

SEEKING EKOBIO: CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORIC
IMAGINATION OF THE AMERICAS, 1940-2000

by

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ABSTRACT

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Seeking Ekobio: Cultural Exchange and the African Diasporic Imagination of the Americas, 1940-2000

Dissertation directed by Associate Professor Phoebe S.K. Young

This dissertation traces twentieth-century cultural and intellectual exchange within black consciousness movements of the US and Latin America through the lives of influential activists, artists, and authors who built transnational networks of support and collaboration. I argue that these networks fostered the construction of a distinct African diasporic imagination of the Americas. This imagination projected an alternative and necessary space where African descendants (and it was eventually argued all Americans) could re-engage with and rewrite historical memory. Within this space African heritage was celebrated for its inherent value and deep and rich contribution to the hemisphere in all areas: culturally, politically, socially, and economically. From this imagined familial diasporic space, the tensions between difference and commonality were reconciled for greater purpose. The family of ekobio, who collectively addressed the pain of the past, became a source from which many could draw the great resilience that allowed the fight against racism and toward social justice to continue in so many spheres and throughout the adult lives of the activists and artists discussed here.

This imagination was composed of several unique factors. It differed from, yet was in conversation with, movements such as Pan-Africanism and international anti-colonial movements. The continent(s) of the Americas was an essential geographic, spiritual, and conceptual framework within which this understanding of the diasporic experience was situated, and while Pan-Americanism existed long before the twentieth century, certain postwar historical moments created shifts and changes in the diasporic imagination in innovative ways between 1940 and 2000. Within this diasporic imagination, Francophone *négritude*, *afrocubanismo*, Caribbean and South American *negritud* and *negrismo*, and Black Power were all influential to the historical actors included in this history. These movements appear in the narrative as the activists encountered and made meaning of them. This study focuses specifically on African descendants of Colombia, Cuba, Panama, Brazil, and the US, and traces multiple cultural influences and points of exchange within an evolving network that included other nations of the Americas.

To my husband,
Stefano Lorenzini Alonso,
whose beautiful country inspired this study,
and whose love and support made it possible,
I lovingly dedicate this work.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
I. Con “Afán de Ser”: The Intellectual Journeys and Writings of Manuel Zapata Olivella and Langston Hughes, 1920-1950.....	28
II. “Taking Compass Points”: Situating African Diasporic Experience within Jazz, Dance, and Literature in the Americas, 1946-1960.....	68
III. In Search of “Soul Space”: Music, Literature, and Theater in Personal and Collective Liberation.....	111
IV. Academic Networks, The Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas, and Cultural Pan-Americanism.....	155
V. “No Había de Otra:” Discourses of Racial Solidarity, Political Gains, and Black Movements in Colombia, Panama, and Brazil, 1970s-1990s.....	202
VI. Rewriting Historical Memory, Afro-centricity and the Diasporic Imagination of the Americas in Novels, Painting, and Poetry.....	238
CONCLUSION.....	269
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	274

MAPS

1. Principal Cultural Contact Points of the African Diaspora included in Chapter One.....	32
2. Caribbean Coast of Colombia from the Darién to Barranquilla.....	33
3. “Colombia: Primeros Pobladores”.....	165
4. “La Cultura Negra de las Américas: Area de arribo y difusión,” First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, 1977.....	179
5. Transatlantic Slave Trade.....	181

FIGURES

1. <i>Manuel Zapata Olivella</i> by Nereo López.....	68
2. Manuel Zapata Olivella and Rosa Bosch on their Wedding Day.....	114
3. Miles Davis, “Milestones” Album Cover.....	134
4. <i>Rambao</i> Performance in the Plaza Bolívar, 1973.....	150
5. Gerardo Maloney, Abdias Nascimento, and Manuel Zapata Olivella at the III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas.....	194
6. Logo of the III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas.....	195
7. Nina S. de Friedemann in Palenque de San Basilio.....	205
8. Gerardo Maloney, George Westermann, and Diogenes Cedeño Cenci.....	225
9. Benkos Biojo Statue.....	244
10. Abdias Nascimento with <i>Theme for Léa Garcia—Oxunmaré</i>	256

INTRODUCTION

*Let me finish
 Let me start now.
 Listen to my tale,
 Story of yesterday,
 Roads of return
 Not yet traveled,
 Forgotten histories of the future,
 Future stories of the past.*

- Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Changó, el gran putas*

In a 1989 letter to two other influential black activists, authors, and artists of the twentieth century, Afro-Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella addressed Abdias Nascimento (Brazil) and Gerardo Maloney Francis (Panama) as “Queridos Ekobios” [Dear Ekobios].¹ The letter was written in the planning of the IV Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, an event envisioned in order to extend and continue the African diasporic cultural and intellectual exchange in which all three men participated during the twentieth century. “Ekobio” meant a spiritual brother of the African diaspora, and is the same term that Zapata Olivella used to describe African descendants in his epic historical novel, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983) published six years before the letter to Nascimento and Maloney. The use of this term, repeatedly present in Zapata’s letters, reveals his diasporic imagination that linked the three men together in special and powerful ways. Zapata Olivella also used ekobio to describe his relationship with US literary scholars Lawrence Prescott and Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo.² Zapata does not refer to all black people as ekobios; the term was reserved for those whom he considered a close friend or

¹ Letter from Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias do Nascimento and Gerardo Maloney, 10 April 1989, Manuel Zapata Olivella Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University. This collection will be referred to as the MZO Papers throughout this dissertation.

² See for example, Manuel Zapata Olivella to Lawrence Prescott [Lorenzo in the letter] 28 August 1990 and Manuel Zapata Olivella to Yvonne Captain-Hidalgo 14 September 1993, MZO Papers.

colleague, and a brother or sister in the struggles against racism. The term reflects imagined kinship, as well as common purpose within diasporic identity work.

This dissertation traces twentieth-century cultural and intellectual exchange within black consciousness movements of the US and Latin America through the lives of influential activists, artists and authors who built transnational networks of support and collaboration. I argue that these networks fostered the construction of a distinct African diasporic imagination of the Americas. This imagination was in many ways a homecoming from the multiple displacements of the diaspora. As the result of the long history of racism that stemmed from the painful legacy of the Middle Passage and the slave trade, the Americas was a complex, fractured homeland for the activists and artists described in this study. The African diasporic imagination projected an alternative, and necessary space where African descendants (and it was eventually argued all Americans) could feel a sense of belonging. Within this space African heritage was celebrated for its inherent value and deep and rich contribution to the hemisphere in all areas: culturally, politically, socially, and economically. From this imagined familial diasporic space, the tensions between difference and commonality were reconciled for a greater purpose. The family of ekobio, who collectively addressed the pain of the past, became a source from which many could draw the great resilience that allowed the fight against racism and toward social justice to continue in so many spheres and throughout the adult lives of the activists and artists discussed here.

This imagination was composed of several unique factors. It differed from, yet was in conversation with, movements such as Pan-Africanism and international anti-colonial movements. The continent(s) of the Americas was an essential geographic, spiritual, and conceptual framework within which this understanding of the diasporic experience was situated,

and while Pan-Americanism existed long before the twentieth century, certain postwar historical moments shifted and changed the diasporic imagination in innovative ways between 1940 and 2000. Within the diasporic imagination, Francophone *négritude*, *afrocubanismo*, and Caribbean and South American *negritud* and *negrismo* were all influential to the historical actors included in this history. These movements appear in the narrative as the activists encountered and made meaning of them. This study focuses specifically on African descendants of Colombia, Cuba, Panama, the US and Brazil, and traces multiple cultural influences and points of exchange, within an evolving network that also included such countries as Mexico and Canada.

Nature and Scope

Many personal and cultural connections that grew through these networks ran through the life of one remarkable man of the African diaspora, Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004), and connected with the lives of those with whom he built these networks of cultural exchange. The analysis that follows weaves in and out of personal journeys throughout the Americas of the twentieth century, tethered to the historical context of individual transformations that were echoed in the collective experience. Zapata was an Afro-Colombian author, physician, anthropologist and diplomat. He was dedicated to national civil rights in his country, yet he understood his personal and professional work as a means of re-writing historical memory and participating in dialogues about the African diasporic imagination of the Americas.

These webs of exchange had points of contact in Colombia, Cuba, Brazil, Panama, the US, Mexico, and Canada. All of these locations are included in this study, though individuals from the first five countries are the main focus. The central historical actors here are elsewhere rarely discussed together in one narrative: Manuel and Delia Zapata Olivella (Colombia),

Langston Hughes (US), Nicolás Guillén (Cuba), Jorge Artel (Colombia), Dizzy Gillespie (US), Katherine Dunham (US), Larry Neal (US), Nina S. de Friedemann (Colombia), Gerardo Maloney (Panama), and Abdias Nascimento (Brazil), to name a few. In the process, I trace new patterns on the map of the Americas, following the understudied meridians of cultural exchange that cross through national boundaries and connect the US to Latin America in important and powerful ways. This map shows us clearly the links between thinkers as well as the tensions between interconnectedness/similarity and distance/difference. The American experience of navigating these tensions has been articulated in the conversations that formed the African diasporic imagination.

In sketching the diasporic imagination, the narrative moves chronologically through Zapata's activist life beginning in the late 1940s until his passing in 2004. Along the way I mark major shifts in the articulations of the diasporic imagination in ways that move forward and back in time when necessary. I follow a more thematic approach when it is useful, yet generally move forward in time aligned with wider cultural movements such as the Golden Age of jazz music or the Black Power Movement. Thus the chronological scope of this study focuses largely on the second half of the twentieth century. The geographical scope, as mentioned above, includes all of the Americas, though many countries and regions do not receive in-depth consideration such as French Guyana, Suriname, the Southern Cone, Belize, among others. Future studies can continue to pull out the links between other American nations.³ The three locations of the Congresses of Black Culture (Colombia, Panama, and Brazil) were crucial in developing the diasporic imagination. Conversations that arose at these congresses had been heavily influenced by

³ A closer study of the Congresses of Black Culture of the Americas, for instance, would reveal much about these networks.

dialogues around blackness that came out of the US and Cuba, which are discussed throughout the dissertation as well.

Methodology

This dissertation is fundamentally a cultural and intellectual history. As such, it values the historical influence of ideas and cultural production as a collective and individual reflection of worldview and the process of making meaning out of experiences. In my approach to understanding the African diasporic imagination of the Americas and its various articulations and developments throughout the twentieth century, I have turned to the unlikely field of astrophysics for a helpful metaphor. After all, history and astrophysics have much more in common than is obvious at first glance. Both disciplines seek to account for push and pull factors that influence outcomes in time and space. In 2016, as I wrote this dissertation, a new planet was “discovered” in our solar system: Planet Nine. We know Planet Nine exists in a similar way that we know dark matter exists: because of its impact on neighboring energies and masses. Planet Nine is visible, for now, through the forces that it applies to other celestial beings: its gravitational signature is undeniable, and clearly marks its orbital path. We assume that it is a matter of time before the human eye directly views Planet Nine.

Similarly, the historian’s engagement with the past is both informed by what is seen, and unseen. Changes and continuities in the past are charted according to direct and indirect influences. In the following pages, I seek to account for an African diasporic imagination in the Americas and explain its cultural, political, and social development in the twentieth century. The diasporic imagination is not always clearly visible, or articulated as such by all members of the African diasporic community. Yet its presence and the ideas and cultural production projected

onto the imagination and pulled from it has had a clear impact on black activists, artists, and their black consciousness movements throughout the twentieth century. This dissertation traces the gravitational signature, so to speak, of the diasporic imagination: at times encountering it head on, and other times catching glimpses of its orbit. By many who encountered, engaged and constructed this imagination, it was believed to be inextricably tied to ethereal forces: all of them spiritual and some of them artistic or tied to race and bloodlines. These forces, like those of Planet Nine, are best understood when felt, and traced through their impact. They resist direct confrontation and fixed definitions. They are inherently part of a process.

I follow this process through the life and work of the influential Afro-Colombian author, physician, anthropologist and diplomat, Manuel Zapata Olivella. I trace his personal understandings of the diasporic imagination and those of his colleagues as he formed friendships and professional relationships, engaged in cultural exchange with them, and inspired black consciousness movements through the networks in which he participated.

Distinct from other methods privileged in social or political history, for instance, this dissertation is grounded in the belief that personal and professional relationships, no matter how small in number or limited in reach, are significant, and meaningful for those who engage in them. Social Network Analysis theories used in other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and political science have long demonstrated that personal connections have political, economic, and social impacts.⁴ This project engages less with quantitative analysis of large

⁴ Social Network Analysis is an interdisciplinary process that engages mathematical, network, and graph theories to characterize network structures. It uses the “core ideas” of points, lines, and paths to measure the aspects of social networks such as their density, centralization, and spatialization. This approach reveals the social structures of networks and measures change over time in the newest approaches. For an overview of these theories and techniques see John Scott, *Social Network Analysis*, 3rd Edition. Los Angeles: Sage, 2013. Mark Granovetter has also contributed to Social Network Theory by differentiating between “strong” and “weak” ties within social networks. He argues, contrary to the obvious, that “weak” ties, or bonds made between acquaintances as opposed to close friends or family members, often have a greater impact on an individual’s ability to seek out new

social structures and more qualitatively analyzes the meaning made through intimate social connections and the ways in which close networks of activists produced concepts that laid the groundwork from which larger movements built support and momentum for change.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead said it one way that is commonly quoted within popular culture, “Never doubt the power of a small group of determined people to change the world.” Her daughter, linguist and anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson, articulated even more beautifully what I find to be true time and again in the small and large histories that we write:

Multiple spheres of human experience both echo and enable events shared more widely; expressions of moment in a world in which we now recognize that no microcosm is completely separate: no tide pool, no forest, no family, no nation. Indeed, the knowledge drawn from the life of some single organism or community or from the intimate experience of an individual may prove to be relevant to decisions that effect the health of a city, or a piece of the world.⁵

Indeed, Bateson’s comment reflects a shift that is occurring in how we understand history, our connection to the past, and the production of knowledge about that past. The historical actors I follow throughout the twentieth century demonstrated a similar epistemology concerning connectedness, and their deep belief that the most intimate of exchanges with each other was inseparable from the larger communion with the ancestors, spiritual brothers, and the larger social and cultural movements within which they worked. This dissertation seeks to better account for that particular understanding and world vision.

Historiographical Contributions

opportunities, have access to information, and increased mobility economically and socially. See Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited” in *Sociological Theory*, vol. 1 (1983), 201-233.

⁵ From “Composing a Life.” Interview with Mary Catherine Bateson by Krista Tippett. *OnBeing*. *NPR*, October 1, 2015.

My dissertation makes several key interventions into US, Latin American, and African diasporic historiography. It is one of the few transnational histories of the Americas focused equally on Latin America and the US. In fact, it challenges traditional views of area studies and US history as exceptional, regionally unique fields. It also re-centers transnational African diasporic history to Latin America in the twentieth century from a dominance of US-based and slavery-era studies. Within histories of the African diaspora, Colombia is conspicuously understudied in the post-emancipation period despite having the third largest population of African descendants in the Americas (behind the US and Brazil). Virtually no historical work has comprehensively explained the Afro-Colombian *movimiento negro* [Black Movement] of the twentieth century, and while this is not the main purpose of my project; I do emphasize the role of Afro-Colombian activists and artists throughout my dissertation. In order to accomplish this, I have relied heavily on interdisciplinary approaches from sociology, anthropology, political science, and literature where Colombia has received more attention in the African diasporic context.

Most studies, regardless of field, locate the origins of black consciousness in Colombia in the 1970s and 1980s. I demonstrate in this work that there are much longer, deeper roots to these movements. By focusing on the 1940s to 2000, the longer arc of racial and cultural consciousness becomes apparent, along with a recognition of the courageous and meaningful work that so many activists, Manuel Zapata Olivella among them, completed prior to the 1970s. The activists included in this study overcame monumental obstacles of prejudice, socially constructed racism, and a lack of knowledge around black cultural practices and national contributions that makes their work in the early years that much more pioneering. Situating this

work within the larger diaspora of the Americas connects these efforts in new ways that emphasize common historical processes and changes in perceptions around blackness.

The term “diaspora” has long been associated with the dispersal of Jewish peoples throughout the world. It has traditionally implied not only dispersal, but also forced removal to several different locations with strong ties to an original homeland. For instance, an enslaved African person may be forcibly taken to Louisiana, then subsequently sold to an owner in Jamaica, then moved to Cuba, individually, or as part of a community. Multiple forced displacements differentiate diaspora from exile, immigration, or emigration. The word was first used in the context of Africa and African descendants beginning in the 1960s when anti-colonial freedom movements in Africa and the civil rights struggle in the United States brought attention to racist systems and an international black world and cultures that encompass what came to be known as the African diaspora.⁶

The term was most likely coined at an African history conference at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1965 and has since burgeoned as a field, growing especially in the 1990s and 2000s.⁷ These early works traced the transnational movements of Africans and their descendants as a result of slavery, privileging the slavery era and immediately following emancipation. Since the 1990s historians have focused more attention on specific regions such as

⁶ Some scholars capitalize “Diaspora” when referring to the African Diaspora. I choose to refer to the phenomenon, and historical process, as the African diaspora to acknowledge the multiple meanings and experiences and a lack of unifying, universal understanding of the diaspora.

⁷ Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 3. Some of the most important early works explicitly about the African Diaspora include: Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976, Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad: A Documentary History of the Black Diaspora in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean During the Age of Slavery*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977 and Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982.

the Indian Ocean, or the Atlantic World, and several works have focused on the later, post-slavery period, of the twentieth-century.⁸

Histories of the African diaspora differ from international, global, comparative histories in the ways that they place communities of African descendants at the center, without privileging the nation or nation-state. The nation might be mentioned as a geographical locator, or to create context when necessary, but it is not a key focus within African diasporic studies. Historian Kim Butler wrote one of the pioneering theoretical works on the African diaspora, in which she defines diaspora as physical and cultural movement to and from Africa involving more than one re-location. She also situates the experience within gendered and racialized hierarchies that vary depending on the country and region. Her contribution called for studies of the commonalities between African diasporic communities while allowing for their individual localized, regional, and national differences.⁹

My project is in direct conversation with this body of work, and it has a closer affinity to African diasporic history than any other field. I enter the conversation with a history that examines the contributions of individuals who physically and intellectually created diasporic community through their transnational journeys, writings, and relationships, their participation in international events, and their attempts to reconcile racial and African heritage tensions within their native countries. The nation-state is thus a key part of this history as I argue that the African diasporic imagination of the Americas had direct implications for local civil rights movements. Yet the nation is simply one of the tiers of experience and cultural exchange that I will discuss.

⁸ See as examples Tiffany R. Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World.” *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 11-45, Frank Guridy, “From Solidarity to Cross Fertilization: Afro-Cuban and African American Interaction during the 1930s and 1940s,” *Radical History Review* no. 87 (Fall 2003): 19-48, Brent Hayes Edwards’ *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2003, Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 and Ira Berlin. *The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations*. New York: Viking, 2010.

⁹ Kim Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining A Discourse” in *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 (2001): 189-219.

Local and individual circumstances and stories will illuminate the collective twentieth-century struggles and celebrations of the black consciousness movements of the Americas, and particularly those of Colombia, Cuba, Panama, Brazil, and the United States.

While African diasporic history is a relevant umbrella field from which this project heavily draws, it cross-pollinates with Latin American and African American historiography. In the case of Colombia, scholarship produced in the US has overwhelmingly been dedicated to political and social works on the civil war, guerillas, narco-trafficking and the resulting violence, internal displacement and peace and justice process. Most often these issues are discussed in gender and racial neutral ways, though women and Afro-Colombians have been disproportionately affected by the internal conflicts. Within the field of history, most works on Colombia follow this subject matter, though there have been important works produced on slavery and the early emancipation period. Historical analysis, and cultural history in general, of the twentieth century has been conspicuously absent.¹⁰

Anthropological, sociological, and political science studies have dominated the academic research on blackness and race relations in Colombia.¹¹ Literary scholars in Spanish have contributed to the scholarship of Afro-Latin American authors since the 1970s with the Latin American literary boom period and the rise of Black Studies in the US, led by Miriam DeCosta-

¹⁰ For early works on the history of Afro-Colombian slavery produced by the Colombian academy, see Jorge Palacios Preciado, “La esclavitud y la sociedad esclavista,” in Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, ed., *Manual de Historia de Colombia*. Bogotá: Procultura, 1982, 303-343, and Orlando Fals Borda, *Historia doble de la costa*. Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1984. Within the US academy, see Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Colombia, 1770-1835*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, and Margaret Olsen, *Slavery and Salvation in Colonial Cartagena de Indias*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004.

¹¹ See Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. and *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. New York: Pluto Press, 2010, and Kiran Asher, *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands*. Duke University Press, Durham, 2009.

Willis, and Richard Jackson.¹² I have drawn from these rich studies, yet approach my own work with an historical methodology that will add to the depth and breadth of understanding the twentieth century historical implications of black consciousness in Colombia.

Within historiography on Panama, the most common approach to race relations has been through the lens of US imperialism. Historian Julie Greene has led the field with *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (2010), a history of the Panama Canal construction that places race at the center of US and Panamanian labor structures and tensions in the early twentieth century. Covering the later period of the second half of the twentieth century historian Michael Donoghue considers race in the Canal Zone and Free Zone in *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* (2014). Both works privilege the imperialistic role of the United States while I refocus the attention on Afro-Panamanian conversations around race that influenced and were influenced by travels, journeys, and conversations with US activists and artists (rather than the federal government or military). Within the framework of diaspora, Lok C.D. Siu's *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* poses useful questions about belonging and the nation for Chinese communities in Panama. Yet a large space of opportunity exists for more nuanced, historically focused works on Afro-Panamanian contributions and influence within Panamanian national history and the broader history of the diaspora in the Americas. I touch upon just a few of those contributions.

In contrast to Colombia and Panama, the US academy has produced several meaningful works on Afro-Brazilian history and even more has been written in Brazil.¹³ My work adds to

¹² Miriam DeCosta-Willis, editor, *Blacks in Hispanic Literature: Critical Essays*. New York: Kennikat Press, 1977, Richard Jackson, *The Black Image in Latin American Literature*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976 and Richard Jackson, *Black Writers in Latin America*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979.

this historiography in its transnational approach that privileges relationships and events over nations; connecting Brazil to its American neighbors though it is usually discussed as a national exception within Latin America. While most scholarly works on Abdias Nascimento (a key actor in my dissertation) emphasize his Brazilianness, I highlight his Pan-American, diasporic sense of belonging within his cultural and activism work. This shifts the focus of US-Brazilian black consciousness connections away from the U.S., contradicting the dominance of the U.S. perspective in “US and the World” histories.

As I focus on histories of the African diaspora within the Americas, several works have greatly influenced my perspective within African American history. Those that tie international movements to moments of black expression in the U.S., including the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Power movements have been especially insightful for how I approach international blackness with, and at times against, transnational African culture exchange.¹⁴ The former tends to search for similarities or differences within the black experience while the latter often involves cultural appropriation and redefinitions that travel between two distinct nations.

To understand the ways that ideas around blackness have travelled in a transnational way within literary and artistic circles, I regularly consult the work of Brent Hayes Edwards. Similar to my work, his scholarship traces intellectual networks and the individual contributions that

¹³ For examples from the U.S. see Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Post-Abolition Brazil*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998, Patricia de Santana Pinho, *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, Paulina Alberto, *Terms of Inclusion: Black Intellectuals in Twentieth-Century Brazil*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. The most important Brazilian works on Afro-Brazilians are: Amilcar Araujo Pereira and Verena Alberti, *Historias do Movimento Negro no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Pallas, 2007 and Amilcar Araujo Pereira, *O Mundo Negro: Relações Raciais e a Constituição do Movimento Negro Contemporâneo no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Pallas, 2013.

¹⁴ See Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003 for a thorough discussion of Black Internationalism within the US, Europe, and the Caribbean. For a political history on African American opinions of colonialism abroad, consult Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americas and the State Department, 1945-1969*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999.

formed those networks. Shared political activism is a very different topic, but also enters this project in the ways in which black activists understood cultural work as inherently political. The impact of international travel to Africa on US Civil Rights activists is the topic of Fanon Che Wilkins' "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa Before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-1965" in *The Journal of African American History* (2007).¹⁵ His work is a great example of how individual and group experiences work in tandem. This dissertation similarly explores individual and group experiences, focusing on a broader time frame and more geographically varied process of constructing discourses around those experiences.

Another influential work to this project in understanding the broader political movements on the world stage is Peggy Von Eschen's *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (1997). Von Eschen's work has been especially influential in the way I understand black internationalism and the crucial intersection between civil rights and human rights. Before her groundbreaking work, anti-colonialism among African Americans was typically viewed in support of African liberation movements in the 1960s and 70s. Anti-colonialism, however, has a much longer history and Von Eschen convincingly traces earlier international consciousness and fights against colonialism within the African American community that were then put on hold during the early years of the Cold War. I argue that international black freedom activism continued throughout the Cold War, often through Afro-Colombians and Afro-Brazilians who visited the US to influence the black community through universities and the black press.

The fields of Latin American, African diaspora, and African American history have provided much crucial context and many innovative studies from which to build histories within

¹⁵ Fanon Che Wilkins' "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa Before the Launching of Black Power, 1960-1965" in *The Journal of African American History*, vol. 92, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 467-490.

the frameworks of region, the individual national histories, and the process of diaspora. These fields are forever changing. As a result of the “transnational turn” of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, historians are looking past the confines of the nation-state to identify the ways in which people, commodities, ideas and culture have moved across borders in previously uncharted ways. While this dissertation contributes to that turn, and has been heavily influenced by it, the geographical and historical reframing of this project is the result of an effort to describe a certain hemispheric American perspective and approach to historical discourses, resulting in the African diasporic imagination of the Americas. Detecting this imagination goes beyond crossing borders. It requires a re-mapping of the Americas: recognizing the entire hemisphere for its shared diasporic history of physical and cultural dislocations and movements toward a new homeland that is formed out of that shared historical memory.

Defining Key Terms

This dissertation engages several terms that require definition and consideration. The first is “imagination.” The African diasporic imagination of the Americas contains an envisioning of the past, current reality and future hopes, dreams, and desires. It is neither a fixed idea, nor is it a theory or discourse. It is not a strictly defined set of goals or outcomes.¹⁶ This imagination is different from the “imaginary” used by historian Michelle Stephens in her work *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962* (2005). The “imaginary” that Stephens describes is a perspective informed by multiple

¹⁶ Imagination in this study is in direct conversation with Robin D G Kelley’s concept of “imagination” in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002. Kelley’s use of imagination is a way of describing certain dreams and ideas that reflected aspirations or utopian ideals. I use imagination in this way at times, but branch into further meanings that include concrete spaces for dialogue such as the Congresses of Black Culture of the Americas. Additionally, I do not situate the African diasporic imagination within a political spectrum; it is not necessarily radical, reactionary or conservative, though it may be at times.

discourses situated within a “materialist theory of black internationalism”¹⁷ that arose from the English-speaking West Indies. While this dissertation uses some of the same approaches, it focuses more on intellectual and cultural exchange than materialism, and intentionally highlights the Afro-Latino contributions of Afro-Colombians and Afro-Panamanians to the diasporic imagination of the Americas.

The center of this imagination is engagement with the process of diaspora with a perspective rooted in the Americas alongside a gaze toward Africa. It draws upon the experience of black communities, but it is not the experience itself. It is both individual and collective in the sense that it is felt and formed personally, yet it also shifts through interpersonal and communal conversations that have involved African descendants, and people of all races and ethnicities in the Americas. The imagination can best be understood as a space that was at once intellectual, affective, and physical. As this dissertation describes, it could be expressed in the ideas, feelings, and forms of the words of a poem, the notes of a jazz tune, or symbols painted on a canvas.

Secondly, this is a history of transnational cultural and intellectual exchange. I choose the term “transnational” to emphasize that ideas and cultural production exchanged within the context of particular nation-states regularly crossed and transcended those borders. This differs from “international” which implies that the nation-state is the primary actor, and “supranational” which goes above and beyond the nation-state. In my study, the geographical location of the contact points is significant, yet the people are the focus. It is important that people from Colombia participated in conversations about the diasporic experience of the Americas in light of that country’s specific history and the nationalist rhetoric that shaped understandings of race and race relations. This is also true for the unique histories of Brazil, Cuba, Panama, and the United

¹⁷ Michelle Ann Stephens, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005, 5,13-14.

States. And yet the conversations produced concepts that did not necessarily belong to any one nation. Borders of these nations were crossed, but not erased, making this an explicitly *trans-national* story.

For this reason, “black universalism” is not the main concept that this dissertation engages, though at times the individuals involved in this history sought commonalities that might essentialize the meanings of blackness or a universal black experience.¹⁸ More often shared histories, rather than cultural commonalities, were the focus of the diasporic imagination. Nor is this a history of the popularly studied Black Atlantic, or Atlantic World.¹⁹ To start, the Pacific coast has long been a vibrant location of Afro-Colombian, Afro-Panamanian, and US African American communities that contributed immensely to conversations discussed in this dissertation, though even more work needs to be completed within this geographic focus. Additionally, these terms are not accurate frameworks for this study as they imply a greater consideration of the participation of Africa and Europe than is presented here. Rather I focus on the ways in which those within the diaspora reached out and connected with each other in what they understood to be an American (in the broadest interpretation) brotherhood or kinship situated within specific geographical spaces that mattered to the activists and artists.

¹⁸ The term “blackness” also requires consideration and is a word that carries with it many meanings. Blackness in this dissertation is used to connote a social and cultural identifier that is tied to African heritage. Identifying as black, or being identified as black, occurs differently depending on the country, and even region, in question. For instance, “blackness” can be identified along US regional differences from the East and West coasts, the South, the urban centers, and along socio-economic lines. Similarly, blackness is recognized in the US differently from in Colombia, Brazil, and Panama. Far from being gender or sexually neutral, blackness can also be experienced, or understood, differently by men, women, transgender people and according to sexual orientation.

¹⁹ For examples of prominent works on the Atlantic World and Black Atlantic, see: Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993; John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2d ed. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005; Douglas R. Egerton, et al., *The Atlantic World: A History, 1400-1888*. Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2007 and Jack P. Greene and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Other works that contribute to this body of scholarship include, Emilia María Durán-Almarza and Esther Álvarez-López, eds., *Diasporic Women’s Writing of the Black Atlantic: (En)Gendering Literature and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2014 and Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

For instance, Manuel Zapata Olivella traveled through Central and North America to reach Harlem to meet Langston Hughes. Harlem held specific meaning for Hughes and Zapata Olivella as a convergence point of the diaspora: a neighborhood that was culturally built from the internal US Great Migration and international migrations from the Caribbean and Paris. Zapata and Hughes' friendship would have been experienced differently had they met in another place. As Hughes traveled to Cuba and Colombia, and Zapata Olivella continued to visit and work in the US, their relationship and cultural exchange was transnational as it regularly crossed over borders fluidly. Likewise, Afro-Brazilian Abdias Nascimento participated in conversations about the African diasporic imagination in the Americas while in exile in the US, and from his native country of Brazil. He regularly traveled between the two countries following the end of the Brazilian military dictatorship in the early 1980s. His life, relationships, and works were transnational.

The transnational networks described in this dissertation also engaged in international and supranational conversations. For instance, the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas can be understood as international events, and certain ideas and strategies that emerged from those congresses were supranational ideas—concepts that applied to many nations above and beyond their particular contexts. Yet I argue that the main purpose of the Congresses was to engage in a diasporic imagination of the Americas; to construct a Pan-American black consciousness movement that had its own ideas and goals that acted as catalysts for movements in which some of the same actors were engaged, such as the Black Arts Movement of the US, the *movimento negro unificado* of Brazil, the *movimiento negro* of Colombia, or the Afro-Panamanian movement of Panama.

Thus the African diasporic imagination of the Americas described in this dissertation is best understood in relation to, and in conversation with, other intellectual, cultural, social, and political movements such as Pan-Africanism, Pan-Americanism, and black internationalism. These terms have been used in so many different contexts, that they must be defined within the scope of this study. I understand Pan-Africanism as a series of movements initiated by WEB Du Bois and Marcus Garvey that changed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that sought the complete unification of the African continent and a return of African descendants to that unified land and connected territories within the Americas and Asia. Pan-Africanism strove for a distinct African economic, political, and/or cultural autonomy. The diasporic imagination of the Americas envisioned certain “returns” to Africa, and some of the most influential activists and authors discussed considered cultural and physical returns to Africa at different times in their personal journeys. Yet the authors and activists of the diasporic imagination were not specifically seeking Pan-Africanism as the final goal.

Likewise, this is not exclusively a study of black internationalism. According to Michael O. West and William Martin, the single defining characteristic of the black international is struggle within systemic racism.²¹ They argue that black internationalism has existed since the Age of Revolution and emerged from “black traditions of struggle and resistance in particular localities.” These “local struggles intersected with one another across diverse boundaries to form, loosely and informally, a black international that was greater than the sum of its constituent parts.”²² West and Martin are careful to point out that the black international was a uniquely Western phenomenon (in the Americas and Europe), and not a product of the Eastern African

²¹ Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins, eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 36.

²² West and Martin, “Contours of the Black International: From Toussaint to Tupac,” in West, et al., *From Toussaint to Tupac*, 1.

diaspora (in West Asia, the Mediterranean and Indian subcontinent) because of the lack of a “transcendent sense of African consciousness” in the Eastern diaspora.²³ What I describe in this dissertation is a diasporic imagination that differs from the black international in that it is not wedded to one common experience such as struggle, and it is not atemporal nor aspatial. “International” is simply too imprecise a term. What I have identified is a specific imagination of the Americas, in the Americas, and tied to American experience in the broadest terms, without essentializing that experience to blackness. This diasporic imagination was certainly in conversation with black internationalism, and the activists and artists who participated in the shared imagination often referenced struggle as a reality of the diaspora in the Americas, yet they are not the same idea or framework through which diasporic history is understood in this work.

Central to many of these terms is the socially constructed idea of “blackness” and race more generally. I refer to blackness as a racial social identifier that encompasses a wide range of meanings and experiences.²⁴ Traditionally in the US, blackness has been defined by the “one-drop rule” that identifies all people who have any African heritage as being black. Latin American concepts of blackness have been much more fluid and resist the simple black/white binary found in the US. The most commonly used racial categories stem from the *casta* [caste] classification system developed by colonial Spanish and Portuguese elites. This complex hierarchy of categories included terms used into the present day such as *mestizo* (of mixed race,

²³ Ibid, 36.

²⁴ Central to discussing blackness and black consciousness is an understanding of race as a social construct, far from a biologically hard “truth.” In the nineteenth century the eugenics movement asserted that races could not only be distinguished by external physical markers such as skull and brain size and shape, but that there existed a natural hierarchical order to the human races, and eugenics was seen by some as “an appealing solution to the problem of moral disorder” that arose out of the industrial revolution, increasing urbanization, challenges to traditional gender roles, and resulting perceived social ills that concerned many white middle-class Americans. The above quote is from Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 2. For more on the history of the eugenics movement see also Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

typically European and indigenous), *negro/a* (of African heritage) *mulato/a* (African and European), and *zambo/a* (African and indigenous).²⁵ In contrast to the US where race was marked principally by skin tone, other indicators such as physical characteristics, socio-economic status, and profession marked race along with skin tone in Latin America.

Central to the spectrum of racial categories in Latin America was the process of racial mixing, known generally as *mestizaje* in Spanish and *mestiçagem* in Portuguese. Throughout the twentieth century a variety of terms (*syncretization*, *creolization*, *acculturation*, and *transculturation* to name a few) have been used to describe cultural mixture to account for the various dialects, religious and culinary practices, festivals, clothing, and familial structures that involve elements of indigenous, European, and African cultures in countries throughout the Americas.²⁶ Brazilian Gilberto Freyre and Mexican José Vasconcelos were two of the earliest and most influential intellectuals to argue that their national cultures were formed from racial and cultural mixture. The activists and artists discussed in this dissertation worked in direct conversation with the ideas of “racial democracy,” or the harmonious existence of mixed races within the nation, that were espoused by Freyre and Vasconcelos.

José Vasconcelos (1882-1959), an educator, politician, lawyer and author, published his most influential essay, *La Raza cósmica* [The Cosmic Race] in 1925.²⁷ The essay claimed that a spiritually superior, more advanced race would emerge out of the race mixture of the Americas.

²⁵ The caste system is described in detail in Nina S. de Friedemann, *African Saga: Cultural Heritage and Resistance in the Diaspora*. Sante Fe: Gaon Books, 2008, 83. See also Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

²⁶ Until relatively recently, Asian and Middle Eastern populations in Latin America have been less discussed regarding race relations. For studies analyzing the experiences of the Chinese diaspora in Latin America see Fredy González, “Chinese Dragon and Eagle of Anáhuac: The Local, National, and International Implications of the Ensenada Anti-Chinese Campaign of 1934” in *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 48-68, and Lok C.D. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005.

²⁷ José Vasconcelos, *La Raza cósmica: misión de la raza iberoamericana: notas de viajes a la América de Sur*. Paris: Agencia mundial de librería, 1925.

Brazilian anthropologist Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987) came to a similar conclusion in his *Casa-Grande & Senzala* [The Masters and the Slaves] (1933) that argued that Brazilian society had greatly benefitted from the mixed culture that resulted from white and black Brazilians living in close proximity during slavery.²⁸ Freyre studied under Melville Herskovits at Columbia University in the US. In line with Herskovits' work, he emphasized the value of Afro-Brazilian culture, though mostly in terms of its benefits to white, Portuguese culture in Brazil.

Vasconcelos and Freyre celebrated racial democracy as it principally benefitted white society. Freyre in particular continued to “reinforce the ideal of whitening, showing... the ways in which the white elite” acquired “precious cultural aspects of the Indian and African in Brazil.”²⁹ As many activists pointed out throughout the twentieth century, claiming that all races mixed in Latin America, while privileging whiteness, rendered blackness and indigeneity simultaneously less desirable and less identifiable. Thus blackness became invisible and racism seemingly absent within society. Abdias Nascimento ardently pushed against the concept of racial democracy espoused by Freyre in his influential book, *Brazil, Mixture or Massacre?: Essays in the Genocide of a Black People* (1979).³⁰ Manuel Zapata Olivella, for his part, celebrated the tri-ethnicity of the Americas, drawing from Vasconcelos's work, yet also asserting that black and indigenous cultures should be celebrated for their own cultural merits separate from whiteness.

²⁸ Freyre, Gilberto, translated by Samuel Putnam, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*. [1933 in Portuguese] Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

²⁹ The original Portuguese quote from Kabengele Munanga reads, “sua analise servia principalmente, para reforçar o ideal de branqueamento, mostrando de maneira vivida que a elite (primitivamente branca) adquirira preciosos traços culturais do intimo contato com o africano (e com o índio, em menor escala,” quoted in Amílcar Araújo Pereira, *O Mundo Negro: Relações Raciais e a Constituição do Movimento Negro Contemporâneo no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas Editora, 2013, 78.

³⁰ Abdias do Nascimento, translation by Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *Mixture or Massacre?: Essays in the Genocide of a Black People* [1978]. Buffalo, NY: Afrodiaspora, 1979.

The benefits of recognizing tri-ethnicity, which exists throughout the Americas, is illuminated when approaching diasporic history from Colombia out into the wider Americas. By shifting the historical lens south from the dominance of US diaspora studies, the binary of whiteness and blackness becomes less determinate. The possibilities of racial experience expand, and the hemispheric contributions from more fluid indigenous and African identities become more apparent. Pan-Americanist responses to racism bring into greater relief the ways in which colonial racialized systems have held historically common legacies. Additionally, Colombian and Latin American racial history expose the ways racism has been hidden and uncontested. The process of identifying the nuances of implicit systemic racism is one that would also benefit the US as many Americans continue to believe that the US is in a post-racial era following the US civil rights movement. Much can be learned from Latin American history to address this.

Chapter Overview

The structure of this dissertation consists of six chapters that are split roughly into two parts: the first focuses on increasing awareness, consciousness and reframing of history within the African diasporic imagination, while the second part demonstrates the ways in which that imagination was a catalyst for more public political and social action. While political work was present in the earlier years, cultural forms were consistently used to create conversations around the diasporic imagination. This is especially evident in the poetry, literature, music, and theater analyzed throughout these chapters. Such cultural spaces, often more available when political avenues were restricted, acted as seedbeds for social contestation. By the 1970s cultural production still fostered debates and expressed diasporic ideas that were then used for more political and institutional gains.

The first and last chapters are both heavily based in literature as a window into the worldview of the artists/activists and their attempts to re-write historical memory through poetry and historical novels. Zapata Olivella was part of a wide web of African descendants and their allies who continually sought black liberation and social justice. In the 1940s, the most influential voices were Langston Hughes, Afro-Cuban Nicolás Guillén, and Afro-Colombian Jorge Artel, the main historical actors of the first chapter. It weaves the poetry and discourses of the Harlem Renaissance, *négritude* and *negrismo/Afro-Cubanismo* together through the friendships of the poets. Rather than viewing these three movements as separate from each other, although with a common lineage, I show that when we shift our lens to include Colombia in the historical analysis, we see simultaneous, transnational conversations that deepen our understanding of the meanings of those movements to the artists themselves. An African diasporic identity emerges, rather than one of Harlem, Havana, or the Francophone Caribbean/Paris. A more interconnected, American reality allows the artists and activists to redefine their sense of belonging, disembarking from the middle passage to claim their history.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Chano Pozo, and other Afro-Cuban musicians transformed jazz music by expressing a black experience of orientation and self-discovery. Thus Chapter Two transitions into the 1950s and follows the formation of networks in the US/Cuban jazz world, the international tours of Duke Ellington and Dizzy Gillespie, and the work of dancers Katherine Dunham and Colombian Delia Zapata Olivella.³¹ This chapter analyzes the diaspora as a location, or "locale" toward which the artists were constantly "taking compass points" in their art, friendship, and work. Their goal, quite often, was to make their respective nations appreciate and celebrate African heritage as an essential, even

³¹ Delia Zapata Olivella was the sister of Manuel Zapata Olivella.

definitive part of the national culture as a whole. This national cultural activism is situated within the Cold War context.

The topic of the third chapter is the Black Arts Movement that sought to define a distinct Black Aesthetic and the effort to use cultural production as a form of political liberation in the Americas. I analyze the work of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal who developed jazz theory in poetry, essays, and speeches that articulated the tensions between a universal and uniquely US black identity. Their Black Aesthetic is situated within Baraka and Robert F. Williams' trip to Cuba and the parallel national arts projects run by Zapata Olivella in Colombia. Widening the lens of BAM to include its connections with Cuba and parallel projects in Colombia expands our understanding of the Black Power Movement to which it is essentially tied, but also broadens and deepens our understanding of African diasporic experience more generally.³²

Chapter Four explores the rich terrain of the US and Latin American university systems that provided fertile ground for sharing ideas and constructing discourses around blackness within the Americas. Zapata Olivella, Abdias Nascimento, and Nina S. de Friedemann all taught at US and Latin American universities. This chapter links the opportunities for intellectual exchange provided to by the universities to the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas that were held in Cali, Colombia (1977), Panama City (1980), and São Paulo, Brazil (1982) respectively. Funded in part by UNESCO and the OAS, these conferences created platforms for

³² This answers historian Peniel Joseph's call for much greater study of the Black Power Movement and to understand the ways in which it was intricately tied to the broader US civil rights movement, lengthen the periodization of the movement, and account for the international influences and reverberations of Black Power in "Historians and the Black Power Movement" in *OAH Magazine of History*, vol. 22, no. 3, Black Power (Jul., 2008): 8-15. Many new works have addressed these issues, but my dissertation is the first (to my knowledge) to pay close attention to the crucial role of Zapata Olivella and Afro-Colombians.

discussion of freedom struggles that were conceived of within an international conversation around human rights.³³

After expanding the national context to international goals within the African diaspora, the fifth chapter explains the ways in which the diaspora had a direct impact on national political gains. Because of the ardent dedication of Zapata Olivella, Amir Smith Córdoba, and Nina S. de Friedemann, (who all drew support from their international networks of activists) the most radical civil rights legislation of the Americas was passed in Colombia in 1993: Law 70 protecting indigenous and Afro-Colombian civil rights. A decade later, affirmative action was accepted in Brazilian state and federal universities, and during the final decades of the twentieth century the Panama witnessed a growing Afro-Panamanian movement that led to anti-discrimination gains, and disappointments, for that nation. This chapter explores the ways in which these national civil rights issues were tied to African diasporic conversations of blackness and liberation movements.

The sixth chapter acts as a bookend to the first chapter by returning to mostly literary and intellectual history. I analyze the re-writing of historical memory of the African diaspora to express a more Afro-centric understanding of the past in the Americas.³⁴ These ideas, while not necessarily tied to legal or political action, contributed to a change in awareness and meaning around the diasporic historical connections. A thematic analysis of Manuel Zapata Olivella's *Changó, el gran putas* (1983), Abdias Nascimento's paintings and poems, and the writings of Toni Morrison, Alex Haley, and Gerardo Maloney highlight the intricacies and depth of the web of cultural exchanges within the Americas. These efforts to rewrite historical memory will echo

³³ UNESCO is the acronym for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and OAS is acronym for the Organization of American States.

³⁴ In this context, "Afro-centric" reflects a worldview and approach to history that departs from Western, European-based epistemology. Manuel Zapata Olivella understood his Afro-centric histories to more accurately reflect the African descendant experience within the Americas.

and reflect the earliest works discussed in Chapter One, and act as a call to future action. Literary scholar William Luis has called *Changó* one of the greatest novels of the twentieth century of any genre, though it has been left out of the traditional canon of great literature. This chapter will give that work, and others with which it was in conversation, the long overdue attention that they deserve as works of radical historical revision.

Manuel Zapata Olivella's novel, *Changó, el gran putas*, opens with an invitation to the reader as a "Fellow Traveler" to embark on a journey through the book with an open mind, open heart, and willingness to encounter the unexpected. I similarly invite the reader to join me in a journey through the following chapters that follow closely the life of Zapata Olivella, seeking the gravitational signature of the African diasporic imagination of the Americas from recognition to its mobilization for political, cultural, and social change that emerged from the identified spirit of ekobio. Along the way, the incredible resilience, creativity and deep love for African heritage and culture will be evident in the works of Zapata Olivella and his colleagues Langston Hughes, Abdias Nascimento, Gerardo Maloney and Nina S. de Friedemann (to name a few). Their ability to work together through the challenges of linguistic, national, and cultural barriers to rewrite historical memory within a wider range of perspectives and experiences might inspire future activists and authors to do the same.

CHAPTER ONE

Con “Afán de Ser”: The Intellectual Journeys and Writings of Manuel Zapata Olivella and Langston Hughes, 1920-1950

Marinero, tus canciones navegan más allá de la muerte.
[Sailor, your songs sail far beyond death]

- Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes

Introduction

Manuel Zapata Olivella was born on March 17, 1920 during a torrential downpour. The rain gushed through the thatch-roof of his family’s adobe home in Lorica on the Caribbean Coast of Colombia. The house was so flooded that Manuel’s mother would continuously remind him that the first thing he saw when he came into the world was not light, but water. He mentioned this in several interviews about his early life; it was a fact that held substantial significance for him in explaining his affinity for water, rivers, and the “amphibious” lifestyle of coastal Colombians.¹

The natural fluvial landscape was an important reference with which Zapata Olivella understood himself and his place in the world. As a young child, he visited the Sinu River nearly daily just to watch his reflection in its waters.² He insisted that his two grandchildren be named after the sea: Manuela del Mar (Manuela of the Sea) and Carib (in honor of the Caribbean). It is

¹ Interview of Manuel Zapata Olivella in María Adelaida López, *Manuel Zapata Olivella: abridor de caminos, un documental*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2007. DVD. The concept of “amphibious” lifestyle is discussed by Colombian historian Orlando Fals Borda in *Historia doble de la costa*. Bogotá: Carlos Valencia, 1979-86 and Jason McGraw, *The Work of Recognition: Caribbean Colombia and the Postemancipation Struggle for Citizenship*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2014, 14.

² José Luis Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella, caminante de la literatura y de la historia*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2002, 94.

through the lens of water that we approach the early life and journeys of Manuel Zapata Olivella, which are marked by a growing black consciousness, a call to civil rights justice, and an early awareness of the African diaspora within the Americas. Water was indeed one of the most prominent elements of the diaspora beginning with the slave trade's crossing of the Atlantic Ocean and inter-Caribbean sailings within the Middle Passage.

Water connected Zapata Olivella to others in his native Colombia, and also to African descendants in the diaspora that was especially crucial to the diasporic imagination of the Americas. His personal journeys through Mexico and the United States, coupled with his intellectual travels through the literature of the Harlem Renaissance shed light on the deep cultural connections and ties between the US and Latin America from the 1920s to the 1940s. Links between the two regions in this time period push against the dominant historical scholarship that mark US history as exceptional, and emphasize inherent differences between Anglo-European North America and Latin America.³

The Harlem Renaissance, *negrismo* and *afrocubanismo*, for instance, have been historically understood as separate movements that arose from unique national circumstances. This understanding of the movements isolates their contributing members from each other, when their personal relationships and interactions while abroad were some of the most defining moments in their lives and diasporic work. Thus this chapter shifts the historical lens to the transnational relationships and shared affinities of the artists and activists of these movements. Their common goals and aspirations, amid their differences, emerges and illuminates an African

³ There is a rich body of literature produced in Latin America that actively separates the region from the US as US imperialism increased around the turn of the nineteenth to twentieth century. Authors such as José Martí (Cuba), Octavio Paz (Mexico), Augusto César Sandino (Nicaragua), José Carlos Mariátegui (Peru) discussed the concepts of "latinidad" in contrast to US cultural identity. Also, Jeff Gould's *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880-1965*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998 speaks to the role of imperialism in US in understandings of race and ethnicity in Latin America. In the case of Nicaragua, Gould argues that *mestizaje* was articulated as an anti-imperialist discourse during the US invasion in ways that pulled attention away from the indigenous minority.

diasporic imagination of burgeoning black art that was created within cultural connections between North and South America and the Caribbean.

These cultural connections were built through a dialectical process of distance and closeness, similarities and differences, reaching out for international community and then retreating to the national context of one's homeland. The African diasporic imagination was constructed along the water routes that at times separated the regions of the Americas, and at other times brought them intimately together. The waters of the Caribbean were a passage of exchange and separation that Manuel Zapata Olivella and his colleagues, friends, and fellow activists navigated with an eagerness to find their individual voices, find community, and articulate their particular worldview within national and international historical narratives. Some of the most influential artists who formed part of Zapata Olivella's constellation of black artists include the poets Langston Hughes (US), Nicolás Guillén (Cuba), and Jorge Artel (Colombia): they will receive special attention in this chapter.

This chapter traces the ideas and cultural expressions around blackness of the 1920s to the 1940s, by following the personal travels of Manuel Zapata Olivella closely. When relevant, the narrative branches out to follow these ideas and artistic media to different locations and artists. Zapata Olivella's native Colombia has been traditionally understudied in histories of black movements and this chapter seeks to remedy that absence through added emphasis on Colombian participation in African diasporic dialogues. In order to understand later developments in Afro-Colombian history within the diaspora, first we must situate the country within the diasporic Americas and underscore the common experiences of the legacy of slavery with the rest of the region. Particular attention is paid to the state of racialized experience during the time period when Zapata Olivella came of age, between the 1920s and 1940s.

Following Zapata Olivella's early encounters with race identity, we turn to the most impactful journey of Zapata Olivella's life: his trip from Colombia to the US from 1943 to 1947. On this journey he engaged with key soul-searching questions around race, socioeconomic class, and ideologies of socialism and communism that had a powerful influence on his later novels, memoirs, and poetry. These early experiences were similar to the processes of self-discovery that Langston Hughes and other Harlem Renaissance authors described in their work. The act of being a vagabond and wanderer was one of those experienced and is analyzed as an historically specific approach to engaging with race relations throughout the Americas in the inter-war period, with special focus on the 1930s and 1940s.

The final section of the chapter then transitions to poetry as a means of creative response to the travels and self-transformation that so many black activists, including Zapata Olivella, undertook during the 1930s and 1940s. Poetry was understood as a means of self-expression and as a unifying agent among disparate communities; it was the synthesis of connection and separation in the dialectic process of engaging with the African diasporic imagination. The most influential ideas produced in the poetry of Langston Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, and Jorge Artel are discussed and interwoven through the early understandings of black consciousness for Manuel Zapata Olivella.

As a whole, this chapter paints a portrait of the early overlapping ideas exchanged by artists and activists during their personal travels as they encountered race relations and experiences of the Americas in the mid-twentieth century. At times these ideas were exchanged in person, and at times they were read in letters or printed materials that traveled far distances. These ideas were the results of relationships between people who lived the diasporic dialectic process of closeness and distance with their fellow African descendants. This chapter will thus

map out the origins of a diasporic imagination in the western hemisphere that was built in the connections and exchanges between African descended people across multiple national contexts. As subsequent chapters will show, this diasporic imagination, far from being inevitable, was developed intentionally by activists and artists who shifted their approaches and ideas throughout the twentieth century. As a result of this exchange, the diasporic imagination could serve as a crucial inspirational element for multiple black consciousness movements.

Situating Colombia in the Diasporic America



Map 1. Principal Cultural Contact Points of the African Diaspora included in Chapter One. National Geographic MapMaker Interactive, 2015.



Map 2. Caribbean Coast of Colombia from the Darién to Barranquilla (does not include Santa Marta and La Guajira further to the east). National Geographic MapMaker Interactive, 2015.

Water is the main trade route on both coasts of Colombia. On the Pacific, the historical lack of roads and infrastructure in the dense tropical rain forest has made the sea the easiest form of travel for goods and people, mainly out of the port of Buenaventura. On the Atlantic side, the Magdalena River flows from the capital city of Bogotá to the Caribbean coast, connecting the interior of the country to the Atlantic world. The Magdalena has been the principle trade route through Colombia from the pre-Columbian period: gold, emeralds, and salt mined from the Andes have long traveled her waters. With Spanish colonial settlement in the sixteenth century, the slave trade burgeoned in the Caribbean. Cartagena de Indias became the largest slave port of entry in South America and with it came a legacy that intimately formed the experience of blackness in the Colombian coastal region.

Entering the Americas enslaved has held historical significance to the diasporic imagination, though the arrival has been less present in the collective historical memory of black communities than the experience of the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage, or journey across the Atlantic in overcrowded slave ships, has come to represent an on-going, atemporal process rather than a singular event for Zapata Olivella and his fellow writers and activists throughout the Americas.⁴ It was a forced journey from their homeland to a diasporic land that redefined the enslaved people's understanding of themselves, their communities, and their relationships with their ancestors that took place in the past, but held meaning in the present and for future generations.

The water of the Middle Passage represented captivity and a loss of freedom and fundamental human rights. The chains of bondage held meaning of one people's dominance over and exploitation of another, yet Zapata Olivella underlined the paradox of those chains in the potential for liberation from oppression. Toward the end of his life he remarked, "The first African they brought here was brought in chains, and the last they brought here was brought in chains. Chains are the symbol of freedom for the Africans."⁵ This statement links the Middle Passage and water to the pain of forced relocation, and simultaneously to the possibility of freedom and return. While Zapata Olivella does not explain his paradoxical statement that "chains are the symbol of freedom for the African" his other writings would suggest that the process of removing those chains has been a struggle of freedom and liberation that has been constant since the time of slavery.

⁴ See for example, see Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983) and Aimé Césaire, translation by Joan Pinkham, *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.

⁵ The original Spanish reads, "Primer Africano que trajeron acá, lo trajeron encadenado, y el último que trajeron acá, lo trajeron encadenado. Las cadenas son para los Africanos, el símbolo de la libertad." Manuel Zapata Olivella speaking in the film by López, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*.

Water was a key element of this search for Zapata Olivella. His understanding of his connection to the seas and rivers was a metaphor for his fluid sense of self that was constantly changing in his early years as a vagabond wanderer of the Americas. These journeys and observations of the wider world led Zapata Olivella to develop racial awareness through his own identity formation, and to connect him to a close network of writers, artists and activists who influenced and helped sustain his work throughout the rest of the twentieth century. Zapata Olivella engaged in his intellectual and physical journeys as a means of finding connection within the Americas, yet the popular imagination in the US, Cuba, and Colombia often reflected two very different ways of viewing the relationship between the US and the Caribbean: on the one hand, separated by cultural and physical distance and exoticized, and on the other hand, deeply interconnected by history and community.

When Zapata Olivella was coming of age in the 1930s and 1940s, US newspapers, travel books, and historical accounts often portrayed the Caribbean region as exotic and distant. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia and Havana, Cuba would have been two tropical locations most immediately associated with the Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century in the US. They were popular tourist destinations up until the 1950s when civil war broke out in Colombia and the Cuban Revolution overthrew the US-supported Batista government.⁶ Havana of the 1920s through 1950s was famous for its beautiful beaches, overtly sexualized women seemingly available in its widespread prostitution industry, and casinos and dance halls that attracted tourists from Europe and the US. While the cultural history of Havana in this time period has been dominated by this image, recent historical scholarship has started to explore the “diverse

⁶ For more on tourism in Cuba prior to the Revolution, see Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

cultural scene that extended beyond U.S. American tourist sectors of the city.” Yet the stereotype was continually reproduced in the US popular imagination of Cuba.⁷

Manuel Zapata Olivella was well aware of this exotic gaze upon the Caribbean from the North American perspective. In a letter to Langston Hughes in 1947, he wrote, “I don’t know why artists of color do not come to South America more often. Could it be because they imagine that we wear loincloths and that we’re cannibals?”⁸ Perhaps the most striking aspects of this comment are his underlying desire for a more intimate connection and cultural exchange between the US and South America and his understanding that North Americans, including African Americans, likely exoticized his country. Also mentioned is the image of Colombians wearing loincloths and being cannibals as a primitive stereotype that was associated with most tropical places in the US popular imagination. These imagines portrayed a savage, underdeveloped and “backward” society that was in need of civilizing from the Anglo-European countries of the Western Hemisphere. This perspective held deep historical roots embedded in US foreign and imperialistic policy that was in place during Zapata Olivella’s formative years as a child and young adult.

Following the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, countries of the Atlantic World were feverishly attempting to develop their cities and urban centers in line with capitalist ideology. This disrupted the previously dominant agrarian lifestyle and ushered in urban “anxieties” that came with mechanistic jobs, strained and unsanitary living conditions in

⁷ Quoted in Frank Guridy, “Feeling Diaspora in Harlem and Havana” in *Social Text*, 98, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 126.

⁸ The original Spanish reads, “No sé por que razón no vienen con más frecuencia artistas de color por este Sur America ¿Será acaso porque se imaginan que estamos con taparabos [sic?] y somos antropófagos” in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, 29 August 1947, Box 176, Folder 3229, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Langston Hughes Papers, 1862-1980. This collection will be referred to as LHP throughout this dissertation.

overcrowded tenement housing and neighborhoods, and the massive influx of immigrants who arrived throughout the Americas with their language and cultural traditions.

From these industrial and urban revolutions, the United States emerged as a hemispheric and world power by the early twentieth century, and its influence was acutely felt in Latin America through imperialist claims in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Panama. The legacy of the Monroe Doctrine of the 1820s had positioned the US as the protector of Latin America from European ambitions and justified US presence throughout the region. This purportedly anti-imperial policy practically installed the US as the preeminent imperial influence throughout Latin America. President Theodore Roosevelt made US intentions explicit in the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine declared in December of 1904. The corollary asserted that the US could intervene in another American nation's affairs if that country was threatened by intervention of a European country.

At the time of this corollary, Colombia had an especially tenuous relationship with the United States due to the latter's acquisition of the Panama Canal territory. The canal was built between 1904 and 1913 after the US supported a Panamanian uprising against Colombia when the Colombian government refused the US offer to purchase the territory in order to build the canal. This early US presence in the Panama Canal Zone, and in the Colombian Caribbean region more generally, continued through the twentieth century as US economic ventures expanded. Military bases were strategically established to protect US interests and were augmented by the First and Second World Wars. The Roosevelt Corollary was a means of explaining US influence in terms of protecting the local "people" and their right to freedom from European hegemony.⁹

⁹ As argued by Mary Renda in *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2001 and Ada Ferrer's *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and*

In the process of justifying imperialist policies, the US military and state defined intervention in the Caribbean in terms of protection that marked the region as distinctly separate and “other” from the US.¹⁰ Adding another layer to this complex relationship, historian Gilbert Joseph brings into relief the ways in which imperial claims did not simply flow one direction -- from a hegemonic US to the oppressed colony -- rather cultural exchange throughout the Americas is evident upon close inspection of cultural experiences. For example, baseball has been traditionally understood to be a quintessential US sport, yet it is the second most popular sport in Caribbean Colombia, just behind soccer. This love of baseball is shared with other Caribbean nations such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Venezuela. Joseph reminds the reader that, “Fidel Castro quoted Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson long before he invoked Lenin, and for a time played baseball as passionately as politics.”¹¹ Before the Cuban Revolution and the Cold War climate of the second half of the twentieth century, Cuba and the United States were far from polarizing countries in many senses; they were tethered closely to Caribbean nations through the passages of water, and also through the passages of ideas, ideologies, and cultural exchanges.

Scholarship of the past decade has explored these local, quotidian ties in the context of the African diaspora and demonstrates close connections within the Caribbean region that break the exoticizing narratives. Historian Rebecca Scott documents the intertwined post-emancipation sugar cane cultures of nineteenth-century Louisiana and Cuba in her book, *Degrees of Freedom*

Revolution, 1868-1898. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1999, US protection over the Americas was often constructed racially and within patriarchal rhetoric and military culture.

¹⁰ “Other” in this case refers to rhetorical, political, and cultural distancing from the US. Edward Said has explained this process, in part, in his classic text, *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978 where Said studies the West’s patronizing perceptions and depictions of people who inhabit Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. While “Orientalism” does not directly address the US-Latin American relationship, concepts from the theory are applicable to understanding the ways in which the “other” is placed in contrast to Western, or in this case US, culture.

¹¹ Gilbert M. Joseph, et al., eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, 2.

(2005) and traces the ways in which political activists in New Orleans and Havana followed and understood each other's campaigns and tribulations. This knowledge allowed them to "see what freedom had come to mean on the other shore, with all that this might suggest about their own future" and that travel throughout the Gulf of Mexico was often "an effort to gain rights at home by going farther afield in pursuit of alliances and respect."¹² While Scott's analysis is situated within the context immediately following emancipation in the US and Cuba, the ideals of freedom unrealized in the crucial step from slavery to "free" societies became the goals that defined parallel ideals of the twentieth-century.

Picking up chronologically where Scott's narrative leaves off, Frank Guridy explains the process of "cross-fertilization" of nationalist ideas in US and Cuba in the era of Garveyism. The Pan-African leader Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) created dedicated followers in Havana who studied at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and exchanged understandings of blackness and Pan-African identity between the two nations.¹³

These historical understandings of Caribbean culture reflect the larger tendency to see interconnection almost exclusively with the Antilles islands. This approach moves the US out of its isolated historiography to more transnational analyses that account for interconnection within the Americas, while still preserving and honoring national differences. While enlightening, these studies often leave out or only briefly mention participants from countries such as Colombia and Panama. African diasporic connections have long involved multiple nodes of exchange between

¹² Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005, 2,4.

¹³ See Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. Also, while Cuba has often been understood as having a special relationship with the US due to its proximity to the US and US political and economic interests on the island. This view of Cuban exceptionalism within Latin American history, while valid in certain analyses, has eclipsed the cultural exchange throughout the Americas that includes Cuba and Colombia. This chapter seeks to expand the cultural lens to include Colombia to show the ways in which the diasporic imagination shifts when that part of the Caribbean is included in the analysis.

the commonly studied nations such as the US, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, and are more fully understood when we draw the circle of interconnection wider to include Colombia. The mainland nations of Central and South America have held a central place in the narratives of African diasporic cultural and intellectual exchange and must be moved into the purview of wider diasporic historiography. Colombia, with a majority black population on its Caribbean coast, has long been a region of active writers, thinkers, activists and artists who have been among the most influential diasporic leaders throughout the twentieth century.

The founding father of Afro-Colombian writing is generally understood to be Candelario Obeso, the *costeño* [from the coast] poet who wrote in the late nineteenth-century and whose collection of poems, *Cantos populares de mi tierra* (1877), directly addressed black identity, pride, and racial discrimination within Colombian political and public society.¹⁴ A long line of writers claims intellectual genealogy from Obeso including: Jorge Artel, Amir Smith Córdoba, and Manuel Zapata Olivella and his brother, Juan. The importance of poetry for Afro-Colombian consciousness, within the context of the African diaspora, will be explored later in this chapter.

The literary and intellectual journeys of Manuel Zapata Olivella clearly demonstrate the participation of South American African descendants in the rich black literary and artistic movements of the early twentieth century that have been firmly placed geographically in Paris, New York, and the Caribbean islands. The Harlem Renaissance, franco-phone *négritude* movement, and Spanish-speaking *negrismo* and *afrocubanismo* are typically understood as successive movements that loosely influenced each other from the 1920s through the 1940s. Literary scholar Brent Hayes Edwards has demonstrated the significant dialogue between New York and Paris that intricately connected Harlem to *négritude*, yet the Spanish-speaking

¹⁴ The adjective *costeño* describes a person from either the Pacific or Atlantic coast of Colombia. Candelario Obeso was from Mompox, an Atlantic coastal town in the Bolivar Department.

participants are left out of his analysis.¹⁵ By shifting the historical lens to the Caribbean coast of Colombia, and focusing on the participation of its black artists in international movements, a greater understanding of the relevance and import of these movements becomes apparent. Additional meanings emerge from the Spanish-speaking contributions to the diasporic language that has historically emphasized conversations held in English and French. The friendships and networks formed across these translations began with the simple act of discovery through travel: from a desire to wander the world.

Journeys to Find the Self: “Vagabundaje” in the African Diaspora of the Americas

Zapata Olivella had always had a deep desire to explore. As a child he used the rivers of the Caribbean coast as reference points and guides as he walked by foot throughout the region, drawn to the water as a means of travel. He described his hometown of Lorica, “we could define this shire as fluvial; running waters in the rivers, creeks, marshlands, big torrential downpours in the area of the gulf of Morrosquillo.”¹⁶

River and water culture was the first link that Zapata Olivella felt to the United States of America. Remembering his earliest literary influences, he recalled reading Mark Twain in Colombia and relating to his works not through their humor and satire, but through the everyday workings of the Mississippi River. Zapata Olivella stated that “another author who influenced me very much was Mark Twain” and he felt connected to Twain’s work through the way he portrayed “the sailors on the Mississippi” who shouted “ ‘the depth’ [of the water] and something similar occurred on the vessels that went from Cartagena to Lorica through the river

¹⁵ See Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

¹⁶ The original Spanish reads, “la podríamos nosotros definir como una comarca fluvial; aguas corrientes en los ríos, cañadas, ciénagas, grandes aguaceros torrenciales en la proximidad del golfo de Morrosquillo” in Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, 91.

and when they would enter the mouth of the river, they would start to yell: two yards, one yard, seven inches.”¹⁷

The similarity of this nautical language across such a great distance caught Zapata Olivella’s attention, and ignited an early sense of compatriotism with the workers of the Mississippi. It also is an example of how he felt close to a place very far from him geographically and culturally. Zapata Olivella’s engagement with the river culture of the Mississippi marks simultaneous difference and similarity and a curiosity to experience lands far away. In his early years these travels were accomplished through literature, and he later embarked on physical journeys to better understand himself and his role in the world.

Indeed, Zapata Olivella’s reflection on his affinity with the US underscores the sense of belonging that Zapata Olivella craved and sought. As a man of diverse ethnic heritage, he was keenly aware of his African, indigenous, and European ancestral roots. His father, Antonio María Zapata, was a *mulatto* (of African and European descent), and his mother, Edelmira Olivella, a *mestiza* of indigenous and European heritage. His father was a radical liberal educator who ran a school, La Fraternidad (The Brotherhood), out of the family’s household in Lorica and then Corralito de Piedra, Cartagena de Indias.

Thus Zapata Olivella, and his siblings, grew up in a household dedicated to reading, learning, and a sense of racial pride. Zapata Olivella’s earliest memories include listening to his father give morning readings aloud in the household for the family. His father read authors of the European and American literary canon, including: Jules Verne, Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas, and James Fenimore Cooper. Upon later reflection, Zapata Olivella did not differentiate the

¹⁷ The passage reads in Spanish, “otro autor que me influyó mucho fue Mark Twain...los acompañantes de los capitanes de navegación, en el Mississippi, iban gritando ‘la profundidad,’ y algo parecido sucedía en las embarcaciones que iban de Cartagena a Lorica a través del río y cuando entraban en las bocas, desde ellas comenzaban a gritar: dos yardas, una yarda, siete pulgadas...” Ibid, 102.

process of listening to the stories by ear from reading them on the page.¹⁸ His appreciation for oral culture and its place in Afro-Colombian folklore likely stem from these early experiences and the cultural influence of his mother who taught her children “que no debían transgredir ‘la palabra de los mayores, la memoria de los difuntos, ni la ley de la tribu.’” [They should not transgress the word of the elderly, the memory of the deceased, nor the tribal law]. Zapata Olivella credits his mother for instilling a sense of heart and spirit into his worldview, and his father for his intellectual curiosity.¹⁹

Such early experiences embedded an ethnic and racial pride in Zapata Olivella that prompted him to enter a writing contest in 1936 organized by his literature teacher, the pioneering Afro-Colombian poet, Jorge Artel.²⁰ Zapata Olivella won the contest with the essay on inter-racial culture of the Americas. That first success marked his work as an author and began his use of writing as a form of activism, though his goals for racial equality would continue to develop throughout the rest of his life. It was not until he left Cartagena and moved to the capital city of Bogotá that Zapata Olivella started to become aware of what racism meant on a systemic level. He saw the lack of Afro-Colombian representation in the university, politics, and within leadership positions of the capital city.

Having been somewhat sheltered in his home environment, the larger context of Colombian national rhetoric around race became more apparent in Bogotá. Following the abolition of slavery in 1855, Colombian racial discourse centered on nationalism that revolved around the ideal of *mestizaje*, or racial mixture between the European and indigenous populations, at the exclusion of African heritage. Politicians of the late nineteenth and early

¹⁸ Manuel Zapata Olivella in *Ibid*, 92-93

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p19.

²⁰ Jorge Artel’s contribution to diasporic poetry is discussed later in this chapter.

twentieth centuries echoed the common scientific beliefs in eugenics that the Caucasian race was the most advanced and capable of industrial development.

A large-scale campaign of *blanqueamiento* [“whitening”] began in the early twentieth century in an effort to attract European immigrants. This ideology was frankly stated in the 1920s with the passage of Law 144 that authorized the immigration of white Europeans as a “necessary condition” to national progress.²¹ While mass immigration from European countries never reached the levels of Argentina or Brazil in Colombia, the racialized intention to “whiten” the nation was still present. Politician Laureano Gómez, later to become president, stated in 1928, “The black is a plague. In the countries where he has disappeared, as in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, it has been possible to establish economic and political organization on a strong and stable basis.”²² These beliefs of the elite were reinforced by the fact that white Colombians held almost an exclusive hold on positions of leadership in government, business and the Catholic Church.

As a medical student in the prestigious Universidad Nacional in the 1940s, Zapata Olivella studied almost exclusively with white and *mestizo* students. In contrast to the Caribbean coast, he was in the minority racially in the capital city for the first time in his life. Immediately he felt conspicuous and out of place, and his racial consciousness began to take shape. He later recalled that when children passed him the streets they would “grab their parents’ hands with force, showing their fear of a black man.”²³ With time he began to act with a subtle rebelliousness to the sense of rejection he felt. He showed this outwardly by refusing to repair his torn pants, wearing unusual hats, and walking by foot long distances instead of taking the bus.

²¹ Jaime Arocha, “Inclusion of Afro-Colombians: Unreachable National Goal?” in *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 25, no. 3, Race and Identity in the Americas (May, 1998), 77

²² Nina S. de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha, “Colombia” in Minority Rights Group, ed., *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today*. London: Minority Rights Publications, 1995, 65.

²³ Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, 20.

His colleagues began to remark on his behavior. After questioning Manuel on his “strange deliriums and rebelliousness”, Alfonso Uribe Uribe, his medical school professor, determined that Manuel was not crazy as many thought. He declared that rather than being insane, “usted lo que tiene es afán de ser” [what you have is a case of being in a rush to be]. He did not yet know what this “rush to be” meant, or what it would become, but he knew that it was the beginning of his journey to find himself and his place in the world.

With this diagnosis, Manuel left medical school and set out on the journey of a lifetime: to travel by land and sea from Colombia to Central and North America. Fueled by the writings of vagabond authors such as Max Gorki, Jack London, Panait Istrati, and Miguel Cervantes, Zapata Olivella understood his need to travel in solidarity with these authors, and others he would meet along the way. He did not associate his need to escape Colombia explicitly with racism, but rather he understood his identity crisis on a larger, more humanistic level. Zapata Olivella was driven purely by a desire to discover a more authentic self, denied to him by the racist society of Colombia, and the Americas more broadly. His ultimate goal was to arrive in Harlem, New York City, and meet Langston Hughes, the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance.²⁴

A close look at this journey that began in 1943 of the young Afro-Colombian man demonstrates that rather than experiencing these movements separately, the ideas produced at this time were often exchanged simultaneously. Zapata Olivella encountered the black literary movements in a variety of contexts. The Harlem Renaissance, *negritude*, *negrismo*, and *afrocubanismo* occurred in different nations, separated by borders and linguistic barriers, but they were in fact closely sewn together through the threads of ideas shared throughout the journeys of their participants. This desire to find a more authentic self and to connect with a

²⁴ Laurence E. Prescott, “Brother to Brother: The Friendship and Literary Correspondence of Manuel Zapata Olivella and Langston Hughes” in *Afro-Hispanic Review*, vol. 25, no. 1, (Spring 2006), 91.

“reality” beyond the national discourse was typical of modernist thinkers and artists at the time. Several decades before the white authors of the Beat generation published their works romanticizing the nomadic bohemian lifestyle of rejecting societal norms the “vagabond” existence was a strong theme for black writers in the US and Paris.²⁵

For Jamaican-born author Claude McKay, being a vagabond was a necessary way of life, key to survival in crowded urban centers that privileged whiteness as synonymous with upward mobility. Set in post-war Marseilles, France, his novel *Banjo* (1928) portrays a working class neighborhood of vagabonds who live through improvisation, constantly shifting jobs and locations to find new opportunities. His style of writing was striking in the 1920s for its “photographic” portrayals of reality in a country where many African and Caribbean colonial soldiers decided to stay in Europe following the First World War. France, like Harlem, offered a more fluid space within which to explore concepts of identity, racial solidarity, and artistic expression than had been previously available.

Perhaps the most famous female author of the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston similarly writes of finding the self through journey and travel. Her most celebrated novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), narrates the personal spiritual, physical, and emotional journeys of Janie Crawford, who finds her authentic self through a series of relationships that lead her to find her own internal voice.²⁶ Hurston’s conservative political ideas around the power of the individual further alienated her from radical colleagues who fought for systemic changes in U.S. society. Yet her work can also be read as a testament to individual agency within the

²⁵ Examples of Beat authors who began publishing in the 1950s include: Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs.

²⁶ This assertion of the individual was often interpreted by critics as denying the systemic problems of racism in Jim Crow US society. Thus Hurston’s relationships within the Renaissance were complicated. She experienced various degrees of support and alienation throughout the 1930s and 1940s from fellow black artists. Langston Hughes collaborated with Hurston; they co-wrote the play *Mule Bone* together in 1930. In February of 1931, they quarreled over its authorship and became estranged.

racist system. This seizure of personal destiny and power is precisely what Zapata Olivella sought, and what Langston Hughes would similarly accomplish in his personal journeys. Being subject to, and the object of, power is a theme echoed throughout both of their writings, a literary theme that greatly influenced Zapata Olivella's understanding of US society.

Zapata Olivella's first contact with US citizens occurred in Panama on a ship from Buenaventura, Colombia at the start of his trans-American "vagabond" journey in 1943. As he remembers it, American Marines, fearful of a German attack on the Panama Canal, suspected him of being a German spy and captured him at gunpoint. They took him to a military camp where he was jailed and then questioned in "unrecognizable" languages before it was discovered that he spoke Spanish. Given limited information, he understood that he would be executed without justice, but the next morning he was pleasantly surprised to find that the Marines gave him a ham and cheese sandwich to help him on his journey. After being released, he ran up the beach and headed into Central America to make his way to Mexico.²⁷

This event, as remembered by Zapata Olivella, is significant in its portrayal of the US military and its perceived use of force. Zapata Olivella clearly envisioned the encounter as negative from the outset, and saw few options for him beyond death: the result of gross linguistic misunderstandings. Fortunately for Zapata Olivella, the exchange ended in his favor and he was free to continue his journey. Zapata Olivella subsequently made his way to Mexico where he joined a community of fellow travelers and vagabonds that had a powerful impact on his political and artistic views. He recalled the various jobs that he needed to work in order to survive, and the key intellectuals and artists whom he met during this journey.

As he moved through the Mexican states, he worked as a messenger, dishwasher, fisherman, muleteer, mechanic's assistant, medical assistant and journalist. While working as a

²⁷ Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, 24-25.

medical assistant in Mexico City, Zapata Olivella attended the Mexican artist Diego Rivera who had pneumonia at the time. When Rivera asked Zapata Olivella how he could pay him for his services, Zapata Olivella responded that he wanted to model for one of Rivera's murals that was to be painted in the Secretary of Education building in Mexico City. According to Zapata Olivella, his figure is painted in the mural that emphasizes working class culture of Mexico's *mestizo* laborers. Participating in this art form helped to concretize his vision as a worker of the world and part of the American proletariat. Connections to Rivera, and his circle of socialist thinkers, further underscored the liberal teachings Zapata Olivella had received at home in Colombia.

Throughout his journeys, Zapata Olivella continually returned to writing as a means of processing his experiences and articulating them to a wider public, always with special focus on the most dispossessed and underserved populations. He became a journalist for several Mexican newspapers, including: *América*, *Hoy*, *Sucesos para todos*, *Mañana*, and *Cinema Reporter*. Because of his credentials as a reporter, he was allowed to enter the United States through California in 1946, where he was commissioned to write stories about the inhumane treatment of Mexican farm workers by Californian fruit and vegetable companies.²⁸ This task provided him with plenty of added evidence with which to form his socialist and communist political leanings that he held throughout his life.

The travels of Zapata Olivella were a rich time for reflection. He not only researched various examples of exploitation within the US, but he also experienced racial discrimination on a level that illuminated inequalities in his home country of Colombia. On his first bus in Los Angeles, he was asked to move from a front seat, reserved for white passengers, to the back section of the bus. Then while working at the General Hospital of Los Angeles he interrupted a

²⁸ Ibid, 27-28.

white doctor during a lecture and was punished by being sent to clean bedpans dirty with excrement. He understood the doctor's reaction as one that was made in response to his race. Zapata Olivella interpreted the event as another example of racial discrimination where he was expected to be silent and deferential. These experiences, the most degrading of his life to that point, drove him to head immediately for New York City, where he believed that Harlem would welcome him in racial solidarity as an African descendant.

Eventually Zapata Olivella arrived in Harlem in 1946, the "mecca" of his pilgrimage, where he was eager to meet intellectuals and in particular, Langston Hughes. He later recalled what motivated him to find Hughes,

When I arrived in Harlem as a pure vagabond, deserted, starving, I came to the house of Langston Hughes. All I knew of him was his novel, *Not Without Laughter*, that had been translated into Spanish, and *The Big Sea*, his autobiographical novel. And from that autobiographical novel I guessed that Langston was the man, the brother, the teacher that I needed in that moment in which I was overcoming the stage of vagabondage and I was anchoring into historical responsibility.²⁹

Zapata Olivella illuminates the special relationship he sought from Hughes: that of a friend, brother, and mentor. He hoped to find in Hughes kinship based in racialized experience, and professional guidance, as the personal and public were inseparable within the African diasporic work of many poets. The "historical responsibility" that Zapata Olivella felt was to work against the impoverished and oppressive conditions in which many African descendants lived in his native Colombia and whom he encountered on his travels. The distance and

²⁹ The quote reads in Spanish, "Cuando yo llegué a Harlem en plan de vagabundo, de desertado, de hambriento, me acerqué a la casa de Langston Hughes. Yo de él solamente conocía su novela Pero con risas, que había sido traducida al español, y El inmenso mar, un relato autobiográfico. Y a través de este relato autobiográfico yo adivinaba que Langston era el hombre, el hermano, el maestro que necesitaba en ese instante en que yo estaba ya superando la etapa del vagabundaje y estaba anclando en la responsabilidad histórica," Manuel Zapata in an interview in Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, 110-111. *Not Without Laughter* by Langston Hughes was first published in 1930 and was translated into Spanish by the Argentine publisher, Editorial Futuro, in 1945.

difference between the two men was overcome, in Zapata Olivella's imagination, by their common heritage and desire to write against the status quo.

As Zapata Olivella arrived in Harlem, the question lingers as to whether Langston Hughes felt the same sense of kinship and professional bonding with the Afro-Colombian who was eighteen years younger than Hughes. How would Hughes receive Zapata Olivella? As a Spanish-speaking foreigner? As a diasporic brother? What were his first thoughts when Zapata Olivella arrived on his doorstep? Hughes' direct perspective on their first encounter is not in the letters or notes available for this chapter, but other evidence suggests that Hughes saw in Zapata Olivella a fellow wanderer and writer in need of the kinds of connections from which Hughes benefitted in Harlem. Hughes had learned Spanish during extended stays in Mexico to visit his father from an early age. He would also have been familiar with the country of Colombia, as he traveled there in 1945, the year before he met Zapata Olivella.³⁰ According to Zapata Olivella, Hughes welcomed him in, as he often did with fellow writers, and Hughes slept on his sofa so that Zapata Olivella could sleep comfortably in the only bed in the house. Zapata Olivella commented, "Langston Hughes took me in like a brother, he gave me his bed; I knew the next day because when I woke up I found him sleeping on a sofa. That was Langston Hughes; and he gave me all of the answers that I was searching for at that moment."³¹

As Zapata Olivella explored the deep questions and answers he asked of life, he found work in several hotels, and spent his free time navigating the world of Harlem with Hughes. Through the "Blues poet" Zapata Olivella met some of the most influential artists and writers in the African American community, including Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Kenneth Spencer,

³⁰ The only reference to Hughes' visit to Colombia, that I have been able to locate, is in Guiomar Cuesta and Alfredo Ocampo, eds., *Antología de Mujeres Poetas Afrocolombianas*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura. 2010, 29.

³¹ The quote reads in Spanish, "Langston Hughes me acogió como a un hermano, me cedió su cama; lo supe al día siguiente porque al despertarme lo encontré que estaba durmiendo en un sofá. Ese era Langston Hughes; y me dio todas las respuestas que yo en ese momento andaba buscando," Ibid.

and Ralph and Fanny Ellison. The time spent in Harlem forever changed his life, so much so, that he later named his first daughter “Harlem” after the beloved neighborhood.

This neighborhood of New York City, inhabited primarily of African descendants with its burgeoning arts scene, was an invigorating and intellectually stimulating environment for both Hughes and Zapata Olivella. Hughes wrote of the dynamic mix of diverse populations drawn to Harlem at the time, which adds evidence to the hypothesis that Hughes thrived from making international connections,

Harlem, like a Picasso painting in his cubist period. Harlem- Southern Harlem- the Carolinas, Georgia, Florida-- looking for the Promised Land-- dressed in rhythmic words, painted in bright pictures, dancing to jazz... West Indian Harlem- warm rambunctious sassy remembering Marcus Garvey. Haitian Harlem, Cuban Harlem, little pockets of tropical dreams in alien tongues. Magnet Harlem, pulling an Arthur Schomburg from Puerto Rico, pulling an Arna Bontemps all the way from California... likewise a Josephine Baker, a Charles S. Johnson from Virginia, an A. Philip Randolph from Florida, a Roy Wilkins from Minnesota... Melting pot Harlem- Harlem of honey and chocolate and caramel and rum and vinegar and lemon and lime and gall.³²

Hughes’ commentary on Harlem is rich with historical and social context. The Great Migration, from the outbreak of World War I through the 1920s, was a movement of African Americans from the US South to northern industrial cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York City in search of jobs that offered greater opportunity than the predominantly agricultural South. Indeed, the growing black middle class in these cities created what was termed by Alain Locke, “The New Negro”: African Americans who were highly influential in sports, art, music, and literature. Two dominant cultural groups split within the New Negro image: one that sought to achieve acceptance within white society, while the other abandoned “high brow” norms to assume more popular folk expressions. Amidst this dynamic creative

³² Quoted in Frank Guridy, “Feeling Diaspora in Harlem and Havana” in *Social Text*, 98, vol. 27, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 121. Originally quoted in, Langston Hughes, “My Early Days in Harlem,” in John Henrik Clarke, ed., *Harlem: A Community in Transition*. New York: Citadel, 1964, 64. Emphasis in original.

fissure arose the Harlem Renaissance: an art and literary movement that held artists in both camps, though the majority celebrated primitive representations of African culture as a counter-narrative to the Anglo-European cultural norms of the time.

New York City and Chicago were epicenters of these movements. Nearly 1.5 million people of African descent were part of this migration, and they were joined in New York City by “40,000 foreign-born people of African descent, most of who were from the English-speaking Caribbean.”³³ As demonstrated in the passage above, Hughes relished in the cultural and linguistic diversity of Harlem. He claimed it as his home, and stayed there until his death in 1967.

In Harlem, a rich community of artists and writers such as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and Zora Neale Hurston surrounded Hughes.³⁴ They all found financial and moral support in progressive white patrons, a relatively new social development at the time. Hughes alone was sustained by Carl Van Vechten, who convinced Alfred Knopf to publish Hughes’ work, and Noel Sullivan who allowed Hughes to spend from 1933 to 1934 rent-free in his Carmel, California cottage, and sheltered him politically during right-wing attacks of the late 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps most crucially, Charlotte Mason supported Hughes throughout most of his career. He affectionately called her “Godmother.”³⁵ Mason’s support gave Hughes the time and resources to live a professional life dedicated to writing, enriched and informed by his travels abroad.

³³ Guridy, “Feeling Diaspora in Harlem and Havana,” 120.

³⁴ Michelle Ann Stephens focuses on the writings of Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James and Claude McKay in her book on “transnational blackness” that arose out of the West Indies, *Black Empire: The Masculine Global Imaginary of Caribbean Intellectuals in the United States, 1914-1962*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.

³⁵ Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel, eds., *Selected Letters of Langston Hughes*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015, xix-xx.

Hughes paid this generosity and kindness forward by enthusiastically encouraging new talent, and a whole generation of writers in Harlem and abroad contributed to black art and literature because of him. Similarly, though much less documented, Zapata Olivella's influence extended further into the literary world of the Americas than has been widely recognized. After his return to Colombia at the end of the 1940s, Zapata Olivella met the young Gabriel García Márquez who would later go on to be one of Latin America's most celebrated authors and the winner of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Literature. A year after meeting as students in Bogotá, the two men ran into each other in the oldest neighborhood of Cartagena, the former slave quarter of Getsemaní. The next day Zapata Olivella took García Márquez to the newspaper offices of *El Universal* and introduced him to Eduardo Zalamea Borda, the paper's managing editor. García Márquez was hired with his first writing job as a journalist and his career as a writer began.³⁶

Yet that was not the end of Zapata Olivella's influence on the young writer. In November 1949, after graduating from the National University as a medical doctor, he invited García Márquez to accompany him to the small town of La Paz where he would begin practicing medicine. The town was located a short distance from Valledupar, the epicenter of the Colombian coastal music, *vallenato*.³⁷ Because of Zapata Olivella's invitation, García Márquez was introduced for the first time to singers of *vallenatos* and *merengues* most crucially to Abelito Antonio Villa, an Afro-Colombian who was the first man to record *vallenato* music. Additionally both Zapata Olivella and García Márquez befriended Rafael Escalona, one of the most revered *vallenato* artists in Colombian history. The music inspired García Márquez to explore his coastal roots, and as his biographer paraphrased, "his encounter with the *vallenato* genre, and the

³⁶ As described in Gerald Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez: A Life*. New York: Vintage Books, 2008.

³⁷ "Vallenato" means "born in the valley" as it comes from Valledupar which is in the Valley of Upar. Traditional *vallenato* music combines the European accordion with African drum rhythms and the indigenous *guacharaca* instrument, a type of scraper. The accordionist is usually the lead singer. See Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez*, 152.

musicians who created it really gave him the idea for the narrative form of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967),” his greatest novel about a mythical Colombian coastal village.³⁸ The generosity and friendship of Zapata Olivella helped his fellow Colombian on a path that changed the twentieth-century literary canon, just as his “comrade” Langston Hughes did both in the US and abroad.

Scholar Richard L. Jackson has noted that Hughes acted as “a bridge to the ‘new Black Consciousness.’”³⁹ His influence has been well documented in the US, yet his ability to act as a bridge to the Spanish-speaking world merits further exploration. Hughes began speaking Spanish at a young age when his father left the family to move to Mexico, in escape of the racist Jim Crow laws in the US. Hughes visited his father in Mexico for extended stays, though Hughes never moved permanently to Mexico. Hughes’ ability to communicate in Spanish allowed him to form a strong bond with Zapata Olivella. When Zapata Olivella arrived in Harlem, Hughes had already learned Spanish and several of his works had been translated into the language. Because the language barrier was less of a challenge for them, Hughes and Zapata Olivella read and shared each other’s work, and navigated similar social and writing circles within the African diaspora. Their friendship lasted exactly twenty years. It was a relationship based on solidarity of racialized experiences within the African diaspora, but also from a shared vagabond identity and glorification of travel as a means of self-exploration. Hughes titled his first auto-biography, *The Big Sea* (1940), which chronicles his story of being born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, raised in Lawrence, Kansas and Cleveland, Ohio and then he moved to New York City to attend Columbia University after spending time in Mexico with his estranged father. Hughes then

³⁸ As quoted in Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez*, 153.

³⁹ Richard L. Jackson, “Review of Edward J. Mullen, ed., *Langston Hughes in the Hispanic World and Haiti*” in *Hispania*, vol. 61, no. 3, (Sept., 1978), 572.

explains the years that most radically formed him as a poet, novelist, and playwright while he was in Paris, Harlem, Havana and Africa.

Hughes, similar to Zapata Olivella, associated water with movement and opportunity. He valued rivers and seas as a means of traveling to far shores to make critical connections with other artists and activists. After leaving Columbia University due to a lack of funds, Hughes turned to the sea and boarded a merchant ship to Africa in 1923. He writes in his autobiography of the experience, “...it was like throwing a million bricks out of my heart when I threw the books into the water. I leaned over the rail of the S.S. *Malone* and threw the books as far as I could out into the sea—all the books I had had at Columbia, and all the books I had lately bought to read.”⁴⁰ Hughes had felt rejected, unsupported in his studies, and decided to leave for an adventure that would offer him the opportunity to redefine himself and his engagement with the world. He quickly felt camaraderie upon meeting his companions onboard from Puerto Rico and Harlem. “At ten o’clock that morning I had never heard of the S.S. *Malone*, or George, or Ramon, or anybody else in its crew of forty-two men. Nor any of the six passengers. But now, here were the three of us laughing very loudly, going to Africa.”⁴¹ New possibilities, new shores of meaning were offered through the ocean.

Hughes’ second autobiography, *I Wonder as I Wander* (1965), makes a direct commentary on the value of “wandering” and the ability of travel to produce valuable education and insights. The book follows the writer’s journeys throughout the USSR, as a correspondent in Spain during the Spanish Civil War, and his extensive travels in Asia. As Hughes met with activists around the world, he gained a greater appreciation of what his blackness meant to him in that global context. Hughes’ travels shaped his vision of the world, and also exposed him to

⁴⁰ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1940, 3.

⁴¹ Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 5.

the dialectic of difference between cultures, and similarities of racial discrimination and colonial oppression. He encountered socialist and communist thought, and was radicalized by the synthesis of his personal and witnessed experiences of working class struggles.

Both Hughes and Zapata Olivella cited their journeys and wanderings as the most formative experiences of their lives. Hughes travelled further abroad, while Zapata Olivella stayed within the Americas in his earlier days. Their paths crossed in Harlem, where Hughes chose to make a home among the diverse, multi-cultural African descendant community there. Both men drew great inspiration from that part of New York, and articulated their experiences through literary works that described the meaning they made of their unique historical period of the 1920s to the 1940s. More than anything, they sought freedom and community through their writing. The poetry of Langston Hughes, more than any other literary form, brought him great comfort in its creation, and also in the sharing and exchange of those writings with his fellow African descendants in the Americas.

Poetry as Self Expression and Common Language

Surely one of the most influential friendships Zapata Olivella made on his vagabond journey was with Langston Hughes, who himself acted as a nexus of African diasporic cultural exchange throughout his lifetime. Hughes maintained literary friendships, through prolific personal correspondence, with writers and activists from all regions of the US, throughout Europe, Africa, and Latin America. His travels allowed him to form this immense network, and where he did not physically go, his writings did. He was immensely popular throughout Latin America, especially in the Caribbean, but also in South America. His poetry helped fuel the

Afro-Antillean movement of Puerto Rico and Cuba in the 1930s, and the less recognized articulation of that movement in Colombia.

By far the most translated Hughes poem into Spanish is “I, Too” published in the 1925 *Survey Graphic* issue that became *The New Negro*:

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And I eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.⁴²

This poem, interpreted in Spanish with varying degrees of revolutionary fervor, resonated in Latin America for its strong identity claim of being “American.” This adjective, understood to mean from the United States to US readers, held a more encompassing significance for Afro-Latin Americans to include all of the Americas. It is unclear how Hughes himself understood “America” in his poem. To be sure, his life travels and friendships underline a strong affinity with African descendants throughout the Americas, especially with Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and

⁴² Quoted in Vera M. Kutzinski, “‘Yo también soy América’: Langston Hughes Translated” in *American Literary History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Autumn, 2006), 556-557.

Colombians. Hughes found solidarity with a wider African descendant community that conceived of itself throughout the continent as one.

The messages of American inclusiveness, racial pride (“They’ll see how beautiful I am”), and projected improvement in race relations in the future (“Tomorrow, I’ll be at the table/When company comes”) were especially powerful for the young Manuel Zapata Olivella, a budding journalist and poet in his own right. Hughes taught Zapata Olivella the value of poetry as social commentary, and as a means to fight racial and socioeconomic oppression. The result was that the two men were unified with each other and with the reading audience who drew inspiration from the poetry. Zapata Olivella recalls that he learned from Hughes “that poetry was not solely an art form used for singing beauty, which is what until that moment fed me, but that it was also a weapon used to fight for equality of mankind, for liberty... the extraordinary in Langston Hughes, my great lesson learned from him, is that that poetry, for fighting for the equality and liberty of men, should not have been a poster, but rather that it should have been just that: poetry.

...⁴³

The poem “I, Too” was one of the most memorable Hughes’ poems to Zapata Olivella. Zapata Olivella did not separate his experience from that of Hughes; he did not mark the distance, nor difference of racial experience, between their two countries. Rather all references to Hughes were made with a strong sense of community. Hughes’ poem was similarly read and celebrated in Puerto Rico, Cuba, Uruguay, Mexico and Argentina. The Spanish-speaking reading

⁴³ The full quote in Spanish reads, “ En primer lugar, que la poesía no era tan solo un arte para cantar la belleza, que era lo que hasta ese momento a mí me alimentaba, sino que también era un arma para luchar por la igualdad de los hombres, por la libertad. Pero lo extraordinario de Langston Hughes, mi gran aprendizaje con él, es que esa poesía, para luchar por la igualdad y la libertad de los hombres, no debía ser un cartel, sino que debía ser eso: poesía. Y claro, sus poemas, “Yo también soy América” y otros, me permitieron ahondar más en lo que con sus palabras yo escuchaba” in Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, 110-111.

public who encountered the poem in its various translated forms, all found a voice that unified the Americas through racialized experience within the diaspora.

In 1947, Zapata Olivella returned to Colombia from his travels around the US, and wrote a letter to Hughes. He addressed Hughes as “Querido Camarada” [Dear Comrade].⁴⁴ Surely this title is used to signify not only their racial bond, but also their left-wing socialist political views. Zapata Olivella does not use the title of “Comrade” in his other correspondence, which could point to the historical moment in which he met Hughes. Just a few years later, Hughes would be questioned and targeted by the right-wing anti-communist investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Fighting for the freedom of political ideology was an additional battle that was fought along side civil rights struggles that many African Americans encountered in the 1940s and 1950s. Zapata Olivella recognized these multiple fronts of black freedom movements and continued to explain to Hughes the importance of his art abroad.

The letter goes on to discuss the current translation projects for Hughes’ poetry that were underway in Bogotá. Poetry was an effective medium, buffered by its status as “art”, through which both Zapata Olivella and Hughes wrote of their desire for a greater appreciation of African descendant culture and contributions to society. This “poetry as weaponry” is apparent in its ability to unify within the writing network to which they both belonged.

This network of poets included franco-phone *négritude* authors such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and the highly influential Cuban who celebrated *afrocubanismo*, Alejo Carpentier. Carpentier wrote of Hughes,

And I sing that day,
Langston, Langston,
For everyone that day,

⁴⁴ Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, 29 August 1947, Box 176, Folder 3229, LHP.

Langston, Langston!⁴⁵

This brief stanza was handwritten on an unpublished poem signed by Carpentier and sent to Hughes, dated “Paris, 17 Julio ’37.” Carpentier demonstrates his participation in these diasporic networks not only as a Cuban writing from Paris, but in his subject of Langston Hughes himself. Carpentier, one of Cuba’s most influential and revolutionary intellectuals, espoused ideas of a unique American culture throughout the entire continent, much as Zapata Olivella asserted.⁴⁶ They both viewed America as a site of cultural merging between indigenous, African, and European groups that had formed a specific worldview independent from the original homelands of American ancestors. Poetry was a means for both artists to portray that unique reality and circulate “American” ideas among other writers. Such networks of friendship, literary exchange, and mutual celebration were sustained through correspondence and the acts of translation between the readers.

Poetry, translated and re-translated, offered a means of not only sharing ideas, but also sharing emotions tied to racialized experience in the early twentieth century. Aimé Césaire wrote of this phenomenon in 1945 stating that “‘Poetic knowledge is born in the great silence of scientific knowledge’ and that poetry’s great contribution is its ability to portray ‘experience as a whole... everything that has been lived.’”⁴⁷ Where science, technology, and their explanation of modern societal ills throughout the Western hemisphere had failed to fully encompass the diasporic experiences of black communities in the Americas, poetry could fill that void.

⁴⁵ The original Spanish reads, “Y canto ese día/Langston, Langston/Para todos ese día/Langston, Langston!” quoted in Vera M. Kutzinski, “‘Yo también soy América’: Langston Hughes Translated” in *American Literary History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Autumn, 2006), 550. Originally this stanza was handwritten on an unpublished poem signed by Carpentier and dated “Paris, 17 Julio ‘37” in Box 440, Folder 10219, LHP.

⁴⁶ See William Luis’ Introduction to Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Frank Guridy, “Feeling Diaspora in Harlem and Havana” in *Social Text* (March 1, 2009), 134.

Connections made across national boundaries were richer for the shared understandings and feelings in poetry.

The second most translated poem into Spanish by Langston Hughes is “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” his first publication and most widely known poem in the US.⁴⁸ Hughes used water as a medium through which to speak about the wider African diasporic history of African descendants. Published in the *The Crisis*, the journal of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1921, the poem links the contemporary African diaspora with the past:

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and

I’ve seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.⁴⁹

Water, as referenced in this poem, is timeless: it cannot be created or destroyed. It simply changes form. This change of form, constant and never static, is similar to the ways in which the West African *orixas*, or spirits/deities, are understood to inhabit different beings in spiritual “mountings” but their essence cannot be destroyed or fundamentally changed. They exist

⁴⁸ Kutzinski, “‘Yo también soy América’: Langston Hughes Translated,” 552.

⁴⁹ As published in Dudley Randall, ed., *The Black Poets: A New Anthology*. Bantam Books, NY, 1985.

simultaneously in the past, present, and future, similar to the rivers of Hughes' poems. In the final line of the poem, Hughes asserts, "My soul has grown deep like the rivers." This intimately connects his very being with travel, movement, connection to the past and future. The poem addresses a diasporic consciousness decades before the term became used in the academy, and an Afro-centric worldview early in the Harlem Renaissance that would have a powerful impact within the brotherhood of the African Diaspora as understood by many black activists and artists throughout the Americas.

Historian Frank Guridy has recently documented the surge in "affect" studies and approaches emotions through the strong connection between Langston Hughes and his Afro-Cuban friends and colleagues, including Nicolás Guillén. Both poets were the first to incorporate linguistic and musical folk styles into their poetry in their respective countries, and they "shared diasporic imagination," or understanding of being. Belonging to the diaspora meant "forever moving, in and out of self or government-imposed exile, to simultaneously cross national boundaries."⁵⁰ Hughes and Guillén both travelled extensively between the US and Cuba, and first met in the early 1930s when Hughes visited Havana. At that time Hughes had already been writing poetry in the musical style of the US *blues* and *jazz*. This technique was directly influential on Guillén. Hughes biographer Arnold Rampersad elaborates on this relationship:

Within a few days of Hughes's departure...Guillén created a furor in Havana ("un verdadero escándalo," he informed Hughes with delight) by publishing on the "Ideales de una Raza"...what Gustavo Urrutia called exultantly 'eight formidable negro poems' entitled *Motivos de Son* (Son Motifs). For the first time, as Hughes had urged him to do, Guillén had used the son dance rhythms to capture the moods and features of the black Havana poor.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Frank Guridy, "Feeling Diaspora in Harlem and Havana," 116.

⁵¹ Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: I, Too, Sing America, 1902-1941, Vol. I*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 181.

The two poets influenced each other's writing styles, socialized in both Cuba and New York, and they also traveled to Colombia.

While Zapata Olivella was traveling in the US in the mid-1940s, Guillén visited Colombia and saw his friend, Jorge Artel, Zapata Olivella's mentor.⁵² Though closely tied with Colombian regionalism, Artel's conceptualization of black identity had many international influences. He was familiar with the American writings of Langston Hughes by the 1930s, Claude McKay, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. He studied the French-Guyanese poet and novelist, René Maran.⁵³ He travelled extensively, and lived outside of Colombia from 1948 to 1971. In the 1950s he resided in the United States, though he wrote poems to the city of New York and Harlem much earlier in *Tambores*. In "Words to the City of New York" he expresses the human experience that came out of that city, "I speak to you, New York.../from whatever corner of Harlem/ the proud humanity that hopes and sings/ refuged in your blues and sarcastic sadness."⁵⁴

In contrast to Guillén's vibrant celebration of Afro-Cuban culture, Artel's poetry carried a heavy sadness within it, a quality that Guillén attributed to the feeling of defeat felt by Artel through his constant efforts to increase awareness of Afro-Colombian contributions to Colombian national culture. Sadness and pain are points of solidarity across national borders in Artel's poetry. In "The Painful Route," Artel speaks to the common tragic history shared by all descendants of slaves in the Americas: "In which leap of blood/ did you and I meet/ or in which Yoruba song did/ we rock together like two brothers?/ The remote masts will know it/ of the shop that brought us/ the unpassable Congo/ where our grandparent walked."⁵⁵

⁵² Artel experienced literary success in Colombia; he published six volumes of poetry including *Tambores en la noche*. Cartagena: Editora Bolívar, 1940, *Poemas con botas y banderas*. Barranquilla: Mejoras, 1972, and *Antología poética*. Bogotá: Ecoe, 1979.

⁵³ Prescott, *Without Hatreds or Fears*, 73.

⁵⁴ Artel, Jorge, *Tambores en la noche*, 148.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Ratcliff, "'Black Writers of the World Unite!,'" 29.

Decades later, in Medellín, Colombia in 1984, Guillén recalled the personal struggles of Artel in his fight as a black artist trying to raise racial awareness with his poetry in Colombia, “I found a man who was a little bit, how shall I put it, dissatisfied but expressing it through irony, disbelief. He did not believe in anybody, he felt virtually defeated. I helped him a lot from a material and moral point of view, but nothing came of it.”⁵⁶ Artel’s poem, which contemplates the legacy of slavery in Colombia, expresses this melancholy:

Black I am, since many centuries ago.
 Poet of my race, I inherited its pain.
 And the emotion of which I speak must be pure
 in the rough rhythm of the call
 and the mono-rhythmic drum.⁵⁷

“Son,” understood to mean an African-derived rhythm in Colombia, can also be *son*, typically attributed to the Afro-Cuban music style that became popular in the 1930s. Not only was *son Cubano* popular in Havana, but it also made its way to stages in New York City and was marketed and sold by Victor and Columbia Records.⁵⁸ Many African descendants in Harlem, Caribbean coastal Colombia, and Havana alike would have been familiar with the Afro-Cuban influences that melded into American *jazz* forms and later Colombian *salsa* music. All three styles of music reflected not only African rhythms, but also a common use of improvisation, exploration of the fractured “modern” self through the motifs and “voices” of the instruments, especially the trumpet and saxophone. Improvisation was the musical mirror image of the

⁵⁶ Laurence E. Prescott, “A Conversation with Nicolás Guillén” in *Callaloo*, no. 31, Nicolás Guillén: A Special Issue (Spring, 1987), 352.

⁵⁷ The poem reads in the original Spanish, “Negro soy desde hace muchos siglos./Poeta de mi raza, heredé su dolor./Y la emoción que digo ha de ser pura/en el bronco son del grito/y el monorrítmico tambor” in Artel, *Tambores en la noche*, 31.

⁵⁸ Guridy, “Feeling Diaspora,” 125.

“vagabond” literary themes discussed earlier in this chapter, and reflected the desire to create a whole out of what had been considered broken, or previously discarded by the white, patriarchal society.

While music and poetry of the Harlem Renaissance and its Latin American participants celebrated these new styles, they also reflected a generational pain that had been expressed in such encompassing media prior to the World Wars, Great Depression, and ensuing migrations. Langston Hughes juxtaposes the sense of celebration following the Second World War with the lingering reality that sacrifice, including that of black soldiers, had to be made to achieve it:

What a grand time was the war!
 Oh, my, my!
 What a grand time was the war!
 My, my, my!
 In war time we had fun,
 Sorry that old war is done!
 What a grand time was the war,
 My, my!

Echo:

Did
 Somebody
 Die?⁵⁹

Hughes used this poem to address the lacking historical memory of the pain and death involved in the war. The sadness felt by both Hughes and Artel is similarly reflected in the poetry and works of Juan Zapata Olivella, Manuel’s brother, a critically acclaimed poet in his own right:

Those sad silences,
 those melancholies,
 that ancestral pain,
 they hold a drop of happiness.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Quoted in Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: : I Dream a World, 1941-1967, Volume II*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, 105.

⁶⁰ The original Spanish reads, “Aquellos tristes silencios,/aquellas melancolías,/aquel dolor ancestral,/tienen gozo de alegría” in Juan Zapata Olivella, *Panacea Poesía Liberada*. Cartagena: Editora Bolívar, 1976, 27.

As Artel, Hughes, and Juan Zapata Olivella portray in their poetry, a key to identity formation within the diaspora of the early twentieth century was the recognition, by all of society, of the ancestral pain of slavery and racism. The Middle Passage, made possible through water transport, was the defining experience of pain that had carried into the twentieth-century diasporic imagination. It was fitting that water should also be the dominant portal through which a return to African heritage could be achieved, of which freedom could be conceived, often embodied in cultural exchange within the Americas.

Conclusion

As millions of African Americans journeyed northward following the First World War and the Great Depression, travel became a means of redefining the self, the community, and the meaning made of interactions with others who had previously been considered “foreign.” Travel on land was matched by travel at sea, as African Americans traveled to the Caribbean, Afro-Antilleans traveled to the US and Colombia, and the Afro-Colombian Manuel Zapata Olivella traveled to Harlem. Harlem became a neighborhood that fostered new writing, painting, and theatrical works that accounted for the varying perspectives of African descendants, felt through the dialectic encounters of difference and similarity. Langston Hughes was drawn to that place precisely for its diversity, following his travels as a vagabond to understand the world from such a perspective. This worldview centered on the fluidity and connection brought by water; through timeless rivers, seas, and oceans.

Some of the most influential artists of the 1920s to the 1940s, including Zapata Olivella, Hughes, Nicolás Guillén, Jorge Artel, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, and Alejo Carpentier, encountered the legacy of the Middle Passage and worked to ameliorate its painful legacy

through defining their community of activists, unified through poetry in translation. Individual and collective awareness of racialized reality in the Americas, made more poignant by the possibility for change, inspired decades of creativity that fueled black consciousness movements that will be explored in later chapters. It was through poetry, music, and dance, carried throughout the continent by its waterways, that those themes were explored and articulated in powerful ways in the first half of the twentieth century that led to drastic political and social change in the latter half of the century.

CHAPTER TWO

“Taking Compass Points”: Situating African Diasporic Experience within Jazz, Dance and Literature in the Americas, 1946-1960

Freedom in jazz, after all, is that feeling of improvised musical self-determination that is both the joy and challenge of every improvised performance. It is here that jazz, black nationalism, and modern subjectivity meet: in everyday practices and performances as intimate as love itself, yet as connected to real-world aspirations for freedom and justice as the knee bone is to the thigh bone.

- Ingrid Monson



Figure 1. *Manuel Zapata Olivella*, Photograph by Nereo López, date unknown. MZO Papers, Vanderbilt University.

Introduction

Manuel Zapata Olivella considered his return to Colombia in the late 1940s a bookend to his vagabond, wandering days. He would continue to travel continually throughout his life, but the role of travel had a very different purpose from this first pilgrimage to Harlem. This journey

was intended to be an “authentic” way of seeing the world, not from the perspective of a tourist, but as a person struggling to get by. His travels brought him into close encounters with fellow African descendants who inspired him to engage with the world around him to create real change.

Part of the transition from the role of “witness” to activist was a shift in vision; imagining oneself as belonging to a community based on cultural heritage and a living historical connection with the diasporic past. As the letters between Zapata Olivella and Langston Hughes indicate theirs was a bond of brotherhood and common cause shared within their literary, cultural, and intellectual network. This network consisted of writers, musicians, dancers, and actors: artists who participated in cultural production as a simultaneous means of transforming the individual self and larger society. Author Ralph Ellison, jazz musician Duke Ellington, and dancer Katherine Dunham were all mentioned in Zapata Olivella’s letters to Hughes, and were an active part of the network of collaboration for racial awareness in which Zapata Olivella was an activist.

Examined within their historical context, Zapata Olivella, Hughes, Dunham, Ellington, Ellison and their colleagues can be understood as crucial actors around whom a larger network of artists and activists was created. They used their art as a means of connecting with others in the African Diaspora of the Americas; their work drew from a diverse body of cultural production that articulated diasporic expression, and thus they were crucial to the development of the diasporic imagination of African descendants in the Americas. A sense of belonging to a community radiated from their work and personal interactions, but it was more than a “natural” bond. They constructed common experience out of their connections to each other. Rather than

an inevitable commonality waiting to be discovered, it resulted from the intentional reaching out toward each other—amidst profound differences and across national borders.

The shared diasporic imagination that included diverse political, national, and religious perspectives created in the 1950s and 1960s is especially striking given the polarizing political climate in which many African descendants lived following the Second World War. The Cold War created an ideological divide throughout much of the world that split along two directions: West toward U.S. capitalism and East toward Soviet communism. This arose out of two fundamentally different reactions to the Second World War and economic and political plans that sought to ensure peace and stability following the devastation of war. Ironically the Cold War did not result in peace, but rather escalating tensions as the US and USSR urgently sought to expand their “spheres of influence” to regions that were establishing sovereign governments and defining the ideology of their nations. Eastern Europe, newly independent African and Asian nations, and Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua were just some of the territories over which this Cold War was fought.¹ Yet the 1950s and 1960s were a time period of national re-definition that had implications as yet understudied, beyond traditional understandings of the “nation.”

As the US government envisioned the world along an East/West binary, the left/right political divide was growing in the US, Europe, and South America, particularly in Colombia where “La Violencia” sparked a civil war that has continued, in different iterations, to the present day. “La Violencia” (1948-1958) was a conflict between the Colombian Conservative and

¹ Recent scholarship has demonstrated the ways in which the Cold War was understood and experienced differently from the “periphery” of Latin American countries than in the US. For instance socialism was often conflated with communism or the fear of communism in the US. Nuanced understandings of Cuban communism, for instance, were lacking. In the case of Mexico, communism was never really a threat. The FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) initially mobilized around a communist platform, yet was situated within the unique context of Colombia. Much work has yet to be done on the specific case of Colombia, especially from a cultural perspective. For a cultural analysis of the Cold War in Latin America see Patrick Iber’s recent publication, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

Liberal Parties instigated by the assassination of the Liberal Party Presidential candidate, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. As a solution to the violent civil war, the political parties formed the National Front (1958-1974), a bipartisan coalition that involved alternating presidential, cabinet, and other political powers between the Conservative and Liberal Parties.

While the National Front ended the specific conflict of La Violencia, violence continued in Colombia as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) mobilized in 1964 with a Marxist agrarian and anti-imperialist platform. Colombia never experienced a widespread populist leftist movement, or a dictatorship, as in other Latin American countries. So the question emerges, in what ways did US Cold War foreign policy play out in Colombia and what role did the US have in limiting or opening ideological spaces for the African diasporic imagination there? To what extent did inter-American solidarity, within the context of the Cold War, strengthen the formation of African diasporic networks of the 1950s and 1960s?² Clues to these questions can be found in the transnational networks analyzed in this chapter. What emerges most clearly, is that African descendants created their own spaces for identity formation that navigated both the limits and opportunities of Cold War ideologies.

When we refocus the lens of experience to the African diaspora, the compass needle no longer orients East and West, but in fact reveals many other directions. Surprising lines of connection – both solid and frayed - offer a new perspective on the era that has been dominated by works on the Cold War. In “taking compass points” the writers, jazz musicians, dancers, and

² There is very limited scholarship on US-Colombian relations in the early period of La Violencia and its immediate aftermath. More historical analysis has been produced around the escalated FARC and narco-trafficking crises of the 1980s through the early 2000s with the emergence of the US-led War on Drugs. For consideration of guerrilla warfare in light of the Cuban Revolution, see Thomas C. Wright, *Latin America in the Era of the Cuban Revolution*. London: Praeger, 2001. The FARC, however, has been generally understood by the US government more as a terrorist organization than as a widespread communist revolutionary movement such as that of Cuba. For an overview of La Violencia and the National Front, see David Bushnell, *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Bushnell’s book was the first comprehensive history of Colombia written in English.

actors, expressed their dreams and aspirations through the ability to define what their authentic “self” meant in the context of the historical moment. This context included an international battle supporting American capitalism by some, which seemed to emphasize individualism, while societal racism paradoxically limited the freedom of the black individual to feel accepted and liberated within the supposed “democracy” of the United States.

The constraints of the US Cold War, exacerbated by fears of the *other*, of foreignness in general, and of identities that pushed the boundaries of the traditional Anglo-American narrative, made the African diasporic imagination at once less likely, and more necessary for those who worked to foster that imagination. The space created, physically and mentally, by many African descendants served as a refuge from Cold War tensions, and also as a response to them. An alternative to the binary of American and *other* was necessary in order to find exhibit an expression of the “self” that was defined by the black community itself, in conjunction with other communities of the Americas. These definitions shifted while on and off stage, in Harlem, Paris, Bogotá, or Havana. Their goal, quite often, was to increase within their respective nations an appreciation and celebration of African heritage as an essential, even definitive part of the national culture as a whole.

The Journey Home: Cold War US, Colombia and Cuba

Afro-Colombian medical doctor and author, Manuel Zapata Olivella, returned from his trans-American journey by land and sea in November of 1947, having experienced a profound transformation in his sense of self and purpose. After crossing through Central America, Mexico, and the United States, he re-entered Colombia with strong opinions about race relations in the United States and their wider implications throughout the continent. Zapata Olivella’s first-hand

experience of racial discrimination in the Jim Crow South, coupled with witnessing poverty and socio-economic oppression of the black population in urban centers such as Chicago and Harlem, were the topics of reflection in his first published works, *Pasión vagabunda* (1949) [Vagabond Passion] and *He visto la noche: las raices de la furia negra* (1953) [I Have Seen the Night: The Roots of Black Fury]. These reflections and reactions fit into a wider dialogue about colonialism in which Zapata Olivella fervently participated. His stance on US imperialism, in particular, was a driving force of much of his social work.

Zapata Olivella's Colombia had felt first-hand the effects of US imperial projects, particularly on his native Caribbean coast. In the early twentieth century the US-based United Fruit Company (UFC) arrived in the region to farm bananas; the resulting enclave was completely dependent upon the banana trade with most workers employed by the company. This created what Mary Louise Pratt calls "Contact Zones"³ between US corporate and Colombian culture. The mono-crop industry brought much wealth to foreign investors of the company, and drew criticism for its exploitative practices in Colombia. The banana boom ended in the 1920s, and approximately 25,000 workers organized a strike in 1928 that led to the brutal massacre of workers in Ciénaga. The Colombian government and UFC were implicated in the excessive violence used to stop the strike. Some scholars regard this incident as the beginning of violent responses to rural unrest that characterized Colombia's recurrent civil wars throughout much of the twentieth century.⁴

³ Catherine C. LeGrand, "Living in Macondo: Economy and Culture in a United Fruit Company Banana Enclave in Colombia" in Gilbert M. Joseph, et al., eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998, 336.

⁴⁴ See Michael J. LaRosa and Germán R. Mejía, *Colombia: A Concise Contemporary History*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012, 85. LaRosa and Mejía cite Catherine LeGrand, Michael Jiménez, Herbert "Tico" Braun, and Álvaro Tirado Mejía as historians who follow this argument.

Following the Great Depression of the 1930s the UFC drastically cut back production in Colombia, creating a deep recession. The economic struggles of farm workers, fueled by anger over the violence of the Ciénaga massacre, led to a long, complicated civil war. This bitter conflict emerged from the coast over federal power, rural and urban ways of life, and the imposition of external corporate powers on the Colombian people, especially Afro-Colombians who were the majority population on the coasts and some of the most displaced during the conflict.

Manuel Zapata Olivella returned to Colombia at the height of the first articulation of this conflict called “La Violencia” that lasted from 1946 to 1960. It was precisely during this lengthy conflict that Zapata Olivella began his work to account for the diverse, rich folkloric traditions of Colombia with his sister, Delia Zapata Olivella. Their counter narrative to the deep divisions of their country was created through presenting Afro-Colombian coastal dances throughout the country. For many Colombians in the interior, it was the first time they were exposed to the rich African traditions of their country. This anthropological project to celebrate the presence of Afro-Colombian cultural forms as part of the national Colombian culture will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is worth mentioning as an example of how culture was approached in the Cold War as a way of expanding the dialogue beyond simply a US/Soviet struggle for power throughout the world.

As historians Robin D. G. Kelley and Penny Von Eschen have underscored, the Cold War was in fact quite complicated with many layers of participation that were understood by Americans differently. The most visible stance, supported by the federal government, was to promote freedom throughout the world through US capitalism, poised in polar opposition to Soviet communism. Von Eschen argues that the cultural diplomacy jazz tours of artists such as

Dizzy Gillespie and Duke Ellington took place during the 1950s in an effort to downplay tense US race relations in the eyes of the world and to emphasize American democracy abroad. The jazz musicians themselves used their international tours to highlight their own agendas and understandings of democracy.⁵

On the Cold War home front in the US, “democracy” held various meanings. Paradoxically in the view of the US government, many African Americans supported communism, in defense of “freedom”: Paul Robeson, Langston Hughes, and WEB Du Bois among them.⁶ To these writers and activists, the struggle for democracy was understood as a means to liberation from the oppression of the capitalist system for the most underserved in the US, and in the colonized nations of the world. This line of thinking was closely linked to the theories of Martinican Aimé Césaire who revised Marx in claiming, “the anticolonial struggle supersedes the proletarian struggle as the fundamental historical movement of the period.”⁷

While in Paris in 1956, Césaire argued that US racism was essentially an extension of colonialism, an assertion that echoed Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Manuel Zapata Olivella did not come into contact with these works until the late 1950s and 1960s, but African Americans were familiar with them, along with WEB Du Bois’ influential work, *Color and Democracy* (1945). These groundbreaking books, including Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950) were key texts in what Malcolm X called the “tidal wave of color” from the end of World War II to the late 1950s.⁸ This anti-racism movement was part of the effort to

⁵ See Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

⁶ For further analysis of the ways in which African Americans in Depression-era Alabama aligned with the Communist Party as part of their struggle for democracy and civil rights, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1990.

⁷ Robin D. G. Kelley, “A Poetics of Anticolonialism” in Aimé Césaire, translation by Joan Pinkham, *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001, 10.

⁸ *Ibid*, 10.

overthrow the internal imperialism of the US government toward its own people of color and was part of a larger discourse highlighting the racist impacts of colonialism.⁹

Penny Von Eschen argues that US anti-colonialist rhetoric ended with the Cold War, yet when we shift our lens to include Colombia and the Caribbean, an African diasporic dialogue based in anti-colonialism within the Cold War emerges.¹⁰ While anti-colonial groups might have disbanded or gone silent within the US, particularly with added pressure from the FBI and HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee), the conversations including African Americans did not stop abroad, nor did correspondence cease between the US and other countries within African diasporic communities. Anti-imperialism continued as an active struggle throughout the 1950s. Zapata Olivella, for instance, participated in this conversation in his journal articles and published books, and in his letters to Langston Hughes. Zapata Olivella envisioned a shared radical leftist black brotherhood that was in conversation between Colombia, Cuba and the US. He wrote to Hughes in 1947,

As you will see, I hold you and our brothers of the race, very close to my heart. Also many commentaries have been published about your poetry, and if I were to send you all of them, there would not be enough money to pay the postal charges. However, I am sending you a few clips, among others, a commentary from Cuba, in the journal Hoy, of the Popular Socialist Party, on the translation you wrote of the book by comrade Romain.¹¹

This letter reveals much about the ways in which Zapata Olivella made meaning of his historical moment and interpreted his place in it in relationship to the African diaspora. He is

⁹ As discussed in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, p4.

¹⁰ Von Eschen argues that the Cold War ushered in an era that ended many of the anticolonial efforts of African Americans in the US in her highly influential work, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.

¹¹ The letter reads in Spanish, “Como verás, te tengo a ti y a los hermanos de raza, muy adentro del corazón. También se han publicado muchos comentarios sobre tu poesía, que si te los enviara todos, no tendría suficiente dinero para pagar el porte de correo. Sin embargo, te envío algunos recortes, entre otros, un comentario salido en Cuba, en el periódico Hoy, del Partido Socialista Popular, sobre la traducción hecha por ti de la novela del camarada Romain.” Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, 29 August 1947, Box 176, Folder 3229, LHP.

acutely aware of the kinship that he shares with his “brothers of the race” – including Hughes. Woven into the racial connection, and perhaps inseparable from it, is a firm identification with the political left. Hughes is Zapata Olivella’s “brother” and also his “comrade” as indicated in the greeting earlier in the letter.¹² The tone of the correspondence is both familiar and revolutionary. Zapata Olivella also refers to Romain, most likely referring to the Haitian poet, Jacques Roumain. Hughes translated a novel by Roumain in 1947, the same year that this letter was sent and Zapata Olivella returned to Colombia.¹³

For Zapata Olivella, Roumain is considered a “comrade,” marking affinity across national and linguistic barriers, further expanding his sense of diasporic and political union to include authors from Creole-speaking Haiti. He further emphasizes his commitment to this transnational community by sending Hughes clips from the revolutionary periodical, *Hoy*, published by the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). The PSP was the official name of Cuba’s communist party from 1944 to 1962. Several of the paper’s journalists were instrumental political activists during the Cuban Revolution. Carlos Franqui, for instance, was a journalist for *Hoy* and was involved in Fidel Castro’s July 26th Movement. Interestingly, *Hoy* did not prioritize poetry or cultural production, but rather focused on revolutionary rhetoric and socialist ideals.¹⁴ Far from being isolated in Cuba, this letter indicates that *Hoy*’s readership expanded beyond the island to reach Colombia and the US via Zapata Olivella’s letter.

What is especially compelling in this letter concerning the diasporic imagination is the aspect of literary cultural exchange between the two men. Zapata Olivella sent to Hughes clips of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hughes’ translation is mentioned in Transcript of a video presentation by David Kresh in “Langston Hughes and His Poetry,” part of the virtual program, *Journeys & crossings*, Library of Congress, available at: www.loc.gov/rr/program/journey/hughes-transcript.html (accessed June 29, 2016).

¹⁴ Interview with Carlos Franqui in William Luis, *Lunes de Revolución: Literatura y cultura en los primeros años de la Revolución Cubana*. Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2003, 175.

articles from Cuba, translations of poetry and reviews in order to keep Hughes aware of the conversations that revolved around his writings. Clearly there were so many writings about Hughes that “there would not be enough money for the postal charges.” While Zapata Olivella’s use of hyperbole could have been a form of flattery, Hughes was well known and celebrated as an American author in the widest sense: he was considered to be an artistic mentor in many nations throughout the Americas.

Zapata Olivella likewise received poems and clippings from Hughes. Zapata Olivella was appreciative of their correspondence, “With true pleasure I have received your latest shipments” that included a poem that Zapata Olivella’s friend translated into Spanish. From these poems, and especially *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Zapata Olivella drew strength from Hughes’ “example of the writer’s courage who does not shun his responsibilities with the social problem of the time.” Zapata Olivella linked the social problems in the US with those of Colombia by extending to Hughes “my warm hand and with it the hand of all of the new writers from this southern continent who know how to appreciate your great work.”¹⁵

Zapata Olivella’s strong sense of solidarity can be viewed as a microcosm of what was felt between many African Americans and the anti-colonial struggles in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia following the Second World War. The language of Zapata Olivella in his letters is one of a warrior for justice and peace writing to a fellow poet/warrior. He expresses a radical vision that is enforced, ignited and inspired by the writings of Langston Hughes and his translated poetry. The poem referenced by Zapata Olivella is unknown, but *Montage of a Dream Deferred*

¹⁵ The letter reads in the original Spanish, “Con verdadero placer he recibido tus últimos envíos, el poema a la raza, en este momento en manos de un amigo que lo está vertiendo al español y “Montage of A Dream Deferred”, que representan para mi, además de verdaderos modelos de interpretación popular, un ejemplo del coraje del escritor que no rehúye sus deberes con el problema social de la época. No dejo de comprender el gran valor que significa publicar un poema como este que me has enviado en un país que lo sacude una ráfaga amenazadora para el artista combatiente. Recibe Langston mi mano calurosamente y con ella la de todos los nuevos escritores de este continente sureño que sabemos apreciar tu gran obra.” in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, May 11, 1951, Box 176, Folder 3229, LHP.

(1951) was one of Hughes' most celebrated works that marked an apex in his writing career. The book-length poem suite, innovative in its use of jazz forms, was not published until 1951. Significantly, Manuel Zapata Olivella had access to an earlier version prior to its publication and was able to encourage Hughes in his "courage" for addressing social problems "of the time" with his poetry.

Because of his travels and contact with Hughes, Zapata Olivella was well aware of the racial climate of the US in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He directly confronted the hateful acts of the Ku Klux Klan in several writings, including essays, articles, and his travel memoirs, *Pasión vagabunda* (1949) and *He visto la noche: las raíces de la furia negra* (1953) that described his early experiences of racial oppression. Zapata Olivella denounced Jim Crow segregation, and highlighted the ways in which less explicit, but just as socially damaging, discrimination occurred in his native Colombia and throughout the Americas more broadly.¹⁶

The Colombia Zapata Olivella imagined was intimately linked to the US through common African diasporic experiences. He felt a great desire to continue a dialogue of experiences between the two nations. To this end, he established the Centro de Estudios Afro-Colombianos [Center for Afro-Colombian Studies], with his sister Delia immediately upon his return, in order to study and document the experiences of Afro-Colombians throughout the country and tie them to experiences throughout the Americas more broadly. This organization conducted research based in anthropological methodology, with a heavy emphasis on music, dance, cooking practices, and religious rituals. The Zapata Olivellas never approached the unique cultural practices of Afro-Colombian communities in isolation, but rather within transnational conversations and dialogues.

¹⁶ See article by Manuel Zapata Olivella "La Epopeya..." in *Sábado*, 30 October 1948.

In an earlier letter, Zapata Olivella requested from Hughes publications and news from the US, including the thoughts of author Richard Wright on the Communist Party. He hoped that Hughes

will send, or search for a way to send us, *Ebony* and *Negro Magazine*, as well as all of the publications that can be useful for us for the disclosure of the poets, musicians, painters, scientists and other exponents of the black race. We are particularly interested in receiving the book on the biology and psychology of black people published in Chicago and by the researcher from the School of Medicine in that city. I don't know the title but look for it and send us it.

A lot of people here want to know more about Richard Wright, particularly the communists, who want to know his position on the party. Hopefully you can send me news about him.¹⁷

It is not clear what else Hughes sent to Zapata Olivella over time, but the eagerness of Zapata Olivella, and the other members of his Center for Afro-Colombian Studies to learn about “other exponents of the black race” is significant in itself. Not only is he interested in the writings, he asks for those that would be “useful” for him and his colleagues. This usefulness was attached to a clear effort to change historical and racial awareness throughout the Americas through the medium of literature. Zapata Olivella consistently gathered and distributed writings: extending in the act the transnational lines of discourse across the Caribbean between Havana, Bogotá, and Harlem. Where publishers did not reach, he acted as the conductor of conversations around blackness, communism, and imperialism. He knit together a diasporic imagination of belonging, and dreaming for a world where the constraints of racism and *La Violencia* no longer held the citizens of the Americas captive. This vision was present in poetry, especially that which merged with the jazz musical form as did Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* mentioned by

¹⁷ The letter reads in Spanish, “nos envíe o busques la forma de enviarnos, la revista *Ebony* [sic] y *Negro Magazine*, así como todas las publicaciones que nos pueden ser útiles para la divulgación de los poetas, músicos, pintores, científicos y demás exponentes de la raza negra. Particularmente nos interesa recibir un libro sobre la biología y psicología del negro que se publico en Chicago por un investigador de la Facultad de Medicina de esa ciudad. No se cual es el titulo pero averigua y envíanoslo. Mucha gente quiere conocer algo más de Richard Wright, particularmente los comunistas, pues quieren saber su posición frente al partido. Ojalá me envíe noticias sobre él.” in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, August 29, 1947, Box 176, Folder 3229, LHP.

Zapata Olivella above. Indeed, jazz became one of the most visible and recognized transnational American cultural traditions that both transmitted ideas of freedom and acted as a catalyst for a created African diasporic community.

Jazz Music and its Transnational “Tree”

In 1956, one year after Martin Luther King, Jr. began the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the US State Department sent jazz musician, Dizzy Gillespie on a cultural diplomacy tour of the Middle East to improve relations with newly independent states. That same year, the *New York Times* had referenced a statement by the State Department that reflected its views on jazz as an important tool for diplomatic relations. It stated, “One phase of American music which has gained tremendous popularity abroad is jazz...[J]azz has come to represent a kind of international brotherhood and... jazz, truly an American product, has high propaganda value—for to be interested in jazz is to be interested in things American.”¹⁸

“Things American,” as understood in jazz, had reached Africa, Asia, and Latin America by the time Gillespie boarded his first plane. Jazz had become an international sensation through the expansion of radio stations and radio sets abroad. The federal program *Voice of America* (VOA) had an impressive reach: by 1955 an estimated 30 million people in 80 countries were listening to the program, and that number more than tripled over the next decade. Jazz was featured on Willis Conover’s *Music USA* show broadcast through VOA, which played seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year. The show opened with the Duke Ellington Orchestra playing Billy Strayhorn’s “Take the A Train.”¹⁹ As the State Department enthusiastically

¹⁸ Quoted in Lisa E. Davenport, “Jazz and the Cold War: Black Culture as an Instrument of American Foreign Policy” in Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of the Black People in Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, 282.

¹⁹ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 15.

promoted jazz abroad as an exclusively US phenomenon, it was travelling and changing through other channels, less well known, but just as meaningful in the empowering networks that black activists in the US and Latin America created for themselves.

Reflecting on his time in Harlem, Manuel Zapata Olivella remembered fondly the artists and musicians he met with Langston Hughes. Ralph Ellison (1914-1994), celebrated literary critic and author of *Invisible Man* (1952) made a significant impression on the young Zapata Olivella. He mentioned Ellison in several letters to Hughes, often sending regards to both Ralph and his wife, Fanny. Zapata Olivella considered the author as part of his professional and personal network within the African diaspora. Whether or not they discussed music and jazz remains unrevealed within the letters of Zapata Olivella, but surely both men held a strong interest in the conversations around blackness that emerged from music. Ralph Ellison was particularly interested in jazz, and was critical of its developing forms from the 1920s through the 1960s. To Ellison, jazz was both performative action and an authentic space for African Americans to build community through dance. The dancer and musician were intricately intertwined in this process, in fact, inseparable. Thus to Ellison, the performance of jazz in white clubs, away from black dance floors, was a violation of jazz's purpose as a cultural mode through which the black story could be told and expressed. In this sense, orientation and taking compass points was equally important to the diasporic experience for Ellison, but in the context of jazz, the white "other" was not part of the understanding of place in which the musician and dancer orients herself. Ellison wrote:

Perhaps the swift change of American society in which the meanings of one's origins are so quickly lost, one of the chief values of living with music lies in its power to give us an orientation in time... In the swift swirl of time music is a constant, reminding us of what we were and of that toward which we aspire.²⁰

²⁰ From "Living with Music" quoted in Brennan Maier, "The Road to Don Cornelius is Paved with Good Intentions: The Crisis of Negro Nationalism in Ralph Ellison's Jazz Criticism" in *Callaloo*, 35.1 (2012), 274.

Ellison's comment is especially illuminating in the way that it addresses orientation as the result of meanings that emerge when "one's origins are so quickly lost." In the context of the Great Migration, when millions of African Americans uprooted from the south to find new opportunities in the north and west, music was a link; continuity to a past lost that connected jazz musicians and dancers in their new locale. Reaching further into the past, jazz expressed linkages to Africa, through its rhythmic ancestry, and connected African descendants to each other through its ability to transcend the absence of history. Jazz, as Ellison articulates, created an alternative sense of time, and thus an alternative way of defining the past and one's relationship to it. This redefinition offered the possibility of taking compass points where "true north" was not upward mobility in white, western society, but in a community brought together by its common experiences amidst a great diversity in background.

According to Ellison, just one of these common experiences was that of "invisibility." In his novel, *Invisible Man*, the narrator explains the ways in which society does not ever fully see him as a full human due to his race. As a black man in both the US north and south, he is seen only in the preconceived stereotypes through which others view him. The narrator states, "I am an invisible man...When they approach me they see only surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me." Living through this reality of fragmented interactions is a reflection of the crisis of modernity; jazz echoes in form and function that crisis. The narrator explains the important jazz metaphor of timing in daily life: invisibility "gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat. Sometimes you're ahead and sometimes behind...And you slip into the breaks and look around."²¹

²¹ Quoted in Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 24.

Slipping into the breaks, the space between one identity and another is the act of living jazz with its improvisational shifts to different scenarios. Manuel Zapata Olivella lived this shifting, following the lead of Langston Hughes, as he navigated Harlem and reflected on the experience from Colombia. He later recalled, “Me tocó ver el Savoy cuando se presentaba Carl Caldwell y me tocó ver a Duke Ellington, con quien hablé durante una visita que hicimos con Langston Hughes a su estudio”²² [I had to go to the Savoy when Carl Caldwell was performing and I had to see Duke Ellington, with whom I spoke during a visit to his studio that I made with Langston Hughes.] It is worth noting that Zapata Olivella’s use of the verb “tocar” in this passage is ambiguous, and carries multiple translations. Translating the phrase as “I had to,” indicates obligation, while a more passive interpretation of “I got to go,” signifies opportunity. Whether his visits were obligations or opportunities he highlights them as notable moments. That space and time, the essence of his “locale” of diasporic experience, converged in such a way that allowed him to encounter black artists at a specific historical moment. Zapata Olivella considered Ellington a part into his personal circle as the world was listening to Ellington’s music on VOA.

Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington (1899-1974) was born and raised in Washington, DC though his music career was launched in the prominent jazz city, New York, where CBS radio network broadcast his music nationally. Many listeners heard Ellington over the radio, yet his live performances were essential to his musical conversations with his band-mates and with the audience. Ellington’s early music was popularly heard at the Cotton Club in Harlem, where only white clientele were permitted in the largely black neighborhood. His music was celebrated in this venue for its “primitive” and “jungle” portrayals of African American folk music and jazz of

²² Interview with Manuel Zapata Olivella in José Luis Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella, caminante de la literatura y de la historia*. Bogotá: Ministerio de la Cultura, 2002, 125.

the 1920s and 1930s. Sensationalized by the white audience, some middle class African Americans criticized the exoticization of black music and culture and fought for racial progress through expanding understandings of black culture beyond images of sexuality and primal instincts.

Internal American influences layered and shifted jazz music from its West African syncopated rhythm roots, and additional diasporic elements blended into those forms through travel of musicians to the US, and the converse route: US musicians who performed in other countries and were thus influenced by local cultural expressions that they encountered. Duke Ellington, one of the most famous and influential American musicians of the twentieth-century, kept up an ambitious world tour schedule that took him to every continent in the world, including South America.

After gaining relatively immediate fame through his radio presence in New York, Ellington gained international notoriety through a rigorous world-tour schedule, mostly performing in Europe in the earlier years. In 1931, Ellington published his first article in a British music journal titled *Rhythm*. In the article, “The Duke Steps Out,” Ellington explained the power of jazz music as he understood it: a space for telling the story of the African diaspora in the Americas when words were either prohibited or did not suffice to convey the full experience. He wrote, “The music of my race is something more than the ‘American idiom,’... It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as ‘jazz’ is something more than just dance music.”²³ The possessive use of “our” and active voice of “we” expressed in Ellington’s article demonstrates the sense of racial community in which Ellington viewed himself and his art. Ellington himself did not live on a plantation, and did not

²³ Quoted in Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Literary Ellington” in *Representations*, vol. 77, no.1 (Winter 2002), 1.

experience the system of slavery, yet his connection to it, through the black experience in the US, was an identity that he claimed without hesitation.

This sense of community is shared throughout the black diaspora by many artists, and is built through the conversations between themselves and their art. As literary scholar Brent Hayes Edwards rightfully points out, Ellington was a musician, but also a writer. He used music to articulate messages just as he used his pen in essays and poetry. The “literary Ellington” is one and the same as the “musician Ellington” and the messages portrayed by him through a variety of media were his contribution to the diasporic conversation around blackness.²⁴

Many of the conversations about race in which Ellington participated began with the simple act of orientation within a space, be it concert hall, bar, or practice room. Ellington would first analyze the physical space in order to ascertain the nature and tone of the messages that he would portray to those around him. Thus he would fold both the American past from which he came and the contemporary influences of his location into his stories, musical and lyrical. According to Barry Ulanov, jazz critic and advocate of bebop and jazz musicians, “Duke has always been a teller of tales, three-minute or thirty, ...He has never failed to take compass points, wherever he has been, in a new city, in a new country, a redecorated nightclub; to make his own observations to translate these, like his reflections about the place of the Negro in a white society, into fanciful narratives.”²⁵ These “fanciful narratives” were expressed in a language communicated across music that spoke to those who would recognize its messages, symbols, tones, and rhythms. Many members of the African diaspora participated in this communication on the stage, in the audience, and listening to the radio and records.

²⁴ See Edwards, “The Literary Ellington.”

²⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

The act of taking “compass points” is significant in the act of belonging to, and participating in the African diaspora. It is at once a physical, mental, and emotional process that involves orientating oneself beyond the national space, to reference points that align to a community based on racialized experience. Orientation is the determination of one’s place, and it is always relational. As Ellington took the stage in the Cotton Club in Harlem, with its predominantly white clientele, the story played through his jazz music was both one of attesting to the painful past where the listeners likely did not own nor recognize their complicit role in the story, and simultaneously an act of entertainment that led the listener, through their pleasure and celebration of the art, to appreciate the history despite their limited understanding, or willingness to acknowledge, the full range of messages communicated in Ellington’s performance. How Ellington placed himself in that conversation was the result of the historical context and the agency with which he approached his own musical talent and ability to convey messages through it.

A meaningful part of playing music for Ellington was the conversation that he prompted between musicians. In his autobiographical *Music is My Mistress*, Ellington claimed that the soloists “send messages in what they play,” and that “The audience didn’t know anything about it, but the cats in the band did....”²⁶ These conversations on stage had been started in the privacy of the practice space. Ellington elaborated the process of musical composition through conversation in a particular setting, a mood that he would create with the other musicians: “Still other times I might just sit down at the piano and start composing a little melody, telling a story about it at the same time to give the mood of the piece...Then the boys go to work on it,

²⁶ Ibid, 4.

improvising, adding a phrase here and there... when we do it's usually three o'clock in the morning after we've finished a date."²⁷

The story that he would tell in order to write the melody would often be a sad tale of everyday life, perhaps about a woman not showing up to be with a waiting lover, or the feeling of a room at night after a long day of work.²⁸ These quotidian experiences written into the music did not carry blatant political messages, but they spoke to a sense of belonging with a specific orientation understood within the historical geography of the *blues* and jazz. This orientation becomes even more significant because of its transcendent nature. It connoted not only a political or ideological perspective, but also an entire cultural worldview: an understanding of one's place, role, and meaning in the wider society.

For Manuel Zapata Olivella, the directional compass of the black experience continuously led back to the sea as the most apt metaphor. Navigating the world of racial injustice and oppression in which he lived was a process he shared with his diasporic brothers such as Langston Hughes, and Duke Ellington. In a memorial essay on the death of Hughes written in the 1960s, Zapata Olivella wrote that Hughes, "Knew that the pain of the race was a sea always with borders of oppression." The greatest strength to cross those barriers of oppression was found in the African heritage of the ancestors as expressed through art. Zapata Olivella continues, writing that Hughes "felt that the song of the grandfathers, spirituals, jazz, blues, was the music of the black man, in order to reach freedom for everyone. He would intone that with faith and rebelliousness." Zapata Olivella addresses the lineage and connection of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

artists to each other, stating that Hughes “had the voices of Ellington, Baldwin, Robeson, Anderson, Wright, and so many others.”²⁹ .

To Zapata Olivella, Hughes understood the power carried in the musical traditions passed down the generations. The power of jazz mentioned here was an inheritance of the ancestors that was impactful in the present day: it carried a force of liberation for all people, of all races but especially for African descendants given the particular history of oppression in the Americas. The greater purpose of freedom, which jazz and blues served for Zapata Olivella, was an essential part of what made Hughes a key actor in the historical process of liberation. Yet he was not alone in his conveyance of messages through his poetry. Zapata Olivella understood Hughes, Ellington, Robeson, and Wright as part of the same web knit together through the freedom struggle. Jazz’s central role in this web cannot be overstated. Langston Hughes wrote in an article for the Chicago Defender in 1955, “Jazz, America’s own music, is a happy gift which Negroes have given to the whole world. We can be right proud of our musical present wrapped up in the rhythms of Africa that have now gone around the world, refashioned, and back again.”³⁰

As jazz traveled around the world, it went through what Hughes points out as a “refashioning.” Jazz musicians throughout the diaspora converged and collaborated in spaces within this geography through the act of orientation both within their racial “group” and in contrast to the racial “other.” Again, orientation toward the diaspora was a key experience that

²⁹ The original Spanish reads, “‘Supo que el dolor de la raza era un mar con fronteras siempre de opresión,’ ‘sintió que la canción de los abuelos, spirituals, el jazz, los blues, era la música del negro, para lograr la libertad de todos. Debía entonarlo con fe y rebeldía,’ and “ ‘Tenía las voces de Ellinton [sic], Balwin [sic], Robeson, Anderson, Right [sic], y tantos otros.” in Manuel Zapata Olivella, Draft of “El Inmenso Mar Ha Muerto”, MZO Collection, 1-2.

³⁰ Quoted in Robin D.G. Kelley, *Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz in Revolutionary Times*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012, 1.

produced and fostered creativity. Ellington also described jazz in terms of its international influences and appeal. He wrote,

Jazz is a tree, a most unusual tree, whose branches reach out in all directions. The heat of the tropics allows them to grow firm and strong, yet with gentle, melodic contours... Those limbs that stretch out toward the poles tend to bundle up, as though withdrawing into their inner selves, so that sometimes their joints are gnarled and knotted. From each branch come many multidirectional twigs, no two alike, and with no two pointing the same way... On the tree of jazz, there are never twin blossoms, and none the same in any respect other than that they are beautiful, exotic, and healthy, all at the same time... On close examination of it, we discover that the trunk is extra sturdy, that it has a kind of translucent bark... But as we study it more deeply, we find that its very blue-blooded roots are permanently married to, and firmly ensconced in, the rich black earth of beautiful Black Africa.³¹

Ellington's description of jazz is worth close examination, for it illustrates the nature of both the music and the diasporic community that it created. The limbs of the tree of jazz reach out in many different directions, and no two are alike, though they exist as part of one body. This imagery resolves the tension between shared experiences within the diaspora expressed through jazz, and allows for the difference inherent in those experiences depending on time, space, culture and national context. As historian Jacqueline McLeod points out, the people of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean "share a common set of experiences: domination and resistance, slavery and emancipation, the pursuit of freedom, and struggle against racism."³² It is important to distinguish between a "common set of experiences" and the same lived reality.

A set of experiences can be understood in a diversity of ways, and approached from multiple contexts, as exist throughout the diaspora. Socio-economic and educational inequality, for instance, is experienced differently in the US, Cuba, and Colombia. While experiences might differ, the act of taking compass points, of situating oneself in relation to others, is a common process with different outcomes. This common process was an intentional investment in a

³¹ Edward Kennedy Ellington, *Music is my Mistress*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1973, 338-339.

³² Hine and McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries*, xix.

collective ability to see common roots that Zapata Olivella and others embraced and felt was necessary, not an essentialized sameness that inevitably brought them together. Just as jazz expanded musical possibility to include improvisation and unexpected melodies and timing, the multiple narratives that contributed to the diasporic imagination included space for difference and accommodated jazz-like multiplicity.

In fact, Ellington further complicated the experience of orientation as a collective one. He noted that the very exercise of taking compass points often led to solitude and retreat. Ellington stated, “Those limbs that stretch out toward the poles tend to bundle up, as though withdrawing into their inner selves, so that sometimes their joints are gnarled and knotted.” The withdrawal into the inner self is a process that most of the black activists in this time period experienced as they encountered the modern “self,” often fragmented, multi-faceted. These branches of jazz, the players as well as the musical styles and expressions, with all of their gnarled and knotted joints, came into blossom when they awoke to the realization that the tree of jazz held them all; that the compass rose of the diasporic imagination had room for everyone, even those from very different backgrounds and historical contexts. As Ellington writes about the tree of jazz, the trunk was always rooted in the “rich black earth of beautiful Black Africa.”

The connection with Africa, physically and conceptually, was one of the strongest links within the diasporic imagination of jazz. The artists of the 1950s and 1960s were engaged in the project of drawing clear links from their worldview as expressed through their art to African cultural roots. As anthropologist Melville Herskovits demonstrated, it was possible to trace African musical forms throughout the Americas, and Manuel Zapata Olivella worked to demonstrate those same roots in Colombia beginning in the 1950s upon his return to his native

country. In the case of Cuba, African culture was considered especially evident and traceable through the *afrocubanismo* movement.

Cuban Fernando Ortiz Fernández (1881-1969), widely regarded as the founder of Afro-Cuban studies, wrote prolifically through the early and mid-twentieth century about African heritage in Cuban history, religion and ritual, and dance and theater culture.³³ He, along with Cuban author Alejo Carpentier, stressed the ways that blackness was encoded in rhythmic structures, emphasizing the centrality of drums to Afro-Cuban music. Ortiz's studies *El engaño de las razas* (1946) [The Deceit of the Races], *La africanía de la música folclórica de Cuba* (1950) [The Africanness of the Folkloric Music of Cuba], and his five-volume *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana* (1952-1955) [The Instruments of Afro-Cuban Music] among other works, were pioneering in their consideration of black culture, and tracing the African roots of Cuban musical, dance, and theater traditions.³⁴ Yet far from expressing a static, progressive perspective on Africa and transcultural processes in his native Cuba, Ortiz's perspective shifted drastically throughout his career.

Ortiz's engagement with *afrocubanismo* followed a historical trajectory of increasing appreciation of black contributions to Cuban culture and the Americas more broadly. In his early years, up to the 1920s, he remarked that Afro-Cuban music and dance was "repugnant, "primitive," and "savage" when analyzing "lower-class" expressions of black culture in Cuba. These reactions echoed rhetoric of the white elite used in the US, Colombia, and other countries at the time. What is more surprising is the change that occurred as Ortiz's work progressed. In

³³ Robin Moore, "Representations of Afro-Cuban Culture in the Writings of Fernando Ortiz" in *Latin American Music Review/Revista de Música Latinoamericana*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1994), 32.

³⁴ Fernando Ortiz, *El engaño de las razas*. Habana: Páginas, 1946, *La africanía de la música folclórica de Cuba*. Habana: Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Cultura, 1950, *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*. Habana: Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Cultura, 1952-1955. See also Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*. Habana: Ministerio de Educación, Dirección de Cultura, 1951.

the 1930s, his tone shifted to claim that black arts were “an abandoned [cultural] treasure” and by the 1950s, his work more explicitly celebrated those music, dance, and literature traditions.³⁵ Ortiz’s personal understandings of Cuban black culture illuminate the possibilities for development in perspective that so many experienced throughout the twentieth century, and the moments of catalytic change that occurred around mid-century.³⁶ Locating African cultural heritage as being essential to the island, and to the wider diaspora, was a process that emerged from Cuba in a variety of influential modes.

The idea of Africa being located in Cuba was an especially powerful one; it was a compass point toward which Afro-Cuban and African American jazz musicians directed their art and community-building. Literary scholar Gustavo Pérez Firmat explains the way Africa was viewed from the American perspective looking at Havana as a site of “authentic” black culture: “I will call it a locale rather than a location—that is, a setting not bound by geography, a ‘there’ without a ‘where,’ the kind of place that can materialize anyplace: on an army base near New York or a PI’s office in San Francisco.”³⁷ As Pérez Firmat indicates, the physical location was of less importance to the diasporic imagination than the mental, emotional, and artistic place toward which many artists of the diaspora oriented. That is not to say that the physical manifestation of this imagination was less significant, real locations could reveal this “locale,” such as the neighborhood of Harlem, a Guillén or Hughes poem, in a tune passed through the generations, or in the act of improvising in and out of that tune. Indeed, if Africa could “materialize anyplace” it especially did so in the jazz bands of the 1940s through the 1960s.

³⁵ Moore, “Representations of Afrocuban Culture in the Writings of Fernando Ortiz,” 33.

³⁶ As Robin Moore explains, one of Ortiz’s most significant contributions was his early use of “transculturation” theories to describe the blending of African and Hispanic cultural elements as a process of cultural change. He drew from Melville Herskovits’ 1938 publication *Acculturation: The Study of Culture Contact*, yet preceded other studies of transculturation as described in Moore, “Representations of Afrocuban Culture in the Writings of Fernando Ortiz,” 44.

³⁷ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Havana Habit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, 4.

The introduction of Afro-Cuban rhythms to US jazz had been developing in the 1930s, but made an especially transformative impact when Mario Bauza, one of the first Afro-Cubans to play in New York, introduced Afro-Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo (1915-1948) to Dizzy Gillespie in the late 1940s. Pozo, born Luciano Pozo González in Havana Cuba, was the first conga player to join a US jazz band when Dizzy Gillespie insisted that he play with him. Pozo had already immigrated to New York City, and though Dizzy's band-mates were doubtful about how a conga player could possibly fit into an American jazz band, Gillespie's understanding of the conga drum's significance was diasporic in nature; he was thinking globally, in a universal African descendant framework. While Gillespie could have chosen not to incorporate the conga (certainly many other jazz musicians had not), he was compelled to include the particular rhythmic affect and sound that the Cuban instrument offered. He consciously knew that the addition of the drum in his ensemble would orient his jazz music to include an "African" cultural musical thread. The decision pulled his musical compass toward an Africa situated within the American island of Cuba.

The composer and percussionist George Russell recalled that, "Chano's concept came from Africa. When I heard it, it sounded on fire to me, the mixing of the standard American drumming together with the Afro-Cuban thing. We were striving for exactly that kind of world grasp, a kind of universality."³⁸ As a result of his influence, Pozo changed Gillespie's band forever, and taught the African American musicians rhythms they had never been exposed to previously; giving them access to a heritage that greatly enriched their senses of participation within the diaspora. Gillespie recalled his relationship with Pozo as one of finding common ground and learning from each other's difference. Pozo's very broken English made some think

³⁸ Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, *To Be, or not... To Bop: Memoirs*. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1979, 325.

that communication must have been very difficult between them. Gillespie remembered, “Since he couldn’t speak any English, people always asked, “Well, how do you communicate?”, Pozo would respond, “Deehee no peek pani, me no peek Angli, bo peek African,” [Dizzy no speak Spanish, me no speak English, both speak African]. Gillespie explained what Pozo meant by the comment:

He meant something which began during slavery times. In the United States they wouldn’t let us use our primary means of expression, which was the drum because we could talk with the drum, and they figured you could foment revolution with the drums...

After the drums had been outlawed and taken away, our ancestors had to devise other means of expressing themselves, their emotions. So they started, like in the fields, singing and clapping their hands, and they would hit the hoe in the ground in rhythm at the same time. The rhythm was in them, but they just didn’t have any means, instrumentally, to put it together so the sound could travel very far. To do that, they needed the main instrument, the rhythm maker, the one that you play with your hands. Our ancestors still have the impulse to make polyrhythms, but basically they developed a monorhythm from that time on, and it was very easy to adapt. That was in the United States. We became monorhythmic, but the Afro-Cubans, the South Americans, and the West Indians remained polyrhythmic. They didn’t give up theirs. Our beat in the United States was so basic, though, that other blacks in the hemisphere could easily hear it.³⁹

The idea that drumming was a black language was not new. The first Europeans who began the Atlantic slave trade in Africa noted the significance of the drums as communicative instruments that conveyed complex messages in contrast to European practices. An 18th-century missionary to Africa, Robert Clarke, noted that he heard a variety of messages that were carried through drums, “The signals represent the tones of the syllables of conventional phrases of a traditional and highly poetic character.”⁴⁰ He described the effectiveness of this language in communicating: it crossed great distances, was more efficient than carrier pigeons or post, and was as specific as words. While many Europeans and their descendants, before and after Clarke, did not always recognize such cultural coherency in drumming practices, the ability of drums to “speak” held great significance for Gillespie, Pozo, and likely their audiences in the diasporic

³⁹ Gillespie, *To Be, or not...To Bop*, 317-318.

⁴⁰ James Gleick, *The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood*. New York: Vintage, 2012, 15.

context. It lessened the cultural difference between them. Jazz crossed the Spanish/English barrier, and allowed for communication in the present moment, as well as a mutual acknowledgement of the legacy of slavery shared by all Americans, including those from the US, Cuba, and Colombia. The point of convergence is the drum's central place in all three of these diasporic cultures, yet differences exist in the rhythms. The learning of each other's rhythms was the process of relationship-building across national boundaries and highlights the overcoming of difference in order to create a new music, a new communication between Afro-Cubans and African Americans. In the process of building community, a greater self was discovered and created. Diasporic identity resulted. Gillespie explains: "...Charlie Parker and I found the connections between Afro-Cuban and African music and discovered the identity of our music with theirs. Those concerts should definitely have been recorded, because we had a ball discovering our identity."⁴¹

Just as Manuel Zapata Olivella set out to find his identity and become a truer version of himself on his journey through the Americas, Dizzy Gillespie created his musical self through musical collaboration with Afro-Cubans. A similar experience transformed the experience of African American dancer, Katherine Dunham, who incorporated Afro-Cuban drumming elements into her performance repertoires. While performing in Havana in 1953, she recruited Afro-Cuban sacred drummer Francisco Aguabella (1925-2010) to join her company. Aguabella had played at the Sans Souci, one of Havana's leading nightclubs in the 1940s and 1950s where Dunham recruited him.⁴² The collaboration between Dunham and Aguabella was indicative of the African diasporic artistic world that was transnational in nature. Dunham invited Aguabella

⁴¹ Quoted in Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 110.

⁴² Folder "808 JOHP, Collection Transcripts/Abstracts, Aguabella, Francisco," Box 1, Series 5 in Jazz Oral History Program, Archives Center, Smithsonian Museum of American History.

to play with her dance company that at the time was working on the film “Mambo” in Rome with US actors Shelley Winters, Ava Gardner, and Anthony Quinn. The Dunham company, the first African American dance company formed in the United States, performed abroad, exposing audiences to the diasporic dances and music of the Americas. In the 1950s they performed in Europe, Africa, South America, the US, Australia and New Zealand. These musical experiences with Dunham led Aguabella to meet other musicians in the US, and in the 1950s he recorded with Tito Puente and introduced two Afro-Cuban *iyesa* tunes to the album “Top Percussion” with Puente. In the late 1950s he performed at jazz festivals around the US with Dizzy Gillespie and through him met Peggy Lee, with whom he performed throughout the 1960s. Aguabella’s experiences are another example of the US-Cuban artistic collaboration that was burgeoning in the 1950s in the realms of music and dance. The transnational visions of both Gillespie and Dunham led them to include Afro-Cuban musicians in their artwork, claiming in the process a celebration of African heritage shared throughout the Americas.

Anthropological Dance and National Cultural Activism

As jazz music offered spaces for diasporic conversations spoken through instruments and sounds, so did dance create the same opportunities through bodily movement to such sound. Dance, based in anthropological research, emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, ushered in by the growing field of cultural anthropology. One of the century’s most influential innovators in this area was Katherine Dunham. Despite relatively few scholarly words dedicated to her, Dunham was an historical actor who appeared practically everywhere in the diasporic Americas; she was intricately involved in black consciousness movements through her artistic endeavors and academic ethnographic work in the Caribbean and US. Much like Langston Hughes and Manuel

Zapata Olivella, Dunham acted as a nexus, a networking spoke, throughout the twentieth century. She connected people to each other, built bridges of ideas about dance, culture, and racial identity that crossed national and temporal boundaries. For those who participated in and witnessed her performances, Dunham's art was a means of journeying through the African diaspora and imagining oneself in that "locale."

A native of Chicago, Katherine Dunham (1909-2006) started the first African American dance company after completing formal training as an anthropologist under Melville Herskovits (1895-1963). Herskovits had shifted perceptions of African American history with his 1941 publication of *The Myth of the Negro Past* and his application of cultural relativism to US black culture. He was one of the first white anthropologists to assert that African American culture was not "pathological" but rather had deep, traceable roots from Africa.⁴³ Through his mentorship, Herskovits encouraged Dunham to find survivals of African culture in her studies of Caribbean dance and music. This approach inherently culturally linked various locations of the African diaspora to each other, and reinforced the diasporic imagination through an orientation to Africa, as expressed in the Americas.

While Dunham decided to leave an academic career to be a performer, her dance was a form of public anthropology heavily influenced by her studies, what anthropologist Vève Clark calls "research-to-performance."⁴⁴ Thus dance for Dunham was not simply art, nor entertainment: it was an authentic expression of culture. She and the members of her company portrayed a worldview and set of experiences that were based on their understanding of black cultures throughout the Americas. Her most famous ballet, "L'ag Ya" was set in Martinique and

⁴³ This "pathological" description of black culture is discussed in Professor Vince Brown's film about Herskovits, "Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness" available at: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/herskovits/film.html> (accessed June 29, 2016).

⁴⁴ Quoted in Elizabeth Chin, "Katherine Dunham's Dance as Public Anthropology" in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 112, no. 4 (December 2010), 640.

incorporated local dances from the island with traditional French ballet technique. L'ag Ya is a martial art whose dancer-warriors imitate fighting moves used by enslaved peoples of the island as a form of self-protection; similar to Afro-Brazilian *capoeira*. These martial art dances, performed in very different places, both were oriented within compass points situated within the diaspora. They both reflected power relations during slavery where the enslaved found their own ways of training for self-defense while masking the exercises within moves that the slaveholders would have interpreted as dance. In the recreation of these moves generations later, a specific language is spoken between the dancers that was not immediately obvious to all observers. It is a language of power, agency, and cultural innovation that was useful in the diasporic "locale"; located outside of the slaveholders' artistic definitions, yet within an inhibited, manipulated expression of the enslaved and their descendants.

Dunham meticulously studied the dance of L'ag Ya and dedicated months to training her dancers to its particular movements. Authenticity was of utmost importance to her. What was "authentic" was that which portrayed an accurate worldview of the original practitioners of the dance. Dunham later commented on her anthropological approach to dance that expanded beyond traditional Western dances: "I simply could not, with purely classical ballet, say what I wanted to say. I could do a story of course, with ballet. If you know ... ballet is just a narrative, but to capture the meaning and the culture, life of the people, I felt that I had to take something directly from the people and develop that."⁴⁵ For Dunham, reproducing local dances within the diaspora was an act of taking "something directly from the people." In this context art through dance is translatable and transferrable. The culture exists in a pure form that can be replicated and presented to different audiences. The quote above also demonstrates Dunham's

⁴⁵ "Katherine Dunham on need for Dunham Technique" Video Clip #38, recorded in September 2002, Katherine Dunham Collection, Library of Congress.

understanding of ballet as a European art form: it could present a narrative, but it could not “capture the meaning and the culture.” For her, only the Afro-centric dances could capture culture and they were the most relevant to the diasporic communities and populations. Dunham’s approach, while it incorporated European dance techniques, was intentionally oriented directly to the spaces “in between” that were present in jazz: the “locale” of the diaspora is present in the dances, but points away from European influences.

Dunham’s intention in her art was to convey a full experience with the range of emotions, connections between the dancers and the audience, and the representation of cultural elements of the African diaspora. Her approach, which was completely innovative at the time, went far beyond the traditional techniques to incorporate ethnographic research.⁴⁶ This evidence-based dance, while often understood by some audiences as representing “primitive” black culture, in fact disrupted stereotypes by refusing to be categorized in a neat, concise form. Dunham’s art attempted to move beyond mere images of diasporic life and communicate the underlying meanings of the music and dancing traditions. Dunham elaborated on the transcendental aspects of dancing as a cultural act: “There is an energy within...we are given the capacity to use it. We use it in a way that is a part of our basic culture.” Expressing that culture occurs through the energetic dance such that “once we discover that energy... such a thing as dance becomes such a

⁴⁶ While Dunham was innovative and pioneering in her ethnographic and dance approaches, there were other dancers doing similar work as her contemporaries. Eleo Pomare (1937-2008), for instance, was a black Colombian-American dancer who spent time in Cartagena, Colombia, Panama, and came to the US as an adolescent. While living with an aunt in New York City, he began his dance career that addressed racial relations and identity in the Americas throughout the second half of the twentieth century. He trained with Dunham while in New York, and went on to establish his own acclaimed dance company. For more on Pomare, see Anna Kisselgoff, “Eleo Pomare, Dancer and Rebel, Dies at 70” in *The New York Times*, August 13, 2008 and Rachel Fensham, “‘Breakin’ the Rules’: Eleo Pomare and the Transcultural Choreographies of Black Modernity” in *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 45 (1): 40-63.

delight. Because you are moving on the stream that is, that is you, but is even over and beyond you: that is your energy.⁴⁷

Dunham's concept of the self, of that which "is you" is intricately connected to culture and energy. Energy is the form that carries the essential in all of us, and exists in the space that intersects with culture, but is also separate from it. This energy, as she describes it, is also a locale. The locale is not static, but ever "moving on the stream that is... you." When a dance, poem, or jazz piece is approached in terms of a moving stream of energy as the essential self, the diasporic space shifts from the physical space: beyond the dance hall, the city, or the nation, to a "locale" that can be understood in energetic terms. The African diasporic imagination of the Americas was often located in this place of energetic convergence, clearly present in artistic endeavours.

In all of her performances, Dunham sought to present what was "even over and beyond you" within certain cultural parameters. To this end she merged rhythms, dance steps, clothing, and plot lines from the Caribbean and the US in efforts to show the beauty, depth, and commonalities between African diasporic cultures in the Americas, and occasionally to comment on social and political injustices. Her ballet "Southland," first performed in 1950, directly criticized the vigilante practice of lynching in the US South. The piece narrated the story of a white woman who was physically abused by her white lover. When a black man innocently finds her and attempts to help her, she blames the black man for her injuries. The community takes justice into its own hands and lynches the black man. Both the audience and Dunham's integrated dance company had to wrestle with the meanings of racial justice with this piece, five years before the gendered complexities of racial justice were thrown into the national spotlight

⁴⁷ "Katherine Dunham on the concept of the circle of energy in Dunham Technique" Video Clip #40, recorded in September 2002, Katherine Dunham Collection, Library of Congress.

with the cruel death of Emmett Till: an African American boy from Chicago murdered in Mississippi for allegedly flirting with a white woman. State Department funding with which Dunham had been touring ceased as a result of “Southland’s” controversial subject matter.⁴⁸

While Zapata Olivella was travelling through Central and North America in 1947 and writing about the atrocities of lynching in the US South, the Dunham Company performed “Cumbia,” a dance piece televised in Europe that had clear Colombian references.⁴⁹ *Cumbia*, both a musical style based in West African rhythms and a courtship dance, originated on the Caribbean coast of Colombia and gained popularity throughout the Andean region in the twentieth century. The male dancers in this piece wear costumes reminiscent of traditional Colombian coastal clothing: *guayabera*-like shirts, *vueltao*-style hats, and they carry *machetes* and small woolen bags that resemble the *mochilas* used on the Colombian coast. Dunham herself is the central dancer in the piece, with male and female dancers encircling her.

The women are dressed in traditional Colombian coastal dresses used in *cumbia* dances. Dunham is smoking a cigar throughout the entire dance, a key diasporic element that is woven into the Afro-Colombian context. While cigars are not traditionally associated with *cumbia*, they are used, particularly their smoke, as religious offerings to orishas within Yoruban Ifá religions including Cuban Santería, Haitian Vodun, US Voodoo, Brazilian Candomblé, and other practices in the West Indies and Caribbean regions. What is unclear is the audience of the piece. Questions linger around for whom Dunham performed this piece and for what reasons, though there is a

⁴⁸ Constance Valis Hill, “Katherine Dunham’s ‘Southland’: Protest in the Face of Repression” in *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994), 6.

⁴⁹ It is unknown whether “Cumbia” was performed or recorded in the Americas. It was performed in 1947 and then later televised in Germany. The video of the production “Cumbia” Video Clip #31, Katherine Dunham Company, 1947, broadcast in a 1960 television production titled *Karibische Rhythmen*, Katherine Dunham Collection, Library of Congress.

clear celebration of Colombian culture and music. The performance is evidence of Dunham's simultaneously broad and specific knowledge of diasporic dances, dress and music.

In his letters to Hughes, Manuel Zapata Olivella does not specifically cite "Cumbia," though he was well aware of Dunham's performances in Colombia and the critical acclaim there. He also knew that Dunham held a shared significance within the diaspora and the US. He wrote in a 1957 letter to Langston Hughes, "It is noticeable in my country a growing interest in North American black art. Just a few months ago Katherine Dunham was among us with her dancers, who caused a true furor in the artistic world."⁵⁰

The Dunham furor was present in the most widely read Colombian newspaper at the time: *El Tiempo*. Zapata Olivella's personal collection contains many clippings from this paper, and it is highly likely that he would have read, or at least been aware of the Dunham reviews. One article, dated February 4, 1951, noted the immense success of Dunham's performance in the city of Cali stating that the debut of the Katherine Dunham Company "constituyó el más sonado éxito jamás visto en esa ciudad al colmarse totalmente el teatro."⁵¹ [constituted the most resounding success ever seen in that city that totally/completely sold out/packed the theater]. A *caleño* (from Cali) paper wrote of the performance:

Without exaggeration it is affirmed that what occurred last night in the Municipal Theater constitutes an American triumph over Art. Due to the grace and genius of Katherine Dunham, we have passed from adolescence to adulthood in the artistic world. After 450 years of babbling and struggles, of vacillations, of cruelly frustrated intuitions, we Americans have an authentic art, dignified, to oppose that which has traditionally come to us from Europe in postcards and shopworn books. After much anthropological and ethnographic research, Dunham has been able to produce a typical American ballet.]⁵²

⁵⁰ The original Spanish reads, "Se nota en mi país un creciente interés por el arte negro norteamericano. Hace apenas un par de meses estuvo entre nosotros Katherine Dunham con sus bailarines, que ocasionó verdadero furor en el mundo artístico." Manuel Zapata Olivella to Langston Hughes, 11 May 1951, Box 176, Folder 3229, Langston Hughes Papers, 1862-1980, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁵¹ Anonymous, "Pleno Triunfo de Katherine Dunham en el Debut de su Ballet en Nuestro País" *El Tiempo*, Feb 4, 1951.

⁵² The original Spanish reads, "Sin exageración alguna se puede afirmar que lo ocurrido anoche en el Teatro Municipal, constituye un triunfo de América sobre el Arte, por la gracia y el genio de Katherine Dunham, hemos

The author proclaims that Dunham's performance in Cali was "an American triumph over Art" using "American" in the broadest, continental sense. It demonstrates an affinity between Colombian and US culture; Dunham unifies the continent through her art and can be claimed by all Americans, whether in North, Central or South America. The language presents a common "we," that is culturally advancing to produce "an authentic art" and Dunham is leading that charge. These comments are especially enlightening considering their context within Cali as a Colombian urban center.

Cali, Colombia's third largest city is situated near the Pacific coast and has long been an epicenter of diasporic culture. The cultivation and processing of sugar cane has traditionally been the largest industry there; a job dominated by enslaved Afro-Colombians during the colonial era who were emancipated after the mid-nineteenth century. A century later, Cali became the birthplace of Colombian salsa music and dance. The jazz orchestra style of play migrated from the US to the Colombian coast and then to Cali in the 1950s and 1960s and several bands emerged that fused Colombian slang, American jazz, and Cuban son rhythms. The city also produced its own style of dance to the new Colombian salsa, and thus had already begun embracing artistic forms rooted in African heritage.

In contrast, the reaction in Bogotá to Dunham's performances was quite different from that of Cali. Bogotá, the capital of Colombia and its most populous city has traditionally been portrayed within the context of a colder Andean climate, close connections to Spain and Europe, and the intellectual capital of the country with the most prestigious universities, largest

pasado de la adolescencia a la mayoría de edad en el mundo artístico. Después de 450 años de balbuceos y luchas, de vacilaciones, de intuiciones cruelmente frustradas, los americanos tenemos un arte auténtico, digno, para oponerlo al que tradicionalmente nos viene de Europa en postales y en libros trasnochados. Después de muchas investigaciones antropológicas y etnográficas, la Dunham ha podido producir un ballet típicamente americano." Quoted in Anonymous, "Pleno Triunfo de Katherine Dunham en el Debut de su Ballet en Nuestro País" *El Tiempo*, Feb 4, 1951.

companies, and political dominance over other regions. Exoticism, primitivism and “jungle” rhetoric dominates the review of Dunham’s performance and suggests that she was celebrated for the sexuality interpreted in her dance and music. A *bogotano* newspaper article described her performance as “Sensual and insinuating, elusive and fast, dotted with hedonistic greed.”⁵³

While the article from Cali claims Dunham’s dance for all of the Americas, using the possessive “we” pronoun, the Bogotá article written by Jaime Posada mentions “the folkloric hallucination of *her* people...Faustian forest of *her* company...” and states, “Dunham emerges as a delirious ‘re-creator’ of the habits and resources of *her* onyx people” [emphasis mine]. The third person pronoun creates a distance between the spectator and Dunham, grouping her together as representative of a black “other.” This black other is far from neutral: it is linked with earthly desires, Faustian deals with the devil, deliriousness and lack of control. While Posada portrays Dunham’s diasporic culture as being foreign to Colombia, he does state that her dancers “give authentic successful demonstrations.” What the authenticity is measured against is unclear, yet Posada’s compass points and cultural orientation vary greatly from that of the diasporic imagination. His language marks difference and distance, rather than a common cultural experience that carries diasporic meaning.

Another reviewer, whose article appeared in the same edition of *El Tiempo*, struggled with the tension between the European-centric canon of traditional ballet, modern dance, and the clearly more Afro-centric dance that Dunham displayed. The author’s expectations of what

⁵³ The original Spanish reads, “Sensual e insinuante, esquiva y veloz, salpicada de codicia hedonista, implacable en la soberbia de sus escorzos, esta Cleopatra de oscura epidermis tiene la aptitud y el prodigio de representar la alucinación folklórica de sus gentes y de elevarla a una categoría de preciosos rasgos. Entre el fáustico bosque de su compañía, en donde cada elemento sabe dar auténticas muestras de acierto, Katherine Dunham emerge como una delirante ‘re-creadora’ de los hábitos y los recursos de su pueblo de azabache para hundirse en el paroxismo, en la queja agobiante, en la esclavitud del fetiche, en el vegetal aliento del deseo.” Jaime Posada, “El Extraño Arte de Katherine Dunham” in *El Tiempo*, Feb. 11, 1951

afrocentricity might mean on the dance stage come through his commentary that is worth quoting at some length:

That which George Balanchine and Salders Wells represent in ‘ballet’ and Martha Graham in modern dance, Katherine Dunham represents in folkloric... If her natural tendency for dance has brought her to capture the choreographic expression of her own race in the United States, the Caribbean, and now in South America, her curiosity and anthropological background have brought her study of ritual primitive dances... It is a shame also that Miss Dunham has not given us a more eloquent and genuine demonstration of North American black dance, which is precisely her strength. Only God knows how long Bogotá should wait for a new opportunity to know first hand interpretations of what is a ‘revival’ between Baptists and Revivalists in the South of the United States, or those popular dances that were the fruits of the three great stages of classical jazz: New Orleans, Chicago, New York.⁵⁴

The orientation of Dunham’s work consistently points toward and away from classical ballet. She, and her reviewers, comment consistently on her strong technique and training and that then gave her a framework from which to incorporate other dance traditions of the American South, Caribbean, and South America. In this sense, her work is based in a Western, European foundation, yet her academic anthropological work inspired her to carry messages through her dance, and thus incorporate the languages that most suited the cultures she wanted to celebrate. The author of the above article recognizes the various artistic influences in Dunham’s work, yet does not seem to connect to the diaspora through the performance. He is searching for the US culture from which Dunham emerges, and does not situate her dance in the larger context of black dance and history in the Americas. This distance between American nations is what both of the Zapata Olivellas worked to counter and reframe within their work. The *bogotano* alliance

⁵⁴ The original Spanish reads, “Lo que Georges Balanchine y el Salders Wells representan en el ‘ballet’, y Martha Graham en la danza moderna, lo representa en lo folklórico Katherine Dunham... Si su tendencia natural por la danza la ha llevado a captar la expresión coreográfica de su propia raza en Estados Unidos, en el Caribe y ahora en América del Sur, su curiosidad y formación antropológica la han llevado al estudio de danzas rituales primitivas... Lástima también que Miss Dunham no nos hubiera dado una muestra más elocuente y genuina de la danza negra norteamericana, que es precisamente su fuerte. Sabe Dios hasta cuándo deberá esperar Bogotá una nueva oportunidad de conocer en intérpretes de primera mano lo que es un ‘revival’ entre bautistas o revivalistas del Sur de Estados Unidos, o aquellas ya extinguidas danzas populares de salón que fueron fruto de las tres grandes etapas del jazz clásico: Nueva Orleans, Chicago, Nueva York.” José Santos Quijano, “La Visita de Katherine Dunham” in *El Tiempo*, Feb. 11, 1951.

with Spain and European culture actively denied strong roots of connection that the Zapata Olivellas, and their colleagues, believed had been intentionally kept invisible by nationalist agendas of *mestizaje* that hid a deep, painful history of implicit racism in Latin America.

The above comments in *El Tiempo*, surely read by a wide audience of literate Colombians, were made before Colombia's most celebrated folkloric artist and anthropologist introduced the capital city to Colombia's own diasporic dance traditions. In 1947, the same year that the Dunham Company danced "Cumbia," Zapata Olivella's sister, Delia, was in the first class of women to graduate from Cartagena's first coeducation school.⁵⁵ In Cartagena, Delia would have been surrounded by *cumbia*, a dance that she studied closely along with other Colombian folkloric styles. She decided to pursue an art degree in the capital city of Bogotá, and began her own dance group at Manuel's suggestion. In the early 1950s, Delia and Manuel set off to study the folkloric traditions of the Colombian coasts, making their way by staying in towns for three or more months at a time. Completely self-funded, Delia worked as a seamstress in each location and Manuel practiced medicine to sustain their travels and anthropological research.

In 1953 Delia starred in the first performance that featured Afro-Colombian dances in the Teatro Colón in Bogota, the same theater where Katherine Dunham performed two years earlier.⁵⁶ Delia later studied with Dunham in New York City in the mid-'60s, but first she engrossed herself in the national dances of Colombia. In 1954, she convinced a revered traditional sacred Afro-Colombian drummer by the name of Batata to join her in Bogotá as a part of her performances there. Batata was from the maroon community of Palenque de San Basilio on the Caribbean coast, a unique community that speaks a dialect infused with West African syntax and vocabulary, and a dance culture that has been intentionally preserved from the first

⁵⁵ Cynthia Margarita Tompkins and David William Foster, eds., *Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001, 296.

⁵⁶ Rosario Montaña Cuéllar, "Delia Zapata Olivella" in *Semana*, March 12, 2005.

enslaved runaways who founded the community during the colonial period. Batata brought to Bogotá the *lumbalúes* (funerary songs) of his community, and for the first time, the capital city residents were exposed explicitly to the Afro-Creole culture of the coast.⁵⁷

As Delia's dance troupe performed in the open spaces of Bogotá, as well as in its theaters, her brother, Juan hosted a radio program in Bogotá, "La hora costeña" [The Coastal Hour]. The show highlighted popular coastal music, and Juan's writings were part of a surge of literature produced from the coast, including Colombia's most celebrated author, Gabriel García Márquez. Couched in modernist primitivism that had transnational "currents," the Zapata Olivellas rejected the stereotypes attributed to black culture and worked to accomplish a shift in national cultural imagination to include a more sophisticated understanding of the coast, and specifically Afro-Colombian dance, music, and ritual forms.⁵⁸ Delia's approach to dance reinforced her brothers' writings and anthropological work. They were also a mirror image of Katherine Dunham's approach to close study and familiarity with dance forms before repetition of them. Delia claimed, "prior to experimentation, it is essential to delve into one's own cultural expressions." Delia believed that the "traditional dances are both the language with which to communicate with her ancestors and the living history of her country."⁵⁹ This "living history" is essential to understanding the cultural meaning of the dances and diasporic experience through their performances. Delia did not view the past as a foreign place, linked only to the present through distant lineages of ancestral practices. The ancestors were actively with her in her dances, just as Manuel conceived of Ellington's jazz as carrying ancestral messages to Langston

⁵⁷ Peter Wade has highlighted the fact that many Colombian musical traditions, including the archetypal *bambuco*, very likely has African origins, but centuries of denial and narrative-shifting has placed that Andean musical form firmly in Spanish traditions. See Peter Wade, "African Diaspora and Colombian Popular Music in the Twentieth Century" in *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 28, no. 2, (Fall 2008), 41-54.

⁵⁸ Peter Wade, "African Diaspora and Colombian Popular Music in the Twentieth Century," 49.

⁵⁹ Tompkins and Foster, eds., *Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women*, 295.

Hughes and all African Americans. For the Zapata Olivellas, Katherine Dunham, Chano Pozo, and Duke Ellington, dance, music, and literature were all physical forms of experiencing a temporal, energetic commonality.

Conclusion

During the 1950s, jazz entered its golden years, with the most beloved US and Afro-Cuban players creating a community around their shared meanings as expressed through musical conversations. These conversations were held in a language spoken by the instruments, especially through drums that were considered direct conduits of African heritage. The heartbeat of the world was present in the rhythms for both secular and sacred drummers who encountered jazz and its diasporic dimensions. Similarly, the anthropological approaches to African diasporic dance of Katherine Dunham and Delia Zapata Olivella forever changed the ways that the diasporic imagination engaged with cultural meanings in the US and Colombia, redirecting the compass points from a Cold War East/West binary, to the African diaspora and its particular vision of democratic freedom and liberation.

Both of these musical and dance art forms were performed in creative space that did not belong to any one location but rather oriented toward the “locale” of the African diaspora in the space between the nations.⁶⁰ This orientation offered the opportunity for a new envisioning of belonging and participation in the anti-racism struggle and created new and innovative entrees

⁶⁰ While considering the “in between” spaces of the diaspora, it is important to note that hierarchical national power structures within the Americas do not render all nations necessarily equal in the political economy and monetary and cultural resources available to participate in cultural exchanges through film, radio, and television. For instance, Katherine Dunham may have received more international attention due to her status as a US performer and her access to technological resources in the US. The sources consulted in this study do not reveal whether Afro-Colombians asserted resentments or tensions between themselves and African Americans due to wealth, status, or international political influence, but Manuel Zapata Olivella does address some US imperialistic assumptions about race and Latin America in a letter to Langston Hughes discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. He was well aware of “primitive” ideas of blackness in the US and their conflation with tropical places such as Colombia.

into the “lived history” of African diasporic communities. While performing on stage, practicing late at night in private, or during an ethnographic research encounter, artists such as Dunham, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Chano Pozo, and Delia Zapata Olivella brought the past into their present and pulled their audiences into experiencing blackness in an entirely new way that engaged an encounter with difference and cultural familiarity. The diasporic imagination of the past, and the meanings attached to that past were reconsidered, remade, and re-experienced in ways that were used to harness power for change in the coming decades.

CHAPTER THREE

In Search of “Soul Space”: Music, Literature and Theater in Personal and Collective Liberation¹

In which leap of blood
 did you and I meet
 or in which Yoruba song did
 we rock together like two brothers?
 The remote masts will know it
 of the ship that brought us,
 the unpassable Congo
 where our grandparent walked.

- “The Painful Route” by Afro-Colombian poet Jorge Artel

Introduction

The development of an African diasporic imagination of and within the Americas had clear roots in the early years of the twentieth century.² It spread in the 1930s and 1940s through networks of New World writers, especially poets, as they encountered each other across waters of great difference but chose to focus on a sense of commonality. Together they produced a vision of black experience that used poetry as a common language of expressing their personal journeys of growth and increasing awareness of black consciousness.

While commonalities between black communities had previously been acknowledged within the US and through international Pan-African movements, the artists of the Harlem Renaissance, Franco-phone *négritude*, and *afrocubanismo* reached out to each other in new ways that held the Americas within a specific vision of diasporic reality. The broader web made up of

¹ The phrase “Soul Space” is quoted in Anthony Ratcliff, “‘Black Writers of the World, Unite!’: Negotiating Pan-African Politics of Cultural Struggle in Afro-Latin America” in *The Black Scholar*, volume 37, no. 4, (Winter 2008), 29.

² There were certainly roots of the African diasporic imagination before the 1930s and 1940s when this narrative begins. W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance, wrote about what could easily be identified as a diasporic imagination in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and *The Negro* (1915), among other writings. I am not asserting that the first articulations of an African diasporic imagination were found in the 1930s and 1940s with Manuel Zapata Olivella, but rather I am highlighting a particular conversation and network of activists and artists that constructed their own imagination that was influenced by and linked to earlier discourses and ideas.

many regional networks extended beyond the US and the Antilles to include the mainland Caribbean and South American nations. Afro-Colombian authors such as Jorge Artel and Manuel Zapata Olivella participated in these conversations and relationships in ways that have traditionally been understudied yet were crucial to diasporic networks. Focusing on the links within the Americas, particularly those that flowed through Colombia, expands upon the US-Africa conceptualization of diaspora in two significant ways: it emphasizes diaspora as a process that is continually changing, and it highlights some of the important ways in which African descendants made meaning of the diaspora through a shared regional context of the Americas and cultural connections with others in the hemisphere.

This implicit diasporic imagination shifted in the 1950s and early 1960s as the Cold War simultaneously limited dialogue around black consciousness and acted as a catalyst for expression of diasporic reality that found its form and function in jazz music and anthropological dance. Rather than define themselves within the limits of Cold War ideologies, many black artists and activists participated in a diasporic imagination that oriented to other “locales” that were located in between the rhythms of jazz, in between their geographical nations, with a language that intentionally expressed an alternate reality to the majority populations of their nations and audiences.

In an important next stage, the diasporic imagination coalesced into intentional, purposeful community art that emerged in an effort and vision that addressed the need to confront historical memory. Prior to anthropologist Melville Herskovits’ 1941 publication of *The Myth of the Negro Past*, the history of black communities and the slave trade had been all but obliterated by dominant white discourses of US history.³ Re-claiming and re-engaging with that

³ Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1941. It is important to note that Herskovits was not the first to account for the “Negro Past,” WEB Du Bois and other authors had written on the

history was a crucial step to reconciling the past with the legacy of slavery in the present. One of the most impactful historical exercises was to abandon the middle passage of slavery that metaphorically and psychologically held great significance for many black communities.⁴ The act of directly moving past the legacy of slavery into the present required a redefinition of history that acknowledged the past's influence on the present. The artists and activists discussed in this chapter felt the past as a present condition: a present history, or *past-present* that was expressed and negotiated through the creation of alternative spaces (such as jazz poetry and theater) for expressing a more authentic and liberated self, both individually and as a community.

Physically and spiritually disembarking from the middle passage as a past and contemporaneous condition was accomplished in a variety of ways. One of the principal and most powerfully transformative modes was through a re-definition and re-purposing, of the role of music, literature, and theater in a direct engagement with the community. Music created the “soul space” needed to find liberation and theater was a way of living out a present history that reflected reality. There were many art forms involved in the Black Arts Movement and its parallel movement in Colombia; it is important to see these not as separate, but rather as simultaneous and parallel expansive projects informed by the artists' understanding of music, theater, and poetry as one process, experience and vessel through which the present history was lived.

In order to fully understand the ways in which a black aesthetic music and theater contributed to the developing diasporic imagination in the 1960s and 1970s, this chapter will first

topic in the early twentieth century. Yet Herskovits' work opened up a field of cultural work that had hitherto been limited.

⁴ “To abandon the middle passage” means, in this sense, to emotionally and psychologically escape from the slave ships and inhabit a reality not determined by the slave traders or masters, but by the African descendant community. It is to take full control of the consciousness of the community through a process of healing from the pains of the legacy of slavery. This process requires addressing and describing the legacy of the middle passage first, and then reconciliation with the past in order to claim the present from that past.

consider the ways that Cuba, with its *afrocubanismo* artistic forms and Revolution, acted as a catalyst for imagining other possibilities for liberation and redefinitions of community activism. It then turns to the Black Arts Movement, and its parallel, simultaneous artistic movement led by the Zapata Olivellas in Colombia, and analyze the music, literature and theater associated with them as works of cultural nationalism. These works brought forth the diasporic experience as an essential element of understanding the nation and to engage and activate its African descendant communities.

Revolutionary Cuba and Diasporic Liberation



Figure 2. Manuel Zapata Olivella and Rosa Bosch on their wedding day, photograph, photographer unknown, 1960. MZO Papers, Vanderbilt University.

The 1960s started off with great change for the African diasporic imagination and for Manuel Zapata Olivella. In 1960 the Cuban revolutionary government began its rule of the island and Zapata Olivella married Spaniard Rosa Bosch, the daughter of a celebrated Catalan painter,

Emilio Bosch Roger.⁵ Rosa was most likely raised and surrounded by art, though it is uncertain whether she met Zapata Olivella in an artistic context. The two married in a low-key Catholic ceremony and settled in Bogotá, Colombia. Bosch stepped into the role of wife and professional assistant to Zapata Olivella, as well as stepmother to his two daughters, Harlem and Edelma. Bosch worked with Zapata Olivella in his black consciousness activism as she took on the role of secretary and editor for Zapata Olivella.⁶ Working with her assistance, Zapata Olivella became a prolific writer in the 1960s: he began his magnum opus, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983). He published several other novels and travel memoirs in Bogotá, but the Cuban publishing house Casa de las Américas was instrumental as a Latin American platform for some of his work and allowed him to reach a wider audience.⁷

If Cuba was a crucial site for publishing radical ideas within the African diaspora, it was also an invaluable contact point for Black Power activists. In contrast to the dominant political discourse in the US at the time that criticized and rejected the Cuban Revolution, many African American activists turned to Cuba for inspiration following the disillusion of unfulfilled dreams of equality during the US civil rights movement. As increasing numbers of activists turned their attention to the economic capitalist inequalities of the US, Cuban socialism offered the possibility of eliminating class stratification while simultaneously creating a legitimized space for the use of force as a means of re-claiming societal power.

⁵ Emilio (Emili) Bosch Roger (1894-1980) was from Barcelona, Spain. Rosa Bosch grew up in Barcelona, a strongly Catalan nationalistic city in the region of Catalunya, Spain. She likely spoke both Catalan, the regional language, and Spanish.

⁶ Rosa Bosch's relationship with Zapata Olivella's two daughters is not explicitly discussed within the papers I encounters, but is revealed mostly through inference in his correspondence and photographs in the MZO Collection.

⁷ Casa de las Américas had a wide Latin American reputation due, in part, to its commitment to democratic representation, freedom and the defense of marginalized voices. Historian Patrick Iber explores some of the successes and complications of this mission in Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015.

The possibilities of revolution appeared especially powerful to LeRoi Jones who visited the island in 1960. Jones/Baraka wrote of this trip in his autobiography, remembering the anticipation he felt at the invitation, “But one Saturday night I get a phone call...” [it was Richard Gibson, whom he didn’t know] “and he asks me if I want to go to Cuba, as part of a delegation of black artists and scholars whom the Cuban government wanted to spread the word to. I agreed to go, turning from the phone and telling people, ‘I’m going to Cuba!’”⁸ Jones acknowledges that he was invited to Cuba to receive a message that was intentionally aimed to African Americans, yet he does not reflect further on that aspect of the trip. His enthusiasm is evident, and demonstrates perhaps the moment in time when the Cuban Revolution presented the possibility of change in the Americas so close to the US. His trip was one of the most significant moments of his life. He continues,

I carried so much back with me that I was never the same again. The dynamic of the revolution had touched me. Talking to Fidel or Juan Almeida, the black commander of the revolutionary army... Seeing youth not just turning on and dropping out, not just hippily cynical or cynically hip, but using their strength and energy to *change* the real world—that was too much.

When I returned I was shaken more deeply than even I realized. The arguments I’d had with my old poet comrades increased and intensified. It was not enough just to write, to feel, to think, one must act! One *could* act.⁹

For Jones/Baraka, witnessing Revolutionary Cuba acted as a model for the convergence of ideas and action. The poetry that he had written as a weapon against the oppressive racist system in the United States held new possibility when coupled with revolutionary action that completely uprooted the power and political systems. This historical moment, in which Jones/Baraka participated, transcended national ties and contexts. He felt that he was a part of the Cuban revolutionary spirit even though it was not his nation of birth. Cuba was not considered historically different enough to Jones/Baraka to discount the possibility of its

⁸ Amiri Baraka, *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*. New York: Freundlich Books, 1984, 163-164.

⁹ Baraka, *Autobiography*, 166.

revolution coming to US shores; it was a credible, realistic model for his vision of what the US should look and act like. Jones/Baraka even learned some Spanish on his trip to Cuba and wrote poetry that incorporated both Spanish and English: merging the two languages into one idiomatic expression.¹⁰

Jones/Baraka's companion on the trip, civil rights activist Julian Mayfield, was also deeply moved by the trip to Cuba, and his experience was perhaps even more profound considering his strong Spanish-language skills. Mayfield had married Puerto Rican, Ana Livia Cordero, in 1954 and lived in Puerto Rico until 1959 when he became involved with the NAACP in Monroe, North Carolina. Mayfield traveled to Cuba just after he relocated to the US. He wrote in 1960, "The important lesson of the Cuban experience is that great social change need not wait on the patient education of white supremacists." He reasoned that, "a powerful and secure government like that of the United States could, if it chose, achieve remarkable results. If the democratic press, of which we boast, needs several generations to achieve what the Cubans have done in 18 months, then there is something wrong with it."¹¹

Frustrated by the slow pace of change in the US, Mayfield admired the speed with which freedom seemed to be achieved in Cuba. This expediency was largely a result of the urgency of the revolutionary fervor on the island, the significant support of the mass public, and also of the violent approaches of the revolution. Revolutionary soldiers were armed in public and had an omnipresence that was impressive to the African American visitors who witnessed it. They felt a sense of camaraderie with the soldiers and amongst each other that strengthened diasporic bonds. Jones/Baraka explained who his companions were on the trip and notes how significant their

¹⁰ See, for instance, the early poems in Paul Vangelisti, ed., *Transbluesency: The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones (1961-1995)*. New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995.

¹¹ Quoted in Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 297.

acquaintance became to his understanding of the role of violence and power in the freedom movement both in Cuba and in the United States. He later recalled in a 1970s interview that his first trip to Cuba was a “revelation” that revealed to him “that people actually could make a revolution, that you could actually *seize* countries.” He was in Cuba “with a whole lot of young dudes my own age who were walking around with guns—they just did it. It blew my mind; I was never the same.”¹²

The time Jones/Baraka spent in Cuba profoundly changed his understanding of violence due to the prominence of Afro-Cuban soldiers and men carrying guns freely in the streets there, but also because of the support he received from his Cuban comrades. This is not to suggest that the power of Afro-Cuban soldiers was absolute, or that racial tensions did not exist in Cuba; they certainly did. Neither did the Revolution solve the problem of implicit racism in Cuba; racism was rendered invisible, as it became a “non-issue” within economic equality rhetoric.¹³ The quote above reflects Jones/Baraka’s perspective: what he saw, perhaps what he hoped to see, and how he made meaning of it. His comments reflect what he pulled from his trip to Cuba: revolution is possible, black men and women can take up arms and “seize” control of their nation, and mobilizing the community can lead to change more immediately than writing poetry or addresses racism from an academic space. Cuba offered a visual example, to Jones/Baraka, of another racial reality.

¹² Kimberly W. Benston and Amiri Baraka, “Amiri Baraka: An Interview” in *boundary 2*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter, 1978), 306-7. Quoted in John A. Gronbeck-Tedesco, “The Left in Transition: The Cuban Revolution in US Third World Politics” in *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 40, no. 4, Cuba: 50 Years of Revolution (Nov., 2008), 651. It would be interesting to know if the Cuban soldiers Jones/Baraka met gave him any suggestions on how to use violence, or carry out revolution in the US. Baraka mentions in his autobiography that some Cuban revolutionaries accused his poetry, without being political, of being “bourgeois individualism” (page 164). The sources that I have studied indicate that the trip was mainly inspirational and that Castro invited the African American activists as an opportunity to improve US perceptions of the Cuban government.

¹³ Race relations and tensions in Cuba in this time period are intricately discussed, including their status as a “non-issue” for many elite Cuban government officials in Alejandro de la Fuente’s, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Jones/Baraka's memories of the Cuba trip are also significant for what they reveal about relationships strengthened by the trip. He wrote in his autobiography that the trip was a "turning point" in his life that reinforced previous relationships and created new ones. "Langston, Jimmy Baldwin, and John Killens were supposed to go, but didn't," while he had close contact with "Julian Mayfield and his wife Ana Codero, a doctor, born in Puerto Rico. Also with our party was a man I didn't know until then, Robert Williams." Williams was significant to Jones/Baraka as he "had organized the most militant NAACP chapter in the States, a chapter composed of black workers and returning veterans....he made the statement, after a white rapist of a black woman had been freed by an all-white jury, that blacks? should 'meet violence with violence,' he was summarily ditched by Uncle Roy and the NAACP (1959)."¹⁴

Jones/Baraka suggests that close links within the African American community existed well before the trip; Jones/Baraka knew a lot of his fellow travelers. Yet the trip provided the unique opportunity to meet and build a friendship with Robert F. Williams, one of the most militant civil rights leaders who espoused the use of violence to end police brutality and assert local justice in the US. It is conjecture to assume that the two would not have met in the US in another context, yet there was nothing inevitable about their friendship. The two first came into contact and exchanged ideas about black liberation while in Cuba, a location that transcended US regional difference. Williams' story is yet another example of an African American transformed by Cuban events, though his pro-violence stance preceded his journey there.

Born in Monroe, North Carolina in 1925, Robert Williams grew up in a relatively middle class household in a home his father owned. In 1943 he moved to Detroit in search of work and found himself in the middle of the most violent race riot of the time. He then moved the

¹⁴ Baraka, *Autobiography*, 163-164. See also de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 297, for a description of the US delegation to Cuba in 1960.

California, served as a Marine during the Second World War, and travelled extensively between Harlem and Monroe through his early adulthood. By the time Williams returned permanently to Monroe, he had experienced the civil rights struggle throughout the US and viewed violent response as the only effective response to oppression.

Upon returning to Monroe, Williams served as the president of the local NAACP chapter. After being wrongfully accused of kidnapping a white couple and closely followed by the FBI, he was forced into exile in 1961 to Canada and then to Cuba.¹⁵ From Cuba he broadcast “Radio Free Dixie” to the South. The radio program espoused black freedom movements, armed self-defense and African American heritage. Cuba provided that radio space as a means of supporting the African American freedom cause, a foreign policy that Fidel Castro used to counter the negative portrayal of Cuba produced by the US government.

Just as Havana was an important diasporic contact point in the 1960s, so was Harlem in New York City. Well aware of this fact, Castro strategically used Harlem as a diplomatic base from which to show his support to the African American community during his visit to the US in September and October of 1960, a few months after the African American delegation including Jones/Baraka visited Cuba. He arrived to visit the United Nations with plans to stay at a mid-town Manhattan hotel. Displeased with the treatment his delegation received there, Castro moved to the Theresa Hotel in Harlem denouncing US discriminatory practices. In an interview with the *Afro-American*, Castro stated that, “in Harlem he felt like he was in his own country.” When

¹⁵ Nico Slate, ed., *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p131. See also Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1999). Tyson argues that the life of Robert Williams demonstrates the ways in which self-defense and armed resistance had strong southern roots in the US, in contrast to the dominant perception of the US civil rights movement as being fundamentally based in non-violent civil disobedience and direct action. The book follows the life and influences of Robert Williams through his time in the US and exile abroad.

he was not invited to a luncheon held in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel by President Eisenhower, Castro responded that he was “honored to lunch with the poor and humble people of Harlem.”¹⁶

Castro’s affinity to the African American neighborhood complicates the binary foreign policy stances typically used to describe US-Cuban relations during the Cold War. The Bay of Pigs attack, led by the CIA under President Kennedy, would exacerbate tensions between the two nations just a year later. But in 1960, Castro was able to see that the US African diasporic experience was situated within a broader American context that allowed the space for racial and socioeconomic class affinities across national borders where polarizing rhetoric dominated political discourse.

This ability to construct a common imagination through Cuba was crucial to the transnational perspective of many in the African diaspora during this particular era. Cuba, a central location within the diasporic imagination, became even more crucial during the 1960s due largely to the transformative example of the Revolution, the foreign policy approaches of Fidel Castro, and the role Cuba played as a link between activists and artists. While Zapata Olivella and Amiri Baraka, for instance, may never have met in person, they both gazed toward Cuba to better understand diasporic experience in the Americas and thus shared in the diasporic imagination of the Americas. Cuba expanded their vision of racialized experience, offered radical possibilities for change and portrayed messages of equality to key leaders such as Jones/Baraka who went on to found the Black Arts Movement in the US. These messages came through political rhetoric and the physical manifestations of the Revolution in Cuba, but also

¹⁶ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p297-298. For more information on Castro’s worldview and foreign policy, including the Afro-Cuban units sent on the Cuban mission to Southern Africa see Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2002) and *The Cuban Drumbeat: Castro’s Worldview: Cuban Foreign Policy in a Hostile World* (New York: Seagull, 2009).

through artistic media such as literature and especially music. Music held the distinct quality of being able to carry African diasporic messages across linguistic, geographic, and temporal boundaries.

Music and Diasporic Soul Space

Immediately following the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Afro-Cuban salsa sensation Celia Cruz toured in Mexico with her internationally renowned band, La Sonora Matancera. The group decided not to return to Revolutionary Cuba and was based in Mexico in 1960 and 1961, playing prolifically, continuing to build their international reputation, and appearing in several films, including *Amorcito Corazón* (1961).¹⁷ Cuba lost a devastating number of citizens at the time: between 1960 and 1974, an average of 30,000 citizens were sent into exile each year.¹⁸ Cruz's was a self-imposed exile; she never considered living in Revolutionary Cuba a valid option for her and her band. Her expatriation so angered Fidel Castro, that he forbade her to ever enter the country again, even when her mother was sick or when her father passed away.¹⁹

Cruz forever missed her native land, and she lamented the physical and emotional separation in her hit song, "Cuando Salí de Cuba" [When I Left Cuba]: "I will never be able to die/I do not have my heart here with me/When I left Cuba/I left my life I left my heart/When I

¹⁷ Jon Pareles, "Celia Cruz, Petite Powerhouse of Latin Music, Dies at 77" in *The New York Times*, July 17, 2003.

¹⁸ Robin D. Moore, *Music & Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p68. I have not found official numbers on the Cuban exile, but it would be useful to find out what proportion of those who left the island were Afro-Cuban. Given the political and economic relations with the US, it seems likely that many more *mestizo* and White Cubans fled the island than Afro-Cubans, as they were more representative of the Cuban large landowners (especially of sugar plantations) who had been supported by the US government. Also, I have not found a specific explanation for why Celia Cruz chose to leave Cuba beyond her efforts to escape the Revolution. Perhaps she did not ideologically agree with the Revolution, or she suspected that performance and recording opportunities might be more limited following the Revolution. There is a possibility that she foresaw the wider audience available to her abroad, and chose to go to Mexico and then New York in an effort to expand her singing career, though her lament for her homeland suggests that she felt that her choices were limited, and that leaving Cuba had motivations that went beyond the professional sphere.

¹⁹ Diane Telgen and Jim Kamp, eds. *Notable Hispanic American Women*. Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1993, 116.

left Cuba/I left my heart buried in the ground.”²⁰ Cruz’s popular song is enlightening in its implication that death is not possible unless one’s heart, the emotional center of the body, is present. The concept of a separate spiritual self that can be in a different geographic location from the physical self is a prominent and powerful idea in the African diasporic imagination, and will be explored in greater depth in the last chapter. In the 1960s, we find Celia Cruz permanently separated from her land and kin and forced to re-define her sense of belonging through her music.

Cruz’s Afro-Cuban roots were an integral part of her worldview and music. Contrary to the assumptions of some of her fans, she was a devout Catholic and never practiced *santería*, the syncretized Yoruban Ifá religion of Cuba. She did, however, celebrate and honor the power of the Ifá orishas, or spirits in her songs. For instance, one of her most memorable Afro-Cuban albums was *Homenaje a Yemayá* (1965) [Homage to Yemayá].²¹ The Cruz hits, “Canto a Yemayá” [Call to Yemayá], “Changó Ta Veni” [Chango Has Arrived] and “Elegua Quiere Tambo” [Elegua Wants Drums] are odes to the West African feminine maternal spirit of the seas, the masculine warrior spirit, and the spirit of beginnings and endings respectively. These three songs were later compiled in the “Tributo a las Orishas” [Tribute to the Orishas] album of 1999. Cruz was a practicing Catholic, yet the orishas held cultural significance to her as they would have been regularly referenced by Afro-Cubans during everyday occurrences. Cruz honors her connections to those West African traditions, even while she distanced herself religiously from Santería.

While understood by many fans as a quintessential Afro-Cuban singer, Cruz honored *afrocubanismo* yet intentionally distinguished herself through her unique costumes, signature styles, and her emphasis on the ways in which her religious beliefs did not fit the Afro-Cuban

²⁰ The original Spanish is, “Nunca podré morirme/Mi corazón no lo tengo aquí.../Cuando salí de Cuba/Dejé mi vida dejé mi amor/Cuando salí de Cuba/Dejé enterrado mi corazón.”

²¹ Tompkins and Foster, eds., *Notable Twentieth-Century Latin American Women*, 83.

stereotypes. She insisted that there were many ways to be Afro-Cuban. In a later interview she recalled a man in a hotel who once confused her with a *santería* priestess whom he had met. Laughing at the memory, she attributed the confusion to the misconception that “all black women are the same.”²²

The incident took place in Cuba, but she did not clarify if her joke was specific to that place. Cruz’s larger point was to highlight a stereotype, and underline the ways in which religious and racial social identifiers are often combined in the popular imagination. She also underscores her individuality and the diversity of Afro-Cuban reality. For her, Cuba was a source of inspiration and its varied cultural traditions were rich with meaning for her career. The significance of Cuba became tangible to Cruz after she left the island and in light of her contact with other nations and cultures. This is often the case within diasporic experience, and emigration in general: the homeland takes on new meaning in the process of dislocation in the new land. Moreover this also points to the multiple locations of the diaspora and relocations within the Americas. Celia Cruz’s ancestors were brought to Cuba, and in the wake of the Revolution she was part of the Cuban diaspora around the Caribbean.²³

Even before the Revolution, Cruz had begun to make international connections during her tours throughout the Americas. In 1953 she toured Colombia playing in Bogotá, Medellín, and in the Caribbean coastal city of Cartagena, the hometown of Zapata Olivella. Several times in the 1950s she sang further down the Caribbean coast in Caracas, Venezuela, where she participated in *carnaval* celebrations with African American dancer, Josephine Baker (1906-

²² The original Spanish reads, “todas las negras son iguales” in Jazz Oral History Interview: Celia Cruz” Sept. 25-26, 1996 in Hollywood, CA, conducted by Raul Fernandez with Dr. Anthony Brown and Professor Nancy Page Fernandez, JOHP, Collection No. 808, Series 3 Reference CD, Box No. 10.

²³ Regarding the Cuban Revolution, the multiple experiences and understandings of the event and its consequences are brought into relief by the varied reactions of African descendants. For instance, Celia Cruz’s dislocation due to the Revolution is in stark contrast to LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka’s enthusiastic embracing of the Revolution and the reinforced sense of black brotherhood he experienced as a result both in Cuba and in the US.

1975). In a later interview Cruz remembered that despite cultural differences, they communicated, as Baker spoke Spanish to her, “con su acento, pero hablaba.”²⁴ [with her accent, but she spoke.] The quote is short, but illuminating in the way that Cruz uses the imperfect past tense to emphasize that Baker not only spoke Spanish to her a few times, but repeatedly in an indefinite past. If she had said, “con su acento, pero habló” it would suggest limited contact between the two artists rather than an ongoing process of communication between the Afro-Cuban and African American. Cruz marks difference, a linguistic separation between the two artists, while simultaneously underscoring their ability to find common ground in communication, and common celebration of the African diasporic *carnaval* celebrations in Venezuela.

By 1958, Cruz began touring the US, and moved to New York permanently in 1961. In 1966, she signed with Tico Records, working with Tito Puente, later crowned “The King of Latin Swing” who was also living in the US. This same year, Cruz toured the United States and South America, linking the American continent with her salsa music and contributing to a diasporic imagination based in musical experience. For Cruz, Cuba was always the root of her music and cultural expression, and her articulation of those roots resonated with fans throughout the continent. An article in Colombia’s *El Tiempo* newspaper announced a Celia Cruz concert in Cali in 1974 and proclaimed that the Sonora Matancera would perform with “the same enthusiasm and attention that has existed for 40 or 50 years” as “the Antillean group is the most joyful musical group of the current century and of all time.... The majority of its members have become legendary characters. Daniel Santos, Celia Cruz... the *barranquillero* Nelson

²⁴ “Jazz Oral History Interview: Celia Cruz” Sept. 25-26, 1996 in Hollywood, CA, conducted by Raul Fernandez with Dr. Anthony Brown and Professor Nancy Page Fernandez, JOHP, Collection No. 808, Series 3 Reference CD, Box No. 10.

Pinedo...and the other members of the popular group are characters who have permeated the people and have known how to portray the people's anxieties, problems, and joys."²⁵

According to the article, Celia Cruz and her band were received as musicians of the people, including the Colombian people. Nelson Pinedo (1928-), a member of her group was in fact Colombian, from the Caribbean coastal city of Barranquilla. Pinedo, "El Almirante del Ritmo" [the Admiral of Rhythm] joined the group around 1954 and incorporated various Colombian musical styles into the band's repertoire including *porros* and *cumbias*. He likely left the Sonora Matancera in 1959, and did not play in the concert mentioned in the article, but he was clearly associated with the act.²⁶ The concert was received with great enthusiasm and was accompanied by an hour-long radio broadcast of exclusively Sonora Matancera music on Caracol's Radio Tigre. While the concert and broadcast occurred in 1974, the author of the article reflects on the long past of popularity that Celia Cruz and her band enjoyed. Indeed, the twentieth century was profoundly marked by her art and messages of joy and strength revealed through diasporic and Afro-Cuban forms. Though she never returned to her birthplace, she insisted that dirt from the island be placed in her mausoleum in the Bronx that is next to the burial sites of US jazz legends, Miles Davis and Duke Ellington.²⁷

²⁵ The original Spanish reads, "Con el mismo entusiasmo y atención de hace 40 o 50 años, en Cali como en otras ciudades del país se siguen escuchando y bailando hoy los ritmos alegres de la Sonora Matancera... No es exagerada la afirmación de que es el conjunto antillano de todos los tiempos y la más alegre agrupación musical del presente siglo...La música de la Sonora Matancera no pasa de moda...La mayoría de sus integrantes se han convertido en personajes de leyenda. Daniel Santos, Celia Cruz...el barranquillero Nelson Pinedo... y los demás componentes del popular conjunto son personajes que han calado en el pueblo, que han sabido interpretar sus angustias, sus problemas, sus alegrías." Anonymous, "La apoteosis de la 'Sonora Matancera'" *El Tiempo*, November 20, 1974.

²⁶ Some details about the life of Nelson Pinedo is included in Carlos Bernales, "La Sonora Matancera en el Recuerdo" in *El Diario La Prensa* (New York), 14 January 1996 and Anonymous, "El bolero celebra los 88 años de vida de Nelson Pinedo, 'El Almirante del Ritmo'" in *El Heraldo* (Colombia), 10 February 2016. Surely publications exist in Colombia that would provide more information.

²⁷ David Gonzalez, "Keeping the Flame Burning for a Beloved Queen of Salsa" in *The New York Times*, October 26, 2009, and in Omer Pedillo-Cid, "Epílogo" in Celia Cruz and Ana Cristina Reymundo, *Celia: mi vida*. New York: Rayo, 2004, 242.

Cuba offered a space of musical inspiration, but as many black artists in the 1960s understood music, it could not be separated from literary text. Jones/Baraka described music as “the great definer and link, the extension cord of blackness in me. And so everything (else) had a music to it. A shimmer of sound you heard as you saw it, or saw as you heard it.”²⁸ Within the diasporic imagination for Jones/Baraka, as discussed throughout other chapters, music was the dominant language that was integrated into songs, poetry, novels; written and oral expression. For him, and many of the Colombian Celia Cruz fans, music was an experience simultaneously of the visual and auditory sensory registers. Lyrics and words were often secondary to that experience, and had their own purpose as part of what would come to be called the “Black Aesthetic” that was working for black liberation.

Music, Literature, and the Black Arts Movement

Revolutionary Cuba, with its complicated relationship to artists such as Celia Cruz, offered a space for publications that articulated the interests and social justice arguments of many African descendant authors throughout the Americas. In 1962, Manuel Zapata Olivella published *Pasión vagabunda* in Cuba, and the following year his *Chambacú, corral de negros* [*Chambacú, Black Slum*] was published by the Cuban publishing house, Casa de las Américas.²⁹ The novel has been described as the first “Afro-Hispanic novel that calls for revolution as a solution to the plight of the oppressed”³⁰ and the purpose of Casa de las Américas was to provide the literary space for just this type of work.

²⁸ Baraka, *Autobiography*, 47.

²⁹ *Pasión vagabunda* was first published in 1949 in Bogotá, Colombia by the Editorial Santafé.

³⁰ Richard Jackson, *Black Writers and Latin America: Cross-Cultural Affinities*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1998, 101.

Chambacú was a novel that chronicled the struggles of an Afro-Colombian neighborhood outside of Cartagena, Colombia. Heavily based in historical fact, the protagonist returns from fighting in the Korean War with a Swedish wife who highlights racial tensions in the neighborhood and brings into relief the stark poverty, illiteracy, and lack of economic opportunity in Chambacú. The particular racialized reality described by Zapata Olivella in the novel carries a diasporic universalism that was recognized by African American scholar Laurence Prescott. In January of 1972 Prescott published an article in the Colombian newspaper *El Espectador* titled, “Harlem queda en Chambacú” [Harlem Is Located in Chambacú].³¹ Prescott was born in Harlem, educated at the City College of New York, Oberlin College, and the University of Indiana, and dedicated his professional academic career to emphasizing the connections between Afro-Colombian and African American experience through the work of Zapata Olivella. Prescott’s connection to Zapata Olivella was made possible through Casa de las Américas and their publications of Zapata Olivella’s work. The transnational dialogue that helped form the African diasporic imagination was translated across nations divided ideologically but unified through the art of African descendants.

While Celia Cruz and Manuel Zapata Olivella distributed their art throughout the Americas, a growing Black Arts Movement, led by Jones/Baraka and Larry Neal, was taking root from within the US and moving outward. The Black Arts Movement, while typically understood as a uniquely US movement, made spaces for people to connect through multiple realms of art, including theater, in ways that paralleled what occurred in Cuba and Colombia. Indeed, the poetic, musical, and theater spaces espoused by the BAM allowed many to access ideas exchanged within the diasporic imagination of the Americas within the context of the US.

³¹ Noted in *Letras Nacionales*, no. 23, Abril-Mayo 1974, 39. Laurence Prescott is often called Lorenzo Prescott in Spanish sources.

BAM's emphasis on the role of jazz and jazz poetry for instance, would have been understood throughout many black communities of the Americas, even if the meanings of that art form were refracted within different contexts. The BAM's use of theater to mobilize the community can be recognized as another common approach shared by Zapata Olivella in his theater project in Colombia. Both projects were similar artistic endeavors that sought to increase recognition and appreciation of blackness on a national level with the ultimate goal of black liberation. Larry Neal would later meet Zapata Olivella in person in the late 1970s, but in the 1960s, Neal was navigating the civil rights and Black Power movements within the United States. His consciousness around the diasporic imagination first developed within his national context.

The 1960s have long been understood in US popular memory as a decade of unusual turbulence. Just as the country established itself as a postwar global leader of capitalism and democracy, the very fabric of American identity and prosperity was questioned, overturned, and redefined. In these years of extremes the US sent the first humans to the moon and several of the country's most important leaders were assassinated: President John F. Kennedy, his brother Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr. The era, often grossly over simplified in hindsight as the age of "sex, drugs, and rock and roll," was characterized by the paradoxical storm of post-World War II affluence and the resulting tumult and counter culture. While the GI Bill allowed an unprecedented number of returning soldiers and their families to benefit from home ownership, job security, and access to education, this prosperity did not reach everyone: not all boats rose with the incoming tide that lifted the midcentury middle class.

Though the decade brought the end of *de jure* segregation, many African Americans continued to experience discrimination in housing, employment, education, health care, and

within democratic civic participation. Frustrated with the limits of the US civil rights movement, despite concrete gains such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and an end to Jim Crow segregation in the South, many activists turned away from peaceful civil disobedience and followed the radical, militant branch of the Black Power movement led by Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael. The promise of Black Power and liberation from white society came to represent the only means of gaining equality more generally more many activists.

This dominant narrative accounts for an important historical shift that was meaningful for many in the black freedom movements of the time. Yet it does not tell the whole story, as historians of Black Power have asserted over the past decade. Historian Timothy Tyson demonstrates that violent self-defense, even among members of the peaceful NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), has a long tradition in the US South that had existed long before Black Power. Historian Robin D.G. Kelley also accounts for the many ways in which African Americans in the inter-war years fought for their rights outside of the established political institutions, engaging their local communities in ways that were most relevant to them within both race and socioeconomic class relations. Others, such as Donna Murch, emphasize that Black Power had an agenda that went far beyond its militarism and goals of self-defense to racial and community uplift including food, education, and anti-poverty programs. Continuing efforts to explore the nuanced and diverse experiences of Black Power, historians Nico Slate and Manthia Diawara have looked at the international dimensions of Black Power abroad especially in Africa and Asia.³²

³² For examples of this scholarship see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1996, Donna Jean Murch, *Living For the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010, Nico Slate, ed., *Black Power Beyond Borders: The Global Dimensions of the Black Power Movement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, and Manthia Diawara, "The 1960s in Bamako: Malick Sidibé and James Brown" in Harry J. Elam, Jr., and Kennell Jackson, eds., *Black Cultural Traffic: Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Less studied, but just as crucial to the cultural developments of this decade were the exchanges and parallel movements within the African diaspora that occurred between the US and Latin America. Focusing on the cultural and artistic wing of the Black Power movement, the Black Arts Movement (BAM), or the Black Aesthetic, adds a great richness and depth to our understanding of the African diasporic imagination at this time and the ways in which it used art to metaphorically and physically heal both individual and collective memories of the legacy of slavery: a goal that was never clearly articulated by the broader, church-led US civil rights movement.

Within this specifically artistic space, many black artists used poetry to express the activist voice that then became rooted in other literary, musical and theatrical forms. Musical expression and theater were used to articulate a liberated soul, or space for the individual self. This realm of artistic being then also expressed a revolutionary rhetoric that held as a final goal communal transformation on local, national, and international levels. Scholar James Smethurst describes the importance of this shift, “Never before, I think, was such artistic activity made an absolute political priority and linked to the equally emphatic drive for the development and exercise of black self-determination within a large black political-cultural movement in the United States.”³³

What Smethurst does not address are the ways in which this movement echoed throughout the Americas. At the exact same time that BAM was growing in influence and presence in the US, Manuel Zapata Olivella was leading a parallel movement, within its own unique context, with his Centro Colombiano de Investigaciones Folclóricas [Colombian Center for Folkloric Research]. This umbrella organization, based in Bogotá, had a broad reach

³³ James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 15-16.

throughout the nation and used literature, dance, and theater as a means of fostering cultural nationalism and radical societal change. This artistic intention resulted in the emergence of a cultural nationalism in both the US and Colombia that was part of an effort to further fight against the psychological damages of the legacy of slavery in the Americas that had not been fully remedied by previous black freedom movements. Smethurst defines the “cultural nationalist stance” as involving “a concept of liberation and self-determination” that in the case of African Americans, “usually posited that the bedrock of black national culture was an African essence that needed to be rejoined, revitalized, or reconstructed, both in the diaspora and in an Africa deformed by colonialism.”³⁴

BAM literature and theater initiatives certainly aligned with the above definition of cultural nationalism, and situated their independence within the US context. In the case of Colombia, Manuel Zapata Olivella and his colleagues took a different view of cultural nationalism. For them, Colombia was a nation that needed to address its “African essence” that was inseparable from its wider continental relationships. For Zapata Olivella, true understanding of Colombian culture could only emerge with the artistic liberation of the oppressed peoples of the nation and American continent, especially African descendants.

Thus the individuals who participated in the movement held as an imperative that the “bedrock of black national culture was an African essence that needed to be rejoined, revitalized, or reconstructed” in a similar sense to what Smethurst describes in the US, while Zapata Olivella and his colleagues had a unique perspective on how that should be accomplished within the Colombian nation. This perspective included (as will be discussed later in this chapter) support, collaboration and ideas from other countries such as the US, Cuba, Mexico, and Panama as crucial to the Colombian artistic movement.

³⁴ Ibid, 17.

The leaders of the BAM and black aesthetic movement, for their part, drew great revolutionary inspiration from Cuba, as discussed earlier. The Cuban Revolution was a point of reference through which the diasporic imagination, engaged in the black aesthetic, shifted to become more community and politically focused. In his 1968 essay defining the Black Arts Movement, Larry Neal explained the essential need for black cultural expression that “would speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people.”³⁵ This call for culture within a paradigm that addressed the needs of a people, expanded “culture” beyond a definition tied to worldview and cultural production. Neal moved beyond the previously defining categories of “high brow,” “low brow,” or folk culture to move art into the realm of liberating exercise from the bonds of the past. Neal’s idea was revolutionary, and represents a unique perspective that emerged in the 1960s not only in the US where the Black Arts Movement has been firmly situated, but also at other contact points in the Americas. To explore this phenomenon of moving beyond the popular soul of “soul” music, let’s first turn to the spiritual revival to which Neal dedicated his work.

Everett Leroi Jones, a close friend and colleague of Larry Neal, has been credited with initiating the Black Arts Movement. He was born in Newark, New Jersey in 1937 while the US was in the devastating throes of the Great Depression. As Jones entered the world, his city of Newark was growing with the migration of African Americans to northern cities, and the bipartisan Conservative Coalition formed in opposition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s progressive legislation intended to ameliorate the affects of the Depression on the most dispossessed populations. Born into an era marked by struggle throughout the country, Jones

³⁵ Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement” in *The Drama Review: TDR*, vol 12, no, 4, Black Theatre (Summer, 1968), 29.

dedicated his life to fighting the oppression he viewed as inherent to the racist and capitalist system of the US, Europe and their colonized lands.

Against this backdrop, Jones was also exposed to artists who instilled in him a racial pride and hope. Jazz, discussed extensively in the previous chapter, was key to this experience of celebrating African heritage and connecting to a wider community of black experience. He later reminisced about the admiration he held as a teenager for jazz musician Miles Davis,

I wanted to look like that too — that green shirt and rolled up sleeves on *Milestones* ... always wanted to look like that. And be able to play "On Green Dolphin Street" or "Autumn Leaves" ... That gorgeous chilling sweet sound. That's the music you wanted playing when you was coming into a joint, or just looking up at the sky with your baby by your side, that mixture of America and them changes, them blue African magic chants.³⁶

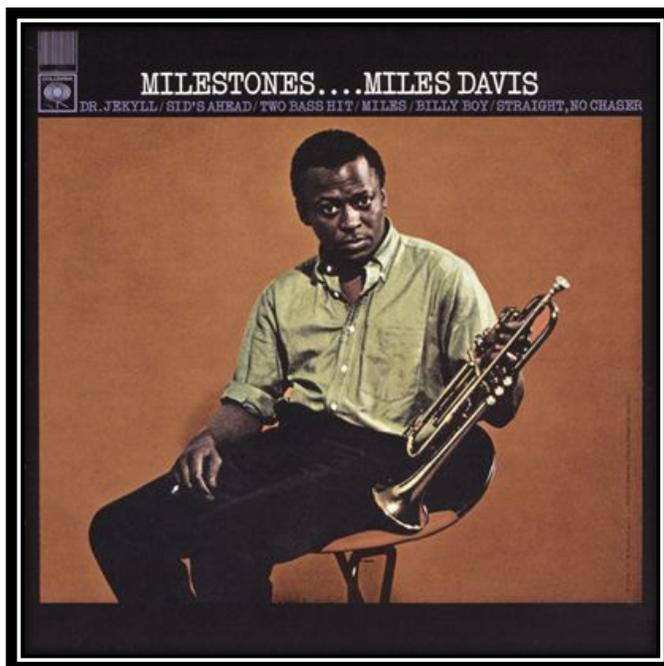


Figure 3. Miles Davis, "Milestones," Album Cover, featuring a photograph by Dennis Stock, 1958. Columbia Records.

³⁶ "Amiri Baraka's Legacy Both Controversial and Achingly Beautiful." Narrated by Neda Ulaby. All Things Considered. NPR, January 9, 2014.

Jones/Baraka's memory of jazz evokes a "chilling sweet sound" that he simultaneously attributes to America and Africa. The improvisational shifts in the music are indicative of an essential American experience of changes and the merging of many cultural elements to express the diasporic realities in the Americas. Yet at the same time, Jones/Baraka names the "blue African magic chants" as holding a certain power that can transcend the American experience through music. It is worth noting that the "blue" is connected to Africa for Jones in this comment, when the *blues* are typically understood in popular culture as having African roots, but being a quintessentially American musical type.

Another important point made in Jones/Baraka's comment about Miles Davis and jazz is the visual presentation of jazz and the inherent power that embodied for him. Jazz was a means of self-definition and self-expression that provided an alternative space from white America's definitions of beauty and value. Jones/Baraka not only wants to play jazz music but he equally wanted to *look* like Miles Davis. Davis' self-confidence is evident on the cover of his "Milestones" record (see Figure 3): his direct gaze at the viewer, relaxed, confident posture and rolled up green sleeves portray a cool, calm artist who presents his music on his terms.³⁷ The external projection of a profound inner change was a principal goal of the BAM, to which Jones/Baraka was so instrumental.

The Black Arts Movement grew out of the East Coast, principally in New York City and Newark, New Jersey. Yet there were artistic movements throughout the US, in both urban and rural settings, and all emphasized the importance of art in the process of self-determination, healing from the historical memory of slavery, racial uplift, and communal self-development. Poetry and drama were the most popular mediums involved in BAM, but music, and specifically soul, also held a special role.

³⁷ Here I paraphrase some of the insightful analysis of the source by historian Phoebe S.K. Young.

In an effort to use music as a communicative tool for BAM, Larry Neal wrote a letter to James Brown who was also in New York City in the late 1960s. The letter follows in its full form:

Dear Mr. Brown,

I am a writer. I written [sic] mostly poetry and essays. I am rarely [fairly?] well published; my work has appeared in numerous [sic] magazines. I have also had play with music on C.B.S. And am writing a piece for A.B.C. I have always liked your work in a very deep sense; I have written about you on several occassions [sic]. Always, what we have, us poets that is, always what we have is --- THAT THE BLACK POET SHOULD START WRITING SONGS FOR THE BLACK ARTISTS. THE ARTISTS OF THE PEOPLE. OUR PEOPLE. So enclosed you will find a poem written for you with the hope that it is good enough and equal to your genius. If it is, I would like you to make into a song. If you don't dig it, send it back, I'll try again sometimes [sic]. But since all artists are egotists, I say it's a million dollar hit!

Later for now,
Larry Neal

P.S. Ask Eddie Ellison, Ted Wilson, or Mucky about my work.

additional notes on lyrics

be as free with them as you can. i mean you can extend or repeat any lines you want. its your thing. As I hear it however, i kind of think it belongs in a 4/4 boogaloo type thing. You might hear something else. in that case PLEASE DO WANT [sic] YOU WANT Soul.³⁸ [all emphasis original]

The letter articulates both the hopes and dreams of BAM, including the use of poetry and music as artistic forms that should be freely exchanged between black community members in an effort to reach a greater mass of people. The “people” are specifically “OUR PEOPLE;” African descendants who would benefit from the messages in James Brown’s music such as occurred with his hit, “Say it Loud- I’m Black and I’m Proud.”³⁹ Neal calls for mutual cooperation

³⁸ Larry Neal to James Brown, 5 January 1969, Box 2, Folder 5, Larry Neal Papers, 1961-1985, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Libraries. Unfortunately the poem mentioned in the letter was not with the original letter in this archival collection.

³⁹ These messages also reached a large international audience, including countries throughout Africa, Colombia and Brazil. In 1973 James Brown performed in Bogotá and was greeted by a parade of cars that accompanied him from the airport to the center of the city. The reception is detailed in Anonymous, “Viene al País James Brown” in *El Tiempo*, 2 April 1973.

between the artists and underscores the communal vision of black consciousness that authors such as Neal hoped would revolutionize the Americas, with a particular focus within the United States. Neal wrote to the “Godfather of Soul” as his fellow “poet” and shows, or perhaps urges, a strong sense of camaraderie despite criticism that Brown’s commitment to civil rights was never as strong as many in the movement would have liked.⁴⁰ Whether Brown held his commercial interests above those of the black freedom movement or not, his music did create a space for deep reflection of the diasporic condition and created an artistic outlet for ideas of belonging, racial pride and uplift, and strength through the rejuvenating power of music.

Soul music, which flourished in the 1950s and early 1960s with Ray Charles at the helm of the genre, drew directly from the call-and-response gospel tradition. Brown’s performance was intimately tied to and dependent upon audience participation such that his energetic, preacher-like repetition of messages and audience vocalization of those messages led to his meteoric rise in popularity and fame in the early 1960s. On October 24, 1962, Brown performed a concert live at the Apollo that few suspected would bring him great fame. It was recorded by King Records and released in January of 1963 to enormous commercial success. Indeed, “Live at the Apollo” has “long been considered one of the essential recorded documents of soul.”⁴¹ Brown’s popularity soared among both white and black audiences in the US. By 1966, a national popularity poll of university campuses reported by *Time* magazine ranked Brown third behind the Beatles and Bob Dylan.⁴²

⁴⁰ See for instance, William Marable’s article “Say James Brown is No Soul Brother” in the *New York Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1972 and the article, “Has James Brown Sold Black People Out or Sold Them In?” in *Jet*, November 2, 1972.

⁴¹ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations*. Berkeley: University California Press, 1998, 202.

⁴² *Ibid*, 186.

For Neal, and his radical colleague LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, poetry and its twin medium, music, was the exercise of using art to create a space that allowed for the “essential” in the black experience to emerge and speak for itself. Zapata Olivella similarly remarked that language used in all oral and written forms “is linked to race.”⁴³ The essence of blackness to Zapata Olivella, Jones/Baraka and Neal could be expressed in music and poetry in ways that reflected and unified the spirit of the people. This necessary, immediate form of communication transcended traditional understandings of what poetry was as a literary medium and became literally a place where the soul, crucial to the “Soul” music movement, could be nurtured and fully appreciated.

The attention to the soul was a means of addressing what was most intimate, most closely-felt, within the African American community that required a re-claiming and redefining of the self as a means of personal and collective liberation. Speaking of music at the time, SNCC staffer Mary King commented, “the freedom songs uplifted us, bound us together, exalted us, and pointed the way, in a real sense, freed us from the shackles of psychological bondage.”⁴⁴ Freedom songs used by civil rights activists were a different genre from soul music, or spirituals sung in churches, but by the 1960s they had a common purpose: they served to unite the community in a common goal of liberation on the most intimate levels of psychological bondage.

The broader Black Power movement grew in popularity throughout the US, and into Latin America, based on a message that resonated with many who felt dispossessed within their nations. Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, changed his name to highlight the erasure of historical connections to Africa within the institution of slavery. Other activists, like SNCC leader, Stokely Carmichael, chose to draw even closer ties to Africa by changing his name to Kwame Turé and

⁴³ The original Spanish reads, “está ligada a la raza” in handwritten notes on loose-leaf paper, “De la raza y la cultura,” in MZO Papers.

⁴⁴ Ward, *Just My Soul Responding*, 173.

relocating to Ghana permanently. As previously noted in this chapter, LeRoi Jones changed his name to Amiri Baraka, though he never expatriated to Africa. Throughout Latin America, names of kinship were used between African descendants to connote a brotherly bond. Afro-Brazilian Abdias do Nascimento, Afro-Panamanian Gerardo Maloney and Manuel Zapata Olivella called each other (and others), *ekobio* or *ecobio*, a West African-derived word used throughout the diaspora to mean “spiritual brother.”⁴⁵ Again, the spirit, or soul, was considered crucial to the mutual uplift that occurred with using this name and building a diasporic brotherhood. Both changes in name and citizenship were important steps in leaving the middle passage of slavery and redefining a personal sense of self for many involved in Black Power.

Still other activists disembarked metaphorically from the middle passage in ways that did not involve a physical or spiritual return to Africa. To those who did not change their names, or move to Africa, the Black Power Movement was equally transformative. Gwendolyn Zohara Simmons, one of the original Black Power feminists, had a different experience with the movement from Jones/Baraka, yet it involved a profound transformation at the spiritual/soul level. Simmons’ grandmother and great grandmother raised her, the former had been a sharecropper, and the latter had been enslaved. Simmons defied her grandmother’s wishes when she became an activist in the civil rights movement while at Spellman College in 1962, and was a teenager when she became a leader in the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964. She later recalled perceptions of Africa from her youth,

When I was growing up, when you called a black person an African, you might get hit in the nose. I mean... “Africa? I’m no African. You know, I grew up where the only movies that I saw was “Tarzan” remember? And Cheetah had more sense than the Africans (laughter). So we have to remember what was going on. I mean, the denigration of black people. We had a whole lot to deal with. Because we’re talking about a culture that has denigrated black people, made us ashamed of everything- your hair, the shape of your

⁴⁵ As seen in correspondence in the MZO Papers.

nose, the size of your lips. I mean everything- you hate, because you've been taught to hate. And this is why Malcolm was so amazing, you know, because he said that to us.⁴⁶

Simmons' reflection is illuminating in the way she describes the early perception of Africa as a distant, exoticized land that was in no way connected to American experience. On the surface, there is a rejection of Africa, yet beneath that same surface she describes her experience of shame connected to African heritage that contributed to the psychological damage from which the BAM and Black Power Movement worked to free African Americans. Simmons remembered Malcolm X working against the discourse of "hate, because you've been taught to hate." Self-acceptance was that first step of abandoning the legacy of the middle passage. Simmons continued to explain what that process felt like for her,

And, I just, know you, want to say that, in Laurel, Mississippi...the community had taken this boarded up building and built this beautiful center. And the Klan firebombed it and it was burned down. Now, I'm sitting in this partially burned out place...nobody would rent us anything else. And the mail comes. In the mail is a record of Malcolm X. I've never heard of Malcolm. And we have a little record player there. I put the record on. And Malcolm X is talking about the ballot or the bullet. And I've never heard anything like this. I am totally mesmerized. I am scared to even listen to it, it is so incendiary compared to anything else I know. But I'm so struck by it.⁴⁷

Simmons heard the liberating, incendiary message of Malcolm X, which forever changed her life's work because it resonated on a level beyond her initial comprehension. Malcolm X emphasized the need for transformation and change through militant means. These messages of Black Power, and the BAM, were disseminated through many venues in both the US and Colombia: through popular music, but also through the intentional mobilization of the community around literature and theater projects. Led by the BAM and Zapata Olivella's Colombian Center for Folkloric Research, these projects paralleled each other in that they were

⁴⁶ From, "The Movement, Remembered Forward." Interview with Gwendolyn Zohara Simmons and Lucas Johnson by Krista Tippett. *OnBeing*. NPR, February 19, 2015.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

both created, simultaneously to express local culture, educate local populations and liberate African descendants of the Americas through cultural nationalism.

Public Art and Theater: BARTS, Letras Nacionales, and Teatro Anónimo Identificador

In 1965, one hundred years after the abolition of slavery in the US, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka moved to Harlem from Newark to found BARTS (Black Arts Repertory Theatre and School) allegedly in response to the assassination of Black Power leader Malcolm X that same year.⁴⁸ Jones/Baraka felt that a more revolutionary approach to societal change was needed, and BARTS had a relatively short, but meaningful life. Its primary purpose was education in the community, and to create a space where black liberation could be imagined and enacted. Langston Hughes received the regular publications of BARTS, and in October of 1965, he donated \$5.00 to the theater.⁴⁹ Hughes also received mass flyers and posters that advertised BARTS events, including the winter program performance of Jones/Baraka's play, "Experimental Death Unit #1."

"Experimental Death Unit #1" was one of Jones/Baraka's most impactful plays, and was a watershed work in his career. At the time it was considered abstract as it attempted to redefine time and space within black experience. The play outlined his revolutionary vision for America, where blackness and black culture would set a new moral order, replacing that of white society. The characters used colloquial "street" language of black communities in the Northeast US to confront existential questions and to embrace a "meta-language" for American experience,

⁴⁸ Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 5.

⁴⁹ From "Collection of Material Relating to the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School," Langston Hughes Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

essentially defined by blackness.⁵⁰ Zapata Olivella used his theater for very similar purposes, though differences did exist. Jones/Baraka was more interested in militantly overturning White dominated power structures in the US, while Zapata Olivella was more concerned with the celebration of blackness among the wider Colombian population. The US black community did not typically experience the same level of racial denial of blackness as occurred in Colombia.⁵¹ Yet both men used theater to expose racism and approached that artistic mode in ways that reflected a specific diasporic history and response to the present living of that history.

This new theater was understood as being revolutionary, a term that Zapata Olivella used for his theatrical project, “Teatro Revolucionario” [Revolutionary Theater] which was also the title of a Jones/Baraka’s manifesto, “The Revolutionary Theater.”⁵² What was revolutionary about the theater projects of BARTS and Zapata Olivella was their specific purpose of confronting history and reframing it within the present moment. The stage offered the unique opportunity of redefining time and space. On the stage, unlike in the rest of society, the artists used theater as a means of disembarking from the middle passage of the slave trade.

Many artists and poets conceptualized the Middle Passage both metaphorically and literally. It was considered both an historical event of the past, and a simultaneous racialized condition of the Americas that had to be addressed in order for the healing process to continue both individually and collectively. Larry Neal, Jones/Baraka’s close friend, colleague, and

⁵⁰ An in-depth description of the play and its artistic significance is discussed in Owen E. Brady “Baraka’s Experimental Death Unit #1: Plan for (R)Evolution” in *Negro American Literature Forum*, vol. 9, no. 2 (Summer, 1975), 59-61.

⁵¹ In the US, race has traditionally been popularly imagined along a black/white binary. Others have often identified a person with any African heritage as being “black” regardless of their personal identity. While this has happened in Colombia more than is openly discussed, blackness is seen and identified in ways that are more fluid than in the US. Thus Baraka was less concerned about his audience identifying as black, and more interested in claiming blackness in a powerful, revolutionary way. Zapata Olivella similarly sought to overturn racial hierarchies and power structures within Colombia, but his theater project simultaneously worked toward the widespread recognition that African heritage existed in Colombia and that it was important to the national culture.

⁵² Published in *Liberator*, July 1965.

leading BAM poet, essayist and dramatist, explained the vision that was germinal to the black aesthetic:

we must emphasize that it is impossible for a people to struggle and win without a sense of collective consciousness...a sense of our psychic blood lines that are rooted in the *living* culture. The African past on the other hand, is an archetypal memory. Unless that past can be shaped within the context of a living culture, it basically has no function. That is to say: we are *an* African people, but we are not Africans. We are slave ships, crammed together in putrid holds, the Mali dream, Dahomey magic transformed by the hougens in New Orleans.⁵³ [emphasis original]

The distinction between being African and of Africa is crucial to Neal's approach to black culture and collective consciousness. He states directly, "We are slave ships," meaning that they are neither in Africa nor the Americas, but rather in the constant process of being transported between the two. They are suspended in a reality of bondage that carries with it the essences of many different places, and the merging of cultures on the journey. Neal argues that the black aesthetic must reflect that reality and portray the need for the middle passage to be acknowledged as a living process, then to be abandoned for history to move into the present, to serve the "*living* culture." He also notes the centrality of "psychic blood lines" that are "rooted" in that culture. Within the diasporic imagination, Afro-Colombians and Afro-Cubans certainly shared those same bloodlines.

Just as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka understood African American culture within a diasporic context linked through common "psychic blood lines," Manuel Zapata Olivella and his sister Delia valued the same "blood lines" that had been present in Colombia since slavery. Yet they understood the Afro-Colombian contribution to national culture not as separatist, as Jones/Baraka and Neal asserted, but was appreciated through ties to other countries in the Americas and the unique cultural contribution of Colombia in a global context. Blackness had

⁵³ Quoted in Paul Carter Harrison, "Larry Neal the Genesis of Vision" in *Callaloo*, no. 23, Larry Neal: A Special Issue (Winter, 1985), 172-173.

traditionally been considered “invisible” within the popular national discourse that emphasized Colombia as a *mestizo* nation of indigenous and European heritage.⁵⁴

Increasing the visibility and appreciation of the African heritage within that rich culture was of highest importance to Zapata Olivella. In his travel memoir, *Pasión vagabunda* (1949) Zapata Olivella explains that on his journey through Colombia and Central and North America he awoke to a new awareness of the necessity of unity within the diaspora. He wrote that on his travels, “amé a la tradición Africana como si de repente, en mitad del camino, se hubieran borrado cinco siglos de historia que dieron a la sangre nuevos bríos y nuevos gritos” [I loved the African tradition as if all of sudden, in the middle of the road, as if five centuries of history had been erased that gave the blood new spirits and new cries]. In this comment Zapata Olivella does not suggest that five centuries of history had literally been erased, but rather that time had been erased and the past was brought suddenly into the present. The spirits and cries of the diasporic shared past became his present experience, creating a self-transformative awakening.

Zapata Olivella further explained what this experience meant to him: “tuve conciencia de mis deberes para redimir a los negros aún vejados con una profunda discriminación económica, no solo en mi país, sino en el mundo...Los negros del mundo formamos una sola familia y debemos estar unidos”⁵⁵ [I became conscious of my duties to redeem blacks who were still harassed by a profound economic discrimination, not only in my country, but in the world. The blacks of the world form one family and we should be united]. Zapata Olivella’s vision of union involved a Colombian cultural nationalism that could not be separated from the continental context of the Americas.

⁵⁴ The invisibility of blackness in Colombia is discussed extensively by Peter Wade in *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 and Nina S. de Friedemann, *African Saga: Cultural Heritage and Resistance in the Diaspora*. Santa Fe: Gaon Books, 2009.

⁵⁵ Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Pasión vagabunda - He visto la noche*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2000, 52.

The Zapata Olivellas worked to increase the visibility of blackness by educating the public about the rich Afro-Colombian cultural forms in dance, literature, and theater through their Colombian Center of Folkloric Research. Similar to BARTS, the Center's goal was to both create space for artistic expression and use that space to espouse messages of personal and communal freedom. After traveling extensively around Colombia gathering anthropological information and recruiting dancers in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Center performed Afro-Colombian dances in the major cities of Colombia, creating the opportunity for many Colombians to be exposed to dances they had not previously known existed. These performances gathered huge crowds, often filling the entirety of Bogotá's main square, plaza Bolívar.⁵⁶

In the mid-1960s, the Center expanded its reach by establishing *Letras Nacionales* [National Letters], a literary review journal that “has published emerging Colombian writers, consolidated scholarship and opinion around the more established ones, and in general, fostered national and international dialogue about matters aesthetic and cultural.”⁵⁷ From the first edition, *Letras Nacionales* collaborated with some of the most celebrated authors in the Americas including: thirty-eight Colombians, Nobel prize-winning author Gabriel García Márquez among them, Carlos Fuentes (Mexico), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), and Langston Hughes (US). Regular collaborators from Chile, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador and Spain all informed the journal's international purpose, couched in its distinctly Colombian artistic vision.⁵⁸

The journal published bimonthly short stories, essays, and poems beginning in 1965, but it quickly grew to host events throughout the country that drew attention to cultural production in

⁵⁶ Such crowds as can be seen in the photographs of the MZO Collection of the Teatro Identificador.

⁵⁷ From *The American Book Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, (April-May 1991), 15 in Box “Correspondence Outgoing (January 1964-December 1993)”, Folder “Correspondence-Outgoing (Sept. 14, 1989-July 2, 1991)”, MZO papers.

⁵⁸ Gabriel García Márquez won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982.

many forms. In 1966 *Letras Nacionales*, under the umbrella organization of the Colombian Center for Folkloric Research, hosted a conference to celebrate and honor one of Colombia's most well known authors, Leon de Grieff, in the country's second-largest city, Medellin. On February 3, Manuel Zapata Olivella wrote a letter to Haydee Santamaria of the Cuban Casa de las Américas, the press that published his novel *Chambacú* in 1963 and that gave the most prestigious literature award in the Americas.

Zapata Olivella explained in his letter that some of the most distinguished authors of the continent had been invited, including Pablo Neruda, Carlos Pellicer, Jorge Icaza, and Langston Hughes, and that *Letras Nacionales* would very much appreciate the attendance of Cuban authors at the event. He wrote, “Desde luego que la designación de los intelectuales es de libre escogencia por parte de ustedes. No obstante, le expresamos el gran interés que existe entre las juventudes [sic] y el pueblo colombiano en general por tener la oportunidad de dialogar con Alejo Carpentier y Nicolás Guillén”⁵⁹ [Of course you all can freely choose which authors to send. However, we express to you the great interest that exists among the youth, and Colombian people in general, in having the opportunity to dialogue with Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén].

Significantly Zapata Olivella mentions that the Colombian youth and people would be most interested in having a dialogue with the two Cuban authors most established within *afrocubanismo*, the twentieth-century Afro-Cuban artistic movement. Zapata Olivella further demonstrates cultural ties to Cuba by signing the letter with “saludos fraternales” [brotherly greetings], demonstrating a kinship with the Cuban publishing house. Just as BAM had international reverberations, so Zapata Olivella and his colleagues at *Letras Nacionales*

⁵⁹ Manuel Zapata Olivella to Hayde [sic] Santamaria, 3 February 1966, MZO Papers.

understood cultural aesthetics in Colombia as being intimately linked with those of the wider continent.

As the decade continued, *Letras Nacionales* became more ambitious with its national and international reach and gained readership in the US, Panama, and Ecuador.⁶⁰ In 1967 alone, thirty poets were published in the review, seven authors held public talks, literary works were discussed in thirty different events hosted by the organization, fourteen different presenters spoke and eleven short-story authors read their work. The total public attendance for these events reached the impressive number of 8,000. For 1968, *Letras Nacionales* planned Colombian culture courses, conferences, reading clubs, “famous round tables” on diverse topics, and small courses on relevant national themes such as “The Executive and its Problems,” and “Colombian Economic Problems.”⁶¹ Manuel Zapata Olivella and his international group of collaborators made a literary and cultural impact that deserves closer study and analysis to fully appreciate the role of *Letras Nacionales*.

A key component of *Letras Nacionales* was its ability to go beyond the printed page into community action. Zapata Olivella viewed literature, especially in the context of the African diaspora, as being inseparable from the spoken word and the very spirit, or soul, of African descendants. He wrote in his personal journals,

Black literature, because of its ethnicity and culture, cannot be separated from certain congenital traits to expose its own characteristics, ideas and aspirations. Black people, [historically, it was reported], since the primordial days of its culture, communicated with their gods, and ancestors and living members not only through the word, [as has been done], but with dance, music, tattooing, and totemic symbols... Our literature, if it wants to be black, in the deepest blackness and not africanness, should be a literature that has

⁶⁰ Rainer Schulte of Ohio University, for example, wrote to the journal on Jan. 11, 1970 asking for a copy to be included a short, descriptive list of literary journals from South America, from correspondence in MZO Papers.

⁶¹ As reported in the article by Anonymous, “Reanuda Labores Hoy la Galería Letras Nacionales” in *El Tiempo*, April 3, 1968.

dance, calls, music, totemic symbols, theater, spoken out loud or written. This is the fundamental difference between our literature and white, yellow or red literature.⁶²

These comments reflect an understanding of literature within the diaspora as being multi-form, multi-media, and essentially tied to race. Zapata Olivella's vision of race in the Americas was inherently rooted in indigenous, European, and African ancestry; it was not tied to "purity" claims of blackness as elsewhere in Africa or the diaspora. Zapata Olivella rather defined blackness by the intention and approach of the community to its past, its conversation with its ancestors, and its use of the liberating "word" to reclaim freedom from slavery's past.

To this end of using literary efforts in multiple ways, in step with the US Black Arts Movement goals, by the early 1970s the Colombian Center for Folkloric Research launched a drama initiative called El Teatro Anónimo Identificador (TAI) [Anonymous Identifying Theater]. The title of the theater is especially interesting as it signals its nameless, or anonymous status, while simultaneously "identifying" the subject of its art. Similar to BARTS founded in Harlem by Jones/Baraka, TAI aimed to increase knowledge of Afro-Colombian history, create a platform for the Afro-Colombian collective voice, and serve as a means of redefining the self within the nation in a context of liberation from the legacy of slavery. TAI, and the theater projects that emerged out of it, were intended to re-orient the Afro-Colombian experience toward freedom from oppression as a state already achieved, rather than as an on-going process of struggle. This immediacy of the impact was similarly a crucial aspect of the Black Arts Movement's theater.

⁶² The original Spanish reads, "La literatura negra, por su etnia y cultura, no puede desligarse de ciertos rasgos congénitos para exponer sus propias características, ideas y aspiraciones. El pueblo negro, [históricamente, se comunicó], desde sus días primordiales de su cultura, se comunicó con sus dioses y ancestros y vivos no solo a través de la palabra, [como lo ha hecho ...] sino con la danza...la música, el tatuaje y los símbolos totémicos... Nuestra literatura, pues, si quiere ser negra,... en la más profunda negritud y no africanidad...debe ser una literatura que tiene danza, música, canto, música, símbolos totémicos, teatro... hablaba viva o escrita. Esto diferencia fundamentalmente nuestra literatura de la blanca, amarilla o roja." The brackets are in the original document. Handwritten, unpublished notes by Zapata Olivella in box "Notebooks-'Apologia a la amnesia,'" MZO Papers.

Zapata Olivella reflected on the role of revolutionary theater in his personal notes, “It should be a type of practicing theater... it should not be understood as a theater of victims, but rather of the liberated and liberators.”⁶³ These words, handwritten by Zapata Olivella, seem to be in conversation with Baraka’s “Revolutionary Theatre Manifesto.” While the sources do not reveal whether Zapata Olivella ever read Baraka’s writing, given his ties to US academics and black activists, it seems likely that he would have been aware of Baraka’s most important interventions in the BAM.

In Baraka’s manifesto and Zapata Olivella’s notes, both men use the word “should” to indicate the imperative use of dreams, desires, and goals that emerged from the diasporic imagination. Baraka declared, “The Revolutionary Theatre should force change, it should be change...The Revolutionary Theatre must take dreams and give them a reality...This should be a theatre of World Spirit. Where the spirit can be shown to be the most competent force in the world.”⁶⁴ Regarding spirituality, Zapata Olivella wrote, “it should inspire the spirit of the cult/worship.” He defined this cult or worship as “a religion of man. But understanding man as a creator of justice, not as a beggar in injustice.”⁶⁵ Both Baraka and Zapata Olivella regarded their theater as a space for rewriting history, and thus a space for justice.

⁶³ The original Spanish reads, Debe ser una especie de teatro practicante...no debe ser comprendido como un teatro de víctimas, sino de liberados y liberadores.” Handwritten notes by Zapata Olivella in an unpublished green notebook, Hallinger box “Notebooks-‘Apologia a la amnesia,’” MZO Papers. It is not directly clear if these notes were related to the TAI, but they reflect Zapata Olivella’s thoughts on the role of theater.

⁶⁴ LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, “The Revolutionary Theater” in *Liberator*, July 1965.

⁶⁵ The original Spanish reads, “debe inspirar el espíritu del culto,” “una religión del hombre. Pero entendiendo el hombre como un creador de justicia, no como un mendigo en la injusticia.” Handwritten notes by Zapata Olivella in an unpublished green notebook, Hallinger box “Notebooks-‘Apologia a la amnesia,’” MZO Papers. In this context, Zapata Olivella is not referring to a cult in the sense most often used in the US to indicate religious practices seen as strange or unusual by others. Cult in this quote is more a general term for religious and worship practices.

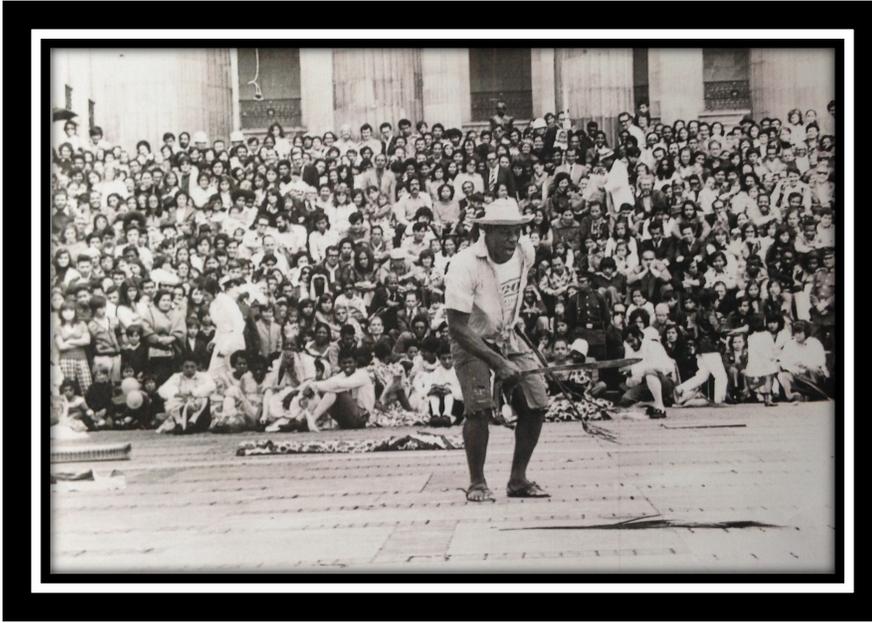


Figure 4. Filibesto Díaz in *Rambao* performance in the Plaza Bolívar, Bogotá, Colombia, photograph, Nereo photography, 1973. MZO Papers, Vanderbilt University.

Zapata Olivella toured with his theater project throughout Colombia and it drew large crowds in the public spaces of Bogotá, Medellín, Cali, Tunja, Loricá, along with other cities. One of the most popular pieces, *Rambao*, juxtaposed the present day with a protagonist in modern dress who was situated in the era of slavery. By having an enslaved Afro-Colombian exist in a simultaneous present and past, and viewed by a contemporary audience of the 1960s and 1970s, the public witnessed a shift in time that reflected a *past-present*. The audience, and actors, was forced to confront slavery directly, removing it from its distant place in the past. Similarly, another TAI theatrical piece, “El Bolívar Descalzo” [The Barefoot Bolívar] brought the 18th century hero of Colombian nationalism, Simón Bolívar, into the present, and in a context that acknowledged his African heritage. Bolívar has long been considered the great “liberator” of South America from Spanish colonialism, reclaiming his African heritage in that context was a radical and revolutionary idea for many Colombians in the 1970s.

Following each TAI performance, Zapata Olivella and his team of anthropologists interviewed the audience to assess their reception of the messages and their comprehension of the Afro-Colombian dialects used in the piece. The active interviews made TAI not only a project based on art, but also on community activism and research. The team would ask the viewer-participants what they thought of Rambao and his struggles, and whether they thought his coastal language infused with African syntax was reflective of Colombian culture. The data gathered was then used by the Center to adjust and shift their art projects to directly address local community needs.

From the information gathered in the research of the Colombian Center for Folkloric Research, Zapata Olivella took his findings to an international audience. In 1974, he secured a grant from the Interamerican Foundation to help fund his theater projects.⁶⁶ In 1975, TAI participated in the Encuentro de Grupos Latinoamericanos de Teatro Educativo para el Desarrollo Popular [Meeting of Latin American Educational Theater Groups for Popular Development] held in Bogotá, Colombia. Other participating groups included the Teatro de los Barrios (San Antonio, Texas), the Centro de Publicaciones Populares (Panama), Grupo Yayachkani (Peru), Grupo Waikhuli (Bolivia) and the Family Life Theatre from New York, among others.⁶⁷ The meeting was initiated and funded by International Education Development (IED) of the United Nations with collaboration from Manuel Zapata Olivella. Zapata Olivella had made the necessary contacts for the meeting while at a 1974 conference in Bucharest, Romania with his TAI.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ According to a letter from Eileen Keremitsis of the Interamerican Foundation to Manuel Zapata Olivella dated February 22, 1974, Folder "Correspondence—Incoming (January 1974-March 4, 1974)" in MZO Papers.

⁶⁷ From Encuentro de Grupos Latinoamericanos de Teatro Educativo para el Desarrollo Popular meeting notes in MZO Papers.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Zapata Olivella's TAI was created in Colombia, yet due to the international vision of Zapata Olivella, the ideas and modes used in the theater had a wider international audience. The BAM similarly had a wider audience than the Northeast Corridor of the US where it was created. As the artistic wing of the Black Power Movement, it was viewed from many regions in the US and abroad, and had much in common with the revolutionary approaches to black liberation that were used in Cuba and Colombia. The resonances within these separate national and artistic contexts are too strong to ignore: while not necessarily directly connected, they are part of the gravitational signature of the diasporic imagination of the Americas.⁶⁹ Zapata Olivella consistently fought for black liberation on all artistic and academic fronts, as did Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka.⁷⁰ The 1960s and 1970s were a moment of great impetus and change for the Afro-Colombian population, and in particular, in their participation in wider, continental efforts to use art as a means of communication and dissemination of ideas.

Conclusion

In 1981, Larry Neal met an untimely death due to a heart attack at the age of 43. In a eulogy Jones/Baraka stated, "Larry is an example for us. Read his work. Heed his example and imperatives. Understand why he was so hip. It is all critical and necessary.... We see our cultural workers falling on all sides.... It means we have not created what we need to preserve ourselves and kill our enemies. It means we are still in the middle passage."⁷¹ Unfortunately, by the 1980s

⁶⁹ As mentioned earlier, it is highly likely that Zapata Olivella read LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka's "Revolutionary Theatre" Manifesto, so direct links may have existed. There is no direct evidence of this in the sources.

⁷⁰ In 1969, a few years after Baraka established his Revolutionary Theatre, Zapata Olivella gave a lecture at the University of Texas, Austin titled "The Material and Psychological Contributions of the Negro to Colombian Folklore." This was part of a university lecture tour that same year that included Syracuse University and Columbia University. Zapata Olivella's connections to US academic institutions became another important contact point for his diasporic work, and will be analyzed in depth in the following chapter.

⁷¹ Amiri Baraka, *Eulogies* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1996), 31.

the intention to reconcile the legacy of the middle passage and its psychological reverberations throughout the African diaspora of the Americas had not been accomplished. But the artists and activists two decades earlier certainly expanded their vision and embraced new artistic modes of accomplishing that specific liberation into personal and collective freedom. They did so by pulling from the strength and ideas espoused in other countries, particularly in Revolutionary Cuba, turning to enhanced literary and musical production, and enacting in theater a shared sense of the past forever wedged into their present.

While inspiring to Black Power leaders Jones/Baraka, Mayfield, and Williams, Cuban revolutionary violence was a source of fear for many in the US. This fear was equally directed toward the Black Power movement as its rhetoric of anger and militarism grew in the 1960s. The typical images of the Black Power movement in the US popular imagination portray the movement as primarily one of rage, expressed in postures, language, and actions perceived as hostile to white society in America.⁷² Sure enough, the anger, the exasperation with the existing societal systems was real. The violence was real, as was the urban degradation and poverty in which many of the riots took place in the 1960s. Yet there was also a deeply beautiful power and spiritual revival that took place with the BAM that emerges with exceptional clarity when we shift our point of focus from the urban US, to the parallel movements and connections with similar black aesthetic projects that simultaneously took place in Latin America; particularly in Colombia. There is a much larger, more profound, and complicated story around the Black Power movement and its reverberations and partner movements in the Americas that must be

⁷² Historian Daniel Matlin noted the “literary and visual texts that reinforce the movement’s sensational image as a wild outburst of criminality and sexual violence: footage of wasted urban landscapes with buildings reduced to smoldering rubble by rioters in Harlem, Watts, and Detroit; Black Panthers clad in black leather, stone-faced behind dark glasses, flaunting shotguns; graphic expressions of sexual rage in prose, verse, and drama,” in “‘Lift Up Yr Self!’ Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power and the Uplift Tradition” in *The Journal of American History*, vol. 93, no. 1 (June, 2006), 92

told and understood in order to fully appreciate the ways in which it was lived and understood in a diasporic context. This perspective releases us from the warring framework in which it is typically situated, and underscores the ultimate aim of peace and prosperity that was so eagerly sought within many black communities.

The common desire for peace and prosperity was often encountered within the diasporic imagination of the Americas that was advanced by the poetry, music, literature and theater of the BAM in the US, in Cuba, and Colombia with reverberations that have yet to be fully measured throughout the continents. By the 1970s, this diasporic imagination included the central and essential act of leaving the middle passage for all citizens of the Americas. Addressing the *past-present* condition of the middle passage, and consciously abandoning that state of bondage was essential to the diasporic imagination. The ability of American communities to accomplish this task and embark on a new era of freedom may yet reveal its possibility in the echoes of the words of Zapata Olivella and Baraka.

CHAPTER FOUR

Academic Networks, The Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas, and Cultural Pan-Americanism

Introduction

In late August of 1977, The First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas (El Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas) was held in Cali, Colombia. Considering Manuel Zapata Olivella's background, Cartagena on the Caribbean coast would have been a logical location for the I Congress, yet Cali was chosen for reasons not revealed in the sources.¹ While justification for the location is not evident, Cali was a significant city in which to hold the Congress: it is located in the Cauca Valley near the Pacific coast, and historically had a large population of African descendants and a rich salsa music and Afro-Colombian dance tradition. It also signified a unity of diasporic vision, as the Pacific and Atlantic coasts have discursively and physically been marked as distant and separate in the popular Colombian imagination.²

The Congress in Cali was well attended: over two hundred people participated, representing all regions of the Americas and several parts of Africa. From this diversity of perspectives emerged a common approach: the engagement of a diasporic imagination of the Americas to analyze the black experience in the Americas and formulate an action plan to fight against systemic racism and encourage full celebration of the African descendants in the

¹ I was fortunate to conduct research for this project shortly after Vanderbilt University acquired the Manuel Zapata Olivella Papers. The collection was in the process of being documented, organized, and catalogued while I conducted research with it. Only thanks to the incredible generosity of the library and archival staff at Vanderbilt was I able to access it at all. Because the collection was in the midst of being processed and catalogued, I was unable to access somemuch information was unknown or too difficult to access in the limited amount of time that I had to spend in Nashville. I expect that many of the questions that I have concerning the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas will be answered as the archival material is made more accessible or other avenues of information are consulted.

² These regionalisms are described in greater detail in Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

participating nations. Manuel Zapata Olivella envisioned the Congress as a natural extension of earlier conferences that addressed blackness in the Americas. In a letter to the former Senegalese President, poet, and cultural theorist Léopold Sédar Senghor, Zapata Olivella stated, “our Congress adds to the chain of events born of the fertile seeds sown at the Conference on Negritude and Latin America (Dakar, 1973).”³ As Zapata Olivella indicated, earlier conferences, congresses and meetings had addressed the issues of racism within the diaspora, and his Congress built upon those earlier conversations. Yet the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas (and the two other congresses that followed it) contributed a fundamentally new vision to the earlier conceptions of blackness in the diaspora. They considered the Americas as a culturally significant geographic space while focusing on both African diasporic struggle and cultural contributions to the Americas.

Inspired by Manuel Zapata Olivella, this historically significant congress was made possible due to the dedication, activism, and influential networks of black leaders throughout the Americas that had built close personal and academic ties throughout the previous decades. Together the delegates and participants compared case studies, experiences, and opportunities within the African diaspora that were particularly unique to its Pan-American focus. The particular historical context of the 1970s illuminates the ways in which academic changes opened new spaces for conversation around blackness that took place in the congress. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a marked shift in conceptualization around political and social change emerged from cultural conversations that were the result of two key mechanisms: the growth of Black Studies as an academic field with universities as nodes of networking and intellectual

³ The original Spanish reads, “nuestro Congreso se suma la cadena de eventos nacidos de la fértil siembra del Encuentro de la Negritud y la América Latina (Dakar, 1973)” in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Léopold Sédar Senghor, 5 April 1990, MZO Papers.

support, and the Congresses of Black Culture of the Americas which were made possible, in large part, by the networks formed within academia.

This chapter will connect these two developments together, with special attention on the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas and the articulations of the diasporic imagination of the Americas that arose out of the congresses. First we will consider the academic developments and emerging university spaces that fostered the transnational professional and personal networks that led to the Congresses. A chronological analysis of the Congresses will then follow with added consideration given to the First Congress, which was the most innovative and revolutionary in its conception and articulation of Pan-Americanism within the diaspora.

University Networks, the Rise of Black Studies and the Shift to Social Action

Beginning in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Manuel Zapata Olivella's professional career blossomed with opportunities to travel, lecture, and teach, collaborating with universities in Colombia, Mexico, Canada, and the US. One result of these journeys was his "Panamerican" understanding of Black Studies that is discussed later in this chapter. Zapata Olivella was one of many Latin American professors who studied and/or taught abroad and had an impact on the education system in the US. Among others who traced similar circuits, this chapter also follows the travels of Afro-Panamanian Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, Colombian Nina S. de Friedemann and Afro-Brazilian Abdias Nascimento.⁴ The university campuses were fertile ground for fostering dialogue. They were contact points for these scholar-activists to exchange

⁴ Abdias Nascimento is often referred to as Abdias do Nascimento in the literature and sources on his work and life. I have chosen to not use the "do" as part of his surname after a conversation with Nascimento's widow, Elisa Larkin Nascimento, in August 2014. In that interview she stated that his last name was Nascimento despite the common practice of calling him "do Nascimento".

ideas, educate, and engage in active, dynamic conversations around the diasporic imagination of the Americas. These intellectual and professional opportunities were made possible due to the expanding university systems in the US and throughout Latin America.

Higher education in the US and Latin America expanded in the mid-twentieth century from different origins yet with some common historical factors. US universities grew in number and capacity following the Second World War with funding from the GI Bill and a growing professional middle class. Driven by the Cold War, enrollments in science and engineering departments grew significantly. By the 1960s, both greater percentages of U.S. high school graduates and more diverse groups of students (primarily in terms of gender and social class) were attending institutions of higher education. This created pressure for increased co-education, more equal opportunities, and greater diversity in the faculty and curriculum.

Latin America (with the exception of Brazil) had an older tradition of public universities than the US that was established under Spanish colonial rule, often by the Jesuits, and modeled on the European educational system. A new wave of growth of the Latin America university system occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in countries such as Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia due to increasing urbanization, a growing middle class, and the ambitions of “enlightened political elites” who invested in the expansion of educated professionals to develop foreign trade and regarded universities as a symbol of modernity.⁵ Professional *facultades* [departments or schools] of business, engineering, and law gained the

⁵ For more information on the history of higher education in Latin America, see Jorge Balán, “Latin American Higher Education Systems in a Historical and Comparative Perspective” in the International Institute of Education’s report, *Latin America’s New Knowledge Economy* and published in Jorge Balán, ed., *América Latina y su nueva economía del conocimiento: educación superior, gobierno y colaboración internacional*. Buenos Aires: Universidad de Palermo, 2014. George Reid Andrews discusses the expansion of the university system in Brazil and the attendance of black students in light of racial inequalities in Brazil in *Blacks & Whites in São Paulo, Brazil: 1888-1988*. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1991.

most support, but the humanities and arts similarly grew and attracted a greater number of students by the time Zapata Olivella established himself as a literature professor in Bogotá.

Zapata Olivella's university journeys abroad began in 1967 when he went on his first lecture tour. He spoke at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro; Claremont College in Los Angeles; the University of Texas, El Paso; and Indiana University, Bloomington. At Indiana University, Zapata Olivella befriended George List (1911-2008), an ethnomusicologist who collaborated with Zapata for decades on the study and documentation of Colombian musical forms, especially rural *costeño* music and dance from the Colombian coast. List and Zapata kept a regular correspondence and introduced each other to other academics within their professional and private circles. List travelled to Colombia regularly, and with Zapata Olivella's assistance, he had access to musical groups and anthropological data that might otherwise have taken much longer to acquire.⁶ The two men referenced the contributions they made to each other's work in letters. For example, Zapata Olivella thoroughly researched and defined fifteen coastal terms for List. Zapata Olivella also wrote the introduction for a Spanish translation of List's book *Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village* (1983, published in Spanish in 1994).

Zapata Olivella's academic network continued in 1968 to 1969 when he was the first visiting professor in the Latin American Studies program at the University of Toronto, Canada. This home base gave him the opportunity to lecture and participate in conferences at other Canadian universities including McGill University in Montreal, the University of Guelph, Queens University in Kingston, and MacMaster University in Hamilton. He also travelled to the US to lecture at Howard University and Columbia University. In 1970 and 1971 he was a

⁶ The two men referenced the contributions they made to each other's work in letters. For example, Zapata Olivella thoroughly researched and defined fifteen coastal terms for List. Zapata Olivella also wrote the introduction for a Spanish translation of List's book *Music and Poetry in a Colombian Village* (1983, published in Spanish in 1994). See Manuel Zapata Olivella to George List, 11 November 1993 and Manuel Zapata Olivella to George List, 7 January 1992 in MZO Papers.

visiting professor at the University of Kansas and continued his university tour by presenting at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Delton College, Finch College, the Benito Juárez University in Mexico, the University of California, Irvine; University of Colorado, Boulder; University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; and the University of California, Los Angeles.⁷ He most often solicited invitations from Spanish and Romance language departments as well as Latin American Studies programs. His letters indicate great persistence in seeking academic opportunities, often relying on his friends, colleagues, and professional contacts for funding and job leads. From his time in Canada, Zapata Olivella maintained frequent correspondence with Professor Kurt Levy of the Department of Italian and Hispanic Studies at the University of Toronto. In a letter to Zapata Olivella dated April 7, 1969, Levy thanked Zapata Olivella for his “lively interest” in the “organic development of the Latin American Studies Program. Your stimulating presence and your magnificent academic work, believe me, have been an incalculable contribution not only to the Program and university life, but also to the cultural links between Latin American and Canada.”⁸

As Black Studies and area studies such as Latin American Studies were becoming established in North American universities, Zapata Olivella was infusing his specific view of race and ethnicity in the Americas into the early development of these programs. While ethnic and area studies had two different academic trajectories, Zapata Olivella’s anthropological research, novels, and essays made contributions to both fields and received responses from a

⁷ *Curriculum Vitae* of Manuel Zapata Olivella, MZO Papers.

⁸ The original Spanish reads, “vivo interés que sigues manifestando en pro de un desarrollo orgánico del Programa de Estudios Latinoamericanos. Tu presencia estimuladora y tu magnífica labor docente, créemelo, han hecho un aporte incalculable no solo al Programa y a la misma vida universitaria, sino también a los lazos culturales entre Latinoamérica y el Canadá” in Kurt Levy to Manuel Zapata Olivella, 7 April 1969, “Correspondence-Incoming,” MZO Papers.

diverse array of departments.⁹ Spanish professor Antonio Olliz Boyd of Temple University wrote to Zapata Olivella asking how he could acquire copies of Zapata Olivella's novels and writings, and Philosophy professor Alfred H. Boersch of Colorado State University encouraged Zapata Olivella to publicize his books in the *New York Review of Books* so that they might gain a wider audience.¹⁰ Both professors, just a few of many, were enthusiastic about Zapata Olivella's academic involvement within the US and supported the distribution of his works.

In yet another academic field, History professor Richard Sinkin of the University of Texas, Austin thanked Zapata Olivella for his contribution to Afro-Colombian historical knowledge that had been lacking in his field. In a letter written in 1971, Sinkin found the conference paper that Zapata Olivella presented at the University of Texas very interesting and a contribution to the little knowledge "that we have about the influence of black people in Latin America."¹¹ Perhaps studies of the African diaspora in the Americas offered a point of connection and relation between academics in North and South America. The shared history of slavery and African heritage was a unifying link where political and cultural discourses very often separated the two regions, as evidenced by the creation of the academic field of Latin American Studies.

Latin American Studies, and area studies more generally, signaled a discursive separation between the US and other American regions. The fact that the US academy viewed and analyzed non-U.S. regions as separate, objects of study underscores the epistemological distances and power structures within the hemisphere. While Latin American, Near Eastern, and Black studies

⁹ Area studies arose out of the historical context of the Cold War while ethnic studies arose out of the US civil rights, Chicano, and Native American movements.

¹⁰ Antonio Olliz Boyd to Manuel Zapata Olivella, 25 February 1974, and Alfred H. Boersch to Manuel Zapata Olivella, 22 February 1971, MZO Papers.

¹¹ Richard Sinkin to Manuel Zapata Olivella, undated, 1971, "Correspondence-Incoming," MZO Papers.

were explicitly named by the academy, the assumed Anglo-European Studies was taken for granted and not named in the same way.¹²

Further analyzing educational regional perspectives, it is significant to note that in most Latin American countries, schools have taught that North and South America is one continent of the world's five. In contrast, the US education system traditionally taught that North and South America are two separate continents, of the world's six total continents.¹³ The linkages and collaboration between Zapata Olivella and his US colleagues are all the more significant considering these differing hemispheric perspectives of the Americas as a geographic entity (or entities).

Zapata Olivella, and his North American colleagues conversed across these intellectual and regional barriers. Zapata Olivella continued his ties to Canada and in 1974 he served as a delegate to the Asamblea General de la Asociación Canadiense de Estudios Latinoamericanos [General Assembly of the Canadian Association of Latin American Studies] in Quito, Ecuador. This work was simultaneous with and intricately connected to his work specifically within the African diaspora. In 1975 Zapata Olivella founded the Centro de Estudios Afro-Colombianos [Center of Afro-Colombian Studies] in Bogotá, Colombia, and in 1977 he led the panel on "African Influences in Art, Music and Religion in Latin America" organized by the Latin American Studies Association in Houston, Texas. Zapata Olivella found ways to integrate diverse perspectives and approaches into his work that was relevant throughout all of the

¹² American studies did emerge as a field in the 1920s and burgeoned following the II World War. This interdisciplinary field of study privileged US history, literature, and society, implicitly following the US academic pattern of not including Latin America in the conceptual field of American studies. It should be noted that American studies programs and institutions are most common in the US and Europe. Latin American studies, Near Eastern studies, and Asian studies were also founded in the US and Northern Europe in Great Britain and Germany especially. For further critical reading in American studies, see Lucy Maddox, *Locating American Studies: The Evolution of a Discipline*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 and George Lipsitz, *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.

Americas. His professional and intellectual energy was directed simultaneously to his national and international projects that could not be separated or isolated from each other. For Zapata Olivella, the work of racial and ethnic identity essentially had to address both the local and broader hemispheric contexts.

In his award-winning memoir and social commentary, *Levántate Mulato!: “Por mi raza hablará el espíritu”*¹⁴ [Lift Yourself Up, Mulatto!: Through my race, the spirit will speak] Manuel Zapata Olivella reflected on the dynamic and tumultuous time period of the 1960s and early 1970s with a wide, continental American perspective. He wove together a wide variety of movements and social upheavals in countries throughout the Americas as part of a Pan-American vision that intimately linked his native Colombia to its hemispheric neighbors, including the United States. He summarized the historical US and Colombian academic moment in a relentless series:

The professors, the reference books, the television, the cinema, the newspapers and journals agitated the youth revolution, women’s liberation, the struggle against the contraceptive programs, the Colombian guerrillas, Nicaraguans, Peruvians, and El Salvadorans, the battles of the peasants reclaiming land, armed with sticks and rocks against the repression of the soldiers and police, the overthrow of Allende, the successes of the Cuban Revolution and the death of Che Guevara in Bolivia, the strikes and fights of the workers in the mines, factories and streets, the great marches of the ecologists against pollution and atomic warfare.¹⁵

Zapata Olivella sketched a panorama that referenced both common struggles and specific, local movements that he folded into the larger picture of unrest and urgency for societal change. All of the movements mentioned were part of the rising political and social left throughout the

¹⁴ Interestingly, the subtitle of Zapata Olivella’s book is in reference to Mexican intellectual José Vasconcelos’ essay *La Raza Cósmica* (1925).

¹⁵ The original Spanish reads, “Los profesores, los libros de consulta, la televisión, el cine, las revistas y periódicos agitaban la revolución de la juventud, la liberación femenina, la lucha contra los programas anticonceptivos, las guerrillas colombianas, nicaragüenses, peruanas y salvadoreñas, las batallas de los campesinos reclamando tierra, enfrentados con palos y piedras a la represión de soldados y policías, el derrocamiento de Allende, los éxitos de la Revolución Cubana y la muerte de Che Guevara en Bolivia, las huelgas y combates de los obreros en las minas, fábricas y calles, las grandes marchas de las ecologistas contra la polución y la guerra atómica” in Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Levántate Mulato!: “Por mi raza hablará el espíritu.”* 1st ed. Bogotá: Rei Andes Ltda., 1990, 333.

hemisphere including the women's liberation movement that emerged out of the US civil rights movement, the communist movements in Colombia, Nicaragua, Peru, and Cuba, and the environmentalist movement that occurred in the US and Latin America. He mentioned the labor struggles throughout the hemisphere, and the conservative backlash that ensued including the US-backed overthrow of the Chilean Marxist president Salvador Allende in September of 1973.¹⁶

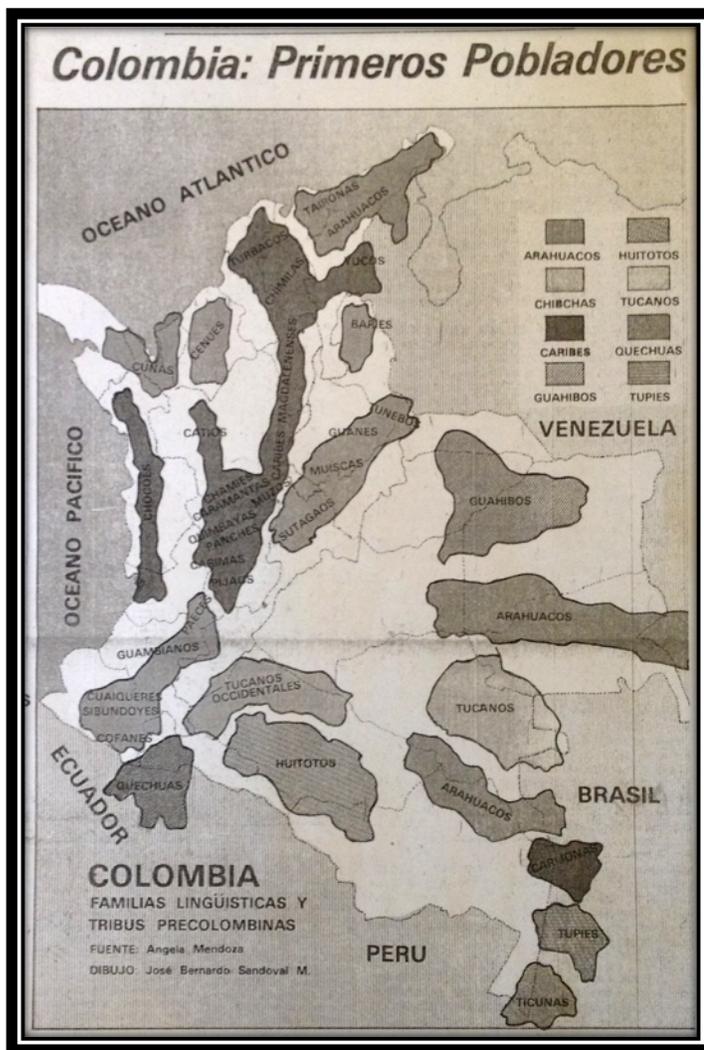
At the center of all of these movements, Zapata Olivella firmly situates the university with its central role in disseminating ideas, fostering debate and social justice action in the wider society. Zapata Olivella describes the transformation common to Colombia and its American neighbors, "Gradually in America and Colombia studies on social and racial issues were growing. The concepts of blackness and 'indianness' had managed to permeate academia."¹⁷

The opening of indigenous cultural acknowledgement occurred in both academia and in the wider Colombian public in the 1970s, as indicated by a map published in Colombia's most widely read weekly magazine, *El Espectador*, on 29 April, 1976, one year before the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas (See Map 3). The map is titled "Colombia: Primeros Pobladores" [Colombia: First Settlers] and directly maps the presence of the first indigenous groups in Colombia. What is especially striking about the map is the number of different language groups and tribes represented, and the extent to which indigenous groups populated

¹⁶ The CIA sponsored the Chilean military *coup d'état* of Allende and supported the military junta of Augusto Pinochet who was in power from 1973 to 1990. Zapata Olivella's reference to the resistance to the growing use of the birth control pill is unclear. It is likely that Zapata Olivella was referring to the general Roman Catholic Church position against the use of contraceptives. Colombia is traditionally a Catholic country, with a vast majority of the population claiming to practice the religion. It is highly likely that church discourse had an impact on Zapata Olivella's understanding of the role, and reception of, the birth control pill. In the US, the birth control pill that was approved for widespread use in the US in 1960 and was used by 6.5 million US women by 1965. The history of the birth control pill is chronicled at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/health/a-brief-history-of-the-birth-control-pill/480/>.

¹⁷ The original Spanish reads, "Paulatinamente en América y Colombia se acrecentaban los estudios sobre las problemáticas social y racial. Los conceptos de negritud e indianidad habían logrado calar en los medios universitarios" in Zapata Olivella, *Levántate*, 333.

almost the entire country. They were by no means concentrated in the remote areas of the Amazon or Pacific, but inhabited large territories throughout the country. This map would have increased awareness of Colombia's diverse indigenous populations beyond the generalized *mestizo* ethnic label, and was significant enough to Manuel Zapata Olivella that he saved a clipping of the map in his personal papers.¹⁸



Map 3. Angela Mendoza and José Bernardo Sandoval M., “Colombia: Primeros Pobladores,” in *El Espectador*, 29 April 1976. MZO Papers.

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that Zapata Olivella conducted anthropological research on the indigenous culture of Colombia as well as Afro-Colombian culture, often highlighting the ways in which the two cultures were linked or informed the “tri-ethnicity” of Colombia and the Americas. His personal papers contain references to his desire to complete a larger project on indigenous culture in Colombia that was never realized.

While studies in the fields of anthropology, sociology, history, political science, and economics were taking on questions of race and ethnicity throughout the Americas, Zapata Olivella was especially interested in the experiences of the students themselves, who were instrumental in leading black consciousness movements both in the US and Colombia.¹⁹ He reflected specifically on the Colombian university experience, “Many of the students whose skin was not marked by the obvious stigma of the proscribed races, but who were really *mestizos* (of mixed European and indigenous racial heritage) o *zambos* (of mixed African and indigenous racial heritage), found themselves attracted to the degrees of anthropology, sociology, and economics.”²⁰

Especially revealing in Zapata Olivella’s assessment of the changing university climate toward cultural studies concerning race, is his recognition of a shifting racial identity for many students. He notes that though some of these students did not possess racialized physical markers of indigenous or African heritage, they were “really” *mestizos* or *zambos*. For Zapata Olivella, as indicated in the title of his book discussed in the above quote, race included physical markers such as skin color, and hair texture and color, yet it was an essential aspect of the very soul, or spirit, of a person. This aspect of race could not be erased, however much it was denied in the public dialogue. The process of being “attracted” to fields of study that explored racial and ethnic issues within academia is described by Zapata Olivella as an internal calling, a part of the spirit influenced by race, though external racial identifiers might be absent or not recognized by the self or society at large.

¹⁹ The establishment of several universities in the Pacific regions of Colombia is discussed in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

²⁰ The original Spanish reads, “Muchos de los estudiantes no marcados en la piel con el supuesto estigma de las razas proscritas, pero realmente mestizos o zambos, se veían atraídos por las carreras de antropología, sociología y economía” in Zapata Olivella, *Levántate*, 333.

The fluid, and diverse, process of racial identity has been complicated in both Colombia and the United States, and Zapata Olivella's statement is revealing in showing his specific vision of an American process that was fostered by the university systems. This statement implies a "true" self to be discovered and revealed, where physical features might not be the basis for identification. Universities created a space that had hitherto not existed within the Colombian public sphere, to address racial identification in new ways. In Colombian university courses and programs, African descendant students (while still in the minority) had the opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage, that of others, and the ways in which implicit and explicit racism worked in their country where great silences created a vacuum on the subject in more public political spaces.

With similar goals amidst different approaches, US Black Studies exploded on the university scene in the late 1960s as a social justice initiative: it fought against perceived racism and racist violence embedded within the traditional academic curricula built from Anglo-European epistemologies, methodologies and research approaches. Black students considered it unjust to not create a space for students and faculty of color to participate in the full university roles. In addition, they also called for a greater connection between the university and community service.

The first Black Studies department was created in rapid response to student protest at San Francisco State College in 1968. With the involvement of other black freedom organizations such as SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), the Black Panther Party and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), similar Black Studies departments were created throughout the US. By 1969, these attempts to break "the white monopoly on knowledge" and to "create a new context for the creation and dissemination of a new knowledge directed toward service to

the community rather than toward its suppression” had been successful and Black Studies or similar programs were adopted at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, and Lincoln Universities, to name a few.²¹ These departments were dedicated to the “the systematic and critical study of the multidimensional aspects of Black thought and practice in their current and historical unfolding” with the understanding that “intellectual freedom was posed as a prerequisite to political freedom.”²²

The break from Anglo-European epistemology in the US academy was both instrumental in allowing a transnational perspective on the African diaspora in the Americas to develop, and it was the result of transnational exchanges already in place. Several leaders had origins in countries located elsewhere in the diaspora. Afro-Panamanian sociologist Roy Simón Bryce-Laporte (1933-2012) founded the African American studies department at Yale in 1969. He was a crucial member of the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas and kept close ties with his native Panama. Bryce-Laporte’s approach to African American studies went beyond the US African American experience and embraced a hemispheric inclusion of diasporic communities in the Americas. This made Yale’s program unusual, but certainly not exclusive in its wider American scope. Bryce-Laporte went on to teach at Syracuse, Howard University, the University of Pennsylvania, Colorado College, and Colgate.²³ He presented work at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem and was the founding director of the Smithsonian’s Research Institute of Immigration and Ethnic Studies. Bryce-Laporte’s work consistently crossed academic and popular lines, as well as national lines within the Americas.

²¹ Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 2nd Edition. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993, 9-10.

²² This is the definition of Black Studies used by Maulana Karenga, the creator of the holiday Kwanzaa, as expressed in *Introduction to Black Studies*, 13, 21.

²³ Douglas Martin, “Roy S. Bryce-Laporte, Who Led Black Studies at Yale, Dies at 78” in *New York Times*, August 8, 2012.

Several academics that participated in the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas conducted their transnational work in similar ways to Bryce-Laporte and Zapata Olivella. The universities were an important mechanism through which they were able to complete that work. Colombian anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann, for example, had been academically trained in the US and maintained close contacts at Emory University in Atlanta, yet she dedicated her career to tracing African heritage in both the US and Colombia. She was crucial to the academic and political recognition and celebration of Afro-Colombian culture and community needs that will be discussed in the next chapter, but it is worth emphasizing here that her work revolutionized anthropology within Colombia.

Similarly, Afro-Panamanian leader Gerardo Maloney began his black activist work while a student at UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) in Mexico City. In the setting of the university abroad, he encountered the writings of Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, Franz Fanon, and others, all of which shaped his personal understandings of racism in the Americas.²⁴ For Maloney, de Friedemann, Bryce-Laporte and Zapata Olivella, their diasporic view emerged from their personal experiences at home and abroad that highlighted the need to negotiate the tensions between the commonalities and differences within diasporic communities. The fight against American racism more broadly required multifaceted approaches that engaged the intellectual centers in the universities, local community activism, and organizations created to address human rights needs more globally.

As the 1970s continued, an increasing number of non-governmental organizations supported the efforts of universities to expand or create Black Studies departments and to hold conferences, lecture series, journals and other academic programs dedicated to multicultural

²⁴ According to Gerardo Maloney's personal memories expressed in an informal conversation in Panama City, Panama, 15 January 2016.

initiatives. The Ford Foundation, for instance, gave more than \$10 million (in equivalent 2005 US dollars) between 1970 and 1978 to universities and other organizations connected to the cause of black studies.²⁵ UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the Interamerican Foundation were two organizations, along with the Organization of American States (OAS), that supported the work of Zapata Olivella and his colleagues in South America concerning black educational programs affiliated with universities. The most prominent and these projects were the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas, specifically supported by UNESCO and OAS.

Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas

Manuel Zapata Olivella initiated the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas and they were made possible, in large part, because of the extensive networks of black activists and artists throughout the Americas that had been built in the previous decades. Crucial to the overarching vision of the congresses was the diasporic imagination of the Americas, in varying forms and articulations. African American Studies scholar Anthony Ratcliff has argued that the congresses surpassed “translocal considerations of *Négritude*” and other black consciousness movements to become part of a broader Pan-African movement.²⁶ While Pan-African ideas were discussed at the congresses, and recommendations were made in solidarity with Pan-African movements, the focus of the congresses were Pan-American in nature rather than Pan-African.

²⁵ Fabio Rojas, *From Black Power to Black Studies: How a Radical Social Movement Became an Academic Discipline*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, 130.

²⁶ Anthony Ratcliff, “ ‘Black Writers of the World, Unite!’: Negotiating Pan-African Politics of Cultural Struggle in Afro-Latin America” in *The Black Scholar*, Volume 37, No. 4, (Winter 2008), 27. The focus of this article is on the First Congress.

The American (in the sense of all American countries and continents) focus and dedication to addressing the needs of those in the diaspora in the Americas made the congresses unique in their context and vision. This vision will be analyzed in the following pages along with each congress' leadership, structure, main themes, and specific contributions to the diasporic imagination as a whole. Each congress will be discussed separately, though some leaders and ideas will overlap.

The congresses convened to accomplish four main goals: to highlight and celebrate African cultural practices and contributions in the Americas, study the effects of racism and the living conditions of African descendants in the Americas, design strategic responses to improve those conditions and to implement those strategies on local, national, and international levels throughout the continent. The original intention was to begin a series of congresses that would meet indefinitely into the future, indeed Afro-Brazilian Abdias Nascimento referred to the congresses as a “movement.”²⁷ Unfortunately financial circumstances required that the fourth congress be cancelled, and they never resumed. Yet the three Congresses were impressive and ambitious in their reach and goals, and future Pan-American efforts continued the visions expressed in the congresses.

The three Congresses built on each other to accomplish different initiatives: The first, the diagnostic congress, was an opportunity to assess black culture in the Americas and its role within black experience; the second created plans for action to address needs of black communities and society writ large; the third congress discussed ways of implementing those plans. All three addressed issues of identity, culture, and education, as well as socio-political and class-oriented concerns. The congresses, considered together, acted in space and time as a convergence of ideas about the diasporic imagination being used to enact change. The networks

²⁷ The term “movement” is used in reference to the document “Processos e Estruturas Organizacionais do Movimento dos Congressos de Cultura Negra das Américas” mentioned in the “Introduction” to the “3^o Congresso de Cultura Negra das Américas” document by IPEAFRO, Archives of the Universidad Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

of activists and artists who participated worked to bring forth that change in their own countries and on an international, continent-wide level.

First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas

El Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas (the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas) took place in Cali, Colombia from August 24th to the 28th, 1977.²⁸ The organizing and sponsorship of the congress was led by two organizations founded by Zapata Olivella: the Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas (Colombian Foundation to Investigate Folklore) and the Centro de Estudios Afro-Colombianos (Center of Afro-Colombian Studies). The Asociación Cultural de la Juventud Negra Peruana (Cultural Association of Black Peruvian Youth) also contributed to the organization and sponsorship of the event. As the congress date approached, an Organizing Committee was formed and convened a Preparatory Conference in Cartagena, Colombia from the 19th to the 22nd of December 1976. Manuel Zapata Olivella served as the President of the Organizing Committee among delegates from the US, Colombia, Panama and Brazil. The committee determined the Congress goals, guidelines and structure.²⁹ The motivation for the Congress was stated clearly, and it explicitly underscored the Pan-American focus: “Never before has it been so necessary to join social and cultural forces to establish the identity of the in the Negro in the American hemisphere as it is today.” The immediacy came from a need to vindicate “those of African descent, whether pure or of mixed race, who either openly or covertly are victimized as a result of attitudes inherited from a slave regime....” The Congress further exerted that “The negro, mulatto and negro-indian populations

²⁸ From here on I will refer to the consecutive congresses as the “First Congress of Black Culture,” “Second Congress of Black Culture,” “Third Congress of Black Culture” and the never-realized “Fourth Congress of Black Culture.”

²⁹ Referenced in a letter to Congress attendees written by Manuel Zapata Olivella, January 1977, MZO Papers.

of the Americas claim their rightful places within the American cultural pattern and to do this it is essential to bring together ideas and theories about the origin; development and destiny of African cultures in the American hemisphere.”³⁰

The geographic reach of the Congress focused on scholars, activists, and artists from the Americas, but considered input and participation of Africans and Europeans essential to the Congress’ goals. Spanish, Portuguese, English, and French were the official languages of the Congress. All of the papers presented were distributed in two of those languages to all of the participating delegates. The two most represented countries were Colombia and the US, with sixty-three and twenty-three delegates respectively from those nations. Delegates from five South American countries were present including Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Delegates from Central America traveled from Costa Rica, Honduras, and Panama. Additional delegates attended from Angola, Egypt, Mexico, Nigeria, Puerto Rico, Senegal, and Spain. Valerie McCormick represented the Organization of American States (OAS) and César Fernández Moreno represented UNESCO. In total, more than one hundred and fifty researchers, artists and activists participated in the panels, debates and four “working commissions,” along with an unrecorded number of attendees not assigned to a commission or panel.³¹

The four working commissions created the organizing structure of the Congress and were led by some of the most prominent leaders of black consciousness movements of the Americas. The first commission was titled “Etnia Negra y Mestizaje” [Black Ethnicity and *Mestizaje*], led by Brazilian Abdias Nascimento and Colombian Nina S. de Friedemann. Panamanian Roy Simón Bryce-Laporte and Venezuelan Angelina Polak-Elhe led the second, “Filosofía y Afectividad” [Philosophy and Affect] and Colombian Carlos Calderón Mosquera and A.

³⁰ “I Congress of the Negro Culture in the Americas” Call for Papers, MZO Papers.

Faulkner Watts from the US led the third, “Creatividad Social y Política” [Social and Political Creativity]. Colombians Aquiles Escalante and Delia Zapata Olivella led the final commission, “Creatividad Material y Artística” [Material and Artistic Creativity]. As their names indicate, the commissions were organized around overarching themes relevant to all regions, and individual regional national cases were discussed within the wider themes.

Taking all four commissions together, half of the leaders were from Colombia, and one leader each represented Brazil, Panama, Venezuela and the US. Seven out of eight leaders were from Central and South America, and one from the US, who was of Panamanian heritage. Before examining in depth the concrete gains and goals of the commissions, and the congress more broadly, an overview of this impressive leadership is warranted. The unique combination of individuals contributed to the empowerment of the congress and to the personal and professional networks that were developed there.

Abdias Nascimento, the President of the commission “Black Ethnicity and *Mestizaje*,” was one of the most distinguished leaders to attend the congress. He was well known for his groundbreaking, influential play, *Orfeu da Conceição*, which was later adapted to the 1959 film *Orfeu negro* [Black Orpheus]. Similar to Zapata Olivella, Nascimento worked his entire adult life for black consciousness and freedom movements in a myriad of roles inside and outside of his native country of Brazil. He was a playwright, poet, painter, professor, and activist who traveled extensively throughout the Americas, Europe, and Africa and he held a crucial leadership role within the congresses. Understanding Nascimento’s personal and professional history highlights the processes of the development of the African diasporic imagination in the Americas in parallel ways to the experiences of Zapata Olivella. Nascimento was tirelessly dedicated to working for Afro-Brazilian civil rights, yet he was considered by many to be an

ekobio of the diaspora.³² His spiritual kinship with many African descendants regardless of national borders was evident and significant to distinguished intellectual, Molefi K. Asante who described Nascimento:

Abdias was Brazilian, but he belonged to the African world. We claimed him in the United States; they claimed him in Mexico; he was claimed in Nigeria; they spoke of him as belonging to them in Ghana; the Angolans and Mozambicans called his name fondly as one of theirs. All over the African world his name was written in the bosom of the people. Abdias' name must be included among the most eminent of Africans, alongside those of Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Malcolm X, and Cheikh Anta Diop.³³

As Asante underscores, Nascimento was considered by many African descendants to be a member of the global diaspora. He was involved in Pan-African movements that were not mutually exclusive with his hemispheric work. Nascimento had a particular impact in the Americas that was informed by his personal history within the continent.

Abdias Nascimento was born on March 14, 1914 in Franca, São Paulo, Brazil and first became conscious of institutional racism within Brazil while serving with the military in the early 1930s. After leaving military service, Nascimento met and traveled with several other Latin American poets as part of the Santa Irmandad Orquidea [Holy Brotherhood of the Orchid]. Traveling throughout South America with the purpose of sharing poetry, a process and experience discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation at length, was a life-changing experience for Nascimento; one that permanently shifted his view of the daily realities of the majority of Latin Americans and the ways in which poetry and art could be used as a means of racial awareness, uplift, and social justice work.

³² *Ekobio*, alternatively spelled *ecobio*, is a West African-derived word that means “spiritual brother” in the diaspora.

³³ Molefi Kete Asanti, “In Memoriam for Abdias do Nascimento, 1914-2011 in *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 5, September 2011, 2.

Dedicating his career to activist art, Nascimento founded the Black Experimental Theater in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1944. The theater produced many works, most notably *Orfeu da Conceição*. Nascimento's direct criticism of implicit and explicit racism in Brazilian society ultimately led to his exile at the beginning of the military dictatorship in 1968. He assumed a position as a visiting professor of drama at Yale University from 1969 to 1971 where his work was welcomed within the context of growing area and black studies. In 1971 he became a professor at the State University of New York, Buffalo (SUNY) where he founded the chair of African Cultures in the New World within the Puerto Rican Studies Program. Both Nascimento and Zapata Olivella came to North America in the late 1960s as visiting professors, opportunities that allowed them to build strong support networks outside of the home countries that, in turn, allowed them to make lasting change within Colombia and Brazil.

Nascimento and Zapata Olivella began their friendship in the context of the first Congress. They knew of each other through correspondence and met in person in Cali in August of 1977. Nascimento returned from Nigeria, where he had been a visiting professor at the University of Ifé, just in time to attend the Congress. According to a letter written to the Organizing Committee, Nascimento learned of the Congress about a year prior, in the summer of 1976, and made the decision to attend before he left the US for Nigeria.³⁴ Upon his return from Africa almost exactly one year later, Nascimento promptly wrote Zapata Olivella to confirm that he would attend the Congress and expressed his desire to meet Zapata Olivella saying, "Espero conhecê-lo pessoalmente dentro em breve" [I hope to meet you in person soon].³⁵ When they did meet in Cali, a strong *ekobio* bond began that was significant to both of their black freedom work.

³⁴ Abdias do Nascimento to the Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas, 1 August, 1976, Correspondence, MZO Papers.

³⁵ Abdias do Nascimento to Manuel Zapata Olivella, 2 August, 1977, Correspondence, MZO Papers.

Zapata Olivella had noted before the Congress began that it had been well received within Brazil among black leaders, fostering a new link within the diaspora between Colombia and Brazil that had previously not been emphasized.³⁶ Similarly, the Congress brought together influential activists from other countries that had been separated from Colombia discursively in the popular imagination in Latin America.³⁷ Gerardo Maloney Francis, an Afro-Panamanian poet, black activist and sociology professor was greatly inspired by his personal interactions with Zapata Olivella and the possibilities for change that the Congress could address. Maloney had met Zapata Olivella at a symposium in Panama the year before the Congress and believed that it held great importance for those in the African diaspora.³⁸

Other key leaders who attended the Congress included Zapata Olivella's close colleagues and friends from the US: Lawrence Prescott (often called Lorenzo in Spanish sources), African American anthropologist Vera Green, poet-theorist Larry Neal (mentioned in the previous chapter), and African American/Panamanian education professor A. Faulkner Watts. Nigerian playwright, Wole Soyinka, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1986, attended, though he was unable to participate in the working commissions due to a several-day flight delay in

³⁶ Manuel Zapata Olivella wrote to Lorenzo Prescott, "Respecto al Congreso, ha tenido muy buena acogida en el Brasil" [With respect to the Congress, it has been very well received in Brazil] in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Lorenzo Prescott, 25 July 1977, Correspondence, MZO Papers.

³⁷ For example, the Colombian province of Panamá was considered a distant, remote area separated from the rest of the country by the lack of roads and infrastructure in the Darien rainforest. After Panamanian independence from Colombia in November of 1903, the Panamanian government asserted a strong nationalist rhetoric that was complicated by the US presence in the Canal Zone. Brazil has traditionally been understood as uniquely dissimilar from Colombia due to the geographical barrier of the Amazon rainforest between the two countries and the linguistic barrier between Portuguese and Spanish. In the second half of the twentieth century, the case of Colombia within Latin American history has often been dominated by a focus on the impacts of guerrilla warfare and the resulting narco-trafficking and internal displacement. Political and social histories centered on the civil war have pulled attention away from more nuanced and comprehensive cultural and comparative histories with other Latin American countries.

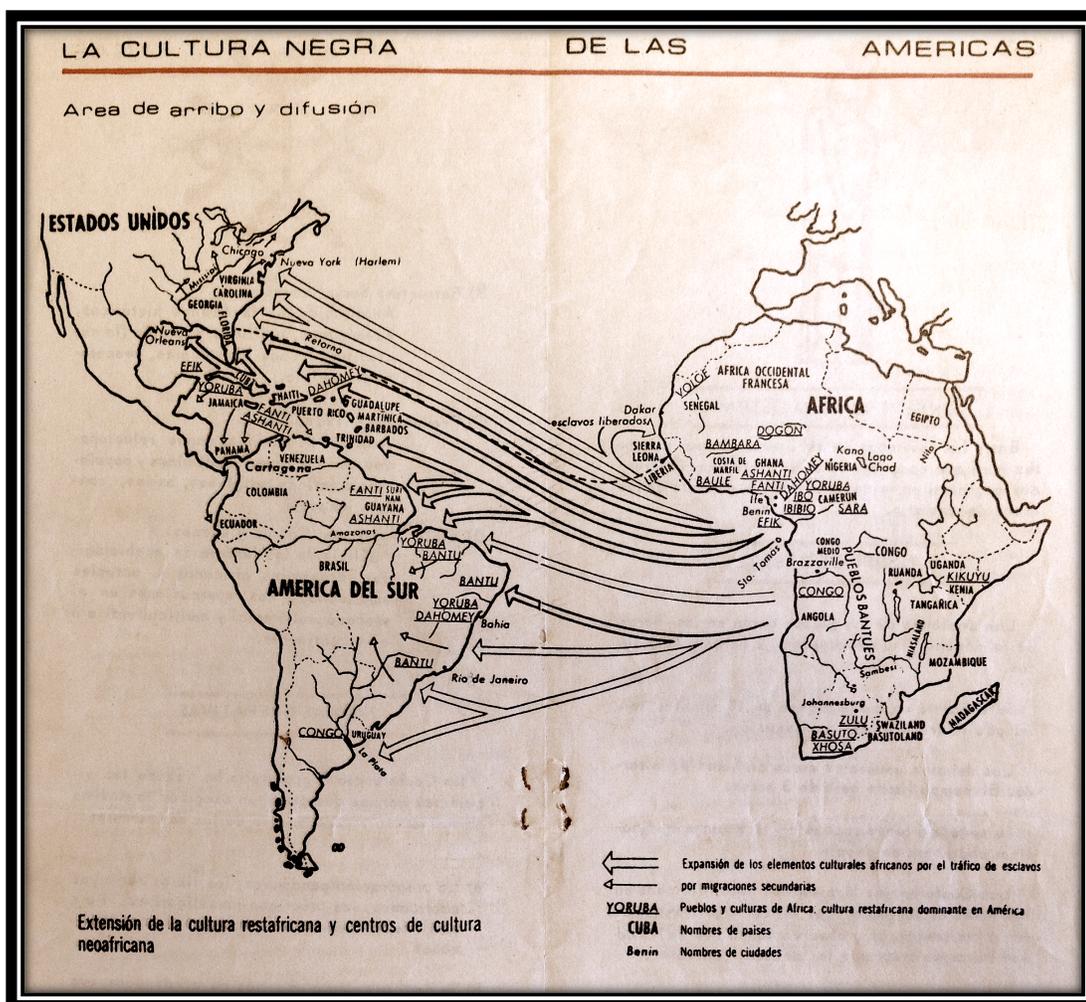
³⁸ According to the memories of Gerardo Maloney expressed in a conversation with the author on 15 January, 2016, Panama City, Panama.

Peru.³⁹ Afro-Panamanian Roy Simón Bryce-Laport, and two highly influential Colombian anthropologists, Jaime Arocha and Nina S. de Friedemann were also in attendance. The connections and ideas exchanged between this diverse group of intellectuals and artists inspired a dedication to social and cultural change that had reverberations well beyond the five days of packed events of the Congress.

Zapata Olivella inaugurated the Congress with an opening speech that clearly outlined the Pan-American vision of the Congress and its significance. This Pan-American vision was necessary in order to fully counter the historical context of the slave trade. The Congress was a space that promoted freedom contrary to the perceived legacy of the Middle Passage, and this could only be fully effective if all destinations of that slave trade were taken into account in the new historical record that the Congress produced.

This particular vision of the Middle Passage was included in a map printed in the First Congress pamphlet that Wole Soyinka kept in his personal papers (see Map 4). The author/artist of the map is not marked, and its subtitle is “Área de arribo y difusión” [Area of arrival and diffusion] with a subscript at the bottom, “Extensión de la cultura restafricana y centros de cultura neoafricana” [Extension of the “restafricana” culture and centers of neo-African culture]. The map is explicitly cultural in nature; it illustrates a cultural imagination of the Americas and its role in the slave trade and beyond. Geographically, it is a fascinating illustration.

³⁹ According to an interview with Wole Soyinka published in Alvaro Burgos Palacios, “El Nobel africano estuvo en Cali” in the section *Área Metropolitana* of an unidentified Cali newspaper, Sunday 26 October 1986, MZO Papers.



Map 4. “La Cultura Negra de las Américas: Area de arribo y difusión” [Area of arrival and diffusion] in Pamphlet of the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, 1977. Wole Soyinka Papers 1966-1996, Harvard University Rare Books and Manuscripts.

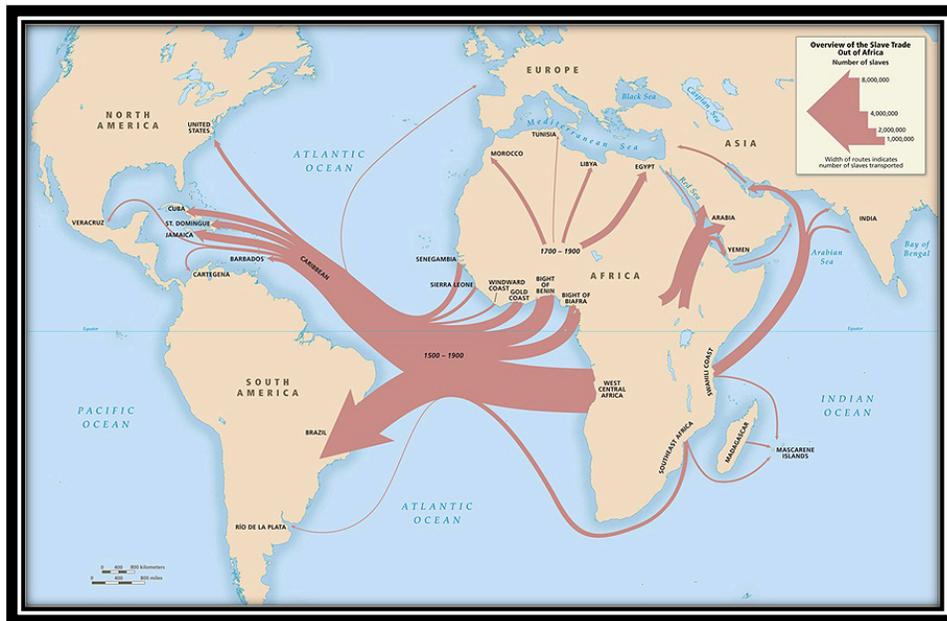
To start, it is striking that places are marked, but no chronology or time frame is written into the map. This atemporality situates the map within a diasporic concept discussed in the third and sixth chapters of this dissertation: the *past-present*, or the simultaneous experience of the past and the present. Secondly, the Americas and Africa are the only two regions featured in the map: the near total absence of Europe and Asia highlights the centrality of the Americas and Africa to the Congress. Additionally, the Americas and Africa are broad geographic spaces that lack national borders within them. “Estados Unidos” [United States], “América del Sur” [South

America] and “África” are marked largely in bold, indicating the privileged historical and/or cultural status of those places (the US is the only country marked in bold) within the diasporic imagination.

Borderless countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador are marked in South America. Senegal, Ghana, and Camerún [Cameroon] are marked in Africa. Many countries are not marked at all on the map such as Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, and most African countries. Mexico is not marked; neither is any other Central American country except Panama. Very few cities appear on the map; Chicago, Nueva Orleans (New Orleans) and Nueva York (New York), are included, presumably for their cultural and political contributions to the diaspora. As we have seen, Harlem was an especially significant diasporic place for Zapata Olivella and many artists and activists in his network; hence, it is the only neighborhood included on the map and is written in parentheses next to New York.

Given its markings, the logic that the map accurately reflects the world during the slave trade does not hold up; too many nations and cities (such as Harlem) did not exist as such, and too many places are absent. The specific worldview the map reflects comes into stark relief when juxtaposed with a twenty-first century map of the transatlantic slave trade (see Map 5).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This map is digitally available at: <http://www.neh.gov/news/voyages-the-transatlantic-slave-trade-database> (accessed June 28, 2016).



Map 5. Transatlantic Slave Trade Database Map, 2011. National Endowment for the Humanities.

In this map, the US is far less emphasized, and the Middle East, Asia and Europe are included as important locations within the slave trade. Additionally, the newer map portrays a much larger number of enslaved peoples transported to Brazil than the Congress map, with a much smaller line leading to Colombia and none to Panama.⁴¹ The twenty-first century map does not capture the continental vision nor shared experience as shaped by American histories and places, as emphasized by so many in the I Congress. What is most clear from the Congress map is that the Americas, as a geographic framework, was absolutely unique and central to the Congress vision. Zapata Olivella explained this vision in his opening speech,

According to the most generalized thesis, the African was brought to America simply as a work force and as a consequence, he has only been valued in economic terms, ignoring his participation in the areas of philosophy, thought, social conduct and artistic creativity.

⁴¹ The differences in the maps are largely due to the fact that much less information was known about the slave trade in the 1970s at the time of the First Congress. Indeed, the Congress inspired increasing research into the diasporic history of the slave trade that has helped fill in many of the gaps in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. More research has yet to be done. It is also important to note that the twenty-first century map of the transatlantic slave trade does not include diasporic displacements or movements after the initial arrival to the Americas.

The Congress of Black Culture, on the contrary, will position the presence of the black man as a sustained cultural flow throughout more than four centuries, massive, extended across the entire Continent, and most importantly, persistently renewed. Generations and generations of slaves of all ages, the African contribution swelled annually, revitalizing itself in African and *mestizo* values. The river of African culture was not a passenger exodus, only, but rather it was a nutritious sap that brought with it renewed influence.

This is not the first time that regional meetings have been called together with the purpose of researching aspects of the black presence in America [in the continental sense]...But the Congress in Cali is the first to position the issue within a continental scale.⁴²

Zapata Olivella's opening comments reveal the Congress' intention to assert a new narrative around the experiences and cultural contributions of African descendants that were particular to the Americas due to the nature of the transatlantic slave trade and the shared history of the diaspora within the Americas. He significantly reframes the slave trade not solely as a "passenger exodus" but a "nutritious sap" that "renewed" the populations of the Americas.⁴³ African heritage, made new in the Americas, was expressed by Zapata Olivella and many who participated in the Congress, as one of struggle but also as great enrichment, beauty, and cultural significance.

This emphasis on the American experience was understood in conversation with other international movements such as anti-colonial struggles, Pan-Africanism and *Négritude*. The

⁴² The original Spanish reads, "De acuerdo con la tesis más generalizada, al africano se le trajo a la América como un simple fuerza de trabajo y en consecuencia, solo se le ha estimado en los enfoques económicos, ignorando su participación en las áreas de la filosofía, el pensamiento, la conducta social y la creatividad artística. El Congreso de la Cultura Negra, por el contrario, se planteará la presencia negra como una corriente cultural sostenida a lo largo de más de cuatro siglos, masiva, extendida a todo el Continente, y lo más importante, persistentemente renovada. Generaciones y generaciones de esclavos de todas las edades, engrosaban anualmente el aporte africano, revitalizándose en valores africanos y mestizos. El río de la cultura Africana no fue un éxodo pasajero, único, sino savia nutriente que aportaba su renovado influjo.... No es la primera vez que se haya convocado reuniones regionales con el propósito de investigar los aspectos de la presencia negra en América...Pero el Congreso de Cali es el primero en plantear el problema a escala continental" in Manuel Zapata Olivella, "Discurso de Apertura a cargo del Doctor Manuel Zapata Olivella, Presidente de la Comisión Organizadora: El Congreso de la Cultura Negra. Nueva Era para La Identidad de América," in Fundación Colombiana de Investigaciones Folclóricas, *El Primer Congreso de la Cultura Negra, Cali Colombia* (UNESCO, 1988), 19. This particular copy of the publication was in Zapata Olivella's personal papers, MZO Papers.

⁴³ Zapata Olivella's shift from struggle to positive contribution departs from the discourse around pain in the middle passage that was discussed in the last chapter and emphasized within the US Black Arts Movement.

former movement fought against European social, economic, and cultural domination of African peoples and their descendants as Pan-Africanism called for worldwide unity amongst all Africans and their descendants with an emphasis on a return to African physically or metaphorically. The latter, understood within the colonial context and highly influential to Zapata Olivella, underscored an “essential” universal black culture that was expressed within local conditions and national contexts. Zapata Olivella describes above a different conceptualization of the diaspora in the Americas that folds these influential movement ideas, especially an essential black culture, within it. He believed that the diasporic communities needed to address and confront issues of oppression from the continental perspective in order to acknowledge the African “cultural flow” throughout the Americas that spanned four centuries, consistently inhibited by European racism and socio-cultural dominance, yet simultaneously continuing to change in a perpetual process of “renewal.”

Zapata Olivella continued in his speech, explaining the ways in which “la familia negra Americana” [the American black family] was forcibly separated and divided in the slave trade and in the Americas. Those who had been of one family were placed in different nations and learned, through the generations, to speak separate and foreign languages. This process is part of the multi-location diaspora, or diaspora within the diaspora. In the case of Panama, for example, descendants of African enslaved peoples brought to Jamaica, Barbados and the Bahamas later immigrated to Panama to work on the Canal Zone in the early twentieth century. These displacements (whether forced, coerced, or made necessary by socio-economic conditions) created cultural and linguistic ruptures that layered upon each other to created division within the “black family.” Zapata Olivella explained, “From there came the alienating division that separated the Africans into communities that spoke English, Portuguese, Spanish, French and

Dutch, referring to the European cultural processes and not those of their own African identity.” He connected that alienating process to the importance of the conference, “For this reason, the primary purpose of the Congress of Black Culture held in Cali is to delve deeper into the essence of African identity on our Continent.”⁴⁴

Zapata Olivella ended his speech discussing racism in Latin America that had been traditionally denied in light of racial democracy discourses, and then calls for the nations of Latin America to officially include black cultural studies in school curricula.⁴⁵ This call for education to be a vehicle of cultural understanding, pride, and liberation was a principal goal of both the Black Studies movement within the United States and similar movements within the universities of Colombia, Brazil, Panama and other Latin American nations.

Zapata Olivella drew explicit links to black studies, claiming it as “Panamerican.” He ended his opening discourse stating that “In the Panamerican field of black studies, we propose that the regional (OAS) and international organizations (UNESCO) fund the future Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas just as they have for the studies of indigenous issues.”⁴⁶ In this last sentence Zapata Olivella alludes to the growing national and international interest and support for indigenous rights and national inclusion that grew in both the United States and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s that will be discussed further in the subsequent chapter.

⁴⁴ The original Spanish reads, “De aquí viene la división alienadora que separa a los africanos en comunidades de habla inglesa, portuguesa, hispana, francesa u holandesa, refiriéndolos a procesos culturales europeos y no a los de su identidad africana. Por esta razón, el Congreso de la Cultura Negra reunido en Cali constituye un primer propósito de ahondar la esencia de la identidad africana en nuestra Continente. Zapata Olivella, “Discurso de Apertura,” p20.

⁴⁵ The two most influential works of Latin American racial democracy theory came from Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, author of *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1933) and Mexican José Vasconcelos, author of *La Raza Cósmica* (1925). While the two works had very different arguments, they both asserted an absence of racial tension in light of racial mixing between descendants of African, European and indigenous Latin Americans, essentially portraying race relations as harmonious or rendering them “invisible” in many Latin American countries.

⁴⁶ The original Spanish reads, “En el ámbito panamericano de los estudios del negro, propondremos que los organismos regionales (OEA) y los internacionales (UNESCO) patrocinen en el futuro a los Congresos de la Cultura Negra de las Américas al igual del ya existente para el estudio de los problemas del indio.” in Zapata Olivella, “Discurso de Apertura,” 20-21.

Pertinent to our analysis of the Congress in this chapter is his “Pan-American” black studies language that signals solidarity throughout the continent.

Zapata Olivella articulated his vision of Pan-American solidarity addressing the entire Congress that was made up of a diverse group of participants and attendees. With this diversity came varied approaches and interpretations of the diasporic imagination. The delegates convened at the start of the congress to vote the congress officers into service and to determine the themes of the four working commissions, constantly negotiating the focus and scope of the Congress. Zapata Olivella led the Congress as its President, but many other voices contributed to the topics that were discussed. Abdias Nascimento, for instance, brought to the Congress an understanding of black experience in the Americas that was closely aligned with Pan-Africanism. He prioritized solidarity movements with African communities in the Americas and in Africa, consistently reminding the Congress participants of the wider African brotherhood that needed the support of the American African descendants.

This role of solidarity, for Nascimento, went beyond aligning with Pan-African initiatives: it was an essential part of the diasporic imagination to reach back toward Africa in support of fellow *ekobio* in their freedom struggles. What differentiated the Pan-American vision from Pan-Africanism was that the reaching back to Africa was not a return; it did not require absolute unity on the African continent. Nascimento explained this unique relationship in a presentation to the Congress, “Afro-Brazilian Ethnicity and International Policy.” He asserted that “the diaspora in this epoch of human history has an inverse sense of dispersion: we are the diaspora that turns itself in a concentric rhythm toward the pristine center of historic and spiritual origin of our ancestors. We salute the hour of Africa!”⁴⁷ The “historic and spiritual origin,” for Nascimento was the bond that linked the communities of the diaspora together, and origin that

⁴⁷ Quoted in Ratcliff, “Black Writers of the World, Unite!” 34.

included historical links to Africa, but did not necessarily privilege contemporary Africa as a necessary geographic epicenter of black identity. A contemporary unified Africa was not the goal for Nascimento, but rather an intentional orientation of the diaspora “toward the pristine center” of African origin.

The simultaneous, unified turning toward Africa from the Americas was an important element of the American diasporic identity for Nascimento. During the First Congress, he promoted a shift in language that directly addressed the division between black identity in the US and Latin America. While many African descendant Latin Americans had not claimed the word “Afro” in their self-identification, the term “Afro-American” was regularly used in the US. Nascimento urged the black populations of the Americas to embrace the “Afro” and shift the “the concept of the ‘Afro-America’ identity to extend beyond American Blacks to include all African-origin peoples in the Americas.”⁴⁸ Nascimento’s intentional articulation of the diasporic imagination of the Americas through the term “Afro-America” was central to a unified political and cultural front against racism amidst all of the diversity of blackness within the Americas.

This continental solidarity was crucial to, and inseparable from, broader struggles against racism, class exploitation, and imperialism. Nascimento’s presentation inspired the first proposition ratified by the delegates of the Congress, the “Declaration of Solidarity.” The proposition, formally addressing the governments of the US, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and international organizations such as the United Nations, Organization of American States, and the Organization of African Unity, adamantly opposed “any type of act which could lead to the realization of an Alliance or Treaty of the South Atlantic” that masked “the objective of

⁴⁸ Ronald W. Walkers, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora: An Analysis of Modern Afrocentric Political Movements*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993, 274-275.

collaborating with the racist criminals who head the governments of the white supremacist states of Southern Africa.”⁴⁹

The statement clearly opposed the South Atlantic Treaty Organization that was in negotiation at the time between the United States and several Latin American dictatorships as well as South African apartheid. The solidarity proclamation linked the black citizens of American nations together in a political front against the imperialistic claims within those nations, and against racism more broadly. Throughout the congresses, themes of racism were intricately tied to questions of ethnicity, socio-economic status, and anti-colonialism. The political, cultural, and working class struggles were all intertwined within the diasporic imagination expressed throughout the congresses.

Abdias Nascimento was known for his passionate calls for political and cultural justice and his commanding presence at conferences and congresses. He had been excluded, along with his Teatro Experimental Negro, from joining the Brazilian delegation to the Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar in 1966 due to his reputation for political radicalism.⁵⁰ At the Second World Festival of African Art and Culture (FESTAC) in Lagos in 1977, the month following the I Congress of Black Culture, Nascimento was initially denied the opportunity to make his presentation due to his independence from the official Brazilian delegation. Nascimento protested fervently, along with other supporters, until he was given the opportunity to present to the colloquium.⁵¹

II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas

⁴⁹ Quoted in Ratcliff, “‘Black Writers of the World, Unite!’” 34.

⁵⁰ Anani Dzidzienyo, “The Changing World of Brazilian Race Relations?” in Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler, eds., *Neither Enemies nor Friends: Latinos, Black, Afro-Latinos*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 150.

⁵¹ Walkers, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora*, 274.

Nascimento's personal conviction to fight against oppression, often couched in radical language, was ever present throughout the Congresses of Black Culture. The II Congress began with his calling for "a vote for the revindication of the Jamaican people." Nascimento's vote did not take place as Panamanian Juan Materno Vazquez stated that the Congress would follow official protocol and leave all voting for subsequent days.⁵² Yet in line with Nascimento's dedication, the II Congress did end with a proclamation denouncing the policies and demands of the International Monetary Fund in their Jamaican financial programs, a call for Jamaican liberation from all forms of oppression, and a call for the Jamaican people to reclaim their African ethnicity "en términos americanos" [in American terms].⁵³ The solidarity statements demonstrated a sense of hemispheric unity, commitment to social and political justice, and the Congresses' focus on the entire hemisphere even if delegates were not present from some American nations such as Jamaica. The lack of Jamaican representation did not stop Jamaican inclusion within the dialogues.

The II Congress also followed Nascimento's suggestion to send a telegram of support to the newly independent Rhodesian government that officially became Zimbabwe in April of 1980. The telegram stated,

Upon inaugurating our Second Congress of Black Culture of the Americas, we, Africans in the Diaspora, wish to express to our brother peoples of Zimbabwe and to the leaders of their liberation, our rejoicing in the historical event of the democratic elections which culminated their heroic struggle for independence and sovereignty.

We salute and congratulate the sustained unity of the liberation forces in comprising the new Government of Zimbabwe.

We celebrate the victory of Zimbabwe as an inspiration and stimulus to our own struggle against economic destitution, social and cultural inferiorization, and racist

⁵² According to the newspaper article by Rosalina Orocu Mojica, "En marcha Congreso de la Cultura Negra" in *La Republica*, 18 March 1980. The original Spanish reads, "un voto de reivindicación del pueblo jamaicano."

⁵³ *Segundo Congreso de Cultura Negra de las Américas: Identidad Cultural del Negro en América: Informe de Comisiones y Resoluciones*, Panamá, 17-21 marzo, 1980. [Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified], 1980, 90.

oppression [sic] that we have suffered for 500 years at the hands of the ruling elites of Eurocentric origin and orientation. Long live Free Zimbabwe!⁵⁴

Thus the II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas began on March 17, 1980 in Panamá City, Panama, with calls for justice and American racial solidarity led by Abdias Nascimento.⁵⁵ In fact, Nascimento had fought at the end of the First Congress to hold the Second in Brazil, but Gerardo Maloney and his Afro-Panamanian colleagues were successful in securing Panama as the site for the Second Congress, “in the face of the tenacious effort made by Brazil to have the II Congress there.”⁵⁶ To Gerardo Maloney, the growing Afro-Panamanian movement would greatly benefit from the presence and support of the II Congress through the educational resources and support networks that the Congress would bring. Additionally, the Congress brought attention to race relations and the diasporic experience within Panama that had been traditionally eclipsed by discourses of the complex imperialist political and cultural conditions of the Panama Canal and the US-controlled Canal Zone.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Anonymous, “Black Culture Congress Solidarity” in *La República*, Wednesday, 19 March 1980.

⁵⁵ Nascimento’s focus on solidarity can be understood within the larger history of anti-colonialism movements that occurred in both the US and Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America. For an analysis of anti-colonialism supported by US African Americans, see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. By the 1970s, ethnic, or cultural tourism to Africa was increasing from the US and Brazil in order to retrace the roots of slavery (especially following the 1976 publication of Alex Haley’s *Roots*) and strengthen ties to the African continent. Brazil, in particular, established diplomatic ties with newly independent African countries and hoped to enter the African commercial markets through trade campaigns in the 1970s. See Jerry Dávila, *Hotel Trópico: Brazil and the Challenge of African Decolonization, 1950-1980*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Dávila argues that Brazilian diplomats and intellectuals in Africa understood their policymaking in terms of Brazilian “racial democracy,” yet they exposed “ruptures” in Brazilian racial identity in their work. For his part, Abdias Nascimento ardently worked to disrupt the portrayal of Brazil as a racially harmonious nation. In the US, Brazil also became a site of cultural tourism as it was considered by some to be a more “authentic” black space that had conserved African heritage more than in the US, especially in the state of Bahia. See Patricia de Santana Pinho, “African-American Roots Tourism in Brazil” in *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2008): 70-86 and her book *Mama Africa: Reinventing Blackness in Bahia*. [2004] Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. For an analysis of Cuban and US foreign policy toward Africa see Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2002.

⁵⁶ The original Spanish reads, “frente al tenaz esfuerzo realizado por Brasil para que el II Congreso se realizara allá” in *Segundo Congreso de Cultura Negra de las Américas*, 5.

⁵⁷ For a detailed account of race and worker relations in the context of US imperialism, see Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America’s Empire at the Panama Canal*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2010.

The II Congress did in fact bring Afro-Panamanian black consciousness movements and their participation in wider diasporic dialogues to the fore. More than three hundred delegates and participants attended the Congress.⁵⁸ The Panamanian press covered the event extensively, both in English and Spanish. Most major papers ran articles announcing the event and *Crítica* and *La Estrella de Panamá* emphasized that the President of Panama, Dr. Aristides Royo, inaugurated the II Congress.⁵⁹ *La República* highlighted the other high profile organizers and participants including Panamanian author and playwright Rogelio Sinan, the Minister of Planning Gustavo González, the director the National Historic Patrimony Dr. Reina Torres de Arauz, and Walter Chandler of the Ministry of Health. Several Panamanian organizations were involved in the event, including the sponsors Instituto Nacional de Cultura, the Centro de Estudios Afro-Panameño (CEDEAP) [Center for Afro-Panamanian Studies], La Unión Nacional de Negros Panameños (UNEP) [National Union of Black Panamanians], la Acción Reivindicadora de los Negros Panameños (ARENEP) [Vindicating Action of Black Panamanians], and the University of Panama. Several newspapers mentioned the roles of these organizations and advertised events of interest to the public including the performances of the II Congress featuring calypso, jazz and traditional Panamanian music and dance including Afro-Panamanian *el tamborcito*.⁶⁰

The II Congress held as an objective to increase the visibility of Afro-Panamanians within Panama and throughout the diaspora. The newspaper *Crítica* reported the broader significance of the congress,

⁵⁸ There are differing numbers for the Congresses depending on the reporting source, but they all drew more than two hundred delegates and participants each. For instance, the II Congress reported reported an attendance of three hundred delegates in *Segundo Congreso de Cultura Negra de las Américas*, 6.

⁵⁹ See Anonymous, “Royo Inaugura Congreso de la Cultura Negra” in *Crítica*, 17 March 1980.

⁶⁰ See for example: Anonymous, “Royo Inaugura Congreso de la Cultura Negra” in *Crítica*, 17 March 1980; Anonymous, “Congreso de Cultura Negra” in *Crítica*, March 18, 1980; “Perfiles” in *La República*, Monday, 17 March 1980; Anonymous, “Comienza hoy Congreso de Cultura Negra” in *La Estrella de Panamá*, 17 March 1980.

I believe that the event that takes place in our country will contribute to the defining and make more precise with opportune discernment, that which has been the role of the black man in the social and political make up of this hemisphere, and fundamentally what is currently his action in the development of the American people [in all of the Americas].⁶¹

The article also highlighted the benefits for Panama with its particular racialized labor history,

This event has vital importance for Panama, because here the problem of the black man is bifurcated, between those who came in the time of the conquest and those who arrived afterward because of the Canal construction. In this time period, thousands of workers were recruited from Jamaica, Barbados, Santa Lucia, and other Caribbean islands, whose traveling expenses were paid so that their energies could be extracted for the prodigious canal work.⁶²

The II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, just as the first, acted as a platform from which local experiences, such as that of Nascimento's Brazil, and Maloney's Panama, were situated within conversations of international human rights and solidarity claims. The commissions for the II Congress were: "Raza y Clase" [Race and Class] led by Afro-Panamanian Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte; "El Negro en los Sistemas Educativos" [Black People in Education Systems], "Pluralismo Cultural y Unidad Nacional" [Cultural Pluralism and Nacional Unity] led by Afro-Panamanian Marcos Mason, and "Perspectivas del Negro en América" [Perspectives of Black People in America].

The presentations and ensuing debates within these commissions covered a wide variety of topics that were case studies that highlighted American continental concerns that confronted all populations. Just a few examples of these case studies were: "Identificación del Negro en la

⁶¹ The original Spanish reads, "Creo que el evento que se realiza en nuestro país contribuirá a definir y precisar con oportuno discernimiento, cual ha sido el papel del negro en la configuración social y política de este hemisferio, y fundamentalmente cual es en la actualidad su acción en el desarrollo de los pueblos americanos," in Rafael Bolívar Ayala, "Relexiones: El Negro Panameño" in *Crítica*, Thursday, 20 March 1980.

⁶² The original Spanish reads, "Para Panamá este acontecimiento tiene vital importancia, porque aquí el problema del negro es bifurca, entre los que vinieron en el tiempo de la conquista y los que llegaron después con un motivo de la construcción del Canal. En esta época, se reclutaron de Jamaica, Barbados, Santa Lucia, y otras islas del Caribe, millares de trabajadores, a quienes se pago el pasaje para que rindieran energías en la portentosa obra canalera," in Anonymous, "Congreso de Cultura Negra" in *Crítica*, 18 March 1980.

Estructura de Clase: Una Perspectiva Haitiana” [Black Identification in Class Structure: A Haitian Perspective] by Haitian Dr. Jean Casimir, “Estereotipos y Realidad en la Identificación del Negro Colombiano” [Stereotypes and Reality in the Identification of the Black Colombian] by Colombian Nina S. de Friedemann, “Pluralismo Cultural y Unidad Nacional: El Caso de Guyana” [Cultural Pluralism and National Unity: the Case of Guyana] by Dr. Arthur Seymour, “Pluralismo Cultural y Unidad Nacional: El Caso de Panamá” [Cultural Pluralism and National Unity: the Case of Panama] by Luis Gustavo Torreglosa, and “*El Quilombismo*: una Alternativa Afro-Brasileña” [*Quilombismo*: an Afro-Brazilian Alternative] by Abdias Nascimento.

Other presentations directly addressed commonalities throughout the Americas that were tied to the unique history of slavery and class relations across larger geographic regions. Examples of these presentations include: “Enfoque al Profesional Negro dentro de un Mundo Blanco” [Focus on the Black Professional in a White World] by Panamanian William Reuben Arthur, “Perspectivas del Negra en las Américas” [Perspectives on Black Women in the Americas] by Brazilian Lincoln Santos, “Mecanismos Creadores de los Africanos en la Religión” [Belief Mechanisms of Africans in Religion] by Manuel Zapata Olivella, and “El Efecto Socio-Psicológico de Aprender en Segundo Lenguaje en los Grupos Marginados” [The Socio-Psychological Effect of Learning a Second Language in Marginalized Groups] by Brazilian Irma Pate.

From the discussions that revolved around the work of the commissions, the II Congress agreed on recommendations and goals that they carried forward into their personal and professional work and into the III Congress. These recommendations included, to name a few: to maintain an inseparable link between the problems of race and class within the world capitalist system; the necessity of maintaining precaution with respect to an “uncompromising

blackness.”⁶³ The II Congress “energetically” condemned the racist terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan in the US, segregation in South Africa and Namibia; and Brazilian fascist, racist policies. It highlighted the importance of stimulating Afro-American cultural forms that strengthen unity and struggles of black peoples. These recommendations were agreed upon by all delegates: they reflected the unified diasporic imagination based on experiences specific to the Americas and necessary steps to fight against racism on the continent.

The II Congress set as concrete actions the formation of an “Asociación Regional Afro-Americana” [Regional Afro-American Association], an “Instituto de Cultura Afro-Americana” [Afro-American Cultural Institute] that would seek the support of international organizations and address regional wide needs of the black communities. While evidence of those organizations has not been readily available, many members of the congress went on to fulfill many of the organizations’ primary purposes such as “writing of the history of the diaspora or the presence of black people in the Americas that situates the character, contributions and legacies of the Afro-Americans to the region and its civilization”⁶⁴ These goals, a few of many, speak to the Pan-American approach of the II Congress that built upon the visions and discussions of the first to further articulate continental unity of vision and purpose. This unity was understood in light of national and regional differences as part of the plurality of the diaspora and its cultural richness.

III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas

The III Congress, which convened in São Paulo, Brazil from August 21st to the 27th 1982 took on the task of creating further action plans to bring political and social change throughout

⁶³ The original Spanish reads, “Se señala la necesidad de mantener una precaución respecto a una negritud a ultranza, que se automargine de su realidad de clase oprimida y raza discriminada” in *Segundo Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas*, 10.

⁶⁴ “Los Logros” and “acciones acordadas” in *Segundo Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas*, 9-13.

the continent. The III Congress was organized by the previous presidents, Zapata Olivella and Gerardo Maloney, and Nascimento with his organizations, IPEAFRO (Institute of Afro-Brazilian Studies and Research) of the Pontifice Catholic University of São Paulo and TEN (the Black Experimental Theater). Nascimento asserted the importance of holding the III Congress in Brazil “because Brazil has the largest population of African descendants in the world outside of Nigeria: approximately 80 million.” Brazil was also considered by Nascimento to hold “a central strategic position in the African world, in terms of power and geography” and “It has an active and vital African culture expressed in religion, art, philosophy, dance, music and cuisine.”⁶⁵



Figure 5. (from left to right) Gerardo Maloney (President of the II Congress), Abdias Nascimento (President of the III Congress), and Manuel Zapata Olivella (President of the First Congress) at the III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, São Paulo, Brazil, photograph, 1982. Archives of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, Universidade Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

⁶⁵ “Call to the Third Congress of Black Culture in the Americas” May 13, 1981 in Folder “Congresso de la Cultura Negra de las Americas, 1977-1982”, Wole Soyinka Papers, 1966-1996, Harvard Rare Books and Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The III Congress, as indicated in the rationale for holding it in Brazil, built upon the previous Congresses' initiatives to further discuss culture explicitly in light of political outcomes and goals. The III Congress adopted IPEAFRO's symbol as the logo of the congress as a "simultaneous spiritual and secular invocation of the Afro-Brazilian divinities Exu and Ogum." Nascimento explained that these two West African *orixas* acted as unifying symbols of significant influences needed within the diaspora. Exu is the dialectic spirit of the good and evil in life's path, and strength in struggles represented by the trident. Ogum is the pioneering entity of the cosmic kingdoms who breaks the barriers between the secular and spiritual and is represented by the bottom half of the symbol.⁶⁶ Nascimento presents the symbol as Afro-Brazilian, yet it would have been understood by many Yoruban Ifá traditions throughout the Americas. The symbol of the III Congress is a physical example of the differences and similarities brought together by the Congresses that resulted in conversations around the most powerful methods of expressing the diasporic imagination in the Americas.

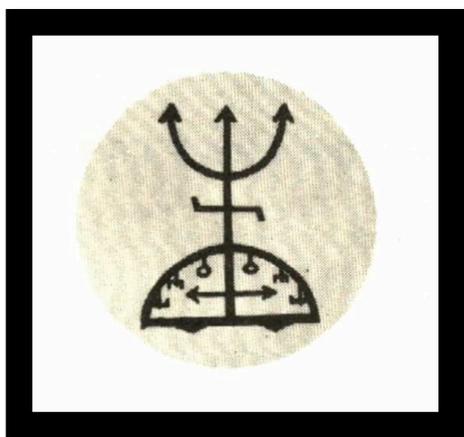


Figure 6. Logo of the III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas and Symbol of IPEAFRO, Artist unknown, 1982. Archives of the Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, Universidade Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

⁶⁶ "Nota Sobre Nosso Símbolo" in IPEAFRO documents, Archive of the Universidade de Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In keeping with its cultural emphasis, the main theme of the III Congress was “African Diaspora: Political Consciousness and Culture of Liberation.” This overarching theme was broken down into four areas of discussion. The first was “Cultural Evaluation of the African Americas” that focused on religion, spirituality black arts and creativity and the use of culture as a means of physical survival for “African-Americans” (meaning African descendants of the Americas). The second was “African-American Socio-Political Movements” that analyzed employment, education and other programs and their repercussions in black communities along with strategies for the future. The third commission followed from the women-specific themes brought up in the II Congress, “Situation of the African woman: past, present and future” and the fourth was “Relationships of African-American with Africans on the Continent” that studied “people-to-people channels,” institutionalized relations and governmental relations.⁶⁷ Significantly the term “African-American,” referring to all African descendants in the Americas, was used in three of the four focus areas.

Each of the focus areas for the III Congress was positioned within the premise that cultural approaches could lead to concrete political and societal change, and that they were, in fact, the only way to achieve full liberation. Nascimento explained,

Culture encompasses all major aspects of human experience: economic, political, social, historical, literary, religious, philosophical. Far from being restricted to a folkloric or static view, it is vitally connected to the living issues of the African world. Thus, the Congress will not be a forum for stale and sterile academic debate, but a place to lay foundations for a path of unity in active struggle for the people of Africa in the New World Diaspora. It is essential that the African people of North, South and Central America, the Caribbean and Africa come together in a greater understanding of the

⁶⁷ “Call to the Third Congress of Black Culture in the Americas” May 13, 1981 in Folder “Congresso de la Cultura Negra de las Americas, 1977-1982”, Wole Soyinka Papers, 1966-1996, Harvard Rare Books and Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University. See footnote 78 in this chapter for more information on “channels” between the Americas and Africa.

specific nature of their experiences and struggles, for there is much to learn and share in the practice of liberation of our people.

A luta continua!⁶⁸ [The fight continues!]

All Congresses addressed cultural, political, social, and economic issues together, but Nascimento's particular understanding of culture as an umbrella concept that encompassed "all major aspects of human experience" contributed a particular cultural emphasis to the diasporic imagination of the Americas. He often situated cultural forms of struggle within the Brazilian context of *quilombismo* that held wider implications throughout the Americas. A Brazilian quilombo was a community of runaway slaves who fled to a remote, sparsely populated area, and established a community with their own traditions and leadership, opposing outside forces with armed resistance. The most famous Brazilian quilombo was Palmares, a seventeenth-century fugitive community in the current state of Alagoas that resisted both Dutch and Portuguese attacks through most of the seventeenth century until 1694 when the Portuguese gained control of the territory. Many Afro-Brazilians have remembered Zumbi dos Palmares, the last legendary leader of the quilombo, as a brave warrior who rejected European domination.⁶⁹ Nascimento urged Brazilians, and all African descendants of the America to draw inspiration from Zumbi, and all quilombos as a model of resistance, rebellion, and the creation of alternative black spaces for the present day.

Nascimento explained *quilombismo* in its broader American terms in the II Congress where he and the fourth commission proposed, "That this congress recommend to the descendants of the New World the formation of movements and socio-political organizations and

⁶⁸ "Call to the Third Congress of Black Culture in the Americas" May 13, 1981 in Folder "Congresso de la Cultura Negra de las Americas, 1977-1982", Wole Soyinka Papers, 1966-1996, Harvard Rare Books and Manuscripts, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

⁶⁹ For an extensive discussion of the history of runaway slave communities and slave rebellion in Brazil, see: João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, eds., *Liberdade por um Fio: História dos Quilombos no Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996 and João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Brazil*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

the corresponding theoretical ideological systems” that would be inspired by the examples of “*cimarrones, palenques, cumbes*, maroon societies, *quilombos*, in all of the free African militant social entities, as a form and alternative political action in their respective countries.”⁷⁰ *Cimarrones* and *palenques* were the common term used in Spanish speaking countries, while maroon societies were used in English speaking countries. Linking these communities together in the concept of *quilombismo* made the idea applicable throughout the Americas and not solely in Brazil.

The III Congress offered a similar space for exploring the practical applications of *quilombismo* with an emphasis on the cultural aspects of rebellion, resistance, and racial and cultural affirmation that, according to Nascimento who was the President of the III Congress, was the only fully coherent strategy to changing American societies. Many of the ideas espoused by Nascimento were directly in line with Black Nationalism in the US and most certainly had an impact on Nascimento during his time in the US.⁷¹ In the context of Brazil, the vast inequities experienced by many Afro-Brazilians in access to employment, health care, governmental representation and democratic participation were increasingly recognized due to the efforts of activists like Nascimento and the *movimento negro* that began in the late 1970s.⁷² One of Brazil’s largest newspapers, the socially conscious, *Folha de São Paulo*, documented the importance of the III Congress in light of Afro-Brazilian reality. An article published on August 21, 1982 stated,

⁷⁰ The original Spanish reads, “Que este congreso recomiende a los descendientes del nuevo mundo la formación de movimientos y organizaciones socio-políticas y correspondientes sistemas teórico ideológicos, inspirados en los ejemplos de cimarrones, palenques, cumbes, sociedades maroons, quilombos, en todas las entidades sociales militantes africanos libres, como una forma y alternativa de acción política en sus respectivos países,” in *Segundo Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas*, p79.

⁷¹ I have not found any explicit links in the source material between Black Nationalist thought and Nascimento’s *quilombismo*, though his widow, Elisa Larkin Nascimento mentioned in an interview with the author that Nascimento had been exposed to many radical theories of the Left when they met in Buffalo, New York in the late 1960s.

⁷² A more in-depth history of the Brazilian *movimento negro* will be discussed in Chapter Five.

There is no doubt that racial prejudice and discrimination are a reality in Brazil. The small number of black people who are in the free professions, in public office and in prominent positions in society, demonstrates that our racial democracy in practice is more myth than reality. The few who find success in the ascension and integration process are required to divest themselves of the marks of their culture and adopt postures that distance them from the great majority of people, who to the contrary, view their efforts as unsuccessful.⁷³

The social consciousness that emerged from the III Congress motivated the delegates and participants, and it added to public dialogues about race and racism that led to legislative change over the following decade.⁷⁴

Conclusion

Manuel Zapata Olivella opened the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas in 1977 to an audience of academics, journalists, artists and activists who had gathered due to the opportunities and networks that were fostered by growing area and black studies programs at universities, and the public support conferences and projects received for human rights and cultural work on a global level. With the financial support of UNESCO and OAS, the Congresses of Black Culture were able to pull from a diverse group of participants and viewers

⁷³ The original Portuguese reads, Não cabe dúvida de que o preconceito e a discriminação racial são uma realidade no Brasil. O reduzido numero de negros nas profissões liberais, em cargos públicos e em posições de destaque na sociedade mostram que nossa democracia racial participa mais do mito do que da realidade. Os poucos que conseguem êxito no processo de ascensão e integração são obrigados a despojar-se das marcas de sua cultura e a adotar posturas que os distanciam da grande maioria que, ao contrario, vê malogrados seus esforços,” in “Cultura negra” in *Folha de São Paulo*, 21 August 1982.

⁷⁴ Further study is needed to fully access the impacts of the Congresses of Black Culture on the Americas in the countries of the participants beyond what is analyzed in this study. This chapter primarily argues that the Congresses informed a diasporic imagination of the Americas that led to political and cultural change explained in the subsequent chapter, but certainly broader implications of the Congresses led to educational programs, the establishment of national and international organizations, and future conferences and congresses that are beyond the scope of this study. What is clear is that the Congresses created a space where both “homegrown” and “grassroots” movements were discussed in relation to wider, international and transnational movements and cultural exchange. The US civil rights movement, anti-colonial and anti-apartheid movements in Africa all contributed to the ideas around black liberation expressed in the Congresses. The literature of Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X, for example, had been read by a large number of participants to the Congresses, regardless of national origin.

who all contributed to the Pan-American vision of the diasporic imagination of the Americas that was clearly articulated in the Congresses.

Zapata Olivella named the American continent(s) as the necessary analytic framework within which the working commissions would approach issues of African descendants, and the language and liberation tactics shifted through the conversations of the Congresses. In the II Congress, Nascimento urged the adoption of the word “Afro-American” as applicable to all African descendants of the Americas, and not just those in the US. By the III Congress held in Brazil, the congress shifted to use “African-American” to express the continent-wide identity. The importance of such language was considered a crucial step to the goal of understanding blackness in the Americas through a cultural lens: the only approach that could lead to full liberation, according to Nascimento.

Much unity, intellectual, social, political, and cultural work emerged from the five-year span of energy that produced the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas. Many attendees have remembered the Congresses as inspiring, motivating, clarifying, and empowering events that brought national and international attention to African diasporic activism.⁷⁵ Zapata Olivella worked tirelessly for more than a decade to organize the IV Congress that was set to take place in Jamaica, Guyana, and lastly in Paris, where Zapata Olivella believed it would receive necessary European attention and collaboration. For example, the IV Congress had the support of the renowned Senegalese poet, politician, and cultural theorist Léopold Sédar Senghor who was living in Paris during the organizational phase. The Congress was set to take place at UNESCO’s Paris offices, and would have received the international attention associated with that

⁷⁵ According to correspondence in the MZO Papers and anecdotal comments by Gerardo Maloney and Elisa Larkin Nascimento, Abdias do Nascimento’s widow and the director of IPEAFRO.

organization.⁷⁶ Unfortunately a confidante of Zapata Olivella, José Ortiz, stole the funds for the fourth congress: an event that brought Zapata Olivella much sadness and frustration.⁷⁷

Though the “Congresses of Black Culture Movement” did not continue in its original form as many had hoped, the impact of the Congresses echoed well into the twenty-first century and led to substantial legislative and social change in several countries.⁷⁸ What clearly emerged by 1982, however, was an explicit articulation of an African-American continental identity that helped inform the diasporic imagination in the Americas in the twentieth century. The cultural, intellectual, and artistic approaches to the diasporic imagination discussed in this chapter were instrumental in the formulation of political demands within the national context that are discussed in the next.

⁷⁶ According to the letter Manuel Zapata Olivella to Léopold Sédar Senghor, 5 April 1990, MZO Papers.

⁷⁷ In a letter to Abdias Nascimento, Zapata Olivella expressed that he was “muy abatido por el robo del atradador José Ortiz,” [very dejected by the theft of the thief José Ortiz] in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias Nascimento, 9 December 1992, MZO Papers.

⁷⁸ The “Congresses of Black Culture Movement” is mentioned in IPEAFRO documents on the Congresses of Black Culture in the Archives of the Universidade de Cândido Mendes, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

CHAPTER FIVE

“No Había de Otra:” Discourses of Racial Solidarity, Political Gains, and Black Movements in Colombia, Panama, and Brazil, 1970s-1990s

Introduction

In 1983, the year after the III Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, Manuel Zapata Olivella published his magnum opus, the epic African diasporic saga *Changó, el gran putas* [Changó, the Biggest Badass]. Over the next decade, Zapata Olivella dedicated himself to the promotion of the novel collaborating with US professor Jonathan Tittler on its translation into English, and continued activism for black freedom throughout the Americas. This work included tireless effort into the organization of the IV Congress of Black Culture, which rather quickly became a lost cause due to financial issues.

Though the Congresses of Black Culture did not continue as originally intended, the activist work supported and empowered by the African diasporic imagination of the Americas continued and developed in new, effective ways that had powerful implications for the activists and artists in their home countries. During the 1980s and 1990s, Zapata Olivella was based mostly in Bogotá with extended stays in Europe and visits to the United States and other countries. His work continued to be transnational in nature and form, yet remarkable changes in activist work occurred in his native Colombia between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s that resulted in a growing *movimiento negro*, or *movimiento de negritudes* [black movement or movement of blackness].

Zapata Olivella was instrumental in these movements that resulted in cultural, political, and social gains for Afro-Colombian communities. Within overlapping networks and

geographically based civil rights groups, two major factions emerged within the Colombian black consciousness movements. The Pacific department of Chocó and the Pacific Littoral that fought chiefly for communal land and economic rights, while the intelligentsia led the more urban-based university movement. Both groups, with some individuals navigating the two, contributed to radical legislative change of the early 1990s. The case of Colombia, and similarly that of Panama, demonstrates the possibility of divergent black liberation movements that debated the meanings of blackness and African heritage in the country, yet contributed to political change despite their differences.

In the following pages the particular cases of Colombia, Panama, and Brazil will be discussed: analyzing the national political gains within the context of the cultural and intellectual conversations that developed around the diasporic imagination of the Americas. What emerges is a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which culture, political and economic racial concerns and goals were intricately intertwined and approached from all angles by Manuel Zapata Olivella and his colleagues and friends.

In an informal conversation with Afro-Panamanian activist, sociologist and President of the II Congress of Black Culture of the Americas, Gerardo Maloney, I mentioned that it seemed rather remarkable that so many of the key actors within the black consciousness transnational networks held so many different roles within the work of black liberation. They had myriad skills and diverse professional expertise that coalesced in interesting and effective ways of fighting racism. For example, Abdias Nascimento, Manuel Zapata Olivella, and Gerardo Maloney were all university professors, poets, essayists, activists and diplomats or civil servants. These leaders excelled in many areas, had a powerful impact within many different and overlapping spheres of cultural production, and social and political activism in ways that are less evident in other

struggles or social causes. Gerardo Maloney's response was immediate: "No había de otra." [There was no other].¹

The missing yet implied word in this simple phrase is "option." There was no other option. While the artists and activists involved in the networks in which Manuel Zapata Olivella worked had agency and choice, Maloney implies that the nature of black freedom work was such that the political, cultural, social, and economic had to be intertwined and addressed all at once to do justice to the visions of freedom that the artists/activists held. As this chapter will discuss, the politicization of the liberation movements played out differently in the particular national contexts of Colombia, Panama, and Brazil. Yet in all three countries, regardless of the nature of political and economic gains for the black communities, the diasporic imagination of the Americas fostered the dialogues that strengthened the black movements and tied them together. Central to the black movements of Colombia, Brazil, and Panama were transnational conversations and discourses that the activists and artists discussed here espoused in their home countries. Central to these discourses was the disruption of the "invisibility" of the black population on the national level, appreciation and celebration of the African diasporic contribution to national culture, and political and economic responses to systemic racism. These ideas will be discussed throughout the following sections that focus on Colombia, Panama and Brazil.

Discourses of Blackness in Colombia: Racial Visibility and Moving Toward Solidarity

¹ As expressed by Gerardo Maloney to the author on January 15, 2016 in Panama City, Panamá.



Figure 7. Nina S. de Friedemann speaking with a local “tienda” saleswoman in Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia, photograph by Richard Cross, 1978. Nina S. de Friedemann Fondo Visual, Luis Ángel Arango Library, Bogotá, Colombia.

Along with Zapata Olivella, one of the most celebrated leaders of the Congresses of Black Culture and the varied Afro-Colombian movements was Colombian anthropologist Nina Sanchez de Friedemann.² Transnational cultural exchange had been an important aspect of de Friedemann’s career. She dedicated over thirty years of anthropological and anti-racist work that was involved closely within Manuel Zapata Olivella’s network of colleagues, and with others throughout the Americas and Africa. Her personal travels and journeys highlight the ways in which the diasporic imagination in the Americas informed her work that became so impactful within her native country and beyond.

² A note on Colombian surname practices might be helpful in order to clarify family relations throughout this chapter. Traditionally, a Colombian woman will keep her maiden paternal surname and add “de” along with the paternal surname of her husband when she marries. Thus Nina’s maiden paternal surname was Sánchez, and she married a Friedemann, becoming Nina Sánchez de Friedemann. Commonly she would be called Nina de Friedemann. Her daughters, Greta and Nancy, carry their father’s paternal surname followed by their mother’s paternal surname. Their surnames are Friedemann Sánchez.

De Friedemann's success in highlighting the need for a space for Afro-Colombians to speak to their concerns and needs with the nation's legislators, came from a varied and active career in which de Friedemann addressed racism in the Americas from as many different angles. Nina S. de Friedemann was an anthropologist, editor, photographer, and educator. Her personal and public conversations overlapped and intertwined. Her hobbies and her professional work were one in the same for her. Her daughter, Greta, wrote, "So, it is evident that for Nina there was no distinction between fieldwork and daily life. The gathering of information to develop facts and analyze them was a way of life."³ This "way of life" involving intertwined personal and professional work was crucial to the freedom work of many African descendants of the Americas.

In 1991 the Colombian government ratified a new federal constitution that replaced the Constitution of 1886. The new "Constitution of Rights," as it was popularly called, focused on directly securing human and civil rights for Colombians as a result of the increased violence from the civil and guerrilla warfare, increased military presence, and narco-trafficking throughout the country in the late 1980s. The impetus for the new Constitution came largely from a student-led movement called *Todavía podemos salvar a Colombia* [We can still save Colombia] that emerged from the 1989 "silent march" protesting the violence and violations of civil rights.

The movement, led by students and faculty from the three most prestigious private universities in Bogotá, and generally understood to reflect the public will, pressured Liberal

³ The original Spanish reads, "Entonces, es evidente que para Nina no había distinción entre el trabajo de campo y la vida cotidiana. La toma de información para elaborar datos y analizarlos era una forma de vida" in Greta Friedemann-Sanchez, "Nina, memoria innovadora y fuente vitalicia" in Jaime Arocha Rodríguez, ed., *Nina S. de Friedemann: cronista de disidencias y resistencias*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales, Grupo de Estudios Afrocolombianos, 2009, 55.

President Virgilio Barco to initiate constitutional reform.⁴ The movement gathered over 30,000 signatures for a petition that was ultimately unsuccessful but nonetheless demonstrated what was considered to be public opinion. A final decisive push for constitutional reform came from the movement's support of the *séptima papeleta* [seventh ballot paper], an idea formulated by the Harvard-trained constitutional lawyer, Fernando Carillo. The seventh ballot was in reference to a constituent assembly in addition to the other six official ballot papers of the March 1990 legislative election.⁵

The Bogotá student movement achieved their ultimate goal of securing the new Constitution of 1991 that protected rights for all Colombians. This early version of the Constitution failed to provide specific protection to Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations, rendering them “invisible.” For instance, the new legislation did not protect the communal land rights of Pacific Afro-Colombian communities that had suffered disproportionately from the loss of their land to the production of cocaine, palm oil and internal displacement. The loss of their land had economic, cultural, and political impacts. The mass internal refugee communities of Afro-Colombians in the capital city of Bogotá was another diasporic location was not recognized as such by the wider community.

To those who had participated in a diasporic imagination of the Americas, consideration of the particular history of slavery and racism in Colombia were conspicuously absent from the human rights dialogue that emerged around the movement for a new Constitution. Those who had contemplated the results of racism in the Americas saw clearly the inequities that countered the gender and race neutral ways in which the greater public understood the civil war. What was

⁴ These three universities were the Universidad de los Andes, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana and the Universidad del Rosario.

⁵ The other six official ballot papers were for senators, representatives, departmental assemblies, mayors, municipal councils and the Liberal presidential primary.

especially urgent to activists like Nina S. de Friedemann and Manuel Zapata Olivella was the acknowledgement of the role race played in making certain populations vulnerable and the appropriate legislation needed to address those vulnerabilities. It took several years of advocacy from the *movimiento negro* for Transitory Article 55 to be added to the Constitution and approved by Congress.

On May 26, 1993 a session of the Colombian Congress assembled to discuss the proposed Transitory Article 55 (AT 55) that would include a law establishing: “The protection of the cultural identity and the rights of black Colombian communities as an ethnic group, and the promotion of their economic and social development to guarantee that these communities may obtain real conditions for equal opportunity alongside the rest of Colombian society.”⁶ A delegation of activists and sociologists from the Special Commission for Black Communities had been appointed by the Colombian government to draft the law. After being denied entrance, and then told that the meeting would not take place, the Commission finally received the audience of congressmen. After several Black *campesinos* [peasants] from the coast spoke of the damages to their land by private companies and investors, the well-known anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann took the floor. She “spoke of Afro-Colombians and their contributions to the nation’s history, economy, and culture and how they were ‘invisibilized’ because of ethnic discrimination and the nation’s racist political ideology. She ended by urging the government to ‘right historical wrongs’ and legally recognize Afro-Colombian ethnic and territorial rights.”⁷

That this discussion took place on the floor of the Colombian Congress would have been very surprising several decades earlier, given the lack of attention to Afro-Colombians in previous eras. However, what is not surprising is that de Friedemann was front and center at the

⁶ Quoted in Ligia S. Aldana, “Policing Culture: The *champeta* Movement Under the New Colombian Constitution” in *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 14, no. 3, August 2008: 266.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

congressional assembly, actively advocating the recognition and rights of the Afro-Colombian community. She had dedicated more than thirty years to erasing the “invisibility” of Black people in Colombia, and was one of the most tireless and consistent voices against the implicit racism that had been hidden by a national ideology of “racial democracy.”⁸ Her own privilege as a White, Euro-Colombian, as Zapata Olivella himself noted, gave her voice an added power in front of the country’s legislators.⁹

Nina Sánchez was born and raised in Bogotá, Colombia. Her parents, Inés Abella and Liborio Sánchez, Colombians with European and Sephardic Jewish heritage, raised her in a household that encouraged family discussion, reading, and interests in the arts. Liborio was a railroad engineer who had been trained in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the early twentieth century. He often shared his memories of race relations in the US with his family, as he was especially struck by the systems of discrimination and segregation in the US during his time there. These early stories made an impression on Nina, and instilled in her a strong sense of social justice. Her father passed away when she was only sixteen years old, but the formative years of her youth were profoundly marked by her relationship with her father. As an engineer involved in building Colombia’s railroad system, Liborio traveled around Colombia frequently and Nina and her brother spent much of her childhood accompanying him on his travels. Liborio gave Nina the task of recording what she saw on their journeys, instilling in her the habit of observational note taking.¹⁰

⁸ The ideology of racial democracy is best articulated in Gilberto Freyre’s influential *Casa Grande & Senzala* (1933), translated in English as *The Masters and The Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

⁹ Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Las claves mágicas de América*. Bogotá: Plaza & Janés, 1989, 77.

¹⁰ The family history and early childhood of Nina S. de Friedemann is chronicled in her daughter’s essay on de Friedemann’s life and work, Greta Friedemann-Sanchez, “Nina, memoria innovadora y fuente vitalicia” in Jaime Arocha Rodríguez, ed., *Nina S. de Friedemann: cronista de disidencias y resistencias*. Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Centro de Estudios Sociales, Grupo de Estudios Afrocolombianos, 2009.

This keen awareness gave Nina a different perspective on her travels and led her naturally toward the profession of anthropology. As a child, she had noticed race differences in Colombia, and she had an especially strong interest in the culture and daily lives of Afro-Colombians. Through her observations she saw evidence of racialized resistance in Colombia though dominant discourses of nationalism did not directly address the systemic power structures of racism there. Her daughter, Greta Friedemann-Sánchez, remembered one of Nina's earliest encounters with racialized resistance in Colombia:

On one of these travels they went to Cartagena, and Liborio made Nina get up early, at the same time that the bakers delivered bread to houses in the affluent neighborhoods. One day Nina saw what would have an impact and determine her investigative orientation: A young Afro-Colombian female domestic servant intentionally kicked the bread on the ground before she picked it up and placed it in the elegant linen-lined basket.¹¹

This early experience led to further study, including of the Caribbean coastal community of Palenque de San Basilio, founded by runaway enslaved peoples in the colonial period. De Friedemann was one of the first anthropologists to study this community in depth, noting the familial structures, religious rites, language, and food ways that are rooted in West African heritage. Greta underscores her mother's pioneering studies, "Years before Aiwa Ong or James Scott studied resistance, Nina made observations and took notes from scenes in the Palenque de San Basilio, comparable what those two authors analyzed."¹²

¹¹ The original Spanish reads, "Uno de esos viajes fue a Cartagena, donde Liborio la hizo levantar temprano, a la misma hora en que sacaban el pan del horno para repartirlo a domicilio en los barrios de alcurnia. Lo que vio un día de aquellos, la impactó y determinó su orientación investigativa: el joven que llevaba los panes a domicilio había tirado uno a un balcón. La señorita del servicio domestico, afrocolombiana, lo había arrojado con el pie antes de agacharse a recogerlo y ponerlo en la elegante canasta cubierta de lino," in Greta Friedemann-Sánchez, "Nina, memoria innovadora y fuente vitalicia," 54.

¹² The original Spanish reads, "Años antes de que Aiwa [Aihwa] Ong o James Scott estudiaran la resistencia, Nina realizó observaciones y anotaciones de escenas en el Palenque de San Basilio, comparables a lo analizado por ellos," in Greta Friedemann-Sánchez, "Nina, memoria innovadora y fuente vitalicia," 54. Friedemann-Sánchez mentions anthropologist Aihwa Ong and political scientist and anthropologist James Scott likely in reference to their works,

De Friedemann's ability to recognize racialized experience within Colombia was rooted in her childhood experiences, yet were reinforced by her anthropological training in the US where she studied African American folk culture. She attended Hunter College in New York after graduating high school. While in New York, she witnessed explicit discrimination and racism toward African Americans. She continued her education at the University of California and the Colombian Institute of Anthropology in Bogota, and returned to the United States as a Research Associate at Emory University from 1967 to 1968. While there she focused her research on the experiences of African Americans.¹³

De Friedemann lived in Atlanta during a moment of great change in the U.S. civil rights movement. In December of 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a speech in Atlanta marking his shift from focusing on legislative rights to eradicating poverty. Speaking of his 1963 "I Have Dream" speech, King reflected: "I watched that dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw my black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity, and saw the nation doing nothing to grapple with the Negroes' problem."¹⁴ King was later assassinated on April 4, 1968 while de Friedemann was in the United States. It seems implausible that she could have remained aloof during this turbulent moment in which she resided in Atlanta. Though her reactions to King's speeches and assassination are unknown, it is highly likely that she would have been aware of them.

Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987 and James Scott, *See like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999 and *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

¹³ Biographical information was compiled from the biography of Nina S. de Friedemann on the website of the Luis Angel Arango Library in Bogotá: <http://www.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/antropologia/criele/criele0.htm> (accessed June 29, 2016) and the Introduction by Ron Duncan-Hart in Nina S. de Friedemann, *African Saga: Cultural Heritage and Resistance in the Diaspora*. Santa Fe: Gaon Books, 2008.

¹⁴ Quoted in Britta Waldschmidt-Nelson, *Dreams and Nightmares: Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the Struggle for Black Equality in America*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012, 99.

Upon returning to Colombia, de Friedemann focused her studies on Colombian black populations. Her first work was on the Colombian Caribbean islands San Andres, Providencia, and Santa Catalina and in the Pacific Littoral. She would go on to study both the Atlantic coast and urban populations thoroughly. Her studies focused on the African heritage in those regions present in family structures, language, music, medicinal practices, and the funeral rites of *lumbalú*. She essentially created the field of Afro-Colombian studies through the publication of seventeen books and dozens of articles from the 1970s to her passing in 1998.¹⁵ Her book *African Saga: Cultural Heritage and Resistance in the Diaspora* (2008) was published posthumously.

De Friedemann's personal and academic story informed her unique view of blackness on Colombia. In addition to her groundbreaking research, de Friedemann contributed much to increase the intellectual space for conversations around Blackness. She founded the journal *America Negra* in June of 1991, published by the Pontificia Javeriana University in Bogotá. She increased conversations transnationally through her well-maintained ties to the United States throughout her career. She was a Permanent International Research Associate of Emory. Her membership with the American Anthropological Society strengthened her academic connections, and after receiving a Fulbright Hays Fellowship, she was a visiting professor at both Georgia State University and the University of Alabama.¹⁶ She carried her U.S. academic experience back to Colombia as a founding member of the Anthropological Society of Colombia and the National Union of Writers.

In addition to writing blackness into the Colombian national history, de Friedemann wrote that the invisibility of African heritage had not only been perpetuated by Euro-Colombians

¹⁵ Duncan-Hart in de Friedemann, *African Saga*, 11.

¹⁶ These connections require much more research. At present I cannot find any additional details about these experiences.

and mestizos, but had been reinforced within the black community. Manuel Zapata Olivella wrote to this phenomenon in recounting the attitude of a relative of his, shared by many Atlantic coastal Afro-Colombians, “She remembers nothing about her distant forebears, nor did she acknowledge any linkage with those blacks with whom she had no family ties. The majority of African descendants in Cartagena, eager to find a place in a discriminatory society, dragged this lack of identity around like a shield.”¹⁷ Both Manuel Zapata Olivella and Nina S. de Friedemann recognized that addressing blackness as an identity within the black community, and acknowledging racism within the wider public was a crucial step to democratic political gains. This celebration of African heritage had been an essential part of the dialogues that informed the diasporic imagination of the Americas. Those discourses were present in a great variety of spaces: in the communities, on the Congress floor, and in publications throughout the country.

Leading up to the ratification of Law 70, Article 55, Nina de Friedemann was involved in several influential publications in Bogotá that directly addressed African cultural heritage and racism in Colombia. She served, with Manuel Zapata Olivella, on the editorial board of *Presencia Negra*, a newspaper modeled after the French *Presence Africaine*. The newspaper was a publication that began in 1980 by El Centro para la Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Negra (CIDCUN) [the Center for Research and Development of Black Culture]¹⁸ that had been founded in 1975 by Amir Smith Córdoba.

Amir Smith Córdoba was an influential leader who came from a working class background in the Pacific region of El Chocó. He had an ability to speak to the grassroots

¹⁷ Quoted in Prescott, Laurence E. *Without Hatreds or Fears: Jorge Artel and the Struggle for Black Literary Expression in Colombia*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000, 32.

¹⁸ Smith Córdoba’s organization and publication is mentioned in footnote 39 of Maguemati Wabgou, et al., eds., *Movimiento Social Afrocolombiano, Negro, Raizal, y Palenquero: El largo camino hacia la construcción de espacios comunes y alianzas estratégicas para la incidencia política en Colombia*. Bogotá, Universidad Nacional, 2012, 100.

movements in the Pacific and directly advocated blackness as an important identity to be claimed by Colombians of African descent. To this end, he consistently wrote a column in *Presencia Negra* titled “Aprender a Ser Negro” [Learn to Be Black] that highlighted black culture and strategies for claiming rights based on racial solidarity.

Another highly influential political leader of the *movimiento negro* was Juan de Dios Mosquera, who also came from the Pacific region Cauca and addressed blackness from a standpoint of economic equality and human rights justice. In 1976, Mosquera founded a small study group called “Soweto” at his university in Pereira, Colombia.¹⁹ From this student group, the activist organization Movimiento Nacional Cimarrón [called Cimarrón] emerged. Cimarrón, though it has lost some momentum in the 2000s, was highly effective at mobilizing university students in black activism work in the 1970s through the 1990s.²⁰ The objectives of the group clearly demonstrate the importance of transnational dialogue and solidarity work. Cimarrón declared its primary purpose was to, “Draw attention to the discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups, especially blacks.” Within this objective, the group would “Be in solidarity and form alliances with other black struggles, such as the antiapartheid movement in South Africa, civil rights efforts in North America, and negritude movements in the Caribbean and Francophone Africa” in addition to struggling “for equality and universal human rights of subordinated groups all over the world, including blacks, workers, and women...”²¹

Mosquera’s outreach and educational efforts attracted a great deal of attention to Cimarrón throughout the country’s universities, but especially in Bogotá, the seat of the national

¹⁹ The name “Soweto” was used in reference to the urban area of Johannesburg, South Africa, and was originally an abbreviation for the South Western Townships. The name was used by Juan de Dios Mosquera in solidarity with the South African anti-apartheid movement.

²⁰ Juan de Dios Mosquera continues to serve as the president of Cimarrón. Current information about the organization is available on their website: <http://www.movimientocimarron.org/>

²¹ Quoted in Kiran Asher, *Black and Green: Afro-Colombians, Development, and Nature in the Pacific Lowlands*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009, 42.

government. Coupled with the efforts of Smith Córdoba's publications, Nina S. de Friedemann, Manuel Zapata Olivella and the grassroots efforts of activists from the Pacific Coast, the government passed some of the most radical civil rights legislation in the Americas. Law 70, specifically Article 55 of that law, recognized the cultural, economic, and social rights of Afro-Colombians, granting them access to communal land rights that would ensure their way of life in the Pacific and acknowledge their cultural contribution to the nation.

Multiple *Negritudes* in Colombia

In a similar turn to political action taken by de Friedemann and Zapata Olivella, Manuel's brother, Juan Zapata Olivella, ran for president of Colombia in the 1978 elections. He explicitly identified as Afro-Colombian and sought the votes of the Afro-Colombian population to support him. Juan had been working throughout the previous decades to increase awareness and celebration of Afro-Colombian culture like his siblings, but in very specific channels, most notably in journalism. He regularly wrote articles for *El Tiempo* and had a radio talk show. As his siblings Delia and Manuel participated in widespread cultural, intellectual, and academic production and activism, Juan focused more on the media and politics.

Juan Zapata Olivella was not elected president, yet his campaign brought to the fore divisions in the Colombian black consciousness groups. A debate, that had already begun, was intensified as to what the goals of black consciousness movements should be in Colombia. For some, Juan Zapata Olivella's participation in politics was a necessary step toward equality within the country. Some, such as the author of an article in Colombia's most widely read newspaper, *El Tiempo*, saw his candidacy as a natural step in the progressive uplift of the race that was a part of a larger, diasporic-wide history. The article postulated,

The black man is the legitimate son of the sea, the sun and the wind. These three elements and the mysterious ancestor, in whom is mixed the Queen of Sheba—seductress of King Solomon—and the slave, who was given his strong physical architecture and that subtle spirit that goes from the spirituals of Carolina to the songs of our Negra Grande to Uncle Tom, to doctor Zapata Olivella, the current presidential candidate of our *negritud* [blackness].²²

This romantic understanding of Zapata Olivella’s presidential campaign was situated within a conceptualization of blackness that was intricately tied to nature, ancestral heritage and cultural forms expressed through music, literature, and leadership roles. Yet other Afro-Colombians, especially those involved in the Movimiento de las Negritudes from the Pacific Coast, understood the role of blackness within Colombia in a different light: one much more closely tethered to full participation in society as a prerequisite to political and economic gains.

The Movimiento de las Negritudes emerged mostly from Quibdo, the capital of the Pacific province of El Chocó and was led by several prominent black lawyers and economists. The founding of the Diego Luis Córdoba Technical University of the Chocó in Quibdo, founded in 1972, gave many Afro-Colombians in the region access to higher education that led to a deeper understanding of social justice and economic issues as well the opportunity to acquire certifications and degrees that led to trained careers and socio-economic opportunities that had previously been unavailable in the province dominated by the fishing and palm oil industries.²³ Over a decade later, the University of the Pacific in the coastal city of Buenaventura, founded in 1988, continued to provide further educational access to the Afro-Colombian community that was instrumental in civil rights gains of the early 1990s.

²² The original Spanish reads, “El negro es hijo legítimo del mar, del sol y del viento. Esos tres elementos y el misterioso ancestro, en que se mezcla la reina de Saba—seductora del rey Salomón—y el esclavo, le dan su poderosa arquitectura física y aquel sutil espíritu que va desde los ‘spirituals’ de Carolina hasta las canciones de nuestra Negra Grande, desde el Tío Tom, hasta el doctor Zapata Olivella, actual candidato presidencial de nuestra negritud,” in Author unknown, “El negro colombiano” in *El Tiempo*, 1 April 1977. It is not clear to whom “our Negra Grande” refers, though it could be the singer Totó, la momposina from the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

²³ Juan de Dios Mosquera notes the importance of the universities in the Chocó in his essay “El renacimiento afrocolombiano” in *Boletín del Movimiento Nacional Afrocolombiano Cimarrón: Estudios Afrocolombianos*. Bogotá: Boletín del Movimiento Nacional Afrocolombiano Cimarrón, 2001-2009.

One member of the Pacific-based movement, Ciro Alberto Valoyes, wrote an article published *El Tiempo*, a few weeks after, and in conversation with, the previous article discussed above. Valoyes addressed aspects of *Negritud* that were directly in line with the goals of activists such as Zapata Olivella, Nina S. de Friedemann and Abdias Nascimento in Brazil: a recognition and celebration of African cultural heritage and contribution to the national culture, the pursuit of a free and open space to search for and express the spiritual identity of the black people, and a desire to fully belong and feel at home in both the local nation of Colombia and within the wider Americas. He argued that hemispheric consciousness was central to movement as “*Negritud* is to recognize with dignity and pride the contribution of Africa to the very heart of America and Colombia.”²⁴

The next step for many black activists was to address the glaring political absence of black representation in civil service and public office, yet Valoyes did not feel that Juan Zapata Olivella should have been the candidate at that time in the late 1970s. Juan Zapata Olivella did not gain the support of the Segundo Congreso de Negritudes [Second Congress of Negritudes] that took place in the capital city of El Chocó, Quibdó, in 1976.

The support of black people in Bogotá, or on the Caribbean coast, was not enough for this author, and claiming their support was tantamount to exploitation. He protested, “It is inadmissible, absurd and counterproductive, that said people [Juan Zapata Olivella] use as an argument, the color of their skin to arrive at the presidency of the Republic, knowing that the Congress of Negritudes attacked such a position.”²⁵ Valoyes viewed the presidency as a position of power that should be achieved only after full inclusion of the black population was a reality in

²⁴ The original Spanish reads, in full, “*Negritud* es reconocer con dignidad y orgullo el aporte del África al fondo cultural de América y de Colombia,” in Ciro Alberto Valoyes, “La Real Negritud” in *El Tiempo*, 26 April 1977.

²⁵ The original Spanish reads, “Es inadmisibile, absurdo y contraproducente, que dichas personas utilicen como argumento, el color de su piel para llegar a la presidencia de la República, a sabiendas de que el Congreso de Negritudes atacó esta clase de posturas,” in Valoyes, “La Real Negritud.”

Colombia. He considered Juan Zapata Olivella's presidential bid, explicitly framed as a black candidacy and campaign, as offensive in its attempt to gain black votes without having the support of the Congress of Negritudes of the Pacific. As a *costeño* from the Caribbean, Zapata Olivella's campaign highlighted the racialized regional differences of the country.²⁶ Caribbean and Pacific black cultures indeed had many differences, and claiming blackness from one region did not imply support from the other. National unity was needed before a national campaign based on race could be successful to Valoyes.

Valoyes described the several key steps needed to reach racial and national unity. He urged, "first, we must discover the enemy, we must reject and fight against all the racist germs that invade Colombia presenting to our government plans for our schools and colleges to adopt measures in favor of feelings of brotherhood and tolerance among all human groups..." and that "When all of Colombia understands, that we are an important part of the roots of the genetic tree then we will have a black president not for black people but for all of Colombia."²⁷ Valoyes' comments are illuminating in their reference to "outside" forces that came into the Colombia to restructure the education system. Though he does not specifically state it, it is likely that Valoyes is alluding to the large number of international non-governmental organizations (particularly

²⁶ Regional racial differences are explained in the voluminous work of Nina S. de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha, and also in Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. Some of the key differences between the two coasts were informed by the relative isolation of the Pacific coast from the rest of the country, the history of slavery in gold mines and in the cultivation of sugar cane on the Pacific coast. In the late twentieth century, the Pacific coastal communities have felt the impacts of globalization in unique ways through the exploitation of palm oil by private, foreign companies. The rich biodiversity of the rainforests of the Pacific coast have also attracted international attention for resource extraction. The lack of infrastructure in the region has separated it from the interior. In contrast, the Caribbean coast has traditionally been more politically and economically connected to the Colombian interior and urban centers such as Bogotá and Medellín. The Caribbean region also has a long history of connections to other diasporic countries such as Cuba, and the US, as described in earlier chapters of this dissertation.

²⁷ The original Spanish reads, primero, "descubramos al enemigo, rechacemos y luchemos contra todos los gérmenes racistas que invaden a Colombia presentando al Gobierno planes para que en las escuelas y colegios se adopten medidas en favor de un sentimiento de hermandad y tolerancia en los grupos humanos..." and "Cuando entienda y comprenda toda Colombia, que somos parte importante de la raíz de su árbol genético tendremos un presidente negro no para los negros sino para toda Colombia," in Valoyes, "La Real Negritud."

from Europe and the US) that established educational and human rights programs in Colombia in response to the internal conflict and narco-trafficking. Valoyes viewed these outside influences as “germs” that perpetuated racism and its invisibility in the country (as reflected in the early Constitution of 1991 discussed above). The Pacific *Movimiento de Negritudes*, while influenced by the diasporic imagination of the Americas, was celebrated as a more grassroots and “bottom-up” movement than that of the Caribbean coast.

The grassroots approach of Valoyes is evident in his argument that the first step to political participation was an understanding, by all of society, that Afro-Colombians were an important part of the “genetic tree” of Colombia. This required an acknowledgement of the racism that was so often denied within Colombia by white, mestizo, and Colombians of African descent. Valoyes asserted that race relations in Colombia were clearly not “equal to the US or South Africa, but there is racial prejudice in our beloved Colombia, there is; it is in a subtle form, but it is a virus that ... if we do not detect the causes and apply the necessary correctives, a grave and unattackable institutionalized form will flourish.” He added that to deny Colombian racism “would be to try to block out the sun with a finger.”²⁸

To “try to block out the sun with a finger” is a clear statement about how some viewed racism as omnipresent in Colombia, though the best way of fighting that racism was heavily debated. The two black movements were divided along their understandings of how racism was experienced throughout the country, yet their combined efforts led to the passing of Article 55 of Law 70 that had important implications for the recognition of Afro-Colombian culture and civil, political, and economic rights. These gains, and unity of purpose among great division, was

²⁸ The original Spanish reads, “igual a EEUU o Sur África, pero que hay prejuicio racial en nuestra querida Colombia, lo hay; es en forma sutil, pero es un virus que por tratar de ocultarlo va corroyendo por dentro y si no se detectan las causas y se aplican correctivos necesarios, aflorarán en una forma institucionalizada grave e inatajable [sic, inatacable?]” and “sería tratar de tapar el sol con un dedo” in Valoyes, “La Real Negritud.”

possible due to the dedication of several individuals who participated in discussions around the diasporic imagination of the Americas and were able to translate its key ideas within the national context. As in Colombia, and other countries throughout the Americas, Afro-Panamanians worked throughout the twentieth century to address racism in their country and throughout the continent. Yet the unique history of Panama made this process especially complicated, and concrete legislative gains in civil rights have been fewer than in other countries.

The Struggle for Unity among Difference in Panama

The process of connecting to a diasporic imagination of the Americas has been meaningful for many Afro-Panamanians, enriched by cultural exchange and production, but the specific realities of race relations in Panama have inhibited widespread movements that would unify or empower Afro-Panamanians or their allies within the national context. This is due mainly to the presence of the United States as an imperial power in Panama for most of the twentieth century, and to the tense race relations between groups of Afro-Panamanians of different origins.

The 1903 Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty created an official US protectorate over the entire country of Panama that included the right of eminent domain and unilateral intervention by the US. This treaty lasted until 1939 when the US ratified the 1936 Hull-Alfaro Treaty that removed the protectorate status of the US over Panama. Thus while the Canal Zone remained an official US territory between 1903 and 1999, the US held a significant foreign presence within the entire country of Panama for more than thirty years in the early 1900s, with reverberations of this influence that lasted through the subsequent decades. This, in addition to the imperial projects of

the Canal Zone, resulted in a strong pushback of Panamanian nationalist rhetoric that emphasized the Spanish language and Catholicism as inherent elements of what was truly “Panamanian.” Many ethnic and religious groups did not fit into this mold, and the US presence in the Canal Zone and beyond exacerbated the complicated, shifting, and constantly re-negotiated race relations.

The interplay and interactions of several different groups all inhabited what historian Michael Donoghue calls the *borderlands* of the Panamanian isthmus.²⁹ Donoghue frames these borderlands as part of a *noncontiguous* US border, not attached at any point to the US mainland. This borderlands involved many nationals of other locales: the US, Panama, West Indies were the most populous, but Chinese, European, and Middle Eastern nationals also inhabited these borderlands. From these national contexts came identities that were at times claimed and at others rejected in order to gain access to cultural heritage, economic benefits, and to mitigate the effects of racism and the legacy of Jim Crow laws that the US brought to the Canal Zone.

Living in close proximity were those who actively distinguished themselves according to language, ancestry and religion. Zonians were US Americans who lived in the Canal Zone, but who also inhabited and worked and moved through areas of Panama adjacent to the Canal. Separate and alongside the Zonians were members of the US military. Both Zonians and US military personnel spoke English, often practiced Protestant religions, and were of Anglo-European ancestry. Panamanians spoke Spanish, were of Spanish and *mestizo* descent, and practiced Catholicism almost exclusively. African descendants within Panama were divided into two groups that have long struggled to join in solidarity along class or racial lines. A sub-group of the Panamanians were the Afro-Colonials; descendants of slaves brought to the Spanish

²⁹ As argued in Michael E. Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

Colombian province of Panama during the colonial period or in the first few decades of the new Colombian republic. Afro-Antilleans, or West Indians and their descendants, came from the French and English speaking islands of the West Indies to work on the construction of the Canal. The large majority of these African descendants came from Barbados and Jamaica and spoke predominantly English and practiced Protestant religions. While much could have been gained from solidarity efforts between Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antilleans in Panama in the twentieth century, several historical factors prevented this from becoming reality in the ways that it did in other countries.

In the early twentieth century, race relations reflected a confluence of US and Latin American practices and perceptions. Racial rhetoric in Panama had been dominated by the theory of “racial democracy” that was espoused in other Latin American countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba. The racial mixing of Spanish and indigenous descendants throughout the country presented Panama as a nation that did not see, nor discriminate based on race, though whiteness was clearly privileged in many sectors including education, civil service, business, and leadership roles throughout the country.

This implicit racism was made more explicit with the establishment of the US Canal Zone and construction of the canal. The Zone was segregated along US Jim Crow laws and black and white workers were divided into two different pay scales (US/ “gold” and local/“silver”), separate housing, schools, churches, and leisure spaces. As historian Julie Greene examines, race also divided the laboring sectors of the Canal: “Frenchmen, Germans, English, and Swedes were almost uniformly destined for supervisory or skilled jobs, while thousands of Spaniards, Italians, and Greeks who came found themselves working unskilled jobs as tracklayers, freight loaders, or

diggers.”³⁰ The split between Northern and Southern Europeans reflects the nuanced ways in which race and ethnicity was understood in the early twentieth century. Mediterranean cultures were considered “darker” than other Europeans, and thus were placed further down the racial hierarchy of the US mainland and imperial territories.³¹

Just as whiteness was understood and varied according to cultural and linguistic heritage, likewise blackness was not a fixed racial category in Panama or the Canal Zone. Afro-Antilleans, or black West Indians, were considered black by US Zonians, and “darker” than the Afro-Colonials who tended to emphasize their *mestizo* racial identity. All African descendants were segregated from white workers in the Canal Zone, though canal work was less available to Afro-Colonials. The limited access to employment on the canal was a point of contention between Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antilleans as canal jobs often paid higher wages and came with US education opportunities for the children of workers.

As the twentieth century progressed, the national status of Afro-Antilleans grew increasingly ambiguous with shifting levels of acceptance by the Panamanian and US governments. Many black people of West Indian descent were left in a national void, denied full citizenship rights in both Panama and the Canal Zone. Children of West Indians born in the Canal Zone, while it was a sovereign US territory, were referred to as “alien” and considered potential Panamanian citizens. Yet Panama was hesitant to grant citizenship to West Indians who came to work in the US Canal Zone, and between 1941 and 1946, the Panamanian Constitution ratified an amendment that denationalized the children of “prohibited immigrants,” directly

³⁰ Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2010, 34.

³¹ For further discussion of the ways in which “whiteness” shifted, was attached to labor identities, and was contested and changed over the nineteenth and twentieth century in the US, see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. New York: Verso, 2007 and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*. New York: Routledge, 2009.

targeted at Afro-Antilleans. The amendment was lifted in 1946 and replaced by a measure that required all Afro-Antilleans and their descendants to prove their integration into Panamanian society through a demonstration of their ability to speak Spanish and knowledge of Panamanian history. Due to the prominence of English in the Canal Zone, many Afro-Antilleans had preserved their English language, continued to practice Protestant religions, and educated their children in English. Thus the burden of “proof” often greatly delayed the ability of Afro-Antilleans and their children to secure citizenship in Panama, making work and international travel practically prohibited.³² Considered neither Panamanian, nor US nationals, Afro-Antilleans supported their own communities as a sub-group of African descendants inhabiting an “in-between” space that often exemplified, to varied degrees, diasporic reality in the Americas.

Several Afro-Panamanian black activists who participated in the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas found within the transnational networks of activists great inspiration, support, and strategies that they used to address the complex race relations in their native Panama. Their contributions to the discourse of the African diasporic imagination of the Americas included many relevant ideas around the complexities of diasporic race relations, and highlighted the ways in which solidarity was often difficult to construct in Panama. Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte, George Westerman and Gerardo Maloney all directly confronted these divisions, between white and black Panamanians, as well as between Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antilleans.

Based in the US, sociologist Roy Bryce Laport published works accounting for the Afro-Antillean cultural contributions to Panama. George Westerman was an influential community leader who wrote some of the first histories of West Indians in Panama. He published the

³² The complex citizenship laws and practices in Panama and the Canal Zone are explained in Kaysha Corinealdi, “Envisioning Multiple Citizenships: West Indian Panamanians and Creating Community in the Canal Zone Neocolony” in *The Global South*, vol. 6, no. 2, Interoceanic Diasporas and The Panama Canal’s Centennial (Fall 2012), 91.

Panama Tribune, the largest West Indian daily newspaper on the isthmus, and he was a prominent labor activist who highlighted the ways in which labor struggles were tied to racial discrimination. In 1980, the same year as the II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, Westerman founded the Afro-Antillean Museum in Panama City. The museum has been considered a crucial celebration of the Afro-Antillean culture and contribution to the Panamanian nation.

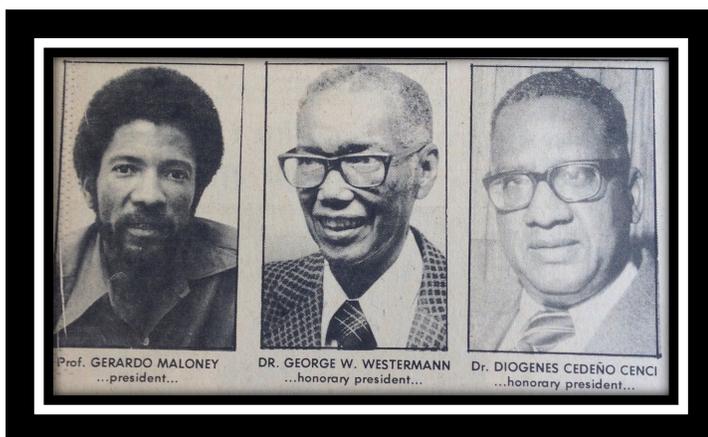


Figure 8. Photographs of Gerardo Maloney, George Westermann and Diogenes Cedeño Cenci featured in newspaper article, “Maloney, Westerman Speak Tonight as Black Culture Congresses Closes” in *La República*, 21 March 1980. National Library of Panama, Panama City, Panama.

Inspired in many ways by Westerman, and coming of age a generation later, Gerardo Maloney has been one of the most impactful leaders of the Panamanian Black Movement. Maloney, whose parents were from Jamaica and Barbados, directly addressed the antagonized racial divisions among the black population in Panama. He explained,

The inter-ethnic relations were always conflictive in Panamanian society. The Antillean possess a material and spiritual position superior to that of the Colombians and/or Panamanians. (The idea of being a British subject then a resident of the Canal Zone). The first generations of Antilleans mixed among themselves within their own residential areas, they conserved their churches, schools, organizations, etc., they resisted integration into the society that rejected them in every way.³³

³³ The original Spanish reads, “Las relaciones inter-étnicas fueron siempre conflictivas con la sociedad panameña. El antillano partía de la base de poseer una situación material y espiritual superior a los colombianos y/o panameños.

While unifying disparate groups within Panama had been a challenge, he believed that the II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, held in Panama City, Panama in 1980, would be a unifying event in its ability to join Afro-Panamanian experiences to wider diasporic communities. Gerardo Maloney remarked at the importance of the Congress: “This congress was important strategically, because it contributed to the reaffirmation and legitimization the approaches of the Panamanian Black Movement to the extent that these were subscribed by the people of other social formations, with similar problems and experiences.”³⁴ For Maloney, the solidarity created through the Congresses was an important step in bringing together Afro-Panamanians as equal members of the Panamanian nation. He stated, “the homeland belongs to all of us.”³⁵

Going beyond the nation, Diógenes Cedeño Cenci (1927-2010), the organizing president of the II Congress of Black Culture in the Americas, framed the assertion of black identity in Panama in global terms. He presented “La Recuperación de la Identidad Cultural del Negro como una Contribución a la Paz Mundial” [The Recuperation of Black Cultural Identity as a Contribution to World Peace] at the II Congress, asserting than oppression of peoples, including

(La idea de súbdito británico, en un principio y luego de residente en la Zona Canalera). Las primeras generaciones de antillanos, se mezclaron en áreas residenciales propias, conservaron sus Iglesias, escuelas, organizaciones, etc., resistieron la integración a una sociedad que de todas maneras lo rechazaba” in Gerardo Maloney, “Los Afro Panameños y La Etno Educación” in *Temas de Nuestra América*, no. 134 (Abril 1993), Universidad de Panamá, Panama, in the Biblioteca Nacional de Panamá [National Library of Panama], Panama City.

³⁴ Gerardo Maloney, “El Movimiento Negro en Panamá” in *Revista Panameña de Sociología*, no. 5, VI Congreso Nacional de Sociología, Memorias (1989), 155. The original Spanish reads, “Este congreso fue una importancia estratégica, porque contribuyó a reafirmar y legitimar los planteamientos del Movimiento Negro Panameño, en la medida que estos eran suscritos por los pueblos de otras formaciones sociales, con una experiencia y problemas similares.”

³⁵ Gerardo Maloney, “Sectores y Movimiento Negro en Panamá” in *Procesos Sociales: Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, no. 2 (Nov., 2010), 97. The original Spanish reads, “la Patria nos pertenece a todos.”

African descendants of the Americas, inherently led to unrest and a lack of global peace.³⁶ Thus global efforts were needed to address racism on a local scale, and echoing the arguments of Abdias do Nascimento, the liberation of black culture was a key step in that process.

In the context of Panama, Cedeño Cenci, like Westerman and Maloney, had dedicated most of his adult life to the recognition of black identity in Panama. And like Westerman and Maloney, he fought for solidarity between Panamanian black groups, elevating a unifying diasporic imagination above the divisive Afro-Colonial and Afro-Antillean sub-groups. Just as Maloney addressed the division through nationalist rhetoric, so did Cedeño Cenci promote blackness as an essential part of the broader Panamanian national identity.

Cedeño Cenci first addressed the lack of racial awareness through the education system in schools and universities. He began his career as a teacher in the predominantly black province of Bocas del Toro, and then served as the Rector of the University of Panama from 1978 to 1980. In that role he directed the Instituto Nacional de Cultura (INAC) [National Institute of Culture] from 1980 to 1983, and participated in the Primer Congreso del Negro Panameño [First Congress of the Black Panamanian] in 1981. Thus the early 1980s were a watershed moment for the Panamanian Black Movement, likely catalyzed by the increased sense of nationalism that arose after the signing of the Torrijos-Carter Treaty of 1977 that gave significant rights to the canal to the Panamanians and promised full removal of US control over the canal by December 31, 1999.³⁷

³⁶ “La Recuperación de la Identidad Cultural del Negro como una Contribución a la Paz Mundial.” Panama City: Imprenta Universitaria, Universidad de Panamá, 1980, presented at the Segundo Congreso de la Cultura Negra de las Américas, Panama City, March 17-21, 1980.

³⁷ It should be noted that while the Torrijos-Carter Treaty arranged for the US to end its ownership and operational role of the Panama Canal, the US retained the permanent right to defend the canal should its neutrality toward ships of all nations be threatened.

The US presence in Panama has long had a powerful effect on race relations and the discourses around blackness in the country and the Canal Zone. During the US civil rights movement and Black Power Movement, US black military personnel often challenged the segregation of the Canal Zone and in Panama in general terms that did not differentiate between Afro-Colonials and Afro-Antilleans. Afro-Colonials, in particular, often pushed back against the US presence in support of Panamanian nationalism and sovereignty in the region, while Afro-Antilleans long resented the lack of recognition of their role in building the canal, yet enjoyed many privileges as employees of the US government. Afro-Antilleans earned on average, for instance, wages that were three times greater than Panamanian wages.³⁸ When the US left the Zone, many Afro-Antilleans sought the limited employment provided by the US Panama Canal Commission (1979-1999) and on US military bases. Thus the US imperial project of the Canal came with both perceived benefits and disadvantages. Afro-Antilleans navigated these complexities in ways that inhibited full integration into Panamanian society yet provided close-knit communities and support with some middle class economic opportunities provided by the Canal.

As the 1990s came to a close, Panama was confronted with the arduous task of redefining its role in the hemisphere as the owner of the Panama Canal, and of unifying its citizenry under one nation. With the US presence all but gone, descendants of West Indians have increasingly learned Spanish and sought participation within Panamanian culture. While some elders lament the loss of the West Indian culture and its expressions in food, language, mutual aid societies, churches, and rituals, an Afro-Panamanian identity has slowly been asserting race as the unifying social identifier under which more general poverty and implicit racism should be addressed

³⁸ Donoghue, *Borderland on the Isthmus*, 125.

within Panama. The diasporic perspectives and participation of activists such as Maloney and Cedeño Cenci have greatly expanded this black political ground.

Though Panama has yet to pass radical legislation similar to Colombia and Brazil, some political gains have been achieved. In 1999, the year the Canal was officially turned over to Panama, Alberto Barrow founded the Panamanian Committee Against Racism with its platform of “restructuring the nation-state to reflect the cultural, ethnic, religious, gender, and racial diversity of the nation.”³⁹ The Committee worked to unite Afro-Colonials (or Afro-Hispanics) with West Indians and their descendants.

On May 2002, the first female President of Panama, Mireya Moscoso, declared the first Día de la Etnia Negra [Black Ethnicity Day]: the first time blackness was recognized on a national level in Panama. Gerardo Maloney paid tribute to this meaningful milestone in his poem “Black Awareness Day.” Another important result of the national commemoration was the establishment of the Comisión Coordinadora de la Conmemoración del Día de la Etnia Negra Nacional [Coordinating Commission for the Commemoration of the National Black Ethnicity Day] on May 30, 2001 to “defend Black rights and challenge the existing racial paradigm.”⁴⁰ One year later, on April 10, 2002, Moscoso passed Law 16 that prohibited discriminatory practices by regulating “the right of admission to public spaces” regardless of race. This legislation, just one step toward breaking down implicit and explicit racism in Panama, was especially notable given the fact that Moscoso is the widow of former president Arnulfo Arias.

³⁹ Sonja Stephenson Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama: Afro-Hispanic and West Indian Literary Discourses of Contention*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014, 99-100.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Arias, a medical doctor educated at Harvard and the University of Chicago in the 1920s, was widely recognized as a racist who passed several discriminatory laws against West Indians.⁴¹

The unique case of Panama and its particular history within the wider African diaspora of the Americas highlights the ways in which the diasporic imagination created spaces for dialogue around racism that had not been readily available within Panama. Yet the transnational ideas shared eventually led to change at the national level. Political gains came later in Panama than in Colombia and Brazil, and over thirty years after the Civil Rights Act of the US was passed. Yet in its own ways, and in its own time, Panama is a striking example of how the diasporic imagination has united political efforts more than divided them throughout the hemisphere. The Brazilian black freedom movement similarly echoes commonalities in the Americas.

Grassroots Mobilization in Brazil

As the black consciousness movements of Colombia and Panama grew in the 1980s and 1990s, so did the *movimento negro* [black movement] of Brazil. These movements developed simultaneously and parallel to each other, yet as this dissertation shows, several key leaders acted as contact points of cultural and intellectual exchange between the movements. Abdias Nascimento, Brazil's most celebrated black leader, worked along a growing number of black activists who fought for civil rights to be expanded within Brazil. Nascimento's life-long dedication to anti-racism work is evidence of the long tradition of transnational black consciousness work throughout the twentieth century, and more isolated events had occurred long before the 1980s.

⁴¹ Ibid. Arnulfo Arias was the President of Panama on three occasions: 1940-41, 1949-51, and for a brief period in October 1968. He graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1925 and was a suspect in the 1955 assassination of the Panamanian President José Antonio Remón according to a Harvard *Crimson* article, "Harvard Graduate Suspect in Panamanian President's Death," published 5 January 1955.

For example, US anthropologist and dancer Katherine Dunham directly challenged the practice of racial discrimination in Brazilian hotels in 1950. While *de jure* segregation had never existed in Brazil the way Jim Crow laws segregated the US, *de facto* discrimination and housing practices often separated Afro-Brazilians from white, or *mestiço* Brazilians.⁴² While on tour in Brazil, Dunham and her troupe were denied accommodations at the Hotel Esplanada in São Paulo, Brazil's largest city. Dunham was outraged at what she perceived to be blatant racial discrimination and widely publicized the event within the Brazilian press. Due to the national attention of the issue, the Brazilian government passed the Afonso Arinos Law in 1951 that prohibited racial discrimination in public places.⁴³ In this instance, Dunham's fame, and political leverage as a North American traveling in Brazil drew added visibility to the issue of discrimination in public places. The "outsider" status of Dunham likely contributed to her ability to draw attention to the issue.

Later in the twentieth century, US black anthropologist Angela Gilliam lived in Brazil in 1963 and 1973 as part of her anthropological research in Latin America. While there, she discussed racism when it was illegal to do so openly under the 1969 Lei de Segurança Nacional [National Security Law] enacted under the military dictatorship.⁴⁴ While some dismissed Gilliam as an "outsider" seeing US racism in Brazil, Gilliam opened the conversation around blackness in Brazil with a voice that was received in different ways precisely because she was an "outsider." Her status as a US academic came with disadvantages and certain privileges. In the late 1960s, Gilliam translated conversations between Abdias Nascimento and the Black Power

⁴² *Mestiço* is most commonly used to describe a person of mixed European and indigenous ancestry.

⁴³ Amílcar Araújo Pereira, *O Mundo Negro: Relações Raciais e a Constituição do Movimento Negro Contemporâneo no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas Editora, 2013, 154 and Florestan Fernandes, "The Negro Problem in a Class Society: 1951-1960 Brazil" in Arlene Torres and Norman E. Whitten, Jr., eds., *Blackness and Latin American and Caribbean*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988, 117.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Pereira, *O Mundo Negro*, 193.

artist/activist Amiri Baraka, helping them exchange ideas about blackness, racism and thus participating in the diasporic imagination of the Americas.⁴⁵

Gilliam's ability to utilize English and Portuguese allowed her and others to cross language barriers to exchange these ideas. In 1970, Gilliam published her experiences in the essay, "From Roxbury to Rio- and Back in a Hurry." Her work was read within academic circles in the US, but found a broader audience in Brazil. She was mentioned in national newspapers and a political cartoon featured her voice shouting that racism did indeed exist in Brazil.⁴⁶ Gilliam's studies and experiences added to the discourse started earlier in the century that was led by the UNESCO study of race relations in Brazil that shattered the dominant illusion of Brazil as a racial paradise.⁴⁷

Emerging from the end of the Second World War, the United Nations made an imperative initiative to end world racism. In this effort, UNESCO approved an anti-racist agenda at the Fourth Session of the General Conference in September 1949. Out of subsequent meetings emerged a research agenda that would seek to identify what was so successful about Brazilian society's "racial democracy" so that solutions that resulted from the findings could be applied to racist societies throughout the world.⁴⁸ The studies concluded that racism did in fact exist in Brazil, and the myth of racial democracy was debunked through the studies. Though the UNESCO conclusions ran counter to the dominant narratives in Brazil around race, it would take

⁴⁵ Amiri Baraka and his work within the Black Arts Movement is discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation. Gilliam's work as a translator is discussed in Pereira, *O Mundo Negro*, 193.

⁴⁶ A cartoon, and details of an interview with Gilliam from *O Pasquim*, November 8, 1983, is featured in Amilcar Pereira's *O Mundo Negro*, 194.

⁴⁷ Originally published in the *Journal of Black Poetry* and published in David J. Hellwig, *African-American Reflections on Brazil's Racial Paradise*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

⁴⁸ Marcos Chor Maio, "UNESCO's Anti-Racist Agenda: Research on Race Relations in Brazil in the 1950s" at the UNESCO website: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=30394&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed February 29, 2016). This study is also discussed in George Reid Andrews, "Brazilian Racial Democracy, 1900-90: An American Counterpoint" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 31, no. 3 (Jul., 1996), 438-507.

decades, and the end of the military dictatorship, for widespread support of racial justice to take hold.

At the same time that Mosquera and Smith Córdoba were leading more militant groups to prominence in Colombia, a group of Brazilian militant black activists founded the Movimento Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial (MUCDR) [Unified Movement Against Racial Discrimination] in 1978. Their movement officially began with a declaration published as an open letter to the public on the stairs of the Municipal Theater of São Paulo. Present at the declaration was Abdias Nascimento and the Afro-Brazilian feminist activist Léila Gonzalez. The following year, the organization became the Movimento Negro Unificado (MNU) [Unified Black Movement] that has been an influential umbrella entity with representation in various Brazilian states and active in the public sphere to the present day.⁴⁹ The open letter to the public articulated the move from discourse to action that typified the shift in the late 1970s through the 1990s in Colombia and Brazil:

We are coming out of the meeting rooms, the conference rooms and we going into the streets. A new step has been taken in the fight against racism.

The Unified Movement Against Racial Discrimination was created to be an instrument in the fight of the Black Community. This movement must have as its basic principle the work of permanently denouncing all acts of racial discrimination, the constant organization of the Community to face all and any kind of racism.

Therefore, we propose the creation of FIGHT CENTERS of the UNIFIED MOVEMENT AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION in the neighborhoods, in the towns, in the prisons, in the ritual spaces of candomblé and umbanda, in the workplaces, in the samba schools, in the churches, in any place where black people live; FIGHT CENTERS that promote debate, information, awareness and organization in the black community, making ourselves a strong movement, active and combatant, taking black people to participate in all of the sectors of Brazilian society.⁵⁰[emphasis original]

⁴⁹ Pereira, *O Mundo Negro*, 219.

⁵⁰ The original Portuguese reads, “Estamos saindo das salas de reuniões, das salas de conferencias e estamos indo para as ruas. Um novo passo foi dado na luta contra o racismo. ...O MOVIMENTO UNIFICADO CONTRA A DISCRIMINACAO RACIAL foi criado para ser um instrumento de luta da Comunidade Negra. Este movimento deve ter como princípio básico o trabalho de denuncia permanente de todo ato de discriminação racial, a constante

Abdias was present on the steps as these words were announced to the public spaces of São Paulo, literally to the streets, though he was based in the US at the time. A few years later, in the early 1980s, he permanently returned to Brazil as the military dictatorship was coming to an end. Civilian control of the government was fully restored in 1985, and the 1988 Constitution was “intended to consolidate political democracy and civil liberties.”⁵¹ The juxtaposition of popular goals with the realities of implicit racism, and the reinstatement of democracy, opened opportunities for black activists such as Nascimento to influence politics within the country. Nascimento immediately became politically active in the Democratic Labor party, and was elected as a deputy to the Brazilian Congress and to the Senate in 1994. During his service as a senator until 1999, some of the most progressive policies were adopted by the Brazilian state that directly addressed the Afro-Brazilian community.

As in Colombia, the first step of the MNU in fighting racism in Brazil was to encourage Brazilians of African descendant to identify as such. In the 1990s the MNU ran a campaign to change the Brazilian census categories that had included a large number of racial categories that the MNU believed inhibited people from embracing blackness and claiming *negro* as their identity. The MNU worked to have the racial categories *pardo* (indicating lighter skin tone) and *preto* (black) removed with *negro* as the only African descendant racial category.⁵² Having one category for African descendancy allowed a much greater percentage of the population to claim

organização da Comunidade para enfrentarmos todo e qualquer tipo de racismo. ...Portanto, propomos a criação de CENTROS DE LUTA DO MOVIMENTO UNIFICADO CONTRA A DISCRIMINACAO RACIAL, nos bairros, nas vilas, nas prisões, nos terreiros de candomblé, nos terreiros de umbanda, nos locais de trabalho, nas escolas de samba, nas igrejas, em todo o lugar onde o negro vive; CENTROS DE LUTA que promovam o debate, a informação, a conscientização e organização da comunidade negra, tornando-nos um movimento forte, ativo e combatente, levando o negro a participar em todos os setores da sociedade brasileira” quoted in Pereira, *O Mundo Negro*, 219.

⁵¹ As stated in Lincoln Gordon, *Brazil's Second Chance: En Route toward the First World*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2001, 141.

⁵² This is described in G. Reginald Daniel, *Race and Multiraciality in Brazil and the United States: Converging Paths?* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, 4.

blackness. This important step drastically shifted how blackness was understood from the state's perspective. The lack of participation of Afro-Brazilians within the universities and professional fields became abundantly clear once the racial identity of the population became articulated in this new way.

In 1996 the government made racial equality a state priority by establishing the Task Force for the Elimination of Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (GTDEO). That same year the President of Brazil acknowledged publically that Brazil was a racist country and the state determined that affirmative action was needed to address the glaring disparities between participation of Afro-Brazilians, especially in leadership roles, in both the public and private sectors. On May 13, 1996, the government launched an affirmative action plan through Decree No. 1904. In the subsequent four years, the Brazilian government worked to establish its affirmative action law that was passed in 2001. The year before affirmative action became law, a study revealed that 86% of the 284,000 physicians in Brazil identified as white though only 48.2% of the overall population identified as white.⁵³ These numbers certainly reveal the institutional racism that has inhibited many Afro-Brazilians from equal access to educational and economic opportunities, though it may also reflect the racial reality that socio-economic class and race are intricately linked within Brazil. As one's professional status increases, so does one's "whiteness." A closer examination of the politics of racial identity along class lines would need to be made to fully assess the impact of affirmative action in Brazil.

While the racial politics of affirmative action in Brazil have been heavily discussed throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, the dedication of black activists has emphasized the public discourse around the need for affirmative action led by the MNU.

⁵³ A detailed discussion of affirmative action in Brazil with statistical analysis can be found in Joaze Bernardino-Costa and Fernando Rosa, "Appraising Affirmative Action in Brazil" in Edmund Terence Gomez and Ralph Premdas, eds., *Affirmative Action, Ethnicity and Conflict*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Senators Abdias Nascimento and Benedita da Silva dedicated great time and effort to the law and proposed quotas for black students in public universities, public administration and private enterprises. Abdias Nascimento, like Nina S. de Friedemann in Colombia, was an activist who dedicated all aspects of his life to the Afro-Brazilian freedom cause. His paintings, essays, books, and government service were all necessary for him to address the multiple modes of acknowledgement and celebration of African heritage in the hemisphere. His leadership role, coupled with the grassroots work of the MNU, significantly changed Brazil's political and cultural landscape to include an active recognition of the Afro-Brazilian contribution to the wider nation. This recognition regularly pulled from ideas shared in transnational spaces and journeys that were expressed through the diasporic imagination of the Americas. Nascimento and others had access to language and support that helped them articulate in the national sphere a wider perspective on the African diasporic contribution to national culture and political and economic responses to systemic racism.

Conclusion

Zapata Olivella mentioned the important work of Nina S. de Friedemann in his book *Las claves mágicas de America* (1989), published just a few years before the ratification of the Colombian Constitution to include black and indigenous rights. He stated, "The most valiant and unflagging accuser of the procedures to hide the black presence in Colombian history, culture and society is the anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann."⁵⁴ De Friedemann's anthropological work was crucial to increasing knowledge about the black population in Colombia. With

⁵⁴ Manuel Zapata Olivella, *Las claves mágicas de América*. Bogotá: Plaza & Janes, 1989, 177. Translation by the author.

increased “visibility” of blackness in Colombia, and the Americas more generally, the fight for black liberation took a markedly political turn throughout the hemisphere.

Activists who had been there for decades led this shift: Abdias Nascimento, Manuel and Juan Zapata Olivella, Gerardo Maloney and Nina de Friedemann. Their continued work, in various sectors of society, supported the growth of grassroots movements led by activists such as Amir Smith Córdoba and Juan de Dios Mosquera. Thus the African diasporic imagination of the Americas led to discourses that produced civil rights legislation and social and political action that was the direct result of the work of activists who were involved in the networks explained in previous chapters. The strategies for change that were created in the Congresses for Black Culture in the Americas, for instance, were tools welded in an international space that were then applied to the national context. The urgency for black freedom encountered in the transnational sphere translated into local urgency for political gains. What made their work even more impactful was their ability to work within professional and personal spheres: harnessing all of their talents to fight racism as “a way of life.” To Maloney, there was “no other option” than to continue the fight on all fronts.

CHAPTER SIX

Rewriting Historical Memory, Afro-centricity and the Diasporic Imagination of the Americas in
Novels, Painting, and Poetry

If I had to live in a racial house, it was important..to rebuild it so that it was not a windowless prison into which I was forced,..but rather an open house.

- Toni Morrison, "Home"

*Yo he vivido mi conciencia de escritor en dos etapas: antes de Changó y después de Changó.
[I have lived my consciousness as a writer in two stages: before Changó and after Changó.]*

- Manuel Zapata Olivella

Introduction

In April of 1985, Manuel Zapata Olivella miraculously survived a plane crash into a Colombian swamp and was rescued by local canoeists. When asked how he had such good luck to survive such a dangerous accident, he responded: "Because Changó protects me."¹ Three years earlier, Zapata had published his magnum opus, the historical novel, saga, and African diasporic epic of the Americas, *Changó, el gran putas* (1983). The novel, along with Zapata's comment, pays tribute to Changó, the West African orisha (spirit/deity) of war, masculinity, strength, and virility. He is symbolized by the axe, lightning and thunder. Changó is an aggressive orisha, one whose power Zapata understood as crucial to his own personal resilience, and for those who channeled the orisha's warrior essence to survive throughout centuries of struggle stemming from systemic racism in the Americas.

Changó, el gran putas was unique and groundbreaking in many ways, and it was also one of many historical novels, and works of fiction of its time period about African diasporic

¹ The original Spanish reads, "Porque... a mí me protege Changó," quoted in José Luis Garcés González, *Manuel Zapata Olivella, caminante de la literatura y de la historia*. Bogotá: Ministerio de Cultura, 2002, 34.

communities in the Americas. The late 1970s and 1980s were a catalytic moment in which several authors from different national contexts contributed diasporic literature and art that addressed common themes, with common purposes. These themes and interventions include: the rewriting of historical memory and the role of memory and remembrance in diasporic communities; the use of Afro-centric forms including the disruption of linear time,² chronology and understandings of the past and present; centering the role of the ancestors within the lives of the protagonists and blurring the line between the living and the dead; the presence and intervention of orishas in daily life; and the discussion of the relationship of Africa to the Americas and the concept of homelands and belonging.

These themes and interventions will be discussed throughout this chapter with special consideration of Zapata's *Changó* and according to various works, including Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (US, 1976), Gerardo Maloney's collection of poetry, *Juega Vivo* (Panama, 1984), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (US, 1987), and Abdias Nascimento's paintings and poetry (Brazil, 1969-1988). Considering these works together illuminates the networks and cultural exchange that influenced both *Changó*, and the wider diasporic imagination Zapata Olivella and others constructed throughout their work. This imagination included common themes that are shared within works discussed here, and are further emphasized by the geographical breadth of the authors and artists.

At times there were direct links between the authors of these works. It is likely, considering the prominence of Malcolm X in *Changó*, that Zapata Olivella was familiar with

² For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the hyphenated term "Afro-centric" to describe Zapata Olivella's style and method in *Changó* to differentiate it from the theory of Afrocentricity coined by Molefi Asante and to stay consistent with the term used by the novel's English translator, Jonathan Tittler. Though elements of the novel are consistent with Asante's Afrocentricity as discussed later.

Alex Haley (1921-1992) as the co-author of Malcolm X's autobiography published in 1965.³ Over a decade later, Zapata invited Alex Haley to the First Congress of Black Culture the year after Haley published his epic diasporic historical novel, *Roots*. In a letter to Haley Zapata congratulated him on the success of the novel, and expressed a sense of fraternal camaraderie by referring to the novel as "a valuable contribution to black culture on our continent" and ending his letter stating, "Receive the greetings of all your Latin American brothers."⁴ It is curious to note that Zapata Olivella's letter is written in Spanish, when he did occasionally write English letters to non-Spanish speaking people in the United States. Perhaps given the time constraints (the letter was sent a month before the start of the Congress in Cali), Zapata was more comfortable writing in Spanish. Theories on language use are conjecture, but what is clear in the letter is Zapata's understanding of *Roots* as a diasporic work of the Americas, not just the United States.

Zapata Olivella, Nascimento, and Maloney were likewise well connected as friends, colleagues, and presidents of the Congresses of Black Culture.⁵ Zapata Olivella addressed both Nascimento and Maloney as "Queridos Ekobios" [Dear Ekobios] in a 1989 letter on the planned IV Congress of Black Culture in the Americas.⁶ The use of this term, repeatedly used in Zapata's letters, reveals his diasporic imagination that linked the three men together in special and powerful ways. Zapata does not refer to all black men as ekobios; the term was reserved for those whom he considered a close friend or colleague, and a brother in the struggles against

³ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. New York: Grove Press, 1965, written with the assistance of Alex Haley.

⁴ The original Spanish reads, "valioso aporte a la cultura del negro en nuestro continente" and "Reciba los saludos de todos sus hermanos latinoamericanos" in a letter from Manuel Zapata Olivella to Alex Haley, 29 July 1977, MZO Papers.

⁵ The Congresses of Black Culture of the Americas are discussed at greater length in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

⁶ Letter from Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias do Nascimento and Gerardo Maloney, 10 April 1989, MZO Papers.

racism. The term reflects imagined kinship, as well as common purpose within diasporic identity work.

I have not found any evidence to indicate that Morrison knew Zapata Olivella or Nascimento personally, but she did read Haley's *Roots* and themes within her work are so strikingly similar to the others that she must be included in this consideration of diasporic literature.⁷ She is also one of the most celebrated US authors of the twentieth century; she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award for *Beloved* in 1988. It is highly likely that Zapata Olivella, Nascimento, Maloney and others were well aware of her writing and influence. While it is unknown whether Morrison ever spoke to Zapata, *Beloved* speaks to *Changó*, and the diasporic experience is better illuminated through a discussion of the two works in light of each other.⁸ The novels and works discussed in this chapter all contain the individual and historical threads that explicitly demonstrate the diasporic imagination of the Americas: the transformative nature of friendships and travel, the role of the arts and literature, intellectual and academic communities, and political viewpoints and goals.

Rewriting Historical Memory

Changó, el gran putas was a novel twenty years in the making. Published in 1983, Zapata Olivella began writing the epic historical novel in the early 1960s, right in the Latin American

⁷ Toni Morrison mentions Alex Haley's *Roots* in an interview with Dan White, "Toni Morrison and Angela Davis on Friendship and Creativity" in *Newscenter*, University of California, Santa Cruz, 29 October 2014. Morrison specifically mentions how poorly she feels the novel, and others "by black authors on black things," was edited and that a motivating factor in her work was to produce well-edited books.

⁸ Previous scholars have discussed the literature of Manuel Zapata Olivella and Toni Morrison together. A few examples are: Gurleen Grewal, *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1998, Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Daughters of the Diaspora: Afro-Hispanic Writers*. Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003, Niyi Afolabi, *Afro-Brazilians: Cultural Production in a Racial Democracy*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009, and Timothy Cox, *Postmodern Tales of Slavery in the Americas: From Alejo Carpentier to Charles Johnson*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

literary “boom” period when several Latin American authors gained national and international notoriety for their portrayals of reality through the lens of magical realism and other forms. The authors canonized within this movement include Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa, Mexican Carlos Fuentes, Argentine Julio Cortázar, and Colombian Gabriel García Márquez who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982, the same year that Zapata completed *Changó*.⁹ Zapata Olivella’s work belongs within this group of prolific authors, as his work was every bit as creative, revolutionary, and incorporates many of the same forms and literary devices recognized in the boom period, yet he has been consistently under recognized. It is likely, as some scholars have suggested, that the practice of implicit racism inhibited Zapata from the recognition that he was due for his novels, including *Changó*, and this dissertation seeks to shed light on both that process and the writing of Zapata.¹⁰

The main purpose of *Changó* was to rewrite and reform historical memory of the Americas in light of African diasporic experience. The very structure of the novel revises hemispheric history to center the diaspora and its heroes. The novel consists of five parts that progress chronologically over a wide geographic expanse. The novel opens with “Origins,” that begins in Africa as enslaved peoples are captured, boarded onto a Portuguese slave trade ship and sail through the Middle Passage to reach the Americas. The second, “American Muntu,” takes place in Cartagena, Colombia where the great runaway warrior, Benkos Biojo, was born, rebelled, and established the maroon community of Palenque de San Basilio in the seventeenth century.

⁹ Some of the most celebrated fictional works of these authors include, Carlos Fuentes, *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (1962), Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela* (1963), Mario Vargas Llosa, *La casa verde* (1965), and Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, García Márquez and Zapata Olivella were friends and Zapata Olivella was instrumental in García Márquez obtaining his first writing job as a journalist in Cartagena in the late 1940s.

¹⁰ Literary scholar William Luis analyzes the relative lack of attention that Manuel Zapata Olivella’s literature has received in his introduction to Manuel Zapata Olivella, translated by Jonathan Tittler, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010.

It is not coincidental that Zapata Olivella included the warrior-hero in his epic novel as Palenque and *palenqueros* [the people of Palenque] have long had a cultural and commercial presence in Zapata Olivella's home city of Cartagena, often traveling to the city to sell rice, sweets, and fruit grown in their community. Also, Zapata Olivella's close friend and colleague, Nina S. de Friedemann, wrote the first major cultural study of the community that was later published as *MaNgombe: Guerreros y ganaderos en Palenque* (1979). The anthropological work, published just a few years before *Changó*, forever changed the field of Afro-Colombian studies and brought long overdue appreciation of the *palenquero* culture.

Palenque de San Basilio continues as an Afro-Colombian community to the present day and its inhabitants have preserved many of their traditional West African cultural practices such as the language Bantú (derived from Spanish, Portuguese and languages from Angola and Congo), the funeral ritual *lumbalú*, matriarchal familial structures, and cuisine and musical traditions. A prominent statue of Benkos Biojo currently dominates the public square of the community: a reminder of the long history of black resistance in the Americas and the liberation achieved by Biojo. Upon viewing the statue, the viewer participates in the past-present of the diasporic imagination in a similar way to Zapata Olivella's novel. In the photo below (see Figure 9), the power and strength of Biojo is evident in his posture and expression, rising out of the column that lifts the statue into the air far above human height. His hands, the left lifting beyond his body, have visibly broken chains around the wrists. His screaming expression mirrors that of the man embodying Changó on the cover of the English translation of *Changó*.



Figure 9. Benkos Biojo statue in the central square of Palenque de San Basilio, Colombia. Photograph by the author, March 2016.

Continuing the theme of resistance, “The Voudou Rebellion” is the third part of *Changó* and discusses the Haitian Revolution of the eighteenth century. To Zapata Olivella, the same rebellious strength of Changó fueled Biojo’s escape and the Haitian Revolution. The novel links the two events through one spiritual source and attributes Haitian culture to its Ifá roots of Voudou. The fourth part, “Rediscovered Bloodlines,” considers four Latin American leaders in light of their “forgotten” or denied black heritage and examines their encounter with blackness and the powers of the ancestors and orishas.¹¹ The leaders are Simón Bolívar, the liberator of South America; José Prudencio Padilla, a Colombian soldier who fought in the Spanish American wars of independence; Aleijadinho, an eighteenth-century Brazilian artist and

¹¹ An *orisha* is a spirit or deity of the Yoruba-based Ifá religion that is referenced in West Africa as well as in Latin America and the US in religions that stem from Ifá. These include Cuban Santería, Brazilian Candomblé, Brazilian Umbanda, and US and Haitian voodoo, or Vodun. Those who follow these religions are initiated and considered a “son,” “daughter,” or initiate of a particular orisha who “mounts” them and possesses them during rituals involving dance, song, and ceremonial drumming. Special offerings, foods, colored fabric, and symbols for the orishas are used in the ceremonies. Throughout this chapter I will interchangeably use “oricha” (English), “orisha” (English and Spanish) or “orixá” (Brazilian Portuguese) to describe the same spirit/deities. Sometimes, as in the English translation of *Changó*, the spelling “oricha” is used. Some orishas, such as Santa Barbara-Xangô in Brazil, are syncretized with Roman Catholic saints.

architect; and José María Morelos, a Mexican Roman Catholic priest and revolutionary leader in the Mexican War for Independence. The final section, “Ancestral Combatants” centers on the US civil rights movement and follows closely the experience of Agne [sic] Brown, who represents US black feminist activist Angela Davis. The voices of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. are present in this last section, echoing the voices of Changó. Across its five parts, the novel collectively tells one hemispheric history that belongs to all of the Americas, and that is intentionally applicable to people of all ethnicities and races.

Zapata frames this rewriting of history as a process in which the reader participates. Reformation of historical memory takes place as the reader encounters and interprets the novel. Zapata urges the readers to embrace the experience as a journey through the past that is defined in the present, and to recognize his/her role in the construction of historical memory. He explains in his letter to the reader that opens the novel, titled “To the Fellow Traveler,”¹²

Climb aboard this novel like so many million African prisoners on the slave ships; and feel free despite your chains... Whatever your race, culture, or class, don't forget that the land where you tread is America, the New World, humanity's new dawn... If you find strange spirits—in word, character, or plot--- take them as a challenge to your imagination. Forget about academics, verb tenses, the boundaries between life and death, because in this saga there is no other trace than the one you leave behind: you are the prisoner, the discoverer, the founder, the liberator.

If you come upon a mysterious term, give it your own meaning, reinvent it. Don't consult the glossary at the end of the book, because that serves only to show the landmarks you have already passed; it will not orient you along the paths ahead... Now embark upon your reading and let Elegba, the trailblazer, reveal to you your future steps, which were written on the Boards of Ifá long before you were born.¹³

¹² Most passages from *Changó* in this chapter are quoted from the English translation of the novel. The Spanish version was consulted during research in the libraries at the University of Texas, Austin and Harvard University. Few libraries have copies of the novel, so it is much easier to access the English version that is widely disbursed throughout US libraries and much easier to purchase. In either language, the novel is an exceptionally challenging read with its prolific use of African and African diasporic terms and concepts, nonlinear time and corresponding syntax. I feel that the most important aspects of the novel concerning the African diasporic imagination of the Americas are equally accessible in the English version as in the Spanish.

¹³ Manuel Zapata Olivella, translated by Jonathan Tittler, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2010, 1.

“To the Fellow Traveler” is a direct invitation for the reader to participate in the African diasporic imagination of the Americas. While the hemispheric location is important, Zapata Olivella asks the reader to let go of unfamiliar vocabulary or unexpected verb tenses. Instead, he encourages the reader to “give it your own meaning, reinvent it.” This reinvention brings the reader from the story of the past into the present, and urges them into the future, which Zapata states is in fact a past—the future steps have already been “written on the Boards of Ifá long before you were born.” He summons the orisha Elegba to guide the reader through their predestined future. Thus there is a sense of destiny, juxtaposed with individual agency that shapes the readers’ experience of historical memory.

While Zapata Olivella portrays the reading of his novel as an experiential journey that crosses several temporal barriers, Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* similarly engages an experiential encounter with the past in a more grieving, memorial sense. The novel tells the story of a former slave in Ohio who is haunted by the daughter she murdered in an effort to save her from the realities of slavery and racism. The daughter, Beloved, appears in the novel as a memory, a ghost, a feeling, and an encounter with the past that is both painful and unwilling to retreat into the distance of time. With and beyond *Beloved*, the novel narrates memories of the Middle Passage, slavery and freedom in the United States.

The crucial task of dealing with the collective past of slavery is imperative for Morrison. She explains the role of her book in historical memory: “There is no place you and I can go to think about or not think about, to summon the presence of, or recollect the absences of slaves...There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath....And because such a place doesn’t exist,...the book had to.”¹⁴ The book is thus an active memorial space, and historical memory

¹⁴ Quoted in Tessa Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 55. The quote is originally from a 1989 magazine interview with Morrison. Since then, Morrison was

shifts with our reading of it. The novel is where we can all encounter our collective past and walk through the pain, absences, and survival of those who were enslaved.

Changó chronologically offers a similar space for the history of slavery, and progresses into the twentieth century in ways that *Beloved* alone does not, but that is achieved when Morrison's larger body of work is considered together. Morrison referenced how her novels, viewed as one body, shift our experience of the past:

The author [Morrison] once said that though she could not change the future, she knew she could change the past. The way she does this is to approach the past through the personal lives of those whom the dominant culture has silenced, erased, or forgotten: an ugly black schoolgirl in *The Bluest Eye*, the servants in a millionaire's mansion in *Tar Baby*, a formerly enslaved mother in *Beloved*, women abused as children in *Love*.¹⁵

Morrison's statement presents an inversion in temporal logic. The past is usually considered unchangeable, while the future offers hope and possibility for change. Writing her novels was a means of changing the past by changing society's collective memory of the past. Though the novels of Morrison, Zapata Olivella, and Haley are all categorized as fiction, the resulting power in the historical novels is their very ability to shift memory, and shift the act of remembrance, to address diasporic experience, give voice to those who had been silenced, and reconcile the pain of slavery by acknowledging it.

The remembrance of pain and suffering is present throughout *Beloved*, *Changó* and *Roots*, yet all novels also reflect upon the processes of healing, strength and celebration of cultural expression. Alex Haley's *Roots* and *Changó* both take the reader to Africa before the enslaved peoples were forced on their journey to the Americas. In Africa there is great joy, solidarity, and communal support. The novel *Roots* narrates the journeys of Kunta Kinte, an

involved in the installation of a "memory bench" to slavery on Sullivan's Island near Charleston, South Carolina. The bench, and some of Morrison's thoughts on its importance are explained in Felicia Lee, "Bench of Memory at Slavery's Gateway" in *The New York Times*, July 28, 2008.

¹⁵ Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*, 14.

enslaved African, and his descendants as they struggled through the realities of racism in the United States. While in Africa, Kunta's familial structure and rituals rewrite memories that precede slavery. This was especially affirming in 1976 as a counter narrative to the theories of black cultural degradation that had been espoused by the 1965 Moynihan Report.¹⁶

Similarly, though published exactly thirty years later, Afro-Brazilian author Ana Maria Gonçalves, wrote her feminist historical novel *Um defeito de cor* (2006) [A Color Defect] to rewrite the history of slavery in the Americas. The novel narrates the multiple diasporic journeys of Kehinde (baptized Luiza Gama) who is enslaved in Benin and brought to Brazil in the nineteenth century. In Brazil she gives birth to a son conceived with a white lover who then sells their son into slavery while Kehinde is sent into exile for participating in a rebellion. Kehinde spends the rest of the novel searching for her son throughout the diaspora, living the multiple displacements involved in the process of slavery and freedom, the exiles from and returns to Africa, and the intergenerational bonds of mother and child. The novel won the Casa de las Américas prize in 2007.¹⁷

In a 2011 interview Gonçalves reflected on what she wanted to achieve with her novel. She explained, "Until now I only heard you. History was only told by you. Now sit down and listen to me because I have another version." She has a hypothetical conversation with the predominantly white, Western, and European historical perspective and makes room for the diasporic feminist voice to the future generations. She continued to describe her novel as "a mother's letter to her son, it is not only a question of orality, but it is also about the past as

¹⁶ The Moynihan Report was officially titled "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action" and was produced by Assistant Secretary of Labor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965. The report was an effort to persuade the US government that civil rights legislation alone could not produce racial equality, and that poverty and socio-economic struggles within black communities in the US were the result of cultural family structure and practices.

¹⁷ The Casa de las Américas prize is given by the Cuban publishing house of the same name that is discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. It is one of the most prestigious awards in the Americas, and is especially revered within Latin America.

inheritance, about History as inheritance.”¹⁸ The retelling of history from the Afro-centric perspective adds power to the narrative as the inheritance or heritage of the current and future generations.

Inhabiting the Past-Present and Afro-centricity

In order to rewrite historical memory of the diaspora in the Americas, Morrison, Zapata Olivella, Maloney, and Nascimento all relied on Afro-centric forms and epistemology to tell their stories. Afro-centric motifs or narrative tools may, but not necessarily, align with academic theories of Afrocentricity that have been espoused by scholars of Black Studies and African and African American studies since the 1960s.¹⁹ Afro-centricity, as understood in this chapter, is a process of moving away from Western, European frameworks to privileging Afro-centric ones such as disrupting narrative expectations of linear time, and physical/spiritual, life/death, and human/nature binaries. Zapata regularly references seemingly contradictory concepts throughout the novel such as “night-days,” “lightshadow,” “visionsound,” and the enslaved people aboard the ship, “have heard the smells of land.” Physical entities merge nature with human bodies: an enslaved baby is nourished from sucking a man’s “fingerrivers” aboard the slave ship.²⁰ Men are traditionally not associated with nourishing children with their physical bodies, yet this nourishment goes beyond the baby’s nutritional needs, the man gives the baby the life force from

¹⁸ The original Portuguese reads, “...Até agora só te ouvi. A história só foi contada por você. Agora senta e me escuta, porque eu tenho outra versão.’... É uma carta, né? É uma carta de mãe para filho, não é só a questão da oralidade, mas também do passado como herança, da História como herança.” Quoted in John Maddox, “Inspiração e viagens através da diáspora: Uma entrevista com Ana Maria Gonçalves” in *Afro-Hispanic Review*, vol. 30, no. 2 (Fall, 2011), 174.

¹⁹ See for example, Molefi K. Asanti, *Afrocentricity*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988 and *The Afrocentric Idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998 and Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 2nd Edition. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1993.

²⁰ Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, 57, 59, 66, and 58.

his own energetic body. Disrupting these expectations was much more than a matter of style, what was at stake was historical justice and a reclaiming of history. Morrison explained the urgency and necessity of her intentional Afro-centric writing, “I knew from the beginning that I could not, would not, reproduce the master’s voice and its assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father.”²¹

The two most common Afro-centric approaches within Morrison and Zapata Olivella’s writing are the disruption of linear time and the blurring of divisions between physical and spiritual beings and life and death. *Beloved*, of Morrison’s novel, is at once a ghost, memory, and set of haunting feelings of the murdered baby. *Beloved* is a being that inhabits both the past and the present at the same time, and her appearance to her mother and other characters demonstrates her ability to inhabit multiple spaces. She is a physical and spiritual being who has agency and power in the present and the past, she is the baby when she died, and she is the young woman the baby would have grown up to be. *Beloved* is reminiscent of the dead existing with the living and the Yoruban *abiku*, or wandering spirit of a young dead child.²²

Zapata Olivella similarly interweaves the living and the dead throughout *Changó*, and the spirits of the orishas regularly inhabit the physical bodies of the muntu, or man. An enslaved muntu recounts in *Changó*, “When we arrived at Cartagena de Indias, the dead clamber down the anchor chain to deposit their bones in the bay’s deep waters.”²³ The enslaved man understands the burying of the dead at sea as an event of their own agency. The depositing of their bones is also a temporary event as he believes that “In the new land Nagó will reunite the dead and the

²¹ Quoted in Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*, 14.

²² The connection of Morrison’s character *Beloved* to *abiku* is mentioned in Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*, 48.

²³ Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, 84.

living, along with the animals and the trees, the stones and the stars, all tightly joined by the fist of Odumare, who gives us life.”²⁴

Those who died in the Middle Passage as a result of the slave trade experience death in Afro-centric terms in the novel. Zapata Olivella explains that death carries different connotations and expectations in Bantú worldview. Bantú is the plural term for man, yet “transcends the connotation of man, since it included the living and the dead, as well as animals, plants, mineral, and things that serve these...all immersed in the present, past, and future universe.”²⁵ Within this Bantú context, the dead are referred to as *bazimu* that “encompass a kind of energy replete with intelligence and will.”²⁶ The *bazimu* are central characters throughout the novel who speak with the living and with each other, though “words are unnecessary when we *bazimu* speak. Thought is sufficient.”²⁷ Thus silence and sound is another binary disrupted within *Changó* by the *bazimu*, but also by the voices of the soldier’s horses which tell the narrative of the Haitian Revolution in the third part of the book. The horses narrate through remembrance, in both life and death and in a simultaneous *past-present*, of the forces that led to the success of the Haitian Revolution. Animal, man, spirit, and past and present all merge within the novel to force the reader out of what Morrison called “assumptions of the all-knowing law of the white father” and into the *past-present* of the diasporic imagination.

Linear time is likewise disrupted in the 1980s poetry of Afro-Panamanian, Gerardo Maloney. His poetry, published in the collection *Juega Vivo*, is an exercise in inhabiting the *past-present* as he merges history with the present moment in which the reader encounters his poems. His poem “Belleza” written in Panama City, Panama in 1984 is a celebration of the beauty of

²⁴ Odumare is the “Supreme Omnipotent God” who is “never invoked or represented, for he is always present.” See Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, 84, 458.

²⁵ Bantú in this context should not be confused with the language of Palenque de San Basilio of the same name.

²⁶ Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, 449.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Afro-Panamanian women that crosses temporal boundaries. Maloney writes, “Black woman.../Radiant you shone/fighting for your freedom in the *palenques*/laboring from sun to sun on the plantations/recreating in the songs and dances/your African heritage.”²⁸ The women of 1984 who Maloney praises are addressed as the women who fled into the *palenques* [maroon communities], who worked enslaved on plantations, and who have recreated their African heritage across an undefined period of time. Maloney treats these women of the past as one woman, all embodied in the present. The past is carried into the present and exists, from Maloney’s perspective, in the Afro-Panamanian women who are his contemporaries.

Maloney also uses the *past-present* by linking the Afro-Panamanian woman (in a collective sense) to other African descendants of the Americas that have lived throughout the twentieth century. In this way Maloney participates in the diasporic imagination saying that the Afro-Panamanian woman is beautiful because she has given her testimony of grandeur to “Marcus Garvey y Luther King/a Malcolm X y a Bob Marley/a Angela Davis...”²⁹ Maloney’s naming of the Caribbean and US leaders connects the Afro-Panamanian woman to civil rights and social justice struggles alongside African heritage.

The Presence and Power of the Orishas/Orixas

An important element of the Afro-centric African diasporic imagination is the presence of the orishas as African heritage, but also as deities that inform the past-present moment. Maloney celebrates Yemayá (Yemaja), the maternal oricha of the sea, waters, and fertility, in his poem

²⁸ The original Spanish reads, “Negra.../Radiante luciste/combatiendo tu libertad en los palenques,/laborando de sol a sol en las plantaciones/recreando en los cantos y las danzas/tu herencia africana.” in “Belleza” in Gerardo Maloney, *Juega Vivo*. [1984] College Park: Original World Press, 2008, 85-86.

²⁹ “Belleza” in Maloney, *Juega Vivo*, 85-86.

titled “Yemayá”.³⁰ The orishas are also an essential part of Zapata Olivella’s *Changó*, and consistently intervene throughout the novel to alter outcomes of the African descendants in their efforts to fight against racism and the abuses of slavery. The very first chapter titled “Land of Ancestors, The Orichas, Let the Kora Sing” is a twenty-nine page song/poem that narrates the birth of the orishas and tells the tale of Changó’s exile from his homeland because of his warring excesses and abuse of power.³¹ Zapata Olivella builds on the mythical stories of Changó to claim that he journeyed to the Americas to find the White Wolf [Euro-American evils of slavery and racism] and seek vengeance. The poem/song powerfully recounts Changó’s transformative journey, directly addressing his “Children-Astros,” or African descendants in the Americas:

And exploding in resonant eruption,
Whose echoes are still heard in the thunder,
He [Changó] transformed himself into the Father-Fire-Sun.
 And spread across timeless space,
Illuminating infinite corners,
Shine his Children-Astros,
Twinkle his Sister-Stars!³²

Zapata Olivella expresses the thunderous power of Changó right at the beginning of the book, and links his power to his descendants in the Americas, again disrupting the past, present, and future of Euro-centric linear time. The orisha of Changó continuously appears as the greatest protagonist through the rest of the epic.

In the following chapters during the journey of the Middle Passage on a Portuguese slave ship, the enslaved men and women consistently resist the enslavers with the help of the orishas. They understand the thunder and lightning storms to be a sign that Changó accompanies them on

³⁰ “Yemayá” in Maloney, *Juega Vivo*, 83-84.

³¹ For additional information about the tales of Changó in the Americas and analysis of Zapata Olivella’s novel see, Timothy Cox, *Postmodern Tales of Slavery in the Americas: From Alejo Carpentier to Charles Johnson*. New York: Routledge, 2013, 88-89.

³² Zapata Olivella, *Changó*, 19.

their journey while the Portuguese captain and crew believe that God is punishing them with bad weather. The Portuguese also believe that a ghost on board terrorizes them at night, when the enslaved people understand the spirits to be orishas fighting against the Portuguese. The symbol of Elegba as two snakes eating each other's tails continuously appears throughout all chapters to the main characters, confirming that their path is part of their destiny guided by the orisha. Abdias Nascimento's paintings also portray symbols of the orishas and their guidance for African descendants. Just as the act of reading *Changó* or Maloney's poetry brings the reader into the past-present moment, so Nascimento's paintings bring the viewer into the *past-present*. Linear, chronological time is disrupted, and the past is contemporaneous with the present, viewing moment.

Abdias Nascimento began exhibiting his paintings while in exile from Brazil in the late 1960s to the 1980s. Nascimento painted on a wide variety of Afro-Brazilian subjects, but his paintings of the orixás are of particular relevance to this study. The orixá paintings have been displayed in many exhibitions throughout the US and Brazil including, just to name a few: the Harlem Art Gallery, New York, and Yale University (1969), Harvard University (1972), the Langston Hughes Center, Buffalo, New York (1973), Howard University (1975), the Inner City Cultural Center, Los Angeles (1975), United Nations Headquarters, New York (1979), El Taller Boricua and Caribbean Cultural Center, New York (1980), Ministry of Culture in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (1982, 1988), Brazilian National Congress, Brasilia (1997), Debret Gallery, Paris (1998) and the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro (2004). His paintings are part of the Permanent Collections of the Museum of African and African-American Arts and Antiquities, Buffalo, New

York, and Columbia University.³³ The paintings' chronological and geographic reach is expansive and demonstrative of his diasporic approach to his art. Nascimento stated of his paintings:

The orixás portrayed in these canvases are the outcome of my own contemplations and adventures of spirit; they are more a vital imperative than an artistic or academic exercise. I am not interested in merely aesthetic forms, the distribution of volumes in spaces, or the relative tone of colors. What is important to me are the spiritual and cultural vicissitudes of Africans and African Brazilians: the history and deities of the religion my ancestors brought with them into exile.

My orixás are living and vivifying beings that inhabit Africa, Brazil and all the Americas, right now. They are part of our daily secular life, a legacy of history and the ancestry.³⁴

Nascimento named some of the orixá paintings after living people, as he believed that the orixás “defend our heroes and martyrs and are committed to our people’s search for identity, freedom, and dignity.”³⁵ His comments reveal the *past-present* in his paintings: the orixás are the legacy and inheritance of the diaspora, and instrumental in the diasporic imagination of the Americas. As the viewer experiences the paintings, the symbols and powers of the orixás are seen, felt, and remembered. The viewing pulls the reader into the diasporic space created by Nascimento.

³³ Amy H. Winter, et al., eds., “Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014,” the exhibition catalogue for Nascimento’s work at the Godwin Ternbach Museum, Queens College, City University of New York, 94-95.

³⁴ Abdias Nascimento, “My Painting and the Candomblé” in Amy H. Winter, et al., eds., “Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014,” the exhibition catalogue for Nascimento’s work at the Godwin Ternbach Museum, Queens College, City University of New York, 20.

³⁵ Nascimento, “My Painting and the Candomblé,” 20.

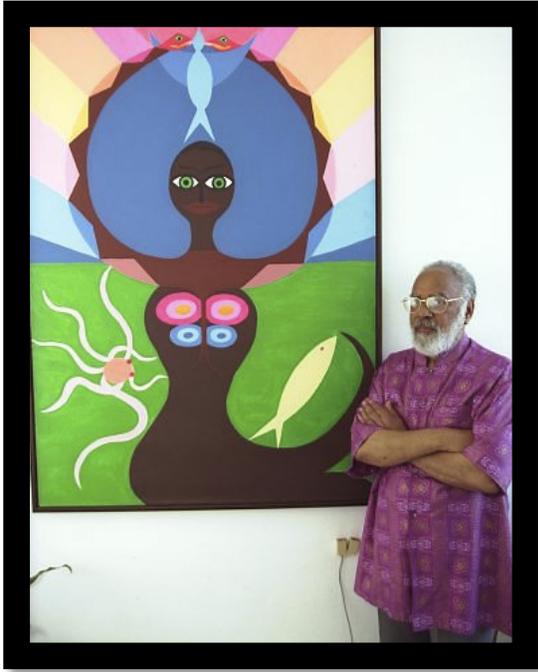


Figure 10. Abdias Nascimento with his painting, *Theme for Léa Garcia- Oxunmaré*, photograph by Jorge Willian, 2002 in “Morre Abdias do Nascimento, aos 97 anos” in *O Globo*, 24 May 2011.

A clear example of orixá art is Nascimento’s painting dedicated to Léa Garcia, the Afro-Brazilian actress activist and a former spouse of Abdias, and Oxunmaré (see Figure 10).³⁶ Oxunmaré, also called Oxumaré or Oshunmare (Spanish), is a mixed female and male orisha who links heaven and earth and presides over the weather. Tuesday is the day dedicated to Oxunmaré in Candomblé. The painting shows the presence of the sky and land with the orisha embodying both spaces. The “land” section is green, but contains a fish and octopus, merging sea and land as one earthen entity. A bird is visible in the sky portion of the painting, which consists of a large rainbow, one of the most prominent symbols of Oshunmaré. The serpent encircling his/her head also symbolizes this orisha. Manuel Zapata Olivella used repeatedly referenced

³⁶ The photograph in Figure 10 is available at: <http://extra.globo.com/noticias/brasil/morre-abdias-do-nascimento-aos-97-anos-1877041.html> (accessed June 29, 2016).

serpents in *Changó* as a simultaneously spiritual physical beings inhabited by the orishas and ancestors to move through the inhibited spaces controlled by the slave traders.

Another clearly diasporic painting that was created in 1988 was *Padê de Exu* by Nascimento.³⁷ The Candomblé liturgical weeks, and all subsequent ceremonies, begin with Exu, the Yoruba trickster god who personifies contradictions and the principles of good and evil.³⁸ This balance can be seen in the two complimentary sides of the orisha's face that is evenly divided down the middle. Exu is the master of crossways and the paths of universe, symbolized in the crossing lines below and above the orisha's head in the painting. His colors are red and black, also present in the painting, and he personifies dialectics within human existence, impressions created through the patterns around the deity in the painting. Exu also carries *axé*, the cosmic energy and life force of all beings.³⁹ In a ritual poem/song for Exu, Nascimento references *axé* and the healing benefits of Exu in his life:

I implore you Exu
to plant in my mouth
your verbal axé
restoring to me the language
that was mine
and was stolen from me
blow Exu your breath
to the bottom of my throat

...

Exu

³⁷ An image of the painting is included in Amy H. Winter, et al., eds., "Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014," the exhibition catalogue for Nascimento's work at the Godwin Ternbach Museum, Queens College, City University of New York and is digitally available at: http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/godwin_ternbach/godternb_exhibitions/Nascimento_catalogue.pdf (accessed on June 29, 2016).

³⁸ Exú is also called Eshu in English and Echu in Spanish. For more information on Eshu in the US context see Robert Farris Thompson. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House, 1983.

³⁹ As explained in Winter, "Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014," 100-103.

you are the master of our people's freedomways
 you know who has brandished your redhot irons
 against injustice and opprobrium

...

you know that in every African heart
 pulsates a kilombo
 in every shanty
 another Palmares crackles
 Xangô's fire
 lights up our struggle
 yesterday and today...⁴⁰

Nascimento's requests to Exu echo the common bonds that he felt with African descendants throughout the Americas as he discusses the orisha as "the master of our people's freedomways" and the presence of a rebellious spirit "in every African heart." Emphasizing shared experience within the realm of the orishas, Nascimento often ended his letters to Manuel Zapata Olivella with the exclamation "*axé!*," wishing him fortifying life force and energy.

While Zapata Olivella did not use the *axé* ending to his letters, he did reference Exu in his letters to Nascimento and Maloney. Zapata Olivella began a letter to both men "Invoking the protective blessing of Echú..." to bring them, and their families, health.⁴¹ In other letters Zapata Olivella greeted Nascimento stating, "Exu is attentive and that gives me confidence" and "May you and your loved ones be protected by Exu!"⁴² Zapata Olivella ended a letter to Nascimento stating, "With the protection of Echu in our favor."⁴³

These small greetings and endings, all referencing the oricha Exu or *axé*, highlight the ways in which Zapata Olivella's and Nascimento's letters to their diasporic ekobio were more

⁴⁰ Abdias Nascimento, "Padê for Freedomfighter Exu" in Winter, "Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014," 26.

⁴¹ The original Spanish reads, "Invocando la protectora bendición de Echú..." in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias do Nascimento and Gerardo Maloney, 10 April 1989, MZO Papers.

⁴² The original Spanish reads, "Exú está pendiente, y eso me da plena confianza" and "¡Seas protegido de Exu, con todos los tuyos..!" in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias do Nascimento, 20 May 1991 and 4 January 1992, MZO Papers. In some letters Zapata Olivella refers to Eshu with the Spanish spelling of "Echu", and at times with the Portuguese spelling "Exu."

⁴³ The original Spanish reads, "Con la protección de Echú a nuestro favor" in Manuel Zapata Olivella to Abdias do Nascimento, 12 March 1991, MZO Papers.

than mere communication: they carried with them blessings, invocations, and spiritually unifying experiences. They were indicative of the shared diasporic brotherhood between Zapata Olivella, Nascimento and Maloney, and signal the influence and significance of the orichas in their daily lives. Zapata Olivella gained confidence, protections, and support from Exu, and in the last salutation, he includes the communal “in our favor” to emphasize their shared experiences.

Another common orisha that was familiar to Zapata Olivella, Nascimento and very likely their colleagues, is Oxum (Oshun in Spanish). She is the orisha of love, creativity and aesthetics. She is a wife of Xangô (Changó) and is the patroness of fertility and children. She presides over lakes and rivers, symbolizes the female principle and takes the form of woman fish and bird woman.⁴⁴ Nascimento’s painting of Oxum, *Oxum in Ecstasy*, portrays both the orisha and the Candomblé practice of being possessed or mounted by the orisha.⁴⁵ Changó’s axe is in the center of the painting behind her neck. She is wearing the crown often associated with Changó and over her face is the veil identical to that worn by practitioners of Candomblé. The green half circle around her head is indicative of the ceremonial circular fan, usually made of bronze or tin, used by Oxum. The alternating blue and yellow triangles may represent Oxum’s inhabitation of the waters and the sky. Her femininity is signaled in the bright stars located at her breast.

Nascimento’s orisha paintings, created in the US and Brazil and exhibited in those two countries are diasporic in content, exhibition and also in their creation. The ideas and symbols portrayed on the canvasses were the results of relationships, exchanges, and the “adventures of

⁴⁴ As described in Winter, “Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014,” 103. An image of the painting is featured in Winter’s catalogue.

⁴⁵ Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion that descends from Yoruban Ifá. It is popularly considered a syncretized religion with Catholicism. Both practitioners and non-practitioners alternatively refer to the practice as a “cult.” I refer to it as a “religion” to emphasize the legitimacy of its belief systems in contrast to the specific historical attempts, some led by the Roman Catholic Church, to delegitimize Candomblé and associate it with “dark magic” or wizardry. Similar discourses of magic have been associated with US and Haitian Voodoo/Voudou/Vodun, Cuban Santería, and certain Afro-Colombian spiritual and medicinal practices. The anthropological work of Nina S. de Friedemann, for example, shed much light on the cultural bases of the Colombian practices, pulling the national discourse away from suspicion and toward acceptance and appreciation.

spirit” that Nascimento experienced as part of the African diasporic reality he personally lived. The past-present, and Afro-centric forms used in his paintings, and in the writings of Morrison, Zapata Olivella, and Maloney, were communally experienced through the activists/artists historical encounters and contemplations, and within their relationships to each other.

Dr. Molefi Kete Asante, founder of the theory of Afrocentricity and a friend and colleague of Nascimento, remembered the mutual influence the two men had on each other’s developing theories at this critical moment around the 1970s to 1990s,

I met Nascimento in the early 1970s but I did not publish the first Afrocentric book, *Afrocentricity*, until 1980. This means that the numerous conversations, and rap sessions of African Brazilian and African American history, impacted my work and Nascimento’s. I came out with the theory of Afrocentricity and he was developing Kilombismo [*quilombismo*]. This is a historical moment that must be recorded, because here we were sitting in Buffalo, New York, two Africans of the Americas, he the elder and I the younger, debating the histories of our people...Nascimento and I sought insight from our own particular reference points for a new sense of agency.⁴⁶

Asante traces elements of the diasporic imagination in the above quote, stating that he and Nascimento were “two Africans of the Americas...debating the histories of our people.” The possessive pronoun “our” signals the shared, communal exchange of ideas while Asante marks the differences between the two men by placing the exchange within the context of “our own particular reference points for a new sense of agency.” Zapata Olivella also knew Asante personally, and wrote to him in May of 1990 asking for an article that Zapata Olivella wanted to publish in anticipation of the IV Congress of Black Culture in the Americas set to take place in 1991 or 1992 at that time. Zapata Olivella not only valued Asante as a fellow intellectual, but also as a brother who would continue “empujando la carreta de nuestras luchas y aspiraciones”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Molefi K. Asante, “Celebrating the Remarkable Genius of Abdias Nascimento” in Winter, “Abdias Nascimento: Artist, Activist, Author, April 28-June 21, 2014,” 36.

⁴⁷ Manuel Zapata Olivella to Molefi Kete Asante, 8 May 1990, MZO Papers.

[pushing the cart of our struggles and aspirations]. Again, Zapata Olivella uses the collective possessive pronoun “our” to indicate shared goals and struggles.

Ancestral Connections and Home in the Americas

Many of Nascimento’s paintings were dedicated to orishas, and also to ancestors who were heroes of the diaspora to Nascimento. Thus the orisha and ancestral power is often merged into one form that carries significance and inspiration for the present. Similarly, ancestral connections are an imperative aspect of the diasporic imagination of the Americas and of Zapata Olivella’s *Changó* on two levels: the reader encounters their own hemispheric ancestors who are the main characters of the novel, and the characters within the novel interact with their ancestors.

As discussed earlier, the line between living and dead is erased in the novel, and both inhabit the same space and time, sharing a common energy field, ancestry, and history that inform who they are and how they historically act. Ancestors, and their presence in quotidian life is an essential element of traditional West African culture. Ancestors are considered living actors of the present, thus the rupture between Africa and the Americas, and the physical separation from the African ancestors was considered especially painful during the Middle Passage. Additionally, the loss of historical memory that linked descendants of enslaved peoples to their ancestor’s land and tribal homes in Africa further exacerbated that spiritual and physical separation. Zapata Olivella, Maloney, Haley, and Morrison all address the importance of ancestral connections to the rewriting of diasporic history and to the empowerment of current generations.

A crucial part of reconnecting with the ancestors is the inheritance of the knowledge of the ancestors and the contribution of that knowledge to understanding the past and the present. African American activist jazz poet, Jayne Cortez (1934-2012) remembered vividly when she saw Afro-Cuban percussionist Chano Pozo perform with with Dizzy Gillespie at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles, in 1948. Decades later, she wrote about the importance of Chano Pozo as ancestor: he could revisit in his death all of the diasporic places that held meaning for Cortez and other African descendants. She wrote, “I am in the presence of ancestor Chano Pozo” and continues:

Chano connector of two worlds
 You go and celebrate again with
 the compañeros in Santiago
 and tell us about it
 You go to the spirit house of Antonio Maceo
 and tell us about it
 You go to Angola
 and tell us about it
 You go to Calabar
 and tell us about it/
 You go see the slave castles
 you go see the massacres
 you go see the afflictions
 you go see the battlefields
 you go see the warriors
 you go as a healer
 you go conjurate
 you go mediate
 you go to the cemetery of drums
 return and tell us about it...⁴⁸

For Cortez, Pozo, as an ancestor, can access the further world of the ancestors and the past and “tell us about it.” In the same sense, *Beloved* of Morrison’s novel, can tell her relatives what death, and the Middle Passage is like, which she states is a great darkness.⁴⁹ In *Changó*, the ancestors are the main characters of each chapter. They tell their stories to the reader in an effort

⁴⁸ Jayne Cortez, *Jazz Fan Looks Back*. Brooklyn: Hanging Loose Press, 2002, 33.

⁴⁹ Roynon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*, 53.

to link those from the past to the present and create diasporic community. In line with Bantú perspective, the ancestors are at times humans, and other times animals, or natural elements such as rocks, water, stars, the sun and the moon. They protect and fight for their descendants, mitigating the effects of racism and the legacy of slavery.

In the final section of *Changó*, the fighting spirit of the ancestors is given special emphasis as support and impetus for current generations to continue the social justice fight. The ancestors Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. guide Agne Brown (Angela Davis) and the warrior orisha Changó's power is present in their words and spirits. As linear time is dismantled in the novel, the assassination of Malcolm X is at once a past, present and future action with the words "Malcolm, today you will be assassinated!" are repeated in several places in the final chapter. As a character, and an ancestor, Malcolm's assassination is both a rallying point for strength and a solemn, unjust event. In the middle of the clashing race wars in the US discussed in the novel, the ancestor Kanuri "Mai" appears to Agne Brown, "surrounded by writers, musicians, and artists. 'Satchmo,' Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright..." The ancestors continue to visit Agne Brown [Angela Davis], "The Ancestor Ngafúa holds my head between his hands. I hear his song intoned by the clear and ethereal voices of Burghardt Dubois and John Brown...Sitting at my feet are the ekobios who preached peace against the war." Among these ekobios are "Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King. Their weeping reopens my wounds." Ancestors from other areas of the Americas are present to Agne, including Touissant L'Ouverture from Haiti, and "Benkos Biojo's Wolof call invoking Zarabanda, the Oricha of war, from the walls of Cartagena de Indias. There, now, Gunga Zumbi relates to me the long resistance of the runaway slaves in the Kilombo of Palmares."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, 444.

As the ancestors visit Agne Brown, she pulls from them knowledge and support as geographical, linguistic, and temporal differences are rendered irrelevant to the larger diasporic commonalities. Zapata Olivella intentionally privileged common purpose above differences, though the diasporic multiplicities of experience were an important part of engaging with ancestral connections for other activists and artists.

Engaging with the ancestors involved both a spiritual and geographic dislocation for the activists and artists discussed in this chapter and dissertation. Quite often ancestral connections implied a mental or spiritual return to Africa, but one that was always remade and understood within the context of the Americas. Multiple homelands resulted, to match the multiple displacements of the diaspora, and the meanings of “homeland” were diverse and varied depending upon the individual local and national context, as well as the time period.

By the 1980s, the diasporic imagination of the Americas of Zapata and his colleagues included an embracing of the American continent as black, in ways that involved indigenous, European and Asian ancestry. *Changó* specifically references the “tri-ethnicity” of African, indigenous and European roots of the Americas, while Maloney’s poetry seeks to reconcile the reality of multiple homelands within the Americas itself. In his poem, “Aunt May”, written in Panama in 1979, Maloney gives the moving account of a West Indian aunt who comes to painful terms with the fact that she and her relatives have made Panama a new, and future home:

Every night,
while you all
got together in dinners and meetings
projects and going away parties,
Aunt May... prayed
to return one day
to the place from where she had come.

Every day,
while you all

signed checks,
 verified accounts,
 checked keys
 and the saying of one hundred per hour,
 Aunt May...passed the time
 looking to approach... more and more
 the path of which she dreamt.

Every year,
 when the last day arrived
 and you all were full of joy
 the triumphs and conquering

and one hundred doves flew toward the promised land,
 Aunt May...would cry in silence
 her land each time further away.
 "Now me know
 we came fi stay."⁵¹

Maloney brings the reader into the sadness and hopelessness felt by Aunt May as she waits for the day when she can return to the West Indies, her ancestors' first diasporic home after Africa. In the context of the second location (Panama), the West Indies are understood as the original home, and Africa is not mentioned as a possible relocation site. Perhaps a full embracing of the Afrocentric disruption of Western concepts of time and space, as well as the distinctions between physical/spiritual and human/nature, created the Americas as intricately linked to Africa without having to physically return to the African continent.

Zapata Olivella, Haley, Nascimento and many others visited Africa, while others, such as WEB DuBois, and Stokely Carmichael, permanently resettled there. The choice to return, or stay in the Americas, is another aspect of the diasporic conversations that attached different meanings

⁵¹ The original Spanish reads, Todas las noches,/mientras que ustedes/se recogieron en cenas y en reuniones/proyectos y despedidas,/Aunt May... rezó/regresar algún día al lugar de donde había venido./Todos los días,/mientras ustedes/firmaron cheques,/verificaron cuentas,/comprobaron claves,/y la dicha de cien por hora,/Aunt May... recorrió el tiempo/buscando acercarse... más y más/al soñado camino./Todos los años,/cuando se llegaba al último día/y se registraban en alegría/los triunfos y conquistas/y volaban cien palomas hacia la tierra prometida,/Aunt May... lloraba en silencio/su tierra cada vez más lejana./"Now me know/we came fi stay." "Aunt May" in Maloney, *Juega Vivo*, 26-27.

to both continents for African descendants. The activists and artists most discussed in this dissertation reframed their understanding of diasporic experience to specifically align with the Americas, and sought out friendships and networks of support that contributed to that vision. As Toni Morrison stated in the quote that opens this chapter, she decided to write her own “house” that was realized in her novels and that became her articulation of home, and place of belonging. *Changó* is similarly a homecoming: a novel in which the diasporic imagination can flourish, be supported, and bring all peoples of the Americas together to create a new space that reconciles the continent’s racial divides and disconnects in a common history.

Conclusion

As *Changó* stepped onto the world literary stage it joined a growing body of literature and art that spoke to diasporic experience through specific motifs and strategies that included: a rewriting of diasporic and hemispheric historical memory; a centering of Afro-centric perspectives, forms, and worldview; an acknowledgement of the importance of ancestral connections; and a conscious process of engaging ideas around displacement, homeland, and the possibility of return to Africa. These themes were not new; they were actively discussed throughout the twentieth century, and many of them had been discussed from the slavery era to the present. Yet when analyzed together, *Changó*, Alex Haley’s *Roots*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, Gerardo Maloney’s *Juega Vivo* and the paintings of Abdias do Nascimento show a clearly intentional articulation of the diasporic imagination that is in active conversation with transnational networks that developed throughout the twentieth century. Manuel Zapata Olivella was generally at the center of the networks described in this dissertation, yet many more were

actively contributing to the ideas and cultural exchange that informed the ever-changing African diasporic imagination of the Americas.

Unfortunately, Zapata Olivella's role in this exchange, as powerful and influential as it was, has yet to be acknowledged fully by the general public in any country in the Americas. Zapata Olivella was a prize-winning author, but he never received a Pulitzer or Nobel Prize as did his friend and compatriot Gabriel García Márquez. Many have asked why this is, and several academics closest to Zapata Olivella and his work posit that implicit racism in American societies and the academy have restricted the full appreciation and celebration of Manuel Zapata Olivella. Though progressing at a slower pace than one might expect, Zapata Olivella has gained increasing mention within US literary studies since the 1970s. A growing academic circle in the US has contributed to scholarship on *Changó* with the greatest contributions coming from the *Afro-Hispanic Review*, a tri-lingual literary journal based at Vanderbilt University that has published articles on Zapata Olivella and his works for over a decade. In recognition of Zapata Olivella's influence and important life work, Vanderbilt acquired the Manuel Zapata Olivella Papers in 2008. Processing and cataloguing the collection has been ongoing.

In 2010, Jonathan Tittler completed the fifteen-year task of translating *Changó* into English. He reflects on the long, arduous process in the Acknowledgements of the novel:

My goal...became to see *Changó* published during his [Zapata Olivella's] lifetime. This I thought was a feasible goal, since I had already succeeded in having not only *Chambacú* published, but two other novels as well. But *Changó* was not like any of those other novels. It was strange to the Western eye (immersing its reader in an alien, Afro-centric cosmos), and it ranged over five centuries and spanned three continents (Africa, South America [including the Caribbean], and North America). Its protagonist, announced in its title, is a Yoruban god of thunder, war, and sex. And it is long, very long. How many times did I receive from publishers letters that ran along the lines of 'an inspirational work, admirably translated, but unfortunately too costly for us to accept'? In an age of short blogs and even shorter tweets, it looked as though there was no place for a colossus

like *Changó*. On November 19, 2004, Manuel entered eternity. The goal then became to have the novel published before *I* died.⁵² [emphasis original]

Fortunately Jonathan Tittler completed the impressive task of bringing *Changó* to the English-speaking public. As Tittler indicates, the barriers of length and “strange” and “alien” references have likely played a significant role in the novel’s lack of due attention. With time, perhaps this will change.

In Colombia, Zapata Olivella remains generally unknown outside of Cartagena. Many in Bogotá recognize the name of the theater named for his sister, Delia Zapata Olivella. Manuel does not, for instance, hold a place in the popular memory as Martin Luther King, Jr. or Malcolm X do in the US. The reasons for this are deeply entwined with the historical understandings of race in Colombia, as this dissertation has sought to explicate and Zapata Olivella himself fought to expose. Yet it is still striking considering his work was well documented and received by the Colombian press and literary critics: articles on his books and career were published in the largest Colombian newspapers consistently throughout his adult life. *El Tiempo*, Colombia’s most widely read newspaper published a cartoon that even featured a reference to one of his least famous novels, *¿Quién dió el fusil a Oswald?* (1967). So the questions remain: how many people shared Zapata Olivella’s *Changó*, and how many discussed the novel? What impact did it have in the local communities of Bogotá, the Caribbean coast and the Pacific coast? These questions will be better addressed as his personal papers emerge fully processed, and more research is conducted throughout the various regions of Colombia. Yet, we can see Zapata Olivella’s impact by following the gravitational signature of the diasporic imagination of the Americas – the making and sharing of which he was so instrumental.

⁵² Zapata Olivella, *Changó, the Biggest Badass*, x.

CONCLUSION

In the twenty years that it took Manuel Zapata Olivella to write his greatest work, *Changó, el gran putas*, he lived through many changes and personal and professional developments. As Zapata Olivella wrote and revised his novel, he participated in, contributed to and was aware of continued cultural and intellectual exchange throughout the Americas that undoubtedly had an impact on his thinking, cultural production, and the formation of the African diasporic imagination of the Americas. These ideas of racial and cultural justice were expressed in changing forms in music and dance, the US civil rights movement, and the Black Power Movement. The novel was published right after the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas took place in Colombia, Panama, and Brazil respectively. The powerful and inspirational Pan-American networks that arose in those congresses directly contributed to the rise of the *movimiento negro unificado* [Unified Black Movement] and *quilombismo* of Brazil, the *movimiento de negritudes* [Black Movement] and *cimarronismo* of Colombia, and the Afro-Panamanian movement.

Changó came to being within all of these developments. It was a cultural reflection of and catalyst for increased black consciousness in the Americas of an African diasporic identity that was shaped by transnational networks of artists and activists that involved Zapata Olivella and his colleagues throughout his adult life. Others came in and out of these networks in different times and spaces: the poets Jorge Artel (Colombia), Nicolás Guillén (Cuba), and Langston Hughes (US); the jazz musicians Dizzy Gillespie (US), Duke Ellington (US), Chano Pozo (Cuba) and anthropological dancers Katherine Dunham (US) and Delia Zapata Olivella (Colombia). In the 1960s and 1970s the Black Arts Movement founders and jazz critics LeRoi

Jones/Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal engaged in hemispheric dialogues of blackness. Baraka was involved in Afro-Cuban networks and articulated a revolutionary theater project that was likely in conversation with Manuel Zapata Olivella's theater work in Colombia. Neal and Zapata Olivella both attended the First Congress of Black Culture in the Americas in 1977 in Cali.

Sadly, Zapata Olivella did not live to see the full extent of the appreciation of his work; most notably the widely recognized influence of the Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas and *Changó, el gran putas*. That process is ongoing. The twenty first century has been a time of greater recognition than the twentieth. In March of 2004 Zapata Olivella was awarded the Colombian National Prize for Literature, one of many national prizes and international prizes that honored his work. Several conferences were held in his honor in Colombia posthumously.

On November 19, 2004 Zapata Olivella left this world and entered that of the bazimu.¹ His final wish was to return to the water. He requested that his ashes be placed in the Sinú River on the Colombian Caribbean coast so that he could be connected through the currents to his ancestors in Africa.² Zapata Olivella's ekobio, Abdias Nascimento passed away in the same month of November seven years later in 2011. He also wished to join the ancestors. Nascimento's ashes were buried, according to his wishes, on the site of the Palmares quilombo in Alagoas, Brazil. The cremated remains of their ekobio one generation older, Langston Hughes, are interred in a vessel beneath the cosmogram and peace memorial located in the lobby of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem (see Image 22). The words "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," from Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" are

¹ Bazimu is the West African term used in *Changó* for the deceased, though they cross the binary division of life and death. They have consciousness and can assert their will in the realm of the living.

² According to the newspaper article by Roberto Llanos Rodado, "El Cadáver de Zapata Olivella Le Quedó Grande a Lórica" in *El Tiempo*, 29 November 2004.

embedded into a fish shape at the center of the cosmogram. Water and the ancestors bring these three ekobio together within the diasporic imagination after their lives, as it did during them.

As the burial sites of Lorica, Colombia; Alagoas, Brazil; and Harlem, US indicate, the gravitational signature of the diasporic imagination can be identified in several contemporary spaces. One of them is in the process of memorializing the work of Manuel Zapata Olivella. Zapata Olivella's personal papers and library were held by his daughter Edelma, and subsequently sold to Vanderbilt University to be preserved and made accessible for public use. The collection has unfortunately been the center of debates over its commoditization and value. At question is who determines where his personal papers should be kept, how much they are worth, and thus how Zapata Olivella will be remembered in the future. Most of the collection (three quarters of it) arrived in Nashville; the Bogotá hotel in which Zapata Olivella was living at the time of his passing sequestered one quarter of the collection for outstanding payment that was allegedly due.³

Several activists and scholars who are close to this story have speculated that the lack of government intervention in the matter despite academic pressure from both inside and outside of Colombia is due to implicit racism that has inhibited Zapata Olivella from being fully appreciated and his work valued as a cultural resource to the full extent that it merits.⁴ The uncertainty surrounding Zapata Olivella's papers illustrate what Caribbean scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot argued about the entry of silences in multiple stages of the "process of historical production." The second stage, the "moment of fact assembly (the making of archives)" creates a compounding effect of silences on those institutionalized in the later stage, "the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history*). The story to tell Zapata Olivella's story thus

³ Pablo F. Gómez, "La colección Manuel Zapata Olivella" in *Revista de Estudios Colombianos*, 37-38, 2011: 117-118.

⁴ This opinion is also implied in Gómez, "La colección Manuel Zapata Olivella," 117-118.

continues, not merely as an attempt to retrieve a completed record but also as part of the ongoing work to unravel the “bundle of silences” contained in all historical narratives.⁵ Such academic and public battles over whose stories and legacies are memorialized, and how they are remembered are closely tied to the political economy, access to resources, and civil justice for which Zapata Olivella, and those within his network of friends and colleagues, dedicated their lives. The fulfillment of such justice was an aspect of the dreams and hopes expressed within the diasporic imagination.

In the past few years another contemporary space in which the gravitational signature of the diasporic imagination of the Americas is revealed is the Black Lives Matter Movement. The movement began in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted in the murder case of African-American adolescent, Trayvon Martin and gained momentum following several subsequent police brutality and racism cases through 2015. Unlike previous movements discussed in this dissertation, this most recent articulation of black liberation efforts was started by the Twitter social media hashtag **#BlackLivesMatter**. The hashtag itself relates to an imagination: it is a non-geographic location, beyond the borders of the nation, where conversations take place in the virtual realm, with real consequences. The hashtag invites all voices, all opinions to participate, and creates its own space for exchanging ideas.

Expanding beyond racism in police brutality in the US, many in the Black Lives Matter movement have shifted the dialogue to emphasize the importance of embracing the full black self

⁵ Trouillot writes that there are four crucial moments when silences enter historical production: “the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).” He argues that the process of disentangling sources and silences in each historical narrative requires a recognition that those in the present live “hand in hand with the continuous creation of the past... they do not succeed such a past: they are its contemporaries.” Trouillot’s understanding shares in the past-present worldview of the African diasporic imagination of the Americas, and underscores how the work to safeguard Zapata Olivella’s legacy is continuous with the work of his life. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997, 26, 16.

and black community in the US. The movement has implications throughout the Americas, it has pushed the conversation of social justice beyond equal civil rights, black representation in the civic and private sectors, eradicating poverty, and discriminatory housing and educational practices to engage a much wider, all-encompassing discussion of the whole human being and its celebration within the American community. In February of 2016, Black Lives Matter leader Robert Ross posed the pivotal interventions of the movement: “Black Lives Matter is a case study about...narrative change and framing. If black lives matter, then what does it mean for schools? If black lives matter, what does it mean for police reform?... for economic development and jobs? ... It challenges us to rethink our frames.”⁶

Ross’ statement emphasizes that we are currently challenging the very frames of thought in which we placed civil rights and civic engagement, a task that Zapata Olivella and his colleagues did throughout the twentieth century. It is the task of our generation to answer this call and honor the decades of continuous work before us with a much more holistic approach to valuing, in real terms, all peoples of the Americas. This involves responding to the call of Zapata Olivella to revisit our common history and engage with it. To heed what Khalil Gibran Muhammad, the Director of the Schomburg Center has so poignantly stated: “the impact of slavery on American history is so significant that everyone’s implicated. And so this is really an occasion for all of us to come to terms with our relationship to a slave-owning past...”⁷ This “American” legacy is part of all of the Americas. We must all join Zapata Olivella in re-engaging with that past, rewriting that history, and understanding our common relationship to it together.

⁶ “The Resilient World We’re Building Now.” Interview with Patrisse Cullors and Robert Ross by Krista Tippett. *OnBeing, NPR*, February 18, 2016.

⁷ Khalil Gibran Muhammad in NPR Radio broadcast, “Ben Affleck (Kinda) Apologizes for Asking PBS Program to Hide Slaveholding Ancestor,” 22 April 2015. Muhammad was specifically responding to the events around Affleck’s efforts to silence knowledge of a slaveholding ancestor in a PBS program about genealogy.

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