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"THERE IS NO RACISM IN CUBA": A FIELD STUDY OF THE "POST-RACE" RHETORIC OF MODERN CUBA

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**“THERE IS NO RACISM IN CUBA”: A FIELD STUDY OF THE
“POST-RACE” RHETORIC OF MODERN CUBA**

BY

CLARISSA J. WALKER

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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OF
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2019

ABSTRACT

Claims of racelessness in present-day Cuba conflate identities and generate public discourse that misaligns with the social realities of black Cubans on the island.

Decolonial and critical race theorists argue the necessity of a racial-identity language:

Unconfronted race-based injustice and unproblematized whiteness are among the unaddressed issues concretized by racial democracy rhetoric. The aim of this

qualitative study is to investigate the collective narrative of modern-day Cuban

interviewees to determine their epistemological knowledge and current uses for the

rhetorics of racelessness; further, the study tracks the island's century-old rhetorical

practices designed to sustain erasure of race rhetoric in Cuba. This work will

determine the consequentiality of the purported racelessness and the absence of race

rhetoric for modern-day black Cubans. In this context, "race rhetoric" registers racial

identity and acknowledges concomitant experiences within the social ecology;

specifically, race-based disparities and aggressions experienced by black Cubans may be isolated, amplified and made public.

Structured interviews were conducted with 97 participants in Santiago, Cuba;

additionally, archival Cuban artifacts were analyzed, serving as historical context for

the interview data and content examined in this project. The majority of the

participants claim, "There is no racism in Cuba," clarifying that the claim refers to

constitutional racism and not "social racism". Some participants reported individual

experiences with racism and shared testimonies of race-based discrimination, dispelling assumptions of a monolithic solidarity rhetoric driven exclusively by socialism and state censorship. “There is no racism in Cuba” is an assertion that signifies allegiance to victories of the 1959 Cuban Revolution and affirms “Cubanidad” or a patriot’s individual association with the island’s national identity. Finally, project participant responses were highly influenced by #BlackLivesMatter rhetoric and United States news stories of police violence against people of color; Cuba’s first public Internet connections and the BLM movement began one month apart, a short time before this study commenced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will start this book by honoring my elders beyond:

I have to thank my beautiful maternal grandmother, Gram. For nurturing my writing life from the time I was 5 years old. Although you are no longer here, your grace was so tremendous in life that it now serves me as a working muse. When my toppling cursive letter "s" upset me in pre-kindergarten or the paragraphs of my high school graduation reading terrified me, you patiently, lovingly assured me that there would be better writing days to come.

During this project's writing, I sat with my granddad at the V.A. hospital in Augusta, Ga., his last month in the world. Even in hospice, Papa was effervescent and shrewd, inspiring the testimonies of his doctor, nurses and grandbaby; Papa's stories continue to circulate, fill rooms with laughter, smiles and nods, affirming the truth in it and bringing the people who loved him closer together. Papa: I am eternally grateful that you chased my school bus with my forgotten homework, tossed aside writing. The warmth and love of your home on Sand Bar Ferry Road, my first writing space, is the sense of safety that I continue to carry.

Dr. Daniel Scott, the chair of the Rhode Island College English Department, passed away days before my defense. That week, Daniel wrote: "Hello Clarissa... The idea

that you are performing a rhetorical analysis of interviews with people across national, gender, generational, class, (racial), and (most importantly) linguistic boundaries is full of exciting possibilities, I think. I know you have plans to extend your work beyond the dissertation, and I certainly feel that you should.” Each time I spoke to Daniel, he sought to help me calibrate my thinking to greater, higher, future glory, a generosity that everyone who knew him had the privilege to enjoy. Daniel was a part of the RIC community, my academic support system (my project resuscitators) for the duration of this writing process.

I thank my patient dissertation chair, Dr. Renee Hobbs, whose years of encouragement and mentorship made me a better researcher and pedagogue.

For my mom and my Augusta, Ga. family, I am sincerely grateful; your prayers and well-wishes fill the miles-wide gap between us.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

At the inception of this study, race rhetoric in modern Cuba was problematized in Narragansett, Rhode Island by an elderly retired white resident, Hillary Salk, and her husband, “Ed”. In January 2013, I met Hillary in Fuel, a neighborhood coffee shop, where she wrote and edited her book each morning. Our discussions of Augusta, Georgia, which is my hometown, a stop in her “army brat” childhood and the setting of her book, are how our friendship began. After returning from a Havana, Cuba cultural exchange trip with 200 U.S. retirees, Hillary expressed concern about my burgeoning academic interests in Cuba:

“Clarissa, I don’t know what you are going to do about your dissertation project. You are interested in racism *in Cuba*? There is no racism in Cuba!”

“Says who, Hillary?”

“Everyone. The Cuban trip leader, the government officials who spoke to us...
. Everyone knows.”

For the remainder of our coffee break together, I considered the 200 retirees from the United States (and thousands of others) engaging discourse purporting that one African-diasporic group (black Cubans) had dodged oppressive, inequitable, modern social realities structured and concretized long ago by colonialism and slavery. How many of the island’s visitors left Cuba disseminating narratives of a

modern Cuban racial democracy? And, which were the exigences that compelled this claim?

General Statement

Global exposure of the rhetorically-constructed realities of black Cubans, particularly those advancing a modern racial utopia, would inevitably contribute to a distributed depiction of this group of African descendants. Considering the United States alone, recent increases in encounters with Cuba's public rhetoric, specifically generative storytelling of black experiences on the island, hurdle the prior isolating constraints and state-regulated censorship. In 2016, there were 624,433 travelers from the United States visiting Havana and Santiago de Cuba (Talty, *Forbes*). And, within the first six months of 2017, 300,000 Americans had already visited the island. In 2012, 98,000 U.S. travellers visited, up from 73,500 in 2011 (Frank *Reuters*). This count does not include 350,000 Cuban Americans and U.S. diplomats traveling annually, who are considered Cuban nationals. This escalating contact with the island was a direct result of changes made to the 54-year-old trade embargo, which restricts commercial and financial exchange between Cuban and United States businesses and their subsidiaries (Fisk, 2000). During the time of this study, the terms of the embargo between the United States and Cuba was in flux. On December 17, 2014, President Barack Obama announced his decision to “restore diplomatic relations and the liberalisation of travel and remittances — will do much to normalise a relationship that has been trapped in a sterile logic of the cold war.”¹ Subsequently, on June 16, 2017,

¹ “America and Cuba: The New Normal”. *The Economist*. January 3, 2015. Print

President Donald Trump, arguing that adjustments of the previous Administration were too one-sided, reinstated travel restrictions and arrested trade easements. Despite the unsettled diplomatic circumstances, travellers, like the Salks' retiree group and many others, continue to have unrestricted access to Cuba under President Trump's policy as well. Therefore, the resurrected, large-scale interest in cultivating and reconfiguring cultural and diplomatic connections with island-based Cubans, in part, creates the kairotic moment for this study. Further, for the first time, the Cuban government unrolled Internet access, starting in 2013. Cuba's public wifi parks, specifically those in Santiago de Cuba, facilitated the first wide-scale Internet access on the island in mid-2016; this launch coincided with the #BlackLiveMatters movement, including viral web content chronicling and disseminating repeated police assaults on people of color in the United States. Expectedly, participants' relatively new exposure to discourse about racism in the United States influenced outcomes of this project.

The Claim: "There is No Racism in Cuba"

Historicized, the claim has salient corroboration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The work of Cuban author, military strategist and activist, José Martí, suggests one conceptualization of a racelessness Cuba. In his 1891 essay titled "Nuestra America," Martí declares: "There is no racism in Cuba." The Cuban national hero explained that there is no racism because there are no races (iii); this pronouncement subsequently anchored Fidel Castro's 1959 *Proclamation Against*

Discrimination and potentially fuels a modern-day mantra of Cuban tourism. Yet, problematically, this 6-word statement, “There is no racism in Cuba.” seemingly collides with the work of the island’s anti-racism activists and black Cuban creators; writers and activists such as Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Alejandro de la Fuente, and Tomas Fernandez Robaina consider the assertion of racelessness in Martí’s declaration one constraint that has kept their compatriots and international onlookers blinded for decades. De la Fuente (2001) writes that, in Cuba, historically, it has been considered unpatriotic and “racist” to claim racial identity:

To insist on someone's Blackness or whiteness could then be easily construed as a racist and un-Cuban act. As Martí put it, ‘the Negro who proclaims his racial character ... authorizes and brings forth the white racist... . Two racists would be equally guilty, the white racist and the Negro. This constant allusion to a man’s color should cease’” (De la Fuente 28).

Such historical acts of erasure and the ways that this rhetorical action in Cuba is sustained, -- beyond regimes, generations, and shifting exigence -- help to anchor this project. As embracing African descendancy or racial identity is perceived as “a racist and un-Cuban act,” the tenor and tensions of the project landscape in Santiago, Cuba are crystallized.

Statement of the Problem and Importance of Study

Problem #1

Modern day applications of anachronistic military recruitment language are rhetorical strategies that thwart the establishment of the racial identity and the race consciousness of African descendants on the island.

Cuban leaders sought to unify would-be troops who were needed for battle wins, creating calls that assembled groups of Cubans fighting to win the island's independence; to this end, leaders often wrote essays and speeches describing Cuba as a racial democracy, depicting racial identity as fragmenting and unpatriotic.

Purporting homogeneity in this way is a rhetorical strategy of colonialism, specifically the notion of cleansing a group of racial or cultural identity strategically removed motivation for resistance. Frantz Fanon discusses this type of socialization, one that psychologically separates Africans from blackness (Fanon "Black" 147). He discusses the problem of the "collective unconscious," or the reality that racelessness is not raceless at all; raceless is a centering of dominant culture and blacks, who have been stripped of their own identity, are systematically pressed to embrace the dominant discourse. Related discursive tactics are employed in modern Cuba. For example, during the Special Period (1989 to 1995), President Fidel Castro continued making

claims that, for Cubans, racial identifications are obsolete and that the island was a colorblind society; yet, “in redrawing the geography of Cuba’s racials landscape, the state simultaneously closed down Afro-Cuban clubs and the black press. As racism became public once again during the Special Period, blacks were left without means to talk about it” (Fernandes 39).

Problem #2

Concretized presumptions about Cuba’s race politics precludes the creation and continuous recalibration of a generative race rhetoric; such a rhetorical process must consider temporality and consequentiality for modern day black Cubans.

Afro-Latin American historian Devyn Spence Benson credits an oversimplification of Cuban race politics for the fortified, lasting beliefs that socialist and communist ideologies are the only guides for the island government’s approach to race. “I actually find that racial policies have more to do with over 100 years of Cuban racial history and the histories of people of African descent in Cuba” (Goldtree, “Interview” 2016). Benson touches on one of the problematic paradigms impeding study that focuses on discursive, meaning-making processes of Cuban individuals about racial identity; the presumption is that Socialist/Communist ideologies have created monolithic public rhetoric and personal histories.

During the Special Period (early to mid-1990s), black Cubans were vocal about economic disparities and sparseness they endured. Their testimonies align with

observations of critical race scholarship: In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1963) discusses dominating narratives driven by economic agents (such as tourism) as a distinct tactic employed by colonialists. With economic masking and diverting as a rhetorical exigence, the cost is inevitably an inclusive and more accurate nation narrative. Fanon warns that the highly visible and widely disseminated measures are often questionable and mask greater constraints that have long-inhibited marginalized communities. “Certain spectacular measures delay the crystallization of national consciousness for a few years” (Fanon 208). With public fora dominated by nation narratives and none for testimonies of race-based experiences, a silencing of counternarratives is sustained. Even with the acknowledgement of race-based inequalities, there is an absence of discourse that continuously addresses consequences and shifting social realities for African descendants on the island. Critical race theorists have long discussed the necessity for language that forms around and chronicles the experiences of those experiencing oppression, resisting oppression. In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Bell Hooks (1989) describes the process of reclaiming and recovering for the oppressed and exploited. She states that this type of resistance is a continuous effort to expose the projected/imposed false reality: “We make revolutionary history, telling the past as we have learned it mouth-to-mouth, the the present as we see, know and feel it in our hearts with our words.” When there is an absence of public fora to process encounters with racism and “name our pain”, material casualties are amassed unreported, undetected. Jacqueline

Jones Royster (1999) argues that unchallenged valorization of historical narratives have lasting, generational and material consequences.

There is a danger in assuming a universality in these texts that spans eras and generations unchanged and unchallenged. Without continuous recontextualization, historical narratives are given the power to immortalize dated viewpoints and expired exigence. “The challenge is for all of us to have a critical perspective of the extent to which images and valorized viewpoints shape interpretive visions and thereby create consequences, given the interpretive framework that grow out of these visions, in terms of knowledge making, policy-making, and day-to-day operations (Jones-Royster et al. “History” 564). The claim, “There is no racism in Cuba”, has functioned, in some instances, as a “color-blinding” instrument, employed rhetoric, created and reconfigured by national heroes such as Martí, Ferdinando Ortiz and subsequently President Fidel Castro.

Problem #3

Public spaces that disallow race rhetoric inhibit the correction of race-based disparities in modern Cuba.

Critical race theorists bring attention to a common practice of excluding black “historical agents” and the lack of public acknowledgement of racist acts (in the form of microaggressions, masking, omission, alienating, etc.). Addressing the exclusion of black chroniclers, Henry Giroux and Keith Gilyard discuss the implications of dominant ideology that assumes whiteness or Western perspectives as the standard/the

default. When people of color are not telling their own stories and power is not located in the subject position, blackness (if handled at all) is essentialized, conflated with other identities, or erased. This is the structuring rhetoric of colonialism; Giroux (1991) notes that when blacks “cease to be historical agents” problematic social hierarchies are materialized and sustained; this, of course, occurs rhetorically.

Within the discourse of modernity, the Other not only sometimes ceases to be historical agent, but is often defined within totalizing and universalistic theories that create a transcendental rational white, male, Eurocentric subject that both occupies the centers of power while simultaneously appearing to exist outside time and space (Giroux 1991).

Gilyard acknowledges that an assumed default white or raceless identity “preserves a cultural backdrop that is blinding”; yet, the rhetorical activity is operationalized in relational and material experiences of black communities (Gilyard, 1996). He posits that race is “rhetorical...but not merely so,” indicating that an examination must include overt and encoded racist verbal acts and testimonies of experiences with race. Gilyard calls for an examination, or an approach, that considers that racism is not only a “calculated social maneuver,” but a substantial rhetorical construct. He advises that the degree to which race discourse is established must be assessed “deeply and frequently”:

It is entirely possible that racist verbal constructs are directly responsible for racist actions, but it also possible for one to act humanely even while operating inside certain language of inhumanity. What one cannot do, however, when locked inside the discourse of “race” is to show the way out of that position. Thus, one is implicated to the degree that that discourse is delimiting. The “degree” is what we need to investigate further and continue to do so deeply and frequently. Moreover, although I have posited that race is rhetorical, I have not suggested that it is *merely* so (Gilyard 51).

Other critical race theorists amplify the material consequences of generic distortions shaped by colonial sensibilities; the validation of limited assimilation, an environment in which race is undertheorized, and the operation of power-evasive paradigms that impact an individual’s sense of self (Prendergast, 1998; Williams, 1991; Bell, 1995; Gilyard, 1996; Villanueva, 1997).

Problem #4

A critical black voice is necessary to challenge politics of domination.

Decolonial theorists discuss problematic claims of racelessness, specifically meaning making in social ecologies that is devoid of black thinkers’ perspectives;

missing in these public spaces are the isolation and challenging of “hegemonic modes of seeing” (Hooks “Black Looks” 2).

Without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure. A fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with the hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory (Hooks “Black Looks” 2).

For an representative and inclusive critical response to the “politics of domination,” black identity is a necessity. A material consequence of Cuba’s rhetorics of solidarity (and the erasure that occurs to create it) is the removal of the black subject position as a valued and empowered perspective. The viable operation of the black voice is missing and, as critical race theorist Catherine Prendergast (1998) argues: “This voice is the expression of double-consciousness; significantly, it embodies contradiction, ambiguity, and even irrationality as it reflects the experience of discrimination in a society which professes to be colorblind” (40).

Modern day Cuba’s public rhetoric is comprised of overt identity claims of solidarity and racelessness: “Colorblind” claims guide the distribution of wealth and opportunities among all Cubans. And, historical, yet virulent, rhetorical structures

sustain notions of a national identity rooted in the racial democracy. This project tracks the rhetorical life of this phrase “There is no racism in Cuba” and seeks out the implications of various concatenations resulting from the century-old claim as they are relayed in the testimonies of Cubans interviewees.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative project is to investigate rhetorical practices designed to sustain the erasure of race rhetoric in Cuba; this work seeks to determine the consequentiality of the purported “racelessness” for modern-day black Cubans. The study included 97 participants in Santiago, Cuba who were identified by the project’s gatekeeper from three categories: “academics”, who were invested in the topics discussed in the study; “professionals”, who are engineers, doctors, nurses and teachers; and, “laborers”, who are blue-collar workers. This study used structured interview protocols to collect data from participants located in Santiago, Cuba. Interviewing Santiaguan participants provides insights on their understanding, the significance and use of race rhetoric, as it operates in their lives. Secondly, the study draws from three curated Cuban archival artifacts, the content of each provide historical context for the project’s focal claims such as “There is no racism in Cuba.” Historicizing claims of racelessness allows for the scope of the investigation to precede the time of dominant socialist ideology of the island’s revolutionary government; and, the artifacts provide backstory evidencing how uses of the solidarity

rhetoric shifts as it leapfrogs through time. Finally, researcher field notes create a narrative that situates the work in the present-day social ecology of Santiago, Cuba.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this project combines elements of critical race and public rhetoric theories. Critical race theorists have consistently conceptualized and delineated the operation of what this project calls “race rhetoric” (Jackson & Richardson, 2007; Gilyard, 1999; Royster & Williams, 1999). Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson (2007) suggest that this rhetoric, that of African descendants, is “the study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles of people of African ancestry in America” (xiii). A fundamental function of race rhetoric is to address unproblematic whiteness and rhetorical practices that mask disharmony and injustice (Gilyard “Higher” 49). Further, race rhetoric functions to bring attention to hegemonic practices responsible for alienation, misrepresentation, omission of people of color in narratives (Jones Royster “Reading” 134). In this framework, public rhetoric scholars clarify the movement, influence and encounters with race rhetoric. First, this scholarship describes recipients of rhetoric as “self-selecting and self-understanding” publics, publics that form because they chose to engage a text

(Warner, 2002; Edbauer-Rice, 2005). Secondly, this scholarship provides a useful lens for investigating that ways that generations of Cubans, including this project's participants, chose to engage century-old rhetoric that calls for the erasure of racial identity. This scholarship also defines rhetoric as circulating, moving rather than stable, fixed and stagnant; this approach "recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes" (Edbauer 9).

Critical race theory provides the parameters for an examination of the consequentiality of a discourse of racelessness in the public sphere in Cuba, the implications for modern-day African descendants in a space where the use of race rhetoric is considered treasonous, counter revolutionary or racist. Further, public rhetoric scholarship considers temporality, the way that race claims move through time, surviving engagement with generations of publics and their respective histories.

Research Questions

There is an overabundance of scholarship (1) examining the island's legacy regarding kidnapped and enslaved captives from several African countries, and (2) that has analyzed Cuba's Communist and Socialist governance as the impetus for solidarity rhetoric. The research questions reflect the mission of the project: This work investigates testimonies of individuals for the epistemology and validity of Cuban racial democracy claims and that rhetoric's misalignment with the modern social reality for blacks on the island.

Central Question

- How do Afro-Cubans use race rhetoric in a social ecology in which racialized discourse is considered counter-revolutionary or treasonous?

Subquestions

- What are everyday Cubans willing to say about their experiences and understanding of race and racism when they are physically situated in a space that is historically deemed raceless?
- What are the social mechanisms in place that potentially veil and/or influence racial discourse in modern day Cuba?
- Which are the rhetorical strategies and discursive configuring that sustain the rhetoric of solidarity or national identity tropes?

Issue Subquestions

- Specifically, with the American field researcher as an embodied (embattled) hegemonic rhetoric, how does researcher subjectivity influence the data gathering process in Cuba?
- Considering the current state of de-racialized expression in modern Cuba, what are the embodied/material/psychological implications for black Cubans?
- How has the absence of racial discourse influenced the crystallization of a national consciousness?

Overview of Research Design

This study was conducted by interviewing 97 participants in Santiago, Cuba; structured interview protocols were employed with the guidance of the project's gatekeeper, appointed by the Fernando Ortiz Center for African Studies. Further, textual analysis of curated archival Cuba works were used to historicize racial democracy claims and to contextualize participant interviews. The Santiaguan participants were drawn from three categories: academics, professionals and laborers who were situated around the city.

This multimethods project explores the use, absence and erasure of racial discourse; the work raises important questions about the way racism is registered and reported/not reported/encoded in modern Cuba. By amplifying voices of everyday Cuban community members who are not necessarily politically prominent, the aim is to add more inclusive dimensions to the "No Racism" narrative that currently exists and to contribute to other work that has the potential to guide our renewed focus on the island. As Cuba's national identity becomes resituated in hegemonic networks and

tributaries of information exchange, it is important that the experiences of black Cubans with the island's race politics register simultaneously.

The Project Scope and Delimitations

Beyond the scope of this study are Cuban-Americans or Cubans living off-island; this project seeks to examine race rhetoric as it operates in the present-day social ecology on the island. The work is concerned with the testimonies and epistemologies of race rhetoric of everyday Santiaguans. For that reason, there is not an emphasis on Fidel Castro, the 1959 Cuban Revolution or the complexities of the island's historically controversial governance. Because such research has been addressed exhaustively, ideological components of Marxism, Socialism and Communism are not deconstructed here.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH NARRATIVE I

This chapter serves as the researcher journey narrative, recounting select experiences in the field and problems that I encountered while in the early phases of the project. The aim is to contextualize the work and describe the impact that the destabilized zeitgeist of United States-Cuba relations had on this research; this is a historically significant moment because, while the changes incentivized over 2 million Americans to travel to Cuba annually, this hegemonic relationship sluggishly awakens from diplomatic paralysis that lasted more than a half century. The decision to use an autobiographical approach in this chapter has precedence with composition studies researchers who assert that narratives of the researchers lived experiences effectively contextualize studies (Smitherman, 1977; Gilyard 1991; Martinez, 2016). In the *Journal of Education Research* (2009), Petra Munro Hendry argues that there is an urgent need to think beyond the binary framework that privileges science and empiricism. It is this body of scholarship that compels me to, autobiographically, discuss the impact of polarizing policy changes of two U.S. presidential administrations between January 2009 to the present; to share the challenges of curating effective “race language” for interview instruments in preparation for field work in modern Cuba; and, to discuss why preliminarily, my greatest worries for the project were the misguided inclusion of incendiary (to participants) questions about race language or that these research efforts would be reduced to a mere transference of

American race politics or counter-revolutionary discourse. I underscore the key challenges tethered to my subjectivity as a researcher in Cuba, specifically the double indictment of being from the United States and being African American, each often carrying a respective set of distrusted agendas. Most significant to the anchoring of this project, this chapter anecdotally situates my introduction to the claim: “There is No Racism in Cuba”.

This project journey began for me in 2014.

The Stage: A Shifting Hegemony

On February 28, 2014, I was the first speaker at the University of Rhode Island’s Women’s Day Conference. The topic of my raw and undeveloped presentation, “Rhetorics of Activism: Afro-Cuban Women Tweeting, Blogging, Tracking the Finish of the 59-year-old Castro Regime,” at that stage was no more than a clumsy statement of burgeoning inquiry. Over the next four years, this dissertation project would be pruned and developed on a realtime turbulent diplomatic landscape, a historic shifting in U.S.-Cuba relations that amounts to more hegemonic political activity in those few months than the world had seen in over a half century.

Figure 1. Timeline of Presidential Events in the United States and Cuba 2014-2017.

For the last 60 years, U.S. universities have sent student groups to Cuba annually, under the visa type “educational activities,” one of 12 approved categories for traveling to Cuba. It is a misconception is that this began with the Obama administration; the change was that prior approval for travel was no longer needed after the President’s December 7, 2014 announcement, which clarified they new terms of the loosened embargo. As I prepared to satisfy IRB requirements for my project, I

fastly learned that the new arrangements for “educational activities” did not solve my field work access problems.

I was an American graduate student who needed permission to study as a researcher in-residence at one of the universities or cultural centers in Havana or, more preferably, Santiago. The learning institutions in Cuba are narrowly themed and the work of a foreign researcher must align with the emphasis of the island’s sponsoring institution. The nature of my project, which sought to investigate forms and uses of race language in modern Cuba, is deemed to be counter-revolutionary by many on the island. Realizing what I faced, I contacted my family in Augusta, Georgia and explained that I would not be home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. I emailed three Cuban cultural and educational institutions requesting support and was denied by one. The others did not reply because on November 25, 2016, the Cuban government announced the death of Fidel Castro and the island shut down for weeks to memorialize their iconic leader, who died at age 90. My generation has not experienced a single death so prodigious that it arrests a nation. However, I grew up hearing repeats of treasured family lore that began with, “When I heard Martin/President Kennedy was assassinated, I was...,” my Uncle David, Gram and Papa could recall with precision where they were when “it” happened. This was more than that. A regime leader of 67 years, who defined a revolutionary Cuban identity, was gone. Other than the thriving black market, the island is essentially a state-run

apparatus, I got no responses as they mourned. This is the point when my new friend, Afro-Cuban writer Pedro Sarduy Perez, was most heroic in my story.

I discovered Pedro's work on AfroCubaWeb.com in 2013; he authored *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture* (1993) and the *Maids of Havana* (2003). Pedro is a 75-year-old writer who was born in Havana, Cuba. In 1980, he moved to London, England and now spends only the spring and summer months on the island. In 2014, I located him as he traveled on a book tour in the United States. We would Skype several times during this process and eventually meet in person when I arrived in Santiago for the pilot study.

As I sat in the URI Bay Campus Library, with the cheer of staff librarians having their Christmas party five feet away from my laptop, I sat in front of an incomplete IRB application with no research residency confirmed in Cuba. On that day, I reached out to Pedro one more time. Pedro wrote:

Hello Clarissa. Sorry to hear that. I just spoke to Marta Cordies Jackson, the director of the Fernando Ortiz African Cultural Centre. Send email. Let's see what happens.

The center's director responded to me, immediately. And, the match could not have been more ideal. Fernando Ortiz African Cultural Centre was founded in Santiago de Cuba on July 25, 1988. Anthropologists, linguists, historians, authors are based there annually to conduct a spectrum of research on the African origins of Cuba.

I sent Marta my approved dissertation proposal and a letter of intent; within a few days she invited me to the present at the center's annual conference and to work there for six weeks on my research project. A fleck of hope at a wall and the outpouring of support from Cuban strangers establishes the backbeat of two years. I wanted to tell the world, so I posted the news on Facebook: "Found research home in Santiago, Cuba. Merry Christmas to me!" (June 19, 2017) The vitriol of "Miami Cuban" voices weighed in.

Figure 2. Post on Facebook: "Miami Cuban" Opposer.

She was right.

Yet, on the island, I would converse with Cubans who vehemently disagreed with Garbarino, offended because her post represented a group of Cuban descendents whose voices controlled the narrative of a place they have never seen.

On the weekend that I departed for my final research trip to Santiago, June 17, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump was in Little Havana at the same time. He

announced that all of the terms of the embargo “loosening” of the previous regime were nullified.

The public discourse around Cuba was charged and certainly polarized by the approaches of two very different U.S. presidential administrations. After the pilot trip and after meeting new colleagues and friends living in Santiago who were desperate for something new, I responded to Jessica Garbarino.

Figure 3. Post on Facebook: Response to “Miami Cuban” Post.

While some of their reports are factual, many of the most vocal Cubans living in Miami have never visited Cuba. The Mariel Boatlift occurred on April 20, 1980 and the Cuban Missile Crisis on October 15, 1962. Between those years were the largest exodus of Cubans that landed in Miami, 90 miles away. Those born in Miami, and those who have never returned, tell true but cherry picked stories of modern Cuba that I found fueled divisiveness;

The Dual Indictment: Black and American

I grappled with the best way to acknowledge the complex role of my own subjectivity in the execution of this project. For me, the works of post colonial scholars such as Paulo Freire, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Ralph Cintron, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Malea Powell and Ellen Cushman weigh in on my responsibility as a researcher coming before Cubans, “like a collection basket before the lives of others” (Cintron, 2). Before boarding the plane in Miami, I thought a great deal about the substantial patchwork of experiences that inform my beliefs about race and racism and how those beliefs may be substantially differed from those ascribed to me by the Cuban participants. I am a black woman, inquiring about the language of race and racism and am an American, tied to the country credited with exporting all modern manifestations of bigotry into Cuba. As these things are embodied, I present my ascribed subjectivity as a (potential) problem and submit that within the scope of this project, this problem will not be solved.

Regardless, Powell, Tuhiwai-Smith and Cintron instruct me on the importance of avoiding essentialistic instruments in the field, remnants of imperialism, even when you are a scholar studying the places from which you come. Jones-Royster says of researchers “tramping around” in other people’s “home spaces”: Where is your home training? Ellen Cushman, a white researcher who conducted her doctoral project in the predominantly black neighborhood near her college, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, said this:

Although I am white, the women in this neighborhood and I identify with each other in many ways: we're no strangers to welfare offices, cockroaches, and empty refrigerators. We've held our chins out and heads up when we haven't had enough food stamps at the checkout line. We've made poor (and good) choices in men and have purple and pink scars to prove it. We know enough to take out earrings before we fight. We know abuses and disorders and the anonymous places people turn to for them (Cushman, 18).

As I explore ways to respectfully and strategically enter participant space, while simultaneously using this scholarship to help temper my expectations, I think of Cushman the most. Cushman delineates stripes earned, hard knocks endured that justify a white woman's temporary membership and approved access to the black women participants, their lives and their neighborhood.

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and since my great-great-grandparents were in the Trail of Tears, we know why, on a crisp January day a cardinal in a pine tree gives us hope. (18)

However, what I find problematic is that to establish her ethos in the field, Cushman omits from the poetic timbre of her narrative the signifiers of white privilege that litter a fuller examination of her positionality. For example, Cushman left the field and returned to graduate school, distinctions, access, voice and placement in academia. She rhetorically pursues sameness in what is to me a reductionist, yet musical, listing of shared trauma and bad decisions that she had in common with the black participants. Delivering her field story before CCCC readership/audience, she neutralizes her participants as they are absent and were never the target audience. I enter Santiago, Cuba mindful of problematic pursuits of sameness and of how essentializing can so easily be mistaken for empathizing. The assumption may be that “There is No Racism in Cuba” is my chosen project because the participants and I are of the African dissent; that, too, can easily and dangerously become a reductionist view.

As a black woman from Georgia, I am often astounded by assumptions that are made about my experiences with racism, where they occurred, with whom and the nature of the concomitant wounds that I must currently bare as a result. I enter carrying a litany of experiences with racism, many of which did not occur in the United States nor the south. As a child in Augusta, Georgia my grandmother, the

person closest to me, told me detailed stories of costumed dancers and the glorious choreography and singing of the Vaudeville shows that she would see as a child. In her stories, her view was from the balcony, above the white-only sections of the Lenox Theatre on Ninth Street. Ghosts of my grandmother's Augusta continue to thrive in mine. In the early 2000s, as a metro reporter at the *Augusta Chronicle*, I entered the expansive marble-floored lobby of the Richmond County Courthouse to cover the day's court docket stories. Facing me were two functioning antique water fountains set seven or eight feet apart. Those water fountains were a metaphor of my perception of racism in Augusta; the official "Whites Only" sign had been removed, but segregation's racist infrastructure remained. So, I watched racism in my hometown chug along, possibly more reluctant than before, but still electing to shapeshift, violently or subtly, rather than to ever allow itself to be eradicated. Journalism took me to Micronesia. Essentialism also operated in a racialized space there. To Chamorros (what the people from Guam choose to call themselves) all Americans, black or white, are "statesiders". I served on the Diversity Committee for Gannett Company's *Pacific Daily News* and developed strategic plans for inclusion to address claims of discrimination in newspaper coverage. We budgeted stories that would include Palauan, Pohnepain, Chuukese, and Filipino readers who correctly claimed that, while they were a substantial population on the island, the newspaper's coverage had erased their communities. Guam was the first time that a lived experience

complicated the black-white binary that structures race rhetoric in mainland United States.

New or Restored? Infrastructure, Race Language, and Starting from Scratch

My trips to Santiago, Cuba always began in the Miami International Airport, where the line to board the charter flight formed at 2 a.m. in front of a makeshift Havana Air counter. The pilot project for this research in Cuba was slated to begin the week before Easter 2017. I missed my flight. I missed my flight due to my own short sightedness, which taught me to sleep over in airport and not Uber in a few hours prior the ticket time; there is no network to electronically connect Miami to Cuba. Therefore, the departure times and instructions on tickets generated in the U.S. do not always correspond with realtime Santiago. Also, there are no Havana Air signs curbside, so the drop off location is a crapshoot, this at the 10th largest airport in North America.

Having waited three days in Miami before the next flight to Santiago, I did laundry. I wanted to arrive in Cuba with clean clothes. In the laundromat, I met an older Cuban woman and her friend laughing as she reenacted her grandson's mischief in Spanish. They spoke no English while I was there and we were fascinated with one another. They introduced me to other Cubans who stopped in, telling them about my research and traveling troubles. The two women were from Santa Clara, which is on the opposite side of the country from my destination.

“You are going to the right place,” said the woman in charge.

She paused, searching for language.

“If you are looking for people who... look like you.”

I chose Santiago, not only because I had been accepted as a researcher in-residence at the Center of African Studies/Fernando Ortiz, but I discovered the island’s history that compelled her comment. Voluntary migration and slavery in the region resulted in a greater concentration of Cubans in Santiago who are of African descent. Geographically, Santiago was a closer point from Haiti and Jamaica.

The women inspected my clothes as I folded warm shirts from the dryer.

“Those are too hot for Santiago,” the friend warned. “You need something like this.” Her hands pulled out the belly of her blouse, making a tent of airy cotton with ribbon trim.

“It’s the hot season, now?” I asked the manager, as I handed her my leftover detergent. I donated it because I couldn’t take it on the airplane.

“No. It’s not the hot *season*.” They laughed again like they had been when I entered.

“It’s hot everyday of the year in Santiago.”

While the Havana Air weight restriction for each person is 40 pounds (total), I seemed to be the only passenger in line without family waiting for the bubble-wrapped flat screen televisions, suitcases of clothes, small furniture that the embargo made it impossible to mail for the last five decades. It was an additional \$5 per pound for any weight over the 40 pounds. We are there for hours. There is leaning, but no sitting. I

trace the line past closed money changers and international flight counters, down corridors that were empty a year ago when flights from Miami to Cuba were forbidden. Dunkin Donuts is open. Travellers heading to Havana intersect with those in my Santiago-bound line. And, naturally, I noted that I was in a much browner line, many did “look like me”. Therefore, until I speak and present my United States passport, the airport employees assume that I am Cuban.

Employee: Muéstrame tu pasaporte y tu boleto solamente. (Show me your passport and ticket only)

The TSA man roars, condescendingly and with an American accent that makes his boisterous request unclear but we know what he wants. Someone yells back at him: “We speak English. We live in Miami.” He pretends not to hear it, probably because every Cuban living in Miami or in that line does not speak English. But, we all know what he wants.

Me: (To the woman behind me) We are packing a lot of cargo on this plane.

Her: This is nothing. It is *much* worse at Christmas time.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW | CRITICAL RACE-GENERAL

The purpose of this chapter is to situate this “No Racism in Cuba” study in existing scholarship, a rich intersection of works by postcolonial and decolonial theorists addressing the considerations when historicizing, contextualizing, erasure and function of race rhetoric in modern Cuba. In this chapter, critical race theory (CRT) provides one analytical framework and precision language to discuss some of the agreed upon, shared experiences of colonized, marginalized groups navigating dominant social systems, specifically those of the United States. I note this because, for many of these scholars, the CRT backdrop, with its legal studies anchoring and ties to the race politics of the Civil Right Movement, is essential, but not *essentializing*. Although this section seeks to present discourse of creators from Brazil, Martinique, Kenya and the United States, placing each in conversation about uses and functions of race rhetoric in Cuba, there is no assumption that there is exact sameness in the African-diasporic experiences, ecological factors, shared social realities or an “easily stated unitary identity” (CRT). “Socially dispossessed and culturally displaced adherents (are) active social actors and knowledgeable agents capable of making their own history” (Singh 18). This project aligns with those scholars who “take issue with black cultural nationalists who deploy a race-culture essentialist discourse, homogenizing blackness” (18). In this study, Afro-Cuban participants, rightly speaking from their subject positions, state clearly and decidedly that the social

situation concerning race and racism in Cuba is in no way comparable to that of the United States: There is no racism in Cuba, some participants claim. However, there is an undeniable history of colonization on the island and the importation of kidnapped Africans forced into slavery guided the imperialistic shaping of Cuba; this is how the use of the following scholarship is justified.

Objectives of this dissertation project require a cobbling together of seemingly eclectic theory and scholarship that will, collectively, engage and contextualize the Santiago field data and archival artifacts. Necessarily, critical race theorists and decolonial works provide discourse that catalog the lasting social and material consequences of rhetorical acts that have historically sought to erase racial identity of Afro-descendent groups. Above all else, the Santiaguan participants of this study, their agency and voice are the centerpiece of this project. However, the prominence given (by Cuban participants) to the significance of the archival artifacts compels the inclusion of public rhetoric scholarship. Here, public rhetoric work offers insight on the ubiquitous role and the vast rhetorical and material influence of the archival artifacts included in this study and the participant interview data collected in the field.

The objectives of this chapter are:

- To explore critical race theory, decolonial and public rhetoric scholarship that contribute to a working definition of “race rhetoric” for this dissertation project.
- To contextualize the function of race rhetorics in social ecologies and discuss consequentiality for African-derived people in spaces that attempt to de-racialized discourse.
- To isolate rhetorical acts and strategies practiced as colonial oppression and trace these moves to present day public spheres.

Critical Race Theory

Because areas of this dissertation are informed by the race politics of two vastly different countries, it is productive to describe how “race rhetoric” and Critical Race Theory (CRT) are conceptualized in the strategy of inquiry for this project. Drawing from law and humanities-based scholarship, CRT theorists understand racism to be “ordinary business” in the United States, “not aberrational,” but operating more like “normal science” (Delgado et al “Critical Race” 2001). This conceptualization encompasses the rhetorical acts that lead to material realities for blacks, acts born from a “system of white-over-color ascendancy that serves important purposes, both psychic and material, for the dominant group” (Delgado et al “Critical Race” 2001; Williams 1998; Bell 1995; Prendergast 1998). Because this “normal science” is so

pervasive, the activity is prevalent, yet often unacknowledged, in routines, rote practices, and structuring institutions. This body of CRT work consistently calls for an examination and the transforming of the relationship between racism and power (Delgado et al “Critical Race” 2001). In other words, CRT is focused on the relationship between power and the construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination (Delgado et al “Critical Race” 2001). Therefore, this work situates the a functionable conceptualization of “race rhetoric” in the conversation generated from the legacy of critical race theory.

Toward a Conceptualization of “Race Rhetoric”

In *Race, Rhetoric and Composition* (1999), Keith Gilyard presents the challenges he faced curating the scholarly collection of essays. “I was inclined to demand that contributors take a hard materialist turn and link race explicitly to historical formations of racism and economic exploitation,” (ix). By doing this, *Race, Rhetoric* would have been “a clearly focused assault on the idea of race”. Further, the work may have represented a body of evidence illustrating the relationship between the social realities of African-diasporic groups to racist discourse, symbols, signifiers and rhetorical structures operating in their respective ecologies. However, Gilyard did not choose that route; he went another way: “Race itself is little more than the language of *race-ism*; the writers would eschew or foreground the labels, categories,

and terminologies that constitute and promote ‘race’ dialogue” (ix). The difficulties expressed by Gilyard -- a veteran, “blacktivist”, American Book Award-winning, sociolinguist, compositionist, pedagogue and scholar -- reflects the numerable landmine issues engrafted in such an effort. For example, in his contribution to the collection, “Higher Learning: Composition’s Racialized Reflection”, he juxtaposes the pedagogical musings of Professor Maurice Phipps (a fictitious character in an Ice Cube film) with the argument of James Berlin (1991) in “Composition and Cultural Studies” to draw out the hypocrisies in the way that we teach students to construct racialized identities with language. On the matter of raising awareness of controlling discourses, “hegemonic discourses”, Berlin states:

Our effort is to make students aware of the cultural codes -- the various competing discourses -- that attempt to influence who they are. Our larger purpose is to encourage our students to resist and to negotiate these codes -- these hegemonic discourses -- in order to bring about more personally humane and socially equitable economic and political arrangements (Berlin 50).

There are, at least, three assertions that Berlin presents to explain the characteristics and function of hegemonic discourse: (1.) Hegemonic discourses are multiple and compete for influence, (2) the influence controls identity formation and, to remain dominant, these discourses are often constructed to diminish and marginalize counter

discourses, and (3) agency lies in the negotiations. The power is in one's capability to "resist", reject or "negotiate" "these codes. Gilyard embraces this analysis and, among other things, agrees with Berlin, saying that embedded in discourse is ideology. However, the problem is that scholars, including Berlin, rarely racialize "whiteness" and there is rarely an examination of how controlling whiteness is as a discourse (Gilyard 48). Unaddressed issues, like unproblematic whiteness, deeply complicate all attempts to conceptualize race rhetoric. "Casting race analysis in conventional terms leads students to pedestrian interpretations and constructions inside a bankrupt race-relations model, thus leading to a sort of King to King solution, students dreaming and all getting along -- rhetorically" (Gilyard 49). Similar scholarly aims guided the *Rhetoric and Ethnicity* (2004) conference and edited collection. To isolate an "American ethnic rhetoric," Gilyard and other contributing contributors considered "how ethnic rhetorics might function as generative sites of difference and how they intersect with social movements" (v). Finally, Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson (2007) define *African American* rhetoric as "the study of culturally and discursively developed knowledge forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles of people of African ancestry in America" (xiii). They continue, these are "indivisible components of a larger study of the universe of Black discourse. From this perspective, African Americans and other diasporic Africans have developed communicative behaviors, ideas, and persuasive techniques to advance and protect themselves while counteracting injustice" (xiii).

Here, discursive endeavors that characterize and define “ethnic,” “African American” and aspects of indigenous deconial rhetorics are epistemic contributions to this project’s conceptualization of “race rhetoric”, tracing the boundaries of nuanced, yet historically high-stakes, terrain. In the United States, our knowledge of post-Civil Rights Movement “race rhetoric” could be plotted on a continuum: One pole anchored deeply and painfully in formative political goals and a burgeoning public black discourse and the other pole turning the gaze outward, calling out failures to interrogate “whiteness”, which remained unproblematized, dominant, the standard and the model for hegemonic rhetoric. In “History in the Spaces Left: African American Presence and Narratives of Composition Studies,” Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams (1999) performed a rhetorical analysis on several seminal texts that were, at the time, the canon credited with establishing the notional parameters of the composition and rhetoric field. The two examined several works including James Berlin’s *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985* (1987), *Susan Miller’s* *Textual Carnivals: The Politics of Composition* (1991) and Valerie Balester’s *Cultural Divide: A Study of African American College-level Writers* (1993); the purpose of the exploration was to bring attention to hegemonic practices and the primacy of the greater, narrow mission that, in part, were responsible for the alienation, omission and/or misrepresentation of African American students in the field’s classroom narratives (Jones Royster “Reading” 134). “The imperative is to emphasize the need for historicizing practices that both contextualize the historical

view...treat that view as ideologically determined and articulated” (Jones Royster “History” 581).

An Important Emphasis on Consequentiality

The emphasis on the consequentiality of rhetorical acts and public discourse vacuums for African-derived people drive the “So what?” for this project. This conversation presses into the all-encompassing, far reaching implications for socially and economically marginalized groups, implications tethered to way that rhetoric operates. Malea Powell describes the social function of rhetoric saying that meaning making systems and practices are integral “much like the ways we say culture and people can’t be separated” (Powell et al. 24).

We contend that rhetorics are made through everyday practices and systems of practice... . We study rhetorics by looking at how practitioners negotiate, and even create, establish order, or the impact of Western notions of ‘the body’ on actual bodies (24).

These scholars help to produce a cogent, serviceable conceptualization of African-derived rhetoric, one that is concerned with exposing undetected dominance, specifically the overarching and too often unchecked, unbalanced agency of whiteness. Additionally, hard materialists within this tradition work to link this

rhetoric to the social realities, economic disparities and political movements, to “actual bodies” of people of color.

Essentially, this review is comprised of rhetoricians who are the “watchers on the wall,” whose works sift out “bankrupt race relations models” (Gilyard 49), who seek to unteach “pedestrian interpretations” that dangerously generate and use language to celebrate progress that only exists rhetorically. This dissertation project is particularly informed by these “watchers” because the literature’s emphasis on monitoring and interrogation delineates rhetorical acts that violate and it forcefully brings the discussion to consequentiality. Jones Royster points to many of the infractions: Alienation that is the direct result of the misrepresentation of African American (students); scholarly narratives, deemed universal, are delivered from a white subject position and will problematically omit important areas of black discourse (Jones Royster “History” 565). Further, this work collectively provides a watchlist that includes racial claims, metaphors and interpretive or exclusionary framing of the artifact creators, framing that sustains the agency of structuring hegemonic discourses. Further, these works note cultural coding that is indicative of membership or the tactical inclusion or exclusion of viewpoints. And centrally embrace a mission to create and protect a space for public discussion about the power relationships that often function in the audience-text-rhetor meaning making cycle and to establish parameters of black rhetorics that teach tangible, measurable and namable

consequentiality: One key consequence that registers is the problematic ways rhetorical acts contort subjectivities and assign identities to African-derived people.

Colonial Structures: Rhetorical Strategies and Discursive Configuring

This section isolates discursive strategies and configurations of colonization that were created to sustain a spatial barrenness for racial-identity discourse. Postcolonial theorists, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Paulo Freire, historicize the psychological clearing and commandeering of black thought and empowerment rhetoric, which was necessary for slavery and all parts of the imperialism mission to occur. Here, there is a particular focus on the work of Frantz Fanon because *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) combined provide a framework for the most relevant discussion of colonization that most inclusively addresses the following processes: the dispossession and replacement of language, the brainwashing of the colonized, rhetoric of solidarity needed to form a national identity of homogeneity and/or exclusion. Most importantly, Fanon's texts open the discussion about the importance of black intellectuals in the decolonization process; more specifically, Fanon addresses the psychological assault, particularly on black intelligentsia, needed to establish a culture of erasure, language adoption, and the production of assigned identities. This work contextualizes contributions of Cuban scholars, Alejandro de la Fuente and Fernando Ortiz, who, in their respective texts

produced one century apart, discuss the lasting race rhetoric restrictions in the context of the historical crusade of the black intellectual.

According to David Macey (2000), Fanon survived at least one assassination attempt for espousing anti-colonialist rhetoric up until he died of leukemia in 1961 (3). Fanon studied psychiatry in Lyon and, therefore, focused on the deep (and, in his opinion irreversible) psychological attacks endured by the colonized. He is a post colonial theorist who used Marxism to demonstrate that the racist colonial system was, above all else, a socioeconomic issue. Because he grew up in Martinique, which was under colonial rule at the time, his own testimony of consequentiality for Africans and their descendants is the linchpin of his work's perspective. Many decolonial scholars disagree with Fanon's position on the colonized, as he asserts the impossibility of undoing colonial structures, systems and thinking. He states: "However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And, it is white" (Fanon "Black" 10).

Of course, the scope of Fanon's work far exceeds the colonial influences on the positionality, destiny of the individual. In the "National Culture" chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon discusses the would-be restoration process of national identity after colonists are defeated and independence is gained. While some African diasporic groups concentrated more on local collectives or closed discourse communities for identity formation, Fanon discusses the colonizer's aim for national

agency, national-level control. This informs the scale of influence and cultural formation (Fanon “*Wretched*” 218).

This point further contextualizes this dissertation project objectives because Fanon describes the cultivation of a social ecosystem that benefits from and necessitates the homogeneity of hegemonic discourse; in such public spaces there is a fora for building nationalism, “true” patriotism, from rhetorics of solidarity. Racialized or ethnic rhetoric described as “labels, categories, terminologies that constitute and promote race dialogue” (Gilyard “*Race*” ix) or “culturally and discursively developed knowledge forms, communicative practices and persuasive strategies rooted in freedom struggles of people of African ancestry in America” (Richardson et al. “*Rhetoric*” xiii) would obviously not register in such a system as evidence of diversity or cultural richness; in the system (and the components of its long legacy) described by Fanon, this would necessarily be perceived as counter-rhetorics that work *against* patriotism.

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing precolonial history takes on a dialectical significance today (Fanon “*Wretched*” 210).

Because the constructed national identity needs a following, proponents and

disseminators. Fanon's scholarship traces the mental transformation of the individual, the proselytizing process of the colonized.

Psychological Oppression

Reaching beyond structural determinist arguments, which tend to start and stop with the assertion that racist systems will cyclically yield racism, Fanon delineates the stages of targeted attempts at psychological retooling of the colonized. He suggests that when the oppressed aligns with the system, the "retooling involves identification with the oppressor and the appropriation (personalized use, ownership and validation of) the oppressor's narratives and justifications. In dominant systems, blacks are "appraised in terms of the extent of assimilation" (Fanon "Black" 36). He discusses the relationship between language acquisition and use with fear, fear of displacement, fearing the loss of membership within the African-diasporic group and fear brought on by an inferiority complex. According to Fanon, these systems reward the embrace of rhetoric supporting imperialistic structures. Therefore, those who master dominant discourses are also "inordinately feared", as this mastery is a form of power (Fanon 21). Fanon's work clarifies the role of a psychic shift for the colonized; among other things, this shift often accounts for the adoption of an oppressors discourse, or rationale, even when the discourse carries ideology that so evidently does not reflect the social reality of the oppressed. Fanon establishes that one of the key roles of language is empowerment. He also notes that language can cause blacks to "be slaves of their own archetypes" (35). As the oppressed builds an identity with the language of

the oppressor, “he is the eternal victim of an essence, of an appearance, for which he is not responsible”; in this case, that which can empower can ensnare and imprison.

Dispossession of Language

Anchoring Powell’s suggestion that culture and people cannot be separated, Fanon and Ngugi Wa Thiongo argue that, for African-diasporic groups, specifically, agency and language are inextricable. While in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon describes the function and acquisition of French and pidgin languages for Martinicans (25), other postcolonial theorists extend this notion, including language as the colonized group’s carrier of history, racial identity and ideological positioning (Ngugi, Fanon, etc.). This is important for the consideration of race rhetoric that potentially exists in ecologies that do not register racial realities in the public sphere and that systematically arrest meaning making or a fluency in *race language*. For this project, the interest is in what happens when African-diasporic groups assimilate into social ecologies that completely deny the development of a *race language* as public discourse; and, under those circumstances what serves as testimony when racism is still in operation. As Fanon elucidates one of the many legacy effects of colonialism, he discusses the psychological position of the oppressed that allows for the dispossession of language and delineates the psychic shifts that are the result of colonial subjugation (Fanon “Black” 17). “Mastery of language moves the colonized closer to being human; he likens possession with power. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (Fanon

“Black” 18). Dominance of hegemonic discourse is sustained through the same system. Adoption of a national identity and of a solidarity rhetoric are more than patriotic and compliant. In the system that Fanon describes, Cubans who have, for a more than a century, adopted solidarity rhetoric and participated in the sustained erasure of racial identity discourse are thought to have engaged in a rhetorical act that, by colonial measures, indicate the acquisition of power.

A Way to Name It: Race Rhetoric and Black Voicedness

In her book, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989), bell hooks details the process of “coming into voice” and describes the nature of the constraints that make expressions of black voicedness significant, symbolic victories:

The absence of a humane critical response has tremendous impact on the writer from any oppressed, colonized group who endeavors to speak. For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless (hooks 251).

For African-derived community voices, rhetorical acts, specifically public acts of sharing testimony and having a public fora to shine a light on the racist events and encounters are significant; the lasting consequences of such absences are

socioeconomic, familial/generational and psychological. There is a concern with areas of a social reality that are deeply impacted by absences that seem merely rhetorical in scope. Hooks addresses the quality of life tethered to testimony: “Without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure” (hooks 2). Lacking fora, a collective mode of expression, to speak openly about racialized experiences invalidates and erases the testimony of people of color; this practice effects chronicling and the collective memory. Previously indicated by Fanon, the suppression of rhetoric, the practice and commitment to familial/social systems that mute black voices may also be controlled by other psychologically colonized blacks. Because so many are taught that there is so much that you “should not talk about in the private of public” (Hooks 151).

Scholars such as bell hooks and Jacqueline Jones Royster, not only explore the necessity of this type of voicedness for marginalized groups, but insist on the subject position (that of the Other) as the focal point, the centerpiece or a starting place of scholarly inquiry. This is important because individual testimonies are rhetorical acts that honor, chronicle and cultivate unique individual experiences within a black collective. “Indeed, a fundamental task of black critical thinkers has been the struggle to break with hegemonic modes of seeing, thinking, and being that block our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally, to imagine, describe, and invent ourselves in ways that are liberatory” (hooks 2). Discourse is the evidence that meaning making has occurred or is occurring, a process that requires a space that authenticates various experiences

that come with the social realities of differing black communities. The legacy of colonialism includes practices (objectification, exoticization, etc.) that build discourse from outsider interpretations.

Such interpretations of human potential create a type of discourse that serves as a distraction, as noise that drains energy and sabotages the work of identifying substantive problems within and across cultural boundaries and the work also of finding solutions that have import, not simply but for human beings whose living conditions, values, and preferences vary” (Jones-Royster 31).

In this scholarship, there is an expressed need for research that amplifies participant story from the subject position, in this case, the Cuban interviewees’ worldview; this is one of the most powerful approaches of decolonizing scholars. According to Jacqueline Jones Royster, it is academic negligence when scholars fail to perform rigorous inquiry from the subject position. To illustrate the dangers of this negligence, she discusses *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (1994), a book that argues that human intelligence is influenced by genetic and environmental factors; the writers, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, (among other things) excluded blacks from the group they called “the cognitive elite,” claiming that there were racial differences in intelligence. The work was pummeled critically by researchers and reviewers who called the work racist

rhetoric and rhetoric of eugenics, advancing controlled breeding to increase desirable population characteristics (Soloway 506). Royster calls this type of discourse a distraction, clearly invalidated by its creators' detachment and lack of familiarity with the complex subjectivities of the individuals discussed. She describes the uselessness of an essentialistic work that attempts to report on "the innate capacity of the race as a whole, again". She discusses the ways in which public discourse created by outsiders historically places African-diasporic groups on the defensive. "We are compelled to respond to the rendering of our potential that demands, not that we account for attitudes, actions, and conditions, but that we defend ourselves as human beings" (Jones-Royster "Bell Curve" 31). Beyond black voicedness as a counter narrative to dominant discourse indictments, there is multidimensionality that must be considered. This claim is instructive in that it exposes the places where the scholarly investigations of black voicedness are limited and limiting.

Our critical approaches to voice again as a central manifestation of subjectivity, are currently skewed toward voice as a spoken or written phenomena. The call for action in cross-boundary exchange is to redefine theory and practice so that they include voicing as a phenomenon that is constructed and expressly visually and aurally, and as a phenomenon that has import also in being a thing heard, perceived, and constructed (Jones- Royster "Bell Curve" 30).

For marginalized groups, voicedness is recompense, evidence of a win in a continuous struggle against a hegemonic overcast. The absence of the black voice “blocks our capacity to see ourselves oppositionally” (hooks 2). Most importantly, without black voicedness, as it is described by decolonizing scholars, liberatory invention/reinvention/reinscription within a social system cannot occur for African-diasporic groups. By issuing calls for theoretical frameworks and study design that conduct work from this subject position, as the central position, is one way these scholars hold outsiders accountable for creating various discourses of alterity.

The Rhetorics They Carried: African-derived Frameworks

There is considerable scholarship drawing from African rhetorics that kidnapped and enslaved Africans brought with them to the colonies; not only is this body of work comprised of the most powerful counter rhetorics, but the uniqueness of an African rhetorical force is isolated and celebrated here. Caribbeanist Edward Kamau Braithwaite suggests that histories of African-diasporic groups are not accessible to Anglo-derived methods of study and valuation, in part, because “conventional” approaches are an impossibility to examine a diaspora that was logistically and by its nature unconventional. Braithwaite discusses the “immanence of African culture” (13) to explain the manner in which African slaves stored and carried culture, stories and their theorizing. “The slave ship became a kind of psycho-physical space capsule, carrying intact the carriers of the kind of invisible/atomic culture”

(Braithwaite 13). Because this differed so greatly from that of the Europeans which was located “existentially, externalized in buildings, monuments, books, the artifacts of civilization,” colonizers assumed that there was no culture or signs of African civilization comparable to their own (13). Those slave communities internally housed their volumes, lamentations, riddles, narratives, chronicles and critical assessments of their experience, the rhetorical life of each is sustained by use.

In 1988, when Henry Louis Gates presented the book, *Signifying Monkey*, to academia, he was offering a system of rhetoric for interpreting black literature; he demonstrated a way of theorizing that was already inscribed in black vernacular traditions; and, he created critical discourse that explored the relationship between the African and African American vernacular traditions. By addressing the African ontological context of known rhetorical moves of African-descendents, Gates filled a gap with an “academically-authenticated” framework constructed by the contributions of Africans and African Americans. While it is by no means comprehensive, the following encapsulates discussion of the aforementioned rhetorical moves that are decidedly African-derived; the connection between these rhetorical actions -- their creativity, their meaning-making power -- and Africanness is indissoluble.

Both anchored in African mythology, two trickster figures, Esu-Elegbara (Yoruba) and the Signifying Monkey (African American) are metaphors for formal revision and intertextuality (Gates “Signifying” 52). The functions of the tricksters gives access to “reference and representation, of connotation and denotation, or truth

and understanding”; as a rhetorical act the speaker is deliberately embodying the ambiguous shifts of language, often stacking tropes in a single discursive act. Of course, in the literary sense, this work created a theorizing space uniquely African speakerly texts, repeated (yet altered) tropes in various black texts, intertextuality between black books, etc. Gates also discusses “black rhetorical tropes subsumed under ‘signifying’ that include marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one’s name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens (52). In *Talkin and Testifyin* Geneva Smitherman (1977) defines: “*signifyin* as the act of talking negatively about somebody through stunning and clever put downs... . And, *testifyin* is a “ritualized form of black communication in which the speaker gives verbal witness to the efficacy, truth, and power of some experiences in which all blacks have shared” (58).

Extending on Gates’ scholarship and Gerald Visenor’s “Trickster Discourse” (1989), native American decolonial theorist Malea Powell suggests the relational trickster, or mixed-blood, rhetoric in which “the rhetor’s very relationship with oppressive discourses opens a space of possibility” (Powell “Blood” 10). Employing the double-voicedness and revision, suggests a rhetoric that follows the hegemony, follows the rules by transgressing them. “Not just to oppose them, but to transform them, to change utterly the grounds on which our scholarship exists (Powell “Blood 10).

When Gates states, “I have attempted here to show how the black tradition has inscribed its own theories of its nature and function within elaborate hermeneutical

and rhetorical systems”, he affirms the need for a race rhetoric, one that is functioning in the public sphere and in the matter described in this project.

Public Rhetoric Scholarship

Public rhetoric scholarship addresses the portion of the research strategy seeking:

- To understand an individual’s self-selecting process of joining a “public” and the agency to build ideology from a self-identifying space.
- To understand the role of “things” like the turn-of-the-century archival speeches and seeing the rhetorical life of such artifacts (almost personified) as circulating, unifying, generative and influential far beyond the moment of production (Laura Gries “Still Life” 24).
- To have a sense of temporality in the consideration of rhetorical action; what is it to track influence of an artifact from the time of production (or speech delivery) to continued material consequences in futurity (to date)?
- To access a theoretical lens for this rhetorical study that is both materialist and consequentialist.

Paramount nineteenth and twentieth century Cuban speeches and essays containing the island’s racial democracy narrative qualify as “public rhetoric”;

however, public rhetoric research suggests that, beyond those original artifacts, every subsequent message, every proselytized witness, every revolutionary campaign, every nonhuman and human thing that encountered the rhetorical life of those original artifacts must be counted as a part of their influence (Warner 2002; Gries 2015; Edbauer 2005). “Artifacts do ‘live’ on beyond their initial moments of production and delivery. And, during circulation, material artifacts generate traceable consequences in their wake, which contribute to their ongoing rhetoricity” (Gries 24). Public rhetoric research informs the role of these artifacts in the wielding of or distribution of power in the participants’ material circumstances.

As he differentiates “a public” from “the public,” Michael Warner (2002) explains that “the public” is a kind of fictitious social totality. However:

A public is “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation. A text’s public can be based in speech as well as writing. Publics have a constitutive nature as a cultural form, a cultural artifact” (Warner 72).

In this conceptualization of a “public,” there is a reevaluation of popular notions of the audiences as receivers, of “rhetoric encountering an already-formed, already-discrete set of individuals” (Edbauer 7). Seeing publics as multiple and self-selecting is a viewpoint that thwarts generalizing and some of the dangers of essentialism. The complexity of this cultural form means acknowledgement that a single public is anchored (because of the membership) in multiple histories, as well. This dissertation

project, in part, seeks to understand what Warner calls the “mutually defining interplay between texts and publics” (Warner 16).

Participant agency or agency of all who elect to engage discourse shifts to an empowered, self-understanding positionality, arguably the opposite of models like Paulo Freire’s “banking” model (in which discourse is deposited or “banked” into an intended audience). Michael Warner asserts that public discourse is a thing that is to be “inhabited” and only in this habitation can a continual transition occur. Most relevant to this project is Warner’s assertion that people are a part of a public because they elect to engage with the discourse; this opens a multi-dimensional discussion about participant agency in this project.

A public sets its boundaries and its organization by its own discourse rather than by external frameworks only if it openly addresses people who are identified primarily through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance (Warner 74).

Discourse generated by a public reveals its rules, interpretations of the text and establishes its discursive boundaries; according to Warner, external frameworks are not as significant for “recruitment” because people are identified through their participation in the discourse (74). For this study, this approach is significant because it provides a way to reconsider the role of political ideology or “external frameworks” in the absence and prevention of race rhetoric. A public rhetoric lens will allow for an examination that begins with, “Sure. Cuba’s contemporary socialist governance has

played a significant role in the social constraints generated by solidarity rhetoric; beyond ideology, what should be the other influential considerations?" This work could help researchers avoid reductionist, dismissive assessments that assume that agency is not located with the individuals of the public. This work helps to explore: What can we learn exploring the testimony behind the choice? Warner writes, "In the self-understanding that makes them work, publics thus resemble the model of voluntary association that is so important to civil society" (Warner 88). What is the modern Cuba contribution to this discussion of publics comprised of participants versus intended audiences comprised of recipients?

Jenny Edbauer-Rice (2005) describes a framework of affective ecologies that will re-contextualize rhetorics in their "temporal, historical and lived fluxes" (9). The notion of a rhetorical ecology examines rhetoric as a complex thing moving, traveling through time spaces; this challenges a suggestion that a turn-of-the-century Cuban speech is stable, fixed. Instead, such an artifact is generative and *concatenations* are created in the form of metaphors of conversation, answering, talking back, argument, interplay, etc. over time. An extension of Warner's notion of a public as an "ongoing space of encounter for discourse," Edbauer describes the movement of rhetoric as circulating through ecologies, having an impact on new enactments, compelling events and generations. These concatenations are texts created through time "between the discourse that comes before and the discourse that comes after a link that has a social

character; it is not mere consecutiveness in time, but the context of interaction”
(Edbauer 6).

In this project, public rhetoric scholarship serves in two capacities. The discussion situates inquiry about the operation of racial democracy rhetoric that spans a century. The degree to which the project participants are self-selecting and self-understanding in their engagement with national identity rhetorics that purport racelessness can be considered here. Agency of participants is considered, respected, in this discussion. Also, discussed in depth in the Methodology chapter, public rhetoric scholarship is joined with elements of CRT to create the theoretical framework employed in this project to study curated archival artifacts and participant interview data collected in Santiago.

CHAPTER 4

LITERATURE REVIEW | CUBA-CENTERED

The objective of this section is:

- To present context and a cursory description of the discursive trail that led to existing claims of a racial democracy in modern Cuba.
- To hear from Cuban voices, deemed heroes, thought leaders who are credited with composing the historical identity and solidarity rhetorics of the island.
- To historicize the claim “There is no racism in Cuba”, as several project participants echo the exhortations and writings of Cuban scholars and cultural leaders Ferdinando Ortiz and José Martí.

Who is Ferdinando Ortiz?

The field work for this project was conducted at the *Center for African Studies Ferdinando Ortiz* in Santiago, Cuba. The center is one of three archival collections in the country bearing the name of the scholar and national hero credited with cultivating cultural syncretism ideology, a Cuban version of Eduard Said’s hybridisation theory; with publically challenging the sorcery and voodoo lore that alienated and endangered Afro Cubans; and, with purporting a sociological approach to race that countered biological reductionist arguments for racial disparities (Coronil xvii). Ortiz was born in Cuba, but spent his youth in Menorca, Spain with his Cuban mother and Spanish

father (Coronil xvii). He studied law in Cuba and Madrid, served as a public defender in Cuba, was elected to Cuba's Congress for several terms and served as the Cuban consul in Italy and Spain. Before he died in 1969, Ortiz wrote texts that disrupted racist paradigms that characterized discourse of his academic contemporaries. Although he was not always ideologically a champion for African descendants and their cultural legacy, Ortiz published works that are anchors for what is arguably a cultural movement in the early twentieth century that gave language and context to the conceptualization of "negrismo" (Black Studies) (Mullen 112). Specifically, in *Glosario de Afronegrismos, estudio de lingüística, lexicología, etimología y semántica* (1924), Ortiz challenged a Cuban lexicon that failed to note the rhetorical contributions of various African compatriot groups on the island. In 1906, he published *Los Brujos Negroes* (Black Sorcerers/Witches), which "is important for the Afro-Cuban movement because it underlines the salient aspects of African culture in Cuba and constitutes the first systematic written account of its myths and beliefs" (Mullen 113). However, in the book's preface, Cesare Lombroso states that the project was "undertaken with the avowed intention of understanding the phenomena better in order to eliminate it".

Ortiz contributed other neologisms such as the social phenomena called *transculturation*, which he posited as a substitute for *acculturation* in ethnographic and sociological studies. In *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (1947), Ortiz

claimed that, for Cuba, “transculturation is a more fitting term” than acculturation (98).

I am of the opinion that the word *transculturation* better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word *acculturation* really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation (Ortiz “Cuban” 103).

Because Ortiz was both European and Cuban, his ideological conflicts can be traced through his works. Earlier in his career, Ortiz publicly described Cuba as “backward” and “inferior”. He wrote: “Our civilization is much inferior to the civilization of England, of America, of the countries that today rule the world” (Ortiz “La Reconquista” 28). To Ortiz, the civilization that Cuba needed was European. Then, in the summer of 1918, Ortiz encountered and embraced ideas of Oswald Spengler; the author of *The Decline of the West* offered a new worldview and unique, invaluable distinctions for Latin America. This burgeoning new identity discourse sparked an inner war among Latin American intellectuals, many of whom began to reject notions of European superiority. “Ortiz’s alternative conception of Latin American

development revalorizes popular and regional cultures but maintains a modified evolutionary framework” (Coronil xix). During this period, Ortiz would pen works that countered disparagement of the island nation and misrepresentation of all Cubans, including biological essentialism arguments that attacked the island’s African descendants. In *Africana de la música folklórica en Cuba* (1954), Ortiz glorified Afro Cuban music as a significant cultural treasure to be valued alongside that of French and German composers. The story of Ortiz’s ideological progression is significant to this dissertation project because it makes evident this scholar’s shifting exigences; at times, his motives were about rejecting European categorizations and aesthetics and arranging a comparable identity for the island nation. Works defending Cuba’s African compatriots and circulating Africanisms were an available means to that end.

Cuban Counterpoint (1940) delivered an acerbic metaphor of Cuban race politics couched in the story of capitalism. Here, race rhetoric appears in a work about the hegemonic turmoil brought on by Cuba’s tobacco and sugar economies. Hybridisation and transculturation are the themes of this writing as well; because the story of “Don Tobacco” and “Dona Azucar” is an allegory, black/white race categories are but one of the binaries explored in related scholarship (i.e. the blending of white colonists and Afro Cuban labor begat the “mulatto child,” tobacco). Because Ortiz’s race narratives are loyal to multiplicity, complex racial mixtures that support a transcultural identity, it is important to note that the black/white and West/nonWest binary are seen as “experimental terms for people subjected to imperial domination...

.Ortiz treat binary oppositions not as fixities, but as hybrid and productive, reflecting their transcultural formation and their transitional value (Coronil xiv). When he published *Cuban Counterpoint*, Ortiz was 60 years old and the book also engaged a national conversation about, then Cuban president Fulgencio Batista, who was thought to be under the control of the United States until he was overthrown by the revolutionary government in 1953. This places into context the work's strong commentary on hegemonic influences, United States violations and the depiction of tobacco and sugar in an embattled, forever changing courtship with outsiders. However, public artistic works historicize racial discrimination in Cuba, often dealing with the country's social failure through similar metaphors.

A Way to Say It: When It's Treasonous to Say That Racism Exists

In Cuba's public sphere, there is a willingness to generate discourse that acknowledges racial discrimination; however, in these accounts, the racist events are relayed as dated and exclusively legacy of colonialism and occupiers and the structural discrimination was remedied in 1959 during the Cuban Revolution. In other words, these rhetorical boundaries are consistent and clear: Acknowledgment of racism in Cuba is limited to a long past, pre-Revolution import.

These questions of sociological nomenclature are not to be disregarded in the interests of a better understanding of social phenomena, especially in Cuba,

whose history, more than that of any other country of America, is an intense, complex, unbroken process of transculturation of human groups, in all state of transition. (Ortiz, 1947, 103)

Creating this “sociological nomenclature” or negotiating *a way to say it*, a way to chronicle or publicly make meaning of experiences with racism on the island, has yielded a unique storytelling process in Cuba. In many artistic works and writing, coding, double-talk and allegorical devices put sugar and tobacco into play as race symbols and the “main characters” of the nation’s race politics narrative. The trickster and other elements of African diasporic rhetorical systems are used by Cuban artists and filmmakers most likely because these strategies have allowed for the masking of strong counternarratives embedded in creative work that tacitly expose racism and oppression in more recent years; in the years after the Revolution, public claims of racist acts of the state are deemed by many to be treasonous.

According to Sujatha Fernandes (2011), Cuban film and rap music content often address Cuba’s local problem with racial inequality, police harassment, etc. indirectly through poignant commentary on global problems (Fernandes 47). She argues that filmmakers like Tomas Gutierrez Alea, also known as “Titon”, the black director Sergio Giral, chose undeniable historical themes, like slavery, as a way to comment on racism in modern Cuba (Fernandes 47). The December 1976 release of the film, *La Ultima Cena (The Last Supper)*, is an example of Cuban writing that

employs double-voiced, redirecting counter rhetorics, pointing to and confirming the existence of racism in 1970s Cuba. That same year of the film's release, the island nation constitutionally converted to a socialist state and consolidated the position of president and prime minister, a post that would be occupied by Fidel Castro for the next 32 years.

La Ultima Cena (The Last Supper)

This section provides a cursory opportunity to examine, an award-winning Cuban artistic text (a film) that thematically addresses racism in Cuba and illustrates how the island's writers employ "the black rhetorical tropes, subsumed under Signifyin(g), would include marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on" (Gates 52). *The Last Supper* (1976) is set during Holy Week on a sugar plantation of the character, "the Count", the proprietor played by Nelson Villagra; he is a member of the Spanish ruling aristocracy of Havana. When the Count returns from a trip, he is informed that one of the slaves has run away and, as punishment, the brutal overseer Manuel has cut off the slave's ear. Alea clearly seeks to layout the innumerable hypocrisies that fueled the system of slavery in Cuba; specifically, he juxtaposes Christianity rhetoric of slave rulers with their material acts of oppression and murder. The director also uses the

film as a platform for making powerful references to foundational racist beliefs that are a part of the national identity.

In the film, Alea uses several devices to achieve rhetorical strategy described by postcolonial theory, including Gates' *Signifying Monkey*: In one scene, the Count inspects the sugar processing area/the mill on his plantation. There, a white area manager yells, ordering for an increase in burning bagasse (which is all there is left to burn due to deforestation); slaves stir several cauldrons filled with liquid, composed of sugar at varying stages of the production process (8:20). The manager, Don Gaspar, explains that nature, rather than technique, instructs sugar production, a notion that the priest calls "witchcraft". Alea uses this character to make a powerfully disturbing commentary on the discursive role of eugenics, supremacy of the white/dominant/Spanish plantation-owning race and economic justifications for slavery in Cuba:

Manager: (waves a small bag) This powder's purpose is to produce sugar... .

This is necessary for change. The green juice turns dark because what was white must first be black.

Priest: What's in the bag?

Manager: It's not a secret. *Caca de poulet* (chicken feces)

The sugar is here: black, brown and then pristine white. It was purged by fire like souls in Purgatory.

Priest: Not all souls grow white in Purgatory.

Manager: Not all cane juice turns into white sugar.

In this scene, Alea also uses an elaborate sugar production metaphor representing the racialized social hierarchy in Cuba and a race mix on the island with African origination: “The green juice turns dark because what was white must first be black.” Here, the writer discusses this ethnic anchoring in blackness as the only way to arrive at “pristine white” in production. “The sugar is here: black, brown and then pristine white. It was purged by fire like souls in Purgatory.” This alludes to the belief of Cuban leadership that solution to Cuba’s savagery is European in essence.

In the subsequent famous dinner scene, the Count, as an act of atonement for the brutalization of the runaway slave, assembles 12 slaves for an elaborate dinner, which is obviously a representation of the well-known symbol of the Christian faith -- the 12 apostles’ last supper with Jesus Christ. At several points in scene, Alea highlights racialized hierarchies, addressing the typical binaries blacks/whites, blacks/blacks. For example, during the meal the master reinstates a house slave previously demoted to sugar cane field work as punishment for worship. The Count delivers a speech stating that pride was social ill on the plantation that compelled the slaves’ desire to revolt or escape (34:40); in response, the runaway slave spat in the Count’s face.

Alea employs the double-voicedness of the slaves, unfolding in a sequence in which the slaves explained a literal interpretation of symbolism associated with the Christian

sacrament (eating bread as the body of Christ, specifically), concluding that it was an act of cannibalism (38:43). His disapproving religious commentary is coupled with cogent arguments around a racist Cuban system that debilitates systemic discrimination in which there are no options even for blacks who gain freedom (50:35).

Pasqual (elderly slave): I have a favor to ask you. I will die soon. I can't work in order to buy my freedom.

Count: How much time do you have left.

Pasqual: One year.

Count: You are free, Pasqual.

Joy leaves Pasqual's face as he stops at the door before leaving.

Count: Pasqual, you happy? What will you do?

Pasqual (crying): I don't know anything. I'm old. I have no place to go.

Count: Will you stay at the mill? Go back to Africa, to your land. You are free with no place to go. See what I mean? Freedom will not make you happy.

Throughout the scene, there are slave soliloquies and clear illustrations of signifying by the slaves, representative of African-derived theorizing of figures such as Esu-Elegbara and later, the Signifying Monkey. In this scene, by generating what Gerald Vizenor (1989) calls "Trickster Discourse" and other rhetorical strategies, Alea creates a space for Afro-Cuban voicedness and a social commentary, again, indirectly confirming the prevalence of racism in Cuba of the 1970s and continued oppression of

Afro-Cubans on the island. Using ontologically African rhetorical activities, Cuban artists use their works, coded, historicized, but exact to disseminate anti-racism discourse.

It's Racist to be "Afro Cuban"

In the late nineteenth century, Cuban political leaders used rhetoric to rally a public around the conviction that it is racist and unpatriotic to claim a racial identity. Fanon describes this conversion process using public rhetoric and highlights the potential for resulting tension between controllers of national identity and members of marginalized communities that attempt to reclaim their voices, testimonies and individual cultural histories. Fanon (1963) uses the Negritude movement as one example of the folk culture's uprising and the dominant culture's response to this racial identity vocalization (Fanon "Wretched" 212). Grassroots efforts, specifically those with the potential to incite social transformation, contribute to the design of nationhood or cause paradigm shifts. Or worse, the state uses rhetorical acts to draw attention to the racial or cultural anchoring of the movement in order to diminish, marginalize or reduce the effort to mere folklorization. In other words, folk culture contributions fastly become a "black thing" rather than a broader, authentic "national thing", or a "black problem" rather than a "national problem". According to Fanon, a common power play is to racialize the effort, reducing what should be national in scope to marginal. Obviously, this is strategy is meant to undermine or diffuse the

work of black mobilizers or change agents from African-derived communities (Fanon “Wretched” 212). Nineteenth century Cuba is a fitting case study for the dynamics described here by Fanon.

In the 1890s, it was the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia who served as the voice of resistance, challenging claims touting that the island had achieved a racial democracy (De la Fuente 33). During the country’s Ten Years War (1868 -1878), a unified Cuban force fought for *la patria*, for Cuba’s independence from Spain. The first constitution of the resulting, Cuba Libre, stipulated that “all the inhabitants of the Republic were free and equal” (26). Cuban leaders and scholars such as José Martí strung together solidarity rhetoric in rallying cries intended to counteract divisions by race and class that would fragment a would-be Cuban fighting force. This racial democracy, built rhetorically and not through material shifts or social change, was layered discourse, anticipating, resisting and leveling every possible opposing assertion. As Fanon observed, in the case of Cuba, it was considered unpatriotic and ‘racist’ even to claim racial identity:

To insist on someone's Blackness or whiteness could then be easily construed as a racist and un-Cuban act. As Martí put it, ‘the Negro who proclaims his racial character ... authorizes and brings forth the white racist... . Two racists would be equally guilty, the white racist and the Negro. This constant allusion to a man’s color should cease’ (De la

Fuente 28).

One History: An Operational Cuban Race Rhetoric?

Scholars suggest that what might call a Cuban dominant rhetoric was shaped, not only by political strategy and the state's military needs, but largely by the fears of the elite class. The practice of "diluting" and creating hazy racial imagery was rhetorical strategy, also. In Cuban political discourse, race labels inexplicitly alluded to blackness: "race of color" and "class of color". And, there was an apparent effort to disengage racial identities that might be perceived as socially fragmenting: *negro*, *moreno*, *pardo*, and *mulato* (De La Fuente 31). Historically, the Cuban elite feared that, with the strength of Afro Cuban military leaders and fighters, blacks could be organize an uprising similar to the 1791 Haitian Revolution, which circulated as terrifying regional lore. In 1812, Cuban blacks, led by Jose Antonio Aponte, orchestrated several revolts meant to end slavery; of course, this disputes were believed to be inspired by the successful Haitian Revolution (Childs 2006). Here the consideration of the fear and emotionality of the elite as an exigence for this solidarity rhetoric is instructive.

To quell those fears, Martí and others advanced a retooled idea of the freed slave as "the subservient insurgent": "Martí suggested that rather than being seen as a racial threat, blacks should be seen as grateful recipients of white generosity" (De La Fuente 28). At this point, all of the shifts in race relations were rhetorical. There were no concomitant socioeconomic equality plans and this sustained socioeconomic

disparity was evident to Afro-Cubans and the creole elite alike. The response to the disparity was completely rhetorical as well. According to De la Fuente, the elites reasoned that the abolition of slavery was a sacrifice of the wealthy class. They admitted that it was the injustices of the defunct slavery system that caused Afro-Cubans to be “unprepared for Republic life”.

As Fanon predicts, it was the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia who responded to this layered dominant discourse that justified sustained inequalities amid claims of a racelessness Cuban society. The Afro-Cuban intellectuals challenged the the foundational claims of the island’s racial democracy.

It was exactly because of their extensive participation in the struggle, to which they had contributed more than their proportional share, that they had gained the right to full citizenship. To the argument that blacks were indebted to whites for their freedom: the abolition of slavery was not an example of generosity by Cuban Masters or Spanish Colonial authorities but a conquest by black insurgents in the 1868 War (De la Fuente 32).

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH NARRATIVE II

On April 17, 2017, I traveled to Santiago, Cuba to conduct a two-week pilot study.

I deemed this trip to be a necessary step because the communication infrastructure between the United States and Cuba continues to waiver between developing and stalled. Email exchanges are slow and telephone calls are non-existent, too expensive to rely upon. For example, AT&T charges \$3 per minute for a telephone call between the two countries. Also, the island established its first Internet connections in 2014; therefore, even in 2018, many Cubans, including the staff in the research center, do not have daily access to the Internet. In a research environment in which trust is an influential variable, personal contact with the center director and the other coordinating researchers would be more sensible for initiating fruitful relationships. Therefore, one important goal for the trip was to expedite the project setup process and begin to cultivate relationships with necessary agents of the study. Secondly, I sought to test the efficacy of the project design; more specifically, the interview questions.

What I Learned During the Pilot Study

A Miami-based travel agent, who coordinated housing, scholar visas and charter flights for individual researchers in Cuba, organized my trip; because the categories and procedures differ, the multiple agents handling undergraduate student groups could not help me. The agent placed me in Santiago, Cuba, in a community called “Reparto Sueño,” which translates “the disseminated dream”. This experience was vital contextualization for the designing of my “No Racism in Cuba” project. For me, this community would situate my conversation about race and racism in an extant, bustling socialist state.

At 5 a.m. each day, the neighborhood shakes off its slumber by the rhythmic shrill of a whistle. The bread man is a drum major marching through his route in the event that there is a need for fresh bread at breakfast. Soon, the egg man, the lady with mangoes and green beans, guava, onion, fresh garlic and okra will roll down the street like a traveling garden. But, this is only one part of the commerce exchange in Reparto Sueño. On the island, the fortitude of the black market matches that of the state-run marketplace. In the neighborhood, the blocks are laden with industrious entrepreneurs, whose hustles vary from door to door. The “paint man” markets his inventory with an empty metal gallon container suspended from the awning that shades his living room window. (He may have many hustles, but he is understood to be the paint man here.) I walked through Reparto Sueño with Yamira, a 44-year-old bed and breakfast owner whose husband is restoring a second property; she stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and yelled into the paint man’s window

screen to place her order: “I need one gallon of white paint.” A voice replied: “One. O.K.” No person ever appeared, but this is the way orders are confirmed and buyers authenticated. Because, obviously, there are no paper trails in this market. Therefore, I printed drafts of my work at the print man’s house. On the porch of the coffee man’s house, I people watched and sipped sweet murky coffee from a lovely clay mug; in their living room, his wife’s eyes were always transfixed on her television programs while he greeted his customers and collected empty cups to wash. There was a hamburger house, a pizza house and a black market Blockbuster Video house, where you can have a thumb drive loaded with the latest movies from the United States and Spain for under \$5 US.

Protective of her *Casa Yamira* guests, Yamira warned me to avoid all of this. If I wanted things, she said, she would send her husband, Alberto. Because at his state job, in the 5-star Hotel Casa Granda, he worked well over 50 hours weekly, I never asked him for anything. I lived on the second floor of Yamira’s property, the whole second floor. Her business was registered with a state-run agency called Havanatur, a company that she said takes a 40 percent finder’s fee. A portion of this pays the agent in Miami who placed me there. On the second day of my pilot study trip, two doctors visited *Casa Yamira* to ask me questions about my health and officially note my occupancy. Also, I signed Yamira’s thick black guest registry, which she showed state officials regularly. Names of lodgers from Sweden, Australia and Spain covered dozens of pages, but there were no Americans before me. The Obama administration

policy changes, the new Internet in Cuba and her discovery of Airbnb opened a possible new and lucrative revenue stream for her family.

Alberto, and Yamira's daughter, Amalia, are the only ones in the house who speak English. Amalia is an Universidad de Oriente undergraduate, a burgeoning scientist who talks incessantly about bugs and her recent one-week camping trip to collect more bugs. The living room is a shrine to the bug princess, Amalia's Sweet 16 celebration. The walls are muraled with portraiture, from several angles, of Amalia in a tiara and a ballgown. But, to her parents chagrin, their beauty queen is obsessed with insects. She recently won a scholarship to study in Germany for three months and the family is overwhelmed with excitement about the opportunity. But, fearful, and at times tearful, that the Cuban government will not permit her to travel.

Some nights for dinner, I walked three blocks to my favorite neighborhood restaurant, El Refugio. There, I eat a Cuban twist on chicken fricassee, rice and peas, and salad for less than \$3 US (with leftovers for lunch the next day). During walks in Reparto Sueno, I want to wear my Beats earbuds and listen to music or audible books, but concrete erupted by tree roots make walking along the edge of the roadway a necessity. During the peak of the day motorcycles tear through the neighbor, beeping at crossing pedestrians, as if to say: "Try me." These motorcycles are taxis. For one peso, you hop on the back and they will take you anywhere in the city. An elderly couple sit in their living room on Calle K watching television. Filled with Cuban

coffee, thermos bottles line their gated porch. If you yell for him, a kind and hospitable elderly gentleman will pour you up one in a ceramic cup and chat you up while you drink it in front of his house. I saw Yamira walk in the door with both hands filled with fresh yeast rolls from the bread man. The following morning, I requested one of the rolls for breakfast when she asked.

Yamira: You can't eat those.

Me: Okay.

Yamira: You understand, right? Those are for us. We have to get bread for you from the store.

Me: I understand, now. I wasn't thinking.

Yamira: Clarissa, when you are out, you shouldn't eat that.

One of my favorite times of night in Reparto Sueno is 6 p.m., when daily desiccating sun rays are reduced to smoldering. That's when on almost every block, men set up folding tables in the street to play dominoes. The players are punctual, focused. This window of time is important; it's cool enough and there is still enough sunlight.

Children play in the streets near the tables and the players almost always have an audience. The onlookers study moves and as the game advances, they comment like musicians congratulating a fellow musician who just birthed a beautiful riff. To an outsider, setting up a table in the middle of the street is insane, dangerous. Cubanidad allows it, justifies it, and it only works if everyone agrees that you have the right to do

it. Here, in Reparto Sueno, this is an honored, respected and expected traditional. I look forward to to that time of day every evening.

For me, Cuba is instructive in this way, because I also remember walking through Little Havana in Miami over a decade ago. There, on Sunday afternoons, elderly Cuban men were seated playing dominoes with their table was on the sidewalk, not the street. At that point in my life, I had not been to Cuba, yet. Now, I understand.

Displaced, those men were remembering home.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCHER SUBJECTIVITY IN THE SANTIAGO PROJECT

In this chapter, I explore the process from the subject position of the researcher as an influential element in negotiations that occur during fieldwork, data collection and meaning-making that shape the project. Using observation narratives and scholarship detailing decolonial approaches to field research, I consider the following elements of field site ecologies: researcher subjectivity, ethos building, reciprocity, the rules of border crossing and the negotiations. This reflective chapter was made a necessity by the participants and Santiaguans (in general), routinely demonstrated during interview sessions that it mattered to them that I was (1) of African descent and (2) from the United States.

As I discuss in subsequent Results chapters, participants referenced my subjectivity in their interview responses. Responding to four interview questions, prompts to compel testimony about racism in modern Cuba, interviewees stated, “Clarissa it’s not like it is in the United States. We can eat anywhere, go anywhere whites can go.” During one interview, the participant explained that she had viewed an Internet download of *Hidden Figures* and wanted me to understand that it is not like that in Cuba. These encounters briefly illustrate field experiences that compelled the addition of such a chapter. To further establish the need for this dissertation chapter, I will share project design stories that influenced my process and those scenarios that

guided my understanding of this phase of the qualitative investigation. Regardless of how strategically prescribed, researcher observation and engagement were variegated by the uncontrollable imprinting of the researcher's (my) histories, memory, and identities (those claimed and assigned)(Cintron 1997). As Cuba is also a unique socio-political ecology laden with multiple agents and systems, Santiago, Cuba's Ferdinand Ortiz African Studies Center is the first area of the field site that I will describe. As a resident investigator, I spent several hours in this environment weekly. Here, I recount select personal experiences and my observations of the interrelations of foreigners and Cubans there in the regular operations. This contextualization sets up the subsequent and essential discussion about researchers as complex (human) apparati that have historically influenced the fieldsite, the final text and every negotiation in between (Cintron 1997).

Scholars have isolated and discussed factors that may establish or destabilize a field researcher's ethos, credibility to make project inquiries and claims in the "home places of others" (Cintron, 1997; Powell 2002; Cushman 1996; Jones-Royster, 1996). Border-crossing problems and breaches of local decorum have inspired a call for a research lens that begins with a terministic screen from the subject or the participant position (Jones-Royster, 1996; Anzaldua, 1999). Further, first phases of project design (and dissertation proposal) should take into consideration reciprocity between the participant community, the investigator, village-level governance, traditions, differing ways of knowing, communication, hierarchies of concern and other elements of the

fieldsite ecology (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012; Powell 2002; Cushman 1996). Finally, I delineate negotiation struggles in, what Ralph Cintron calls, the real field site, the text, the IRB-approved instrumentation where he claims the researcher's knowledge making also occurs. I attempt to capture my tussling with observation and memory "between brand new experiences and very old experiences and it is through processes like these that real field sites become understood both as objects of knowledge and as extensions of life-pattern or ethos" (Cintron 8). Ironically, poorly selected methodology for my dissertation proposal, the subsequent process of reflection, revision and correction led to an apt approach to field work in Cuba, one most fitting for an African American southern US-native seeking to build researcher ethos amid Santiaguans.

Failed Ethos Borrowing

Facing the dissertation proposal deadline, I initially pressed my project into many ill-fitting methodological models. I first settled on a qualitative approach that included "talking circles" as the main field data-gathering strategy, which was at the time popular in Cultural Rhetoric Studies and was a indigenous, decolonizing methodology. I presupposed that talking circles would address my chief concerns: Mistakenly employing an approach that essentialized all African descendents , too heavy-handedly imposing United States Critical Race Theory models on "black Cuba", and unwittingly using obtrusive Western instrumentation (interview protocols,

IRB-approved guidelines, artifacts and procedure) were among them. I was also concerned about affronting Cuban participants by asserting a hierarchy of concerns that were vastly different from their own.

In my dissertation proposal, I described the process as follows:

By employing methodology that includes talking circles (testimonies, focus groups and/or interviews), this work collects and includes accounts from a cross section of participant black Cuban community members. Talking circles as methodology is relatively new in the field of rhetoric and composition. And, existing applications are concentrated on indigenous and American Indian participants (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012; Powell, 2014; Riley Mukavetz, 2014). This project grows the existing body of work that amplifies and captures such participant voicedness in this way procedurally; further, this study extended these approaches to African-derived communities.

The following researcher narrative illustrates how, in the field work of Rhetorical Studies researchers, the layered process of ethos-building and function of subjectivity are highly influential factors in design, participant responsiveness and project results.

I contacted Malea Powell, an Eastern Miami and Shawnee Indian scholar at the University of Michigan, who had written about “talking circles”; she suggested that I speak with Andrea Riley Mukavetz, who was identified as the originator and the first

to use “talking circles” as a methodological framework. As a graduate student, Mukavetz helped an American Indian elder woman in Lansing, Michigan record her oral history. From that experience, she learned of several others in the area. Assembling these women into “talking circles” was a very organic culturally-fitting methodological approach for Mukavetz’s project. This researcher’s ethos, as she is a native woman with shared ethnic membership, afforded her the credibility to make such a research design feasible. Further, Mukavetz’s subjectivity, that she is a poet, her relationship with university power structures and personal adjustments within academia have been a unique-to-her journey and a political shift from creative writing to American Studies -- all significantly influenced how she engaged the native women assembled. At times, her loyalties to her tribal affiliation and her alignment with academic-speak and research decorum collided. Mukavetz states: “I knew I wanted to write about American Indian women and their roles and responsibilities. But, I didn't call it that. Instead, I use words like ‘leadership’ and ‘activism’” (Powell et al., 2014). She talks about how, as a researcher and American Indian woman, she “carried” these women’s stories with her. “And, in the act of re-telling, I started to articulate a language about how these American Indian women made themselves visible, how I made myself visible in academia, and how our discipline can learn from them/us” (Powell et al., 2014). In sum, as a model, Murkavetz’s project design was developed for an American Indian graduate facilitator who spoke to the assembly of participants in their shared language, understood the community’s codifications. The group’s

deliberation was guided by interview questions born from Mukavetz's personal tribal experience.

There were several problems with my attempt to adapt Mukavetz's field method. Starting with the obvious: I am not a Cuban island compatriot of the participants. Worse, as an American, I am inevitably an ambassador of one of the most distrusted, occupying countries of the project field site. Drawing from the playbook of the field's celebrated, trending methodologies, I had designed a project that attempted to borrow another researcher's ethos; this process worked for her, in part, because Mukavetz's tribal affiliation affirmed her credibility with participants, allowing her to make claims and ask questions that could possibly be incendiary if an outsider asked them. This attempt at failed transference was instructive. Highly structured Western models are often employed in marginalized participant communities without regard to the indispensable ethos building process and without proper considerations for the invisible white colonizer subjectivity tethered to the most justified methodological frameworks.

With an idea of how exchanges create and maintain oppressive structures, activists can pay conscious attention to the power structures produced and maintained during their interactions with others outside of the university (Cushman 16).

Beyond the function of the institutional hierarchies, the component parts of the researcher's subjectivity must be scrutinized during the design phase and considered

living contributors to the strategy of inquiry, the outcomes of the field site and the real time meaning-making process of the project participants.

Three Women Scholars, Africa-derived Identities, Nationalistic Dissimilarities

Identity can never be reduced to a bunch of little cubby holes. Identity flows between, over, aspects of a person. Identity is a river, a process (Anzaldua 252).

In the following sections, I will discuss the scholarship I used to grapple with the significance of the moments in the field like those described here and the influence of the multiple identities -- American, African American, woman, University of Rhode Island scholar -- I conveyed within the participant community. Ada Lescay Gonzalez, a 20-something scholar who self-identifies as Afro-Cuban, has been a researcher in the center for five years. She is also a graduate student at the University of the Orient in Santiago, Cuba; she publishes and speaks on themes that branch from her foci -- history of the island's enslavement of blacks and art produced to chronicle that history. Ada was one of only two staff researchers who spoke English with me in the research center. After some weeks, Ada confided in me that she was self-conscious of her "professional English speaking abilities"; she wanted to increase precision, vocabulary and practice enunciation. She hoped to explain her own scholarship better in English, she explained. I suggested daily lunchtime *intercambios*. For weeks, Ada and I met in the conference room and discussed Cuban texts from my reading list and

others that she recommended. I read passages aloud in Spanish and we discussed the scholarly content and arguments in English. Ellen Cushman (1996) and Malea Powell (2014) discusses a “theory of reciprocity” in which researchers enter a community with an activist agenda that is inherently self-critical, accountable (Cushman 16).

This activity with Ada, who was a colleague, a fellow researcher and graduate student, not only generated discourse that contextualized this project, but it established my role as more than a “needy requestor” in the community, but a willing facilitator and do-er. Reciprocity among researchers as a component of my burgeoning ethos in Cuba field work was one of the only reasons why the 97 interviews were possible.

Jokingly, field study gatekeeper and researcher supervisor, Zoe Creme Ramos, introduced herself as “Clarissa’s boss, mother, friend, sister...,” counting off each of her roles on her fingers. Duties she performed for my research work in the center included reviewing interview schedules, answering questions, providing archival material and explaining much of the ornate, verbose turn-of-century Spanish that many of the documents held that I did not understand. With me, Zoe was generous with her time; it was evident that she showed me favor. Some of our academic exchanges occurred while we moved chairs, mopped the floor to receive the 30 American undergraduates from Manhattan who were on a semester abroad in Cuba. The herds of Americans were all led down the hallway and shown artwork from several African nations as they were led into the meeting room. There was always a slide presentation about the founding of the center in 1988, followed by contracted

dancers who performed Afro-Cuban content -- the rumba, guaguanco and pachanga -- in the lobby. To close, the center director, Marta Codies Jackson, spoke in slow Spanish to the American student group, explaining the historical and cultural context of all that they had witnessed.

There were two other foreign researchers completing work in the center during my stint, a 47-year-old Cuban man who had lived in Miami his whole life and an Australian woman who I met only once. We each had one scheduled appointment with Zoe weekly. They showed up for their appointments and in 60 minutes, they were gone. I called the center “my headquarters” because I was physically present in the space, immersed in the day-to-day of the ecology as much as I possibly could.

My participation in these moments, unscheduled and unrelated to the procedures laid out in my dissertation proposal, earned me a level of insider status (as much as an outsider could earn). The other two foreign researchers elected to come to the center only for scheduled appointments, which likely worked for their travel schedules and academic programmes. Also, I believe that a key icebreaker between Zoe and I had nothing to do with Ferdinando Ortiz, research methodology or mentorship. In part, it had to do with cooking and recipes; we are both women who are cocky about our culinary prowess. In Augusta, Georgia, at restaurants, church luncheons, and cookouts my maternal grandmother and I would run food over our palate and name all distinguishable ingredients and the subtiliest of flavors. At lunch time, Zoe and I played the same game each day.

I will use my interactions with these three black women to isolate and begin to explore the chapter's central theme of subjectivity, theirs and mine. (Here, "black" means that we all claim African-derived cultural identities, yet we possess vastly different understandings regarding our ontologies and claimed identities.) We acknowledged a shared African diasporic membership; still, meandering and splintered, our collections of histories, experiences, biases, ways of making meaning flowed effortlessly and collided sometimes in the same day.

Figure 4. Venn Diagram: Researchers of Color Engagement and Positionality.

Patricia Hills Collins (1998) is not an Afro-Cuban, but an African American scholar; I use her work as my way of discussing encounters with these women and toward

highlighting the material consequences that are the result of subjectivity negligence in field work project design. As she outlines the development of black feminist thought in academic settings where black women are deemed to be “marginal intellectuals,” Collins isolates process, concepts and consequences that are instructive in the exploration of subjectivity.

In her conceptualization of the “outsider within status,” Collins explains the unique positionality, the special standpoint of the black women in academia, specifically. However, this status has been used more generally to explain the creative ways marginalized groups, despite alienation, produce profoundly useful creations often appropriated by dominant groups. Advantages of the outsider within status are described as standing in a position of nearness and remoteness, informed because people often feel more comfortable confiding in strangers. And, from this unique perspective these outsiders can register patterns difficult to register if you are too close (Collins 15).

Collins explains self definition and self valuation as effective countermeasures for insiders within; the two concepts are instructive when considering border crossing fieldwork, working with community participants. Among the problems for the black women feminists that Collins considered was that they were “externally-defined” and represented by “controlling images” (Collins 16-17). She noted material consequences for these public rhetorical actions: Stories of marginalized groups controlled by outsiders are central to historical dehumanization and exploitation, a discussion that

include impact on positioning in the labor force (Collins 18). In such power systems, when the outsiders within challenge these negative definitions and images they are “assaulted with more, varied externally-defined negative images designed to control assertiveness”. In response, Collins expresses the importance of self-definition, within oppressive power systems in which negative identities have been assigned to the marginalized; the right to define self must be restored (19). Self evaluation takes the recovery process a step further. Self valuation is a psychological process that “allows black women to reject internalized, psychological oppression” (19).

As three black academic women, Zoe, Ada and I are the subject group that Collins discusses in her work, as we are all from groups historically marginalized by the academy. This outsider within is highly influential in our engagement and that status is significant to all of us, particularly relevant to the exigence for our work together. What is also illustrated here are the complexities involved in a scholarly consideration of subjectivity in fieldwork and what a danger essentialism poses in meaningful encounters on the fieldsite. How the three of us respond to dominant powers structures, different culturally and different nationally, has everything to do with how we engage each other in the African studies center in Santiago, Cuba. As I moved into their context, “my racialized gendered body”, moved into their ecosystem: “Conceptualizations of race and discourses of racialization constitute researcher subjectivity, how different understandings of race mediate relationships between researcher and participant” (Fisher 1).

While I do not share national membership with the participants of my project, for some Cubans who self identify as Afro-Cuban, we share a type of racial membership, one that is tethered to similar African diasporic experiences. As Zoe discussed with me black hair care product choices and soul food recipes of my grandmother, the intersection for Zoe and I converged around her understanding of how black womanhood is universally performed, ideas which drew from both my gender and racial identities. The purpose of these anecdotes is to illustrate the identity politics operating within this single ecology for the researcher. In an academic center, the most forward identities are erudite and anchored in completed studies, scholarship and professional achievement and university affiliation. Yet, a myriad of field encounters, like those described above, led me to deepen my inquiry about the complexities and influences of researcher subjectivity.

Fieldsite: Complicated Terrain

Field sites are complex ecosystems made of existing components and relationships that operate by a rhythm that will naturally react to the introduction of an outside agent. Influential components of such systems include the ideological profile of the terrain's political system (albeit national or village-level) that may command a prescribed response to the researcher and the aims of the project. The diversity of these complex spaces is explained in Gloria Anzaldua's rejection of essentialism and oversimplification of spaces, particularly those occupied by people of color. This

nexus, which she calls *borderlands*, is important here because she is a researcher and scholar who uses the geographical location of her birth (the border country south of Texas in Jesus Maria of the Valley) as a source of her theorizing (Cantu and Hurtado 5). Further, Anzaldua presents the crossings of real or metaphorical boundaries as a way of discussing dynamic collisions within a community between outsiders within, those with insider status and Western models that do not register the social textures of hybridity. “(Anzaldua’s) work has been devoted to making spaces where such multiplicity could be enacted” (Lunsford 1). She describes this Mexican border as an open wound “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldua 25). This border culture metaphor has been extended to symbolize any disruptive crossing of terrain -- physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual.

In the field, project participants, each possessing several complex identities and perspectives, present researchers with an entanglement of characteristics often related to the socio-political situation of the terrain. Ralph Cintron (1997) suggests that it is negligence when we fail to acknowledge that these environmental factors may align or conflict with racial membership, history, memory or loyalties of the researcher in the field. And, this is a meaningful collision.

Cintron states that he concerns himself with asymmetrical power relationships (xi). This is likely a remnant of childhood and life experiences and the impetus for curating the following story for inclusion in the final text of his fieldwork: “My own ethos contains a certain socio-economic and cultural nervousness. These are odd

demons that have helped place me on the periphery of two groups of people (Cintron 5). One of the groups is his Puerto Rican family, including this father a Ph.D horticulturist, a Texas farm manager and a highly skilled technician. Cintron remembers his mother being deeply concerned about seeming too Puerto Rican before wealthy Dallas landowners. They were the true authorities and proprietors of the farmland and the large house planted uphill from the citrus orchards that Cintron called his childhood home (5). The other group is the Mexican workers, who called his father *el patron*. “Imagine this set of colonist-like images... . Unlike my family, I had trouble with the role I was supposed to follow” (5). Decades later, a field researcher Cintron writes a book, *Angels’ Town*, which is about the months that he spent researching Mexican-American gang members in Chicago communities. When he characterizes the work’s intent, Cintron calls his final text a critique about the making of an ethnographic text, rhetoric of public culture and rhetoric of everyday life (x). Yet, he confesses that the “demons” of his childhood on the Texas citrus farm greatly influenced this work. Making amends for the distance between that house on the hill and the citrus workers below, he says, compelled this project.

The real field site observed by a knowledge-making ethnographer eventually becomes the fieldsite of a text, which is the only fieldsite an audience comes to know. Part of the transformation of the first fieldsite into the second is through negotiations that become explicit between observation and memory, the tween brand new experiences and very

old experiences, and it is through processes like these that real field sites become understood both as objects of knowledge and as extensions of a life pattern or ethos (Cintron 8).

Therefore, the field site, inevitably, includes the material, psychological and existing community elements that the outsider enters. However, the site is also comprised of researcher memory which may be folded into exigence, into the building of new paradigms and into the collapse of old ones. These types of fecund convergences are sites of cultural productions (Lunsford 6). The complexities of this terrain, the field site, cannot be adequately engaged without intentional and transparent discovery of the researcher's full ecological contribution. In part, it is this lush set of sub-narratives, serving as the undercurrent of the qualitative, ethnographic-type reporting, that compels decolonizing theorists who call for boundary crossing analytical frameworks.

From the Subject Position

Jacqueline Jones-Royster, an African American scholar, describes her personal experience with alterity, when she and her community are the subject or targeted participants in the investigations of outsiders (Jones-Royster 30).

I have been compelled on too many occasions to count to sit as a well-mannered Other, silently, in a state of tolerance that requires me

to be as expressionless as I can manage, while colleagues who occupy a place of entitlement different from my own talk about the history and achievements of people from my ethnic group, or even about their perceptions of our struggles (30).

This scene, whether it occurs in an ivy tower or on a field site in Central America, is comprised of the violence that decolonizing theorists work to counter. The problems, and their histories are deeply rooted in the mission of imperialism and the field of composition and rhetoric is charged with “deliberately unseeing its participation in imperialism” (Powell “Survivance” 398). While this is not intended to be a comprehensive deep dive into the many demons and remnants of imperialism, I will delineate the egregious violations that will contextualize proposals discussed here that suggest improved approaches to “border crossing”. In part, decolonizing scholars seek to correct historically problematic, cyclical rhetorical practices: As Jones-Royster indicates, the entitled outsider approaches and generates normalizing rhetoric, which David Spurr (1996) also refers to as “colonial discourse”(1). Powell gives the example of public sphere imperialism discourses such as anti-tribal pro-private property advocacy solutions, justifying material consequences and permanent land loss for American Indians in the “civilizing” and nation identity-building process of America (*Survivance* 404). The exigence, of course, is to make subsequent appropriation easier and set the stage for future thefts. It follows that creators and contributors from the participant community, their meaning-making process and its context are omitted from

the final text or contorted to fit frameworks of the academy. As Jones-Royster illustrates, a subject sitting “well-mannered and silent” in the space of such exchanges, excluded from the outsider’s unfolding observation narrative, is never given the opportunity to weigh in or shape testimony.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that a research system that expects the use of generalizable inferences will, by design, commit such offenses. She states: “It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us” (Tuhiwai Smith 1). Smith, an indigenous scholar affiliated with the Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou of New Zealand, describes in her work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), the community disruptions and barriers that are the result of poor practices of researchers working from a vantage point that claims an objective distance. The word research, to the Maori people, she says “is the dirtiest word in the indigenous world’s vocabulary”(1). The word invokes silence, bad memories and distrust. Affirming Jones-Royster’s sentiment about the unlawful separating of the creation from the creator, Tuhiwai-Smith argues:

It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce. Then, simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations (Tuhiwai Smith 1).

Inevitably, borders will be/must be permeated. Jones-Royster argues in her 1996 CCCC speech, that outsiders should approach the home places of others from the subject position. First, she clarifies the definition and breadth of the term “subjectivity,” that of project participants and of researchers. She states: “Subjectivity as a defining value pays attention dynamically to context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experience, and by doing so it has a consequent potential to deepen, broaden, and enrich our interpretive views” (Jones-Royster, 29). While Cintron’s example demonstrates the depth of influence of the researcher subjectivity in field work, Jones-Royster calls attention to the missed opportunities for the converging of dialectical perspectives when the subject/participant position is not considered; she posits that the benefit of participant-position lens would be the creation of boundary crossing discourse and analysis that “operates kaleidoscopically” (29).

Like Jones-Royster, Powell asserts that approaches that decentralize Eurocentric strategies create space for what Powell describes as “anti-paracolonial” projects, certainly research exploration from the subject position. Powell’s concept extends Gerald’s Vizenor’s explanation that investigation of colonialism is “para” and not “post” because the colonizers have never left (Vizenor 77). Powell presents these projects as renderings of American Indian rhetoricians who use an interpretative lens to remake, tactically refigure, colonists’ artifacts created to corral “savagery” and appropriate Indian possessions for empire-building. “These writings are rarely seen as deliberately rhetorical, consciously and selectively interpretive with the audience’s

needs in mind... . Winnemucca uses the events of her life to create a believable argument and, as a result of her purpose, must perform a kind of civilized Indian-ness which would appeal to her late nineteenth-century reformist audience” (Powell “Survivance” 405). There is more than a counter narrative in operation here: Colonial rhetoric is used, from the subject position, to present a new testimony and this new creation’s purpose is the unraveling of some aspect of imperialism.

Enriched by mindful border crossing, approaches that boldly deviate from Western social science or some conventional anthropological or ethnographic models of mere observation and analysis, Royster-Jones’ suggestion shifts agency back to the Maori community in New Zealand, to the black students studied for the production of the *Bell Curve* reporting, the Winnemucca revisionist, the Mexican gang members in Chicago and the workers on Cintron’s Texas citrus farm. In this discussion, there is a call for field work and analytical approaches that avoid what Michel Foucault calls *hierarchical observation*²; instead, there is the employment of a horizontal and “mirrored gaze” of the researcher, registering a desire for connectedness and relationality. The participants contribute knowledge as “agents themselves, as capable of or interested in research, or as having expert knowledge about themselves and their conditions” (Tuhiwai-Smith, x). Further, such scholarly endeavors reexamines the role and relevance of the field researcher, a role that has always negotiated based on a subjective process of curating and analysis. These scholars call for acknowledgment of the multidimensionality of this role.

² Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Random House: New York, 1977)

CHAPTER 7

METHODOLOGY

Aim of Study

The purpose of this qualitative project is to investigate rhetorical practices designed to sustain the erasure of race rhetoric in Cuba; this work seeks to determine the consequentiality of the purported “racelessness” for modern-day black Cubans. This is accomplished by using researcher field observations in Santiago, Cuba and content analysis of interview data and two Cuban archival artifacts.

Qualitative Research Approach

A qualitative research design provides protocols for data collected in the participant settings, interviews, data/content analysis, and the role of researcher subjectivity in the meaning making interpretations of that data (Creswell 3). Often, the mission of qualitative work is to understand how groups of participants ascribe meaning to their social reality.

“Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or the problem under study. They do not bring individuals into a lab (contrived situation), nor do they typically send out instruments for individuals to complete. This up close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research” (Creswell 175).

Also, this approach aligns with one of the chief objectives of this work, which is to register and trace rhetorical actions that address race and racism in the island's unique political ecology; further, this project's analysis considers temporality, as the work presupposes the operation of solidarity/racelessness rhetoric over generations. As I do with this project, typically, scholars who use qualitative methods operate from perspectives focused on social construction and the negotiation of meaning (Atkinson 69). With the use of curated historical Cuban artifacts, this methodological system can aptly examine the tensions and shifts in negotiations conveyed by turn-of-the-century Cuban national heroes and, subsequently, by this project's interview participants. Interviews conducted on the island are the most effective means of gathering verbal data units that are coded and analyzed using these long-lauded Cuba artifacts as references.

Further, field notes and researcher observations are a significant for interpretive work and contextualizing results. Work in Miami and Santiago, Cuba generated field notes that further contextualize the inquiry narrative (Smitherman, 1977; Gilyard, 1991; Martinez 2016). Because the project's investigation considers the participants' claims chronicling their perceptions of their modern social realities, these notes provide textured snapshots of energetic communities and complex social assemblages. Additionally, researchers develop intersubjectivity through field notes (Lindlof & Taylor 159); arguably, this process allows the researchers to gain (1.) an empathetic understanding of their participants' experience, and (2) more successfully

represent that understanding to others (159). These notes are presented in the project as chapters, specifically “researcher narrative” chapters.

Interview Procedure

Structured interviews were conducted with 100 participants in Santiago, Cuba; 97 were used in this work. This field site was selected because, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, slavery and subsequent voluntary migration on the southeast the portion of the island resulted in a greater concentration of Cubans who are of African descent. Geographically, the Santiago region is the closest point on the island to Haiti and Jamaica.

Pigmentation Using Autosomal and Uniparental Markers”. *PLOS Genetics* 10(7): e1004488. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgen.1004488>

Procedurally, Creswell (2009) suggests the following components for interview data collection: Event details (participant and researcher identification, date, location, etc.), instruction for interviewer that standardize the procedure, a list of questions posed to the participants (ice-breaker, central probes, sub-questions and follow-up) and, final thank you (183). Structured interviews were most apropos for this project because the social climate and community culture in Santiago called for the participation/guidance of a gatekeeper in the execution of procedures. Specifically, structured interviews are scheduled point by point and guided by a list of standardizing questions (Atkinson 70). For this project, the interview questions were written, revised and edited by the researcher and gatekeeper, together: “Gatekeepers are those who provide directly or indirectly access to key resources needed to do research be those resources logistical, human, institutional, or informational” (Campbell 98). Often the gatekeeper is an individual or an organization that has the authority to approve access or to provide sponsorship and, in effect, “they stand guard at the ‘gate’ that we wish to enter” (Lindlof et al 98). The leadership and research team at the Fernando Ortiz Center for African Studies supported this work and served as the “gatekeeper”.

Participants Selection and Engagement

The Fernando Ortiz Center for African Studies is located in Santiago, Cuba in the Reparto Vista Alegre, a district of the city that has a dozen cultural centers that focus on art, music, culture and social sciences. Several of these state-owned centers are housed in a confiscated mansions, taken from occupying Spaniards in the 1950s during the Cuban Revolution. As the project's gatekeepers, the Fernando Ortiz Center Director Marta Emilia Cordies Jackson and assistant director, Zoe Creme Ramos, selected and contacted over half of the participants for this study. Several American and Cuban scholars who have conducted academic work on the island for years recommended the assistance of a gatekeeper in Santiago because the long history of incendiary diplomatic relations with the United States. And, generally, community members tend to distrust outsiders (researchers, journalists, etc.) who parachute in to conduct research; establishing relationships and building trust are needed to discuss sensitive themes, such as race language and national identity. Three staff members served as intermediaries, with Zoe playing a lead role as resident researcher liaison, instructor and advisor during my five weeks (six including the pilot study) working at the center.

The following is the procedure for participant selection:

- One hundred participants will be interviewed.
- The participants are all age 18 and over.

- Participants self-identify cultural association(s), “Afro-Cuban”, “black”, “Cuban”, “Spanish”.
- Participants are drawn from three groups: academics, professionals and laborers (translated from categories given by the gatekeeper).

Academics

The academics are practicing social scientists, humanists and other scholars who are familiar with or who are professionally invested in the subject. This group is believed to be able to offer an academic interpretation of the topic as well as personal responses. Responses from this group adds context, “expertise” and are not expected to be exclusively personal.

Professionals

The professionals are engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and homemakers. This group possesses basic information about social sciences, but not necessarily experts on the topic of this project. It is presupposed that this group will be focused and scholarly in their responses.

Laborers/Everyday People

This group is intended to be blue collar workers who are minimally educated. They are believed to offer varying understandings of the topic circulating in the public sphere.

Structured Interview Protocol

1. Participant is identified by gatekeeper or by researcher with the gatekeeper's assistance. (Willing) volunteers who fit the project's approved criteria may also participate without a gatekeeper present. Introductions between participant and researcher occur.
2. Researcher gives participant an information sheet in Spanish, containing University of Rhode Island contacts, description of project and participants requested role, including a request to record audio.
3. Participants verbally agrees or disagrees to continue.
4. If participant agrees, researcher asks participant to complete a project registration/contact sheet/onboarding form.
5. Researcher begins audio recorder.
6. Researcher asks questions as per the schedule of interview questions and participant responds verbally.
7. After the last question, researcher thanks participant for help and asks for permission to take headshot with cellular phone camera.

Per the IRB (Institutional Review Board) stipulations, the participants were asked if a name could be used and, if yes, to write the preferred name on the

onboarding form (APPENDIX A). In this dissertation, names have been changed and initials are used to identify participants. This is an effort to protect the true identities of the interviewees.

Content Analysis Using the Theoretical Framework (Public Rhetoric and CRT)

Content analysis was performed using a framework comprised of public rhetoric scholarship and elements of critical race theory (CRT). “Content analysis is viewed more generously as a method for describing and interpreting the artifacts of a society or social group” (Marshall et al. 108). Content analysis allows for a “nonreactive” distance that will honor the integrity of the setting and the researcher may “determine where the emphasis lies after the data has been gathered” (Marshall et al. 108). The interview data gathering (described above) yields the first set and the second set are the following two archival artifacts: Fernando Ortiz’s speech “The Human Factors of Cubanidad” (1939) and José Martí’s essay “Nuestra America” (1892). “Archival data are the routinely gathered records of society, community, or organization and may further supplement other qualitative methods” (Marshall et al. 107). These works of Ortiz and Martí were selected because the study’s participants quote or reference portions of these artifacts; they are treated here as epistemic references that will lend insight about how the participants came to understand the precepts of racial democracy in their responses. Also, the artifacts will allow us to historicize claims such as “There is no racism in Cuba”.

;

Approach to Interview Content Analysis

While the interview data and the archival artifacts require different analysis, the objective of using the theoretical framework to perform content analysis is the same. This phase of the design work was largely concerned with creating an approach that (1.) organized the participant responses thematically, and (2.) used archival Cuban documents as a framework for further analysis. More generally, the audio transcripts were coded using a categorization system that aligned with the following key sub-questions of this project:

- What are everyday Cubans willing to say about race and racism when the dominant discourse makes claims of a raceless society?
- How do the creators of public discourse in Cuba veil and influence use of racialized discourse?

The onboarding form (APPENDIX A), which was completed by each new participant, captured details used for coding standard demographic categories (age, education, occupation, etc.) and other “precoded descriptive topics” (Lindlof et al 247). The remaining coding categories are less stable or concrete as they are drawn from responses to the 14 items on the interview instrument. There are three fields of questions included: (1) **Signification questions** isolate the participants’ understanding, definitions and awareness of racial terms, claims and phrases, including “Afro Cuban” and “There is no racism in Cuba”; (2) **Epistemic questions**

seek find where the participants gained knowledge of race language and learned situations of use; and, (3) **Social reality questions** address participants' feelings about the validity of claims such as those asserting Cuba's racelessness and race-based economic disparities and observed shifts in Afro Cuban social realities over time.

According to Cheryl Geisler (2004), discourse level structures, such as the thematic components drawn from research questions can elicit viable verbal data units. The boundaries of the segments are contained within question sets with a common mission and the respondent's adherence to a singular topic. "If we fail to segment our data into units of analysis before trying to place it into categories, we end up moving through our stream of data without awareness of its structure" (Geisler 29). The value of this approach is that it adds necessary context, further validating researcher claims and further confirming "where the phenomenon lives". Here is an example of how this coding strategy is employed in the (thematic tier) of the interview data analysis of this project: Below, respondent conceptualizations of the term "Afro-Cuban" are used to illustrate the segmenting codes for this project.

Step 1

Major themes are drawn from the project's research questions, specifically: (1.) How do Cubans use race rhetoric in an ecology in which racialized discourse is considered counter-revolutionary or treasonous? (2.) What are island-based Cubans willing to say about race and racism when the dominant discourse makes claims of a raceless society? (3.) Which are the rhetorical strategies and discursive configuring that sustain

the rhetoric of solidarity or national identity tropes? Therefore, in this first step, the “discourse level structures” are drawn from the the major themes of the research questions, used to isolate direct articulations, inferences, narrative inclusions that broach:

- Discursive configuring
- National consciousness
- Cuban solidarity
- Researcher (Me) Interference

Step 2

Regarding participant responses to the first three interview questions, researcher observations of emergent patterns reveal potential usefulness of the following categories (1) application/use, (2) individual connectivity and (3) perceptions of use of race language in modern Cuba.

Application/Use (A) - Is the acknowledgement of the concepts existence and personal use

Individual Connectivity (C) - Reports the respondents use of the concept as it is personally experienced or one that is experienced by others (alterity).

Perceptions of Use (P) - Gages feelings about the use of the term.

In this step, the individual responses are coded for the respondent’s use of “Afro-Cuban” and the respondent’s indicated level of connectivity to the concept. For

example, once a participant acknowledges the existence of the term “Afro-Cuban”, the second step registers whether the response is an articulation of personal identity, collective identity or alterity.

Figure 6: Methodology Model for Analyzing Interview Data.

CHAPTER 8

ARCHIVAL ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

The purpose of the artifact analysis chapter is twofold: The Cuban archival artifacts contextualize the subsequent interview data; the participants' continued use of the artifacts' language gives import to an effort to understand exigences and target audiences at the time of production. By historicizing participant interview responses, which arguably constitute a modern Cuban race discourse, it is possible to track the operation of this rhetoric over time. Secondly, public rhetoric scholarship gives further access to matters of temporality and the "agency of the artifact," including its ability to organize and to sustain a generative appeal that engages its public (Warner 2002; Gries 2015). The Cuban archival artifacts included in this work are "Nuestra America," an essay written by José Martí, published in *El Partido Liberal* on March 5, 1892; and, "The Human Factors of Cubanidad" a speech delivered by Fernando Ortiz at the University of Havana in 1939. This chapter adds a re-envisioned framework for perceiving Cuban solidarity and racial democracy rhetoric. A reductionist and essentializing approach too often locks interpretive work in conclusions that suggest the island's public discourse as *merely* socialist, rote, unfailingly political and compelled, exclusively, by a 60-year-old Castro-led regime. The goal here is to create a space, free of such conflations, that registers testimonies and lived-experience narratives of island-based Cuban individuals, varying in age, claimed identities and shifting worldviews. Also, important are the decisions of the

individuals to generationally empower (and be empowered by) the archival artifacts' content. These artifacts were selected for this work because they were mentioned (in direct quotes and paraphrasing) by several participants, research partners and the gatekeeper involved in the project's fieldwork. Public rhetoric research allows for an examination of the "rhetorical life".

Analysis I: José Martí's "Nuestra America" (1892)

An Anti-Imperialist Message

"It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke" (Sinclair 90).

In *The Jungle*, by author Upton Sinclair who was a contemporary of José Martí, the author describes the meat-packing industry conditions in Chicago. As Martí lived in exile in the United States from 1880 to 1895, he was a witness and contributor to public discourse indicting the U.S. government for negligence and its sluggishness in aiding oppressed factory workers nationwide; the mistreatment continued for decades, leading up to the U.S. government's implementation of the federal food safety laws in

1906. Tracing Martí's writings reveal that he was at times conflicted about his perception of Americans, but he was consistent in anti-imperialism message. Martí spent much of his time in New York. He reported on life in the United States for many newspapers in Latin America including *Opinión Nacional* (Caracas) and *La Nación* (Buenos Aires). He wrote everything from a magazine for children (*Edad de Oro*) to poetry (*Versos sencillos* 1891), to essays on the nature of the United States which he admired for its energy and industry as well as its notable statesmen, particularly the framers of the Constitution. However, he denounced its imperialist attitude toward its southern neighbors (Library of Congress "The World of 1898" 2011). Further, Martí was a vocal critic of U.S. race politics as it was at end of the 19th century. He observed race-based violence and the murder of blacks normalized before the indifferent, clearly assenting, administration of President Theodore Roosevelt. This firsthand knowledge of the ethical positioning of the United States government later contributed to Martí's ethos as an expert in Cuba on matters concerning governance is the island were to become a possession.

Solidarity Rhetoric

"Nuestra America" (1892) is a 3,800-word essay written by Martí, then deemed an activist, poet and essayist born in Havana, Cuba in January 1883. This writing is arguably an admonition and prediction aimed at Cubans, particularly those who thought favorably of the island nation becoming an annex of the United States.

Composed of what this project calls *solidarity rhetoric*, the “Nuestra” essay appealed to Cuban readers for “a Cuba that would be independent, socially egalitarian, and radically inclusive -- ‘a republic for all’” (De La Fuente 23). He titles his appeal, “Nuestra America” as his intended audience is politically and strategically weighing the benefits of protection and the favor guaranteed as an annex of the United States government; with the use of “Nuestra,” (meaning, “our” or “our own” in this case) Martí asserts Cuban proprietorship and implies self-determination in place of colonialism or occupation. “Martí was alarmed by what such a (U.S. government) system would mean for Cuba were it imported” (Retamar 792). Describing his compatriots as “provincial”, “asleep” and indicating that they are too preoccupied with minutiae, Martí calls for immediate action: “We must have no other pillow but our weapons - weapons of the mind, which vanquish all others. Fortifications built of ideas... .” Indeed a warning, this essay is also a recruitment tool for the Revolutionary Party that Martí helped to form in the same year. More specifically, the work was a rhetorical response to concerns publicly expressed of Cuba’s creole elite.

A Need for Racelessness

Twenty years prior to Martí’s production of the essay, a multiracial Cuban force fought the Spanish. During the Ten Year War in Cuba (from 1868 to 1878), creole elites fought alongside black fighters, which caused the privileged elites to realize the significant role, power and number of blacks in the island’s rebel army. Most

importantly, blacks advanced an abolition and equality rhetoric “casting abolition as a twin goal of independence”, which substantially changed the social vision of Cuba’s independence (Hatfield 194).

This vision for a reconfiguring of socioeconomic distribution, securing equal material opportunities for black Cubans, was important for negotiating the language to mobilize and persuade. Black men had long been the embodiment of Cuban wartime valor. The “Mambises” was the name given to the group of Cuban fighters who were of African and mulatto descendancy. These fighters were named after Juan Ethnnius Mamby, a black Spanish military officer who deserted and turned on Spain in 1846. In the decades that followed, this would be the moniker for black troops in Cuba, a term functioning in some spaces as a heroic distinction and in others a racial slur.

By Spanish decree, slavery ended on Cuba in 1886; yet, “the end of legal slavery did not bring racial harmony to Cuba” (Sierra 2010). Spanish "thinkers" continued to warn against the potential "evils" of a racially mixed society” (Sierra 2010). By writing this essay, Martí registered and responded to the fear of the creole elite who, like many dominant groups in the region, believed that a “slave rebellion” like the Haitian Revolution could occur in Cuba. From 1791 to 1804 formerly enslaved blacks killed 24,000 of the 40,000 white Frenchmen who occupied the island, ending slavery and the French occupation.

In “Nuestra America”, the intended audience was the creole elite of Cuba; Martí appealed to the creole elite of Cuba who, he knew, were beginning to embrace the idea of the annexation of the United States or willing to settle for Spanish rule (Hatfield 194). Further, they understood that they had favor with the white Americans. American officers did not hide their disdain for Afro-Cubans, openly designating the Cuban creole elite as the “better class”. Supported by these American authorities, some creole elite began to question whether Cubans of African descent were real and full members of the nation (De La Fuente 24).

At the time of production, the essay functioned as a troop primer, imparting a unifying patchwork ideology. The writing’s efficacy relied largely on the writer’s ability to assuage long-established and escalating fears of the elite. Martí offered guarantees: “Blacks would not rise against their white brothers who had fought to end slavery in the island” (De La Fuente 24). “Thanks to the revolution, the Negro race had returned to humanity and had been rescued from the ignominy of their previous existence” and rhetorically challenging the notion of blacks as a racial threat, Martí used other language “grateful recipients” and “subservient insurgents” to placate fears of would-be fighters (24).

Martí certainly created a rhetoric of solidarity by overturning expressions of individualism and all that he deemed racialized identity; he also opposed any social positioning that fragmented the assemblage of would-be troops or associations that threatened the prospective army needed to secure the island’s sovereignty. In the

paragraphs, Martí sought to intercept conflicts and divisions over economic disparities: “(To) those who took land from a conquered brother...smeared their swords in the same blood that flows through their own veins must now return their brothers land if they don’t want to be know as a nation of plunders” (Duany 2017). Further, Martí addressed the mass exodus of Cubans fleeing the political and economic chaos on the island following the Ten Years War (Duany 2017). Between 1868 and 1898, the largest group of political refugees from the Caribbean entering the United States were from Cuba; approximately, 55,700 Cuban immigrants settled in Key West, Tampa, New York and New Orleans (Duany 2017).

These sons of our América, which must save herself through her Indians and is on the rise; these deserters, who ask to take up arms with the forces of North America, which drowns its Indians in blood and is on the wane! These delicate creatures who are men but don’t want to do men’s work! Did Washington, the founder of their nation, go off to live in England when he saw the English marching against his land? (Martí 1892)

In a pathetic appeal, Martí seeks to shame compatriots who considered fleeing the island and avoiding the pending fight for independence. He describes them as cowardly, "termites that gnaw away at the core of patria" and “only runts -- so stunted they have no faith in their own nation". Evocative, acerbic and intimidating, his metaphors contribute to the mission of building a rhetoric of solidarity.

In Martí's process of erasure, *la patria* signifies racelessness; this culminates the emotional appeal, weeding out treasonous segmenting in the Cuban intended audience. The first sentence in the essay's final paragraph is the famed and oft repeated recitation suggesting the "There is no racism in Cuba" claim, a claim that is still asserted almost 120 years later. In this section of the essay, Cubans who would own racial identity or cultural individuality are described here as "low and weak" minded, indicating that to be black (or creole) is to relinquish membership and to display disloyalty to *la patria*.

Low, weak minds working in dim light, have cobbled together and kept in circulation the library-shelf races that the honest traveler and cordial observer search for in vain within the justice of Nature, where triumphant love and turbulent appetite demonstrate again and again the universal identity of mankind (Martí 1892).

Martí draws upon the power of logos, declaring that his claim to the racelessness of *la patria* is established by nature, science and history. Racialized identity here is depicted as dated, unenlightened "kept in circulation on the library shelf".

Martí's ethos as the opposition to a racial identity is rooted in the years he spent, seeking asylum, in the United States. While there his writings were foundational discourse for the anti-imperialism rhetoric of his Cuban contemporaries; further, that experience compelled his concerns about the island becoming an annex of the United

States. “Nuestra America” and other writings, as they served as fighter recruitment for the island’s twindeling population, established a *solidarity rhetoric* that proves to be a thriving public rhetoric, today, in modern Cuba.

Analysis II: Ortiz, Fernando. “The Human Factors of Cubanidad” (1939)

On November 28, 1939, Fernando Ortiz delivered this speech at the University of Havana, having been invited by the Iota-Eta fraternity. The purpose of the speech, “The Human Factors of Cubanidad”, was to present a unifying rhetoric of patriotism that aligned with and affirmed demonstrations that some of Ortiz’s audience members held years prior (Kemper 2010). Nine years before Ortiz’s speech, students at the University of Havana had planned a rally, calling for the overthrow of, then Cuban president Gerardo Machado (Kemper 2010). While the campus demonstration plans were thwarted by the police, the student arrests and public protests around wounded students were believed to be significant in a chain of events that led to the removal of the president three years later. Therefore, Ortiz writes and delivers this speech, “Cubanidad” in the wake of these campus events and six years after president Machado was removed.

Parts of the speech were a historicization of Cuba’s current rejection of any racial identity; Ortiz constructs a distinct, seemingly unforgettable, metaphor *Ajiaco*, which is a type of Caribbean stew. As he works to conceptualize “Cuban-ness”,

“Cubanity” or “Cubanidad”, the speaker makes a case for replacing all understanding of race with explorations of culture.

It would be futile and erroneous to study the human factors of Cuba through its races. Apart from the conventional and indefinable quality of many racial categories, one must recognize the real insignificance of race for cubanidad, which is nothing but a category of culture. To understand the Cuban soul, one needs to study not race but cultures (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939).

The speech, undoubtedly, contributes to de-racializing discourse. However, what is also noteworthy is that such a speech was delivered by this particular leader, lawyer, ethnologist, and anthropologist: In 1881, Ortiz was born in Havana to a Cuban mother and a Spanish father, but spent his childhood in Menorca, Spain. Having completed law school in Madrid and having served as a public defender, Ortiz grew to embrace neoliberal political reforms platform. He was saturated by evolutionary positivist and biological reductionist theories, claiming the innate inferiority of all African-derived people, of course, including Afro-Cubans (Goncalves 445). It became his life’s mission to undermine and disprove these anthropological postulations; “one could thus think that, while Euro-American anthropologies traditionally have been concerned with ‘the other’, Latin American anthropologists have been mostly interested in ‘the self’—that is, the self of that imagined community that they helped construct” (Goncalves 445).

By the production time of the “Cubanidad” speech, Ortiz had established credibility as an advocate for African diasporic groups, having published works that detailed the innumerable contributions of the multiple African nations represented by compatriots living on the island. By the time of the speech the writer had generated and published works that clarified discrete differences (and sameness) between racial identities. Ortiz, by then, had even called for the acknowledgement of Africanisms (Africanismos) in Cuba.

In 1906, he penned *Los Negros Brujos* (The Black Witches), in which he defends “Afro-Cubans, their superstitions, and their deviance” (Coronil xvii). Working as a public defender (and for some time after), Ortiz witnessed the creole elite criminalizing Cuban black practitioners of African-based religions. The evident disparities and lack of social progress of blacks in Cuba were ascribed to the African witch craft, narratives in the island’s public sphere demonizing Cuban blacks.

Ortiz routinely witnessed racist persecution of black in the Cuban justice system. When he penned *Brujos*, his informants were prison convicts, atypical sources for anthropological work at that time (Bascom 816). He was able to elicit from them a great deal of information about Afro-Cuban beliefs and customs. In this very early work, he correctly identified the Yoruba of Nigeria as a major influence on his African sources (Bascom 816). In 1910, Ortiz began to advanced a sociological approach to race, emphasizing culture more than biological factors as a basis for black social progress. This was groundbreaking, controversial scholarship for his era. “With this

work, he introduced Cuba to the scientific study of black, which made him the true discoverer of the cultural integration process of Africans living on the island, and create the precursor to “afrocubanismo” (Godoy 236). It was in defense of Afro-Cubans and to quell the public desire to persecute “black witches” that popularized the phrase: “Las almas no tienen raza.” (Souls don’t have races.) Therefore, for Ortiz to deliver “The Human Factors of Cubanidad” 20 years later was a notable, clearly historic and intended to further establish a consensus on the island’s, national (perhaps, cultural but categorically not racial) identity. Situated in prodigiously different political and social ecologies than his predecessor Martí, Ortiz offered layered, lyrical, and emotive definitions of “Cubanidad” and “Cubania” and elucidations on what it meant to be Cuban. In doing so, he publicly affirmed his (and Martí’s) previous proclamations: There are no races, and therefore no racism, in Cuba.

Racelessness as a Clearing for Cubanidad

Cubanidad is not given in conception; there is no Cuban race. And there is no pure race anywhere. Race, after all, is nothing but a civil status granted by anthropological authorities; but this racial status tends to be as conventional and arbitrary, and sometimes as changeable, as the civil status that fits men into one or another nationality. Cubanidad, for the individual, is not in the blood, nor on the paper, nor in the habitation of a place. (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939).

Clearly, claiming that race is “nothing but a civil status granted by anthropological authorities,” Ortiz appeals to social constructivist arguments that he advanced years before. Here, he writes twice that race is “civil status”; yet, Ortiz does not couple this claim with explanations addressing material, economic and race-based disparities that exist in Cuba at the time of the speech. Interestingly, his rhetorical strategies dismissing the the existence of race arguably contradict previous ones that he employed to convince the creole elite that religious persecution of Afro-Cubans was a growing problem and that the role of race-based persecution in social disparities is an egregious social violation. In this speech, Ortiz avoids this social actuality altogether. In other words, missing in the University of Havana speech is a call for a brand of social consciousness that would register, isolate, and overturn practices that sustained historical inequalities.

The Lasting “Ajiaco” Metaphor

Ortiz famously uses Cuban “ajiaco” as a dual-purposed metaphor; ajiaco is a Caribbean stew that takes 4 to 5 hours to cook. The recipe usually contains cuts of flank steak, chicken, pork spareribs, native root vegetables, plantain, and *aji* pepper. The function of the ajiaco metaphor in the speech was (1.) a way to track the island’s cultural coalescence, a process that begins with an ethnic mosaic and (at the end of cooking) becomes Cubania, and (2.) a counter-metaphor that nativized or provided a point-for-point negation the of the Western “melting pot” metaphor. Cuban Ajiaco

cooks on low heat continuously, long pass it is considered “done”. Characteristically, Cuban Ajiaco is never a finished stew, there is a constant cooking.

As Ortiz highlights, this is why the composition is changed and Cubanidad has “a different flavor and consistency depending on whether it is scooped from the bottom, from the fat belly of the pot, or from its mouth, where the vegetables are still raw and the clear broth bubbles” (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939). Ortiz recounts the arrival of immigrants and the enslaved who have contributed “ingredients” now infused in the Ajiaco:

The Indians gave us corn, the potato, malanga, the sweet potato, yuca, the chili pepper that serves as its condiment, and the white cassava xao-xao with which the good Creoles of Camagüey and Oriente decorate the ajiaco when they serve it. Such was the first ajiaco, the preColumbian ajiaco (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939).

He continues to explain that blacks had contributed root vegetables that grew in several African nations as well as a distinct style of cooking.

The speech makes distinctions between Western versions of similar stews, which are debased and imagined putrid, fragmented and foul. “All peoples have known similar stews, with varying nutritional ingredients according to their particular ecologies, and such stews are sometimes preserved as survivals of remote agrarian life” (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939). He calls Europe’s ajiaco “rotton pot” or “pot-pourri,” adding that the Western versions of ajiaco are “cave cuisine”: “In with these were

placed meats from every sort of creature, quadrupeds, fowl, reptiles, fish, and shellfish that the man obtained in his predatory raids along the mountains and the coastline” (Ortiz “Cubanidad” 1939). He adds that these versions are not above using vegetables with worms and rotten meats.

Cuba in the 1930s

It is oft reported that the “Cubanidad” speech was delivered the same year that Cuba’s public sphere was brimming with Nazi anti-Semitism rhetoric (Mt. Holyoke). This writing, cultural bigotry warning against the criminality of Jewish people, was disseminated in response to an international event. In May 1939, a passenger liner, The SS St. Louis, brought Jewish refugees who were fleeing Nazi persecution in Germany. The Cuban government turned away the 937 Austrian, Czech, and German Jews. More than 40,000 Cubans protested the debarkation of the SS St. Louis passengers (Ogilvie, 2006). The evacuees would eventually find refuge in Lima, Peru and Balboa Chile. In the same way that the witch hunt escalated against Africans in Cuba who were practitioners of their home religions, public rhetoric on the island targeted Jewish visitors seeking asylum, fleeing the Holocaust. “There was a growing Nazi party which targeted Jews as the scapegoats for the growing conflicts inside of Cuba” (Mt. Holyoke).

Ex-Patriots, the Traitors

In the speech, Ortiz describes varying degrees of Cubanness, constructing a membership hierarchy: (1.) those who were born and live on the island, (2.) Cuban ex patriots or the “castrated” Cubans who have disowned their homeland, (3.) Cubans born elsewhere or “aplantando” and, (4.) foreigners who have long resided in Cuba. Completing the descriptive stacking narrative, he culminates at the highest state of Cubanness: “Cubanidad”.

One would say that it comes from the entrails of the native land and envelops and penetrates us like the breath of creation that springs from our Mother Earth after she has been made fecund by the rain sent to her by the Father Sun. It is something that makes us languish in the love of our breezes and snatches us away in the vertigo of our hurricanes. It is something that attracts us and draws us to love, like a woman who is one in three persons: mother, wife, and daughter. Mystery of the Cuban trinity, for in her we are born, to her we give ourselves, her we possess, and in her we must survive.

Evocative of birthing imagery and Catholicism, Ortiz anchors the highest classification what is known to be the most commonly shared values of the audience.

“The Human Factors of Cubanidad” speech is solidarity rhetoric in that it plants an ideology purporting a Cubanness meant to overtake notions of individualism. Cubanidad presumes that there is a “top shelf” brand of Cuban; the speech itemizes who qualifies for the distinction and who does not. In this effort to erase identities and affiliations, Ortiz seeks to counter social fragmentation on the island and to arrest the

exodus of the many Cubans leaving the island at the time. Aligning with this mission is Ortiz's erasure of racial identity. Ortiz suggests that race exists only for anthropological authorities and states "one must recognize the real insignificance of race for Cubanidad, which is nothing but a category of culture. To understand the Cuban soul, one needs to study not race but cultures". According to Ortiz, Cuban culture, as it is presented in the soulful qualities of "Cubanidad", replaces race.

Gaining Perspective Using Public Rhetoric Scholarship

In this project, public rhetoric scholarship provides a theoretical framework that allows for the necessary examination of the "rhetorical life" -- movement, encounters, influence and transfiguration -- of "Nuestra America" and "The Human Factors of Cubanidad" artifacts.

Public rhetoric work responds to problematic, limited ways that we tend to conceptualize the operation of rhetoric (Edbauer 6). Too often, there is presumably a homeostatic relationship between rhetoric and its environment, an examination limited to what Paulo Freire described as the banking model. Or, according Laurie Edbauer Rice, we rely on the sender-receiver-text public communication models, further the misbelief of a stable, static function of rhetoric. Most importantly, the public rhetoric discussion compels a re-conceptualization of the audience of the artifacts (Warner, 2002). A closer consideration of the audience's exigence: Has the audience, in these cases, been invited to engage these artifacts, create discourse? Can we assume

(always) a “mutuality of exigence between the rhetor and the audience”? There must be an account for the claim, “there can be no pure exigence that does not involve various felt interests” (Smith & Lybarger, 1996). Therefore, public rhetoric discourse insists that the audience at the University of Havana, while “attending to” Ortiz’s speech, is necessarily and notably comprised many perspectives, histories, ages and variant feelings. In publics, these scholars suggest, we must register the inevitable range and diversity; and homogeneity, even when the public is situated in socialist political landscapes, is a dangerous assumption.

In *Public and Counterpublics* (2002), Michael Warner states that a “public” is self-organized, self-understanding; in other words, it is the “Cubanidad” speech and the “Nuestra America” essay that cause their respective publics to exist. “Publics do not exist apart from the discourse that addresses them” (Warner 72). Also, this discourse suggests that we temper our assumptions about the prolific roles that we often give “external frameworks”, which in the Santiago Cuba case study includes the ever-changing political frameworks. From 1892 to 1939 to the Cuban Revolution, the island experienced famed volatile political shifts; yet the rhetorical lives of these artifacts moved separately, colliding with and compelling the concatenation of events (Edbauer 6; Warner 74) that these scholars describe.

This framework lends a perspective that registers individual difference, insists on ideological variances, on the most presumably monolithic public arena. In part, this dissertation project amplifies the voices of Santiaguan participants who have

encountered, engaged, and in some cases, claim to embody this solidarity rhetoric. Rhetorical events continue to result from the production of “Nuestra” and “Cubanidad” over time connecting publics, multiple and generative. This approach thwarts some of the dangers of tendencies to generalize and essentialism. The complexity of the form considers a public that is anchored (because of the membership) in multiple histories. This project, in part, seeks to further understand what Warner calls the “mutually defining interplay between texts and (their) publics” (Warner 16).

A text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time, and because this can only be confirmed through an intertextual environment of citation and implication, all publics are intertextual, even intergeneric (Warner 97).

While the “Nuestra America” essay is arguably a recruitment tool, so pronounced was the intended audience and needed response: To motivate the exhausted and fearful among Martí’s compatriots to fight (again) for the sovereignty of the island. Expressed and described by Laurie Gries (2015) as, “(rhetorical is) a thing’s ability to induce change in thought, feeling, and action... to organize and maintain collective formation” (Gries 11). Public rhetoric scholars extend the operation of rhetoric as emerging from material relations and activities “that unfold a diverse ecology of nonhuman and human things assemble and intra-act in various collectives” (Gries 12). This means that these artifacts, “Nuestra” and “Cubanidad”, exist in the same rhetorical ecology, one artifact having influenced the other and both

having encountered and generated publics of their own, absorbing and rejecting reconstituted ideologies across generations.

In conclusion, the historicization of statements claiming racelessness in modern Cuba is instructive. This process makes plain the social ecology at the time of each artifact's production. In the case of Martí's "Nuestra America", the island nation faced a dreaded, but pending fight for independence. At the delivery of "Cubanidad", the speaker's address engaged an audience that was 3 months into World War II and, likely, questioning the fate of the Monroe Doctrine. These artifacts most decidedly had prescribed work to do at the time of production. Yet, "artifacts do 'live' on beyond their initial moments of production and delivery. And during circulation, material artifacts generate traceable consequences in their wake, which contribute to their ongoing rhetoricity" (Gries 24). From the point of production to the participant interviews, the rhetorical force of these artifacts compelled material consequences. While the world and hegemonic shifts continue politically, the uses of this rhetoric, its ways of stripping racial identity and continued insistence on muting expressions of difference lives in modern Cuba.

CHAPTER 9

INTERVIEW RESULTS FOR “ORIGENES” AND “AFRO-CUBAN”

The following researcher observation narrative occurred at the University of Rhode Island in 2016; this brief story contextualizes the subsequent report, which reveals a tension between participants who report a monolithic racial identity for modern Cuba that is mestizo, indivisible and national, and those who chronicle racial discrimination experiences that shape differing social realities. In this scene, on the University of Rhode Island campus, there is an example of one modern Cuban response to the term “Afro Cuban,” a racial signifier tethered to manifold connotations for the study’s participants:

“At least we are not shooting our blacks in the streets!”

Offended, Humberto Miranda spat out his response to my question into the microphone. It thumped the walls of Doody Auditorium and hung over the 100-plus attendees. This was October 5, 2016 and we all showed up at Swan Hall to hear Miranda’s talk titled, “Inequality and the Cuban Dream”. Miranda is a political philosopher from the University of Havana (an affiliation the Cuban government would not allow him to publicize) and was a visiting professor in the Economics Department at the University of Rhode Island.

I had asked Miranda if he would address inequalities that are the result of reported racial discrimination and specifically how this impacts the social reality of

“Afro Cubans”. To this, he replied: “At least we are not shooting our blacks in the streets!”

The room fell silent because his #BlackLivesMatter, police brutality reference did not immediately register with the audience. Surprised, I stood, holding the microphone, and listened to the rest of his reply to my question.

“And, I don’t acknowledge the word ‘Afro-Cuban’,” he continued. “That word does not exist in Cuba.”

Months before this event, I met author Pedro Perez Sarduy, who self identifies as “Afro Cuban” and, since 1980, has lived each year between London and Havana, his hometown. In our first conversation, we spoke about two of his books, specifically, *Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture* (1992) and *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race, Representation and Identity in Cuba Today* (1997). This contradiction (and the impassioned reaction to the utterance) contributed to the design of this study. The 2017 Santiago, Cuba study presented 97 Cuban participants with this term and other language drawn from Cuba-focused racial discourse. Several patterns emerged and the participants, collectively, framed a modern rhetorical life - signification, shifts over time, etc. - for the term “Afro Cuban”, a term that has been embattled for Cubans for the last century.

“*Afro-Cuban*”

In his 1906 publication, *Afro-Cuban Underworld: Black Witches* Fernando Ortiz has the, arguably long-term, objective to build a nation narrative for Cuba that purports a mestizo mix and embrace of hybridity as the island's racial identity. In *Afro-Cuban Underworld*, his first ethnography, Ortiz conceptualizes and coins "Afro Cuban" as a way to discuss, to study, and to perceive compatriots who are African descendants. He constructs this narrative using a "temporal framework that privileges positivist ideas of evolution. Ortiz's desire to create a coherent national narrative creates a constant tension in his work between defining Afro-Cuban culture and subsuming the question of blackness into a narrative of hybridity" (Maguire "Racial Experiments" 25). This term “Afro-Cuban” has been an unsettled, self-contradictory term for more than a century; today, study participants in Santiago describe “Afro-Cuban” as a carrier of sweet nostalgia, marking an era of new opportunities brought by the Cuban Revolution. For others, “AfroCuban” is merely a categorization for filing away history, music, cuisine, etc. Still others, seemingly offended by the utterance, consider the term pejorative.

- 1. Academics tend to locate the use of the term “Afro-Cuban” *exclusively* in research-related situations; these participants tend to prefer descriptive claims of racial democracy such as “racelessness” and “cultural syncretism”.**

Before I interviewed 52-year-old Participant M.M.G. at the center, I attended two of her panel discussions in the city that were thematically dedicated to exploring existing racial discrimination in Cuba. During our session, I asked her the interview set: Do you know the term “Afro Cuban”? What does it mean? Have you had cause to use the term “Afro Cuban”? In which situations, did you use this term? She responded:

The term ‘Afro Cuban’ is used by some but I don’t share in it; I do not use it. I consider that mestizo, Cubans, or blacks are not Afro-Cuban. And, we are not Afro-Cuban because Cuba is a result of a mixture, of a process of an ethno-genic mixture that resulted in an ethno-nation that is Cuba. We mix and we become a single nation ethos. There are researchers who use “AfroCuban”, but I don’t agree with them (M.M.G.).

Afro Cuban has been handled as a social scientific issue. The contributions that African culture has made to the Cuban people must be identified. Evidently, without African culture, Cubans would not exist. Without African elements, without the African factor influencing what we are as a nation, as a country, I believe that there would be no Cubanidad, in that sense (S.R.G.).

M.M.G. references ethnogeny, which is the lens and methodological approach of much of her academic work. Here, she advances the notion that goes beyond descriptions of mestizo, but acknowledging “Cuban” as a race, a tribe, or ethnic group, rather than a national or political identity. With academic respondents, there is a

tendency to reference rootedness, isolating one of many roots (Iglesias) and is a descriptive term that “summarizes” the cultural diversity (Participant S.F.I.).

Researcher L.M.C., 25, asserts that the racial identities of Cubans form “an amalgam, a union of many cultures and many roots”. L.M.C. said that she does not speak of Afro-descendancy because to do so in the twenty-first century is redundant: “We all have some relationship with the slaves.” The academics - professors and researchers - in the group discuss the use of the term in research work and historical, reflective projects; Y.C.C., a 25-year-old television script writer, states that her the application is for categorizing content, professional uses: “I use the term often because I write about those matters, issues of racism and issues of blackness, issues of Afro Cuban origin”. For this group, everyday or a social use of “Afro Cuban,” would be an obsolete practice because the cultural syncretism that they suggest is inherent in Cuban identity subsumes the African ontologies or the ethnic identities of the island’s former “slaves”.

2. Language naming African-descendancy (Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, African American, etc.) is considered problematic, adverse, racist and/or even pejorative labeling.

Asked about the significance and applications of “Afro-Cuban”, Participant Y.B.H. interrupted the researcher mid-question: “Hold on a moment. I don’t know anything about that. That comes from past eras in our country and in the whole world”. To Y.B.H., language alluding to the African descendancy of Cubans was

incendiary and anachronistic, associated with the era of slavery. These participants indicate that, for some, establishing and/or affirming cultural identity and celebrating lineage is not performed with racial themed, racially-specific discourse; “AfroCuban” to several of the participants is a racist slur. “I don’t use it. I get along with everyone of all colors,” (G.H.M.).

Participant J.M.M. shared that he is a non-black Cuban who practices local Yoruba religion, as one measure of the level of his respect for and his perception of African-derived contributions to his life: “I have friends who are Afro-Cuban. We are a country where people are not measured by their race. They are not measured based on their race. Here, color doesn’t matter” (J.M.M.). And, G.F.L. is a native of Santiago, Cuba, who currently directs a theater company in Havana. Before a workshop at the Teatro Macubá in Santiago, G.F.L. discussed his use and his conceptualization of “Afro-Cuban”.

I am insulted by it. It is quite a pejorative term, period, and discriminatory. I do not like it, because I think there are those who serve to lower it. It can mean something discriminatory and derogatory when it is used by someone who is not black; they use it as a term to folklorize or to call you banal. An “Afro-Cuban art”. I think that because a Cuban white person who writes are not called a “Cuban-Cuban”. It is not called “Cuban-Hispanic”. They are merely Cuban. But then when we blacks write, they call us “Afro-Cuban writers. I am Cuban (Participant G.F.L.).

Participants like G.F.L. explain how the term signifies an inferiorizing category. He clarifies that, in his experience, this is a rhetorical activity and exigence of non-blacks, specifically Spanish Cubans and foreign whites. In this explanation, attempts to eliminate this distinction is a protection, a move to thwart discursive ways that the creative contributions of blacks in Cuba are minimized or denigrated. From this purview, “Afro-Cuban” labeling for music, literature, plays, etc. are folklorizing, a way to rhetorically marginalize. G.F.L. expressed a preference for monikers that use “African-descent” if the intent is to acknowledge an ontological tie to African communities. Also, G.F.L. indicated that the use of ‘Afro-Cuban’ seems to be most often employed to connect with tourists.

3. The perception that “AfroCuban” and other African-descendancy words (Afro-Cuban, Afro-Brazilian, African American, etc.) are Western, expressly American, and, in some cases, anti-Cuban.

Twenty-three-year-old college student C.R.M shares her understanding of the term “African American” in the United States; by walking through the rhetoricity (power, function, sphere of influence, and use) of “African American”, C.R.M. draws a comparison to conceptualize “AfroCuban” and to further explain the futility of African descendancy expressions in Cuban culture.

As I understand it, the concept of “African-American” is applied to people who are born in the United States, but who have African roots. That type of appellation cannot be applied in the Cuban context.

Because Cuba, as a nation state, was created after the black, ethnic component was already established in the country. It is not like North American, who have the perspective of being African-American in their lexicon and as their worldview. We do not have that over here. Here, we are Cuban (C.R.M.).

C.R.M. is one of the participants whose notion of racial identity for Cubans is wholly tied to the 1959 regime established with the Cuban Revolution. Evident in her claim, the Cuban Revolution so entirely reorganized the island's social ecology that "that type of appellation cannot be applied in the Cuban context." This aligns with responses that present the moniker "Cuban" as an all-encompassing (cultural, national, racial, etc.) identity in the space in time following 1959.

In responses that compared Cuba to the United States, participants were absolute about differentiations in use of "Afro Cuban", clarifying ties between the race language and their perceptions of both national identities: "Well, in our country, we don't use it" said A.V.I., a 61-year-old Spanish literature professor.

Here in Cuba, racial identities don't exist. However, in the United States they do. It is even seen in the mistreatment of the black race in different states in the United States. In the movies, it has been seen. And it has been seen in videos, like for example on the Internet the murders that occur in the U.S. against the people of color. Here in Cuba, that doesn't exist (Participant A.J.H.).

Responses like A.J.H.'s revealed a belief that racial identity is the impetus for police violence against African-descendant Americans; encountered and experienced rhetorically through - speeches, news coverage content, films, and images - streaming out of the United States, Hardy uses the collection of examples to affirm benefits of racelessness. Or, for these participants, it is the operation of racial identity language (and rhetorical activities that advance the existence of difference) that contribute to the violent social reality of blacks in the United States. Further, participants discussed film, news, images accessed via. Internet. (This is significant, because at the time of the study Internet access in Cuba is less than two years old.) One participant explained: "We can eat at any restaurant here. It's not like it is for you. Like it is in movies like *Hidden Figures*." These responses bring to light that Cubans are building, updating race politics narrative of the United States (with the rest of the world). Temporality is an important consideration in this process because this rhetorical activity between the two countries, in many ways, ceased for a half century. The participants, not unlike URI visiting Professor Miranda, relayed race narratives of the United States crafted during the #BlackLivesMatter movement era; because most of the interviewees have never traveled to the United States, this process is entirely rhetorical. "I have never thought of myself as an Afro Cuban woman. It is not like with North Americans who have the perspective of being African American in their lexicon" (C.R.M.).

4. There are Cubans who self-identify as “Afro-Cuban”. (personal, embodied - me or us)

In the responses of Afro Cuban elders were nostalgic anecdotes about the 1950s and 1960s on the island when, suddenly, being “Afro-Cuban” meant more opportunities, promotion, better homes, lucrative jobs, access to education for the first time -- one immediate aftereffect of the revolutionary government’s anti-discrimination policies. “The term “Afro Cuban” means something very pleasant” stated Ernesto Arminan, 67, who is the director of the Folkloric Ballet of Oriente:

Because my family is of a folkloric origin and I learned of my Afro Cuban culture from my grandparents and great-grandparents when I was a young boy. The 1959 Cuban Revolution liberated people of color in Cuba, because there was a big amount of racism. After the revolution was the first time that Cubans from humble origins could take what they knew about Cuban traditions onto the stage. Folkloric Ballet of Oriente was created in April 1959, which was four months after the triumph of the revolution. We were the first dance company that the revolution created and it was made up of people of color. Before that, everything was made up of the aristocratic class and only white people went to the theater (Arminan).

Two participants, in particular, express frustration with black Cuban compatriots who do claim for themselves a Afro Cuban racial identity. Actress C.D.P., age 47 and E.M.S., age 29, who works in food and restaurant services and as a

drumming instructor, discuss black Cuba as the modern day embodiment of a very specific history and that is tied to a distinctly African ontology: “I am Afro Cuban. To me, it is a problem of identity. I am Afro-Cuban because I am a descendant of Africans. Sometimes there are those who are not clear on what they are. I am the fifth generation of a slave. So, I am a descendant of Africans” (C.D.P). For E.M.S., the lineage of black heroism is amplified in the African descendancy narrative, “Afro Cuban is our Cuban blood. That is our race of the Santiaguero because of the Mambises, because they fought there. They freed us.”

“Personally, I consider myself Afro-Cuban.” D.M.S, age 27, a journalist and researcher expressed personal connectivity to a distinctly African descendancy. However, for R.P.S., she perceived “AfroCuban” as language put into play only for the purpose of academic categorizing, “I use the term ‘Afro Cuban’ mainly in research.”

During the interviews, several elected to respond by tracing their lineage, sharing their understanding of how AfroCuban as a racial identity is situated in their personal narrative.

I am Afro Cuban because my of my parents and my grandparents were from Spain. And my grandmother, the maternal one was a component mixture of the black race. And so, I am a descendent of the African continent and the Spanish continent (R.D.J.).

As far as I understand it, the term afro-cuban is the mixture of, not racist, but rather of the origins of a person who has African origins but who also has Cuban Origins. It can also believe people who are of African descent but who have been born in Cuban territory (J.J.F).

I know the term because my family are descendants of Africans and I was born here in Cuba. And many parts of my family came directly from Africa and others passed through Haiti but arrived from Africa and Haiti. That's why I consider myself an Afro-Cuban. I use the term on a day to day basis. I keep in mind where I come from and where I am and what I am. We do not forget that our roots are African (H.B.S.).

5. “Afro-Cuban” is a cultural categorization, celebrated, studied and folklorized; however, in some instances Afro-Cubans is constructed rhetorically as a separate, distinguishable group, arguably indicating alterity. (Them, They)

In their descriptions, these participants indicated that Afro Cubans are a discrete group; the connection to African-derived cultural and artistic contributions in these responses do not reflect a sense of a personal tie. As they use “they” and “them” to discuss this category of Cuban compatriots, it seems that the African components of the “cultural syncretism” are not expressed here as embodied by the speaker.

“I have a lot of friends who are descended Afro Cubans” (Participant A.N.M)

“In our culture, (Afro Cubans) brought the drums. They brought the instruments. They mixed with the Cubans, so that’s why Afro-Cuban music was born” (Participant R.U.C.).

Afro Cuban music and cuisine are ubiquitous and named worldwide; there were Santigueran study participants who discussed “AfroCuban” as a folklorized categorization, at times folklorization in the discussion pushed the term away from complex ontological significance, in these cases. S.Y.V., age 51, works as a cultural promoter for large-scale, government-sponsored events (conferences, festivals, etc.) “It is a very general concept. We will use it only from the point of view of culture if a thing has Cuban elements and black elements. We use it a lot in foods, and music, and dance, and paintings. We use it in literature” (S.Y.V.).

The term is identified in many bibliographies. Afro-Cuban term is a base of social culture that is rooted in African culture. In Cuba it is relevant in cultural, social, and culinary manifestations. During the Caribbean Festival, it is a time when that term becomes en vogue (B.V.R.).

The discussion about the use of Afro Cuban as a cultural label did not necessarily mean (in every case) that the participants did not express a personal

connection to African ancestry. M.R.D., age 44, is a dancer who self identifies as Cuban, French and Venezuelan. M.B.D. understands “AfroCuban” as the music “that came from our ancestors”. She shares her understanding of the African in Cuba narrative: “The Africans that came from the time of slavery in Baracoa, many settled. Either by the Spanish (Cuba) or the French (Haiti), the African came to the country and implanted his piece” (M.B.D.).

“Afro-Cuban” Results Summary

While there were participants who denied that they had any familiarity with the term “AfroCuban”, most participants expressed prior knowledge of the term’s existence. Consistently, Cubans who knew the term stated that “AfroCuban” is not used colloquially in modern Cuba. These outcomes were expected and confirmed ideas about use, rather than provide new information.

Variances in the claims of personal connections and those who expressed distant folklorized, knowledge of the term were unexpected. Most informative were the varied explanations about what the word signified. Meaning, there were a large group of participants stated that use of “AfroCuban” was problematic, but the rationale or why they believed the term was a problem differed. This portion of the study revealed that Cuba is not as monolithic as Cubans believe.

A.J.J. responded, “Girl, here in our country we don’t use those types of terms. Everyone is the same. The blacks are the same, the whites are the same, the mestizo,

the Indian. We are the same” (A.J.J., 51, event coordinator). In some cases Afro Cuban is a proud cultural distinction woven into the tapestry of the larger, national “Cubanidad” narrative. On some occasions, as it is in A.J.J.’s case, sameness is a protection, a positive, inclusive and validating. In other instances, “We are the same.” is meant to defend social value. As participant G.F.L. indicated there is also an understanding of “Afro Cuban” and labels tied to African descendancy is used as, in modern day terms a microaggression, intended as debasement, a lessening.

The role that forms censorship/monitoring plays in this study’s data gathering process were also instructive. On one of the interview days, Zoe accompanied me to the Archivo Histórico Provincial Santiago de Cuba (City Archive) to conduct interviews. Aged, neglected and towering, this concrete and metal structure in the heart of Santiago was once a prison; now, the relatively spacious cells are used for individual offices and record storage. After Zoe introduced me, one of the interviewees and I stood in the doorway before our session. She had asked to review the questions beforehand, questions that I provided: “You are fortunate to have Zoe. You couldn’t do this without her, not talking about topics like this. Not with questions like this. ” She was referring to questions about conceptualizations and uses of “AfroCuban” and other race identity language.

During interviews at Teatro El Quijote, I observed an event speaker eavesdropping on the interview that followed his own; I realized that he hoped for uniformity in responses, an active proponent for the solidarity rhetoric that likely

informed his answers. A fist pump indicated that he was pleased with “Cuban” as the response to the project question about participant origin.

“Origenes”

At the start of each interview, the 97 participants completed an interview form composed in Spanish (APPENDIX A) reporting name, age, gender, level of education attained, occupation and origin. “Origin,” which appeared on the form as “origenes” was, for the majority of participants arresting and became the anticipated disruption in an, otherwise, smooth onboarding process. Each would ask: “What do you mean by this?” Zoe, the adviser/gatekeeper, and I decided to leave the question because the word “origenes” invoked discussion about ontological variances and the participant’s interpretations of the term’s use inspired storytelling of grandparents and great grandparents, deeply personal familial ties and lineage; just as often, “origenes” caused participants to declare the singleness of their “Cubanidad” or their Cubanness. Defenders of “Cubanidad” seemed to offer their forgiveness for the inclusion of such a ridiculous question, a question that all Cubans, being Cuban, must answer the same. But, all Cubans didn’t respond the same. Zoe explained “Cubans never ask this question. We are all ‘Cuban’”. The only researcher clarification of “origenes” offered was: “There are no wrong answers to that question. Write whatever that means to you.” The following are the results of the “origin” item from the onboarding instrument.

One third of the participants instinctively shared an ontology in terms that were not nationalistic nor Cuban. Instinctively, 32 participants (33 percent) elected to list descriptive cultural complexities of their lineage woven into the stories of French and Spanish immigrant grandparents and the mixing of Haitian great grandparents with those from the Canary Islands. Interestingly, those participants who gave prominence to “Africa, African and Afro-Cuban” heritage in their descriptions were either under age 30, laborers, food service workers or musicians. That this group used “AfroCuban” as a descriptor is noteworthy because it is widely believed to be the language of academics, coined by Ferdinando Ortiz, for the purpose of study. Used in this way, as a description of personal origin, by food service workers and laborers indicates expanding use of the term, a crossing into uses connected to grassroots, layman’s or everyday use.

Of course, 62 percent of the 97 participants who anchored this ontological identity in Cubanidad or Cubanness and were not compelled by “origenes” to isolate or clarify the parameters of a mestizo heritage. Those participants simply wrote, “Cuban”. Those under age 30 represent a generation on the other side of an ever widening gap between themselves and the 1959 ending of the Cuban Revolution; the youngest participants in this project were born in 2000. With this group, 44 percent of the under age 30 group did not write “Cuban”, instead opted to share a complex mestizo identity. Most noteworthy here is how this data speaks to the tensions around language used on the island to construct individual racial identities, how participants

are electing to give differing prominence to shared histories and how the data provides evidence of varied worldviews cultivated in part by lived, generational experiences on the island. The collective expectation is that each responses to “origines” would be the same, aligning with Ortiz’s notion of *ajiaco* and *Cubanidad* as the descriptive that is expectedly “Cuban”. However, many Cubans, especially younger Cubans may be sharing racial identity rhetorics that represent frays and splits in a revolution-inspired solidarity discourse caused by time gaps.

Casa del Caribe, one of Santiago’s state-operated cultural centers, held its annual July festival while I completed field work for this project. Typically, 6,000 to 7,000 attendees travel to the city from several countries, participating in academic panel discussions, drumming courses, street parties and musical and dance performances; some of the events at the government center and theaters had “Afro Cuban” themes. On the fourth day, while conducting interviews at Casa Caribe in Reparto Vista Alegre, I met participant E.M.S. E.M.S. is an Afro Cuban drumming instructor introduced to me by one of his visiting students, Bob Ramos, who is also college music department faculty member in Connecticut. My 20-minute exchange with E.M.S. about racism in in modern day Santiago is a microcosm of the dynamic discursive swirl of self-negotiating, contradictions and exposed gaps and constraints generated by the project questions and the participants’ responses. Immediately,

E.M.S. told me the story of the Mambises³. “who fought here and freed us”. When asked, about the term “Afro Cuban”, he said, “I use it very little, Morena. No. I use it a lot, a lot.” Then, racism? “Sometimes the white people...”, he stopped completely. “I don’t get bogged down about other people, Morena. If they are white, if they are black, if they are mestizo, I don’t believe in any of that.” He starts with his narrative of the group of Cuban fighters whose African-descendancy and bravery is distinct, noted, historic and well-known. While repeatedly calling me “Morena”, a term that (endearingly) isolates my blackness, is seemingly a natural rhetorical practice with for him with black women; simultaneously, Sanchez claims “White...black...mestizo, I don’t believe in any of that.”

³ Mambises is the name given to Cuban troops who fought against the Spanish during the Ten Years’ War and the War of Independence. The term references multiracial troops, named after a black Spanish officer, Juan E. Mamby.

CHAPTER 10

INTERVIEW RESULTS FOR “RACISM IN CUBA”

“There is no racism in Cuba? Maybe there is no institutional racism as such, but among the people, it still persists” (Participant P.R.R.).

In this chapter, the responses of 50 Santiaguan interview participants are examined to learn how they conceptualize, codify, and of course, erase the term “racism” in the race discourse of modern Cuba. This field work was designed to address the following project questions:

(1.) How do Cubans use race rhetoric in an ecology in which racialized discourse is considered counter-revolutionary or treasonous? (2.) What are island-based Cubans willing to say about race and racism when the dominant discourse makes claims of a raceless society? (3.) Which are the rhetorical strategies and discursive configuring that sustain the rhetoric of solidarity or national identity tropes? Further, the following interview data responds to a strategy of inquiry that seeks to understand how testimonies and experience narratives of victims of racism are chronicled in a public space where it is considered treasonous to do so.

1. Santiaguan conceptualizations of the term “racism”: In your opinion, why are tourists told “There is no racism in Cuba?”

Fifty participants were asked about the expression, “There is no racism in Cuba”; confirming Hillary’s assertion, that everyone in Cuba “knows” and often announces that there is no racism in Cuba, 39 of the 50 participants knew of the expression, would use the expression and agreed that “there is no racism in Cuba.” However, in the interview data set it is apparent that, for several the Santiaguan participants, the term “racism” signifies a litany of social infractions, not only those against black Cubans, but those against women, homosexuals and whites as well. The groups’ conceptualization of the Spanish word “racismo” is further splintered by a popular understanding of two categories: “constitutional racism” and everyday (or social) racism. In this case, Hillary’s sources and the 39 participants claiming the validity of the expression, “there is no racism in Cuba”, refer to the constitutional brand of racism. Clarifying this point, several black Cuban participants state: “There is no racism. We can go anywhere the whites can go.”

Look, I really do not think it exists. Because I can stand in front of anyone and they will not say “because you are black you can’t be here”. I think this is one of the countries where it is seen the least. And, where the manifestation of discrimination exists least (Participant D.M.S.).

Participant M.M.G., a university in Santiago discusses use of the term “racism” in modern Cuba. (While she is an administrator, Garcia noted that she was not speaking in this interview in that capacity.)

When we talk about racism in Cuba today, we are talking about a racism that is not instituted from the power. It is a cultural racism that is installed in the subjectivity of people but that does not have a backing from power. The revolution in Cuba took all possible measures to achieve justice and equity. Therefore, racist practices are associated to people’s subjectivity and not from policies or mechanisms that allow racism to be exercised from power (Participant M.M.G.).

M.M.G. uses “power” here to reference government power, reiterating the significance of “racism” in post-revolutionary discourse. She also reveals how successful eradication of racism continues to be measured by most Cubans, how the continued existence and extinction of “racism” is quantified by Cubans today. “Cuba already went through that stage and whites, blacks, mestizos, we have the same rights. The same opportunities. No one is prohibited from accessing one space or another because of the color of their skin. There is no discrimination when accessing” (Participant M.M.G.).

Today, “There is no racism in Cuba” means that people of color (all who are not the white or creole elites) may legally access the same restaurants, hospitals, universities and neighborhoods as their compatriots. The majority of the participants

understand this statement to mean that in today's Cuba that racist acts or race-based discrimination may not be legally performed or supported by the State.

Historicized, the phrase "There is no racism in Cuba" is tethered to concatenations of rhetorical acts that sought to establish national identity, activity that spans more than a century. Claims of José Martí in the 1800s, the solidarity rhetoric of Fernando Ortiz in the 1930s and the revolutionary government political platform in the 1950s necessitate the claimed racelessness of the state; and, it followed, if there are no races, there is no place for racism to nest. Today, several of the project's participants contribute to this lineage of racial identity erasure and the absence of racism. Others articulate the functioning dualism of the term:

Officially there is no racism in our country. Officially. Officially there is none. But yes. Officially, means that the state, the Cuban state, the government, the institutions can't declare openly a racist practice because that would imply legal actions and judicial action. Because constitutionally, it is decreed that in our country racism has no place. Now, one thing is the official and another is the familial or maybe the personal. Even, within an institution what a certain group of leaders (Participant A.V.I.).

A lack of consensus on what the term "racism" signifies was expressed as a problem, truly one of the constraints faced in developing public fora in modern Cuba for addressing racism, registering testimony of racism's individual survivors and, of course, needed redress.

(The term “racism”) is very controversial even from an investigative point of view. It creates a lot of dilemma because people do not agree. And, it does exist. I was a victim of racism in the university. Because of a subject, because of a research topic that is religious. That’s why I would not speak of it sometimes because I was the blackest in the classroom. And, so I do not take the subject on (Participant E.D.R.).

For the participants, discursive negotiations around the term, “racismo” occur at the intersection where Cuban law meets lived experiences of black Cubans.

Latent. We feel it, those of us who are black...we are the ones who feel it most. People do not do it consciously. They have it (racism) in their minds and as long as that is not removed it is very difficult to detach oneself. After the revolution, there is a law, but that does not eliminate it; racism was not eliminated because of a law. But I will tell you, if we do not remove it from the minds, if people do not remove it from their heads... it is very difficult to eliminate it. It is latent there. It is latent (Participant C.D.P.).

Essentially, according to the study participants, the most common exigence for creating race rhetoric in modern Cuba is a dual-missioned one, always existing with ambivalence and embattled contemporaneity: (1) To protect the Cuban Revolution legacy, specifically claims about the eradication of racism and inequality on the island from 1959 to the present day, and (2) To craft testimony lived, witnessed experiences with racism today. This struggle leads to the creations of rhetorical categories,

degrees: “constitutional” versus “social or everyday” racism. Also, these negotiations makes the term, in many cases a catch-all signifier for variations of acts of discrimination against women, disabled, LGBTQ and black Cubans. For some, any marginality can be called racism. The most common conceptualization is that “no racism” means that there is material access and opportunity equality for all Cubans, the most pronounced remnant of revolution rhetoric in operation.

2. Discursive consequences of “racelessness”: The absence of public meaning-making spaces that register a common conceptualization of “racism”.

Participants responses reveal problems with modern social ecologies functioning without public racialized meaning-making spaces, spaces that compel a sharing of testimony, a grappling with individual collisions with racism and that call for correction. Racial democracy discourse has long helped shape national identity for Cuba and a century of public rhetoric sought to elevate cultural/regional/local identities above all others. Therefore, in fairness, a search for points of consensus or discord about race language and its uses needed to include what is arguably the most rudimentary of questions. Participants were asked to share their understanding of the term “racism” and whether that term was, for them, different from “race prejudice”.

Twenty-six of the 50 participants indicated that they were aware of occurrences of “race prejudice” in modern Cuba. Race prejudice, they described, is (at times, multiple) material and, more often rhetorical, acts of racist individuals; still, all deny the existence of “racism” or “racismo”. Although, 26 have personally

experienced or witnessed “race prejudice”. For them, the two concepts are unrelated in terms of their social function. “Racism is cruder (than “race prejudice”) when we consider the term because there is violence involved in ‘racism’. There totally is discrimination, racial discrimination due to the economic problem that exists in Cuba” (Participant E.D.R.). “The concept of racism describes everything” said Participant R.Z.P).

There are white people and there are homosexuals that are discriminated against. That is racism, too. If two women are inverted (lesbians) and you are against something like that, racism also applies. There are racists who are black and there are racists who are white. The term is unpleasant for me. It’s a bit unpleasant (R.Z.P.).

Researcher: Describe what the term racism means to you. What is the significance of “racismo”?

Felina Gonzalez: When one does not accept the color of the race. With blacks is mainly where you see that racism. But, here in Cuba that racism is not produced; it is not as crude as it is in other countries. Because here everyone has the same rights. They are equals: man, woman, black, white, yellow, pink (Participant B.R.G.).

While there are interviewees who conceptualize “racismo” as a catch-all for gender discrimination, bigotry, race-driven persecution, others isolated its use to racial identity-related infractions. Further, several participants described circumstances where they believed blacks were being racists toward whites. These participants suggest that “racismo” is synonymous with “phobia”: “Phobia or racism doesn’t just exist toward the black man; there is racism toward the white man. Sometimes black people are racists toward whites,” added 40-year-old trumpeter, R.R.V.

One participant offered a testimony of what she deemed a racist experience in her life. She confirms that racism exists in Cuba, evidenced in marginality she endures as a result of her complexion and partial bodily paralysis: “Sometimes it is said that there is no racism. But, there is some racism. They marginalize you” said Participant M.B.D. “At least I feel like I’m marginalized, because I’m not pretty. My color ... like I don’t have value and as a child I had a paralysis. All those things marginalize you. When you’re not pretty, you do not have a good physique, they put you on the sidelines. They may say, ‘Oh yeah, you dance very beautifully.’ but, they hate you” (M.B.D.)

Some conceptualized the term using Cuban television’s lack of black representation as evidence of racism in modern Cuba, adding that the first-face of Cuban tourism is not an Afro-Cuban face. “You can see one or two persons of color; all of the ones on television are light-skinned people trigueño, mulatto. And, they all have to be pretty (D.R.R.).

On this lack of black representation in media, M.M.G. states:

The many years of slavery based on the color of the skin. Because slavery in Cuba had color, the slaves were black. That has brought as a consequence subjectivity to stay. People's prejudices remain in considering these people inferior, ugly, uneducated, or unable to perform in certain and certain roles such as in television, movies, etc. But it is not a practice from the power, on the contrary (M.M.G.).

Participant H.T.P., age 40, concurred:

In Cuba, there are lots of psychological fixations on skin color and the type of hair. And racism isn't necessarily from white to black. Because Cuba is such a mestizo country, there is a racism by category of color. There is to say the lightest-skinned discriminates against those who are a bit darker... . The concept of beauty is even based on race (H.T.P.).

Then, how does the evolution of a racism discourse occur when it is counter-revolutionary to claim its existence? In many ways, it remains effectively destabilized for a century. Consensus is built around unaltered metaphors, definitions and claims of men who died as early as 1895 (Martí) and 1968 (Ortiz):

The term "racism" is a racist term. Fernando Ortiz, with his essay "El engano de la raza" (The deceit of race), demonstrated that races don't really exist. The only race that exists is the human being race. But, on the subject of race, to say race is a way to justify racism (Participant H.R.C.).

Ferdinando Ortiz define race very well as a cultural concept... For me in Cuba, there are no races; there are skin colors. There are types of hair. In the population consensus there are three races established for Cuba white, black and mulatto (R.F.C.).

Phew! Cuba is an ajiaco as Fernando Ortíz said, an ajiaco in which they mix. Here there is no pure white. There is no pure black. Here, we are all mestizo products of a mixture that comes from years from centuries (Participant D.M.S.).

Social constructivist theory about the colonial motives for amplifying the import of the races is relayed in the participants' recitations of these early teachings. However, dangerous are the times when the recitations are immovable replacements for personal reports, experiential narratives that, as they unfold today's example, add nuanced updates and become generative.

3. A question of agency: Racism expressed as a economic and social mobility constraint

Fifteen of the 50 participants defined "racism" as an aesthetic-level, melanin and skin-deep partiality. Arguably attributed to socialism indoctrination, these participants did not express racism as a social issue that involved economic disparities

and a race-based lack of access. Only 4 of the 50 participants connected racism with a stripping of power, an earning hindrance or (in any way) with socioeconomic realities of black Cubans.

However, there were interviewees who claimed that they either experienced or witnessed racism operating in a way that had economic implications, particularly inequitable for black Cubans.

In places, people who are black get discriminated against. There are places like centers of work where there are black people who have the capacity, intellectual; they could occupy a higher level position. But because they are black they are discriminated against. There are people who believe that only white people are the only ones who can be bosses or who can direct. (Blacks) are seen as less (Participant Y.M.P.).

Forty-year-old media supervisor, Participant R.R.V., concurs:

There are racist traces in Cuba. Because in the upper spheres, in general, you don't see a lot of black people. In the high political and social powers, you don't see a lot of black people. There are a lot of white and mestizo but black people - you don't see many. This also influences when talking about economic power. In the high commands in government, it is very difficult to find persons of color (R.R.V.).

Several interviewees acknowledged a class hierarchy and the uneven distribution of wealth; this is a topic widely discussed in Cuba. However, validating the existence of

race-based economic disparities in modern Cuba is considered counter-revolutionary, is discussed less frequently, or more often, denied altogether.

In the '90s, a product of a Special Period that we Cubans had to go through... .

We were limited in many things, many products that were necessary and essential for life, including food. We had 10 years of a very difficult process.

And, I remember in one of his speeches, Fidel Castro said: We are going to have to endure seeing a family eat a fish and another family has to eat a yaca or what is called a tamale.

We were being prepared, that there would be a difference. In the income, in the economic part (Participant H.B.S.).

To avoid over-simplification or misrepresentation, it is important to note that most participants understand family contributions from abroad as the primary advantage.

Sogarra also notes improvements, saying that a few black Cubans are among those who have been permitted to engage in increasing entrepreneurship on the island in recent years: “But still, the differences can be noticed” (H.B.S.). Self-identified

Afro-Cuban dramatist, Consuelo Patterson states:

(Whites) were ahead and we had to run behind. Now there are many possibilities. There have been many possibilities with small business that make people have a different level. But let's see - to rent houses who has the best houses? We have had to run a little more and there is always going to be a difference. (S.T.P.)

Rationale for the observable race-based inequities at times align, almost note for note, with the explanations disseminated before the 10 Years War in 1868 and the subsequent decades when blacks were criminalized, accused of witchcraft. In some cases, when participants discuss the economic positioning of blacks in Cuba, causality falls exclusively on the habits, mentality, or generational conditioning of blacks. At the beginning of the interview Maricelys Manzano Garcia, who has a darker complexion, explained that she does not consider herself Afro-Cuban. She is, simply, Cuban, she added. Because she is a philosophy professor and college dean, Garcia discussed Cuban university achievement gaps, claiming that such observable imbalances were not evidence of institutional racism.

At the lowest levels of teaching our classrooms are, you see the presence of all skin colors. Notice that I insist, in Cuba the problem is skin color. You see people of all colors in the classrooms and as you go up in levels the classrooms become lighter. The people are of less dark skin. And that's because the social disadvantage in black families is reproducing. And then there are fewer young blacks who take exams to enter university and who achieve success when entering university. Why? Because they prefer to dedicate themselves to other jobs (M.M.G.).

Participant S.T.G. adds:

No, there is no racism in Cuba. I am black. I studied at a university that is tuition-free. My daughter studied at a university for free, gold title. We work.

We do what we want. And, we do not feel humiliated. There is no Ku Klux Klan. There is nothing that tells us when to sleep, do not do this, do not do that. There is no racism (S.T.G.).

Problematic generational or familial patterns were often discussed as compartmentalizable; the option was there, but the choice was not made by blacks, is the repeated explanation for observable race-based disparities in the neighborhoods, hospitality industry, government and medical jobs. This is especially repeated in discussions about education.

Because (blacks) are not encouraged from the family to access higher education and study and are reproducing the marginality scheme. Because they have the opportunity to access, but if in that family you find the highest percentage of people who commit crimes, if the parents abandoned their studies, if the parents were dedicated from a young age to work and did not worry about education access, it is not important to go to the university. That young man studies less, he prepares less and when the time comes to access the university, he does not succeed. But not because he is deprived of entering the university, but because he does not achieve success (Participant M.M.G).

For a project like this conducted in an ecology long structured by socialism ideology, the hypothesis would be that there would be a high number of participants who were proponents of public race rhetoric that aligned with the precepts of those political ideals.

With the discussion of education, the timbre of the conversations often changed. Emotionality around the role of the Cuban Revolution in overhauling the education landscape on the island is consistent in the interview sessions; this stance is ubiquitous, claimed and proclaimed in Cuba. The revolutionary government's literacy program invoked stories of inspiring lore for younger participants and nostalgic pride for those who were old enough to have been there. "The first thing that the revolution did was the literacy campaign in 1961. There is no racism in Cuba because of the revolution. It was for the most humble people" (Ernesto Arminan, 67, who is the director of the Folkloric Ballet of Oriente). From January 1 to December 22 in 1961 the revolutionary government orchestrated an ambitious campaign to abolish illiteracy on the island. "Because everyone had the right to go to school, but poor people ended in fourth and fifth grade at the most; and, there was a large degree of illiteracy" (Arminan). In the nostalgic recollections of participants like Arminan, a fuller picture of their pre-revolutionary Cuba for them is painted:

Racism is the humiliation of a person of color; it's what I suffered as a child. I lived in a poor barrio, but there were people there who had a higher economic level than ours. There was a time that I was playing with other boys. And, two white kids, a girl and a boy, came to play with us. You know children don't know about racism or anything like that. When the (white) parents saw us playing, they came over and pushed me and said, 'Don't get close to my daughter. If you touch her you will darken her.' That is racism (Arminan).

As it has been stated before, the scope of this project precludes a deep dive into socialism or Marxist doctrine. Nor are there close taxonomic reads of Fidel Castro speeches and his anti-discrimination policy rhetoric. However, there are times in the interview sessions when the imprint and legacy of this political ideology is evident in the responses about the operation of racism on the island. In the discussions of economic disparities and education, this type of political shadowing is most pronounced. Participants share testimony of discriminatory practices that mirror those of other African-descended groups; according to these accounts, despite claims that there is no racism, dominant white creole elite descendants occupy the upper socio-economic levels. Nostalgia is a powerful element in the meaning making process, at times, contorting narratives of today's distressed social realities for black Cubans to fit emotional and adored recollections of the first revolutionary successes of the 1950s.

4. Modern Cuban families were named by participants as one of the most common sites of racial discrimination.

The first time I met M.M.G. was at the 37th Annual Festival de Caribe in Santiago, which is comprised of performances, workshops and academic panels. During that Thursday session, I observed M.M.G. as a targeted, oft challenged and the most unpopular panelist delivering her talk titled *Culture, Race and Identity: A Look from Higher Education*. She spoke about the high number of conflicts in Cuban

families about interracial marriages, tensions, she described, that are fueled by stereotyping and bigotry. When I interviewed M.M.G. days later, she extrapolated on the current programs that, essentially, train Cubans to be anti-racists.

We do not want to return to the past we had in relation to the issue of racism and to, above all, educate (Cubans) to be anti-racist. We're working on that. That's what I can tell you. And, racist practices are not visible, which is why it is harder to work on the problem. Because people behave in a way in their private space and in another way in the public space. It would not occur to anyone in the public space to run over, discriminate against, mistreat a person in Cuba because of the color of their skin. But, you may find that within the family, a family member that does not accept that there is a bi-racial marriage within their family. But, that is another part of the problem (M.M.G.).

White grandmothers, who still think of themselves as aristocrats from past times, will say 'That girl is too pretty to be with him'. And, things like that. They do not do it purposefully to be evil, but it is thoughts that have racist content (Participant C.R.C.).

We say there is not. But you can not know everyone. And, I do know people who are racist, because I had the 'pleasure' of meeting one: I was with a guy,

but we had to see each other secretly because his mother is racist. He isn't, but his mother is (Participant Y.S.G.).

People say they aren't racist in my family, in the family of a white person. But when a white woman starts seeing a black man, Phew! There, in the family, the mother's heart is pained (Participant R.D.C)

When asked about their understanding of the term "racism" and whether they had knowledge of the claim "There is no racism in Cuba," several participants lucidly and directly lay out the familial tensions that exist because of racism.

Chapter Conclusion

Responses of 67-year-old Ernesto Arminan, the director of the Folkloric Ballet of Oriente, highlighted the significance of nostalgia in the race rhetoric of Cuba.

April 1959... four months after the triumph of the revolution. We were the first dance company that the revolution created and it was made up of people of color. Before that, everything was made up of the aristocratic class and only white people went to the theater (Arminan).

Resistance to discuss or acknowledge the operation of racism in modern Cuba is tightly bound, for elders, memory. And, for younger generation of participants

resistance seems tethered to membership, loyalty to Cuban Revolution lore. The negotiations and engagement involved in the the conceptual evolution of race rhetoric must find a place for the role of these rhetorics of nostalgia's ties to the country's nation narrative.

As the eradication of racism was one of the claimed victories of *la patria*; collectively, the project participants clarified the stages of the often contorted, contradictory, breached birth of a race rhetoric in modern Cuba. And, "There is no racism in Cuba" refers to the participants understanding of state-enforced segregation. The statement signifies the learned announcement, the participants' way of saying that segregation, refusing access to black Cubans, is no longer legal. "There is no racism in Cuba" means in the law, all Cubans have the same rights. Project participants also revealed:

- Participants have developed ways to codify and transfigure language to fulfill the dual exigence -- to preserve the legacy of the Cuban Revolution while indirectly chronicling the observed/experienced racial discrimination.
- Participants reveal consequences of absent public meaning-making spaces for racial identity and experiences with racism, spaces that would also support calls for redress. For most participants, this sustained suppression (or censorship) negatively influenced their ability to build personal testimony.

- Murky definitions, a lack of clear personal conceptualizations, and a collapsed consensus on the meaning of the term "racism" are the result of this missing public fora to generate and disseminate race rhetoric that reflect the true material conditions of black Cubans.

In the same week that I met Arminan, I met a 40-something woman in the Internet Park. When she learned of my study, she wanted to participate. She said: "You can't voice record me. You can't photograph me. I teach at the government military facility, so it would be bad for me professionally". Out of concern for her, I explained that it was probably best that we did not proceed. I said, "if I can't record you, I would be concerned about accuracy, the transcription. But, I thank you for your willingness." She placed her hand on my arm, stopped me from standing: "I will talk slow." As she said things out loud, her testimony would begin its "rhetorical life"; there would be a chronicling of lived experiences with racism that was not powered by heroism of now-deceased camouflaged-clad Cuban revolutionaries of the 1950s. Instead, she sat on the park bench, starting with discrimination she witnessed at the military academy, and contributed to an oft embattled story that both adoringly embraces and quarrels with nostalgia.

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION AND PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

“There is no racism in Cuba,” a Cuban tour guide’s declaration, a contextualizing utterance on a bus filled with American senior citizens and the spark that lit the inquiry of this dissertation project, is a declaration that has traveled across two centuries, transfigured and re-envisioned, to accommodate a shifting exigence of rhetors and affirmed identities of its recipients. This chapter discusses the study’s findings about, the project, “There is no racism in Cuba”.

A Way to Say It: The Multiplicitous Use of the Term “Racism” in Modern Cuba

Questions guiding this project ask:

- How do Afro-Cubans use race rhetoric in a social ecology in which discourse about race is considered counter-revolutionary or treasonous?
- What are everyday Cubans willing to say about their experiences and understanding of race and racism when they are physically situated in a space that is historically deemed raceless?

In modern Cuba, race rhetoric is operationally embattled. Part of the ambivalence is the product of a split conceptualization of the term “racism”: “There is no racism in Cuba”, a the central, test phrase of this study, is a declaration “functioning as a racialized speech act in a nation’s racial paradigm” (Gilyard ix).

Indicated in the project participant responses to questions about race and racism (specifically, the units “Afro Cuban” and “There is no racism in Cuba”) is the aforementioned split categorization system. It is the operation of this system, constructed around the term “racism”, that shapes the island nation’s racial paradigm. In this system, the use of “racism” is relegated to negotiations seeking to name observable race-based disparities, while simultaneously preserving the nostalgic observance of Cuban Revolution victories.

Racism: Categories of Use

As conceptualizations of “racism” significantly function in the sustaining, evolving and defining of a modern Cuban race rhetoric, I posit a forked system for understanding two significantly different uses of the term.

Categories of Use Model

Figure 7: Categories of Use Model for “Racism” in Modern Cuba.

In this model, “racism” with capital “R” represents participant understandings of the term that involve dated governmental enforcement of public segregation and suggest “institutional” or “constitutional” racism. The term “racism” lowercase “r” represents Cubans differentiating between personal and state employed acts of racism and explains (for Cuban participants) the existence of racism that is merely social, compelled solely by individuals, and that is, post-1959, wholly divorced from the state.

The categories of use model applied to the term “racism” (in the Santiago, Cuba study) provides insight into the operation of race rhetoric on the island because the model delineates the ways in which the one term is multifunctional in one isolated

social ecology. The model allows for the exploration of temporality and consequentiality of a single term (Edbauer-Rice, 2005); significant are these variations within the race discourse represented by the participants' collective response and in the island's general public use of race rhetoric. First, the term "racism" in modern Cuba is a prompt for evocations, plotted on a spectrum that ranges from lore to experiential. Secondly, the rhetoricity of the term "racism", how the term engages Cuban and American publics today, is interpreted by the respective historical lens of those publics, which leads to meaningful communication misses and incongruities.

"RACISM": Access Granted to Black Compatriots by the Cuban Revolution

When we talk about racism in Cuba today, we are talking about a racism that is not instituted from the power. It is a cultural racism that is installed in the subjectivity of people but that does not have a backing from power (Participant MMG).

During the interview, Garcia explains Cubans' usage of the term racism by highlighting what it *does not* signify to Cubans. Racism that is "instituted from power" is described in the model as Category #1 or "Racism". Some participants described this Racism as "constitutional racism". The eradication of Racism is tethered to one of the most visible victories of the 1959 Cuban Revolution; further, the abolishment of Racism signifies a tremendous 1950s-60s success claim of the island nation that its

hegemonic adversary could not make, as the United States was in the throes of a devastating and bloody Civil Rights movement. Therefore, today, any rhetorical act suggesting that this specific category of racism (Racism) still exists is deemed counter-revolutionary and speaks against the foundations of Cuba's modern nation narrative. "La patria" and "revolucionarios" are repeated terms used by the interviewees (many of whom were not born at the time of the Cuban Revolution) to characterize the current nature and disposition of the nation. For this reason, the rhetorical life of Racism should be considered beyond expected temporal and spatial boundaries. In the Santiago, Cuba study, (the eradication of) this use of the term is further complicated by the claims of the interviewees.

If follows that, according to the participants, spatial considerations for Racism are an impossibility, as this *brand* of the offense does not exist in Cuba; the testimonies often suggest that a modern existence of Racism and Cuban Revolution successes are mutually exclusive. In other words, in a modern Cuba, Racism is fixed because claiming the existence of Racism means (1.) invalidating the national solidarity rhetoric (such as that of Ferdinando Ortiz's "Cubania" and "Cubanidad") and (2.) the hard won overthrow of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista, backed at the time by a segregationist United States government. Of course, the discourse on the island has evolved amid the fluxes of socialist ideology. Today, even according to Cuban interviewees who claim personal experience with race-based discrimination, there will be no exploration of public discourse generated around Racism because it

cannot exist; several participants explain that the revolutionary government uninscribed Racism from the Cuban constitution, a 60-year-old rhetorical act that continues to structure and concretize race rhetoric on the island. To them, if the law states that blacks have the same public access as all other compatriots, then Racism has been nullified, legally defanged:

Look, I really do not think (racism) exists. Because, I can stand in front of anyone and they will not say, “Because you are black you can’t be here”. You understand? I think this is one of the countries where it is seen the least. And, where the manifestation of discrimination exists least (Participant D.M.S.).

This model differentiates between the uses that are, at times, controversial and conflicting even among Cubans. How do you discuss racist (lowercase) affronts when silencing counters will insist that Racism (uppercase) does not exist?:

(The term “racism”) is very controversial even from an investigative point of view. It creates a lot of dilemma because people do not agree. And, it does exist. I was a victim of racism in the university. Because of a subject, because of a research topic that is religious. That’s why I would not speak of it sometimes because I was the blackest in the classroom. And, so I do not take the subject on (Participant E.D.R.).

Essentially, to many of the participants, Racism is a term relegated to legal promises of access—the rights to apply for employment, to dine at any restaurant,

etc.—for black Cubans. Racism in “There is no racism in Cuba” references rights and protections, promised by the state since the 1960s for Cubans of African descent.

*Santiago, Cuba Project and Engagement, “Racism” and Public Rhetoric
Scholarship*

Public rhetoric scholarship effectively comments on such problematic stagnation or an unproductive stability of a term, such as Racism, locked in time and functioning in this manner. Jenny Edbauer Rice (2005) suggests an examination using a “framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” (9) because this would expose the term’s engagement with the socio-economic shifts and concomitant political acts. Racism remains unengaged, unchanged and dated, in this regard. Edbauer-Rice presents rhetoric as moving, circulating in an ecology of effects, enactments, and events. Therefore, conceptualizations of Racism operating as public rhetoric, loyal and fixed, has rendered the term impotent, a fruitless and meaningless usage. Lacking the opportunity to provoke and engage the Revolution’s subsequent generations of publics, aligning with or repelling their comparable experiences through refreshed engagement, Racism has lost the ability to exert rhetorical force and demonstrate rhetoric as a “complex, distributed event” (Gries 20).

Untested by shifts in time, immovable from the pages of 60-year-old annals and legislation, Racism in “There is no racism in Cuba” forfeits its role as an adaptive

signifier, or as a participant in the normal subjectivity of discourse; most importantly, this phrase, “There is no racism in Cuba” cannot be effective or accurate as race rhetoric addressing the social reality of black Cubans of today.

“racism”: Manifestations of Race-based Discrimination in Modern Cuba

Participants report observations and share testimony of “racism,” lowercase “r”, that is race prejudice reflecting the worldview of individuals. The discussion about this category of racism is the portion of the project field work that most completely abandons earliest assumptions (of Americans and Cubans) that patterns, guided solely by a socialist/communist overcast, would arise from this data set; and, the collective response would be monolithic. Testimonies regarding “racism” (lowercase) varied, indeed. Many responses were raw, produced from participant observation and/or experience. Most commonly, the model’s Category #2 racism, is believed to be located within families, racism that strains interracial dating and matrimony. To avoid linking its existence with revolutionary governance, this category of racism carves out discursive terrain occupied only by Cuban family members or individuals operating with agency that is believed to be set apart from that of the State: “People say they aren’t racist in my family, in the family of a white person. But, when a white woman starts seeing a black man... Phew! There in the family, the mother’s heart is pained (Participant C.B.D.).

Even those reporting “racism” in the professional arena describe the acts as isolated prejudices of individuals: “There are places like centers of work where there are black people who have the intellectual capacity, they could occupy a higher position. But, because they are black, they are discriminated against. Blacks are seen as less (Participant Y.M.P.).

Observable material disparities were noted under this category: “Whites were ahead and we had to run behind. Now, there are many possibilities... . But, let’s see. To rent a house...who has the best houses? We have had to run a little more and there is always going to be a difference” (Participant P.F.S.).

Also, at times, Category #2 “racism” has a nonspecific conceptualization as a catch all term, describing the operation of homophobia, race prejudice, sexism, etc: “If two women are lesbians, and you are against something like that, racism also applies” (Participant E.R.P.).

Under this category, “racism” addresses microaggressions, rhetorical acts that assault and construct well-known stereotypes about the African descendants of Cuba. Category #2 racism accounts for the paucity of black representation in Cuban mass media, as well: “People’s prejudices remain in considering (blacks) inferior, ugly, uneducated, or unable to perform in certain roles such as television, movies, etc. But, it is not a practice from power, on the contrary (Participant M.P.G.).

As they descriptively deliver accounts and testimony that construct the spatial boundaries of this category of racism, the participants simultaneously deny that there

is no Racism (uppercase). More importantly, that the Cuban brand of racism is not institutionalized:

Officially, there is no racism in our country. Officially. Officially there is none.

But yes: Officially, means that the state, the Cuban state, the government, the institutions can't declare openly a racist practice because that would imply legal actions and judicial action. Because constitutionally, it is decreed that in our country racism has no place. Now, one thing is the official and another is the familial or maybe the personal. (Participant A.V.I.).

The revolution in Cuba took all possible measures to achieve justice and equity. Therefore, racist practices are associated with people's subjectivity and not from policies or mechanisms that allow racism to be exercised from power (Participant M.M.G.).

Tracking the rhetorical life of the term "racism" in Cuba reveals a narrative about the country's use of rhetoric as a fuel mobilizing ideologies and unifying publics, rhetoric to intentionally conflate and corral a century of identity politics on the island. And, perhaps most importantly, this tracking points to ways that the rhetoricity of the term is made to avert or mask disparate social realities that are race-based.

(American) Outsider - (African-descendant) Within

One of the project's questions asks:

- Specifically, with the American field researcher as an embodied (embattled) hegemonic rhetoric, how does researcher positionality influence the data gathering process in Cuba?

Based on my observations and the responses of participants, my positionality as a researcher in Santiago, Cuba, evidently influenced the way respondents curated language, shared stories. My African descendancy and American citizenship prompted participants to reference their prior knowledge of modern racism experiences of African Americans, who they described as brutally or fatally beaten by law enforcement officers in the United States. Specifically, #BlackLivesMatter content disseminated on the Internet, which most participants did not have access to until summer 2016,⁴ may have compelled discussions of “state-enforced” Racism, Category #1. Blacks dying at the hands of police officers, who are representatives of the state, qualifies as Racism, compelling one participant to clarify (to me): “We don’t have it like you. It is not like that here.” Before the interview session with the center director, she asked: “Clarissa, what is going on in the United States? What is happening to the blacks there?” Only the center director asked the question; most others simply presumed a set of motives and my personal experiences with racism in

⁴ Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Terence Crutcher, Walter L. Scott are the names of people of color who died in 2015-2016 in United States cities, the a result of police assaults.

the United States. Researcher and project advisor/gatekeeper Zoe Creme stated:

“When black Americans come here, they always ask about racism. And, we don’t have racism.”

These individual exchanges potentially serve as anecdotal evidence, revealing the complexities of field work and the unruly operation of researcher positionality — even in a highly-structured project design. Perceived as a microcosm of U.S.-Cuba communication efforts, such data exposes breaches and incongruities likely born from the 60-year separation between the two countries. In this way, the project also reveals a need to calibrate race rhetoric, understanding sameness and differences in conceptualization, as an intentional step in future diplomatic adjustments. In other words, a joint conference addressing “racism” is, from the onset, a fail if there are vast differences in everyday uses of the term. This project data illustrates field work issues that arise when either participant or researcher essentialize or conflate “black experience” narratives, when sameness (on either side) is the problematic assumption.

While my positionality, specifically the participant’s perceptions of my current relationship with power in my own country, was of import in the study, “There is no racism in Cuba” is a claim that is timeless, generative, and possesses the agency to invoke and assemble across generations. “There is no racism in Cuba,” having been material for national identity narratives of historic leaders in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries necessitates examination of the temporality of its circulation (Warner 2002; Gries 2015). “No single text can create a public; a public is understood to be an

ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Not texts themselves create publics, but the concatenations of texts through time” (Warner 90). Reaching back through time, even beyond dominant ideologies of the 1950s, the claim has, in part, assembled compatriots around a generative accord that maintains racial identity erasure and a perceived profitability of essentialism.

Santiago, Cuba Project, Race Rhetoric and Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Scholarship

Project questions ask:

- *Which are the rhetorical strategies and discursive configuring that sustain the rhetoric of solidarity or national identity tropes?*
- *Considering the erasure of racial expressions in modern Cuba, what are the embodied/material/psychological implications for black Cubans?*

This project draws attention to the modern-day fallout (for project participants and black Cubans, specifically) of a field site with an expunged black public fora, which eliminates space for sharing testimony and generating other meaning-making discourse about race, racism, and ways to chronicle how both are tethered to African descendant identity and consequentiality on the island. Implications of this absence for African-diasporic groups have been long discussed: “The absence of a humane critical response has tremendous impact on the writer from any oppressed, colonized group

who endeavors to speak (Hooks “Talking Black” 251). Project participants discussions, individual convictions, devotion to nostalgia and state censorship arrest what Hooks refers to as “a humane critical response” that is vital to discursive negotiations of blackness that is named, made evident, visible and taken into account. While Hooks suggests, “Without a way to name our pain, we are also without the words to articulate our pleasure” (Hooks 2). Critical race theorists have long cautioned that the consequences of this type of deficiency are not merely rhetorical (Smitherman, 1977; Gates, 1988; Gilyard, 1999; Villanueva, 2000).

The Absence of a Critical Black Voice or a Self-Identifying Black Historical Agent

In modern Cuba, the public sphere is devoid of a critical black voice; the absence of self-identifying, black historical agents’ creates a living nation narrative that is cyclically/generationally missing this perspective. Also, this generative nation narrative evolves without watchful chronicles of race-based discrimination. Fanon (1963) warns that the colonial legacy is one that assigns identities, erases language, and conflates cultural legacies in the service of situating the dominant, imperialistic, patriarchal dominance/rule (208). The consequence of these rhetorical acts clearly have lasting material implications for African-derived people, but this continued practice also constrains the crystallization of a national consciousness, one that is as inclusive as it is self-selecting.

Many of the study participants' remain anchored, fixed, defensively claiming that the model's rhetorical categories of R/racism align with how race-based oppression currently operates in the island's complex social ecology, that somehow racist individuals (racism) do not power the Cuban institutions (Racism). This model is the modern Cuba race paradigm that Gilyard (1996) describes; this is, seemingly, the presiding race rhetoric of modern Cuba. Further, it is within these negotiations that the "Other", or black Cubans, relinquish agency, ceasing to be a historical agent and making way for "totalizing and universalistic theories" that, according to Giroux (1991) creates a different subject as the center of power, a subject that "simultaneously appears to exist outside of time and space". In other words, a stripping of African identity is a tactic, born from colonialism, that creates a protected space for uncontested, imported dominance to be cultivated. In Cuba, this rhetorical act is in service of bolstering the legacy of revolutionary government, resulting in solidarity rhetoric that has remained unchanged for decades.

Further, lacking a critical response to racism and, consequently, lacking racial identity language, many of the participants discuss race in terms of phenotypic characteristics only; some suggest whites are racist and blacks are racist, too, never moving the conversation beyond colorism and never suggesting racism as a wielding of power: "In Cuba, there are fixations on skin color and hair...because it's such a mestizo country. There is racism by category of color. That is to say, light-skinned discriminating against those who are bit darker" (Participant S.R.P.). Critical race

theory responsively calls for an examination and transformation between this very pronounced relationship between racism and power. Such an investigation must also include the “construction of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination” (Delgado et al. “Critical Race” 2001). Indicated in the participant responses, the protective advocacy inherent in investigations of this nature is not operational in modern Cuba.

Yet, historicizing the claim, “There is no racism in Cuba,” revealed that this was not always the case; there were pivotal events, historical and political, that shaped this shift in naming. In the 1890s, it was the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia who served as the voice of resistance, challenging claims that indicated that the island had achieved a racial democracy (De la Fuente 33). However, a scarcity of Cuban fighters for the Ten Years War (1868-1878) necessitated the strategic rhetoric that cleansed Cubans of racial identity and class distinctions, advancing a unifying solidarity that would support recruitment efforts. This strategy, in part, was operationalized by national heroes, including José Martí, who insisted that claims of individual racial identity were treasonous. Martí stated:

To insist on someone's Blackness or whiteness could then be easily construed as a racist and un-Cuban act. As Martí put it, ‘the Negro who proclaims his racial character ... authorizes and brings forth the white racist... . Two racists would be equally guilty, the white racist and the

Negro. This constant allusion to a man's color should cease' (De la Fuente 28).

In the fighting spirit of *la patria* or the *revolucionario*, there is a historical pattern of using this erasure rhetoric to organize patriots, who are tied to the land and a singular identity. The indictment, that it is treasonous, or "un-Cuban", to assert a racial identity, may be a century-old rhetorical strategy, but it has operated as a "complex, distributed event" that continues to hold prominence today.

Conclusion

In *Blind: Talking about the New Racism*, Victor Villanueva extends upon Kenneth Burke's assertion, which suggests that rhetoric is epistemological and "has the power to lead us to some understanding of 'truth'" (referencing Burke's Four Master Tropes):

We are affected, often not consciously, by the language we receive and use, by trope. And, that means that we are ideologically affected. What I mean is that our assumptions about how the world works are influenced by - might even be created by - the language we receive and use. Large things. World views. Now, if that's the case, then we're also affected by the language we don't use... . If we no longer speak of "racism," racism gets ignored. It's more than just etiquette, pc; it's a matter of epistemology and ideology (Villanueva, 2006, 5).

The Santiago study brings attention to a modern social ecology where “racism gets ignored” in this way, unengaged and sustained by a ideological tradition of erasure and silencing. This project delineates the rhetorical accommodations that have been made (r/Racism), contorting and splitting modern Cuba’s race rhetoric in the service of past revolutionary achievements. As it exists today, the public discourse, anchored in a shared national identity, does not reflect an equitable, shared socio-economic experience of Cuban compatriots, regardless of race.

On one of the days a researcher and I scheduled interviews at a Santiago hospital. Although we presented the required documentation, we were turned away. It is important to also note that we are both brown-skinned women. Frustrated because she had taken several buses to meet me, the center’s researcher hissed: “I knew this would happen! In these white neighborhoods... I knew this would happen.” I asked, “So this is considered a white neighborhood?” She softened the scowl on her face and said, “Oh. It used to be, but everyone can live here now.” But, everyone does not live there and such disparities are not openly discussed.

So significant are naming, claiming and testifying to African descendants and it is this very performative element of identity that has been targetedly wiped in Cuba. In *Talkin and Testifyin*, Geneva Smitherman discusses “the magic power of the word” as a giver of life in some African-based belief systems (78). She says, “Nommo,” or life force, is how a thing is spoken into being. Keith Gilyard (1996) discusses the “topos of unnamings,” specifically the African descendant practice of casting off labels

as “an affirmation of freedom” (32). This ontological displacement, a lasting experience with a ubiquitous discursive repression was addressed by one study participant who said: “I would describe my country as one that is not liberal. I don’t know. There is no free expression. Here, no one can express what you want to say. You can’t express what you feel.”

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NOMBRE:

EDAD:

GÉNERO: M F

NIVEL ESCOLAR:

OCUPACIÓN:

ORÍGENES:

USAS INTERNET Y WIFI:

¿Con qué frecuencias?

¿Por qué? ¿Correo, investigación, etc.?

CORREO | # TELÉFONO | MÓVIL:

ENTRE#:

PERM GRAB: Y N | V A

APPENDIX B

(Structured Interview) Questions

- 1.) ¿Conoces el término “Afro Cubano”? ¿Qué significa?1.) ¿Conoces el término “Afro Cubano”? ¿Qué significa?
- 2.) ¿Cómo has usados este término?
- 3.) ¿En cuál situación has usados “Afro Cubano”?
- 4.) ¿Que es para Ud. (que entiende) “racismo”?
- 5.) En Havana, un guía está llevando un grupo de turistas. El dice “No hay racismo en Cuba”.
- 6.) ¿Sabe Ud. esta expresión?
- 7.) ¿Cómo y en cual situación has escuchado o usado esta expresión?
- 8.) ¿Hubo “racismo” en Cuba? Ha habido “racismo” en Cuba?
- 9.) ¿En su opinion, que provocó el fin de “racismo” en Cuba?
- 10.) ¿Hay razas en Cuba? Explique su respuesta por favor.
- 11.)¿Hay personas que dicen que hay diferencias en las niveles sociales y económica entre las razas en Cuba? Cual es su opinión?
- 12.)¿Hay prejuicio racial en su opinión ¿Explique las diferencias entre racismo y prejuicio racial?
- 13.)¿Como se definiria “identidad nacional de Cuba”?
- 14.)¿En su opinión, cuáles son las palabras, los términos más importante a describir la identidad nacional de Cuba? Cinco palabras más importante.

APPENDIX C

On-boarding Script

Mi nombre es Clarisa Walker, soy investigadora y estudiante de doctorado de la Universidad Rhode Island en los Estados Unidos. En mi Universidad estoy insertada en el departamento de Inglés pero mi especialización está vinculada a la retórica y composición del lenguaje. La entrevista que le solicitó hoy forma parte de mi investigación, solo deseo su opinión personal al respecto. Por lo que le anticipo las gracias por la ayuda que me está brindando.

On-boarding Script (Translated)

My name is Clarissa Walker. I am a researcher and doctoral student at the University of Rhode Island in the United States. At my university, I am with the English Department, but my specialization is in Rhetoric and Composition. The interview that I am requesting today is a part of my research; I want your personal opinion. I give you thanks for helping me.

(Structured Interview) Questions Translated

1.) ¿Conoces el término “Afro Cubano”? ¿Qué significa?

Do you know the term "Afro-Cuban"? What does it means?

2.) ¿Cómo has usados este término?

How do you use this term?

3.) ¿En cuál situación has usados “Afro Cubano”?

In which circumstances would you use "Afro Cuban"?

4.) ¿Que es para Ud. (que entiende) “racismo”?

What is your understanding of "racism"?

5.) En Havana, un guía está llevando un grupo de turistas. El dice “No hay racismo en Cuba”.

¿Sabe Ud. esta expresión?

In Havana, a guide is leading a group of tourists. He says, "There is no racism in Cuba.":

Do you know this expression?

7.) ¿Cómo y en cual situación has escuchado o usado esta expresión?

In which situations have you heard or used the expression: "There is no racism in Cuba"?

8.) ¿Hubo “racismo” en Cuba? Ha habido “racismo” en Cuba?

Was there racism in Cuba? Has there been racism in Cuba?

APPENDIX E

Structured Interview Questions (Translated) Cont'd

9.) ¿En su opinion, que provocó el fin de “racismo” en Cuba?

In your opinion, what caused the end of racism in Cuba?

10.) ¿Hay razas en Cuba? Explique su respuesta por favor.

Are there races in Cuba? Explain your answers please.

11.)¿Hay personas que dicen que hay diferencias en las niveles sociales y económica entre las razas en Cuba? Cual es su opinión?

There are people who say that there are race-based social/economic differences in Cuba. What's your opinion?

12.)¿Hay prejuicio racial en su opinión ¿Explique las diferencias entre racismo y prejuicio racial?

Is there race prejudice in Cuba? Explain the difference between racism and race prejudice.

13.)¿Como se definiria “identidad nacional de Cuba”?

How would you define Cuba's national identity?

14.)¿En su opinión, cuáles son las palabras, los términos más importante a describir la identidad nacional de Cuba? Cinco palabras más importante.

What are the most important words to describe Cuba's national identity? Five words.

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