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### Resistimos

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*Resistimos* (We Resist)

by

Diana Quiñones Rivera

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

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## **1. Abstract**

*Resistimos (We Resist)* is a documentary about the current socio-economic and political issues in Puerto Rico, as seen through the lives of people practicing Bomba music. Bomba is an Afro Puerto Rican music and dance tradition that was born out of the struggle and survival of enslaved people all over the island. *Resistimos* documents the resurgence of this music as a tool to fight corruption, gender inequality and the austerity measures imposed in Puerto Rico by the US Fiscal Control Board in 2016.

## **2. Project Description**

*Resistimos* is a documentary film that explores how governmental policies have affected people in the Bomba community and to show how this group of Puerto Ricans use their practice of Bomba music to fight what seems like a continuous stream of offenses against the people. The film follows Marién Torres López, Hashlye Perez Vega, Leró Martínez Roldán and members of the Cepeda family as they tell us about their relationship to Bomba music and day to day living in Puerto Rico. *Resistimos* aims to bring the audience closer to the issues on the island in order to attain a better understanding of what it means to be a colony - in practice if not in name - in the 21st century.

In the beginning of the film we learn about the different backgrounds of the people in the documentary, from how they started in Bomba music to their involvement with a community or a political movement. Everyone's journey to Bomba is a bit different, and the way they fit into the puzzle of the film is distinct as well.

Jesús Cepeda tells us about his father Rafael Cepeda, who is known in the Bomba community as the "Patriarch of Bomba." Rafael Cepeda worked to keep the tradition of Bomba alive by showing his children how to play and going to the local papers to talk about the importance of Bomba. Later in the film, through Cary Martínez Cepeda (great granddaughter of Rafael Cepeda and Caridad Brenes de Cepeda), we find out about the difficulties her family faced to preserve this music. We get a glimpse of the struggles that Afro Puerto Ricans have faced for centuries, and continue to endure, because racial discrimination is still a reality on the island. We also hear from a Mexican American, Denise Solis and her spouse, Julia Cepeda (Jesus Cepeda's daughter), as they go back to Puerto Rico and observe people's resiliency and their renewed sense of duty towards cultural preservation as an effect of the difficulties they've faced after Hurricane María.

Marién Torres López, another person in the documentary, is a Bomba practitioner and teacher. We follow Marién as she rehearses a dance piece with a group of students for their annual show. The dance expresses her experience as a protester and organizer against the US Navy on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico in 1999. We learn about her mentor, Norma Salazar, who believed that "culture is not alien to our social struggle." Together they offered Bomba workshops at the different camps in Vieques until Marién was arrested for civil disobedience in October of 1999.

We then meet Hashlye Pérez Vega, a Bomba dance improviser who is originally from the town of Loíza. He grew up dancing with his family and later became interested in other forms of dance. We quickly learn about his father, who, as opposed to Hashlye's mother, was not involved in the Bomba community. Many other members of his family, however, and people in his neighborhood encouraged him to dance Bomba. Later we see that Hashlye is invested in his community in Loíza as he works for the municipality and is part of the clean up and restoration of the town after the hurricane.

Loíza is mostly a town of black Puerto Ricans. It's named the "Capital of Tradition" for its preservation of Bomba culture, the making of "Vejigante" masks, and the "Fiestas de Santiago Apostol" celebration which features religious practices deriving from a mix of Catholic and Yoruba beliefs.

The third main person in the documentary is Leró Martínez Roldán, a Bomba practitioner I met in Chicago when he was part of a musical cultural exchange with the Segundo Ruiz Belvis Center. Upon meeting him I realized that his sense of humor and awareness around issues affecting Puerto Rico would be refreshing additions to the film. I believe humor is helpful to balance the various perspectives presented on screen. Leró isn't just well informed about the terrible policies being imposed on the people of Puerto Rico. He also delivers that information in an accessible and humorous way by, for example, naming specifically what a corrupt politician spent public money on (more than \$1,200 worth of donuts).

Puerto Ricans are outraged for good reason. With the island's current debt of approximately 74 billion dollars, the social structures that make it a livable place are under attack. This is not a new problem. Since times of slavery, social structures have consistently been

dismantled to service the colonizers. We see evidence of this throughout the film as we learn the impact the Fiscal Control Board has had on people's day to day lives. For our subjects, it's just another hurdle they need to get through to survive in what they feel is a colonial situation. From an increase in taxation to the closure of schools and hospitals and the privatization of public institutions, damage on the ground has led to mass migration, rampant crime, and a rise in suicides. These are just some of the situations people are dealing with, and the reason they have been in the streets fighting for an audit of the debt and to remove corrupt politicians.

It's hard to talk about changing Puerto Rico without talking about decolonization. It was a topic I thought would be important to include in the documentary since a lot of the issues facing Puerto Rico today have roots not only in the colonial status but in the colonial mentality as well.

Even though slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico in 1873, many argue that a different type of slavery exists when you are not able to survive in your own country. Hurricane María put this very idea at the forefront of Puerto Rican life. The mass exodus into the US soon after the hurricane definitely had a negative impact on the economy, and has made it so that people staying behind need to find ways to resist.

It only seemed a natural progression of events when people organized in Puerto Rico to force the governor to resign in July of 2019. A litany of corruption, paired with a natural disaster, produced a gathering of people with one aim, the likes of which had never been seen in Puerto Rico. This gathering, this dancing together with the beat of the same drum, is what Bomba represents for our subjects. It's a moment of gathering strength to face anything that comes their way.

### **3. Film Background**

Bomba, a tradition of music and dance, represents a part of Puerto Rican culture that has historically been prohibited, ridiculed and had its practitioners stereotyped. Before the 50s, Bomba was almost invisible to the general public. There were just a few communities who went against the grain and continued this tradition even when it was categorized as “uncatholic” because of its strong connection to African heritage.

In today's Puerto Rico, Bomba is not an expression reserved for Afro Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricans who practice Bomba come in many different colors and shapes, and from very different economic and political backgrounds. But today’s resurgence owes a profound debt to the predominantly Afro Puerto Rican communities that kept their traditions alive by remembering and creating new songs, and getting together to share this expression in their neighborhoods or on stage.

I believe that Bomba’s resurgence is connected to the reality of social unrest in Puerto Rican life. In 2016, the US government created a Fiscal Control Board to deal with the island’s current debt of \$74 billion. The board was created without input from, or consultation with, the Puerto Rican government or its people, and presides over every aspect of the island’s finances. It does not give Puerto Rico’s municipalities the option to declare bankruptcy. Chapter 9 of the US Bankruptcy Code was not made available to Puerto Rico because it’s a privilege reserved for actual states. It is my belief that if the Fiscal Control Board, or “Junta,” had been created to help Puerto Rico get out of debt, the people would have supported it. But that does not seem to be the case. Much of the opposition to the Control Board focuses on the amount of money it costs to

operate, including the cost of their meetings, the amounts charged by advisors and lawyers, and the salaries paid to board members. All of these factors make it hard for the people of Puerto Rico to believe in the work that the Junta says it's doing. Many feel the main function of the Fiscal Control Board is to generate millions for the vulture funds and those who are managing the island's finances. To better understand vulture funds, here's a text from David Bosco's article "The Debt Frenzy:"

"The people are trading in human misery," spits one debt relief campaigner. Congo's Sassou Nguesso calls the vulture funds "snakes in the ocean" and "thug gangsters." The disdain for these debt collectors is shared in Western capitals, too. 'By depleting the resources of developing countries' governments, these companies reduce the funds available for schooling and hospital treatment," declares a spokesman for Britain's treasury. Caroline Pearce of the Jubilee Debt Campaign believes that the vulture funds are misguided, even when their targets are middle income countries that are better positioned to pay. "The way that vulture funds buy out very bad debt and seek to recover as much as possible is not helpful," she says. (Bosco 38)

Much of the activity designed to "restructure" Puerto Rico's debt involves closing or privatizing public institutions that serve the people with the least resources. Events like the closing of 438 schools, the cuts to Medicaid benefits, the level of disrepair of infrastructure like roads, bridges and the power grid, especially after Hurricane María, have rendered many Puerto Ricans hopeless.

#### **4. Personal Background**

Born in New Jersey and a child of Puerto Ricans, I've been interested in dance and have been dancing since I was a child. My mother's artistic background influenced my way of seeing things. She used to dance with feathered and sequined costumes in a regular show at Teatro Puerto Rico in the South Bronx in the early 70s. Dancing, and seeing photos of my mother performing on stage, allowed me to dream about my own artistic inclinations. In addition to this, my mom loved watching Hollywood musicals. She knew songs and dances and lines in movies. Dance and music in film stuck with me from then on. We moved to Puerto Rico when I was 11 years old and I lived there until I graduated from college. In college, I studied Literature and Film at the University of Puerto Rico but it wasn't until 2006, when I moved to New York, that I found my voice as a filmmaker. I was doing an internship with the late Albert Maysles, a renowned documentary filmmaker, while doing catering for income. While catering I met two dancers that were married and working together: Laura Quattrocchi and Joshua Bisset (Shua Group). They were catering waiters, just like me, but also had their artistic practices.

Up to that point I had only made two short documentaries, but I had my own equipment. When Quattrocchi and Bisset found out I was a filmmaker they invited me to film one of their site specific performances. After they saw my footage they wanted to collaborate with me on other projects. I felt I had found my Christo and Jeanne Claude. Christo and Jeanne Claude were also a married couple who worked together on site specific art pieces filmed by Albert and David Maysles.

From there I continued to film site specific dance videos and documentaries with Shua Group and other dancers. By 2013 I had been filming dance for 7 years and had never made a

film about Puerto Rico. I was interested in digging deeper into the history and current world of Bomba, which I thought represented the strongest cultural expression in Puerto Rico today. Looking at documents from the period of Spanish rule, I found out about the huge role that Bomba music and dance had in enabling slave empowerment, resistance and freedom. Realizing the impact of this tradition in Puerto Rican history allowed me to understand one of the reasons there has been a strong resurgence of this music amongst people of all ages on the island. My aim was to find out how Bomba culture and economic and socio-political issues intersect, and to explore how connected people in the Bomba community are to self determination, the power inherent in cultural work, and the ideal of independence for Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rican independence is a cause that I've been actively supporting and engaged with since my first year in college. Although I'm from Jayuya, a nationalist town, I never thought about the importance or need for independence until I learned the real history of the island in college at the University of Puerto Rico.

## **5. Research Analysis**

Early studies of slavery in Puerto Rico pointed towards the idea of a "happy slavery," mostly in the writings of Luis M. Diaz Soler:

They then stayed, coexisting in the small Antille, the white conquering race and the conquered, submissive, enslaved black element. For the latter, it was highly beneficial that its class in Puerto Rico was constituted by a limited number of individuals. The masters, in their desire to

conserve the blacks that they possessed and to obtain the greatest performance, they offered better treatment to their slaves than the Spanish, English and French of other colonies of the area of the Caribbean. It was from there that, in the moment of the decree of the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico, many slaves remained with their masters as day laborers.

(Díaz Soler 22-23)

Generalizing matters regarding the experience of enslaved people and positioning their existence as blind defenders of their masters is underestimating the impact of slave labor and fails to address the suffering and awful conditions of slave life. Later this idea of a “happy slavery” would be contested by the studies and documentation of slave rebels, escapes and revolts in Guillermo A. Baralt's *Slaves Revolts in Puerto Rico: Conspiracies and Uprisings 1795-1873*. This revealing document switched the paradigm of slave history in Puerto Rico by shedding light on the reality of life as an enslaved person. What stands out in this book, to me, is the role of Bomba in the escapes and revolts.

At the front end of the slave trade, people were kidnapped and taken to port cities like Luanda, Angola by the Portuguese. There they were chained to other captives who came from different countries and spoke different languages. The Africans who were brought to Puerto Rico were bought by the Spanish. Studies of Puerto Rican language and food, and other documentation, points to a strong influence from many different populations including the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Igbos, the Bantu and the Dahomey, all of whom arrived in Puerto Rico during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, around the time the Spanish had annihilated most of the Taino (natives)

population on the island, using both them and Africans to mine gold. When the Spanish had extracted all the gold they could find, they transitioned to a sugar based economy which also relied on slave labor.

A sense of home and family were necessary to ensure survival amongst the slave population. Women were at the center of this reorganization. Since families were separated from the moment they were captured, “symbolic as well as ritualistic relationships” were formed. This fictive kinship would also come about if slaves were of “common tribal origin, or for coming on the same ship or for living on the same plantation.” (Mayo Santana 170)

Bomba, based on specific rhythmic patterns and ways of dancing and singing, became one of the ways slaves communicated with one another and created unity amongst themselves. Bomba helped Africans maintain their cultural heritage and provided an escape from their harsh realities. It became so strong an expression that the music and dance, often performed at parties, were regulated by the Spanish government and these laws were enforced by slave masters. One of the reasons for the regulation of the dances and parties is documented by Baralt: “The dancing and the drumming inspired a sense of unity among the slave population. However, the dance was only a front for the slaves' subversive aims ... As the conspiracies in Bayamon in 1821, in Guayama and Naguabo in 1822, in Ponce in 1826 and the slave escape in Toa Baja in 1823 had all been planned during parties and Bomba dances.” (Baralt 50)

After the escapes, more restrictions were placed upon enslaved people. This, however, did not deter them from organizing more escapes and revolts. Benjamin Nistal Moret, in his book *Esclavos Profugos y Cimarrones, Puerto Rico, 1770-1870 (Slave Fugitives and Maroons, Puerto Rico, 1770 to 1870)*, discusses the use of Bomba outside of the Bomba parties and

dances: “The tapping of the fingers and hands in Bomba were repeated on the walls of slave barracks and quarters, in the blacksmith’s anvil, in the hammering of the slave carpenter with subversive purposes to notify others about a meeting, to communicate a message, to make a decision, to give an order.”

The strength of a cultural expression is most significant if it can help ensure a people's survival and well being. This is one of the reasons why the cultivation of a Puerto Rican identity is crucial for people in the island. Being that for over 500 years, Puerto Ricans have only known what it's like to be colonized, maintaining a sense of self in the context of their environment is of great importance and takes precedent at a moment like the one Puerto Ricans are living today. Expressing their cultural identity through music remains extremely defining of the Puerto Rican experience. Puerto Ricans are constantly looking to be acknowledged and accepted while keeping their flag close to their hearts. They insist on speaking Spanish, eating their own cuisine and dancing to their own rhythms.

The aspect of dancing to their own rhythms in the frame of the socio-political environment as a colonized people points towards the resistance to total assimilation. Going back in history to recount the legacy of African ancestry and how they resisted total assimilation is an exercise of bringing us closer to their experience and arrive at the realization that freedom from an oppressive government or social, economic and/or environmental injustice can be attained if we seek unity in the strength of that which defines us as a people.

Looking at the arrival of Africans in the Americas can give us a clearer sense of resistance. Enslaved people were baptized into catholicism, a ritual required for entry onto Spanish soil. So much had been taken away from them already, that that which they could

control, their spirituality and their music, would be an imperative for their survival.

Accordingly, they dealt with the religious obligation by adopting the new icons of Catholicism having them refer to their own Gods. The resulting religion, a blend of Spanish Catholicism and African religions, was known as “Santeria.” Santeria and Bomba are just some of the “diverse social and cultural forms, alternative or marginal, that slaves and freedmen built to survive and support themselves.” (Mayo Santana 170)

A lot of the history of slavery in Puerto Rico, in terms of the influence in the culture and the study of Bomba, is situated in coastal towns. One of them is the town of Loiza, where the majority of the people consider themselves black. For a long time after the industrialization of the island, Loiza lived a reality that was separate from the more advanced cities. *La Fiesta de Santiago*, a documentary directed by anthropologist Ricardo Alegria in 1949, documents a traditional celebration in Loiza dedicated to the religious Spanish icon Santiago Apostol. The film starts by positioning Loiza as a world far away from the “equalizing progress of the mechanized civilization, isolated from the central pathways of communication. Living a tranquil and mild life, maintaining their antique customs and beliefs, ignoring the passing of the centuries.” It seems to suggest that the town of Loiza was forgotten by the rest of the island. That which is not said but could be inferred may be due to its strong African influence. Puerto Ricans back then couldn’t conceive of the notion of having African ancestry unless they lived in a place like Loiza or other towns where the majority of the population is dark skinned.

A 1957 film about Bomba begins, “Bomba, African rhythm but with the elegance and dignity in the interpretation of the dance,” which reads as disdain towards African heritage. There are other instances where the language used to describe the music and other influences

depreciates the culture of African ancestry. It is later in the production of Puerto Rican documentaries, that there is a better understanding and greater respect for African roots.

The film *La Herencia de un Tambor (The Heritage of a Drum)* by Mario Vissepó tells the story of Puerto Ricans from a more reverent stance. Starting from the ruins of a sugar plantation we hear about the suffering of slaves during this period, but we also hear about the struggle, the escapes and the killing of plantation managers, with flashback scenes of slaves drumming and dancing Bomba on a Sunday afternoon, enjoying the music while they planned an escape or revolt. “The happiness of slaves turned into a threat” for slave masters so that slaves had to fight each and every day for their livelihood and that of their families including planning ways to break free from their imposed conditions.

To dance Bomba was to resist the power structures that commanded and brutalized the enslaved body and in turn literally freed people from that slavery. Today dancing Bomba continues to take power back, the dancing body reaffirms its position in the world, it protests and manipulates fury into joy and tenacity carried out in a multifarious social space for everybody to witness. Mark Franko in his *Dance and the Political: States of Exception* describes this to and fro perfectly:

On a micro-historical level, dance may perform protest, a direct and local way of upsetting a power balance. Somewhere between these poles of ideological suasion, deconstruction and protest, we can pinpoint resistance. Resistance is a trope within which movement and representation are ambiguously articulated. This is because dance can absorb and retain the effects of political power as well as resist the very effects that it appears to incorporate within the same gesture. (Franko 6)

When I started my research for *Resistimos* at CUNY's Centro de Estudios Puertorriquenos, I read books about Puerto Rican slavery, lists of enslaved people, accounts of slave rebellions, and explored the use of Bomba as an organizing tool for liberation. With all this information, I realized that my research was wide ranging and that I needed to narrow it down. I had different themes and important historical moments that didn't amount to a story for a film.

I wanted to talk about colorism, women drummers, the creative and emotional expression of dance in Bomba, the history of slavery in Puerto Rico and the birth of Bomba, Bomba as a practice of resistance, Bomba as the propeller of Puerto Rican decolonization and — the biggest one — Bomba as a practice crossing oceans. I wanted to make a film that would tour from Africa to Portugal to Puerto Rico to New York, Chicago and California, following the development of Bomba across generations of practitioners and across cities and oceans. All of these themes are worthy of exploration but as I continued my research and talked to people, hitting roadblocks along the way, the process of narrowing down the story became much easier.

During the development phase, I traveled to speak with different people in the Bomba community in the US and Puerto Rico. There were so many different stories and perspectives I heard during this time that I didn't film because I was just starting out and didn't want to point a camera at people I hardly knew. I wanted to make people comfortable with my presence and to show that I respected them enough to wait for another time to film them. Most people I spoke to during this time are not part of *Resistimos*, mostly because they were in the US or in harder to reach areas of Puerto Rico.

## 6. Production Process

I had so much to learn. In retrospect I can see that I was fairly ignorant about the subject of Bomba and my initial ideas for a documentary about this community were naive and really general. My perception was that the Bomba community was a group of people that supported each other no matter what town they were from and no matter what their background was. After talking with many people in the community I realized there were deep issues that presented a more complex reality of this particular world. These issues had to do with the dissemination of information regarding Bomba. Throughout the course of 6 years, I learned about the essence of Bomba music and why its practice is so prevalent today.

Production for *Resistimos* started in 2014 with a first visit to Puerto Rico and with only one subject secured. I started with a budget of \$5,000 to travel and film that first year. Because I didn't have a driver's license, I relied on friends, family and taxis to get around the island. This proved to be one of the most limiting factors in making the whole documentary and it's one of the reasons why I focused the film only on people who live and/or work in the Northeastern area of Puerto Rico, namely Bayamón, Santurce, San Juan, and Loíza. There were so many other stories that I wanted to tell of people in the South and West towns of the island but the issue of transportation was one I couldn't figure out. This proved to be a blessing as I was able to spend more time with the main people in the documentary on the various trips to Puerto Rico.

When I started working on this documentary, it was going to be much bigger and involve many more people. Bomba communities in the diaspora were going to be featured as well, and I traveled to Chicago and the Bay Area of California to speak with several Bomba groups. I was also planning to have animation be a part of telling this story. Through animation I was going to

recount the history of Bomba and Africans in Puerto Rico. I also had conceptualized to film the whole documentary on a Movi Gimbal and not have any interviews, just conversations amongst people. A lot of these initial ideas were quickly abandoned as rejections for different grants came in and I was no longer able to afford the equipment and a team to support this vision.

After running out of money to continue filming, I would do freelancing and save up for flights to return to Puerto Rico. Even though the lack of funds was one of the reasons to make a smaller film, I came to the realization of what the film should be about as I spoke to a Bomba practitioner in California. Ito Carrillo is a Bomba teacher who was born and raised in Puerto Rico. His thinking was that diasporic Bomba will never be the same as Bomba in Puerto Rico. The reasoning for this idea was that music in Bomba comes from a certain kind of pain suffered by Puerto Ricans in the island that is not felt by people in the diaspora. In my mind I knew what to say to refute this idea because I had my family's challenging migration story from the 50s.

As I thought about it, it made more sense to me in relation to an obvious difference between people on the island and people in the US: living in a colony is different than living in a free country. The things you experience as a low income family in the US are magnified in Puerto Rico. Just as an example, on the island, even if you pay your water and electric bill on time, without any notice or reason for it, you might be a week without services. This was a constant as I was growing up and it still is. And there are no consequences to people in power when the infrastructure fails.

I finally understood what Carrillo might have been communicating to me and this ultimately changed my perspective on the film and what I was going to be focusing on. Following the stories of Puerto Ricans' day to day lives and struggles would speak to my own

experiences of life on the island. Instead of waiting for a film to be made that would reflect my concerns about my country while offering a different approach to telling the story of Puerto Rico, I set out to make one myself and in the process learned more about my African ancestry.

From 2016 to 2018 I went back to Puerto Rico a few times to film interviews with the main people in the documentary plus performances and rehearsals. To complete the film, I went on three separate trips to Puerto Rico in 2019. One of these was in July: I arrived the day after the governor resigned. It was the moment I needed for the ending of my film.

The equipment I ended up using for the whole film was a Canon 60D DSLR, handheld and on tripod, and an H4N Zoom recorder.

I've had many experiences filming documentaries but none where I had to interview people several times and follow them for more than one day. Apart from money constraints, this proved to be one of the biggest challenges in making *Resistimos*. I found it difficult asking people for more of their time. People were not answering my emails or calls. I thought, what am I doing wrong? Since filming a documentary means that you don't pay for the subject's participation, it's up to them to take it seriously and show up. Traveling to Puerto Rico to film was expensive and I was making this film with my hard earned money. For people not to show up for an interview or cancel at the last minute was discouraging to the point where I questioned if I was on the right career path. If I wasn't able to convince people about how important it was to participate, how could I convince people to support my film?

There were also people I had contact with who were suspicious about my intentions in making a film about Bomba. This was probably due to the fact that I wasn't part of the Bomba

community. Some in the community say that this was actually an advantage for me but it didn't seem like that at all because of all the work I had to do to get people involved.

Visiting the house of Bomba practitioner, Melanie Maldonado, was a turning point because she was the first to explain some truths about the practice of Bomba. She said that when Puerto Rico became a colony of the US, Puerto Ricans were forced to enter into this colonial-capitalist relationship and it meant that people had to compete for the little land and other resources that were left. The same happened with Bomba. People fought each other and were unwilling to share knowledge of rhythms, dances and songs because of all it took to preserve this invaluable heritage. From the start of working on this film till now, I perceive that things have changed for the better and the community is becoming more open with sharing information and is doing everything it can to change the capitalistic approach to one that is more collaborative and focused on growing the amount of people that know and practice Bomba music.

Despite the difficulties, the film turned out to be exactly what I intended, but a feeling of exhaustion from guerrilla-style documentary filmmaking has led me to consider making narrative films and television exclusively, at least for the next few years.

## **7. Music**

For *Resistimos* I thought that along with all of the Bomba music played in the film, there would be a score that was using Blues scales to convey the feelings of the people affected by social and economic woes in Puerto Rico. I consulted with my husband, composer and musician Greg Ward II, about making this score. He agreed to work on this project.

Choosing Blues as the base tonality for the music is related to the history of this Black American musical genre. The Blues came out after the Emancipation period in the US. This music is characterized by individuality and the expression of personal ideas and feelings as opposed to music made in groups like Gospel music and work songs. One of the reasons for choosing the Blues tonality is because of its similar roots to Bomba. They both came from the same experience of racism and the pain caused by systemic oppression. So the Blues as well as Bomba are expressions that exteriorize the afflictions of the body and the soul and the need “to do something about it.”

Son House remembered the time when he first began playing the blues: ‘I got the idea that the blues come from a person having a dissatisfied mind and he wants to do something about it.’ For these musicians, playing the blues meant putting on the persona of a black individual who spoke her mind and her emotions in a world that denied not only black individuality but often also black humanity. The expression of the blues person’s particular feeling, in the stylized conventions of the form, asserted the fact that working class blacks had feelings. The expression of the persona’s particular pain and survival in spite of it announced a collective resistance and a collective survival. (Hale 242)

Along with the Blues, I wanted to ground the score in Puerto Rican tradition by using the melody of the national anthem “La Borinqueña.” The romantic song was originally composed in 1867 by Francisco Ramírez from San Germán Puerto Rico. A tenor from Spain named Felix Astol Artés arranged it as a “danza habanera.” In 1868 it became the revolutionary anthem when

political activist Lola Rodríguez de Tió changed the lyrics to the song to support the struggle for independence. Here's the presently used shorter version of her "La Borinqueña":

Rise, Puerto Rican!  
The call to arms has sounded!  
Awake from this dream,  
it is time to fight!  
Doesn't this patriotic call  
set your heart alight?  
Come! We are in tune  
with the roar of the cannon.  
We want  
to be free now,  
and our machete  
Will help us  
Let's go, Puerto Ricans,  
Let's go now,  
that freedom awaits us anxiously,  
Freedom. Freedom.  
Freedom. Freedom!

Since these lyrics were considered too incendiary for the US government after their invasion of the island, the lyrics were changed in 1903 by Manuel Fernández Juncos to a more docile version:

The land of Borinquen  
where I have been born.  
It is a florid garden  
of magical brilliance.

A sky always clean  
serves as a canopy.  
And placid lullabies are given  
by the waves at her feet.  
When at her beaches Columbus arrived,  
he exclaimed full of admiration:  
Oh! Oh! Oh!  
This is the beautiful land that I seek.  
It is Borinquen the daughter,  
the daughter of the sea and the sun.  
of the sea and the sun,  
of the sea and the sun,  
of the sea and the sun,  
of the sea and the sun!

By using only the melody (no lyrics) of the national anthem in *Resistimos*, it could be left to those familiar with this anthem to decide which version they imagine behind the score. The melody is wrapped around a Blues improvisation on alto saxophone accompanied by french horns, piano and upright bass.

## **8. Audience and Exhibition**

*Resistimos* is for people who want to know where Bomba comes from, and where it's going. It's also a film for the Bomba practitioners and researchers from Puerto Rico and abroad, for whom it will provide an opportunity to connect with their community. It's for the people in

Loiza and other towns in Puerto Rico with strong Bomba roots. *Resistimos* is a film for the global music and dance community, so they can experience past and present scenes of Bomba. I'll be submitting the film to various film festivals: Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano (Havana, Cuba), Dance Camera West, Dance on Camera Film Festival, Doc NYC, International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), CPH:DOX and FIFA (International Festival of Films on Art) in Montreal.

After the world premiere of the film, I'll be conducting film screenings in New York (I'll be pitching an event for Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College) and at University of Puerto Rico. In my interest of getting the film seen in as many places as possible, a host in any city could screen the film with a public performance license. Using Dropbox showcase, I'll be creating a screening toolkit for these places that are interested in screening the film. The toolkit will include high resolution photos to create programs, a guide of best practices, a list of questions for the panelists or a Q&A, the public performance license and information to pay for the screening fee. For any screenings scheduled at universities, libraries and cultural centers in Puerto Rico, I'll invite people featured in the documentary to join me or the host at the screening in a discussion panel or Q&A.

Eventually, I'll make the film available online via video on demand (VOD). One of the aims of this film is to reach the Puerto Rican community, to engage them in appreciating Bomba and learning something about the link between Bomba and Puerto Rican resistance. Another is to put the current crisis in perspective for Puerto Ricans, by allowing an open dialogue about how colonialism affects people today. Among the audience for this film are Puerto Ricans on the island, and in the US and abroad, who are interested in connecting with their roots or trying to

learn more about this hidden history. Other audience members for this film are people who are trying to understand current news about Puerto Rico's economy. There are not many films about Puerto Rico available, especially ones addressing the colonial status. Talking about colonialism from the perspective of culture will undoubtedly bring the audience a new way of looking at Puerto Rican society and help with understanding how colonialism directly influences people's day to day life and why it's so important to continue fighting for Puerto Rican liberation.

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