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MONTEVIDEAN CANDOMBE AND MURGA: SYMBOLIC EXPRESSIONS  
OF DISSATISFACTION AND OPPOSITION

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Music  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

Montevidean Candombe and Murga:

Symbolic Expressions of Dissatisfaction and Opposition

By

Madelyn Shackelford Washington

In Uruguay, especially in the city of Montevideo, the contribution from African descendants comprises a major element of Uruguayan national identity: today this contribution is apparent in all events linked to music. The significance, function and symbolic meaning of the Afro-Uruguayan percussive form *candombe* and to a lesser degree its musical counter genre *murga*—a male chorus singing in four to six part harmony accompanied by percussion—is key in visualizing, interpreting, critiquing and reading Uruguayan national culture. The expressions of these music forms during Montevideo’s Carnival celebrations are important transcultural signifiers on the world stage, serving as a testament to the equality, social peace and racial harmony existing in Uruguay. Nothing could be farther from the truth: socially, educationally and economically the Afro-Uruguayan stands as the nation’s most underserved population. This thesis reveals a story that most Uruguayans wish to forget. *Candombe* is the antithesis and direct negation of the pain and exhaustion of coerced heavy labor and *murga* is a carnivalesque theatrical form devoted to the expression, representation, and critique of Uruguayan social experiences with enormous participation of the popular classes. Accurate articulation of the black Uruguayan resistance to the homogenization

of their musical identities and cultural practices is essential to uncovering the conflictive nature of Uruguayan national culture. The display of the Uruguayan national music forms *murga* and *candombe* are aesthetic and symbolic modes of production that signal dissatisfaction with the American-Atlantic history.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Of the immigrant groups that conquered the voyage across the Atlantic to the Americas, Africans were brought here unwillingly. Millions of immigrants from Africa were imported to the New World as slaves between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Africans were imported as human merchandise from various ethnic groups during the North American and British slave trade. These Africans underwent a psychological and physical process of transformation, reducing them to the status of chattel property. In the Caribbean and South America, Africans slaves served as indentured and domestic servants as well as agricultural workers, remaining at the bottom of a three level caste system. Today their descendents form significant ethnic minorities in Latin America and are the dominant elements in many Caribbean nations. The influx of African contributions to the cultural mix of their new surroundings influenced all facets of life in the New World. In the Americas, music and other art forms and modes of expression have long played an important role in the formation of national culture.

The contemporary Americas benefit from a rich African musical heritage. Music, both vocal and instrumental, is intimately associated with black history, the expression of public sentiment and the political views of the Americas. According to Gerard Behague, music, in all its various forms and modes of presentation, is deeply embedded in culture and emerged from such aspects of culture as ideology, politics, social customs, and

ethnicity as well as national identity.<sup>1</sup> As a form of creative expression, music is in no sense static; it is highly dramatic, responding to and influencing events and ideas external to music itself. Argeliers León Pérez commented that folk and popular music, two of the most common genres of musical expression, are of special significance in identifying the social and cultural values as well as ideas unique to a place, a people and a country.<sup>2</sup> Distorted and unbalanced cultural assumptions are primary causes of conflict, confusion and corruption in society. Understanding and embracing different music forms as defining elements of a culture inspires a community of tolerance, order and balance.

During the years in which Latin America was involved in wars of Independence, neo-African folk music forms transformed themselves in the face of opposition into national music and dance phenomena serving as symbols of native identity and cultural affiliation. According to John Charles Chasteen, before 1900, Brazilian *samba*, Uruguayan and Argentinean *tango* and Cuban *danzón* underwent social transformation and aesthetic change during their intermediate phases of integration into popular society as national rhythms. In addition by the 1930s Latin America had given birth to a variety of music and dances receptive to the nationalist music trend: Chilean *cueca*, Dominican *merengue*, Puerto Rican *plena*, Mexican *jarabe*, Venezuelan *joropo*, Peruvian *marinera* and Colombian *cumbia*. Chasteen characterizes these dances as transgressive at their inception; responding over time to political appropriations. The physical spaces in which

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Behague, *Music in Latin America*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Argeliers León Pérez, "Notes toward a panorama of popular music and folk music", in *Essays on Cuban Music*, ed. Peter Manuel (University Press of America, 1991), 3-23.

Latin American national music and dance forms had their beginnings, the syncopated African rhythmic influence and elite resistance, provide scholars with contrasting national contexts. By understanding “music as a medium for the representation and negotiation of identities within specific social contexts”<sup>3</sup>, then varieties of historical, social and political scenarios can provide us with the understanding necessary in interpreting the intricate nature of a specific culture. The study of Afro Latin American music is the institution’s attempt at reconciling a relationship with (and rejuvenating the spirit of) one of the New World’s most underserved communities. The rerouting of these national music and dances’ transgressive connotations gave way to middle and elite class participation; properly articulating this transition may enable us to understand Latin American processes of power relations between citizenship, people, and nation in the early twentieth-century.

Many complexities influence the development of music within a culture. Taking into consideration issues of hegemony and subjugation in the United States, the context of cultural exchange becomes distorted when speaking of North African American musical retentions. As a result of this realm of acculturation, polycultural<sup>4</sup> African American musical practices emerged. African Americans maintain a related yet distinguishable lifestyle where an African antecedent informs every aspect of African

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<sup>3</sup> Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, “Introduction: The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing”, in *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario*, ed. Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2008), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Micheal A. Gomes, *Exchanging our Country Marks: Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 9.

American culture. Sterling Stuckey argues that in North America the ring shout was a principal mechanism by which Africans of varying ethnicities were able to span their differences. In Latin America, slaves syncretized their African religions with European Catholicism and through the propagation of these diasporan religions came a wealth of rites of passage accompanied by music, overwhelmingly African in its preservation and practice. New World musical traditions are influenced not only by a diverse ethnic make-up, but also from environmental changes, politics, and technological development.

The overwhelming Indo-European ethnocentric propensity in Western institutions makes it necessary for scholars to promote an awareness of contributions made by the communities of the Americas contoured by assimilation and transculturation<sup>5</sup>; in the case of this thesis the focus is on the peoples of African ancestry. The limited amount of diasporan musical literature printed, studied, and acknowledged in the Americas gives students a distorted and inaccurate account of the contributions of African-based communities within the Americas. The cosmopolitan nature of the New World requires a better understanding of cultural differences; if our goals are to understand those different from us and live more harmoniously, the study of music provides a path for us to reach those goals.

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<sup>5</sup> Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, introds Bronislaw Malinowski and Fernando Coronil (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 97.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the Afro-Uruguayan community's functional esthetic<sup>6</sup> based on their social, economic, and educational experience as the nation's most underserved constituency.<sup>7</sup> The intent of this thesis is to point out major contributions that people of African descent made to music in the New World as well as provide a qualitative analysis of the musical counter cultures that emerging in reaction to such contributions. Musical counter genres occur when the producers of music oppose the distribution, performance, production and consumption of particular musical practices; they also occur when musical genres becomes so specialized or esoteric that the creators embrace the urge to resist the current cosmopolitan popular musical language. In this light music may be examined as acculturative rather than transculturative; in that the creators seek to define a set of codes and conventions and to regulate difficult orders of subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> For example, Dale Olson refers to the phenomenon of "sweetening" a street samba when the popular classes deemed its organic form too primitive for the sophisticated ballroom setting.<sup>9</sup> In areas where a rich heritage of neo-African music shows significance, or massive popularity, counter genres are developed in order that the music form may be acceptable for the popular social classes.

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<sup>6</sup> Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, *Music as Culture* (Richmond: MRI Press, 1979), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Romero Jorge Rodriguez, "The Afro Populations of America's Southern Cone: Organization, Development, and Culture in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay", in *African Roots, American Cultures, Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Shelia S. Walker (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 323.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Hayward, *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 159-166.

<sup>9</sup> Dale Olson, "Folk Music of South America-A Musical Mosaic," in *Music of Many Cultures* ed. Elizabeth May (University of California Press, 1980), 133.

### Significance of Study and Scope

The need for an afrocentric ethic in the Americas is necessary to promote the awareness of significant contributions that blacks have made in the formation of cultures. National cultural ideologies in the new world vary in the Caribbean, South America and North America as well as their modes of transcultural interpretation. Much of the scholarship concerning Africans in the Americas has functioned under the myopia of the “Deficit Model,”<sup>10</sup> a term frequently used by Robert Farris Thompson to explain the tendency of scholars to view African cultural contributions as nonexistent, or at best, deficient. The notion that blacks are cultureless or are a product of poverty and fear will be addressed and the ability of an entire group to survive and transcend this expectation will be celebrated through the exploration of selected styles of the community’s music and the dances. By engaging in the current discussion on Uruguayan *candombe* and its counter genre *murga*, the author will provide a greater understanding of the Afro Uruguayan musicological, social and economic experience by; engaging to the black Uruguayan functional esthetic by encouraging unity through comprehension, and showcasing these musical forms as highly organized and significant to the country’s national cultural and ethnic identity.

In recent years musical hybrids from the Americas have repeatedly been cross-fertilized until the ancestry of any new style becomes very complex. In Alan P. Merriam’s *The Anthropology of Music* he states, “The field of Afro-Western music offers

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (Random House, New York, 1983).

an ideal laboratory for the study of diffusion, acculturation, syncretism, and the emergence acceptance and rejection of styles through time—all matters of importance to anthropology both theoretical and applied”.<sup>11</sup> Popular and folk music forms are pure forms that encompass the dreams, aspirations, worries and hopes of the common people rather than merely a construction of elitist opinions. This paper will uniquely focus on national music practices and the Black experience in a city where people of African heritage are the isolated minority: Montevideo, Uruguay.

### Methodology and Approach

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative and exploratory. In an attempt to depict versions of black national music forms originating in areas where black people are the isolated minority, intensive reviews of literature and sound and video recordings of Afro Uruguayan *candombe* and Carnavalesque Opera Theater, *murga* were conducted. The literary review is complemented by five years of participant observation due to the author’s direct involvement with various organizations, choreographers, music directors, lyricists, dancers and musicians immersed in these genres. Much of this information has been obtained by the author’s association as an artist with various arts organizations in Uruguay: *Afro Mundo*, *Elumbé*, *Cuariem 1080* and *Mí Morena* in Montevideo. Direct involvement as a singer and dancer with these various groups facilitated an atmosphere of immersion during the author’s “musical enculturation”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, 1964), 145.

<sup>12</sup> Marcia Herndon and Norma McLeod, *Music as Culture* (Richmond: MRI Press, 1979), 53.

period. Conducting interviews with heads of these organizations, prominent musical figures and street performers from communities in Uruguay provided a basis for evaluation, distinction and analysis of the musical genres *candombe*, and *murga*. Frequent visits to various dance and musical academies in Montevideo enhanced the appreciation of these genres and their national music practices.

Intent on applying W.T. Lhamon Jr.'s concept of "Optic Blackness" to the current discussion on Black performance in Latin America, the signaling of discontentment with the realities of our collective American Atlantic history makes this body of work key to the current study. "Optic Blackness is a contrapuntal cultural style that opposes whiteness and embodies a persistent counter memory of historical opposition".<sup>13</sup> That these national music forms (*candombe* and *murga*) be presented a part of Lhamon's designation is central to this contribution to black music scholarship. In addition to the aforementioned primary resources, secondary research efforts consist of; compiling previous research on National cultures studies (John Charles Chasteen, Paul Wade), research on Uruguayan Popular and Folk Music (Lauro Ayestran, Carvalho Neto, Gerard Béhague) musical analyzation efforts; and a review of the texts and rhythms of *murgas*, and *candombes* (texts spanning the last 200 years)

#### Independent Research

Much of the ethnographic data presented was conducted in Montevideo, Uruguay and compiled over the past five years by the author with the assistance of Erica Oliveira

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<sup>13</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," in *Black Cultural Traffic*, ed. Harry Elam Jr. and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 111.

(Uruguayan dancer and close friend). While working with Aladanza (a dance school in Montevideo, Uruguay) for five years, opportunities arose to complete two semi-structured video-recorded interviews with a few prominent figures in the Afro-Uruguayan community: Beatriz Santos, president of UTA (*Unidad Tematica Municipal por los Derechos de los Afrodescendientes*), and Alessando Silva, (General Coordinator of *Afro Mundo* in Montevideo, Uruguay). Added to these interviews are field notes, personal journal entries, informal telephone conversations and e-mails between the author, Erica Olivera and her family and friends. Also quite beneficial to this study were opportunities to visit four *comparsas* in Montevideo while rehearsing for carnival 2006 and one surprise opportunity to video Montevideo's most popular *murga*, *Araca la Cana*. The author attended multiple rehearsals of the groups: *Mí Morena*, *Elumbé*, *Afro-Mundo*, and *Cuareim 1080* only to unfortunately depart by air on the first day of the *llamadas* (the large Carnival parade aimed at the black classes of Montevideo).

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Literature

The listed literature discusses the aforementioned music cultures by providing fundamental historic reflections of Uruguayan national culture before discussing Montevideo's Carnival and its main musical traditions *candombe* and *murga*.

*National Rhythms, African Roots: The Deep History of Latin American Popular Dance*: John Charles Chasteen's book traces the cultural history of transgressive dances and how they become official national rhythms. Expansive in scope he offers a chronological outline from the beginning of the colonial period to the twentieth-century examining social dancing in Cuba, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. In *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, Gustavo Remedi presents the cultural practice of Uruguayan *murga* as a space for expression, representation, and critique of social experiences with enormous participation of the popular classes. Tomás Olivera Chirimini's essay, "Candombe, African Nations, and the Africinity of Uruguay" discusses the Afro-Uruguayan musical contribution to Uruguay's national culture. In Chasteen's essay "Black Kings, Blackface Carnival, and Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Tango," he traces how elites appropriated, refashioned, and redefined Carnival music and celebration, especially its original racial characteristics in Buenos Aires; tracking tango from its black roots and charts its adoption by whites in twentieth-century working-class dance halls, Parisian salons, and finally white middle-class Argentine living rooms.

## CHAPTER 3

### Candombe: The African-based Uruguayan Community

In Uruguay, especially in the city of Montevideo, the contribution from African descendants is a major element of Uruguayan national identity. Today this contribution is apparent in all events linked to music. Despite the blatant denial of some of their compatriots, Afro-Uruguayans continue to play a critical role in the evolution of national culture. Black Uruguayans either created or helped shape music and dance of the *Río de la plata* region, especially *candombe*,—an Afro-Uruguayan percussive music and dance form<sup>14</sup>, the *milonga*,—a popular song and couples dance style with humorous and witty lyrics first appearing in Uruguay around 1870<sup>15</sup>— the *milongón*—a slower *milonga*, and the quintessential Argentine-Uruguayan national music and dance form, the *tango*. Both *milonga* and *candombe* contain important rhythmic influences of the contemporary *tango* with a structural core reflective of an African antecedent<sup>16</sup>. The current version of the tango developed in 1880-90, was originally accompanied by drums and based on rhythms and movements from *candombe* and other African-derived dances.

According to Chasteen, Montevideo was a busy Atlantic port city and *milonga* arose in similar social circumstances that other Latin American national music and dance forms developed. The port districts where European immigrants clustered, the outskirts,

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<sup>14</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay” in *African Roots, American Cultures, Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Shelia S. Walker (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 261.

<sup>15</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations”, 267.

<sup>16</sup> Tomás Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations”, 270.

and the neighborhoods around markets, army barracks and slaughterhouses; were among the areas in which people tested and transgressed the limits of sanctioned social behavior, adopting rhythms and styles of body movements linked to African traditions. *Milonga* was a dance found among people of the lower social orders. Houses of prostitution, where transgressive dancing was prelude to commercial sex, figure insistently in all accounts of the development of *milonga*. *Milonga*'s African associations are interesting in that like the other urban areas of Latin America's southern cone,<sup>17</sup> Montevideo never maintained a large black population. Most *milonga* dancers were white although stage representations of superior *milonga* dancing were connected to a black identity. Whether or not Uruguayans deny an African historical presence in the composition of their country, African roots are frequently at issue when defining Latin American national identities.<sup>18</sup>

Afro Uruguayan contributions to national culture is most concentrated in the manifestation of *Candombe*—music, dance and instrumentation that continues to evidence its Central African origins. *Candombe* is similar in rhythm and style to the Afro-Brazilian *congada*<sup>19</sup>, *maracatu*<sup>20</sup>, and *batuque*<sup>21</sup>. Its antecedents, the *calenda*<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>17</sup> Romero Jorge Rodriguez, "The Afro Populations of America's Southern Cone: Organization, Development, and Culture in Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay", in *African Roots, American Cultures, Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Shelia S. Walker (Rowman and Littlefield, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> John Charles Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Brazil," Gerard Béhague  
<http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/03894#F000811>  
(accessed 16 March. 2009).

*bambula*<sup>23</sup>, *chica*<sup>24</sup>, *congo*, *samba*, and *zamba*<sup>25</sup>, other neo-African music and dance forms, gained popular in the eighteenth century. Similar in nature to other versions of transnational Black music and dances, these forms were characterized by polyrhythmic drumming, accompanying dancers' pelvic rotations, thrusts and ring formations<sup>26</sup>. *Candombe*, which became popular in the nineteenth century, created national space for itself by the twentieth. At this crucial site of transculturation the African-based community forged a permanent position into Uruguayan national culture; primarily as the *comparsa* (processional street dance groups with drum sections, songs, dances; fashion and symbols that have become the basic ingredients giving Montevideo's carnival its contemporary character and ambience). Afro Uruguayan music and popular religion intersect in Montevideo during Christian holidays (especially during Carnival and the festival of Saint Balthazar) and are especially influenced by the *llamadas*<sup>27</sup> of white and black drummers. Originally, the processions, parties, and Christian dances of colonial

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<sup>20</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Brazil," Gerard Béhague  
<http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/03894#F000821> (accessed 16 March 2009).

<sup>21</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Brazil," Gerard Béhague  
<http://oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/24449> (accessed 16 March 2009)

<sup>22</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Calenda," ed, by Alison Latham  
[http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/book/omo\\_t114](http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/book/omo_t114) (accessed 16 March 2009)

<sup>23</sup> Lauro Ayestarán, *La Música en el Uruguay* vol. 1 (Montevideo: Servicio Oficial de Difusión Radio Eléctrica, 1953), 71.

<sup>24</sup> Lauro Ayestarán. *La Musica en el Uruguay*, 74

<sup>25</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Zamba," ed, by Alison Latham;  
[http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/book/omo\\_t114](http://oxfordmusiconline.com.mimas.calstatela.edu/subscriber/book/omo_t114) (accessed 16 March 2009)

<sup>26</sup> Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford University Press: 1987)

<sup>27</sup> Luis Ferreira, *Los tambores del candombe* (Montevideo: Colihue-Sepé Ediciones S.R.L., 1999), 57.

Montevideo included the participation of African slaves (black and mulattos), who performed dramatic dances which became one of the highlights of the celebration. In its early phases *candombes* were celebrated every Sunday and especially on New Year's Day, Christmas, the days of the Resurrection and St. Benedict.

Three years ago, an opportunity to engage in a discussion about *candombe* and African slave conditions in Uruguay arose upon introduction to Beatriz Santos (president of *Unidad Tematica Municipal por los Derechos de los Afrodescendientes en Uruguay*—UTA and author of *la Herencia Cultural African en las Americas*). According to Mrs. Santos, blacks in Uruguay shared similar experiences with those in other New World nations involved in the transatlantic slave trade. But in regards to the forging of an Afro-Uruguayan identity, I got the impression that black Uruguayans lead a syncretic lifestyle; more research is still needed to be fully certain of this statement. Drawing from a number of African (Bantu especially, Angola, Yoruba, Mandingo, Sudanese) retentative qualities, these blacks recreated their societies, and their inner-collective lives drawing from a number of ethnic paradigms informed by the crisis of the slave trade. The nature of Uruguayan slavery was similar although contrasted greatly to the other institutions of chattel slavery throughout the North American Slave trade. An example of this similarity is that Afro Uruguayan slaves lived close in proximity to Europeans, but different from its North American counterpart in that the labor of Uruguayan slaves consisted mostly of domestic servitude. Upon the conclusion of this conversation, one could only come up with a fluid definition of *candombe*: to black Uruguayans it was a rhythm that transforms

consciousness, time and heightens the experience of the moment,<sup>28</sup> for whites and others it provides an avenue for expression of a patriotic spirit of shared national identity essential to a common cause.<sup>29</sup> Initially rejected by Montevideo's white elite and over time affected to maintain a more pan-racial appeal, the perpetuation of Uruguay's national rhythm *candombe* is a testament to the importance of African music identities.

The *candombe* and *comparsas* —a battery of traveling percussionists called *cuerdas* featuring three drum sizes: *tambor repique*, *tambor chico*, *tambor piano*—of colonial Montevideo were unique products of transculturation and the incorporation of slaves into the colonial society. After disappearing in 1870, (due to the wars of independence) companies of black participants returned as part of Carnival's processions. The later *comparsas* consisted of dancing with accompanying percussion, a form the Afro-Uruguayans cultivated in their own spaces, along with singing, and adaptations to the customs of white elites. In the carnival of 1870, twelve white companies and three black *comparsas* participated. The latter were entitled *los Pobres Negros Orientales* (The poor blacks from the east side), *Raza Africana* (African race), and *los Negros* (The blacks). The Carnival of 1876 included the *comparsas* of *las sociedades negros lubolos*; whites in blackface who had studied and appropriated the Afro-Uruguayan tradition. Today's *comparsas* are descendants of this minstrel form and will be discussed in detail in the following section.

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<sup>28</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

<sup>29</sup> Madelyn Shackelford Washington. Videorecording. "Interview with Beatriz Santos" (At the *Unidad Temática Municipal por los Derechos de los Afrodescendientes* I.M.M. piso 3 ½ sector Ejido, Montevideo Uruguay, 25 January 2006).

*Candombe* has played a significant role in Uruguayan culture for over 200 years. The rhythm is created by the use of three drums (*tambores*); *tambor piano*, *tambor chico* and *tambor repique*. The piano is the largest in size and the lowest in pitch of the three *tambores*. The rhythmic base of *candombe*, its function similar to that of the upright or electric bass. The *chico* (small) is the smallest in size and highest in pitch of the three *tambores*, serving as the rhythmic pendulum. The *tambor repique* embellishes *candombe's* rhythm with improvised phrases. Each of the three *tambores* is played with an open hand (*mano*) and a stick (*palo*) in the other. At a minimum, one of each of the three *tambores* must be present.<sup>30</sup>

The purest form of *Candombe* takes place each Sunday night on the streets of Montevideo, where many drummers assemble, playing their drums under the moon lit sky. Isla de Flores is the main street that joins *Cuareim* and *Ansina*, *candombe's* two main social groups. For over a century spontaneous *cuerdas* have paraded on this street, and continue to do so today (Isla de Flores is also known by its second name, Carlos Gardel). As the *cuerda* slowly makes its way through the narrow streets of Montevideo, this contagious rhythm takes with it all in its path, surrounded on all sides by the neighborhood people moving their bodies to the rhythm of *Candombe*. At intervals the *cuerda* will pause, and by setting a fire, will heat their drums' skins for tuning purposes.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Rubén Carámbula. *El Candombe* vol. 21 of *Biblioteca de Cultura Popular* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Sol, S.R.L. 1995), 11.

<sup>31</sup> Rubén Carámbula. *El Candombe* vol. 21 of *Biblioteca de Cultura Popular*, 15.

Afro-Uruguayans constitute between four and six percent of the country's population, thus about 180,000 people, with seventy percent of this community living in the capital, Montevideo.<sup>32</sup> At this point it is necessary to stop to ask: how did this small group of African descendants maintain these transcultural music practices? Why, through the precariousness of their social positioning in the southern cone, didn't the crisis of the transnational slave trade erase these African musical retentions? In a short answer, the American extension of the African male and female societies, the New World African societies of mutual aid: *naciones*.

There were two main slave trading routes into Montevideo: directly from Africa and indirectly from Rio de Janeiro, Santa Caterina, Santos and Salvador da Bahia in Brazil. It is difficult to know the exact number of places of origin of Africans that arrived in Uruguay due to the years of illegal transfer during Portuguese contraband slave trade. Nineteenth-century archival records and newspapers for the Rio de la Plata region provide a sense of relative ethnic origins based on the names of the African nations or societies that were important institutions in both Afro-Argentinean and Afro-Uruguayan communities. *Naciones* were associations of mutual aid created by Africans of the same or related ethnicities and although their organizational structures and rules were formally determined by colonial authority, they attempted to retain African traditions and identities. To name a few of the ethnic groups represented in these nations of the black Uruguayan slave populations were the *Angolas*, *Congo de Gungas*, *Benguelas*, *Bomas*,

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<sup>32</sup> Romero Jorge Rodriguez, "The Afro Populations of America's Southern Cone", 323.

*Cabindas, Casanches, Congos, Molembos, Monyolos, and Mozambiques*<sup>33</sup>. The majority of the black population in Uruguay is overwhelmingly Bantu, and reflects various religious and social rites in which *candombe* materialized and continue to be maintained.

Of the African *naciones*, Idefonso Pereda Valdes says:

From the beginning of their introduction in large quantities, in cities all of the Americas enslaved and free blacks created organization based on their original African communities and cultures. Known as *naciones*, *cofríadas* or *cabildos*, they were recognized and supported by colonial authorities. These *naciones* had their kings or “governors”, and within then survived some traditional festivities as well as certain religious practices camouflaged by the Catholic forms that were imposed on them. In some areas they functioned as mutual aid societies, and they often adopted the form of initiatic secret societies, as in Cuba.

In our country Uruguay, the *naciones* had their own meeting places called *salas* (halls) in which on holidays they held dances presided over by their kings. These more or less secret societies had a public existence. Over and above their rather precarious functions of aid to their members, such as holding wakes for the dead of specific *naciones* in the corresponding “*salas*”, their major purpose was to celebrate collective dances (*candombes*) coinciding with Christian religious festivities such as Christmas, New Years’, and Three Kings Day, any occasion on which was held, in addition, a

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<sup>33</sup> Luis Ferreira, *Los Tambores del candombe*, 31.

procession culminated with a mass at the cathedral.<sup>34</sup>

The socialization process was formally responsible of male and female societies in Africa. In west and central Africa male and female societies were the functional equivalent of social, cultural, and governmental agencies.<sup>35</sup> Complex in organization and implementation they served several functions; politically they helped to resolve diplomatic and commercial differences between local villages and socially; they set behavioral norms and assisted families in times of crisis. The American extension of these societies in Uruguay was a direct response to the disparity of the slave trade and was the first formal—although their organizational structures and rules were formally governed by colonial authority—space in which African descendants could cultivate their own music and dances (*candombes*). The *nacion* is the birthplace of the *candombe*, in which Afro communities (and non-Afro) of the Southern cone have adopted as a collective expression of national identity. Well before official abolition in 1842, African diasporan arts, traditions and customs was on the verge of initiating an influence on all South American popular expressions.

#### Candombe: Defying Erasure

According to Tomás Oliveira Chirimini, *candombe* may be broken up into three different phases historically: the African, the European-African mixed, and the Afro-

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<sup>34</sup> Ildefonso Pereda Valdés, “El negro en el Uruguay, pasado y presente,” in *Revista del Instituto Histórico y Geográfico de Uruguay*, 25 (Montevideo, 1965): 29; Daniel Vidart and Renzo Hugarte, *El legado de los inmigrantes* (Montevideo: Editorial Nuestra Tierra, 1969), 30.

<sup>35</sup> Micheal A. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks: Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill and London, 1998), 95.

Uruguayan. The first, eighteenth-century phase we have only descriptions of individual precursor dances that came to be generally called *candombe*.<sup>36</sup> During this phase at the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth evolved into the practice of institutionalized Sunday social gatherings organized by the African *naciones*. Members of the *naciones* danced to the music of drums, *mazcallas* (shakers) and marimbas outdoors in vacant areas in the *Cubo del Sur*, the wall that once surrounded Montevideo, and in the *Plaza del Mercado* in the center of town. As a Sunday outing, white families would watch the *candombes* of their enslaved domestics, buying foods sold by the Afro Uruguayan women street vendors, who were a common feature of colonial Montevideo. *Candombes* in which Africans could socialize and recreate traditional knowledge and behaviors began to be held indoors when *naciones* began to accumulate enough money to acquire structures in which to house their *salas*.<sup>37</sup> With minimal resources each nation managed to acquire a *sitio*, a meeting place for which to locate their *salas* where they held their meetings and festivities. The first dances held in these *salas* were referred to by the Africans as ‘*tambor y tango*’.<sup>38</sup>

The second phase of *candombe* involved the integration of European styles into the choreography of *candombe*'s annual coronations. The transculturation of *candombe* was beginning to take shape with the introduction of the line formations of the European *contredanse*. This phase involved the perpetuation of private African social and public

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<sup>36</sup> Lauro Ayestarán, *La Música en el Uruguay*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay”, 263-264.

<sup>38</sup> Lauro Ayestarán, *La Música en el Uruguay*, 103.

performative dance and music with the accrual of Africanized European secular forms used in public performances for Catholic holidays—celebrating African royalty in a European fashion. This second era marked a high point for the popularity and practical application of *candombe*. Most important to our discussion on African retentions and implementation of African rites, Sunday festivities in the *salas* of the African *naciones* and annual public performances of *candombe* for Christmas, New Year's and Three King's Day, were sanctioned by colonial authorities<sup>39</sup>.

In 1839, in response to complaints from whites concerning the noise and disturbances caused by these Afro-Uruguayan festivities, *candombes* were prohibited by police decree from taking place within the walls of the city and had to be relocated outside. Although slavery was officially abolished in 1842, Africans and the African-based Uruguayan population continued to suffer the repression of their *candombes* and other forms of cultural policing, as well as being generally denigrated as a community under the ideological pressures of hegemonic power. The generations of Uruguayan born blacks developed new organizational and aesthetic forms in keeping with the social transformation of the times.<sup>40</sup> In 1867 Afro Uruguayans began forming “philharmonic societies” whose members, sought social integration and upward mobility by abandoning traditions of obvious African origin, assimilating European-Uruguayan styles and created songs and dances to be performed by carnival *comparsas*. They created another kind of space for integrating Afro-Uruguayans from the city's segregated neighborhoods into a

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<sup>39</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay”, 264.

<sup>40</sup> Romero Jorge Rodríguez, “The Afro Populations of America's Southern Cone”, 324.

previously elite white event.<sup>41</sup> *Candombe* was at the beginning of a new era, its rhythms and dance styles were being perpetuated in the ‘*comparsas*’.

Seeking equality, citizenship and full incorporation into national life, some African descendants rejected notions of Africanisms and embraced the European models of civilization, modernity, and progress favored by Uruguayan elites. *Los Pobres Negros Orientales*, (founded in 1869), expressed the need for Afro-Uruguayan acceptance into national society, albeit humorously, as always in Carnival. Their principal goal was to create a music academy that would train young Afro-Uruguayans in piano, violin, flute, and guitar: the instruments of European civilization. At the same time, however, the *comparsa* did not completely reject its African past: drums and other African implements for the accompaniment of music were also understood to be instruments. Though the *comparsa* offered no instruction in those instruments, it was assumed that members would know how to play them and would incorporate them into the group’s Carnival performances.<sup>42</sup> Afro-Uruguayan *comparsas* combined the drums and rhythms of *candombe* with melodies, chords, and instruments derived from Europe; (*tangó* as it was called by the black Uruguayans at the time) texts primarily reflected the sensuous nature of African rhythms and dances but also commented on the political events of the day.

“The third phase of *candombe* involved the demise, along with the African-born populations, of the institutionalized context and physical spaces in which *candombe*

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<sup>41</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimina, “Candombe, African Nations”, 265.

<sup>42</sup> George Reid Andrews, “Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87 (4) (2007).

existed—the African *nacion* and their *salas*”.<sup>43</sup> This phase (1870-1890) marked the beginning of the transition of *candombe* from being a *salas*-oriented music and dance form, to being primarily showcased on the nation’s carnivals stage. By 1870 Afro-Uruguayans had become major participants in Carnival festivities. The *comparsas*, ‘*la Raza Africana*’, *los Pobres Negros Orientals* and *los Negros*, participated with great success in carnival festivities. They initiated the definitive Afro-Uruguayan contribution to the principal expression of Uruguayan popular culture. Annual Afro-Uruguayan celebrations of African Monarch’s in honor of Afro-Catholic saints in the context of religious commemorations integrated with annual secular celebrations on a national level.

In about 1875, when black *comparsas* had become quite popular, whites joined the *comparsas* with blackface performances mimicking Afro-Uruguayan traditions. The mid-1870s were a moment of transition in the city’s Carnival celebration. In 1873, the municipal government had issued regulations aimed at “civilizing” Carnival and making it an expression of Montevideo’s progress and modernity. Whites found the *candombes* of Afro-Uruguayans both ridiculous and simultaneously irresistible. The first group was founded by two Argentineans and called themselves *los Negros Lubolos* another notable blackface *comparsa* went by the name of *los Negros Esclavos*. These *comparsas*, made up of young white businessmen and professionals, painted themselves in blackface and dressed in clothes supposedly modeled after enslaved Africans from Brazilian and Cuban

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<sup>43</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay”, 264.

plantations, mimicked the *bozal*, the disoriented, “salt-water”<sup>44</sup> newly arrived African, whom they represented as a simpleton. The role of *negro*, or more specifically, the *negro lubolo* (a white person parading in blackface), proved most appealing, and over time most popular and enduring. Why?

Minstrelsy, [both in the United States and Uruguay] was based on a profound white investment in black culture characterized by the dialectical flickering of racial insult and racial envy, moments of domination and moments of liberation. That dialectical flickering had a powerful sexual dimension based on both white men’s fascination with and attraction to black men and their culture and their fear of black men. White men used the black characters of minstrelsy as ventriloquists’ puppets to voice a series of anxieties and preoccupations concerning the place of whiteness, of masculinity, and of social class in American life. In so doing, minstrel performances played a central role in “marking” the boundaries of gender race and class in America.<sup>45</sup>

“An ironic benefit of the phenomenon of whites imitating Afro-Uruguayans was that it demonstrated to those Afro-Uruguayans who believed that in order to be upwardly socially mobile they had to imitate the philharmonic societies of the whites, the error of turning their back on their own ancestral culture.”<sup>46</sup> Another strange twist of irony is demonstrated here: the very people that moved to erase the cultural contribution of blacks performed a task of black cultural rescue, reviving some African-based music and dances

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<sup>44</sup> Micheal A. Gomez, *Exchanging our Country Marks*.

<sup>45</sup> George Reid Andrews, “Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930”, 704.

<sup>46</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay”, 265.

and compiling and making more widely known some characteristic movements that were simplified versions of complex African dance and musical retentions. Songs of these white *comparsas* were not based on the *candombes* of the nations but of the newer *candombe-tangos* that emerged during the second phase in the transculturation of *candombe*. Here ardent young white men employed racial strictures as a way to comment on the gender conventions that kept middle- and upper-class young men and women at arm's length from each other in order to keep love's fire from burning out of control<sup>47</sup>. Simply put: black men were not to associate with white women.

Deep in my chest  
I feel a kind of burning.  
For that girl my heart dances  
And feels such a yearning.  
But because I am a black man  
I cannot tell her of my heart.  
It's heresy, we mustn't speak,  
But instead remain apart<sup>48</sup>

Messages of black men as unsuitable partners for romance or marriage, and as pariahs and outsiders in Uruguayan society ran rampant in the texts of the songs and white

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<sup>47</sup> George Reid Andrews, "Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930", 707.

<sup>48</sup> Julio Figueroa, *El Carnaval: Colección de canciones de la mayor parte de las comparsas carnavalescas*, (Montevideo: Renaud Reynaud, 1877), 9.

*comparsas*. Only occasionally did these texts which signify dissatisfaction with Atlantic history, attack and criticize racial discrimination and inequality.

Any African they see on the street  
They draft into the army, for the long haul.  
If you don't want to serve, they tell you to hop it  
Or they'll give you a beating and no food at all.  
Once you're enlisted, you get no corn beer,  
No money either — you can't buy a shirt.  
For the nation and freedom they tell you to cheer.  
Then they cast you aside, saying, "go and find work."  
By the time that happens, you're no good for anything,  
You can't even carry a four-pound sack.  
But if you beg in the street, and they see you there,  
It's off to the workhouse, and don't look back.<sup>49</sup>

Afro-Uruguayan *comparsas* were more likely to express their criticisms of Uruguayan race relations indirectly, through the invocation of a lost African paradise.

Farewell forever to the shores of the Danda,  
To its deserts, its palm trees and forests, good-bye!  
Destiny chose to part us forever,  
Nevermore shall I see the African sky.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Negros Africanos," *El Entierro del Carnaval*, Feb. 11, 1883, in Figueroa, *El Carnaval*, 2.

Another type of *comparsa* that came out of Montevideo's *Sur*, *Palermo*, and *Cordón* black neighborhoods and working class immigrants or *conventillos*—the most important traditional Afro-Uruguayan neighborhoods before the military dictatorship's decimation—borrowed from the earlier Afro-Uruguayan *comparsas* as well as the blackface white *comparsas*. The first of these *comparsas* emerged in the city around 1890, were more mixed ethnically than the previous and departed from some earlier practiced and reviving others. A few innovations of this new *comparsa* were; the adoption of racial integration; the adoption of new folk characters (*Mama Vieja*, and the African-mixed Indian warrior) and an increased emphasis on African drums and rhythms reinforcing the new folkloric characters. A few of the successful working-class mixed *comparsas* included: the *Pobres Negros Cubanos* (founded in the 1890s), *Pobres Negros Hacheros* (1896), *Hijos de la Habana* (1912), *Guerreros de las Selvas Africanas* (1915), *Libertadores de la Habana* (1915).

A legacy that permeated the *comparsa* tradition even after the demise of the African *naciones* was that of the *personajes tipicos* (dramatic characters). Modified in their attributes and meanings from the *naciones*, *candombe* coronations, the carnival *comparsas*; the *mama vieja* (old mammy), the *gramillero* (herbal doctor) and the *escobero*; each folkloric character has its own social persona, choreography and costume. The *mama vieja* wears a cotton blouse, full long skirt, head wrap, and a fan in which she fans herself and pays close attention to her partner the *gramillero*; reminiscent of the

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<sup>50</sup> La Raza Africana, "Recuerdos de la Patria," in Figueroa, *El Carnaval* (1878), 46.

United States “mammy” she is widely thought to be a recreation of the colonial era’s *candombe* queen, and Afro-Uruguayan street vendor. The *gramillero*, an elderly man with white cotton hair and a beard representing the African wise elder, formally dresses in tails and a top hat, leans on a cane and carrying a bag (thought to be a medicine bag, conjurer’s bag, herbal bag) and dances a trembling but agile step as he pursues the *mama vieja*. The *escobero* represents the contemporary transformation of the leader of the drum corps; leading the procession with a baton eventually was replaced by the head of a broom. “The transition from baton, representing royal service to African kings, to a broom representing menial service to white elites, suggests a significant decline in status symbolism perhaps associated with the ending of the link with and memory of an autonomous African past with the death of the African-born, African *naciones*, and the Kings and Queens of the Congo and Angola”<sup>51</sup>. Since 1949 the black and *lubolo comparsas* have incorporated a new figure, *la vedette/bailarin* in the *comparsa*; the success of the group is in direct proportion to the popularity and attractiveness of its *vedette*, suggesting that commercial appeal has replaced the value of tradition.

Another unique characteristic of Afro-Uruguayan musical traditions based on *candombes* are the *llamadas de tambores*. Here spontaneous processions of a drummer parade the streets of Montevideo gradually picking up others to join the corps. Reminiscent of the time of African nations when certain groups ‘called’ to each other with their organizations characteristic rhythms in recognition, people would join the

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<sup>51</sup> Tomás Olivera Chirimini, “Candombe, African Nations and the Africanity of Uruguay”, 267.

members of the *nacion* as they passed by. It is this tradition is which I was first introduced to the Black community in Uruguay:

While staying at a girlfriend's house...we were hanging our clothes on a line on the roof of her building, when suddenly I heard drumming that sounded like something only black folk would do, but because I was told that there was no black community in Uruguay I just ignored it. It kept on going and getting louder as each minute passed. Finally I asked, "hey what is that sound". I was shocked at my friend's response, "oh that is *candombe* it is what the blacks do here every Sunday and sometimes everyday during the summer months." <sup>52</sup>

These spontaneous *llamadas* epitomize Afro-Uruguayan and Uruguayan popular culture, and are the nation's most important instrument of social identification and unification. Groups that parade through the streets for their weekend entertainment now sometimes are all white.

The importance of the *llamadas* in both the Afro-Uruguayan and national communities is such that they have become an indispensable part of all significant events—from sports to national and international politics. Based on an initiative from ASCU (*Asociación Social y Cultural Uruguaya, Uruguayan Cultural and Social Association*), now ACSUN (*Asociación Social y Cultural Uruguaya Negra, Uruguayan Black Social and Cultural Association*), in 1956 the Municipal Festival Commission formalized carnival *llamada* performances into an official event, which has become such

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<sup>52</sup> Madelyn Shackelford Washington, Personal Journal Entry, "Day 11 in Montevideo: Rooftops, Laundry, el Mar and Black People?"(Montevideo, Uruguay March 2004), 178.

a success and tourist attraction that it is now a centerpiece of the carnival, with a day set aside for it.<sup>53</sup> Montevideo's municipal government qualifies the participants, chooses the judges for the competition, and supplies both trophies and cash prizes for the winners. Afro-Uruguayan culture is central to the nation's artistic, representational and expressive traditions.

As with the mid-nineteenth-century outlawing of the *candombes* of the African *naciones* due to white elitist objections, in recent decades Afro-Uruguayans once again fell again victim to government policies whose goal was the destruction of the Black community. The most recent dramatic blow to the Afro-Uruguayan community was the military dictatorship's decimation of Montevideo's black neighborhoods. In 1976 the government ordered the removal of all Afro-Uruguayans from the center of the city. Afro-Uruguayans were forced out of their homes and relocated in makeshift living quarters in abandoned warehouses and factories on the outskirts of town. The pretext was that the buildings (tenements in which whole families lived in one or two rooms and shared sanitary facilities with their neighbors) in which they lived were in poor condition and needed to be condemned. In the name of 'urban renewal' the government-sanctioned violent removal of the Afro-Uruguayan community destroyed the concentration of Afro-

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<sup>53</sup> Madelyn Shackelford Washington. Videorecording. "Interview with Beatriz Santos" (At the *Unidad Temática Municipal por los Derechos de los Afrodescendientes* I.M.M. piso 3 ½ sector Ejido, Montevideo Uruguay, 25 January 2006).

Uruguayan families and the perpetuation and spread of Afro-Uruguayan culture. The mass evictions, a process of erasure, suffered by the great majority of Afro-Uruguayan population meant not only physical dispersion to worse housing and the destruction of a sense of organic community, but also cultural destruction since the hub of expressive creation and nurturing shattered.

As a result of these traumas the mortality rate of the elderly community members, unable to adjust to the change, was tremendous. The loss of these elders was itself a blow to the culture. Another very obvious index of destruction had been in the loss of community values. One indication of this cultural loss has been in the realm of *candombe*, which is not surprising since it is a core cultural complex. Previously each neighborhood had its own recognizable styles. The annual *llamadas* of the *Palermo* and *Sur* neighborhoods were moved to more sterilized street locations. With the destruction of these neighborhoods and the dispersal of the people, *candombe* has lost its distinctive styles and become increasingly homogenized.

These national music and dance forms were born at sites of the transculturation where European and African and Indigenous music elements met to express the struggles of black and working class Uruguayans for equality, citizenship and full incorporation into national life.<sup>54</sup> It is the intent of the author to examine *candombe* and *murga* as national cultural practices through the optic black viewpoint of W.T. Lhamon Jr. and will

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<sup>54</sup> George Reid Andrews, "Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930," *Hispanic America Historical Review* 87 (4)(2007), 698.

present these music forms as music styles that either oppose whiteness directly or embody a consistent counter memory of historical opposition.

## CHAPTER 4

### Uruguayan National Culture

Recent transformations in the economics, societies, politics, and cultures of Latin America demand a response from the humanities and, in the case of this paper, from musical scholarly criticism. The social and human sciences must contend with four sets of issues.

First, the constant crisis of Latin America's national cultures, which are continuously disarticulated and reorganized through the realignments and restructurings of the transnational or global economic order; second, the pervasive influence of the media, which contributes to the formation of social subjectivities across national borders; third, the erosion of the public sphere, which has been diminished, corporatized, bureaucratized, or shattered; and fourth, the insufficiencies, confusions, and failures of the modern emancipatory projects that historically provided the framework and foundation for literary criticism.<sup>55</sup>

These issues also constitute a crisis of the teaching of a musical language, literature and criticism as tools for modernization and nation-building, as vehicles of acculturation or emancipation, of understanding and critiquing the national culture. As a response, I propose to shift the attention from the literary archive to other broader bases and criteria in approaching Uruguayan national culture. I suggest that we look at the cultural practices of the national popular classes as well as the disenfranchised, in this case the

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<sup>55</sup> Remedi, Gustavo, *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture* vol. 15 of *Cultural Studies of the Americas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 45.

institution of Carnival and particularly at the *murgas* and *candombe* of the capital city Montevideo.

The significance, function and symbolic meaning of *murga* and *candombe* is key in visualizing, interpreting, critiquing and reading Uruguayan national culture as a contradictory conflictive totality. National rhythms (or national music forms) are representations and practices of race mixture and of Latin American ideals of racial democracy. Partly for that reason, and partly because of their inherent musical appeal, over time each genre has been embraced as a core symbol and expression of national identity.<sup>56</sup> *Murga* and *candombe* of Uruguay (two less paid attention to national music forms) are significations of transcultural performance and collective expressions of dissatisfaction with their American-Atlantic histories. Enormously popular both in the popular classes and marginalized, *murga* and *candombe* maintain high instances of African musical retentions in their cultural practice; Uruguayan *murga*—a male chorus singing in four to six part harmony accompanied by percussion —is a space for expression, representation, and critique of social experiences, and *candombe*—an Afro Uruguayan percussive form—has its origins in the African slave communities of the *Rio de la Plata* region. These musical genres are a part of a cultural style that produce configurations of the dark-skinned other; its participants include (but are not limited to) New World Africans and embody a persistent contestation of social, political, and ethnic issues during assembly and display. The cultural style that will be loosely applied to this

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<sup>56</sup> George Reid Andrews, “Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87 (4)(2007): 697.

study of Uruguayan transnational performance is W.T Lhamon Jr.'s contemporary cultural style *Optic Blackness*.<sup>57</sup>

*Optic Blackness* is a function of cultural optics that does not render an experiential reality for blacks or any ethnic group but gives a convenient pliable meditation of the real—a fiction that seems sufficiently real for cultural symbolism. The preliminary data observed during a few 2006 pre-Carnival rehearsals with Uruguayan *comparsas*, *Cuariem 1080*, *Mí Morena*, *Afro Mundo* and *Elumbé*; as well as informal performance footage of the *murga*, *Araca La Cana* seems a perfect fit to apply Carnival music to this set of optics. The little-understood role of the history of Carnival in Latin America's national rhythms leaves plenty of room for symbolic interpretation. Carnival's "anything goes" ethos facilitated white experimentation with music and dance styles originating among the poor, mixed race populace<sup>58</sup>. The contending forces of blackness and whiteness center their dispute during the assembly and performance of Carnavalesque music cultures and their defense of ethnic and class mixing is actively expressed in the lyrical traditions of Uruguayan *murga* and *candombe*. Afro Uruguayans constitute a very slim percentage of the country's population and even though there is a space for the white spectator and black spectacle paradigm in Uruguayan national and popular culture the black Uruguayan population continues to be farther displaced economically, politically and socially.

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<sup>57</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," in *Black Cultural Traffic*, ed. Harry Elam Jr. and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 111.

<sup>58</sup> John Charles Chasteen, *National Rhythms, African Roots* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 4.

How is it that these black music forms became synonymous with the national fabric of a country that so openly denies connection to African antecedents? What kind of images emerge in response to the adoptions of African functional esthetics to national musical identity politics? In order to more accurately answer these questions, the author chooses to discuss Latin American Nationalism (from which the ideal of racial democracy receives its roots) in relation to W.T. Lhamon Jr.'s contemporary contrapuntal style *Optic Blackness*. Accurate articulation of the black Uruguayan resistance to the homogenization of their musical identities and cultural practices is essential to uncovering the conflictive nature of Uruguayan national culture. From baracoon to the shores of the New World, these transcultured Negros and their music underwent many phases of modification initiated by the situation of the transatlantic slave trade; waves of resistance and acquiescence to forced acculturation, and the challenge of being the isolated minority. *Candombe*'s sheer presence and the lyrical tradition of its carnivalesque counter genre *murga* are symbolic testaments of opposition to Uruguay's colonial history and post-colonial social stratification of Afro-Uruguayans—not to mention the country's working class citizens.

### Murga

Gustavo Remedi affirms up front that Montevideo's *murgas* should not be confused with other spectacles, "such as the *murgas* of Cádiz, the Canary islands, or Buenos Aires; the struggles between Moors and Christians represented in the Caribbean celebrations; the Brazilian Samba schools and *trio-eléctricos*; the Bolivian *diabladas*; the

promenades and masquerade balls of Paris, Venice and New Orleans; or medieval Carnival celebrations”<sup>59</sup>. He addresses a separate Carnival culture: the theatrical representations that occur annually on the *tablados*; the wooden stages built specifically for carnival in the neighborhoods of Montevideo’s popular classes. The *tablados* include the enclosed area surrounding the stages; spectators pay to enter these areas and watch performances. Here, *murga* refers to one of the categories of present day-Montevideo’s carnivalesque theater, similar to but distant from the groups of revelers and the companies of parodists, humorists, and *comparsas* that also participate in Uruguay’s Carnival. The theatrical events directed specifically to the black community, the *comparsas* and the *llamadas* are in many respects a part of a different Carnival. While they occur on the same days as the street spectacles and form a part of the general parade, the *llamadas* usually happen at different times and places. They take place in the main streets and corners of the neighborhoods historically inhabited by the black population, previously the marginalized zones and the outskirts of the walled city. Today these areas (*Cordón, Sur* and *Palermo* neighborhoods) are occupied primarily by tenements and semi-demolished buildings.

Remedi cites that long before the visits of Spanish zarzuela troupes, nineteenth-century Montevideo saw numerous celebrations, carnivalesque dramatizations and other popular forms (procession ceremonies, dances for Catholic Holidays; collections of white, black and *negro lubolos* revelers; troupes; masquerades; student musical

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<sup>59</sup> Gustavo Remedi. *Carnival Theater: Uruguay’s Popular Performers and National Culture* vol. 15 of *Cultural Studies of the America’s* (University of Minnesota, 2004), xiii-xv.

organizations; choruses; one-acts and pantomimes; grotesque creole theater) that share basic characteristics with *murga* and are its antecedents. This unique genealogy and history resulted in a synthesis of social, political and creative processes. The representations of the contemporary *murga*, with their significant differences from the carnivalesque celebrations of the nineteenth-century and the *murgas* consisting of six or seven musician-clowns that appeared as part of zarzuela *intermezzos* must be visualized as a form of theater. This popular theater consists of actor-singer-dancer-musicians, with a background set by and made for the public. For some Uruguayans during the neo-liberalist military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s the *murgas* characteristically critiqued and ridiculed current events.

The *murga* consists of four voices totaling approximately 16 people. Besides the chorus, the *murga* also required an animator, percussionists, a choral director and a *murga* director. The section of the chorus generally consisted of two basses, four or five “seconds”, eight or nine tenors and two top tenors. Three percussionists played the *bombo* (a bass drum worn at the waist played horizontally), *redoblante* (snare drum), and *platinillos* (cymbals). The director leads rehearsals, keeps the crowd hyped, announces the repertoire and advertises the patrons. Traditionally women did not perform in *murgas* until a few early twentieth-century exceptions. Consistent with racial segregation inherited from the nineteenth-century, the *murgas* included few or no Afro-Uruguayans in their productions. While blacks participated in general, inaugural parade and other stage performances, the Afro-Uruguayan subculture maintained its own Carnival.

### Latin American Nationalism, Carnival Culture and Optic Blackness

Nationalism refers to the identity of the majority of people within a nation-state with the republic, nation or national society as the primary reference group. The nation-state's existence is based upon the discursive homogenization of the diverse groups that it represents.<sup>60</sup> In Spanish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking, and French-speaking republics in the 1990s we find two complimentary and one competing nationalist ideologies of racial culture, often denoted by these symbols: racial mixture (*Mestizaje*), *Indigenismo*, and Blackness (*negritude*).<sup>61</sup> *Mestizaje*, the ideology of racial intermixing is an explicit master symbol in all Latin American countries. *Indigenismo* is a dual concept reflecting a search for the creative dimensions of nationalism through the symbolism of an indigenous past and a social-political literary symbol that convey the mood of remorse over the living conditions of contemporary acculturated Indians. *Negritude* is a concept that denotes the positive features of blackness among those classified or self-identified as black. The *mestizaje-negritude* contrast represents a symbolic opposition reflecting cultural exaggerations of ideologically conjoined social constructs of race, civilization, nationalist patrimony, and social movement.

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<sup>60</sup> Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, "Introduction: The Postnational Turn in Music Scholarship and Music Marketing", 3.

<sup>61</sup> Normen E. Whitten Jr., and Arlene Torres eds., "To Forge the Future in the Fires of the Past: An Interpretive Essay on Racism, Domination, Resistance and Liberation," in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean* vol.1. (Indiana University Press, 1998), 7

The *blanqueamiento*<sup>62</sup> (whitening or homogenizing of all represented ethnicities) of the *mestizaje* nationalist idyllic concept leaves little room for the representation of mixed peoples of a darker complexion (*mulatos*). Seeking to improve everyday living the Afro communities of the Southern Cone, it is difficult for this community to find an empowering symbol of identification within Latin American nationalist rhetoric (one that ensures that they can affirm, transmit, and promote the appreciation by other of black cultures without the use of demeaning stereotypes). On many occasions in the River Plate region, self-classified white *mestizos* openly deny (and wish to erase completely) Indigenous or African ancestry in their roots. More than a few women, spoken with in Buenos Aires during a concert reception adamantly indicated, upon questioning them about the Argentine involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, that: “We Argentines have no African blood...we are purely European...maybe some of us with very little Indian”.<sup>63</sup> Understanding that this denial of black roots is not representative of Latin America as a whole (mostly in the Dominican Republic, Argentina and Uruguay), it is safe to say that the white majority in these rare locations have a problem with their country’s American-Atlantic history. Struggling for a stable socio-economic and political space in the national culture of one’s homeland should not be relegated to the exploited cultural expressions of those in marginalized communities engaged in a staged black spectacle for the entertainment of its lighter-skinned spectator. Seemingly, race

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<sup>62</sup> Alejandrina da Luz, “Uruguay,” in *No Longer Invisible: Afro Latin Americans Today*, Minority Rights Group (London: Minority Rights Publications, 1995), 342.

<sup>63</sup> Madelyn Shackelford Washington, Personal Journal Entry. “Jubilee Tour June 1999: Day 2” Chats with female audience members in Buenos Aires. (Buenos Aires, Argentina June 1999), 78-87.

relations and the race problem of the New World are showcased by popular transculturators in the public sphere.

Popular transculturators (*murgistas* and *candomberos*) are cultural producers who perform acts of transculturation in the popular public sphere. As a result of the process of revealing cultural offerings, selections, omission, rescues, searches, incorporations, combinations and synthesis, the creations of popular transculturators express the concerns, values, reasons, or sensibilities of the popular public sphere.<sup>64</sup>

Nationalist ideologies develop as symbols of internal unification based on concepts of racial classification and also ideas of opposition using a criterion of cultural exaggeration. Within each nation-state there are communities of people that self-identify with each other due to their similar places of residence, language, tradition and customs. Nationalist tellings of the construction of *mestizaje* states, up front, that Latin America is a blend of Africa, Europe and Indigenous Americans. This statement falsely implies that everyone identifies as being *mestizo* as well as there being an absence of racial prejudice. In order to convince the world and its citizens of these newly formed Latin American nation-states, national music and dance forms were exploited as aesthetic vehicles of social peace. Political elites used ideas of racial determinism to exploit African and Indian contributions and to reserve wealth and power for those that identified themselves as white. The oversimplified ideal concepts of *mestizaje*, *indigenismo* and blackness that are inextricably tied to Latin American nationalism, allowed micro-communities of Latin

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<sup>64</sup> Gustavo Remedi. *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture* vol. 15 of *Cultural Studies of the America's* (University of Minnesota, 2004), 13.

American nations to construct more detailed ethnic sub-sections. The construct of *negritude* is contrary to the *mestizaje* nationalist ideology in which there is a preference for things of a light-skinned hue. In the process of forming these separate groups I would like to focus most specifically on the symbols of black resistance, and black and white expressions of dissatisfaction (symbol most pertinent to this discussion).

Resistance accompanied the transatlantic slave trade and the New World Africans community history is laid with examples of attempts at liberation. During the last century's formation of nationalist rhetoric the black community found itself having to fight against hegemonic power throughout Latin America to maintain community ties, and equal education opportunities. Struggling for a place of equality in their own country during the push for nationalism; black music, dance and art forms were consistently placed at the forefront of their respective country's affairs. The resistance to the erasure from the fabric of the nation's cultural history by white Uruguayan elites was a hyper-masculine erotic response to the construction of *mestizaje*. *Candombe* was the tool in which blacks fought permanent erasure, not only used in Uruguay; *candombe* became a communal internal unification process symbol, based on nationalist racial classification concepts and ideas of opposition using criterion of cultural exaggeration.

The display of the Uruguayan national music forms *murga* and *candombe* are aesthetic and symbolic modes of production that signal dissatisfaction with their

American-Atlantic history. W.T Lhamon's contemporary concept of "Optic Blackness"<sup>65</sup> is a contrapuntal cultural style that opposes whiteness and embodies a consistent counter memory of historical opposition. Lhamon's application of this style is explained in his essay "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit" and claims that "it struggles to lever into view a particular blackness that disaffected peoples of every ethnicity in the United States evoke to signal their dissatisfied relation to American and Atlantic History"<sup>66</sup>. I opt to extend the range of his contrapuntal style to locations in the New World that seem to struggle with levering into view an acceptance with their own African antecedents; in the case of this thesis: Uruguay. Being that "optic blackness was the earliest style of the first transnational popular culture that grew up around the blackface"<sup>67</sup> minstrel tradition of the United States; I posit Uruguay's minstrel (*lubolo*) carnival *comparsa* tradition as a signifier of Lhamon Jr.'s Optic Blackness. Because of its counter memory and gestural repertoire continually evolving, drawing, since its first manifestation in the late nineteenth century—the United States minstrel tradition and blackface carnival tradition in Uruguay—on its past, optic blackness is transtemporal and keeps track of its past legible in its successive signs. Lhamon Jr. explains that because optic black attracts downwardly mobile and ostracized members of the middle class to its plebian mode, it remains and sustains an important cross-class formation. *Murgistas* in Montevideo perform satire and parody, caricaturizing Montevidean society using grotesque movements of which this

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<sup>65</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," in *Black Cultural Traffic*, ed. Harry Elam Jr. and Kennell Jackson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 111.

<sup>66</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," 111.

<sup>67</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," 112.

plebeian public sphere Lhamon's Optic Blackness speaks. The urban proletariat *comparsas* of Montevideo also speak directly to this plebeian mode.

The *murga*, the essence of the people is an authentic self characterization of society through which the identified, recognized, and salient events of the year parade for people to see, hear and speak. These events are appreciated for their insolent, jocular, aspects, taken in jest and without conceptions, and if the situation requires it, the *murga* will show the conceptual strength of its critique, its true essence. The context of the libretto as well as the social critique will have shown a feeling of ingenuity, naughtiness, and authenticity.<sup>68</sup>

In 'Reina de la Teja's' introduction (1981), *murgistas* dramatize the popular power of the people or at least the hope for such power in this opening: "Murga, the people's queen as long as the people reign, which is its hope".<sup>69</sup>

Araca la Cana's libretto for "Who stole our laughter?" interrupts the Carnavalesque celebration of hegemonic power with a symbolic lament of the tragedy of the defeated, marginalized and subordinated *murgista*. As a result, the people are forced to disfigure, cover and disguise themselves in order to speak; they are forced to speak in code and laugh when it seems more appropriate to cry. The *murgistas* become puppets, condemned to poke fun at themselves and paint smiles on their faces.

I am that old *murgista*

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<sup>68</sup> Gustavo Remedi. *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, 78.

<sup>69</sup> Reina de la Teja, "Introduction, 1981" in Gustavo Remedi, *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, 76.

with my face painted  
the one who dreamed life  
between happy guffaws  
I am that buffoon you see  
he who has lost laughter  
the one you always ask  
to smile  
and you demand that I laugh?  
that the show go on?  
for this I am a *murguero*  
I must fulfill my mission.  
But tonight I ask  
that you forget the clown  
and let me be a man  
so that I can mourn my failure.<sup>70</sup>

Optic black's reconstitution of the "plebian public sphere"<sup>71</sup> and its oppositional relation to the optic white public sphere is most useful when invoking Latin American nationalist rhetoric. The passing for white for those that embrace the *mestizaje* concept is necessary for its survival. In the optic black alternative the opposite is true: the

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<sup>70</sup> Araca la Cana, "Who Stole Our Laughter", in Gustavo Remidi, *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, 147.

<sup>71</sup> Jurgen Habermas "plebian public sphere" in W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit, 112.

compounding of multiple identities (organically black to white) together is clear, and provisional performance is their point. From the first time Crewell and Escalera, (the two Argentines that formed the first blackface *comparsa* in Montevideo, *los Negros Lubolos*) first corked their faces and transgressed onto the streets initiating a *llamada* of their own or the Afro-Uruguayan *comparsa*'s adaptations of the *lubolo* lyrical traditions and expressive styles; to the great *murga*, *Araca la Cana*'s annual toast to Momus, the Greek God of mockery that presides over Carnival<sup>72</sup>, members of their audiences understand that their act is a put-on, and that being in the know is diagnostic of their crowd (black to white, culturally exaggerated and multilayered to unilineal and passing). In optic black, this mixing of identities is requisite for successive reappearance of this mode. "Optic white has a direct connection to identity politics. But because its practitioners know its effects are not real but that they are instead tentative and imaginary, optic black's relation is provisional and oblique."<sup>73</sup>

In Atlantic history, blackness and whiteness developed an interactive relationship contesting each other during their assembly and display. This cultural history determines that we see one fully only in the presence of the other; blackness is all inclusive; *mestizaje* prefers to make what is dark light. The opposing forces of blackness and whiteness center their dispute during the assembly and performance of Carnavalesque music cultures and their defense of ethnic and class mixing is actively expressed in the lyrical traditions of Uruguayan *murga* and *candombe*. Positioning itself as a symbol of

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<sup>72</sup> Gustavo Remedi, *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, 102.

<sup>73</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit", 113.

modernity, sophistication, and relevance to the false notion of a universal culture; Montevideo's carnivalesque transculturators 'dope up' with optic blackness year after year in resistance to the collective urge to 'disappear' the plebian and black sphere in Uruguayan history.

The world of Carnival is no more and no less than a world contained between parentheses, between commas. It is the representation of the world turned upside down, where everything matters and all is permitted. It is the world of mystical celebration and reunion of life, liberty pleasure, and love. It is the world of transgression, burlesque, satire, parodies, inversion, the subversion of the hegemonic discourse, the proposal of an alternative order and another world.<sup>74</sup>

Over time, Carnival became a space for the questioning, disrupting, and dismantling of the current symbolic and social order. *Murga* and *candombe* among other folkloric genres (*milongas, chamarrita, vidalita, samba and baguala*) began to be utilized in national-popular cultural practice and reflect social and cultural change in their representations.

Although optic blackness has prominently marked its territory and the media presence it is certainly not the only available signifier of blackness. Many Uruguayan artists and authors have chosen to drum up their own versions of blackness that aim to delete white addition or presence: Gilberto Silva (Afro-Uruguayan, author and poet), Pilar Barrios (poet), and Pedro Figari (visual artist, 1861-1938) are a few contributors

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<sup>74</sup> Gustavo Remedi. *Carnival Theater: Uruguay's Popular Performers and National Culture*, 77

whose expression share a counter memory of historical opposition to white Uruguayan elites. What is most intriguing about Mr. Lhamon's cultural style is that optic blackness is among several cultural modes that consistently manifest themselves annually. Here again Carnival music practices affords itself to this cultural mode. This phenomenon poses an interesting question: why do Atlantic peoples of many sorts and backgrounds continue to dredge and recycle elements that represent the most disdained idioms of black culture and their most hardened partisans? Dr. Lhamon's answer is that the codes of optic blackness derive from the way European industrial forces placed both whites and blacks into mutual labor on sailing ships, plantations and the in domestic sphere and by the eighteenth century placed both into menial service.

This plebian attraction that optic blackness appeals to identifies those stigmatized by the social ramifications of industrial labor. Atlantic modernity stems from the cross-cultural exchange that occurred with the poor, pressed and captured of Europe and Africa that were moved together through the Americas in laborious circumstances. The optic black mode enacts and replays the imbrications of Atlantic peoples, the problems they share and their distinctive pain.<sup>75</sup>

The *comparsas* as a cultural, performative counterpart of the cross-racial labor movements being constructed during the late eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century in much of Latin America engages Uruguayan working classes and blacks as mutually disenfranchised and interconnected. Uruguayan workers were

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<sup>75</sup> W.T. Lhamon Jr., "Optic Black: Naturalizing the Refusal to Fit," 114.

creating the racially inclusive labor movements that by the 1930s and 1940s formed the core of populist political coalitions and governments. Constructing those movements was far from easy. Race and racial differences were as “real” to turn-of-the-century workers as they still are for many people today — and as difficult to overcome. Yet the presence, in country after country, of multiracial labor forces, and the absence of segregationist legislation and practices to divide those racial groups from each other, made it possible for workers to cross racial lines in order to work together, live together, mobilize together, and, throughout the hemisphere, party and make music together.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> George Reid Andrews, “Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930”, 723-724.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Conclusions

Although now a small portion of the total population, Afro-Uruguayans have made significant contributions to Uruguay's history, military, arts, and popular culture. We have discovered that the Afro Uruguayan percussive forms over time have served as vessels of release and resistance in opposition to the conditions of the crisis of the transatlantic slave trade. "One of the central messages of African music is that rhythm lifts us out of the daily grind by transforming consciousness, transforming time and heightening our experience of the moment".<sup>77</sup> Rhythm was (and continues to be) central to the black Uruguayans production of healing, as well as towards reconciling a relationship with an Africa far out of reach. The *tambores* of *candombe* and the movements that accompanied such music were almost always performed as a reaction to the community's degraded social position. *Candombe* is the antithesis and direct negation of the pain and exhaustion of coerced heavy labor. Originally a music and dance form rejected by whites and the middle classes, dismissed as primitive, barbaric and bordering on the criminal, *candombe* was later embraced as a core symbol of national cultural identity. We can conclude that the musico-masculine reaction against the hierarchy of erasure—the construction of *mestizaje*—is one that stands for harmony in a multiracial society, invoking the erotic pleasure of interracial union. Lyrics and imagery of the hot-blooded *mulata* and *morena* are apparent in New World national music forms.

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<sup>77</sup> George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29.

This musical response addresses one hierarchy while placing foundations for another *machista* hierarchy, proving to be problematic for women of color. In national music the only place for the woman of color is seated at throne of transgression, rarely mentioned as wife or mother.

In the songs and performances Carnival *comparsas*, hot-blooded black women, hot rhythm, and African sensuality came together to define a vision of blackness that has been thoroughly absorbed into Uruguayan national and popular culture. Rhythmic and sexual “hotness” does reflect a certain kind of power associated with blackness — but not the kind of power likely to produce social and economic advancement or genuine racial equality.<sup>78</sup>

#### Black Music Scholarship and Social Action.

In order to promote an awareness of musical contributions made by blacks in the Americas, the author wishes to assist in the shared goal of black communities in the South American cone. The intent of this body of music scholarship is to contribute to Afro-Uruguay’s functional esthetic by building on the community’s growing body of knowledge, empowering the community by improving the conditions of everyday life, and advocating the affirmation, transmission and promotion of appreciation by others of African-based cultures without the use of demeaning stereotypes. As an outside member of the black community actively involved in Afro-Latin American music scholarship, the author is willing to be an agent of inquiry into the musical meaning of various social

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<sup>78</sup> George Reid Andrews, “Remembering Africa, Reinventing Uruguay: Sociedades de Negros in the Montevideo Carnival, 1865-1930,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87, (4) (2007): 725

contexts, in this case Montevidean *candombe* and *murga*. Understanding these national music forms as a medium for the representation and negotiation of identities, the author is well-placed to highlight power relations between the political elite, the middle class, the working class, and black Uruguayans. The creation of *Organizaciones Mundo Afro* was a direct response to the inequality of Afro-Uruguayans. Being an outside member of the black community and active link towards solidarity, the author chooses to align the conclusions of this study with the priorities of this federal organization. Together with *Aladanza*, and *Unidad Tematica Municipal por los Derechos de los Afrodescendientes* we can initiate a series of workshop curriculum aligned with *Mundo Afro*'s and UTA's vision, working toward; the promotion of Afro- Uruguayan active participation in all issues affecting the communities' living conditions, combating all forms of discrimination and racism, escalation of economic position by making social integration more effective via concrete, viable, development projects and recuperating and promoting Afro-Uruguayan historical memory.

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