!” and from the other “Castigad a la gente que compró a nuestros parientes;” or the call “Viva Angola!” in response to the appeal “Enviad sus naves.” Seen in this way, the poem enacts the same poetics of relation we have observed in other discursive acts related to the Angolan intervention, specifically by creating, through the transformative capacity of myths related to the ancestors, the sense of elevation – “hauteur” – which, as Glissant has explained, is necessary for all acts of solidarity.

VIII

On November 8, 1978, Nicolás Guillén signed an Accord between the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists and the Union of Angolan Writers on behalf of Cuba. Poet António Jacinto, who at the time held the posts of Minister of Education and Cultural Secretary of State, signed for Angola (Burness, 1996: 60). The disparity in status between the

two men (Armando Hart Dávalos had become Cuba's first Minister of Culture in 1976) already signalled differences in how the collaborative project was esteemed in each country. While Angola applied itself to the task of introducing its citizens to Cuban literature, this commitment was never matched by Cuba, and the entire project proved to be short-lived. As Don Burness reports in his survey of Cuban literary responses to the Angolan war,

The [Angolan] Writers Union welcomed Cuban writers into the Angolan village of literature. They welcomed Cuban writers into an African extended family. They encouraged; they published. They distributed Cuban poetry on Angola as if it was a part of Angolan literature. In particular Luandino Vieira, Costa Andrade and Antero Abreu established contacts with Cuban poets Victor Casaus and Waldo Leyva and others. In literary journals and anthologies, Cuban poets appear side by side with Angolan poets. (1996: 53)

On the Cuban side, the four literary journals, *El caimán barbudo*, *Unión*, *La gaceta de Cuba*, and *Casa* all published poetic works by Agostinho Neto in early 1976. *Verde Olivo* published its own selection of poetry by the Angolan leader in September 1976, but for the most part remained an occasional outlet for poems by Cubans on the subject of Angola. Apart from these exceptions, it is difficult to find any evidence of Cuban interest in Angolan writers, and reasons for the imbalance are purely speculative. Certainly the youthfulness of Angola's Writers Union must be taken into consideration: established only since December 1975, it is probable that connections with writers from other cultures would have conferred a coveted degree of legitimacy upon the fledgling organisation. Moreover, a desire to repay the 'debt' of Cuban self-sacrifice for the MPLA cause stands as yet another possible motivation for the Angolans'

conscientiousness. Conjecture aside, what *is* clear is that, with the exception of those who had travelled to the country, Cubans had very little interest in 'discovering' Angolan culture. It was the internationalist experience in and of Angola that mattered far more, so that literature which pertained to the *Cuban* experience in Angola received greater attention. Mainly this took the form of testimonials, such as war correspondent José "Pepín" Ortiz's *Angola: un abril como Girón* (1983) – a trend which has continued with, for instance, the 2006 publication of *Patria africana* by Raúl Menéndez Tomassevich and José Ángel Gárciga Blanco. However, by far the most popular form of writing on the African experience to appear in such publications as *Bohemia* and *Verde Olivo*, even surpassing journalism, was poetry.

A survey of the cultural productions associated with Angola during the first two years of the intervention uncovers an overwhelming absorption with the political rather than any sociocultural relationship between the two peoples. In the film industry, between 1976 and 1978, a record eight documentaries focused on the African continent: *Angola: victoria de la esperanza* (1976), *La guerra en Angola* (1976), *La respuesta del pueblo* (1976), *Luanda ya no es de San Pablo* (1976), and *Cabinda* (1977) each covered aspects of Angolan history, the independence movement, and the civil war; *La lanza de la nación* (1977) placed the Angolan war in the context of other African liberation struggles; meanwhile *Maputo, meridiano novo* (1976) traced the roots of revolution in Mozambique, and *Reportaje en Lagos* (1977) reported on the Second World Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture in Nigeria.

Burness has noted that, until the mid-1990s when his book was published, not only were all the Cubans who wrote literature about their experiences in Angola

established writers, but that, without exception, they were either white or “very light skinned mulattoes” (1996: 4). This drives the question whether race established the parameters of the literary landscape? What is more, none of the directors of the documentary films I have listed were Afro-Cuban either. While it is clearly not my intention to suggest that only persons of African descent can be curious about Africa, I strongly suspect that greater participation by black writers and filmmakers in the documenting of the Angolan experience would, at the very least, have generated a wider range of focus, perhaps including comparisons between the two cultures. Only poetry provides the exception to this pattern. I agree with António Jacinto that, “A poem is found in what and in how we see” (quoted in Burgess, 1996: 101). As the most metaphorical of the literary forms, it is unsurprising that poetry most successfully captured the change in consciousness associated with the liminal experience of war, an idea poignantly expressed by Cuban poet Antonio Conte, who travelled to Angola as an internationalist soldier in 1978, when he wrote:

La solidaridad no es un concepto
es sangre derramada. (1981: 34)

IX

Upon his death in the jungles of Bolivia, the Argentine Ernesto Guevara passed into the mythical realm of Cuban ancestors as an icon of the spirit of internationalism. In conversations which I held with veterans of the Angolan intervention during the course of this study, no other figure provoked so much emotional admiration as ‘El Che.’ It

certainly seems likely that the desire to copy his idealised image inspired more acts of volunteerism for the Angolan campaign than any other single factor.

In an interview with a group of American journalists a few days after his address to the UN General Assembly on December 11, 1964, Che Guevara declared that the most important quality for a revolutionary was love.¹⁰⁸ The willingness to sacrifice oneself for the object of one's affection is of course the most self-effacing (ego-displacing) act of love, and Guevara's embodiment of this concept in the Congo carries a particularly acute resonance in the former slaving nations of the West African Diaspora, where public expressions of love involving slaves (either one slave for another, or between slave and master) were either rare or else corrupted by social networks based on use-value. In cultures where the lowest value has traditionally been assigned to persons of African descent, Guevara's willingness to die for the cause of black liberation represents a complete upheaval of social norms, and it is possible that this, over any other feature, has contributed to his elevated position in the pantheon of Cuban (and even world) heroes. Similarly, the powerful idea of internationalism in Cuba cannot be understood separately from the Guevaran example, whose compulsion lies in self-sacrificing love as a symbolic political force.

'Para leer el Che,' written by Roberto Fernández Retamar, was published in the June 1976 edition of *Revolución y Cultura*. The article – a major feature running over ten pages – interests us for its intriguing portrayal of Guevara as the quintessential embodiment of universality, right down to his manner of speaking:

¹⁰⁸ The interview took place at the Cuban mission in New York on December 16, 1964. A full recording is available on the CD entitled *Che Guevara: The Voice of the Revolution* (2008).

Es curioso, al oír su voz, escucharle un acento que no es ni argentino ni mexicano ni cubano, sin ser tampoco, por supuesto ese español abstracto, exangüe, de algunos profesores de lengua en tierra extraña: es en realidad, con referencia a nuestro Continente, lo que Unamuno proponía para el área del idioma: el sobrecastellano. Cada uno de nosotros lo reconoce como suyo aunque, a la vez, hay en él algo de otra parte. Esa otra parte quizás no es sino la totalidad misma, la América nuestra en su conjunto. (1976:64)

As we saw in Guillén's *son*, verbal expression is endowed here with a metaphorical value over and above the simple linguistic. In the case of Guevara, the inability to 'place' him geographically through his accent or speech patterns underscores his reputation as an 'everyman,' perhaps further enhancing his mythic (that is to say, transcendental) qualities. Of course, another way of thinking about this is in terms of liminality. When we apply the idea of liminality to Guevara's career, for example, certain correspondences with mythic characters such as the trickster become evident, such as the following: "The trickster may flit across the borders at any time, penetrating the social structure at will, but he cannot stay there. He must return to that state of betwixt and between in order to manifest his powers" (La Shure, 2005). After leaving Argentina, Guevara, as we know, was involved in Jacobo Arbenz's project of social reform in Guatemala, before fighting in the guerrilla war against Batista in Cuba. Then, in 1965, he left Cuba to assist revolutionary movements in the Congo and finally in Bolivia. The image of Che Guevara over the course of this trajectory is unwavering, we might say static. It is as if once he has undergone the transformative experience of his Latin American tour, which establishes his political philosophy, his character is set. In the same way,

Mythical characters are defined by their consistent personalities. Their personalities do not change or develop over the course of a narrative, and the focus [...] is not on how

outside forces influence that character to change, but on how the character's consistent personality allows them to deal with the world. In other words, mythic characters impose their will on the world, while non-mythic characters are imposed upon by their world. (*ibid.*)

CONCLUSION

If, as Ali Mazrui claims, the bond which brought together black Africans in the struggle for liberation was the bond of being black, we might infer that the link between black Africans and Cuba's *mestizo* population was at least partially based on the solidarity of being 'non-white,' or, more precisely, of being part of the 'imagined community' of blackness. By this I mean blackness as a transatlantic pan-Africanism, "bringing together the Black Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere with all Africans on the continent, both black and Arab" (Mazrui, 1977: 27). Furthermore, if we acknowledge that the core principle of self-determination as the precursor to self-realisation lies at the heart of pan-Africanism, and then take into consideration what we know of the history of Cuban nationalism, it is possible to trace the roots of both movements to the common struggle for sovereignty. Thus a space is created for *cubanidad* in the diasporic imagination by means of the transatlantic expression of pan-Africanism, which encompasses the broad concept of exploitation by the Western world, in contrast to "West Hemispheric pan-Africanism which finds solidarity in having been jointly *enslaved*" (*ibid.*: 69). Nonetheless, it is precisely transatlanticism's historical context of the slave trade which, when applied to the case of the Angolan intervention, rendered it a liminal space beyond the basic notion of a crossroads where political ideologies meet, because to re-cross the unfathomable waters of the 'black Atlantic' without the succour

of unifying myths, the fortifying example set by gods and icons, and the moral legitimisation of a poetics, would have been extremely treacherous, if not impossible. In order for collective action to have social meaning it is vital that political consciousness align itself with the idealised images found in a group's sacred tales.¹⁰⁹ As Glissant has put it, "In the Western world the hidden cause (the consequence) of both Myth and Epic is filiation, its work setting out upon the fixed linearity of time, always toward a projection, a project" (1997: 47). In liminal terms, the consequence of Cuba's epic intervention in Angola was the re-working of the previous project of filiation, towards a new identity.

It is important to stress that while the retelling of myths of the African ancestor may have motivated political and military action, Cuban consciousness did not become 'more African' as a result of Angola. Since the Cuban idea of Africa had been shaped by the lived experiences of slavery, the plantation, and marronage, in the Caribbean context, it was natural that these would form the building blocks of any ideological code. According to Hassan Rachik's (2006) conceptual framework of hard and soft identities, we could say that the national experience of slavery comprised the defining and enduring (hard) dimension of Cuban identification with Africa, which the softer, homogenising and purificatory mythology of filiation, created during the *communitas* period of the Angolan intervention, would need to incorporate. As I have suggested earlier, through the influence of Africa-derived religiosity, many Cubans already had a long tradition of using slave metaphors as a guide to how to live mythically. The mythopoeic African worldview acts, in this view, to provide a sense of purpose when life

¹⁰⁹ See Glissant (1997) for a more detailed account of the role of tragedy and epic in the modern world, especially pp. 52-56.

seems meaningless or fragmented, in the same way that poetry may disclose a hidden order or cosmology beneath the randomness of mundane reality.

Prior to the Angolan intervention, filiation with Africa turned upon the idealised image of the slave in the context of rebellion. Slave iconography focused on the African contribution to the wars of independence, and especially on maroons as precursors of the revolutionaries. At the time of Operation Carlota, however, the significance of the maroon's original act of rebellion was eclipsed, in the national imaginary, by an emphasis on the courageous, and self-sacrificing, strategy of returning to the plantation (the locus of enslavement) in response to the ties of relation.

EL ÁTLAS DE AFRICANÍA: PART TWO

In that fleeting, anonymous passage through Africa, Che Guevara was to sow a seed that no one will destroy. (Márquez, 2009)

The population of Africa was a gigantic, matted, crisscrossing web, spanning the entire continent and in constant motion, endlessly undulating, bunching up in one place and spreading out in another, a rich fabric, a colourful arras.

This compulsory mobility of the population resulted in Africa's interior having no old cities, at least none comparable in age to those that still exist in Europe, the Middle East, or Asia. Similarly—again in contrast to those other regions—many African societies (some claim all of them) today occupy terrain that they did not previously inhabit.

All are arrivals from elsewhere, all are immigrants. Africa is their common world, but within its boundaries they wandered and shifted for centuries, a process that continues in certain parts of the continent to this day. Hence the striking physical characteristic of civilization is its temporariness, its provisional character, its material discontinuity. A hut put up yesterday has already vanished. A field still cultivated three months ago is today lying fallow.

The continuity that lives and breathes here, and that creates the threads of the social fabric, is the continuity of family tradition and ritual, and the pervasive and far-reaching cult of the ancestor.

Rather than a material or territorial community, it is a spiritual community that binds the African to those closest to him. (Kapuściński, 1998:20)

INTRODUCTION

Among the quantity of archival documents which I obtained prior to my journey to Cuba, certainly one of the richest was a copy of a declassified cable transmitted on January 13, 1976 by the US Department of State containing information considered

pertinent to “the Cuban/Angolan problem” (see fig. 14). The two-page document records the presence of two Cuban delegations at the OAU meeting held that month in Addis Ababa: one headed by the UN Ambassador, Ricardo Alarcón, and the other by Osmany Cienfuegos, Secretary General of OSPAAAL. It reports that a few days prior to the OAU Assembly, Cienfuegos and his officials had made a short tour of several African nations: the Congo, Nigeria, Uganda, and Algeria. The cable also alerts US diplomatic missions in the Americas to the continuing (and worrisome?) presence in the region of an MPLA delegation whose travels between the end of December 1975 and early January 1976 had included Jamaica, Guyana, Venezuela, and Panama (National Security Archive, 2002).¹¹⁰

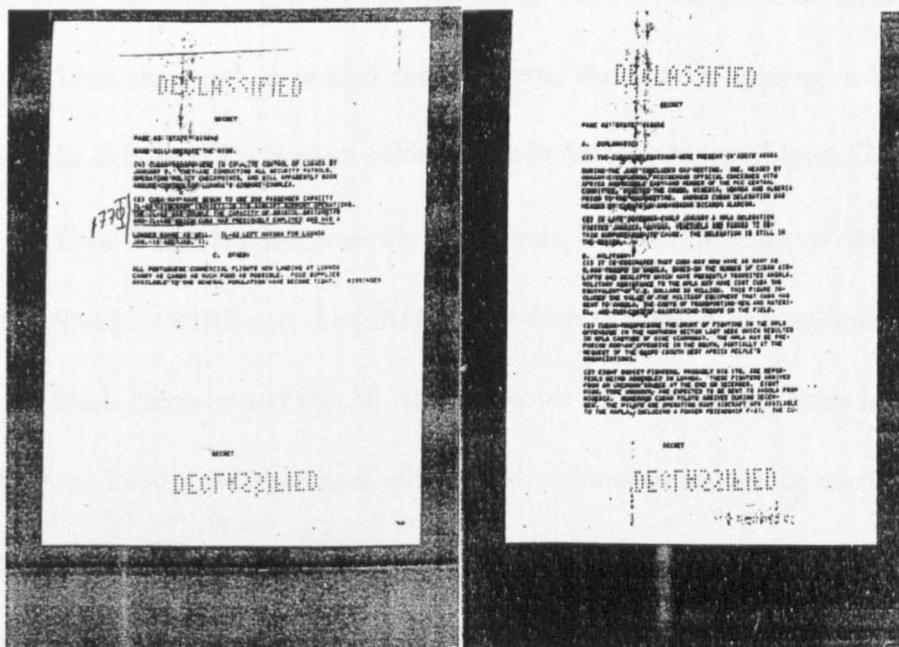


FIGURE 14. These pages, taken from declassified US Department of State Cable ‘Cuban Military Intervention in Angola: Report Number 9,’ dated January 13, 1976, report on the visit by an MPLA delegation to countries of the Caribbean and Latin America to solicit support. Also described are the commencement of Soviet-assisted airlifts between Havana and Luanda in that month, and the extent of Cuban military operations, including in the Angolan capital where Cuban troops were allegedly “in complete control by January 9 [1976].”

¹¹⁰ The rest of the document concerns details of the Cuban military intervention, including the ‘alarming’ estimate that the number of Cuban troops in Angola now numbered around nine thousand, and that Cuban forces had borne the brunt of the fighting in the successful capture of Carmona, capital city of the northern province of Uíge.

The time-worn and partially illegible report captured my attention for a variety of reasons, not the least being the light it cast on the increasing focus, by the mid-1970s, on transnationalist organisation among black and African liberation groups. From previous reading I was aware that in the United States, for example, with its long history of institutionalised black solidarity with the cause of African liberation, including the beleaguered Council on African Affairs (established in 1937) and the American Committee on Africa (formed in 1952), the fixed attention on combating racial inequalities on the home front, which had characterised black political organisation during the 1960s, dispersed in the 1970s into a more diffuse, but no less self-defining, diasporic awareness under the impact of the second wave of African liberationist struggle. Within this newly expanded consciousness, the Soweto uprising in South Africa and the demise of Portuguese colonial rule in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde became watershed moments.¹¹¹ The influence of civil rights groups like SNCC, CORE and the NAACP, and even the appeal of black radical groups such as the Black Panthers and the All-African People's Revolutionary Party had declined by the 1970s, and a plethora of local and national organisations emerged to form a set of interconnecting political networks united in their emphasis on transnational and international connections, and in their shared commitment to bring down the racist system of apartheid in South Africa and Namibia (Minter *et al.*, 2008: 114). Organisations like the Pan-African Liberation Committee, the African Liberation

¹¹¹ On June 16, 1976, students in the township of Soweto took to the streets to protest against the apartheid system. Their action inspired a series of similar demonstrations across the country. The South African government ordered the police to use the severest means to suppress the protests, resulting in over five hundred deaths. The massacre of unarmed civilians provoked worldwide condemnation and inspired a sustained global anti-apartheid campaign.

Support Committee, and TransAfrica, coordinated mass events such as the African Liberation Day rallies held in Washington, DC in 1972 and 1977, which drew tens of thousands of demonstrators to gatherings in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean (*ibid.*: 118-127).

In its terse prose documenting the movements of Cuban and MPLA delegates across the Americas and Africa, the cable effectively traced out a 'map of meaning,' rendering the ideology of African solidarity in geographical coordinates. A further exciting aspect was that this 'map' testified to the existence of a transnational 'community of others' for whom the Cuban engagement in Angola against the South African army conceivably represented a heroic and defining gesture.

In his essay 'The Community of Others: Postcolonial Theory and the Caribbean,' Shaun Irlam (1999) explains the 'community of others' to be "a motley, mongrel group of peoples, cultures and societies" who having been forced together by a particular set of circumstances "needed to improvise ways to communicate with each other." Reflecting upon what I already knew about black political movements in the African Diaspora, it struck me that in this particular 'community of others' members had developed a language (lexicon) for expressing shared values that was based on Swahili and rooted in the teachings of Julius Nyerere. In his reminiscences of the Tanzanian leader, political activist Charles Cobb Jr. recalled that among black Americans in the 1970s, "*Ujamaa* and *uhuru* – those two words meant Africa to us." He continued,

It was Julius Nyerere's Tanzania that reached out to my generation, demanding that we think about this Africa that Africans were trying to fashion. Although necessarily there

were ideas and processes specific to Tanzania underway in that then-new East African nation, the Africanness reached through to us. Something larger seemed to surround local Tanzanian efforts. *Kujitegemea*, or self-reliance, was a term that reached many of us via President Nyerere's important writings on education for self-reliance. The concept seemed bigger than Tanzania, and relevant to my neighbourhood too. Ujamaa seemed to be more than a Swahili phrase defining rural cooperative efforts in Tanzania. (Cobb Jr. 2008: 129)

Since it is the collective written record of lived experiences which comprises the essential annals of all communities, whether 'imagined' or not, the idea came to me that the writings of Cubans who had served in Angola could justifiably be considered part of the chronicles of the worldwide struggle for black liberation. However, it was not until arriving in Matanzas that I came across testimonials of the Angolan intervention among the crammed and overflowing shelves of a curious treasure of a bookshop run by a learned, kaftan-wearing, former university professor in the front room of her town centre home. Held in the well-worn wings of a high-backed armchair, I sat and gently leafed through the pages of one long-forgotten war testimonial after another: the literary 'detritus' of Cuba in Angola. I could have stayed and read for hours. But soon other travellers who had been told of this cultural way-station began to gather outside on the sun-scorched pavement, and I had to make room. Hastily I selected a small stack of paperbacks, among them war correspondent José Ortiz's memoir *Angola: un abril como Girón* (1983) and author Joel James's fictionalised account *Hacia la tierra del Fin del mundo* (1982), paid the dollars requested with minimal haggling, and then hurried away back to my rented room to pack for the next day's journey to Havana. Most of the books I wrapped in old issues of *Granma* to be stored away in a suitcase together with

other similar purchases – my slowly but inexorably expanding library. But I put aside Emilio Comas Paret's *De Cabinda a Cunene* (1983) to read on the bus ride ahead, and it was to this collection of poetic and poignant narratives that I often returned during the many minutes and hours of waiting in various locales over the course of my stay. In this way, over time I came to rely on the book's contribution to the texture of my daily experiences in the city.

Emilio was a gifted and already established poet by the time he travelled to Angola as an internationalist in 1976. His plainly elegant prose stands out for its ability to capture the variegated dimensions of the war experience: anxiety, loss, elation, confusion, grief, and pride. Like the parts of a *son*, his memories chant a refrain to the stanzas reconstructing my time in Havana: our 'stories without a plot' marking out the *montuno* of "multiple voices and dispersed elements" (Webb, 1992: 49) constitutive of all historical experience.

NARRATIVE

Day 15. Centro Habana. On the streets Havana is a much quieter city than I had imagined. In part this has to do with the low number of cars and other motor vehicles, but aside from that there is not the cacophony of yelling and calling out and raucous laughter that floats on the breezes of so many other Caribbean port cities. The hush lends an air of dignity to the signs of decay, but also gives an ambiance of expectancy, as if everywhere everyone is waiting. And of course, taking a look around, at any given moment one's gaze will always come to rest on a queue of some sort – for bread, or a bus, or a cone of sweet, delicious ice cream.

Indoors it is a very different story. Upstairs, in my very own room at the top of the house, I am never alone. Because the heat forces windows to be left ajar, I hear every yawn, cough, and scratch made by the family next-door. They are my invisible room-mates. And they shout – a lot. Not in anger, but just in that emphasised and energetic way of speaking shared by all peoples of the sun. Perhaps Cuban mothers raise their children differently from North Americans and Europeans, training them to speak in their ‘inside voices’ when out in the world and to use their ‘outside voices’ at home. Whatever the case, for me it makes for an enforced intimacy with strangers that is discomfiting and yet reassuring, like the time when I awoke in the middle of the night just as Sr. X’s gentle snoring had stopped, as if it were only that growling lullaby that had kept me asleep. I heard him get up alone and potter around in the kitchen for a long while before returning to bed, and soon the snoring started up again. So that the following morning after their alarm clock had sounded and I heard him explain to his *compañera* that he was tired and had not slept well, I already knew all that he would relate – knew what had happened even before her, his Beloved. Yet I had never seen his face.

This seems a metaphor for my stay so far: I had read and studied and planned in detail this research trip to the point where in some respects everything seemed already known and familiar, but of course I had never experienced Cuba before. And so now, faced with the reality, I no longer know how to feel.

EMILIO

Diario I. Día 18, a las 12:06 a.m. zarpamos. Dormimos. Por la mañana cruzamos Caibarién. Un poco de nostalgia. Luego seguimos bordeando Cuba. Al otro día vimos las montañas de Jamaica, por la noche las luces de Santo Domingo. Tan cerca que se veían los autos. El mar ha estado algo picado. Yo estoy bien del mareo. El grupo en general está bien.

El mar es impresionante de día y más impresionante de noche. El gran problema hasta ahora es hacer mis necesidades, hay muy poca intimidad. Con Lázaro el trovador hicimos un grupo de descarga y actuamos en las bodegas. Yo leo cuentos y poemas.

Tengo muchos deseos de llegar. Me parece que todo será una experiencia tremenda y que los malos ratos ya quedaron atrás, cuando el entrenamiento. (1983: 9)

Day 18. Centro Habana. Two days of phone calls without reaching anyone. Everybody was either in a meeting or away – in Venezuela – and not expected back for several days. Frustration. So, yesterday I decided to walk over to the Instituto de Literatura y Lingüística to look for Pedro's researcher friend, Rafael. I skipped breakfast and left early before the sun had climbed too high in the sky. It's a short walk from here along the wide and pleasant Salvador Allende. I spotted a shopping mall, Plaza Carlos, and breezed inside looking for a hotdog. It seemed gloomy inside, and the food court located right in the centre only sold the usual doughy pizza and ham sandwiches, although I noticed a few plastic tubs of spaghetti too. No hotdogs in sight though, so I continued on to the Instituto.

The receptionist informed me that Rafael was in a meeting and invited me to sit and wait. I sat by the entrance to catch the cooling cross-breezes. Some workmen were tapping away at slabs of stone for the reconstructed inner courtyard. I could see a fountain beneath the folds of dusty plastic sheeting, and plants – ferns and palms mostly. This place will be an oasis when it's completed. Every now and then the kindly receptionist would look across at me with a concerned expression and then get up to check whether the meeting had ended. I must have made a pretty pathetic sight, especially as my hunger and thirst grew, and soon my head began to spin. After just under two hours of waiting I scribbled a note for Rafael with my phone number and left it with the receptionist.

EMILIO

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DIARIO I. El hombre de uniforme había sido movilizado de los primeros, cuando todavía se creía que era una práctica más. Después, cuando algunos comenzaron a desaparecer y empezó el comentario, se dio cuenta que la cosa iba en serio.

Nunca se imaginó que fuera en el África. No se había oído decir nada ya sus compañeros del Puerto que tenían la costumbre de discutir de política y otras cuestiones mientras estibaban los sacos de azúcar, y entre lingada y lingada arreglaban el mundo a su antojo hablaban de América Latina, de Chile más que nada, y de Brasil, Perú o Argentina, pero a nadie se le había ocurrido que los problemas serios fueran en África. Se dio cuenta que era allí, cuando oyó hablar al Comandante de selvas, serpientes y sudafricanos. Porque su misión había sido, desde que vistió el uniforme, la de chofer del Jefe de la Unidad. Al principio pensó que la partida sería enseguida, porque el comandante lo situaba al frente de la tropa, pero luego hubo cambios. En el Ejército

nunca se sabe nada, dicen que por la discreción. Entonces cayó en lo que todos, la especulación. Empezó a aplicar la lógica a las cosas. (*ibid.*: 13)

Day 18. Centro Habana. Afterwards

I took an overpriced tourist taxi to Habana Vieja following yet another lead. I made my way over the burning cobblestone streets to the Fototeca, only

to be turned away by a security guard because public access was denied while

preparations were being made for the new exhibition. By this time I was so

disorientated from the heat and my gnawing hunger that I babbled

something to the guard about feeling

unwell and needing to sit down for a

spell. Intrigued (amused?) by this

cubanita who spoke such halting Spanish,

she showed me into another

courtyard/oasis (the city is full of them!)

and told me that I could stay for as long as

necessary. That's when I met Daphne.



FIGURE 15. Black Cubans gather at a popular nightclub in the Marianao district of Havana, in the 1970s.

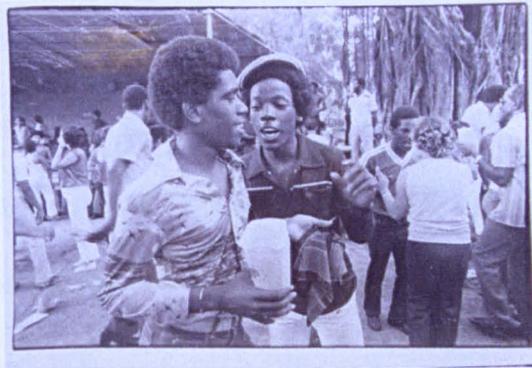


FIGURE 16. 1970s Pan-African dress styles in Marianao.



FIGURE 17. Natural hairstyles (afros) were popular with black Cubans in the 1970s.

She works as an intern at the Fototeca and speaks flawless English. At the moment she's waiting to see if her application to study at a Canadian university will be successful. Her field of enquiry is women photographers and, hearing about my interests, she took me upstairs to the staff offices and introduced me to the work of Marucha, one of the leading luminaries of Cuban photography.¹¹² I knew that Marucha had collaborated in the making of *La última cena*, but it is only now that I have discovered her work documenting the 'marginal' lifestyle of black *habaneros* during the 1970s (a project which was heavily criticised at the time and has been overlooked ever since) that I understood her listing in the credits alongside folklorists and Africanists such as Rogelio Martínez Furé. Looking at these photos was a revelation. My heart leapt, and for a few timeless moments I completely forgot my weakened physical condition. Here was incontrovertible proof of a cultural link between black Cubans and the West African Diaspora – it lay in the clothes, the hairstyles, the overall style and fashion, in what constituted the 'uniform' of black consciousness. Looking at these photographs, it was impossible to tell whether these were Africans or Americans or West Indians, and that of course is exactly the point (see fig. 15, 16 and 17).

EMILIO

DIARIO II. Sábado, diecisiete días de navegación. (¿Será el último?) Anoche soñé agradablemente y desperté bien. Que me perdone mi compañera, pero es culpa del subconsciente. Esto es un gran sufrimiento, es un infierno por el ajetreo.

¹¹² María Eugenia Haya (Marucha) was a highly regarded and award-winning Cuban photographer whose work has been exhibited throughout Europe and the Americas. She remained a founding director of the Fototeca de Cuba until her death in 1991. Her insightful extended essay 'Sobre La Fotografía Cubana' (1980) is a classic among her many historical investigations into the subject.

Dicen que llegamos hoy por la noche, pero vamos a desembarcar mañana, así podremos ver la ciudad de día. [...]

A las cuatro y media de la tarde se vio tierra por primera vez en diecisiete días. Una loma azulosa que casi se confunde con el mar y el cielo.

Estuve ayudando a poner un letrero usando banderas de señales con algunos marineros: Internacionalismo.

A las 9:50 de la noche anclamos. Parece que estamos en Cuba. El Puerto es bello. Estamos tan cerca de la costa que conversamos a gritos con la gente.

Esto está despoblado con la guerra. Se ven carros, muy modernos, que contrastan con la miseria de una parte de la ciudad. (*ibid.*: 16)

Day 21. Centro Habana. It's 8.15 in the morning. Yesterday for the second evening in a row there was a black-out just after dinner. Denys and Olivia told me that it had been months since it last happened. They said that about two years ago *apagones* were a daily occurrence, for hours at a time, in the extreme humidity of July and August. Nowadays it's usually Centro Habana that bears the brunt. El Vedado and Habana Vieja, where most of the tourists stay, are spared.

Yesterday was a rollercoaster of emotions and events. I finally met up with Rafael. He was a veritable fountain of information, and talked enthusiastically about the materials he felt sure would be useful to my project. But in the end he couldn't arrange for me to use the library without a letter of introduction. The same letter which the race relations specialist Dr. Arturo promised to give me once he'd returned from Venezuela more than a week ago. I felt my eyes well up with tears of frustration. Rafael urged me

to continue to press for the letter. So, on the way home I stopped at the office tucked away in a corner of the university campus. Nobody to be found, not even the secretary this time. I wandered around aimlessly, feeling bereft and wondering what the hell I was doing here. When I got home, from out on the street I could hear the voice of a black woman, screaming out unintelligible syllables of rage. Black women *should* be angry in this country. *We should* be! I recalled the scene of my first meeting with Dr. Arturo: his practised gaze, informed by the centuries of history inscribed in my skin, triggered a series of paternal admonishments: "You must be serious, you must work hard, you cannot be lazy!" Exhausted with emotion and overheated by the sun, I fell into a feverish sleep from which I only awoke when Olivia tapped softly on my door. "*¿Te sientes mal, corazón?*"

EMILIO

DIARIO II. Es el amanecer. El sol sale brutalmente tras las montañas despidiendo fuego y luz. Hay cosas muy bellas e interesantes pero tras la belleza se ve la mano del colonialismo y la explotación en la perfección de las formas, en lo blanco de los edificios oficiales.

Se ven muy pocas personas. Pensamos desembarcar de un momento a otro.

Escribo desde un barrio residencial solo para blancos, abandonado, por supuesto. Cecilio está leyendo el portugués magníficamente. Se entiende bastante bien.

Ya está pasando nuestro primer día en tierra firme. Muy agitado. Con guardias de madrugada y bastante tensión.

Cae la noche. Las calles están oscuras, no obstante salimos a caminar por el barrio. Los negros afluyen lentamente por las calles y algunos entran en las casas abandonadas.

Dormí bien, en el suelo. Un poco de mosquitos y calor.

Muchos no pudieron dormir por temor a las culebras. Por la mañana registré la casa. En el piso encima de nuestro cuarto mataron un hombre. Hay sangre, pelos y huesos incrustados en las paredes. Parece una granada o un cohete.

El Niño recuerda que hoy es el Día Internacional de la Mujer.

Yo pienso en mi compañera y en mi madre, en lo intranquilas que estarán por no haber noticias mías y que yo no pueda enviarlas por el momento. (*ibid.*: 17)

Day 25. Centro Habana. While waiting for the letters to arrive, I've been visiting museums – a different one each day: first the municipal museum in Guanabacoa, and then the one in Regla. Yesterday, I went to the Casa de África.

The municipal museums both house important collections of artefacts taken from Afro-Cuban culture but their approaches are quite different. This might be related to the different periods in which they were established: the Guanabacoa museum was founded in 1964 and the Regla museum in 1982. The displays in Guanabacoa show a desire to recreate as far as possible the original contexts of the religious objects. The idea one comes away with is of a practical belief structure employed to solve day-to-day problems. For instance, it was easy to picture the polished wooden chifonier with its china tureens, statuettes, and shiny satins in the colours of the *orishas* in the family room of any ordinary Cuban household. On the other hand, the Regla museum boasts a far

more impressive quantity of historical artefacts, many collected from plantation life – shackles, irons, hand-made dolls, and so on – and they are exhibited according to a different curatorial ethos from Guanabacoa. You could say that one is more sympathetic to the historical experience (Regla) and the other is directed towards a presentation of the cultural context (Guanabacoa).

Casa de África meanwhile is an altogether more self-conscious enterprise. It aims to give expression to the African component in national identity, and so is located in the heart of the refurbished Old Town, not out in the far eastern suburbs like the other two. Founded in 1986, many of its substantial collection of artefacts were previously stored at the Centro Fernando Ortiz, but there are more recent acquisitions too. Because the building next door is being remodelled, only a limited number of items can be displayed at any one time. The current space is spread over three floors. The ground floor showcases the items from Fernando Ortiz's collection, while the two upper floors exhibit gifts acquired by Fidel during his Africa travels, as well as those donated by visiting dignitaries from the continent – including exquisitely carved ivory statues and intricately carved furniture from Angola, and a range of furniture and statues from Benin, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Guinea-Bissau, and a host of other nations. It is a beautiful and spacious building, and empty of tourists.

The museum attendants were keen to learn more about me, their solitary visitor, and so I ended up spending longer than originally planned. One of them, a black Cuban woman, was especially keen to talk. She has been working at the museum for over a decade. She loves her job and is passionate about the space and its function, but doesn't think much of her boss. She enquired whether I found it strange that a white person

should be in charge of such an important institute of African culture. In response to my noncommittal shrug she conceded that it was better that the museum exist, even if under white leadership, than not at all. She warns me that Cuba is very racist, and then proudly tells me that her daughter is a journalist. She is a daughter of Yemayá and practises *santería*. Do I know about the major weeklong festival of African culture in Havana in January? What about the Día de Africa at the end of May? She can take me to a *bembé*, and gave me her address, phone number and typical work schedule. She would also like me to give her some of my clothes before I leave. Would I like to speak with the director? “Take a seat and wait here.” So, I waited.

The director received me frostily when introduced. He was busy teaching, he said, and palmed me off on his secretary who, smiling wanly, offered some bare and rudimentary facts about the Casa’s beginnings – nothing I hadn’t already learned from my guidebook. However, she was far more effusive and forthcoming about plans for the museum to expand its display of artefacts from the Ortiz collection. In fact, what I remember the most about the visit is the similar way in which all three women – the two guides and the secretary – spoke with real feeling and pride about the museum’s collection of religious articles from Regla de Ocha, Palo Monte and Abakuá. For each of them it seemed to matter a great deal that I grasp the significance of these objects as the truest and most important expressions of Africa in Cuba. I need to keep this in mind.

EMILIO

DIARIO III. “Día negro para la guerrilla,” como decía el Che en su diario de campaña. El enemigo nos golpeó tremendamente.

Nos mató seis compañeros, entre ellos el Capitán. Antes de salir me había dicho que traería un documento para discutirlo conmigo, que volvería enseguida. Le zumba esto. Si me hubiera dicho como otras veces: vamos, coge el fusil y dale, quizás no estuviera escribiendo ahora.

Parece mentira que ayer estuviéramos juntos en la despedida de Silvio y hoy no esté físicamente con nosotros.

Recuerdo que fue quien habló, y empezó diciendo que no era orador y esas cosas que siempre dicen, y luego dijo que cantar era también combatir y que eso estimulaba mucho a la tropa y que todo era muy bueno porque el hombre que peleaba por ideología era el mejor soldado del mundo y las canciones de Silvio y Feliú instaban a la ideología. Algo así dijo. Aira, el mago, hizo cosas asombrosas con barajas y pañuelos. Silvio estrenó dos canciones, a una de ellas le llamaba *El testamento* o algo de eso y era sobre cosas que él debía hacer antes de morir. Ni que lo hubiera hecho expresamente para el Capitán.

Ha sido un golpe duro para nosotros.

Yo recogí todas sus pertenencias personales, dice el Mayor que todas ellas son objetos museables, yo creo que sí. (*ibid.*: 23, emphasis in original)

Day 30. Centro Habana. Museo de los Orishas. I feel as if I have touched on some important element of truth here. The museum was nothing like I expected. I was

imagining a replica of the kitschy, creepy and claustrophobic *voodoo* houses of New Orleans, designed to highlight the mystical, forbidden and mysterious reputation of the religion for the thrill-seeking tourist, or else that it would recreate the static collections under glass found in the Casa de África and the municipal museums, which encourage the visitor to study the artefacts as scientific specimens. So, I was unprepared for the magnificent, light and open halls with their celebratory, soaring ceilings. Nor was I ready for the lean power of the huge standing figures representing the pantheon of Yoruba deities, arranged in a vast circle according to cosmological order, with Elegguá, the trickster god of the threshold, at the head. In any *santería* ceremony, Elegguá is always the first to be propitiated. His place in the pantheon is unusual because he is the only *orisha* whose origins are human, as opposed to divine. In this way, he represents the liminal interface between the human and spirit worlds.¹¹³ Indeed, here, rendered in simple brown clay, were the eternal ancestors, proud, erect and noble, with African features and West African hairstyles. The cultural and historical connection with Africa came through clearly and unmistakably, and my intellectual understanding of the Cuban connection with Africa was swept away by the far stronger force of revelation. It was like undergoing a powerful change in consciousness, where the intellect gives way to the surge of feeling. Setting each *orisha* within the context of their natural elements – forest, coast, river, and so on – allows the visitor to comprehend how God is associated with natural objects and phenomena in the African religious tradition, while endowing the *orishas* with the physical features of West Africans symbolically recreates the

¹¹³ An important *pataki* or holy tale relates how the mystical African prince named Elegguá transformed into a powerful divinity upon his death. This story enshrines one of the most sacred tenets of *santería*, that the dead precede the *orisha*. In all ceremonies, even before Elegguá is propitiated, the ancestors or *egungun* must be honoured.

genealogical line. In this way, the figures act as a window onto an imagined African past. Something in this dynamic follows a logic not typically associated with the act of museum-going. In *Civilizing Rituals*, Carol Duncan writes that “in the secular/religious terms of our culture, ‘ritual’ and ‘museums’ are antithetical. Ritual is associated with religious practices – with the realm of belief, magic, real or symbolic sacrifices, miraculous transformations, or overpowering changes of consciousness. Such goings-on bear little resemblance to the contemplation and learning that art museums are supposed to foster” (1995: 8). However, the sense of illumination which I achieved in this place can also be applied to the quiet transformative state that may be reached through aesthetic contemplation, or indeed in any encounter with the sublime. As Duncan affirms, “in fact, in traditional societies, rituals may be quite unspectacular and informal-looking moments of contemplation or recognition” (*ibid.*).

Predictably, I was the only visitor and there was only one museum guide, but at first I thought there were more. In my meditative state, I hadn’t noticed her glide silently from one chair to the next as I followed the trail of exhibits. So I thought that each brown uniform and sweetly smiling brown face that I encountered was another person. It was only at the point when I doubled back to re-read a descriptive tag that I noticed her quick motion to shadow my movement. This, too, contributed to the sense that I was living an experience outside of ordinary time and space – a liminal experience. Duncan affirms, “Liminality, a term associated with ritual, can also be applied to the kind of attention we bring to art museums” (*ibid.*: 11).

The museum felt like a labour of love, and I came away not only with a feeling of enlightenment, but bearing a stronger sense of spiritual elevation or ‘*haussement*.’ On

the way out I stopped at the boards near the entrance which document the history of the building and its contents. I began scribbling away so furiously in my notebook that before long a small crowd had gathered at my back, local people who had been eating lunch at the courtyard café and had become curious to know what important discovery I had made in those nondescript lines of type. Not wishing to draw this level of attention to myself, I abandoned the task and slipped back outside onto the seething Paseo de Martí.

EMILIO

DIARIO IV. Estamos en la frontera, en N'to. Cerquita de Zaire. Primero hicimos un largo recorrido por los caminos que atraviesan la selva. [...]

Esto parece un gran sueño, un sueño interminable y yo me pregunto si alguna vez llegaré a despertar. (Comas Paret, 1983: 28)

Esto es prácticamente un desierto, con colinas onduladas y algún pasto.

Hay grandes fortificaciones y casitas cavadas en la arena.

En una de esas casas alguien lee poemas de mi amigo muerto.

Eso me emociona. (*ibid.*: 29)

Day 32. Centro Habana. I feel hungry a lot but without wanting to eat. Back in England it's often the other way around. I fancy eating certain foods, they call to me. It's more about desire than real hunger. So, in a sense, things are 'realer,' here, but then again they are not. I feel bored without wanting to do anything. I'm lonely without wanting to meet anyone new. It's as if I'm dreaming, in the way that sometimes in a

dream you cannot fulfil your desires, or else they are fulfilled in strange and inexplicable ways. I am acutely aware of all this mainly because all the delays and obstructions mean that I am not busy. Time stretches out before me. There are no distractions, or very few, so I cannot smother my emotions. Everything is sharper, intense to the point of hyperreality, and inescapable. Consequently I have had to become softer, more receptive, and more vulnerable – at the mercy of invisible forces.

EMILIO

DIARIO IV. Recuerdo una noche, estaba lloviendo con fuerza, como si tiraran cubos de agua, así llueve aquí. Yo estoy recorriendo la primera línea y en el flanco izquierdo veo un bulto tirado de costado. Al principio pensé en un ataque comando del enemigo, que estaba muerto, ¡qué sé yo! En fin, era el guardia, dormido como un tronco. Inicialmente me dio rabia. ¡Eso es una irresponsabilidad que puede costar vidas! Pero después, cuando salió la luna de atrás de una nube y le vi la cara me calmé de un golpe: era un niño. Con cuidado le empecé a pasar la mano por la cabeza ensopada de agua, entonces despertó, me miró con los ojos como dos monedas y sí no le quitó el fusil rápido me mete un tiro. Ahora estaba ahí, en la primera línea, esperando sin dormirse. (*ibid.*: 31-32)

Day 42. Centro Habana. I shall have to write a tale of fiction for the research grant foundation at this rate. There are only about two weeks left and I've only spoken to one veteran, I haven't seen a single film nor visited even one Havana archive or library. All is as it seems, and all is not as it seems, just as I am and am not as I seem. For instance, I

ate yesterday at the same restaurant in Habana Vieja as I did last week, with the difference that the first time around I was dressed fairly formally for an appointment, and this time I wore a denim skirt, flip-flops and a vest top. Last week I was served immediately and treated with flourish and flair by my waiter. Yesterday, while all around Chinese and European customers who had arrived after me were welcomed, it took over twenty minutes before a waiter grudgingly approached my table and demanded to know what I wanted. He was obviously concerned that I could not afford to pay the bill and pointed out the cheapest items on the menu. So, I purposely played up the fact of my fledgling Spanish, which prompted him to ask me my country of origin. When I replied, "England," the look of relief on his face was almost comical. I wasn't a *cubanita* after all and so he could relax into the service with flair and flourish for which he had been trained. For the sake of those who would follow, I left him an overly generous tip.

EMILIO

DIARIO IV. Le matamos toda la infantería que venía tras el blindado, le matamos numerosos hombres más y les hicimos salir corriendo como bestias por ahí. Ellos se desengañaron, tuvieron un desengaño muy grande de que cuando se combate de verdad, con fuerza y decisión, nadie puede pasar por un lugar.

Y los muchachos probaron por primera vez el sabor de la victoria. (*ibid.*: 33)

Day 45. Centro Habana. The thing I like best about being in Cuba is that you never know what the next day will bring. The thing I hate the most about being in Cuba is that you never know what the next day will bring.

At last, the reinforcements I had appealed for from England have had the desired impact, and a flurry of emails has opened the gateway to the libraries and the film archive. I have an appointment for tomorrow morning to view as many documentary films as I can manage in four hours.

EMILIO

DIARIO V. Vi que la selva no es de Tarzán. (*ibid.* 34)

Day 47. Centro Habana. Things did not go so well at the film archive. I had to wait a long time for my machine-operator to arrive. She had slipped out to join a queue because word on the street was that the long-awaited rolls of toilet tissue had at last arrived in the stores. It was impossible to blame her, and for my part I hoped that Denys's aunt had been able to pick up our share. But the delay meant that I only got to watch three films, and, of these, two had reels missing. In the end it was only possible to view the shortest film – a mere nine minutes long – in its entirety. What's more, the operator could not hide how tedious she found *Luanda, ya no es de San Pablo*, and yawned loudly and often. At other times she called out to *compañeros* passing in the corridor. At one point her conversation with a white-clad *santero* friend was so voluble that there was no point in me straining to hear the film's scratchy soundtrack, so I downed notebook and pen and gazed off into space. Noticing this, she murmured to

me that her friend had more information on the African dynamic in Cuba than these crisp coils of celluloid contained. Perhaps she was right, but that was not why I had come. All I knew was that I was attempting to analyse the role of these films in the Cuban project to “recuperate the history and contributions of Africans [...] as a step in encouraging a racially inclusive sense of national unity centred on African identity” (Gordon, 2006: 307), and she was preventing me from doing so.

I left the film archive feeling angry, isolated and confused as I started the long walk home. No taxis for me, I needed to walk off my crackling frustration. But when I turned into one of the side-streets that run parallel to Calle 23, all negative emotions fled as I walked past the courtyard of a school and came upon a most remarkable sight. There, on cots spread out under the cooling shade of a cluster of broad trees, lay a class of boys and girls wearing the red and white uniforms of the *escuela primaria*, deep in the unwary slumber of the very young. Two female attendants, seated off to the side, fanned themselves and talked together softly as the children slept. I caught my breath sharply and swallowed down hard the catch in my throat.

EMILIO

DIARIO VII. Siempre que veo a un niño me acuerdo de los míos. A veces sueño con ellos pero las caras no se las distingo. Me alegro de la foto, porque así los recordaré con precisión.

Los niños en Povo Grande terminaron la fiesta con un desfile. Se organizaron en cuatro en fondo y empezaron a cantar una cosa que decía: “quero, quero, quero ser soldao.”

Es interesante el papel que juegan los niños en todo esto, sus cuarteles, sus armas de fabricación casera, pero que disparan; sus trincheras, sus marchas y una verdadera disposición combativa. Los adultos no, son por lo general recelosos y están atemorizados y la ignorancia llega a un punto tal que parece exageraciones de viejas chismosas.

(Comas Paret, 1983: 44)

Day 50. Centro Habana. Everything has changed, and at last I feel as if my 'real' work has started. Of course I have been working all along, but things are coming together now in almost magical ways. It all started when I encountered Lydia Johnson, a Cuban of Jamaican heritage. She found me as I left the university grounds on the third day that Dra. Silvia cancelled our meeting. I'm told the professor has contracted the academic's disease of over-thinking everything, and has anticipated our talk to be more *complicado* than is the case. Anyway, I had stopped underneath the branches of a large shady acacia tree in the forecourt to scribble some notes, when Lydia approached me. She was just returning from a lunch break back to her office at the Fundación Fernando Ortiz and for some reason I had caught her eye. We spoke briefly and she invited me to meet up at the end of her shift to continue our chat. I did so, and that's when everything changed, for Lydia is my portal to an entire 'underground railroad' of Cubans working on diverse aspects of *africanía* – folklorists, politicians, linguists, historians, filmmakers, and on and on. She drew up a list of names with phone numbers and other details, and wrote short notes of introduction for me to hand to each person I met, otherwise, she said, I should simply tell them that Lydia sent me. And it has worked like a charm. I may need to extend my stay in order to meet everyone on the list...

EMILIO

DIARIO XI. Hace ya largas horas que el azul del mar te indica que navegas por el Caribe; piensas siempre “en el Mar de Las Antillas que también Caribe llaman” y un poco ello te acerca a lo que hace un tiempo fue tuyo y dentro de poco volverá a serlo.

Y alguien dice que es la bahía de Santiago y ves de pronto entre los acantilados un pueblo que te saluda con orgullo como si fueras un héroe legendario y parece que esto lo has visto en una película. Un poco sientes escozor en los ojos y con gran disimulo los secas para no dar lugar a dudas.

Pero de buenas a primeras ves los niños. [...]

Y de pronto empiezan a cantar, espontáneamente, como sólo saben hacerlo los niños, y de buenas a primeras abrazas a los tuyos, besas a los pobres niños mutilados, [...] recuerdas a los que quedaron atrás y que todavía pueden contar y hacer historia; te ríes con los niños de todo el universo. Y entonces, sí es un caudal de lágrimas lo que nace en tus ojos y es incontenible el sentimiento, pero no sientes pena porque todos lloran. [...]

Y entre las lágrimas comienzas a sonreír. (*ibid.*: 69-70)

Day 50. Centro Habana. I'm starving this morning. My body feels strange. When I look in the mirror it looks the same, but I can tell by the way my clothes hang that it is much smaller. It's a bit like my project: depending on how you measure things, I either have a lot or precious little evidence.

Olivia is worried that I am starving at her house. My clothes fit me so badly that I have had to pack most of them away. I am down to three bottoms and three tops, and

simply combine them. But it's all that I need. I have shed many things over the past few weeks, but now strangely what has become full is my diary. Between now and my departure date every day is filled with appointments and activities. It's enough to make you laugh, or cry.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in November 1975, when Cuban ships set sail carrying hundreds of internationalist soldiers like Emilio and the comrades he mentions (Cecilio, Silvio, El Niño, and El Capitán), it appeared to be the repetition of a historical scenario from the days of imperial Spain, when the port of San Cristóbal de la Habana had provided “a strategic outpost, a commercial focus, and a base for expansion” into the American mainland (Bannon, 1974: 35). From the standpoint of the Spanish Empire, their Caribbean island holdings were considered to be “defensive and missionary fringes,” because the general feeling was that “The real Spanish America lay to the south of them” (*ibid.*: 50, 51). Cuban society originated in the frontier, at the hub of a system of transatlantic flows (of goods and men), and a foundational element of Cuban culture, which has often been obscured, lies in the figure of the transitory presidial soldier. Therefore, a further dimension linking the Cuban intervention in Angola with liminality is this historical relationship with the border. If official discourse on the Angolan intervention reconstructed the Atlantic Ocean as a border zone between the Cuban past and a Cuban future by appealing, on the one hand, to the cult of the African ancestor and, on the other, to the transcendent internationalist icon, Che Guevara, the ground had been prepared for both of these mythologies long before when

the first presidial soldiers made their territorial claim and violently forged a new cultural environment on Caribbean soil.

Spanish America's border regions, like all frontiers, were considered to be places where heathens flourished. Religion prospered best within the settled landscape and routines of mission life, not in transient societies in perpetual motion, like sixteenth century Havana. It was far more common for the inhabitants of frontier towns to be concerned with the 'here and now' than 'the Hereafter,' and this image and reputation has persisted over the centuries until the present day. It is a frame of mind that is similar to that found in traditional African societies, where the concept of time barely considers the future, and is more concerned with the present or the past. In Africa, as John Mbiti states, religious beliefs and practices are not "formulated into a systematic set of dogmas which a person is expected to accept" (1969: 3). In a similar way, in the absence of a strong clergy, religious worship on the frontier became more individualised, more personalised and more practical, in the African fashion.

Life on the border is daily concerned with questions of leaving, arriving, acceptance, rejection, control, transgression, and interrelation. Everything is negotiable, including 'personal borders' or identities. In this way the border trope pervades all aspects of life on the border, or we might say that the border perpetuates borders. Difference and sameness meet at the site of the border, and their mutual language is metaphorical, because the metaphor likewise comprises elements of the same and the different for its functionality. In a visceral sense, my blackness performed the function of embodied insidedness/outsideness ascribed to the metaphor. Never before had I so keenly felt subject to "the ancient science of reading insides from outsides, character and

soul, no less than the future, from external bodily features” (Taussig, 2006: 168) as I did in Havana. Depending upon the ‘reader,’ access across the border in question was either denied or granted to me; although, more usually, it simply determined the price of transit. For the outsider, successful navigation of the complex network of multiple frontiers in Cuban society can at times seem an impossible task, and it is this initial sense of confusion and frustration which I have tried to convey in the narrative.

In the end, it was my ‘liminal’ experience at the Museo de los Orishas that unlocked understanding. When I first arrived at the museum, cowered by the quietness, vastness and emptiness, I began to wander around the exhibits, self-consciously and in no particular order. In no time the guard was at my side steering me back to the beginning: I had to start at the threshold with Elegguá, the trickster god often depicted as a child, and then proceed from there. This would prove to be the vital lesson: you cannot bypass the limen, nor the ancestors, and expect to enter. What is more, I needed to cultivate the childlike qualities of openness and vulnerability in order to dissolve boundaries. This resonates with Marcel Mauss’s discovery that “underlying all our mystic states are corporeal techniques, biological methods of entering into communication with God” (cited in Taussig, 2006: 121). In my case, it was not so much ‘technique’ (which implies intention) as ‘happenstance’ which generated these characteristics. Oftentimes, any sense of the hyperreal that I felt during my stay in Havana could be directly attributed to the light-headedness (‘spaciness’) brought on by hunger, mild dehydration or the symptoms of heat exhaustion. However, no matter the impetus, the significant point is that of the link between modes of physical experience outside of the everyday and extraordinary modes of consciousness.

As Emilio demonstrates in his recollections of Angola, the poet and the child see the world in similar ways: both see oneness – *ujamaa* – where others see only divisions, borders and duality. My experience at the Museum of the Orishas suggests that the ritual subject may form yet another point to this constellation. Duncan reminds us that “some individuals may use a ritual site more knowledgeably than others – they may be more educationally prepared or respond to its symbolic cues” (1995: 12), which appears to suggest that the parameters of my museum experience were most likely set by my own specific personal background. Nevertheless, to consider ritual sites as manifestations of ‘*communitas*’ reinforces the notion that anyone who approaches the threshold or border with the same openness and expectancy as the poet, child or ritual subject may pass through into that altered state of consciousness which accompanies the experience of transformation.

PART THREE

Incorporation

1979-1980

The Caribbean as a site of socio-political mobilisation and cultural identification forms the focus of the two chapters in this section. The invocation of the slave settlement, or *palenque*, as a symbolic representation of the national experience was a powerful instrument for the integration of Cuba into the Caribbean community in the late seventies, and transformed black Cubans into carriers of collective identity. The first chapter, ‘*Un mismo sol caribeño*,’ describes this transformation through an exploration of the *palenque* theme in several cultural productions, including *Maluala*, the third film in Sergio Giral’s trilogy. I pay particular attention to the special edition of *Revolución y Cultura* dedicated to the important Caribbean arts festival, Carifesta, which was held in Havana in 1979, and attempt to delineate essential similarities to, and differences from, the characteristics of earlier attitudes to the West Indian community.

To help evaluate how the *palenque* paradigm gave shape to Cuba’s relations in the Antillean region on multiple levels, I draw upon the work of cultural geographer, Joël Bonnemaïson, who has provided a number of concepts, such as the territory and the geosymbol, which blend political and cultural phenomena. This approach engages with the idea of place as the foundation of identity, and “deals with symbols as much as with facts, and emotions as much as reason” (Bonnemaïson, 2005: 1).

The second chapter, which comprises the third and final instalment of *El Atlas de Africaña*, deals with the mythical, symbolic and emotional relevance of the *palenque* for identity formation in the form of a narrative which assembles real and imagined experiences from the time of a research visit that I made to the archives of La Casa del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba. The writing interweaves themes from the first chapter with memories, reveries and theoretical ruminations on The Archive in order to produce a type of analysis which mimics the Caribbean’s dynamic principle of syncretisation.

‘UN MISMO SOL CARIBEÑO’

The territory may be defined as the reverse of space. It is based on an idea and often on an ideal, whereas space is material. (Bonnemaïson, 2005: 115)

In geographical terms, the ‘Bright Country’ refers to a region in West Africa located within the current national boundaries of Mali, which, due to its close proximity to the equator, is bathed in strong sunlight all year round. The area receives very little rain, and so the effect of brightness is intensified by the dry light-coloured soil in mainly pale yellow and red tones. There is also an old West African belief that light connects the physical and spiritual worlds, thus the ‘Bright Country’ refers to the place where “the physical world is in closest contact with the spiritual world.” It is a spirit world, in the sense of ghosts, memories, and feelings. (Jones, 2003)

INTRODUCTION

On January 24, 1976, an article in the Miami Herald on the impact of Cuba’s Angolan intervention in the Western Hemisphere quoted a member of the Venezuelan cabinet as saying, “Angola shows that [Cuban Premier Fidel] Castro has the capacity, the strength and the will to mount a large-scale military intervention. If he can do it in Africa, so far from home, he also can do it anywhere in the Caribbean” (Sobel, 1978: 119). In 1964, Venezuela had initiated steps to impose an OAS embargo against Cuba amid claims that Havana had collaborated with leftist revolutionaries to overthrow the Caracas government (*ibid.*). The embargo had been lifted in 1975, after some member nations successfully argued that Cuba had renounced the practice of inciting revolution or

foquismo.¹¹⁴ However, by the end of the decade it was clear that, while Cuba continued to eschew the idea of exporting revolution, this change in position did not preclude the exportation of revolutionaries. Collaboration now assumed the form of Cuban internationalists streaming to the defence of leftist governments in countries within what could be considered as Cuba's 'sphere of influence.' No longer restricted to acting according to the hidden and clandestine agenda of guerrilla struggles aimed at undermining or destabilising governments, this new collaborative imperative was characterised by a bold openness, targeted, like the energising force of the sun's rays, at nourishing the tiny shoots of socialism which had begun to flourish in patches around the world, particularly in countries within the West African Diaspora. This development contributed to the fact that, by the end of the 1970s, for the first time many West Indians considered Cuba to be 'a black Caribbean state' (Maingot, 1983: 21).

Analysts of American foreign policy have noted that Washington from the outset had "played the racial diplomatic game" (*ibid.*), by sending African Americans to represent the United States in the newly liberated countries of Africa and the Caribbean (see Noer, 1985; Borstelmann, 2001; Plummer, 1996, etc.). However, despite assertions that Cuba had employed similar tactics in its international relations (Moore, 1991; Maingot, 1983: 21), the reality of Cuban *mestizaje* means that analysts working within the 'one-drop' racial identification framework run the danger of overemphasising, or even misunderstanding, the significance of colour in diplomatic appointments. Let us consider, in this regard, the examples of Armando Entralgo and

¹¹⁴ *Foquismo* (focalism) is a strategy of revolutionary guerrilla warfare organised around small cadres known as *foci* which act to catalyse popular insurrection. It is often associated with Ernesto 'Che' Guevara.

Juan Benemelis, who both held diplomatic appointments in Africa in the 1960s.¹¹⁵

Entralgo was a white Cuban of European ancestry, while the case of Benemelis is more complicated. For, while his physical appearance suggests the presence of African ancestors, and by U.S. racial standards in the 1960s he would have been considered 'coloured,' Benemelis himself has given no indication of self-identifying as a black Cuban. Therefore, when Caribbean scholar Anthony P. Maingot accuses Cuba, which he describes as "an island where fewer than twenty-five per cent of the people are black" (1983: 21), of playing the racial angle by managing "to be represented nearly exclusively by blacks in the Caribbean" (*ibid.*), his claim skirts around the tangled issue of racial identification and the complexities of Cuba's colour matrix.¹¹⁶ In other words, by selecting the more restricted view of the racial binary lens, Maingot's approach cannot benefit from the wider vista offered by a consideration of the African cultural element or *africanía*.¹¹⁷

From an international relations perspective, Cuban internationalism in the African Diaspora represented a strategy for increasing Havana's sphere of influence after

¹¹⁵ The deceased Entralgo served as ambassador to Ghana. More precise details about Benemelis's career in the diplomatic service have been more difficult to uncover. He is the author of a number of books and articles on Cuban foreign politics, and has most recently published writing on the subject of race (see Benemelis, 2009). He was among the approximately one hundred and twenty-five thousand Cubans who left the island during the Mariel Crisis/Boatlift in 1980.

¹¹⁶ Maingot does not explain how he arrives at his figures for the black population in Cuba, and there is a high degree of controversy surrounding this issue. Prior to the 2002 census, researchers were often forced to use data based exclusively on the testimony of their own eyes, which was translated according to a personal colour-race code system. Moreover, problems have arisen from the controversial application of extraneous racial classifications, such as the U.S. 'one-drop rule,' to the Cuban context, with the concomitant inference regarding matters of social justice. For example, the census indicates that 65 per cent of Cubans are white; while the influential on-line resource AfroCubaWeb has published the claim that around 70 per cent of Cubans have African ancestry (*About AfroCubaWeb*, 2009). Crucially, if Maingot had chosen to apply African ancestry rather than race as a social measurement in this case, his charges of manipulation would have been more difficult to anchor. All census figures used here are taken from *Minority Rights Group International* (2008).

¹¹⁷ Black Cubans were not restricted to diplomatic posts in the Caribbean. For instance, Severo Aguirre del Cristo served as Cuban ambassador to the Soviet Union between 1973 and 1981.

over a decade of isolation. This may be compared to the act of marking out a territory, where territory is conceived as a physical representation of a worldview. As French ethnogeographer Joël Bonnemaïson has described, the concept of territory comprises two dimensions, “a constituent element of a deeply rooted identity and, beyond it, a political stake” (2005: 116). Territory, in the framework of identity, focuses on deep, affective, even spiritual, feelings about a place that transcend the physical space, and transport the individual into the realm of “*the poetic, the sacred, and the infinite*” (Bureau, 1971, cited in Bonnemaïson, 2005: 116). A territory, in this cultural sense, may be real or imagined, but, because it unites those with similar feelings, it may be conceived as “a linkage rather than a frontier” (*ibid.*: 117). On the other hand, the political idea of territory relates to notions of power and control: spaces are marked out by boundaries and frontiers to be “defended, negotiated, coveted, lost, or else imagined” (*ibid.*). A focus on the political component to the detriment of the cultural transfixes analysis within those boundaries, markers and divisions, such as race and ethnicity, which seem to trouble Maingot. In this view, the notion of territory relates to the spatial ‘prisons’ which geographer Claude Raffestin describes: “*space is the original prison; the territory is the prison that human beings give themselves*” (quoted in Bonnemaïson, 2005: 118). On the other hand, if, as I have tried to suggest in the previous section, we take internationalism to be the performance of a mythology, that is to say, a narrative about culture, then territory is recognised as a manifestation of identity, that is, it is a marker of shared knowledge. As Bonnemaïson affirms, “The territory is a fragment of space that gives roots to one’s identity and unites those who share the same feeling” (*ibid.*: 116).

Territory, from this perspective, encourages us to discover symbols and icons held in common, since its ecology depends for survival upon the nurturing of this network of symbolic links.

At the point where cultural and political territories merge is created a space of geosymbols. Bonnemaïson has explained the geosymbol to be, “a place, an itinerary, or an area which, for religious, political, or cultural reasons, takes on a symbolic dimension in the eyes of certain societies and ethnic groups, thereby comforting them within their identity” (*ibid.*: 45). African Americans’ interest in taking ‘Underground Railroad’ tours which promise to ‘retrace the footsteps of runaway slaves’ stands out as one compelling and pertinent example.¹¹⁸ I am intrigued by Bonnemaïson’s use of the term ‘comfort’ in this description because it alludes to a prior condition of uneasiness which may be compared to the social conditions of post-slavery societies, the contemporary patterns of fragmentation and ambiguity that have concerned this study. Likewise, it is interesting to note similarities between the geosymbol conceived as a space “laden with emotions and meaning” (*ibid.*: 47) and the previously-mentioned West African spiritual formulation known as the ‘Bright Country.’ However, it is the depiction of the geosymbol “in its strongest expression” as a “sanctuary-like territory” (*ibid.*) that enables us to comprehend the deep symbolic meaning of the slave settlement or *palenque* for how Cubans had begun to think of themselves and their increasingly beleaguered nation

¹¹⁸ Maria Mallory (1997) published her experience on one of these tours for the *U.S. News & World Report*. The article brilliantly captures the implicit power of geosymbols, even when they are fleeting, flimsy or fragmented in nature. It begins: “I stand before a simple metal sign on the side of a little-traveled road that winds through lonely fields on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. “Harriet Tubman: The ‘Moses of her people,’” it reads, “found freedom for herself and some three hundred other slaves whom she led North...” It marks Tubman’s birthplace and the start of my six-day journey to retrace her 650-mile Underground Railroad route to the promised land of Canada.”

by 1979.¹¹⁹ For, in the wake of performing the West African Diaspora myth of Return in the form of internationalism in Angola, in some quarters, Fidel Castro's Cuba was perceived to be every bit as dangerous a threat to the other countries in the region as Toussaint L'Ouverture's Haiti (a *palenque* on the grandest of scales) had been in the nineteenth century.

MALUALA: CUBA AS PALENQUE

I

Maluala, the third film in Sergio Giral's slave trilogy, was the Cuban entry for the fiction category of the first Havana film festival ('Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de La Habana') held on December 3, 1979. It won the top festival prize, the 'Gran Premio Coral,' jointly with the Brazilian film *Colonel Delmiro Gouveia* (1978). The film is a dramatic representation of the struggle by runaway slaves in the nineteenth century to protect their settlements, located in the mountains of Oriente province, from assaults by the Spanish colonial authorities. Considering the high significance of the film festival beyond the cinematic arena, the choice of *Maluala* signifies that the Cuban outlook was intimately bound up with this aspect of slaving history, with the *palenque* representative of a national ideal, and the experience of *los*

¹¹⁹ Speeches at the national celebrations for May Day in 1980 are replete with references to both current tensions in the region, ranging from excoriating diatribes against the Mariel refugees to vehement, sabre-rattling statements against the threat of a naval blockade after the US Navy began manoeuvres in the Caribbean (see, for example, the collection entitled *A Battle for our Dignity and Sovereignty*, 1980). I recommend Gott (2004) for a good overview of the events surrounding the Mariel Crisis (also see Bardach, 2003; and García, 1996: 46-80), which was triggered by a variety of factors, including most significantly a downturn in the economy attributable to, among other factors, the cost of the military missions in Angola and Ethiopia, and increased efforts by Washington to isolate the island as a punishment for Cuba's African policy.

apalecados descriptive of the contemporary situation. The festival was born out of a series of meetings among a group of Latin American filmmakers beginning in 1967. They had been working separately to develop film as an instrument of social awareness and change in their home countries of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Uruguay, and Venezuela.¹²⁰ After the first discussions in Viña del Mar in Chile during the first Latin American film festival, the group continued to meet from time to time before forming the Committee of Latin American Filmmakers in Mérida in 1977 (Chanan, 2003: 378). Through the sharing of knowledge, strategies and practices related to “oppositional modes of filmmaking” (Pick, 1996: 15), the film makers sought to create a collaborative response to sweeping social and political changes on the continent. Although serving diverse national contexts, the aim was to create a cinema which focused on the general themes of liberation, postcolonialism and the emerging ‘third world.’ Appropriately, the Havana festival opened with a screening of the first newsreel shot by the Nicaraguan Film Institute, which was formed that summer in the early days of the Sandinista revolution (Chanan, 2003: 377).

Traditionally, Latin America’s intellectuals rarely touched on the New World African experience: interest in the marginalised ‘other’ predominantly centred on the indigenous ‘Indian.’ So, although the historical events depicted in the film met with the festival’s overarching theme of resistance, the choice of *Maluala* to represent the Cuban experience, by stressing a particular set of social processes tied to the African Diaspora, marked out a distinctively Cuban articulation which diverged from the Latin American focus. Interestingly, the only other film of the twenty-four Cuban entries to win a prize

¹²⁰ There is no room in this study to treat in depth the development of this important artistic movement, but Martin (1997) and Pick (1996) both offer comprehensive accounts.

at the festival was Miguel Fleitas's documentary on internationalism, *Etiopia: diario de una victoria* (1979). That the two most highly-praised Cuban films at the festival concerned Africa from both fictional and factual perspectives leads us to ponder the extent to which discourse on Cuban *africanía* had converged so that myth and history were interrelated. Furthermore, when viewed within the conceptual framework of liminality that underpins the present project, evidence of the merging of discourses on Africa supports the notion that a new, unified consciousness had been generated in Cuba by the transformational experience of *communitas* (internationalism in Angola).¹²¹ In contrast to the dualism and fragmentation of the former way of thinking about Africa, and set against the dislocation of the liminal stage, this new imaginary placed the myth of the slave-ancestor into the historical context of Cuba as a political culture of resistance. By recovering the *palenque* as a geosymbol marking the site where the diverse elements of myth, history and politics intersected, Cubans could satisfactorily lay claim to the Caribbean as a territory in the sense of identity: a place where, to adapt Benítez Rojo's formulation, the *palenque* 'repeats.'

II

Maluala explores the dual meanings of 'collaboration' through a narrative that connects the fortunes of three slave settlements located in a seemingly inaccessible area of Cuba's easternmost mountain range, first, to the positive sense of working together for mutual benefit, and, second, to the negative connotation of conspiring with an enemy. Against all odds, the *palenques* have survived intense opposition from the colonial authorities

¹²¹ I have described Turner's concept of *communitas* more fully in chapter 2.2 ('The Return of the Slaves') of this thesis.

mainly because of their remote location. However, the Spanish governor devises a new strategy to dismantle the communities by pitting one slave against the other. He promises freedom for the *cimarrones* according to a set of stringent terms: the *palenque* chiefs will become free upon signing the agreement, but the other slaves will have to 'work off' the terms of their bondage. A devious addendum to the proposal states that any slave who assists in the hunt for runaways will immediately be freed: an offer which proves irresistible to three of the *apalencados*, who end up betraying the secret locations of the slave communities. The drama revolves around the inner conflict of the *palenque* chief Coba, who is torn between the wish to prevent his community, Bumba, from succumbing to the same brutal fate as the storied slave settlement known as 'El Gran Palenque,' where men, women and children had been butchered by the Spanish, and the desire to uphold the joint demand for land and freedom which binds his village with the other two *palenques*.¹²² Eventually, Coba's heart is swayed by the merciless slaughter of a group of young women by a slavehunting gang. The violent act compels him to accept the Governor's offer, and, leading his followers from the front, he begins the long journey down from the mountains. However, along the way, Coba is confronted with the alarming sight of re-enslaved *cimarrones* forced to submit to the twin hardships of harsh labour and the slave driver's whip. Swiftly, he turns the group around, and they return to the mountains. Choosing to remain independent rather than join forces with Maluala and the remaining inhabitants from the third *palenque*, which in the meantime

¹²² This might be a reference to the famous *palenque* of Moa (El Frijol) which is described by Cuban historian Francisco Pérez de la Riva (1973: 55), among others, as one of the most important slave settlements in the Oriente region. Gabino La Rosa has uncovered historical records which undermine earlier claims regarding "la famosa destrucción del Palenque de Frijol" in 1816. According to the Cuban historian, there is clear evidence that a colony of runaway slaves remained in the environs of Moa at least as late as the 1840s (1986: 115-116).

has been destroyed by fire, Bumba comes under attack, and Coba sacrifices himself in an effort to protect the other maroons. Emboldened by the victory, the Spanish army and their collaborators proceed to Maluala, where they are confronted by the conjoined forces of the remaining rebel communities. Side-by-side, the slaves fight ferociously against their enemies. In the final scene, the few walking wounded Spanish soldiers who stagger back to the town after their rout by the maroons find themselves in the midst of celebrations for El Día de Reyes.¹²³ The Captain, already traumatised by his violent defeat at the hands of Africans, is overwhelmed by the swirl of grinning black and brown faces, the garish colours and grotesque masquerade figures. The final frame captures his face distorted in a loud scream.

III

Cultural landscape and political realities converge in *Maluala*. Giral's reformulation of a historic slave insurrection as a tributary to the 1959 Revolution perpetuated the national mythology of the slave-ancestor which had come to define Cuban culture. At the same time, Cubans could recognise in Coba's dilemma some of their own inner turmoil regarding the social, economic and political challenges they currently faced. Just two months before the film festival opened, U. S. president Jimmy Carter had made a television broadcast to address the Cuban 'threat.' The spectre of the Missile Crisis loomed large over Washington as the State Department reported the presence of between two and three thousand Soviet troops in Cuba. Given that the Havana

¹²³ El Día de Reyes was a colonial-era precursor to the contemporary Carnival celebrations in the Caribbean. Epiphany, January 6, was a free day for slaves when they and free persons of colour held festivities in the streets. Daniel E. Walker (2004) has written a compelling comparative study of these activities in Havana and New Orleans as forms of countercultural resistance.

government had made no attempt to hide the brigade, which had been stationed on the island since 1962, and therefore, presumably, with the full awareness of the CIA, Cuban officials surmised that the 'revelation' had been timed to coincide with the commencement, on September 3, of the Nonaligned Summit Conference in Havana (Franklin, 1997: 152-153). The United States had worked strenuously to prevent the meeting from taking place, especially as it appeared to demonstrate the failure of efforts to isolate Cuba. In fact, the more vigorous the signs of Cuba's reintegration into the world community, the more forceful grew the countermeasures adopted by the U.S. administration. So, media attention on the earlier election of Fidel Castro as chair of the Nonaligned Summit played directly into the hands of Carter's hawk-like national security adviser, Zbigniew Brezinski, who had long viewed Cuba as "a Soviet pawn" (Gott, 2004: 262).¹²⁴ A few weeks later, Carter issued Presidential Directive 52, a strongly-worded plan of action to "contain Cuba as a source of violent revolutionary change" (Jimmy Carter Library, 2008). Most prominent among the list of measures was the strategy "to engage like-minded Latin American governments" through a combination of economic and military incentives (*ibid.*). This habitual feature of U.S. policy in Latin America was bolstered by proposals targeted to directly impact on the lives of ordinary Cubans. Among these, the most potentially damaging were plans to prevent Cuba borrowing money from international lending bodies such as the World Bank, and the decision to increase the U.S. military presence in the region. The first plan sought to raise the cost of internationalist missions, thus requiring a greater financial sacrifice from the general population, while the increase in military personnel

¹²⁴ Castro held the position of chair between 1979 and 1983.

and naval manoeuvres was designed to raise fears of a possible U.S. invasion. From an examination of political speeches and newspaper articles in Cuba during this period it appears that Washington achieved a level of success with both measures, especially since loan restrictions exacerbated pre-existing financial pressures from a drought-induced low sugar crop coupled with low prices on the global market.¹²⁵

At home, stringent austerity policies exacerbated the already mounting pressures that would eventually explode at the Peruvian embassy in April 1980.¹²⁶ At the same time, the onslaught of bombings and assassinations executed by externally-organised and supported terrorist groups like Omega 7, and the heightened U.S. naval presence in the waters off the coast, made it impossible for Cubans to ignore the very real threat of death or harm from forces outside the island. Like Cuba, Cuban men and women, confronted with the stark reality of their situation, were challenged to make a morally-informed decision on the best path to follow: whether to collaborate with adversaries and leave their *palenque*, or to stay and collaborate with friends? *Maluala* lays out an unsentimental view of the brutal realities involved in either choice. From a historical perspective, slave settlements did not survive in their original institutional form in Cuba. Although a rare few managed to maintain their autonomy for several years, in the end practically all were crushed by the colonial powers.¹²⁷ However, it is their survival in the

¹²⁵ For example, a survey of *Granma* between October 1979 and December 1980 uncovers numerous defiant references to Washington's "plans of aggression." Likewise, Fidel Castro mentioned the U.S. position during many speeches, including at the May 1, 1980 rally in Havana and at the July 26, 1980 speech in Ciego de Avila on the anniversary of the Moncada attack (see Castro, 2001).

¹²⁶ Austerity measures included a cut in electricity output to conserve fuel and a reduction of the coffee ration from forty-three grams a week to thirty grams. Cuba was forced to increase its dependence on aid from the Soviet Union and other communist countries (Sobel, 1978:165).

¹²⁷ While the odds were certainly stacked against their survival, there are some notable exceptions. Pérez de la Riva (1973:54) states that *palenques* have sometimes formed the basis of rural towns. He gives the

mythological context, that is to say, in the imagination, which constitutes the essence of the film's power. By reorganising reality (which is the function of the dramatic), the film presents us with a 'what if' scenario. What if the runaways had not been betrayed? What if an unassailable loyalty and unity had prevailed among them? Giral's vision exposes the maroon village's vulnerabilities: it is no paradise of self-sufficiency. The maroons exist in a marginalised realm where freedom is conditional upon being at a physical and statutory remove from official society, but where survival ultimately depends upon their ability to overcome this remoteness, through negotiation, bartering and, when necessary, bloodshed. In the end, the sombre warning appears to be that the dual disadvantages of dependency and isolation produce the weaknesses which enemies can exploit.

IV

To allow a fuller exploration of how Cuban identity formed around the *palenque* paradigm, our study will benefit from a short examination of the slave settlement in its sociohistorical context. The *palenque* was a mode of social organisation among New World Africans which challenged the structure, norms and values of slaving societies. Maroon communities sprouted on the perimeters of sugar, cotton and other slave plantations across a wide swathe of the Americas, including the islands of the Caribbean. The inhospitable natural locales where maroons settled provided the most viable defence against incursion by colonial troops and slavehunters; however, reaping a livelihood from the harsh environments – often in swamps, thick jungles or steep mountain

specific example of the Poblada del Cobre in Oriente Province. There are also remnants of a well-known slave village near the town of Viñales in Pinar del Río, which have become a tourist attraction.

outcrops – demanded ingenuity and steely determination. In this context, *enpalencamiento*, or the establishing of slave settlements, can be considered the most extreme form of revolt, as it comprised a generative and long-term approach to the problem of enslavement. Contrary to individual acts of rebellion, the building of slave communities demonstrated the presence of a theoretical model or ideal constructed around an alternative way of living and thinking based upon the rejection of plantation slavery. This is an important point to emphasise because, since historians have documented cases of freed men and women who became slaveowners in their own right, we cannot interpret every individual struggle for emancipation as an act of rebellion against the practice of slaving.¹²⁸ Life in maroon settlements, on the other hand, appears to have been based upon organisational principles related to traditional African life (see studies by La Rosa Corzo, 2003; Price, 1973, 1975, 1976, and 1999; Franco, 1961; among many others).¹²⁹

For the *palenque* to carry force as a viable metaphor for the forging of Cuban identity, we would expect to find clear associations between the two historical experiences. With this notion in mind, let us consider the following list of common features shared by maroon communities:

Inaccessible and/or inhospitable location

Harsh environment or living conditions

¹²⁸ There is a long history of such studies in the American context throughout the twentieth century, including one of the earliest by Russell (1916). Other notable contributions to this area of scholarship are: Kroger (1995), and Johnson & Roark (1986). One of the few accounts of the phenomenon in the Caribbean is by Knox (1975). Finally, *The Known World* (2003) by Edward P. Jones is an outstanding fictional portrait of black slave ownership which won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize.

¹²⁹ From historical studies and autobiographical accounts, such as Olaudah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative* (2003 [1789]) we know that slavery existed among African tribes, however, there is general agreement that the practice did not approximate the horrors of the Atlantic slave trade. In any event, it appears that even this 'milder, more humane' form of human chattelage was not adopted by the maroons.

Fighters skilled in guerrilla warfare

Will to exploit agriculture and cultivation with the goal of self-sufficiency

Dependence on outside society for trade

State of continuous warfare

Strong measures against desertion (usually punishable by death)

Opportunistic

Leader who understood the ways of the whites, but who could communicate according to African modes of thought and expression

Strong ideological (or at least relational) commitment to Africanness, although no single identifiable African culture: African in 'feeling'

Usually 'synthetic' societies, made up of isolated Africans, embittered *criollos*, and ideologically committed individuals. (adapted from Price, 1973: 1-30)

Certainly, it is possible to recognise close analogies between the slave settlement, as formulated here, and key features of the Cuban 'life story' before and since 1959. While it is difficult to make a claim for the island's inaccessibility, the location of most *palenques*, deep within tropical forests or *maniguas*, carries great symbolic value on three levels: the historical, the experiential and the spiritual (in terms of the African religious dynamic). Historically, the forests of the Sierra Maestra Mountains play an important part in the story of the Revolution, since they provided the perfect camouflage and cover for the guerrillas against Batista's soldiers. From the experiential standpoint, a case can be made that the vulnerability-resilience dichotomy of 'islandness,' a concept borrowed from island studies or nissology, might likewise be compared with the situation of the maroon communities. Finally, if we acknowledge the great impact of African religious practices on how Cubans understand the world, it would be negligent not to mention that, in this belief system, the *manigua* represents a point of contact between the organic and spirit worlds, it is the dwelling place of spirits who work to bring forth the healing

powers of the plants which grow there. The other points of similarity between *palenque* and national experience are easier to establish, but I wish to draw the reader's attention in particular to the last characteristic listed. Considered in relation to Bonnemaïson's insight regarding the "comforting" quality of geosymbols, the characterisation of maroon settlements as ethnically and racially diverse communities supports the ideal of hybridity which is an essential component of *cubanidad*. The notion that a small minority of white Cubans chose to align their own socio-political struggle with the cause of black freedom not only opens a space for their descendants in the contemporary Africanist national project, but, most importantly, it sets the chronological point-of-entanglement (the grafting of the African with the European) back to a much earlier time than the previously accepted frame of the independence wars: in fact, around eighty years earlier, to the mist-enshrouded beginnings of the formation of a slave colony. What is more, it anchors the geographic point-of-entanglement firmly in Cuban soil, thereby renegotiating the cruelties of the Middle Passage as the history of Spain and the *peninsulares*. Finally, the construction of a national idea in reference to the multi-ethnic *palenque* allowed Cubans to reconfigure important national events and historical experiences according to the wider regional formation of the ethnically diverse Caribbean. As a result, the self-absorbed isolation of *afrocubanía*, reflected in the heavy emphasis on the ties of 'blood shared and bloodshed,' was opened to the uplifting camaraderie and energising optimism of the transnational Caribbean idea.

CARIFESTA – A CELEBRATION OF IDENTITY

I

It is important to understand Cuban discourse on the maroon settlement as an historical site of resistance within the frame of the Caribbean quest for a regional identity in the 1970s. For this reason, changes in Cuban consciousness must be seen in the broader context of the trend among the nations most impacted by the Atlantic slave trade to reconfigure their social, cultural, political, and economic frameworks to neutralise the legacies of the plantation. Within this process, the *palenque* offered the ultimate symbol of liberation. As Antonio Benítez Rojo has explained, “of all the communities of transgressors possible in the colonial Caribbean, the palenque was much the most widespread, the most representative, and also the most dangerous; it was in itself the antiplantation and, therefore, the one community whose destruction was most urgently required” (1996: 249).

The special issue of *Revolución y Cultura* published to celebrate Carifesta, the Caribbean festival of the arts, which was held in Havana in the summer of 1979, featured an excerpt of the poem ‘Cuba-Angola’ by Jan Carew, which was translated into Spanish by Cuban poet David Chericían. So perfectly does it marry the icons and geosymbols of black Caribbean consciousness to the cultural and historical narratives which shaped Cuban internationalism in Angola that it demands to be presented in its entirety.

Verde santuario de Colinas apretadas como
puños de Acompong;
nudillos de granite amenazantes,

caobas capturando el rocío y la luz de las estrellas
durante las noches largas, y esparciéndolos
cuando los vientos mañaneros y las lanzas del sol
hacen trizas las espesas brumas, hasta
que se harrastran [sic] como bufandas rotas desde los ardientes
picos de las montañas.

Palenques de Acompong, sus sueños de
regresar al África y al hogar
se han realizado

hijos cubanos de madres y tías maternas
han desandado la Travesía
en Carabelas de Libertad

Palenques de Acompong, ¿recuerdan,
recuerdan el tiempo de su exilio
en las nieves de Nueva Escocia;
su encarcelamiento en estaciones
de ocasos invernales, luz de sol invadiendo
la noche; desafinados vientos del Norte quejándose
en los pinos; ojos de hielo ártico
dándoles la bienvenida?

Palenques de Acompong, sus sueños
son realidad, poemas-himnos a la libertad
cantan alegres en la Sierra Maestra
y hallan eco a lo largo de las llanuras de Lobito
Cuba hizo la primera elección
inequívoca para todos nosotros:
los sin-nada no los con-todo,
no Calibán esclavizado
sino Calibán esgrimiendo su herencia inmemorial
de libertad o muerte.

Nuestro Caribe por primera vez
se volvió un archipiélago de escalones
hacia el camino de regreso al África y al hogar.

Los hermanos cubanos encauzaron el retorno
 con armas en sus manos, furia en sus corazones,
 reverencia hacia el pobre,
 amor hacia dos patrias - ¡Cuba-Angola!
 De los innumerables
 que vinieron en un viaje forzado
 sin regreso, ellos fueron la vanguardia
 los primeros en volver para arrancar
 de los usurpadores a la patria ancestral. (Carew, 1979: 59)

The poem assumes for its power that the reader is familiar with many of the references to the political culture of the black liberation movement, such as the clenched-fist silhouettes raised by the hilltops in the opening lines, or the later allusion to the frozen Canadian wilderness to which some of Jamaica's rebellious slaves were banished by the British. However, rather than examining the work as an anthology of black radical symbolism, what concerns the present analysis is Carew's technique for revealing the two dimensions of the Caribbean mountain region – the hidden and the manifest. In the main this is achieved through the juxtaposition of multiple geographical and temporal reference points to form a heterodox narrative of a single cultural (and sacred) landscape. However, another noteworthy strategy is repetition: most notably, the name of the only surviving maroon village in Jamaica, 'Acompong',¹³⁰ is mentioned more frequently than either nation in the poem's title. In this way, Carew teases out the historic settlement's emblematic and essential link with the Caribbean's political cultures of resistance. The detail of Accompong's endurance signposts the

¹³⁰ Accompong was founded in 1739 as a result of a peace treaty signed between the great maroon leader, Cudjoe, and the British colonisers after the eight-year long First Maroon War. The settlement remained even after Jamaican independence in 1962. The Accompong maroons did not take part in the Second Maroon war of 1795 which resulted in the destruction of the Trelawney town slave settlement.

intersection of the three temporal modalities: the historical past, the present time and the distant future. At the same time, its geographic position in Jamaica produces that country's spatial incorporation into the cultural and political territory that Carew is organising. A further point for us to consider is the poet's lyrical representation, in the first few lines, of a verdant landscape with hills "como puños de Acompong." The region is unspecified but "como" lets us know that it is not the specific geographic location of Accompong. The mountain mists and expansive, star-lit, night sky evoke a dreamlike landscape, an idea which is reinforced at the start of the following sentence in the reference to "sus sueños." However, Carew draws a distinction between the mythical dream world and the dreams of the historical Accompong maroons. By connecting the imagined to the real in this way, the green hills may be seen as a liminal or transitional space linking known (visible) and unknown (invisible) realms, a 'betwixt and between' territory inhabited by the ghosts of runaway slaves, the air reverberating with their dreams of returning to Africa, and their longing for home – "y al hogar" – therefore, not only a physical terrain but also "a spirit world, in the sense of ghosts, memories, and feelings." But our gaze into the past lurches abruptly forward as Carew reminds us that the maroons' dreams "se han realizado:"

Palenques de Acompong, sus sueños
son realidad, poemas-himnos a la libertad
cantan alegres en la Sierra Maestra
y hallan eco a lo largo de las llanuras de Lobito [...]

Here we observe how the reality of Cuban internationalism pursues an historical trajectory that begins with the Accompong maroons first dreams of freedom and return

to Africa. Equally, the poem suggests that the revolutionary project itself configures the imagined territory of slave rebellion along an arc that extends from the mountains of Oriente province to the shores of Benguela province in Angola. Consequently, the act of crossing back, that is, in the opposite direction from the slave ships laden with African bodies, symbolically neutralises (crosses out) both the temporal and the spatial experience of rupture. Another way of expressing this is that the journey back closes the circle. The final territorial marker I would like to bring into focus is the Caribbean region itself, or to use Carew's more potent formulation, "Nuestro Caribe." This reshaping of Cuban national hero José Martí's defining term, "Nuestra América," suggests a reinvention and reconstruction of the cultural past – a syncretism of the old and the new. In this way, Carew seems to be signalling that, culturally speaking, internationalism in Africa – that is, the performance of the *palenque* myth of return – had redefined how Cubans thought of themselves and their place in the world, and, inversely, how the world now imagined Cuba.

Carew's perspective on the *palenque* as a model for postcolonial solidarity may have diverged from what St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott has observed as the popular "identification with Hebraic suffering" in Caribbean politics, marked by "the subdued search for a Moses" (1998: 44), but the Guyanese poet was certainly not the only West Indian writer of this period to move beyond the theoretical binary of paradise or plantation by foregrounding "the struggle against the forces of colonial domination" (Strachan, 2002: 245). In her 1969 novel *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People*, Paule Marshall, an American writer of Barbadian descent, likewise narrates the myth of the maroon or *cimarrón* as the ultimate symbol for a postcolonial nationalism. Through the

heroic, ancestral figure of Cuffee Ned, the awe-inspiring leader of a slave revolt, Marshall “seeks to elevate historical conflicts with the plantation to the status of myth so as to help generate a new Caribbean ethos, one that would be efficacious in the struggle to build a more egalitarian, self-determined region” (Strachan, 2002: 246). But while this line of argument struggled to take hold in the other nations of the West Indies, Cuban internationalism in Africa had already provided the fundamental mechanisms through which historical understanding generated new meaning. This new understanding, as we shall see in the following case study, was a liberating and potent celebration of Africanness in the context of the hybrid Caribbean – “un arcoiris de pueblos.”¹³¹

II

Posters designed for the Festival de las Artes del Caribe, held between July 16 and 22, featured an eye-catching adaptation of the Chinese yin-yang symbol which represents balance, wholeness and integration. In the Cuban version, the dark, cold, feminine principle is rendered as the deep blue Caribbean Sea and a huge yellow sun embodies the bright heat and intensity of masculine energy (see fig. 18). The illustration carries a semantic depth that extends beyond the simple reference to natural traits that influence local life (the sun and the sea), in other words, its meaning extends beyond the “regional label” (Shortridge cited in Entrikin, 1991: 55). For, on one level, it symbolises what Benítez Rojo saw as the myth or desire in Caribbean discourse “for social, cultural and psychic integration to compensate for the fragmentation and provisionality of the

¹³¹ The tagline for the third Festival de las Artes del Caribe, 16-22 July 1979.

collective Being” (1996: 189). From another perspective, the outer circle may be seen to delimit the Caribbean as a “culture region” (Entrikin, 1991: 53-57), with an emphasis on the spatial setting or locale. On yet another level, it is possible to interpret the symbol with reference to actual socio-political conditions in Cuba: in this context, the sun rising above the depths may refer to the emergence of a new optimism after the gloom of the *quinquenio gris*.¹³² In reality, all of these definitions contribute a part to the organic experience of Caribbeanness that is celebrated in the pages of the June 1979 edition of *Revolución y Cultura*, “dedicada a Carifesta ’79.”



FIGURE 18.

An examination of the June issue’s contents page clearly signals the interconnectedness of Cuban *africanía* with Caribbeanness. A glimpse at the list of

¹³² Although strictly-speaking a term for the repressive, anti-experimentation phase in Cuban cultural policy, the term *quinquenio gris* is often used to refer to the general climate of conformity in other cultural areas, such as religion or style (clothing, hairstyles, etc.). Individuals who adopted styles related to exogenous subcultures, such as hippies, came under particular pressure.

contributors reveals that the Caribbean specialists assembled for the special edition were also some of the country's leading Africanists. The work of Miguel Barnet, Jesús Guanche and Argeliers León, among others, had been published in sporadic and isolated bursts in previous issues of the cultural journal, but the Caribana edition stands out not only for marking the first time they had appeared in a single issue, but also for uncovering a common thread in their diverse projects. In this way, not only were they integrated as researchers in a mutual field of enquiry, but the Cuban experience of Africa as separateness was finally obliterated through an embrace of Caribbeanness. It is no overstatement to say that the sense of joyousness in this discovery of relatedness is palpable in almost every page of the Carifesta issue, beginning with the very first article, Miguel Barnet's 'La cultura que generó el mundo del azúcar.' In this essay, Barnet defines the African slave-powered sugar production industry as the common denominator in Caribbean societies from which all other cultural manifestations radiate. His theory rests on the idea that Cuba was united through sugar. "El azúcar nos unió para esclavizarnos y ahora nos une de nuevo en la liberación," he maintains, "Aquél que llegó amordazado de las costas de su tierra de origen, al que le pusieron las cadenas, y aquél que se enajenó en una economía dependiente de poderes foráneos, contribuyeron a que nos quitáramos el yugo de la esclavitud cultural y política en increíble paradoja" (Barnet, 1979: 11). This line of reasoning places slavery at the hub of the Cuban national experience: firstly, in terms of the emancipationist idea that slavery enslaves master and slave alike,¹³³ and, secondly, through the joint experience of fighting for

¹³³ For example, when Frederick Douglass stated that "No one man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man without at last finding the other end fastened about his own neck" (in Foner, 1950: 397).

liberation against Spain. In other words, slavery transformed Africans and Spaniards into Cubans:

Dejamos de ser españoles para ser cubanos. Y cuando nuestra cubanía estuvo a punto de ser quebrantarse la salvamos. Dejamos de ser blancos puros para ser cubanos, que es más que blanco y más que negro. (Barnet, 1979: 11)

Of all the Cuban artists and intellectuals presented in this issue (which bore the illuminating tagline “un mismo sol caribeño”), only Nicolás Guillén stands out as an original Caribbeanist. From the earliest days of his career, Guillén’s compositions testified to a profound awareness of the many historical, political, social, and cultural characteristics held in common by the nations of the archipelago. So, as we might expect, one of the most substantial articles chronicles the Caribbean themes in the national poet’s long career. On the first of six pages devoted to ‘El Caribe en la poesía de Nicolás Guillén,’ Angel Augier begins with an analysis of ‘West Indies, Ltd’ (1934).

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The first stanza goes as follows:

¡West Indies! Nueces de coco, tabaco y aguardiente.
Este es un oscuro pueblo sonriente,
conservador y liberal,
ganadero y azucarero,
donde a veces corre mucho dinero,
pero donde siempre se vive muy mal. (in Augier, 1979: 22)

Cubans who were confronting austerity measures, partially related to the vicissitudes of the world market for sugar, would have been sensitive to the portrait Guillén had painted, over twenty years before the 1959 Revolution, of ‘the repeating sameness’ of the Caribbean experience.

Luis Suardíaz's 'Crónica de CARIFESTA' narrates the beginnings of the arts festival and recounts events at the first and second meetings, held in Guyana in 1972 and then Jamaica in 1976. The festival was the brainchild of Guyanese prime minister Forbes Burnham, who, in May 1966, dreamed aloud of a festival that would bring together creative artists from all over the region "cuyos poemas, pinturas, esculturas proyecten nuestros sueños y nos ayuden a promover y desarrollar nuestra personalidad caribeña" (cited in Suardíaz, 1979: 46). According to Suardíaz, the first steps in turning the dream into reality were tortuous, and at times the barriers between islands appeared insurmountable:

nos desconocemos trágicamente. Integramos grandes, medianas o pequeñas islas culturales, o bien peculiares archipiélagos que la voluntad de los antiguos amos mantuvo tácticamente separados y que aún hoy, cuando se ensayen diversos modos, grados diferentes de independencia, andamos desunidos o dispersos. (*ibid.*: 47)

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Of all the potential barriers to collaboration, linguistic diversity proved to be the most challenging to overcome. However, for Cubans an impressive precedent had been set, Suardíaz informs us, in the examples of Nicolás Guillén and Alejo Carpentier, who "han logrado romper desde hace años las barreras lingüísticas, las prohibiciones obstinadas, las prevenciones de todo tipo" (*ibid.*: 48). As we know, Carpentier's vision of the Caribbean was seared by his travels in Haiti, eventually giving rise to three of his most important novels, *El reino de este mundo*, *El siglo de las luces*, and *Los pasos perdidos*. Guillén, meanwhile, worked with Haitian poet Jacques Roumain in the late 1930s, and spent time in Guadeloupe on his way back to Cuba from exile in South America. Perhaps the best expression of the deep feelings of identification driving those early

efforts to transcend differences and turn Burnham's vision into reality comes from a line in another Guillén poem, 'El apellido' (1958) – "sin conocernos nos reconoceremos" (1974b: 398).

The remaining features seem to be permeated with a sense of exhilaration that the barriers to unity had been overcome. Articles like, 'Bailes y fiestas populares cubanos' by Feijóo (1979), 'Poesía del Caribe' by Morejón (1979), 'Plástica caribeña' by de Juan (1979) 'Aspectos musicales de Jamaica' by Salado (1979), and 'Un aporte del tambor a la música cubana' by León (1979) tumble one behind the other, like celebrants at a carnival parade, to arrive finally at the inside back cover, where Manuel Mendive's resplendent tableau 'El palenque' (1979) is reproduced.

III

The contrast could not be sharper between the festive mood of the *Revolución y Cultura* special edition and *Casa's* more subdued issue devoted to "Pocos países de nuestra América menos conocidos que los que forman el área caribeña inglesa," which was published in the summer of 1975 to mark the establishment of closer relations with Guyana, Trinidad and Jamaica. Prime ministers Burnham, Williams and Manley had made state visits to Havana that year in April, June and July respectively. Despite an emphasis on the literary arts, the opening article, a speech given by Fidel Castro during Burnham's visit, initiates the earnest mood by explaining the ties between Cuba and the other countries as a matter of duty: "Es deber de nuestros pueblos unirse y cooperar estrechamente entre sí, frente a la política neocolonialista y de dominio imperial que los Estados Unidos establecieron sobre nuestros pueblos" (Castro, 1975: 13). However,

aside from political expediency and a set of shared historical features – “La historia de estos países del Caribe es muy similar: el descubrimiento, la conquista, siglos de explotación económica, el exterminio de la población aborígen y el establecimiento de la esclavitud, la explotación más despiadada y la pobreza consecuente de las masas (1975: 12) – there is no indication that the English-speaking West Indies is considered part of the same culture area as Cuba. Instead, the implication is that Latin America continued to form the dominant cultural association, as may be noted in the following: “Y nosotros, siempre que planteamos la cuestión de la integración económica futura de la América Latina, nunca olvidamos mencionar también a los países de habla inglesa del Caribe, puesto que es nuestro deber luchar por la integración económica y aun política de los pueblos de la América Latina, incluidos los pueblos de habla inglesa del Caribe” (*ibid.*: 13). The deeper meaning here seems to be that inclusion of the British West Indies in the context of a ‘greater Latin America’ is facilitated through Cuban largesse. In other words, Cuba is willing to expand its vanguard role in Latin America to work on behalf of the English-speaking peoples of the Caribbean too.

The most significant difference between the 1975 and 1979 publications, which perhaps links to the preceding point, is the low participation of Cuban writers in the former: aside from an article by Antonio Benítez Rojo (1975b) on the English Caribbean novel, and an overview of Jamaican contemporary art by Manuel López Oliva (1975), all of the remaining contributions are made by British West Indians.¹³⁴ Although, admittedly, this allows for a comprehensive introduction to the finest writers and creative artists in these countries, there is no denying that the separation of cultures

¹³⁴ These include political writings by Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James and Cheddi Jagan.

(because that is how it appears in comparison with the more 'integrated' situation found in the June 1979 *Revolución y Cultura*) promotes a degree of estrangement, as if, despite the longstanding contributions of Jamaican migrants to Cuban society since the late nineteenth century, the English Caribbean remained 'other.' The election of friendly governments in the region in the early 1970s had initiated the process of collaboration, however *Casa's* efforts to limit, if not entirely remove, evidence of black nationalist thought through a painstaking selection and editing process, highlight a lingering discomfort with aspects of the English Caribbean's political culture, particularly regarding race. Instead, the emphasis is placed on the multiethnic composition of these societies. Hence the inclusion of Jamaican poet Louise Bennett's (1975) '¿Volver a África?' which conveys the Ortizian notion that in Caribbean culture European roots are just as strong as African. Even back-to-Africa movement leader Marcus Garvey shows a surprisingly conciliatory side in the carefully chosen '*fragmentos*' of his writings, such as the following:

No estoy prejuiciado contra ninguna de las clases de Jamaica. Quiero a todos los jamaicanos – blancos y negros – y a todos los que han hecho de Jamaica su patria adoptiva. Pero todas las clases deben cooperar por el bien común. Queremos que en lo racial Jamaica se alce como un faro de tolerancia y buena voluntad. (Garvey, 1975:51)

In the meantime, C.L.R. James's piece, 'De Toussaint L'Ouverture a Fidel Castro' emphatically declares Cuba to be "la isla más antillana de las Antillas" (1975: 68). In seeking to explain the fascination for Africa among black intellectuals in the West Indian colonies, beginning with Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a

Return to My Native Land) in 1939, the Trinidadian intellectual gives the following profound analysis:

Hoy – y sólo hoy – podemos definir lo que ha motivado esta preocupación antillana con África en el período de entreguerras. Los antillanos fueron y han sido siempre educados a la manera occidental. La sociedad antillana confine a los hombres negros a una franja muy estrecha del territorio social. El primer paso hacia la libertad era ir al extranjero. *Antes de que pudieran empezar a verse a sí mismos como un pueblo libre e independiente, tentan que limpiar de las mentes el estigma de que todo lo africano era inherentemente inferior y degradado.* El camino hacia la identidad nacional antillana pasaba por África. (*ibid.*)

Although written in 1963, more than a decade before internationalism in Angola and the transformation of Cuban consciousness and identity, James's essay is striking for its prescient appreciation that societies became Caribbean only through an 'experience' of Africa.

"ANGOLA EN NUESTROS CORAZONES"

I

'Palenque' was the title of a popular routine choreographed by the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional in the mid-1970s. The troupe performed at the first Carifesta held in Georgetown, Guyana in 1972 – the first of a series of overseas engagements that continued right through the decade. Thinking back to those times and the visits to the Soviet Union, Peru, Mexico, France, and many other countries, cofounder Rogelio Martínez Furé recalled with amusement a trip that the company made to England in 1976. The Cubans had arrived in the capital on a bitterly cold winter's night. Gazing

through the window of the tour bus, some of the group suddenly spied two “Black Londoners” dancing out in the open streets to keep warm. Martínez Furé laughed at the memory of the young performers squealing with delighted recognition at this unexpected reflection of their own selves. It was a scene which helped affirm to him the existence of a “Caribbean civilisation.” When you travel to the different nations of the Caribbean, he told me, you will find traces of the former colonial rulers – British, French, Dutch, etc. – that distinguish one society from the others, but when you strip all of that away, you are left with a people who, “en la vida exterior,” express themselves in similar ways. You see it on the streets, in their manner of speaking, no matter the language: “Somos Caribeños todos” (Martínez Furé, interview, 2008).¹³⁵ In a similar way, he remembered how on his first visit to Brixton market in London the sound of the vendors calling out their produce – “Mango, mango, mango! Avocado! Okra!” – transported him to the streets of Kingston, Jamaica.¹³⁶ Not to mention Notting Hill at Carnival time! According to Martínez Furé, the reason we can speak of a Caribbean civilisation is because the peoples are linked by a common philosophy. That philosophy, he believes, is a “transpolation” of the West African religious view from the past into the New World context.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Martínez Furé’s findings is that they support the idea of culture as the performance of shared values, beliefs and practices, and, more precisely in the Caribbean framework, as the performance of some sort of

¹³⁵ All quotations from Martínez Furé in this chapter pertain to this reference.

¹³⁶ Still suffering the ravages from devastating bombing during WWII, Brixton was one of the few areas where West Indian immigrants could settle during the 1940s and 1950s. Many flocked to the area which now has one of the largest concentrations of West Indian immigrants in London. It is widely considered to be the centre of British African-Caribbean culture.

integrative African tribal memory. In turn, the potential of this idea is greatly strengthened by binding it with Bonnemaïson's claim of a link between territory as culture and ritual:

All told, what characterizes the territory is the presence of ritual. Traditional, modern, or postmodern humanity lives by means of rituals that reveal its hierarchies, express its values and buttress its beliefs, be they religious or not. [...]

The territory begins with ritual. Indeed the territory is the most immediate of rituals.
(Bonnemaïson, 2005: 118)

This perspective provides an understanding of the crucial role that Africa-derived religious practices played in constructing a space (a territory) of resistance in Caribbean societies, as it explains how the syncretisation of African and European religions allowed slaves to perform hiddenness, "with a continuously discharging circuit of taboo and transgression, concealment and revelation" (Taussig, 2006: 169). The point to highlight here is that, if we recognise that through this process the slave's body transformed into a "theater of sacred activity" (*ibid.*: 170), then it follows that a modern movement to mark out the territory of Caribbean identity would most likely form around the symbolism of the black body itself.

In reviewing an array of periodicals between 1979 and 1980 I was able to verify this system of symbolisation in the Cuban context. In *Revolución y Cultura*, for example, concurrent with an increase in articles by specialists in Afro-Cuban culture there was a marked increase in the visibility of black Cubans compared to earlier years. The Carifesta issue, which has been a focus of attention in this study, marked the pinnacle of this trend, but ripples from the festival continued to be felt in the following months, as evidenced by the comparatively large number of articles on African cultural

manifestations in the August and September editions. Interest appeared to wane in the ensuing months, as black Cubans were pushed back to the margins of the music section. However, the March 1980 issue was a startling departure from this trend as it included a robust range of articles on *africanía*, including a four-page feature on the theatrical adaptation of Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón*, which had recently received an important award. Nonetheless, after this brief exception, the previous pattern was resumed.



FIGURE 19

Similarly, in the inaugural March 1980 issue of *Muchacha* magazine,¹³⁷ a publication aimed at teenage girls and younger women, black people are prominently featured, from the models in the fashion feature to the family shown in the article '¿Estamos preparados para el matrimonio?' (*Muchacha*, 1980a) and the couple illustrating '¿Piensas ya en amor?'

(*Muchacha*, 1980b) (see fig. 19 and 20).¹³⁸ However, although a black woman is featured on the cover of the second issue, almost no other person of colour appears in the body of the magazine. The sole exception is an article profiling the political careers of two young Grenadian women from the New Jewel



FIGURE 20

¹³⁷ The magazine, formerly named *Romances*, was one of two important publications by the Federación de las Mujeres – the other was the magazine *Mujeres*. Both ceased publication when paper supplies became scarce in the 1990s, but were relaunched in 2006.

¹³⁸ It is tempting to see the use of images of black Cubans to accompany texts on emotional and moral issues as little more than a superficial strategy to correct the traditional association of blackness with immorality and promiscuity. However, even as we acknowledge this ambivalent aspect there is no denying the freshness of the vision in relation to past representations or omissions.

movement, 'Cantos de libertad en la nueva joya caribeña' (*Muchacha*, 1980c). By the third issue in May 1980, a few black women are present, but only within the fashion pages, and none of them is dark-skinned. In addition, the historical and literary features in this issue exclusively focus on the European element in Cuban culture. Later editions of the magazine continue this tendency, with only isolated appearances by black people. Similar phenomena in *Verde Olivo*, *Casa* and *Bohemia* strongly suggested to me a synchronicity with historical events, and, in fact, March 1980 coincided with state visits by Angolan President José Eduardo dos Santos and Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley. Although Manley made a brief return visit in September, there were no further visits by black dignitaries for the rest of the year, and the close Cuban collaboration with Jamaica was lost after Manley was defeated in the October election by his pro-Washington rival Edward Seaga.¹³⁹ Hence, the brief surge in black representation in March gives the impression that blackness and the black body were the glue connecting internationalism and Caribbean identity in the Cuban imagination (see fig. 21). It must be emphasised that I am not speaking here of simple tokenism for, as Martínez Furé confirms, Cuban interest in Africa "no es una simple curiosidad, sino algo más profundo."

¹³⁹ In one of his first acts as prime minister, Seaga asked Cuba to withdraw Ambassador Ulises Estrada, and one year later Jamaica broke off all diplomatic relations with Cuba (Domínguez, 1989: 232).

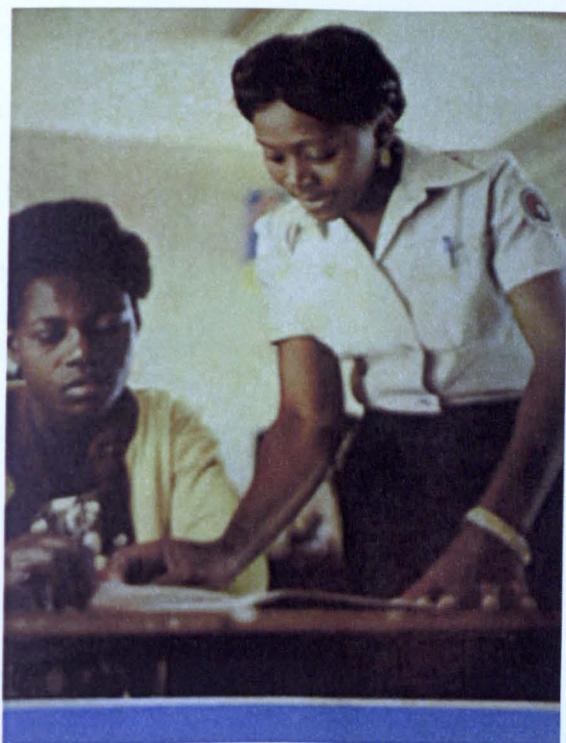


FIGURE 21. Cuban internationalist educator assists a student.

In the many Caribbean countries that he visited, Martínez Furé found that attachment to Africa was largely based on mythical views, in contrast to Cuba, where the physical and pragmatic experience of internationalism, as well as extensive diplomatic contacts with the newly liberated African nations, had produced a more holistic image of the continent which Martínez Furé described as “una simpatía.” As a result, Africa was simultaneously de-mystified and elevated in Cuban discourse. Among black Cubans this often led to powerful feelings of identification. Martínez Furé remembered the many photos enclosed in letters sent by friends fighting in Angola, often inscribed on the back with “mira, me parece mi hija, mira, mi parece mi prima, o mira, mi tía.” At home, the fanfares visits from African politicians and intellectuals positively influenced the image of Africa held by Cubans of all backgrounds. For black Cubans, the importance of these visits for a collective sense of dignity should not be underestimated:

“la autoestima, en todo sentido, no solo cultural. Todo mezclado,” affirmed Martínez Furé. An equally important contribution to African consciousness was the presence of thousands of African students in Cuba.¹⁴⁰ Although mainly located on the Isla de la Juventud, these students were not completely cut off from the wider population, and shared aspects of their cultures, including contemporary practices of the old African religions still followed by many Cubans. Accordingly, Africa was brought out of the past, and came to represent ‘una fuente viva.’¹⁴¹

II

The narrative of *Maluala* was inspired by true historical events. Ventura Sánchez, known as Coba, was the most renowned *palenque* chief in the Santiago area, and governed hundreds of *cimarrones*. As in the film, the governor of Santiago de Cuba, Brigadier Eusebio Escudero, offered to meet with the *apalencados* to discuss their demands for freedom and land. However, unlike the fictional account, Coba was ambushed by slave hunters when he travelled to the city with his delegation, and committed suicide by drowning (Franco, 1973: 42). Likewise the *palenques* of Bumba and Maluala, related by kinship, were two of the most established and densely inhabited slave villages, and, consequently, caused great concern to local plantation owners and colonial settlers. A military raid resulted in the destruction of Bumba on October 4, 1830, and survivors sought shelter at other settlements in the region. The film faithfully

¹⁴⁰ To gain a better idea of the scale of the African influence, let us consider Sarracino's report that of the 38,261 foreign students enrolled on courses in the national university system between 1977 and 1991, 164 were from North America, 5,372 from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, 4,603 from South America, 1,810 from Europe, 4,974 from Asia, and no less than 21,338 from Africa (1993: 103).

¹⁴¹ *La fuente viva* (1983) is the title of a collection of Miguel Barner's writings on the African dynamic in Cuban culture.

depicts the eastern region *apalencados*' heavy reliance upon trade with neighbouring islands for their survival. Giral recreates the character of an Italian known to the authorities in Baracoa as Luis Rufo, who, "would take clothes, shoes, hats, machetes, and other articles to a place on the coast called Sagua, in order to sell his merchandise to the maroons" (*ibid.*: 43). But, in addition to essential supplies, the tides brought in rebellious slaves (illegally transported from Jamaica) or news of their exploits (*ibid.*). Fearful that ideas of freedom might spread from one island to the next, the colonial powers were most concerned to suppress these overseas links and, where strategic attack was prevented, attempts were made to at least contain the *palenques* within their isolation.

During the first few years of internationalism in Angola, Cuba was also defined by a sense of remoteness, which, at the end of the decade, the nation was restless to overcome. This can be attributed, at the level of international relations, to Washington's hostile policies, which, as we have noted, contributed to a degree of economic containment and threatened to impose a military cordon around the island. Meanwhile, Latin American and Caribbean states opposed to the Castro government used the Angolan intervention to stir up old feelings of mistrust against Cuban motives for the region, which created further barriers to regional integration. At the national level, Cubans experienced Angola as isolating in three principal ways: firstly, in terms of domestic dislocation, as the mission separated internationalists from their families for long periods of time, which some regard as a factor in the higher levels of estrangement

and discord between marital partners.¹⁴² Secondly, Cuban policy in Angola put an end to secret talks with the U.S. administration on topics directly affecting ordinary citizens, such as family reunification and the constricting trade embargo. Finally, from both cultural and geographical standpoints, the Cuban relationship with Angola was greatly challenged by distance. In neither case was this an insurmountable problem: for well over a decade Cuban soldiers, engineers, teachers, doctors, and others regularly streamed across the almost nine thousand mile stretch separating the two countries, and, as we have seen in this study, Cuban discourse heavily referenced the traits and characteristics which they held in common. Nevertheless, the physical distance would perhaps have influenced the general perception that Angola was at a distinct remove from Cuba's pressing economic and social problems, and, in a similar way, the focus on history as the motivation for action might have subjected the internationalist mission to the distancing forces of the past. We might conclude, therefore, that in the context of Angola, the Cuban experience of Africa was one of both temporal and spatial detachment, while, on the other hand, internationalism in the Caribbean offered an Africanist experience that, due to its physical and psychological (cultural) proximity, appeared more familiar. In this way, the Angolan experience may be compared to a ritual experience, in which isolation together with sacrifice, ordeal or enlightenment transforms identity.

A similar principle is observable among individuals whose direct experience of Angola generated a new Caribbean orientation or reference point for future tasks. For

¹⁴² This idea has mainly been communicated to me anecdotally by individuals who were living in Cuba during this period. It is supported to some extent by divorce statistics which indicate a sharp rise during the 1980s (see for example, *Catasus Cervera*, 1996: 94).

example, after his experience as a war correspondent in Angola, photographer Ernesto Fernández Noguera's body of work started to include for the first time manifestations of Afro-Cuban culture.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, poet and filmmaker Victor Casaus travelled to Angola in the same year that he produced the documentary *Granada: pequeño país, gran revolución* (1980), which was entered in the second Havana Film Festival. It follows, according to this logic, that Angola could be thought of as a site where rituals of remembrance and feeling were enacted – a concept demonstrated by the appearance of articles such as *Mujeres* magazine's 'Angola en nuestros corazones' by Alicia Cascaret, and Márquez & Ermero Rivero's 'Angola en mis recuerdos' in sister publication *Romances*, both published in 1979.

By the time that Michael Manley had been turned out of office, Cuban internationalists had built fourteen housing units, six dams and five factories in Jamaica. In addition, Cuban medical personnel had seen around a million patients, and instructors had transferred a variety of skills to about a thousand Jamaicans (Domínguez, 1989:232).¹⁴⁴ 'De Cuba a Guyana' in the July issue of *Revolución y Cultura* (1978) records the internationalist mission in that country. However at the close of the decade, collaborative initiatives in the region mainly centred on the support of Maurice Bishop's revolutionary government. If Maluala represented Cuba in the national imaginary, then Grenada symbolised Bumba. Just like the *palenque* leaders in Giral's film, Castro and Bishop established close personal ties beyond their political

¹⁴³ I have come to this judgment from an examination of Fernández's portfolio at the Fototeca. While I cannot be sure whether his photographs on Afro-Cuban culture are the result of assignments or personal interest, in either case they imply that a link had been established (either internally or externally) with his African work.

¹⁴⁴ Also see Walton Cotman (1993:40-47) for an overview of Cuban political and economic links with the Anglophone Caribbean between 1970 and 1979, including early relations with Grenada.

alliance.¹⁴⁵ In his 1980 address to the May Day rally in Havana, Bishop expressed his gratitude for the military assistance which Cuba provided in the first weeks of the Grenadian Revolution in March 1979 (1980: 62).¹⁴⁶ Long-term support from Cuba included health workers, scholarships for Grenadian students, some military equipment, and a few military advisers (Gott, 2004: 272; Walton Cotman, 1993: 147).¹⁴⁷ However, the greatest collaborative project was the construction of an international airport to support Grenada's bid to develop its anaemic tourist trade. As 1980 drew to a close, international affairs magazine *Prima* published a report on the venture:

Tradicionalmente el avance del turismo en Granada se vio frenado por dos razones fundamentales: una, el difícil acceso a la isla, que carece de un aeropuerto capaz de recibir aviones grandes, y otra, la erogación de divisas, provocada por la necesidad de importar casi todos los comestibles y productos necesarios para atender a los visitantes.

La edificación del aeropuerto nacional, iniciada en las afueras de la capital Saint Georges (Point Saline), con un costo de 45 millones de dólares, permitirá el aterrizaje de aviones comerciales de gran tamaño pertenecientes a las líneas aéreas activas en el turismo en la región.

La moderna terminal aérea se construye con la colaboración de Cuba (que aporta personal técnico y equipos) y de otros países. Se estima que se concluya en un plazo no mayor de tres años. (Grant, 1980: 4)

The article also addresses Washington's campaign to isolate Grenada in the region, and details the "peligros desestabilizadores" which threatened to remove the revolutionary

¹⁴⁵ Walton Cotman lists the reasons why the NJM established close ties with the Castro government as: (1) the compatibility of NJM and PCC views on overcoming capitalist underdevelopment; (2) a positive assessment of Cuban socialism from which the NJM concluded socialist-oriented development was viable; (3) growing respect for Cuban internationalism; (4) confidence in Havana's commitment to parties and regimes in the Caribbean basin that challenged U.S. and British hegemony and peripheral capitalism; and (5) the belief that NJM could rely on substantial Cuban aid. (1993: 31)

¹⁴⁶ The first shipment of arms from Cuba arrived on board the *Matanzas* on April 14 (*ibid.*: 75-76).

¹⁴⁷ It is estimated that, at the time of the US invasion, there were 784 Cuban internationalists in Grenada, including 639 airport workers, 22 military advisors, and 17 health workers. 24 Cubans died and 59 were wounded in the invasion (*ibid.*: 221).

government from power. Newly-elected U.S. president Ronald Reagan visualised an altogether different purpose for the airport than the simple goal of economic development alleged by *Prima*. As far as he was concerned, the only international aircraft destined to land on the newly constructed runways would be military jets, since the airport was actually a Soviet-Cuban base designed as a launching pad for a communist takeover of the Caribbean. In the end, Maurice Bishop's demise came after a radicalised section of his party, the New Jewel Movement, led by Deputy Prime Minister Winston Bernard Coard, seized control of the government on October 13, 1983 (Walton Cotman, 1993: 207). After supporters arrived to release Bishop from house arrest, he and several cabinet members were shot dead by soldiers loyal to Coard (*ibid.*; Pryor, 1986: 251). The loss of Bishop as a friend and ally was a deep blow to Castro, and the whole country mourned together when, several days later, on October 25, U.S. forces invaded Grenada using the pretext of re-establishing order. During the invasion American marines exchanged fire with the internationalists, and several Cubans were killed. The others were briskly herded together and shipped back to Cuba.

CONCLUSION

Although the dream of Marxist-Leninist collaboration in the Caribbean was destroyed with the assassination of Bishop and the hostile military takeover that followed, this did not adversely affect Cuba's will to be Caribbean. In fact, it is likely that Havana had learned some important lessons from collaboration with Grenada and other Caribbean countries which would profoundly impact on Cuba's subsequent social and economic development. For example, the Castro government's recognition of the potential

economic benefits of increased tourism coincided with the establishment of closer ties with CARICOM nations in the mid-1970s. In 1976 INTUR was established to develop national and international tourism, the same year in which Havana was selected to host the next Caribbean Arts Festival. The new organisation would be instrumental in preparing the country for the anticipated influx of visitors, and only a year later, tourist figures had surged from fifteen thousand to fifty thousand. In the year of Carifesta that number rose to one hundred thousand.¹⁴⁸ Also, despite the catastrophic denouement, collaboration with Grenada had proven that the model crafted in the Angolan mission could, at least logistically, be applied closer to home.

At the cultural level, internationalism in Angola had brought recognition of the interconnection of Cuba's African past with that of other Caribbean nations, and inserted Cubans into the regional 'circle of memory.' The *palenque* paradigm forged a link between slave narratives in the nationalist revolutionary context and the history of cimarronage throughout the region. In this way, the whole Caribbean area was imagined as a territory of resistance – a ritual space for conjuring the ghosts of rebellious slaves and performing their ancient arts. Cuba's discovery of its Caribbean self continued throughout the 1980s, and launched another round of investigation into folk culture. Although at the turn of the decade Soviet Union-trained ethnographers continued to use their pens in an attempt to 'remove the head from the body' of Afro-Cuban culture, in such articles as 'Integración y desintegración de los cultos sincréticos de origen africano en Cuba' by Argeliers León and Jesús Guancho (1979), and 'Hacia un enfoque sistémico de la cultura cubana' by Guancho (1980), there are signs, only a few

¹⁴⁸ Figures taken from Jayawardena (2003).

years later, that the spirit world of *africanía* began to be regarded as a fertile and intergral repository of national culture. For instance, when Santiago de Cuba based Casa del Caribe was founded in July 1982 as a research institution dedicated to the study of Cuban culture in the Caribbean context, with particular emphasis on: “Formas de resistencia (estrategias de lucha de los indios y los africanos esclavizados, de los criollos y otros portadores del sentimiento de nacionalidad etc.)” (*Casa del Caribe*, 2003), a museum dedicated to Africa derived religions, was created in one of the institution’s buildings – Casa de las Religiones Populares – and was designed to be a ritual space with working shrines for group ceremonies and private worship. Thus, in the territory of Caribbean identity, Afro-Cuban culture stood as a cultural phenomenon that emphasised the link between the present and the past.

Previously slave iconology had turned on cimarronage as a blueprint for individual and collective action. As political/cultural phenomena that involved the “idealized reinvention of the past to serve current political choices” (Bonnemaison, 2005:68), these symbols centred upon a reconstruction of history for the purpose of strengthening revolutionary ideology. In this way, they offered “a dialectical synthesis of the temporal and the eternal” (Webb, 1992: 102). Meanwhile, the slave settlement metaphor emphasised the relationship with territory. As we have seen, the dynamic character of the *palenque* as national image stemmed from its interconnectedness with regional image (Entrikin, 1991: 55). Following the idea that an attachment to place forms the basis of identity, one could claim that by fusing *cubania* with place, the great value of the *palenque* paradigm was the pragmatic vision it offered of the Caribbean as

“la identidad que nos une.”¹⁴⁹ Amidst the perpetual oscillation in Cuban consciousness between competing discourses of Africa and Europe, the endogenous and the exogenous, or the local and the global, the regional evolved as a type of spatial syncretism, merging the specificity of historical experience and the transcendent idea of place.

¹⁴⁹ “Por la identidad que nos une” is the tagline of the *Revistas del Caribe*, a publication of Casa del Caribe.

EL ÁTLAS DE AFRICANÍA: PART THREE

Listen:
 from my distant island
 from my watchful island
 I call out to you: Ho!
 And your voices answer me
 and this is the meaning of their reply:
 "The day is bright and clear." And it is true:
 even in the midst of storm and night
 for us the day is bright and clear. (Césaire: 1970: 83)

In my mind's eye he stands tall and erect, like a sentinel. A long, lean figure glimpsed at the edges of consciousness. In dreams he appears as the stoic sidekick 'friend of a friend' whose presence is only registered when missing. In life he has assumed various forms. Once I misremembered him as the still-born older brother – a fraternal mirage of sorts. At other times I perceived his cool stillness at the edges of dance floors. He never speaks. His silent watching, like a towering granite obelisk, only reflects brilliantly. He saw, but did nothing, when black Carlota was torn limb from limb. He stood amid the oozing chains in the black ships' entrails, and gave nary a sigh. For words or movement would betray him to the fixity of time and space. Eternal ancestor. His ñañigo's secrets are for others to relate, for women such as Lydia, but his heart's story is for me.¹⁵⁰

296

INTRODUCTION

Before leaving Havana I had one final and emotional meeting with Lydia Johnson at her office in the Fundación Fernando Ortiz. As a farewell gift I had brought her one of my favourite necklaces, made from hundreds of tiny turquoise and indigo beads. Beadwork in Africa goes back thousands of years, and beads formed the basis of trade between

¹⁵⁰ While she freely and often attended *bembés* and other *santería* activities, ethnographer and folklorist Lydia Cabrera had to rely on Abakuá informants to provide details for her research on the secret brotherhood (Herzberg, 1992:38-39).

tribes. The value of beads to African cultures was exploited by Europeans as they exchanged them for gold, ivory and slaves. But mine were intended to symbolise the high price I placed on our friendship. Her gift to me made me gasp in gratitude: it was her only copy of the *Repertorio internacional de especialistas en la "africanía"* (2001), edited by Luis Beltrán, head of the UNESCO department of 'Estudios Afro-Iberoamericanos' at the Universidad de Alcalá, and Venezuela-based anthropologist Angelina Pollak-Eltz. The book is a comprehensive (but not exhaustive) bibliography of published and unpublished work by those investigating the African presence in Spanish America. In a short time it would become a sort of bible for me, as I was able to trace patterns in themes and eras, and compare and contrast the study of *africanía* in Cuba with that conducted in the rest of the world. It was the most valuable of gifts, so much so that I told Lydia that I could only accept it as a loan, and that I would return it to her in person one day. In this way the book formed a tie binding us across the separating distance of miles and days to a future time and place of reunion.

From the *Repertorio* I established that after 1980 some of the most prolific researchers on Cuban *africanía* were those based in Santiago de Cuba, at the Casa del Caribe. The earliest studies had come from well-known Havana intellectuals including: in the early 1960s, Rogelio Martínez Furé's essays 'Los collares' (1961) and 'Orichas de Cuba' (1964);¹⁵¹ Nancy Morejón's *Recopilación de textos sobre Nicolás Guillén* (1974); and in 1968, Tomás Fernández Robaina's seminal *Bibliografía de estudios afroamericanos*. However, by the eighties and nineties the locus of investigation had shifted east towards

¹⁵¹ Martínez Furé has written extensively on African cultural traditions and Afro-Cuban culture. In addition to the dozens of essays, which date back to 1960, his impressive body of work includes: books (both edited and unedited), book chapters, and poetry collections. An engaging speaker, he has also presented papers at conferences all over the world. His pseudonym is Lorenzo Suyol.

historians Rafael Duharte Jiménez, 'Cimarrones urbanos en Santiago de Cuba' (1984), and Joel James Figarola, *El vodú en Cuba* (1998), among many others. Since the primary research theme in Santiago was the connection with the Antilles, it followed that after La Casa del Caribe was founded in 1982 the study of Cuban *africanía* took on a much more Caribbean focus.¹⁵² This coincided, in turn, with a diaspora-wide increase in maroon studies in the mid-eighties, which contributed to opportunities for Cuban researchers to publish their work transnationally. An example of this is Duharte Jiménez's essay 'Palenque: Economy and Society,' which appeared in the New York journal *Cimarron* in 1985. For this reason I was eager to begin my investigation in Santiago de Cuba at the archives of La Casa del Caribe. In addition to the back-copies of *Del Caribe* journal that I planned to examine, I anticipated having access to a treasure trove of primary material to support my research findings.

At my first interview with a researcher at La Casa del Caribe I learned that the library and archives were, in fact, housed at La Casa de las Religiones Populares, a sister institution located a short walk away. The problem was that La Casa de las Religiones was currently closed to the public for vital repairs and, aside from the security guard whom I had spied perched alertly at the entrance, all staff members were working off-site. However, since I had travelled such a long distance (across an ocean, even), the receptionist promised that if I could arrive at the archive at ten o'clock the next morning, then surely something could be arranged.

¹⁵² From the 1990s onwards, an increasing number of Africanists, especially but not exclusively those based in Havana institutions, turned their attention to the subject of race and racial discrimination. Examples include sociologists Esteban Morales Domínguez (2002) and María Magdalena Pérez Álvarez (1996).

The following account describes some of the events which took place in the week I spent researching the roots of Cuba's Caribbean identity in the archive of La Casa de las Religiones.

NARRATIVE

Day 1. La Casa de las Religiones Populares is located on Calle 13, a tranquil residential thoroughfare in the pleasing Reparto Vista Alegre. Many of Santiago's finest guesthouses are situated in this neighbourhood, as are other cultural centres, such as the Alliance Française, which organises a full calendar of events, including concerts, recitals and art exhibitions. Each evening as I pass there on my way back to the *casa particular* the overspill of attendees onto the surrounding street attests to the intellectual vitality in Cuba's second city. Santiago's famed revolutionary spirit is accompanied by a strong taste for the arts, which is often overshadowed by the Havana scene. But I find the mixture of French, Haitian and Jamaican influences an invigorating and magical mix, and the local Cuban cultural expressions both more cosmopolitan and more Antillean in turn.

There is an air of expectancy as I enter the short path leading up to the entrance of the museum just a few minutes after ten on my first morning at the archive. But any expectancy is short lived and mine alone, because the guard is surprised to see me; it seems that no one has informed her of my visit. But after a short phone call to La Casa del Caribe I am asked to wait outside in the courtyard for the archivist to be notified. I settle onto a bench under a large shady *ceiba*. The magical *ceiba* tree is at the heart of many legends in the regions where it grows. It even features in Cuban history: it is said

that in 1898 the Spanish surrendered to the United States under a *ceiba* just outside Santiago de Cuba. The tree was later named el Árbol de la Paz (*Library of Congress*, 1998). I fancied that this one was called el Árbol de la Esperanza after my high hopes regarding what the archives would yield. In the end I waited almost two hours, but time passed quickly as I read my book on the life of local hero Antonio Maceo. The story of his mother, Mariana Grajales, fascinated and disturbed me in equal measure. Here was a woman, so impassioned by the independence cause that, at the news of her son Antonio's death, she famously told his younger brother to "Hurry up and grow quickly, Cuba needs you!"¹⁵³ On the one hand, her almost exultant ability to place the collective good before individual well-being demonstrates her heroic 'maroon spirit' and more than earns her the sobriquet "La madre de la patria cubana," but it's all just a little too epically self-sacrificing for me to admire unreservedly. But then again, I am no heroine.

A little after midday, "the hour of ghosts" (Freud quoted in Derrida, 1998: 86), the archivist glided into the courtyard and beckoned to me. I blinked hard and did not move straightaway because for an instant I did not think she was human. It sounds crazy, it *was* crazy, but I, at first, took her to be a sleek feline of some sort – not a domestic cat (she was far too big) but something more muscular and imposing. It was only her upright gait that made me question this first hallucinatory impression. I rose and followed her inside the building. After a few short steps, she moved left into a narrow room – her office. She turned to face me, "I am Pura Luna, the archivist here." Her heavy-lidded amber eyes, streaked with gold flecks, were magnified behind huge horn-rimmed glasses, and added powerfully to my initial feeling of animal grace in

¹⁵³ This story is recounted in a number of sources, but I learned of it from a display at the Casa Natal de Antonio Maceo in Santiago de Cuba.

human form. Her manner was amiable and mild, but I noticed she did not smile. She seemed ageless with that smooth-faced maturity characteristic of West Indian matrons. I was fascinated.

“What do you wish to see?” she asked. I reached into my bag for the *Repertorio* and found the list of articles. She shook her head. “The thing is,” she explained, “a lot of the material here is in a very bad state.” Apparently the heat and humidity were slowly eroding the collection to dust and paste. Consequently, there was very little she could show me from the seventies or even eighties. Before I could respond, she cleared a space for me at her desk and told me to sit down, she would find me something. I gazed out of the open window and thought about the archive. If the provincial archive is “a place of shared memory” (Scott, 2004: 157), and if, to a great degree, we as individuals are made by our memories, then it seemed to me that what was slowly and tragically disappearing in this place was the identity of a people.

It felt as if many hours had passed before Pura Luna reappeared bearing an armful of journals. The sun had crossed to another section of sky, heedlessly taking the light along with it, and leaving the office in shadow. The archivist reached across and switched on a soft lamp, and then took a seat at my back. For the first few minutes I leafed uncomfortably through the journals. My heart sank when I saw their publication dates – mainly the nineties but also the early years of this century – and also I felt uneasy sitting with my back to Pura Luna. Was she waiting, protecting, or guarding, or all three? It brought to mind Derrida’s suggestion in *Mal d’archive* (1995) that the researcher is under some kind of house arrest in the archival space. Slowly I relaxed into her guardianship, and transferred from scanning to reading the journals, and I

discovered that many of the articles addressed the complexities of the 1970s with the perspicacity (and relative freedom) gained from the passing of time and the attendant changes in the political climate and public attitudes. The unexpected effect this produced was of watching the past reflected in a two-way mirror, a strange and dislocated sort of illumination, but interesting for all that. I began writing furiously in my notebook (of course there was no photocopier machine) and had filled many pages before I remembered Pura Luna, who, in all this time, had neither stirred nor made a sound. Turning towards her with an apologetic expression on my face, I asked how much longer I could stay, and suggested that I would be fine on my own if she needed to be elsewhere. She shrugged off my concern in a practised manner, and fingering the individual multicoloured beads of her *collares*, simply resumed her seated reverie.

When, at last, my eyes grew tired from the dim lamplight, I rose to take my leave. Pura Luna suggested that I return the next morning again at ten. This time she would be waiting for me. I wasn't sure it was worth turning up again in the limp hope of 'finding things' in the dying archive, and thought about going to the Santa Ifigenia cemetery instead to look for the monument to those who had died in Angola, but Pura Luna fixed me with those unearthly eyes and I was powerless to refuse.

Day 4. Juan, the guesthouse owner's thirteen year old son, mentioned matter-of-factly that La Casa de las Religiones is haunted. Everyone in town knows this, apparently, but especially the children because the ghost – an ancient *fiañigo* – is only visible to the very young or the innocent which, in these special times, is much the same thing. He urged me to be careful because adults have been known to disappear from La Casa, never to be

seen again. Apparently, the unseen *fiángo* sweeps them up, leaving only empty space behind. The truth is that, in its present ramshackle condition, La Casa looks exactly the type of sad and neglected building that a vengeful and heartbroken spectre would be driven to haunt. The historian Jules Michelet has written that it is up to the living to tend the little something (*petit bien*) that each dead person leaves behind, their memory (cited in Steedman, 2001: 39), and, if this is true, then perhaps the haunting and disappearances will only cease after the building and its contents have been fully restored.

In the meantime, over the past two days, I have returned to La Casa and worked in the archive for three or four hours with Pura Luna seated behind me, her strange, golden-flecked eyes fixed on some far horizon. On both occasions I have arrived before her, but the number of minutes that I have been forced to wait have diminished each time, as if she were gradually rewarding my resolve, my determination. And each day she disappears only to return with another pile of journals collected according to a code that I have yet to decipher. For logic it must be since she is away for too long for it to be a matter of chance or circumstance, i.e. grabbing the closest magazines to hand. And so I continue to fill my notebooks with odd paragraphs that catch my eye. It's like making a scrapbook from my childhood days, with sentences taking the place of pictures cut from magazines. I wrote things like

Así, la diáspora, esto es, los pueblos negros americanos de origen africano, marginados primero por la esclavitud, y después por la discriminación racial, serían más africanos que jamaicanos, cubanos y brasileros y por eso África tendría la obligación moral de defenderlos, así como estos por igual razón tendría la obligación moral de ayudar a

África en cualquier circunstancia [underlining my own]. (Sarracino, 1993: 103, underlining added)

and

En otras palabras, la nueva visión del negro y la negritud no es nueva en teoría – Martí, Palés, Guillén ya la postulaban – sino en práctica. Pero esa práctica marca indeleblemente esa nueva literatura negrista: el negro ahora es parte de esa realidad, parte que se asume con naturalidad, como parte importante y no con sentimiento exótico o como parte extraña. Es éste un proceso colectivo donde se da una evolución similar a la que se evidencia en la poesía de Palés Matos de *Majestad negra* a *Mulata antillana*. [underlining my own]. (Barradas, 1980: 34, underlining added)

Then later, back in my room or while rocking in a chair on the porch, I have tried to unravel the meanings behind the words, and struggle to remember why they had seemed so important before. I realise now that I was badly mistaken about The Archive. I am forced to agree with Caroline Steedman's view that "an Archive is not very much like human memory" (2001: 68), in other words that the decaying documents in La Casa cannot be compared to memories fading: "An Archive may indeed take in stuff, heterogeneous, undifferentiated stuff...texts, documents, data... and order them by the principles of unification and classification. [...] But in actual Archives, though the bundles may be mountainous, there isn't in fact, very much there" (*ibid.*). Yes, a selection of items has been preserved according to some long-forgotten schema, but so much more is missing. Archives are always, from the beginning, incomplete.

The whole process is exhausting and becoming really frustrating. Every night I promise myself that tomorrow will be the last time, but the difficulty is that Pura Luna and I have grown close. Long periods of silence between strangers can breed intimacy

faster than any exchange of confidences. It takes a certain sense of trust to resist the urge to make small talk; but that is not to say that we have not spoken. She has asked many questions about my family and my Caribbean roots, and told me details of hers. Despite the challenges, I often feel as if the archive is home, and Pura Luna a mother of sorts.

Day 5. When I arrived at the museum this morning the guard told me that Pura Luna was already there. I entered the office and saw that she had another visitor, a white-clad *babalawo*. They both nodded a greeting and Pura Luna gestured for me to stay. The *babalawo* rose to take his leave and they moved out into the corridor to finish their conversation. On her return Pura Luna informed me that she had organised *una misa espiritual* to be held outside in the courtyard in two days time, and that I was to be the special guest. Confessing my ignorance, I asked her whether *una misa espiritual* was anything like a *bembé*. A *bembé*, she informed me, is a ceremony for an *orisha*, but in the *misa* the dead (*egun*) are honoured. There will be a table called a *bóveda* (crypt) which will be dedicated to my personal ancestors, and she asked me to collect articles, photographs or any small artefacts, that will represent the dead in my family. It was such a surprising and touching gesture that I was not sure whether to laugh or cry. In the end, I think, I did a little of both. The *misa espiritual* originated in the Espiritista community, but has become “a crucial part of Afro-Cuban religions nowadays” (Fernández Olmos & Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 184). This is an indication of the African cosmogony at the root of all Africa-derived religions: whether Regla de Ocha, Regla de Palo, or any other of the Cuban Reglas, honouring the ancestors is an integral,

maybe even defining, part of practice; the only difference is the manner and form which veneration takes.

Pura Luna bade me resume my seat at her desk, and told me that she would return with more material from the archive. I used the time that she was away to start worrying about the *misa*. What part would I have to play in the proceedings? What if I made a fool of myself? I had attended a *bembé* before, but spiritism was something new: as the special guest, would I be expected to fall into a trance? And on and on, until, looking at my phone, I realised that it was close to noon, and Pura Luna had been gone for over an hour. I decided to go looking for her, and checked with the guard whether she had been unexpectedly called away. The guard assured me that Pura Luna was still inside the building, so I began to search. On the ground floor I wandered into a large empty room with walls draped in black cloth. There were artefacts, much like those I had seen in the municipal museums in Havana, placed around the room on the floor in a haphazard manner, as if someone had been interrupted in the midst of cataloguing them. I left this room and found another similar space adjacent. At first, the room appeared to be empty, but then as my eyes adapted to the gloom, I noticed a shadowy figure in the corner. Straining to make out its contours, I moved closer into the space, and then froze to the floor as the figure turned towards me and I found myself looking into the face of Walter Rodney, the Guyanese historian and political activist, who had been killed in an explosion on June 13, 1980. Staring straight at me, Rodney's ghost began to speak as if simply resuming a previous dialogue: "So the position then was this: three years of struggle within my own terms, reading what I could of Marxism, doing a whole lot of writing and researching, and looking around British society. I also had a

rare opportunity to see fascist Portugal in the course of my research. And that was another useful dimension – living there in that police state and having to go through that experience” (Rodney, 1990: 31). I started to back away slowly, not trusting the evidence of my eyes and ears. But Rodney only continued his feverish explanation:

There were strange contradictions which one had to work with and work through. To get into the University of Dar es Salaam, I had to apply to the British Ministry of Overseas Development. They had a specific service, a university placement service, which advertised in England for positions all over Africa, from Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, etc. They interviewed you and it’s to them rather than Dar es Salaam, for instance, that you sent your papers. (Rodney, 1990: 32)

There was a brief pause, just long enough for me to impetuously test whether Rodney’s ghost could hear me speak just as clearly as I could hear him. In order to mask my heart’s booming thuds, I half-shouted, “Why Africa?” To my surprise he replied,

My return to Africa was never an end in itself. It was always a means to an end, to me anyway. It was always with the understanding that I would return to the Caribbean or something that could go on there. I also felt that one of the ways in which one could mobilize was by picking up a certain amount of information within an experience on the African continent itself. [...] Specifically, I was returning to the Caribbean by way of Africa. (*ibid.* 33)

For a moment we stood, two ‘Guyanese Wanderers,’¹⁵⁴ as our compatriot Jan Carew would say, facing each other across the shifting dimensions of time and space, briefly united through the ritual of archival memory, until Pura Luna broke the spell. “I was looking everywhere for you,” she said, and I didn’t know if she was addressing Rodney or me. By the time I turned my head back in his direction it was too late, he had gone.

¹⁵⁴ This is a reference to Carew’s short story collection titled *The Guyanese Wanderer* (2007).

As we returned to her office, Pura Luna explained that the two galleries I had visited were being prepared to display religious items from the whole Caribbean region, not just Cuba, to show how we are all linked through spiritual ideas.

Back in the office I immediately noticed that the desk had remained empty – there was not a journal in sight. Pura Luna gestured for me to sit, and this time she moved her chair alongside mine so that we could talk. “Tell me,” she said, “Have you found what you are looking for in the papers I have shown you?” I smiled and gave a quick shrug to soften my response: “No, I don’t think so. I’m not sure yet.” She gazed at me, deep in thought for a moment and then asked, “Which of the *orishas* is your favourite?” That was easy. “Ochosi,” I replied, expecting the same surprised response that the name of this warrior deity usually produces, especially among black women in Cuba. They seem to expect me to choose Yemayá or her sister Ochún. But I have always been drawn to the mysterious hunter of the forest. Pura Luna gave an emphatic clap of the hands, as if a problem had been solved. “Then tomorrow we go to *el monte*,” she declared. “That is where Ochosi lives: he will show you the way.” And that was it – everything was decided. We shall meet very early tomorrow at La Casa de las Religiones and Pura Luna’s brother-in-law, who is a taxi driver, will take us to the Sierra Maestra.

Day 6. Late into the night I thought about what I should ask of Ochosi today in the forest. African gods do not like to play mind-reading games, and they do not pretend to share Jehovah’s omniscience; you must address them directly and state your desires clearly. I am drawn to Michelet’s understanding of the Historian’s task as pacifying the spirits of the dead by “finding the meaning of their brief existences” (Steedman, 2001:

71). So it occurs to me that what I need to discover is Carlota's profoundest wish for herself. The only way to do this is to transport myself "into another and imaginary world, in which spirits and ghosts [...] *are given reality*" (Freud in Derrida, 1998: 86), in other words, to change my thinking from the historicist to the African cosmogonic view.

I dressed in Ochosí's colours (a pair of blue jeans with a yellow tee-shirt), and covered my hair with a multi-coloured head wrap as a sign of reverence. Arriving at La Casa, I saw that Pura Luna and her brother-in-law, who introduced himself as Samuel, were wearing matching white outfits right down to the shoes – clothed in white from head to toe. Pura Luna had brought along a straw basket covered with a violet-coloured cloth, which sat between us on the back car seat.¹⁵⁵ She explained that it contained an enticing selection of the *orisha's* favourite foods, so that he could not resist helping me.

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After parking the taxi at a tourist centre, we set out on foot for a spot where Samuel had felt a strong presence in the past – "a place with good *aché*," he said.¹⁵⁶ It took an energetic climb up from the road to reach it, but we did not actually cover a great distance. Remarkably, despite its relatively close proximity to civilisation, this place remained completely obscured and remote. It was an almost preternatural setting of great beauty, sure to entice even the most solitary of hunters. Samuel said that he knew Ochosí would come here. He himself was a son of Ogún, the divinity of warfare and iron who is Ochosí's brother, which gave him a sense of familiarity and wisdom about his 'uncle'-*orisha's* ways. Pura Luna placed the violet cloth at the base of a

¹⁵⁵ Violet is one of the colours associated with Ochosí, other popular shades are blue, yellow, and green. Fatunmbi (1993) provides a comprehensive introduction to this *orisha*.

¹⁵⁶ *Aché* can be considered as a universal vibration or energy that is present in all things – animate and inanimate.

powerful-looking *ceiba* that stood out from all the others with its muscled branches thrusting forcefully towards heaven, and I kneeled to help her set out the items from the basket: a flask containing a drink mixed from milk, honey and cornmeal, smoked fish, yams, and mangoes. The three of us stood and sang for Elegguá, who is always first to be propitiated:

Ibara ago moyuba

Ibara ago, ago moyuba

Omode konikose ibarago

Ago moyubara

Eleggua 'ku L'ona (Canizares, 2000)

After a while Pura Luna told me that she and Samuel had healing herbs to collect from the forest for a sick friend. They would leave me to my business with the hunter deity and return for me later. A little panicked, I asked them what I should do in the meantime. “You listen to your heart,” she replied. “And follow her guidance. The message will come from that.” Then they disappeared off into an opening which closed back over as soon as they had passed through. I stood and stared at the tree and tried to quieten my thoughts to listen for my heart. The *ceiba*'s branches originated quite low to the ground, and I imagined how easy it would be to climb up and sit in their embrace. I decided that this was a message from my heart, so I climbed the tree as high as I could go without feeling fearful. Then I braced myself against the trunk and waited. There are so many sounds in the forest – strange bird calls, the chirping of crickets and buzzing of flies, rustling foliage – and together they form a rhythm, a harmony that soothes the soul.

A memory bubbled up through the forest's melody. I remembered the first time that I had watched Sergio Giral's film, *Maluala*, and how I had listened hard to catch the female *palenque* chief's name. I couldn't believe that the director had chosen to leave her 'nameless' among all the other main characters, and kept playing back the scenes where the leaders addressed each other or spoke of each other, but there was no mention of her name. Without a name, it was difficult to assign her an identity, and yet Giral consigns to her the most poignant and heart-rending scene in the entire film. After their village is ruthlessly destroyed, the fleeing survivors from the third *palenque* reach the safety of Maluala. The unnamed maroon leader screams out in despair: "Aice, mis hijos! Aice, mi gente! Aice, mi pueblo!" Wretched with grief, she rends her clothing and rubs dirt and debris from the forest floor into her hair. Sitting in the arms of the ceiba, the thought came to me that Giral had left his female leader unnamed because, unlike the historical personages of Coba and Gallo, her value to the film was symbolic: on one level she symbolised the African motherland and the historical pain of all those who had lost children to slavery – "Aice, mis hijos! Aice, mi gente! Aice, mi pueblo!" – and on another, she represented the Cubans who had lost loved ones in Angola. In other words, she was Carlota. And I realised that this was Ochosí's answer to my question: Carlota's profoundest wish was to live in meaningful relationship with her people, both the living and the dead. For beyond physical degradation, the greatest violence inflicted upon enslaved Africans was the disruption of their rituals of communal well-being, because without them every day life had no meaning. In this context, evil took the form of estrangement.

The belief systems of west and central Africa attribute collective misfortune above all to the neglect of ancestors or territorial spirits (Klieman, 2007: 44). It seemed to me, then, that for *los apalencados*, liberty meant the possibility to intercede with the spirits on behalf of the whole community of slaves, and, in keeping with African politico-religious systems, the chief would be expected to assume the role of ritual specialist (*ibid.*: 43). In her essay on Central African religious and political life, Kairn Klieman states:

The dual nature of this chiefly role is an important precept that was passed down through time; historically leaders were not considered effective, and indeed could not serve as such, unless their actions demonstrated that they had access to supernatural powers. Thus, chiefs were called upon to utilize all the means at their disposal – both political and religious – in order to ensure the well-being of their communities. Likewise, the institutions they led combined both aspects.

Based on this idea, the *palenque* can be considered to have both a political and a religious value, which has important implications for understanding the nature of Cuban identification with Carlota. For I realised that above and beyond being a slave or a maroon, Carlota's expression of traditional African consciousness in a New World setting made her a Caribbean woman. And that meant, in a way, that Carlota was a reflection of me. So, from the branches of a *ceiba* tree in the *manigua* I had followed the trail which Ochosí set, in pursuit of Carlota, only to find myself back at the beginning: the path led right back to the same *ceiba* tree and to my own self. The serpent swallows his own tail, the circle closes.

I clambered down from the tree, knelt at our makeshift alter to thank Ochosí for his lesson, and began searching the ground for stones to represent my ancestors at

tomorrow's *misa*. Before too long Pura Luna and Samuel returned with the straw basket full of medicinal leaves and roots, and we began the steep descent back to the car park.

Day 7. What a wonderful party we had! And indeed it was a real celebration, and not the solemn affair that I had imagined a remembrance of the dead to be. Now I think that I understand a little more the Mexican people's deep affection for *el día de los muertos*. The festivities began at dusk. When I arrived, wearing an ankle-length white cotton sun dress, the courtyard was awash in the glow from hundreds of votive candles, amplified by the accumulated brightness of the guests' white clothing. The effect was incandescent. Pura Luna greeted me warmly with a small mew-like smile, intensifying the feline-quality of her features. Then, taking me by the hand, she introduced me one by one to each man, woman and child in attendance, and I discovered that she was *madrino* to many of them. The visible guests were new friends I had made during my unforgettable time in Santiago – researchers from La Casa del Caribe who had generously given interviews or shared their unpublished writings with me, their partners and children, the receptionists and their families, a local historian, members of the Conjunto Folklórico de Oriente, and a few teachers from the Académie Française. The invisible guests were more difficult to recognise, but I thought that I glimpsed Rodney again among the crowd of shadowy figures flitting among the mortals. Juanito was right, of course, La Casa *is* haunted, but so is all of Santiago de Cuba with the ghost of Maceo perennially beckoning to us from atop his galloping steed in the Plaza de la Revolución, and so is Havana with its diorama of dead heroes in every quarter of the city, and so is the whole Caribbean and all of its natives. Antilleans are a haunted

people, each person contains multitudes and trails the ancestral past behind like a ghostly bridal train.

When the moment arrived, I took my place at the *bóveda* holding my bowl of stones from the mountains. The table was draped in a white shiny fabric atop which was amassed an effusive collection of objects, including: goblets of water; candles of all shapes, colours, and sizes; cigars; flowers; figurines and statues of saints; photographs; paintings; prayer cards; bibles; dolls; rosary beads; and polished stones. As the special guest, mine was the honour to recite individually the names of my dead. With each name the guests muttered an invocation, and the *babalawo* – the same one I had met in Pura Luna’s office – poured libation upon the ground in front of the *bóveda*. I felt held within a living, breathing circle of memory, physically and psychically connected to every being present. At the end, Pura Luna gave me a beautiful gift, a personal message from my *eledá* (spiritual double or guardian angel). I kneeled before her, and she placed her hand on the crown of my head, then she interpreted the message she had received from the spirit world.¹⁵⁷ She raised me up from the ground and hugged me, and then the collective rite for veneration of all our dead began, with songs and prayers and drumming. We held hands in a circle and danced in counter clockwise direction, which I assumed symbolised the reversing of time. There were so many dances, all through the night. When some dancers tired or grew hungry or thirsty, they would leave for a while and then resume just as others left to take a break: in this way there was a constant motion of arriving and leaving, of opening and closing, like the rhythm of life itself. At

¹⁵⁷ In *santería* and other Africa-derived religions, the head is considered to hold the essence of the human being, the primordial life force imparted by the Creator spirit Olodumare (see Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003:60).

one point I noticed Pura Luna sitting on the steps of La Casa in animated conversation with the phantom *ñanigo*. The startling sound of her laughter broke through the air and shook the leaves of the *ceiba* tree which had sheltered my long wait almost a week before. The celebration ended fittingly with a long conga dance that snaked around and about the trees and shrubs. Previously, I had considered the conga as a jerky and vaguely silly dance, usually performed by inebriated partygoers, but at La Casa it was in fact a multilayered spiritual performance – the mimetic equivalent of Elegguá’s glyph of the snake swallowing its own tail. Elegguá – part *orisha*, part ancestral spirit (*egun*), Lord of the crossroads, intermediary between humans and gods, the eternal ancestor. So that now I think of the conga line as Elegguá’s dance, signifying unity and the bonds that time and death cannot break. Like the multicoloured beads that make up the sacred *collares*, one attached to the other, we joyfully followed the invisible thread.

CONCLUSION

In her position as maroon leader, the historical Carlota would have performed two roles – the political and the religious – and, in a similar way, the metaphorical Carlota combined two functions in Cuban internationalist discourse – the rhetorical and the poetic. In the same way that metaphor bridges the domains of rhetoric and poetry, by defining both “the political world of eloquence and the poetic world of tragedy” (Ricoeur, 2003: 12), Carlota comprised the link between the historical and mythical worlds. In this way, she represented the quintessential Caribbean experience of *lo real maravilloso*. For what is *lo real maravilloso* except an aesthetic expression of the Antillean native’s ‘archetypal life’ (Henry, 2000: 92)?

In the archetypal life “consciousness is incorporated as a site of agency” (Henry, 2000: 105) and has its own specific textuality in which everyday existence is read according to mythopoetic codes and images. This redescriptive reading allows the individual who lives archetypally “to make or re-establish connections between planes of existence or between binary opposites on the same planes” (Henry, 2000: 107). Caribbean intellectuals in the poeticist philosophical tradition, such as Wilson Harris, Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Sylvia Wynter, perceive the archetypal life as an essential instrument for the recovery of the postcolonial self in defiance of what may be conceived as sociohistorical determinism. In this way archetypal living, or in literary terms *lo real maravilloso*, reflects the Caribbean project to find historical meaning and re-shape cultural values through mythic consciousness. This viewpoint both assigns creative potential to history and assumes the role of myth “as historical memory and speculative inquiry intended to provoke consciousness” (Webb, 1992: 6). But surely this has ever been the Antillean’s tormented challenge: how to make sense of an old self in a new world? How to fashion substance from the void?

During times of social upheaval, when the fragile lines holding together a collective consciousness threaten to fracture and splinter, hybrid Caribbean societies become increasingly concerned with the question of filiation, which may be expressed as a longing for a “tribal past” (Wilson cited in Webb, 1992: 62). But as Barbara Webb remarks: “Given the multicultural heritage of the peoples of the Caribbean, the problem becomes which “tribal” – the Amerindian, the African, or the European?” (*ibid.*). Yet, it seems to me that both the threat of conflict and the promise of resolution are embodied in the emblematic figure of the maroon leader. As a shaman, the maroon leader was a

storehouse of “myth, folklore, sociocultural values and practices, and the healing arts” (Mehta, 1997: 231), and served as a bridge between the spirit and material worlds. But to this role of keeper of the past was added the responsibility of forging a future direction for the whole village, and of constructing a strategy for their survival. The magic of the maroon leader resided in her ability to interact dynamically between the mythic and historical realms, as well as between the African, European and American landscapes, in other words, her capacity to “live in three continents at the same moment” (Okri, 1999: 30). Through the physical construction of the slave settlement, maroons established a site for the creation of new networks, and by sacralising the landscape through ritual performance the *palenque* was transformed from a physical region to a territory, by which I mean a place of cultural synthesis and a transference space of Relation.

EPILOGUE

The mapping of Cuban *africanía*, which was the objective of this project, required an investigation of two distinct realities: the material world comprising all the tangible objects associated with the preservation of Afro-Cuban culture (museums and their artefacts, books, journal articles, speeches, and so on) and *lo intangible*, the realm of imagination, beliefs, feelings, and emotions. While the material search was sometimes made difficult due to environmental, financial and physical problems, exploration of the invisible aspects of *africanía* presented an unprecedented set of challenges for this researcher to overcome. The sometimes anguished technique which I eventually discovered was the cultivation of vulnerability and a childlike sensitivity to the peaks and

trenches of experience. This allowed me to access levels of truth about Africa in the Cuban imaginary that would otherwise have been impossible to reach. This resembles the strategy used by poets to identify those patterns and relations often overlooked in our quotidian interactions with the world. To the question of the intrinsic value to this project of the child/poet's perspective I can offer no simple explanation, except to propose that for a dialogue to be meaningful the speakers must use the same language. Therefore, a case can be made that it was appropriate that my interrogation of experience (in this case, the Cuban experience of Africa) should be conducted through the medium of consciousness. Reflecting on the intimate experience of place, cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan recalled that: "Intimate occasions are often those on which we become passive and allow ourselves to be vulnerable, exposed to the caress and sting of new experience" (1977: 137). The consequence of this dual approach is a map whose features become visible alternately through the hard (distancing) eyes of thinking and the soft (intimate) focus of awareness.

CONCLUSION

[...] la ley de la vida no es la que aparece escrita, sino otra, que se enuncia de forma más sencilla: dando y dando. (Vasco, 2007: 31)

This thesis initially grew out of a desire to investigate the tension between Washington's view that Cuban internationalists were 'out-of-place' in Angola and Fidel Castro's justification of the Cuban presence as an outcome of the nation's Latin-African identity. In casting the Cuban mission as an act of transgression, the U.S. leadership seemed to be referring to far more than the simple infringement of geopolitical boundaries: the Cuban action appeared to undermine certain structures of feeling holding together a normative concept of how third-world societies behaved. Unable to fit Cuban internationalism within these normative categories, Washington relied on the only explanation that made sense according to a conventional Cold War frame of reference: Cuba was engaged in a war by proxy for the Soviet Union. This idea was accepted without deeper questioning by most scholars of U.S. foreign policy and international relations analysts in the Western nations throughout the remaining years of the Cold War and beyond. So that the quiet publication in Poland of respected journalist Ryszard Kapuściński's memoir of his time spent covering the Angolan War, *Another Day of Life* (1976), which appeared to corroborate Havana's claim that the Cubans had acted independently and were motivated by factors drawn from their own national experience, passed unnoticed into the murky atmosphere of bipolar ideological conflict. In fact, it was only with the publication of U.S.-based scholar Piero Gleijeses's *Conflicting Missions* (2002), after the

collapse of the Soviet system and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, that the now generally-accepted view that Moscow assisted rather than spearheaded the Angolan intervention began to take hold. However, despite Gleijeses's passing allusion to the historical ties binding Cuba to the African continent, until now no scholar has chosen to take on a more extensive investigation of the significance of this shared history as motivator for the unprecedented mobilisation. Nor has the epic campaign, which touched the lives of Cubans in all walks of life, been considered as a subject of sociocultural scrutiny.

To be sure, the danger in such lines of enquiry resides, among other things, in the uneasy blending of disparate disciplinary practices. The notion of conjoining an array of investigative techniques taken from the humanities and social sciences is sufficient to produce anxiety in even the most ardently driven researcher. That an interdisciplinary approach was called for which took into account the differences between how groups define what constitutes appropriate behaviour (sociology and cultural studies), and that addressed how these differences in opinion are "translated into different normative geographies" (Cresswell, 1996: 10) was clear. The idea of "normative geographies" arises from cultural geography's engagement with the "society-and-space dialectic" (*ibid.*: 12) or, expressed differently, the role played by a society's myths and beliefs in the ascription of meaning to space, and, inversely, the importance of place in the creation and development of ideological beliefs. There has also been a longstanding tendency amongst political scientists to look askance at any suggestion that culture contributes to policy and political behaviour, mainly, they say, because claims of a connection are difficult (if not impossible) to measure, and therefore to substantiate.

Fortunately for this study, scholars like Gearóid Ó Tuathail, Klaus Dodds, Simon Dalby, and John Agnew had already prepared the way by producing works that disrupted the traditional accounts of international relations to engage with geopolitics as a discourse that “seeks to make ‘world politics’ meaningful” (Ó Tuathail, 2006: 1).

From this perspective, thinking critically about geopolitics requires attentiveness to “the ways in which global space is labelled, metaphors are deployed, and visual images are used in this process of making stories and constructing images of world politics” (*ibid.*).

Therefore, implementation of this approach inevitably demanded the construction of a methodology which not only examined the African presence in Cuban society, but also considered how this informed, and was itself informed by, internationalism in Angola.

In consequence, the study soon centred on interpreting the meaning of Cuba’s Angolan experience for the process of reforming collective (national) identity.

Since national identity is not a set of fixed traits, but rather a set of experiences, interpretations and processes, analysts of this complex phenomenon are faced with a number of interrelated theoretical and methodological problems connected to the challenge of capturing and representing historical consciousness.¹⁵⁸ The first problem relates to the fact that identities change with circumstances and opportunity. Early on in my research I perceived subtle differences in how Africaness/blackness was represented in the Cuban press that suggested a change in consciousness around the time of the engagement in Angola. After first concentrating on the immediate time-frame of Operation Carlota, that is November 1975, and then taking a wider survey of public discourse to about ten years either side of this period, I finally decided to focus

¹⁵⁸ For deeper insight into the mechanisms of national identity formation in the German context, see the engaging study by Mary Fulbrook (1999).

attention on the first five years of the Angolan intervention as the most reflective of this transformation in consciousness. This brought me to the second difficulty, which revolved around the techniques for measuring historical consciousness. In this case, I resolved that by using a range of sources, including political speeches, journal articles, films, and creative literature, I could pile up layers of experience to create a partial but 'saturated' articulation of the Cuban *zeitgeist* and experience of Angola. Finally, there is the problem of conceptualising change with respect to collective consciousness. For this I considered anthropological studies of human behaviour in collective formations, and in particular the concept of rites of passage, to help articulate the connection between certain collective experiences and changes in consciousness. In fact, the idea of rites of passage is inextricably tied to the fact that the whole of human life is marked by change (Davies, 1994: 1). A general appreciation for the usefulness of ethnographic techniques for investigations into human experience led me to consider autoethnography as a potentially productive method of tapping into some of the discrete and inchoate repositories of consciousness which remain embedded in the social and cultural environment, and that often cannot be brought to light in any other way. This interdisciplinary methodology, encouraged by the cultural approach to both geography and geopolitics, allowed me to move back and forth across disciplinary boundaries, drawing on work in cultural studies, historiography, sociology, ethnography, and literary studies, in order to keep the more abstract conceptual formulations in touch with empirical findings.

The thesis turns upon the central proposition that the experience of internationalism in Angola transformed Cuban identity from Latin American to Caribbean. As we saw in the chapter 'Un Mismo Sol Caribeño,' more than a decade before the Cuban mission took place, C. L. R. James had already made the cogent observation that a 'reencounter' with Africa outside of the slavery narrative was instrumental to the development of Caribbean consciousness. James explained that, because plantation societies had been constructed upon a conceptualisation of the African as "inherently inferior and degraded," it was essential for Caribbean peoples to travel abroad to 'discover' (or perhaps 'recover') Africans as they truly are, and, thus, return with a renewed, liberated, vision of the self and of the postcolonial, national and regional projects. To repeat James's observation: "El camino hacia la identidad nacional antillana pasaba por África."

The thesis posits that, for Cubans, Operation Carlota, the epic-scale military intervention in the Angolan civil war, represented this essential collective encounter with Africa – outside of the historical, and problematic, context of slavery – through which identification with the Caribbean project was facilitated. It claims that while action in Angola was motivated, at least initially, by political ideals (specifically the policy of lending support to revolutionary allies abroad, such as the MPLA), what may be termed as the 'ritualization' of the mobilisation, which the chapter 'Rituals of War' delineated, set in motion ideology's transformative capacity. Moreover, by framing Operation Carlota within Turner's formulation of 'communitas,' the thesis highlighted the transitory or liminal aspect of the Angolan Experience, thus reinforcing the idea that Africa represented a threshold to another state of consciousness.

This theme of the transformative power inherent in the encounter with the 'real' Africa was dynamically mediated in the self-reflexive account in three parts entitled 'El Atlas de Africanía.' By appropriating the concepts articulated in eighteenth-century geographical accounts which, as reproduced in the preamble to the first section, postulated that "the farther away from the coastline, where the slave trade was centered, the more 'civilised' African culture became," the narrative reflected on the multiple manifestations of this 'imaginary geography' in the modern Cuban context. It demonstrated that the image of the debased, 'slavery-infected,' African coastline could be applied to any contemporary situation in which the social vestiges of the plantation system persisted, whether in the run-down Matanzas neighbourhoods described in the first part or in the tourism-dominated environment of Havana which formed the setting of the second. On the other hand, those enclaves of *africanía* which are sheltered from the assaults of marginalisation, folklorisation or 'the marketplace,' such as the Casa de las Religiones Populares in the third section, displayed the potential for a restorative, and even regenerative, link with the African past. It was also in this final part of the narrative that the 'gateway' trope accumulated yet another layer of meaning, when Walter Rodney disclosed the patterns of his own wanderings: "Specifically, I was returning to the Caribbean by way of Africa." Of course the primary value of Rodney's statement for our cultural geography approach is that it can be read from any of the three dimensions of landscape-space: the spatial; the political/geopolitical; and the geosymbolic or mythic (Bonnemaïson, 2005: 17). The importance of the latter category, which describes how humans invest spiritual meaning in landscape, motivated the thesis's adoption of the trope of *rites de passage* as the procedure for extending a

'closed' geopolitical perspective on the Cuban action to the wider sphere of emotional identification or consciousness. Central to this technique is the understanding that rituals (which are the performance of myths) "seem not only to transform but actually transport us into another world" (Young, 1992: 163). It is a feature that is reciprocated in certain literary texts such as the novel which, in a similar fashion, may reveal to the reader previously unknown worlds. In consequence, it may be observed that the fictocritical approach to analysis was emphasised in this narrative. The fictocritical focus was directed at weaving strands of ideas, thoughts, theories, and situations that had arisen in the preceding chapters of the section into a type of shadow-discourse.

As we have seen, the thesis followed a tripartite organisational trajectory in line with the three stages of liminality: separation, transition and integration. Part One concerned the dualism inherent in Cuban discourse on Africa in the early 1970s. It indicated that the Revolution's plotment of the slave into the narrative of nation failed to displace the persistence of "communities of sentiment" among their descendants. The concept of separation was taken beyond its ritual context in order to discuss the antagonistic and contested character of Cuban thinking on Africa. We saw that, despite the appropriation of the image of the rebellious slave in post-revolutionary discourse, the historical experience of slavery continued to contribute to dissonant ways of thinking about the place of Africa in the national project. Africanist discourse often broke "the bounds of historical language" (Feierman, 1995: 40) and spilled over into areas associated with the emotions. The first chapter, 'Slave Nostalgias,' linked this dissonance to the different ways in which slaving was remembered by the positional

descendants of slaves and the positional descendants of slave owners. It differentiated the plantation practice described by Glissant as *dissimuler* (hiding and pretending for the sake of social harmony) from the 'circles of memory' created by Afro Cubans to maintain an emotional identification to forebears. The chapter proposed that while both procedures arose from the need to transmute the experience of pain and conflict into personal and collective power, official intolerance to overt expressions of 'nostalgia of the slaves,' and a contrasting emphasis on 'nostalgia for the slaves,' threatened the possibility for Cubans to integrate the traumatic history of slavery in a universally meaningful way. The following chapter, 'The Public Lives of Santería,' developed the notion of *dissimuler* as a legacy of slavery, and considered its significance for Cuban race relations through an analysis of *el doble moral* in relation to Africa-derived religions. By juxtaposing separate historical and cultural analyses of the folklorisation of Afro Cuban culture, the chapter re-emphasised the competing meanings ascribed to Africanness under the growing influence of Soviet-inspired scientific atheism. In this way, the chapter brought to the foreground the dialectic between tradition and modernity which characterised much of the discourse on African religiosity in the 1970s. The point was made that, because African religious practices were related to practical concerns of daily existence, that is to say, to an individual's ability to survive and thrive, official attempts to separate the spiritual aspect of worship from the performative component (folklorisation) were seen as the perpetuation of plantation society's brutal negation of African ways of thinking about the world. 'El Atlas de Africanía: Part One,' the final chapter of this section, expanded on the themes of memory and forgiveness by integrating the concept of 'imaginative geography,' already mentioned above, with the

notion of recovering invisible remnants of an African past, here symbolised by the quest for *lo inmaterial* in Matanzas province. The chapter used Wilson Harris's paradigm of 'limbo' to consider the 'inbetweenness' of *africanía* as an identity born in the liminal Middle Passage, that inhuman gateway to the New World and fiery furnace where multiple familial and tribal identities were reduced to the singular – African/black. Finally, by applying this "limbo perspective" to the problem of Cuba's cultural dualism in relation to slavery, it was suggested that the historical experience of social dismemberment, that is the traumatic sundering of personal relations, could be healed through memorialisation as a performance of psychic reconfiguration.

The opposing strategies of 'dis-membering' and 're-membering' formed the connective theme between the first and second parts of the thesis. 'Rituals of War,' the first chapter of 'Part Two,' drew our attention to the death by hanging, drawing and quartering of the historical slave, Carlota, which symbolically demonstrated the colonial authorities' strategy of isolating the slave body. The chapter also introduced the overarching theme of transition. It suggested that extraordinary events, such as wars, contain great transformative potential as they bring about changes in how individuals interact with one another, which, in turn, requires the assumption of new thought patterns. The chapter made the claim that the 'africanisation' of the slave-symbol in official discourse in order to legitimise the Angolan Intervention became a mechanism for cultural change. Consequently, the discursive strategy described as 'the cult of the African ancestor' played an essential role in the creation of a new social mythology aimed at redressing the violence of the historical slaving experience through the re-description of all Cubans as Latin African. The following chapter, 'Return of the

Slaves,' investigated this discursive strategy in detail. It considered the imaginative mechanisms involved in releasing new meaning from old, slaving society, history, which it compared with the transcendental role of metaphor in poetry. It then investigated the Latin-African mythology in the context of other Africanist myths in the Black Diaspora, specifically those related to the idea of 'return.' The chapter concluded that the act of naming the military mission in Angola after the historical slave leader, Carlota, served to illuminate the emotional (in contrast to political) reasons which had motivated runaways to risk recapture by returning to the *palenque*: the maintenance of relations. As a result of this, the hollow icon of the anonymous self-sacrificing *cimarrón* was changed forever. 'El Atlas de Africanía: Part Two' linked the physical and mental criteria related to the 'extraordinary' experience of Cuban internationalists in Angola, described in 'Rituals of War' (disorientation, confusion, etc.), with the liminal status of the foreign social researcher in Havana, in order to create a multi-layered reflection on insidedness/outsideness. The concept of transition was highlighted through the extraordinary experience at the Museo de los Orishas, a space associated with African religiosity. In this way, the search for intellectual understanding was shown to lead to a space/place of spiritual communion (ritual) with the African ancestor.

The theme of integration or synthesis organised the third and final part of the thesis, which was partially reflected by the reduction in the number of chapters from three to two. The beginning chapter, 'Un Mismo Sol Caribeño,' refined Bonnemaison's concept of the 'territory' to show how the geographic, political and spiritual guises of Africa merged together into the formulation I term *afrocubanía*. *Afrocubanía*, when conceived according to this paradigm, is seen to fulfil "a number of geographical, social

and political functions but its reasons transcend these functions; they are in keeping with the universe of memory, representations and values” (Bonnemaison, 2005: 119). The chapter extended the idea of the Caribbean as a civilisation that unites different cultures through representations of *africanía*, most importantly, in the late 1970s, through the dynamic geosymbol of the *palenque* as a historical space of resistance. Consequently, Latin-African mythology, as a manifestation of pan-Africanist ideology, moved beyond its legitimising role in Africa to generate a new cultural identity that united Cuba with the Caribbean. ‘El Atlas de Africanía: Part Three’ transposed the idea, expressed in the preceding chapter, of the Caribbean as “la identidad que nos une” to the context of Santiago de Cuba (widely considered as the ‘most Caribbean’ Cuban city), which was observed as the place where the researcher arrived at the final stage in the process of (self)understanding. Thompson has written that “in hermeneutical reflection [...] the constitution of *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of *meaning*” (1981: 220). This notion was brought to the fore in the ritual in the forest which was seen to bring to the researcher both an acute awareness of the symbolic meaning of Carlota ‘the internationalist mission’ and, at the same time, an unexpected but illuminating moment of self-identification with Carlota ‘the historical slave.’ In this way, the researcher appeared to embody both the question and the answer. The end of the research investigation was marked by a celebration that symbolically incorporated the researcher into the ‘family’ of Cuban Africanists, thereby endowing her with a new identity. The transformation was completed through a ritual of invoking the line of African ancestors.

Rituals of naming, or invocation, hold great significance in the communities of the West African Diaspora. This was made apparent in the thesis, which traced a line of evolution from the idealised image of the unnamed black slave, representative of the struggle for Cuban national liberation, to the named (and, thus, (af)iliated) *palenque* leader, Carlota, symbol of Cuban internationalism in Africa. A similar evolutionary trajectory may be observed in the professional (and perhaps personal) development of Cuban filmmaker, Sergio Giral. As explained earlier, Giral's trilogy of films on slavery formed the basis of the second organisational strategy applied to the thesis. When Giral first started making films about slavery, his first production was the anonymously-titled *Cimarrón* (1967). His second film, *El otro Francisco*, exposed the conflict inherent in Cuban discourse on slavery by portraying two different versions of the same life story. In this way, the question of biography, the idea implicit in being 'named' Francisco, was called into question. Significantly, however, in his final slave narrative, Giral drew deeply from the well of Cuban history to create a story based on real-life – named – characters and events.

It has been the principal aim of this thesis to offer a cultural perspective on the Cuban intervention in Angola's civil war that has been missing from previous scholarly treatises on this historic event. As this study has shown, subaltern discourses on Africa invoked larger cultural systems than official discourse on Africa until the late 1970s, when closer ties were established with the Caribbean community. Links with the other nations of the Caribbean are still maintained today through a robust level of cultural, educational and medical initiatives. On March 10, 2006, Alejandro Marchante Castellanos, the

Cuban Ambassador to CARICOM was welcomed at the Georgetown, Guyana, headquarters by Edwin Carrington, the organisation's Secretary General (CARICOM, 2006). In his welcoming speech, the Secretary General made several points underlining the strength of Cuba's position in the region: (1) The event furthered the "long-standing" relations between Cuba and the CARICOM nations; (2) Cuba now had diplomatic missions in all the CARICOM states; (3) These relations had "served to enhance" the standard of living of citizens of both CARICOM and Cuba; and (4) CARICOM and Cuba enjoyed "a shared Caribbean identity" and "common regional interests" (Maingot, 2006, emphasis added).

To the extent that a national identity tends to discover and reveal its most distilled expression in encounters with the 'other' abroad (often more acutely than at home), in a particular sense the thesis has shown that Cuban national identity became more fundamentally Cuban through the Angolan experience. However the main point to consider with regard to the 'hard/soft' identity dichotomy is that while the diverse experiences connected to plantation slavery remained fundamental to the construction of Cuba's 'hard identity,' the act of ascribing value to this experience as a characteristic of all plantation societies in the Americas, which, I claim, took place in the late 1970s, had a diffusing effect, or 'softened the hardness,' at least around the edges. Based on this idea, we could say that African slavery, described as a national experience, had the effect of trapping Cubans in a rigid network of structured social relations, whilst the collective formulation of Caribbean slavery opened national history up to a wider interpretation.

As mentioned elsewhere, an 'other' is always required for the construction of an identity. In *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* (2001),

David Howard has described how, at key moments in the country's historical and political development, the racist scapegoating of neighbouring state Haiti played an essential role in the forging and reinforcing of Dominican national identity. During Cuba's Angolan Experience, as 'Rituals of War' discussed, apartheid South Africa and the racially divided United States represented the racist 'them' against the Latin African 'us.' More recently, however, global events, including the election of Barack Obama as the first African American president of the United States, have triggered a certain amount of soul-searching on the race question in Cuba. Since the 1990s, a small but persistent minority of Cuban academics has tried to assert the urgent need to address the continued marginalisation of, and discrimination against, Blacks. The group has charged that, beginning in the 'Special Period,' overt expressions of racism have increased, and that there has been a gradual impoverishment of Afro-Cubans vis-à-vis their white compatriots, who are more likely to receive remittances from family members abroad. Historians have figured prominently in the group, although even analyses by sociologists and anthropologists, such as Gisela Arandía (1994), Pablo Rodríguez (2006) and Esteban Morales Domínguez (2002, 2007a & 2007b), have emphasised the historical context of the contemporary situation.

Parallel to the intellectual activities, musicians – rap groups and hip hop artists chief among them – have given voice to the frustration and growing sense of despair shared by black and mixed-race youth who are often subjected to racial stereotyping and harassment by police. Songs such as *Afrolucha continua* by Anónimo Consejo or Hermanos de Causa's *Lágrimas negras* (2008) deliver lyrics that denounce racial prejudice and address the continued social and political marginalisation of black

Cubans. Meanwhile, analysts outside of Cuba have also started to comment on the country's new openness to discussions on race, especially in the period since Raúl Castro took over the country's leadership.¹⁵⁹ An event of particular note was the recent edition of nightly public affairs show *La mesa redonda*, which brought together a number of specialists to address the issue of race relations.¹⁶⁰ While such developments are unquestionably important, this study has suggested that unless changes take place at the level of collective identity then transformation at the societal level may never take hold.

While the focus of the thesis has principally centred on the impact of the Angolan experience on Cuban national identity, research for this study has developed questions about the effect of internationalism on perceptions of Cuba abroad. For example, returning to the circumstances which first aroused my interest in this topic, the U.S. administration was not alone in its discomfort with the Cuban presence in Angola: a number of African governments also expressed concerns with what, by regional standards, amounted to the stationing of an entire foreign army (Mazrui, 1977: 190).¹⁶¹ Likewise, black liberation activists in the United States struggled to identify the "correct" forces to support in the Angolan civil war (Minter et al, 2008: 118). Cuba's assistance for the multiracial Marxist-Leninist MPLA heightened the concerns of those activists who had been swayed by the 'black nationalist' rhetoric of UNITA leader, Jonas

¹⁵⁹ In a recent address to the Asamblea del Poder Popular on the race problem, Raúl Castro declared: "Personalmente considero que es una vergüenza el insuficiente avance en esta material." The government has also announced the formation of a committee to commemorate the massacre of members of the PIC in 1912. Readers may be interested in recent analyses by de la Fuente (2008) and Fernández (2001).

¹⁶⁰ The programme, entitled 'Una batalla cubana contra el racismo,' aired on January 21, 2010.

¹⁶¹ In view of the continent's history of colonial oppression, and African nationalists' acute sensitivity to outside incursions, Mazrui makes the poignant assessment that "With Russia's equipment and Cuban manpower, MPLA became the most externally dependent of all the three [Angolan liberation] movements" (1977:190).

Savimbi, in the United States and elsewhere. Nowadays it is generally acknowledged that the Cuban intervention, especially the decisive battle at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988, directly contributed to the downfall of the despised apartheid regime in South Africa, by proving that it could be defeated.¹⁶² A survey that explored this black Atlantic dimension would both illuminate those external mechanisms of (inter) national identity construction that I have not been able to attend to here, and, additionally, provide a highly interesting and useful contribution to the field of West African Diaspora studies in its own right.

Ryszard Kapuściński, whose African chronicles have contributed such a rich layer of understanding to our study, once recounted that the “inner realm of spirits, dreams, anxieties, and premonitions” (2007: 261) has been one of the single most important influences on the history of nations and the fate of their subjects. Through an investigation of the symbolism and iconology of *africana* during the first five years of the internationalist mission in Angola, I have explained how Cuba’s mythic world first justified collective action and then later laid the groundwork for a transformation in collective consciousness in relation to that action. This approach positions the study as a groundbreaking contribution to the nascent body of scholarship concerned with going beyond the phenomenal world to explore how the unseen world of dream, poetry and ‘disembodied forces’ operates as a channel of human agency. In the process of this type

¹⁶² In a speech to the Southern Africa-Cuba Solidarity Conference held in Johannesburg, October 6-8, 1995, President Nelson Mandela directly implicated Cuban internationalism in the region’s political developments. Mandela affirmed: “As Southern Africans, we are deeply indebted to the Cuban people for the selfless contribution they made to the anticolonial and antiapartheid struggle in our region” (Malapanis and Kane, 1995).

of investigation, the thesis has contributed to contemporary debates in two further areas of enquiry in the social sciences and humanities: first, it has expanded the social constructivist approach to politics beyond the national to the area of international relations and foreign policy; and second, it has disrupted more hegemonic post-colonial perspectives to demonstrate the efficacy and possibility in applying an Africa-centred theoretical framework for the revelation of discrete but highly influential knowledges.

Appendix I – Research Methods

Notes

Cuban Africanist, Reinaldo Sánchez Porro, had been one of the first students of the former ambassador to Ghana and distinguished professor of African history, Armando Entralgo, at the University of Havana in the 1970s.¹⁶³ Soon after I began to describe my research project to him, Sánchez Porro gently corrected my ‘mistaken’ suggestion of a link between *el tema negro* and Africa. The process of transculturation, he asserted, began as soon as the slaves arrived in Cuba: from that moment, they ceased to be Africans, and so the term Afro-Cuban is a misnomer.



FIGURE 22. Armando Entralgo stands next to Che Guevara at the Cuban embassy in Accra, Ghana. January 1965.

I pondered his words later on the walk home along Calle 25 and could not agree. In fact I became convinced of the antithetical view, that the slaves did not become Africans *until* they arrived in the New World. The institution of slavery dispossessed these men, women and children of all meaningful tribal affiliation, and forced alliances across the divisions of language, caste and religion. At the same that the forces of colonialism went to work on the African continent carving up ancient kingdoms according to an

¹⁶³ In 1970 Armando Entralgo co-developed with Eduardo Delgado a specialisation in African and Asian history within the School of History of the Facultad de Humanidades at the University of Havana.

abstracted European political model, the enslaved peoples of that continent confronted a similar process, that is the breaking-down and dissolution of all previous societal and political forms in the interest of plantation industries (sugar, cotton, tobacco, and so on). An African could therefore be considered as a 'new' man or woman, a sort of hybrid construction of the European imagination.

'El Atlas de Africanía' constitutes a fictionalised account of real events. In this vein, the names of all individuals mentioned have been changed, with the exception of the divinely denominated archivist in Santiago de Cuba, Pura Luna.

Appendix II – Research Methods

Interviews

Fernández Noguerras, Ernesto (2008). Structured interview, 14/4/2008, at his residence in the Miramar district of Havana, Cuba

Martínez Furé, Rogelio (2008). Structured interview, 8/5/2008, at the home of a friend in the Vedado district of Havana, Cuba

Miyares Ruíz, Raúl (2008). Structured interview, 3/4/2008, at La Casa de las Tradiciones, Santiago de Cuba, Cuba

Sánchez Porro, Reinaldo (2008). Structured interview, 30/4/08, at the Fundación Fernando Ortiz, Havana, Cuba

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