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Performing Blackness in a Mulatto Society: Negotiating Racial Identity through Music in the Dominican Republic

By Angelina Tallaj-García

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York
2015

2015
Angelina Tallaj-García
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract
Performing Blackness in a Mulatto Society: Negotiating Racial Identity Through Music in the Dominican Republic
By Angelina Tallaj-García

Advisor: Professor Peter Manuel

My dissertation analyzes Dominican racial and ethnic identity through an examination of music and music cultures. Previous studies of Dominican identity have focused primarily on the racialized invention of the Dominican nation as white, or non-black, often centering on the building of Dominican identity in (sometimes violent) opposition to the Haitian nation and to Haitian racial identity. I argue that although Dominicans have not developed an explicit verbal discourse of black affirmation, blackness (albeit a contextually contingent articulation) is embedded in popular conceptions of *dominicanidad* ("Dominicanness") and is enacted through music. My dissertation explores ways in which popular notions of dominicanidad are negotiated and ways in which they align with or diverge from official elite notions of national identity, particularly in relation to blackness. By analyzing the evolution of Afro-Dominican genres of music in the last half of the twentieth century and by studying urban pro-black social movements, I reveal a more complex Dominican identity than has generally been acknowledged. For example, I explore the movement of previously marginalized Afro-Dominican music (e.g., the music of Vudú) from strictly rural and ceremonial settings to more urban locations and even into dance clubs as a form of popular music, in the process changing the practice of defining ethnic and religious identities. Other chapters explore recent urban music influenced by hip-hop and Jamaican dancehall, which has vindicated an emerging—if still somewhat controversial—positive Dominican attitude towards blackness.

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Performing Blackness, Resisting Whiteness: Negotiating Racial Identity through Music in the Dominican Republic

Introduction

Born in La Romana, Dominican Republic.
This fact makes her anti-Haitian as well as Black in denial according to the world over.
Lives in New York.
Writer, performer, devotee…
Dominicanyork.
Too Black to be Latina.
Speaks with an accent in any language as everybody else in the planet, but in her case that makes her *not from here.*
Some speak slow so she will be able to understand.
Spanish first and last names, therefore not Black enough; or not Black at all, again, since she is Dominican and as a result, in denial of her Blackness.
So they say, beyond reason.

--Josefina Báez[1]

If you say you're Dominican, that's fucking good enough for me.

--Junot Díaz[2]

Afro-Dominican Identity in a Third Space

When I was ten years old, growing up in the Dominican Republic, my school class was taken to the Haitian-Dominican border. There the guards demonstrated the safety of the boundaries, telling us that members of the Dominican National Army patrolled the entire border. The tacit message was that Dominicans were superior to Haitians and that the borders had to be well guarded to prevent illegal immigration from one country to the other. We were told to stand with one foot on each side of the border while the teachers took our picture. It seemed cool to stand on the border between two such "different" and seemingly opposite countries. My beliefs were not

[1] excusemeexcuseus.wordpress.com (accessed November 12, 2011)
[2] RepeatingIslands.com, 4/10/2012 (accessed April 10, 2012)

unique to me; rather, they stemmed, in part, from the values all Dominicans were taught. I grew up in a world where dark-skinned Dominicans attributed their black color to tanning from the sun, and used whitening creams for the skin—a world where marrying a whiter person meant "improving the race." A person's skin color could be described by a range of terms, from *indio* (Indian), or *indio claro* (fair Indian), to *oscurito* (little dark one) or *trigueño* (brown)—but rarely was it described as *negro* (black). The Taíno native Indian was romanticized and used to explain cultural traits that could suggest African origins or influence. Thus, the Dominican Republic of my childhood was truly a world of contradictory ethnic and cultural identities. My experience, both common and transformative, points to a paradigmatic binary narrative within Dominican culture, history, and national discourse. Such ideas of borders and binary opposition have been important to the conceptualization of the Dominican nation. These borders and binaries have particularly manifested themselves in concepts of race and ethnicity. Having a political, social, and economic as well as a linguistic and cultural boundary with anything black (and especially with anything Haitian) was a formative concept in the Dominican national consciousness. Further emphasizing this binary is that within both Dominican policy and the Dominican imagination ideas of Haiti and blackness have been verbally and symbolically constructed as synonymous.[3]

I have noticed these patterns in scholarly treatments of Dominican identity; academic work in this area has focused primarily on the racialized invention of the

[3] Etienne Balibar reminds us that "In fact the discourses of race and nation are never far apart" (1991:37) and that "racism is not an expression of nationalism, but a supplement of it or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project" (ibid.:54).

Dominican nation as white or as non-black. Often scholars have centered on the building of Dominican identity as one in juxtaposition—at times vehemently hostile—to the Haitian nation and to Haitian racial identity. According to this narrative, Dominicans, a population composed mainly of people of African descent, lack a collective black identity as a nation. They are portrayed as imagining themselves white, Catholic, Hispanic, and elite, in contrast to Haitians, who are considered black, primitive, and satanic practitioners of "Voodoo." These narratives are not necessarily wrong. Most Dominicans would not affirm themselves as "black," when asked a yes-or-no question regarding their identity. When given a chance to explain, they would likely also say that they are not white and that they have Taíno, black, and white racial traits. Although ethnic and racial identities are most easily formed and theorized in relation to what they are not, this point misses the nuances arising when we analyze labels. Dominicans, if given the chance, will implicitly problematize the white, Catholic, and Hispanic identity. As Stuart Hall states, identity is "composed of more than one discourse" (1997:49). I intend to show that these identities are further complicated and problematized when we look at cultural productions, such as music, which provide counter-discourses to monolithic views of Dominican identity.

There is no denying that the history of Dominican attitudes towards the Western part of the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti) has often been permeated by moments of bigotry, rivalry, and violence. Many current historical texts have argued, however, for a more nuanced picture, and view the relationship between Dominicans and Haitians as better understood in terms of ambivalence (e.g., Matibag 2003;

Martínez 2003; Derby 2003). Historical moments of hostility have been tempered by episodes of unity and camaraderie, as evidenced by the outpouring of help to Haitians by Dominicans following the earthquake of January 2010.[4] Living in and studying the Dominican Republic continually complicates the dualistic organization of Dominicans as anti-Haitian and anti-black, and more rigorous studies are needed that dismantle such narrow concepts, examining instead how the Dominican population understands, resists, and negotiates official and accepted conceptions of racial identity.

Although Dominican governments have commonly imposed anti-Haitian and anti-black ideologies on the Dominican population, Dominican blackness, in particular, needs to be studied beyond the Dominicans' historically antagonistic relationship to neighboring Haitians. In order to understand the postcolonial Dominican Republic, one must go beyond resistance-domination dichotomies of impositions of whiteness on the Dominican population. As James C. Scott reminds us, "Most political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of power holders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites" (1990:136).[5] In this dissertation, I show

---

[4] The closeness between Dominicans and Haitians can also be seen in their musical influences on each other. In the article "The Hidden History of Dominican Migration," George Lipsitz foregrounds the rich cultural exchanges that have taken place between Dominicans and Haitians. "Radio broadcasts and touring bands regularly brought Dominican merengue to Haiti, even when the two countries seemed on the verge of war" (2007:147). Dominican merengue influenced the birth of *konpa* music in Haiti, and even the most well known Dominican musician, Juan Luis Guerra, has a song ("Mal de amor"), which is a tribute to Haitian songwriter Nemours Jean–Baptiste, the founder of Haitian *konpa dirèk* music.

[5] This dissertation is also informed by Deborah Thomas, who considers hegemony and resistance to have a fluid relationship and as "mutually constituting conceptual tools rather than opposition, categorization poles" (2006:53).

that Dominicans have produced, not a stable form of identity, but what Homi Bhabha has called a "third space" (1990). This space displaces the histories that constitute identity formation and instead sets up new structures of authority. In this third space—between compliance and defiance to anti-Haitianism and anti-black policies—the Dominican people have constructed their unique articulation of Dominican blackness and their identity as a nation.

Although race is always embedded in a process of nation formation, and identities are achieved partly through recognition of the Other, national identity is hybrid, unstable, ambivalent, and more diverse than history reflects. Social science literature on Dominican identity has concentrated primarily on examining institutionalized ideologies (Sagás 2000; Howard 2001), in the process effectively silencing subaltern Dominicans, and treating Dominican identity as one-dimensional. Academic discourse has tended to essentialize *dominicanidad* ("Dominicanness") by avoiding challenges presented by the general public. It has also minimized the prevalence of expressions of blackness by Dominicans who might contest—although not always verbally—elite definitions of Dominican identity. As Homi Bhabha asserts, "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities. For the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space…" (1994:149). The question here becomes a common one around identity in contemporary scholarship: How do we allow these silenced counter-narratives to be heard?

Performing Race: Afro-Dominican Music and Identity

In this dissertation, I grapple with this question by focusing on Afro-Dominican genres of music that destabilize essentialized notions of Dominican identity. These musical genres, and the culture and history surrounding them, provide a text through which to examine how the Dominican population articulates blackness as embodied knowledge and expressive culture.[6] I further concentrate on the five main Afro-Dominican genres: *palo, congo, sarandunga, gagá*, and *cocolo* music. These genres are performed in various ritualistic contexts, as part of religious cofradía activities,[7] but also in what scholars have called *Vudú;* [8] an African-derived religion characterized by spirit possession. These genres were traditionally limited to rural communities until the 1970s. I trace their movement from the periphery to the center, noting the various mobilization processes they underwent, which rendered them visible and influential. Cultural "texts," such as music, enable new identities to be formed, expressed, and sustained. I argue that blackness—though always a contextually contingent articulation—is embedded in popular conceptions of dominicanidad, and enacted through music. Blackness has always been a resistant and adaptable element within Dominicanness. Dominican identity has more plural and

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[6] My work is informed studies such as Zoila Mendoza's study of dance in Peru. She sees dance as playing a central role in the construction of ethnic and racial identities precisely because through dance "the dancers explore and rework the relationship between the practical embodiment and the ideological aspects of [their] identities" (2000:11).

[7] Cofradías are mutual aid societies that have a patron saint. Many focus on helping members with burial rituals.

[8] In this dissertation, I am calling Vudú a gamut of popular religious practices that is related to Haitian Vodou and that is distinguished by spirit possession. Other forms of Dominican religious practices do not necessarily include spirit possession. Dominican Vudú serves the functions of healing and divination (See Chapter Two). Vudú involves a belief in deities (some of them with Catholic correspondence) and spirit possession. Other contexts in which Afro-Dominican music is performed includes religious pilgrimages and messianic cult activities.

complex aspects than have generally been acknowledged; I complicate the often-reductionist assertion that a denial of blackness characterizes Dominicans of all social classes, throughout the nation and its diaspora.

Music has played and continues to play an important role in the creation of Dominican national identity, both through elite constructions of a Hispanic white nation and, conversely, through popular and subaltern expressions of Dominican blackness. Trujillo made merengue the national music in 1936 because it putatively epitomized the "Hispanic" essence of Dominicans. One focus of my study is the role Afro-Dominican music has played since the last half of the twentieth century in complicating Dominican identity and encouraging a democratic and pluralistic society. Even during the Hispanophilic dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (from 1930–1961), when there were laws against the practice of Vudú and its drumming-based music (Law 391, 1943), heterogeneity prevailed. Just as "Haiti" and "black" have historically been synonymous in the Dominican national imaginary, Afro-Dominican music and rituals have mistakenly been correlated with Haiti, and, consequently, relegated to silence during the formation and consolidation of the Dominican nation. As I will discuss in Chapter One, the spirit possession of Vudú is the one aspect that does indeed clash with Catholicism and is similar to Haiti's *Vodou* religion. On the other hand, congo, sarandunga, and cocolo music—performed by darker-skinned Dominicans (not Haitians), and in some cases descendants of maroons—do not serve the primary purpose of summoning spirit possession and might not necessarily be of Haitian derivation.

Since the 1960s, scholars have added the prefix "Afro" to these music genres placing them under the "Afro-Dominican" umbrella, strategically underscoring their closeness to African or Haitian ancestries.[9] However, as I discuss in Chapter Two, these genres are Dominican hybrids—many of them no more or less mixed than merengue—and like merengue, they also have European traits. Because of their connection to ritualistic religious activities, these "Afro-Dominican" genres were lumped together with Vudú, Haiti, and spirit possession, and have been constructed in dissonance with merengue, itself taken to represent ideals of dominicanidad. In this dissertation, I will show how academics, cultural activists, and musicians have mobilized Afro-Dominican music genres in order to challenge Hispanic definitions of the nation. In many ways, however, the Afro-Dominicanness of certain genres has been constructed just as much as the Hispanicity of merengue.[10] Although these members of civil society see themselves as part of a movement that claims more African/black presence in the Dominican Republic, they have not named their endeavor. I call this movement *afro-dominicanismo* because its members have deployed Afro-Dominican music.[11]

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[9] In this same vein, although practitioners call their practices Las 21 Division or a belief in the misterios (deities) and see their practices as part of Catholicism, by labeling certain practices Vudú, scholars, especially since the 1970s, have wanted to make explicit the connection to Haiti, as it had been so common in Dominican history to deemphasize it. Dominican Vudú, while different, has many similarities with Haitian Vodou. Many practitioners resist the word Vudú because of its semantic associations with Haiti and evil magic. For a good emic explanation of this religion, see (http://las21divisiones.com).

[10] In spite of the potentially misleading aspects of the term Afro-Dominican, I use it in this dissertation to denote the genres that Dominicans call Afro-Dominican because of their general belief that these genres are "more African-derived" than merengue.

[11] "African" and "blackness" differ, the first implying heritage and the second race. However, many of the constituencies treated in this dissertation seem to act upon the premise that increasing awareness in Dominicans' African heritage will necessarily lead them to develop a sense of their race as black.

African-based religion and rituals—as well as Afro-Dominican music genres––have survived governmental persecution and are now quite visible in the Dominican Republic, primarily because of the grassroots activities I describe and analyze in this dissertation. In Chapters Two through Five, I highlight different aspects of the afro-dominicanismo movement. This movement, through which the Dominican population negotiated and contested elite notions of Dominican Hispanic identity, brought Afro-Dominican music into the twenty-first century in more visible—sometimes commercial and popular—ways. It is partly through the visibility of Afro-Dominican music that the Dominican Republic has become a more openly multicultural country.

Cultural studies and diaspora scholars such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy have stressed the plurality and complexity of any subject's identification. They think of identity not as fixed, but in terms of the processes or performances by which identities are formed. From this perspective, identity is neither a marker nor a stable trait shared across groups, but a practice whose meaning and effect constantly mutates as its context changes. This conceptualization of identity is useful in understanding the plurality of identifications that form Dominicanness. It also accounts for the plurality of identities contained within Dominicans as individuals, as the aspects of these identities become salient according to varying circumstances. A Dominican individual encompasses a polyphony of identifications, a paradox reflected in music cultures as well. While merengue represents Dominican identity at the national level, many other music genres enjoy equal or greater significance as indicators of other identities, which Dominicans display in certain locations and situations. Folklorist Iván Domínguez once told me that: "Merengue is the music by

which people identify Dominicans, but not the only one by which all Dominicans identify themselves."[12]

My own experience has been a model for the complexities I am studying. While the young girl, with one foot in the Dominican Republic and the other in Haiti, might have been expected to experience sharp boundaries, the same exercise also offers a different interpretation: that of someone with a foot in two worlds. Even while the elite discourse of anti-Haitianism formed a large part of my upbringing, religious and other cultural aspects coded as Haitian and black in the Dominican imagination formed not only part of my social identity as a Dominican, but also of my family history. My family and home life told a more complicated story. There is a legend in my family that the evil eye of an angry Haitian woman was responsible for my grandmother's death. When I began researching Vudú, my two cousins advised me to use camphor to ward off bad spirits. These kinds of beliefs are not talked about openly in the family, as they are regarded as "superstition." Nevertheless, or perhaps because they remain unexamined, beliefs like these were still formative for me.

These beliefs are paradoxically and revealingly anti-Haitian while also ascribing power to a supposedly "simple" folk religion. Haitian—and therefore "black"—culture is regarded as both an inferior "Other" and a powerful force to be reckoned with. The deeper one looks, the more one finds this paradox in the lives of many Dominicans. Even elite Dominicans, like my family, who strongly identify as Catholic and Euro-Hispanic, maintain a belief in an enchanted world of folk religion

[12] Personal communication, June 2010.

that is partly encoded as Haitian.[13] Beliefs of this sort are common at all levels of Dominican society.[14] The relationship between Dominicans and their Haitian Other is polyvocal and ambivalent, as it is charged with both admiration and fear for the Other. Anti-Haitianism has more to do with fear of intimacy and relatedness than with distance, and "whiteness" in the Dominican Republic is impregnated with cultural elements constructed as black.

Since the early 1970s, the mobilization and popularization of Afro-Dominican music—by political and socially progressive Dominicans—has played a role in the unsettling of assumed existing borders, those between white and black, elite and subaltern, Catholicism and Vudú, and Dominican and Haitian. The conspicuous presence of this music nowadays has continued to help bring awareness of the black/African elements in Dominican identity. Equally important, changes in Dominican popular music in recent decades demonstrate a paradigm emphasizing whiteness in Dominican identity as a limited and outdated model. Dominican genres of popular music are currently moving away from European styles and towards black diasporic aesthetics, drawing elements from hip-hop, R&B, and Jamaican dancehall, or moving towards more local Afro-Dominican genres.

Moreover, as Dominicans gain the technological means to access and connect to the outside world, new ways of articulating blackness emerge. For example, as

---

[13] My babysitter used to tell me "the Haitian" would take me away if I "behaved badly," or explained that if a Haitian set her evil eye on me, my hair would turn from straight to—what in the Dominican Republic is considered "bad hair"—coarse hair, which is identified as black because of its supposed distance and "inferiority" to "good hair" or more European-identified and "finer" hair.

[14] To my surprise, even an Opus Dei member, and one of the major Dominican scientists, revealed to me his beliefs in mediums. And, whether true or apocryphal, dictator Trujillo and president Joaquín Balaguer were both said to govern with the help of Haitian spiritual leaders.

tourism has increased, Dominicans have strategically emphasized, or even constructed, black heritage because blackness sells within the context of the Caribbean tourist industry. Dominicans in the tourist industry have grown dreadlocks and adopted Rastafarian accents to improve their commercial appeal. On the whole, national identity is being reworked within new contexts governed by neoliberal policies, migration, tourism, and transnational alliances with black people around the globe. Where Afro-Dominican music and religion were historically silenced, thousands of videos are now posted on the Internet by Dominicans documenting their Afro-Dominican traditions. In this way they are changing the course of a history that previously placed *merengue* as the epitome of Dominican identity, while burying an African past.

Merengue music has been one of the most powerful vehicles through which the Dominican Hispanic and white character were conceptualized. Among other Eurocentric ideas, this can be traced back to Trujillo, who in 1936 declared merengue the national music of the country while simultaneously ordering the Europeanization of its style and instrumentation. Narratives of merengue's allegedly exclusively Spanish origins were created during Trujillo's regime, in the process obfuscating its African origins and African aesthetic. Paul Austerlitz argues, however, that merengue was successful "as a national symbol precisely *because* its syncretic quality appeals to the prevailing African-derived aesthetic without offending the prevailing Hispanophilism" (1997:149). Thus, what appeared to be a celebration of European values simultaneously presented a counter-narrative for embodied blackness.

According to Peter Wade "people experience popular music and dance in an embodied way that evokes racialized elements" (2003:265), which would suggest that the blackness in merengue was never erased from the music or its perception and embodiment. Because these signifiers survived in the music, Dominicans were able to find their mixed heritage, which contains blackness, enacted through merengue. This awareness is more than a simple reversal of binary organization. In "Rethinking Mestizaje: Ideology and Lived Experience" Wade explains how *mestizaje,*[15] like Bhabha's characterization of the nation, carries a tension between sameness and difference. For the idea of mixture to exist, its original elements must also remain intact to a degree; thus, mestizaje need not erase the original parts once constituted. More importantly, subjects who possess mestizaje may not see themselves as homogeneous to the same degree; quite the contrary, "a mestizo or mixed person could be a mosaic of elements, which were racialized with reference to the tri-racial origins of the nation. This suggests that the concept of mestizo includes spaces of difference, while also providing a trope for living sameness through a sense of shared mixed-ness" (2005:249).

Wade's model of a mestizo person as a mosaic is a useful concept; we might think of each person as an enactor of multiple identities, that also allows for re-combinations of elements (ibid.:252). The mosaic metaphor might then be applied to our reading of the label, employed historically to homogenize the Dominican population. Most Dominicans would say that they are not black but indio, a label instituted from above to erase blackness. By contrast, reinterpreted from below, indio

[15] Here "mixture" refers to biological and cultural blending taking place among diverse populations, especially in Latin America.

allows for different combinations and articulations of racial elements and practices. While the term indio was intended by those in power to conceal blackness, on the ground many Dominicans interpreted it as referring to the continuum of skin color among Dominicans, which includes shades of blackness (see Chapter One). In other words, indio is a fluid label, epitomizing "mixedness" while leaving intact the presence of blackness in Dominican national identity. Although a common reading purports that the concept of indio erases blackness, I argue that, for many Dominicans, to say that one is indio is to include blackness as part of the constitutive identity—as evident in many of my informant interviews. We might use the same argument to read merengue as a metaphor for Dominican identity, a metaphor not of Eurocentricity, but one through which elements of blackness have always already been a part of Dominican racial identity.

According to Homi Bhabha (1994), the nationalist narrative conveys a contradiction and a sliding ambivalence between the common basic binary of the homogeneous national elite and the heterogeneous subaltern. Rather than argue for a facile and simple binary opposition between the two, he recommends breaking away, because the nationalist agents (dominant elite), in order to survive, need the heterogeneity they also deny. They also need a hierarchical social, racial, and cultural relationship with the subaltern. In the Dominican Republic, as we shall see, music and religion show how the lines between elites and the subaltern are less clear than has often been assumed. Music cultures have allowed these disparate communities to converse and converge, revealing how each exists only in dialogue with the other.

An awareness of the changes in merengue in the last few decades, for example, demonstrates explicitly how this music adopts rhythms and aesthetics from previously marginalized music genres constructed as Haitian or black in the Dominican national imaginary. As Afro-Dominican music genres gain visibility, elements of these genres are finding their way into merengue recordings, resulting in a new subgenre called *merengue de calle* (street merengue), a name that points to its contrast with the "national" merengue. This new merengue represents a reversal of the traditional and historical narrative. Conversely, genres of Afro-Dominican music are borrowing merengue aesthetics as these genres are consumed and marketed as popular music.

Recent shifts in Dominican merengue demonstrate new, alternative expressions of race and ethnicity. For example, when the popular merengue artist Omega employs bass patterns derived from Haitian-derived *gagá* music, his music communicates street carnival aesthetics; thus he connects Dominican culture to its African origins and articulates a more complex, pluralistic attitude towards expressions of Dominican blackness. Similar changes in merengue's rhythmic structure are related to more graphic and aggressive urban realities that are also portrayed through new styles of lyrics, rhyming, and dance. These changes underscore a need for more rigorous studies that problematize the reductive binaries present in most conceptions of Dominican identity. Such hybrid musical history, and the new musical forms associated with it, reveals and performs deep truths about Dominican culture. Like merengue, the assumed-elite European Catholicism of the Dominican Republic has been infused with elements from popular beliefs, and vice

versa. Even the most Catholic and privileged Dominicans—like my family—sometimes embrace elements of Vudú, and many practices of Vudú have influenced Dominican Catholicism. Bhabha's concept of "mimicry" in the analysis of colonial relationships is useful here. He defines mimicry as the colonizer's desire for "a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite." This ambivalent relationship produces "its slippages, its excess, its difference" (1994:86). In this way, "mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization of repression of difference, but a form of resemblance…" (ibid.:90). Hybridity occurs as a result of creating mimicry, and both colonizer and colonized are changed.[16]

In recent years, merengue and Afro-Dominican music genres have fed and influenced each other, revealing a part of merengue that has always attuned to African aesthetics, and opening a space through which we can study Dominican blackness. Wade points out that "Bhabha's interest in ambivalence opens a perspective onto the 'space of liminality . . . of the national discourse'" (2000:6). It is precisely these liminal stages or cracks in the nationalist project, and how they are enacted or reflected in music, that interest me. Dominican identity is located in this liminal, ambivalent space.

A challenge of studying Dominican national identities lies in the extreme racial fluidity and regional diversity of the population. Blackness, or even national

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[16] George Reid Andrews reminds us that, "In linking African and Christian gods and spirits, slaves profoundly reworked and modified both religious traditions. They then further transformed Christianity by insisting that access to those gods be mediated not just by Catholic priests and rituals but by African priests and rituals as well. The spiritual power of Catholic sacraments was highly priced and valued; but equally powerful was the African sacrament of trance and possession, through which gods entered the bodies of their worshippers to 'mount' and 'ride' them" (2004:28). In the Dominican Republic, elite Catholicism is impregnated with elements as a result of interactions with African-based beliefs.

consciousness, develops unevenly among different social groups and regions in the country. As Michiel Baud states,

> the conservative ideology tried to conceal, or at least to de-emphasize, the ethnic heterogeneity within Dominican society by the deliberate construction of an external enemy [in this case Haiti]. However, its refusal to accept the consequences of modernization and the ethnic diversity of its own population prevent the Dominican elite from creating a coherent ideology of Dominicanidad. (1996:147)

Dominican national identity is in constant negotiation, and in recent decades music genres show this perhaps more than any other signifier. Popular and folk cultures, especially music, provide an entry point to read blackness and identities outside of political and historical discourse; they also provide a useful lens for understanding not only the top-down hegemonic forces at play (in this case anti-Haitianism and anti-black policies), but also the compromises and continuous dialogue that emerge from the bottom up. Music has been fertile ground for a popular enactment of a multi-dimensional definition of Dominicanness, one that often oscillates between a formulation or assertion of blackness and a more ambiguous inclusion of blackness within definitions of Dominican identity.

Literature Review and Methodology

Despite the growing interest in Caribbean music throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Dominican folk and popular music remain under-researched by both Dominicans and foreign scholars. Works by Dominican scholars have, until recent decades, reflected biased attitudes: they excluded any mention of an African influence, celebrated an imagined native Indian heritage, referred to Africans and Haitians as savages who infected the Dominican Republic, and claimed merengue as unquestionably the highest form of Dominican music.

Since the 1970s, a surge in efforts to acknowledge an African cultural heritage has occurred, but music studies are still scarce. There are three English-language studies, from the 1970s to the 1990s, that have advanced the state of Dominican music scholarship: Paul Austerlitz's work on merengue's rise to a national music (1997), Deborah Pacini's on *bachata* (1995), and Martha Ellen Davis's on Afro-Dominican traditions (1976, and others). Since these three publications, there have been radical changes in all these musical genres, leaving new forms of these genres under-examined and under-theorized. Merengue and bachata artists have incorporated R&B, hip-hop, and Afro-Dominican influences, which have further blackened and Africanized these genres. Martha Ellen Davis's doctoral dissertation still gives the most complete study of the Afro-Dominican field; however, Afro-Dominican music has gone through numerous changes—including its secularization—and the urgent need for research remains.[17] The practices of Dominican Vudú are also transforming

[17] The contribution of the music of African-based religions to the creation of an African identity has played out, to differing degrees, in many Latin American and Caribbean countries. Works of anthropology and ethnomusicology such as

rapidly, and need documenting. While books have sufficiently outlined past Dominican Vudú traditions (e.g., Davis 1987; Deive 1975) their research is outdated; the current public visibility of Vudú and its crossroads with commercialization have radically altered the role this religion and its music play in Dominican culture. Like the music, Vudú rituals are no longer predominantly rural or underground events. As the music and religion become more important as social and cultural events, they constitute a significant part of the process through which alternate constructions of identity arise.

Studies of Dominican identity and music have also to consider the diaspora, as the Dominican diaspora in the United States constitutes over ten percent of that country's population. Dominicans are among the fastest growing ethnic population in New York, and many more Dominicans are forming communities in Europe—especially Spain. One of the few current works to focus on these diasporic changes is Sydney Hutchinson's as yet unpublished 2008 dissertation. Hutchinson analyzes how merengue típico (folk merengue) helps returning migrants create a transcultural identity and negotiate their ambiguous social status.

The histories I tell in this dissertation—those of Afro-Dominican genres and their cultural bearers, *clubes culturales y deportivos* (Cultural and Sports Clubs) and folk dance troupes, the group Convite and other Afro-Dominican fusion musicians, as well as hip hop and Afro-Dominican-influenced urban genres—have, for the most part, remained untold in either English or Spanish. The reasons for this are social, political, and cultural. Little funding exists for research in the Dominican Republic,

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Béhague 1994 and Moore 1997 have documented and theorized the complexities of these movements.

nor do trained ethnomusicologists flourish, and, in the case of urban music, the elitist prejudices that haunt the history of Afro-Dominican traditions still prevail.

Since 2005, I have conducted research in the Dominican Republic and the United States, especially in New York City. I have spent about a month in the Dominican Republic each summer, and three months in the summers of 2010 and 2011. This research consisted of archival study, fieldwork, and oral history. I have conducted research in libraries in both New York and the Dominican Republic, especially Centro León in Santiago, Dominican Republic, and the Dominican Studies Institute Library at City College, CUNY. My sources have also included newspaper articles, blogs, and online discussions about music or identity. As an Associated Researcher affiliated with Museo del hombre dominicano, the main anthropological institution of the Dominican Republic, I have traveled with staff on several research trips. I have also attended Vudú religious ceremonies and music festivals in the Dominican Republic, as well as in New York City, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. I often traveled with the musicians from venue to venue; in some ceremonies, I was allowed to videotape or record. Thus, this dissertation is informed by formal interviews, but most importantly by my many conversations and informal interviews with practitioners of rituals associated with Afro-Dominican music. I have also interviewed or conversed with musicians, fellow scholars, cultural rights activists, folk dance troupe leaders, members of clubes culturales y deportivos, and Dominican friends from various walks of life collecting oral histories previously untold. My questions to practitioners have revolved around primary ideas of how they identify their music and practices with race, ethnicity, class, and nationality. In particular, I

have questioned activists, folk troupe leaders, and musicians about their motivations for aligning themselves with the afro-dominicanismo movement.

My interest in agency and social change led me to investigate resistance as a theoretical concept. It also spurred me to look at the ways in which Dominicans have resisted hegemonic racial conceptions of the nation through "everyday forms of resistance" (Scott 1985, 1990). The seminal work of James C. Scott called attention to resistance as informal, non-organized, hidden, and non-confrontational. Scott argues that powerless people rarely have the resources to resist openly and so we should not expect open resistance. The powerless, instead, use "low-profile techniques" that help protect them from their oppressor's reprisal (1985:xvi). Sometimes the efficacy of these types of resistance lies precisely in their invisibility or their ambiguity. In the Dominican context, resistance constitutes the manipulation of context that many Dominicans have exerted in order to negotiate their position at the margins of power. My ultimate purpose is to use music cultures to study the cracks in the nation project, deconstructing Dominican identity and attempting to understand modes of agency of the Dominican people at various times in history.

In "Who Needs Identity," Stuart Hall reminds us that "identities are never unified and in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply, constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices, and positions" (2000:17). In Dominican society, this fragmentation has accelerated throughout the vast array of diverse genres of popular music that have emerged on the Dominican scene since the 1960s. These genres have challenged the notion of a single, unified culture and have shaped the postmodern

Dominican experience. However, while I take music cultures as indicators of unofficial alternative views of Dominican identity or popular responses to elite ideologies, I avoid assuming the simplistic approach of correlating music genres to a single social class. On the contrary, one important aspect of Dominican identity is how within a single subjectivity, there can be contradictory aspects, and, within a single genre of music, multivalent aspects might be solicited, or interpreted differently by various social classes. Similarly, in this dissertation, I do not assume that, for most people, national identity excludes or supersedes the remainder of identifications that constitute the self, or that national identification remains unchanged over time.

As a Dominican myself, I feel that exploring Dominican identity is also a process of exploring my own Dominicanness. As I trace the effects of music on Dominican identity, I am aware that I study myself, but am also involved in a process of altering my perceptions of my identity. I am always both scholar and subject, offering my own readings in the context of their effects, both on me and within the broader context of Dominicans and their diaspora. Growing up in the Dominican Republic during the 1970s and 80s, in an upper-middle-class family, I had no awareness of Dominicans as part of an African diaspora until I moved to New York. I socialized there with Dominican migrants who, for the most part, came from a different social class and political reality. I learned in depth the intricate and multidimensional aspects of Dominican identity. Now, I am in a position to understand the poles of social classes within the Dominican Republic and both the island and the diasporic experience.

My interest in music dates back to an early age when I was studying to be a classical pianist. At the same time that I was being trained in classical music, in my home, the women who cooked and cleaned listened to bachata and had Vudú altars. They gave me another perspective on Dominican culture outside my bubble as an upper middle class Dominican. I now study some of these genres of music as both a musician and ethnomusicologist. My interest in leftist politics and the Latin American movement of *nueva canción*[18] also informs this work. As a teenager, my friends and I circulated the rare tapes of nueva canción that were brought from Cuba. And finally, of utmost importance in my formative years were my father's stories about his involvement in the anti-Trujillo movement (*14 de junio*), which led him to suffer torture and imprisonment.[19] My dad, a doctor to the poor, used to be interested in lower class Dominicans and often brought home stories about superstitions and how Dominican beliefs got in the way of medical care, because they believed in the evil eye, or tried to heal themselves by other means. I always knew that there was this other world of folk religion.

Indigenous Paradigms

The Dominican Republic has the largest percentage of mulattos[20] in the world. Even so, Dominicans possess what Silvio Torres (2000:1094) calls a "deracialized consciousness," or what other authors have called "the black behind the ears," meaning a hidden or concealed African ancestry and black identity (Simmons 2011;

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[18] The nueva canción movement emerged in the mid-1960s combining folk traditions with political lyrics.
[19] My father (José Tallaj) compiled some of his experiences in his 2006 book.
[20] Mulatto describes someone of mixed white and black racial ancestry.

Candelario 2007). If one tries to read aspects of this identity as only coming from a place of anti-blackness, however, one misses a rich territory of nuances and subtleties that complicate such an analysis. For example, the acute color consciousness of Dominicans means that skin-lightening creams are common; nevertheless, when the renowned baseball player Sammy Sosa was discovered to use such creams, Dominicans mocked him, privately and openly on mainstream TV shows, a contradiction of the simplistic representations of Dominicans seeing themselves as non-black. What were they laughing about? Was this a critique of a public display of "wanting to be white"? Or did they ridicule Sosa because his darkness would never allow him to be white? Dominicans' display of blackness, in its primary aspect, is embodied—contrasting with the recognized and legitimized expressions of black pride, which reside in the visible, the spoken, and the written.

Reading Dominican identity only through verbal discourse will easily confuse, particularly in the resistance many Dominicans have shown in being labeled as *negro*. Thus, in my research and writing, I have grappled with different conceptualizations and articulations of blackness, specific to the Dominican Republic, and enacted and performed through music, dance, and ritual. Just as anti-Haitianism is a social construction, so is the display of blackness in ways other than speech allows. With the help of fieldwork, I draw time and again on the unspoken to complicate expressions of blackness that have always already been present in Dominican society. They have manifested differently over time, as each chapter will demonstrate.

I also contest the generalization that when Dominicans do exhibit racial pride, it is an importation into the country, an attitude that subtly influences both scholars

and the general public. To give just one example, we can look at the reactions and debates surrounding the 2011 PBS audiovisual series *Black in Latin America: Haiti and the Dominican Republic*, featuring Henry Louis Gates as narrator and guide. The documentary reinforced the common interpretation of Dominicans as almost delusional in their denial of their own blackness. Dominican responses to the viewing of the series, in social gatherings and public forums on the Internet, focused on the issue of understanding Dominican identity. Many Dominicans, inside and outside of academia, accused Gates of superimposing US paradigms onto his study, and encouraged a more nuanced approach. A few of the many comments on the PBS website offer a sense of the criticism. One person commented:

> Our attitudes towards race are not what you think. Unless the person is pure black, meaning not mixed, why should they identify as such? To satisfy American's sense of political correctness? The host of the show said at one point: 'All these people (in DR) would be considered black in the USA.' I ask you . . . Why? Because many Americans have preconceived notions about race? Because if you are not white and your skin has a bit of brown or beige you are labeled black? Is Halle Berry black? In the USA maybe for the reasons I just explained. In reality she is of WHITE and BLACK descent. Mariah Carey? Irish and Venezuelan. Lenny Kravitz, Black and Jewish. But you want us to classify them as black? Do not label me. I am what I am. . . . Do I have black in me? Proudly yes. But I am not black, nor white. I just am.[21]

[21] All Spanish to English translation in this dissertation are mine.

Another comment took a different tone:

> Dr. Gates applies the same bigotry he experienced while growing up. . . . We embraced our blackness and it is impossible to escape. It is present in the way we speak, in the way we look, in our music and everything else, but just because we don't conform with your predisposed concept of a black country doesn't mean we are less "black" than Haiti or any other country.

While the first quote calls us to question the possibility of understanding Dominican blackness through US models, the second introduces the idea of an embodied blackness that still defies our paradigms. American uneasiness with mixed categories of race appeared also in the commentaries of Dominicans reacting to *Black in Latin America*:

> My mother is Spaniard, my grandfather black, we have [a] certain amount of native DNA in our blood, why do you want me to perceive myself just as black?[22] When I lived in DR, I would have never described myself as black or white, in fact, there would have been no need for me to describe my race at all because I was just Dominican. I looked like the majority of people in the island. Dominicans (in the 80's and probably still do today) are taught that our racial make up is a mix of white, black and Taíno.

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[22] Peter Wade, in an article on mestizaje, recalled that a mixed Latin American woman told him that she would not call herself black because she would then neglect her father, who was white. (Only her mother was black.) Wade concludes that mixture is not simply about ideologies, but also about relationships (2005:253).

(http://www.pbs.org/wnet/black-in-latin-america/featured/haiti-the-dominican-republic-an-island-divided-watch-full-episode/165/)

These are voices from the general public. While academics commonly challenge binary oppositions and look for complications within received structures, it seems here that Dominicans understand the intellectual models used as imported from the United States, and that to understand Dominican beliefs on race and color requires new frameworks for the conversation.

Previous studies have helped construct a simplistic and reductive narrative of race and identity in the Dominican Republic, leaving the field with a gap in local paradigms. The concept of "tacit subjects," which Carlos Decena (2008) created when examining same-sex desire among Dominican men, can be useful to describe what occurs in such reductions. Decena points out that Dominicans' process of "coming out" differs greatly from the celebratory aspects of their US counterparts, because homosexuality carries economic and social consequences specific to the Dominican Republic. He states that, from a US perspective, "negotiations of the closet that refuse speech, visibility, and pride have been generally viewed as suspect, as evidence of denial and internalized homophobia, or as outright pathology" (2008:339). The US paradigm takes for granted it is healthiest for all LGBTQ people to come out, but for many queers of color, as Decena explains, coming out constitutes a more political process. Dominican gay men resort to a tacit process, a way of coming out as assumed rather than explicitly stated. Similarly, Dominican ambivalence allows for the tacit expression of blackness, one that avoids direct

confrontation with elite notions of Dominican whiteness, but nevertheless takes pride in a uniquely Dominican mixed culture, which includes blackness. Through their response to and production of music, we can begin to understand how Dominicans may tacitly resist, understand, and negotiate Dominican conceptions of racial identity.

A commonly cited indicator of the Dominican "denial" of blackness has been how they wear their hair. Dominicans have been stigmatized by other Afro-diasporic populations for preferring straight hair as opposed to Afros and untreated hair. Like the culture of their music, the culture of hair is more complicated than a mere Eurocentric rejection of blackness. While traditional writers pointed to Dominican women as mere recipients of elite beauty ideals, Ginetta Candelario sees their engagement with hair as one strategy among others for "capital accumulation. . . [as part of] complex and complicated negotiations of self in the face of social inequality, and not a simple internationalization of racist, sexist, and heteronormative ideals imposed by patriarchy, the state, and social institutions" (2007:255). In their study of hair, Murray and Ortiz, the authors of the book *Pelo bueno, Pelo malo* (2012), concluded that even if most Dominican women choose to chemically treat their hair to make it straighter, they nevertheless also like their dark skin, not denying their blackness. Through examining hair culture, works such as these have been able to sort out some of the complexities of Dominican self-definitions, identity construction, and race relations.

Chapter Overview

The chapters in this dissertation move chronologically, starting with the mobilization of Afro-Dominican music by advocates of afro-dominicanismo in the 1970s, and ending with popular music of the twenty-first century that uses Afro-Dominican elements. In Chapter One, I examine major writings, as well as historical and cultural perspectives, on Dominican identity. I also explore the connection of Dominican identity to Afro-Dominican music, Haitian and American cultures, and anti-Haitianism. I propose frameworks for understanding how Dominicans have formulated racial identity, a complex and unique construction that requires a consideration of the historical specificities of the Dominican Republic and its inhabitants. We can learn from, but cannot blindly apply here, the same intellectual paradigms of blackness that have been employed, for example, in Cuba or the United States; the Dominican Republic simply has its own specificities, its own idiosyncrasies. In Chapter Two, I discuss religious-musical traditions (congo, sarandunga, palo, gagá, and cocolo music) ostracized in the Dominican Republic, because of their African derivation, throughout the period of nation formation, especially during the Hispanophilic government of Rafael Trujillo. I examine the function of these music traditions as expressions of subaltern blackness, including scholarly work documenting them after the demise of the dictatorship. These scholars sought to vindicate African heritage and return the stolen memory and pride to Dominicans.

Chapter Two also contains a literature review written as a narrative history of Afro-Dominican music from its absence—or stigmatization at the time of the

dictatorship—to its exaltation in the latter half of the twentieth century. Dominican history was revised and re-evaluated, and scholars took it into their hands to find Africa's place in new definitions of the nation, and to give Dominicans new ways of imagining themselves. I problematize memory and analyze the testimonies of tradition bearers, showing that memories of Africa were always part of some practitioners' lives. Scholarly work has foregrounded these memories by disseminating knowledge about these traditions, and giving cultural carriers and others a language to grapple with questions of race and racial identity. Although I argue that any sort of "black pride" discourse has limitations within the Dominican population, practitioners have nonetheless acquired pride in their traditions through their interaction with scholars and their public work.

In Chapters Three and Four, I demonstrate ways in which representation for the marginal, darker-skinned classes, and the culturally excluded, has been fought for through the mobilization of Afro-Dominican genres. I explore specific ways in which music, dance, and festivals communicate social ideals, and encourage activism and black consciousness. Chapter Three also describes a Dominican leftist and populist movement that arose following the end of the dictatorship of President Trujillo in 1961. Although this movement did not succeed politically, its ideals remained in the consciousness and dreams of many Dominicans during the right wing Balaguer's first presidency (1966-1978). During these twelve years, Balaguer reverted to Trujillo's monolithic definition of a Dominican identity that was anti-Haitian, anticommunist, conservative, Catholic, white, and elitist. Nevertheless, dozens of folk dance troupes were formed in which young people learned to play, dance, and appreciate Afro-

Dominican music while articulating a resistance to Balaguer's policies. Cultural activists at *clubes culturales y deportivos*, and other grassroots organizations, defended and reclaimed their conception of Dominicanness and committed themselves to redefining "culture" from traditional Eurocentric models to culture as populist. Afro-Dominican music was central in these quests. These troupes in turn participated in folk festivals, themselves deployed as tools by cultural activists in encouraging pride in the African heritage of Dominican culture, and in re-inscribing these genres into the nation.

In Chapter Four, my investigation concerns the research-musical group *Convite*, an essential contributor to the current celebration of African heritage by Dominicans. Convite was a performance group of social scientists and university students from 1974-1981. Their common goal acknowledged a concealed African heritage. I analyze the ways in which their music transformed folkloric aesthetics into political popular music, teaching many urban Dominicans to value Afro-Dominican traditions. I also focus on *Siete días con el pueblo* (Seven Days with the People), a music festival organized by the political left. This festival articulated an opposition to Balaguer's presidency and ultimately helped bring an end to his authoritarian government. In Convite's performance at Siete días, many listeners first heard the sound of Dominican Vudú drums accompanying popular music: through these rhythms and sounds, borrowed from Vudú practices, Convite contested negative attitudes towards African heritage.

In Chapter Five, I examine the ways in which the folklorization and commodification of Afro-Dominican music have led to the recent visibility of Vudú.

These transformations have also led to the transfer of religious ceremonies from private altars to public secular venues (e.g., restaurants, dance clubs, and hotel party rooms), revealing previously closeted identities. I also examine the origins and significance of this shift, especially considering that rituals of spirit possession (as I discuss in Chapter One) have often been used to define symbolic borders between Dominican and Haitian religious practices. In celebrations at public venues, club culture elements penetrate religious ceremonies and, in turn, these elements influence rural and traditional Vudú ceremonies. Most importantly, the visibility of these rituals, in projecting greater acceptability of previously marginalized Dominican "black" culture, is also changing Vudú through the incorporation of new commercial elements.

In Chapter Six, I examine how the main genres of Dominican popular music today have moved towards both the Afro-Dominican and the Afro-diasporic, simultaneously pulling Dominican identity toward the local and the global. Although Dominican popular music began in an effort to claim Spanish tradition through Hispanicized merengue, Afro-Dominican music genres are finding their way into merengue recordings and other forms of popular music, helping many Dominicans create alternate visions of nationhood. New ways of musicking are also connecting Dominican identity with its Black Atlantic relatives and its African heritage. In the twenty-first century, genres such as *dembow* music—a spin-off of Jamaican dancehall—have taken the country by storm. Rap has also become one of the most popular genres among Dominican youth, especially its darker-skinned constituencies. However, this embrace of Afro-diasporic elements should not be read simply as

"new," as, in many ways, it has not changed the ways Dominicans have historically produced popular meanings of blackness. I argue that, despite these new ways of imagining themselves, Dominicanness, specifically their blackness, continues to be expressed, not discursively but bodily. This lack of an explicitly expressed black identity, however, need not be equated with rejection/denial of blackness, as most studies of Dominican identity have suggested.

While I hope this dissertation does not read as an apology for the continued valorization of whiteness and the devaluation of Haitians and the darker-skinned in the Dominican Republic, I emphasize that studies of Dominican identity must better differentiate between black awareness, black pride, and racism. Even though most Dominicans would prefer being light-skinned, their identity has been formed in an intermediate conceptual space, in tension and negotiation between hegemonic anti-Haitianism and subaltern expressions of blackness, which need not come necessarily from a place of shame or denial. To assume the total compliance of the Dominican masses with anti-black policies robs them of agency. Many forms of music codified in the Dominican imaginary as black have served historically to resist, question, and contest the official racial structuring of Dominican society. Scott (1990) differentiates between public and hidden transcripts, the latter referring to the critique of power by the disenfranchised that goes unnoticed by those in power. According to his theory, in public those who are oppressed accept their domination, but in private they contest it. In other words, in public, Dominicans see themselves belonging to a white nation, but privately, darker-skinned Dominicans have continued to identify with forms coded as black. Adopting music genres codified as

such has helped Dominicans, since the late 1960s, to re-evaluate received ideas of nationhood.

Finally, I note that the absolute denial of blackness attributed to Dominicans, and the discourse of afro-dominicanismo—which advocates black pride—are both social and historical constructions far from reality. In recent decades, Dominican identity has been located in the interstices of these two ideologies. The evidence is located more in music and discourses about music than in verbal political discourse.

In some ways, the movements I describe here are failures. Cultural activists and *afro-dominicanistas* failed to establish the Afro-centered leftist revolution they advocated (Chapters Three and Four). Nevertheless, these movements have resulted in changes in ideology, shifts not obvious in political rhetoric, but hinted at or overt in folk and popular culture. In the same way that scholars have unpacked meanings in hairstyles, my study of Dominican music and music cultures enters the issue through the side door in order to enter fully into the conversation.

Chapter One
African Heritage, Music, and Identity in the Dominican Republic

Studies of Dominican identity have invariably focused on the construction of the Dominican nation as anti-Haitian and anti-black. In part the anti-Haitian and anti-black sentiments stem from 1936, when the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo instituted *merengue* as the national music to officially represent Dominicans and their "Hispanic" roots. Many Dominicans accepted this dominant representation, yet also continued to identify with other music genres. Because of their putatively African derivation, these other genres were officially silenced or prohibited. A study of Dominican identity that focuses on multiple forms of Dominican music, especially on Afro-Dominican genres, has yet to be written. In this dissertation, I concentrate on Afro-Dominican music as a way of examining the dissonance between merengue as a common assertion of Dominican collective identity and personal/individual identification with African-derived and historically demonized music genres through which Dominicans have negotiated and articulated blackness. It is only by looking at many music genres and the discourses surrounding them that one can begin to understand the complex expressions of Dominican identity, which go beyond the official ideology through which merengue was chosen as the national music. Studying Afro-Dominican music provides a window to understand ways in which many Dominicans have been able to disrupt—consciously or unconsciously—the dominant discourse. On the other hand, the study of Afro-Dominican music will reveal ways in which, while resisting power, many Dominicans have also supported the structures of domination.

Identity and Resistance

In recent decades, social scientists have shown a growing concern with studying forms of resistance not overtly political and collectively organized.[23] Studies of Dominican identity have done little to attribute agency to the Dominican population against anti-black and anti-Haitian ideologies. The fact that dark-skinned Dominicans have not mobilized themselves along racial lines to advance their economic and political agendas has provoked the portrayal of Dominicans as "delusional" or "abnormal" in academic literature (Torres Saillant 2001:viii).[24] Adding to the image of Dominicans, a largely mulatto population, as mere passive recipients of elite ideology is their acceptance of *indio* (Indian) as a racial category. When asked the question of what their race is, most Dominicans resort to this label. Official use of indio was intended to erase blackness, but many Dominicans interpret

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[23] For a typology of resistance, see Hollander and Einwohner 2004.

[24] Dominicans have often been portrayed as delusional in academic writings on Dominican identity even though historians have theorized the specificities of Dominican racial formation. Historians often trace the lack of black collective identity in the Dominican Republic to the earlier decline (late sixteenth century) of the plantation in the eastern part of the island (now Dominican Republic). By the seventeenth century, nearly three-fourths of the African-descended population in the eastern portion were free and constituted the majority of the population. The seventeenth century was characterized by extreme poverty, which brought whites and blacks together in a unique sense of intimacy and dependency. In this environment, intermingling was acute, and a large population of free blacks developed social mobility, regardless of their color. As Torres explains, the early demise of the plantation

> brought the status of slaves and former slaves to a level identical with that of masters and former masters, breaking down the social barriers between the races, stimulating interracial marital relations, and largely giving rise to an ethnically hybrid population. In that context of relaxed racial interaction we encounter a good many people of African descent who become part of the ruling colonial structure or who stand out as stalwart protectors of the social system. (2000:1094)

Because blacks in the Dominican context have developed social mobility, Dominicans have learned to disassociate their social and economic conditions from their color.

the term as a mixed color (not a race), which includes blackness. Scholars, however, have traditionally interpreted their wide use of the term as confirmation of the Dominican rejection of blackness. Some recent literature (Sorensen 1993; Torres 2000; Derby 2003; Candelario 2007; Simmons 2011) has argued that the popular use of indio as a racial category indicates that most "Dominicans do see themselves as mixed-race…" (Derby 2003:10). These scholars have started to recognize that the use of indio as representative of Dominicans' mixed skin color and background also recognizes their African heritage, which—though sometimes undervalued—has nevertheless survived in popular definitions of Dominicanness.

In both academic and popular discourse, Dominicans are largely portrayed as denying their own race. Sociological literature has yet to study the intricacies of the Dominican social construction of identity and race outside verbal discourse. As Silvio Torres-Saillant reminds us:

> Denormalizing Dominicans does not clarify the issue. Persuaded that Dominicans do not suffer from collective dementia, I would prefer to believe that they do possess the ability to discern the phenotypical characteristics that distinguish one racial group from another, and they do recognize the traces of Africa in their ethnicity despite the insistent efforts of the conservative intellectual elite to define them as part of a Western, Caucasian community. (2000:1089)

While it is undeniable that racism pervades Dominican society,[25] their social construction of identity as indio (as a word meaning mixed) is not far from the truth: Dominicans are a highly mixed population, more so in comparison to their Haitian Other. Dominicans recognize a color continuum including *indio oscuro* (dark Indian), *indio claro* (light Indian), *trigueño* (brown), and other such hues. Various markers—from hair texture to class—complement skin color, and must be factored when defining a Dominican.[26]

Torres attributes the lack of racial mobilization in part to a lack of education. Dominican schoolchildren are not taught about their black ancestors, nor do they learn anything about the black slave rebellions during the colonial period.[27] Torres also observes that Dominican people settle for indifference as a way to deal with race-related questions, and most dark-skinned Dominicans seem to ignore the high degree of racism present in elite definitions of Dominican identity (2000:1997). This

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[25] For music enactments of anti-Haitianism and racism in song: see the video "Cola de camiona," an adaptation of a Dominican reggaetón by Don Miguelo ("La cola de motora"). In this video Haitians and their Spanish accents are mocked as they ask not to be deported by Dominican officials: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iU6ScUijihQ). Also see "El Haitianito," by Luis Vargas: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5oCdJEBErQ). Solidarity with Haitians is also reflected in music. See, for example, Johnny Ventura's "El pique" or Rita Indiana's "Da pa lo do." Lipsitz (2007) provides good examples of musical interactions between Haitians and Dominicans.

[26] For example, my friend who is light-skinned with coarse hair is considered indio claro. Although I am exactly as light as him, because of my straight hair, I am considered white. Hairstyle also separates Haitians from Dominicans. Haitians braid their hair in African-looking styles, while Dominicans tend to process their hair to make it straight. For studies of Dominican identity through hair culture, see *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (Candelario 2007) and *Pelo bueno, pelo malo* (Murray and Ortiz 2012).

[27] I remember looking at my niece's fourth grade social science textbook, curious to see how much she was learning about the African heritage of the Dominican Republic. She learned little about this topic, and Dominican *Vudú* was hardly mentioned. Nevertheless, I see the inclusion as representing a certain change in Dominican society; I was not even taught that Vudú existed, and I studied in Dominican Republic schools through college.

indifference, I would argue, stems partly from the mosaic that constitutes Dominican identity, and attacks against blacks marginalize only part of Dominican identity.

In many conversations with dark-skinned Dominicans, I observed that they have learned to consider only Haitians as fully black. Many of my informants claimed that having white and Native Indian (or Taíno) blood meant that they could not be black. While I am not denying that, on the spectrum, most Dominicans would identify more toward white than black, and that black consciousness and pride could make Dominican society more egalitarian, I am arguing that the particularities of Dominicans' construction of identities are too complex to just be studied through verbal discourse. The relationship of Dominicans towards the Haitian Other—against whom they have defined themselves—is full of contradiction and ambivalence; it reflects more than simple anti-Haitianism. Abundant literature depicts this historical relationship (see, for example, Lauren Derby 1994; Samuel Martínez 2003; Eugenio Matibag 2003). Some writers have chosen to emphasize the antagonism between the two countries, while others present a more nuanced picture. Michelle Wucker (1999) likens the Dominican-Haitian relationship to a "cockfight," a metaphor through which she discusses their relationship as charged by antagonism and rivalry. This metaphor has been challenged by Samuel Martínez, who has argued that "were the whole story to be told, the end product would be a story full of contradictory emotions and impulses—of tenderness and violence, love and hatred, incorporation and rejection of the Haitian 'other'—that no theme as monolithic as 'anti-Haitian ideology' could contain it" (2003:81). Eugenio Matibag prefers using a metaphor of musical counterpoint. As in a fugue, the Dominican-Haitian relationship is replete with "many

convergent-divergent narrative lines caught up in a puzzlelike unit of contrasts and affinities, continuities and discontinuities" (2003:vii). What seems clear in these arguments is that in order to understand how the complex relationship plays out among Haitian and Dominican populations, one must look beyond legal codes, historical documents, and popular vocabulary, and instead focus on human behavior.

Gramsci saw hegemony as powerful, in part, precisely because it brings together the dominant and the subordinate; the official draws on the popular, but the popular supports the official. While Dominicans have verbally and publicly complied and supported anti-Haitianism, a more complex story is at play. Dominicans have taken power from above and below, and, through the generations, have learned to live between acceptance and resistance to the discourse of anti-Haitianism. Both behaviors are culturally learned and socially constructed. By adopting anti-Haitianism, Dominicans, especially dark-skinned ones, separate themselves publicly from blacks (Haitians) and the stigma that comes with that label, but they also resist anti-Haitianism by continuing to identify and perform rituals and music stigmatized as black and Haitian—and, consequently, anti-Dominican. Even when Trujillo made Vudú illegal, Dominicans continued to practice it in private, as they had learned to strategically differentiate between their public and private spheres and identities. As an example, when my father learned that I was interested in studying Vudú, he told me to interview my babysitter, who had for years avoided discussing her beliefs and practices. She thought my father—as her employer and a devout Catholic—would be angry if he knew that she told me about her belief in the deities and spirit possession.

But she slowly revealed those beliefs to my father as she grew to trust him over the years.

Hollander and Einwohner point to the complexity of resistance, and that "individuals can be simultaneously powerful and powerless" (2004:550). Adopting anti-black policies, while also separating themselves from them, both empowers and disempowers Dominicans. The continued practice of Vudú, despite legal prohibition, can be seen as an act of agency, as can the avoidance of the label *negro*. Indifference, silence, and concealment are forms of agency with which Dominicans—especially the dark-skinned—have negotiated the best position for themselves. When Dominicans learn to conceal their blackness and adopt a verbal discourse of antihaitianismo, they act out a culturally learned behavior that have helped their predecessors survive Dominican history. Rather than simply reading this as racist, one might instead see it as learned behavior that helps them navigate Dominican society. However, because Dominicans have not mobilized racially, nor harnessed the power given to them as non-Haitians, dark-skinned Dominicans are also in compliance with the structural racism that keeps them at the bottom of the ladder. Even though Dominicans have learned to think of themselves as non-black, or mixed, race is used as a mechanism to perpetuate a hierarchical class-based society.[28] It is in

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[28]According to Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, two concepts of class are crucial when analyzing Dominican society. In *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950*, Hoffnung-Garskof states that: "Ideas of progress and culture [progreso y cultura], in both their elite and popular formulations, are useful furthermore because they reflect Dominican thinking about color and race" (2008:12). He explains that in the absence of the race discourse in the Dominican Republic, progreso and cultura were early on tied to ideas of whiteness and therefore reflect Dominican ideas about color and race (ibid.:12). Hoffnung-Garskof thinks that cultura was a useful concept that allowed Dominican nationalists to describe the citizens that they hoped to create as white, and that even today "middle-class and poor Dominicans tend to express their identities in terms of race as cultura, rather than race as

this ambivalent terrain between public compliance and private challenge to anti-Haitianism and policies of whiteness that Dominican identity must be studied.

These private and public identifications should not be understood as binary oppositions; quite the contrary, they coexist in a single Dominican person, and aspects of each are more or less salient in different situations; they overlap, crisscross, and sometimes contradict each other. In Chapters Two through Four, I will examine the work that different Dominican constituencies have undertaken to move specific rituals or aspects of them from their private spheres into commercial venues and ventures. The tension between private/public identities is shifting, a movement that can be understood through examining music cultures. These shifts were initiated and advocated by cultural activists, folk dance troupe leaders, as well as scholars. In the 1970s these factions began a celebration of Afro-Dominican culture at festivals, universities, and many such public venues. They attempted and still attempt to produce a positive black consciousness among Dominicans, a movement I call *afro-dominicanismo*. Both positions, the anti-black Dominican and the proud black Dominican, are social constructions, neither true nor simple. Because most Dominicans already consider themselves to have black in their mixed identity, the work of *afro-dominicanistas* has not reached the bulk of the population. The majority of Dominicans remain indifferent to race-related quests. What afro-dominicanismo

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a social community determined by color" (ibid.:13). In other words, it was cultura, rather than biology, which "became the basis of class and racial exclusion" (ibid.:23). Hoffnung-Garskof does not imply that Dominicans are not aware of racial color, but that society establishes power relations through cultura and progreso, and Dominicans tend not to organize their politics around race (ibid.:61). Cultura becomes a means of exclusion and ironically also of belonging, explains Hoffnung-Garskof. Cultura is a tool for racial oppression, and a strategy for racial inclusion based on the exclusion of others (ibid.:13). In other words, the elite classes would monitor what entered their definition of Dominican identity based on their version of cultura.

has achieved, however, is the visibility and acceptance of previously marginalized forms of rituals and music and an overall ambiance of multiculturalism.

Vudú is perhaps the best arena in which to understand the tensions between Dominicans' public and private terrains. Scholars have called the belief in deities and spirit possession "Vudú" in order to strengthen the connection of the Dominican Republic to Haiti and Africa. Dominican practitioners refrain from using the term, instead referring to a belief in *los misterios* (the deities), or *las 21 divisiones* (the 21 Divisions; see Chapter Two), usually conflating Vudú with their Catholicism. Even so, many practitioners also recognize the commonalities with the religion practiced by Haitians. Dominican Vudú practitioners might even cross the border to Haiti, in order to be initiated or baptized. Both anti-Haitianism and an admiration for the power of their religious practices are part of the Dominican experience, but the latter is expressed less publically, as Vudú practitioners are well aware of the Eurocentric prejudices of the upper classes. Members of many isolated regional ritual communities comfortably enact their religious identity only among themselves. I have noticed, however, that, as many rural Dominicans move to cities, they conceal their private affairs and regional identity, and instead emphasize their public, anti-Haitian identity. It is easy, then, to infer that practitioners conceal their rituals because they are ashamed of them, but in studying attitudes towards Afro-Dominican music, the analysis has pointed to a more complex picture of Dominicanness: one that contains not only shame, but also pride in "black" rituals.

Many Dominicans have hesitations about expressing this pride to outsiders. Many of the interviewed practitioners spoke proudly about their deities and the

contagious aspects of the music, only after establishing a trust that I would not judge them for their beliefs. They have indeed learned to keep beliefs private in order to navigate a political and social system that discriminates against them. While refusing to call their practices Vudú—in order to separate them from those of Haitians—many practitioners of Afro-Dominican rituals (Vudú and others) recognize that both Africa and Haiti play some sort of role in their beliefs, although most would not feel the need to celebrate this heritage, or stress its importance. Matters such as origins of rituals are taken for granted, and many Dominicans assume these practices are their own, regardless of where they came from.

While practitioners of Vudú—and other Afro-Dominican rituals—have little interest in teasing out the African heritage of these traditions, the Dominican elite's struggle to define Dominican culture has to a large extent constituted a debate over Dominican religion. Throughout history, Dominican elites have insisted on the pure, Hispanic Catholicism of Dominicans, and dismissed other elements as foreign. It was African/Haitian infiltrations that dictator Trujillo persecuted with Law 391 from 1943 (modified in 1958), when he prohibited participation in Vudú ceremonies.[29] However, as 85-year-old Vudú practitioner Inés de Márquez[30] told me, during the dictatorship

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[29] Aquiles Castro states that the dance called "judú" had already been prohibited in 1862. He has transcribed some of the items in the 391 Law from 1943, and reminds us that this law is still in place in the Dominican Republic. Although not enforced, many gagá practitioners still suffer from retaliation (see Chapter Two). Some items of this law include: "1) Spectacles known as 'voudou' or luá' (whether celebrated in public or in private) will be considered an outrage to public morality and as such shall be punished with correctional practice. 2) Persons convicted of committing this crime against decency will be punished by imprisonment of two months to two years or a fine of ten to five hundred dollars. 3) The same penalty will be imposed on the people whose houses or establishments, farms and possessions held any act of the nature here expressed." (http://www.cielonaranja.com/aquilescastrogaga.htm)

[30] The majority of the interviews for this dissertation were conducted in Spanish. All translations from the Spanish are mine. This phone conversation took place in September 2009.

people continued to celebrate their saints' ceremonies, and even government officials in rural communities participated; many of them were believers as well. These local leaders protected practitioners by warning them when officers from the central government were coming to town for an inspection. Their Vudú festivities were then scheduled for days that were deemed safe. When asked why she thought she would be persecuted for practicing her beliefs, de Márquez responded that the government associated these ceremonies with prostitution and *brujería* (witchcraft), but she claimed they were nothing of the sort. She pointed out the beautiful and contagious aspects of the music used for the rituals: "Don't you see that everyone who hears these drums has to dance?" Even though laws against practicing Vudú remain, they are not currently enforced; thus practice wins out over official policy, demonstrating how Dominicans have been able to function within such controlling structures. Noncompliance with regulation is a modality of agency, as is the acceptance of a public collective national identity, which has elevated Dominicans' status over their Haitian neighbors.

Since the 1970s, the Afro-dominicanismo movement has sought to reverse negative attitudes toward blackness and Africa in Dominican culture, and to have ritualistic practices no longer confined to hidden geographical areas, no longer shunned or hidden by their practitioners, and no longer a part of Dominican culture that many feel ashamed of showing publicly. This movement, initiated by urban educated academics, musicians, and cultural activists, has become more and more influential; African-based and Haitian-influenced beliefs and rituals are growing in visibility, playing a vital part in the country's shift in identity. In recent decades,

Afro-Dominican music has been performed out in the open at many festivals throughout the Dominican Republic and the diaspora. It is also performed in the many Vudú ceremonies practiced in hotel lounges and party rooms, with disco lights and open admission (see Chapter Five).

Specific musical articulations of blackness have developed since the 1960s, sometimes silent in discursive practices, but embodied through expressive culture and lived experience. My examination includes the passage of Afro-Dominican music from its strictly rural and ceremonial settings to more urban locations, and even into dance clubs as a form of popular music. It demonstrates how race as a historical and social construction portrays Dominicanness as founded upon fluid relationships and ambiguous borders. It also reveals a plural construction of Dominicanness, resulting from interactions between the state and the multiple actors who among other things may call themselves indio, experience possession with African deities, and dance merengue, the "Hispanic" symbol of the nation.

Interactions between the different constituencies of the nation reveal a polyphony of voices. If one studied only elite ideology, one would lose sight of the exercises of agency and social action that Dominicanness carries. To attribute no agency at all to the Dominican masses is to believe in the achievement of an essentialized, non-fluid, and steady identity. As Charles Hale states, "the term 'subversion' sheds its former meaning of 'conspiring against the system' and refers instead to the art of working at the interstices, finding the inevitable cracks and contradictions in the oppressor's identity, discourse, or institutional practice, and using them to the subaltern's advantage" (1997:581). In the Dominican Republic,

blackness has often been communicated through the manipulation of context rather than in words. Through music and music cultures, Dominican agents have been able to resist and subvert. Various modes of resistance range from the overtly political or Marxist-based to vulgarity in twenty-first century popular music lyrics that contest traditional values and behavioral codes attached to elite and white Dominican cultures. In each case, dissidents using these forms of resistance deliberately to reject values that sustain the existing power relations.

Dulce: A Vudú Priestess

In the summer of 2010, I spent a few weeks in the house of Dulce, a Vudú medium in the Dominican town of San Juan de la Maguana. I had visited her several times in previous summers while attending her Santa Marta (Saint Martha) celebration. San Juan de la Maguana is about an hour away from the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and has a very strong regional identity. It is the home of many Vudú mediums and practitioners including the messianic leader Olivorio Mateo.[31] In Dulce's home, I was surprised by aspects of the interaction between Haitians and Dominicans. Dulce constantly received visitors seeking help, blessing, or healing (physical or spiritual). I spent those weeks listening to their negative comments about Haitians, only to find out that Dulce's adopted daughter, closest friend, and godmother of her son are all Haitian. As surprising as this was at

[31] Olivorio Mateo had and still has many followers. He fought against the American forces during the 1916 invasion of the Dominican Republic, and was killed by members of the American military in 1922. He had also become a threat to civil authorities because his followers obeyed him fervently.

first, the contradiction points to larger issues in Dominican-Haitian relations, which require deeper inquiry.

Comments by Dulce, regardless of the fact that many of her closest friends are Haitians, demonstrate that these relationships are partly fearful or disdainful:

> Haitians are thieves and traitors. That is why they are always in big groups. They sleep on the floor and where we can fit two, they fit 15… They are so bad that two people from here went to Haiti to help with the earthquake [of Jan 12th, 2010], and they were killed there. It's as though the evil runs in their blood… They are always checking on you. When you close your eyes, they take everything away from you and leave. They can live with you for 20 years and nothing happens, but one day they take everything away and you would never find them because they know the whole country, and anyway, they all look alike.[32]

Listening to such statements in isolation would demonstrate the racism and apprehension of many Dominicans towards Haitians, but Dulce's admiration for Haitians, and their strong skills as mediums, also influenced her opinion. Because of her own practice, she traveled to Haiti to find religious guidance and to visit friends. One day we went to visit a friend of Dulce and, while sitting under a mango tree, some of Dulce's friends talked derisively about the Haitians who lived across the street. Dulce got up to greet the Haitian family; Altagracia was the godmother to one of her children. Their conversation indicated they were quite close and fond of each

[32] Interview, June 17, 2010.

other. I also learned that Altagracia was a Vudú mentor to Dulce. While they stood there, Altagracia advised Dulce to perform the ceremonies properly in order to have her life move in the right direction.

Another good friend of Dulce, Mami, speaks both Haitian *Kreyòl* and Spanish. Though everyone knows that Mami is from Haiti, no one in the circle of friends dares to ask details about her life there, or why she came to the Dominican Republic. Mami is highly valued among Dulce's friends because she takes them to Haiti, serving as a tour guide and translator. She is also the only person they believe can understand certain deities so powerful that they speak only Haitian Kreyòl, not Spanish. Mami is the kind of subject many Dominicans fear because she speaks both languages, understands certain deities, and is at ease in both countries. She could choose to use her "evil" Haitian power over the Dominican. Similar to the Dominicans concealing their blackness in public, Mami's Haitianism is also tacit, but known to everyone in her community.

In the examples of Altagracia and Mami, conflicting forces are apparent in the shaping of Dominican subjectivities. Haitians embody Dominicans' private identity and stand for how Dominicans don't want to be seen publicly. Dominicans shun Haitians, while admiring and coveting their ability with magic and their superior spiritual power. On the whole, Dominicans like Dulce articulate their public identity as anti-Haitian through verbal discourse, but their cultural closeness with Haitians is kept in the private realm, embodied as part of expressive culture. Through their actions, Dominicans implicitly express belonging and critique power structures. Their bodies produce a source of lived identity. While ideologies of anti-Haitianism have

been transmitted through official means, Dominican bodies transmit alternative social knowledge, cultural memory, and black identity.

While Dominicans distrust Haitians like Mami, many of them also embrace Haitian practices. It is precisely this cultural closeness that creates a Dominicanness that often oscillates between a public identification with anti-Haitianism (ostracizing of Vudú), and a private reverence for these beliefs, seeing Haitians as the ultimate practitioners and arbiters of religious power. This Du Boisian double consciousness is a complex play between the exclusionary conditions of the social structure and the cultural strategies used by the marginalized to resist them. Ginetta Candelario has analyzed how Dominicans switch between different ideological codes, depending on the context, to demonstrate how they use strategic ambiguity "simultaneously for purposeful self-presentation strategies and for equivocation in dynamic interplay between the internalization and externalization of official identity discourses" (2007:32). Thus, Candelario notes, we must separate internal versus external, as well as private versus collective, Dominican identities.

Lauren Derby has historicized the connection of Vudú to Dominican identity and anti-Haitianism in the article "Haitians, Magic, and Money, Raza and Society in the Haitian-Dominican Borderlands, 1900–1937." She explains that in the first decades of the twentieth century, during the Dominican Republic's first occupation by the United States, the Dominican-Haitian relationship was commodified, and as a result both populations shifted their views of one another. As Dominican-Haitian trade was integrated into the national markets, "Haitians came to be seen as the very embodiment of money magic" (1994:489). So, for border communities, Haitians

represented value, both economic and religious. Derby explains that "as a result of their perceived monopoly of the sacred, Haitians were treated with awe and deference in certain situations. The Haitians' command of *Vodou* endowed them with a form of social power that at the time took priority over class distinction" (ibid.:517). Today this remains the prevalent view about Haitians and Vodou. Many Dominicans, even those that either experience spirit possession themselves, or are close to those who do, emphasize that Haitians, when possessed, perform extreme acts, such as stepping on glass or fire. Dominicans fear and envy Haitian religious power, while they are also fascinated and disdainful of things Haitian.[33] Unlike most Dominican practitioners, Haitians are believed to become possessed by the most powerful deities. This fear of Haitian economic power, and moreso their religious power, came to be feared by border Dominicans, a fear later appropriated by the state to spread anti-Haitianism.

As Derby states, "Dominicans see their [own] possession like a simulacra or a forgery of the real thing" (1994:517).[34] As many of my informants are Vudú practitioners, I have observed them going to a Haitian medium when they seek someone with "true" power and knowledge. When Dominicans need a powerful medium, they prefer a Haitian, and in many cases a possession is believed to be truthful when the medium speaks Kreyòl. Thus, Derby (2003) sees anti-Haitianism not as the product of the occupation by Haiti of the Dominican Republic (1822–1844), nor as outright racism, but rather coming "from Haiti as the virtual

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[33] The fascination with Haitians extends beyond their magic abilities. Dominican men talk about the *cocomordan* of Haitian women, the ability of grabbing men's penis with their vagina enhancing pleasure for the men. Hear the merengue "Cocomordan" by Amarfis and the *dembow* "Coco Mordan" by El Alfa.

[34] Santana and Sánchez argue that the variants of palo music from the Southwest (specifically from San Juan de la Maguana) have become the most widely spread throughout the country precisely because of the proximity of this town to Haiti, the source of knowledge (2010:383).

embodiment of commodity value—of gold, silver species and slaves—derived initially from an attitude of reverence, not depreciation" (2003:34). In recent decades, as the music and rituals of Dominican Vudú have moved into secular spaces, many Vudú believers doubt the truthfulness of Dominican mediums' possession more than ever, enlarging the perceived difference between the powerful Haitians and Dominicans.

Agency Through Diaspora

In recent academic literature on Dominicans, there has been a tendency to point to a gradual change in their racial awareness because of the large migration to the United States. Many advocates of this idea point to a racial trauma or racial change that affects Dominicans on encountering the racial classification of the United States, where they may be considered black (Moya Pons 1986; Duany 1998; Simmons 2011). Racial transformation of Dominicans in New York is assumed to account for changes in identities of Dominicans on the island. To some extent, I agree with this reading of the diaspora; however, I see the need to complicate the reductiveness of the narrative. While I concur that certain identity shifts and multiplicities of identifications happen to Dominicans in the diaspora, island Dominicans have also been active agents in the politics of identity, in changing the meanings of blackness, and in redefining Dominicanness in the post-dictatorship era.

Cultural remittances, especially music, have been key in defining Dominican identity. They must be studied understanding the transnational field in which Dominicans have worked, in the last decades, where influences move in multiple

directions. Over this period Dominican music and identity have increasingly drawn material from traditionally black music genres (I discuss in detail in Chapter Six). Afro-Dominican music genres are each day enjoying more acceptability, and popular music genres acquire more influences from R&B, dancehall, and hip-hop. In countless conversations with my Dominican friends, they attribute this process to a "Nuyorquización" (Americanization) of Dominican culture, but many of the forces that brought about these changes were initiated and developed inside the country, where shifting racial identities are not exclusive importations.

In arriving at these conclusions, I build upon earlier work of my own, which I now find leaning too much towards essentialism. In a 2006 article, I linked changes in *bachata* and merengue to shifts in Dominican identity, arguing that the shifting racial awareness of migrants in New York led them to create hybrid forms of music, those combining bachata, merengue, and *merengue típico* with hip-hop, R&B, and the musics of New York City. I conceptualized this identity as binary—those in the homeland and those in the diaspora—failing to consider collective identity as multidimensional and contradictory. Although the diasporic experience has indeed helped transform Dominican society to some degree, Dominicans on the island, I would now argue, have not been passive recipients of ideologies, but products of complex processes of identity formation.

It remains as challenging to analyze Dominican identity in the diaspora as it is to understand the plurality and contradictions of identity on the island. José Itzigsohn (2005) notes the complexity of analyzing the verbal identification of recent Dominican migrants to the United States, finding that Dominicans in New York

possess an even larger repertoire of labels by which they define themselves. In his study of Dominican immigrants, conducted in New York City and Providence, Rhode Island, Itzigsohn found that Dominicans chose "Hispanic" over "black" or "white," even though over a third realized Americans saw them as "black." Despite a growing appreciation of African American struggles for liberation and equality, Dominicans in the diaspora, for the most part, still prefer to identify themselves within mixed and ambiguous categories, such as Hispanic, over mutually exclusive ones (e.g., black, white).[35]

I assert that it is entirely understandable for Dominicans to use a plural identity of "Hispanic" in the United States, and also to call themselves indio in the Dominican Republic. For many Dominicans the migratory experience adds a layer of identity to the self. It is possible, for example, for me to perceive myself as a member of a racial minority in the United States, while also seeing myself as white in the Dominican racial system. The diasporic experience of Dominicans adds another square to the identity mosaic (see Introduction), or one more point along the continuum. Candelario points to how Dominicans engage "in a sort of ideological code switching in which both the Dominican Republic's and United States' race systems are engaged, rejected, and sustained at various historical and biographical moments" (2007:263). Many writers and scholars have argued that a permanent change of Dominicans' racial identity has occurred in the diaspora, while others see a return to old identifications once Dominicans return to the home country. Looking at

[35] In 2012, an article from Fox News Latino reported that Dominicans were President Obama's most enthusiastic Latino voters because they felt an affinity towards Obama's mixed race background. (http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/11/02/dominicans-are-obama-most-enthusiastic-latino-voters)

music offers an indirect and more complex way of reading the plurality and contradictions of identity and perhaps a better way of reading general tendencies without dismissing the implicit countervoices within. It is possible for a person to keep identifying themselves with new emerging music genres, just as it is possible for one to keep adding identities to their repertoire.

We should be wary of studies that exclusively attribute agency to the diasporic community in current Dominican racial identity shifts. Such conclusions rob agency from island Dominicans, who, since the end of the dictatorship, have found ways of contesting notions of culture and representation. Studies of Dominican identity must also take into account the many ways local processes of racialization have changed as a result of modernization, tourism, and globalized mass media. In understanding these changes, I follow Peter Wade, who sees in Latin America and elsewhere, a shift to multiculturalism—which has decentered hegemonic narratives—and a move towards the commodification of diversity prompted by globalizing capitalism (2000:25–26). New Dominican music genres now emerge with influences from black musics such as hip-hop and dancehall. These reflect and help form new black identities in the Dominican Republic. In some ways these identities have been made possible by forces unique to the twenty-first century such as migration and neoliberal policies (Chapter Six).

"Indio" and Color Blindness

The term indio was officially instituted as a national racial category during the Trujillo dictatorship. A strategic move to homogenize and contain the many layers of

racial diversity of the Dominican population, it also erased direct references to blackness, Africa, and Haiti. The indio label gave Dominicans a way to make sense of their color: not white, but still underscoring their Hispanic culture, as opposed to relating their racial background to that of the Haitian population or Africa. According to Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, during the eighteenth century Dominicans already "perceived themselves as a very special breed of tropicalized Spaniards with dark skin, but nevertheless culturally white, Hispanic, and Catholic" (1996:15). "Indio" has been used since at least 1917 (Moya Pons 2009:140), the census in the Dominican Republic using the term to avoid registering the actual color, or race, of the Dominican population. Use of indio became more ubiquitous throughout the twentieth century; in the census from 1993–1996, eighty-two percent of the population was registered by state officials as indio (ibid.:150–151).

For most of the twentieth century, the census included white, negro, and indio as possible categories, indio implying mixed color. Then, as Kimberly Eison Simmons explains, in 1998 "mulatto" was added as a category to the newly digitalized *cédulas* (Governmental ID). Mulatto (according to media reports and information by state officials) "was supposed to replace indio" (2011:11). For the first time, a mixed category implying African ancestry was used as an official state category on the cédula. While many government officials told Simmons that indios (the people) did not exist, or that indio was "not really a color," they were reluctant to register people using other categories, such as mulatto or negro.[36] Instead, indio continued to be the default category, except for the minorities of clearly white, black,

[36] In the Dominican Republic, government officials record an individual's race on the census and on the cédulas.

or *amarillo* (Asian) Dominicans (47). As Candelario observed, the term mulatto has had "connotations of illegitimacy and the stigma of slavery in colonial and early national discourses of race," but indio, as a local Dominican construction, opposes identities such as white and black, whose roots lie elsewhere (2007:18). Although both indio and mulatto convey mixed race or "mix," generally, mulatto resonates with discursive practices that underscore the black part of the mix.

Many studies have attempted to explain Dominican attributions of the term indio as representative of ideas of either race or ethnicity. According to Simmons (2011), indio correlates not with Dominicans seeing themselves as native Indians, but rather as designating "mixture." Other scholars have concurred, as mentioned above. My research, however, has indicated that the ambiguity of the term leads to complex understandings, and misunderstandings, of its meaning. Many Vudú practitioners told me that their practices come from the Native Indians and many (for example, the *palo* music[37] group called Los Taínos) defend their Indianness by dressing in "indio" clothes, painting their bodies, and participating in performances that verbally describe the Indian roots of palo music (music used in Vudú ceremonies). In interviews, this group insisted they were direct descendants of Native Indians of the Dominican Republic, and that Africa had nothing to do with their heritage. In 2011, at Sainaguá, one of the major festivals in support of African culture in the Dominican Republic, the group's indio display was so extreme that the MC proclaimed ironically that Los Taínos was the only group of Taíno Indians playing African music. While examples of blatant erasure of Africa or blackness, such as that of Los Taínos, are not rare in the Dominican Republic, the ambiguity of the term indio might strategically or

[37] The music of Vudú.

unconsciously serve to conflate the mixed color of Dominicans with an allegedly Indian heritage. For most Dominicans indio represents their mixed racial heritage (white, black, and Indian).

A new trend in Dominican identity politics, however, is to defend the Taíno Indian presence. According to the history Dominicans learn in schools, the Taíno Indian were eliminated just a few decades after the Spanish arrival on the island. Thus, Taíno culture was thought to have little effect on contemporary Dominican cultural forms. Advocates of Taínoness, however, have conducted studies to find genetic traces of Taínos, and they have also conducted cultural studies to show that their traits remain in many more aspects of Dominican culture than previously acknowledged. Currently, some Dominican musicians attempt to recreate Indian Taíno ceremonies, such as *areíto*, and look for Taíno features embedded within Dominican music. Taíno advocates viewed the Junta Central Electoral attempt to eliminate indio as a racial category as yet another step in the historical erasure of the Taíno presence.[38] The Junta's putative intention was to eliminate the use of indio as a masking for mulatto; advocates of Taínoness believe, however, that black identity should not be advocated at the expense of another subaltern group. Taíno advocates are sometimes misunderstood by Dominicans in the afro-dominicanismo movement. Irka Mateo, one of the main performers attempting to reconstruct Taíno culture, has argued that Taíno culture offers another possible identity that neither replaces nor conceals blackness.[39] Thus, while for current Taíno advocates their name stands for

[38] Personal communication, summer 2010.
[39] Personal communication, summer 2010.

the recovery of an identity, for afro-dominicanistas, indio stands for erasure of an African identity.

Whether the use of the indio label to self-identify or identify Dominicans constitutes an awareness of mixture, a rejection of the black in Dominican culture, or a true identification with ancestors, an understanding of Dominican identity should perhaps be approached through another set of markers that go beyond identity labels and verbal discourse. Simmons has pointed out that the word "denial," used in both academic and popular discourses to characterize Dominicans' relationship with blackness, gives, perhaps, the inaccurate impression that Dominicans fail to acknowledge their African ancestry at all: "Denial would mean that Dominicans do not think they have African ancestry, which is not the case. African ancestry is often acknowledged, but it is downplayed and relegated to a place that is hidden or 'behind the ear'" (2011:2). While many of my informants seem to recognize Africa as part of their heritage, they feel no need to convey it, and if asked, acknowledge it in a matter-of-fact manner. However, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, a pride in African culture is now emerging, and with it a proud acknowledgement of "mulattoness" (as a substitute for indio) or even "black" as racial identification. This shift has resulted from the work of cultural workers, musicians, academics, and the politically progressive who initiated the afro-dominicanismo movement in the 1970s. Vudú celebrations, and the countless festivals celebrating Afro-Dominican culture, have disseminated pride and prompted a reassessment of identity to the general population as well. Afro-dominicanistas have consistently used culture to shift the balance of power, and music has played a large role in these shifts.

From Color Blindness to Cultural Borders

As Ernesto Sagás points out, "Antihaitianismo ideology combines a legacy of racist Spanish colonial mentality, nineteenth-century racial theories, and twentieth-century cultural neoracism into a web of anti-Haitian attitudes, racial stereotypes, and historical distortions" (2000:ix). Because skin color is an imprecise marker, hardly separating Haitians from dark-skinned Dominicans, Dominican elites have resorted to cultural markers such as music, religion, and hair to differentiate Haitianness from Dominicanness.[40] Therefore, anti-Haitianism is often articulated as Dominican concern of a constant threat of invasion by Haitians and their "barbaric" cultural practices such as Vudú, neglecting the fact that Dominicans practice Vudú in all confines of the Dominican Republic. In the summer of 2011, I attended Dominican sociologist Dagoberto Tejeda's lecture on popular religion. He emphasized that if we ignore Vudú we are left with only a partial glimpse of Dominican identity. For example, Belié Belcán (Saint Michael) is associated with the colors red and green; noticing that many countryside houses are painted in these colors gives some understanding of the level of fervor Dominicans feel towards Belié Belcán, the most revered deity in Dominican Vudú. Singer María Terrero told me a story once that illustrates how oblivious Dominicans can be to a part of their culture, which is nevertheless present everywhere. When María was 13 years old, her aunt fell on the floor. María's mother kept asking her sister what she wanted, ultimately giving her some rum. From that moment on, María grew afraid of her aunt when she would roll on the floor, a seemingly inexplicable act. Only after learning about Vudú (not

[40] As explained earlier, Afro-Dominican music and Vudú were constructed in the Dominican imagination as Haitian. Haitians can be distinguished in the Dominican Republic by their braids and untreated hair. For more on hair, see fn 26 and the Introduction.

through her family) did María understand that her aunt experienced spirit possession periodically, and that the whole family believed these possessions held power. These Vudú beliefs, of course, were not talked about openly; ambiguity and tacitness[41] permeate the self-presentation strategies of Dominicans.

María's experience is not atypical in Dominican society. Vudú and spirit possession rituals are important in this study because of how they reflect and relate to many of the Afro-Dominican music genres and ritualistic practices. Such practices in the Dominican elite's racial imaginary were constructed similarly to Vudú, and relate to the Haitian black.[42] The study of Dominican attitudes towards forms of popular religiosity reveals the ways in which Dominicans have historically constructed racial identities and borders. Possession has been used as a symbolic border between Haitian practices and those of Dominicans who allegedly only practiced Catholicism. These borders are becoming blurrier as possession rituals are being taken out of their confined spaces.

In many instances, Afro-Dominican practitioners of rituals other than Vudú emphasize that possession is not part of their religious practices. When Sixto Minier, former captain of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo (a black cofradía organization), learned that I was looking for Afro-Dominican music and rituals, he directed me to his neighbor's house, assuring me that these rituals were not found in his cofradía. He was referring to the spirit possession taking place at the neighbor's Vudú ceremony. Although possession is not used in all rituals of the Congo cofradía,

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[41] See the work of Decena 2008.

[42] Although Vudú is different from cofradías and other manifestations of popular religiosity—such as messianic cults—all such traditions were socially constructed in the Dominican imaginary as Haitian and black for their dissonance with Catholicism.

in particular death rituals a dead person *can* possess the body of a member of the cofradía. The possession in Vudú, however, lends itself to a more sensationalist character, as some deities are deemed loud and showy. By disassociating himself from his neighbor's spirit possession, Sixto Minier was avoiding the stigma that spirit possession has and seeing possession not as something one practices, but as a marker of an unwanted identity.

Trujillo enforced laws against Vudú rituals, but even after his assassination, democratic governments in the Dominican Republic, especially those of President Balaguer (1966–78 and 1986–96), reinstituted policies of *hispanidad*. In books and many of his presidential speeches, the Hispanophilic Balaguer accused Haitians of wanting for centuries to Africanize and corrupt the religious feeling of the Dominican people. He claimed that during the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic (1822–1844), Haitian leaders deliberately imported blacks to the eastern part of the island (now Dominican Republic) in order to spread their "savage-like" practices, and that after independence (in 1844) they spread these practices in more clandestine ways. Balaguer insisted that Vudú was the most barbaric practice and that President Trujillo had been against Vudú because it threatened Dominican moral values. Balaguer wrote:

> All the zones near the territory of Haiti had been invaded by exotic customs that were not only undermining the morality of the Dominican people but their unity in religious feeling as well. Incest and other practices no less barbaric and antagonistic to the Christian institution of the family are

> common among the lower classes of the population of Haiti and give testimony of its appalling moral deformities. Haiti's popular religion, known as "voudou," had been embraced by a large portion of the Dominican population of the frontier zones and was causing a severe religious crisis. . . . The propagation of that diabolical rite, contrary to the essence and the education of the Dominican people, could have succeeded in uprooting the Catholic feelings of the country and in destroying the bases for our religious unity. (1947:110)

Many writings from the dictatorship period underscore the Haitian threat. Such blatant anti-Haitian rhetoric is rarely seen today, but, as recently as 1990, Manuel Núñez wrote the controversial *El ocaso de la nación dominicana* (The Decline of the Dominican Nation) to voice concern that the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic[43] had multiplied by six between 1960–1989, while the Dominican population had only doubled. He accused Haitians of "implanting" their culture on Dominican land, citing as evidence the number of Haitian Kreyòl speakers in the Dominican Republic, and young Dominican's sympathy for the *gagá*[44] rituals, Vodou, and other forms of "Haitian" religious experiences (1990:37, 311). Particularly controversial are Núñez's concerns about the current mainstream visibility of Afro-Dominican culture. He attributes youth's attraction to these forms of religion and music to Dominicans' sense of emptiness because, he claims, they have

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[43]Recent studies have shown that half a million Haitians are living in the Dominican Republic. These numbers contrast with previous estimates of 1 million and 1.5 million Haitians. See http://www.acento.com.do/index.php/news/76337/56/Republica-Dominicana-pais-de-emigrantes-mas-que-de-inmigrantes.html. Accessed May 5, 2013).

[44] These are carnivalesque rituals intimately related to Haitian Vodou and Dominican Vudú.

no knowledge of their own poets, writers, artists, and thinkers. Thus Núñez attributes their attraction to Vudú and Haitian rituals to a lack of education, needed, he maintains, to help Dominicans fight against the "primitive" sexual and emotional appeal of Africanized forms of music.

Since such blatant racism has long been denounced in much of the world, writers like Núñez make a point of emphasizing the defense of culture. Many Dominicans justify their anti-Haitian attitudes, and those in Dominican society in general, by pointing to the different fate of the *cocolos,* another black population that—like the Haitians—migrated to the Dominican Republic in large numbers at the end of the nineteenth century in order to work in the sugarcane industry, (see Chapter Two). Cocolos migrated from the English-speaking Lesser Antilles (e.g., Anguilla, St. Kitts, Antigua, and Tortola), and over time have been incorporated into Dominican society.[45] Many are praised as "prestigious" Dominicans.[46] In the Dominican imagination, according to this view, Haitians are uneducated and barbaric, whereas cocolos were British citizens and thus well-mannered. Norberto P. James Rawlings reminds us that though this image of cocolos is in some ways a historical construction, denigration campaigns against them appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, a scenario that contradicts recent history (2004:58). Although cultural plurality currently forms part of Dominican society, with Afro-Dominican music—such as cocolo theater pieces and dances—presented in countless festivals

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[45] According to Jessica Hajek, "The image of the dancing *guloya* [i.e. cocolo] first burst into the national imagination during a series of Barcelo-brand rum commercials of the mid-1980s, one of which highlighted San Pedro de Macoris" (2010:80). This was the Dominican city where cocolo settled.

[46] One of the many successful cocolos is the renowned baseball player, Sammy Sosa. Although a descendant of cocolos, most Dominicans would not question his identity as Dominican.

and events, such pluralism has not proved democratic and inclusive enough to recognize Haitian transnational culture in the Dominican Republic, regardless of their growing numbers and their majority of the foreign population.

In Chapter Two, I explore how afro-dominicanistas,[47] in their attempt to advocate for Afro-Dominican music and culture, have nevertheless failed to centralize the place of Haitian culture in Dominicanness. Instead, Dominican governments have strategically allowed Afro-Dominican subcultures to exist in the Dominican imagination as a trope for Africa, through events that celebrate African heritage, thus de-emphasizing their connection to Haiti. Afro-Dominican identity is gaining ground, but this subtle recognition of difference is in some ways separating communities in terms of a putatively stronger connection to Africa than to mainstream Dominican culture.

Mainstream Dominican culture has historically been conceptualized as a balanced blend of its three constitutive parts (African, Indian, and Spanish), and teasing out these influences was considered non-sensical in recent decades. I argue that Dominicans have achieved an increasing awareness of new constructions of Afro-Dominican and Taíno identities, and of aspects of these cultures they felt no need to claim before. The visibility of previously private celebrations and ritualistic practices is shifting the balance between private and collective Dominican identities. Whereas in the past Dominicans were proud of their mixed identity, presently they have flexibility and opportunities to shift between their African, Indian, and Spanish influences, and between their public and private identities. Afro-dominicanismo has

[47] By afro-dominicanistas I mean the various activists, folklorists, and intellectuals who have sought in diverse ways to valorize Afro-Dominican culture.

also increased the ways in which Dominicans display identities, both discursively and bodily. Nevertheless, new official cultural histories are still needed. As writers of the book *Desde la orilla: Hacia una nacionalidad sin desalojos* (2004) point out, a democratic Dominicanness should also include the culture of the shanty towns, the working class, Kreyòl, and the transnational Haitian community.

Although Dominican governments have made concessions to the afro-dominicanismo movement mainly by co-sponsoring music festivals, culture also remains where power relations are established, and Dominican collective national identity is monitored to exclude rather than include. It is easier to form connections with an imaginary Africa through Afro-Dominican music, than to reassess marginal communities in Dominican society. Haitians and dark-skinned Dominicans, living in shantytowns and marginal neighborhoods today, still pose a threat to the elite-informed Dominican national identity. This threat is evident in the anxiety elites express around public identity displays coming from these places, and music genres associated with them, a dynamic I explain further in Chapter Six.

The Thresholds of the Church: Hybridity and Borders

When analyzing Dominican identity, one must be aware that, nowadays, symbolic borders between Haitians and Dominicans are everywhere, not only because the fear of Haitians pervades all social classes of the Dominican Republic, and includes regions farther afield from those around the geographical border, but also because the Haitian presence has recently increased in cities. Haitians are no longer confined to living among the poor, rural, and darker-skinned; they also work in cities

and in the tourist industry—where they have flourished because they speak several languages.

To understand the ubiquity of everyday borders in the Dominican imagination is to see that identity-making happens not on either side of the border but within it. For example, in the summer of 2010, in my hometown Santiago, an incident occurred that helped me to understand how deeply ingrained the fear of Haitians is for most Dominicans, even those like me who have challenged anti-Haitianism and the stereotypes taught to me in my childhood. A Haitian woman appeared on my balcony and tried to sell me some fruit. I repeatedly told her that I was not interested, but she would not leave. I could not understand her Spanish, but as our interaction went on, I realized that I feared her, and that somehow her gaze made me feel very uncomfortable. I imagined a Haitian "evil look," but I decided not to run away and instead to confront my fears. She asked me if I could give her some water. I picked up a mug and served her water, not realizing the mug had not been washed. The woman tasted the contents of the mug, then threw the water at me and screamed something in Kreyòl. I could not understand why she threw it at me until I realized she believed I had given her water in an unwashed mug on purpose. Most interesting and shocking to me were my reactions to her. I was extremely afraid of her, and her gaze invoked a feeling in me that many Dominicans have also reported: a fear that she (the Haitian) would always watch me and, if she decided to, could use her "dark" powers on me.

The fear and envy of Haitian religious power forms the basis for much of the prejudice against them. My feelings resembled Dulce's; she also believed that Haitians were always watching Dominicans and, even though they appeared passive

and benevolent, they could switch and turn "evil." I heard statements about beliefs such as Dulce's throughout my childhood, as this fear of Haitians permeates the Dominican Republic, in every social class. While economic and political reasons account for the difficult relationship between the populations, religion plays an even bigger role than many previous researchers have understood. Ernesto Sagás explains anti-Haitianism was imposed from above (for instance by the laws of Trujillo), but argues this form of bigotry has been willingly accepted from below, where it has roots in national-cultural prejudices" (2000:4).

Sagás also points out that, historically, the Catholic Church has played a prominent role in the development of the prejudice against Haitians. The Dominican clergy, composed primarily of Spaniards, have instilled their racial views with animosity stemming from secular ideas of the French Revolution (ibid.:29). Sagás notes that the Catholic Church also opposed the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1822–44[48] on cultural and racial grounds, arguing they were particularly against the secular orientation of the Haitian administration (ibid.:30). In 1937, none of the Jesuit priests present in the border region when Trujillo ordered the massacre of 17,000 Haitians ever formally denounced the killings (ibid.:59). Today, voices speaking for the Catholic Church continue to express uneasiness about religious elements they see as foreign to the Catholic faith. In 2010 Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez condemned the consumption of rum and alcohol outside the church during the Saint Michael celebrations (Belié Belcán for Vudú believers), explaining that these rituals were not part of the Catholic faith.

[48] Dominicans celebrate their independence from Haiti.

Once again Homi Bhabha's analysis of colonial relations applies. These relations are ambivalent and have produced hybridity for both colonizer and colonized. The colonizer has obtained power by provoking colonized subjects to imitate the forms and values of the dominant culture; control cannot be completely achieved without destroying the hierarchical structure. In the process, though, the colonizer undergoes hybridity and the colonized mimicry, a form of resemblance. Thus, Haitian presence forms part of upper-class Dominican identity, and Vudú (and other popular religious practices) have popularized Dominican Catholicism. Afro-Dominican rituals have incorporated Catholic elements, while Dominican Catholicism assimilated local particularities deriving from Vudú and are the products of the people's agency. Catholic and Vudú, therefore, do not function as polar opposites, but influence each other. The Saint Michael celebrations in the colonial city of Santo Domingo are known for their religious syncretism, particularly—although still opposed by many Catholic priests—the presence of drumming on the steps of the church.

In the spring of 2005 I attended a *novena*[49] in Santa María, San Cristóbal. I had been told that for the nine Fridays culminating in Pentecost, drums would be played for the Holy Spirit at a church where no priest presided. People from nearby were to come in procession, singing and dancing palo music. The procession would culminate at the church and, after praying a rosary, the members would sing and dance for the next eight hours. I was interested in experiencing what I had seen in a video of this event from 1991. Palo drums had been played on the steps of the church

[49] Novena refers to the number nine. It could be a ritual that occurs nine days after a death, or possibly a ritual involving a sequence of nine.

and several members showed signs of Vudú deity possession. When I got to the church, I found palo drummers playing in an open-air tent, although no procession appeared; eventually, a priest came out of the church to invite us to attend Mass. About half of those present agreed to stop making music and attend Mass. The remainder claimed to be too drunk to go to the Mass, and continued worshipping in their own way. A disagreement broke out between the musicians, who wanted to continue playing, and a few church officials who had taken over that church about four months previous to the exchange. When the Mass was over, the attendees moved back to the steps of the church, to play and sing with the drums, and to "receive deities" as they had obviously done in the past. The church officials, proclaiming that the "Holy Spirit does not possess anyone" and dislikes palo music and rum drinking, kicked them out.

This incident dramatizes many of the paradoxes and tensions that exist in the current scene of Vudú music. It also raises the question: Are such performances sacred or secular, Catholic or Vudú? Although the verses in palo music were of religious character, the improvised lyrics were primarily secular. (In this case, the improvised lyrics concerned the *güira* [scraper] instrument the musicians had mistakenly left at home, and lyrics sought to flatter me—"how pretty you are!"—and "not just because you are white"). The incident raised other questions: What is the relationship of the Catholic Church and the Holy Spirit to Vudú rituals and to spirit possession? What meanings does the music have for people? If, as the church officials seemed to think, the performance was only about having fun and drinking, why did performers need to play on the steps of the church? Why, even if there was

no priest, would the drummers go near but refuse to go inside the church? Where exactly does the religious power reside—in the Catholic Church or the Vudú rituals, or both? Where do we locate the borders or the thresholds of this power? The relationships created between Vudú and Catholicism as well as Haitian and Dominican culture are too complex to decipher, constructed as they are across different, often intersecting and antagonistic dialogues and borders. Dominican identity reflects many convergent sets of processes, processes that are revealed in religion and music.

Chapter Two
In Search of the Production of Memory: Scholars, African Heritage, Music, and Black Consciousness

It is impossible to understand the complex contemporary narratives of Dominican music and identity without acknowledging Trujillo's brutal dictatorship (from 1930-1961). Trujillo assumed complete control of the nation and persecuted Haitians and African-derived religious practitioners as part of his politics of *blanqueamiento* (whitening). After Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, the country began a slow, progressive democratization process, which continues today. An important aspect of this process has been the mobilization of previously ignored cultural forms. Since the 1960s, many progressive Dominicans and sympathizers of the political left have fought for an egalitarian Dominican society through claiming visibility and space for genres of music that, during the dictatorship, were neglected or even prohibited.

Throughout Dominican history, writings about music have played an important role in creating ethnic and racial identities, becoming a crucial tool deployed by those in power to erase Africa from Dominican history and identity. Music has served the interests of conservative groups joining an ongoing debate as to what continues "true" Dominican culture. On the other hand, music, and specifically Afro-Dominican music, has been deployed by academics, musicians, cultural activists, and many constituencies of the nation as a vehicle for educating Dominicans in alternative conceptions of Dominicanness. These activists have challenged long-held national conceptualizations and searched to define the nation as inclusive of Dominicans' African heritage. After five decades of development in the form of

published scholarship, festivals, pedagogical folk troupes, and musical ensembles that celebrate Afro-Dominican music, progressive Dominicans have managed to create changes in definitions of Dominicanness—changes brought about in part by the use of music as a tool for educating, agitating, and changing identity. In this chapter, I delineate the work of revisionist scholars who took upon themselves to actively "return" the memory "stolen" from practitioners by researching the roots of these traditions and becoming vocal educators (without public funding) of Dominicans' African heritage. Today it is quite common for the general Dominican population to have been exposed through the media to Afro-Dominican musics. This current embracing of these cultures, and their popularity at large, is partly a consequence of the work of these academics.

Even if not by reading, practitioners themselves have acquired more awareness and pride in the African roots of their cultural practices through contact with academics and their work and by participating with academics in workshops, conferences, and festivals. After introducing the major genres of Afro-Dominican music and the issues included in their categorization, I will contextualize this growing awareness of African roots and explore some of the consequences that resulted from this scholarly reconfiguration. I look at music writings as a way of analyzing Dominican intellectual history and changing attitudes about African heritage. Until the end of the Trujillo dictatorship, Dominican folklore was portrayed as having a Spanish essence, and Afro-Dominican music and rituals were mentioned only in connection with Haiti or Haitian "barbaric" practices. An examination of music scholarship demonstrates the changes in perception of Afro-Dominican music that

have contributed to Dominican pride in their African heritage and also reflect changing attitudes towards blackness.

Many of the scholars whose ideas I discuss in this chapter were members of progressive or leftist groups opposing the Hispanicized identity put forth by Dominican governments. The public university, Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD), the center of operation for this new intellectual wing, introduced Marxism and incorporated new ideas and departments in its curriculum.[50] It opened its doors to the Dominican masses and to new ideological currents, in the process becoming a popular rather than an elite institution. In the 1960s and 1970s, the university filled its sociology and anthropology departments with professors and students who pushed for new schools of thought and research. The University's 1973 international symposium on the presence of Africa in the New World was a point of departure for the awakening of the search for African influences in Dominican culture. UASD and the Museo del hombre dominicano, an anthropological museum which also opened in 1973, have published many studies in recent decades (e.g., *Boletín del Museo del hombre dominicano)*. Out of both of these institutions, scholars have produced the bulk of revisionist academic literature, retelling a Dominican history and culture that acknowledges the influence of Africa. The work of scholars at the Museo del hombre dominicano led to UNESCO's recognition of two Afro-Dominican enclaves as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of

[50] This shift was in part due to the fact that the university gained autonomy after the assassination of Trujillo and in 1965 overthrew the old authorities and made changes in the university curriculum.

Humanity.[51] This acknowledgement has changed how the Dominican population views its African heritage.

However, such recognition has not come without conflict. For many Dominicans, recognizing these formerly "black" traditions as part of *dominicanidad* has triggered a deep-rooted fear of becoming too much like Haitians. In recent decades, as activists, artists, and the politically progressive have acknowledged the common roots of both cultures, many have been accused by traditionalists of wanting to unify the island and of compromising the Dominican nation. Most, if not all, *afro-dominicanistas* I interviewed would oppose joining the two countries of the island, but support the fair treatment of Haitians as a transnational population within the Dominican Republic; they also support the inclusion of Afro-Dominican culture in definitions of Dominican identity. This vision would translate into better social and economic conditions for the darkest and poorest sections of the population. Thus, many Dominicans recognize their differences with Haitians and that political unification is impossible, but they also understand a change in discourse must occur in order for Dominicans to value their African-derived traditions and take pride in their black ancestry.

Unfortunately, many of the academic writings discussed in thie chapter have been out of print[52] and are hard to find. Most have been written in Spanish and have not been translated into English.[53] Dominican scholarly work on music ranges from writings that neglect the existence of any ritualistic music not tied to the Catholic

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[51] Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo in Villa Mella and the Cocolo Teatro Danzante.
[52] Most books printed in the Dominican Republic are ephemeral publications that are generally hard to find even in the Dominican Republic.
[53] All translations of quotes and interviews from Spanish to English are mine.

Church to the current decades, when music related to African heritage in the Dominican Republic has received the most attention. The recognition of the importance of Africa in Dominican culture can be traced back to the late 1960s, when scholars resignified African traditions within the contexts of nation-making and national patrimony. Folklorist Fradique Lizardo best represents this point of view: "El problema dominicano estriba en que el negro en nuestro país ha perdido su identidad y tenemos que ayudarlo a conseguirla de nuevo" ("The Dominican problem resides in the fact that the black [person] in our country has lost his identity; we must help him to recover it") (1975:82). After five decades of scholars working with religious communities, practitioners themselves have even begun to adopt academic terminology when explaining the origin of their practices, particularly African traits. Martha Ellen Davis recounts that the leader of an Afro-Dominican cofradía told her the cofradía's music has African origins and that she knew this because a folklorist told her (1987:34). Davis, the most published writer on Afro-Dominican music and rituals, sees such communication as the mission of scholars (ibid.). The narrative is, of course, not linear. As will be discussed in this chapter, not all practitioners have been unaware of the African origins of their religious practices. Although early academic literature erased these narratives from the nation, later scholars found a "hidden transcript" contained in the music and rituals of these repressed populations (Scott 1990).

Defining Afro-Dominican Genres of Music

In this section, I introduce the music genres constructed as Afro-Dominican largely through their dissonance with the hegemonic merengue. Although many of these genres are not very different from merengue in the sense that they are hybrids with both Spanish and African-derived traits,[54] it has been primarily because these genres stayed connected to the rural poor, the darker-skinned populations (sometimes former Maroon settlements), and to rural religious cultures (e.g. messianic leaders) different from Catholicism that they were ostracized during the Trujillo dictatorship and since the 1970s labeled Afro-Dominican by scholars. At the same time these "African" genres were set aside or banned, Trujillo's narratives of merengue's allegedly exclusive Hispanic origins were created, in the process obfuscating African origins and African aesthetics in Dominican music.

Palos and *Salves*: The Music of Cofradías and Dominican *Vudú*

Palo is a generic term for the Dominican music genres that use palo drums. It includes music for Dominican Vudú ceremonies as well as for rituals within religious cofradías.[55] Palo drums are long, single-headed and played in sets of two or three accompanied by idiophones. (The idiophones can be *güira* [scraper]—one or several according to geographical region—or sticks beaten on the drum called *catá*).[56] Palo

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[54] Some "Afro-Dominican" genres even have similar instrumentation to rural merengue, as in the case of *priprí* or *comarca* music.

[55] Palo can also be played as part of pilgrimages and messianic cults (e.g., that of Olivorio Mateo).

[56] Some informants pointed out to me that before the güira, *maracas* (shakers) were used, but because the maracas's sound was too soft, they were replaced by the güira. According to folklorist Iván Domínguez (personal communication), in some areas of the country this shift happened earlier than in others. I have never seen maracas played, but Martha Ellen Davis

drums are usually played with bare hands, and with much variation of rhythm, depending on the geographical area. Lizardo has observed two ways of carrying palo drums. Players might fasten the drums to the waist, a practice which Lizardo considered to be of Bantu heritage, along with the use of pins to hold the skin. Other drummers leave drums free of the body, a trait characteristic of the Yoruba (Guerrero 2005:36). Within cofradías, the palo drums are a symbol of identity,[57] and in Vudú ceremonies, palo music can induce spirit possession.

Terminology in Dominican drumming is confusing because of the overlapping titles of genres: sometimes the vocal genre salve—also associated with cofradías and used for Vudú ceremonies—is sung with the accompaniment of the palo drums. In such cases, salves are referred to as palo music. Thus, if a tune is accompanied with palo drums, practitioners will call that palo music (the same way a ballad played in merengue rhythm might be considered a merengue). In this usage, the genre is determined by the rhythm and instrumentation, and the songs based on melody and lyrics. Salves can also be sung accompanied by other drums, such as *mongó, tambora*, or *balsié* (friction drum), with *panderos* (tambourines with few jingles, so they sound more like drums), or accompanied by clapping. In this chapter, I will refer to any music using primarily palo drums as palo music. Music using other

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has noted they are still played in the province of Monteplata. (http://www.lameca.org/dossiers/palos_drumming/eng/p2.htm)

[57] For example, if the cofradía's saint is the Holy Spirit, the palos are called *los palos del Espíritu Santo* (Holy Spirit's palos).

membranophones in either one of these two contexts—cofradías or Vudú—I will call salve.[58]

Davis has given the most complete study to date of Afro-Dominican genres. In *Voces del purgatorio: Estudio de la salve dominicana* (1981), she divides salves into three types, in a spectrum from sacred to semi-secular to secular. In her taxonomy, sacred salves are sung antiphonally, rhythmically free, sometimes in modal scales, a capella, or in a high, tense vocal register.[59] The texts of the sacred salves are addressed to the Virgin Mary and consist of settings of the liturgical prayer *Salve Regina*.[60] The other two kinds of salves are non-liturgical and more syncretic with African-derived features. The secular salves are in diatonic scales, use the major mode, and are in a medium range for the voice, strict tempo, sung responsorially (with call and response), and accompanied by a polyrhythmic instrumental ensemble. The soloist improvises lyrics, and responses are sung in the form of quatrains or *cuartetas* (four-line verses). The semi-secular salve adds secular text to the original sacred salve; this additional text can consist of a brief response or of cuartetas at the end of phrases (Davis 1981).

In palo music, usually the lower drum, or *palo mayor*, improvises while the other(s), *chivita* or *alcahuete*, are used to keep a steady ostinato.[61] Although

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[58] The accompaniment is varied for salves as players might use panderos, tambora, balsié, or mongó in many possible ensemble combinations. Sometimes they simply clap in accompaniment.

[59] Davis adds that many salve sagradas have less than seven notes (as in European modern music) or have the "tercio movible" (the major and minor third interval within the same piece).

[60] Salve Regina translates as Hail Holy Queen and is a Marian hymn. The term dates to the Middle Ages, and the Salve Regina is no longer used in Catholic masses.

[61] In a few areas of the country the highest-pitched drum improvises as in the town of Tamboril.

discrepancies appear within the terminology, most scholars agree that palo rhythms for the dead are slow and somber (sometimes called *palo abajo* or *palo de muerto*), and a faster type of palo (*palo arriba* or *palo corrido* in the east) is used for festive occasions and dancing.[62] Palo abajo singers frequently sing open vowel sounds rather than words, [63] and frequently alternate between call and response. Many texts for palo arriba are sung in call-response, alternating cuartetas with different sets of rhymes. In both palo abajo and palo arriba (as well as salves with palo drums), the solo lyrics are improvised while the refrain is not.

Although most Dominican genres are of mixed backgrounds (i.e., salves and palos might use Spanish quatrains, melodies, and harmonies, as well as African-derived ostinatos and polyrhythms), there has been a general tendency—by both governments and scholars—to classify them as either Spanish or African-derived. This premise has formed the basis for the historical marginalization of the most "African genres" in favor of the Spanish ones. However, these distinctions are of little use when analyzing Dominican music (or dance) in depth.[64] In several of her writings, Davis prefers placing Dominican genres on a continuum from the more African to the more Spanish (e.g. Davis 1980), yet she acknowledges that Dominican genres are so creolized that to categorize them in this way is too simplistic. Thus, for example, in her study of the Dominican salve (1981), Davis considers the secular salve to fall on the African side of the spectrum, but it is important to note that these

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[62] For more on the classification and terminology for palo drums, see Davis (1976), or (http://www.lameca.org/dossiers/palos_drumming/eng/p2.htm).
[63] These intonations perhaps are onomatopoeic sounds or African phonemes.
[64] Although nowadays, this model is probably a limited one, when analyzing any genre of music, I explore this discourse because it is still used in the Dominican Republic to marginalize or mobilize certain genres according to nationalistic agendas.

salves use Western tempered intonation, perhaps closer to European practice than to any African genre. This unwieldiness of dividing Dominican music into mutually exclusive categories remains. Nowadays, regardless of the fact that Dominican elites have tried to retain putatively Spanish-derived elements in Dominican culture, many music and dance genres categorized as such are found only in folk troupes or confined to small areas.[65] Those classified as "African," such as palo, have grown more visible.

In comparing so-called Spanish-derived music and dance genres to palo music, Davis rightly points out that many Dominican dances are similar to palo dance "in that they are couples' dances representing symbolic pursuit by the man of the woman" (1976:321). While palo music varies regionally, the palo dance is much more standardized; describing circular figures with his body, the man approaches and woos the woman.[66] Similar gender play happens in the *sarandunga* and *congo* dances. The palo dance involves a side-to-side movement and footwork, maintaining a rigid torso and arms. Such dances, Lizardo has noted, are European-derived. He argued that the prohibition of many religious rituals in colonial society resulted in the incorporation of African rhythms into European court-like dances (Guerrero 2005:70). Merengue exemplifies this as a hybrid music genre danced by couples. Regardless of the use of merengue in attempts to conceal blackness in Dominican culture, merengue—just like congo, sarandunga, and palo--is hybrid in both its music and dance form.

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[65] For example, *yuca, chenche matriculado, sarambo*, and others.
[66] For some variations on the dance, see (http://www.lameca.org/dossiers/palos_drumming/eng/p5.htm)

Palos and Salves in Religious Context: Vudú and Cofradías

Most scholars have considered Dominican Vudú a simplified version of Haitian *Vodou* because it is highly syncretic, thus less "purely" African, and uniquely eclectic due to the hybrid nature of the Dominican population. While I agree that Haitian Vodou is more standardized than Dominican Vudú, for several reasons I must disagree with ideas of the seeming simplicity of Dominican Vudú. The complexity of Dominican Vudú lies precisely in its eclecticism and lack of dogma. To pinpoint similarities in practices, and even beliefs, among Vudú believers remains difficult because Vudú's historically persecuted and repressed status has forced it to be malleable and hide within Catholic rituals, making intricate the multifaceted relationship between the two. These practical characteristics of the religion are evident in the music and performance of Vudú music (salves and palos), whether performed in a rural ritual, on the steps of a Catholic church, or in an urban dance club.

Although there are different ostinato rhythms in palo music, there are not as many as in Santería *batá* music, or the music of Haitian Vodou, because rhythms used in Dominican Vudú are not attached to particular deities. On the contrary, the same rhythmic base can be used for many different deities. The text of the music orients a piece towards a particular deity, although one deity may manifest even when the music played is intended to praise another deity. In Dominican Vudú ceremonies as opposed to other African-based religions, the drummers are free to choose the order of the pieces. Drums are generally not baptized (as they are for *Santería*), and while palo music can incite spirit possession, this can occur without music. A medium

might call deities simply by ringing a bell, and secular popular music might also be used for such ceremonies. I have even seen mediums manifest the spirit and give advice with *reggaetón* blasting in the background. Merengues and bachatas with religious lyrics are also composed for these festivities.

In April 2005, I was invited to a Vudú ceremony in Villa Mella, a small municipality in Santo Domingo Norte. I was expecting to hear palo music at the ceremony; instead a group called "Keko Band," with no palo drums, performed with a set of *congas, bongós*, guitars, and a drum machine. To my surprise, this music caused spirit possession. In fact, the adaptability of the religion can be noted in that, before there was any palo music in New York City, the favorite music used in Vudú ceremonies was a popular 1950s recording by the Cuban singers Celina and Reutilio[67] consisting not even of Santería songs, but of songs in popular dance-music style, about the *Orishas* (deities).[68] So, even though most practitioners use palo music (and salves as well), other music can help in spirit possession, a unique feature of Dominican Vudú that further demonstrates its adaptability.

In grappling with the origins of this religion, most accounts of Vudú consider it a derivative of Haitian Vodou although much more eclectic. In an attempt to reexamine Dominican relationships to race and Haiti, revisionist scholars have strategically used the name Vudú, even though, as stated, practitioners consider their beliefs and rituals as part of their Catholic faith. Davis sees the lack of structure in comparisons of Vudú to Haitian Vodou as a consequence of the smaller number of African slaves brought to the eastern part of the island, who maintained less

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[67] Personal communication with Iván Domínguez, summer 2011.
[68] Even today, *botánicas* (religious paraphernalia shops) in New York and the Dominican Republic still offer this recording as music to summon the spirits.

connection to Africa (1987:307).[69] Other scholars consider Dominican Vudú as having developed parallel to Vodou and then splitting, taking on distinctively Dominican features (see Deive 1975). The advocates of this theory note that, even though many deities are common to both Vodou and Vudú, many are also uniquely Dominican, for example, the Indian or Taíno deities. Dominican Vudú is also distinctive in its use of elements of Kardecian spiritism,[70] such as tarot cards and water vessels. Domínguez[71] recalls how, until the 1970s, songs used in Vudú rituals were sung in *Kreyòl,* but later, as repression waned, were increasingly sung in Spanish. According to Daniel Piper, until recently Dominican Vudú lacked its own indigenous music, either because music played a minor part in the rituals or, if music was needed, Catholic-based salves or Haitian music were used. Precisely with the emergence of public festivities after Trujillo's dictatorship, a repertoire formed around Vudú salves (Piper 2009). Understanding the historical context of Vudú helps us understand why Vudú uses many diverse genres without disrupting the spirit possession of its mediums and practitioners, and why it has been open to so many new constructions.[72]

It becomes easier to explain the historical lack of emphasis on music in Vudú when understanding that public celebrations were persecuted during the Trujillo

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[69] Davis also argues that the "simplicity," as well as the orientation of Vudú towards medicine, derives partly from a large Congo-Angolan influence on the eastern portion of the island (the Dominican Republic). According to Davis, in the Congo-Angolan region, as opposed to other regions, religious cults were smaller, less complex, and more oriented towards magic.

[70] Writings by Allan Kardec traveled to the Dominican Republic and became popular, thus part of popular religious practices.

[71] Personal communication, summer 2011.

[72] See Piper 2012 (Chapter Three) for more on the history of the relationship between palo and Vudú.

dictatorship. Most of the activities in Vudú still consist of a private consultation with a deity through a medium in order to obtain help with a problem or a cure to a disease (Davis 1987:424). It is in recent decades that ceremonies have been held out in the open, but the religion continues to lack a consistent dogma. There are also differences according to geographical region, urban or rural environment, and the social class of practitioners. Vudú's eclecticism is also manifested in the pantheon of deities and in its rituals, which incorporate elements of folk Catholicism, European Kardecian spiritism, and other African-derived religions. Icons of messianic and political leaders, as well as Buddha and deities from Cuban Santería, can be found on altars of Dominican Vudú. Because it is only in recent decades that the persecution of Vudú practices has decreased, there are no temples but there are countless private altars, and the rites of passage for a medium are flexible, as baptism and training are often neglected.

Although most Dominican practitioners try to separate their religion from that of Haitians by rejecting the label Vudú, the common roots are often ambiguously acknowledged. According to Davis, "when Dominicans want to give certain formality to their religion, they turn to a Haitian priest or cross the border in order to get baptized" (1996:3). Ironically, the common Dominican image of Haiti as evil can help to strengthen Dominican Vudú. When possessed, many Dominican mediums speak Kreyòl words regardless of whether they know the language. Speaking some Kreyòl renders the possession more "truthful" or authentic in the eyes of Dominicans, who consider Haitians to be more powerful (see Chapter One). Davis remarks that "Dominicans who wish to do evil to another person often seek out Haitian mediums

in sugarcane communities (bateyes) or go to Haiti," and "Dominican mediums, justly or not contrast their noble mission with practitioners of Haitian Vodoun who they say 'work with both hands,' i.e. do good and evil" (1996:5).[73]

Many Dominicans consider acts such as animal sacrifice to be "diabolical" and not Dominican. They believe the native deities present only in Dominican Vudú (i.e., not in Vodou) are the noblest of all deities. This ambivalent relationship towards Haiti is reflected in the Dominican use of the terms *brujo* (witch) for medium and *brujería* (witchcraft) for Vodou and Vudú. Believers use these words constantly; however, if an outsider refers to a medium as brujo, practitioners take offense. In the minds of Dominicans, Brujería is symbolically connected to Haitian Vodou; thus they prefer to be identified by outsiders as Catholics serving the *misterios* (deities). Showing the discrepancy between public and private aspects of Dominican identity, privately they believe practicing a religion with Haitian connections is fine, but publicly it is taboo. Nowadays, many mediums, especially in New York, use the labels brujo and brujería as a way of empowering themselves. New York practitioners are also more open to calling their religion Vudú.

Dominican historical attitudes towards blackness are also evident in aspects of the Vudú religion, such as its hierarchy of deities.[74] Out of the four main categories of deities—*Radás, Petró, Guedés* and Indian—the Radás group, Davis explains, is considered "white" because these deities are considered the most spiritually positive.

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[73] Davis explains earlier in the text that "evil" refers to *hechicería*, or witchcraft.

[74] Although many practitioners say that there are twenty-one divisions of Vudú deities, few are actually known, suggesting that twenty-one is perhaps more of a symbolic number (Davis 1987:125). Davis says the number 21 should be interpreted figuratively and not literally, as the number 21 possesses mystical qualities (as well as 3 and 7 which when multiplied are 21) (ibid.:125).

They are also superior in rank. The Guedés are called "black deities"[75] because they work with the dead. The Petrós are considered materialistic and vulgar, associated with magic and sensationalistic acts such as walking on or eating fire, drinking kerosene, and piercing the body with pins. Petrós are thus associated with Haiti. The Native Dominican Indian deities do no harm whatsoever (1987:136-137). Thus, the most feared deities are referred to as "black" and viewed as having more connection to Haiti than to the Catholic Church. The racism in Dominican Vudú is also apparent in the fact that the Catholic saints are the patrons of the misterios (deities), and, as Davis points out, the Catholic elements are used in the most important moments of the ceremonies (1996:426).[76]

In the Dominican Republic, popular religiosity includes Vudú, pilgrimages, a belief in messianic leaders, and religious cofradías; the latter have been in existence since colonial times. In contrast to Vudú rituals, many cofradías are devoted to a particular saint with no correspondence to the Vudú pantheon.[77] Their rituals may not include spirit possession unless by the deceased in a death ritual. Palo music is played at Vudú ceremonies and also for rituals organized by religious cofradías. In addition

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[75] Black in this sense could stand for association with skin color and racial identity, but also for evil magic.

[76] Davis sees a hierarchy of temporal and spatial positions within the ritual procedure and physical setting of a saint's festival (or Vudú ceremony). Practitioners, for the most part, start with what Davis considers the most sacred elements of the festival, the Catholic rituals (e.g., praying, singing Salve Regina-based salves), and continue with what she considers the less spiritual (e.g., the African-based palo music—or salves accompanied by palo drums—and spirit possession). While salves are sung at the altar, palo drums are for the most part kept away from the sacred space of the altar (1994b). In terms of class, Davis notes that the events of the urban elite are more spiritual and introverted, as opposed to those of the working class, who celebrate with more alcohol and extroverted expressions of faith. The upper-class festivities are more somber and, if a spirit possession takes place, the saint's European persona manifests rather than the Vudú misterio (2010:185).

[77] One example of a cofradía whose saint has no correspondence in Vudú is the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo. The Holy Spirit corresponds to the West African *Kalunga* deity. Another one is the sarandunga cofradía, which praises St. John the Baptist.

to celebrating devotion for a saint and burial rituals of the cofradía's members, religious cofradías provide mutual aid to their members, fulfilling needs not met by governmental institutions.

Cofradías originated in Spain and form a colonial legacy, but when blacks were included, cofradías adopted certain changes. Davis (1976) explains that Spanish cofradías were exclusively for men, but in Afro-Dominican cofradías women occupy the highest rank. This reversed gender hierarchy is also true of Vudú, where most mediums and leaders are women and sometimes male homosexuals.[78] Many cofradías also name symbolic kings and queens, a feature influenced not by the Spanish but the Congolese, although some have hierarchical positions that replicate colonial Hispanic society. These historical changes to cofradías have seemingly disappeared from the conscious memory of practitioners. Revisionist academics have tried to empower bearers of traditions by teaching their history, one that instills pride in their African-derived traditions. Generally, some people believe that if today's black descendants could learn about the resistance of their forefathers, they would grow to see themselves not as passive recipients of culture, but as proud and active creators of their own history.

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[78] Vudú has helped create alternate gender spaces by providing and allowing for sexual freedom and gender equality uncharacteristic elsewhere in the Dominican Republic. Through practicing Dominican Vudú, women have become empowered; they are, for the most part, the leaders of the rituals and constitute the considerable majority of the mediums. In my research, I have noticed an element of status attached to the ability of "receiving" the deities in trance. A medium is perceived as curing diseases, especially those of a psychological nature, and helps her clients with a variety of other problems. Dulce, the medium in San Juan de la Maguana, enjoyed a high level of respect, even from the local police. Also, in the world of Vudú, homosexuality is tolerated, even welcomed. In general, characteristics perceived as effeminate in men are subject to ridicule in the Dominican Republic. But Vudú is seen as explaining male homosexuality and behavior perceived as effeminate: When a female *misterio* possesses a man, for example, he will naturally start to show female characteristics. In gagá, some queens are crossdressed men, and are accepted as part of the gagá society.

Traditionally, both Vudú and cofradías have provided protection and status to many who would otherwise remain without it in Dominican society. Proper burial is a primary service provided by cofradías, since this is a prioritized but expensive event for many Dominican families. In recent years, cofradías have declined in membership even as palo music and Vudú have become more widespread and legitimized. Domínguez[79] believes this is partly because the modern method of funeral rituals has moved to the funeral home, where previously funerals were held in private homes.[80] Perhaps this move also stems from the theatrical and sensationalist possession rituals of Vudú that are nowadays presented in the open air, thus taking closeted identities outside of their confined spaces. Vudú might also be taking the place of cofradías in providing services to believers. Often, cofradía-like informal societies form around a Vudú medium, and all members pay for saint ceremonies. Today, spirit possession in cofradías sometimes occurs.

Throughout history, it has been precisely the eclecticism of Dominican Vudú that has made its survival possible and allowed it to create alternative spaces of resistance for its practitioners. In recent years, the persecution and police retaliation have decreased, which has given more freedom to practitioners. Another factor that might be contributing to the rise of Vudú is an increased Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic in the last decades due to looser monitoring of the border between the two countries. Also, migration to New York has allowed many Dominicans to express their faith more openly, as other communities of African descent in this city were already celebrating public festivities as well as having

[79] Personal communication, summer 2011.
[80] Not surprisingly, then, palo abajo or palo de muerto are also played less than in previous decades.

religious paraphernalia shops (*botánicas*) on major streets where people could buy the religious items for their practices. While in the Dominican Republic, botánicas are often relegated to shantytown markets, and usually invisible from main streets, New York City has countless botánicas with glass windows in the heavily Dominican neighborhoods (for instance, Washington Heights and areas of the Bronx). One informant told me: "In the Dominican Republic the brujos are hidden, but not here." While botánicas can sell non-religious products (e.g., medicinal herbs), they also provide Dominicans with Vudú paraphernalia and, in New York, a place to find or to consult a medium.

In recent years as well, palo music has become part of popular music genres, and has been recorded and marketed successfully. This new accessibility of palo music CDs has encouraged practitioners to take Vudú's music to clubs. Although perhaps not as mainstream as merengue and other forms of Dominican popular music, palo music is enjoying a visibility previously not allowed and, as we will see in Chapter Five, dancing to palo music in a club blurs borders between religion and club culture.

Unique Cofradías: Sarandunga and Congos

Most cofradías in the Dominican Republic are organized around devotion to St. John the Baptist or the Holy Spirit. Most of these use palo music for their rituals; however, two cofradías stand out. The Cofradía of St. John the Baptist (whose rituals, dance, and music are known as sarandunga) in the province of Peravia uses distinct drums, dance, rhythmic patterns, and rituals found nowhere else in the

Dominican Republic. The Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo in Villa Mella is another distinctive group. Since the 1970s, these two cofradías have drawn much attention from scholars and musicians because of their pronounced African-derived features, and for their proximity to the capital city. In 2001, UNESCO's proclamation of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo in Villa Mella as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity motivated more official institutions to promote formerly neglected and marginalized "African" traditions. This proclamation, as we will see, was an important event in changing attitudes towards Dominicans' African heritage.

The worship of St. John the Baptist was a popular Spanish tradition in Dominican colonial society, which celebrated St. John the Baptist Day, June 24th, with bullfighting, horse riding, and carnival-like activities. Blacks then adopted this tradition to create their own cofradía. Today, previous sites for maroon settlements form the three areas for the feast of the sarandunga (Tejeda, Sánchez, and Mella 1995).[81] The sarandunga music is performed with three small, double-headed drums, called *tamboritas*, which are held between the legs, played with bare hands, and accompanied by a güira. One of the sarandunga pieces is a processional (*morano*) in which the drums are held under the arm. Davis sees this music as having influences from the Guinean area of West Africa.

According to Davis, sarandunga music is denser in texture[82] than most other types of drumming in the Dominican Republic, which seem more influenced by

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[81] The members of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo were also among the descendants of maroons.

[82] By density she means the number of pitches per minute and the number of simultaneous pitches.

Congolese music (Davis 1980:260).[83] Sarandunga genres also have a triplet time feel[84] (which might be transcribed in 12/8) as opposed to most Dominican genres, which could be transcribed in 2/4 or 4/4.[85] Sometimes sarandunga is referred to as a complex because it includes many genres with different rhythms, melodies, and texts. Besides the morano procession, the sarandunga encompasses the sub-genres *capitana, bomba,* and *jacana*.

Tejeda, Sánchez, and Mella explain that many of the rituals of the sarandunga cofradía are influenced by the official liturgy of the Catholic Church, practiced by the white dominant class surrounding these maroon communities (1995:82). They also see the influence of Vudú in the sarandunga rituals.[86] In contrast to Dominican society in general, as well as most practitioners of Vudú, many members of this cofradía trace their origins to Haiti. While many myths exist as to the origins of this devotion, one of the legends is that in Haiti the icon of St. John the Baptist and drums were sold to Piobisco Martínez for fifty heads of cattle. He then brought these to the Peravia province. It is hard to know to what extent these myths are based on actual events, but the triplet-time feel of the sarandunga music resembles Haitian music more than Dominican. Many aspects of the cofradía's organization vary from other cofradías; for example, the sarandunga also has a woman as head of the cofradía, and

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[83] Hernández Soto (1996) explains that the term Congo was used in the 16th through 19th centuries to name slaves brought to America from the ports in the Congo River basin, in Central Africa.
[84] Each beat can be divided into three smaller units.
[85] I should add here that the sarandunga triplet-time feel could prove that it came from Haiti because some scholars would argue that this triplet feel signifies that the music has been less creolized than other Dominican genres. See, for example, Rolando Pérez Fernández (1986).
[86] One of the influences of Vudú is that spirit possession sometimes takes place in one of the three places where the sarandunga is celebrated.

places less emphasis on death rites than any other Dominican cofradía. All these features connect to Haiti and Haitian practices.

The Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo also demonstrates Haitian influence simply because Villa Mella has received migrants from Haiti at different points in its history.[87] While the word Congo in the title might invoke Africa, Carlos Hernández Soto explains that even if the name of the Cofradía denotes only Congolese heritage, its rituals also show influences from Dahomey and the Iberian Peninsula (2004:61).[88] A main function of this cofradía, besides celebrating the feast of the Holy Spirit and ensuring proper burial rituals for its members, is to celebrate the feast of the Virgen del Rosario. Many scholars believe that practices by the Congo cofradía were already referred to in the Código Negro of 1784, a document in which the prohibition of these practices was outlined.[89] For this cofradía, popular myth establishes no connection to Haiti, but many trace its origin to the Holy Spirit, or to maroon slaves.

Hernández Soto argues that, as opposed to the many Dominicans who practice African-derived forms of religion, members (and especially the leaders) of the Congo cofradía have, even if in vague form, some consciousness of their African ancestry

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[87] Santana and Sánchez explain that in 1677 slaves from the French portion of the island (now Haiti) were held in the zone of San Lorenzo de los Mina. By 1786, this settlement was abandoned as these slaves moved to other towns, possibly including Villa Mella, a place where the Congo cofradía is settled today (2010:209-210). The authors also trace the response of one of the cofradía's songs—"Bembe Yagua," whose response is *Malé*—as meaning "I am leaving" in Haitian Kreyòl.

[88] The word Congo is used to refer to the cofradía title, the music, the drums, the members of the cofradía, and in certain cases, people use it implying the Congolese derivation of this cofradía.

[89] In 1873, King Carlos III initiated ordinances for the creation of this code, sometimes used by the authorities over the slaves of the island. Scholars have been able to learn about Afro-Dominican culture through studying of the code, as it mentions festivals, rituals, and instruments.

(1996:32). He has concluded that their ancestors are found not only in the areas by the Congo river, but also perhaps from Ghana all the way to Angola, although the strongest influences are from the Congo-Angola and Dahomey regions (ibid.:34). The former captain of the Cofradía, Sixto Minier, told Hernández Soto his family's story of their ancestors, African slaves who escaped colonial authorities' punishment for playing congo music (1996:31). In a documentary about the Congo cofradía (*Congo Pa' Ti*), Minier expressed his pride in his African roots. In the same vein, the king of the Cofradía, Pío Brazobán, explained in the film that the slaves asked the Holy Spirit to liberate them. It is important to note the knowledge about slaves of both leaders of the Congo cofradía, as it decenters hegemonic narratives of Dominican identity that point to an absolute denial of blackness.

The music of the Congo Cofradía uses two double-headed drums called *congo mayor* (the larger drum) and *conguito* (smaller and higher-pitched). For this music, players also use a set of two sticks, called *canoíta* because of the canoe shape of the larger one. As in all Dominican drumming traditions, the drummers are primarily men, and, for this cofradía, women shake *maracas*. The canoíta players drum the quintessential Caribbean 3-3-2- *tresillo* ostinato as a rhythmic time line (also found in *zouk* and many other Caribbean genres). Most of the congo *toques* (songs) are about Kalunga, a Congo-Angolan deity for sea and death, syncretized in this tradition with the Holy Spirit, or else refer to rituals of death. Cofradía members claim to have just twenty-one toques, but, in the same way the mystical number twenty-one is used figuratively in Vudú to describe the number of deity divisions, here it belies more than twenty-one songs.

The music of the Congo cofradía still preserves non-Spanish words, for example, *kumandé*, which translates as "there is no death." This is not the case with other genres of Dominican music, such as palo, in which African words are no longer heard. In the Congo cofradía, African or African-sounding words are common.[90] Hernández Soto argues that the Congolese influence is present in the music, and also in the hierarchy of the cofradía, with chosen kings and queens. On the other hand, many prayers (e.g., requiem, rosary) and symbols are of Spanish and Christian descent. Thus, the rituals in Vudú and the cofradías—in the same way as palo, salves, sarandunga, and congo—are hybrids of Spanish and African-derived traits.

Much of the information here is gathered from the work of scholars; in many cases, practitioners have limited historical knowledge of these rituals. Their ancestral memory is often fragmented, and sometimes—especially in the younger generation—absent. Other members, particularly the leaders of the traditions, are aware—or vaguely aware—of the connection to Africa or Haiti, and sometimes claim that proudly, as do gagá practitioners and *cocolo* dancers, who have traced their roots to Haiti, the English Caribbean, and the African diaspora (discussed further below). Through the work of scholars, the general Dominican population is also learning about the roots of these previously shunned traditions. As scholars and musicians pay attention to these communities, the sense of pride among practitioners has also grown. Although it would be difficult to say whether or not practitioners have read the work of academics, they nevertheless absorb part of their own story from participating in lecture-demonstrations together with academics. In recent decades, activities at the

[90] Hernández Soto mentions the following African names of toques: Bembe koko, Pembué chamaliné, Ma Yungué, and Antonio Bángala among others (2004:77).

Museo del hombre dominicano and music festivals celebrate Afro-Dominican culture, bringing these communities to the stage to display aspects of their culture in an unprecedented, public way.

No Longer Foreign: *Guloyas* (Cocolo) Music and Gagá

The genres of Afro-Dominican music described up until now (palos, sarandunga, congo) seem to have existed in colonial Santo Domingo, but Gagá and guloya music were brought to the Dominican Republic at about the turn of the twentieth century. *Afro-dominicanistas* since the 1970s have advocated the acceptance of these forms as Dominican and believe these communities (cocolo migrants and Haitians) should be considered part of a plural Dominican society. Both Gagá and guloya are connected to black Caribbean migrants, brought to work in the sugarcane industry at the end of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, and count among the main genres of music that have been deployed by Afro-dominicanistas to create an inclusive Dominican Republic. It is important to study them because, as opposed to other Afro-Dominican genres, cocolo music and gagá are part of current Dominican popular music and exist in more than just folklorized forms. Their influence of the new types of merengue underscore their role in the redefinitions of the nation.

The terms cocolo and guloya refer to immigrants from the English-speaking Lesser Antilles (e.g., Anguilla, St. Kitts, Antigua, Tortola) brought to the Dominican Republic. Discrepancies regarding the origins of these two labels have emerged. Some scholars argue that the term cocolo was a derogatory way to refer to Haitians

even prior to the influx of English-speaking migrants. These migrants experienced discrimination and hostility from native workers who felt that the acceptance of poor working conditions by these migrants impeded Dominicans from higher salaries and better treatment within the sugar industry. Thus, the cocolos, just as the Haitians, became Others in Dominican society. They were black, Protestant (Episcopalian and other sects), and English-speakers, all identities that set them against Dominican self-identifiers: white, Catholic, and Spanish-speaking. Today, cocolos have reappropriated the terms cocolo and guloya for themselves.

Throughout the twentieth century, those in power who conceptualized the nation sought homogeneity and assimilation for migrants in Dominican culture. However, the cocolos, similar in color to Haitians, experienced difficulty in this process, whereas Italians, Lebanese, Jews, and other Europeans assimilated more rapidly.[91] Cocolos and Haitian sugar workers were expected to return to their country once the sugar season (*zafra*) was over; they were transient workers, according to policies still in place today for many Haitian sugarcane workers. Julio César Mota Acosta observed that in the first zafras at the beginning of the twentieth century more than ninety percent of cocolos ultimately returned to their country. As the Dominican Republic advanced economically, however, more cocolos stayed to find other jobs in the growing economy (1977:17). This led to more discrimination against them, for taking the jobs Dominicans wanted for themselves. The discrimination against these migrants reached its peak during Trujillo's Hispanophilic dictatorship, when they

[91] I always felt wholly Dominican until I came to the United States, where people referred to me as Lebanese-Dominican because three of my grandparents were Lebanese migrants.

suffered retaliation, especially those who were in the country illegally or had not paid their immigration taxes.

As I argued in Chapter One, today there is a tendency to perceive cocolos as "respectable negros." Their hard work, honesty, and good ethics have won a place for them in Dominican society. Haitians have not "earned" the same treatment. Cocolo "progress" (though many still live in extreme poverty) has served in recent decades to portray Haitians' lack of acceptance in the Dominican Republic as their own fault for not being like the "hard-working" and "honest" cocolos.[92] The cocolo community, whose migration stopped decades ago, is today scattered in different regions of the Dominican Republic, and most have assimilated into broader Dominican society. These developments have made it more difficult for older cocolos to transmit their knowledge to younger generations to keep their traditions alive. The difficult circumstances of survival for their traditions influenced the UNESCO recognition of the cocolo Teatro Danzante as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage Patrimony of Humanity in 2005. This honor boosted the reputation of cocolos even further and increased their perceived difference from Haitians.[93]

Since their early migration, the cocolos have founded lodges and mutual aid societies, as well as religious, artistic, and athletic organizations. Mota Acosta points out that cocolos created the first workers' guild on Dominican soil (1977:35). They were also involved in the Black Star Line, or the Back-to-Africa movement of Marcus

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[92] Some informants pointed out to me that they thought the respect for the cocolos also grew because they were able to get American visas due to their already British citizenship. Indeed, many cocolos live in the US nowadays.

[93] The same is true of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo. Because spirit possession is not a big part of the rituals in these cofradías, many Dominicans separate them from Haitians who practice "witchcraft," and perform animal sacrifice and other ritual practices seen as "too barbaric" for many Dominicans.

Garvey, anticipating Dominicans who developed a black pride movement (although small) only in the last decades. Cocolos were active in Garvey's movement early in their migration, forming a branch of his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).[94] Santana and Sánchez note that in 1928 Garvey lived in the town of San Pedro de Macorís, where cocolos lived, and helped organize a large protest in front of the British consulate, burning the British flag (2010:299).

Nadal Walcot, born in San Pedro de Macorís and the most well-known cocolo visual artist, writes that, in his day, cocolos kept writings of Marcus Garvey in their pockets, forming a clandestine government connected to the UNIA called *saguá* (1998:16). This institution fought for the political and labor rights of the migrants and contributed to the education and the preservation of cocolo culture. The saguá had a government council, which would place members at the residency of white patrons, as well as in important positions (the post office, for example) in order to exert certain controls over the migrant destinies. Black consciousness was transmitted through the educational institutions of cocolos, whose teachers continued educating cocolo children in English about ideas of black pride. This celebration of black culture contrasted strongly the rest of the Dominican population, who were inculcated with strong anti-Haitian and anti-black sentiments.

Another important vehicle for the spread of cocolo pro-African sentiments were the many dance-drama pieces with music and dance that became popular among

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[94] In his article, "Carlos A. Cooks: Dominican Garveyite in Harlem," Pedro R. Rivera traces the life of Carlos Cooks, a cocolo born in San Pedro de Macorís in 1913. His father was persecuted for his involvement in spreading doctrines of Black unity, and the young Cooks brought the training of the UNIA to Harlem and became its officer at the age of 19. Rivera points to the influence that Cooks exerted on Malcolm X (2010:215). Cooks is considered one of the primary figures setting the stage for the black radicalism in the 1960s. A sample of Cooks' ideals is "Hair Conking: Buy Black," included in Flores 2010.

the cocolos in the Dominican Republic. These were skits, typically performed by processional groups in the street, involving dialogue, dance, music, and action scenes. Cocolo dancers use a core of four instruments: bass drum, snare drum, triangle, and flute. These instruments accompanied the diverse dance-drama performances such as David and Goliath, Wild Indian, the *Momise*, and the Bull, among others. In recent times, only a version of the Wild Indian dance remains. Though many of these plays were based on the Bible, medieval European literature, or British legends, teachings about social justice and political consciousness were coded into them. Thus, their performances were heavily monitored during Trujillo's dictatorship, when the performers could be incarcerated. The play David and Goliath was performed by cocolos until 1958 and included messages aligned with black liberation. Once Trujillo knew of these messages, he banned David and Goliath in fear that the social and political denunciations would incite revolt. Unfortunately, the UNESCO recognition came at a time when most cocolo dances and plays had disappeared, remaining only within memory of a few elders. The current cocolo troupe needs resources in order to rescue and pass on their traditions.

While the origin of the term cocolo remains unknown, some cocolos speculate that the other name for cocolos, guloya, derives from the David and Goliath drama. The story goes that audiences feared Goliath and gathered in the streets surrounding the theater-dance troupe, yelling "Goliath, Goliath," which could be heard as Guloya. Another commonly performed drama was the Momise. Walcot writes that Momise was originally from St. Kitts and Saint John's (the capital of Antigua and Barbuda). The story centers on workers who, on returning to their country after six months of

employment, picked up any kind of gift possible for their wives (1998:28). In contrast, Julio César Mota Acosta says Momise is based on the legend of a giant kidnapping a woman, who is then rescued by the hero. The deeper meaning of this story, he argues, lies in the Christian struggle to reach the city of salvation (1997:60-61). Unfortunately, discrepancies within the descriptions of these extinct plays make a definitive narrative difficult to achieve.

The Wild Indian is known in Saint Kitts as Cowboy, and represents the fight between Native Americans and cowboys of North America. For many Dominicans, this is the only cocolo dance that they have seen, even though nowadays activists and the cocolo troupe "Teatro cocolo danzante" attempt to resurrect old plays. Subversive messages are no longer part of the troupe's performance. One of the reasons for preserving the Wild Indian drama is its colorful and flashy dance, where the performers wear hats made of colorful peacock feathers (representing the birds of the gardens of British nobles) and play with a twirling ax. Although many of my interviewees point to the current Wild Indian as already a mix of Momise and Wild Indian, this dance has gained visibility through its use in high-profile music videos such as "A Pedir su mano," by the Dominican musician Juan Luis Guerra.

Perhaps the major legacy of the cocolos in Dominican culture lies in their influence on carnival music. A music subgenre called *Alí Babá* derives from cocolo music. Alí Babá has become popular in recent decades as the carnival music of the capital city, and has spread today to most regions in the Dominican Republic. Merengue players are also adopting some of these carnival aesthetics and incorporating the instruments of cocolo (and Alí Babá) music (see Chapter Six).

Haitian music in the Dominican Republic has also left a mark on both Dominican carnival and popular music. Although musical interchange between the Dominican Republic and Haiti goes back centuries, it has only been since the last half of the twentieth century, through the work of afro-dominicanistas, that music genres recognized as Haitian have become Dominicanized and incorporated into Dominican culture. This process has far to go in terms of enjoying acceptance by all sectors of society; anti-Haitian attitudes still prevail in the Dominican Republic. The notion that a Haitian minority culture can exist without harming Dominican nationalism is still unimaginable to many Dominicans. In general, Haitians are considered non-Dominican, and those born of Haitian parents on Dominican soil must still fight for many legal rights.

Gagá rituals and music have been brought to the Dominican Republic since the beginning decades of the twentieth century by the many Haitian *braceros* (sugarcane workers) working in Dominican sugar mills with the cocolo migrants. Gagá is essentially the Dominican counterpart of the Haitian rara, a religious-carnivalesque ritual of Haitian Vodou,[95] although over time its transformation has led it to develop uniquely Dominican features. Rara functions as a society,[96] and most of its rituals begin when carnival ends, then build up until Easter week when—under the protection of Vodou spirits—revelers take to the streets from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. These revelers walk and dance for miles, attracting fans and collecting money for their group expenses. *Majo jons* (baton twirlers, *mayores* in Spanish)

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[95] The nomenclature can be confusing, because rara and gagá are names given to the society or community that celebrates these rituals, as well as the music and the dance.
[96] A vow to serve in gagá is usually made for seven years, during which protection from the deity will be provided.

honor certain individuals and attract potential donors by passing their batons over their bodies. Gage Averill reports that the majo jons wear distinctive costumes representing "the principal spiritual symbols of the bands" (1999:154).

Followers of rara and gagá are attracted by its celebratory aspects. For many Dominicans (not only those who are descendants of Haitians), gagá[97] culture forms an important part of their lives. Every year they expect to enjoy the colors of the gagá attire, the exuberant dancers, and the characteristic music, with drums, horns, and whistles. Many only see the public festivities of rara, because the religious rituals are often hidden from outsiders. Yet, rara holds within its core much of the religious work done year round. Elizabeth McAlister (2002:7) notes that rara rituals include fulfilling mystical contracts with deities (usually the *Petwo*, or *Petró* in Spanish), saluting sacred places, and paying tribute to the recently dead. Practitioners shift between political social critique, the obscene, and the carnivalesque as a protective measure to minimize the risk of persecution. McAlister observes, "Surrounding and hiding rara's religious core is an outer layer of carnivalesque play," and a strategic combination and ambivalence between the two allow the disenfranchised to critique and dialog with those in power (ibid.:7-8).

The two types of speech in rara, the religious and the obscene, use metaphors, polyvalent meaning, and "coded expressions that speak to disempowered Haitians" (ibid.:7). McAlister believes that while rara's songs are full of humoristic innuendo

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[97] In this section, I discuss rara implicitly as similar to or the same as gagá. When I refer to gagá, I am referring to specifically the Dominican context. In her dissertation, "The Band Carries Medicine: Music, Healing and Community in Haitian/Dominican Rara/Gagá" (2009), Maurea Landies uses the composite *Rara/Gagá* to evoke the dialogism and hybridity between these two genres. Although gagá is the Dominican version of rara, these are not totally the same; however, the differences await closer academic scrutiny.

(betiz), they are "as much about order, subordination, exploitation, and dictatorship, as they are about sex and sexuality" (ibid.:60). She gives the example of a song involving a domestic theme that also contains critiques on national and transnational levels (64). Through such conflations, McAlister connects vulgarity with power as a means for humor, or public laughter, which, she argues, is the only form of public speech the subjugated possess. With these songs, rara bands are "free to parody, to question, and to laugh" (61). Whether songs of worship, of explicit sexual content, or social critique, an aura of laughter prevails during their performance. Those in power see these performances as "safety valves," recognizing this once-a-year event prevents the masses from rebellion.

Besides providing interaction between popular humor and politics, or the religious and the carnivalesque, rara also acts as a dialogue between Vodou and Christian narratives. Rara echoes the Christian celebration of Easter in its rituals of death and resurrection, fertility, and the renewal of life. Its music is lively, and its undulating dance resembles copulation, with quick and small hip movements enacting the spirit of rebirth and fertility. This dance is performed by queens (*rens*) and the majo jons, who wear ornate hats and colorful skirts with brightly colored handkerchiefs, symbolizing the deities of Vodou. A main attraction is the swirling of the batons and machetes by the dancing mayores, adding to the energetic dance routine and performance. A clear path is made for the colonel of the band who cracks a whip, in this way securing the way for the band. Averill asserts that "the whip chases away malevolent spirits and purifies the space through which the band passes" (1999:153), as sometimes groups can leave malevolent energy to other groups.

Much paraphernalia used in rara is, according to McAlister, related to the Petwo deities. Rara contains an "emphasis on the entire Petwo symbolism, including the colors red and black, and the use of the whip, gunpowder, and whistles" (2002:88). Before the band departs on Good Friday, several rituals take place. Some of these can be observed by visitors, including the blessing of all the paraphernalia to be used in the days to come (e.g., instruments, attire, handkerchiefs) and the *levantamiento de silla,* in which new dancers and queens, who have promised to serve for seven years, are taken out of the altar space (a small room) covered in white cloth. In the morning, rara bands sing Vodou prayers, but as the day goes by and musicians drink more alcohol, the songs start taking on an irreverent and vulgar character (McAlister 2002:59). This vulgarity—favorite themes are the description of genitals and sex acts, adultery, and prostitution— is not totally opposed to Vodou, as sexual jokes and satire are part of the *Ghede* deities (Guedé in gagá, from the Petró category), who govern death and sex. "These songs are meant to be funny in their absurdity and rebellious in their vulgarity," asserts McAlister (ibid.:62). This rebelliousness can be a parody of Church decorum, which in Carnival is mocked (63).

Music accompanies all these rituals. Unique to this music is the use of single-note bamboo wind instruments (called *fututo*s in the Dominican Republic and *vaksins* in Haiti), which play a composite ostinato in hocket style. Metal trumpets (koné), with an open bell at the end, reinforce this melody, while drums from the Petró variant (in gagá *tambú* and *catalié*),[98] as well as idiophone instruments, add to the

[98] In the Dominican Republic, catalié patterns vary by region and have mutated over time. Many rhythmic patterns are played in catalié with a stick in one hand. The tambú drum improvises. There is usually only one (but sometimes two) tambú drums per group, but recently the tambú beat has been reinforced by the newly-added bass drum.

groove of this contagious music. Sometimes other instruments are added to this core group. In the Dominican Republic, many add the Dominican tambora drum, as well as bass and snare drums. Whistles are constantly blown, which add to the excitement of the musical landscape. Averill analyses the complex music and harmonies of rara in the book *Music in Latin American Culture: Regional Traditions* (1999), observing that pentatonic or hexatonic vocal melodies prevail, as well as vaksin melodies, which often form arpeggiated diminished triads. These two melodies, the vocal and the vaksin, are often played in different tonalities. The notes in the vaksins are interlocked or hocketed in short ostinatos of three to five tones, and frequently both vocal and vaksin melodies are dissonant within themselves and to each other, using tritones and semitones. A rhythmic time line, called *katá*, is played on a piece of iron, and sometimes tapped on the side of the vaksins. Koné trumpets may duplicate, substitute for, or add other parts to the vaksin ostinato. The melodies of a certain rara group identify a group, and fans can identify its arrival, heard from a distance. Other melodies and lyrics are improvised on the spot.

Rara music functions for more than rituals, the carnivalesque, the absurd, or the rebellious. Militarism has also informed rara in many aspects. The rara society is organized hierarchically, using military names, and members compete spiritually and physically with enemy rara groups if found at a crossroad. For spiritual strength every rara group will prepare a magic powder *(maji*) in the cemetery. Songs are composed each year; writing new songs is also a way of competing and subverting the policies that keep the group in the margins. However, on Easter Sunday, as the festivities

conclude, social order returns, and sugarcane workers return to the difficult grind of their daily lives.

Little documentation exists that would clearly define differences between Haitian rara and Dominican gagá. Some instruments included in gagá might be Dominican additions, and many songs are composed in Spanish. Anthropologist Juan Rodríguez told me that in the Dominican Republic many rituals have been maintained, whereas in Haiti, especially in its capital, rara is primarily about the carnivalesque.[99] In gagá, a chorus of youngsters trails behind the revelers, improvising obscene refrains in Spanish, using such profanity as *mamagüevo* (cocksucker).[100] June Rosenberg, in an attempt to identify uniquely Dominican elements of gagá, examined old descriptions of music, rituals, and dance (all similar to current gagá), present in narratives dating from before the beginning of the twentieth century, when Haitian migrants came to the Dominican Republic. Her objective was to show that many elements of current gagá might not be Haitian-derived, but Dominican. She asserts: "As one can see, various elements of the gagá features already existed in the Dominican Republic either in carnival or cofradía dances" (1979:40). In her attempt to encourage Dominicans to consider gagá a Dominican ritual, Rosenberg pointed out other differences between gagá and rara, but, unfortunately, her work stopped short of a deep analysis of their significance.[101]

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[99] Personal communication, summer 2012.

[100] Ribald chants derived or similar to these become a part of a new type of merengue called *merengue de calle* in the twenty-first century (see Chapter Six).

[101] For example, Rosenberg mentions that, in Haiti, the many whistles used in gagá by the mayores are only played by the leader. She also notes that spirit possession in gagá is more like that of Dominican Vudú than Haitian Vodou, as manifested in the way of breathing and in its vigor (1979:212). According to Rosenberg, the Petró deities are more dominant in gagá than in rara in the Dominican Republic because of Haitian migrants' need for strong deities to

Santana and Sánchez argue that the closer a gagá group is to the border with Haiti, the more its tendency to have a triplet time feel; the farthest from the border a duple one (2010:359), perhaps pointing to more creolization in the Dominican territory. Many informants also point to the improvising manner of the gagá drums as being influenced by Dominican rhythms. For example, in the areas close to where cocolos have lived, gagá patterns are said to resemble snare drum patterns from cocolo music.

In recent decades, although the religious aspects of gagá are still kept from the public eye, its festival aspects form part of many Dominican lives, and it is a vibrant and living tradition. In gagá the religious is not easily accessible, but the public revelry, on the other hand, suffers from contestation and police retaliation; persecution of gagá still occurs today. In 2012, church officials in the province of El Seybo pushed the government to prohibit gagá festivities, claiming they interfered with the Christian tradition. Police officials stopped the entrance of gagá revelers to the town, saying that gagá rituals were disrupting public order. Ministry of Culture officials, along with the cultural rights activist Roldán Mármol, stepped in to defend the rights of practitioners. Mármol was primarily responsible for the approval of the recent Article 64 of the Dominican constitution, approved in 2010, in which cultural rights and freedom were granted to anyone on Dominican soil.

However, every year two or three sensationalist accounts of gagá events (as well as Vudú) make newspaper headlines. Although the total prohibition of these

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protect against the abuses of sugar mills owners. Rosenberg mentions a few times in the monograph that ritualistic aspects of gagá correspond to Vudú, not Vodou, but does not analyze them in much useful detail (ibid.:112).

rituals (customary during the Trujillo dictatorship) has not been reinstated,[102] several years ago, I recall, newspapers blamed gagá revelers for the burning of a Dominican flag, which fomented nationalist fervor. The flag is used in gagá rituals, but its presence was misunderstood by both press and readership. These sensationalist accounts contrast with the work of academics, who have published books and scholarly and journalistic articles with the goal of helping shift Dominican identity away from the anti-Haitian and anti-black sentiment. In later chapters, I will address cultural activist and urban musicians' mobilization of gagá, those looking to gain rights for Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Gagá generates an ongoing dialogue between the two populations, breaking down the binaries that endure within the cultural memory and identity of many Dominicans. Its presence can be seen in several arenas, and its rhythms and secular choruses serve as the basis for new popular forms of merengue, which contest monologic narratives of Dominican identity.

Revisionist Narratives of Dominican Music

Erasing Africa: Writings during the Trujillo dictatorship

Although I am primarily interested in the period following the Trujillo dictatorship, it is important to understand the impact of Trujillo-era policies and ideologies on Dominican writings about music. Writings about music during the Trujillo dictatorship reflect a range of biased attitudes towards Dominican music. A survey of these writings shows ways in which scholars ignored or downplayed the African influence on the music of the Dominican Republic. They also elevated and

[102] I had read so many sensationalist accounts of gagá that I was afraid to attend a gagá event for the first time. Once there, I was surprised to find no disruptive behavior.

romantized a lost native Indian heritage, referred to Africans and Haitians as "savages" who infect the Dominican Republic, and claimed *merengue* as the most "sophisticated" (i.e., European) form of Dominican folk music.

In 1944, the state university, UASD, invited Ralph Boggs, an American anthropologist, to teach courses in the Dominican Republic. Boggs guided the first generation of trained folklorists, which included Edna Garrido and Flérida de Nolasco, both pioneer scholars of this era. Nolasco produced a few volumes on Dominican music (1939, 1948), but left out palo music altogether and, even more troubling, stated that "folk music from the Dominican Republic cannot be anything but a derivation of Spanish music" (1939:71). Nine years later, she added, "we have very few African traits, which can be noted by the total absence of African words in our language" (1948:112).

Julio Arzeno (1927) and Enrique de Marchena (1942) also disregarded Afro-Dominican music altogether, calling on Dominicans to use merengues to create "true" Dominican art music. Arzeno wrote that "merengue is the most beautiful and elevated part of Dominican folklore" (1927:15), saying it should be the preferred genre of music for Dominicans because of its internal beauty, the sincerity of its accents, its soberness, its simplicity and grace, as well as its beautiful dance (ibid.:41). For Marchena, the debate about the origin of merengue as either Haitian or Dominican was solved by his claim that "the merengue rhythm is too developed to have come from Haiti" (1942:49).

Arzeno's and Marchena's call for merengue's use for art music was realized by composer Juan Francisco García. Considered one of the most important

Dominican nationalist composers, García was the first to transcribe merengues and use them in the composition of art music (e.g., Ecos del Cibao; see Austerlitz 1997:42-43). From the broad range of Dominican folk music, García drew mostly from merengues because, as he said, they come from the Spanish *contradanzas*, and "our musical base is essentially Spanish, like our temperament and our culture" (1947:15). In his book, *Panorama de la música dominicana* (1947), García gave an account of Dominican music from before the arrival of the Spaniards to the 20th century, but included only Spanish-derived forms such as *coplas, villancicos, romances, boleros, fandanguillos, sones* and *cuadrillas*.

García's music and views represented larger national beliefs and trends that relate to actual policy. During Trujillo's dictatorship, in an attempt to enforce a policy of *hispanidad*, merengue from the largely white *Cibao* region was adopted as the national symbol of the Dominican Republic. To set it apart from "primitive" local music, Trujillo ordered merengue's "stylization" and Europeanization in orchestrations of big-band ensembles featuring trumpets and saxophones. As part of a political campaign against palo music and Vudú, Trujillo's historian Rodríguez Demorizi described the palo drums as "instruments of savages… that produce noise without harmony," and palo dance as "barbaric, provocative, and sensual" (1971:64).[103] Such conclusions ignored the obvious religious character of the music.

Edna Garrido was one of few researchers before the 1960s who seemed less exclusively Spanish-centered. She grew up in the southwest of the Dominican Republic, an area rich in African-derived musics. Even though she chose to do most

[103] Compare Rodríguez Demorizi's description of the palo dance with those of later writers, like Davis, who describes the dance as calm and serious (1976:310).

of her research on Spanish retentions in Dominican children's songs, and the Dominican versions of the Spanish romances, she did not deny the presence of African-derived folklore in the Dominican Republic although she considered the contribution of Africans to Dominican culture less influential than Spanish folklore (1961:2).

In 1947, Garrido set out to demonstrate the vast array of Dominican folk culture by organizing a folklore festival featuring many musical forms previously undocumented. Her research on the sarandunga cofradía was part of this effort. Garrido found Spanish traits in the sarandunga, especially in the rhymes and the hexasyllabic content of many verses. After examining the possible origins of the sarandunga dance as either African or Spanish, she concluded, "it does not matter where the sarandunga comes from because after so many centuries, it is Dominican" (1950:232). Still, Garrido was a pioneer who anticipated what many would express after the end of the dictatorship in 1961: that African-derived cultural forms were Dominican. Despite contemporary currents that reflected the ideology of drumming music as foreign to Dominican culture (most likely Haitian), Garrido recognized the need for research into many lesser-known music genres. Predictably, the festival she had prepared failed to occur because of differences of opinions with Trujillo's wife, who opposed Garrido's choices of folklore (Lizardo 1987:250).

Post-Dictatorship: Acknowledging African Influence (1963-1986)

After the end of the dictatorship, President Balaguer—in power from 1966-1978, and again for ten years beginning in 1986—continued the ideology of

hispanidad that Trujillo had enforced. During periods when the opposition political party was in power (1963, 1978-1986), however, the country produced a significant body of research on Afro-Dominican themes. Although the research centered around anthropological themes, without much emphasis on music, it acknowledged music as revealing of African influence in Dominican culture. Important Dominican scholarly figures from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s include Fradique Lizardo, Julio Alberto Hernández, Aída Cartagena Portalatín, and Carlos Deive. The establishment of the Museo del hombre dominicano during this time greatly contributed to the research in the amount of publications on the subject of the Dominican Republic's African heritage, in books as well as the journal *Boletín del Museo del hombre dominicano*.

In 1963, the politically progressive populist president, Juan Bosch, led the Dominican Republic for less than a year. He saw the need for documenting folklore and invited the eminent Latin American musicologists, Isabel Aretz and Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera, to teach courses in research methodology, and to write a monograph that would summarize Dominican folk music and folklore. Aretz and Ramón y Rivera returned to teach again in 1975. During the first visit, Aretz wrote in her report that many Dominican intellectuals ignored African-based traditions present throughout the country, that, she observed, enjoyed "vitality and strength" (1963:191). Aretz also found African-derived genres to be deeply ingrained in Dominicaness and argued that Spanish-based musics were not as alive. She viewed this lack of vitality as caused by a stagnation of cultural renewal:

> Tenemos la impresión de que algunos distinguidos intelectuales. dominicanos inclusive, parecen ignorar las manifestaciones de ascendencia africana, sin saber que gozan actualmente de una notable fuerza y vitalidad—además de que se encuentran notablemente enraizados en la historia del pueblo dominicano--. Esta es la música que encontramos más viva durante nuestros viajes, que no tuvimos necesidad de exhumar o de buscar con gran esfuerzo. La otra música, la de herencia española… se conserva pero no se renueva; no muestra vitalidad como pudimos comprobarlo. (Aretz 1963:191)
>
> (We are under the impression that Dominicans, including distinguished intellectuals, seem to ignore the manifestations of African descent, not knowing that these have remarkable strength and vitality, and they are significantly rooted in the history of the Dominican people. This is the music that we found more alive during our travels; we had no need to dig or look with great effort. The other music, of Spanish heritage, is preserved ... but not renewed; it shows no vitality.)

Aretz also found that Vudú practices were hidden from public view (ibid.:181). Aretz's conclusions are even more apparent now as, perhaps ironically, despite the efforts of government officials to identify Spanish heritage as the soul of the Dominican people, music genres coded in the Dominican imaginary as Spanish are

kept alive only through folk troupes.[104] By contrast, Afro-Dominican music is performed a great deal in rural areas; contrary to previous attitudes, many Dominicans now recognize these genres as indigenous Dominican folk musics, rooted in an African heritage.

One of the beneficiaries of Aretz's visit to the country was Fradique Lizardo, who served as her guide and became one of the most influential advocates of African heritage in Dominican culture. He wrote two extensive volumes of research (1975, 1988), on dance and on musical instruments of the country, as well as other important folklore monographs,[105] and hundreds of newspaper articles. Lizardo was a dancer and, even though he included some musical transcriptions in his book (1975),[106] his focus in his first volume was primarily on choreography. This volume on dance is quite comprehensive and includes dances now extinct. He also created stage presentations for the Ballet Folklórico, which were important in the development and acceptance of an Afro-Dominican identity (Chapter Three). Many of Lizardo's students and dancers later became important researchers of the African roots of Dominican dance and music. His volume on the instruments (1975) organizes them by geographical area; his maps show that palo drums can be found throughout the whole Dominican Republic. Lizardo argued throughout his life that palo should be

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[104] As stated, most Dominican music genres have Spanish and African-derived traits, but some were nevertheless classified as Spanish and some as African-based. Both categories are historical constructions, far from accurate.

[105] Lizardo's publications include *El carabiné: Origen y evolución en Santo Domingo* (1957); *La canción folklórica en Santo Domingo* (1958); *Metodología de la danza* (1975); *Cultura africana en Santo Domingo* (1979); and *Fiestas patronales y juegos populares dominicanos* (1979).

[106] Some of these transcriptions are inaccurate.

the national dance, because it could be found all over the country, as opposed to merengue which, prior to Trujillo, was considered a regional genre.

Another of Aretz's guides, Aída Cartagena Portalatín, published a book in 1975 on the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo. The book reads more like field notes than the researcher's findings or interpretation. Cartagena gives descriptive ethnographic accounts of the rituals she and Aretz observed. She also identifies the instruments, dances, and iconography of the Congo cofradía. Cartagena also addresses the need for racial equality and for the urgent study of these cultures, which she saw as endangered. Today her warnings have proven correct, as many of the elder practitioners of Afro-Dominican rituals have passed away, leaving no one to carry on the tradition.

Julio Alberto Hernández, the author of *Música tradicional dominicana* (1969) and one of the most prominent composers of nationalist Dominican music, is among the few composers who have incorporated African-based folk music.[107] The scope of his research is limited—he primarily searches for compositional inspiration—and his findings are not always accurate. Only since around 1995 has interest among young composers inspired more Afro-Dominican based repertoire.[108]

During the period from 1963 to 1986, the country saw an increased awareness and acknowledgement of the prevalence of Vudú. In 1975, Carlos Esteban Deive published *Vodú*[109] *y magia en Santo Domingo*, one of the most complete books yet written on Dominican Vudú. He grappled with the origins of Vudú, but also of magic

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[107] Good examples of Hernández' compositions that use Afro-Dominican music are his "Suite Folklórica," "Sarandunga," and "Baile de Palos."
[108] Darwin Aquino and Jonathan Piña-Duluc, for example, use elements from Afro-Dominican music in their compositions.
[109] Vodú is another term for Vudú.

beliefs in the Dominican Republic, situating both, comparatively, among practices in other Afro-American nations. The book has a historical scope and provides an in-depth study of the relationship between Dominican Vudú and its Haitian counterpart (as well as other African-based religions), establishing similarities as well as differences. Deive also explored the relationship of Dominican Vudú to Catholicism, emphasizing that witchcraft and magic come from both Africa *and* Spain. He asserted that Vudú beliefs and practices are present in all social classes of Dominican society, not simply among the darker-skinned or among descendants of Haitians. As a historian, he considered the possible parallel development of Vudú in the Dominican Republic and Vodou in Haiti, as opposed to the often expressed but narrow view of Vudú as a Haitian import. Deive's book, although not highly ethnographic, remains the most complete historical account of Vudú to date.

Thus the era, especially from the 1970s until President Balaguer resumed power in 1986, was foundational for studies then carried out from 1996 to the current decade. In some ways the 1970s was the most fertile time for research because Dominicans' new freedom to re-examine and challenge traditional historical narratives flowered for the first time after the Trujillo dictatorship.

Recent Trends: 1996-Present

During the period from 1986 to 1996, when President Balaguer held power for the second time, no significant work on Vudú, Afro-Dominican music, or Dominicans' African heritage was published. Since the mid-1990s, however, a surge has occurred in efforts to acknowledge African cultural heritage in both scholarly and

popular writings. In this section, I examine the recent books on the subject that have contributed significantly to research.[110]

One of the few works concentrating on Dominican folk music, *El canto de tradición oral* (1982), by Bernarda Jorge, complements much of the scholarly work on Afro-Dominican themes from other disciplines, primarily studies on ritualistic and religious practices. She transcribed religious chants (which include Afro-Dominican songs: palo, congo, and sarandunga), work songs, and children's songs, using analytical tools of Western European music to study rhythmic cells, tonality, and the relationship between music and lyrics. Her book includes forty pages of analysis of the Dominican salve, showing its ternary rhythmic structure, modality (or sometimes bimodality), and other aspects that place the liturgical salve close to early Christian music. Jorge agrees with Davis, in analyzing salves in a continuum that ranges from ecclesiastic to secular ones.

Key scholars of Afro-Dominican themes include Hernández Soto and Dagoberto Tejeda. Hernández Soto has concentrated on documenting the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo. In his first book, *Morir en Villa Mella* (1996), Hernández Soto describes and examines in detail the funerary rites of the members of this cofradía using Van Gennep's ritual model: rites of separation (pre-liminal), rites of transition (liminal), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal). He also grapples with the origins of the cofradía and analyzes how their music expresses feelings of

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[110] The Dominican popular press has embraced the interest in the African cultural heritage; almost every week articles dealing with folklore and Vudú appear in national newspapers. Furthermore, videos and audio recordings are now produced, although as yet primarily by aficionados and amateur researchers, and not many from governmental institutions. The government, though—as will be later discussed—has responded with measures contributing to the current awareness Dominicans have acquired about their place within the African diaspora.

separation, death, and proper burial. Common phrases in their music include *M'alé* (*Me Voy*—I am leaving), *Adió' que me voy* (Goodbye, I am leaving), and many others that allude to the departure of the dead. Proper burial is one of the obligations of the cofradía to its members. In *Kalunga Eh!*, Hernández Soto continues with the Van Gennep model, analyzing the African and Iberian influences on the rites of this cofradía; the Iberian influence is quite common in many of the prayers, sometimes written in Latin. He also continues his examination of the Congolese Cofradía's origins, comparing them with other Afro-American Congolese-derived traditions in the Americas.

Dagoberto Tejeda's book, *Religiosidad popular y psiquiatría* (1995), written in collaboration with two psychiatrists, Fernando Sánchez and César Mella, asserts that Vudú's importance to the behavior of most Dominicans is such that Dominican psychiatrists must make an effort to understand it to improve the treatment of many Dominican patients. The last section of the book is devoted to a history of the cult of San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist) in the Dominican Republic, its relationship to Christianity and Europe, and its transformation in the Dominican Republic. Because St. John the Baptist is the patron saint of many Dominican cofradías, including the sarandunga, our understanding of its place in Dominican culture is of great value: Davis asserts that the ongoing popularity of St. John the Baptist in Dominican cofradías might pertain to St. John's syncretization—during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—with Shangó, the Dahomey or Yoruba deity associated with thunder (1987:203).

Tejeda has also written *Cultura popular e identidad nacional* (1998), two volumes which are collections of short essays describing primarily aspects of the Vudú religion, such as spirit possession and its paraphernalia, as well as gender issues in Vudú. One of his most recent works, *San Juan Bautista y la sarandunga de Baní* (2010), is devoted to a study on the worship of Saint John the Baptist, and specifically about the sarandunga. In this book, Tejeda summarizes and corrects the many earlier publications about this cofradía, and also gathers together the many legends of practitioners regarding its origin. He is adamant in pointing out what he considers errors in previous writings in which aspects of the cofradía (for example, the dance) have been attributed to Spanish traits. Aware of the loss of historical memory in the Dominican Republic, Tejeda—as Hernández Soto and Carlos Esteban Deive before him—emphasizes the importance of historical roots. For him, the sarandunga cofradía was a product of maroon settlement in places en route to major *manieles* (where maroons settled to escape Spanish rule and slavery) within the context of the sugar industry. Tejeda explains that, later, with the commercialization of coffee, members of the cofradía expanded to two other locations, and nowadays celebrate in three separate locales in the province of Baní.

Tejeda urges researchers to notice the richness of metaphorical codes in the music of the sarandunga. He criticizes previous research that views the sarandunga songs as poor in lyrical context. For an example of Tejeda's alternative analysis, the *moranos*—a song used as a procession to the river in order to "baptize" St. John the Baptist—literally describes the beauty of the sea waves. Thinking of the maroon status of the practitioners, Tejeda interprets this song as a utopian journey when

slaves most likely wanted to return to Africa (2010a:68-69). By speculating on maroon feeling and expression in this song, it acquires richer meaning (*Ola, Ola, Ola/ Ola de la mar/ que bonita ola/ para navegar.* Wave, wave, wave / sea wave / what a beautiful wave / to navigate).

Josué Santana and Edis Sánchez's *La Música folclórica dominicana* (2010) is perhaps the most comprehensive book offering Western analysis of Afro-Dominican music. Like Jorge's *El canto de tradición oral*, Santana and Sánchez use Western analysis, but the scope of their work is more complete, covering all major genres of Afro-Dominican music, and offering connections between music analysis and culture. For example, the authors contrast Christian and African religious practices in their analysis, thus linking religion and music. They propose a relationship to temporality in Christianity and African-based religions based on Christianity as more future-oriented and African-based rituals emphasizing a return to an idealized past, when humans were "pure." According to these authors, these religious aspects are reflected in the music: whereas tonality keeps Western pieces moving forward, African music, according to the authors, is more circular, without definitive endings.

Santana and Sánchez offer a useful overview of Afro-Dominican religious traditions: the music of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo, and that of the cocolo immigrants, salves, gagá, palos, and sarandunga. They also examine the lyrics of many Afro-Dominican songs using a technique they call *transducción prosódica codificada,* or TPC, with which they analyze linguistic codes used by former slaves in avoiding persecution. They devote a chapter to each Afro-Dominican genre of music, and analyze both African and Spanish retentions as reflected in the music, evaluating

them always in comparison with other Afro-Caribbean genres or in reference to African music. The book includes an audio CD, constituting the first publication of its kind.

Other existing studies, despite the increased visibility and presence of both Vudú religion and its music, include nothing substantial about the music. They rarely include or refer to an ethnomusicological or analytical study of the music, nor do they take into account current theories of identity construction, or the role music plays in forming a stronger Afro-diasporic identity in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora. Such forms of critical analysis have been undertaken with related music of other cultures—for example, the music of Cuban *Santería* or Brazilian *Candomblé*—but as yet have not been applied to Dominican culture. Thus, whereas in the 1970s, the seeds were planted for the study of African heritage in the Dominican Republic, the period from 1996 to the present has been characterized by the production of more in-depth ethnographic studies of specific traditions. More thorough studies are still needed, a challenge in the Dominican Republic.

Research in the United States

Not surprisingly, much important research on Dominican music comes from outside the country, as Dominicans have few resources necessary to either engage in fieldwork or to publish. Important foreign researchers include Jacob Maurice Coopersmith, June Rosenberg, José Francisco Alegría-Pons, and Martha Ellen Davis.

In 1945, the American musicologist Jacob Coopersmith wrote the monograph *Music and Musicians from the Dominican Republic*, primarily concerned with the

Dominican art music tradition. He touched on different Dominican dances and songs, giving preference to the folklore from the whiter Cibao region, or, as he wrote, the region where Dominican folklore is "best observed." Because he considered Cibao the richest region, Coopersmith devoted a large portion of his folklore section to the *décimas* (ten-line poetry), and a large portion of the monograph to merengue, which he called the most popular dance. Although his focus on the Cibao region favors Spanish-based folklore, as did previous research, Coopersmith contradicted the Spanish-obsessed conclusions of Flérida de Nolasco. He stated: "The Negro contribution to Dominican music still persists in many dances, rhythms and instruments . . . Flérida de Nolasco attempts to emphasize the domination of the Spanish popular idiom, maintaining that the extraordinary vigor of Spanish music saved the Dominican tradition from the French tutelage and the Haitian domination" (1975:76).

June Rosenberg (1979) points to gagá as a Dominican phenomenon by locating certain colonial dances in the Hispanic part of the island (now the Dominican Republic) that resembled present-day gagá. Her work refutes the belief that gagá is simply a recent (20th century) Haitian importation, a belief that forms the basis for arguments locating gagá in Dominican culture. Rosenberg sees gagá as based in elements of both Dominican Vudú and Haitian Vodou, and challenges the traditional Dominican view that considers anything "black" in the Dominican Republic as an infiltration through Haiti. For her argument, Rosenberg documents thirty-five gagá participants she interviewed, only three of whom were raised in Haiti, proving Dominicans are as involved in gagá as Haitians. Her role as an educator, after moving

to the Dominican Republic in 1963, has proven influential; she was the UASD's first professor of anthropology and an expert on Haitian and African studies. She has guided generations of UASD students to gagá celebrations, teaching them the nuts and bolts of fieldwork. Thus she helped form many generations of sociologists and anthropologists, and her book, *El gagá: Religión y sociedad de un culto dominicano* (1979), remains the most important written in Spanish about gagá.

In *El Gagá*, Rosenberg studies the genre in relation to other African-based religions and rites, most importantly within the context of Dominican society. She emphasizes the culture of poverty and the marginalization of those in the sugarcane fields where gagá is practiced; she sees these rites as a safety valve from the conditions of the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican population within the Dominican sugar industry. She argues that differences between Dominican gagá and Haitian rara lie in their developing in a new context. One of the major differences, Rosenberg notes, is the fact that the *Petró (Petw*o) deities, while secondary in Haiti, enjoy greater significance in the Dominican Republic. She notes that the greater power of Petrós (in comparison to other deities) serves Haitian sugar workers needing their protection in the Dominican Republic. Rosenberg emphasizes that many of the practitioners of gagá are Dominican-born and have never been to Haiti; their lives are insecure because laws in the Dominican Republic have seldom recognized their citizenship. Periods of massive deportation have not considered (and still do not consider)[111] the many workers who were Dominican by birth, not Haitian. When Rosenberg's book was published in 1979, it was controversial even to mention gagá

[111] An example of this is the Contitutional Tribunal ruling of 2014.

as part of Dominican culture. Both authors of the book's prologue express admiration for her courage and emphasize just how controversial her ideas were.

Whereas Rosenberg studied gagá in its totality, José Alegría Pons examined particular aspects of gagá and Vudú in a series of essays compiled in *Gagá and Vudú en la República Dominicana* (1993). He noted that while he wrote his book, gagá could no longer be considered a subculture; it had influenced the larger Dominican culture in significant ways—from the tourist industry to shows in national theaters and the media to inspiration for Dominican art. His essays explained the relationship of gagá to the Petró deities. Pons also analyzed other aspects that include the relationship of Vudú to Catholicism. He observed that Vudú is permeated with Catholic influences, from the use of prayers—for example, the Lord's Prayer, and rituals like baptism—to the use of bells, incense, crucifixes as well as objects for libations.

In her doctoral dissertation, "Afro-Dominican Religious Cofradías: Structure, Ritual and Music" (1976), Martha Ellen Davis examined religious cofradías of the Dominican Republic as examples of the syncretism of the African nation with the Spanish Catholic religious cofradías. She suggested that Afro-Dominican[112] cofradías have historically corresponded to African nations present in the Dominican Republic at particular points in history. Thus, she associated the cofradías of the sixteenth century with the nations from the African Senegambia region, cofradías of the seventeenth century with those of the Guinean area, and those of the eighteenth century with the Congo-Angola nations. The Congolese influence manifests in aspects of the cofradías' social organization, the use of Kings and Queens, as well as

[112] Davis was, I believe, the first to use the term Afro-Dominican.

the ubiquity in Dominican cofradías of El Espíritu Santo (the Holy Spirit), patron saint syncretized with Kalunga (Bantu God of the sea and of death).[113]

Although Davis is an anthropologist, she conducts ethnomusicological work and devoted a large part of her dissertation to describing the diversity of drumming in Dominican cofradías: she describes types of drums, drum ensembles, rhythms, ways of playing and dancing, and the function of music in the various rites of the cofradías (e.g., processions, *velaciones* or saints' festivities, death rites, wakes, and *novenas*). Throughout her dissertation, Davis points out similarities of palo music and dance to other Dominican dances, historicized as European-derived. Emphasizing the acute hybridity of Dominican music and dance, she challenged Dominicans' conceptualization of palo as purely African, arguing that it—like other Dominican dances and music—incorporates elements of European culture. She stated "it is impossible and inaccurate to attribute one to African influence and another to European. In all Dominican dances there appears to be some of each component, whether reflected in the steps, posture, rhythms, accompanying instruments, social organization, or whatnot" (ibid.:330). She explained that many Dominican couple dances, including palo, enact ritual pursuit and male flair, use handkerchiefs, and, importantly, are hybrid. Finally, in her dissertation, Davis analyzed the polyrhythmic aspects of the music, finding many two against three rhythms and polyrhythmic improvisation in the music of Dominican cofradías.

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[113] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Davis argues, the devotion to Saint John the Baptist was predominant because of a syncretism with Shangó (the Dahomean-Yoruban deity). She explains that in the nineteenth century, as slaves were brought from the Congo region, the Holy Spirit began to predominate because of syncretism with Kalunga (the Congo-Angolan deity of the sea and death) (1987:203). In current times, most cofradías worship either Saint John the Baptist or the Holy Spirit, though cofradías exist who are organized around a Vudú deity.

Davis has also produced other important studies. In *La otra ciencia: El vodú dominicano como religión y medicina populares* (1987), Davis explains that Dominican Vudú fulfills the needs of practitioners not satisfied by the Catholic Church or the Dominican Republic government. Vudú functions as a sort of medical cult, with the consultation of a medium constituting its most common activity. Thus, the public ceremonies in Vudú constitute a small percentage of rituals within this religion. Davis sees private consultation in search of a cure as characterizing Dominican Vudú, in contrast to Haitian Vodou, whose ceremonies are more public and ritualized. Davis contrasts Dominican Vudú with Haitian Vodou in other of their traits, while also grappling with Vudú's origins. She explains that no name has been given to the belief in deities in the Dominican Republic because practitioners see these beliefs as part of their Catholic faith. Other scholars (e.g., Rosenberg and Deive) have called such beliefs Vudú, a name similar to the Haitian term, thereby emphasizing the similarities and common roots between Vudú and Vodou.

Thus, scholars have created a counter-narrative to elite Dominican discourse, which has been based in the negation of similarities between Dominican and Haitian culture. Davis sees Dominican Vudú as a variant of Haitian Vodou, but considers the influence multidirectional, as the eastern Hispanic Dominican part of the island has also influenced western Haiti. She observes that while deities in the Dominican Republic speak Spanish with a Haitian Kreyòl accent (and a few words and phrases in Kreyòl), many Haitian deities speak *panyol*, which is Kreyòl with a Spanish accent. This linguistic aspect enacts a bilateral influence. The influence from the Dominican

Republic on Haiti is apparent in that the deities Petwo (Petrós) are given a Dominican—not Haitian—origin.

Davis' article, "Aspectos de la influencia africana en la música tradicional dominicana" (1980), organizes folk music of the Dominican Republic on a spectrum ranging from greater to lesser influence of Africa. She analyzes the possible influences on Dominican music of the different migratory African groups that came to the Dominican Republic. Davis continued her exploration of the cultural amalgamation that occurred in the Dominican Republic in *Voces del purgatorio: Estudio de la salve dominicana* (1981). Importantly, she describes here the substantial transformations of the Dominican salve, as a product of the Spanish-African syncretism and biculturalism. She discusses salves as part of orthodox Catholicism, where as formal and serious in nature, they utilized liturgical text from the Salve Regina prayer. But other salves have been much more syncretized with African music. These salves became far more rhythmic, faster, and festive.

The contribution of scholars from outside the country to Dominican culture, particularly Davis, has been significant; prior to the nineteenth century and during the Trujillo dictatorship, only academic music was documented. Today, researchers of Dominican music must complete the large task of filling the gaps in history. One often hears, "Dominican history has not yet been told." The African contribution to Dominican culture, as well as many other aspects of Dominican society, still remain under-examined.

These scholars have had a wide-ranging influence that includes the political. Many of these scholars now occupy political positions of importance as directors of

the Museo del hombre dominicano and the Instituto dominicano de folklore (INDEFOLK). Scholars connected to the Museo del hombre dominicano first submitted materials to UNESCO, leading this institution to the recognition of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo and the cocolo Teatro Danzante as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 and 2005, respectively. These were turning points in the current trend of valuing these practices as important Dominican traditions. Academics have also been involved in the revival of traditions. For example, members from the Museo del hombre dominicano were responsible for the restoration from oral accounts of the cocolo play David and Goliath in order to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its prohibition by Trujillo. Scholars have been researching and teaching an alternate Dominican history, the one not taught in schools: that of "the true heroes of our history," as Dagoberto Tejeda stated in a lecture I attended. He published a *Guía de las festividades de la cultura popular dominicana y símbolos nacionales* (2010b), in which these heroes are central. The place of Africa in Dominican culture is still not given enough attention in K-12 school education. Nevertheless, many university students have learned the other, or underdog, Dominican history through these scholars.

Memory Production and the Legacy of Scholars

Today, a discourse of black consciousness within Dominican culture is common among academics, the media, and cultural institutions. Anthropologist and musician Edis Sánchez told me[114] that until recently many practitioners talked about Africa only in passing and would have had only a distant idea of the possible history

[114] Personal communication, summer 2010.

of their rituals. Today, increased awareness has brought about a reconfiguration: many Dominicans, particularly ritual leaders, have problematized answers to questions of race and racial origins. Scholars, as well as cultural activists and urban musicians, are also helping practitioners retrieve and reexamine vague memories and oral tradition statements passed down from their ancestors. The revisionist scholars discussed here have now taught generations of students at UASD, particularly courses in Dominican folklore to urban students who may or may not come from these traditions. Sánchez, at the National Conservatory of Music, teaches students trained in Western European music about Afro-Dominican genres; thus, he has inspired new generations of Dominican composers to combine Dominican art music with rhythms influenced by or borrowed from Afro-Dominican musics.[115] In sum, Dominican revisionist scholars have identified silences within the narrative of African heritage in Dominican culture, managing to initiate shifts in the conception of the nation, influencing both university students and practitioners.

The current enthusiasm for multiculturalism among a significant sector in the country has brought tension, as demonstrated by a recent event. In 2005 the Academia de Ciencias, located precisely in the center of the Spanish colonial city, opened a large Vudú altar as part of its exhibitions. This opening incited a public debate between those in favor and those opposed to the altar. Eurocentric Dominicans showed much concern over tourists visiting the site, and getting the "wrong" impression about Dominicans. But in the newspapers, the director of the Academy, Nelson Moreno Ceballos, said that the Academia de Ciencias only wanted "to show

[115] Following Prof. Paul Austerlitz's donating of folkloric Dominican instruments to the Conservatory in 1998.

the value that Vudú has in Dominican heritage" (Misol 2005). When Tejeda promoted the inclusion of Olivorio Mateo (the messianic leader and Vudú healer from the last century)[116] within this exhibition, many believed he subversively provoked Dominican elites. Regardless of how controversial this exhibition might have been, even the public debate made evident that Dominican identity was being reworked. In the same vein, the decision of the director of the Conservatorio Nacional de Música to include Dominican folklore as an obligatory subject for all students provoked meetings and heated discussions among professors of the institution who wanted to reserve the institution for European music.

Even though the Dominican government is not openly opposed to acknowledging certain previously neglected aspects of Dominican culture, and in fact, supports many festivals and events that celebrate Afro-Dominican culture, more resources are needed in order to fully end structural racism. Resources are also needed for these traditions to be canonized as essential parts of Dominican culture. Many in the afro-dominicanismo movement believe that the government cedes only limited cultural rights, as a tactical maneuver for coping with larger and harsher forms of protest, allowing a certain degree of multiculturalism to mask the high number of human rights violations against its Haitian population. In any case, an Afro-Dominican identity continues to be formed in ways that connect to ancestral Africa, but which downplay the relationship between Dominicans and Haitians.

[116] Mateo fought against the American military, and declared himself sent by God. The authorities considered him a threat to their power and killed him in 1922.

Problematizing "Memory"

In this section, I want to turn away from the work of scholars and listen more closely to the plurality of voices I have come across during my own research. Scholars must find a method of approaching questions of race without relying on the simple yes/no binary, or black/white racial templates. In five years of research, I have asked different questions, mostly regarding the origins of Afro-Dominican music, in order to refocus the lens to more accurately understand the complexity and the contradictions of Dominican identifications. I have also gained a sense of the pride practitioners have in their identification with genres constructed as black in the process of national formation—congo, palo, sarandunga—in comparison with their identification with merengue as the epitome of the national identity.

A tendency among afro-dominicanistas to focus merely on the denial of blackness within the Dominican population has amounted to a simplistic generalization, sometimes also reflected in academic literature. Although there is some truth to the idea of a general denial of blackness, the actual situation is much more complex. For many Dominicans, blackness is embedded in their notion of *criollo* (creole) or Dominicanness (see Introduction and Chapter One). Dominicans will likely answer in the negative if asked whether they are black, because even when a Dominican person is so black that he or she could be considered "pure" black, the mere fact of being "Dominican" constructs an individual as having mixed heritage and racial composition. Thus we must listen to what Dominicans say, but also look behind their words—at non-verbal signifiers of ethnicity and race performed through music and popular religion.

For example, I have found it more productive to engage practitioners with questions concerning the origins of the drums used for their music. Instead of asking identity questions, I inquired about origins of instruments and music whenever I attended Vudú events or cofradía meetings. By recognizing their acceptance of plural origins, we might recognize plural identifications. The responses included did not deny connections to Haiti nearly as often as would be suggested by the literature on Dominican identity. Often practitioners traced the origin to the slaves, to Haiti, and sometimes to Dominican towns close to Haiti. Most Afro-Dominican practitioners recognized that Africa was part of Dominicans' ancestry, but believed, nevertheless, that "Dominicans are mixed," although some—especially Vudú practitioners—sometimes inaccurately related their practices to the native Indians. Many elders traced the origins of their ritual practices to some religious event—such as an apparition of the saint, virgin, or palo drums—views not influenced by current academic trends. These positions, both the mythological and historical, are not necessarily in conflict with each other, as one person might claim both as true. When I asked Dulce, the Vudú medium, where the religion came from, she answered: "If we knew, then it would cease to be a mystery." With the word mystery (misterio) she referred both to the mystery of the origin, the "not knowing," and also to the deities (practitioners refer to deities as misterios). Sixto Minier, captain of the Congo Cofradía, narrated to me the legend of the drums handed down through a dove (which represents the Holy Spirit), while also recognizing their roots in Africa. More importantly, Dulce and Sixto resisted the typical academic stand of taking a single

position on the question of origin. In sensitizing ourselves to this kind of plurality, scholars can learn to resist literal black-and-white polarities.

Academics and cultural activists who have sought to increase an awareness of Afro-Dominican identity have adopted a particular discourse of blackness in some ways contrary to the ways Dominicans have constructed their own identity (Chapter One). In current decades, however—through participating in academic lectures, workshops, and festivals that celebrate Africa's contribution to Dominican culture, and ultimately by having received two UNESCO awards, these practitioners and many Dominicans now are starting to positively identify as black Dominicans. In any case, we must remain careful about assuming our own definitions of what black means and of superimposing a unidirectional, teleological structure to this narrative.

Although, in my interviews, a Dominican might not show pride when responding about her skin color, most practitioners take pride in their ritualistic practices, which they recognize as coded black and Haitian by outsiders. Many explained to me that Haitians also have drums, so the Dominican genre in question must have originated in Haiti, or from the slaves. At a Vudú ceremony, one man in his fifties told me that palo music must surely come from a good place because the music is beautiful. The logical conclusion to these comments—that the original land of the slaves is a beautiful place—obviously leads to a much different perception of the darker Other than is usually discussed or admitted. At another Vudú ceremony, an old lady told me that palos were more special than merengue, because merengue could be danced anywhere and could be found all the time, but that palos were reserved for special times and places. I found this answer revealing; in many ways

she was favoring her local identity over the national. This local identity, as represented by Afro-Dominican music genres, although constructed historically in opposition to the national identity, seems to be a stronger identification for many Dominicans, although not necessarily one in opposition to the national. For example, many Dominicans feel black and Dominican, although they might feel that Dominicans in general are not black. Thus, while they recognize that the national Dominican identity is white, they know and feel black because they are on the darker spectrum when compared to most Dominicans. Nevertheless, most Dominicans would never say that they are like Haitians, who are conceptualized as 100 percent black.

In contrast to older practitioners, younger ones responded to questions of the origins of their rituals and music as from Africa, because of the drums. They sometimes explained that they had heard similar music on YouTube and the internet, so they knew that Africa must be the source. Increasingly, aficionados upload videos on YouTube and Facebook, creating a public Afro-Dominican archive that governmental institutions in the Dominican Republic have not created. Music discourse provides a means of engaging Dominicans in race talk and helps us gain a better grasp of the complexity of their identity. For example, when I visited the sarandunga in 2011, a blind old man reasoned to me that Dominicans and Haitians had to be similar because Haitians have the tambú (drums), as do Dominicans. Immediately after saying this, I noted his need to clarify his remark: that two traditions, one black and one white, could actually have a resemblance, or that, although Dominicans were white and Haitians black, it was possible for their

heritages to be similar. The old man's rhetorical move disproves scholars who have insisted that, if Dominicans do not see themselves as black, they must not acknowledge an African heritage, or connection to Haiti, as part of their culture. It also suggests that, even as this man was blind, he "saw" color in the same way as those around him. As many other of my interviews indicate, simple answers are rare; many Dominicans might note that Haitians tend to be darker-skinned, at least the ones they see crossing the border into the Dominican Republic, but simultaneously recognize commonalities in culture. Dominican identity is always relational and situational.

Many scholars who conducted research in the 1970s pointed out in their writings (and I still hear them say) that Dominican practitioners had the idea of Africa erased from their consciousness through the imposition of anti-black ideologies. Other practitioners have managed to retain a vague ancestral memory. Most Dominicans have not had the opportunity to grapple directly with such questions, as nothing about race, blackness, or Africa is taught in schools—and centuries of oral history have eroded specific connections. They learn only that Dominicans are a product of three cultures: African, Spanish, and Taíno. While most Dominicans might recognize that African heritage is one aspect of their identity, they learn no details about it, or how this heritage plays out in their Dominican identity presently. They are not trained or given a lexicon to talk or ponder about the significance of such identification. As Hernández Soto told me, this absence of Africa need not reflect a desire to deny black roots. With Trujillo and Balaguer relegated to a past political environment, and a half a century of revisionist academic literature revising their

propaganda, more room is now available for the permeation of black awareness among the Dominican population.

In talking to many dark-skinned Dominicans today—especially the ones whose rituals have been examined by scholars—one gets a sense of how much they have learned through their interaction with scholars, musicians, and activists. These bearers of traditions would likely not have read academic literature per se, but new narratives have become part of their cultural environment. A renewed sense of pride in their customs has come from the many invitations to participate in music festivals, and in pedagogical and cultural events, where activists and academics have consistently advocated for inclusion of their African roots, and for recognizing and valuing blackness in Dominican culture. I have noticed that practitioners—particularly members of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo—repeat phrases heard at such events, boasting of their heritage as black descendants of maroon slaves. Thus scholarly attention has increased their awareness of their traditions and raised their cultural capital. Sixto Minier gloated with pride about how famous the musicians of the cofradía were because they had traveled as far as Italy to play.[117] Many rural practitioners I talked to pointed with pleasure to how many urban people (academics, cultural activists, and aficionados) now enjoy what they do, and how this new-found pleasure helps keep old traditions alive.

Color, of course, like race, is essentially a cultural construct. Color exists in the real world, but only as a physical spectroscopic fact. In the words of religious studies scholar Roger Bastide, "Color is neutral; it is the mind that gives it meaning" (1967:312). On the other hand, color, and especially blackness, as it has come to be

[117] Personal communication, summer 2010.

understood, has assumed central significance in human history, especially modern history. W. E. B. DuBois noted a century ago that the problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the "color line." An even more complex problem, as the case of the Dominican Republic indicates, is what to do with a line that seems to be simultaneously imaginary, absolute, and malleable.

UNESCO: Cultural Capital Exploited or Recognized?

Scholars of Afro-Dominican subjects, in personal communication with me, almost unanimously demonstrated their joy when UNESCO recognized the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo in 2001. The feeling was that finally Dominicans would appreciate what long-time researchers and advocates of these traditions had been claiming: that the value and uniqueness of many Afro-Dominican traditions deserved to be appreciated at the national level. This recognition, followed by the same distinction given to the cocolo Teatro Danzante (dancing company) in 2005, has caused governmental institutions, and Dominicans in general, to gain appreciation of these previously unknown and marginalized communities. Today such traditions are appreciated as integral parts of Dominican culture by much of the general public. Although it was scholars who played a large role in getting the attention of UNESCO, as could be expected, as soon as each of the awards was granted, government officials, whose cultural policies had given little weight to these rituals, took partial credit for the acknowledgments.

In this section, I discuss some of the benefits and negative consequences that the congo and cocolo practitioners have experienced as a result of UNESCO's

recognition. I also problematize what appears to be a legitimate interest by governmental institutions in promoting Afro-Dominican music and rituals as key elements of Dominican culture. I will analyze some efforts practitioners have made in redefining themselves as Intangible Heritage of Humanity, and weigh the involvement of the Ministry of Culture (the main governmental cultural institution) in giving—if any—a new voice to these actors as carriers of the nation cultural diversity.

Practitioners of these traditions have on countless occasions manifested pride in the UNESCO award. They have also expressed their previous skepticism of the possibility of black people being recognized to such degree. In an interview, Linda, a cocolo leader (now deceased), expressed his surprise that blacks from the sugarcane mills would become famous.[118] He added that they did not have much money, but were being contracted to play in many events including birthday parties. These events, which include countless festivals around the country, add new material resources into these communities, but they also cause quarrels between members of the groups, as well as with other nearby communities. There have been differences of opinion over the destiny and proper use of such resources, and occasional envy from members of other traditions who have not been given similar attention by UNESCO, scholars, or the government.

Unfortunately, the possibility of obtaining resources has put both communities at risk from outsiders, who might benefit economically from claiming themselves promoters and coordinators of these cultural activities. The cultural activist Josefina Tavárez has been accused of collecting money in the name of the Cofradía de los

[118] Personal communication, summer 2005.

Congos del Espíritu Santo, which, according to newspaper accounts and informants, did not reach its destination. She has also been accused of misusing the Cofradía's name in order to obtain visas and take illegal migrants to Italy. Informants assert that her meddling in the Cofradía's internal affairs has provoked divisions among members, and even among blood relatives. In 2005, the Congo Cofradía received an award from the Brugal Foundation (*Cree en su Gente*) of 375,000 Dominican pesos (about $9,000). When Tavárez was accused of taking the money, she defended herself, arguing that she had kept the money to invest in cultural events, activities that she handled. I learned, however, that not even the captain of the Cofradía knew that the money had been awarded. Officials from the Ministry of Culture refused to communicate with Tavárez about the matter. They demanded instead to talk directly with the captain of the Cofradía. But Tavárez had become both manager and spokesperson and interfered in the communication. The presence of this outsider has become a serious and ongoing source of debate between members of the cofradía and the world outside. This is one example of controversial aspects stemming from the UNESCO award. Problems also arise because, although, unlike the Brugal Foundation award, UNESCO's recognition does not entail a monetary prize, many members of the cofradía were misinformed into believing it did. Lawyers and producers, attempting to manage the cocolo troupe, have encouraged unrealistic expectations among its members, causing more quarrels than ever.

The major positive result of UNESCO's recognition has been in motivating more Dominicans to value Afro-Dominican traditions as heritage to be preserved. Still, despite the illusion of monetary possibility, this inclusion has not changed the

socioeconomic conditions of these practitioners; they continue to live in poverty, with no appropriate facilities in which to live, operate, or teach youngsters about their traditions. A plan had been made by both UNESCO (through its office in Havana, Cuba) and the Dominican government (via its Ministry of Culture), in which the latter committed to recognize, protect, and promote the activities of such communities and their expressions. But the plan was only partially carried out. The communities continue to need support. The difference is that nowadays they participate in many folk festivals around the country, giving young people an incentive to continue the tradition and monetary gain (although little) to a few musicians. Perhaps those most benefiting from these events are the cultural workers, who create and promote the events; becoming an afro-dominicanista sometimes results in financial remuneration through the many events organized in this endeavor.[119] When I visited Linda in 2005, he stated his hope that the recognition from UNESCO would change practitioners' socioeconomic situation, which had been so extremely poor that some members begged on the street in order to eat. He said they were still waiting for the money to come their way in order to afford a proper building or space to teach. As of 2014, the cocolos are still waiting.[120]

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[119] In this dissertation, I emphasize that Africanness (as well as Taínoness) has become a means to gain capital. Economic opportunities have been opened up with the many festivals, lectures, and performances organized around new identities. Activists benefit equally or probably even more than bearers of these traditions.

[120] In a newspaper article titled "Los guloyas no pueden más," *Listín Diario* proclaimed in 2009 (four years after the UNESCO declaration—and still true today) the need for proper infrastructure for tradition bearers, including offices, rehearsal space, and a museum. Listín Diario quoted one of the members of the cocolo troupe, who sayd that his group sometimes was turning down gigs for lack of a proper transportation vehicle (Listín Diario, August 12th, 2011).

In the case of the Congos, the government committed to a plan of action in the form of workshops, books, documentaries, audiovisual materials, and a community center/museum. The first phase of the plan consisted of workshop cycles performed by members of the Museo del hombre dominicano. These workshops' focus audience was children and adolescents. The second phase, the building of a cultural center in Mata los Indios—the hometown of the cofradía—was not fulfilled. In the cocolo community, the main contribution of the governmental institutions has been to create several youth groups. This type of discontinuity in follow-through with projects is typical of Dominican governmental officials who blame the scarcity of resources for the lack of completion of projects.

The government is spending money on these traditions, but primarily in the form of subvention to some of the elders; even these efforts do not always come through as promised.[121] The sponsorship comprises a subsidy of festivals, in which many groups perform, and establishing an annual fund, whose money is distributed among some of the traditional groups to help pay for ceremony expenses. The funds are usually distributed each year, so one year a group might receive funds, but the next they might not. The festivals encourage more people to celebrate Afro-Dominican culture, but at the same time, no plan exists for creating systematic documentation or an institution that would canonize important rituals as Dominican. For example, no plan or curriculum exists for teaching Dominicans in school about these traditions and their importance. The Dominican school system does not prioritize teaching Dominican folklore or about the central place of Africa in

[121] The pension for one of the leaders of the Cocolo Teatro Danzante, Ruddy, was approved in April of 2008. As of September of 2009, because of administrative negligence, he had not received any money.

Dominican culture; consequently, no changes occur in the institutionalized definitions of Dominican identity. Festivals and small stipends to leaders of these communities are not a strong enough policy to really bring these cultural communities into a definition of the nation.

Beyond these omissions, an official compilation of Afro-Dominican music has yet to be completed, and no encyclopedia, dictionary, or museum has yet been dedicated to documenting Afro-Dominican culture. Children learn nothing about black leaders and the long history of resistance by black slaves, and the Dominican Republic celebrates no holiday related to Afro-Dominican history. A cynical point of view suggests that stipends and festivals are simply ways of co-opting these populations (or those in advocacy of them—including many urban-educated, middle-class advocates) from demanding better socioeconomic conditions.

As Peter Wade points out, in terms of Latin America generally, "There seems to be a certain official acceptance of postmodern celebrations of diversity—what one might call a postmodern nationalism that defines the nation in terms of its multiculturalism, rather than an ideally homogeneous culture" (1997:105). However, Wade does not see this operant new multicultural nationalism as a rupture from the past; these new trends are "still subject to the play of power and resources" (ibid.:105) important in previous eras. So, while subaltern groups might claim a fair share of material resources of the nation, the actual gain may be confined to the form of identity politics. Charles Hale notes that, by the second half of the 1990s, the image of *mestizaje* (mixedness in the Dominican context) "as [an] epitomising metaphor for the culturally homogeneous subject of the nation had been replaced by

an official discourse of multiculturalism" (2002:505) Thus, he argues, "as attempts to implement at least minimal standards of democratic accountability and rule of law advance, it becomes more difficult to impose manifestly unpopular cultural models and to resist demands for basic cultural recognition" (ibid.:506). This dynamic, he explains, concerns international democratic standards. The Dominican government has had to make concessions, within this environment of multiculturalism, in its support of Afro-Dominican culture. Government officials open just enough space to avoid confrontation, but the degree to which this nod to multiculturalism leads to real cultural rights, or even to a redistribution of resources, is questionable.

In sum, the UNESCO awards built up hope among the practitioners of the rewarded traditions, but the gain has been in cultural capital only. Without proper support for the advancement of these communities, they are condemned to remain as repositories of Dominican blackness, without any serious challenge to the prevalent rhetoric of mixedness, or to the existing structures of domination and oppression.[122]

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[122] Several studies help with comparative context. Isar Godreau analyzes similar processes in Puerto Rico where the government is distancing blackness, geographically and temporarily, from the official definitions of the nation. Blackness is portrayed as vanishing and distant. This distancing manifests in celebrating black folklore as "traditional" and locating blackness within the community of San Antón in the city of Ponce. The racial purity of San Antón "is only recognized in the past, while mixture is understood as the mark of the present" (2006:182). The nation of Puerto Rico continues to be defined as non-black, and blackness is believed to lie elsewhere, in San Antón.

Zoila Mendoza (2000) shows that the folklorization of Cusco music and dance has been used by elites to curb a potential threat to the established social order, by giving certain populations cultural recognition. Elites have also used this folklorization to form stereotypes about subjugated groups. Ruth Hellier-Tinoco (2005) analyzes the connection between *indigenismo* policies and folklorization, in which "these dances are nationalized and given center stage, but only within controlled spaces (54-55). The *Viejitos* dance is labeled as folklore, but Hellier-Tinoco explains that this process of labeling creates division and otherness; "folklore is placed in opposition to art, authentic opposed inauthentic, traditional (backward-looking) opposed modern" (56).

The Dominican government's embrace of Afro-Dominican culture might be a comfortable way of nodding to an imaginary Africa, long gone from the Dominican imaginary, easily manipulated (as Trujillo did with the label indio). This recognition of Africa also serves to work out contradictions in Dominican history. In many ways, although some of them unintended by afro-dominicanistas, recent decades have seen the creation of an Afro-Dominican identity that connects Dominicans with their African past; but this identity building has also erased some of their common history with Haiti. The connection of the Congo Cofradía to Haitian migrants of the area is rarely mentioned. Nor are the spirit possessions that occur within the Cofradía recognized (although these are by deceased members, not deities). Only scholars mention these developments. Embracing Africa might be a way of vindicating or otherwise transforming Dominicans' racist history, while exploiting the cultural capital of these communities that, despite a rise in visibility, continue to suffer from marginalization.

The government continues to strategically deploy resources providing limited opportunities for Afro-Dominicans, even those who received UNESCO recognition. As Wade reminds us, "In the 1990s, the tensions between tradition and modernity, region and nation, and blackness and whiteness are similar in some ways to those . . . of preceding decades. But the notion of mixture now has a new context of multiculturality within which these tensions are worked out in different ways" (2000:225). What started as subaltern initiatives (afro-dominicanismo) has been co-opted into state-endorsed multiculturalism.

Chapter Three
Somos Cultura Popular: The Redefinition of Dominican Identity through Folkloric Music and Dance in the 1960s and 1970s

From our current vantage point in Dominican history, the "constructed" nature of the cultural and political narratives of *merengue*'s Hispanicity seems obvious. By contrast, merengue, as an eclectic genre possessing both European-derived *and* African-derived features, is now largely accepted. During the Trujillo regime, merengue features were associated with an idealized Eurocentric Dominican subject, and genres beyond merengue were excluded from official Dominican historical records, or were connected to Haitian identity. Thus, what later became known as Afro-Dominican music comprises these excluded genres that were pushed aside in the process of defining the Dominican nation as white, Hispanic, and Catholic. Although some of these genres are as eclectic as merengue, because Afro-Dominican musics were connected to those marginalized within the nation, they formed a powerful tool for progressive Dominicans to use in mobilizing against merengue and the Hispanicity of Dominican identity. In this chapter I highlight the work of cultural activists in folk dance troupes and *clubes culturales and deportivos* (cultural and sports clubs), demonstrating how they sought to defend and reclaim their conception of *dominicanidad* through teaching grassroots folk music and dance in the 1960s and 1970s.

Important actions for *afro-dominicanismo* included the creation of folk troupes, in which young people learned to play, dance, and appreciate Afro-Dominican music. Troupes were primarily formed and sponsored by cultural and sports clubs of the marginal classes (the inhabitants in working-class neighborhoods),

in part to counteract North American culture and elite ideals of dominicanidad. In these clubs, teachers and activists also passed on their political ideas, which leaned primarily towards the left. There were dozens of clubes culturales y deportivos in the country, and about half offered folk dance as part of their education agenda. Understanding the work of these folk troupes is significant for this dissertation because my argument is that this nationalist movement of the late 1960s and 70s came to incorporate pro-African heritage and pro-black identity advocacy. The transition from nationalist to Afro-nationalist (afro-dominicanismo) was cultivated and disseminated partly by these clubs, particularly by the folk dance organizations that emerged from them. Whether in its traditional form, in staged festival performances, as folk troupe repertoire, or as part of *nueva canción*-inspired music groups,[123] Afro-Dominican music was central in offering a counter-narrative to monolithic and hegemonic definitions of the nation.

Cultural Activism, 1965–1982

In 1962, President Juan Bosch had won the first free Dominican elections in forty years. His ideas for government—acquired from Cuba and Costa Rica—were populist and reformist. His democratic government paid attention for the first time to previously neglected voices in Dominican history, and his 1963 constitution synthesized the nature of his regime. Bosch's 1963 constitution included laws that restricted the power of the economic elite, the Catholic Church, the military, and—

[123] *Nueva canción* (Spanish for new song) was a movement in Latin American music that emerged in the mid-1960s, taking root in South America, especially Chile and other Andean countries. It combined traditional Latin American folk music idioms with progressive and often politicized lyrics. It gained extreme popularity throughout Latin America.

importantly—the United States. Bosch limited the political activities of the military, respected the right of workers to strike, tolerated a diversity of ideologies (for example, communism), and separated church and state in recognizing common-law marriages and divorce. Bosch also proposed agrarian reform that limited private property, denied the right of foreigners to own Dominican land, and redistributed Trujillo's lands among peasants—while also defending the right of rural families to own land. Because of the dissonance of these policies with those of Trujillo, a considerable demographic of Dominicans (including the economic oligarchy, the military, as well as the Catholic church) feared becoming another Cuba, and branded Bosch a communist.

In September 1963—seven months after Bosch had taken power—a coup d'état replaced him with a triumvirate governing with support from the United States, Catholic Church constituencies who feared the secular nature of the new constitution, and former Trujillo generals of the armed forces. The operative division between the segments of the population that supported the return of Bosch without elections to finish its constitutional government, and those who opposed his policies, led to a civil war lasting five months.[124] This civil war divided the population among the left-leaning followers of Bosch (who called themselves the Constitutionalists, in reference to the 1963 constitution), and members of the Trujillo conservative armed forces (the Loyalists). The civil war culminated, in August 1965, with the intervention of the

[124] As historian Frank Moya Pons explains, after the end of the Trujillo dictatorship, "suddenly actors emerged that the dictatorship had repressed: political exiles, political parties, unions, professionals' associations, student organizations, and free press" (2008:527). Many of these constituencies would favor Bosch's manner of governing.

United States, whose President, Lyndon B. Johnson, wanted to restore order and to prevent "communists" from coming into power.

After the war ceased, elections took place, leading to what has become known as *Los doce años* (the Twelve Years) of President Joaquín Balaguer. These twelve years are remembered for the repression of ideologies among the Dominican masses. Although Balaguer was not technically a dictator, many Dominicans refer to his government as a civil dictatorship (or Neo-Trujillista).[125] Repression continued, especially as Balaguer fought with a strong hand against the political left and communism. During Balaguer's presidency, the ideas of *hispanidad* and anti-Haitianism were replayed through the oppression of African culture. Moreover, Balaguer suppressed union activity and all leftist organizations. With the support of the Trujillo military, Balaguer "carried out a campaign against Bosch and the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD)[126] in which more than 350 political activists were killed between January and May of 1966" (Moya Pons 2008:536). More than three thousand Dominicans lost their lives in political violence between 1966 and 1974 (ibid.:538). Although the Constitutionalists were defeated, the short period between the end of the Trujillo dictatorship and the end of the civil war was marked by the rise of social actors who, supported by the political left, shaped the Dominican Republic as a democratic nation.

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[125] I have heard many Dominicans argue that the press enjoyed more freedom during the Balaguer government than under Trujillo; however, even though Balaguer's enforcements were somewhat milder than Trujillo's, the political left and any opposition were severely persecuted. Orlando Martínez's disappearance (the director of the seminal left-leaning magazine *Ahora!)* is an example of the ways in which freedom of the press was inhibited. He still stands today as the symbol of freedom of expression in the Dominican Republic.

[126] Leftist political parties besides the PRD, the most popular, are numerous and include the MPD (Movimiento Popular Dominicano), the PCD (Partido Comunista Dominicano), and the PTD (Partido de los Trabajadores Dominicanos).

Dominican sociologist Laura Faxas notes that this period gave birth to the political populist movement, represented by President Bosch and his ideologies. Even though these populist ideals were truncated in 1965 by the U.S. intervention, Bosch's consciousness and ideals remained in the minds of many Dominicans during the Twelve Years, allowing the Dominican imaginary to be organized from below (2007:110). Populism was epitomized by the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (Bosch's political party), as well as left-leaning parties, and manifested through urban grassroots organizations that included the clubes culturales y deportivos. These clubes became ubiquitous as some of the safest places through which to express opposition to Balaguer policies. During the Twelve Years, as historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof states, "cultural activism became the primary outlet for young anti-imperialists who joined church-sponsored youth groups, cinema clubs, and poetry societies" (2008:85). A large segment of the population deployed music and dance as effective tools against the oppression of the Twelve Years, in which countless Dominicans were exiled, jailed, or killed.

After Trujillo's dictatorship, many Dominicans who wanted a more democratic society had begun to question the function of art; they sought to use culture "to challenge both the elite Hispanism of the Balaguer administration and the growing popularity of imported, urban, and commercial cultures" (Hoffnung-Garskof 2008:85). During this time American music, especially rock, came to dominate Dominican taste, as the market opened and multinational music corporations gained strength. As Deborah Pacini asserts, American rock music began to dominate the airwaves and "became the strongest competitor not only to Dominican merengue and

guitar-based music, but to other foreign genres as well" (1995:77).[127] Afro-Dominican music and dance were instrumental in keeping the popular consciousness alive and in building a nationalist movement that set out to contest American influence.[128] Theater, poetry, and folk dance troupes played leading roles in spreading the revolutionary consciousness, and in counteracting the artistic forms that were coming in from the United States.

Dominicans' relationship to the United States has been crucial in the conceptualization of its national identity. Since the late nineteenth century, the U.S. has played a role of intervention in Dominican matters, and in 1965 helped members of the Catholic Church and Dominican elites, loyal to the military, to defeat the Constitutionalists in the civil war. Thus, the civil war and resistance during Balaguer's regime were as much about culture as about the political and economic future of the country.

Although Balaguer's government set out to exterminate all opposition, the populist movement remained, but not until 1978, when the PRD won elections, did the opposition have a chance at governing. Instead of increasing in strength, however, the populist movement collapsed. Thus, the period from 1978-1982 marks the end of what Faxas calls "the populism myth." In her words:

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[127] According to Paul Austerlitz, in the 1960s Dominican radio broadcast mostly North American music, salsa, and *baladas,* but merengue airplay increased dramatically during the 1970s and 80s (1997:98). He sees this as a trend in which Dominicans turned to native popular culture as part of a nationalist movement, a shift that was apparent in TV programming as well. He argues that, "by the late 1980s most working-class Dominicans preferred local shows to U.S. imports" (ibid.:99).

[128] Similar nationalist sentiments were aroused during the first U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic in 1916. Dominican nationalist art music dates to this period.

> The fact that the PRD government of 1963 did not have time to establish a national-popular regime made of this model [populism] . . . a myth of great strength. This abortive populist experience remained in the imagination of the Dominican population as a myth, more an aspiration without crystallizing, but not a failure, until 1978, when the PRD, back in power, failed to come together with such a model. In fact this myth linked all the popular aspirations: the desire for economic integration, the anti-Yankee nationalist feeling, and the democratization of society (2007:109)[129]

Faxas argues that the populist political movement was aborted by the rise of the PRD in 1978, but I would argue that this populist movement, begun in the 1960s, only mutated then into a "new social movement," where, as sociologists define them, "efforts to define, celebrate, enact, and deconstruct identity are more important . . . than they have been in the past" (Poletta and Jasper 2001:5).

Although active social progressives in the present (academics, cultural activists, and musicians) still concern themselves with economic issues, the focus since the late 1970s has been on transforming into identity politics and the rights of Afro-Dominicans to participate in the definitions of dominicanidad. The same young people who went to the streets during the civil war, participating in the political activities of the left, now focus primarily on social and cultural issues. They no longer focus on the support of the labor unions and the mobilization of the working class. The PRD government made room for Afro-Dominican traditions in governmental events and town festivities, as well as supporting research and grassroots festivities

[129] All quotations in this chapter are my translations.

on these traditions in neighborhoods.[130] This spirit of celebration of afro-dominicanismo survives today.

Faxas contends that the end of the populist myth—in the 1980s and 1990s—was marked by an important apolitical stance, in which Dominicans increasingly separated the social from the political; they lost faith in worker mobilization as a solution to problems, stopped looking at the collective for the improvement of life, and lost hope for social mobility through education and labor union organizations. Instead, they increasingly sought salvation and betterment in emigration to the United States or in conversion to evangelical Christianity (2007:x). In this milieu, culture took on a new importance, as it seemed to be the arena of possible mobilization. Through contesting notions of culture, constituencies have had some success inverting dominant relations of representation. Although the political right defeated the left in the Dominican Republic, afro-dominicanismo remains today among those who belonged to the left and have advocated populism since the 1980s.[131] These afro-dominicanistas continue to struggle for a more egalitarian society and recognition of the heterogeneous traditions that make up Dominican society.

The seed of afro-dominicanismo can be traced back to Bosch, whose populist policies were concerned with national folklore, and who had a broader vision of Dominican culture and identity. During his government, Bosch commissioned folklorist Fradique Lizardo to prepare a folk festival, presenting seventy-two rural

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[130] The PRD government also started to give value to grassroots carnival, and not the elite celebrations, which happened in ballrooms.

[131] It is important to note the motivations for afro-dominicanistas. Many come from families practicing Afro-Dominican rituals and are fighting for national recognition of their cultural background. Others do not have that cultural background, but find more of a leftist or socialist agenda in promoting Afro-Dominican forms, as their practitioners are the most marginalized within the nation.

groups from various areas of the country.[132] Bosch's interest in all genres of Dominican folklore, including those labeled as African-derived, formed the seed of both the revisionist literature (reviewed in Chapter Two), and the work of afro-dominicanistas. While the particular political inclinations of folk practitioners of Afro-Dominican music remain diverse, or even inchoate, the cosmopolitan cultural activists, folklorists, and intellectuals who champion their music are largely left-leaning progressives. In Dominican politics, the left is heterogeneous and represented by various political parties, all of whom coincided in contesting the values of the Trujillo dictatorship and the Balaguer regime, including capitalism, Catholicism, social conservatism, and anti-Haitian racism.

When I communicated with cultural activists and musicians involved in afro-dominicanismo, however, they expressed feelings of both frustration and fulfillment. Despite their work crossing boundaries of pre-Bosch Dominican society, at another level many feel their work has stagnated. It has been difficult to move beyond gains in cultural recognition of the practitioners of Afro-Dominican religion and music; these communities remain some of the poorest within the country.

Clubes Culturales y Deportivos and Folk Dance Troupes

Clubes culturales y deportivos—the neighborhood communal associations created by inhabitants who wanted to improve their social conditions—offered social

[132] As mentioned in Chapter Two, Bosch's presidency saw the musicologists Isabel Aretz and Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera invited to teach courses in research methodology to Dominicans, and to write a survey of Dominican folklore.

services and educational programs for youth.[133] Many clubs came to incorporate folk troupes with the objective of teaching Dominican folk music and dance. Little has yet been documented about these clubes, and even less about the afro-dominicanistas who came from them, those who learned Dominican folk music and dance. Since the 1970s, Dominicans participating in these clubes learned to contest elite definitions of Dominican identity and the growing influence of North American culture. They formed stronger connections to local and rural Dominican traditions,[134] and, as these traditions have moved into public spaces, showcased them at festivals. Their aim was to re-insert traditions, and the constituencies they represent, into new definitions of the nation.

During the twelve years of Balaguer's first presidency, the government perceived the clubs' emphasis on grassroots culture and folk traditions as evidence of subversive political tendencies, or as "communism." Balaguer identified his opposition broadly, based on a monolithic definition of "authentic" dominicanidad (anti-Haitian, anti-communist, conservative, right-wing, Catholic, white, and elite). Anybody whose beliefs could be perceived as marginally different from Balaguer's ideals of a true Dominican, anyone whose affiliation might lean to the left, could be subjected to persecution. Although cultural groups at clubs were not always explicitly political, the government was indeed right to fear these organizations, as clubs were

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[133] Some clubs even formed schools with a full curriculum due to the inexistence of quality schools in their neighborhoods.

[134] Information for this chapter was for the most part gathered in conversations with musicians and dancers who came out of these clubs and remain active in afro-dominicanismo. Several books mention the clubes culturales as part of the history of movimientos populares in the Dominican Republic, but none concentrate on their cultural work. Newspaper articles comprise the main written source. I also attended many festivals that foreground Afro-Dominican music.

often sources for recruitment by the political left, whose political agendas were often expressed through art and education. Club leaders were committed to redefining culture away from Trujillo and Balaguer's Eurocentric models, toward culture as populist; they understood high/low culture distinctions as directly related to the construction of class differences in the Dominican Republic. They sought to achieve their ideals through efforts at democratizing education, creating opportunities for the lower classes.

In addition to traditional curricula, club members were encouraged to read about and research progressive political movements and local Dominican culture. *Clubista* Julio Valdez told me that in his club in Güaley, he even studied the history of cultural movements such as the clubs themselves.[135] For many clubistas, researching rural musics and dances was their first encounter with an unfamiliar Dominican culture. Clubista Rufino Santos told me that when his club brought palo and other music groups from the mountains to perform, it expanded his horizon of what constituted Dominican culture.[136]

The club leaders' concern for education expanded outside the classroom. Faxas claims that the clubs were a kind of a "primitive communalism," protecting all individuals who participated, with the purpose of conserving and spreading positive values (2007:75). She believes the clubs were the most important organizations of the working-class, urban neighborhoods during Balaguer's Twelve Years; they were the most active in urban environments and articulated the local demands of their population (ibid.:80). To this effect, clubs educated their population through the arts,

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[135] Personal communication, September 2012.
[136] Personal communication, October 2012.

fought against brothels in the neighborhood, encouraged young people to stay away from drugs, and built schools, libraries, and hospitals. Joining a club was a way of obtaining protection against the hardships of urban life and against repression by the government.

With the intensification of rural-urban migration in the Dominican Republic during the 1960s and 70s, *barrios* (lower-class neighborhoods) had no water, electricity, or street cleaning services. The neighbors might form a club cultural y deportivo to remedy such situations. In negotiations with the government, leaders of the clubs—who tended to be more educated than most members—represented participants, and helped raise resources for the well-being of the community. Working in the clubs was voluntary, and club attendees were encouraged to work for the community, not the individual. Members paid a minimal monthly fee (say, twenty-five cents), but many taught and worked for free at the clubs, or helped organize fund-raising events. The clubs became so important to their members that, by 1974, more than 500 were maintained throughout the country (De la Rosa 2012b).[137] Historian Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof has observed that, "By the end of the 1970s, 93 percent of residents in the string of barrios closest to the river . . . [in Santo Domingo], told interviewers that they knew of club activities in their neighborhoods" (2008:86). My informants have told me that the number and influence of clubs grew so large that the government feared their activities, realizing that they had a deep influence on the political leanings of the population.

[137] Among the most popular clubs in Santo Domingo were Los Nómadas, Héctor J. Díaz, Salomé Ureña, Mauricio Báez, San Carlos, San Lázaro, Bameso, and Cristo Rey. Clubs were also found in New York. There were many clubs in Manhattan including Juan Pablo Duarte, Cultural Amantes del Progreso, and Centro Comunal Cultural.

Although club leaders tried to define the clubs as apolitical, members of the political left recruited followers and established leadership at these clubs. The former club member and musician, Pedro Raposo, told me that, because club leaders could influence the general population, "elections for presidency in a club were as important as national elections. People campaigned heavily [to become a club leader] because, by gaining leadership of the clubs, it was then easier for them to recruit and form political study groups."[138] Raposo was invited to groups studying Marx and Lenin, and to meetings of several leftist political parties. These meetings sometimes took place at the club clandestinely, as the repression from the government could lead to killings and arrests.

The clubs and the political left reacted not only against right-wing governmental policies, but also against perceived threats from outside the Dominican Republic. American culture in particular[139]—rock music, movies, and fashion styles––was seen as a threat by members of the political left because, as Hoffnung-Garskof points out, "cultural penetration was [seen as] a conscious strategy to erode the revolutionary potential of Dominican young people." (2008:84) The young were quickly becoming Americanized consumers, and Leftist activists feared they would become so infatuated with American culture, drugs, and consumerism that their interest in working for national liberation and social justice would vanish. The penetration of American culture was inevitable in the rising influence of media on Dominicans on the island, but also through the rapidly increasing migration to New

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[138] Personal communication, November 2011.

[139] Manuel Scott (2000) provides a good overview of the history of rock in the Dominican Republic. The first rock group was formed in 1957, but was banned by Trujillo who considered it too liberal. But once his dictatorship ended, movies were shown that featured rock, "hippie" culture, and drug consumption.

York City, which had become possible for many only after the assassination of Trujillo in 1961, when restrictions on foreign travel and trade were removed.

Received notions of North American modernity and Dominican backwardness fundamentally shaped the ways that many migrants and young Dominicans perceived reconstruction of the nation after Trujillo. This modernity was largely represented by the popular youth counterculture that came from the United States. Hoffnung-Garskof explains that, with Trujillo's death, the songs and dances of the early 1960s (particularly rock) represented the new freedom and democratic transition many young Dominicans sought (2008:81). He explains that Dominican youngsters—many of whom would later turn against American influences—embraced music they saw as modern and cosmopolitan.[140]

Many Dominicans embraced American artistic or intellectual ideas and practices. Once tight government control lifted, they had the freedom to experiment and bring these influences to Dominican culture. Thus some musicians, such as the merengue superstar Johnny Ventura, borrowed elements from American styles. They incorporated the bass drum of disco music, and "aspects of Elvis Presley's dance steps, rhythms, and performance styles. They played electric instruments and put dancers in front of the musicians, grease in their hair and sexual innuendo in their hips" (Hoffnung-Garskof 2008:81). Dominican rock groups played popular American rock songs with both English and Spanish lyrics, and the clothes, hairstyle, and

[140] Examples of these modern and cosmopolitan musics, according to Hoffnung-Garskof were "the *twi* (twist), *ye ye* (from the Lennon and McCartney lyric, 'Yeah, Yeah, Yeah'), and *go go*—collectively known as the *nueva ola* (new wave), or simply *música moderna* (modern music)" (2008:81). Nueva ola was basically a movement in the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas which produced cover versions of songs already popular in the United States.

culture of rock musicians became fashionable.[141] Dominican music groups—inspired by the "spiritual" shift of the later Beatles—adopted names related to Hinduism such as the Brahmins, Samadhi karma, and Miguel Om.[142] For many Dominicans, especially left-leaning nationalists and club leaders, this penetration of Euro-American culture was seen as a reflection of Balaguer's political compliance with the United States, although the Balaguer regime also persecuted Dominicans who performed and followed American music and styles.

The regime even turned young people from working-class neighborhoods against each other, in what Balaguer called an anti-communist war; a "communist" was basically anyone opposed to his policies and those of his political party, the Partido Reformista.[143] As Hoffnung-Garskof explains, "The police sought to crack down on subversion and the left on cultural penetration" (2008:89), and long or unconventionally styled hair represented both. Informants told me that barrio residents felt protected by the presence of the clubs, and young people in the clubs studied and socialized, both incurring harassment on the streets, either by the police,

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[141] Dominican rock groups lacked electric guitar and sitars, and had to imitate this sound with acoustic guitars, resulting in new instruments and new sounds. They sang in English without understanding the words.

[142] Starting in 1968, following this turn to Eastern spirituality, several philosophical institutions (which continue today) were established. These institutions, such as La gran confraternidad yoga, the Maharishi school, and Hindu and Hare Krishna temples, introduced their philosophies, first to rock musicians and then to the general public.

[143] These young people were feared and came to be named colloquially by Dominicans as "La banda colorá" (the red gang—red being the Partido Reformista color). The Partido Reformista called them the Anti-Terror and Anti-Communist Democratic Front. They mercilessly attacked opponents of the regime, but enjoyed the protection of the police. Clubista Rufino Santos told me how, in his neighborhood, they were always aware of government spies (*caliés*), and violence and hostility occurred between clubistas and caliés (Personal communication, October 2012). For a good depiction of this climate of terror, listen to the bachata "Barrios calientes," by Luis Días, sung by Sonia Silvestre.

la Banda Colorá (anti-"communists," young people paid by the government; see fn. 143), or criminals.

Sometimes even club leaders attacked those with long or "weird" hairstyles, such as Afros, dreadlocks, or long "hippie" hair, albeit for different reasons than the government. The club activists differed from the police in that they tolerated "styles gleaned from third world resistance movements: olive drab pants, black T-shirts, beards, and berets," but they matched the police in their intolerance for "long hair, blue jeans, and peace symbols" (Hoffnung-Garskof:89), as these were considered American and, consequently, imperialist. Young Dominican artists, musicians, and intellectuals were therefore in the paradoxical position of looking for new paradigms with which to express their progressive ideas, but needing to do so without appearing to embrace American imperialist and capitalist models. "If you wore Indian clothes, bell-bottom jeans, or long hair you were considered a communist and consequently persecuted. The same if you wore an Afro or any non-traditional style. To be young was a crime," as writer José Rodríguez told me.[144]

In this climate, cultural and sports clubs provided both an outlet and an intervention. Some clubs offered a full curriculum of courses, but the most common classes were sports, theater, poetry recitation,[145] music, and dance. The prevalence of art courses originated in the need to escape political persecution, but the government disliked even the cultural classes of the clubs. As an informant told me, "Balaguer had a problem in that he did not want an educated working class, so club members

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[144] Personal communication, summer 2011.
[145] Poetry classes included *poesía coreada*, a group style of reciting that became very popular in the Dominican Republic. The UASD's group for poesía coreada was among the first, founded in 1969.

were always afraid of being persecuted. For the mere fact of being lower-class and a student, the government would see you as a communist." While all this is true, the government, as clubista Pedro Osorio told me, "knew that there were often political messages encoded into artistic presentations."[146] The clubs were shaping the political and social ideologies of young working-class Dominicans. Clubista Rufino Santos told me that in his club, the poetry of nationalist Pedro Mir and the "Versainograma a Santo Domingo," by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, were favorites among recitations.[147]

Through reciting Pedro Mir, Santos' nationalism grew. Pedro Mir's poetry reflects social concerns, for which he was pressured by the Trujillo government to go into exile, returning to the country during Bosch's government. "Versainograma a Santo Domingo" was written in honor of Dominicans during the 1965 invasion, and sympathizes with Bosch, while criticizing the Trujillo government and the U.S. invasion. The minds of young working-class Dominicans were taking a direction reflected in these poems. When clubistas had no access to poetry books or theater pieces, Santos told me, leaders and youngsters at the clubs created their own, and these inevitably had a leftist inclination, speaking openly against the Balaguer regime and U.S. interventions on Dominican matters. Santos remarked that expressions of antipathy towards Balaguer were expected of all art performances in his club.[148]

The arts were seen as constituting a relatively safe medium to communicate these progressive ideologies; grassroots Dominican music and dance, which built on long buried and repressed strains within the population, communicated these ideas most directly. In many of the clubs, folk dance and music in the 1970s were part of

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[146] Personal communication, December 2012.
[147] Personal communication, October 2012.
[148] Personal communication, October 2012.

attempts to strengthen working-class communities, learn community work and leadership, educate people in their cultural roots, and offer activities for young people. Members of folk dance troupes were encouraged to research rural dance traditions and to visit the communities where the dances originated. Folk dance troupe leaders helped the less advanced or less established troupes of other clubs. Inter-neighborhood or city folk festivals thrived, and dancers and musicians from troupes received constant role-modeling, lectures, demonstrations, and lessons from fellow clubistas, who were professional folk dancers or musicians.

Many of my informants (former members of clubs' dance troupes) told me that, without the education and services from the clubs, they would probably have ended up in jail or dead. They would likely have fallen victim to the repression by the government. Instead, they gained a profession as folk dancer or musician. Nowadays, even as the clubs have declined in importance, former clubistas continue in their profession, and the best Afro-Dominican urban musicians are former clubistas. Other former club members now lead folk dance troupes around the country, which continue to thrive in the still-existing clubs and other cultural organizations. Dominican universities also include folkdance troupes as part of their extra curricular activities, for example, APEC University, led by former clubista Edis Sánchez.

Although club troupes emphasized Dominican folk music and dance, many became more and more in tune with the search for African "roots" and heritage, this prevalence growing among academics, folklorists, and researchers. Sometime during the 1970s, troupes at clubs went from dancing merengues and *mangulinas*[149] to

[149] The *mangulina* is couple's dance in 6/8. Although of hybrid background, in the Dominican Republic it has been considered part of the "Spanish" heritage.

suppressed genres of music and dance, such as *congos, sarandungas*, and *palo*, genres that had been prohibited during the Trujillo dictatorship and still forcefully discouraged by Balaguer's government.[150] For many club attendees who came from the rural traditions brought to folk dance troupes by advocates of Dominicans' African heritage, embracing these traditions instilled pride in their roots, and gradually the gaps between scholars, cultural activists, and club attendees diminished or disappeared. Through the club's educational programs, young people in the Dominican Republic were, in Raposo's words, "discovering and learning about Dominicans' African heritage and identity through the performance of the clubs folk dance troupes."[151]

Yet, while celebrating the progressive moves of these clubs is tempting, they nonetheless adopted—and in some ways merely reversed—the same essentialized and binary ways of thinking. For example, the new left, like the right, claimed to have a path to authenticity and truth; arguably the left replaced high European with grassroots (and then African) culture. Thus we might see both sides as equally imagined and constructed. But clubs and the arts emerging from these political wings made possible more nuanced ways of thinking about the binaries of left and right, low

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[150] Before the 1970s, the prevalent aesthetic trend in Dominican music was to arrange pieces in big-band styles. These arrangements often changed the rhythmic structure considerably from the folk music Dominican pieces were based on. During the Trujillo dictatorship, Dominican music, arranged for big band, was presented on the regime's official radio and TV station, La Voz Dominicana. Bands favored mangulinas, merengues, and salves because of their putatively "Spanish" origin, and pieces were sometimes loosely and inaccurately named to suggest these origins. For example, those by well-known "salve" singer, Elenita Santos, were actually merengues, avoiding the vocal timbre of countryside salves. Today, many Dominicans associate Santos with salves, not knowing what "real" salves are. As happened in other music genres, in folk troupe dances more effort was made to emphasize spectacle and stage performance than keeping authenticity or resemblance to original folk dances.

[151] Personal communication, December 2012.

and high, African and European culture. While reactionary and conservative ideas existed on the political right and left, the complexity of what it meant to resist both the American and the conservative Dominican model was worked out through the arts, and through modes of expressions made possible by these clubs.[152]

Somos Negros: A Search for African Heritage Through Music and Dance

Dominican folkloric music and dance were important parts of the anti-imperialist agenda of the clubs of the 1970s. However, as club members gradually began to enter into contact with seminal figures in the afro-dominicanismo movement, which developed alongside, the objective of folk dance troupes formed within the clubs transformed from nationalism defined in opposition to the U.S. to nationalism that looked to celebrate the African and the black in Dominican culture. In the early 1970s, the repertoire of clubs' dance troupes had been limited to stylized merengues and other genres, such as mangulina, performed by big band-type ensembles, playing with a "polished" style and sound. These types of arrangements had been prized by high society in conscious opposition to the "primitive" music and dances of the folk religious cultures of the lower and darker-skinned classes. Through this high vs. low cultural model, the society's class structure was formed, sustained, and since the 1970s, challenged. Under the influence of afro-dominicanismo activists, club troupes expanded their repertoire to include Afro-Dominican genres (congo, palo, sarandunga, and others). Today most dance troupes retain Afro-Dominican

[152] One example of the complexities Dominican youth expressed at that time is reflected in the music of merenguero Johnny Ventura. He was influenced by North American rock, opposed U.S. hegemony, and enlisted to support the Constitutionalist anti-US troupes (see Austerlitz 1997:88-89).

dances in their repertoire. The pedagogical impact of the club troupes is also apparent in today's leaders and educators, who learned to appreciate Afro-Dominican dances and ritualistic practices through dancing in clubs and university troupes during the 1970s.

The pro-African movement began after the decline of the Trujillo dictatorship. In Chapter Two I addressed the work of academics in this movement. Here I explore the influence of seminal folk dance troupe leaders such as Fradique Lizardo, who researched and developed a more complete repertoire of Dominican dances, both secular and religious. These leaders were important in shaping the afro-dominicanismo movement followers. Their ideas of black consciousness would permanently change the focus of club dance troupes, and the clubs provided trained dancers for their companies. Lizardo founded what came to be designated the state-sponsored Ballet Folklórico Nacional, formed partly with some of the best dancers from the club troupes. The public university (UASD) dance troupe also served as a training ground for many folk dance troupes throughout the country.[153] Lizardo studied folklore and choreography in Cuba, ethnography in Sweden, and brought this training to the Dominican Republic. Although he did not belong to a cultural club, he taught generations of club leaders about the Afro-Dominican dances he had researched, and choreographed for folk dance troupes.

Prior to the incorporation of these dances into the folk dance troupe repertoire, Afro-Dominican music and dances were relegated to their rural and religious arena. Those who Lizardo trained became the leaders of club troupes and spread the

[153] Several informants, who belonged to clubs outside the capital city, told me that dance troupe leaders of their clubs would on Saturdays travel to Santo Domingo where they received dance instruction by members of the UASD's folk dance troupe.

knowledge of this new repertoire. Pedro Raposo, a former Lizardo student and member of the ADECEA club, told me that Lizardo recruited the most talented dancers from his club, who would then bring the dances to the clubs' troupes, expanding and changing the repertoire.[154] Eventually Lizardo's and UASD's choreography of congo, palo, sarandunga, and other Afro-Dominican dances spread throughout the country. Raposo's club had to buy instruments, such as the congo, sarandunga, and palo drum, in order to play the music of Afro-Dominican dances and the new repertoire learned through Lizardo. In this way, these troupes taught clubistas not only to dance, but also to play Dominican folk instruments. The experience of Raposo and the ADECEA club was not atypical. The success and proliferation of folk dance troupes, as well as the efforts of Lizardo and others to recognize Afro-Dominican dances, contributed to the legitimization of the troupes and the acceptance of previously marginalized musics, instruments, and dances as Dominican.[155]

While Lizardo was among the first to spread the popularity of this new repertoire, René Carrasco was the first to choreograph Afro-Dominican dances. He is regarded by many as the pioneer figure in the beginning of ballet folklóricos in the Dominican Republic. A self-taught researcher of Dominican dances, Carrasco founded an academy and museum for the study of Dominican dances in 1940, and he was the first to construct a map of the Dominican Republic showing the dances of each region. Since the 1970s, however, many cultural activists in the afro-dominicanismo movement have attempted to discredit much of Carrasco's work as inauthentic. As Martha Ellen Davis points out, his knowledge was vast, but "his

[154] Personal communication, November 2011.
[155] A major point of departure for this recognition was the presentation of the Ballet Folklórico Dominicano, led by Lizardo, in the Miss Universe contest of 1977.

troupe's performances unconsciously fused ethnographic observation with artistic creativity" (1994:141). During Trujillo's regime, dance music, like merengue, was "stylized," disguising or underplaying its African features by adding melodic instruments in Hispanicizing it. For advocates of black identity in the Dominican Republic, retaining African aspects visible in Afro-Dominican music and dance was important as a form of political resistance. Carrasco went beyond this scope, adding turns, leaps, and outside props to a dance. His emphasis was not literal historical precision, but commercial folkloric shows. Accompanying his dances, the ensemble, too, would add European instruments to what ritualistically had been played only with drums; thus, according to afro-dominicanistas, he masked the African in the music. Hoffnung-Garskof asserts that Carrasco and others presented an African past "boiled down to a rhythm or a dance step, digested and 'elevated' into elaborate choreographies and stage shows" (2008:128). Davis points out that Carrasco added accordion to all his pieces, because he took the sound of the Cibao region as typical of the whole country (1994:141). This sound, because it represented the whitest region of the country as well as the region that gave birth to merengue music, would provoke oppositional resistance by afro-dominicanistas.

Yet as a pioneer, Carrasco's choreographies and musical arrangements were the point of departure for Dominican folk troupe dances.[156] While the historical validity of his performances can certainly be debated, it is possible to see the "inauthentic" changes he made as a strategy to avoid upsetting those in power. The folklorist Iván Domínguez made this point when we were listening to Carrasco's

[156] Even the first director of the ballet folklórico at UASD (Divina Estrella), recognized for accurate enactments of Dominican dances and music, had been a dancer in René Carrasco's folk dance troupe.

1970s CD set, *Lo que se pierde en Santo Domingo*. Accordion is heard on a *jacana* (one of the sarandunga dances), with a similar feel to a *pambiche* (merengue rhythm). Domínguez pointed out that the accordion—while not historically accurate for the sarandunga—would have made this piece sound appropriate to Dominican elites familiar with its sonority in merengue. Thus, the accordion sonority served to conceal the African aspects in this piece. It is difficult to evaluate if and how much these musical decisions were conscious concessions by Carrasco, or others living in a Hispanophilic society, because it was not until 1963 (Bosch's government) that Afro-Dominican dances were presented and celebrated. Only in the twenty-first century have they enjoyed acceptance, or at least acknowledgement, among Dominicans of all social classes. When studying music before this time, it is important to learn to hear an African presence that is not necessarily silenced or absent but sometimes merely disguised.

My folk-troupe dancer and cultural activist informants have claimed that Lizardo also changed Dominican dances—although he left the music as he found it, unlike Carrasco—in order to enhance their commercial appeal across social classes; however, they also recognize such changes as part of a necessary process of adapting folk dances to the performance arena of urban folk dance troupes. Domínguez told me that Lizardo had said he envied the independence of the state's university ballet troupe (UASD), which is known for having the most historically accurate choreographies. Lizardo depended on external support and did not enjoy full artistic freedom; his remark suggests his conscious recognition of needing to appease elites. Yet Lizardo's research became a point of departure for the search and promotion of

Dominicans' African heritage, and his many students have created folk dance troupes that have themselves been instrumental in the afro-dominicanismo movement.

Lizardo authored publications on Dominican dances, instruments, and other aspects of folklore (see Chapter Two). He was also a pioneer in encouraging choreographers to root their folk dances in research. Domínguez told me that Lizardo encouraged him—and other members of the folk dance troupe of UASD—to abandon the choreographies created by Carrasco[157] and to conduct their own research. Lizardo impressed on him that their own research would result in more informed reenactments of Dominican folk music and dance in terms of steps, choreography, and outfits. Domínguez noted that his conversation with Lizardo influenced his own search, as well as those other members of the UASD ballet; they went on to learn how these dances were performed, not in the staged performances of ballet troupes, but by rural practitioners. If they experienced dances in their environment, Lizardo thought, the folk dance troupe's reenactment would retain more of the dance's original essence, particularly the "African" elements.

Different schools of folk dance performance vie for attention in the Dominican Republic, following the choreographies of Carrasco, Lizardo, UASD, and others.[158] While they might all use the same steps to represent the traditional dance, they differ in choreography, staging, and costumes. When Josefina Miniño took the directorship of Lizardo's Ballet Folklórico Nacional in the middle 1980s, she added Spanish-like dresses to the dancing of Afro-Dominican music. Afro-dominicanistas, who felt she purposefully disguised the African aspects in Dominican culture,

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[157] Domínguez had learned these choreographies from Divina Estrella.
[158] See Davis (2002) for more on folk dance troupes.

expressed their discontent. Today, they argue that the national ballet programs very little Afro-Dominican music, little of it authentic. As an informant told me: "This ballet, as the nation's organization, must reflect who we Dominicans are, and we are not Spaniards." When Miniño took directorship of the national ballet, many of Lizardo's dancers left the institution because, as my informant remarked, the dancers in the Ballet Folklórico Nacional "started moving their skirts as though we were Spanish, and the dresses had sequins." Afro-dominicanistas consider folk troupes that leave out the traditional drums, or add instruments (e.g., congas or bongo drums) from outside a particular tradition, guilty of concealing parts of Dominicans' African heritage.

In general, afro-dominicanistas oppose the current policies of state-sponsored ballets. They also accuse the two folk dance troupes of the Ministry of Tourism of being inauthentic, even performing drum pieces with saxophones. The people's folk dance troupes continue to push for opening new spaces in which to redefine nationhood where Afro-Dominican culture is promoted.[159] When I questioned informants about the seeming Hispanicization of their folk dance troupes, their answers alluded to what they do as presenting an attractive show. Many folk dance

[159] Hoffnung-Garskof notes the importance of the Tourism Board during Balaguer's government. It became the primary governmental body attending to the promotion and marketing of Dominican popular identity. The board organized carnivals, merengue festivals, parades, beauty contests, and folklore troupes (2008:127). This presentation was according to Balaguer's ideals of Dominican identity. In New York, the efforts were made to present the Dominican Republic as a civilized and cultured nation (128). The Ballet Quisqueya, directed by Normandía Maldonado, was crucial in this undertaking.

troupe leaders feel that if dances are kept too close to the "authentic," they make an inferior show.[160]

While disagreements about the value of these organizations tend to be based on the familiar binaries of authentic/inauthentic or African/European, my main point is that the prevalent debates about authenticity of the different schools of ballet folklóricos present a more clear picture of Dominican folklore, and demonstrate that this tradition of folkloric dance is essentially an invented tradition[161] that has been manipulated by different sectors of the population and mobilized according to ideological agendas on the left and the right—of Hispanization or Africanization. When my afro-dominicanista informants claim "we are not Spaniards," what they leave unsaid is "we are not Africans either."

The afro-dominicanismo movement, which often aligns itself with authenticity, is also a constructed ideology. There are many schools of folk dance; they all claim to possess the "truth," and the most authentic representation of an idealized folk culture.[162] In recent decades, various trends have developed in attempts to confirm accuracy such as trips to the countryside and attending religious

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[160] One cannot neglect the economic aspects of folk troupes. The more popular the troupe, the more it is invited to participate in festivals, thus the more money it raises. Although in the 1970s, most of the activism was done as voluntary work, today, activists, folk troupe leaders, and afro-dominicanistas in general, receive compensation.

[161] I borrow the term from Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) to mean that ballet folklóricos (like heritage) attempt to establish indigeneity and continuity with a past and are cultural constructions.

[162] The question of authenticity in ballet folklóricos is a heated debate. It was the most prevalent debate of panel discussions at the fifth conference, Music, Identity, and Culture in the Caribbean, hosted in 2013 by Centro León, in Santiago, Dominican Republic. Conversations on this subject drew the large number of members of ballet folklóricos from the 1970s. In a panel about copyrights laws, debaters insisted that the Ballet Folklórico Nacional should be sued because of their inauthentic portrayal of Dominican culture. Although choreographers acknowledge that they "dress things up" to make a better show, they claim to do it without changing the essence of the original folk dance in which their choreographic number is based.

ceremonies with dances. However, many Dominican dances, such as *bamboulá* and *chenché matriculado*, have essentially disappeared, and what remain are the different versions presented by the ballet folklóricos. The circle of influence is already too established to unravel; there is no pure origin or authentic presence outside of ideology, and scholars must read the layers and masks that are crucial to any analysis. Despite the impossibility of asserting pure origin or authenticity, folk dance troupes at clubs have played and continue to play a major role in reimagining the cultural heritage of the Dominican Republic.

Decline of the Clubes Deportivos y Culturales under the Government of the PRD (1978-1982)

In this section, in illuminating current identity politics in the Dominican Republic, I address the decline of the populist movement, exemplified by the decline of the clubes culturales y deportivos. By 1970, cultural clubs had increased so much in number that the Asociación de Clubes del Distrito Nacional (ASOCLUDISNA) was created to organize them. Former clubistas told me that, in 1978, when Balaguer lost elections, and the new political party (PRD) took over, their club leaders were co-opted and lost the trust of the masses of barrio Dominicans. As populism declined, artistic freedom remained possible; the cultural work of the left survived, but it now evolved into the afro-dominicanismo movement that, although in many ways still connected to the politically progressive, has detached itself from leftist politics. Today, no one is persecuted by the government for listening to American music, or for singing odes to Cuba and its leftist revolution; as my friend said, “there is the music without the revolution.” We might see it as a different kind of revolution. Folk

dance troupes, Afro-Dominican urban musicians, and nueva canción-informed groups (see Chapter Four) still claim the rights of the impoverished, but now through fighting for the recognition of Africa, racially and culturally, in Dominican culture.

With the rise of the PRD, the 1980s marked the end of blatant opposition against American imperialism, as well as the decline of Marxism as an attractive alternative. With the decline of the left, the clubs declined in importance as well. But the afro-dominicanismo movement is still strong today, even though, as I argued in Chapter Two, the government has appropriated some of its demands into domesticated multiculturalism rhetoric.

Since the early decades of the twentieth century, American music has enjoyed massive popularity in the Dominican Republic. In the 1950s and 1960s, the "twist" (the dance) and rock music were popular among Dominicans, as well as 1970s disco. Despite the club movement's attempts to "save" Dominican music and identity from the influences of the massive popularity of American music, Dominicans incorporated these into their music. In this process they created new sounds, which also became popular. When Johnny Ventura in the 1970s incorporated rock and disco music elements into merengue, the popularity of merengue actually increased.

The influence from American culture was not possible to eradicate: in the 1980s, more rock and jazz concerts than ever before drew large audiences, but Dominican music genres also increased in popularity. The 1980s were also a high point for merengue and Afro-Dominican fusion groups. Although, as Laura Faxas explains, the populist movement essentially died with the PRD government (2007:26), this period also marked a new sense of freedom. The eight years of PRD

government (1978-1986) represents a period of artistic and academic openness, as pointed out in Chapter Two. As a musician told me, "during the PRD government, reading Marx or following the new trends of disco, punk, and house music did not put someone's life at risk. The police stopped going around to see who they were going to attack that day."

Balaguer's Twelve Years of terror found every oppositional party or hint of opposition suppressed. For many on the left, these years were simply a continuation of the civil war of 1965, as the clash between the left and the Balaguer government played out on the streets. Leaders of the left were killed in this process, but, perhaps more importantly, those who survived were often co-opted through diverse mechanisms, such as appointments to important governmental positions:

> Engineers, architects and other professionals who worked in the construction business received contracts for state-owned works; intellectuals and professionals were added to the governmental payroll through their appointment as professors of the state university, many of them without appropriate professional qualifications. (Moya Pons 2008:541-541)

Between open repression and secret co-optation measures, Balaguer managed to govern even with a strong leftist opposition. Historian Moya Pons adds that Balaguer utilized members of the Partido Comunista Dominicano (PCD) in his program for agrarian reform, and that communists became the main channel of communication between Balaguer and Castro (ibid.:542).

When the PRD won power in 1978, the left was already substantially weakened by Balaguer's strong hand and his policies; many leftists, ironically, were further co-opted by PRD's elected president Antonio Guzmán (1978-1982). The PRD had been historically in favor of clubs and recruited members from them, but Guzmán's government launched a campaign against club leaders. My informants relayed that, once in power, the PRD leaders feared the mobilizing power of the clubs, who could oppose economic governmental policies that had swung to the right. Thus, as one interviewee said, because the PRD leaders knew that the clubs were "a school in leadership," they gave positions in the government to important club leaders, weakening their oppositional incentive. A clubista told me, these club leaders then began prohibiting activities they themselves had initiated during the Balaguer years. Faxas writes: "Indeed, once in power, the PRD took over the control of many clubs, subjecting them to government interests and transforming them into instruments of power, so the clubs lost their fighting spirit" (2007:80). Failing to serve the masses, the PRD government marked, according to Faxas, the end of populism. Clubs in turn gradually lost their legitimacy as instruments for the empowerment of the masses, and today are no longer recognized for their oppositional political policies.

Many clubes culturales and deportivos are still open, although their work is depoliticized. Some remain mainly as sports associations (for example, club Mauricio Báez), while others still organize cultural classes, festivals, lectures, and workshops.[163] For example, the Club Recreativo, Deportivo y Cultural Sol Naciente, in Sainaguá, San Cristóbal, organizes one of the largest Afro-Dominican music

[163] Still other clubs remain as party or entertainment halls.

festivals in the country. Folk dance troupes perform in the many festivals that celebrate Afro-Dominican culture. Former club members are involved in folkloric activities, and many of today's best urban folk and fusion musicians trace their training to the clubs.[164] But while the political left and the populist movement were gradually weakened or domesticated, the number of Dominican scholars, activists, folklorists, dancers, and musicians who produce work consciously calling for the redefinition of Dominican identity has increased. A leftist revolution is no longer as desired in the Dominican Republic and the left as a political force has never recovered its stature of 1965 and the Balaguer regime. Nevertheless, the afro-dominicanismo movement, searching for African heritage and blackness, grew out of the political left, and, more specifically, out of the clubs, the UASD university, folk dance choreographers, and nueva canción-informed musical groups (see Chapter Four), all of which existed during Balaguer's twelve years.

Celebrating "Heritage" and Rewriting History: Festivals, Activists, and a New Identity

Not until the 2000s did a degree of ideological comfort exist for Dominicans, regarding the discourse of black consciousness and reaffirmation of their African heritage. This path was partly paved through the celebration of folk festivals, events that have grown in number since the 1970s. Dominican governments throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have understood the importance of music and folkloric festivals and their role in legitimizing or challenging ideas of culture and identity. For example, in 1944, the Trujillo family stopped an intended festival

[164] The clubs at Los Mina, Gualey, and Herrera, among others, produced musicians and dancers who remain active today.

planned by Dominican researcher Edna Garrido (Chapter Two),[165] in which she had intended to present a comprehensive view of Dominican culture. In a reversal of these policies, in the festival held during Bosch's presidency, Fradique Lizardo presented musical genres silenced during the Trujillo dictatorship.[166] These two festivals exemplified the policies of each government and the opposing directions they wished to take the country.

As anthropologist and musician Edis Sánchez told me, "nowadays every community wants its own festival."[167] The festivals bring pride and attention to previously marginalized communities, but they also constitute a means by which many Dominicans create spaces for African heritage in the Dominican Republic—celebrated, canonized, and taught to the general population. In these celebratory occurrences, one can note complex interactions among music, politics, and identity. Through festivals, cultural activists have inserted Afro-Dominican music into tradition and used it to create the idea of national patrimony. In this way they rewrite Dominican history to include the constituencies Afro-Dominican music represents in definitions of Dominican identity and the nation. Cultural events like festivals have kept populist ideologies alive, but are also some of the arenas where progressive ideologies have been allowed to exist by current Dominican governments. Governments also have appointed grassroots cultural activists to important positions

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[165] In 1950, Papito Vallejo produced a festival with some of the material compiled by Garrido.

[166] According to Iván Domínguez, another festival of such magnitude, one that presented and prized popular culture, would not happen again until 1980, after Balaguer's government. This festival, organized by the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Agriculture, was called "Tierra y Alma" because it celebrated the year of the farmer. It lasted two weeks (personal communication).

[167] Personal communication, summer 2010.

and help to sustain ballet folklóricos co-opting these 1970s activists. As stated in Chapter Two, supporting the project of cultural activists has made it possible for Dominican governments to create an image of multiculturalism, a respected position in much of today's world. Thus, the Ministry of Culture regularly praises and presents Afro-Dominican traditions in public events.

If populism in the Dominican Republic died out in the early eighties, then the memory of and nostalgia for the activism of the 1970s can be felt in cultural events happening around the country today. Identity politics have largely displaced the leftist politicization of the 1960s and 70s. Today, former and newer progressive and left-leaning Dominicans see themselves as part of a joined movement, still searching to "rescue" Dominican identity from elitist definitions and from the continued threat of globalization and North American influence. Afro-dominicanismo has been shaped partly through fusion music, folk festivals, and folk dance troupes. Troupe members have continued to be active in remaining clubs, as well as in universities and cultural institutions, thus forming a major presence within this movement. Their continued participation in festivals is motivated, in part, by a desire for Dominicans to recognize that traditions such as palo and gagá are part of their heritage.

Several important festivals that came out of the activism of the 1970s still occur today. The festival of La muestra campesina, in the town of Salcedo, started in 1977, and the Sainaguá festival in 1979. Others have grown in importance in recent decades, such as the Festival del Café Orgánico and the Festival Cimarrón, in Monte Plata. Although these festivals present diverse Dominican culture, they emphasize its Afro-Dominican elements. Groups previously marginalized (cocolos and congos)

now enjoy recognition and some economic capital because of them. The convergence at festivals of Afro-Dominican music groups with academics, folk dance troupes, club members, folklorists, and urban musicians has developed the growth of these constituencies as part of a pro-blackness movement. For example, at a 2010 festival organized by the well-established cultural club Sol Naciente of Sainaguá, I saw attendees paying homage to deceased folklorists (Fradique Lizardo), and to Luis Días (former Convite member; see Chapter Four). In festivals practitioners of traditions also perform with fusion musicians. Festivals are then a microcosm of an alternate Dominican world and are also in themselves new spaces for the reinvention of the nation.

Festivals separate religion from music performance, making effective venues for cultural activists to introduce Dominicans to Afro-Dominican music and dance traditions, without the impediment of deeply held prejudices toward rural religious practices.[168] As opposed to presenting attendees with a *Vudú* ceremony, for example, festivals provide a celebratory and familiar environment. The festival of Sainaguá was created in 1969. In 1975, Dagoberto Tejeda suggested that club members celebrate a public saint's ceremony. The event was so successful that the club has repeated it ever since, but nowadays events occur onstage. Because Sainaguá goes back to the 1970s, it has been recognized as "Cultural Patrimony" by the government, to honor its survival during the repressive Balaguer years, and for helping to preserve Dominican traditions for thirty years. For afro-dominicanistas, this festival

[168] In the Second Regional Festival, a folk troupe leader announced that the group would perform some secular numbers so that people could understand this music outside of its context in religious rituals.

symbolizes the resistance of the populist movement, rooted in its struggle to support local culture since the 1970s.

Clubs like Sol Naciente and festivals like Sainaguá remain supporters of Afro-Dominican art and music, but since the 1970s, Dominican civil society has sought venues other than the clubes culturales that could support countercultural and Afro-Dominican culture. Today the Ministry of Culture also supports such venues, but their administrators have sustained these institutions mostly with private or international sponsorship. They have, for example, found support from Swiss organization Helvetas.

Casa de Teatro (founded in 1974 in the capital city) and Casa de Arte (in Santiago, the second largest city) constitute two examples of this type of venue. These venues, among others, have been crucial in the promotion of cultural forms outside the commercial mainstream or the officially promoted (e.g., merengue and other forms of accepted popular musics). Casa de Teatro has served since its foundation as a home for traditional and countercultural art and music, including important concerts by the fusion group Convite (see Chapter Four), who have considered Casa de Teatro a second home. When I was a child, my mother and other cultural activists met to create Casa de Arte in my hometown, a place to make Dominican culture accessible to all Dominican classes, and an institution that would also support Dominican popular culture. Today Casa de Teatro and Casa de Arte comprise a significant part of the cultural life in both cities. Through celebrating concerts and festivals, both institutions continue the work of the clubs, advocating popular culture and resistance to the dominant power structure through art. Like the

clubs and folk troupes, they exemplify civil society pushing cultural policy from below, and sponsoring art education to all members of society.

One of the main activities organized by Casa de Arte administrators is a festival titled *Arte Vivo* (Live Art). I was living in Santiago when the first Arte Vivo took place in 1987, and I still remember the democratic aspects of the festival: walls were covered by paper so everyone could paint on them. Arte Vivo also holds free concerts and visual arts exhibitions. For people coming from outside Afro-Dominican traditions, this festival taught a broadened concept of art. It gave me insight into the ideals of nueva canción and the liberal attitudes towards popular culture I had not been exposed to at the more European-centered music academy. It also taught me about music genres such as Afro-Dominican fusion and artists who enacted heterogeneous notions of dominicanidad.

These institutions continue to sponsor events, in part organized precisely to help Dominicans validate Afro-Dominican cultural forms. In 2004, for example, the organizers of Arte Vivo had an *Encuentro de servidores de misterio* (Vudú Medium's Meeting), at which Tejeda gave a lecture, and Vudú mediums were encouraged to share their life experiences. Tejeda, who has been one of the main vocal advocates of afro-dominicanismo, referred to the mediums as "the most important subjects of society," and encouraged them to speak proudly about what they do. The meeting was powerful and revealing, its audience composed of those who gathered to share an aspect of their lives that, until recently, many would have hesitated to enact in the public eye.

Conferences and pedagogical activities, such as the Vudú Medium's Meeting, are often part of festivals. At Sainaguá 2010, several issues were brought up at a symposium titled "Municipality, Culture, and Local Development," including afro-dominicanismo's loss of followers because of co-optation by the government, and the growing number of conversions to evangelical Christianity. Another concern, how much of the youth has failed to continue ancestral traditions because they see music and dance as unviable professions, was also discussed. The fear that the continuance of such trends could lead to traditions eventually disappearing prompted some solutions: creating jobs for traditional musicians might be a way to guarantee the continuation of these roles. In fact, cultural activists organize these festivals partly in order to create jobs for traditional musicians. As I noted in Chapter Two, communities have gained cultural capital, bringing some economic advantages from paid performances in festivals and the many other activities that nowadays promote and celebrate African heritage in the Dominican Republic.

It is at festivals where I have heard some of the most revealing statements about the goals of afro-dominicanistas. Cultural activists will often remark about the purpose of the event, or about "rescuing" (*rescate*) Dominican identity, such as: "We have to rescue what we are. The white folks have made us forget our identity." Phrases like, "we have to rescue our heritage and unlearn what they have taught us in schools" reveal that the ideology of the 1960s and 1970s, of rescuing identity from Hispanophillic Dominican elites and the influence of the United States—and today's globalizing tendencies as well—still has powerful echoes today.[169]

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[169] Although the Civil Rights movement, and the popularity and achievement of blacks in the United States, have informed the ideologies of progressive Dominicans, cultural activists and

The trope of rescate (rescuing) reoccurs in the context of academic studies, teachings in folk dance troupes, the remaining clubs, and folk festivals. It invokes re-centering Africa in cultural identities, and opposing elite and official ideologies that have caused its marginalization or disappearance. MCs at festivals constantly remind attendees that the festival music they are enjoying and dancing to is part of their African heritage and should make them proud.

Activists also encourage black consciousness. In the summer of 2010, I attended the Second Regional Festival in my hometown, Santiago, in commemoration of the patron saint of the town, Santiago (Saint James). The MC stated that this festival had been organized in the open park so that passing pedestrians might begin to identify with their blackness while experiencing the contagious rhythm of palo music. Such statements permeate folk festivals. Culture is conflated with racial identification; activists seem to assume that the enjoyment of music and dance will instill pride in African roots and, importantly, the recognition of black skin as a positive attribute.

Activists want to suggest that palo music-equals-African-equals–black, but more typical of the population is to think about the slippages and ambiguities between these categories. In addition to the problematic conflation between culture and race, another important tension lies in the negotiation of implicit and explicit claims of blackness. While festival organizers' didactic intentions may be clear, for many attendees, connecting to this music seems an uncomplicated embrace of Dominican culture that may or may not be conceptualized as "black" (*negro*). I have talked to

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leaders of clubes culturales and deportivos in the Dominican Republic still inhabit a 1960s anti-imperialist worldview.

attendees who view the music as part of their cultural background, and who recognize its influences from Africa, but these insights have changed little, if anything, about their personal identification as blacks. They primarily recognize the music as Dominican, and Dominicans as mixed. Festivals, then, contribute to Dominicans' awareness of the cultural value of these traditions; although not necessarily seen by attendees in connection to the racial definition of the nation, they sometimes are viewed as part of a family or community history.

So, despite a new or rising acceptance of these traditions, a discourse of black affirmation has limitations for many within the Dominican population, primarily because of the ways in which Dominicans have historically conceptualized and articulated their blackness. Black Dominicans might be conscious of their color, recognizing themselves as dark-skinned, but most conceive of themselves as mixed (or *indio*). Because Dominican identity is not fully black, Indian, or white, but rather all three at the same time, the acceptance of black pride discourse is most easily understood by those inclined to political or social consciousness, or those with an academic education who understand the historical contingency of Dominican identity. They also understand the possible gains obtained by claiming such racial identification. Without this access to a politically progressive or academic background, a vocabulary to express these concepts is absent. But within festivals, even if attendees express no black pride through their language, a shift in expressions of blackness occurs through music and dance. Festivals offer performers and attendees other ways—outside language—to embrace the heritage they have learned to keep concealed or private.

Many traditional musicians, having absorbed the language of activists, present their products (palo, gagá, guloyas) as traditions worth valuing and preserving. In festivals, musicians and MC's create pride through interacting with the audience. In several festivals I witnessed, the MCs pointed out specific actions of white Dominicans in the audience to show spectators a particular value of this music, particularly its infectious quality that "makes even white Dominicans dance." In the Second Regional Festival, an activist took my white friend (a well-known Dominican historian) onto the stage and shouted to the crowd: "So you see that even the white intellectuals of this country can't help but dance when they hear palo music." This seemingly simple remark can be read in various and contradictory ways. The obvious implication is that, if this white prestigious historian enjoys the music, then it must be so good that all Dominicans can't help but enjoy it. Or the remark could imply that even the whitest of Dominicans are culturally black; they only need a little push in order to attune to their blackness, overcoming governmental policies throughout history that taught them to associate it with Haiti. Such sentiments are also aimed at educating Dominicans that black music is so valuable—enjoyed by both black and white Dominicans—that it deserves to be recognized as a vital part of the national identity; Afro-Dominican music is a treasure that all should appreciate. Contained in this statement is the even bigger implication that Dominicans must overcome the prejudice against religious rituals this music accompanies. The multiple ways to interpret this comment point to the complexity of blackness as expressed and constructed through music and music discourse in Dominican culture.

Although one purpose of activists is to get rid of misconceptions, which many Dominicans have against Afro-Dominican rituals, in festivals the music is taken out of its religious context so that less open-minded Dominicans can appreciate it.[170] After an appreciation for the music, activists hope that Dominicans will learn enough about these traditions that they will not stigmatize the religions and rituals. As Theodore Gracyk writes, an aesthetic connection often precedes an ideological one, particularly in popular music (2007:66-67). One example of this separating of music from its ritualistic context can be seen in the Second Regional Festival, where, in his opening remarks, the MC stated that the festival was in commemoration of St. James, the patron saint of the city of Santiago. Traditionally, there had existed separate elite and popular St. James celebrations, and palo music as well as Vudú ceremonies had been part of the popular celebrations, but both types of celebrations, elite and popular, have been on the decline for decades. The MC alleged that "this revival was from the vantage point of the popular, not the religious or the institutional" ("Lo hacemos desde el punto de vista de lo popular, no de lo religioso ni lo oficial"). With this statement, he claimed to be reinstating popular St. James festivities, but he was also separating the music from its religious context so that once attendees "learned" to enjoy the music, they would not be afraid of the religious ceremonies.

Although afro-dominicanistas' intentions are targeted towards the support of a proud Afro-Dominican identity, the government's separating the religion from the music might also strategically serve to erase its connection to Haiti. Vudú has similarities with Haitian *Vodou* whereas palo music is distinctively Dominican, and

[170] Although this does not mean that activists would be disappointed if people experienced spirit possession because this would point to successful performances at the festival. This possession however, sometimes discourages others from attending.

thus can serve to create an Afro-Dominican pride and identity separate from Haiti. Because the state has supported and co-opted the more recent Afro-Dominican identity (see Chapter Two), the exclusive connection of these previously neglected forms to the countercultural is dubious. While cultural activists continue presenting Afro-Dominican culture in festivals to counteract hegemonic ideas of dominicanidad, the government endorses Afro-Dominican music as part of their democratization ideologies, co-opting these challenges. The subaltern initiatives by the government, amounting to state-endorsed multiculturalism, present more a continuation of previous policies than a rupture. Multiculturalism is used to embrace everyone within the identity of the nation, without making significant structural changes to the inequalities that govern Dominican society.

In recent decades, afro-dominicanismo has become commodified in a number of ways, not only by music groups, but also by activists of the 1970s, who have now gained institutional power and governmental positions. Activists now respond to programmatic imperatives beyond preservation and dissemination. Traditional groups respond to the market by speeding up the music, adopting formal arrangements, and diversifying their improvisational patterns. They pick catchy tunes and adopt songs from other traditions that seem to have good audience reception. Music groups now coordinate their outfits and use microphones. Activists profit by helping to organize the many activities that celebrate African culture in the Dominican Republic. Folk troupes are also in abundance,[171] and what started as voluntary activism in the 1970s

[171] The proliferation of folk dance troupes, where most troupes use the palo rhythm generic to the Southwest (the style of San Juan de la Maguana), has resulted in this palo rhythmic pattern expanding and becoming *the* palo rhythm, leaving out rhythmic diversity. Many (even accomplished) drummers now only master this single palo rhythm.

is now paid work.[172] Today, a large number of ex-revolutionaries are either frustrated by the lack of change or are part of the system they once tried to contest. Yet others have dedicated themselves to teaching. Some say that the collective struggle was part of the past; however, many continue to strengthen ties to Africa and claim rights for the poorest populations of the Dominican Republic.

Music remains central to these quests. Anyone visiting the Dominican Republic today would be surprised by the amount of folk troupes, festivals, and other events that seem to celebrate a new multicultural society, especially its African-derived cultural forms. Thus, embracing Afro-Dominican music no longer seems inclusive enough to counter racism in the context of a mixed Dominican society. The question of how to challenge racial and economic inequality remains urgent, as the celebration of Afro-Dominican culture leads to ways in which blackness is conceived as disconnected from political action.

Conclusion: Imagining Heritage

Considering the recent manifestations of clubs, dance troupes, and festivals is to see a complicated network of progressive ideologies, invented traditions, and cultural policies. As a result of meetings at folk festivals, and through the emphasis that cultural activists have placed on valuing and recovering Afro-Dominican

[172] At one festival I attended, musicians asked my friend how much he thought the cultural activist organizer of the event spent on the rented stage platform and sound system. The musicians wanted to know whether the activist had profited at their expense. The incident points to questions of how much this movement has become commodified. By this, I do not imply that activists mean not to strengthen Dominicans' connection to Africa, but that embracing Africa has become a viable source of income for many. The government takes advantage of this by co-opting through stipends, salaries, and sponsorship of events, folk troupes, and traditional musicians.

traditions, imagined communities have been forged among disparate Afro-Dominican groups including cocolos, congos, palo drummers, and others). These communities see similarities in their traditions and find themselves cast in the role of projecting a new Dominican national identity. Their members now feel a sense of having survived oppressive policies and possess a shared heritage and tradition that should be celebrated and recognized. These populations also see themselves as creating social change through their music, dance, and rituals.

However, while festivals may weave together the strands of these imagined communities, they also have introduced new rifts in the fabric of constructed continuity. Although festivals celebrate a multiculturalism that aims to include previously excluded communities in the historical narrative of the nation, they also divide them into separate categories. The discourse of the Afro-Dominican in many ways reinforces the tradition previously excluded from official Dominican history. Rather than "Dominican," traditions are seen as Afro-Dominican, and because this discourse splits the identity Dominicans have seen as mixed, it does not penetrate all sectors of the Dominican population. Despite the efforts of afro-dominicanistas, most attendees celebrate Dominican culture in ways not necessarily assuming their traditions are black or African.

Through festivals, cultural activists attempt to rewrite history by creating heritage—a complicated move that might only rewrite or renegotiate history for those who have the capacity to understand the historical construction of Dominican identity. These renegotiations can be seen within the tensions of history and historiography, heritage, and narratives of an imagined past. Recent scholars such as

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett have problematized issues of heritage versus history in ways that are important in our understanding of festivals and dance troupes. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, heritage is a "new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past," not something that existed before its classification as heritage. Rather, heritage "is created through a process of exhibition (as knowledge, as performance, as museum display)" (1995:369-70). It takes on completely new cultural meanings. When festivals present congo, palo, gagá, or *ballet folklóricos* (folk troupes), they in many ways present new art forms. While these genres are valuable to our understanding Dominican history and identity, they must also be understood as relatively new creations, not as purely preserved African artifacts. They have acquired a value as heritage, but their meaning has been, in the process, resignified.

The interface between the instruments and objects of heritage, or the means by which particular cultural practices are staged, must also be considered. In the case of music and dance at folk festivals, how is this staging "muted" to present an aura of authenticity (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995:373-375)**.** There is no denying the ways in which clubs, dance troupes, and festivals have influenced, and continue to influence and encourage Dominicans to recognize previously marginalized traditions and arts. And while these entities have clearly played a major role in the complex conversations about race and blackness, we must be careful of assigning any kind of linear development, or monolithic meaning, to such processes.

Chapter Four
Afro-Dominican Music at the Political Forefront: Convite

In Chapter Three, I outlined some of the forces, in the form of folk troupes and festivals which contributed to the increasing acceptance and celebration of African elements in Dominican identity and culture. The performances of the research-based musical group, Convite ("communal work"), from 1974-1981, exemplified and helped shape the shift in ideology. Convite's members were social scientists and university students,[173] deeply influenced by the pan-Latin American *nueva canción* movement. As part of their Marxist-driven agenda, they sought to acknowledge the hidden African heritage and the silenced poorest segments of the population. Today many Dominicans trace their knowledge and awareness of Afro-Dominican music to encounters with Convite, in concerts or on television in the 1970s.

Convite emerged out of the political left's grassroots efforts during the 1970s. These efforts included creating a democratic nation in which dark-skinned, rural, and working-class Dominicans would be represented. As José Rodríguez, a Convite member, said, "Convite wanted to give a voice to those people and make Dominicans recognize and value our folklore."[174] Although, as I argued in Chapter Three, in terms of political power, the left might ultimately be considered unsuccessful in the Dominican Republic, the legacy of the nueva canción artists, folk troupe leaders, and cultural activists survives today.

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[173] Convite members included José Rodríguez, Luis Días, Ana Marina Guzmán, Dagoberto Tejeda, José Mañaná, José Castillo, Iván Domínguez, and José Enrique Trinidad.
[174] All quotes by Rodríguez come out of an interview conducted in the summer 2010. All translations of quotes, interviews, and personal communications are mine.

Convite members' desire for revolution, and their repertoire, were in turn influenced by progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s—Liberation Theology and the Latin American New Left—as well as the U.S. youth counterculture and other reformist movements. Although the Dominican Republic had produced other nueva canción groups, Convite recreated and politicized the context in which Afro-Dominican music was performed. The group was similar to those of other Latin American countries such as Inti-Illimani of Chile, who mined folklore for new political songs and socially committed music. While other Dominican nueva canción groups composed mainly for the guitar, in singer-songwriter style, Convite was unique in their incorporation of folk traditions associated with formerly marginalized Afro-Dominican genres such as *palo* music. A typical Convite performance included musicians in an array of ensembles, including guitars and traditional Dominican percussion instruments. They performed at festivals, in events at UASD, in *clubes deportivos and culturales,* and in venues such as Casa de Teatro, the latter a home for countercultural events. Considering their great influence exerted on Dominican culture and identity, Convite remains under-researched and under-examined.[175]

Convite's point of origin was the state university (UASD). Dagoberto Tejeda and other professors from the UASD joined students in their quest to bring rural musics into an urban context, as part of the larger project to promote the left-leaning ideals of the nueva canción movement. Early members included students who came

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[175] Convite members have written a few articles, including Tejeda's in *Colloquios* (2011) and *Encuentro con el merengue* (1979), and José Rodríguez's in *Échale Gas* (1999). See also, Deborah Pacini's *Bachata: A Social History of a Dominican Popular Music* (1995:128-134). Most of the information collected for this chapter was obtained via newspaper articles, interviews, and the quintessential *Revista Ahora!,* the most popular left-leaning political magazine in the 1970s.

to the university from rural areas and were encouraged to bring their cultural heritage into their social and political activism. Although most of them became educated cosmopolitans, some came from the traditions that Convite sought to validate. Convite played a variety of genres—*congo, palo, gagá, sarandunga*—until then not well known, performed in the city, or recognized as Dominican.[176] Even though the group only lasted from 1974 to 81, there are still music groups such as Palotré and Sinhora whose roots and methodology go back to Convite, and whose commitment to politics is enacted in their choice of Afro-Dominican genres of music. These musicians continue Convite's goal of self-consciously challenging the self-identification of the Dominican Republic as a white Spanish country.[177]

As Tanya Valette, a public intellectual, explains, through their exposure to Convite performances many young Dominicans recognized their Spanish past as a historically constructed myth: "In the mid 1970s, with Convite, we understood that we were a multicolored society. The *negro* was suddenly beautiful for us. We turned to the countryside and found ourselves accompanied by a lot of deities that we did not know were there" (quoted in Mena 1999:16). The deities Valette refers to are those of Dominican *Vudú*, which Convite incorporated into their lyrics in challenging the idea

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[176] Before Convite's time, there were arrangements of Dominican folk pieces with added instrumentation. Musicians such as Rafael Solano arranged *mangulinas (*e.g., "Por Allá por Guayacanal") and other forms of music codified in the Dominican imaginary as Spanish-derived in big band styles for commercial purposes. There was also some inclusion of genres and themes coded as religious or African in commercial merengue (for example, "El Brujo" by Cuco Valoy and Joseíto Mateo's "Levanten la Vírgen"). However, with Convite, previously marginalized genres were performed with calculated political intention and, since then, other groups have followed by consciously expanding definitions of dominicanidad. Today, Dominican musicians continue to show the influences of Convite, and especially Luis Días.

[177] As of 2013, about 10-15 music groups continue to research Afro-Dominican music to create racially and socially conscious popular music. See, for example, Aumbatá, Sinhora, Los guerreros del fuego, and Drumayor.

of Dominicans possessing only European and Catholic ancestry. She notes that Convite explored aspects of Dominican identity previously unimagined by the urban population, and made many aware of the "local mythology that the authoritarian hispanophilia was always trying to hide" (ibid.:16). I heard statements similar to Valette's from Dominicans of all walks of life, explaining that Convite's music conveyed an understanding of the Spanish character of Dominicans as a social construction, far from historical reality. As phrased by Eduardo Veras, an engineering professor, Convite helped consolidate the beliefs of "those like me who did not suck our thumb!" ("que no se chupan el dedo!").[178] Veras's colloquial expression refers to himself and other Dominicans who refused to blindly accept the history taught at school and the white and Hispanic definition of Dominicans.

Nueva canción style appears in different aspects of Convite's music: in their highly politicized and poetic lyrics, in certain guitar harmonies and effects, and in their use of folk rhythms and instruments. As with much of the nueva canción genre, the music aimed to incite political and social revolution. In their attempt to reach the Dominican people with political claims, Convite employed the use of colorful metaphors, rural and popular dialects, peasant-style timbre, and symbolic images. These strategies cloaked their politically subversive meanings, and appealed to oppressed and rural populations. For example, in the song "Salve pa' cambiá de tono" (Salve for a Key Change), Convite used animals and rural imagery as metaphors for political conflict.

[178] Phone conversation, october 2011.

Iván Domínguez, another Convite member, explained to me that Convite had started with a mainly socio-political agenda.[179] As they visited rural areas, however, members realized that a large part of this agenda should include the recognition of the African musical heritage in the Dominican Republic. This heritage expressed the traditions and concerns of the most excluded and oppressed communities. Convite members' project, to create a new democratic society through their songs, expanded to show the wealth of Dominican music, especially that of African origin. This music had remained unknown to urban Dominicans, and had received little attention from musicians, politicians, and scholars. Convite used congo, sarandunga, palo, and gagá to outline basic rhythmic structures and as aesthetic foundations for much of their music. For example, the piece "Ay ñungué" uses congo rhythm, telling an imaginary story that takes place in Villa Mella, one place where congo rhythm and rituals originated. In this way, Convite's music is rooted in Dominican rural culture, but speaks an urban language, verbally and musically.

In their attempt to take Dominican music from its strictly rural and ceremonial settings to more urban locations, Convite's methodology included ethnographic study and participant observation in absorbing not only the music and rituals of rural Dominicans, but also their way of life, language, oral traditions, and use of symbolism. Convite members developed relationships with rural people and used the material to create socially conscious, urban popular music with their own lyrics and harmonic language. Often their songs were constructed by adapting traditional melodies, or newly composed ones, with a rural flavor, mixing the old and the new, the rural and the urban. Sometimes Convite would mix several folk rhythms within

[179] All quotations from Domínguez are from an interview, summer 2012.

the same song. The lyrics, either original or adaptations of folk songs, were typically charged with political content.

Convite's research and creative methodology were informed by the ideal of favoring the communal over the individual. All members of the group (about 8-10) conducted fieldwork, and composed songs collectively, although each member had an area of concentration within the group.[180] Some members (Iván Domínguez, Miguel Mañaná, and José Castillo) concentrated on learning the dances and rhythmic aspects of these ritualistic traditions, whereas others (José Rodríguez, Luis Días) concentrated on creating lyrics, learning about verse structures and vernacular vocabulary. Yet others (Ana Marina Guzmán, the only female in the group,[181] and Luis Días) focused on vocals and harmonization. Tejeda and José Enrique Trinidad studied mainly the social contexts in which the rituals took place.

The name Convite reflects this communal methodology, referring to the practice of collective work in the context of mutual aid farmers' organizations. In *convites*, farmers collectively perform duties, such as building homes and collecting fruit. These activities are interspersed with eating, singing, dancing, poetry reading, and other entertainments.[182] Convite copied this model in their work. José Rodríguez might compose the song lyrics, Iván Domínguez might provide the rhythmic structures, and Luis Días might work out the melodic and harmonic aspects of a song.

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[180] Paradoxically, Luis Días, the main musician in the group, went on to become a rock superstar in the Dominican Republic and the creator of Dominican Rock. To understand his rock persona and iconic importance, read Dominican writer Aurora Arias' "Emoticons," "Invi's Paradise" and "Poco Loco."

[181] At the start of Convite, Guzmán was the only woman in the group. She was also in The Phantoms, the first Dominican rock group with a female guitarist.

[182] The word Convite comes from the Spanish word *convidar*, which means to invite. It reflects the invitation of the group to create a new society.

But everyone provided feedback in all aspects of music making. For their two LPs, songs were credited not to an individual composer, but to the group. Domínguez recalls with nostalgia that

> The magic of this group lay in its collective process. For the first time there was a group in which it did not matter that José Rodríguez was such an incredible poet, that Luis Días was an incredible musician, that Ana Marina had a beautiful voice, that Dagoberto Tejeda was such a research specialist, that José Mañaná, José Castillo and myself were percussionists, or that José Enrique Trinidad had such verbal ability. What mattered was the final product.[183]

They achieved their aims, using the communal methodology, despite political and musical differences. Convite members were affiliated with different political parties (e.g., PRD, MPD) and had adopted different ideologies, particularly in their views on American culture (especially rock counterculture), but they all shared an opposition to the Balaguer regime and a desire to provide a voice for the disadvantaged, the rural, the poor, and the underdog.

Convite learned from rural practitioners. Once they had composed new songs, they would return to the communities for feedback. Domínguez told me that he learned to play congo with practitioners of that cofradía, and that his *balsié* playing was once critiqued by a rural drummer. Rodríguez recalled that they would question listeners to see how they understood the lyrics, and, according to their reactions,

[183] Personal communication.

would assess whether that repertoire was ready for performance.[184] Their rehearsals were open to the public, and listener ideas welcomed. Convite members sought mass audiences for their coded messages, so even when their lyrics were urban-oriented, they were adamant about using symbols and language taken from peasants. Rodríguez notes that Convite had a special interest not just in taking from folklore, in appealing to a "bourgeois" audience, but in forming a bond with peasants through participant observation. In the most important left-leaning magazine of the 1970s, *Revista Ahora!*, Convite members expressed their mission: "Our beginning and our end was the people. If we were able to discover the peasants' symbols, their images, their logic, we could transmit their pains, their sorrows, their joys, their dreams, their struggles" (*Ahora!* 1975:59).

Convite's songs attempted to incite peasants and workers to unite in a fight for social justice, so, unsurprisingly, their music tapped into the farmers' movements, strong during the 1970s.[185] Convite's songs articulated the discontent and demands of farmers, and, according to Domínguez, many farmers saw their members as urban allies in their struggles for worker rights. As I will demonstrate in examining some of their songs, even when Convite composed new lyrics to folk songs, they maintained rural language aesthetics—vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythms, melodies—in an effort to reflect subaltern Dominicans (the dark-skinned, workers, farmers), so that these people might recognize their own voices, aspirations, and suffering, as well as the possibility of a better world. Rodríguez told me that, in their process of creative

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[184] Rodríguez is thought by many to be the best songwriter of nueva canción in the Dominican Republic. He wrote many of Convite's lyrics.
[185] An example of this kind of mobilization by farmers is the Movimiento de Campesinos Independientes, which started in 1977.

rearticulation, Convite members were well aware of the danger of distorting the grassroots spirit. Several Convite members told me they believed that their songs became popular among the masses precisely because people recognized their distress in them, and recognized the rhythms employed by Convite (palo, sarandunga) as ones not previously incorporated into urban genres.

For Tejeda, "Convite broke the invisibility of the people" (2011:69). As opposed to many other Latin American nueva canción groups, accused of reaching only educated audiences, Convite's fieldwork and participant observation attempted to let the people speak through their songs. Tejeda explains that this methodology was based on the work of Paulo Freire, the Brazilian pedagogue and theorist (ibid.:69). Tejeda had studied in Brazil and, when he returned to the Dominican Republic to teach at UASD, brought Freire's ideas from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), as well as liberation theology and black consciousness. Tejeda also had contact with members of the *música popular brasileira* movement in Brazil,[186] who used music to denounce social injustice and governmental repression. Tejeda lectures often about how he learned more about Dominican culture from his rapport with the people than through formal education, and he brought these ideas to Convite.

Although they primarily focused on fieldwork, Convite members have also expressed to me that intellectual debates were significant to their work. Before visiting a community, they would research and discuss all available sources about that particular tradition. This social science approach afforded new analytical tools for Convite members of rural backgrounds to re-examine the rituals they had participated in. Luis Días' mother had been a *salve* singer, José Rodríguez listened to work songs

[186] MPB—exemplified by musicians such as Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil.

and *décimas*[187] in his hometown, and Iván Domínguez's Haitian grandmother celebrated *Vodou* ceremonies. "Through research, we [Convite members and their fans] woke up to our own experiences, which lay dormant in us," Rodríguez told me. Convite used to perform for the new students coming to UASD, he said, where many Dominicans, who realized they had been hiding their cultural traditions, now saw they were valued in this urban context. Through Convite's performances, these and other Dominicans reassessed the meaning of their traditions and learned to claim their importance in Dominican society.

Attempting to reaffirm Dominicans' African identification, Convite incorporated elements of the music of Vudú and Haitian-derived gagá into the group's repertoire. Their embrace of gagá expressed a belief in the common roots between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, a notion that has long been contested by Dominicans, especially the elite. Even today, music groups similar to Convite continue to use gagá for its contagious spirit and its counterpart in Haiti (*rara*), which has historically served the subaltern as a subversive force. Haitian bands, such as Boukman Eksperyans, and Dominican musicians use rara in their popular music as a vehicle for revolutionary action, challenging and changing Dominicans' perception of the Haitian Revolution, from a savage uprising to a glorious event. Before these bands, no such politicized urban music had appeared in the Dominican Republic, especially one that incorporated Haitians into Dominican narratives. Rodríguez explained that Convite, as a specifically Dominican group, wanted to reach a more universal audience as well. They looked to rescue and reevaluate Dominican folklore, reworking this material "from a liberating perspective that would assign codes to the

[187] Ten-line verses.

music and the literary content. These codes would take the message out of a religious perspective, a conservative ideology, and a cornered or limited vision."[188] This message of liberation could then be applied to other populations, especially in Latin America.

The Dominican government opposed Convite's liberating goals, reflected in their music, particularly when Convite became visible in live concerts and in the media. In addition to the group's participation in political events and festivals, their music was broadcast regularly on Radio Santa María.[189] They also performed on "El show del mediodía," one of the most popular television shows in the country and an important influence on the latest trends in popular music. Dominican families (including my own) watched this show while eating lunch, discovering the music groups that might go on to become most popular. Many elites and nationalistic conservatives also opposed the visibility of Convite. Rodríguez recalled that people sent letters to "El show del mediodía" claiming that Convite brought witchcraft and communism into society.

Thus, since the 1970s, through UASD, the folk troupes, and groups like Convite, Dominicans visited rural communities, embraced neglected rituals, and

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[188] José Rodríguez explained Convite's goal as: "El objetivo desde el principio fue la investigación, el rescate y la revalorización de ritmos, expresiones, y manifestaciones folkloricas, populares, tradicionales. Era investigar, aprender, reelaborar desde una perspectiva liberadora, que le asignaba a la música y al contenido literario códigos que lo sacara de una perspectiva de la religión, de una mentalidad conservadora y de esa visión acorralada." Rodríguez is credited for having united literary and popular cultures through his symbols and for having taken folklore out of the margins.

[189] Radio Santa María belonged to the Catholic Church and remains deeply committed to education. They used nueva canción as part of their education philosophy. Their literacy program is well known, and important to Dominicans who educated themselves through Radio Santa María's broadcast courses. In 1971, Radio Santa María, wanting to join the peasants in their struggles and labors, started promoting the formation of farmers' associations. Today the station works with groups of farmers as well as housewives clubs, neighborhood associations, federations, and youth clubs.

contested traditional views of *dominicanidad*. Like dance troupe leaders, discussed in Chapter Three, Convite was influential in bringing urban youths to the rituals they researched.[190] Drawing these urbanites towards ritualistic practices, through participant observation, became important at the UASD, where, in the 1970s and 1980s, professors such as June Rosenberg (Chapter Two) took generations of students to experience gagá.

Paradoxically, although part of the group's agenda was to emphasize Dominican culture, it was through the influence of rock music, especially its riffs and harmonies, that the group broke away from the traditional folk landscape. Even as all members of Convite opposed the right-wing Balaguer regime, they differed in their views and tastes regarding American music and culture. Some in the group were rock musicians, while others had ambivalent or antagonistic relationships to rock culture, with its emphasis on rebellion and freedom they saw as corrupting Dominican values and threatening the political left. As Robin Moore remarks, "Rock with its emphasis on transgression, physical gratification and /or liberation, excess, and pleasure ran contrary to the development of a disciplined and self-sacrificing socialist mentality" (2003:17).

The influence of American music is apparent in some of Convite's harmonic choices, not surprising because Luis Días, their lead musician who devised most of the arrangements, went on to become an innovator in Dominican rock. Días was eventually thrown out of the group because of differences in opinion regarding their

[190] Cultural tourism, which began during this era and continues today, has slowly increased Dominican pride in these traditions. Convite, UASD professors, and folk troupe directors started bringing youths from the cities to observe rituals in countryside Dominican Republic. This provoked many rural young people to begin valuing these traditions that city people were appreciating.

musical direction. Some members were willing to be more experimental than others,[191] but the majority believed Días was too influenced by American genres. Without Días, Convite became less prolific and, by 1981, the group had disbanded. Días continued cultivating styles influenced by rock, heavy metal, and other American genres.[192] The end of Convite came with the demise of populism and the rise of the PRD government. Opposition to the Balaguer government was no longer relevant, but Convite's legacy lives today through the many *afro-dominicanistas* who trace their awareness of blackness to the days of Convite.

A Close Reading of Convite Music: Messages of Liberation

Unfortunately most of Convite's plentiful works went unrecorded. In this section, I analyze songs from their two LPs, *Convite Convida* and *Candelo*, demonstrating their roots in Dominican culture. I also explore ways in which their music broke musical, political, and racial boundaries. Convite's songs were written mostly with acoustic guitar as central instrument, but they also incorporated Dominican drums and other grassroots instruments. Harmonic analysis of the songs

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[191] See the introduction to *Rockin' Las Américas: The Global Politics of Rock in Latino/America*, in which the authors outline the pattern of harassment and abuses rock fans suffered both from the political right and the left throughout Latin America. For the left, rock was imperialist, and for the right-wing conservative sector, it represented the breakdown of traditional patriarchal institutions and values (Pacini, Fernández and Zolov 2004:6). While the Cuban revolutionary model was seen by many Latin Americans as the correct approach to resolving the question of Latin American underdevelopment, for many others, the terms of modernization and cosmopolitanism were to be achieved by means of capitalist consumption. "An integral component of this cosmopolitan promise was access to mass-mediated forms of popular culture, which had quickly become an influential—and profitable—U.S. global export. For middle and upper class consumers in Latin America, rock 'n' roll represented the quintessential experience of modernity" (ibid.:8).

[192] Nueva Trova (Cuban nueva canción) resembled Convite's music in that it enjoyed influences from rock, and later from Bob Dylan and Joan Baez. Whereas its influences from North America at first rendered the genre suspect, it eventually gained state support and mass popularity (see Peter Manuel 1987 and Moore 2003).

reveals ways in which Convite extended the boundaries of Dominican music by incorporating harmonies from rock mixed with Dominican rhythms and melodies.

Convite's music most often focused on the life and struggles of peasants and workers. In particular, they revisited themes of coming revolution, questioning religion alone as an ineffective tool for liberation, the role of women and love, and critiques of urban society and the repressive authoritarian government. These themes were expressed through everyday Dominican rural expressions and dialect. In some songs, for example, they enunciated words with consonants elided or cropped, using *pensa'o* instead of *pensado* (thought of), *tajá'* instead of *tajada* (a piece of something). Other words used are Dominicanisms such as *juye* (Run away!, a Dominican version of *huye*—used in "Cavilando Pedro va"). Convite also regularly used nonsense syllables present in rural musics, such as *ololei* and *ololelolai*.[193]

Convite members claim that their ability to connect to peasants through the use of symbols and imagery was a key to their success.[194] For example, according to Rodríguez, their song "Dispense el atrevimiento," with its abundant Dominican rural imagery and colloquial phrases (e.g., "Ay ombe," an expression of compassion and nostalgia), was one of Convite's most popular pieces. Their song titles are suggestive of themes related to peasantry, such as cattle herders ("Toro bravo"), peasant leaders (Mamá Tingó in "Salve pa' subí la vo'"), and the countryside. Verse structures and rhymes also reflect common Dominican styles. For example, as indicated in the liner

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[193] Bachata and merengue típico also signify rural aesthetics by using Dominican pronunciation and rural expressions such as ololei, but I find these features more underscored in Convite's music than in the other two genres. As arrangers began orchestrating merengue and taking it to cities, the genre began losing these rural tropes.

[194] Although Convite's music had a presence among peasants, the bulk of their audience was urban, ranging from workers to educated youths.

notes of *Convida*, Convite used many octosyllabic verses in *coplas* (four-lines verses with different rhyming combinations, such as abcb) and décimas*,* structures commonly used in Dominican music, and in the Hispanic Caribbean more generally.

Besides singer-songwriter, guitar-based songs (similar to other nueva canción genres), Convite's repertoire included children's songs as well as percussion-driven versions of traditional folk music including Afro-Dominican genres such as palos, congo, salves, and gagá.[195] Songs often followed the common verse-chorus form, or used call and response, especially those pieces with Afro-Dominican rhythms. By incorporating rhythms, sounds, and instruments from the music of marginalized communities, Convite's songs suggested the democratic society they advocated.

Although Convite added guitar to what traditionally would be drum pieces, often it was played percussively, in imitation of the scraper, or *güira,* of palo music; in some songs the guitars imitated the finger gliding or foot pressure techniques[196] of the Dominican *balsié* drum ("Toro Bravo" and "Con Flores a María"). When not in imitation of percussive rhythms, the guitar provided American blues-like harmonies and riffs,[197] or folksy Dominican and pan-Caribbean styles. In many songs (e.g., "Juana," "Una huella campo adentro") Convite used the Dominican *quinto* guitar[198] instead of the six-string guitar typical in nueva canción, enhancing the folk Dominican flavor. They also mixed Afro-Dominican genres with variants of

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[195] Convite also used other genres not encompassed in this dissertation, such as *bamboulá*, *priprí*, and *tonadas*.
[196] Players change the pitch by pressing the membrane of the drum with their heel.
[197] The blues came to Días via rock. He played guitar in a rock group prior to his involvement with Convite.
[198] The quinto is a Dominican folk string instrument with five double strings.

merengue (*pambiche*, for example, in "Dispense el atrevimiento," which mixes congo and pambiche).

Because Convite fused guitar with drums, and American harmonies with Dominican rhythms, their use of merengue might seem particularly counterintuitive, since afro-dominicanistas associated merengue with Trujillo's regime. However, according to Domínguez, their use of merengue was strategic, helping to break down prejudices against the genres that Convite mixed with merengue. Although merengue figured less among the most frequently used genres,[199] Convite understood that to discuss merengue's origins was to discuss Dominican identity. They revised common theories of merengue's origins, inserting into concert programs and research publications their ideas contesting myths of merengue's Eurocentric origin.[200]

For example, in the concert and consequent research publication, *Orígenes del merengue*, Convite reexamined accepted notions of European roots in merengue, and introduced the idea of its antecedents in Africa, and even Haiti (Deláncer 1975).[201] Although these theories are now commonplace, in the 1970s Dominicans had just begun revising Hispanophilic histories of merengue constructed during the Trujillo's dictatorship. Thus Convite's political project to prove African influences in merengue, and to conceptualize merengue as the synthesis of much Dominican music prior to it, was a significant achievement. According to Convite, they particularly wanted to demonstrate that, while the *paseo* (introduction) in merengue might derive

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[199] Iván Domínguez said palo was favored because it was the most neglected Dominican genre.

[200] Paul Austerlitz discusses these narratives of merengue's origins, and quotes the merengue innovator Luis Alberti, who proclaimed that merengue "has nothing to do with black or African rhythms" (1997:2).

[201] José Rodríguez noted that while many people thought the tambora drum in merengue derived from the snare drum, Convite demonstrated that Africa had similar drums.

from elements of Spanish-influenced genres—such as the *contradanza, polka*, and *mazurka*[202]—many grassroots Afro-Dominican rhythms (including palo, sarandunga and congo) contributed to subsequent merengue sections with more complex rhythmic activity.

In the concert of *Orígenes del merengue*, Convite played the Afro-Dominican genres (e.g., *priprí*) they believed had influenced merengue but remained relatively unknown to Dominicans Convite was adamant in educating audiences about blind spots in the official history of the country. Their concerts were sometimes lecture-demonstrations, teaching audiences through their music and research. My informants often described these informative efforts as transformative; through Convite, they heard new rhythms and an alternate history for the first time.

Revolutionary Key Change: Peasants and the Underdog

Convite's repertoire, in part, portrayed the hard work of rural workers; e.g. "Toro bravo" (Mad Bull), "Bala que zumba no da" (The bullet that you hear does not kill you), and "Coplas del viento grande" (Coplas of the Big Wind), among others. These songs address the daily life of peasants, but also their tribulations resulting from injustices of the Dominican system. For example, the song "Cavilando Pedro va" (Pedro is Pondering), depictes the subject, Pedro, wishing for a better life. A farmer living in abject poverty, with hungry children to feed, he dreams he is no longer a slave. In reality, the land he works is not his, but he knows it should be:

[202] Although these genres originated outside Spain, Dominicans consider them part of our Spanish-based heritage because of their instrumentation and melodic features, and because they came to the Dominican Republic via Spain.

El compai[203] no tiene tierra	The Godfather has no land
Trabaja en conuco ajeno	He works on someone else's plot
Sabe que le pertenece	He knows it truly belongs to him
Y es el fruto de su empeño	And is the fruit of his efforts

The title and chorus emphasize Pedro's awareness of the injustices and his considering joining a revolution.

Convite's lyrics often move from an opening section (a few verses), which portrays peasant or worker life, to a second section where an awareness of revolution is revealed, or a plea to the peasant or worker to engage in an active quest for change. This lyrical shift is musically articulated by changes in volume, melodies, rhythms, and harmonies. "Toro bravo" uses a bull as an analogy for another man who works land not belonging to him. For the bull, the jail is the pigsty, but for the worker the jail is his boss's hostility. The song intones

Pero llegará el momento	The time will arrive
Pregúntale al campesino	Ask the farmer

On these lines, the guitar lines, which have been subdued, shift into aggressive, loud strumming. The music sonically represents the moment when frustration turns to action through anger. Often in Convite songs the guitar metaphorically becomes the weapon.

[203] Compai is the Dominican version of *compadre*, a word with no direct English translation, but refers to a godfather relation.

The theme of future justice for which people must be prepared to fight is also found in "Coplas del viento grande." According to Rodríguez, who wrote the lyrics, the metaphor of a big wind represents revolution: "When one feels that wind, there is a lot of power." In the first strophe of "Coplas del viento grande" the singer, again as a farmer, narrates how he has been scratching soil, waiting in silence, and working hard for "the big wind" all his life. In the second verse, the farmer reveals he can no longer be satisfied by life; the singer says that his guitar is in tune and no one can silence it. The revolution, or big wind, comes because the farmer/singer cannot go on as he has. His guitar is now his weapon and, ready to fight, no one can stop him.

Although in most Convite songs the dispossessed is a peasant, in "Bala que zumba no da," we learn the troubles of a black man, who is encouraged not to give up; he is still alive and should join the fight:

Ya viene cambiando el tiempo	Times are changing
Y no se puede aguantar	And life is unbearable
No se me afloje mi negro	Do not give up, my negro
Bala que zumba no da	The bullet that you hear does not kill you

In this song, Convite expresses the experience of the dark-skinned person:

Pie cansa'o y polvoriento	Dirty and tired foot
Que deja sangre en la huella	That leaves blood in his footprints
Ojos de iglesia en silencio	Eyes like a silenced church

Negro sudor y miseria	Black sweat and misery

Beyond depicting the peasant's reality, the singer offers black Dominicans hope for a path to freedom: "No se me afloje mi negro" (Do not lose steam my *negro).* In "Bala que zumba no da," the subject sometimes cries during the night, not as a coward, but because he is hungry and frustrated. His life is hard, and God's promises have been unfulfilled. Convite's criticism of religion becomes explicit:

Ándele negro al asunto	Go ahead and act
Porque Dios duerme la siesta	Because God is napping
Vaya a ver si la injusticia	Maybe injustices
O el hambre que lo despierta	Or hunger would wake him up

The guitar accompaniment is subdued and dreamy, using harmonics.[204] The music's tranquil style is enhanced by a modal quality since its scale is mixolydian and the piece emphasizes the flat seventh and fourth degrees in final cadences. Rodríguez remarked that the lyrics were so subversive that they decided to balance them with gentle music. Convite wanted to reach the masses, to incite revolution, but were always aware of the danger of an attack by members of the authoritarian Balaguer regime. In this sense, the subdued music served to disguise the message.

[204] This song uses the 12-string guitar, Días's expression of his rock influences (probably via the Beatles, who used it in many occasions including in their album *A Hard Day's Night*).

"Bala que zumba no da" contrasts with "Dispense el atrevimiento," (Apologies for my Audacity), as in the latter the singer announces at the outset that he will be talking plainly and to the point because that is the way the rural man talks:

Dispense el atrevimiento	Apologies for my audacity
si le hablo claro y pelao	for talking clearly and to the point
soy de loma y tierra llana	I am from the hill and flat land

The narrator tells about the farmer's life, and more importantly, the upcoming revolution, using phrases such as the following in the chorus:

Uste' va ver	You will see
En el día menos pensa'o	when you least expect it

The song is rich with rural imagery and aphorisms, the singer constantly forecasting the coming revolution and expressing readiness with, "I have always been poor, so I do not lose anything," or "I am not afraid of anything, not even death." The lyrics of "Dispense el atrevimiento" reflect Dominica n life, while the song's harmonies show rock influences. For example, Días infused this and other songs (e.g., "Bala que zumba no da") with flat VII chords (built from the flat seventh degree of the scale).[205] The IV–I and flat VII–I cadences are ubiquitous, as is a general emphasis on the subdominant chord and power chords without a third to indicate major or minor.

[205] The flat VII chord was a favorite of the Beatles, appearing in "The Night Before" and "All My Loving."

Convite choruses often end the chorus on IV (e.g., "Una huella campo adentro" and "Con flores a María"), and the harmony rests on IV on pedal points. This emphasis on IV, an element used in rock, is rare in traditional Dominican music.

Rock harmonies provide a discourse outside language for Convite's articulation of revolution and necessary change. In "Dispense el atrevimiento" the final flat VII gives the listener a feeling of the readiness the lyric describes. In the chorus, announcing that on the least expected day, revolution will happen, a I-IV progression and a IV pedal underscore the lines when the singer sings of having no fear. Modulation is also used (one step up) in "Dispense el atrevimiento," to emphasize the shift of mood from describing peasant life to cries for revolution.

Rhythmically, "Dispense el Atrevimiento" blends congo with pambiche (variant of merengue), and merengue is heard on quinto in the style of its nineteenth-century beginnings. Domínguez relayed that, by using congo and pambiche, Convite sought to demonstrate how Dominican musics could be fused, and foreign genres were not needed to create interesting and effective Dominican fusion music. The blending of rhythms, and of drums with guitars, show some of Convite's pioneering steps in a genre I call Afro-Dominican Fusion.[206]

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[206] Domingo de la Cruz, in *Comunidad Dominicana en Nueva York: Una Historia Cultural* mentions that Convite was also instrumental in disseminating Afro-Dominican folklore in New York City, when they concertized and held conferences in the city. Before these events, in 1976, the Dominican New York community understood folk music as fundamentally merengue, mangulina, and carabiné. In 1980, Días came to live in New York City, joining the group, "La Cofradía" (2004:290-291)

An interesting fusion piece and musical articulation of revolution is "Salve pa' cambia' de tono" ("Salve for a Key Change").[207] The modulation here—more obviously than other songs—is the metaphor used to indicate change through revolution. The piece blends palo drums with percussive guitar passages. Following the familiar narrative structure, the song opens with a portrayal of life as a laborer, then the lyric describes wanting to "change key," as the song modulates, together with a change of melody and an increase in the prominence of the palo drums. Thus subject and mood change to suggest the time has come to begin the fight. This call to revolution is full of rural imagery and sounds. In the third verse, the singer says he has a chicken in his backyard that he will throw at the *pelón* "bald" when the bald one comes near the fence. As stated before, Convite uses bald as rural imagery, and here the pelón refers to a cock since feathers are removed from cocks before cockfights. Domínguez told me that in this song pelón also refers to President Balaguer because the symbol of Balaguer's political party was a red rooster.

The following verses in "Salve pa' cambia' de tono" describe an unidentified, man, supposedly dead (*Fulano*):

Dicen que murió Fulano	They say John Doe died
Fulano no ha muerto na	He has not died
A Fulano lo que le pasa	What happens to John Doe
es que no come pendejá'	Is that he does not take shit from anyone

[207] Terminology in Dominican music is confusing, but in this chapter, when I talk about salves, I mean pieces accompanied by the *palo* drums. For other modalities of salves, see Chapter Two.

Domínguez explains that John Doe is Francisco Alberto Caamaño, leader of the Constitutionalist forces in the Civil War of 1965, who had just been killed in 1973 when the song was written. Today this verse is commonly sung in both cities and rural areas, popularized by Luis Días after Convite disbanded. Días sometimes substituted Liborio—the messianic leader and revolutionary figure—for the nameless man. (The significance of connecting Caamaño with Liborio stems from both men having led forces against North American invaders—Liborio during the 1916 invasion, Caamaño during the civil war. Both figures represent the fight of Dominicans to maintain their sovereignty against the United States.)

The sixth verse states that the war will begin when he returns. As the subject in Spanish can be left unspecified, one does not know which of the two, the John Doe (Caamaño) or Liborio, will return. The seventh verse of "Salve pa' cambia' de tono" starts with the metaphor for social change:

Le voy a cambiar de tono	I am going to change key
toy cansa'o en e'te ya	I am tired of being in this key
Pa que me digan ahora	So people tell me now
Quien aquí es el manda ma'	Who is the boss here

The song's mood, the key, and the melody change at this point. The following verses encourage revolt, announcing that revolution has come:

Mira que e' la hora	The time has arrived

de amarrarno' lo' pantalone'	For us to tighten our belts

Although "Salve pa' cambia' de tono" was perhaps the most explicitly revolutionary of Convite's songs, Domínguez says "Salve pa' subí la vo'" (Salve to Raise our Voices) had the greatest impact: "This song became an anthem among farmers in many rural areas of the Dominican Republic." It calls people to sing together and join in revolution with Mama Tingó, a black peasant who led the peasant struggles during the Balaguer government. They sought to reclaim land that had been usurped by the military and landowners. Tingó was arrested several times, then killed in November 1974, shortly before the festival Siete Días con el Pueblo, discussed below. In the festival, she became a symbol of the left-leaning struggles nueva canción groups like Convite advocated. "Salve pa' subí la vo'" and another song about Mamá Tingó's experience, by popular merengue artist Johnny Ventura, were featured during the festival. Today, Tingó remains a symbol of the revolutionary struggles of peasants and women.

In "Salve pa' subí la vo" the verses are sometimes in the voice of Tingó:

No me dejen sola	Do not leave me alone
Suban la voz	Raise your voice

…

Tenemos la salve	We have the song
Falta el arroz	We now lack rice (food)

…

No tenemos tierra	We do not have any land
Pero hay valor	But we have courage

The catchy rhythm and tune of the song account, in part, for its popularity; it also uses the melody from a traditional salve. Convite changed the lyrics of the salve to downplay the religious tone: the original words were "Yes, Lord, Yes, Lord, the salves that I sing belong to God." By layering political words on top of a religious song, the "meaning" for those who knew the original melody conflated faith with revolt. Rodríguez noted that this song created revolt among the farmers. He maintained that peasants understood the intentions of Convite as not only encouraging rebelliousness, but also to raise the image of Mama Tingó to a saint-like status, for giving her life to fighting for the rights of peasants. Convite's lyrics also encouraged people to follow her just as they followed messianic leaders. Tingó fought for her land, but also for the rights of farmers to own the land they harvested.

Bringing Down the Monster

In much of their music Convite was highly critical of institutionalized religion, particularly for how it discourages people from fighting against injustices. "Tonada de la hora santa" (Tonada of the Holy Hour) blatantly states that praying will not achieve desired change; prayers go unanswered, so people must act. Here, the music functions like a litany: very repetitive and prayer-like, with steady strokes in the guitar and maracas, always with the same melody in a slow tempo. The harmony alternates between two chords: G and D7. The singer states that he appeals to Lord

Eternal and the Virgin of Altagracia, but is tired of kneeling down on his calluses. He is also dying of hunger, and thinks that God must be tired of hearing him. By the sixth verse, the key of the piece modulates a major second to emphasize the words:

Esta es y ésta es la hora	This is the time
Ya es la hora de levantarme	The time to rise up has arrived

The overt criticism of religion, Domínguez told me, could have led to Convite members being killed after performances of this song. Once, after a concert, they had a scare from a member of the military, who said the song was too irreverent and that they had crossed a line with it.[208]

Although Convite was harshly critical of the Catholic Church—which they viewed as the institutionalized religion of the oppressor—they found comfort and power in the beliefs of the oppressed. While they often sang that praying to God and the saints helps little, in "Candelo," they pleaded to Candelo Sedifé, the Vudú deity of fire,[209] to help with the upcoming revolution:

Candelo dame la mano	Candelo give me your hand
Para llegar a tu nido	To get to your nest
Que ando muerto de la sed	Because I am dying of thirst

[208] Convite members were not always so lucky, as they were jailed several times.
[209] Candelo Sedifé corresponds to San Carlos Borromeo in the Catholic liturgy.

The lyrics are set to palo rhythms, accompanied by guitars, in a call-and-response vocal texture. The response "Aa-ee Candelo," repeated over and over, emphasizes calling on Candelo for help. The last verse of the song powerfully expresses a premonition of the workers:

Para derribar el monstruo	To bring down the monster
se han unido los obreros	Workers have united
se están cabando las fosas	They are digging the pit
donde enterrarán su cuerpo	where they will place the body

We might read the monster as a metaphor for the government, and the body to be buried as Balaguer's. Again, a shift in the middle of the song occurs, where the lyrics move from describing peasant or worker life to announcing or pleading for revolution. In this piece this shift is accented with a changing melody (at about 4:00), after which the texture builds to a climax, signifying the workers' celebration of the fall of the monster/government. Although the energetic palo rhythm remains constant, Convite adds several effects to break up the monotony of the call and response typical of palo music, and to emphasize the words.

"Candelo" opens with guitar, accompanied by ornamental effects in the palo drums. Días plays in a bluesy mood, progressively becoming more percussive in anticipation to the drums joining, becoming established at 0:40. Although the first five verses of the song seem mainly to invoke Candelo in a call-and-response format, Domínguez remarked that the song also refers to President Balaguer. In the second

verse, Balaguer is described as a horrible monster who has constructed borders lying between Haiti and the Dominican Republic:

Ese animal tenebroso	That scary monster
Tan grande como su historia	As big as his history
Que construye con sus brazos	whose arm constructs
Las fronteras divisorias	the borders that divide

After the initial five verses the melody changes and the piece rises in key, while the drums drop out leaving guitars and voices alone. At this moment, only two verses are left of the song: one asking for help ("Candelo dame tu mano") and one announcing that workers are bringing down the monster. In this section, Convite clearly connects Vudú and revolution, and a Vudú deity grants workers the power and strength they need. After the bringing down of the monster, the texture of the piece thickens, enhancing the celebratory atmosphere of a successful revolution. The guitar shifts from playing rhythmically to bending, bluesy riffs. The piece then returns to palo rhythm, with percussive guitar patterns, and an added vocal line that gives the impression of a chorus heard from afar. With both choruses, including the repetitive "Aa-ee Candelo" response that has been present since the beginning and another with "Oh, oh, oh," the texture is at its densest point when suddenly the guitar stops and the two choruses answer each other with the accompaniment of only clapping and drums. Festive background vocals and whistle sounds are added to enhance the celebration of conquering the foe.

"Candelo" is perhaps one of the best examples of how Convite brought Afro-Dominican music into urban and political music. It juxtaposes Vudú and revolution, American blues riffs and palo drumming, and the traditional call and response with popular music techniques into a new genre, Afro-Dominican fusion.[210] This song also reflects the musical influence of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, and Jimi Hendrix (with a little Ravi Shankar, probably acquired via the Beatles). Rodríguez has noted proudly that this song was No. 1 in popularity among fans and tells a story of how one day after a concert, Convite took the audience out into the streets singing this song as a protest over the problems in the neighborhood. This song also blurs boundaries between Dominican and foreign influences, not only American, but also Haitian, as part of the text is in Haitian Kreyòl.[211] The piece is equally palo and rock, religious and revolutionary, and rural and urban, and exemplifies how Convite worked out their ideals and negotiations through their music.

While immediately after the Trujillo dictatorship, rock represented democracy for many Dominicans, after the 1965 American invasion, anti-American sentiments spread and the popularity of rock diminished. Although "Candelo" epitomizes Convite's musical style, it remained controversial among members of the group. Rodríguez, who talked proudly about this song, also believes it provoked division among the group. The strong blues effects in the piece created dissent among Convite members who supported rock influences and those who resisted *any* American

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[210] Since the 1970s, there has been about twenty music groups of fusion music whose roots and methodology go back to *Convite.* These musicians continue *Convite*'s goal of changing the previous self-identification of the Dominican Republic as a white Spanish country. Some of the most prominent musicians include Xiomara Fortuna, José Duluc, Luis Días, Irka Mateo, Edis Sánchez, Florentino Alvarez, Roldán Mármol, Tony Vicioso, and Bony Raposo.
[211] *Candelo pitit fi nwen* (Candelo, my little girl or daughter).

influence in Dominican music. Rodríguez believed that incorporating sounds from rock, or other genres, into their sound would help their music spread internationally, but many in the group rejected such influences, which they saw as imperialist.

Untapped Revolutionary Power

Convite's celebrations of the unacknowledged include the silenced Dominican working women,[212] many of them peasants. "Una huella campo adentro" (A Footprint Deep in the Country) is an ode to women farmers: "She wakes up early / she is the livelihood of her family / she is hope / she is the land / and she is the silenced battle." "Juana" is about a peddler (*marchanta*), a common figure in Dominican society, on the streets of every city, likely riding a donkey, selling produce, calling out her wares. In "Juana" Convite imitates her chanting:

Llevo cilantrico y perejil	I carry coriander and parsley
Llevo ají caribe	I carry Caribbean pepper
Llevo miel	I carry honey

Again, "Juana" moves from describing a typical occupational situation to voicing a readiness for revolution:

Llevo la falda bien amarrá'	I tightened my skirt

[212] Many of Convite's songs are to women, although Guzmán was the only woman who played in the original group.

Para exigir lo que nos quieren quitar	To demand what they want to take away from us
Mi sangre está caliente mi compai	My blood is hot, my compai

In "Juana," Días uses a double tonicity common in the Latin American folk music repertoire.[213] "Juana" is in Bb, and it is constructed over a harmonic ostinato of Bb–Eb–F harmonies, with as much emphasis on the dominant as the tonic. The piece tonicizes Bb through a recurrent progression in the bass (F–G–A–Bb), but maintains an F pedal in the section when Juana sings of the products she sells. "Juana" only breaks away from the harmonic ostinato in a second section where the lyrics shift from setting the rural scene of the farmer to the female seller returning home tired and craving revolution. In this section the piece moves harmonically through a circle of fifths (cm-F-Bb-Eb). "Juana," also uses elements from folk traditions (harmonic progressions, quinto guitar, and rural melodies). It exemplifies the extent to which Convite used Dominican and Latin American music to ground their songs, while portraying women differently than did popular music treatments of the time.

"Con flores a María" is a song about the Virgin Mary; once again Convite juxtaposes religion with revolution, this time in portraying an alternative Virgin. Instead of the passive María, Convite's version paints a revolutionary one. The refrain of the song encourages the listener to bring flowers to Mary, but not the Mary in the minds of most people:

[213] See Manuel 2002.

Con flores, con flores	With flowers, with flowers
Con flores a María	With flowers to Mary
María no es la misma	Mary is not the same one
Que todos se creían	That everyone thought she was

The first verse continues with:

María rompía los lazos	Mary used to break the knots
Y encajes del silencio	And shackles of silence
La vi que era bravía	I saw that she was brave
Un día que iba naciendo	On a dawning day

Luis Días, the lyricist of this song, told the merengue scholar, Luis Manuel Brito Ureña (1997:235-236),[214] that the intention was to write about Mary as a liberated woman. María breaking the knots and shackles shows her as anything but submissive. Días notes that "burying a thousand deaths and a hell," means María would bury the centuries-long passivity of women. In the next verse, the revolutionary aspects of María's character are more clearly stated: "María has a prohibited faith, and another faith she does not even remember." The forbidden faith is revolution, and the faith she cannot remember having is her religion (Brito Ureña 1997:x). Her forgotten religious faith makes María more revolutionary than religious, thus the song (like other Convite songs), both employs and demystifies religion, turning it into a tool for encouraging revolution. Rodríguez remarked that peasant women understood and

[214] Brito Ureña 1997.

assimilated the message of songs like this one in a profound way. They understood that this was a María they could embody: not the conventional passive, external figure to be modeled or appealed to, but an active participant in revolution.[215]

Other Convite songs are, like much nueva canción, primarily about love, but they portray it in a different manner from conventional, hackneyed mainstream emotional love songs, which nueva canción songwriters shunned. In newspaper articles, Dominican nueva canción artists described traditional love songs as tools used by those in power to distract people from protesting about their real problems. Nueva canción artists like Convite rejected values and genres of music they saw as escapist, commercial, and imperialist.[216] Convite treated themes of love and women without sentimentality, and reexamined the role of women in partnerships, society, and revolution. In "La chica in" (The Girl In) they criticized beauty pageants and women who take advantage of their beauty, living a superficial life in dance clubs, exclusive elite parties, and beauty parlors. In "Puedo" (I Can), the singer vows to be the best friend and companion of a man, in this way raising the status of women as more than simply housewives. In "Quiero" (I Want), Convite weaves together a love poem and a political message. The singer expresses her desire for hope and freedom,

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[215] Personal communication,

[216] The authors of *Rockin' Las Américas* lay out the new vision of popular music for the Latin American left, "one intended to counter the perceived hegemony of the mass-mediated, commercial, popular music that was being disseminated throughout Latin America by multinational culture industries" (Pacini, Fernández, and Zolov 2004:10). For them, nueva canción has four elements: (1) The intention to increase social and political awareness in contrast to commercialized music, which was viewed as escapist; (2) the disassociation of music from bodily gratification; (3) Pan-American solidarity; and (4) No electronic instrumentation to avoid associations with commercial music (a major difference with rock), and the inspiration on traditional melodies and rhythms from the countryside by urban middle-class musicians (10-11).

and to enjoy living among others in freedom without guilt. “Quiero” has many verses that express the desire for a new society:

Quiero sentirme libre	I want to feel free
Recorriendo tu mano	Exploring the feel of your hand
Por los senderos	Through the trails
Perseguidos	That are persecuted
Y amanecer sonriendo	And wake up smiling
Con tu pueblo…	With your people
Quiero hacer de tu cuerpo	I want to make of your body
Un camino	A trail
Sentir dolor de patria	To feel homeland pain
En mis bolsillos	In my pockets
Descubrirte sencillo	To discover the simple you
Entre la gente	Among the people
Conocerte luchando	To see you fighting
Por la vida	For life
Yo quiero tu canción	I want your song
Para dejar	To leave
Sentada mi sonrisa	My smile
Sobre las rodillas	On the knees
De un pueblo en libertad	Of people in freedom
Yo quiero madrugadas de esperanza	I want hopeful sunrises
Para los que hacen futuro	For those who a make future

A manos limpias	With clean hands

Convite also used children's songs to mask messages of revolution. In "Pequeñito pequeñín" (Little One), they cleverly describe a child's life, and his growing curiosity and worry about what is happening on the streets. The song also critiques religion:

Mañana será domingo	Tomorrow will be Sunday
No le busques en la iglesia	Do not look for him at Church
Si camina con la gente	If he walks with the people
Y sabe de sus problemas	And knows of his troubles

He cannot at once attend church and also side with the people he worries for; "Pequeñito" implicitly asks listeners to choose revolution over institutionalized religion. In "Soldadito" (Little Soldier)—which starts with Días striking one guitar string on top of another, hitting them as though the guitar was a soldier's drum[217]—the lyrics encourage the use of cannons in revolutionary action:

Yo traigo una palomita	I bring a dove
Traigo en mi mano una flor	I have a flower in my hand
Para darte soldadito	To give you soldier
Si volteas el cañón	If you turn the cannon
Y haces poom y haces poom poom poom	And you go boom boom boom

[217] Rodríguez explained that Luis Días used the guitar as a percussion instrument, and both he and Días got ideas from Led Zepellin guitarist Jimmy Page and Jimi Hendrix.

The singer imitates the sound of the cannon—"boom boom"—blending the revolutionary with the childlike. The singer will be rewarded for turning the cannon against the government. Other statements in the song invoke the flag as a broken symbol, everyone as of the same color, and those living on the land as having stayed asleep. Domínguez noted that the military considered this song quite troubling, but that it moved audiences deeply.

Coda: The Legacy of Convite

In their desire to help Dominicans imagine a new society, Convite drew from oral traditions, folk religion, ostracized ritualistic practices, popular culture, and leftist thought. They believed their music should be rooted in the Dominican past, but also to point to new directions, and thus needed to both draw from tradition and be innovative. The rhythmic styles of Convite (e.g., palos, gagá, and salves) expressed the past (within new ways of imagining it); their songwriting innovations lay in harmony and lyrics. In an interview, Días once remarked that music should unite the old and the new; in Convite's harmonies the union becomes apparent with rock-influenced harmonies joined to grassroots progressions.

The group made Dominican rural music visible in the cities, connected to the political left, and virtually gave birth to Afro-Dominican fusion. Because Convite used images and words from the countryside and farm life, their songs might appear simple, but in analyses of the lyrics, the mixed rhythms, the old and new harmonies juxtaposed, and their clever metaphors conveying the political reality of the time, their music emerges as complex and well-crafted. The effectiveness lies in the collage

itself, which conveys a complex message in ways understood and appreciated by both rural and urban communities. Their music differs from other nueva canción (e.g., the songs of Silvio Rodríguez), where messages are too often metaphorical, understood only by educated audiences. Convite's music was mostly for middle-class and college-educated audiences, but Convite's methodology remained key to their influence and appeal among rural practitioners and audiences.[218]

A Dominican Woodstock: Siete Días con el Pueblo

In 1974, Convite's commitment to leftist politics and revolution through music led them to co-organize the festival, "Siete días con el pueblo: Encuentro internacional de la nueva canción" (Seven Days with the People: International Meeting of Nueva Canción). The seven days of concerts,[219] occurring simultaneously in Santo Domingo and other big cities such as Santiago and San Francisco de Macorís, featured Dominican and international artists. Artists of the caliber of Silvio Rodríguez and Mercedes Sosa[220] donated their talents in solidarity. The festival brought together labor activists, musicians, artists, and Dominican fans of nueva canción to create an environment of vigorous protest against the policies and human rights violations of the Balaguer government. In addition to Convite, sponsoring

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[218] Although I admire this methodology, and the attempts to speak for the disadvantaged, I wonder how the music would differ if farmers had been given the opportunity to speak for themselves. In many ways, presenting traditional groups at festivals organized by afro-dominicanistas is a current attempt to do just this.

[219] Siete Días occurred from Nov. 25th to Dec. 1st of 1974.

[220] Among the thirty-eight Latin American and Spanish singers at Siete Días were Víctor Manuel, from Spain; Danny Rivera, Lucecita Benítez and Antonio Cabán Vale (El Topo), from Puerto Rico; Los Guaragüaos, from Venezuela; and Dominican merengue artists Johnny Ventura, Cuco Valoy, and Félix del Rosario.

Dominican nueva canción groups included Expresión Joven and Nueva Forma.[221] These music groups joined the CGT (Central General de Trabajadores), whose leaders had initiated the festival partly in order to raise money for labor unions.[222] Besides music concerts, the festival included visual arts exhibitions, visits to marginal neighborhoods, and conferences at worker unions and clubes culturales y deportivos.

Although accounts of this festival are sparse in academic literature, it is hard to overestimate its impact, politically and musically, as it served as a tipping point. In great part caused by the impact of Siete Días con el Pueblo, nueva canción became popular in the Dominican Republic. Prior to the festival, only those who traveled abroad had access to recordings of non-Dominican nueva canción; afterwords, it became impossible for the government to enforce such restrictions. Promoters of the event obtained the support of broadcasters and journalists, and nueva canción music was played everywhere on radio stations in the days leading up to the event. To promote the event, performers would "intervene" in workers' factories, giving a *calentamiento*, a preview or mini-concert, to entice workers to attend. Other mini-concerts were hosted at unions, newspapers, radio and TV stations, and clubes culturales y deportivos. International artists were included in preview activities a few days before the festival. They also visited clubes culturales y deportivos to recruit an

[221] Joan Manuel Serrat, among others, was in exile and could not attend.
[222] Prices for the concerts, however, were not more than one Dominican peso, as the organizers wanted everyone to be able to access the activities.

audience.[223] After the festival, people called radio stations and requested songs heard there; pirated versions circulated more frequently than ever before.[224]

Significantly, Afro-Dominican music crystallized its position at Siete Días con el Pueblo, as the music of the political left and those resisting the ideals of hispanidad in Dominicanness. This association emerged from this festival as a powerful political and cultural force in the Dominican Republic. For Convite, the festival marked the beginning of seven years of constant TV and radio appearances, and concerts. Although the festival was primarily associated with nueva canción and Convite (then a newly formed group), their participation was considered essential by the CGT and other nueva canción groups as they represented the music of marginalized communities.[225] Afro-Dominican music was given centrality, an orientation made clear with palo drums accompanying the hymn of the festival "Obrero, acepta mi mano" (Worker, Accept my Hand), for which Luis Días wrote the music. The title and lyrics of the hymn reflected the spirit of the festival, sung by several Dominican nueva canción groups, with a refrain for the audience to join in on: "Obreros, a luchar" (Workers, to the fight!).

The timing of Siete Días was partly responsible for its political impact. The conflict between civilians and the Balaguer government was at its peak, and the masses attending could easily mask their desire for revolution with a love for the music. Once at the arena festival, the discontent towards Balaguer's policies was

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[223] The event was supported by forty-four *clubes culturales y deportivos*, who helped promote and sell tickets for the events.
[224] An example of a nueva canción song that was pirated is the bachata version of "La canción del elegido," by Silvio Rodríguez, which circulated during the days after the festival.
[225] Other groups composed in singer-songwriter style, accompanied by guitar.

voiced explicitly and collectively.[226] The festival today is remembered as a moment of political breakthrough, when the government began to sense the dangerous level of discontent, and the need to loosen up some of its brutal policies.

To date, Siete Días has been the largest festival in Dominican history, and the largest Dominican political demonstration. The festival's attendance exceeded all expectations, including as it did students from the state university, members and leaders of clubes culturales and deportivos, and workers. The closing concert had 35,000 attendees, with 10,000 remaining outside. These overwhelming numbers surprised both the government and the organizers. Neither had realized the level of support that revolutionary politics had in the country, nor had they anticipated that so many people would dare attend.

While Siete Días was strategically promoted as an artistic event, the organizers' political leanings were clearly stated in the introductory speech by the General Secretary of the CGT, who stated that the Dominican people were fighting for human rights through this festival. He denounced the lack of freedom for workers' unions. He also called attention to jails full of political prisoners, the many Dominicans in exile, and the country dominated by imperialism with institutionalized oppression. Among other topics invoked during the festival were the Vietnam War, Puerto Rican independence, and the United States embargo of Cuba. The politically energized audience chanted "Freedom, freedom," "Viva Cuba revolucionaria," "Independencia para Puerto Rico," and "Obreros unidos, jamás serán vencidos" (The workers united shall never be defeated).

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[226] Some informants say Balaguer allowed the festival in order to discover who his opposition was, but organizers of the festival have said he never realized the festival would comprise more than concerts.

Many of my activist informants speak of Siete Días as a moment of collective reawakening and of reassurance that progressive change was still possible, indeed, approaching. Although a successful leftist revolution was never realized in the Dominican Republic, progressive Dominicans still remember Siete Días with deep nostalgia. On the television program, "Un tiempo después: Siete días con el pueblo," Yolanda Martínez (2010) referred to Siete Días as the artistic and political event most revered by Dominicans, calling it the Dominican Woodstock. This nostalgia, I argue, is about remembering a moment of awakening hope for a democratic society. The festival impacted Dominican society, as its collective manifestation of disapproval for Balaguer's policies helped change the political climate and led, four years later, to the end of the Balaguer administration. By 1978 Balaguer was unable to continue holding fraudulent elections for fear of a strong opposition.[227] When the oppositional party took over that year, exiled Dominicans were allowed to return home and political prisoners set free. The protest at Siete Días demonstrated to the government the power of art to mobilize Dominicans, and the large role played by artists in the revolutionary spirit of the time. International artists brought a sense of Latin American solidarity to the Dominican people, both against Balaguer policies and the United States, and in rescuing Latin American folklore and values.

Although recordings of the event are scarce, people still recall listening to specific performances of specific songs.[228] The group Los Guaraguaos, from

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[227] The common view today is that Balaguer had stolen previous elections. In 1978, the opposition to his policies was so widespread that he was forced to resign.
[228] In recent years a CD was released (7 Días con el Pueblo) with fifteen songs, some of them now uploaded on YouTube.

Venezuela, incited people to action, their song, “No basta rezar,” deriding prayer as an agent for change:

No, no	No, no
No basta rezar	Praying is not enough
Hace falta muchas cosas	There are a lot of things needed
Para conseguir la paz	For peace to be obtained
Y rezante buena fe	Good will to those who pray
Y rezante Corazón	Good heart to those who pray
Pero también reza el piloto	But the pilot also prays
cuando monta en el avión	When he gets into the airplane
Para ir a bombardear	To go bomb
A los niños de Vietnam	The children in Vietnam

Victor Manuel’s “No quiero ser militar,” also impacted attendees, with verses such as:

No quiero ser militar madre	I don’t want to be in the military, Mother
No quiero ser militar	I don’t want to be in the military
Si debo poner cadenas	If I have to handcuff
Al hombre que pide pan	Men who ask for food
Si quieren que sea juguete	If they want me to be a puppet

De ambiciosos nada mas	Of power-hungry people

Rosa María Rodríguez said that when Manuel sang this song, even soldiers cried; the Balaguer government had also oppressed them.

Nueva canción artists, including Convite, resisted a division between artists and the masses. They wanted to experience and enact through songs the sufferings of the subaltern. The rural rhythms of Convite brought race to the political platform of the event. Palo music and rhythm for the event hymn demonstrated a significant choice, as palo was (and is) everywhere in the country symbolically connected to non-elite Dominicans. In this hymn, the drums are accompanied by the voices demanding revolution, the lyrics a statement of solidarity from the nueva canción groups to workers, making explicit that they would join them to help in the revolutionary movement:

Obrero acepta mi mano	Worker, accept my hand
Déjame entrar en tu hogar	Let me into your home
Obrero yo soy tu hermano	Worker, I am your brother
Quiero contigo luchar	I want to fight with you
Del pueblo venimos Obrero	We come from the people,
Sabemos de tu penar	We know of your suffering
cantando tu sufrimiento	We are singing your suffering
comenzamos a luchar	We are starting to fight
obreros a luchar (many times)	Workers, to the fight!

Somos obreros del arte	We are art workers
Somos la nueva canción	We are the new song
Luchando con las guitarras	Fighting with guitars
Aportando nuestra voz	Giving our voice
También somos pregoneros	We are spokesmen
Del orden que ha de venir	Of the order to come
Acercando ese momento	Bringing that moment closer
Lucharemos junto a ti	We will fight with you
Obreros a luchar [repeats]	Workers, to the fight!

Tanya Valette recalled how, through Siete Días, and especially the music of Convite, she discovered a collective dream where music provided possibilities she had never thought of: "Our universe widened, and there was no longer a way to turn back. Nobody could stop us singing to Mama Tingó, or stop rural young people coming to town . . . to reveal that María was not who we had been taught she was" (quoted in Mena 1999:12). She referred to Convite's performance of songs like "Con Flores a María." Valette is one of many who remember the festival as a moment forming collectivity and solidarity, and diminishing fear—when music emerged to the forefront for conveying these messages.

In the television documentary "Un tiempo después," Freddy Ginebra, the creator and director of Casa de Teatro, describes how, as Siete Días progressed, the police presence around Casa de Teatro increased. During the last concert of the festival, a document written by the political prisoners, demanding freedom and the

return of political exiles, was read to the audience. Spouses of political prisoners and exiled men had brought a large sign, demanding the men's freedom. The Argentinean singer, Mercedes Sosa, took the sign and paraded around the area followed by artists and attendees, all chanting. This moment has been described as the climax of the festival. The government, having allowed the festival so that people could blow off steam, first increased repression and gave the CGT and other organizers of the event seventy-two hours to expel every international artist from Dominican soil. Before Siete Días, it had been common for nueva canción artists to be jailed, but just after the event the government exerted an even stronger hand. In "Un tiempo después," Cholo Brenes (organizer and member of the nueva canción group Expresión Joven), said that he was jailed four times after Siete Días, and that the members of Expresión Joven were beaten on several occasions. These counts of brutal reaction abated soon thereafter, however; the festival had given a sense of empowerment to the masses of Dominicans. The government's response, after the initial tightening, was to begin releasing political prisoners, and to recognize some unions and their demands. The festival ultimately foresaw a slow transition towards the democratic government elected later in 1978.

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As I explained in Chapter Three, after the demise of the Balaguer government the populist movement, which had begun in the 1960s, mutated in the 1980s into identity politics. Dominicans lost faith in worker mobilization as a solution to problems and migrated to the United States. The PRD government, which followed Balaguer's,

allowed artistic freedom and consequently fusion musicians such as Tony Vicioso, Irka Mateo, Xiomara Fortuna, and José Duluc become influencial in continuing the racial challenges that Convite initiated. They remain active musicians in the afro-dominicanismo movement. The next two chapters focus on the 1990s to today when changes in the fabric of Dominican identity have been guided not by intellectuals or middle-class musicians, but by popular musicians and Vudú practitioners themselves.

Chapter Five
Out of Confinement: Vudú and Black Identity from Private Altars to Dance Clubs

One of the most dramatic consequences of *afro-dominicanismo* is the recent move of *Vudú* religious rituals to public clubs and dance halls, in both the Dominican Republic and, especially, the Dominican diaspora in New York. This shift has predictably incited debate over the folklorization, secularization, and commodification of the music of Dominican Vudú and Afro-Dominican rituals. In this chapter, I will examine the current scenes in both the Dominican Republic and New York, the emerging contradictory discourses surrounding the new conspicuous visibility of Vudú and its music, and ways in which this visibility might destabilize previous notions of Dominican identity.

The influences of public ceremonies on the music, rituals, and conceptions of racial identity are multi-directional. On the one hand, the public ceremonies of religious practice open spaces for new religious and racial identities; on the other, public and seemingly secular performances in festivals and dance clubs have influenced rural and traditional Vudú ceremonies. Public and secular performances have also changed how practices such as spirit possession are experienced, enacted, and perceived. Most importantly, as Vudú becomes more visible, and as its music—and that of other Afro-Dominican genres, especially palo—gains popularity, the perceived boundaries between ritual and performance have increasingly blurred. While this move of religious ceremonies from private—and sometimes concealed—spaces to public dance clubs has led believers to see them as compromising authenticity through commercial activity, the reality is even more complicated. The

transfer of a repressed and ostracized sacred religion and its music into public spaces, especially in a population traditionally constructed as Hispanic and Catholic, goes straight to important issues of race, music, and popular religion. As religious studies scholars have recently claimed,[229] secularization itself is a religious process and, as I will argue, the sacred and profane elements of Dominican Vudú and its music cannot be seen as antagonistic forces. More specifically, as we shall see, it is precisely these new seemingly secular, commercial, and theatrical practices that have given Dominicans the freedom to exercise more agency and flexibility in their religious identification and practices.

In my fieldwork, I have heard contradictory statements and anecdotes in reference to these events and to palo music, often beginning with the question: Does palo music in clubs function as sacred or secular music? This question leads to more specific queries: Will the popularization of palo music continue to raise the acceptance of Vudú as an authentic Dominican faith? Or will this popularization effectively domesticate the religious aspects of the music, assimilating it into existing popular forms? These questions are without definitive answers, but clearly an opening has occurred, where the commodification of the music has changed the ways in which the religion is expressed and experienced. This opening represents another break in the historical linear narrative of Dominican identity, where Afro-Dominican traditions and identities were forced into hiding and kept private.

In the first part of this chapter, I will sketch out some of the historical forces at play in this new version of the narrative. I pay particular attention to the 1990s

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[229] This point has been made from a variety of perspectives: Charles Taylor 2009, Mark C. Taylor 2007, Robert Orsi 2010, and Gregory Erickson 2007.

recordings of Kinito Méndez, a merengue artist who influentially and controversially began including elements of Afro-Dominican and Vudú religious music in his songs. In the second section, I will report the details of my fieldwork, describing my observations of the new public spaces where this music is performed. I focus on locating hybrid spaces and objects where blurring of the lines occurs between the sacred and the secular, the commercial and the ritual. I will close the chapter by theorizing these contradictory spaces, looking to the concept of "lived religion" as it applies to issues of possession, trance, ritual, and the discourse over authenticity. Here I will show the important role palo music performance plays in recent constructs of racial, ethnic, and religious identity among Dominicans.

Introduction and Background

Because of the particularities of Dominican national identity, many Dominicans have historically concealed their Afro-Dominican religious beliefs and practices—especially spirit possession—the suppression of which has, as I argued in Chapter One, served to demarcate symbolic borders between Dominicans and Haitians. Because the Dominican population practices a variety of popular and folk religious rituals, that may or may not include spirit possession,[230] Dominicans, in attempts to separate their practices from those of Haitians, have traditionally denied their belief in or practice of possession. This public denial was often accompanied by private or secret practices and beliefs that included possession. New York-based drummer Mendi Fortunato told me that when he came to New York during the 1970s,

[230] For example, most of the rituals in cofradías (see Chapter Two) include or claim no sort of spirit possession.

Vudú mediums (*brujos*)[231] would not dare to open the door to strangers, or anyone without a recommendation or referral.[232] They were understandably afraid of discrimination because of memories of the persecution of Vudú mediums during the Trujillo dictatorship.[233]

Nowadays, especially in New York City, Vudú ceremonies openly feature mediums and possession, and are practiced in commercial venues, such as clubs, restaurants, and hotel rooms rather than in private homes and altar spaces.[234] This openness points to an unprecedented comfort with these practices made possible by this new commercial environment, an eruption of the current possible openness brought about by the popularization of Vudú's music, and a shift in Dominican identity especially among young people of the diaspora, who are creating a new narrative of what it means to be Dominican.[235] These new forms of rituals are also

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[231] I use the emic word *brujo* to mean medium. Practitioners, especially in New York, use the term, although its meaning can be ambiguous, something I address later in this chapter.
[232] Personal communication, September 2011. All communications for this chapter were in Spanish, and all translations of quotations from Spanish to English are mine.
[233] See Introduction.
[234] Other African-based music and rituals in the Americas (e.g., Haitian *Vodou* and Cuban Santería) have been dramatized or folklorized, and have been presented as spectacles in various sorts of commercial shows, although not with the sorts of participation by attendees as one finds in the Dominican club events being discussed. To a certain degree Vodou and Santería possess commercial activities, but these public Dominican Vudú ceremonies are unusual in occurring in commercial spaces not ritually purified beforehand. In New York, practitioners of Haitian Vodou or Cuban Santería might rent a space to be cleaned prior to the ceremony. The corporate sponsorship seems unique to Dominican Vudú as well. Hagedorn points out that, in Cuba, Santería drums are consecrated for ceremonies, although not when the purpose is a profane representation of the rituals and the music (2001:108). In Dominican Vudú, drums can be consecrated, but few drummers do so; thus the distinction between a secular or sacred intention is harder to trace.
[235] As has been pointed out to me by many informants, most club attendees in New York are young Dominicans, and anecdotal evidence suggests that the popularity of these religious practices is growing rapidly among people younger than forty. This tendency seems to be contrary to what happens in New York in Haitian Vodou. Lois Wilcken (1992) examines the fact that many Haitians in New York "'walk away' from the Vodoun drum" because of

found in the Dominican Republic, where the palo drumming of Vudú (and sometimes other forms of Afro-Dominican music) is increasingly performed at festivals, in *colmadones* (grocery and liquor stores), *ranchos típicos* (party outdoor spaces), and other secular venues. These public celebrations, at times, have no explicit or expressed religious significance, although they may hold religious importance for attendees.

From 2005 to 2013, my fieldwork involved accompanying palo musicians to various ceremonies in clubs, rented spaces, and private homes in both the Dominican Republic and the New York City area. Palo parties in clubs are celebrated throughout the year, but most commonly on or around major saints' days.[236] Around these days, palo musicians in New York, for example, perform for ceremonies in *botánicas*, grocery stores, basements, lobbies, and crowded apartments; in the evenings they play in hotel rooms, restaurants, and clubs. While *fiestas de palo*[237] at secular venues became somewhat popular in the 2000s in the Dominican Republic, the use of secular spaces for religious ceremonies remains primarily a diasporic phenomenon. The New York environment seems to offer more freedom to celebrate Vudú ceremonies openly than in the Dominican Republic,[238] and in these public venues, mediums give consultations in open view, exhibiting pride in their clairvoyant powers.

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growing ambivalent feelings towards their African heritage. Hagedorn (2001) sees a rise in Santería practice, both within and outside of Cuba (219).

[236] Especially around September 29th, in celebration of San Miguel or Belié Belcán (Saint Michael), the most important deity among Dominican Vudú practitioners.

[237] These club ceremonies are colloquially called fiesta de palo. Traditionally, though, a Vudú ceremony is called a *maní* or *priyé*.

[238] Another possible reason for ceremonies having moved into dance clubs is the lack of space or privacy for many migrants in New York. While in New York some ceremonies are held at people's apartments, basements of buildings inhabited primarily by Dominicans, or other private locations, migrants generally have no space for an altar or celebrations of their

In New York, there is more willingness by practitioners to call the religion "Vudú," whereas in the Dominican Republic, as stated, they traditionally called it a "belief in the misterios," to separate their practices from those of Haitians. Brujos in New York are open about their occupation, even adopting nicknames to promote their mediumship (e.g., El Niño Prodigio, La Mambosa).[239] Mediums commonly advertise their services on the Internet, and through business cards and flyers in this new milieu. I have also witnessed more spirit possession in these public environments than in rural celebrations back in the Dominican Republic, although, as I will discuss, the validity of these possessions is called into question by many attendees. If, in secular venues, people fail to fall into trance, musicians and attendees might easily come away believing the festivity unsuccessful.

Through globalization, these secular activities in the diaspora have had an effect on the homeland; mediums in the Dominican Republic are now part of a transnational world in which they give consultations to diasporic Dominicans over the phone, and many Vudú ceremonies in the Dominican Republic are sponsored with remittances from abroad. This current Vudú environment perhaps points to Dominicans learning, if not an explicit discourse of black pride, then at least the

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own festivity. Instead, they attend celebrations of such events in dance clubs. This experience holds true for Dominican migrants in other places. Sánchez Carretero's study shows that, in Madrid, Dominicans feel they cannot use their apartments for bringing in live palo groups or inviting more than a few attendees. Those holding festivities at home use recorded palo music and, as in New York, palo drums are taken to the dance clubs where there is a cover charge, minimal prayer time, and common possession. Carretero's informants show ambivalence as to the religiosity or secularity of dance club celebrations; they believe that for the festivity to be religious, admittance should be free. In the Dominican Republic the devotee offering the feast to the saint also pays for food and other expenses. Although others might contribute, no one pays at the door. As I will address in this chapter, similar ambivalence is felt by many New York practitioners. There is an abundant literature regarding changes in Afro-Caribbean religions in New York. See, for example, Wilcken 1992, Cornelius 1991, and Bazinet 2012.

[239] In Haitian Vodou, *mambo* means high priestess. Adding the *sa* is a way of Hispanicizing the word.

embodiment of different practices and definitions of popular, folk, and institutionalized religion that implicitly challenge accepted constructions of race and ethnicity.

Historical Background: From Kinito Méndez to the Clubs

How did the music of a rural marginalized folk religion—one practiced in dark rooms and rural villages, and spoken of in hushed tones—enter urban dance clubs where Dominicans might openly and proudly express spirit possession? Although this long, complicated shift is impossible to trace definitively, we can point to several significant events in the popularization and secularization of palo music.[240] In the 1990s the merengue artist Kinito Méndez began mixing merengue sounds with traditional religious *salve* lyrics and palo drumming.[241] The reception of his work was truly paradigm-shifting, and one cannot overemphasize the impact of these

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[240] I have interviewed numerous informants in reconstructing the history of palo music and Vudú in secular venues. Most say this trend started in New York City around 2000, after palo music had been established in Vudú ceremonies throughout the city. Claudio Fortunato claims that, through a cultural club, he and his brothers founded the first palo group in New York in the 1970s (personal communication, 2011). This club was modeled after the clubes culturales in the Dominican Republic (see Chapter Three) and functioned out of Fortunato's family apartment (184th and Audubon, Grupo Cultural Orientación). The Fortunato brothers offered theater, poetry, and percussion classes until one day in September 1979, the owner of a botánica (Botánica Reyes) heard the palo drummers, and contracted them to play their first ceremony (for San Miguel) a few days later. Currently, about seven or eight palo groups work in New York, but the number is insufficient for the amount of ceremonies held on major saints' holidays.

[241] Méndez was not the first to add palo to merengue, but certainly his production gave the drums and the Vudú chants more prominence than those previous, which in any case were scarce. Prior to Méndez, for example, Primitivo Santos had included palos in the merengues "Mi caballa" and "Me importa un caramba," but traditional singers or Vudú chants were not included. Other merengueros such as Sergio Vargas and Johnny Ventura (e.g. in "El Popular") also included palo drums (or patterns of palo music in conga drums). The merengue "La vi cuando voló" is clearly a salve, although orchestrated as merengue for the Orquesta San José in the first decades of the 20th century.

recordings. It is indeed possible to claim that his musical productions changed the course of Dominicans' religious and racial history.

One of the earliest examples of this hybrid is Méndez's "Dame a beber de tu amor" (1997; "Give me to Drink from Your Love").[242] The song opens with the sound of the bell, used in Vudú to summon the deities, and with religious salve chants and palo drumming. It then shifts into a classic, horn-driven merengue feel. While the lyrics concern asking someone for love, towards the end of the song, the salve singers change the secular lyrics to a traditional religious chant, as Méndez invokes San Miguel: "San Miguel won, San Miguel won, San Miguel beat the enemy, and I beat the enemy too." In several ways, the lyrics and the music exemplify the current processes of Vudú. The eclectic blend of the secular and religious, for example, other than the initial chant, never becomes overtly religious until the end, when the plea to San Miguel for help reveals the religiosity that had been embedded in the song from the beginning. Similarly, Vudú rituals have moved from confinement to unprecedented visibility, and what appears on the surface as simply secular has religious significance for practitioners who know what to listen to and look for. This new type of hybrid music, with its blend of religious ritual, drumming, salve chant, secular lyrics, and traditional merengue (that might seem incongruous to many listeners), reflected the eclecticism[243] of traditional Vudú and its practices. The blend also anticipated the path Vudú has embarked upon.

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[242] All translations from song lyrics, books, and interviews are mine.

[243] As noted in Chapter Two, Dominican Vudú has proven fluid and, because of continuous historical repression, reduced mostly to the privacy of mediums and their altars (Davis 1987:67). The increasing public celebrations of Vudú, and the incorporation of club culture elements into the religious celebrations, indicate another step in eclecticism and flexibility. This eclecticism can also be noted in the incorporation of elements in New York from other

In 1997, Méndez once again combined religious salve and secular merengue in "El Sueño de amor" (The Dream of Love). The singing is by a traditional salve ensemble from Villa Mella.[244] One of the traditional salves used in this tune, "Los olivos,"[245] addresses the Vudú deity Ogún Balenyó,[246] and the success of "El Sueño de amor," in turn, made "Los olivos" extremely popular among Dominicans of all walks of life. In "El Sueño de amor," Méndez again conflates the love of the deity with romantic love, the lyrics asking both for Ogún Balenyó's help and an "intravenous injection" of love from a woman. The lyrics and music blend human and divine love; the secular shot of love and the power of Ogún Balenyó will cure the narrator of his suffering. After the first verses of "Los olivos" a musical break occurs,

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Afro-Caribbean religions. Davis (1996:13) observed an eclectic mix of paraphernalia in the botánicas of New York, such as elements of Cuban Santería (e.g., deities such as Yemayá and Shangó Prieto). Iván Domínguez pointed out to me that, in New York, Dominican Vudú has always had a connection to Cuban culture, and before there were palo groups in the city, as mentioned earlier, Dominicans would play the popular 1950s recording by the Cuban singers, Celina y Reutilio. Nowadays one can find Cuban shells and saints even in the Dominican Republic, which, Domínguez believes, came to the country via New York.

The flexibility in rituals of Dominican Vudú are reflected in the music used in Vudú ceremonies. While in Haitian Vudú and Cuban Santería the spirit coming down is one specifically called through the music, the lack of dogma, or rules, in the Dominican Republic allows a spirit to come down even when another is being called. Dominican Vudú also has no particular rhythm or dance attached to deities. For consultations, the medium can bring down the "misterios" without the use of music at all. In the several consultations I have attended, the medium called the deity by ringing a bell. Also, unlike a Santería *toque*, for example, which starts with the *oru seco*—the *batá* sequence performed without singing or dancing—in which all of the major *Orishas* or deities (Eleguá is first and last) are saluted, in Dominican Vudú any order might be followed.

[244] The ensemble is led by Eneloriza Núñez.

[245] The lyrics for "Los olivos" are:

Yo soy Ogún Balenyó	Ay yo soy Ogún	Anaisa Pié	Ay, soy Ogún
y vengo de "Los olivos"	ay vengo de allá	ay la división	y vengo de allá
a darle la mano al enfermo	ay Papá Candelo	ay la división	ay San Elías
y a levantar los caídos	ay Belié Belcán	de Papa Legbá	Santa Marta eh!

[246] San Santiago (or St. James, in the Catholic liturgy) is the patron of warriors and military. Santiago is also said to help with trips and visas. Other salves in "El Sueño de amor" are addressed to Anaísa (St. Anna) and Damballah (St. Patricks).

changing the rhythm to merengue. Prominent merengue bass lines are added to the drums and *panderos*[247] of the salves, to delineate the passage between the two genres.

In subsequent projects Méndez continued to mix salves and merengues, culminating in his groundbreaking album, *A palo limpio* (Pure Palo), nominated for the 2002 Latin Grammy Award for Best Merengue Album.[248] On *A palo limpio* "Sueño de amor" is renamed "Suero de amor."[249] The CD, consisting of mixes of salve religious chants, traditional rhythms, and instruments with modern merengue, sounds similar to "El Sueño de amor." Parallel to *A palo limpio*, another rendition of the catchy "Los olivos" salve (with its traditional ensemble of panderos and palo drums) was almost simultaneously released on the CD, *Música raíz*, by the Fundación Cultural Bayahonda, a non-profit institution working on projects contributing to the appreciation of Afro-Dominican cultural identity. Both versions of "Los olivos," the Méndez and the Bayahonda, became enormously popular, helping to break down some of the prejudice against Afro-Dominican music. They have sold well and stayed popular for many years since their release.

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[247] Tambourines with fewer metal jingles.

[248] While Méndez denies his affinity with Vudú, practitioners embrace his merengues. In a YouTube interview, Méndez says that people think he is a brujo (medium) because he does this type of music. He emphasizes that he uses palo drums and Vudú themes not because he believes in the religion—he believes in the Christian God—but because these are part of Dominican culture. He continues to do these musical blends because they haven taken him to the Grammy awards and because people request them. In fact, Méndez' biggest music tour is the week of San Miguel celebrations, when one finds him in clubs in Washington Heights and the Bronx. This style of merengue has won him wide recognition; even in carnival merengues, he uses Vudú chants. Do these comments reflect his desire to mask his beliefs? My informants say Méndez believes in the deities and keeps numerous saint statues in his home. His ambivalence, not an isolated experience, may reflect ways Dominicans still shy away from externalizing their beliefs beyond an intimate circle.

[249] Suero means intravenous therapy.

One can only speculate on what accounts for the popularity of certain songs over others.[250] I would argue that the Dominican masses practicing Vudú in confined spaces have eagerly formed a large market for the commodification of their religious music. Up until this point, professional-quality recordings of Afro-Dominican genres were uncommon and thus not commercialized. *Música Raíz*, which included salves, palos, *congo, gagá*, and other genres of Afro-Dominican music, is still for sale in botánicas across the country, sold by street sellers and record shops including those catering to the middle and upper classes (e.g., Musicalia). These recordings have also been popular and influential throughout the Dominican diaspora. Rufino Santos, a former New York recording executive and record store owner, told me that Música Raíz is his best-selling record ever; musicians tell me they consider it an anthem. Drummer Claudio Fortunato, who is known as the pioneer New York palo drummer, noted that he has been playing palo festivities at clubs and restaurants in New York since the early 1990s,[251] but after "Los olivos," the popularity of the music on records and club performances exploded.[252]

In the years since the popularity of "Los olivos," Vudú celebrations, palo music, and the lives of its many musicians changed, especially in New York. Not only has palo music been marketed and consumed as popular music, but the figure of the individual celebrity artist in the palo scene has also emerged. In clubs, many

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[250] Results for a YouTube search include renditions of "Los olivos" by many ensembles (even the University of Colorado Caribbean Ensemble), who have adapted the song to different rhythms.

[251] Fortunato said that the first restaurant ceremony in New York happened in the early 1990s, at D'Kalaff Restaurant. Asked whether he thought it would be disrespectful to celebrate in a public space, he suggested the organizer get a brujo who prepared the place for a respectful ceremony.

[252] All quotes from Claudio Fortunato are from an interview, Sept. 2011.

followers of the music prefer groups with female singers, as a frontline of attractive singers and dancers adds to the theatrical aspects of these ceremonies. As an informant noted, “In New York clubs the palo image has changed from men with no teeth to beautiful women.” Francia Reyes has risen to become “The Queen of Palo,” but there is also a “Palo Diva,” and a “Clásica.” Another female palo singer in New York, La Piki, dresses provocatively, sings and dances, sometimes receiving deities while onstage.

Thus, what used to be collective and ritualistic music is now a vehicle through which an individual singer might be featured, or become famous. Dominican-based Eneroliza Núñez, the leader of the salve group featured in recordings by Méndez and Bayahonda, now performs in urban Dominican venues. She also represents the country internationally when the Ministry of Culture sends her to foreign stages as a featured performer. Today one can find flyers of performance groups at botánicas in both the Dominican Republic and New York: Reyes’ New York City debut in Studio 84, in 1998, was highly advertised; on the cover of her CD (1998), she appears dressed and posed like a pop star. Other performers, such as the group “El Barón y su Tipipalo,” are featured in advertisements in the botánicas of Santiago, posing in African-looking clothing. Nowadays, especially in New York, many individual singers advertise their palo music, and the commercialization of the music, alongside its move to dance clubs, has led to the commodification of brujos’ mediumship powers and Vudú ceremonies.

Hybrid Spaces and Commercialism: Altars, Posters, Alcohol, Money, and the Theater of Ritual

While many practitioners of Vudú believe the public festivities are a corruption of the performance of the "true" religion, parties at clubs and restaurants result in a complex web of practices that could be fluidly labeled commercial, secular, theatrical, or religious. One way to begin to understand this intersection of the personal, cultural, commercial, secular, and spiritual aspects of this music is to look closely at material details. Robert Orsi (2005) argues that, for many people, everyday life is affected by embodied practices (experienced through the body) through which the sacred is made real and present. In other words, religion, as scholars such as Harvey point out, is not what people privately "believe" but what they *do* (2013:1). To study religion, therefore, we need to identify not just its beliefs but how its practices feel, smell, and sound.

For these new public Vudú ceremonies and events, we can find in the physical objects and spaces the same contradictions and ambiguities that we find in theorizing the religious and musical experiences. One of the most complex physical manifestations of belief and culture is the private altar of most believers and all mediums. These altars are made of icons, offerings to the saints, religious paraphernalia, and objects of personal meaning. In previous times altars were kept hidden, often quite literally in the closet, but today they can be found or transported to more public or visible spaces, and thus transform commercial venues into spaces for a Vudú ceremony although at times kept out of the public eye so drunken customers or dancers cannot harm them. Traditionally the deities were consulted about the placement of an altar, because the space must be free of negative forces, and the

ground underneath the altar specially prepared and cleaned with fire. In front of the altar, there must be three holes for the libations, and the area should not be used for any purpose other than worship.

In clubs, however, this altar is located in a previously unprepared space, and is removed after the ceremony. In ceremonies at New York area clubs, restaurants, and hotel rooms, it is not unusual to find photographers taking and selling pictures, or cigar companies promoting their products. There is usually a cover charge, bouncers, and security guards present, who check IDs and attempt to keep practitioners from smoking in the establishment, or getting too rowdy while experiencing spirit possession or trance.[253] Many club owners instruct bouncers to keep order, for fear that too many people possessed will result in disruptive behavior that could harm the altar or club. While traditionally devotees would humbly offer the celebration to their deities, in clubs, the owners and the mediums profit from these ceremonies.[254] The cover charge usually ranges from $20 to $50,[255] depending on whether club owners offer food, cigars,[256] and handkerchiefs, which are given as an offering by the club owner to his or her saint. Club owners nevertheless profit from the alcohol sales, and

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[253] In both trance and spirit possession, the person feels an altered state of consciousness, but when I speak of spirit possession, I refer to what is believed to be the incorporation of a deity in the body of a medium.

[254] In a more traditional setting, people close to the medium usually contribute to the festivity, or sometimes the medium uses money made through consultations. Thus, no obvious economic gain for the medium occurs, although she or he gains prestige, which might lead to believers paying later for consultations or religious work. In New York, club owners prepare the ceremony, and mediums gig at it, or a medium might arrange for the ceremony, and if in a secular venue, charge an entrance fee. The festivities at botánicas are also profitable because the medium instructs people to buy objects needed for religious work.

[255]The medium El Niño Prodigio charges each attendee $125, besides asking them to contribute food and other supplies for the festivity.

[256] Cigars are traditionally used to keep the medium alert (not in a spiritual realm). Martha Ellen Davis notes that otherwise, the medium stays inexpressive and dreamy (1987:324). Cigars are also said to satisfy the desires of the deities.

musicians tell me that club owners might stop the music if too many people are falling into trance. Club owners believe that if this happens, those in trance and other customers standing and dancing around the person possessed will not consume enough alcohol.

Public Vudú festivities in New York are heavily advertised; close to major saints' days one might find posters and invitation cards all over uptown New York and the Bronx. Since the advertising strategies appeal to religious, festive, and commercial interests, we might further explore the array of practices found within these ceremonies. Posters display the name of the ceremony's sponsor: either a botánica, a club, or a restaurant.[257] The events are advertised as either a palo party (fiesta de palo*)* or as a party for a saint (e.g., Fiesta para San Miguel), and the iconography of the saint is usually included. Photographs of the music groups or DJs performing that night also appear on these posters; such groups play more than palo, as the ceremonies sometimes include merengue and bachata artists as well.[258] Often the posters contain photos of the alcohol that will be on sale, as well as the party favors given out once the entrance fee is paid. Party favors might include food (usually the food of the deity),[259] champagne, handkerchiefs, cigars, or numbers for a raffle or lottery announced by a clairvoyant or brujo.[260]

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[257] For example, Bamboo Lounge, Jet Set Café, La Nueva Fortuna Restaurant, Umbrella Night Club, and others.
[258] For example, Amarfis y la Banda de Attake, El Cuco de la Bachata, Kinito Méndez, El Shino, and Teodoro Reyes.
[259] For example, devotees serve San Miguel rice with black beans and goat meat. In these festivities the same food is served to attendees.
[260] Some people say that the custom of bringing in someone to predict winning lottery numbers began with Cristian Casablanca, a diviner in the Dominican Republic who hosted palo parties with the primary purpose of announcing lottery numbers. These popular parties, at which Kinito Méndez and palo drummers provided the music, ended when, on her show,

The posters also often advertise a special appearance by a medium or diviner, who reads fortunes for the attendees (e.g., Fanny the Prayer Leader, the diviner Niño Prodigio, the Messenger of Peace Lourdivery Bisonó), and include their photos. These posters sometimes include ads for cigar or taxi companies, as well as instructions for the attendees, such as a reminder to bring IDs, come early enough to catch the prayers (although prayers are sometimes done before the club opens to keep them private and orderly), or come dressed in the colors of the deity.

Interestingly, I have rarely seen posters where the actual palo drums are shown. Instead, most promoters find other ways to suggest their presence, for example, by showing secular *Conga* drums (not used in Vudú), or even firewood (the word palo in Spanish is also a synonym for firewood). Drummer Joan De León believes that club owners may exclude palo drums to attract believers *and* non-believers, who might negatively associate the palo drums with Haiti, *brujería,* or witchcraft.[261] It is revealing of the music's power and importance that the drums communicate the idea or "danger" of witchcraft more than the festival, the saints, or even the mediums. Although palo drums are also used in cofradía rituals, where spirit possession is uncommon, they remain primarily connected in the Dominican imagination with Haiti and *Vodou*. These posters suggest that the commercial

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the TV producer Nuria Piera proved Casablanca's predictions inaccurate. The association, however, of Vudú ceremonies at clubs with commercialized clairvoyance continues today. Nuria Piera proved not only that Casablanca gave out false lottery numbers, but also committed business frauds (in his consultations and other business transactions), claiming to have studied astrology, and taking sexual advantage of women to "save" them from brujería. See "Nuria destapa a Cristian Casa Blanca," (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tq8IiQV7EtA).

[261] I use these terms because they are emic. Vudú practitioners (especially in New York) sometimes call what they do brujería. The mediums are called and call themselves brujos. Both terms are more commonly used in New York than in the Dominican Republic.

qualities of such celebrations in dance clubs have helped Vudú religious practices come into public view. Simultaneously, they demonstrate that the importance of the religion allows these products to be successfully marketed. Thus, the commercialization of Vudú, not purely secular, also serves to celebrate and normalize a religion that many have regarded as dangerous. Meanwhile, the products and services sold at ceremonies are commercially viable precisely because they have religious value.[262]

Furthermore, the commercial theatricality of ceremonies suggests that the recent openness of the religion is commoditized. The blurry line between the religious, the commercial, and the theatrical manifests and is dramatized in the anxiety club owners might experience about spirit possession or trance occurring in their establishments, even though they advertise these festivities as parties for deities. In La Nueva Fortuna restaurant in 2009, the owner hired Francia Reyes and her group to play in front of a large icon of San Miguel, standing in the basement of the building. Afterwards, the group was taken to the restaurant, which was decorated with red and green handkerchiefs (the colors of San Miguel). The restaurant also featured a large altar and a medium giving consultations. The foods of San Miguel (rice, goat, and plantain) were being served. As the music grew in excitement, several women fell into trance, one of them crawling on the floor as if possessed by Santa Marta

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[262] This commercialized popular religion is not, of course, unique. Although the realms of the commercial and the religious remain separated in the popular imagination, choices of religious experiences have been expanded since the twentieth century greatly because of media coverage. Evangelists and churches advertise through posters, pamphlets, and banners on buses and subways. Katherine Hagedorn argues that in Santería, everything is commodified (2001:9), and initiation ceremonies in the United States cost between $15,000 and $20,000 (ibid.:220), while in the Dominican Republic they go for about $5,000. Francia Reyes told me that botánicas pay musicians about $700, and dance clubs between $500 and $600 a ceremony.

(who manifests as a snake). This spectacle provoked increasing excitement and curiosity among the other attendees. The owner stopped Reyes and her musicians, and kicked "Santa Marta" out of the club, apparently for disruptive behavior. I heard observers say that they were sure she and her friends were just drugged, not truly possessed. Perhaps the owner believed the possession a fake, too, otherwise why would he throw the deity herself out of a Vudú ceremony?[263]

In an interview on the "Night Show," when told that the owner of Studio 84 was worried about spirit possession in his club, Reyes ambiguously concealed her life-long connection with the salve and Vudú tradition. She responded, smiling ironically, "That is what people say, that people can be mounted[264] with this music." Reyes's response is a common one among Dominicans who have historically felt these practices belong to their private realm, yet now perform aspects of them in public to present them to a larger audience.[265]

The difference between secular trance and spirit possession, particularly in these types of club settings, is not clear, and sometimes possession and disruptive behaviors are not considered opposites. While music can produce both trance and

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[263] The motivations for the festivity get further blurred when money is brought into the picture. After the ceremony at La Nueva Fortuna, the owner paid the palo group less than the agreed amount (a common occurrence for club festivities). When the leader of the group protested, the owner replied: "You know we do this as an offering to San Miguel. He would be upset if he knew you were not happy with this payment." She was outraged and replied: "San Miguel will be mad at you because you have more money than me." Musicians have also told me that some practitioners (the ones responsible for paying the musicians) often pretend to be possessed for longer than they actually are, so that musicians will keep playing; if the deity is asking for more palo music, musicians would be disrespectful to leave. In a festivity at the D'Blasio club in 2009, the medium got upset with the palo drummer because he kicked a candle that was on the floor as an offering. Although the drummer had kicked it accidentally, the owner paid him less for his services because of the incident.

[264] Mounted means become possessed by a deity.

[265] Francia Reyes grew up in Villa Mella, a town known for its Afro-Dominican traditions (including congo, see Chapter Two). She was given her first pandero to play when she was three years old and regularly attended ceremonies with her grandmother.

spirit possession, musicians have told me that "possessed people" are sometimes disturbing. They have seen women "possessed," taking their shirts off, and other mounted people picking fights. Although I use these types of events and responses to complicate the binary of authentic/inauthentic representations of religious faith, it remains important to examine how the public commercialization of these events has changed the music and the rituals. As early as 1974, Martha Ellen Davis wrote about a tendency towards the secularization of Afro-Dominican genres, noting that practitioners paid less attention in ceremonies to ritual and more to festive aspects (22-23).[266] For example, the music was sped up, and more festive styles of palo were preferred.[267] But while the tendency towards the secularization of Afro-Dominican popular religion and its music is not new, the commodification of palo music has led towards the commodification and visibility of the Vudú religion itself. From Kinito Méndez and professional mediums to club owners and musicians, the religion and its music have entered a consumerist market. Palo parties afford opportunities for lottery play, brujos (mediums) encourage people to dance and have fun (while also promoting their services), and sometimes praying is kept to a minimum because it discourages the purchase and consumption of alcohol.

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[266] In 1981, Davis found that there was already a preference for the least sacred salves accompanied by drums, and practitioners dropping the performance of the ecclesiastical Salve Regina (1981, Chapter 2). She sees these choices as consequent to a preference for faster tempos (*estado subido*), and the tendency towards secularization and hybridization (as well as Africanization) of Dominican culture, both resulting from urbanization and modernization (ibid.:81-82). Davis classifies the African-based salves as used more as vehicles for self-expression and catharsis, and the sacred type being of a more contemplative nature. Although contemplative altar singing need not necessarily be more sacred than drumming music used for dancing and spirit possession, in club festivities more emphasis is given to the celebratory and the unreflexive.

[267] Davis also points out that the increasing tendency for couples to embrace as they dance reflects part of this secularization (as in Dominican popular music genres).

Nevertheless, although commercial aspects of club culture increasingly inhabit Vudú, their juxtaposition with religious rituals at many levels does not undermine the religious significance of the ceremonies.[268] Many intersections of commerce and religion have first been resisted and later accepted. That Mormons advertise on TV, or famous cathedrals sell souvenirs, is perhaps no different than selling alcohol at Vudú ceremonies, or giving out free cigars and handkerchiefs. When the Redeemer Presbyterian Church meets in the Hunter College auditorium, we tend not to attribute secular motivations to attendees, but when a religious sect meets at a club we often think so, when it might not be the case.[269]In an interview, Rossy La Diva, a New York-based popular singer of palo, characterized this juxtaposition of religion and club culture as a *cruce*, or crossroads.[270] This metaphor offers a view of a space where possibilities and choices are multiplied, but where violent collisions might also occur. For example, in the 2009 San Miguel festivity at the Trio bar in Brooklyn, children were included, and the ritual smoking of cigars showed no concern for breaking the city's non-smoking law. Attendees, while possessed or drunk, blew smoke at people, provoking the security guards' intervention.

These cruces were reflected in the interior of the Trio bar, a hookah bar decorated with Middle Eastern motifs as well as handkerchiefs with San Miguel's colors hanging from the ceiling. Some clubs have hookah smoking, which avoids breaking the non-smoking law, but practitioners often privilege the deity's desire for

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[268] The club ceremonies are similar to religious pilgrimages in the Dominican Republic where vendors market their products, and gambling tables are set up at the rest points. See Tallaj 2008.

[269] An interesting parallel is "hipster Christianity." Their members meet in churches that resemble clubs, and they sponsor church "beer summits."

[270] Personal communication, September 2011.

a cigar over obeying New York City law. Another common activity in Vudú is spraying people with beer, but in a club, Rossy says, this might easily lead to a physical fight, as dressed-up attendees find the practice disrespectful. All the paraphernalia used in clubs, such as cigars, handkerchiefs, palo music, and even mediums themselves, form part of traditional Dominican Vudú's ceremonies; in clubs they are given new meaning. For example, clubs give as party favors the handkerchiefs traditionally use to bind the spirit's deity to a medium's body.

While both practitioners and skeptics often divide these activities into religious and secular, new spaces for Vudú offer and require new definitions. Following religious studies scholars like Graham Harvey, who argues that religions are "most easily observed (seen, heard, smelled, tasted, and touched) when people ritualize together" (2013:199), all such actions within this environment would be seen as forms of religion. Religion has always recognized and "marketed" its most theatrical elements. The Catholic mass is deeply theatrical, and, as R. Laurence Moore says of American Protestantism, "Whenever people rush down aisles, fling themselves in the straw, and cry for salvation with mighty sighs and groans, other people become spectators" (1995:15). Drummer Pedro Raposo informed me that, in Vudú, "mediums, diviners, and club owners exoticize or Hollywoodize the religion by sensationalizing its symbols and paraphernalia."[271] When a medium is brought to a public Vudú ceremony, often the entrance is prepared with music, and handkerchiefs and cigars are given to attendees to greet the brujo (shaking the handkerchiefs and blowing cigar smoke). This entrance is staged with drum rolls and an MC, much like the entrance of a headlining musician. Confetti and dancing lights further enhance the

[271] Personal communication, September 2010.

atmosphere. As a friend said, "In New York and the dance clubs, the brujos are like celebrity Hollywood actors."

In their attempt to enhance their theatrical presence, mediums refer to themselves as *brujo* to add an aura of mystery to what they do. Informants say that in the Dominican Republic mediums reveal nothing to people about what they do, out of respect to the religion, and because they have a pre-established reputation. In New York, however, brujos identify themselves in order to gain status in this environment. Yvonne Schaffer analyzes the use of the word brujo in the Dominican context and points to its use by some mediums to provoke fear, which gives them power (2006:106). In New York, more mediums than in the Dominican Republic call themselves brujos as part of their commercial and theatrical strategies. My informants talk about powerful brujos battling for status (e.g., between El Muchachito de Mao, El Niño Prodigio, and El Caballito). Conversely, calling someone a brujo can be offensive in more traditional situations. In the Dominican Republic mediums tend to call themselves *caballos* or *servidor de misterio* (servants of the deities), undermining the possible negative consequences of identifying with brujos—or the associations of brujos with Haiti.

Music groups exploit the theatrical aspects at clubs, in ways similar to how club owners and mediums market religion's performative aspects. Claudio Fortunato, the palo group leader, enters ceremonies with his followers carrying flags with the colors of the Vudú deities. He likes to start a fire in the form of a cross in the middle of the dance floor. Fire is traditionally used in altars for its purifying effects, and Fortunato told me he uses it to open the way down for the deities (what practitioners

call *dar punto*).[272] He admits he is proud of the spectacle that fire creates and claims that people going into it "do not even mind having their clothes burned."

For festivities, his musicians enter the club in a processional manner imitating the spectacle of Jesus on Palm Sunday, with the path lined by flags in the deity's colors. Even more dramatically, some musicians in New York now demonstrate possession while onstage. Leaders of groups allow this, seeing that it enhances their theatricality; spirit possession is the most popular attraction in these ceremonies. While in many ways, these extreme examples of theatricality are "created" rituals, practitioners in New York consider Fortunato's music group one of the most authentic of all palo groups because of its ritual basis; these rites—some invented for the stage—literally become the rituals by which authenticity is measured.[273]

Commercialism and Tradition

Not surprisingly, many older and more traditional Dominicans find Vudú's public club festivities inauthentic because, to them, the commercial world is incompatible with what they recognize as religious. For example, several informants told me that a *bautizo* (baptism or initiation) in New York costs $5000, and some brujos, such as El Niño Prodigio, baptize up to five people a night. These informants find the amount outrageous and the medium's BMW car and luxurious house

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[272] Often the points are given using a jug and dropping three drops of water in the door of the venue of the altar. The puntos are performed by a series of twists and salutations. Practitioners believe that without these puntos, the deities will not come down.

[273] This is not to say that all of Fortunato's ritual-based performances are original; many of his rituals and activities are based on tradition, but Fortunato infuses even a traditional prayer with theatricality.

unconscionable.[274] Modern New York mediums now "gig," just as musicians do, and during popular saint's days are in high demand. I have seen mediums working in New York City, going from festivity to festivity, repeatedly mounted by deities, and greeted as celebrities. They freelance and promote their services through business cards, blogs, Facebook pages,[275] and 1-800 numbers; they even host TV and radio shows.

In the Dominican Republic, by contrast, most mediums charge modest fees for consultations[276] (often the amount is determined by the deity), and work only a few days of the week.[277] The overall perception is that mediums in the Dominican Republic are driven not by a desire for economic mobility but by a commitment to service. Conversely, an informant pointed out that mediums in New York are so eager for money that they sometimes stay mounted in a botánica from eight in the morning until eight at night, accommodating numerous consultations, which nears the physically impossible as possession can be strenuous. Other informants have told me that mediums in New York tell their clients that their religious work must take place in the Dominican Republic so their clients will buy them air tickets.[278] New York City palo drummers also have marketing strategies not traditionally found in the

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[274] A consultation with a brujo might cost a client $125, but paraphenalia must be bought in the botánica in order to carry out the religious work.
[275] See, for example, Ruben Ricart, on Facebook or his blog temasespirituales.com.
[276] Practitioners use a medium to talk with deities and ask for advice. Sometimes a consultation consists of a tarot card reading, or other fortune telling modalities without spirit possession.
[277] Historian Carlos Esteban Deive states that Dominican mediums work on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays because the deities are free and easily assessed on those days (1975:201).
[278] Traditionally, brujo fees end in multiples of three and seven (important mystical numbers). Mediums might begin working at age seven, and promises to serve are kept for seven years. The number three also reflects the Holy Trinity. Fortunato, in order to place himself within the Vudú tradition, charges amounts equalling the multiples of these numbers. He notes that, when he charges $150.21 for 15 minutes of music, his clients understand the symbolism.

Dominican Republic. Claudio Fortunato runs what he calls *calentamientos* (warmings) in botánicas. He visits a botánica for free, playing palo inside or at the entrance, to attract passing pedestrians who might take his business card.

While these moves towards the commercial and theatrical might have started in secular venues as a result of the commercialization of Vudú's music, they also leave a mark on more long-rooted traditions in New York and the Dominican Republic.[279] Whether or not such alterations are reverberating from urban contexts like New York, or cities in the Dominican Republic, rural practitioners now also incorporate new elements into their rituals. For example, although historically Vudú ceremonies allowed popular music (even Vudú-themed bachata and merengue),[280] the inclusion of DJs in rural ceremonies is a fairly recent occurrence, perhaps originating in festivities at dance clubs. In the summer of 2010, I attended a private festivity to San Elías (El Barón del Cementerio) in Tamboril (a town that often celebrates palo parties at dance clubs), where a DJ played music when the palo group took a break. The DJ took pride in knowing how to summon each deity with a particular piece. He was also working as the MC, encouraging people to come to the altar to salute the deity. Several times throughout the afternoon, he announced that San Elías loved his people so much that "the saint" would dedicate a song to the attendees. To my surprise, these dedicated songs, which the saint ostensibly chose, were not pieces

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[279] Hagedorn writes that even though practitioners of Santería may seem repulsed by the exaggerated representation of their rituals in folkloric shows, they nevertheless bring gestural and theatrical tropes learned in these shows to their traditional ceremonies (2001:149). The difference between what is happening in Dominican Vudú and the commodification of other African-based religions (either in its traditional form or in the form of ballet folklóricos) is that since Dominican Vudú is more flexible in its dogma, the club ceremonies are reshaping traditional ceremonies to a faster pace.

[280] For example, merengues by Cuco Valoy, which touch on Vudú themes (e.g., "El Brujo).

from the traditional Vudú repertoire or traditional Dominican music, but instead modern Christian ballads. The DJ also encouraged people to dance by playing fast *merengue típico* numbers.

This festivity seems indicative of a trend in which even the traditional festivities are becoming more elaborate, flamboyant, and, on the surface at least, more commercial. Mediums throw grandiose ceremonies to demonstrate the effectiveness of their power, noting how much money they can make in performing spiritual work. In fieldwork, I have seen Dominicans, often those returning from New York, incorporate club culture elements, such as disco lights, into their ceremonies to display their newly acquired modernity and economic success. In "San Miguel, Tabaco y Ron," a newspaper article, Omar Santana wrote that in San Miguel celebrations in the capital city, cigars are nowadays sold in chocolate and vanilla flavors, catering to different tastes (2010). Perhaps not all these changes are caused by the new club Vudú culture, but I would suggest that urban influences on Vudú ceremonies, which had remained in rural and concealed environments until the end of the Trujillo dictatorship, have now dramatically altered them, particularly following the popularity of "Los Olivos" and Méndez's blends of salve and merengue.

Any reform in religious practice spawns a counter-reformation. Practitioners complain that these new infiltrations into their ceremonies compromise the authenticity and efficacy of traditions. Dulce, the Vudú medium from San Juan de la Maguana (see Chapter One), complained about the increasing presence of "disrespectful" people in Vudú festivities. For her, the growing number of Vudú's public ceremonies has also brought an increase in fights, the sacrilegious use of

cellular phones even in front of the altar, and a general lack of attention to traditional ritual aspects. An informant related that at Dulce's Santa Marta ceremony a few years ago, an attendee was about to urinate in the water of the altar for the indio deities. Dulce attributes this lack of respect to young people's materialistic attitudes: "People are confusing devotion for marketing. Before people would come to a ceremony to give something in devotion, but nowadays people come to receive things, to eat and drink without giving anything in return."

Efredes, a practitioner and leader in the Dominican town of Bánica, agreed with Dulce's critique, remarking that he controls his celebrations to maintain a traditional level of respect. He reprimands disrespectful behavior and disallows couples to hold hands when dancing. He believes a couple should be physically separated when they dance, the traditional way of dancing to palo music.[281] Efredes also stops musicians from improvising highly sexualized lyrics.[282] Some informants believe the increased loudness and flamboyance[283] in festivities account for why so many practitioners believe the possession is more akin to secular trance (or an altered state of consciousness), and that ceremonies are simply an excuse to party.

Musical Changes

The music of Vudú as entertainment remains located at the crossroads of the popular and the religious, the commercial and the ritualistic, and ultimately challenges the definitions of each of these terms. All of the issues and debates

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[281] Efredes recalled that, as a child, he saw partners holding handkerchiefs and making reverent gestures when they encountered each other face-to-face.
[282] Personal communication, summer 2010.
[283] The increasing presence of homosexual men in Vudú countryside festivities is sometimes blamed for the present disorderly character of the ceremonies.

surrounding the changing landscape of Vudú—authenticity, eclecticism, theatricality, and commercialism—can be studied through a closer examination of the music itself. While the motivations behind musical decisions—made to increase excitement and the occurrence of possession—may be similar whether playing for a traditional ceremony or a dance club, performative aspects of the music are adapted specifically for commercial spaces, and musicians create new musical gestures to enhance ritualistic activities. At clubs, palo groups become popular musicians, and the entertainment demands necessitate changes to both lyrics and music.

In the same way that Kinito Méndez's merengues borrowed from Afro-Dominican rhythms, in clubs palo musicians adopt merengue aesthetics, speed up the music, and shout out to people in the audience, to brujos, and to deities. Musicians tend to choose the catchiest palo songs for the audience. Palo groups have been making CD recordings roughly since the popularity of *Música Raíz* (1997 onwards), and have created a canon of the repertoire. Audience reaction has defined which songs are most familiar and favored. In this new milieu, musicians perform onstage, as opposed to traditional ceremonies, where no separation divides performers and audience. In a traditional ceremony palo musicians would be aware of their audience, especially when summoning spirit possession, but would feel no need to entertain with shout outs, and would otherwise blend in with the audience, as drums are passed out to others when a drummer grows tired. Anyone, whether performer or other participant, might begin a song or improvise lyrics.

At clubs, female singer-dancers (as well as attendees) wear provocative clothes and male musicians wear coordinated outfits. Francia Reyes' group lines up

with beautiful women playing panderos in front of the drummers. Panderos, used in traditional salves, serve more as aesthetic props: I have only seen these players hit the panderos on the downbeat or else play the Cuban clave, disregarding the more complex polyrhythmic styles of the Dominican pandero.[284] In clubs, singers must sing more in tune than in ceremonies, use microphones, coordinate the improvised sections of the music, and add musical breaks, fading or tremolo effects, and tempo changes within a song.[285] In a ceremony I observed in La Nueva Fortuna restaurant, the drummer added vocal effects for a palo song to the deity Damballah Wedo,[286] onomatopoeically depicting the deity's snake shape and character by moving his tongue as a snake and improvising rhythms and vocalizations. Some of these changes in the music also occur on the stages of music festivals (see Chapter Three).[287]

Sometimes club owners bring a brujo to the stage to incite attendees, but musicians and DJs might also work as MCs. At a 2010 San Miguel party at the El Aguila Restaurant in the Bronx, the singer, La Piki, shouted out numerous times from the stage: "Who are the single women? Where are the brujos? Raise your handkerchiefs! Hurray for San Miguel!" Musicians and DJs take the microphone to

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[284] Dominican tambourines or panderos have fewer jingles because they are traditionally played polyrhythmically, functioning like drums.

[285] In his paper at MIDSEM 2013, Víctor Hernández Sang observed that the palo group Los Mellos adds two congas, electric drum pad, and electric bass guitar when playing a dance club. He believes they follow Kinito Méndez's idea, making the group sound bigger and fuller in accordance with cosmopolitan popular music aesthetics. Los Mellos also developed a way of heating and tuning the drums with a light bulb (as opposed to using fire, as do those in rural Dominican Republic) because dance clubs were wary of an uncontrolled blaze. I have also seen groups add ending licks popular in merengues.

[286] St. Patrick in the Catholic correspondence is one of the only deities who manifests as a non-human.

[287] A lot of rural groups that perform at music festivals in the Dominican Republic add none of these popular music effects to their performances in a traditional ceremony, only when performing on a stage. At the Second Regional Festival, in Santiago, a palo drummer sang a bass line into the microphone, an addition to the traditional palo rhythm. He believed this strategy improved the music.

acknowledge people in the audience, to make announcements, or to maintain order. I have heard MCs remonstrating the audience that San Miguel disapproves when they fail to stand in line to bow to him, or warning people not to get too close to people coming down in possession. DJs and musicians encourage people to dance and feel the music, to make room for those possessed, to shout for the deity, and even suggest that people make a contribution to the party.

In club ceremonies, dance also plays a role ambiguously located between ritual and entertainment. Davis (1976:221) points to a growing tendency throughout the twentieth century for couples to embrace while dancing palo, as opposed to the traditional style where no embracing occurs. She sees this embrace as another aspect of the secularization tendency in palo music, in which popular music, like merengue, influences religious music. In dance clubs, palo can also be danced without embracing, but usually in the free-form solo, exhibiting influences from current popular music. Hence, the dance seems to be moving back toward an unembraced style, instead taking elements from urban musics such as reggaetón (*perreo*) and hip-hop while also incorporating moves derived from possession.[288] It is not unusual for dancers to incorporate what they see as elements of spirit possession (i.e., shaking of the body, rolling the eyes) that hint at an altered state of consciousness. In festivals as well, palo is commonly danced onstage without regard to tradition, in more theatrical ways. For example, at the Second Regional Festival in Santiago (see Chapter Three),

[288] Some informants have pointed out that reggaetón has influenced even gagá dance.

two young women danced to a Santa Marta song with sensuous belly movements, imitating a snake.[289]

As a result of an enhanced search for theatricality, changes to palo music in both clubs and New York ceremonies have brought the religion closer to its Haitian counterpart. Attempts to commodify the music and rituals of Vudú have resulted in what could be seen as a *performed* authenticity. According to drummer Joan De León Metz and other informants, in New York, as *Petró* deities have become popular because of their extroverted manifestations, musicians have been asked to sing in *Kreyòl*.[290] Although historically these types of extreme possessions by Petró (or Petwo) deities have been associated with Haiti, thus not common among Dominicans, in the last few years De León has seen mediums mounted by the Haitian deity Criminelo, who eats, stands in glass, and inserts pins into his body.[291] In Claudio Fortunato's group, songs with *Kreyòl* lyrics are adapted to palo rhythm and, as drummer Julio Valdez explains, sometimes drummers mix palo and gagá ostinatos on the same palo drum.[292] In this way, Fortunato's group has created its own hybrid style to accompany the theatrically of the Petró deities. Similarly, the drummer from Francia Reyes' group noted that he introduces a rhythmic riff used today in both gagá

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[289] Folklorist Iván Domínguez told me (personal communication, summer 2010) that, in 1974, Nino Solano, a Vudú practitioner from the town of El Seybo, was already complaining that the symbolic pursuit of the palo dance was being lost because dancers were holding hands. Nevertheless, Domínguez said, some types of *palo* rhythms have traditionally been danced with couples embracing (e.g., *gerapega*). In an effort to historicize palo dance, José Guerrero writes that the embraced style is not an influence from popular music (merengue) in palo, but that palo and merengue dance developed this embraced step at the same time (2005:165).
[290] Another favored possession is by San Elías, and De León believes this is because he expels foam through the mouth and his belly grows, and that people enjoy this performativity.
[291] Quotations by Joan De León are from interview, April 2010 and September 2010.
[292] In these mixes, the scraper *güira* plays like palo while a time line plays the gagá ostinato (personal communication, Sept. 2012).

and new merengues de calle (see Chapter Six), when the audience is reaching climax. He believes that people fall possessed at higher rates when he switches to this rhythm.[293]

Such borrowing and exchanges between genres exemplifies the directions that this music and rituals—rooted in tradition while drawing from what devotees see as modern, sensationalist, and commercial—are taking. These blends represent new directions in Dominican identity: closer to Haiti, but reinterpreted in a new Dominican context, a complicated and multi-directional move religiously, ethnically, and racially. As stated in Chapter Two, Dominicans in the twenty-first century have found ways to redefine Dominican identity in ways that encompass forms of culture previously codified as black and Haitian, into new Afro-Dominican constructions. These events and musical genres form examples of the power and malleability of popular religion and tradition, which work dialectically with modernity and popular culture, and adapt to the environments, demands, and desires of practitioners.

Vudú, Public Spaces, and Lived Religion

As Dominican migrants entered the urban and highly commercial spaces of New York City, their sacred practices, rather than disappear, dialogued with the secular, in particular, meaningful ways. And while one might be tempted to say that changes in palo music exemplify sacred music circulating as a fetishized commodity in a global market (e.g., Moroccan gnawa, or medieval chant), it is important to remember that events for which palo is played are almost exclusively intended for Dominicans. While the move to the global New York market is seen as progress for

[293] Interview Pedro Osorio, Sept. 2011.

many Dominicans, the need to hold onto their traditional religious practices is perhaps more important than ever.

Whereas, in the Dominican Republic, most mediums work from home, and botánicas are confined to city markets in marginal neighborhoods, in New York City (especially Washington Heights and the Bronx), a large number of botánicas and brujo spiritual centers are located in commercial spaces with doors and windows facing the street. Their visibility represents a reversal of dominant patterns, whereby Vudú was hidden from mainstream public view. Several aspects of the New York environment might account for this new type of freedom. Such aspects include an encounter with other Afro-Caribbean groups who celebrate their African-derived syncretic religions openly,[294] an assimilation of black consciousness ideals, the Dominican liberation from the negative consequences of publicly enacting intimacy with Haitians, and finally, the younger generation of Dominicans in New York growing up under different racialization processes, and with different identities. Throughout my research, I witnessed that club ceremonies are for the most part attended by young people,[295] both Dominican-born and first-generation Americans of Dominican parents; they have consciously or unconsciously redefined their religious practices in response to new ideological and social environments.

New York informants pointed out that many New York-based brujos and young club attendees have never attended a ceremony in the Dominican Republic. Thus, this generation is finding fresh ways of practicing the religion and creating new

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[294] Although I know of no African-derived religious community that holds their ceremonies at music clubs.

[295] Several informants had witnessed mediums in New York as young as 14 years old. Rossy la Diva had seen a five-year-old girl smoking cigars while possessed at a dance club.

hierarchies within the system. As drummer Raymond Abad stated, "the trance in secular venues is spontaneous," meaning that in the clubs anyone might "get possessed,"[296] and, through this experience, help create different ritualization processes than in traditional ceremonies. Another informant described the club festivities as democratic, everyone having access to the deities.[297] So, whereas in a festivity in the Dominican Republic those receiving the deities have, for the most part, been determined by ritual and hierarchy, in a dance club young people transform the religious narratives to include themselves.

We can theorize that without the commodification of the music, followed by the religion, such moves to public ceremonies and personal narratives would have been impossible. But while Davis observes that "In New York Vudú serves as an antidote for the problems of modern life" (1996:13), modernity has also become a vehicle through which New York Dominicans infuse Vudú ceremonies with new values and narratives. The younger and more globally-minded participants on the New York scene seem not to perceive the traditional separation of commerce and ritual. Precisely this commodification of the religion has allowed it to grow and given practitioners more choices as to how to practice and express religious sentiment.

Possession, Authenticity, and Lived Religion in Vudú

Conversations with informants in New York City, and practitioners who visit New York from the Dominican Republic, confirm that accusations of inauthenticity

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[296] Phone conversation, Sept. 2009.

[297] More traditional practitioners find a club with several people at once experiencing possession, an occurrence which might prove dangerous as energies can cross. The clubs also allow those without training to experience possession, which can also have negative consequences.

are usually expressed through the discourse surrounding possession. In traditional ceremonies, participants who are possessed enact the personality of the deity through their mannerisms, tone of voice, and body language. An assistant, or *la plaza*, helps a particular deity or person possessed of the deity obtain the paraphernalia needed for this characterization, such as cigarettes, rum, or handkerchiefs. Attendees gather around to pay reverence to the deity, and the deity in return may help them solve problems or give advice. Often the person or brujo receiving the deity is the organizer of the festivity, although anyone, theoretically, might receive a deity. In a club, one can see more spirit possession than in traditional ceremonies. This possession, often expressed through dance, is hard to separate from musical expression, although we should perhaps not see them as mutually exclusive. While sometimes my informants refer to club parties as a r*elajo* (joke), clearly they regard them, in some ways, as a part of religious expression.

The motivations and intentions of attendees and clubs owners, or of musicians and mediums, are not easily teased out. One of the most common debates I hear among musicians involves whether someone was truly possessed or not, and musicians often joke about fake possession. Many practitioners, even those attending public celebrations, think that attendees fake possession while under the effects of drugs and alcohol. Some believe that mounting deities results in the best free rum, cigars, and food at the club.[298] A drummer once joked with me at a party that "Saint Corona" and "Saint Whiskey" possessed a woman although, ironically, shortly after the woman warned him about a promise that he had not fulfilled, he believed

[298] Other informants agree that only the barefoot might receive spirits. According to one informant, if an attendee is serious about these festivities, she or he must tie a rope to the body in order not to receive the deities in such an unfavorable environment.

otherwise. Some believers say that people who pretend too much may one day be visited by a deity who wants to teach them a lesson. Others claim that these possessions must be faked because deities would never come down in such a disrespectful environment.[299]

Traditionally, when mediums summon deities they shake a bell, hit a table or altar, perform bows, turns, and salutations, or consume rum and cigars. But in a dance club, someone might suddenly fall into trance without having performed any of these ritualistic procedures. Such changes in practice have led practitioners and musicians to rethink possession, and to question the boundaries between performance and ritual. Movements might be exaggerated when falling into trance. In clubs, I have overheard dancers utter phrases such as "Vamos a montarnos" (Let's get mounted), or "Mira, me estoy montando" ("Look, I am getting mounted"), and incorporating gestures that indicate spirit possession: shaking the body, rolling the eyes, or sticking out the tongue. I once observed a woman, possessed with Anaísa, dancing with a machete in her hand, making big flamboyant gestures. Although Anaísa can manifest in this way, attendees were commenting that this was a show. They might find unusual or questionable that, when the music ends, suddenly that person stops being possessed, or even breaks into laughter. If truly possessed, as tradition has it, a person would come out of trance slowly and feel tired afterwards. Some informants point to the possession at clubs as simply *representación*, meaning that club dancers enact the

[299] Hagedorn describes a possible crisis in Afro-Cuban religious practice that could lead to possession in inappropriate spaces, perhaps caused by trauma from persecution and later seeing their rituals at state-sponsored displays for the amusement of non-believers (2001:115). In the Dominican case, I get the sense that commercial spaces are partly preferred because the festivities are fancier.

persona of the deities, without really being possessed.[300] Some accuse these dancers of enacting possession in the hope of acquiring status and admiration.

For many, the question of whether a possession is real or not determines an authentic religious experience. This question presents a false dichotomy, as possession cannot be an either/or condition. Like identity, possession might better be construed as a process rather than a state of being. To describe the state achieved by club dancers, I prefer to use the verb "trancing" to the noun "trance," as dancers are in constant search of a higher state through the music. Judith Becker has observed that questioning the authenticity of possession is always a part of possession ceremonies (2004:30). Trance and possession are defined partly by their ambiguity and "even within trancing communities, the very ambiguity of trance leads to conflicting interpretations" (ibid). Uncertainty and speculation about whether or not one is actually possessed is also common in trance traditions (Kapchan 2007:52).

Public Vudú ceremonies and the debates surrounding them are defining and changing what it means to worship, what it means to be possessed, and even how one defines one's own religiosity. After all, religion is socially constructed. In the five years I have interviewed informants, the opinion regarding the intentionality of these ceremonies has shifted from mostly skeptical to acknowledging the religious aspects of club celebrations. At the beginning these palo festivities—so radically different from what religious "ritual" had previously looked like—were often viewed as merely business opportunities or entertainment. Attendees were perceived as attracted primarily to the music or alcohol, and perhaps more to the trance and drugs than to ritualistic practices. Today definitions have shifted, and most informants

[300] In Spanish, representación refers to an image of something else, which is real.

acknowledge that club festivities, although they carry elements from club culture, are not fully secular either. For example, the association of "trance" with drugs, or possession with "religion," comprise gray areas currently being negotiated. Pedro Pablo Osorio, a New York-based palo musician, told me: "If people are willing to pay so much money to go to a palo party, it is because they truly believe."

Osorio's reversal of previous logic, where commercialism might point away from authentic religion, is echoed by other informants who conclude that New York practitioners paying for ceremonies is *not* a sign that a party is secular; instead it points to their acute religiosity. Singer María Terrero noted that five years ago she believed possession at clubs was phony, but now believes it impossible that so many people would fake it.[301] As Kapchan remarks, "possession is a state of embodied power, but in a very specific context" (2007:177). The current situation is complicated by this shifting context. It might seem as though trance and spirit possession are conflated into a single event, one coming from club culture, the other from religion. But while this distinction may have been possible at the beginning of the movement, the current scene reflects otherwise for both participants and observers.

Although the presence of Vudú in dance clubs is relatively new, secular practices have always been part of this, or any, religion. For example, in saint festivities, entertainment has been provided for attendees in the form of music and dance; food and alcohol are also always prepared. As the music has taken to the stage and venues outside of traditional spaces, more ambiguity has grown between the folk, popular, and the ritual. Questions of authenticity arise everywhere palo music is

[301] Personal communication, Sept. 2011.

played, from the streets of Washington Heights to the palm leaf *enramadas* in the rural mountains of Bánica, to the recording studios of Manhattan. As Afro-Dominican music becomes more visible, one sees people mounting spirits while attending a music festival, or attendees at a club rhythmically waving handkerchiefs, often unaware of their traditional use in "binding" the spirits to those who mount a deity.[302]

These tensions, ambiguities, and uncertainties often play out in very real ways. In the 2010 Sainaguá festival (see Chapter Three), a young woman sweated so heavily it looked like she might collapse. When the Red Cross showed up to take her to a hospital, people around her explained that she was not ill but possessed; they knew she had this ability because her father did. Others claimed she was performing to get attention from men. Those who believed she was possessed were concerned that the deity had no chance to enjoy the music and would be taken from the festival arena by the Red Cross. At the same time, another woman, apparently mounted with Santa Marta, blew cigar smoke in people's faces. Those around her said she was being paid by the organizers of the event to pretend to be mounted, a statement I have also heard at Vudú festivities in clubs. One attendee said, "She is all about rum and spectacle. She cannot be mounted." All of these shades of performance and possession represent both long traditions and new manifestations. Debates over authenticity and reality are also nothing new, but recent shifts have changed the ground of the discourse.

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[302] Handkerchiefs are traditionally used to seal and strengthen the deity to the medium's body, as well as to deter interference from other deities. Once the deity enters the medium, the handkerchief is tied to the head or other body part. Handkerchiefs are also used to invoke or identify the deity, and to perform a cleansing. Handkerchiefs are baptized and each medium receives handkerchiefs in his/her baptism.

By emphasizing trancing rather than possession or trance, we resituate the occurrence as one that is always in a state of becoming. By putting the emphasis on action, it becomes something that cannot be faked, but rather an activity that is part of practice. The "meaning" of this term depends on the person possessed, rather than on her relationship to some larger system of belief.[303] The power no longer resides only within the priests or the drums, becoming one that people can take into their own hands. Where, after all, does the religion manifest if not inscribed in these bodies experiencing transformation during ceremonies? So, while the debates among practitioners over "authentic" versus "faked" possession are important, as in studying the act of prayer, it is the person praying that is the subject for the scholar, not attempting to determine objectively whether the prayer was somehow "answered."

In trying to understand the act of possession and its surrounding discourses, we might remember what this act might afford to practitioners. As Janice Boddy points out, "phenomena we bundle loosely as possession are part of daily experience, not just dramatic ritual. They have to do with one's relationship to the world, with selfhood" (1994:414). In the context of Dominican migrants in New York City, possession can provide protest, catharsis, and resistance to the marginality and racism

[303] It seems that the intention or expectation of the practitioners is more important than the belief and the power of specific forms of music, which explains why people at clubs receive deities even while reggaetón is being played. Often the possession is achieved through recorded music because of constraints in spaces and budget. Hagedorn studied the reception of various audiences (believers and non-believers) to staged performances of Cuban *Santería*. Even though Santería devotees, just like Vudú ones, insist there is a difference between secular and sacred performances, the study showed that the main reaction to the performance depended on the intent of the participants. Thus, the same performance might constitute a religious experience for some but not for others. Hagedorn concluded that "the meanings of the performances [sacred or secular] of the Conjunto Folklórico depend on the backgrounds and expectations of the audience, and how these diverse experiential memories are communicated and understood by the performers" (2001:69).

experienced in the host country. Today, practitioners acquire status and express pride in their ability to mount deities both in New York and the Dominican Republic. Young disenfranchised Dominicans in New York use possession and trance as a way of exhibiting cultural identities they have learned from elders, yet recreating the act of trancing through their own generation's music and dance, thereby inserting themselves into the Dominican narrative of religion, ethnicity, and race.[304]

Conclusion: Practicing Race

This chapter is informed by the works of recent religious studies scholars who have expanded how we define and talk about non-institutionalized religious practices. Theorists of religion, such as Robert Orsi and Talal Asad, have asserted that religion is not defined by a "transhistorical essence," and that not only do religions and their practices change over time, but also what people understand to be "religion." This is perhaps most important in forms of "popular" religion, which exists outside formal declarations or institutions.

Throughout this work, my understanding of some recent shifts in the practice and performing of Vudú—and other Afro-Dominican religious and musical-ritual genres—has been enlarged by the concept of "lived religion." As employed by scholars such as Orsi, the term is useful for distinguishing the actual experience of religious persons from the prescribed religion of institutionally-defined beliefs and

[304] Many cultural activists approve of festival attendees dancing to Afro-Dominican music even if they fail to fully understand its use for ritualistic practices (see Chapter Three). My informants also approve of the repressed religion's move to dance clubs as a way to guarantee the spread and acceptance of Vudú. While the validity of the spirit possession might be in doubt, they believe the music's becoming danceable may be the only way Vudú can survive, and view the open embrace of Vudú and possession as a vehicle through which Dominicans will gain a positive awareness of their African heritage and blackness.

practices. Although lived religion pertains to the individual, scholars remind us that it is not "merely subjective," but that people construct their religious worlds together. Young Dominicans are not re-inventing traditions one by one, but rather through acts of communal dancing, singing, drinking, and trancing together. The act of possession or trancing is, as Becker writes, "a learned bodily behavior acted out within a culturally pregiven religious narrative . . . one learns not only how to imagine trance and how to behave in trance but also how to go into a trance" (2004:41). Within the context of these clubs, this definition could include not only that attendees bring learned behavior to the dancing, but also that the dancing is part of the process of learning these behaviors: attendees are changing the "pre-given religious narrative" both inside and outside of the club scene.

In a new introduction to his influential book on lived religion, *The Madonna of 115th Street,* Orsi comments on practices that have long been considered outside of accepted religious practice:

> the relationship of people and communities to the real presences of their gods and spirits and what follows from these relationships for everyday life, including civic life, constitute a powerful alternative experience of the modern—not in reaction to the modern, not as atavism or survival, but as another way of being in the world. (2010:xx)

As religious studies have moved from "popular religion" to "lived religion," the field has also moved its theoretical approach toward the idea of spiritual "presence." In other words, in talking about possession, scholars are looking for ways to talk about

spirits as real entities and experiences, not simply as identifying certain social structures or symbols, but as having a "presence that becomes autonomous within particular life worlds" (ibid). In this view, when talking about possession, especially in discussing religious rituals enacted in commercial clubs, rather than question how "real" possession is, we should recognize a participant's experience as Santa Marta, for example, as a real part of their lived experience of the club, the music, and their religion.

The study of lived religion also breaks away from the Protestant bias towards studying what one "believes," and instead focuses on practices and activities. Applied to the material of this chapter, we focus our interpretive gaze less on the authenticity of possession and more on the activity itself as a source of religious identity and agency. Scholars have argued that religion, like gender or racial identity, is socially constructed. Recent work in this area—which might easily apply to my ideas about music and race—encourages us to learn to "craft new theories of subjectivity, insisting that it no longer be defined in terms of meaning and intentionality, but through the signifying practices of language and action" (Furey 2012:9). In making this application, however, the danger has been to deny the subject any agency. This scholarly trend has, as Constance Furey writes, strongly undermined the assumption that "the object of the religionist's inquiry is (and should be) a freely volitional subject" (2012:9). We must see these subjects as moving beyond the binary of freedom and determinism; instead see that their engagement with a previously private religion in open view represents a complex engagement in crafting new racial identities. Moving away from beliefs to the practices of agents—both individual and

social—allows us to see practitioners, musicians, and dancers, not simply as reacting to the sensationalist, but as true co-creators of a racial narrative in which Vudú and palo music play essential roles.

Chapter Six
Embracing the Black Atlantic: Black Aesthetics and Identity in *Merengue*

If we were to give Dominican popular music one overarching narrative from the 1930s into the twenty-first century, we could say that while it began in an effort to claim Spanish tradition through Hispanicized merengue, it has gradually moved towards previously shunned Afro-Dominican genres such as gagá and has borrowed black diasporic aesthetics from genres such as hip hop and dancehall. This process could indicate a historical and cultural progression toward an acceptance of an African and black identity. However, as I have tried to show, this narrative is not nearly so teleological and is a complicated one that reveals many sides of identity formation. In this chapter, I will identify recent shifts in Dominican merengue as expressions of race and ethnicity, demonstrating how merengue has made visible previously confined dark-skinned identities while at the same time contributing to the continuation of existing racial attitudes.

As the music and aesthetics of previous marginalized black communities find their way into the national popular music, and as urban musicians embrace influences from genres of the Black Atlantic (e.g. hip hop and dancehall),[305] there is a need for more studies that scrutinize the current darkening of Dominican genres and that question whether these variations on the national merengue constitute a break in the

[305] Some examples of this Black Atlantic influence can be seen in the use of pseudonyms for names of artists, and in the ways that current Dominican popular music is danced. Rap and dembow Dominicans artists nowadays use pseudonyms such as El Famoso Biberón (The Famous Bottle) and El Lápiz Consciente (The Conscious Pencil). In terms of dance, the Dominican Republic is losing its characteristically Spanish-derived couple dance, as even merengue is danced by unembraced couples. In merengue de calle, the speed of the music does not allow for turns and figures, and many times the couple dances face-to-face but not embracing. Dembow dancers use moves from dancehall and hip hop.

ways that Dominicans have traditionally conceptualized and expressed their black identity. As we will see, traditional *merengue* also borrows from and converses with Afro-diasporic genres, which would point to more of a continuum than a break. And there are many contradictory ways to hear and interpret the blackness as it is presented in new forms of merengue.

The main new style of merengue I am interested in here was derogatorily labeled *merengue de calle* (merengue of the street) during the 1990s, and it constitutes the most popular merengue among the masses of Dominicans today. What makes merengue de calle such a significant intervention into the narrative of music and racial identity is that it is largely informed by two Afro-Dominican forms of music that were until recently discredited as too black and too foreign: c*ocolo* and *gagá* music. These two genres were imported to the Dominican Republic by Afro-Caribbean communities (see Chapter Two), but have formed part of Dominican culture and, especially since the 1970s, Dominican carnival. Scholars often represent carnival as a reversal of society's order. Dominican carnival is an arena where previously Afro (and as explained later, cross-dressed) identities have been able to participate, complicating national projects.[306] What is interesting about this phenomenon is that in many ways Dominican diversity—often repressed in mainstream entertainment—has been showcased in carnival for decades. In this chapter, I look at the movement of dark-skinned, lower-class, and cross-dressed identities from carnival to mainstream through merengue de calle. I will also look briefly at a more recent genre of music, dembow, which is relevant for this

[306] Carnival has also had a connection with Vudú, as Dagoberto Tejeda explains. Many carnival revelers get blessings from Vudú deities and some carnival attendees experience trance (2003:140-142).

dissertation because, as a spinoff of Jamaican dancehall, it moves Dominican identity closer to its Anglo-Caribbean neighbors and to the larger Black Atlantic.[307] Through dembow, working-class Dominicans are active agents in redefining Dominican history, reasserting the identities first brought to visibility by merengue de calle.

Because of its carnival connection, this new merengue facilitated the emergence of identities once relegated to working-class neighborhoods and only visible during carnival. My turn to popular music is an attempt to address a common question in contemporary scholarship: How can we listen to these silenced voices? And more specifically, how do we read articulations of blackness that are not verbally expressed? It is in addressing this question that a study of the music sound is helpful.

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that Dominicans have historically embodied blackness while not conforming to global expressions of blackness and of black pride. But "black" ways of thinking, musicking, and dancing have recently become more prominent in Dominican urban music, thereby challenging the usual binary paradigms of Dominican identity. As we move into the music and music culture of the twenty-first century, I will reframe some of the questions I have been asking throughout the dissertation: What do these recent musical borrowings from Afro-Dominican and Black Atlantic musics say about Dominican identity? Are new genres of music such as merengue de calle and dembow pointing to a more explicit affirmation of blackness by Dominicans? Does the current visibility of Afro-Dominican music enact a changing sense of identity in Dominicans or a shift in the patterns of expressions of blackness?

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[307] "Dem Bow" was a song by Shabba Ranks, which was popular in Panamá and Puerto Rico and laid the foundation for reggaetón. In the Dominican Republic, the faster Dominican version of reggaetón is called dembow.

Historicizing the Blackness in Merengue

As demonstrated in previous chapters, Dominican blackness, while symbolically masked and ideologically denied, has often been clearly musically encoded. While conservative narratives about Dominican merengue by authors such as Luis Alberti, Enrique de Marchena, and Flerida de Nolasco tended to trace its origins to Spain,[308] the national merengue actually presented a counter-narrative of embodied blackness. Read closely, merengue shows that Dominicans have always already been part of the "relational network" (Gilroy 2000:13) among different black communities worldwide. Dominican *merengueros* (merengue musicians) consistently borrowed from Afro-diasporic genres[309] for their musical and compositional inspiration, proudly sported Afros,[310] and, in recent decades, have adopted urban fashion as marketing strategies. Afro-Dominican genres and themes have also been musically[311] and discursively a part of the national merengue, as lyrics related to Vudú and mediumship have also been a part of the Hispanicized merengue. The national merengue has lyrics dealing with Vudú deities such as Anaísa and Candelo, and many narrate the need of *brujería* for winning love. [312]

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[308] See Chapter Two of this work.
[309] Wilfrido Vargas, one of the most popular merengue band leaders of the 1970s and 80s, incorporated into *merengue* the most diverse array of music styles, from French Caribbean *zouk* and *konpa* to Colombian *cumbia*, hip-hop, and jazz. See "El Jardinero" for rap influences, and "El Calor" for influences from the Charleston.
[310] For example, merengueros Johnny Ventura, Fausto Rey, and Wilfrido Vargas.
[311] An example is "La Ventanita" of Sergio Vargas, which uses the triangle used in cocolo music although more for effect than as a rhythmic ostinato. But also prior to Kinito Méndez' "A palo limpio," others included it.
[312] I have been compiling a list of merengues and merengueros in which Vudú and other forms of folk beliefs have been addressed prior to the 1990s. Some of these are: "El Brujo" and "Anaísa" by Cuco Valoy, "Candelo" by Los hijos del rey, "El lamento de Fermando" by Johnny Ventura, "Mampote" by Kaki Vargas, "Candelo" by Francisco Ulloa, "El Haitiano" and "Guede Hosu De Ja Cua" by Guandulito, "Papá Liborio" by Jorge González, "Siña Juanica," by Félix López, "Brujería" by Toño Rosario," and Johnny Ventura's 'Apágame la

Merengueros have historically been well versed in the popular music tastes of the African diaspora and many adapted Afro-diasporic hits to merengue rhythm. For example, one of the most popular merengues of all times, the 1980's "La Medicina" by Wilfrido Vargas, is an adaptation of the international hit "Zouk la sé sèl médikaman nou ni" by the French Caribbean group Kassav.[313] Examples of Afro-diasporic interactions are numerous, but in Peter Wade's terms, a process of resignification was applied to popular music "by which particular elements become incorporated (accommodated) into nationalist versions of the nation culture" and their significance defined within the central value complex of the dominant groups (1997:87). In other words, using Wade's analysis of Colombia's *música tropical,* one can say that until recently blackness in merengue didn't disappear but was diluted stylistically; its meaning was re-articulated while other musics became the expressions of blackness (2000:10-11). In merengue, especially in the Trujillo era, percussion was kept to a minimum and buried deep in the recording mix. Instead, bandleaders emphasized melodies and harmonies in European styles and big band instrumentation while the Afro-Dominican genres treated in this dissertation became

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vela." Other forms of Dominican popular music have these themes as well (e.g. "No es brujería" by El varón de la bachata, "Candelo" by La Familia André, and "El Haitianito" by Luis Vargas).

[313] Other adaptions of Afro-diasporic hits include "Skokkian" by Los magos del ritmo (a South African song), Johnny Ventura's acclaimed "Bobiné," which is originally by the group Los diplomáticos de Haiti. The all-female merengue band popular in the 1980s, Las Chicán, had already used the "Zamina Waka Waka" that Shakira used for the World Cup 2010 theme for their song "El Negro no puede." "El africano" by Wilfrido Vargas was originally by Colombian composer Calixto Ochoa, "El jardinero" was based on the Haitian *konpa* tune "Barie" by DP Express).

the repositories of Dominican blackness, serving to emphasize a homogeneous national culture, which was viewed as not black, but mixed.[314]

In contrast to its perceived Eurocentric roots, merengue instead performed the dialectical relationship between ideology and everyday practice, between the macro level structural anti-black ideologies and the micro level human action that enacted intimacy with black genres and Afro-diasporic communities transnationally. In recent years, through creative new genres of music, this connection with the larger African diaspora has been even further enacted.[315] George Lipsitz comments on this aspect of merengue, writing that, "the music [merengue] that once emblematized the ideal of a unified and racially homogeneous nation-state now reveals the multiracial character of the country and registers the inexorable interconnectedness of contemporary culture and commerce in a transnational frame" (2007:151). Merengue as it stands reveals the complexity of the nation and dramatizes the fact that it is "more connected to other nations than the old nationalist merengues could ever admit…" (ibid.:151). For example, it is easy now to see and hear the connection of today's merengue with rap music and its connections to Spain are becoming harder to make.

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[314] See Isar Godreau (2006) for similar studies in Puerto Rico regarding bomba music.

[315] Today, merengueros de calle record with major international figures such as Daddy Yankee, Shakira, and Pitbull (see for example "Que tengo que hacer" recorded by Daddy Yankee and Omega, "Mi alma se muere" by Omega and Pitbull, and "Rabiosa" and "Addicted to You" by Shakira and El Cata). But most importantly, current urban Dominican artists are in tune with R&B and hip hop and borrow from these genres. For example one of the most well-known merengues by Omega, "Tú si quiere, tú no quiere," is "You Don't Want It" by R&B artist Akon. "Porque tú no 'ta pa mi" is based on Akon's "Sorry Blame It on Me." The same is happening to bachata with groups such as Aventura incorporating R&B into bachata, creating a New York school of bachata. Artists such as Prince Royce collaborate with Ben E. King for "Stand by Me." Romeo sings "Promise" with Usher.

In *merengue de orquesta* (the national merengue), the African contribution—syncopated rhythms, percussion instruments—gave merengue its excitement and danceable qualities, but this blackness was kept at a safe distance from the elites and their nation project. A new development in recent decades is that merengue and other forms of Dominican popular music have abandoned many of the melodic and harmonic qualities associated with European music, and merengueros have emphasized grooves and minimalist rhythmic aesthetics, locating merengue closer to what is understood worldwide as black music.[316] The many Afro-Dominican and Afro-diasporic influences on merengue are nowadays recognized by most Dominicans and are placing merengue, for the first time, according to the Dominican elite imaginary, in intimate connection with transnational black communities. These connections create a strong counter-discourse to monolithic views of identity previously hegemonic among the elite, who saw merengue as the emblematic music of the Hispanic Dominican nation. The pre-1990 merengue and the current merengue de calle can be contrasted by the fact that blackness in the latter is not sonically re-signified according to elite aesthetics and polite culture. The new merengue emphasizes street carnivalesque aesthetics where transgression is in order, upsetting

[316] All Dominican genres these days borrow from globally recognized black genres of music. What is interesting is that influences from R&B often go unnoticed, because Dominicans (unless diasporic) are not familiar with this genre. In the case of hip hop influences, the scenario is different because most Dominicans do recognize that as black music and also react to hip hop's spoken character as corrupting the melodiousness (and hence sophistication) of previous merengues. Hip hop influences are seen as rough and degrading to elite values, both aesthetically and behavioral. However, bachata infused with R&B influences (such as the group Aventura), while at first regarded as too "Spanglish" and "Dominicanyork," has come to be accepted by all levels of society. I argue that this is because R&B-infused bachata is perceived as feminine, and because bachateros still present their music in unaggressive ways, which does not upset the image, respectability discourse, or status quo of elite Dominicans.

previously unwritten codes of respectability that have been historically connected to the elites and Dominicanness.[317]

The transgression of merengue de calle (and current urban musics) is present in the lyrics as well. Traditional merengue lyrics, although many times portraying the life of the lower and darker-skinned classes, featured clever sexual double entendre, and did so in a humorous and non-confrontational manner that did not upset the behavioral moral codes associated with Dominican culture.[318] In contrast, merengue de calle's characteristic graphic vulgarity and claims of sexual prowess can be seen as part of the counter-hegemonic strategies of lower-class men, who cannot keep up with the growing consumerism present in Dominican society and for whom neoliberal policies and migration have not taken them out of the nation's margins.[319] Many times their protest gets relegated to the realm of gender, as working-class men fantasize with having access to material goods, including good-looking women[320] This economic success and social mobility would, as Reid

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[317] This chapter has been informed by ideas of "modern blackness" developed by Deborah Thomas in reference to Jamaica. She describes modern blackness as "a more racialized, individualist, autonomous, and consumerist vision of progress whereby a great many lower-class black Jamaican men and women are defining citizenship transnationally and therefore are increasingly bypassing local middle-class leadership to get what they need" (2006:335).
[318] I remember listening to the merengue "Plátano maduro no vuelve a verde" and not realizing until I was 16 years old that it referred to the fact that an old penis is not the same as a young one. Nowadays the language is so graphic that it cannot be missed.
[319] Hoffnung-Garskof explains that migrants from the United States have been blamed since the second half of the 1970s for bringing to the Dominican Republic materialism, corruption, crime, and aberrant behavior like drug use and perverse sexuality (2008:6-7, 192). These influences would probably have still come to the Dominican Republic even if migration had not happened (8-9), because Dominican capitalism generated it its own nationalized version of mass consumer culture (237).
[320] See Deborah Pacini's writings on bachata for similar studies of gender through Dominican popular music.

Andrews states, "whiten" them (2004).[321] These genres perform a crisis of masculinity among Dominican men and one can read the superficially misogynistic lyrics as also being about social impotence, lack of trust in the government, and inability to create social and economic change.

Afro-Dominican Origins of Merengue de Calle

The birth of merengue de calle involves multiple factors—cultural, musical, political, and technological. But one place to begin the story is with the pioneering recordings of an Afro-Dominican music known as *Alí Babá*. Alí Babá is a carnivalesque genre of music derived from the music of the cocolo Caribbean migrants (see Chapter Two).[322] According to Dagoberto Tejeda, the origins of the Alí Babá genre can be traced back to the early 1980s, when dancer Luis Roberto Torres (or "Chachón") was in need of new costumes for his carnival float. His inspiration for Middle Eastern attire was the towel turban his mother wore when stepping out of the shower. He was also inspired by the music of the cocolos, using their bass and snare drum while sometimes adding more percussion instruments (especially idiophones) and single-note brass horns.[323] For the "oriental" float, Chachón also developed a

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[321] George Reid Andrews states: "Racial markers—skin color, hair, facial features—are not necessarily conclusive in Latin America, where economic success and other forms of upward mobility can 'whiten' dark-skinned people in ways that were not the case in the United States" (2004:5)

[322] Cocolo percussionist Alexander Callender demonstrated to me the similarities between Alí Babá and the cocolo rhythm called *mascarade*. Personal Communication, April 2012.

[323] Rossy Díaz (2013) considers Alí Babá a mix of *guloya* [cocolo music], gagá, and military band music. It uses cornets, bass and snare drums, and trombones together with gagá *vaksins* (*fututos* in Spanish) and whistles.

style of hyper-kinetic dance.[324] The Alí Babá *comparsa* (carnival float) was successful from the start, and from the 2000s until today, Alí Babá music can be found throughout the country, and it can already be considered *the* music of Dominican carnival.[325]

Ali Babá became important for the genesis of this new merengue when the Fundación Cultural Bayahonda[326] recorded the Alí Babá group Los Reyes del Carnaval on the 2001 (reissued in 2006) CD of carnival music. This was the first or one of the first formal recordings of Alí Babá. Just like Kinito Méndez's *A palo limpio*, Alí Babá became massively popular outside of its traditional arena, moving from the street to dance clubs. As Alí Babá ensembles began performing outside the carnival milieu, identities such as cross-dressers moved out of the carnival sphere as well.[327] Since the recording by Los Reyes del Carnaval, there has been a proliferation of other Alí Babá groups, who looked to achieve commercial success (e.g. Alí Banda and Jacubanda). As the popularity of Alí Babá music increased, Alí Babá groups began looking for new sounds, adding more brass instruments to their mostly

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[324] Many influences have been attributed to the dance of Alí Babá, from the dance of the cocolos to the choreography of the merengue music group Los Kenton. For Rossy Díaz (2013), the dance has influences from guloyas and martial arts. For Alí Babá comparsas examples, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfPA5bAdYFs and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts_n_nFLphw

[325] Jessica Hayek states that "in 1993, as the popularity of the Alí-Babá comparsas grew, carnival organizers were compelled to create a new, separate competitive prize category for the Alí-Babás" (2010:83).

[326] Foundación Bayahonda also produced the CD *Musica Raiz* so relevant in the move of Vudú ceremonies to clubs (see Chapter Five). It was founded and directed by cultural activist Roldán Mármol in Santo Domingo.

[327] The popularity of the Alí Babá groups has been such that President Leonel Fernández used this sound for his 2004 campaign. The slogan 'E pa fuera que van" was sung to Alí Babá rhythm and was highly televised with many civilians giving testimony of the wrong doings of the present government. The fact that Pres. Trujillo campaigned with merengue *típico* in the 1930s and nowadays we hear Alí Babá symbolizes the new directions in Dominican culture. In the late 1990s, the popular merengue de calle "Ay que olla" by La Banda Chula was used as part of political propaganda as well.

percussion ensembles, as well as the characteristic Dominican merengue percussion instrument, the *tambora*, forming the core of what we know today as merengue de calle.[328] Conversely, merengue artists started borrowing from carnival musics, similarly to the incorporating of *Vudú*'s music into Kinito Méndez's merengues, to appeal to the masses and to find new commercial sounds.[329] Alí Babá has also influenced genres such as dembow and rap.[330]

Another carnival rhythm that influenced merengue de calle comes from gagá (see Chapter Two),[331] a genre that has been included in the Carnival National Parade since the 1980s. Gagá groups, as well as cocolo dancers, have won many carnival competitions, and during carnival time, rural gagá groups visit the capital city; in some cases urban gagás get created in major Dominican cities. Gagá revelers, cross-dressers (what Dominicans call *travestis*), and cocolo migrants have been included in this milieu, which is otherwise uncharacteristic of Dominican society. Gagá revelers are consistently harassed by police, and in 2012 were prohibited from marching in several cities in the Dominican Republic. Cross-dressed men have been traditionally

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[328] Cuco Valoy had composed "Yo quiero mi cuca" with Alí Babá rhythm in the early 1990s, but this was rare until this new type of merengue.

[329] The same process that we have seen in palo music, which is borrowing merengue aesthetics (Chapter Five), can be seen in gagá music, which is incorporating the snare and bass drums found in Ali-Babá and merengue de calle. This incorporation helps amplify the sound of the gagá revelers as they proceed into towns. The bass drum doubles the muffled downbeat of the drum (*tambú*) of gagá. The snare drum plays the pattern of the *catalié* drum, an idiomatic borrowing as both are played with sticks.

[330] See "Haciendo bembita" by El Batallón and "Ayy" by Amara la Negra. Both videos show the connection to carnival with visual images as well.

[331] Many merengues by Amarfis y la Banda de Attake and La Banda Gorda are examples of the influences from gagá in merengue de calle. Hear Amarfis "Yemayá" "El concón," and "To la mujere rapan" by Amarfis. In "To la mujere rapan," Amarfis even included a gagá chant in Haitian *Kreyòl*. Also hear "Traigo fuego" and "Déjalo ahí" by La banda gorda. For a video of merengue that shows gagá, see "Pa ke suden los cachetes" by Pacheman y Griselito (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCFqqEVLCTU). This merengue was composed by adding lyrics to "Gagá electrónico," discussed later in the chapter.

seen in lower-class neighborhoods and most acutely during carnival, but harassed (and even put in jail) when outside these spheres[332] Cross-dressed men have also been a part of rural gagá celebrations as men can become queens in the gagá society.[333]

While merengue de calle clearly borrows sonic elements from gagá and Alí Babá music, other genres have also influenced this new merengue. Musicologist Rossy Díaz (2006 and 2011) has traced these other influences, and considers the merengue group La Coco Band the father of the merengue de calle because of their frequent and percussive breaks, fast tempos, and use of street lyrics and chants. Their energetic and sometimes nonsense lyrics include brief choruses and an emphasis on the *mambo* or *jaleo*, which is the third and most celebratory section of a merengue (2006:30-31).[334] All these elements give the music a carnivalesque feel. This feel is reflected not only in the sound, but also in the lyrics of merengue de calle. These lyrics range from sexual street chants (very common in gagá revelry)[335] to depicting graphic sexual scenarios. For example, in "El pelerío," El plebe describes the different styles of women's pubic hair: Afro style, with hair, and modern style,

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[332] The relationship between carnival, homosexuality and the new urban musics is also apparent in the video "Ayy" by one of the newest dembow artists, Amara la Negra. In this video she features images of carnival. This is a song about sexual attraction, but she features the *Roba la Gallina* (a cross-dressed character from carnival) and gagá ensembles. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXebGKxxW-Q). See also the dembow "Lassy" by La Delfi in which this cross-dressed man (later discussed in detail) shows up dressed as Roba la Gallina (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzDvTSdgxwo). Dembow also connects with Vudú. In the video to "Tamo en cocoró," La Delfi anounces how sexually out of control women (including the cross-dressed man) are. At the end of the video, he calls himself (the cross-dressed man) "La Vudú."

[333] As stated, homosexuality in Vudú is not only tolerated, but often welcomed.

[334] Their style was followed by groups such as Tulile, Oro Solido, Julián Oro Duro, Amarfi y la Banda de Atakke, la Banda Gorda, among others.

[335] In gagá, there are revelers in the back of the musicians and dancers screaming sexual chants such as: "Qué es lo que tú quieres que te diga?, Mamaguevo!" (What is it that you want to be called?, Cocksucker!). Hear this chant in a merengue de calle in the following link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMZeAHQNYfw

shaved. In "La mano" by Los tres desafinao, a man's acute masturbation is emphasized in a humorous narration of a woman having left him.[336]

Characteristic of hybrid musical styles at the turn of the twenty-first century, merengue de calle[337] has received many names throughout the years, often referring to sub-styles within it such as merengue Alí Babá.[338] Other names refer to the celebratory character of merengue de calle: *mambo* (because the jaleo third portion of merengue has been called mambo by band leaders since the 1990s);[339] *merengue de chercha* (revelry); merengue hip hop; *merengue barrial* (from shantytown); *merengue sin letra* (without words, as many merengues de calle just have street chants as hooks as opposed to the large strophes of previous merengues); and *mambo violento* alluding to the violent and percussive nature of this new merengue. The origins of these names, as well as the initiator of each of the influences on merengue de calle, are part of a story too complex to be traced. Much of its development as a new genre, occurring in the shantytowns of the capital city away from media and scholarly attention, was not documented. [340] Merengue de calle is perhaps most accurately seen as an umbrella term for an array of different rhythms, and its name has to do with the fact that this merengue grew out of carnival and street aesthetics.

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[336] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRmhqAZeHi8

[337] Some of my informants credit merenguero Nelson de la Olla from the group La Banda Chula as the first that used this name in 1996.

[338] For some examples of merengue de calle with Alí Babá rhythm, see "La macate" and "Me engañaste" by Omega. Other examples are "Pasando de piquete," "Yuca," "Dame mi," and many other merengues by Tulile.

[339] Mambo is a name given to the third part of a traditional merengue characterized for its light mood, call and response, harmonic simplicity (two chords), and catchy phrases. The word is almost synonymous in Spanish with swing, so *merengueros* would use expressions such as 'Let's mambo" to announce that merengue is going to switch to its most rhythmic and improvisatory section. Rossy Díaz explains mambo was a term used when bands such as Jossie Esteban, Oro Solido and Peña Suazo referred to the jaleo section (2006:37).

[340] Still today, after a decade of popularity of this new merengue, studies are scarce. Most upper-class or elite Dominicans still do not regard the music as a serious art form.

Embracing Black Aesthetics

Merengue de calle differs musically from the national merengue in many aspects, and in this dialectic can be found a musical debate over racial identity. Although often understood as an issue of class, the relationship between the two forms can also be seen as part of a long national conversation about blackness. Compositional form is one of the major differences. The traditional merengue musical form consists of a short introduction or *paseo* (eight measures) and two other longer sections, the merengue and the *jaleo*. The merengue section features the European-influenced melody, while the jaleo consists of a two-measure repeating pattern based on dominant and tonic harmonies and exhibits more African features than the first (Austerlitz 1997:38). The jaleo has historically been the most dynamic, upbeat, and virtuosic part of the merengue genre. What emerges in merengue de calle is an emphasis on the mambo (jaleo) festive section, sometimes even dropping all the other "European-derived" sections. Merengue de calle tends to repeat or consists primarily of catchy phrases, which get broken up by short phrases or interjections, many times rapped more than sung.[341] Rap-informed, through-composed lyrics have also influenced merengue de calle (e.g. "La vecina" by Toxic Crow). Previous merengues tended to have longer verses and to be centered on a narrative as opposed to a catchy hook phrase. Some merengues de calle are informally recorded, not arranged, and are minimalist,[342] consisting of rhythmic patterns with street chants. The emphasis on this

[341] See "El coño" by Oro Solido, "El café" by Tito Swing, "La vaca" by Mala Fe, "El bembe" by Banda Soberbia, as well as "El camarón" and "El carrito rojo" by Silvio Mora.
[342] See "El huevo" by Tito Swing, "Vamo a majar cacao" by Ala Jaza, "El camarón" and 'El tomate" by Silvio Mora, "Paleta" by Omega, "El hot dog" by Toño Rosario, and "El guallo" de amarfis.

music is often given to its catchy, cathartic, and humorous qualities.[343] Merengue de calle emphasizes repetition and groove more than melodic and harmonic variety, elements which point more towards music of the African diaspora than to Europe.

Besides changes in the compositional form, merengue de calle also varies in its rhythm, although sometimes not as much as one would think when listening to elites' disfavor of the genre. The *conga* drum in merengues de calle sometimes contains a rhythmic pattern very similar to the main drum in gagá (*tambú*),[344] and many merengues de calle use the Alí Babá carnival rhythm. Sometimes, patterns of the *catalié* gagá drum also get transported to the tambora or conga. The band Amarfis y la banda de Attake, for example, transposes patterns inspired by the catalié to the tambora; however, most merengue de calle include the familiar *maco*[345] rhythm in combination with others derived from gagá and Alí Babá.[346] Merengue de calle uses a muted bass drum instead of the open drum sound in the national merengue. This muted drum marking the beat is present in the conga and the bass, and many informants point out that it comes from gagá music as well. The güira player scratches the instrument on every beat, resembling the scraper instrument in gagá.

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[343] What Dominicans call *chercha*. For example "Y to eso e guto," in which the singer describes the first encounter with a woman. He fell in love by phone, but then when they met, she was dirty, uncombed, toothless, did not have a butt, and is hunchback and cross-eyed (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cO_tLLwN7Vc).
[344] E.g. "Traigo fuego" by La banda gorda.
[345] The most used merengue rhythm since the 1970's.
[346] The same process that we have seen in palo music and Vudú, where palo music is incorporating merengue aesthetics, can be seen also in gagá music, which today incorporates the snare and bass drums found in Ali-Babá and merengue de calle (for the last 10 years or so). This incorporation helps amplify the sound of the gagá revelers as they proceed to towns. In many ways the bass drum is played in the same muffled way as the tambú of gagá. Sometimes the snare drum plays the pattern of the catalié drum, an idiomatic borrowing as both are played with sticks.

The tambora rhythm has often been claimed as the defining aspect of the national merengue. One regularly hears in newspapers, TV, and in conversations with musicians and elite Dominicans that merengue de calle has a different (i.e. less prestigious) rhythm than merengue, and should therefore be considered another genre. These comments reflect the concern of middle and upper-class Dominicans who do not want to be represented by a merengue that is vulgar and often unpolished. As stated, most critics neglect the fact that many merengues de calle *do* use the maco rhythm common in the national merengue, even if the rest of the rhythmic section differs.[347]

The influences from Afro-Dominican and Afro-diasporic genres on merengue de calle go beyond the rhythms and extend to its melodic and harmonic qualities as well. Merengue de calle has short and repetitive melodies, as opposed to the long melodies and verses of the national merengue. Many times the melody is more rapped than sung or has just a few notes.[348] Short melodic ostinatos resembling the *vaksins*[349] in gagá get transposed to the bass or the saxophones.[350] These riffs often start on the second half of the beat, which lends a gagá feel. Another aspect of merengue de calle that resembles gagá is a preference for minor keys. Although many dismissive comments about merengue de calle point to its harmonic simplicity, some songs are harmonically interesting, as I will demonstrate in my analysis. Many times what is

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[347] Throughout history, the merengue tambora rhythm has remained more constant than the conga patterns. For example, conga patterns have been influenced by Cuban genres, Colombian *cumbia,* and Puerto Rican *plena*.
[348] For example, Omega's vocals (e.g. "El mambo del drink" and "El rabo del Lechón"). For another example, listen to "El concón" by Amarfis y la Banda de Atakke
[349] Single-note bamboo trumpets, called *fututo*, in the Dominican Republic.
[350] Hear "El rabo del lechón" by Omega in which vaksins lines are transported to the saxophones.

misunderstood as lack of musical ability or playing out of tune is due to the ways that merengue de calle has incorporated dissonances found in genres such as gagá or rara that do not conform to European tonal models.[351] As Gage Averill states, "Rara tonality can support juxtapositions of pitches in the song melody and *vaksin* accompaniment that would be considered quite dissonant in most Euro-American musics…pitch relationships in rara are not expected to be precise; it's more important to sustain a solid groove" (1999:159). In the analysis section, I will analyze the piece "Mamboteo" by Omega, in which unconventional harmonies for merengue have been misinterpreted as a product of Omega's lack of musical training.

In the traditional "national" merengue, the bass usually plays on the beat or *valsiado* (an eighth-note rest on the downbeat followed by an eighth-note on the off beat and quarter note on second beat). This pattern repeats for the third and fourth beats. Merengues de calle, on the contrary, uses a new style of playing bass.[352] The player hits the strings in mute form on the beat, playing the beat like the muted bass drum of gagá.[353] The following notes tend to be on the second half of the beat, imitating common attacks in the *fututos* (vaksins) and the voices in gagá. Although not every merengue de calle uses this style throughout a piece, it is yet another stylistic addition to merengue that came via gagá.

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[351] For example,"Mamboteo" by Omega and "Dame un besito" by Moreno Negrón.
[352] "El botao" by José Duluc, a fusion musician, is an example of how a passage moving from minor to major tonality and the bass from off-beat to on the beat can help the piece lean towards sounding as gagá or merengue.
[353] For example "Alante alante" by Omega and "Traigo fuego" by La banda gorda.

A Closer Look at Alí Babá and Gagá Merengue Influences

Looking closely at a few merengue de calle songs will reveal ways in which both cocolo and gagá music aesthetics have influenced current forms of merengue. Sometimes these influences are not overt and may not constitute a conscious effort on the part of composers, yet these gagá and cocolo elements function as "hidden transcripts" to listeners who know what to listen for (Scott 1990). This music is more popular among the population of geographical areas where cocolo, gagá, and Alí Babá are popular, and Dominicans familiar with these genres of music recognize their elements in merengue de calle, many times dancing to it as gagá or Alí Babá.

The merenguero de calle Tulile is often credited for having brought merengue de calle into mass popularity. While Tulile's music is eclectic, drawing inspiration from sources ranging from Middle Eastern singing to Frank Sinatra and "Happy Birthday," a trademark of his style is the snare drum of the Ali-Babá. Features of his merengues are the short, spicy, and sexual street chants and single-note (or few notes) brass motifs characteristic of carnival celebrations and gagá revelry. Many of his pieces can be compared to "Mambo Alí Babá." "Mambo Alí Babá" consists of a combination of snare drum rhythms, short brass phrases, improvisatory cocolo-like flute riffs, whistles, whooping and hollering, and ribald chants:

La mujer de un policía	The woman of a policeman
Se casó con un bombero	married a fireman
Porque ella lo que quería	because what she wanted
Era que le apagaran el fuego	was to have her fire put out

In contract to "Mambo Alí Babá," the merengue "El tornillo" by Tulile is not strictly speaking a carnivalesque piece, but it uses the snare drum, chants, whistles, and yelling as in carnival music and "Mambo Alí Babá." The first verse announces that the singer is a "little pork," that when he dreams of her, "it" (his penis) gets like a "screw." Then the refrain emphasizes that the screw is stuck while a choir of men whoop and whistle in celebration. These features alternate throughout the piece with traditional merengue brass riffs and the use of the prototypical merengue *tambora* drum, playing the maco rhythm. The bass drops in and out, and repeats a short riff that resembles vaksin gagá lines. Although not all of Tulile's pieces are in this style, many of the same musical features found in "El Tornillo" are part of the merengue de calle genre. Tulile (often called the "The King of Scandal") also enjoys transgressing limits by dressing in unusual costumes such as the Pope, a baby, or a woman, as if part of carnival.

Just as it happened with Kinito Méndez' *A palo limpio* production and "Mambo Alí Babá" by Los Reyes del Carnaval, there was one gagá recording that was played extensively in *colmadones* (grocery and liquor stores) and car speakers in Santo Domingo during the year 2000. This recording was not produced by a well-known musician like Méndez, or an NGO organization like Fundación Bayahonda, but by young people from the *batey*[354] in the province of Barahona. These youngsters were experimenting with technologically sampled gagá ostinatos. Perhaps it was the fact that this track was instrumental, as opposed to having lyrics in Haitian *Kreyòl*, that accounted for its massive popularity. This "gagá electrónico," as it came to be

[354] Sugarcane area where many Haitians live.

called by many Dominicans, contains the major features from gagá that were taken up by merengueros de calle.

"Gagá electrónico" opens with the rhythmic time line of gagá and a bass motif using the pitches G and E. As is common in gagá—and as we will see with other motifs used in this gaga and consequently in merengue de calle—this motif does not start on the strong part of the beat, but in a syncopated manner. After the bass motif repeats a few times, a sampled muffled drum is added, also a strong component in gagá and merengue de calle. The motif becomes somewhat more complex by adding another pitch (D) to the pitches previously used (G, E). Sampled trumpets playing F join in, and then a second motif, also syncopated gets layered on top of the first motif using pitches D and B. The rest of the piece consists of these ostinatos dropping in and out. When considering the chord that these different motifs form, we get an E minor 9th chord (E, G, B, D, F) or an E minor chord with a tritone on its upper triad. These minor and dissonant harmonies are not uncommon in merengue de calle, especially the ones produced right in the years after gagá electrónico became so popular.

The piece "Mamboteo" by Omega, the most popular merenguero de calle of all time, is a good example of a merengue that has many features that resemble "Gagá electrónico." "Mamboteo" is built with a recurring melodic ostinato on the bass (with notes G, A, C, D, F). This is not a common merengue feature, but it can be seen as another gagá influence. A traditional merengue bass line underscores the harmony by playing mostly on the downbeat and without cyclical motifs; the texture is more homophonic and does not have the polyphonic aspects of "Gagá electrónico" and

"Mamboteo." The bass melodic ostinato in "Mamboteo" is similar to the one in "Gagá electrónico" because of its syncopated nature. Together with the bass ostinato, a treble guitar-like instrument consistently repeats the syncopated pitches D, C, and F, also contrasting with the long melodies in traditional merengues. In some places throughout the piece, a third motif is introduced in the trumpets with the notes Bb, C, Bb, Ab (also with syncopated attacks), and a fourth one with Eb-F. Together, the pitches of the trumpet motifs make up a minor pentatonic scale starting on F (F, Ab, Bb, C, Eb). In turn, this pentatonic scale is superimposed with a minor pentatonic scale formed by the bass pitches (pitches A, C, D, F, G). The use of a pentatonic scale has not been a common one in merengue, and this superimposition of harmonies creates an overall resonant dissonant harmony, an element common in gagá. The dissonance in "Mamboteo" is further enhanced by the fact that an overall G minor chord with the 7th and 9th added results from the combining of the most prominent pitches in all the motifs (G, Bb, D, F, Ab). This was the same chord used in gagá electrónico (transposed from E to G, with the dissonant tritone on the upper triad).

Sometimes what many elite Dominicans and musicians interpret as bad quality music reflects intentional choices on the part of the composers and artists. Merengue de calle contains dissonances[355] resembling "Gagá electrónico" as well as minor keys, syncopated motifs, cyclical ostinato brass motifs of just a few notes (many times resembling vaksin dissonant melodies), muffled bass drum, rap-like lyrics, and a general emphasis on groove as opposed to melodic content. These elements are influences from gagá and Alí Babá and do not necessarily represent a

[355] Good examples of dissonant harmonies are merengues by Moreno Negrón (e.g."Dame un besito").

lack of training on the part of these merengueros. I prefer to read these changes as enacting and reflecting the current carnivalization of Dominican culture. The marginal identities that were confined to carnival are now coming out to visibility, but maintaining their carnivalesque character. In the same way that the commercialization of Vudú ceremonies allows Dominicans to make their black traditions like Vudú visible, merengue de calle is allowing the visibility of the Other (Haitians, cocolos, and cross-dressed men) through the carnivalesque enacted in the harmonies, melodies, and rhythmic riffs of these pieces.

Although clear in their borrowing of Afro-Dominican and black musical aesthetics, the lyrics of merengues de calle and dembow are not often explicit enunciations or celebrations of blackness. Paying close attention to lyrics, however, reveals some of the ways in which Dominicans do enunciate and vindicate their blackness and their traditions discursively. Merengue de calle turns negative stereotypes of blacks into positive affirmations. For example, in many of his songs Omega calls himself "the negro that is killing" (doing well). In "Tiradera," he states that he is black, but he is doing better than many. "La tipa" by Moreno Negrón is about a woman who likes her black man. Although Dominican popular music rarely addresses racism per se, many urban musicians make a point of calling themselves *negro* in their artistic title: Moreno Negrón, Black Jonas Point, Amara la Negra, and Monkey Black. Moreno Negrón announces that "llegaron los morenos" (the blacks are here) as an artistic shout out. Some artists take pride in their blackness, as with dembow artist Amara la Negra, who calls attention in her productions to her

blackness, wearing a large Afro,[356] and appearing on TV shows dressed in African garb. In these examples, we see musical tropes from previously stigmatized genres of music and populations that have moved from carnival to the mainstream, changing the sound and perhaps the message of the national merengue partly as a response to shifting patters of consumption.

Merengue de calle, with its connections to Dominican carnival, rural gagá, and the new globalized digital world, points to new possibilities for a working-class black identity in the Dominican Republic. Deborah Thomas points to similar patterns in Jamaica, where transnational migration and the proliferation of media technologies have "allowed black Jamaicans to evade the colonial class and race structures institutionalized by the British" (2006:335). Thomas advocates taking "radical consumerism" seriously as it may "reveal that the lower-class black Jamaican driving a 'Bimma' has more on his mind than individualist conspicuous consumption. Instead, he is refashioning selfhood and reshaping stereotypical assumptions about racial possibilities through—rather than outside—capitalism" (ibid.:349). Shifting patterns of consumption and access to technology have allowed Dominican artists to bypass historically formed hierarchical systems and aid in the formation of new racial subjectivities. The digital and sampled structure of much merengue de calle[357] creates possibilities as a form of folk music—created by untrained musicians outside of studios and professional institutions—and yet can be distributed through the most modern and global distribution systems of the Internet and digital downloading.

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[356] See for example her video "Poron pom pom: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmiVCAUcX20

[357] Some merengues are all sampled including "Son pájaro malo," by Moreno Negrón, "La torre de control" by Primer Imperio, and "Merengue electrónico" by Omega.

Technology has also helped working-class Dominicans claim the right to their own representation. Through gaining access to the means of music production and distribution through digital music and the Internet, many Dominicans have been able to bypass the musical industry and governmental structures and have their voices heard.[358] There has been a proliferation of new artists, and new songs get created everyday, as production costs have been reduced. Working-class voices that were in the past denied radio access now have digital radios, web pages,[359] and YouTube. The growth of media and technology has opened up new possibilities for imagining communities and increasing democratization and participation in the nation by those previously shunned. The new genres of Dominican popular music, which in previous decades would have never passed the strict regulations of the Comisión de Espectáculos Públicos because of their vulgar lyrics, no longer need traditional media such as radio and TV.[360] They create and market themselves through the Internet as well as through compilations sold on the streets of Santo Domingo for minimal prices. For disenfranchised Dominicans, the dream of becoming a popular dembow artist appears as a postmodern path to social mobility and also to circumvent pre-existing racial and colonial structures.

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[358] See Lise Waxer (2002) for a study of the ways in which *salsa* music enabled Cali residents to forge an identity and bypass national channels of cultural identity voicing their own participation beyond the national confines.

[359] For example, the emblematic alofokemusic.net has been a major force in the promotion of new genres and new artists.

[360] One example of how meaningless state prohibitions are these days is the dembow song "Ponme to eso pa'lante, which was prohibited by the Comisión and has nevertheless been one of the most popular songs of dembow dominicano, reaching almost 7 million views on Youtube. After the popularity on Youtube, radio stations felt pressured to play the song in order not to lose fans. Another example is "Dame leche" by John Distrito and La Delfi, which when the Comisión prohibited it in 2012, it already had more than 3 million views on Youtube.

The Performance of Blackness

In a 2010 TV add by the Banco Hipotecario Dominicano, a young baseball player training for the Major League loses a ball. When he goes into a courtyard to pick it up, the ball is picked by a stereotypically dark-skinned gangster (called Toñitín) with baggy pants, braids, gold chains with large dollar symbols, shiny clothes, and tattoos. Toñitín exhorts the light-skinned baseball player to leave baseball and tosses the ball into the air, shooting it with a gun. This provokes laughter among observers, who are in front of a sports car surrounded by beautiful women, and who are also wearing caps, dark glasses, oversized pants, sleeveless shirts, and tattoos. Toñitín then kisses his gun and encourages the young pelotero to leave baseball and to admire his "flow." His body language and fashion implicitly state that Toñitín is asking the young baseball player to join him in whatever illicit business he is involved in, not only because this is where the money and fame really are, but because it's cool. Toñitín pirouettes to show his "flow" to the young pelotero. His words are: "¿Qué pasó pelotero? Deja eso, ven pacá con tu primo. Aquí es que tan lo cuarto. Mira mi flow. Mira mi pinta" ("What happened baseball player? Leave that; come here with your cousin. Here is where the money is. Look at my flow. Look at how I look.") Tonitín snaps his fingers and, with a reggaetón about money playing in the background, the door of a car opens, offering a brief glimpse of an attractive woman, implying that the baseball player would get a woman like that if he had money and was cool. The images turn to Toñitín giving the pelotero the gun. The pelotero rejects the gun and shatters it with his baseball bat. The advertisement then

cuts to the message that the Yankees signed the baseball player 6 months later while Toñitín was condemned to 30 years in prison.[361]

What I find interesting in this advertisement is that while it tries to reinstitute the old Dominican dream of making it through baseball, clean living, and hard work, most Dominican youth were attracted to and began imitating the image of Toñitín instead. It seemed that the "flow" and image of the gangster was more appealing to most Dominicans than that of the baseball player. This became a popular advertisement on Dominican TV, and it was common to hear kids of all classes saying "Mira mi flow, mira mi pinta," and spinning around like Toñitín. This reflects the society today, where illicit business is a more glamorous and effective way to make it than becoming a major baseball star.[362] Toñitín represents the acceptance of a performance of blackness, as he does not represent a "real" gangster, but an actor playing the role of gangster supported by appropriate music, clothes, and a model girlfriend. In the Dominican Republic this gangster figure is intimately connected to lower-class darker-skinned men who dress like Toñitin. While upper-class kids do not imitate Toñitin's way of dressing, they do accept this "black" figure as a performance. They talk like Toñitin and adopt language from dembow[363] and lower-class neighborhoods while at the same time enjoying dembow when safely performed for them at high-class venues. The acceptance of Toñitin shows that nowadays for

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[361] See this advertisement at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d05xHR6j6t8

[362] There are several documentaries or films (*Pelotero*, *Sugar)* that portray the baseball dream and the difficulties for Dominican players in a difficult baseball economy.

[363] It is not unusual to find upper-class Dominicans disdaining merengue and dembow while at the same time saying phrases such as "¿Te va a dar el teke teke?" a catchy phrase from a dembow whose meaning has been generalized as, "Are you going to get mad and lose control?" Other common words or phrases in Dominican Spanish that spread through this music are "dar cotorra" (make a woman fall in love with a man), "tu ta cloro" (you are being clear), and "ke lo ke" (as a way of saying "what's up?").

most people, respectability is not achieved through high culture and polite comportment, but quite the opposite; Toñitín represents the performance of cool, a performativity of blackness.

Like the US suburban embrace of gangsta rap or of Al Pacino's Scarface, Dominican men of all classes fantasize about becoming Toñitin, a powerful drug dealer surrounded by women and style. Toñitín's image is very similar to that of merengueros (e.g. Omega), which upper classes disdain but love in performance. Aesthetically, a lot of merengueros have an image that was shunned by the elite: some follow hip hop fashion, some represent the aesthetic of the Dominicanyork, and many are sponsored by drug money and look the way drug dealers look in the Dominican imagination (dark-skinned, gold chain, greased hair). However, as Teresa Guerrero (2011) analyzes, Dominican working-class youth have to deal with the ongoing contradiction of Dominican society: what is cool in the barrio is not part of a respectable way of life. Their identity markers—braids, pants and shirts bigger than their size, sneakers, cap, and sun glasses—are not accepted in society, schools, or employment agencies. Toñitin is accepted only as a performance in upper-class circles, (parallel to the gay identity described later in the chapter), as lower-class men who do look like Toñitin are condemned to discrimination and to stay at the margins of society.

Many authors see in popular culture an expression of a fantasy life important to identity formation. Stuart Hall describes:

> popular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is…a theater of popular desire, a theater of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message but to ourselves for the first time. (1996b:474)

Toñitín, along with the lyrics of merengue de calle (and dembow), represents a fantasy of Dominican men to escape from their low-income, darker-skinned marginal status.[364] More importantly, this gangster-like figure has gone from being confined to enjoying value through performance. This performativity of blackness is also reflected in the black aesthetics of current Dominican popular music, epitomized by an embrace of rap and dancehall, genres which for working-class Dominicans represent new modern identities.

Even though on the surface elite Dominicans may express disdain for the image and persona of a merenguero like Omega, who is dark-skinned and cultivates a street-tough image, his music is popular across classes. Elites, however, tend to only see him perform at high-end venues like Centro Español in Santiago or Hard Rock Café in the capital city. This points to an important distinction in the performer/audience dynamic that also reflects on the construction of identity. As we see time and again, from Gypsy fiddlers to American minstrel shows, subversive performers of racial, class, and sexual otherness are less threatening when the

[364] As Arjun Appadurai reminds us, "An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imagined worlds (and not just in imagined communities), and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surround them" (2006:33).

performer and audience separation is emphasized. On the other hand, as a friend told me, "lower-class people go to places where they can be the center of attention such as a car wash or a cock fighting place, and pay a *merengue típico* group to salute them from the audience." This separation, or lack thereof, points directly to the level of identification between listener and artist, and is indicative of the identity forming potential of music.

The street-tough semi-gangster image like Omega's[365] is increasingly appealing to many young people, even some elite ones. A dark-skinned Dominican with gold chains and jewelry,[366] fancy watches, greased or dreaded hair, and tattoos signifies the image of the Dominicanyork, who back in the 1980s, returned from New York with new purchasing power. But today this image is the model for working-class Dominicans, although it remains a performance to young people from the upper classes. We can see in this example the successes and failures of the afro-dominicanismo movement; while these identities are today "cool" in the performance context, they nevertheless have not necessarily redefined what black means on a deep cultural level.

Here lies the paradox of this chapter and of my conclusion. While it may appear that the Dominican Republic has moved to a greater level of accepting their African and black identity, and while it may appear to be a more progressive and

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[365] My colleague and writer for *Daily News,* Carolina González, described Omega coming to an interview at the Hudson Hotel in New York in a bright yellow jacket that covered most of the tattoos on his arms (but not the one between his eyes), with a golden watch, 3-inch rhinestone earrings in both ears, and chunky rings on both hands.

[366] I have noticed a tendency in Dominican culture for mothers of dark-skinned kids to adorn them with jewelry. Working-class men in the Dominican Republic get manicures, and in the current decade twist their eyebrows. This does not mean that they are "black with a gay twist," as an African American friend of mine told me; but I argue that many dark-skinned Dominicans try to embellish or "whiten" themselves in this manner.

tolerant society, these performative aspects of identity force us to examine if there has really been any change in cultural ideology.

Problematizing Visibility

In any culture—but particularly in the Dominican Republic—race is necessarily understood through an interplay of class, location, education, and sexuality. In considering blackness in the Dominican Republic, one has to understand its specificities and context.[367] In pointing to musical manifestations of what I call "blackness," it is important to approach the issue indirectly. Studying embodied musical expressions that may not obviously belong to racial identity can give insights into aspects of the relationship between music and identity that racial politics and attitudes conceal. In this part of this chapter, I will concentrate on ways that we can study sexual identity as one that is folded into and is part of racial identity as communicated through music. The sexual identities expressed through music are, like race, expressed through the tension of performance, through embodied and scripted expressions, and through class assumptions and associations. Recent public queer expressions of sexual identities, which have been intertwined with the carnivalization of Dominican culture, give us a visible metaphor with which to analyze shifts in racial expression.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, transvestites or *maricones* (or *mariquiquis*, effeminate cross-dressed men) were only seen in working-class

[367] The Dominican Republic is not that different from Peru where, as Zoila Mendoza comments, occupation and clothing mark people as Indian, white, mestizo, and cholo more than phenotype does (2000:10). She shows that "ethnic and racial categories in the Peruvian Andes are not fixed and a person can be 'Indian' in one situation and mestizo in another" (11).

neighborhoods or, if outside these, only in carnival. In the Dominican society of today, homosexuality has gained more mainstream acceptance, but it is still performance—drag queens on TV shows and in the entertainment business—and not an accepted domestic way of life.[368] Although a few merengues before the 2000s touched on homosexual themes,[369] they have become common in merengue de calle, and more recently in dembow. One example is a recent popular dembow artist who cross-dresses and who, in his songs, mocks straight men for their superficial masculinity. This artist, La Delfi, has produced many popular videos; his video "Mariquiqui"[370] had by 2014 reached almost 3 million views on You Tube.[371]

In the video to "Mariquiqui" a macho-looking guy walks into a bar and, seeing the effeminate bartender, pushes him and shows disgust with him being a server at the establishment. The customer is surrounded by women and gets mad when he sees that the waiter of his table is the same effeminate man. The effeminate man then appears cross-dressed as an attractive woman in a leopard print tight dress. The customer cannot help himself and follows the cross-dressed man, begging him to give him his phone number. Eventually the two men dance together and share champagne. The video is accompanied by a constant repeat of the hook which says: "Tú ta quillao, pero eres mariquiqui" (You pretend to be a macho, but you are mariquiqui [maricón]). The video presents an ambiguous and mixed message that

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[368] For more on this subject, see Tallaj 2009.
[369] For example "El pájaro herido" by Fausto Rey.
[370] "Mariquiqui" by La Delfi can be seen at:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScIeXivn00U
Other popular songs by La Delfi are "Toy mojá," "Dame leche," and "La Banana."
[371] La Delfi's voice has become a trope representing homosexuality in music productions. Other artists use him to refer to homosexuality. An example of this is "Dame leche" by John Distrito, La Delfi's voice is used to say that he wants milk, that he wants to "drain the milk."

seems to mock both straight masculinity and effeminate men. What it does clearly reveal is the cultural acceptance of the figure of carnivalesque drag queens, who have long been acceptable in popular carnivalesque culture as long as they remain in their place.

In recent years the popularity of the cross-dressed man has increased, although this rise in visibility highlights an ambivalent mainstream acceptance of this figure. At the same time, it serves as a performance and a reversal of what masculinity ought to look like.[372] One of the earliest merengue examples of the gay or cross-dressed man theme is the song "Chichorizo" by merenguero de calle Moreno Negrón, released in 2006. In this song, the singer/narrator falls in love with a drag queen, and after discovering his sex, decides to stay with him anyway. The song refrain "The bad thing was that I kissed him," shows a wish to never have done it because it was after liking the kiss that the singer fell for the drag queen. This popular merengue provoked other merengue artists to get involved in the conversation, writing songs as a response. (Examples of these are "Respuesta a Chichorizo" by Alibanda and "Boda de Chichorizo" by Pacheman and Griselito.)

Several merengueros de calle also play with effeminate male images; for example, Tulile likes to dress as a woman for his shows, and in "El más pegao" talks about wearing a bra.[373] Whatever else it is, this sort of spectacle, using cross-dressing

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[372] One of the most popular dembows of all time is "Teke Teke," in which a woman hits her partner because she gets the teke teke (madness). The video shows the man with a black eye, and he exhorts men to not let women hit them. The popularity of the video was attributed to how funny and unlikely Dominicans found it that a woman would hit a man.

[373] Looking effeminate as a way of looking beautiful is not uncommon in lower-class Dominican men. It is common to see Dominican men with bracelets and chains, getting manicures, and tweezing their eyebrows. But Tulile's goal is to shock the audiences by dressing not only as a woman, but also as a baby, as a military officer, and in many other

as a way of enhancing an artist's popularity, is a marketing strategy, albeit one with complex and contradictory repercussions. These artists identify with a straight-macho life while at the same time cross-dressing enhances their commercial appeal. For the most part, these feminine elements are a reinforcement of masculinity, in a mocking way.

In the same span of time that the theme of cross-dressing men appears more frequently, Dominican genres have gotten more and more misogynistic and homophobic. A favorite theme for merengue de calle mocks a man who falls in love with a "woman" to later find out that this woman was a cross-dressed man, as in "Chichorizo."[374] In the dembow "El Sapito," the singer sings about how he wants a little "*sapito*" (frog, meaning vagina) and not a *maco* (toad, meaning penis). Maco is also a word used in Dominican Spanish for something that looks suspicious. In other recent videos, the figure of the cross-dressed man appears and many times for no clear thematic or narrative reason.[375]

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types of attire. In the 1980s, merengueros, such as Bonny Cepeda in the LP cover "Calor," shaved his chest, used makeup, and tweezed his eyebrows (see fn. 366).

[374] Another example of this plot is "Guineo" by the merenguero Julián.

[375] For example, in "Hoy se va a beber" by Vakero from 2013, the cross-dressed man is there, but has no relevance for the plot of the song. Actual statements of gay pride or tolerance are not common, but an exception was made in 2006 by merenguero de calle Mala Fe on the song "Pluma pluma gay" (Feather Feather Gay). It encourages homosexuals to come out of the closet and ends with a public address announcement: "All our respect to the gay community. Be happy!" So unique was "Pluma Pluma Gay" that in "Tiradera," Mala Fe states that other merengueros are attacking him for singing to gays and that he does it with pride. Other examples of merengue de calle that use the theme are: "Lesbiana" by Julián, in which he states the story of a man whose woman left him for another woman, but he wants her in return, or in "El jabón" by Los tres desafinao, where the singer sings that jails are full of *bugarrones* (men who have relationships with other men, but only as penetrators). Although it is a humorous account of bugarrones, "El Jabón" also describes the social reality of this environment.

Merengue de calle has produced few "gay" artists, if by gay we mean someone who openly embraces a gay lifestyle on and off the stage.[376] Lesbian singer Rita Indiana is an exception; her identity is the opposite of the dembow artist La Delfi, who represents the maricón identity, a cross-dressed man who invites laughter. Rita Indiana produced a few big hits around 2010 (i.e. "El Blue del Ping Pong" and "La Hora de Volve," among others). When she looked and performed androgynous, she was accepted as part of the carnivalesque, but when Rita Indiana expressed her homosexuality in public life, she represented a challenge and became less popular. At an awards ceremony she showed up with her female partner whom she kissed in public, an action that drew wide attention and condemnation. Her popularity waned shortly after, and Dominicans described her as a white *pata* (female duck, slang for homosexual). In contrast, La Delfi is accepted by the masses because he conforms to what they know as maricón, a lower-class transgressive figure that ultimately serves the carnivalesque and to reinforce traditional patterns of masculinity. The questions remain whether this movement from private to public shows an actual change in identity and an increase in tolerance for black and queer identities, or if this commodification of identitites is just appealing to already existing attitudes as a way to market new demographics with newly attained purchasing power.

Since the sexual liberation and black power movements in the United States in the 1960s, it has been common to point to how new identities such as "gay" and "black" have been exported to other cultures. However, as these new identities enter

[376] Homosexuality in the Dominican context is not defined according by one's sex as much as by gender roles. Which role one plays—whether the active (masculine) or passive (feminine)—is more important than the sex of one's partner in defining homosexuality; only the passive partner is considered a homosexual.

other cultures, they don't replace pre-existing models, but rather coexist in a dialectical and often antagonistic relationship with indigenous concepts. In the context of the Dominican Republic, "gay" is an identity totally opposed to that of the *maricón,*[377] which has always been associated with lower and darker-class effeminate cross-dressed men who display flamboyant behavior and are supposedly guilty of various transgressions. Only Dominicans, such as Rita Indiana, with education and awareness of other possibilities are adopting gay (as it is understood in the US) as a new form of identity. As the music and videos suggest, in general, homosexuality has gained acceptance as a performance but not as a domestic activity.

Just as the discourse of gay pride has not replaced the maricón identity, which continues to be celebrated through the carnivalesque and the transgressive, discourses of black pride are also layered on top of deep-seated indigenous paradigms, all of which are expressed through music. In the same way that forms of queer identity are gaining visibility, Afro-Dominican expressions also previously only freely expressed during carnival have gained visibility outside the carnival sphere and time. While expressions of black consciousness tend to rely on visibility and speech, during my fieldwork, I came to understand that discourses of black pride have struggled because Dominicans' ambivalence allows for the tacit expression of blackness, albeit one which avoids direct confrontation with elite notions of Dominican whiteness. Nevertheless, expressions of blackness can take pride in a uniquely *mixed* Dominican culture, which *includes* blackness. While anti-Haitianism was a social construction, so is the ability to show and display blackness in different ways than speech allows.

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[377] The gay identity, as understood in the United States, implies that one is a homosexual, but the Dominican maricón implies something that the person does or a performance.

Working-class Dominicans have less defined attitudes towards expressions of blackness as opposed to those in the upper classes who still tend to cling to anti-Haitianism and anti-black ideologies.

In a fluidly mixed population, the intersection of class and culture has taken prominence, not only in reference to economic capital, but also in how it is intertwined with cultural capital, family background, education, and mores.[378] As Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof states, in the Dominican Republic, since its population could not be described in terms of biological race, "cultura, rather than biology, became the expressed basis of class and racial exclusion" (2008:23). In this way, the culture of the darker classes was until the 1970s pushed down, and still today upper classes try to maintain clear social barriers through culture.[379] In the case of the Dominican Republic, the constituencies of society previously relegated to carnival now must be taken more seriously. Through music, they form part of the mainstream Dominican culture, no longer confined to lower-class neighborhoods, marginal music genres, or the revelry of carnival.

While academic literature has concentrated on replacing old identities with new ones, many times old identities and attitudes do not disappear. Dominicans have

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[378] Although most people enjoy the raunchiness of merengue de calle, when I ask upper-class informants about how they can differentiate between lower and upper-class Dominicans, the answer is that lower classes use tighter and shinier clothes and attend different spaces. It was hard for me to recruit friends to go with me to Montebar in Santiago, a place that is known for its working-class attendees or, as my friends told me, "Where upper-class Santiagueros would go to cheat on their wives." Upper-class Dominicans would rather dance to this merengue in a zumba class at an exclusive gym.

[379] Although in recent decades tolerance has grown towards Africa and the folklorization of forms of Afro-Dominican music, exhibitions of "blackness" that contest traditional elite still meet with opposition. Urban musicians are also been used, in my opinion, as scapegoats for the problems of the nation, while the elite's corruption is overlooked. Many musicians are imprisoned for criminal activities (mostly drug-related and domestic violence).

not adopted a gay pride or a black pride discourse, but that does not mean the opposite either—that they are in total denial. What we learn from this music is two things: that elements of blackness and queerness have always existed within the working classes, and that the movement of the music into more public forums forces old identities to coexist in tension with these newly acquired discourses.

* * *

Although Afro-Dominican music has not created the great tale of blackness that many musicians and activists had hoped, it has been and continues to be part of changes in Dominican identity. The story is not yet done, the song not over. Rossy Diaz writes that these new musics are "from the barrio and for the barrio" (2006). In other words, merengue de calle as well as rap and dembow are produced by the marginalized for the marginalized. These new genres are again changing how we see, hear, and imagine the Dominican Republic. They go against elite notions of proper culture and comportment—as these were always located in high forms of art, in proper behavioral codes—and away from the perceived otherness of Haiti and blackness. Through these new genres, issues of race, ethnicity, and sexuality are brought out of the private sphere into broader society, helping unsettle deep-seated cultural traditions. These artists have pushed their notion of culture into the public discourse, a movement only possible by the proliferation of technology, mass media, increased consumerism, and access to a transnational Afro-diasporic imagined community. The adoption of sounds from reggaetón, dancehall, and hip hop have helped liberate merengue and changed the direction of its history, and with that the direction of Dominican identity.

Conclusion: A Narrative in Context

My goal in this dissertation was to contribute to an understanding of the meaning of blackness and black identity within the context of the Dominican Republic and to present a nuanced view on Dominican conceptualizations of race, challenging previous academic literature that have focused on the construction of Dominican identity as anti-Haitian and anti-black. In this dissertation, we have examined what may seem quite different scenes and genres: Vudú music in dance clubs, gagá revelers in Carnival, merengue de calle blasting from cars, street vendors and bodegas, rural and urban music festivals, and fusion groups in alternative spaces. Although a celebration of their African roots or their blackness is not necessarily the primary, explicit goal in all of these—and in fact, in some cases participants may not envision it that way at all—all these entities demonstrate in some way a situationally constructed form of afro-dominicanismo. Each of these scenes and genres performs and embodies a characteristically Dominican definition of blackness that many Dominicans choose not to foreground, and yet may implicitly acknowledge. Many Dominicans rightfully claim a creole/mulatto/"indio" identity, which can comfortably include the acknowledgment of some past African (and consequently black) elements.

Although in places I may have seemed to agree with the many arguments for the unique nature of the Dominican Republic's view of race, in some ways my position can also be seen as linking the Dominican Republic with other Latin American countries that have experienced similar discourses of mixedness or mestizaje. Latin American countries, as was the Dominican Republic, were early on confronted with issues of what we might call the "problems" of a "multiculturalist"

society. The consolidation of independent republics—after the removal of Spanish and Portuguese direct colonial rule—required a direct involvement with issues of how to solidify and define an emerging and newly independent "highly mixed society" (Wade 1993:8). In Cuba, the fight for independence necessitated the participation of free people of color thus leading to the formulation of a national discourse of "racelessness" and racial brotherhood that would persuade these to join in the struggle for independence (Ferrer 1999; De la Fuente 2001). In post-independence Brazil, unlike Cuba, the standard narrative characterized its national discourse as a *democracia racial* (racial democracy) defined by racial mixture, but most importantly, as a racial "paradise" resulting from the seamless and unproblematic mixture of the various races (European, indigenous, and African) found in Brazilian colonial society.

The Dominican Republic was particularly susceptible to nationalist discourse that subscribed to a privileging of whiteness, resulting in a preoccupation with the racial composition of its population and with publicly distinguishing itself from its Haitian neighbors. Dominicans do not currently refer to themselves as either mulatto or *mestizo*, but employ the term *indio* or *criollo* instead. Even though Indio was officially picked to separate, not to encompass, blackness, I argue through the dissertation that the success of the label was precisely because it gave a way for dark-skinned Dominicans to identify with the nation as white while simultaneously claiming their "mixedness." Like Peter Wade (1995) who asks us to challenge ideas of racial democracy that erased blackness and indianness in the Colombian context, I argue that although "pure" blackness was relegated to Haiti (and Haitians) in the

Dominican context, blackness has been present as lived experienced and embodied practice, as we can see in the diverse genres of music that I analyze in the dissertation. We can compare this context to Puerto Rico where, as Isar Godreau (2006) argues, blackness has been relegated to a particular geographical location within the country, while the nation continues to be defined as non-black. Because of the large Haitian population living in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans can locate blackness in a space imaginatively both inside and outside of the country. It is this distinction, of sharing an island with another nation with which it has had such a convoluted and intermingled history, which sets the Dominican Republic apart from the rest of Latin American nations. This desire for a distinction from Haitian racial identity is still relevant in Dominicans today. However, as I show in this dissertation, Haitian culture is woven into the texture of Dominicanness in ways that are not so obvious, but apparent when we look at cultural productions such as music. In this way, for example, the most popular type of merengue music carries within it many elements from Haitian-derived gagá. Dominican blackness is paradoxically both self and other.

Since the 1960s, we have seen an increasing importance of social movements emerging around issues of ethnic and racial identity in Latin America and the world. Some black movements seek greater political representation while others claim more acknowledgement of the black contribution to the national culture. In the 1980s and 90s, with the demise of working-class politics, new spaces opened up for redefinitions of nationhood. The movements described in this dissertation place the Dominican Republic as part of these global movements; and just like Cuba and Brazil and other

countries of Latin America, the Dominican Republic has also experienced the incorporation of traditional religious musical forms into commercial and popular music as a form of racial identity creation (see Moore 1997; Behague 1994). In Cuba, this movement was called *afro-cubanismo*, a term which I borrowed to call the Dominican movement, *afro-dominicanismo.*

Unlike Cuba's discourse of racelessness, and Brazil's discourse as a *democracia racial*, the Dominican Republic's construction as a Hispanic nation has resulted in the concealment of Africa and blackness as constitutive parts of verbal discourse. Although Dominicans have been portrayed as singular in their ambivalence towards black culture, as Eison Kimberly Simmons reminds us in her analysis of the culture of hair, this ambivalence is spread out throughout the African diaspora. She explains:

> An example often given for black denial is that of the hair-straightening practice in the Dominican Republic, but this is not unique to Dominicans—it is also the experience of African Americans and other women throughout the African diaspora as they have also internalized similar ideals of beauty, a 'light, near White' ideal, and what is socially appropriate in terms of hairstyles. (2011:2)

In the case of the United States, which is usually described as having black-white binary racial politics, Eison also points to the fact that the "the intra-group colorization practice among African Americans is very similar to that of Dominicans"

(ibid.:4). When looking beyond official policies and verbal discourse, one notes the similarities of the Dominican Republic with other Caribbean and Latin American nations and even the United States.

Clearly the Dominican Republic has great examples of "negrophobia" – as Torres-Saillant has termed it—and denials of blackness are manifested daily. Like most countries in Latin America, black identity is not an identity easily admitted to or easily embodied. Racial studies and histories like those undertaken in Cuban and Brazil have yet to be done in the Dominican Republic. The Dominican case beckons further critical analysis and may go a long way towards advancing more nuanced understandings of the intersections of race, nation and power within the African diaspora and the Black Atlantic.

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When I began writing this dissertation, I had one narrative in mind. In tracing the history of the use of Afro-Dominican music by liberal Dominicans since the 1960s, I would demonstrate the contribution of music cultures to contest monolithic and Eurocentric narratives of Dominican national history and identity. I sought to argue that these contributions created a narrative of rising black consciousness and acceptance of an African heritage among the Dominican people. I identified the narrative within an afro-dominicanismo movement, foremost about questioning received values and reworking the meaning of the past, but also about bringing neglected and previously silenced voices to center stage.

While I still see this narrative as important, and one that needs telling, I have come to view this "great tale of blackness," as only a part of the story, a tributary in the ever-changing stream of Dominican identity. A dissertation with this single narrative and thesis would have been an easier project. It would have amounted to a success story of how afro-dominicanismo advocates managed to convince Dominicans to embrace their blackness, and how progressive Dominicans changed the country into a postmodern, multicultural nation that celebrates its African roots and diverse cultural traditions. This narrative would have been based on a reductionist paradigm of Dominicans as anti-black, giving less voice to those that, even prior to the 1960s, embodied a nuanced situational identity.

There is no doubt that the afro-dominicanismo movement has brought pride in Dominicans concerning their African heritage; indeed, it has changed the meaning of blackness. However, as my research deepened, and I began to understand the intricacies of Dominican racial thinking and discourse, I realized many identities were involved, both public and private. These identities are not in binary opposition; on the contrary, personal identities interweave with collective ones. Thus I argue in this dissertation that expressions of blackness and subaltern culture have been largely constructed in private, and Dominicans have learned to present public identities which align with official ideologies of anti-Haitianism and consequently, anti-black ideologies. Afro-dominicanismo and the processes described in Chapters Five and Six serve as a basis for understanding how private identity displays are becoming public, readjusting the tension and negotiation between these identities.

Prior to the 1960s, Dominicans exercised more agency than has often recognized, and the flow of power was not unidirectional. As a scholar, if I attribute absolute negation of blackness to Dominicans, I become victim of the same ideologies I have set out to critique in this document. I now understand, however, that the discourse of afro-dominicanismo is also a social construction, fabricated on the notion that Dominicans suffer from black denial. Instead, rituals related to Afro-Dominican music have been kept as part of private identities while Dominicans have publicly embraced ideologies of anti-Haitianism to avoid the negative consequences that come with proclaiming themselves black. While enacting a mixed identity in regards to the Haitian Other, Dominicans have developed an acute sense of a color continuum where racial categories are fluid and assigned through a variety of markers, such as hair texture, facial features, and demeanor. Dominicans have moved in and out of such identities. Historical conditions constructed the choices of action for them, and concealing blackness under an umbrella of mixed identity became an exercise in agency, not a delusional behavior, as has been portrayed in much of the literature about Dominicans.

Today the Dominican government presents an emerging model of cultural plurality. This new paradigm has resulted not only from the success of afro-dominicanismo, but also from global forces such as migration, urbanization, globalization, tourism, and the current commodification of Dominican cultural forms. These forces, growing outside the Dominican Republic, have brought other articulations of blackness into the country, making advantageous (commercially, politically, and artistically) their open expression within certain contexts. These new

identities decenter Africa and connect with expressive forms from the Black Atlantic. They are enacted in current urban music genres such as New York style bachata, merengue de calle, rap, and dembow.

In contrast to afro-dominicanistas, who have looked to strengthen Dominican connections to Africa through local culture, young Dominicans look towards Afro-diasporic genres outside the country, working dialectically with modernity and globalization and reworking Dominican national identity in ways we might call Modern Blackness.[380] As media and external forces enter the Dominican Republic, they change the ways in which blackness is both articulated and contested. While afro-dominicanismo grew out of Marxist and revolutionary approaches, modern articulations of blackness respond to a different identity politics: less overtly political, but nevertheless effective in the current reimagining of the nation.

To conclude with a broader map of the dissertation's contents, I present three overarching and interrelated narratives. By concentrating on three narratives, I hope to avoid constructing a teleological history that tells only part of a complicated story. The first narrative is about afro-dominicanismo with its successes and failures. The second describes the shift in tension between private and public Dominican identities, as former private identities become public. The third narrative concerns new articulations of blackness enacted in urban popular music Dominican genres. The three narratives intersect, contradict, and reify each other while rendering impossible any single causal relationship.

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[380]The term "modern blackness" is borrowed from Deborah Thomas (2006), who describes modern blackness as "a more racialized, individualist, autonomous, and consumerist vision of progress whereby a great many lower-class black Jamaican men and women are defining citizenship transnationally and therefore are increasingly bypassing local middle-class leadership to get what they need" (335).

Glossary

Afro-dominicanismo: My term for the movement that started after the Trujillo dictatorship in the 1970s pushing the recognition of African heritage and black identity in the Dominican Republic.

Afro-dominicanista(s): Someone who promotes afro-dominicanismo.

Bachata: Popular vocal music genre.

Balsié: Friction drum.

Barrio: Working-class neighborhood.

Batey: Sugarcane area.

Botánica: Retail store that sells folk medicine and religious objects.

Brujo: Witch, but also an emic word for medium.

Brujería: Witchcraft, but sometimes an emic word for Vudú.

Catalié: Drum in gagá played with a bare hand and a stick.

Club(es) cultural(es) y deportivo(s): Grassroots clubs in working-class neighborhoods.

Clubista: Member of a club cultural y deportivo.

Cocolo: Migrant (or descendant of migrant) from the English-speaking Caribbean.

Colmado(nes): Grocery and liquor stores.

Comparsa: Carnival float.

Congo: Music of the Cofradía de los Congos del Espíritu Santo. It can also refer to the drums, the music, and a member of the Cofradía.

Cuarteta: Four-line verse.

Décima: Ten-line stanza of poetry.

Gagá: Carnivalesque rituals intimately related to Haitian Vodou and Dominican Vudú.

Güira: Scraper instrument in Dominican music.

Kreyòl: Haitian Creole language.

Jaleo: Third section of merengue music characterized by frequent call and response.

Las 21 Divisiones: Emic name for Vudú.

Maco (a lo maco): Rhythm common in merengues after the 1970s.

Mambo: In the Dominican context, mambo refers to the third section of a merengue (jaleo).

Mangulina: Dance and music in 6/8.

Maraca: Dominican shaker instrument.

Merengue: National music of the Dominican Republic.

Merengue de calle: Sub-genre of merengue.

Merenguero: Merengue player.

Merengue Típico: Merengue style from the Cibao region that formed the basis for the national orchestrated merengue.

Misterio: The word for deity in Dominican Vudú**.**

Nueva Canción: Movement in Latin American music that emerged in the mid-1960s combining folk traditions with political lyrics.

Palo: Music accompanied by drums, which can be played for cofradías and Dominican Vudú.

Pambiche: Merengue style.

Pandero: Dominican tambourines with few metal jingles.

Petró: Family of deities in Dominican Vudú (Petwo in Haitian Vodou).

Reggaetón: Spanish-language musical style influenced by Jamaican dancehall.

Salve: Dominican religious song. Can be sung a cappella or accompanied by drums, panderos, or clapping.

Salve Regina: Marian hymn.

Sarandunga: Music and dance of the St. John the Baptist cofradía in the Peravia province of the Dominican Republic.

Taíno: Caribbean Native Indian.

Tambora: Double-headed drum used in merengue.

Tambú: Drum in gagá.

Vaksin: Single-note bamboo wind instruments used in gagá (also called fututos).

Vudú: Since the 1970s, scholarly term for the type of African-derived religion characterized by spirit possession. The name underscores Vudú similarities with Haitian Vodou.

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