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The Urban Maroons of Afro-Dominican Music

Paul Austerlitz

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Research Monograph

The Urban Maroons of Afro-Dominican Music

Paul Austerlitz

The Urban Maroons of Afro-Dominican Music

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Dominican Studies Research Monograph Series

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Introduction

Africans have been present in the Western Hemisphere at least five centuries, landing on La Española, the island today containing the Dominican Republic and Haiti, in 1492. For this reason, Silvio Torres-Saillant calls the Dominican Republic the “cradle of blackness in the Americas.”¹ The first uprising of enslaved Africans in the Americas occurred in Santo Domingo in 1521.² During the colonial period, large numbers of Afro-Dominicans successfully rebelled, in many cases, founding their own communities, called *maroon societies*.³ The distinguished Dominican sociologist Dagoberto Tejeda shows that the maroon phenomenon - the concept of *marronage* - is imbued with cultural capital as a powerful mantle representing the struggle for racial justice. He shows that it has transcended its historical moment, representing the conscience and behavior of rebellion in the face of oppression...of the struggle for truth and for justice, regardless of the historical moment or place ... A maroon is someone who defines his life in the face of injustice and oppression.⁴

Since the 1970s, many Afro-Dominican music performers have identified themselves as *urban maroons*, situating themselves within the maroon legacy flowering in early Dominican history.⁵ This article argues that Afro-Dominican music serves as a powerful, lived praxis of black liberation discourse manifested on a daily basis in informal and formal contexts, both in the Dominican Republic and in the Dominican diaspora.

The contemporary Dominican population is estimated as 90% mixed-race or black, and the country boasts a rich legacy of African-based musical traditions. UNESCO, for example, has declared several manifestations of Afro-Dominican music as Cultural Heritage traditions.⁶ Born in Finland and raised in New York, I fell in love with, and embarked on the ethnomusicological study of Dominican music as a young man, playing the saxophone in Dominican bands. When I became a Ph.D. candidate in ethnomusicology, my focus was on *merengue*, a form of secular popular music, but while conducting field research in the Dominican Republic, I attended dozens of Afro-Dominican religious rituals in which music figured prominently. Struck by the beautiful ways that rural religious adepts used music to venerate their ancestors, and by the ways they blended African deities with Roman Catholic saints to form uniquely *Dominican* African-based traditions of faith and music, I fell in love with Afro-Dominican music. I also encountered Eurocentric attitudes. Once, an urban, middle-class friend asked me if I could show her some of the videos I had made of traditional music. My friend,

1 Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Introduction to Dominican Blackness* (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2010), 4, 10. The Afro-descendants arriving in 1492 were free Spaniards of African descent. “[First Blacks in the Americas: Arrival](http://firstblacks.org/en/summaries/arrival-01-free-and-enslaved/),” CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, accessed July 5, 2020, <http://firstblacks.org/en/summaries/arrival-01-free-and-enslaved/>.

2 The rebellion occurred on December 25, 1521, at a sugar plantation owned by the Governor of La Española, Diego Colón, one of Christopher Columbus’ sons. Antony Stevens, “[The Santo Domingo Slave Revolt of 1521 and the Slave Laws of 1522: Black Slavery and Black Resistance in the Early Colonial Americas](#)” (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2019).

3 Maroon societies are called *palenques* or *manieles* in Spanish. See Carlos Esteban Deive, *Los guerrilleros negos: Esclavos fugitivos y cimarrones en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1997). and Stevens, *The Santo Domingo Slave Revolt*, 2019. The *maroon* term was long believed to derived from the Spanish *cimarrón*, which referred to feral cattle on Hispaniola. José Juan Arom, however, has argued that the term actually has a Taíno origin, which would make it one of the oldest words still used in the Americas. José Juan Arom, “Cimarrón: Apuntes sobre las primeras documentaciones y su probable origen,” in *Cimarrón*, eds. José Juan Arom and Manuel A. García Arévalo (Santo Domingo: Fundación García Arévalo, 1979), 13-30. Cited in Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), xii.

4 Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz, *Cultura popular e identidad nacional* (Santo Domingo: Ediciones Indefolk, 1998), 332.

5 Price shows that while the concept of a “mythic maroon” has been lauded in many countries, actual descendants of maroons have often suffered social and economic disenfranchisement in some countries. The situation is a bit different in the Dominican Republic, where celebration of the maroon legacy has been more limited, and where maroon descendants were assimilated into a generalized *campesino* culture already during the colonial period. Price, *Maroon Societies*, xiii.

6 “Intangible Cultural Heritage: Dominican Republic and the 2003 Convention,” UNESCO, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/state/dominican-republic-DO>

however, made it clear that she could not view videos that “involve the saints or the dead,” because veneration of spirits and ritual homage to ancestors involve African-based customs that she considered taboo. But because so much rural Dominican music does, in fact, honor saints or deceased community members, it was almost impossible for me to find videos to show her.⁷

The great Dominican saxophonist Crispin Fernández once told me that, in his view, the African legacy of Dominican culture is “mute culture:” while virtually ubiquitous, it is rarely subjected to public verbal discourse. But while it is rarely discussed openly, Afro-Dominican cultural praxis flourishes in private spaces, where its secrets are expressed on a daily basis through the alternate languages of music, dance, and ritual.⁸ Thriving in rural contexts, rich traditions of African-influenced music and spirituality are also performed in urban centers, both in the Dominican Republic and among Dominicans residing in the United States. Beginning in the 1970s, Afro-Dominican music has been adapted for performance in secular spaces, where, fused with jazz and rock, it has fueled a social movement celebrating black heritage. In spite, then, of Eurocentrism, urbanization, and globalization, Afro-Dominican music, dance, and spiritual traditions persist in rural areas as well as in cities, both on the island and in the diaspora, adapting to new realities and serving as a powerful counter-narrative of blackness.⁹

Ethnomusicologist Martha Ellen Davis opines that Afro-Dominican spirituality is a form of “medicine,” an “alternative science” of healing,¹⁰ because its primary function is to promote psychic and physical well-being. In traditional contexts, music and dance work together with herbal remedies and prayer to promote mystical, bodily, and social harmony. While music and dance, like herbal medicine, function on the physical plane, they are also believed, in many African-based contexts, to communicate with ancestors and with the spirit world. The central sacrament of much African-based rituals, including those cultivated in the Dominican Republic, consists of devotees being “mounted” by divine entities, entering altered states of consciousness in which their bodies are said to incorporate spirits or ancestors.¹¹ As Lorgia García-Peña affirms, this process possesses revolutionary potential:¹² indeed, throughout the African diaspora, African ancestral legacies have been efficacious tools of black liberation, empowering life under adverse conditions and fueling rebellions, large and small. Secular Dominican music and dance, such as merengue and *bachata*, also boast highly African-influenced aesthetics and are therefore part and parcel of this legacy of resistance because even recreational music possesses empowering aesthetics that bolster survival - and even triumph - under the most adverse conditions. Robert Farris Thompson goes so far as to call secular

7 This article incorporates material from the author’s previous publications. Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997). Paul Austerlitz, *Jazz Consciousness* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007). Paul Austerlitz, “Cimarrones urbanos: la música como contranarrativa de la negritud dominicana,” *Global*, no. 61 (2014), 22-19. It also calls upon the author’s 40 years of experience as Finnish-born, New York -bred saxophonist who has performed with many of the musicians discussed here (including José Duluc, Toné Vicioso, Pa’lo Monte, Gagá P’al Pueblo, and Claudio Fortunato); as the leader of his own Afro-Dominican jazz fusion band; and as a baptized participant in Afro-Dominican and Haitian faith traditions.

8 Crispin Fernández, personal communication with the author, n.d.

9 The author extends heartfelt gratitude to CUNY Dominican Studies Institute Director Dr. Ramona Hernández for inspiring, guiding, and supporting this research. The author is also indebted to Rebecca Hey-Colón, Eduardo Paulino, Angelina Tallaj-García, Daniel Piper, Sandy Placido, and Lisette Acosta Corniel for helping him think through these issues. Additional thanks are due to the author’s research assistant at Gettysburg College, Molly Hoffman.

10 Martha Ellen Davis, *La otra ciencia: El vodú dominicano como religión y medicina populares* (Santo Domingo: Editora Universitaria UASD, 1987). Also see Maurea E. Landies, “The Band Carries Medicine: Music, Healing and Community in Haitian/Dominican Rara/Gaga” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009).

11 These trance states are often (and perhaps, pejoratively) called “spirit possession.”

12 García-Peña, Lorgia, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, an Archives of Contradiction*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 4-5, 82. See Alexander M. Jaqui, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations of Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2005), 295-298.

Afro-Caribbean music “religious music in disguise.”¹³ We can therefore appreciate that *all* Afro-Dominican music, secular as well as sacred, is “liberation music in disguise.”¹⁴

Today, in the Dominican Republic and among Dominicans residing in the United States, urban musicians fusing Afro-Dominican ritual music with rock and jazz celebrate Afro-Dominican consciousness. Meanwhile, ritual adepts – both on the island and in the U.S. – enduringly practice thriving ancestral Afro-Dominican religious traditions.

13 Robert Farris Thompson, personal communication with the author, n.d.

14 Also see Marguerite Fernández Olmos, “Spirited Entities, Creole Religions, Creole/U.S. Latina Literature, and the Initiated Reader,” in *Contemporary U.S. Latino/ A Literary Criticism*, eds. Lyn Di Iorio Sandín and Richard Perez (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

An Overview of Afro-Dominican Music

Developing through the process of *syncretism* (the fusion of cultures), Dominican music blends African and European influences. In fact, the hallmark of Dominican music – and of Dominican culture as a whole – is an extremely high degree of admixture of African and European elements. All Dominican music partakes of African influences, with various gradations of admixture with European elements. As mentioned, the most explicitly African-influenced musical genres are those associated with the rich tradition of African-based Dominican religious traditions. Major Afro-Dominican genres include *gagá*, *gulo*, the *salve*, and the *palo complex*. *Gagá* is a celebratory processional form, influenced by Haitian *rara*, played on one-note wind instruments called *fututos* and percussion during Holy Week, predominantly by Dominicans of Haitian descent.¹⁵ The *gulo* dance-theater repertoire, played on percussion and hand-made flutes by descendants of immigrants who came to the Dominican Republic from the Anglophone Caribbean, honors the Magi during the Christmas season.¹⁶ *Salves* are Afro-Dominican religious songs derived from Catholic prayers (such as the *salve regina*). They are sung either *a capella* (without instrumental accompaniment) or with drumming, but, unlike most other forms of Afro-Dominican music, without accompanying dance.¹⁷ *Salves* are customarily sung at rituals called *velaciones* honoring Catholic saints, who are often syncretized with African deities. Women are prominent in the *salve* tradition, both as singers and as players of the *pandereta*, a frame drum resembling a tambourine.

Palos drumming and singing is the most widely-diffused expression of traditional rural music in the Dominican Republic, and for this reason, the eminent folklorist Fradique Lizardo suggested that *palo* music should replace *merengue* as a national symbol of the Dominican Republic.¹⁸ Also called *atabales*, *palos* are long drums made from trunks of trees (called *palos*, or “sticks” in the Dominican vernacular). *Palo* drumming, song, and dance are closely associated with Afro-Dominican fraternal religious organizations called *cofradías*. Many distinct *cofradías*, each with its own religious and musical traditions, are found throughout the Dominican Republic, and the country boasts many distinct *palo* styles.¹⁹ *Cofradías* sponsor rituals honoring ancestors and Catholic saints, who are often syncretized with African-derived deities. Interestingly, while they represent some of the most highly African-influenced institutions of the Dominican Republic, Afro-Dominican *cofradías* have antecedents in Spain, where, already in the fourteenth century, Spaniards of African descent founded mutual aid societies under the aegis of the Catholic Church.

Palos drums demonstrate a great deal of regional variation in their construction. While West African-influenced *palos*, which utilize pegs to fasten skins, are found in the Dominican Republic (especially in the East), Congolese-influenced *palos*, which lack the wooden pegs, are more common in other parts of the country.²⁰ Unlike some Afro-Cuban music, which is sung entirely in the Yorùbá language, Afro-Dominican ritual music

15 June Rosenburg *El gagá: religión y sociedad en un culto dominicano*. (Santo Domingo: Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, 1979). Elizabeth McAlister, *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Landies, “The Band.”

16 Santana, Josué, and Edis Sánchez, *La música folclórica dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 2010), 295-320.

17 Martha Ellen Davis, *Vozes del purgatorio: Estudio de la salve dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Ediciones del Museo del Hombre Dominicano, 1981).

18 Hugo Antonio Ysálguez, “El merengue tiene su origen en Africa,” *Ahora*, no. 630 (December 1975): 51.

19 While *sarandunga* and *congo* drumming, song, and dance, which are performed of the towns and outlying areas of Baní and Villa Mella, respectively, are not *palos* in the strict sense of the term, they can be considered part of the larger *palo* complex due to their association with *cofradías*.

20 Martha Ellen Davis “Afro-Dominican Brotherhoods: Structure, Ritual, Music” (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1976), 82-87, 197. Interestingly, Haiti has more West African influence than does the Dominican Republic, possibly because the slave trade ended in Haiti in the late eighteenth century, while it continued in the Dominican Republic into the nineteenth century, a period that saw a greater Central African influx to the Americas generally. Davis, “Afro-Dominican Brotherhoods,” 287.

is sung in Spanish, although it sometimes incorporates African phrases and liturgical paradigms. Songs sung by the Congos of Villa Mella *cofradía*, for example, invoke the Ki-Kongo concept of *kalunga*, which refers to the boundary between death and life. Palos and salve are also performed in rituals venerating a pantheon of syncretic spirits called *misterios* or *luá*.²¹ As mentioned, trance states in which religious devotees – called *servidores de misterios* (“servants of the mysteries”) -- are “mounted” by spirits are the central sacrament of ceremonies. Bearing similarity to, but also diverging significantly from Haitian Vodou,²² researchers often refer to Afro-Dominican faith traditions as *Vodú*.²³ Participants, however, usually call it *La 21 División*, because it is said that there are 21 divisions, or types, of *misterios*. While 21 División practice venerates spirits such as Ogun, who is well-known in West Africa, Haiti, Cuba, and Brazil, it also boasts its own pantheon of *misterios*, such as Belié Belkán and Candelo (to name just two) who are only revered in the Dominican Republic. As noted, Afro-Dominican music has been recognized internationally by UNESCO, which named the Congos of Villa Mella, *gulo*, *merengue*, and *bachata* as traditions of “Intangible Cultural Heritage.”²⁴ Afro-Dominican spiritual and musical traditions tend to function outside the radar of dominant discourse, having suffered suppression by prevailing Eurocentric attitudes.

21 The latter term is derived from the Haitian Creole word *lwa* (spelled *loa* in French). See Deive 1979, Davis 1979, Dagoberto Tejeda Ortiz, Fernando Sánchez Martínez, and César Mella Mejía, *Religiosidad popular dominicana y psiquiatría* (Santo Domingo: Editora Corripio, 1993).

22 Patrick Bellegarde-Smith and Claudine Michel, eds., *Haitian Vodou: Spirit, Myth & Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

23 This word has been subjected to many spellings. Stereotyped and racist views, often emanating from Hollywood, spell it voodoo. Scholars and practitioners, however, have adopted the upper-case Vodou spelling in accordance with English-language usage, which capitalizes names of religions. The term vodun refers to the word spirit in the Fon and Ewe languages of Benin, Togo, and Ghana.

24 “Intangible Cultural Heritage: Cultural Space of the Brotherhood of the Holy Spirit of the Congos of Villa Mella,” UNESCO, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cultural-space-of-the-brotherhood-of-the-holy-spirit-of-the-congos-of-villa-mella-00006>. “Intangible Cultural Heritage: Cocolo Dance Drama Tradition,” UNESCO, accessed March 6, 2021, <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/cocolo-dance-drama-tradition-00104>

A History of Covert Negritude

Before considering recent developments in Afro-Dominican music, let us take a brief look Afro-Dominican culture in history. As shown in a web site documenting the *First Blacks in the Americas*, the first known Afro-descendant to arrive in the Western Hemisphere was a man called Juan Moreno, a free Spaniard of African descent working as Columbus's personal valet. The second documented Afro-descendant in the Americas was a woman referred to as La Negra del Hospital ("the black woman of the hospital"), remembered by townspeople as the colony's first physician or healer because she ran a clinic in Santo Domingo at the turn of the sixteenth century.²⁵ This remarkable woman initiated a powerful legacy of Afro-Dominican women's empowerment, a legacy that, as we will see, still permeates Afro-Dominican culture.

In the early years of the colony, Dominican maroon leader Sebastian Lemba commanded a formidable black liberation army that freed many enslaved Africans. Lemba still inspires Dominicans and all freedom-seeking people today:

Since approximately 1533, Lemba led a group of maroons ... [in the] central regions of La Española....For many in the Dominican Republic today concerned with social justice and the Black African heritage of Dominican society, Lemba represents a very early symbol of resistance against oppression.²⁶

As elsewhere in the Americas, maroon societies flourished in the early days of the colony,²⁷ often forging alliances with the colony's Native inhabitants. The struggle for Afro-Dominican liberation also developed in tandem with the struggle for gender and class liberation.

Historian Richard Turits shows that in the 16th century, when colonial powers attempted to institute a plantation economy in Santo Domingo, many maroons lived in established, militarized communities. In contrast to French and English colonies, plantations became unprofitable in Santo Domingo during the 17th century. With the collapse of the plantation economy, colonial authorities had a little power in the countryside and stopped sponsoring military campaigns against maroons. A mountainous terrain was optimal for maroons to hunt, graze cattle, forage, and farm. Free to live outside fortified settlements, they gradually started to function as independent peasants.²⁸ Meanwhile, enslaved people continued to escape. Also, liberal manumission laws and a failing economy made it possible for many enslaved people to purchase their freedom; they were often able to save enough money to facilitate these transactions by doing wage labor. Financially-strapped colonists even sometimes found manumission beneficial, if they received "market value" in exchange for granting freedom. By 1681, 75% of the population of color, the colony's majority, was legally free.²⁹

Also significant was a high degree of intermarriage between Afro-descendants and Euro-Dominican *campesinos* to the extent that Pérez-Cabral described Dominican society as a "mulatto community," an appellation as apt

25 "First Blacks in the Americas: Women," CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, accessed December 24, 2020, <http://firstblacks.org/en/summaries/black-women-present-from-the-start/>.

26 "First Blacks in the Americas: Commentary 062," CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, accessed December 24, 2020, <http://firstblacks.org/en/manuscripts/fb-primary-062-t/commentary/>.

27 Price, *Maroon Societies*.

28 Richard Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12, 14, 29-31.

29 Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 12, 14, 29-31.

today as it was in the colonial period.³⁰ The failure of the plantation system and a shaky governing infrastructure resulted in a weak formal economy, which left an aperture for people of color to develop self-sufficient rural societies which functioned, to a certain extent, independently of colonial authorities.³¹ At the same time, as Turits demonstrates, the colonial ruling class propagated an “aesthetic racism, or more precisely, colorism and culturalist prejudices, which valorized Europe and disparaged African-based culture.”³² As in other Iberian colonies, “myths of racial democracy” erroneously posited benign race relations. Historian Alejandro de la Fuente, however, shows that by speciously asserting that race was invisible in the national imaginary, proponents of these myths became “[p]risoners of their own ideological creation[,]” losing the “capacity to structure a system in which blacks . . . would be openly excluded.”³³ Afro-descendants subverted myths of racial democracy, turning them into “doors that could be opened.”³⁴

These doors led to ingenious ways to cultivate Afro-Dominican culture: while official Eurocentric dogma ignored or deprecated African-derived practices, underground African-based currents flourished.³⁵ According, for example, to oral tradition, the fiery, militant *Petwo* division of Haitian Vodou was founded by Don Pedro, a powerful mystic hailing from Spanish Santo Domingo. The earliest documents referring to Afro-Dominican *cofradías* (fraternal organizations) date to the sixteenth century, when the organizations were often associated with specific African ethnic groups (*naciones*, “tribes”).³⁶ With time, the *cofradías* lost clear associations with particular African ethnicities, but links to specific African cultures, discernable through comparative ethnomusicology as well as in the oral tradition, remain vital even today. Early waves of African migration to Hispaniola, documented by data referring to *cofradías*, were heavily represented by Senegambian peoples, who were especially active as maroons, a fact that might have played a role in influencing colonists to turn to the Congo regions of Central Africa for enslaved labor in the seventeenth century. With the passage of time, more Congolese and less West African immigration became the norm, and Dominican music as a whole boasts a strong Central African basis. Catholic saints were increasingly syncretized with African deities, and documents attest to the use of African languages in ritual contexts as late as 1784.³⁷ Acosta Corniel documents the matrix of cultural and social contributions that Afro-Dominican women made to the development of Dominican society in the colonial era,³⁸ showing that official documents were still discussing La Negra del Hospital in 1793, 281 years after she was first documented.³⁹ Apart from a small minority of Eurocentric Dominicans living in towns, cultural traditions steeped in African traditions thrived among the rural Dominican majority.

30 Pérez Cabral, Pedro Andrés. *La comunidad mulata*. (Caracas: Gráfica Americana, 1967). Marvin Harris, *Patterns of Race in the Americas* (New York: Norton, 1964). Harry Hoetink, *Caribbean Race Relations: A Study of Two Variants* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967). Jorge Duany, “Transnational Migration from the Dominican Republic: The Cultural Redefinition of Racial Identity,” *Caribbean Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 253-282.

31 Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 14.

32 Turits argues that this paradoxically coexisted with a “relative absence of racial discrimination in political and legal realms.” Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, 48.

33 Alejandro de la Fuente, “Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900-1912,” *Latin American Research Review* vol. 34, no. 2 (1999): 46.

34 de la Fuente, “Myths,” 39-73. Also see Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 8-9.

35 de la Fuente, “Myths,” 47.

36 Davis, “Afro-Dominican Brotherhoods,” 78-82.

37 Hoetink, *Caribbean Race*, 183.

38 Lissette Acosta Corniel, “Negras, mulatas, y morenas en La Española del siglo XVI (1502-1606),” in *Esclavitud mestisaje, y abolicismo en los mundo hispánicos*, ed. Aurelia Martín Casares (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2015).

39 Acosta Corniel, “Negras, mulatas,” 211.

Spain ceded the Western third of Hispaniola to France in 1697, where a thriving plantation economy, based on brutally-enforced labor, turned Saint Domingue into France's most lucrative colony. Dovetailing with Enlightenment ideals, slave rebellions initiated the Haitian Revolution at a slave uprising ignited at a 1791 Vodou ceremony in Bwa Cayman (the Cayman Forest). The Haitian Revolution's first leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, met with initial success, but Napoleon Bonaparte later captured him, sending him to France, where he was imprisoned and died in 1803. Jean-Jacques Dessalines then took the Revolutionary mantle, expelling Napoleon's forces and founding the Republic of Haiti, the world's first black republic and the second independent state in the Americas, in 1804. France meanwhile took control of Spanish-speaking Santo Domingo. Hoping to banish European domination from the entire island, Haitian President Dessalines entered Santo Domingo in 1805, but was unable to take control. Dominican territory was returned to Spain in 1809, and 1821, Dominicans declared independence as the Independent State of Spanish Haiti. Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer, however, was haunted by the continued presence of European colonizers on the island, and his forces met little resistance when they entered Santo Domingo in 1822, unifying the island under the Haitian flag and abolishing slavery as the first official act. Stressed in Dominican historiography, narratives about the ensuing "Haitian occupation" played a tractable role in the development of a notion of Dominican national identity articulated in opposition to Haiti. Recently, a new wave of Dominicanists have questioned this Eurocentric narrative, instead calling this the period of "Haitian unification."⁴⁰ Although Boyer's regime was relatively stable, a liberal intellectual secret society known as La Trinitaria (The Trinity), headed by Juan Pablo Duarte, mounted a revolt, founding the Dominican Republic on February 27, 1844. An Enlightenment figure, Duarte held progressive ideas about race.⁴¹ Historian Frank Moya Pons has shown that, during the period following the establishment of Dominican independence, the Eurocentric sense of Dominican identity was confined to "a minority that controlled the educational and communications systems," much of which resided in small urban settlements.⁴² The 1880 population of the Dominican Republic is estimated as 97% rural,⁴³ and the culture of the rural majority was highly African. As Moya Pons shows, nineteenth-century Dominican life was characterized by "an extraordinary religiosity"⁴⁴ manifested in frequent Afro-Dominican religious rituals honoring African deities syncretized Catholic saints or deceased community members: one account reported that campesinos "dance[d] during all the *fiesta* days."⁴⁵

In 1930, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo became president of the Dominican Republic. Holding power until 1961, he implemented a brutal dictatorship, bolstering the extant Eurocentric bias. Infamously, Trujillo instigated a massacre, in 1937, of approximately 15,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent.⁴⁶ Acutely aware of the role that cultural symbols play in arousing patriotism, Trujillo sponsored merengue as a national symbol. Noting that the dictator "considered Hispanicism, whiteness, and Catholicism the constituents of the national essence," the prominent Dominican musicologist Bernarda Jorge affirms that "merengue

40 Lorgia García-Peña, *The Borders*, 23. Also see Eduard Paulino, "The Evolution of Black Identity in the Dominican Republic," in *Routes of Passage: Rethinking the African Diaspora* 1, no. 2, ed. Ruth Simms Hamilton (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2007), 26, 28. Torres-Saillant shows that stereotyped notions of blackness were challenged, especially by women, in the nineteenth century. Torres-Saillant, Silvio. "Dominican Literature and its Criticism: Anatomy of a Troubled Identity," in *A History of Literature the Caribbean, vol. 2, Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. A. James Arnold. Philadelphia: Johns-Benjamins, 1994), 57.

41 García-Peña, *The Borders*, 32.

42 Frank Moya Pons, "Modernización y cambios en la República Dominicana," in *Ensayos sobre la cultura dominicana*, ed. Vega, Bernardo (Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1988), 236. Also see Cabral Harris, *Patterns*, 45.

43 Moya Pons, "Modernización," 213.

44 Moya Pons, "Modernización," 215.

45 The Dominican Republic was returned to Spanish rule in 1861, regaining independence in 1865. Adriano López Morillo, *La segunda reincorporación de Santo Domingo a España* (Santo Domingo: Sociedad Dominicana de Bibliófilos, 1983), 80.

46 Turits, *Foundations of Despotism*, PAGE.

played an important role in the dictator's cult of nationalism and the exaltation of Hispanic values.⁴⁷ Afro-Dominican music, however, was rejected by official dogma. Trujilloist folklorist Flérida de Nolasco, for example, wrote that

Dominican folk music cannot be but a derivation of Spanish music, adjusted to the environment, corrupted when it has fallen into inept hands, and sometimes contaminated with black music, of savage stupidity.⁴⁸

Close examination of Trujillo's attitudes, however, reveals telling contradictions. The dictator's sponsorship of merengue was motivated by the genre's supposed Spanish connections, but merengue itself is a syncretic music boasting African as well as European influences. Tellingly, while Trujillo persecuted Dominicans of Haitian descent, his own grandmother was Haitian. Further, as Galíndez reported, while the Dominican constitution's guarantee of "freedom of conscience and of worship" was respected in the case of the small Protestant and Jewish populations, "a law of September, 1943, established punishment for those practicing *voudou* or *lua* [*sic.*]"⁴⁹ Trujillo was even said to instigate public burnings of Afro-Dominican ritual drums. But the dictator himself was known to have faith in African-influenced spirituality. His biographer, Crassweiler writes that the Trujillo gave credence to "the beliefs of old Africa," and

frequently consulted those whom he believed to hold the power of divination. He used spells on occasion. Was there any danger hanging over the regime? ...[I]t would be wise to consult the spirits. A medicine man would be summoned and would report his findings.⁵⁰

A merengue entitled "Pa cone," performed by El Trio Reynoso on a 1952 radio broadcast on a state-sponsored radio station, expresses the simultaneous denial and ubiquity of African and Haitian -influenced religion in the Dominican Republic. The song's first line inquires about the whereabouts of a 21 División spirit named Candelino, while the second line answers with "*pa cone*," "I don't know" in Haitian Creole. The lines continue alternating, asking about other 21 División spirits named Buquí and Belié Belkán, but the answer is always "*pa cone*," until the misterios indicate their arrival, as manifested in the spirit medium's trance state, saying *bon swa* ("good evening" in Haitian Creole). At Afro-Dominican ceremonies, in fact, spirits, inhabiting mediums often do utter words in Creole, perhaps indicating a kind of underground respect for their Haitian neighbors' faith tradition.

47 Bernarda Jorge, *La música dominicana, siglos XIX-XX* (Santo Domingo: Editora Universitaria – UASD, 1982), 84, 94-94.

48 Nolasco, quoted and translated in Davis, "Afro-Dominican Brotherhoods," 22.

49 Jesús Galíndez, *The Era of Trujillo: Caribbean Dictator* (Santo Domingo, 1956), 124.

50 Robert D. Crassweiler, *Trujillo: Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 84-85.

“Pa cone”

¿Donde está Candelino?

Pa cone, mamá.

¿Donde está Buquí el gamberro?

Pa cone, mamá.

¿Donde está, que no lo veo?

Pa cone, mamá.

¿Donde está Belié Belkán?

Pa cone, mamá.

¡Bon swa, bon swa!

Where is Candelino?

I don't know, *mamá.*

Where is Buquí, the bow-legged one?

I don't know, *mamá.*

Where is he? I don't see him!

I don't know, *mamá.*

Where is Belié Belkán?

I don't know, *mamá.*

Bon swa, bon swa!

This song refers the ubiquity of African-based spirituality in spite of its suppression, speaking volumes about the covert, underground history of African traditions of Dominicaness. It also demonstrates links to, as well as divergence from, Haitian culture: while the song's Creole words suggest connections to Haiti, the spirits invoked, Candelino, Buquí, and Belié Belkán, are autochthonous to the Dominican Republic and unknown in Haiti.

Urban Maroons

The period following Trujillo's fall in 1961 was marked by increasing rural to urban migration, and in ensuing decades, high levels of out-migration. Joaquín Balaguer, one of the former dictator's close associates, took power in 1968, establishing an authoritarian regime that some called "Trujilloism without Trujillo." During this period, however, a mood of democratization kindled new currents of thought. Ensuing reconsiderations of conventional notions about identity were associated with resistance to Balaguer. While Trujillo's overt racism prevented the development of an overt *negritude* movement during his regime, the dictator's death paved the way for a steady, although slow, trend toward greater valorization of Afro-Dominicanness. Put on by folklorist Fradique Lizardo, the first staged production of Afro-Dominican music and dance took place in 1963 during the short-lived presidency of Juan Bosch. In the years that followed, *ballets folklóricos*, folkloric dance groups, which presented staged productions of African as well as European-based traditional Dominican music and dance, were founded by the State and private organizations. Folklorist Fradique Lizardo played a seminal role in advocating the celebration of African influences on Dominican culture. Reminding his compatriots that merengue's status as a national symbol had been mandated by Trujillo, Lizardo once declared that "to say merengue is the national dance of the Dominican Republic is false."⁵¹ He suggested that palos drumming be adopted as a national music instead, noting that it is performed in virtually all regions of the country.⁵² Folkloric dance groups, including as the one led by Lizardo; the Ballet Folklórico of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), led by José Castillo; and many other smaller ones, proliferated: it became the "in" for young, urban, working-class Dominicans to join them. These artistic initiatives were accompanied by scholarly trends focusing on African elements of Dominican culture, including the 1969 publication of Franklin Franco's *Los negros, los mulatos, y la nación dominicana*⁵³ and a 1973 colloquium on the "African presence in the Americas" held at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo.⁵⁴ As Edward Paulino shows, this was a home-grown brand of racial consciousness that coincided with, but in no sense emanated from, parallel trends in the U.S. ⁵⁵

During this period, the *nueva canción* movement, which originated in Chile and spread throughout Latin America, was enlisting traditional music in the struggle against rightist authoritarian regimes, economic inequity, and U.S. imperialism. A coterie of young artists and intellectuals created a Dominican brand of nueva canción. Prominent in this movement was a group called Convite, founded in 1974, which featured sociologist Dagoberto Tejeda, guitarist/composer Luis Díaz, Iván Domínguez, and José Castillo, and many others. Like the Dominican-Haitian communal work teams after which the group was named, Convite was a collaborative effort dedicated to serving the community. In addition to being a musical ensemble, Convite investigated, educated, and politicized: its members conducted field research on traditional culture and held workshops to promote their musico-political agenda.⁵⁶ While its primary perspectives were Marxist and therefore focused on class struggle, Convite was interested in Afro-Dominican music, which it saw as an authentic expression of peoples' culture. Indeed, the fact that most members of the Dominican working class are Afro-descendants renders the struggles for social class and racial justice supremely compatible, and arguably, even interchangeable in some ways. While advocating the preservation of what they saw as rural authenticity, Convite also used traditional music as fodder for their own compositions, which blended folkloric forms with contemporary popular styles. Convite disbanded in 1981, but its individual members remained active. Notably, song-writer, singer, and guitarist Luis Díaz took the helm of a new musical movement fusing traditional rural music with urban currents.

51 Ysálguez, "El merengue," 51.

52 Ysálguez, "El merengue," 51.

53 Franklin Franco, *Los negros, los mulatos, y la nación dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Editora Nacional, 1984)

54 Torres-Saillant, *Introduction*, 46.

55 Paulino, "The Evolution," 33.

56 Juan Sálazar Díaz, "Convite: de los congos a la bambaulá, todo es herencia africana," *Ahora* 764, no.3 (July 1978): 22-24.

José Duluc, Toné Vicioso, and Xiomara Fortuna emerged as major exponents of *música de fusión* (“fusion music”), as the emerging style came to be called; this triumvirate remains at the forefront of this movement. While Convite occasionally incorporated Afro-Dominican ritual music, the emerging trends focused on it. Born in the eastern Dominican city of Higüey, José Duluc grew up in a musical family and played tambora drum in his brother’s merengue band as a teenager. Duluc was also exposed to Afro-Dominican spirituality at an early age, asserting that “people in my family were into this: my grandmother, my sister. They hosted gatherings of healers, five or six healers [at a time].”⁵⁷ After moving to Santo Domingo, he began studying at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), majoring in mechanical engineering, but soon auditioned for the UASD Ballet Folklórico, being selected as a lead dancer and receiving a scholarship. Duluc left his studies and turned to music full time. Inspired by the Ballet’s director, Convite member José Castillo, he began conducting research on Afro-Dominican music in the countryside. Duluc recalls that the research methods he learned from del Castillo served as a foundation for the development of his original musical style, stating that his teacher “was rigorous; he taught me respect for the original [rural music]...After that, you can add your own innovations, if you want.”⁵⁸

After working as singer and percussionist with Luis Días’s band, Transporte Urbano, Duluc performed with a group named Palembang. Founded by Luis Miniel and other members of the UASD folkloric dance company in 1983, the band’s name is a portmanteau of palo (as the drums) and the famed maroon, Lemba. Palembang featured Duluc as lead singer, and significantly, band members were wont to wear African shirts at performances. In 1985, Duluc started a new group called Los Guerreros del Fuego (The Warriors of Fire) with guitarist Toné Vicioso and percussionist Boni Raposo, both of whom later emerged as major forces in Afro-Dominican music in their own rights. Duluc explains that because he wanted to create a new form of popular music availing itself of the rich legacy of Afro-Dominican spirituality, “a form of merengue nourished by the sacred,” he called his music *merengue-priye* at that time. *Priye*, in Haitian Creole, means prayer, and in the Dominican Republic, it refers to African-based ritual celebrations. Although this name did not catch on, Duluc believes that its blending of entertainment with spirituality is significant, especially because Afro-Dominican music had always belied European categories bifurcating the secular and the sacred.⁵⁹ While steadfastly affirming the African basis of his music, Duluc also pays homage to the Native legacy of the island, sometimes calling his music “Ras-Taíno,” in a tandem invocation of the black nationalist Rastafarian movement with Dominican indigenous legacy.

Although Los Guerreros del Fuego met with a certain degree of popularity, performing, for example, on television, major support from the music industry eluded them. Disillusioned, Duluc decided to move to Villa Mella, the locus of vibrant Afro-Dominican traditions such as the Congos de Villa Mella cofradía. He ended up living in that rural area for three years, immersing himself in the culture. Duluc also travelled regularly to a batey (Haitian-Dominican enclave), called Las Cejas, where he studied gagá music and dance, undergoing a spiritual baptism. Duluc expounds on his dedication to rigorous study: “I’m not an academic research scholar... but I have tried to be a researcher centered...on making my own music, and more than anything else, with the goal of being *part of* [the rural communities].” His study of gagá was motivated by a desire to create his own music, but after conducting rigorous research, he became a respected drummer specializing in the *tambú*, the lead gagá drum, as well as a lead dancer, or *mayor de gagá*. Duluc explains that “it took work, ten years, of study:”

57 José Duluc, interview by author, Santo Domingo, 2018.

58 Duluc, interview.

59 Duluc, interview.

Because something happened to me. When I was in the Ballet [Folklórico] and in Palemba, I hadn't done much research. [Once,] I went to Las Cejas, and I took a drum [and started playing]. But they took it away from me! They took it away from me, and I felt bad. And Diago [the lead drummer] told me, "you have to come here [more]." So I went more often, and I recorded him [playing drums]. I sat down with him, playing. And I made recordings, and I took the recordings, and I transcribed them...until I had a notebook of transcriptions of rhythms. I learned that improvisation is not just a bunch of craziness, that there are *systems* underlying the drum patterns... Gagá style develops from a tradition... So from there, I started mixing gagá with merengue and bachata.⁶⁰

A veritable treasure of Dominican culture, José Duluc is notable for his in-depth knowledge of gagá drumming, song and dance, as well as of other rural musics such as palos and salve, gained through years of field research. His performances are notable in that, in addition to singing and drumming, Duluc customarily dances at performances, lending them an exciting and original flair. Duluc also emerged as a veritable song writer, composing original gagá and palo songs and intelligent, picaresque bachatas. Other artists have often recorded his works, notably, "La ciguapa," which became a hit as sung by Chichi Peralta, and "Carnaval pa' gozar," recorded by merengue super-stars Sergio Vargas and Maridalia Hernández. Duluc's dynamic artistry gained considerable attention; he toured internationally in Cuba, Russia, and France during the 1990s. Duluc also made a mark in New York, influencing local musicians there during several trips. Still, support from the Dominican music industry eluded Duluc, and he decided to move to Japan in 1996, where he met greater success. Returning to Santo Domingo in 2002, Duluc remained active as a performer, researcher, composer, and short story writer and dedicated himself to mentoring a growing constituency of young Afro-Dominican musicians.

Duluc's early collaborator, Antonio "Toné" Vicioso, also emerged as an innovator of Afro-Dominican fusion music. Born in Maracaibo, Venezuela to Dominican parents, he grew up traveling between the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and the United States. Like many middle-class Latin Americans, his first musical loves were North American music: rock and jazz. Listening to jazz pianist McCoy Tyner while driving in the Dominican countryside one day, he encountered a group of musicians and dancers performing gagá. Vicioso immediately made a connection between the recorded African-American music playing inside his car and the living Afro-Dominican expression surrounding him on the road. After studying jazz in the United States, Vicioso realized that, as he told me, "there was a *Dominican* thing for me to get into." Returning to the Republic, he began to conduct fieldwork on Afro-Dominican drumming and composing music fusing Dominican drumming with jazz. But as he said, "there's a resistance" to Afro-Dominican drumming in the Republic; "people didn't appreciate this kind of thing; there was more acceptance of jazz."⁶¹ Like Duluc, Toné Vicioso conducted research on rural Afro-Dominican music, cultivating lasting bonds with traditional musicians and ritual organizations in several regions of the country. Vicioso also emerged as a formidable composer. As mentioned, Vicioso founded Los Guerreros del Fuego along with Duluc, and as we shall see, he played a major role in influencing subsequent generations of Dominicans, both in the Dominican Republic and in New York, to take up the mantle of Afro-Dominican fusion music.

Born in 1959 in Monte Christi, singer and bandleader Xiomara Fortuna came to Santo Domingo in 1980. First working with Toné Vicioso, whom she credits with teaching her to fuse Afro-Dominican music with jazz, Fortuna started her own band in 1982. Like Convite, Fortuna composed original songs dedicated to the struggle for social justice. She explains that racial consciousness was awakening at the time: "we started to accept that we were black" and to "defend our blackness." Fortuna's band cultivated a dedicated following,

60 Duluc, interview.

61 Xiomara Fortuna, interview by author, Santo Domingo, 2017.

performing regularly not only in the Dominican Republic, but also in France. Fortuna's vision focuses on the intersection of the struggles for justice in race, gender, economic, and sexual orientation:

We in the feminist movement started to sustain that within feminism, we had to talk about the rights and conditions of black women ... In addition to all the problems confronting women, we had to face even more problems, because we are black. The same thing happened regarding lesbians. Aside from being black and poor, they also confront a whole other series of problems.⁶²

Her intersectional vision inspired many up-and-coming Dominican musicians, as we will see.

While making inroads in bohemian circles, the Afro-Dominican musical movement remained marginalized in the 1970s and 80s, especially as compared to mainstream popular music such as merengue. Significantly, however, several high-profile *merengueros* started infusing Afro-Dominican music into their art during this period. Bandleader Juan Luis Guerra, who emerged as the most innovative presence in merengue of the 1980s and 90s, was associated with the *nueva canción* movement and influenced by Luis Días as a youth. Developing his own brilliant, jazz-infused brand of merengue, Guerra showed interest in traditional Afro-Dominican music; while he did not use it in his arrangements, he occasionally referred to it in lyrics. His song "Guavaberry," for example, refers to *guloya* music (described above) of the *cocolos*, the Dominicans of Anglophone Caribbean descent who reside in and around the city of San Pedro de Macorís. With their dark complexions and non-Hispanic roots, *cocolos* had remained on the margins of Dominicanity since their arrival in the country in the nineteenth century. Guerra's song pays homage to the *cocolo* culture, celebrating Afro-Caribbean Dominicanity. In the 1990s, merengero Kinito Méndez produced several hits using *palos* drumming, including "Suero de amor," which incorporates a 21 División song dedicated to the misterio Ogun Balenyó and contributing to the growing acceptance of Afro-Dominican music. Percussionist David Almengó, who, like many of his peers, learned to play in folkloric ballet companies, made his own mark, playing with Méndez and Guerra in addition to mounting a large-scale extravaganza presenting dozens of musicians playing Afro-Dominican music in an outdoor extravaganza called "Afri-Caribe" in 1991.

Much of the attention of the Afro-Dominican movement focused on *gagá*; cultural organizer and singer Roldán Marmol, in particular, made inroads in popularizing this genre. Significantly, Marmol often invited prominent Haitian musicians to perform in the Dominican Republic, and following the devastating Haitian earthquake of 2008, he organized a "Caravan" of Dominican musicians to tour Haiti as an expression of solidarity. Although it began among urban bohemians, the Afro-Dominican movement also included significant segments of the working class, as well as with members of the upper middle-class. Merengue bandleaders such as Amarfis and Tulile, influenced by Kinito Méndez's high-profile use of *palo* drumming, incorporated *gagá* into their own style of eminently danceable *gagá-merengue*. At the same time, rock bands paved new paths not only in fusing *palo* and *gagá* with rock and reggae, but also in influencing changing attitudes about Afro-Dominican culture not among intellectuals and artists. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, this musical movement boasted many adherents among upper middle-class youth, who, despite their relatively light complexions and the benefits they enjoyed by virtue of their class status, were attracted to it as an underground manifestation of an alternative brand of Dominicanity associated with the struggle for social justice. In 2016, Miagros Ricourt found that a relatively small, but still significant, subsection of young urban Dominicans identified themselves as black; for example, a patron of a Rastafarian-themed restaurant in Santo Domingo told her that "[w]e have been wrongly taught to be white. But look at us: we are all black, and everything we do comes from Africa—music, food, even the way we walk."⁶³

62 Fortuna interview.

63 Miagros Ricourt, *The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 141.

Groups playing varying shades of Afro-Dominican fusion proliferated, and some began calling their movement “alternative” rather than “Afro-Dominican.” In 2019, for example, the prestigious Soberano Prize, which recognizes outstanding Dominican musical artists, honored Xiomara Fortuna in the “alternative” category. Some argued that the “alternative” moniker subverted the maroon-based revolutionary value of acknowledging this music specifically as *Afro-Dominican*, but most participants seemed to concur that even the alternative designation contributed to a valuable re-negotiation of Dominican views about race. Indeed, the fact that middle-class “alternative” musicians and fans often collaborated with dark-complexioned, working-class Dominicans made for a powerful intersectional alliance.

Afro-Dominican Music in the United States

Already in the 1950s, New York –based Dominican composer and physician Manuel Sánchez Acosta composed “Papa Bocó,” a remarkable song about the 21 División religion. “Papá Bocó” emerged during a period when widely-diffused secular Cuban songs referring to Afro-Cuban religion were enjoying popularity in the United States. The best known of these was “Babalú,” Mararita Lecuona’s song referring to the Yorùbá-Cuban *orisha* (spirit) of infectious disease, Babalu-Ayé, which became a staple of mainstream U.S. popular culture as sung by Desi Arnaz on the *I Love Lucy* television program. This open display of Afro-Caribbean spirituality diverged from cultural norms in the Dominican Republic, especially during the Trujillo era, where, as noted, public discourse about such things were avoided (with the “Pa cone” broadcast standing as a notable exception). Cuban singers Celina y Reutilio recorded a beautiful rendition and widely-disseminated version of “Papá Bocó.” The song was also often recorded in the Dominican Republic during the post-Trujillo era, by major artists including Félix del Rosario, Cuco Valoy, Wilfrido Vargas, and Tulile. “Papá Boco” refers to an Afro-Dominican or Haitian magico-religious specialist, and the song’s lyrics describe, with some accuracy, the outlook and paraphernalia of Afro-Dominican ritual practice. The first line proclaims that a *luá*, or spirit, illuminates the Papá Boco’s soul, protecting him from evil. The song goes on to list 21 División ritual paraphernalia: candles, alcoholic beverages, color-coded handkerchiefs, and portraits of saints (who are, of course, syncretized with misterios). The invocation of *difé*, a Haitian Creole work for fire, only affirms the auspicious moment, and things really start to heat up when we discover that the Papá Boco “is already mounted:” he has entered the trance state.⁶⁴ As in “Pa cone,” the Haitian Creole phrase *bon swa* (“good evening”) indicates that the altered state of consciousness has “already started,” because, as mentioned earlier, when spirits “mount” mediums in trance, they often announce their arrival with this Haitian greeting, even in the Dominican Republic.

“Papa Bocó”

*Yo tengo un luá que me ilumina,
Y me protege de la gente,
Con cuatro velas de a centavo,
Y tres vasitos de aguardiente.
Aye-aye, aye papá, aye mamá, aye bon swa, ya comenzó!
Aye mi luá, Papa Bocó, aye-aye, asa difé, ya se montó!
Con un retrato pa’ bajo, y la candela en la boca,
Con una vela en la mano, y un rabo de gato en la otra
Y un pañuelo colora’o!*

“Papá Bocó”

I have a *luá* that illuminates me,
And protects myself from [bad] people,
With four penny candles,
And three little glasses of brandy.
Aye-aye, aye *papá*, aye *mamá*, aye *bon swa*, it already started!
Aye my *luá*, Papá Bocó, aye-aye, *asa difé*, he is already mounted!
With a portrait underneath, and a candle in his mouth,
With a candle in one hand, and a cat tail in the other,
And a red handkerchief!

⁶⁴ The song’s only dubious, possibly stereotypical reference is its mention of a “cat’s tail,” which, to this author’s knowledge, is rarely or never used in 21 División or Haitian rituals.

During the 1980s in New York, the Dominican virtuoso saxophonist and multi-instrumentalist Mario Rivera created innovative fusions of palo drumming and jazz. Despite enjoying great success as a sideman, notably, as a featured soloist with Tito Puente and Dizzy Gillespie, Rivera formed his own group, The Salsa Refugees, in the late 1980s. While its name might sound like a reference to immigration issues, it actually reflected New York Latin jazz musicians' desire to move away from commercial salsa to develop new, less commercial modes. For Rivera, these modes were Dominican. Rivera's percussionists Julito Figueroa, Ray Díaz, and Isidro Bobadilla instigated innovative experiments, using unconventional combinations such as two Dominican tambora drums combined with the Cuban *conga*. Rivera had been exposed to palo drumming as a child because his grandmother was a healer devoted to the Afro-Dominican misterio Metresilí (related to the Haitian lwa Metres Ezili), who is syncretized with the Catholic Virgen de Dolores and affectionately known as La Dolorita. Rivera's grandmother took him to ceremonies where palos drumming was played:

[M]y grandmother was like a country doctor [who] used to prepare medicines... [T]hey brought that saint, that Dolorita...in a procession...I saw that when I was a kid ... I used to go and listen and we stayed up all night long and they were singing all those chants, and ... the palos played.⁶⁵

Rivera's percussionist Isidro Bobadilla had studied Afro-Dominican drumming with folklorist Fradique Lizardo and brought palos to the Salsa Refugees, using three palos on arrangements of Afrocentric pieces such as "Equinox" and "Spiritual," both of which were composed by the legendary jazz master John Coltrane. Rivera's innovative palo-jazz fusion goes down in history as a major innovation not only in Dominican music, but in the larger tradition of jazz as a whole.

In the 1970s, Raíces Folklóricas Dominicanas, a New York – based dance company which included former members of the UASD group, started presenting shows including Afro-Dominican forms, and the Conjunto Folklórico, associated with a community organization called the Alianza Dominicana, directed by another Convite alumnus, Iván Domínguez, became active, presenting concerts as well as educational presentations.⁶⁶ The new wave of Afro-Dominican fusion music, discussed above, came to the diaspora in 1979, when Convite visited New York to present series of cultural programs and concerts, even performing at Madison Square Garden.⁶⁷ Convite alumnus Luis Díaz who has been called the "Father of Dominican Rock," lived in New York from 1980 to 1982 and visited regularly until his passing in 2009. Díaz' formidable contributions to musical life among Dominicans in the United States were recognized in 2018, when a New York City street (near 165 St. and Amsterdam Avenue) was named after him.⁶⁸

In New York during the early 1980s, percussionist Isidro Bobadilla, who had worked with Fradique Lizardo as well as with Mario Rivera (and later, with Juan Luis Guerra) played a seminal role in two groundbreaking New York -based Afro-Dominican ensembles: La Cofradía and Los Amigos del Ritmo. Primarily a dance troupe, La Cofradía was founded by Tito Cordero in the late 1970's.⁶⁹ New York's first Afro-Dominican fusion band, Los Amigos del Ritmo, which blended traditional drumming with experimental jazz, was founded in 1986 by the visionary percussionist Ramón Terrero.⁷⁰

65 Mario Rivera, interview by author, New York, 2001.

66 Thomas Van Buren and Iván Domínguez, "Transnational Music and Dance in Dominican New York," in *Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Ernesto Sagas and Sintia E. Molina (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 259.

67 Van Buren and Domínguez, "Transnational Music," 253, 259.

68 Amanda Alcantara, "Luis Díaz, Father of Dominican Rock, Honored with a Street in Washington Heights," Remexcla, December 10, 2018, <https://remexcla.com/music/luis-dias-washington-heights-street>.

69 Or early 1980's.

70 Ramón Terrero, personal communication with the author, 2020.

Back in the Dominican Republic, as Toné Vicioso noted, this music was receiving practically no support from established the music industry and encountered a general sense of “resistance.” Vicioso felt that “people didn’t appreciate this kind of thing.”⁷¹ In 1990, Vicioso decided to start a band in New York. He thought that if Afro-Dominican fusion made inroads in the diaspora and among non-Dominicans in the U.S., the increased exposure might lead to greater acceptance in the Republic itself.⁷² Vicioso called his new group AsaDifé. He explains that “*asa* means hoe in [Dominican] Spanish, and it is also used as a bell [musical instrument] on the island,” adding that, as we saw in “Papá Bocó,” “*dife* means *candela*, fire” in Haitian Creole.⁷³ The agricultural reference evokes traditional culture as well as the process of growing and creating, while the invocation of fire has spiritual overtones, since this element is important in many forms of Afro-Caribbean religion. The use of a Haitian term in the band’s name is also notable: Vicioso notes that “people say we’re pro-Haitian because we [sometimes] sing in Creole and are friends with people in the bateyes, but we are not political.”⁷⁴ Vicioso adds that, rather than engaging in civic debates, he prefers to let the music speak for itself. AsaDifé maintained an active schedule in New York; in addition to presenting concerts in and out of the Dominican community, it offered educational workshops in schools and universities. While many Dominican New Yorkers welcomed the novel approach, others denigrated its members, claiming that they were *brujos* (“witch-doctors”), or even that they were not authentic Dominicans, because, as AsaDifé member Osvaldo Sánchez puts it, the conventional Dominican worldview did “not visualize negritude” in a positive light.⁷⁵

In 1994, Vicioso coordinated high-profile concerts at the City University of New York and the prestigious Symphony Space featuring AsaDifé along with members of two Afro-Dominican religious fraternal organizations: the Congos del Espíritu Santo of Villa Mella (Holy Spirit Congos), which performs congos drumming, and the St. John the Baptist Brotherhood of Baní, which performs the sarandunga. Program notes by ethnomusicologist Martha Ellen Davis explained that

the objective of the presenters and of the New-York (*sic.*) based group, AsaDifé, is educational: to counterbalance the official Dominican cultural policy which affirms that the country is racially white and culturally Spanish and implies that anything African, Haitian, and black is inauthentic... In response, tonight’s program affirms and praises the Afro-Dominican musical heritage.⁷⁶

The notes also elucidated the fact that the program brought together rural Dominican and New York -based musicians:

The components of the program illustrate both conservation and preservation in Dominican music. On one hand, the program features...two types of sacred drumming associated with Afro-Dominican religious brotherhoods... On the other hand, AsaDifé is carrying Afro-Dominican music to a new realm of creativity by developing eclectic creations based on Afro-Dominican folk fusion.⁷⁷

71 Vicioso, interview.

72 Antonio Vicioso, personal communication with the author, 2020.

73 Vicioso, interview.

74 Vicioso, interview.

75 Osvaldo Sánchez, interview by author, New York, 2020.

76 Martha Ellen Davis, Program notes for *Raíces Dominicanas / Dominican Roots*. World Music Institute. New York City: Aaron Davis Hall, City College of New York and Symphony Space, April 30 and May 1, 1994.

77 Martha Ellen Davis, Program notes for *Raíces Dominicanas / Dominican Roots*. World Music Institute. New York City: Aaron Davis Hall, City College of New York and Symphony Space, April 30 and May 1, 1994.

Vicioso mentored a growing constituency of Afro-Dominican musicians in New York; in fact, AsaDifé turned into an informal educational institution. At rehearsals, Vicioso taught musicians about traditional genres and modeled ways to fuse them with jazz and popular music. Dancers Chago Villanueva and Genaro Ozuna specialized in the dynamic *gagá* repertoire, inviting audience members to dance at concerts and workshops, while drummers Osvaldo Sánchez, Ernesto Rodríguez, and Bony Raposo distinguished themselves as Afro-Dominican music experts in their own rights. While he resided in the Dominican Republic, drummer Edis Sánchez occasionally performed with AsaDifé in New York, later pursuing a degree in anthropology at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), becoming a major force in the scholarship of traditional music.⁷⁸ In 2000, Sánchez was appointed as Director of Folklore at the Dominican Ministry of Culture. Vicioso's daughter, Kaila Paulino, attended AsaDifé events as a child, emerging as a major force in Afro-Dominican music in her own right as an adult. Notably, while many ritual drummers in the Dominican Republic are *cofradía* members, with a few exceptions (such as Roberto Aybar of the San Juan Bautista *cofradía*, who, as mentioned, worked with Asadifé), New York -based Afro-Dominican drummers are not associated with *cofradías*.⁷⁹ Longtime AsaDifé member Nina Paulino emerged as a veritable matriarch of New York's Afro-Dominican movement; in addition to her contributions as a singer, for decades spearheading a plethora of performances and out-reach programs, most significantly, a series of outdoor summer festivals, dubbed *Quisqueya en el Hudson* presenting Afro-Dominican music concerts from 1996 to 2001.

Before coming to New York, AsaDifé percussionist Victor "Boni" Raposo played percussion with major *merengeros*, including Wilfrido Vargas, while distinguishing himself in the folkloric ballet *toupe* of *Fradique Lizardo*. After working with AsaDifé, he started a band named *La 21 División* with singer Francia Reyes in New York. This later split into two groups: Francia, *La Reyna de los Palos* (Francia, *The Queen of Palos*) and Boni Raposo y *La 21 División*. Instead of combining traditional music with guitars and keyboards, as Luis Díaz, Vicioso, and Duluc had done, Raposo featured only percussion and vocals. In addition to presenting formal concerts and educational workshops at prestigious venues such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bony Raposo's *La 21 División* often performed ritual music at discotheques, transforming secular venues into sacred spaces. As in the days of *Convite*, field research remained central to the work of the new wave of Dominican musicians. Raposo, who passed away in 2007, is fondly remembered and became the subject of a documentary film made by Wilian Aleman.⁸⁰ In a moving obituary, María Terrero, a *La 21 División* member and major force in Afro-Dominican music herself, affirmed that like Vicioso and Duluc, who cultivated long-term relationships with rural musicians in several regions of the Dominican Republic, Boni Raposo, who kept New York as his home base,

always stayed in touch with the countryside. During the years that he lived in the U.S., he frequently travelled [to the Dominican Republic] and spent time conducting research, as well as living, in rural Dominican communities. For Boni, rural music represented the marrow of his work as an artist outside of the Dominican Republic, and more than anything else, of his personal and spiritual growth.⁸¹

Waxing poetic, Terrero adds that Boni was "clear that his condition was that of an urban maroon, whose origins were cemented in Mother Africa."

78 See Santana, Josué, and Edis Sánchez, *La música*.

79 Interestingly, the rise of non-*cofradía* drummers became more prevalent in the Dominican Republic starting in the late twentieth century. Daniel Piper, "Urbanization, Gender, and Cultural Emergence in the Music of Dominican Popular Religion" (PhD diss., Brown University, 2012). Van Buren and Dominguez, "Transnational Music," 254-256.

80 Willian Aleman, "Bony Raposo: Dominican Criollo Music," posted February 18, 2015, Vimeo video, <https://vimeo.com/119952569>.

81 María Terrero, "Boni Raposo: Biografía" (unpublished manuscript, 2007), author's translation, 2.

In 1998, another AsaDifé percussionist, Osvaldo Sánchez, founded his own band, Pa'lo Monte, which remains active today. While of course invoking palo drums, the group's name actually derives from the phrase *vayamos para los montes* ("let's go to the mountains," pronounced *vamo' pa' lo' monte'* in the Dominican vernacular). Sánchez explains that the injunction to head for the hills invokes the maroon legacy of rebellion and healing:

To me, "pa' lo' monte" means let's go to the mountains, let's go find the medicinal plants...to prepare the magic herbs. I was thinking about all that [when I named the group]. Let's find the tree trunks, to make drums. The rebels, the maroons, meet in the mountains.

Sánchez believes that, like maroons, he and his compatriots in the Afro-Dominican music movement are engaged in a life-and-death struggle:

I chose that name because this is a war, a war of identity, a war to ensure that our identity does not die, do you understand? So, yes, we are maroons ...singing a message to the community to make the community wake up...[and to] learn that...that we are Afro-descendants.

Like Convite and AsaDifé, Pa'lo Monte presents educational workshops in addition to performances. And in keeping with his political stance, Sánchez affirms that the didactic element is central to the band's mission:

The educational part of [the band's work] is fundamental...I love performing and being on stage with the people and everything, but workshops, to me, are more fundamental, because they sustain the transmission of folklore and of history.

Pa'lo Monte started out as a percussion and voice group, but eventually added electric bass, guitar, keyboards, and wind instruments. The band also recorded with the black nationalist hip-hop super-star Chuck D. in a collaboration underlining the elision of the band's twin engagement with recreation and political engagement. The "electric" iteration of the group enlisted the formidable talents of Marlene Mercedes as musical director. A remarkable artist in her own right, Mercedes grew up steeped in Afro-Dominican ritual music, going on to perform, as pianist, with top-shelf merengue bands, including that of Wilfrido Vargas. After studying classical percussion at the Dominican National Conservatory, she became a regular member of the Dominican National Symphony Orchestra. Never losing touch with her Afro-Dominican roots, Mercedes began to work with fusion groups, including Pa'lo Monte as well as a Santo Domingo -based outfit dubbed El Gran Poder de Diosa (Great Power of the Goddess), which celebrates the formidable woman-based legacy of Afro-Dominican music.⁸²

Another AsaDifé alumnus, dancer Genaro Ozuna, founded an organization called Gagá Pa'l Pueblo (GPP), in New York in 2011. GPP's name evokes traditional musical instruments: literally meaning "gagá for the people," the group's name, like those of Palemba and Pa'lo Monte, is a play on words evoking palo drums. And like so many other Afro-Dominican groups, GPP is as much an educational and community outreach institution as a musical ensemble. GPP sponsors informal weekly gagá and palo music sessions, free and open to the public, in New York City parks during the summer months. These events are an opportunity for people get together to play drums and dance, but they also include educational workshops. Still thriving in today, GPP has a web site, prints its own T-shirts, and has been amply documented in a series of videos.⁸³ Their Facebook page states that

Gagá pa'l pueblo is a cultural-educational activity...offering workshops in dance, music, and drawing, as well as presentations on the history of gagá and its contexts... This endeavor is valuable in that it sustains a focus Dominican traditions other than bachata and merengue,

82 See "Marlene Mercedes," accessed March 5, 2021, <https://mediumshipmusic.wixsite.com/marlenemercedes>.

83 Terrero, "Boni," 2.

while offering a healthy environment for the whole family. The objective of this project is [to offer opportunities to] enjoy one of the Dominican traditions such as gagá, or palo, congo, *pri-pri*, *carabiné*, *bamboulá*, and other traditions, which are not well-known by the new generation of Dominicans born in the United States.⁸⁴

GPP's summer events are notable in that they enlist the support of professional *servidor de misterio* (ritual practitioner), who sets up a 21 *División* altar. At the same time, these events are different from gagá / rara events in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which are magico-religious rituals. While acknowledging its basis in Dominican spiritual traditions, GPP gatherings are primarily secular, opportunities for people to celebrate Afro-Dominicanness.

Willian Aleman has produced several videos about the organization in which participants – musicians, dancers, and audience members – explain what GPP means to them. A consensus of interviewees focus on the open-ended, enjoyable nature of GPP events. One participant stated that

Gagá Pa'l Pueblo means many things to many people. I see people going these [events] just for the joy of it...It's a space for learning as well... Quite frankly, it's an act of love, it's an act of joy.

Another recurring theme centers on the ways that the immigrant experience impacts Dominicaness:

We are really helping to conceive a Dominican identity that helps itself to run away from the traditional Dominicans' identity that we have there in the Dominican Republic and that better fits the experience here, as immigrants, where we are exposed to a mass of other cultures' values.

Many interviewees point to GPP as a forum facilitating the reconsideration of racial identities. One, for example, said that to her, GPP means “connecting to my ancestors, connecting with my family, learning about being an African Dominican and learning about my culture,” while others went farther, stating that GPP is dedicated to “making the invisible visible,” and even that that GPP is a “call to action.”⁸⁵

GPP has been the subject of scholarly research by Daly Guilamo, who discusses the group's Afrocentric discourse, noting, for example, that the group's leader, Genaro Ozuna, asserts that his last name means “elephant” in the Akan language.⁸⁶ GPP's musical director, a brilliant drummer named Ernesto Rodríguez, focuses on the maroon heritage of African resistance that Dominicans share with Haitians and others in the African diaspora:

I participate in this activity because as a self-proclaimed pan-Afrikanist [*sic.*], for close to 30 years now, I feel that the Dominican community is in dire need of being reminded that we are generally an Afro-Caribbean community, that we have maybe the oldest Afrikan legacy in the western hemisphere along with our inseparable brothers and sisters on the western side of our island, the republic of Ayiti. I feel it is a must to constantly uplift our Afrikan heritage as part of [our] national identity... Also we take part in sharing historical elements such as *el cimaronage* and its [Afrikan] leaders like Lemba.⁸⁷

84 Gagá pa'l Pueblo. 2011. “Gagá pa'l Pueblo Facebook Page: About.” Facebook, accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Gagapalpueblo/about/>.

85 Willian Aleman, “Gaga pa'l Pueblo - Extended Version – English,” posted 2012, Vimeo Pro video, <https://vimeopro.com/willianaleman/gaga-pal-pueblos-video-gallery-english>.

86 Daly Guilamo, “Gaga Pa'l Pueblo: A Critical Afro Dominican Celebration in New York City,” *Africology: Journal of Pan African Studies* 9.10, (December 2016): 38. Also see Berberena, Marimer, “Dominican Gagá Music and Dance: The Remaking of a Spiritual Performance in the City of New York.” (MA thesis, CUNY Graduate Center, 2012).

87 Ernesto Rodriguez, quoted in Guilamo, “Gaga,” 38.

GPP, however, is committed to expressing a diversity of perspectives. José Figueroa, a talented dancer who assisted in the group's creation, advocates avoiding open assertions of blackness because most Dominicans resist them, and one must therefore "wear a mask until one is in the door, [because] Dominicans are really mentally blocked and not open to it. So, one has to engage in subtle practice."⁸⁸ Once, at a Gagá Pa'l Pueblo event, when the group's musical director, Ernesto Rodríguez, proclaimed that "Africa is the motherland of the Dominican people," an audience member shouted out, "¡Ay, no!" As Guilamo astutely points out, this suggests a feeling of ambivalence: the women had come to the event to enjoy an African-derived tradition. At the same time, she rejected open, verbalized pronouncements asserting the primacy of African influences in Dominican culture.⁸⁹

In addition to AdaDifé, Pa'lo Monte, and GPP, many other Afro-Dominican bands were formed in the U.S. Maria Terrero, a long-time member of Bony Raposo's 21 División, partnered with vocalist and singer Pedro Raposo to found a band named KumbaKarey, while guitarist Yasser Tejada emerged as a major figure in Afro-Dominican jazz fusion. Born in Santo Domingo, he started out working with Luis Días, Toné Vicioso, and Xiomara Fortuna, but moved to Boston in 2008 to study jazz at the Berklee College of Music, and founded his own band, PaloTre, in 2005. Combining rock with Afro-Dominican rhythms and a firm foundation in contemporary jazz, PaloTre emerged as perhaps the most aesthetically sophisticated exponent of Afro-Dominican jazz-rock. The band's "Nuestras raíces" ("Our Roots") video, recorded in New York and Villa Mella, the seat of the Congos cofradía, expresses the "spirit of the palo parties into images...[in a] celebration of Black bodies across generations and their roots, honoring these communities that have been marginalized all throughout history."⁹⁰ PaloTre also recorded an experimental version of Manuel Sánchez Acosta's classic song, "Papá Bocó."

Also notable among the newer exponents of Afro-Dominican music in the U.S. is a New Jersey -based band called Afro-Dominicano, founded in 2015, which fuses reggae with merengue and other rhythms. Their Facebook page affirms that the group's mission is

to reconnect with our Black history- the very one that our history books have overlooked and redefined, the one that continues to influence our culture in both overt and covert ways. It is time for our Black history to breathe.⁹¹

Active in both the Dominican Republic and the U.S., singer Irka Mateo emerged as a successful singer, combining Afro-Dominican forms with U.S. and Latin American popular music, and, notably, reconstructed traditions of the Taíno people.⁹² While most Afro-Dominican drummers active in New York learned their craft in folkloric ballet companies or from other diaspora musicians, the New Jersey -based Grupo Atabales Yogo Yogo is notable for transplanting the rich traditions of palo drumming as practiced in the Dominican city of Haina, a haven of Afro-Dominican culture, to the U.S. Working in conjunction with a community organization called Acción Hainera, Grupo Atabales Yogo Yogo is firmly rooted in their regional tradition of grass-roots Afro-Dominican music, spirituality, and community development, promoting social projects, for example, developing the availability of potable water in Haina. The Massachusetts -based Los Paleros de Peravia distinguished themselves for recording several well-executed albums of acoustic palos drumming and singing which adhere, in many respects, to the style of music played at traditional rituals. Playing saxophone in AsaDifé

88 Figueroa in Guilamo, "Gaga," 41.

89 Guilamo, "Gaga," 39.

90 "Premiere: With Upbeat Afro-Dominican Rhythms, Yasser Tejada y Palotre's New Single Celebrates Their Roots," *Remezcla*, August 21, 2019, <https://remezcla.com/releases/music/premiere-yasser-tejada-y-palotre-nuestras-raices-video/>.

91 Afro Dominicano. 2016. "Afro Dominicano Facebook Page." Facebook, accessed Jan. 4. 2021. <https://www.facebook.com/AfroDominicano>.

92 <http://irkamateo.com/>. Accessed January 4, 2021.

at the time it was founded, Paul Austerlitz also availed himself of the group's educational mission, starting his own Afro-Dominican jazz fusion band, Dr. Merengue y el Ensemble Dominicano, which performs regularly in the Dominican Republic as well as in the U.S., featuring two crown jewels of Dominican music - Julito Figueroa and José Duluc – in addition to Dominican and North American jazz artists.

Rita Indiana Hernández Sánchez emerged as a major force in Dominican music as well as in literature, offering frank and new imaginings of race, as well as, notably, of gender and sexuality in her music and novels. Born 1977 in Santo Domingo, Indiana grew up in that city, where her great aunt, soprano Ivonna Haza, introduced her to classical music and Latin American *boleros*. Indiana spent many childhood summers with her father in Miami, where she learned English and became enamored of North American music, especially heavy metal rock. As an adult, Indiana traveled frequently between the Dominican Republic and the U.S. Eventually settling in Puerto Rico, her migrations perhaps exemplifying the blurred borders that characterize her art as well as our age. Nicknamed La Monstra (*Monstrua*, The Monster), Rita Indiana stands out not only for her altitudinous 6'3" stature, but more importantly, for her genre-blending and gender-bending style which combines influences from Luis Días with elements of heavy metal, electronic music, *reggaetón*, merengue, bachata, and especially, gagá. In addition to her importance as a singer, songwriter, and bandleader, Indiana has made major contributions as a novelist. Questions of nonconforming sexuality, previously untreated in Dominican literature, figure prominently in her books. Indiana's writings also make abundant musical references and treat Afro-Dominican spirituality.⁹³ Her novel *Papi*, for example, includes a fanciful but *au fait* episode treating spirit mounting (altered states of consciousness).⁹⁴ Indiana joined forces with singer Raina Mast in a duo called Miti Miti for her first album, *Altar Espandex*, which used the GarageBand computer program to create electronic merengue and gagá arrangements of provocative, original songs. The music video of "Endendía," from that album, features images of 21 División spirit mounting, electronic gagá, and bilingual rapping. As Sidney Hutchinson brilliantly demonstrates, it ends with "an apparent witch burning as Rita and Raina...are tied to a stake. This persecution recalls the persecution of lesbians and other women living outside the mainstream."⁹⁵ In 2010, Indiana started a band called Los Misterios, which, like her earlier group, combined electronics with live musicians,⁹⁶ entering the limelight with shows at the prestigious Dominican National Theater and New York's Central Park Summer Stage. The Spanish newspaper *El País* designated Rita Indiana one of the hundred most influential Latino personalities in 2011.⁹⁷ Naming her band after Afro-Dominican spirits was a bold statement, and along with her open engagement with nonconforming gender and sexuality, an audacious challenge to the prevalent "mute culture" tendency, which long relegated Afro-Dominican culture to silent praxis.

93 Sydney Hutchinson, *Tigers of a Different Stripe: Performing Gender in Dominican Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 173-86.

Daniel Alarcón, "Rita Indiana's Songs for the Apocalypse," *New Yorker*, (October 2020).
https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/26/rita-indianas-songs-for-the-apocalypse?utm_source=onsite-share&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=onsite-share&utm_brand=the-new-yorker.

"Rita Indiana," Wikipedia, last modified December 25, 2020,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rita_Indiana.

Sharina Mailló-Pozo, "Diálogos músico-literarios y nuevos discursos contrahegemónicos en dos novelas de Rita Indiana Hernández," *Cuadernos de literatura* xxiii, no. 45 (January 2019): 47-72.

94 Rita Indiana, *Papi: A Novel*, trans. Achy Obejas (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 87-88.

95 Hutchinson, *Tigers*, 182.

96 Los Misterios featured Eddy Nuñez on guitar, Francisco "Boli" Martínez on drum set, and Andrew Ramírez as well as Boli's his father, Bolilo, a legend of merengue and Dominican salsa, on percussion. Hutchinson, *Tigers*, 184.

97 Wikipedia, "Rita."

Afro-Dominican Ritual Music in the United States

The history of Afro-Dominican religion in New York is poorly documented, but the long-term presence of *botánicas*, or religious goods stores, in the City suggests that Afro-Dominican spirituality has been present in New York for as long as significant numbers of Dominicans have lived there. Operating in New York since the 1950s, *botánicas* are the longest-standing Afro-Dominican institutions in the City. In addition to selling religious products such as herbal remedies, candles, and images of saints, *botánicas* often serve as centers of operation for *servidores de misterios*, the traditional ritual healers, who provide guidance in the 21 División religion. As noted earlier, providing physical and spiritual and mental healing, this faith tradition is a veritable tradition of “popular medicine.”⁹⁸ In his study of Dominicans residing in Manhattan, conducted in 1993, Jorge Duany noted the presence of “humble altars... surrounded by flowers, lighted candles, food, and glasses filled with fresh water, wine, and other alcoholic beverages” in many Dominican homes.⁹⁹ One Dominican woman residing in New York told him that “she could find any product from the Dominican Republic” in the *botánicas*, adding that “I am a sick woman, and I have to make my teas with roots from my country.”¹⁰⁰ Another said that “when you are away from your country, you need protection.”¹⁰¹

It is important to note that much Afro-Dominican ritual work, both on the island and in the U.S., is done without the aid of music. After all, even in the Dominican Republic, African -based practices have been marginalized, and even proscribed at times. Music attracts attention, and it may be prudent to do spiritual work in secrecy, or even in silence. Until the 1980s, another impediment to including music in New York -based Afro-Dominican rituals was the scarcity of musicians. Therefore, for years, 21 División practitioners in New York played *recordings* of semi-sacred Afro-Cuban music at ritual gatherings. LPs of popular songs invoking Afro-Cuban religion by the Cuban duo, Celina y Reutilio, were widely available in the 1950s to 1970s. Reinterpreted to serve 21 División cosmology, they were highly solicited among 21 División practitioners in the U.S. Celina y Reutilio also toured the Dominican Republic and even recorded songs referring to 21 División, including Manuel Acosta’s “Papa Bocó,” discussed earlier.

Starting in 1970s, Dominicans in New York started conducting 21 División rituals with *salve* singing. Later, drums were incorporated. Drummer Claudio Fortunato grew up a rural Dominican community, playing at Afro-Dominican ceremonies, especially for an annual event honoring San José, which reportedly has been celebrated by his family for over 100 years. After moving to New York at age 11 in 1986, Fortunato and his brothers passed the time by drumming in their apartment. Coincidentally, their neighbors were 21 División spirit mediums who owned a prominent *botánica* called Los Reyes. Fortunato relates that once, while hearing the sound of their drums from the neighboring apartment, one of the neighbors went into a trance:

98 Davis, *La otra ciencia*.

99 Duany, “Transnational Migration,” 41.

100 Jorge Duany. *Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights*, 2nd ed. (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2008), 48-49.

101 Duany, *Quisqueya*, 41. Duany characterizes these practices as “Catholic,” and while it is true that there are Catholic influences at play, it is important to remember that these are highly African influenced traditions. In another work, Duany states that “[l]ike other devout Catholics, many Dominicans believe that the saints protect them from evil and help them economically.” While Dominicans certainly are Catholic, these are *Afro-Catholic* practices featuring elements not present in European Catholicism, especially spirit mounting. Jorge Duany, *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 176-177.

At first they thought we were just fooling around, [but] once, we were playing, and the misterio mounted someone [that is, a medium went into a trance]. They knocked on the door and asked us to play for a ceremony they were planning for September 29 in the botánica. [From then on], we played every year, and people got to know us.¹⁰²

Fortunato founded a group called Claudio Fortunato and los Guedeses, the first organized ritual palo drumming group in the United States, and started to play regularly at ceremonies. The *guede* are a division of Afro-Dominican spirits, and in the context of a culture that has marginalized African-based culture, and their invocation in the band's name was a bold statement of religious freedom.

As noted, palo drumming is quite varied in the Dominican Republic, displaying much regional diversity. Fortunato explains that the musicians in his rural area used two palo drums, two güiras, and pandero drums (the latter played by singers), and that he brought this style to New York, saying that “people like it and the misterios like it.” He also notes that some drummers in New York, including Bony Raposo, were surprised when they first heard his music, because, having learned to drum in folkloric ensembles rather than in rural communities, they were unfamiliar with this style. Fortunato notes that that many of the major musicians active in New York's Afro-Dominican fusion movement, including Bony Raposo, Osvaldo Sánchez, Nina Paulino, and Kaila Paulino have played with him, and that they easily adjust, learning his style. He adds that while the style he plays in New York is based on what is played in his rural region, drumming in the Dominican countryside is generally “more scientific, “or more sophisticated, than what is played in New York. He also points out that the true riches of Afro-Dominican drumming are poorly known globally, as compared to high international profiles enjoyed by Afro-Cuban and Haitian drumming. Interestingly, Fortunato adapted his music to environmental conditions in the U.S. by innovating a new method of tuning the palo drums, substituting metal pegs for ropes and wooden shims, which provided versatility in tuning helpful in adapting to changes in humidity.¹⁰³

While fusion groups such as GPP and AsaDifé play Afro-Dominican music to educate the public, to affirm Afro-Dominican identity, and to entertain people, Fortunato explains that the function of his group is spiritual. In keeping with the syncretic nature of 21 División worship, which recognizes Catholic as well as African spirituality, Fortunato's group includes a prayer specialist, and that the group always starts ceremonies with Catholic invocations, both *a capella* [without instrumental accompaniment] and accompanied by drums. He explains that “We start with the Ave Maria, [accompanied] by palos. Then we stop, and the *rezador* [prayer specialist] does the Credo” without drumming.” As noted, the primary sacrament of the 21 División religion consists of spirit mediums being mounted by misterios, that is, of entering altered states of consciousness to manifest the spirits. Music plays a central role in summoning the spirits, as Fortunato explains:

Music has a fundamental role in calling the misterios... [When I am] playing in front of a spiritual altar and a spirit medium is working...I, as the leader of the group, know ...which misterio to look for and to call with my music...¹⁰⁴ [Spirit mediums] start getting enthused, and I play a certain beat, and [they go into a trance]. The *caballo* [spirit medium] plays his or her part, and the music plays its part...If [the misterio] Anaísa comes, she is sweet, like a bath of flowers, I know what to play...I can play a whole hour or more just for Anaísa... For a *caballo* [spirit medium] of Anaísa, I don't play the same as I do for Candelo [another misterio].¹⁰⁵

102 Claudio Fortunato, interview by author, New York, 2019.

103 Fortunato, interview.

104 Fortunato, interview.

105 Fortunato, interview.

The oldest and most highly revered palos group in the United States, Claudio Fortunato y los Guedeses are still active, in demand in Boston, New Jersey, and Miami as well as in New York. On the day dedicated to Belié Belkán, one of the most popular 21 División spirits, the group is often asked to play, for an hour each, at more than a dozen separate rituals.

While Afro-Dominican fusion music foments identity formation and Fortunato's music serves a ritual purposes, the two functions overlap. Fusion musicians expound an overt discourse of liberation, for example, by asserting that they are urban maroons. Ritual musicians, while refraining from verbalizing this ideology, *live* blackness, because using music to call African-based deities amounts to a powerful *performance of liberation*, an act of cultural marronage that has thrived among Dominicans since the colonial period. Fortunato says that while his group is not vocal about Dominican governmental policies regarding Dominicans of Haitian descent, Afro-Dominican religious practitioners relate well to Haitian traditions and even look to Haiti as a locus of high-level spiritual competence: "servidores de misterios [ritual specialists] are open to Haiti, because, as you know, Dominicans always look for a Haitian servidor. And I also play Haitian [-influenced] music... depending on the misterio."¹⁰⁶ In addition to Fortunato's group, many other ensembles specializing in Afro-Dominican ritual music developed in New York. In the 1990s an acclaimed salve singer named Andrea "Doña Chicha" Nolasco came to the City. Hailing from Villa Mella, a center of Afro-Dominican culture, she distinguished herself not only for her singing, but also for her pandereta drumming, which, as mentioned earlier, is a notable woman-dominated tradition.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the Dominican music culture as a whole is the degree to which urban, mass-mediated, transnational musics coexist with orally-transmitted ritual music. Two and a half centuries after the flowering of the "extraordinary religiosity" that Moya Pons noted among Dominicans,¹⁰⁸ Afro-Dominican ritual life continues to flourish both on the island and in New York.

106 Fortunato, interview.

107 Van Buren and Dominguez, "Transnational Music," 254. Angelina Tallaj-García, "Performing Blackness in a Mulatto Society: Negotiating Racial Identity through Music in the Dominican Republic" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2015), 250.

108 Moya Pons 1988:215.

Afro-Dominican Ritual Music in Discotheques

As noted, Dominican merengue artist Kinito Méndez's 1997 hit recording of a 21 División song dedicated to a misterio named Ogún Balenyó, which blends palo drums with merengue, paved the way for 21 División music to be played in discotheques.¹⁰⁹ This developed as a transnational trend in both the Dominican Republic and the diaspora, but it was most prevalent New York City during the 1990s, when palo bands often played at night clubs, alternating with secular music presented by DJs and bands playing merengue and bachata. Palo groups were also contracted to play at other Dominican businesses, such as barbershops and hair salons. Fortunato reports that the practice developed because many business owners were devotees of the misterios, and as such, they wanted to pay spiritual homage in their shops.¹¹⁰ Palo groups led by musicians such as Bony Raposo, Claudio Fortunato, and Francia Reyes proliferated in New York. Reyes, who studied with Doña Chicha (mentioned above) and came to be known as the Queen of Palo, is remarkable for publicly demonstrating, in the diasporic community, the formidable woman-based traditions of Afro-Dominican music.

Angelina Tallaj-García provides a richly textured musico-ethnographic descriptions of 21 División music in New York discos, buttressed by insightful interpretation of its implied and overt discourse on race, showing importance of public Afro-Dominican ritual performance to debates about authenticity, spirituality, and aesthetics.¹¹¹ While most often performing at ceremonies, Claudio Fortunato also plays in nightclubs, where he blends ritual with spectacle. His musicians are wont to enter the space in a procession, displaying flags dedicated to specific particular misterios, and, invoking traditional rural practice, lighting a purifying fire in the form of a cross on the floor, as Fortunato says, "to open a path for spirits."¹¹² Members of the public at discos presenting palo music are occasionally even mounted by misterios. At times, owners of venues invite traditional healers to address the public from the stage. Tallaj-García relates an incident when a singer shouted "Who are the single women? Where are the brujos ["witch-doctors," healers]? Raise your handkerchiefs! Hurray for San Miguel!"¹¹³ Female members of palo groups often wear the latest, often quite revealing, fashions, while men sport band uniforms and execute synchronized dance steps. Drumming is adapted with the use of amplified sound systems, planned rhythmic breaks, and tempo changes.¹¹⁴ Palo musicians have adopted aspects of secular music, especially merengue, increasing tempos, and feature catchy hooks to call peoples' attention.¹¹⁵ Significantly, the use of palos in secular spaces has influenced traditional 21 División practitioners to incorporate more flamboyant elements into their rituals.¹¹⁶ Some devotees criticize the commercialization of 21 División practice as sacrilegious and inauthentic. Audience members have even been accused of faking trance states as an attention-getting device.¹¹⁷ While controversial, this emergent phenomenon, so provocatively blending the secular and the sacred, amounts to a powerful, and provocative *cruce*, or crossroad, as New York-based salve singer Rossy, "La Diva de los Palos," once stated.¹¹⁸

109 Angelina Tallaj-García, "Religion on the Dance Floor: Afro-Dominican Music and Ritual from Altars to Clubs," *Civilisations* 67 (2018): 103.

110 Fortunato, interview.

111 Tallaj-García, "Religion."

112 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 104.

113 Tallaj-García "Performing Blackness," 267.

114 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 267.

115 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 263.

116 Tallaj-García "Performing Blackness," 264.

117 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 105, 261.

118 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 102.

Without discounting critics' views, and calling upon perspectives borrowed from Performance Studies, Tallaj-García argues that these trends, while diverging from time-tested practices, provide a powerful nexus with traditional ritual functions:

In the context of Dominican migrants in New York City, possession can provide protest, catharsis, and resistance to the marginality and racism experienced in the host country. Today, practitioners acquire status and express pride in their ability to receive deities. Young, disenfranchised Dominicans in New York use possession as a way of exhibiting cultural identities they have learned from elders, yet recreating it through their own generation's music and dance, thereby inserting themselves into the Dominican narrative of religion, ethnicity, and race.¹¹⁹

These changes must be understood keeping in mind that, confronting the vicissitudes of racism for over 500 years, African-based spirituality in the Americas has always been forced to adapt.

119 Tallaj-García, "Religion," 98.

Conclusion

While fusion groups ranging from Convite to AsaDifé and Pa'lo Monte use music to re-think Dominican racial consciousness, rural Afro-Dominican culture-bearers enduringly cultivate their formidable ancestral legacy today, as they have done for over five centuries: the rural home-base of Dominican culture has *always* boasted a rich African-based heritage, a heritage which remains vital.¹²⁰

The dual prism of rural-to-urban migration and out-migration are central to the development of contemporary Afro-Dominican music, with diasporic currents dialoguing with urban developments on the island as well as with the traditional rural home-base of Afro-Dominican culture. This trajectory confirms Jorge Duany's argument that since the 1960s, Dominican culture has been characterized by the interaction of mutually-enriching currents flowing back and forth between the Dominican Republic and diasporic communities.¹²¹

In the 1970s, inspired by proliferating folkloric dance troupes as well as by Convite and Luis Días, urbanizing youth in the Dominican Republic re-embraced music associated with rural African-based traditions that many of their parents had left behind after moving to cities. Starting in the 1980s, the towering influence of the triumvirate of Afro-Dominican fusion innovators, José Duluc, Toné Vicioso, and Xiomara Fortuna, played a major role in inspiring this music's growing profile. Meeting resistance in the Dominican Republic, several innovators of Afro-Dominican fusion music sought refuge on the global stage. Duluc performed internationally, including in New York, and moved to Japan for several years. Xiomara Fortuna continued to reside in the Dominican Republic but performed regularly in France. Vicioso moved to New York for many years, where he mentored an active coterie of diasporic Afro-Dominican musicians, most of whom remain active today. Meanwhile, on the island, influenced by merengero Kinito Méndez's high-profile use of palos in his 1990s hits, the Afro-Dominican movement took on new life to the extent that by the time Vicioso returned to Santo Domingo from New York, and when Duluc returned to the D.R. from Japan, they encountered a growing "alternative" music scene. While economic success and attention from established media outlets continued to elude them, Duluc, Vicioso, and Xiomara Fortuna took their rightful places as musical elder statespeople, mentoring a growing constituency of youth feeding a flowering Afro-Dominican movement. Also during this period, as Daniel Piper's brilliant dissertation shows, traditional Afro-Dominican cultural life continued to thrive, retaining its rural focus but also, thanks to the increasing ease of travel and the proliferation of new technologies, becoming intimately connected to urban and diasporic communities.¹²² The present study demonstrates that mutually-enriching trends connecting the 500-year foundational legacy of Afro-Dominican music and spirituality resulted in a variegated rainbow of rural, urban, and diasporic interstices of musical marronage, which remain vital today.

Intersectionally dialoguing with Afro-Dominican resistance traditions, Dominican women's empowerment has persisted throughout history. As Acosta Corniel showed, La Negra del Hospital, active in the very first years of the colony, was still attracting attention almost three centuries later.¹²³ Today, a Santo Domingo organization called Action Afro-Dominicana lobbies for official recognition of La Negra del Hospital, as the group's leader,

120 Moya Pons, "Dominican," 32.

121 Significantly, Torres-Saillant shows that scholarship applying the "transnational" model often "exaggerate[s] the existential options that the global society affords," therefore "mock[ing] the anguish and pain" that may accompany the migrant experience. He instead advocates the diasporic model, which simultaneously suggests "taking root *and* being uprooted" (my emphasis). Torres-Saillant also acknowledges that Duany and several others who apply the transnational model avoid its pitfalls. Duany, *Quisqueya*, 11. Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Diasporic Disquisitions: Dominicanists, Transnationalism, and the Community* (New York: CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, 2000), 21, 29, 31.

122 Piper, "Urbanization."

123 Acosta Corniel, "Negras, mulatas," 211.

Maribel Nuñez, explains: “Let’s honour [her] and keep her memory alive!’ ...Let the National Congress and the whole nation recognize her! Let there be a sign telling the story of this heroic black woman!”¹²⁴ Innovators of Afro-Dominican music such as Xiomara Fortuna, Nina Paulino, Kaila Paulino, María Terrero, Marlene Mercedes, Doña Chicha, Francia Reyes, and Rita Indiana continue La Negra del Hospital’s legacy.

The Afro-Dominican music movement has also fostered intersectional connections with class struggle and links to indigenous heritage. During the colonial period, Afro-Dominicans rebelled alongside Taínos, forging alliances still celebrated in today’s Afro-Dominican music movement, as noted in the cases of Irka Mateo, who revives Taíno traditions, and Duluc, who coined the “Ras-Taíno” neologism to refer to his music. Leftist activists in the seminal Convite group long forged ties between Marxist-inspired class struggle and the Afro-Dominican legacy. Today, Dominican middle-class youth collaborate with urban and rural working-class Dominican youth in Santo Domingo’s burgeoning “alternative” music scene. At the same time, urban Dominicans, both in the diaspora and on the island, participate in new iterations of globalized black popular music such as hip-hop and reggaetón. This multi-local chorus of intersectional collaboration also incorporates contributions from academia, as exemplified by scholarly work produced both in the Dominican Republic and the United States, ranging from Franklin Franco’s groundbreaking 1969 *Los negros, los mulatos, y la nación dominicana*¹²⁵ to more recent efforts. Edward Paulino, for example, writes that scholarly works emanating from the “Dominican Studies Institute in New York City ...have added a new dimension to the discourse on race.”¹²⁶

It is often claimed that North American constructions of race have motivated Dominicans residing in the U.S. to embrace black identity more vociferously than is customarily done in the Dominican Republic: the Dominican poet, Chiquí Vicioso, for example, once proclaimed that “[u]ntil I came to New York, I didn’t know I was black.”¹²⁷ Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández write that when “Dominicans come the United States,... they escape the ideological artillery that sustains negrophobic thought in their homeland, and they have a greater possibility of coming to terms with their real ethnicity.”¹²⁸ Views about this have varied, with others arguing that Dominicans in the U.S. do not drastically alter their ideas about race.¹²⁹ It is clear, however, that because Iberian colonies fostered more ease of everyday contact and more interracial marriage than did North European colonies, the confrontation with North American constructions of race is often “traumatic” for Dominicans arriving in the U.S., as Duany puts it.¹³⁰ Ginetta Candelario offers a nuanced perspective, detailing a diversity of opinions regarding racial identity among Dominicans in the United States along lines of generation, social class, and location.¹³¹ Similarly, we noted variance among members of the New York-based Afro-Dominican music movement, with Gagá P’al Pueblo’s musical director, Ernesto Rodríguez, celebrating black nationalism, while other members of the same group espoused more conventional perspectives, and GPP’s director, Genaro Ozuna, remaining open to varegated views.

124 Lebewit Lily Girma, “Santo Domingo: The City that Kept Slavery Silent,” *BBC Travel*, November 18, 2020, <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20201117-santo-domingo-the-city-that-kept-slavery-silent>. Accessed December 23, 2020.

125 Franklin Franco, *Los negros*.

126 Paulino, “The Evolution,” 33.

127 Earl Shorris, *Latinos: A Biography of a People* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 146. quoted in Torres-Saillant, *Introduction*, 55. Similarly, Moya Pons argues that Dominicans in the U.S. identify as black more readily than do their compatriots on the island. Frank Moya Pons, “Dominican national identity and return migration,” *Occasional Poets, no. 1* (2016): 32.

128 Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, *The Dominican Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 143.

129 Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Salons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 11.

130 Duany, “Transnational Migration,” 253- 282. Also see Frank Moya Pons, *El pasado dominicano* (Santo Domingo: Fundación J.A. Caro Alvarez, 1986), 247.

131 Candelario, *Black*, 24-25, 262.

Lorgia García-Peña sustains that rather than “realizing they are black in the United States,” Dominicans in the U.S. find new ways to articulate their experiences of racial oppression, building alliances with other oppressed communities.¹³² Rita Indiana adds that, at the same time, Dominicans on the island forge their own directions:

Right now, I mean, a lot of things are happening [in the D.R.], but we have to devise our own movement, our own critique of racial relationships. We can't just bring the Black Lives Matter movement like a Burger King, you know, to Dominican Republic or Haiti or Puerto Rico... [W]e're engaged in finding ways to react, finding ways to learn about our Afro-Caribbean traditions and embracing the culture and finding the strength in it.¹³³

Ana-Maurine Lara astutely notes that

When we continue to ask the wrong questions, such as “Why do Dominicans negate their blackness?” we fail to see that blackness—like all social constructs—can be imbued with multiple meanings for any particular purpose or end.¹³⁴

African-based cultural legacies are diverse; to borrow jazz composer Duke Ellington's phrase, it is “black brown and beige.”¹³⁵ Varying hues of self-perception and cultural practice result in a prism of identities among Afro-descendants all over the world. One thing, however, is certain: while often suppressed, Afro-Dominican music and 21 División spirituality have triumphed. Rejections of blackness cannot be taken at face value in contexts where powerful African-based cultural legacies thrive.

Eurocentric ideas about race have been propagated in the Dominican educational system, for example, in primary school history textbooks. Torres-Saillant suggests that if these textbooks were to change, attitudes might change.¹³⁶ While the conventional Eurocentric historiography dies hard, as Guilamo points out, the Afro-Dominican music movement presents powerful alternative narratives.¹³⁷ Pa'lo Monte leader Osvaldo Sánchez agrees, asserting that the historiography taught in Dominican schools is “abusive. It is complicit with our enslavement...The Dominican history books, the ones assigned in primary schools...are racist.” But he adds that ancestral traditions, as manifested in music, fill the gap:

Music transmits our ancestors' history, so it is a non-official book...The music will tell you, do you understand? It will speak to you, and more than anything else, it will raise your consciousness...it will tell you who we are. So, it is a non-official book.

132 García-Peña, *The Borders*, 19. Also see Eduard Paulino, “The Evolution,” 28.

133 Rita Indiana, “Rita Indiana Returns to Music after Decade-Long Hiatus,” interview by Lulu Navarro, *Weekend Edition Sunday*, NPR, September 13, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/13/912424757/rita-indiana-returns-to-music-after-decade-long-hiatus>.

134 Ana-Maurine Lara, “A Smarting Wound: Afro-Dominicanidad and the Fight against Ultrationalism in the Dominican Republic” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 2 (2017): 484. Also see Raj Chetty, “‘La calle es libre’: Race, Recognition, and Dominican Street Theater,” *Afro-Hispanic Review* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 42.

135 *Black, Brown, and Beige* is the name of Duke Ellington's brilliant symphonic work depicting African American history, premiered in 1946 at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

136 Torres-Saillant, *Introduction*, 49.

137 Guilamo, “Gaga,” 37.

He adds that the proliferation of digital technology lessens the dominance of conventional educational avenues.¹³⁸ Similarly, Toné Vicioso insists that while earlier generations of folklorists aimed to “rescue” rural traditions from extinction, he believes that in actuality, traditional Afro-Dominican culture

rescues the [urban and diasporic] people, that *we* are the ones that are being rescued, that whoever gets involved with this...is getting rescued, because they are finding out about themselves and about their culture...It is a matter of ...[being] humble. We shouldn't think that we are rescuers, we are just learners.¹³⁹

The lessons of resistance, initiated during the first African revolt of the Americas, mounted two hundred years ago on December 25, 1521 in Santo Domingo, still edify us today. In his song entitled “Papa Bocó,” Manuel Sánchez Acosta wrote that an African spirit illuminates the soul of the Dominican spiritual adept. Despite the vicissitudes of colonialism, Eurocentrism, urbanization, and migration, the lifeblood of Afro-Dominican musical marronage endures as a shining light of liberation.

138 See Martin Tsang, “Have you Got Memory? *Cuba Counterpoints*, May 17, 2020, cubacounterpoints.com/archives/712. Martin Tsang writes about religious knowledge transfers via “*el paquete*.”

139 Vicioso, interview.

About the Author



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