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Speaking Bodies: Body Bilinguality and Code-switching in Latina/o Performance

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by

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The dissertation of Jade Y. Power is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with great love and respect to my partner José who accompanies me in my daily acts of code-switching, integrating and anchoring the many worlds through which we together move; to my parents Vivian and Jack and my sister Taína for teaching me about bilinguality; and finally, to Amaury for helping me in these last months to daily rediscover and understand my own embodied self.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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In the last decades, there has been a proliferation of scholarship on embodiment and the body in performance. Likewise, the politics of language and the representation of hybrid, *mestizo* identities have been central in the study of Latina/o theater and performance. However, few scholars have attempted to discuss how the body works in relationship to bilingualism itself. In this dissertation, I argue that the body itself speaks and is thus a maker of meaning, just as it also receives and processes information. In looking at the specific sites of inquiry for this study, I show how the body articulates an argument that situates the performing subject in a web of intersectional identities,

demonstrating how identities are produced through movement itself. The "speaking body" both draws upon and circumvents our understanding of language as a logocentric process and also as the principle way through which identity is perceived and the self is made knowable. Thus, I address theories of social construction that help us question the essential and fixed link between language and identity, while also insisting that the politics of language, in this case spoken and corporeal, continue to matter in very important ways. In doing so, I analyze how the performing, code-switching body can reveal racial construction, enact the contradictions of *mestizaje*, queer the way in which *Latinidad* is read through lenses of gender and sexuality, and finally, privilege the embodied experience of "bilinguality" over logocentric understandings of bilingualism.

Looking at the work of primarily Puerto Rican performers, I engage this concept across a variety of performative registers, including solo performance, historical blackface performance, and the traditional Puerto Rican dance practice of *bomba*. I demonstrate that there are instances where the code-switching body re-enacts hierarchical power relations, and yet it in doing so, makes visible how power is enacted on and through the body in performance. Body bilinguality is thus a strategy for moving between and across codes of meaning-making, contesting narratives of fractured subjectivity through embodiment, and resisting hegemonic systems of representation, revealing sites of relative privilege and oppression.

Introduction

Speaking Bodies

US Latina/o subjects are imagined and imagine themselves through a multitude of lenses: hybrid, code-switching, *mestizo/o*, bilingual, transcultural, transnational, circulating around and across borders, moving, yet fixed in a perpetual state of in-between-ness, caught in the web of nationalisms, post-coloniality and internal colonization, between constructs of hyper-femininity and exaggerated masculinity, between not-quite-white and always already brown/black, simultaneously *la virgen* and *la puta, la chingada* and *el conquistador*,[1] using embodied practices to confront, engage, and contest narratives of genocide, slavery, immigration, and to recount the stories of survival. This dissertation is an effort to interrogate and understand these slippery constructs, this complex set of relations, through specific embodied performances that demonstrate the use of what I have termed the "code-switching body." In doing so, I not only theorize the many discursive levels of signification the Latina/o body encounters and employs, but also re-imagine the body as a site for meaning-making that is simultaneously an object upon which social construction is enacted, as well as a subject with experience and individual agency. Privileging the speaking body in this process is particularly important given the binary framework through which ontologies of Latina/o subjects are so often read, a framework that inevitably finds recourse in other problematic dualities upon which much of traditional humanist ideology is constructed: nature/culture, sacred/profane, male/female, and most importantly, mind/body. My work in this project, therefore, is an attempt to inscribe a counter-discourse of bodily

[1] "the virgin (feminine), the whore (feminine), the fucked one (feminine), the conquerer (masculine)"

subjectivity. Despite the fact that I am attempting to accomplish this through the logocentric act of writing, something that has "paradoxically come to stand in for and against embodiment" (Taylor, *Archive* 16), I aim, through writing, to corporeally invade and occupy ongoing conversations about identity. My goal is to contribute to discourse about Latina/o performance, not by discussing the body object of the marginalized subject, but rather by foregrounding the marginalized subject as experienced *through* the body.

Having grown up in a completely bi-cultural, bilingual household, moving to California from Puerto Rico at age seven, I was always acutely aware of the ways in which my sister and I navigated the many influences that shaped our experience. Even so, as Coco Fusco writes, we "slid into the gap between languages and cultures with ease," quickly learning to make choices that we thought would benefit us (1). As with many immigrants and "outsiders," cognizant of the fact that our mother's brown skin did not "lose its tan" in the winter, we rejected our Spanish in an effort to fit in, asking her to speak to us in English, especially in front of other people, while still secretly speaking to each other in Spanish when we wanted to remember the friends we had left behind. However, Spanish versus English was not the only choice with which we were faced. When visiting with family and friends in Puerto Rico, or with my father's Irish American family, we learned to carefully choose our words, modulate our loudness and intonation, at the same time that we shifted in and out of bodily codes that accompanied our speech. At some point I remember noticing that my body acted differently when I spoke Spanish than when I spoke English.

I now realize that I was actually learning how to perform my ideas of Puerto Ricanness and Americanness accordingly, and that my Latina identity was being developed in relationship to my embodied experiences. Despite our light-skin and almost imperceptible accents giving us the ability to "pass" as non-Latina, and all the privileges that positionality inevitably entails, an out of place gesture, posture, stance, accent, or rolled "r" could lead to the predictable eyebrow raising, and often the question: "are you…Latina/not white/foreign/Other?" And once the person asking the question made the connection between the observed behavior and the newfound insight into my identity, the ideological link between the two were cemented in place. So not only was I learning how identity is performed but also how power is enacted through bodies, becoming cognizant of the disadvantages my father would never face and the privileges my mother would never have. Certainly, I learned to adjust my language (spoken and bodily) to fit given social occasions and contexts, irrespective of the language in which I was speaking. Although we often use the lens of language to think about bilingual, transcultural and hybridized experiences, we think less about how the body also becomes bilingual, code-switches and signifies alongside the tongue, a code-switching that happens in relationship to our cultural identities as well as to our other intersectional social identities (race, class, gender and sexuality). This project is thus very much informed by my own bilingualism (physical and linguistic) and my bodily encounters with movement codes on a variety of fronts. As a *teatrista*[2] and a dancer I have learned to move and speak in a way that underscores the constructed, performative nature of social identities. My own pre-existing notions of a Puerto Rican or American identity have been exploded through this

[2] theater practitioner

embodied learning at the same time that this understanding cannot be divorced from my lived experience as a Latina growing up between the United States and Puerto Rico.

My central research questions in this dissertation are concerned with the construction of *Latinidad* through cultural production. I engage *Latinidad* as a simultaneously hegemonic and oppositional strategy that navigates the tensions between cultural specificity and political efficaciousness, or what Deborah Paredez refers to as the "tensions that disrupt and affiliations that enable" this identity construction (25). More specifically, I aim to understand how Latina/os use their bodies in engaging *Latinidad* as "a social construct that is shaped by external forces…and internally through individual subjectivities and communal cultural expressions of people who identify as Latina/o" (Molina-Guzmán 3). I propose that these code-switching, bilingual bodies learn to "speak" in the multiple registers of social identification, performing racial affiliation and enacting *mestizaje*, queering the way in which *Latinidad* is gendered, and privileging the embodied experience of having "forked tongues"[3] over logocentric understandings of bilingualism, as a means of survival, and ultimately, as a strategy of resistance. The code-switching, bilingual body simultaneously helps the Latina/o subject confront and integrate these various identities, while being, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "*alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro.*"[4] Thereby, these subjects defy what Frances Aparicio argues are the "linear conceptions of identity shifts" that pervade discussions of Latina/o identity formation ("Jennifer as Selena" 97). In examining intra- as well as inter-Latina/o subjectivities through the speaking body, I am proposing an alternative to this linear

[3] Anzaldúa
[4] "Soul between two worlds, three, four"

conception, a process of identity formation that is here understood as a series of fractured experiences that are ultimately unified through the body.

Although I principally examine the work of Puerto Rican performers and performance traditions, I see this work as part of the larger field of the study of Latina/o performance, a field of study that directly relates to processes of Latina/o identity formation in the United States. As Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, "[immigrants] can no longer take themselves for granted as people who do not require definition" (53). And although I am not singularly interested in the experiences of immigrants but also in those of second and third generation Latina/os, Deborah Paredez contends that, "to be sure, one becomes Latina/o only within the geographical and political economic borders of the United States" (23). While I agree with this statement, I also find that given the particular neocolonial liminality of the Puerto Rican homeland, and Puerto Ricans' status as the second-largest Latino population in the United States, the performed constructions of *puertorriqueñidad* stand in a direct relationship to those of *Latinidad*. The process of identifying and unifying a diversity of experiences - racial, ethnic, and in terms of second-generation immigrants, linguistic, identities - under the defining category of *puertorriqueñidad* both for the purposes of cultural survival and hegemonic control, is not analogous, but rather homologous to the way in which *Latinidad* is constructed.

Latinidad emerged as what Juan Flores and George Yudice describe as a "new social movement" (58) in response to globalization and the transcultural flow of people and goods seen in the late 20th century, while the notion of *puertorriqueñidad* emerged in conjunction with the 19th century independence movements across Latin America and later in response to US colonization and the subsequent diasporic migrations in the 20th

and 21st centuries. We can see that both "movements" define the stakes of self-identification in relationship to the threat of being subsumed by hegemonic interests, in defiance of marginalizing practices of Othering. Yet, they are both fraught with the same ambivalent and troubled stance when it comes to the heterogeneous reality of Puerto Rican and Latina/o experience as racialized and gendered, read through the lenses of class and sexuality. Therefore, in examining bilingual, code-switching bodies, I am also interested in finding the instances in which certain Puerto Rican and Latina/o subjects may use this model for purposes that prove liberatory for some, but does not promise the same for others. For as we know, discursive power is wielded, enacted and enforced by the same bodies that might, when read through other lenses, be powerless. However, I also ask questions about how the subjects rendered Other within the constructs of *Latinidad* and *puertorriqueñidad* (whether in regards to race, gender or sexuality) use their bodies to code-switch and manage their own multiple subjectivities in a way that privileges lived experience, thus rupturing and rearticulating the processes of identity formation altogether.

While this dissertation is meant to create an understanding of the specific embodied nature of Puerto Rican identity formation through performance, in elaborating the concept of a bilingual body that code-switches, I draw from the rich collection of experiences and writings of other US Latina/os who navigate bordered identities through their bodies. Therefore, in writing about the Puerto Rican bilingual body I hope to inform and deepen the understanding of these processes for other US Latina/os, underscoring the ways in which *Latinidad* is unstable, mercurial and multi-vocal, while also deeply grounded in affective strategies of resistance and real lived experience. Also, while I am

looking specifically at how the bilingual body operates through performance and not in everyday practice, I draw on what Diana Taylor refers to as the "is/as" aspect of performance being simultaneously "real" and "constructed" and bringing together (through the body) ontological and epistemological discourses (*Archive* 3). In this way, the performances I describe serve as a way to understand the social world in which they are taking place. They can also be read as what Taylor calls "acts of transfer" that transmit "social knowledge memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or 'twice-behaved behavior'" (*Archive* 2-3). We can thus imagine how the on-stage (or otherwise staged) performing code-switching body, can be used to understand daily performances of identity.

Ramon Rivera-Servera further underscores this link between identity and performance when he writes about *Latinidad* as a "performative modality" that, "through serial acts like performance…becomes a legible, although fluid identity position" ("Strategies of Resistance" 274). I thus work from the central premise that identity is performative just as performance relies on the same signifiers that construct identity. The body in this case performatively instantiates identity while simultaneously subverting the lenses through which its identity is read. As Isel Rodríguez writes in her dissertation about the body and performances of national identity in Puerto Rico "national identity cannot be deconstructed without recognizing its performative qualities. Besides being a thing of modernity, nation is something inscribed upon bodies" (5). Finally, this project follows Alicia Arrizón's directive to "reconceptualiz[e] or rearticulat[e] the relationship between subject formation and discursive practice" through *mestizaje*, which "entails the interplay of history in the process of representation" (7). The bilingual, code-switching

body is a particularly useful lens for looking at performances that "narrate experiences that exemplify Latinidad while subverting the limits of hegemonic systems of representation" (Arrizón 48) because it engages *multiple* borders and hybridities. For as Michael Hames-García reminds us, "in embracing hybridity as a resistant political strategy, we must be on guard to always ask: where is the hybridity taking place, in whose interests, in what ways, and to what ends?" (119).

In writing about identity through a focus on the bodies of the performers, and indeed through my own embodied experience as a Latina scholar and performer, I am informed by the work of Paula M.L.Moya and Michael Hames-García in regards to what they have termed "post-postivist realism." Their claims of the value of theoretical inquiry grounded in the lived experience of concrete social relations are key to any body-centered approach to the performance of identity. In their edited volume, *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, Moya and Hames-García outline the theoretical tensions between positivist constructions of identity as fixed and knowable on the one hand, and postmodern constructivist conceptions of identity as unstable, and unknowable, used to conceal the operation and production of power. The authors pose the "predicament" of the contemporary theoretical moment in which identity is caught between "essentialism" and "postmodernism," in order to then construct their own model of "post-positivist realism" (PPR). The PPR model re-inscribes the importance of lived experience as epistemologically valuable, and offers the possibility of objective knowledge built upon on an analysis of the different kinds of subjective or theoretical bias. In the introduction to the book, Moya points to the way that a poststructuralist critique, taken to its limit, dismantles identity to the point that meaning can never be fully

present because it is constituted by the endless possibilities of what it is not and is therefore at least always partially deferred. In the attempt to destabilize structures of power built upon the positivist empiricism that categories of race, gender, ethnicity and sexuality have historically been subjected to, identity as a tool is rendered meaningless, despite what Moya points to as "the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to categories of identity" (8). Acknowledging that biases are indeed created through subjective analysis, PPR theorists prefer to make distinctions between those that are "limiting and those that are necessary for knowledge," to look at *why* identities exist and *how* they are interrelated (13). Instead of doing away with identity and the slippages implied in identity politics, they prefer to formulate a theory of identity that "enables cultural critics to explain where and why identities are problematic and where and why they are empowering" (17).

Because I use language (spoken and embodied) as a lens through which to understand identity, it is imperative that I carefully navigate the tensions between positivism and constructionism. The project of the PPRs is to "reclaim identity" and to question the notion that "truth" or "objectivity" can only rest naively on a representational theory of language. They argue that subjectivity or particularity is not antithetical to objective knowledge but rather constitutive of it, thus recognizing the way that identity can be simultaneously "politically and epistemically significant on the one hand, and variable, nonessential, and radically historical on the other" (12). Rather than doing away with the possibility of objective knowledge as many postmodernists have done, PPR theorists understand objective knowledge as something that is arrived at only through the various subjective experiences of individuals. The role of the PPR intellectual

then is to be able to "replace a simple theory of truth with a more dialectical causal theory of reference in which *linguistic structures both shape our perceptions of and refer (in more or less partial and accurate ways) to causal features of a real world*" (emphasis mine 12). Likewise, for the purposes of understanding the importance of the code-switching body, it follows that processes of identity formation take place through the body, and the body in turn understands itself through and within the strictures of language, corporeal and spoken. In writing through the body then, I am returning to the lived experience of the body as epistemologically valuable, as a creator of language and thus meaning, and ultimately, knowledge. Even as I continue to acknowledge and engage the ways in which language and meaning are mediated through social construction, my focus of the performing body, as Taylor suggests, brings together ontological and epistemological discourses.

Viewed through the lens of PPR theorists, the notion of a "theory in the flesh" as espoused by Chicana feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga, is liberating for the bodies of marginalized and oppressed subjects, and in doing so is epistemologically valuable for all subjects. A "theory in the flesh" is understood for its potential to provide more objective accounts of the world, what feminist critic Sandra Harding refers to as "strong objectivity," or what Donna Haraway calls "situated knowledge," a sort of leveling of the discourse that results from centering knowledge production around the experiences of those who have been traditionally left out of this process, thereby creating more objective accounts of the world in which we live. Instead of conflating identity as a normalizing discourse that conceals structures of power on the one hand, with the in-the-flesh experience of identity on the other, these feminist scholars

believe that by privileging these embodied voices as real, materially and historically contingent oppressive forces are more productively addressed. In practicing a "theory in the flesh," not only are counter-narratives of identity valued as knowledge production, but we can also reveal the relations of power that are concealed in traditional processes of knowledge production. Moya summarizes this point below:

> The key to claiming epistemic authority for people who have been oppressed in a particular way stems from an acknowledgment that they have experiences -- experiences that people who are not oppressed in the same way usually lack -- that *can* provide them with information we all need to understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender and sexuality operate to uphold existing regimes of power in our society (81).

By writing about performing Latina/o bodies and the multiple identity sites from which they speak, I too seek to "reclaim" and understand the productive potential of identity (race, gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality), while also demonstrating how the body, a "theory in the flesh," works on and against these same categories by which subjects are marginalized and oppressed. The codes that the bilingual, code-switching body learns to corporeally speak, create meaning which viewed in the context of multiple codes and valences of experience, in turn leads to *real* understandings of the social world in which we all live.

Thus, in outlining a methodology for this dissertation I broadly frame it as a hermeneutical inquiry into the many ways the body speaks through, about, and around performances of Latina/o and Puerto Rican identity. Read through the lenses of post-positivist realism and "theory in the flesh" articulated above, I combine the interpretation of live performance with movement analysis, textual analysis, historical and ethnographic research. I draw on conversations and methodologies proposed by performance studies,

dance studies, Latino studies, critical race studies and queer studies. In addition to my own experience as a spectator and a practitioner, I use video, playscripts, interviews, and secondary sources written about the performers and modalities that I analyze in this dissertation. This approach allows me to demonstrate how the concept of the bilingual, code-switching body works across a variety of performative registers, to show how there are instances where the code-switching body re-enacts hierarchical power relations, and yet it in doing so, makes visible how power is enacted on and through the body in performance, revealing sites of relative privilege and oppression.

In Chapter One, I define body bilinguality and code-switching in the context of other theories of the body, showing how this model is suited for studying Latina/o performance precisely because of how Latina/os in the United States are situated between nations, races, and cultures. I look specifically at the contributions made by scholars in the field of gesture studies and dance studies in helping us think about the body as a speaking subject and about performance itself as a site of meaning-making and knowledge production. I also outline my strategy for choosing the word "code" as a term that neutrally describes behaviors at the same time that it is also charged with implications of secrecy and subversion, what I point to as a productive ambivalence. In doing so, I demonstrate how Puerto Rico and Puerto Rican subjecthood signal a particular neocolonial liminality that makes use of the ambivalence of neutrality and subversion through the code-switching body, thus making Puerto Rican performance the primary focus of the dissertation.

In Chapter Two I look specifically at the politics of bilingualism both as how they

relate to processes of identity formation and how they operate in terms of the practical considerations of Latina/o performance. Using Anzaldúa's articulation of "forked tongues" and her conception of the border as a "third country," I look at performances of bilingualism that employ and rely upon embodied speaking as taking place in what I call the "fourth country" of signification. In other words, I point to the use of the body in this communicative process as providing the fourth dimension (movement through time and space) of subject formation and the instantiation of identity. To do so, I analyze the work of two female solo performance artists, Puerto Rican Teresa Hernández and Dominican York Josefina Báez whose performative linguistic explorations of Spanglish are accompanied by a highly virtuosic corporeal rhetoric that works alongside verbal signification. I look at a variety of performances that span Hernández's career as a solo performance artist in Puerto Rico and then perform an in-depth analysis of Báez's "performance text" *Dominicanish*. All of these works demonstrate how the embodiment of language is an alternative process through which we come to know, understand and perform ourselves. Finally, as solo artists, what Rebecca Schneider refers to as "not only image[s], but image maker[s]" (35), Hernández and Báez demonstrate how one body can have multiple views/experiences/voices/movement modalities, showing fractured subjectivities that are unified both through the body as metaphor and the body as subject.

In the second half of the dissertation, I look more closely at performances of blackness in relationship to constructs of *puertorriqueñidad* and *Latinidad*. I use the code-switching body as a way to examine how Puerto Ricans and other Latina/os alternately claim, embody and appropriate all three of these constructs in ways that are

both deeply problematic and empowering. Chapter Three analyzes the work of the mid-20th century Puerto Rican blackface performer, Ramón "Diplo" Rivero, who was revered by an adoring public as the subversive black trickster, symbol for anti-colonial resistance and an advocate for actors rights, while the racism instantiated in the code-switching of his white body painted black, remains largely invisible. By using the 2006 inauguration of an independent theatre space named in honor of the blackface performer/character Diplo as a point of departure, I pose questions that fundamentally challenge the narrative of Puerto Rican nationalism as racially democratic. In doing so, I reveal what Frank B. Wilderson III refers to as the "structural antagonisms" between the politics of anti-colonialism and anti-black racism, thus pointing to the limits of the code-switching body when faced with this paradigmatic opposition. I conclude this chapter by looking at the work of Afro-Puerto Rican performance artist Javier Cardona. Cardona takes up and challenges the legacy of blackface performance through his own code-switching body even as he shows himself to be circumscribed ontologically, preceded always, as both a performer and a Puerto Rican subject, by blackface performance and by his own black face and body.

In Chapter Four I write about how the newly invigorated traditional drum and dance practice of Afro-Puerto Rican *bomba* in the California Puerto Rican diaspora serves as an embodied articulation of community for both Puerto Ricans and Chicanas who through shared claims to *Latinidad* participate in this corporeal speaking, suturing shared historical and contemporary experiences of colonialism, slavery and immigration. In looking at *bomba* as a live cultural embodied practice I also show how a specific

movement modality actively works to both create and rupture the normative constructs of sexuality and gender in relationship to national and racial narratives so fundamental to the imagined preservation of this "folkloric" form. By drawing on my own experience as a *bombera* and participant in the California *bomba* community, I use interviews and participant observation to analyze both how a politics of relation is articulated through this community as well as how local innovations with the form raise important questions about authenticity, identity and history. Ultimately, I argue that *bomba* serves as an empowering embodied experience for those who practice it, while at times simultaneously underscoring the troubling ideological links between blackness and an imagined corporeal liberation.

Writing about and theorizing the work of Puerto Rican performance artists is an important counterhegemonic move given the relative lack of visibility for these artists in US academic institutions and, more importantly, in scholarship about US Latina/o identity. Additionally, writing about the performing body as subject foregrounds Latina/o subjectivity in ways that are precluded by many social science treatments of identity. In what follows, I aim to accomplish both of these interventions. I have situated this dissertation at the crossroads of a number of important conversations that overlap distinct fields. Seated at, or perhaps more appropriately, moving, stretching and leaping through, the junctions found between constructs of *Latinidad* and blackness, nation, gender and sexuality, between articulations of performance, language and the body, the bilingual, code-switching body helps us understand the dynamics of these relationships, "reclaiming" an identity grounded in plurality and intersectionality. For ultimately, in my

goal to create insights into these discursive processes of identity formation, I am invested in seeing the productive material effects of creating a space for the bodies about which I write, the subjectivities they possess and the communities they constitute.

Chapter One

The Bilingual, Code-switching Body

Because I, a *mestiza*,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.[1]
-*Gloria Anzaldúa*

"*Hemos tenido que cambiar caras 'como cambia el camaleon-cuando los peligros son muchos y las opciones son pocas.'*"[2]
-*Rosario Castellanos*

"Our formidable challenge… is how to rehumanize, repoliticize, and decolonize our own bodies wounded by the media, and intervened by the invisible surgery of pop culture."
-*Guillermo Gómez-Peña*

Veteran performer Ivette Román's piece "*Hummus Terroristas Todos*"[3] was a highlight in the 2005 *Mixta Con Tod@s*, exposé/variety show at the *Teatro Estudio Yerbabruja* in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. For most of the piece Román sat in a chair, telling a story about how as a *puertorriqueña* she was mistaken for a terrorist when trying to board a plane. The text moved seamlessly through topics that touched on a variety of issues: racism both within *and* outside the island, sexism, body-image, sexuality, expropriation of property, colonialism, and, much to the audience's delight, public scandal. While describing said sex scandal between a politician and a secretary she began to shake her hand in a gesture that in Puerto Rico is commonly done when someone is

[1] "soul between two worlds, three, four/my head spins with all the contradictions/ I am disoriented from all the voices that speak to me/simultaneously"
[2] "We have had to change faces, 'like the chameleon, when the dangers are many and the options few."
[3] "All Hummus Terrorists."

expressing some superlative, as if to say "tsk, tsk." The gesture involves shaking the hand with a bent wrist, and a bent elbow that stays close to the ribs while the hand remains more or less perpendicular to the forearm. The relaxed fingers make a slapping sound as they hit one another, particularly as the middle finger and extended thumb make contact. Román continues to shake her hand in this gesture, highly recognizable to a Puerto Rican audience, invoking the joys of *chisme* (gossip), a performative wide-eyed disbelief, the creation of an in-group, together laughing at another's misfortunes, a reminder of the insular intimacy between the powerful and the *pueblo*. The shaking hand is thus the embodied response that begs expression. Eventually the sound of the slapping fingers transforms into the rhythm for a rap that Román begins to speak, the skin on skin sound ultimately reminding us of physical violence, the simple gesture moving us from hilarity to reflective seriousness. As she builds her rap, the sound of the skin slapping skin loses its light, staccato quality. Slowing in tempo she moves the hand just above her thigh so that it also hits her leg. The gesture now takes on the more forceful and weighty impetus and rhythm of a repeated act of violence. This time, we are reminded of the ever-present disparate power relations between male politicians and women employees, colonial governments and colonial subjects, and in drawing on the genre of rap and urban music, of the relationships between poverty, disenfranchised, racialized bodies, misogyny and ultimately, performance.

This example demonstrates what I will be describing throughout this chapter as the bilingual, code-switching body in Puerto Rican performance. Through a simple yet culturally-specific gesture, Román uses her body to situate herself as gendered, Puerto Rican, racialized, and colonized, inviting the audience to identify with her, participate

and enjoy this moment of recognition. Yet through this same gesture, she actively resists, questions and destabilizes these categories of belonging, demonstrating how her body can confuse the space between the literal and the figurative, be both an object of social power *and* an agent with a performative oppositional power.

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For Latina/o studies scholars, the concepts of bilingualism and code-switching have been pivotal in discussing identity as constructed through language (R. Sánchez, Stavans, Zentella). Together they have provided an avenue for recognizing and validating the processes and experiences of people who inhabit multiple sites of identity. However, though it has been widely accepted that the act of speaking is indeed a process that is embodied, and certainly involves and includes physical acts of signifying, these ideas of bilinguality and code-switching, born of linguistic study, have not been explicitly applied to the body itself. In other words, the fact that the body works as an agent of signification that is *also* strategically bilingual, multilingual, and code-switching, has not been examined and theorized as such. In this chapter, I argue that many US Latina/o subjects, Puerto Ricans in particular, learn and utilize this strategy of embodied code-switching in order to survive in a society that values and privileges comportment in one series of codes (white, middle-class, English-speaking, American). Likewise, through performance, other established, assumed, and often essentialized, codes of belonging are destabilized and interrupted. As I will demonstrate, by drawing attention to the performativeness of these codes, we can question their fixedness, even as we can look to how they can be utilized strategically by both performers and social actors.

In what follows, I will elaborate the model of the bilingual, code-switching body by providing definitions of my use of the terms "bilingual" and "code-switching" in relationship to understandings of language and the body. I will then continue the chapter with a review of important theories of the body from both the perspective of social theory where "the body" first became a site of inquiry and from cultural and performance studies, which have subsequently made important contributions in redefining sociological understandings of the body. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the specific cultural politics of Puerto Rico and how the model of a code-switching body is particularly apt for describing the experience of Puerto Ricans and Diasporicans[4] as performed both on and off stage, the subject for the other chapters of this dissertation.

"Body bilinguality" and the Code-switching Body

To begin with, to think about the body as bilingual, or as somehow engaging in the act of what is known as code-switching, is to recognize first and foremost that the body is involved in the semiotic process of communicating meaning, not only through voice and speech but also through gesture and movement. For theater and performance scholars this may seem obvious since the body is the primary tool through which audience/performer relationships are established, narrative depicted, and visual information conveyed. However, precisely because the field of semiotics stems from an interest in the study of signs as they relate to language (written and spoken), it is important to note that the body creates signification within *and*, I argue, outside of, the defined parameters of language (i.e. words), creating its own corporeal rhetoric. In

[4] Puerto Ricans living in the diaspora (typically the United States). This term was coined by Nuyorican poet Mariposa (María Teresa Fernández) in her 1997 poem "Ode to the Diasporican."

thinking about language as it is written versus embodied language, Diana Taylor's work has been crucial in distinguishing between what she calls the "archive" of texts and the "repertoire" of embodied performances. She writes, "the dominance of language and writing has come to stand for *meaning* itself. Live embodied practices not based in linguistic or literary codes, we must assume, have no claims on meaning" (25). So, even though I propose that the code-switching body "speaks" and engages a "language" of its own, I recognize the limitations involved in applying a linguistic metaphor to a corporeal practice. I heed Taylor's caution that, "the challenge is not to 'translate' from an embodied expression into a linguistic one or visa versa but recognize the strengths and limitations of each" (*Archive* 32). However, the framework that I am utilizing implies that not only does the body "speak" in its own right, but that it also has the ability to "speak" in a variety of different languages, strategically moving through and between these languages, or codes. By looking at identity as performed by the body, this project focuses on understanding the nature of *what* these languages and codes might be and *how* and *why* this shift between them takes place.

Why code-switching?

Code-switching is broadly understood as the alternate use of more than one language in the same conversation or discourse. Linguist John J. Gumperz defines it as "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (59). Performance studies scholar Dwight Conquergood describes it as "a commonplace ethnographic term used to describe the complex shifts minority peoples deftly and continuously negotiate between communication styles of dominant culture and subculture" (8). In her book on the topic,

Penelope Gardner-Chloros, an applied linguist, is cautious in her description of code-switching as something that is not limited to shifts in languages per se, but rather an act that most often requires membership in a given community to capture the full significance of the exchange (1-20). For example, shifts in accent, vocabulary or syntax that may be central to understanding the implied meaning, are only accessible to parties that can appreciate the changes taking place in multiple registers. Furthermore, the speakers' ability or fluency (native language, second-language) is not necessarily a determining factor in motivating the code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, Rampton, Zentella, *Growing Up*). This view implies instead a much more nuanced and complex activity that surpasses and challenges prior models of language competence and a clearly defined "switch" (as in a literal electric switch) that leaves little room for the notion of *transition* or *mixing* (Gardner-Chloros 10-12). In other words, code-switching is figured here as coming from skill as opposed to a strategy that simply emerges due to an assumed lack. I will return to this idea of transition and mixing later, but for now it is important to note the degree of agency and facility that is ascribed to the speaker. This is quite different from the belief that this mixture produces chaotic and degenerate "mongrelization" of linguistic codes, a perspective that is ultimately linked to a fear of accompanying cultural mongrelization (Zentella, *Growing Up* 134).

Just as we can look at the word "switching" for its implications about maintaining clearly established differences and boundaries between sites of belonging, it is also useful to examine the word "code." Gardner-Chloros writes about its origins in the field of communication technology, "nowadays *code* is understood as a neutral umbrella term for languages, dialects, styles/registers, etc. and partially usurps the place of the more usual

'catch-all' term *variety* to cover the different sub-divisions of 'language'" (11). In this reading, "code" is not only applicable to a broad range of nuances in signification, but it is, quite significantly, neutral. However, common usages of this word invoke ideas of secrecy, intrigue, privacy, communication via illegitimate means, limited access, strategic circumventing of power, something closed, to be "cracked" and hacked open in order to ultimately yield a more democratic society. Though "codes" of communication are routinely used by government institutions of military, intelligence, and finance, the word somehow persists in its connotations of illicit activity and underground currents marshaled by the powerless, the "bad guys" and individuals who should otherwise be treated with suspicion by moral, productive (i.e. normative) members of society. Therefore, although "code-switching" is employed as a neutral description of a process of communicating, free of value-judgments and political implications, it is nonetheless a term charged with a number of subversive implications which are relevant in the discussion at hand.

Languages can never be entirely divorced from the cultures in which they are spoken and created, thus relationships of power are almost always implicated in mixing or switching between languages. As Foucault reminds us in his foundational essay "The Discourse on Language," language and the act of speaking do not preexist discourse, but rather discourse itself produces speaking subjects, determining not only what can be spoken of, where and how one can speak, but also *who* may speak (155-158). For instance, the history of Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the United States, as well as on the island, has been fraught with anti-Spanish sentiments and English-Only legislation. The counter-discursive view that code-switching is a positive and productive practice for

these communities only appears in the last decades of the twentieth century. Furthermore, as demonstrated by the xenophobic crisis seen in the current anti-immigrant backlash in the United States, the fear that code-switching somehow threatens the inviolable sanctity of *both* English and Spanish reflects the belief that code-switching is not the same as simply being bilingual. Code-switching calls into question the very existence of monolinguality to begin with, and with it, the "purity" of culture, ethnicity and race. In her groundbreaking study about bilingualism in a New York Puerto Rican community, *Growing Up Bilingual,* Ana Celia Zentella makes a strong case against the idea that code-switching for this group of children was what conversation analyst Peter Auer calls "an individualistic whim – merely stylistic and non-functional – or a pre-programmed community routine" (qtd. in Zentella 113). Zentella writes, "Latin@s are visibly constrained by rigid norms of linguistic purity, but white linguistic disorder goes unchallenged; in fact, white linguistic disorder is essential to a congenial persona, and passes as multicultural 'with-it-ness'" (*Bilingual Games* 53). Instead of being a process that ruins the Spanish language and renders the speakers powerless, Zentella insists that "code-switching is, fundamentally, a conversational activity via which speakers negotiate meaning with each other, *like salsa dancers responding smoothly to each others intricate steps and turns* (*Growing Up* 113, italics mine). Zentella, whose community-focused work remains one of the only studies of its kind in the field of linguistics, makes the point that this research should focus more on the context that "gives rise to the bilingualism and the ways in which children learn to switch" (*Growing Up* 4). Scholars have researched specific features of language and the switching itself but little has been

studied about the dynamic *process* of becoming bilingual and enacting the code-switching behavior.

Zentella's study is also key for the insight that it provides in terms of specifically looking at Puerto Rican bilingualism in the United States, reminding readers that bilingualism among Chicana/os and Mexican Americans, about whom most of the extant research on bilingualism exists, is distinct from the "Spanglish" spoken by Puerto Ricans living in the diaspora (*Growing Up* 5).[5] However, what is most useful about her work is the way in which she locates the act/process of being/becoming bilingual within a community. The metaphor about the salsa dancers quoted above is more than poetic imagery. Rather, it specifies the way in which the body participates in the code-switching, making it about an inter-subjective exchange based on improvisation as well as technique. The use of dance steps as analogs for vocabulary and choreographies as metaphors for larger segments of speech is not uncommon; however, I wish to push the comparison beyond this initial level. I suggest that what takes place in the dance, which also takes place in the exchange of words between speakers, is a level of signification that happens in addition to the signifieds denoted and connoted by the words or the word analogs themselves (the steps). Thus, the bodies of the speakers/dancers are also involved in this process of code-switching. Not only this, but the salsa dance referent here is an improvised, unscripted performance that involves break-away solos as well as intricate exchanges between partners that calls for a shared understanding of dance vocabulary, nuances in rhythm, and of the specific context of the song to which they are dancing. In

[5] Due to regionalisms and to different uses of Spanish vocabulary between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the "Spanglish" used by these different communities does not sound the same. For instance,

other words, this embodied speaking and code-switching is as much about the codes themselves as the worlds in which the codes are constructed and employed. In this way, the "code" that is being switched is more than that which is defined within linguistic parameters.

***El gesto*/The gesture**

The field of gesture studies is especially helpful in thinking about the body in relationship to language and the communication of meaning through a corporeal rhetoric. I am interested in how gesture is an essential component of everyday acts of performance, at the same time, however, I am equally invested in understanding how it is performed theatrically. As an example, in thinking about the commonplace Puerto Rican gesture of using one's lips to point or indicate an object or direction, I would look to how this is strategically worked into the theatrical space of performance, signifying Puerto Ricanness for narrative purposes while performatively highlighting the link between the body and identity formation.[6] The study of gesture dates back at least as far as the conquest of the Americas when, as Esther Gabara points out, the spiritual conquest of the Franciscans in 16th century Mexico saw the use of gesture as a "universal language" that could assist in their desired end of converting the indigenous peoples, just as they simultaneously sought to suppress the culturally specific gestures and dances that embedded native religious beliefs and meaning into everyday life (*e-misférica*).[7] In eighteenth century Europe gesture was viewed as a precursor for spoken language and

[6] For example, in 2010 renowned Puerto Rican visual artist Antonio Martorell created an exhibit titled "Gestuario/Gestures" (exhibited in New York and Puerto Rico). According to the artist, he was inspired by travels in Mexico where without having spoken he was asked by a woman if he was Puerto Rican. When he asked her how she knew, her response was, "only Puerto Ricans point with their lips." (www.iprac.org)
[7] For an in-depth discussion of this see Diana Taylor's *The Archive and the Repertoire*

therefore important for the information it could give about the study of language (Kendon). Sir Keith Thomas, in the introduction to *A Cultural History of Gesture*, insists that gesture is something that is not actively taught, although it is certainly culturally learned (1-13). He draws the connection between gesture and theories of the body, pointing out that the word "gesticulation" refers to the lack of ability to display bodily control, a control that was imagined to exemplify inner bodily harmony and ultimately a desired superiority of mind to body (1-13). However, in terms of linguistics and a systematic study of gesture, David Efron performed the first important study in 1941, concluding that the gestures produced by both "assimilated" and "immigrant" groups of Jews and Southern Italians in New York differed substantially. According to Efron's study, both assimilated groups produced gestures that were different than those produced by the groups of recent immigrants. He also argued that the assimilated groups made gestures that he considered more "American" (McCafferty and Stam 4), in this case "American" is understood as white Anglo-Saxon, European. Ultimately, however, gesture studies did not emerge as a field of research until the 1970s when it became clear that gesture and speech were part of the same process, and researchers were able to provide a theoretical framework for theorizing the use of gesture in processes of communication. In recent years, the teaching of gesture in second-language acquisition has proven to be an important tool that can help quantitatively improve levels of communication and comprehension even if this is not accompanied by an actual improvement in language skills (McCafferty and Stam 16).[8] In a 1990 study of

[8] At times, teaching gesture has also been shown to improve verbal skills as well (McCafferty and Stam 16).

communicative competence comparing oral proficiency interviews of a Japanese student and a Saudi Arabian student, verbal/vocal, facial/head movement, arm/hand movement, and body position/movement were transcribed. In comparing the transcriptions, the Japanese student was found to be more verbally competent while the Saudi Arabian student scored higher in overall communicative competence because of his use of gestures (McCafferty and Stam 16). We can glean two important ideas from this study. Firstly, not only is communication enhanced and supported by gesture, but perhaps, in fact, this transfer of information from one person to another *relies* principally on embodied communication. Secondly, we are cautioned to be wary of the relationship between gesture and stereotype, attending to the ways in which generalizations about cultures and bodies always occur in historical relationships to power and politics. Both of these points are evidenced by the wide availability of books with titles such as *Speak Italian: The Fine Art of Gesture* (a handbook on Italian gestures), *Guesstures* (a charades-type party game book), and *Rude Hand Gestures of the World: A Guide to Offending Without Words*. These three titles reveal the assumption that links between embodied communication and identity are readily perceived, without questioning the discursive matrix that cements these links.

In terms of the code-switching body, gesture is also central to unraveling the relationship between the social theory of linguistics and the aesthetic and political concerns of culture and performance. Likewise, gesture also instantiates the simultaneity of the body's objectness/subjectness as it is interpreted by others (object) and communicated by the self (subject). A gesture emerges from culturally learned patterns and codes at the same time that it is used strategically in the service of the body as

subject. In a recent article, Gabara points to the importance of gesture, *gesto*, and even Brecht's notion of *gestus* in both the history and the future of Latin American cultural and performance studies. She writes that "gesture is produced when language, image, and social norms intersect with the individual uses and habitations of the body; it is culturally informed but does not have a strict semantic order; it can be intentional but, unlike the pose, is not by definition put on or faked" (*e-misférica*). She goes on to write that gesture contains an "internal paradox" because it is at once "natural and codified, innate and conventional, culturally specific and universal" (*ibid*). I propose that this paradox of liminality, "at the limit of code and instinct, body and language, image and word" (*ibid*), is precisely the productive space where the deconstruction of the dualisms posed by the separation of body and mind can take place. For Gabara, the question is one of how the paradox of gesture makes possible cultural and artistic intervention, bridging humanities and social sciences, theory and practice, academic and aesthetic modes. In this project, gesture *is* the code that is being switched, transitioned in and out of, mixed, thereby allowing for a rupture with closed structures of meaning, performing the fluidity of identity just as it is also reflective of the body's position in a given social order. In my examination of the code-switching, bilingual bodies of Puerto Rican performers, I engage Gabara's conclusion that "it may be that the densest layering of cultural knowledge through gesture happens on and through bodies especially marked by race, gender, and non-normative sexuality" (*e-misférica*). Conversely, gender, racial, ethnic, class, sexual and national identities are *produced* through markers of movement (Desmond, *Embodying* 36). By looking specifically at the way in which the body uses gesture, movement, and language to switch between and across codes, this density of cultural

knowledge and the construction of identity can be sifted through layer by layer. However, it should be clear that while I am interested in getting at the meaning or "truth" of what is being signified, I am also interested in examining the very processes of signification the code-switching body works through, or what Rebecca Schneider calls "the very sedimented layers of signification themselves" (2).

Joseph Roach's notion of "genealogies of performance," which he uses to examine the elusive play between memory, performance and substitution is also useful here. He writes that "the key to understanding how performances worked *within* a culture, recognizing that a fixed and unified culture exists only as a convenient but dangerous fiction, is to illuminate the process of surrogation as it operated *between* the participating cultures" (5). Roach allows us then to think about this layering of cultural knowledge as the result of a complex and centuries-long process of substitution, or what he calls surrogation, where one code, gesture, language is imbued with, or substituted with the next. In his influential study *Cities of the Dead*, Roach's formulation of surrogation implies an immortal mortality, the burning of effigies so that a new body can become the subsequent vessel for cultural memory. The embodied code-switching I write about does not theorize substitution through death in quite the same way, but rather posits the body as continually dipping into and accessing the "mnemonic reserve(s)" that are "not prior to language but constitutive of it" (Roach 26). Cultural memory therefore, is carried on the body through gesture, movement, and language, and ultimately brought into being through the repetition of performance, each time slightly revised. Likewise what I am here calling "code" exists only so far as it is remembered and enacted, and like the trickster spirit of Afro-Caribbean cultures, has a stable center only in relationship to

other codes and languages, forever deferring meaning and unsettling identity just as it inevitably creates real and material relationships between the bodies that express and perform these codes.

Bilingualism/Bilinguality

I have been discussing the code-switching body; however, I would like to specifically outline what I call "body bilinguality." Despite the implications that the word "bilingual" may have in terms of reifying, and while certainly I am interested in trilingual and multilingual subjects, I insist that the word is useful precisely because it allows us to examine, question and in essence, "queer" binary constructions. Furthermore, using "bilinguality" as a framework helps us think about how power is invoked in a different manner than it would be through using "bilingualism." In thinking about this distinction between the suffixes "-ity" and "-ism," Nadine George-Graves provides a useful example in her choice of the word "primitivity" over "primitivism" to describe the way in which white audiences viewed African American ragtime dances. She writes, "although primitivism is the belief that so-called primitive cultures and ways of living are inherently better than more technologically dependent ones, this does not translate into direct social power" ("Zoo" 66). Likewise, being bilingual, especially for Latina/os living in the United States, does not translate into direct social power for as much as it may be celebrated through multiculturalism. Lisa Lowe pointedly underscores this failure of "beliefs" to translate into actual experience when she writes, "to the degree that multiculturalism claims to register the increasing diversity of populations, it precisely obscures the ways in which that aesthetic representation is not an analogue for the material positions, means or resources of those populations" (86). In the book

Bilinguality and Bilingualism, Josiane A. Hamers and Michel H. A. Blanc define the term "bilinguality" as "a psychological state of the individual who has access to more than one linguistic code" (33-34) and "bilingualism" as "the constant oral use of two languages" (6). So while the term "bilingualism" would perhaps seem more apt, by using "body bilinguality" I am signaling the state or process of being bilingual through one's body as opposed to using the term to denote the theory, system or practice (bilingualism). This distinction is important because it describes what the body *is* as opposed to what it *does*. Here the body *is* bilingual and *does* code-switching. Also, although the larger theoretical framework is that of the *code-switching* body, "bilinguality" can be useful for thinking about the ways in which dualities are structured: Spanish/English, white/black, male/female. Furthermore, the word "bilingualism" implies a *belief in* being bilingual, as in a certain positive value ascribed to this condition, which I do not find particularly helpful in this study, especially given the many factors that may lead to bilingualism (colonialism, immigration etc). Finally, my insistence on the inclusion of the idea of bilinguality, stems from an interest in directly relating the case studies in the following chapters to the politics of bilingualism, especially as they play out with Latina/os living in the United States and for Diasporicans returning to Puerto Rico. As the population in the United States is increasingly influenced by the presence of Latina/os and immigrants from the rest of the developing world, the issue of bilingualism will continue to be incendiary for members of many different communities. For ultimately, it is through language that immigrants and their descendants often imagine that cultural identity is cemented and kept firmly in place, thus making the topic all the more salient.

While this concept of body bilinguality or, more specifically, the code-switching body, is a new lens for looking at hybrid, trans- and inter-cultural subjects, it does however, benefit from Jane Desmond's articulation of "bodily bilingualism" (*Embodying* 46). Desmond uses the phrase "bodily bilingualism" to describe movements that shift between different codes of race and class. She provides the example of Bill Cosby's use of "Afro-American movement markers in his otherwise white-identified, upper-middle-class professional demeanor" (*Embodying* 46). She points to the way that on *The Cosby Show*, Bill Cosby and his family use "black" body movements through "bodily bilingualism" rather than through hybrid forms, in such a way that makes each of these body movements easily identifiable as "black". In other words, they employ different codes depending upon their need to signify different identities across race and class. Cosby and his television family must therefore contend with performances of race and class that are not necessarily popularly seen as parallel behaviors, thus they signify across ideas of "blackness" and "middle-classness." In popular culture, there is no highly legible gesture of black middle-class behavior, therefore making it necessary for these performers to signify race *and* class through distinct movements, whereas signifying black, working-class behavior would be an altogether different story. Again, while it is clear on the level of academic discourse that such distinctions as "black" and '"middle-class" movements are not ultimately tenable; these distinctions are incredibly powerful in popular discourse "both within communities (serving as a positive marker of cultural identity) and across communities" (Desmond, *Embodying* 43). Therefore, following Desmond, this dissertation is as much about understanding how identity is experienced through the body as it is about deconstructing fixed codes of bodily behavior. Yet, while

Desmond's use of "bodily bilingualism" is similar to my use of "body bilinguality" in that it refers to a strategic navigation of movement in relationship to codes of race and notions of cultural belonging, it is only briefly mentioned in a larger essay about "embodying difference" and should thus be expanded upon as a concept. Furthermore, Desmond's articulation makes no attempt to engage an accompanying verbal bilinguality and the politics of bilingualism I outlined above. Nonetheless, Desmond's essay importantly signals the way that bodies are used to express a subject's relationship to given identities and my work incorporates and extends her use of the term.

Following along the lines of Desmond's "bodily bilingualism" and the shift between socially constructed codes, E. Patrick Johnson's book *Appropriating Blackness* provides another useful example of the way in which racial signifiers are activated through gestural performance. He suggests that "'blackness' does not belong to any one individual or group. Rather individuals or groups *appropriate* this complex and nuanced racial signifier in order to circumscribe its boundaries or to exclude other individuals or groups" (3). Johnson describes this "appropriation" as taking place through performance, thus troubling the possibility of an essentialized, authentic center from which a signifying gesture emanates. In this way, code-switching bodies utilize any number of codes at their disposal, irrespective of positivist claims to identities, while also employing codes learned through embodied cultural experience. However, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the fact remains that bodies are racialized, gendered, classed and sexualized in a complex relationship to history and power.

In formulating my concept of the moving code-switching and bilingual body, I am aware that I am also invoking other theories of bodily movement, or "kinesthetic

semiotics" (Desmond, *Embodying* 34) that use spoken language as a metaphor for, and a lens through which to view and interpret, the signifying body. On the one hand, as discussed above, comparing the speaking body to signification produced through spoken language provides a readily available model for understanding body movement. However, in doing so, the logocentricism and rationalism embedded in Western thought is privileged, detracting from a strategic move to place the body at the center of epistemic production (H. Thomas 26-27). For instance, anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell purposefully avoided using terms like "body language," and pointed to body movement as being something other than a duplicate of what is communicated verbally, producing a disjuncture between speech and gesture (*ibid*). However, the fact that he used linguistic models of "non-verbal communication" to describe this communicative process was later criticized by Julia Kristeva, who in 1978 suggested that gesturality be viewed as a "semiotic text" and "signifying practice" in order to avoid being "blocked by the closed structures of language" (qtd. in Thomas 28). While I am in favor of, and see the necessity in moving away from these "closed structures" because of the way that meaning is encapsulated in the discourse of language itself, I do not wish to entirely eliminate the use of the linguistic metaphor in my formulation of the code-switching body for two reasons. First of all, because I am using the idea of a code-switching body to directly engage spoken bilinguality, the linguistic model cannot be entirely circumvented, as it serves as a bridge linking these two processes of signification. Secondly, as indicated in the discussion about post-positivist realism articulated in the introduction to the dissertation, I believe there *is* significant meaning that can be gleaned from signification *within* the structures of language. Furthermore, by using linguistic metaphors, I hope to find that it

is productive to think about linguistic vocality and orality through the lens of gestural speaking. However, I draw carefully upon this linguistic metaphor and look for opportunities to highlight gesturality as its own signifying practice outside of, and sometimes prior to, linguistic signification.

The concept of heteroglossia is also useful in setting the stage for this discussion. The term comes from Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of a type of polyphonic discourse in the modern novel, where a variety of perspectives are depicted through characters' distinct ways of speaking, thereby providing a "refracted" vision of authorial intention (324). However, I am more interested in Marvin Carlson's application of the term to theater. While Bakhtin sees drama and theater as distinctly monologic with a "unified field of vision of author, director, and audience against the clearly defined background of a single-tiered world" (qtd. in Carlson 4), Carlson points to the way that such a view not only obfuscates the truly heteroglossic potential of the theater, but also how Bakhtin's view reproduces the notion of a "'completely homogenous speech-community' of classic linguistic theory" (4). Carlson goes on to cite James Clifford's use of Bahktin's theory, writing that "languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways…what is said of languages applies equally to 'cultures' and subcultures'" (5). Thus following Carlson, as I have been emphasizing, the code-switching body fundamentally disrupts ideas of homogeneity, especially when it comes to speaking. Furthermore, this heteroglossia of cultural interactions can be extended to include language as an embodied signifying practice. Just as languages are not mutually exclusive, body codes also "intersect with each other in many different ways." In the remainder of his analysis, Carlson focuses on the way in which contemporary theater,

with particular attention to postcolonial theater, engages heteroglossia linguistically as a reflection of cultural intersections and exchanges. He convincingly argues that audiences are much more capable of understanding heteroglossic exchanges than might otherwise be imagined. Carlson's notion of this term, an analog of "code-switching," provides an effective tool for designating the variety of registers in which performers and social actors speak. For instance, to move from signifying linguistically to employing corporeal rhetoric (which also take place simultaneously) would be an example of heteroglossia, speaking both through words and through the body, acts of signification that do not exclude each other but rather intersect in multi-layered ways.

"The Body"

The above analysis has provided the framework for my theoretical intervention at the level of signification, corporeal rhetoric, and issues of bilingualism. However, in order to contextualize this work within the larger scope of studies on the body I will include an overview of the more salient moves in this history, particularly addressing the long-standing issue of the Cartesian dualism between mind and body. The studies on "the body" that I engage come from the field of cultural studies, with explicit ties to historical, social-science-based formulations of the body, as well as from the field of dance studies and performance studies, the latter of which tend to bring together aesthetic and material concerns for theories of the body. Both approaches are useful to my project for the ways in which they negotiate an understanding of the body as socially constructed *and* as a "phenomenal body" that humans live in. For as Helen Thomas reminds us, humans do not just *have* bodies, but they *are* bodies (29).

Elizabeth Grosz writes, “since the inception of philosophy as a separate and self-contained discipline in ancient Greece, philosophy has established itself on the foundation of a profound somatophobia” (47). The body has since come to be regarded as a source of interference, somehow posing a viable threat to the processes of human reason. By the time Descartes entered the picture, mind and body had already been placed in the present hierarchical configuration; however, he succeeded in cementing the separation of the soul from nature. This achieved the more profound effect of locating the objectiveness of knowledge (science), Truth, and consciousness outside of the natural world, where bodies and subjectivity abound. By this model, the reasoning mind can reflect upon the world of objects, bodies, and qualities. Furthermore, consciousness is removed from having any contact with other minds and any sort of a sociocultural community. Grosz explains that, “Cartesian dualism establishes an unbridgeable gulf between mind and matter” (49), one that consequently ends in reductionism as an attempt to disavow this chasm. The problem, however, with either reducing the mind to the body (empiricism and materialism), or the body to the mind (rationalism and idealism) is that the interaction between the two is left unexplained.

As a response to this “unbridgeable gulf” made ever deeper and more entrenched by post-Enlightenment humanism, approaches to the body have followed the logic of what Grosz outlines as the three most pervasive contemporary heirs of Cartesianism. In one approach the body is primarily regarded as an object, as an organic instrument in the natural sciences, merely “physical,” or, an object like any other in the humanities and social sciences. The body in this approach has no specificity or individual complexity informed by the social world. In another approach, the body is treated as a metaphoric

vessel at the disposal of consciousness, passively being acted upon by individuals and the contested territory for social conditioning. Grosz points out that certain feminists often employ this approach when they wish, for instance, to "reclaim" their bodies from someone else's disciplining or training. In a third line of investigation, and the one that I most closely follow, the body is considered a signifying vehicle, or a conduit through which the subject connects the outside world to the inside world. While this last model seems to ascribe the body the most agency in that it is posited as a crucial *link* between the subject and the world, its corporeality, however, "must be reduced to a predictable, knowable transparency" (51).

Not only does the above account demonstrate the pervasiveness of Cartesian dualism in most approaches to the body, but it also clearly shows the need to imbricate the body into the fabric of epistemologies through an approach that values the body as a subject and thus a valued meaning-maker. Despite the seemingly overpowering shadow cast by Cartesian and other humanist conceptions of the body, such interventions have taken place in the latter part of the twentieth century. In these works, however, we encounter what seems to be the inevitable collision between body as object and body as subject. In the first two chapters of her book *The Body, Dance, and Cultural Theory*, Thomas provides an extensive historical overview of what she calls "the body project" in the social sciences that outlines this history.

Thomas's description of the "body project" refers to what she cites as the increasing scholarly interest in studies related to the body. She outlines how, following a Darwinian inspired attention to the body, 20th century anthropological and sociological approaches began to look at the body through the positivistic lens of biology, or

"naturalistic" determinations of bodily behavior. This universalist formulation was later addressed by cultural anthropologists who adopted the position of cultural relativism, arguing that bodily expressions varied from culture to culture, creating what Thomas refers to as the "culture/nature divide" (17), yet another iteration of Cartesian dualism. She describes in detail the way that this cultural relativist position was later picked up by poststructuralists (Foucault, Kristeva) who would in turn create a constructionist reading of the body. For Thomas, the "body project," is situated within the constructivist/naturalistic divide that exists in thinking about the body. Nonetheless, post-structuralist theorists made productive advances that approach the body as a social entity "shaped, constrained and even invented by society" (Schilling qtd. in Thomas 12). However, as already noted earlier, taking these theories to their limit, the body as subject disappears, theories of deconstruction all the while still constituting the body as an object in a tautological cycle of philosophy. Naturalistic approaches having been dismissed as the purveyors of racist and sexist essentialism, and in attempting to endow embodied experience with its own epistemological truth, social constructionists find an unwanted return to positivist essentialism.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault are two theorists crucial to the development of studies of embodiment and useful for thinking through this quandary of the body as object versus subject. Merleau-Ponty's theories of phenomenology articulated in his study *Phenomenology of Perception*, made a highly significant contribution to this discourse by emphasizing the primacy of perception and the experience of the body. He held that any analysis of the self had to stem from the fundamental fact that we are embodied subjectivities (*Phenomenology*). Merleau-Ponty's

work was key in creating an understanding of the body as an object only to those outside; for the self, the body is never an object. His writings helped to establish the body and the psyche as inextricably connected, and his work has been influential to many scholars who have attempted to unravel Cartesian dualism (Thomas 30). Nonetheless, because he is not able to situate the phenomenological body in the social world of historical contingencies, power and discourse, his work still falls within the tradition of liberal humanism and while it certainly privileges the body as subject, it does not succeed at uniting the body subject of phenomenology with the body object of social construction.

Foucault on the other hand, whose work was instrumental in providing a new lens for understanding the operations of "power" that are veiled in the unquestioning perpetuation of liberal humanism, was subsequently able to expose the construction of the modern subject as a complex and deliberate process of disciplining and control. Importantly, he did so by foregrounding his critique of theories of the body, arguing that the material body is the principle target upon which knowledge/power is enacted, which is in turn transmitted through discourse. Foucault argues that instead of being controlled by brute force, the body as the subject of modernity is caught up in a range of practices that control, constrain and objectify it through strategies of surveillance (*Discipline and Punish*). Insightful and productive for a seemingly endless number of philosophical inquiries and political projects with emancipatory ends, Foucault's work however does not sufficiently attend to an analysis of the body itself, and as feminist scholars have argued, his work can be read as gender blind, not noting the particularities of gendered experience. For instance, for Chris Schilling, the body ultimately disappears because it is wholly constituted as an effect of power/knowledge, therefore vanishing as a material

phenomenon. “It is present as an item of discussion but is absent as the object of analysis” (Schilling 81). However, his work is not, as Lois McNay points out, “an endless dispersal of the subject…but is linked to the overall political aim of increasing political autonomy, understood as a humanizing quality of social existence” (193) and thus central in my own aims to make visible bodies that have been discursively erased or obscured.

In conclusion, philosophers found this distinction between body/mind, object/subject helpful for centuries and some arguably still do; however, it bears underscoring that one of the most insidious and damaging results generated from this thinking was the view that women, people of color, and classed subjects are somehow more beholden to their bodies than white male subjects. The manner in which any body is feminized, racialized or classed indicates the genealogy of this Cartesian philosophy. Donna Haraway writes

> Colored, sexed, and laboring persons still have to do a lot of work to become similarly transparent to count as objective, modest witnesses to the world rather than their ‘bias’ or ‘special interest.’ To be the object of vision, rather than the ‘modest,’ self-invisible source of vision, is to be evacuated of agency (32).

We must only look so far as the recent debacle with the judiciary hearings for Judge Sonia Sotomayor, who was accused by conservatives of being too biased to be an objective Supreme Court Justice due to her subject position as a Latina. The notion of the potential for white male bias on the part of the other seven judges was so unfathomable that it was never even mentioned, as objectivity was by default ascribed to them. All of this brings about an encounter with another rhetorical and philosophical trench: by focusing scholarly attention on the bodies of marginalized subjects, even in the interest of deconstructing the narrative of the “body-driven Other,” one runs the risk of reproducing

notions of these subjects as somehow more bodily invested than white male subjects. Furthermore, because historically marginalized subjects have often been denied access to Western epistemology, logocentric systems of knowledge, and operations of power in general, corporeal strategies that emerged as a *result* of being placed on the "body" side of the equation, deserve to be studied in a way that does not reify them as objects but rather inscribes them as active agents.

Recent studies of the body in performance, specifically in dance studies have contributed to privileging the body as subject while also taking into account the ways in which "power" is enacted upon them, uniting a social constructivist approach that destabilizes fixed social identities while also foregrounding the importance of embodied experience. The body for these scholars is what André Lepecki calls "visceral matter as well as sociopolitical agent" (4). In the introduction to a collection of essays on the body in dance, *Meaning in Motion*, Desmond argues for the importance of bringing cultural studies and dance studies together in an effort to both use aesthetic practice to question ideology, and to bring embodiment back into discussions of social identities. She points to the ways in which dance scholarship had previously focused on "historical narratives, aesthetic valuations, or auteur studies of great dancers or choreographers" at the expense of investigations that would address the "operations of social power" (*Meaning* 1). Furthermore, she writes that, "performing arts scholarship that emphasizes aesthetic valuation in transcendental terms, or confines its task to what 'really' happened in linear historical narrative is still often the norm" (4), thereby focusing instead on close-readings of the aesthetic "text" and less on its implications for the socio-political world in which it is being created. Similarly, cultural studies approaches to the body have focused on

symbolic representation at the expense of embodiment, privileging verbal texts and visual-object based investigation (29), thus further contributing to the split between embodiment and the social world. Desmond argues that dance is an embodied social practice as well as a highly visual aesthetic form. In doing so, she identifies three key concepts that underscore the central tasks of the code-switching body: embodiment, identity, and representation. The body, in addition to moving between social codes (race, gender, class, ethnicity), linguistic registers, and actual and imagined cultural borders, is also actually *transitioning* and *mixing* the modes of embodiment (body as subject, how the body feels, the phenomenological body), identity (body as subject-object, how we see the self), representation (body as object, how the self is seen by others). Thus, the code-switching I theorize provides a model for actively engaging and understanding this relationship. Furthermore, by using the body to address both the lived experience of the dancing/moving subject *and* the social construction of identities created through visual representation of the body as object, my project is a response to Desmond's call for work that enacts this conversation between dance studies and cultural studies.

Dance scholars and theater scholars reiterate this joining of object and subject when they point to the body and performance as being simultaneously a process and a product, or what Elin Diamond calls, "a doing" and "a thing done" (1). Performance, the body, and identity, are figured as unstable and unfinished, as they work to create meaning. As Ann Cooper Albright writes, "lived bodies strain at the seams of a culture's ideological fabric. Inherently unstable, the body is always in a process of becoming—and becoming undone" (5). Furthermore, as Desmond points out, thinking about dance as both product and process facilitates a discussion of dance as a performance (product) and

as a social practice (process) (*Meaning* 7). Thus the social practice of dance blurs the distinction between performer and spectator, signaling a critical role for embodied spectatorship. Reception of art and the role of the spectator are also described as processes by Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson who argue that meaning making, the visual or embodied interpretation of art is "a process that can be engaged as performative" (2). Jones and Stephenson explore practices that enact the body or subject "in a performative fashion (Performing the Body), to be able to point to the act of interpretation itself as a kind of performance (Performing the Text)" (1). Juxtaposing the two acts of "performing the body"/"performing the text" thus aids in thinking about the body's relationship to text, to language, to being "interpreted" and thus metaphorically "read." While my own work does not focus directly on audience reception of performances of the code-switching body, the assertion made by Jones and Stephenson is important in thinking about how language is understood and received, how the bodies of spectators, readers, and interpreters are implicated in this process of signification and most importantly, how the performing body is also a spectator of itself. In other words, framing the code-switching body as both product and process implies a self-aware performing body, simultaneously engaging representational strategies and expressive possibilities.

Finally, it should be clear that in referring to "the body," and especially to "Latin/o bodies" as I will be doing throughout this dissertation, I am aware that there is no such thing as a unifying, emblematic body that encompasses the vastness of human experience. Rather, I see "the body" as containing the potential expressive and subjective

power inherent in all human beings. In writing about Latina/o bodies, I draw from Myra Mendible's description of "the Latina body" as

> a convenient fiction – a historically contingent, mass-produced combination of myth, desire, location, marketing, and political expedience… which functions within a social and cultural taxonomy that registers but an echo of the clamor, complexity, and variety of women who embody Latina identities (1).

Therefore my analysis of Puerto Rican performers through the lens of the code-switching body takes into account the "convenient fiction" of Puerto Rican identity, replete with popular associations of heat, spiciness, rhythm, hyper-sexuality, passion, cultural backwardness, and linguistic aberrance, just as it also validates the matrix of lived experience of people who identify as Puerto Rican. Furthermore, Puerto Ricans have been chosen as a subject for this study in part because my own code-switching, bilingual, Puerto Rican, female body informs my inquiry, and also because Puerto Ricans' unusual and particular relationship to the United States as a "free associated state" foregrounds an interstitial space that is especially suited for theories of hybridity, mixing and switching. Additionally, however, "the Puerto Rican body" also presents us with an interesting symbol that blurs race and ethnicity, troubling fixed binaries of black and white, Spanish and Indian, even the uneasy analogous relationship between *mestiza*/o and *mulata*/o, as well as the binary of citizen/non-citizen, outsider/insider. Because of the fixedness of the binaries that are here exploded, Puerto Rican bodies instantiate the way in which the code-switching model can simultaneously engage social construction and lived experience, living the experience of code-switching between social constructs.

Puerto Rico and the Cultural Politics of Caribbeanness

The particular political situation of Puerto Rico, while not the stated focus of this project, is of utmost importance to the topic at hand. I underscore this here not simply because of the way that "culture" becomes a surrogate for "nation" in this nationless territory (which becomes further complicated when talking about a displaced diasporic population), but also for the way in which this special brand of 21st century colonialism affects and interacts with the process of Puerto Rican subject formation. Therefore, I posit the code-switching body as the *force* behind a salient resistance to hegemony, as well as the site where both the colonization *and* resistance take place, both object and subject. This notion of bodily resistance through code-switching is guided by Henry Louis Gates idea of the "Signifying Monkey," Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel's description of a "*jaiba* politics," and José Esteban Muñoz's "Disidentifications," discussed below.

In his foundational text *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates writes about what he identifies as the African American practice of "Signifyin,'" a verbal strategy that exploits the gap between the denotative and figurative meanings of words. Or, understood another way, Signifyin' plays with language in such a way that meaning is ascribed to certain words, acts, and sounds by way of shared connotations, inaccessible through a solely denotative context. For example, the denotative, or dictionary definition of "black" when used to describe a person may be quite different than the connotative "black" depending on who says it, how it is said, and in the context of where and to whom else it is said, rendering the meaning ascribed anything from skin color, to class, to relative alliance etc. Gates expands the term "Signifyin'" to refer not merely to a specific vernacular strategy but also to a trope of double-voiced repetition and reversal that exemplifies the

distinguishing mark of Black discourse. The practice of Signifyin' is traced back to the figure of the Signifying Monkey who first appears as a character in the oral tradition of African slaves. In these stories the Monkey is shown as outwitting and thus escaping from the physically dominant Lion. Signifyin' then emerges as a strategy through which dominant forces are mocked, mimicked, resisted, and sometimes overcome. In reference to what Gates refers to as the Saussurean "homonym" of the English word "signifying" he writes that, "to compound the dizziness and giddiness that we must experience in the vertiginous movement between these two "identical" signifiers, these two homonyms have everything to do with each other and, then again, absolutely nothing" (27). In other words, the African American sign "Signifyin'" signifies upon the standard English "signifying," riding upon and against this sign-signifier-signified relationship of meaning-making in order to provide an alternate route to subject formation, one that is not foreclosed by spoken language.

While Gates's theory is specifically in reference to literary criticism and to the way in which African American writers Signify inter-textually, it is of particular importance in terms of imagining the role of the body in this process of meaning-making. For not only is the person doing the Signifyin' relying on the connotative aspects of words, spoken or written with a rich inter-play of sound and tonality, but she or he also has at her or his disposal the many citational possibilities of gesture and corporeal rhetoric. Furthermore, although Gates writes principally about African American authors, he draws the connection between the figure of the Signifying monkey and the trickster spirit present in many Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latino traditions. Given Puerto Rico's position as a distinctly Caribbean island with a shared history of the natal alienation

caused by African slavery, genocidal colonial encounters, racial mixing, and the development of a particular brand of resistance not unlike the Signfiying Monkey, Gates's theories are in fact particularly applicable to both contemporary and historical Puerto Rico. Furthermore, like the monkey trickster, the code-switching body creates signification that is understood on the denotative level at the same time that it works to create meaning through connotative gestures that invoke any number of verbal and corporeal tropes understood and interpreted by those present through their various lenses of belonging, in this case race, gender, culture, and nation.

José Esteban Muñoz's concept of "disidentifying" also serves to imagine the ways that the code-switching bodies of what he calls "minority artists" work on and against oppressive discourses as a way to simultaneously distance themselves from yet actively engage these dominant ideologies. Like Muñoz's disidentifying subjects, code-switching bodies moves through and simultaneously negotiate multiple sites of identity. In doing so, they create alternate modes of belonging that embrace these sometimes contradictory positionalities that are seemingly at odds with one another. These performances and acts of resistance show, for example, how queer people of color resist white feminist, queer politics, rejecting the heteronormativity of Latina/o politics while employing anti-colonial, anti-racist cultural practices. Or, as another example, we can look to how racialized and gendered colonial subjects negotiate their relationships to racist and sexist anti-colonial politics while still working to decenter narratives of colonial domination. Thus the process of identifying experienced by the subject, the phenomenological experience of the code-switching body is as, or more, important than the identity constructions. In other words, the transformative process of disidentification itself trumps

the affirmation of any specific identity. Furthermore, in Muñoz pointing to camp and *choteo* (poking fun at) as methods through which these performative acts take place, I am reminded of the contestatory practices of Signifyin' and *jaibería* (described below), that simultaneously work within and through the very structures of oppressions that they dismantle.

In their co-edited text *Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics*, Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel suggest the possibility of imagining Puerto Rico outside the lens of the colonialism/nationalism dichotomy that has dominated discussions of Puerto Rican politics and culture for the last century. By negotiating and rearticulating the paradigm that would make Puerto Rican subjectivity possible only through a model of independence from the colonial hegemony of the United States, Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel amplify the ways in which acts of resistance can be understood, for instance in the form of interventions such as this dissertation that often take place in the realm of culture. The editors argue that by limiting the scope of understanding to one based on independence versus statehood, avenues of inquiry remain within the sphere of the dominant classes, overlooking how Puerto Rican identities based on race, class, gender and sexuality are not represented within the hegemonic narratives of Puerto Rican nationalism (particularly cultural nationalism). Instead, they look for ways to imagine more democratic access for Puerto Ricans (regardless of its colonial status) and point to cultural interventions in music and literature that resist both nationalist *and* colonial paradigms. By doing so, Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel accomplish two things. Firstly, they propose a model of "radical statehood" that takes US imperialism as an inevitable obstacle in the twenty-first century, one that will be in effect whether Puerto

Rico is independent or not, thereby undermining the masculinist, heteronormative, racist, classist strategies employed by the independence movement. Or as they write in the introduction to *Puerto Rican Jam*, "this strategy is especially relevant in the present context of globalization where there is no absolute 'outside' to the transtatal capitalism" (28). Secondly, they locate the Diasporican population as the nexus for meaningful, emancipatory interventions on the level of Puerto Rican culture and politics, further de-centering a nationalism platform that would view those living off the island as contaminated by US culture and therefore contaminants of island purity.

In working towards a model of Puerto Rican culture and politics that attends to the needs of individual survival, not simply ideological struggle, Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel describe the function of what they call "*jaiba* politics" or what is termed colloquially in Puerto Rico *jaibería* (26-33). They argue that the strategy of mimicry has been historically and consistently successful in obtaining political concessions that have resulted in the material and social improvement of everyday life for Puerto Ricans. Even as they point to the positive potential in what Homi Bhabha defines as the ambiguity found in this colonial mimicry, Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel argue in favor of a mimicry, a performance, that does not force *identification with* the United States. In other words, Puerto Rican mimicry, or *jaibería*, that relies upon strategies of negotiation and transformation to advance collective agendas, may be the most "viable means of demanding U.S. responsibility and decolonization without having to lose a sense of autonomy from the United States" (29).

The term *jaibería* comes from the indigenous word for mountain crab, "*jaiba*," which in order to move forward, moves sideways. Its popular usage in Puerto Rico refers

to a "non-confrontation and evasion, of taking dominant discourses literally in order to subvert it for one's purpose, of doing whatever one sees fit not as a head on collision but a bit under the table, that is through other means" (Negrón-Muntaner and Grosfoguel 30-31). Interestingly, this unwillingness to confront oppressive forces has been the source of intra-cultural derision and disdain from some of the most revered nationalists, from Antonio S. Pedreira to René Marqués, who wrote scathingly about "*el puertorriqueño dócil*" ("the docile Puerto Rican). Conversely, the editors of *Puerto Rican Jam* see this supposed "docility," as a strategy of resistance that combines mimicry, parody, and *jaibería* in order to begin to rectify the gross power inequities at stake.

While this model is promising for the way in which it validates a broad-based politics of popular resistance, rendering Puerto Rican subjects previously dismissed as the burden of the intellectual elite, active agents of social change, it has also been criticized as sharing with its "imperial ruler, at best, indifference to Third World political struggle" (Puri 35). Though she recognizes the strengths of the arguments made in *Puerto Rican Jam*, Shalini Puri issues a stringent critique of the way in which Puerto Rico is constructed as a place of exclusivist purism in contrast to the somehow more authentic Diasporican subject, while embracing the democracy offered by the United States over a pan-Caribbean politics of resistance (32-40). Likewise, Puri warns against invoking the binary of internal (Diasporican) versus external (island) struggle where, in this particular case, Diasporican is clearly privileged over the other. According to Puri, while they are justified in the much-needed critique of the traditional exclusion of Diasporicans from the discourse of Puerto Rican politics, the solution does not lie in the singular dismissal of the independence movement.

The idea of *jaiba* politics set forth in *Puerto Rican Jam*, placed in conversation with Puri's critiques and qualifications for the strategies delineated therein, is key to the project of the code-switching body. I propose that the code-switching body, whether living in Puerto Rico, as a Diasporican, as a Latina/o, or as another marginalized subject is a form of *jaibería*, for the body code-switches strategically, in order to resist hegemonic practices of domination, particularly in relationship to language. Through this bodily *jaibería*, a not too distant relative of Signifyin', the subject moves through, across and around social strictures that would limit the body-subject to its position as body-object. Thus, emancipatory potential is found in signifying through gesture and corporeality, on and against a verbal language that is always already the master's tongue, in order to, somehow, at least attempt to find subjectivity.

Our understanding of Ivette Román's piece described at the beginning of this chapter, like the work of the artists about whom I write in the following chapters, becomes more legible and tangibly relevant by holding it up to the lens of the code-switching body and the theoretical framework that I have outlined above. Self-aware of her performing body as object, she enacts her own identity and subjectivity as Latina/Puerto Rican/racial Other/gendered/colonial subject. Signifyin' on the connotations of the hand gesture she interpellates the audience's own Puerto Rican identity. Using a gesture that is both instinctual and deliberate, showing us how it performatively invokes Puerto Rican identity, by then switching the gesture, she destabilizes this fixed relationship. Her articulation of a critical stance on Puerto Rican politics while delighting audiences through her scandalous recounting of corruption enacts a *jaibería* politics that mixes pleasure with subversion. The transformation from

one gesture to the other, while also transitioning the narrative of her monologue shows how discursive power and institutional control leads to the hard power of violence. Here Román is shown to be both the receiver and the perpetrator of that violence, while simultaneously resisting this act of oppression through her rap. Finally, speaking with her body, even as she invokes her embodied voice, allowing one process of signification to build on the other, she enacts the bilinguality of the code-switching body. Thus, we come to understand "*Hummus Terroristas Todos*" as an example of "embodiment, representation and identity" as Román's phenomenological body and socially constructed body are united through this brief performance.

Chapter Two

The Bilingual and Code-switching Body Onstage: Spanglish/Dominicanish, Puerto Rico/New York

"Language is a physical act—something that involves yr whole bod, Write with yr whole bod. Read with yr whole bod. Wake up."
-*Suzan-Lori Parks*

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality is the space [site] of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators.
-*bell hooks*

In this chapter I take up the politics of bilingualism and processes of identity formation through language, arguing that concepts of performativity and live performing bodies render seemingly essentialized and positivist identities more complex constructs that allow us to productively discuss the material ways in which Latina/os negotiate experiences of marginality. On the one hand, the popular idea that language is considered one of the principle markers of cultural identity problematically essentializes bodies and lived experiences. However on the other hand, to deny the importance of language as a marker of cultural identity is equally troubling because it overlooks the ways in which the different languages we speak, and more importantly *how* we speak them, directly affects material realities. As Frantz Fanon re minds us, "mastery of a language affords remarkable power" (18). Or, as is pointedly captured in Ana Celia Zentella's adaptation of the common saying, "*Dime con quien andas y te dire quién eres*"[1] to " *Dime con quién*

[1] Tell me who you hang with and I will tell you who you are"

***hablas**, y te dire quién eres*"[2] ("Latina/o Unity" 25). Whom we speak to and the language(s) in which we speak, are significant in constructing our perceptions of ourselves and the world. As Zentella points out, language is a "major form of unequally distributed capital in society's marketplace" and not everyone learns the most marketable way of speaking ("Latina/o Unity" 26). Therefore, although we should be aware of how essentialist claims of identity based on language can be complicated by other signifiers attached to race, class, and nationality, the fact remains that there are material consequences related to identities formed through language. In fact, language networks play a defining role in the idea of identity itself, or as linguistic anthropologist Paul Kroskrity writes, "identity is defined as the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories" (107).

Ultimately, in the interstices between the essentialism of naturalized identity and the constructivism of an identity based on social conditioning, we find the hard fact of language barriers. Thus one result, born out of a need for survival and through strategies of resistance and adaptation, is the emergence of hybrid languages such as Spanglish and Creole. The tongue skillfully and purposefully negotiates these borders; both the physical borders of nation-states, and the discursive borders of identity. It learns to shape and mold languages marked by histories of migration and movement of bodies, colonization and enslavement, in which echoes of genocide can still be heard in the accented sounds, and the ghosts of disappeared ancestors are found in the lexicon of images and objects.

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[2] "Tell me who you **speak** with and I will tell you who you are."

Much like the speaking tongue, the signifying body also performs cultural identification through language. In what follows I will look at the way that two artists perform their bilingual experience through their tongues, as well as through an embodied corporeal language that demonstrates how the code-switching body works. In analyzing the performances of Teresa Hernández and Josefina Báez I will explain how their bodies perform codes of belonging through distinct embodied signification. In doing so, these women question and effectively destabilize essential ideas of what it means to be "Latina," "black," "colonized," "immigrant," "Puerto Rican," "Dominican," and even "bilingual," while simultaneously corporeally relating their lived experiences in bodies marked by these identities. In doing so, this analysis works to create important links between embodiment, identity and representation that run throughout this dissertation.

However, this chapter is also very much about performing body bilinguality and embodied code-switching on a stage, in front of an audience, where the relationship between performer and spectator is clearly defined. While I have argued elsewhere that this model can be applied to informal performances as well as to everyday acts of performance, the questions posed in this chapter are specifically concerned with how the bilingual and code-switching body works, not just on any stage, but how it works in the context of Latina/o theater and performance production in the United States. The locus of this performer-spectator relationship constructs, addresses and questions communities of belonging, just as the act of distancing provided through a theatricalized structure performatively examines constructions of the Other. Thus, this chapter explores the relationship between English, Spanish, and the performing body as the vessel for

conveying meaning and expressing identity within the parameters of stage performance practices.

In creating, attending or studying US Latina/o theater, one will inevitably encounter the issue of language. Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez identifies language as, "one of the most critical and controversial components of Latino theater" (*José Can You See* 104). The relationship between Spanish, English and the hybrid offspring "Spanglish" is one filled with the complexities that reflect the process of Latina/o identification in the United States. Therefore, plays that claim to tell the stories of Latina/os in the United States, should, it seems, also engage the issue of language in order to more fully reflect this process. However, this is not often the case, in part because the relationship between competing tongues is further embodied through the experience of many second and third generation US Latina/os, for whom Spanish may be a language to which they have little or no access despite their continued racialization and abjection as "non-American." Yet, for others, some form of Spanish, or Spanglish, is representative of a daily social reality and therefore the predominantly English plays being produced as "Latina/o theater" fall short of being able to engage with what I am signaling here as some of the most prevalent discourses of cultural identity. Furthermore, this language barrier makes it very difficult, and in some cases nearly impossible, for conversations to occur between US Latina/o theater and Latin American theater. Not only does it make artistic cross-pollinations between diasporic communities and Latin American homelands difficult, but also, as Puerto Rican scholar and theater critic Lowell Fiet points out, scholarship on theater and performance in Latin America is limited by the availability of published scripts and performance texts. According to Fiet, despite burgeoning artistic movements, a

proliferation of performance and production does not subsequently result in the publication of texts due to the fact that Latin American theater artists are faced with severely limited resources (*Preguntas* 8-9). Sandoval-Sánchez further complicates the issue by redirecting Fiet's critique and signaling the way in which US Latina/o theater in English, often marginalized in the United States, is also excluded from the Latin American canon. The solution to this complicated issue is unclear and contains many slippages that inevitably uncover the inherent problems of both essentialist and constructivist readings of ethnic or cultural identification processes. However, I suggest that the body, and more specifically embodied performance, often overlooked in these discussions of language, is of central importance in examining this issue.

Scholars have pointed to the value of orality (Ong, Le Goff) in understanding cultural history, positing oral traditions alongside and against the act of writing. Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu and the noted Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o have gone on further to develop the idea of "orature" as a rejection of the idea of "oral literature," a concept that tends to see the oral as inferior to the written. Highlighting the important relationship between communication, language, and culture, Thiong'o writes, "communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries…the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" ("Theory of Orature" 16). Not only is language as it is spoken important, but Thiong'o also points to performance as the distinguishing element in defining the difference between orature and literature. The presence of song, sound, *and* motion of the body work together to create performance, placing gesture and dance at the center of this act of communication (Thiong'o *Decolonising*). Furthermore, in his influential study

Cities of the Dead, Joseph Roach uses the idea of orature in writing about the "kinesthetic imagination," not of an individual body but of a shared practice of patterned movements that are not "prior to language but constitutive of it" (26). This focus on the kinesthetic, on history as remembered through the body and through language is central to understanding the speaking body that I describe in this chapter.

While scholars have given substantial attention to orality and orature, the speaking body as a mediator of languages, bilinguality and cultural identity has been less explored. In regards to language and the body, Brenda Farnell, an anthropologist of human movement, views the body as a source from which language itself is generated rather than a form of verbal language cultivated via the body. She writes:

> Although in the past two decades considerable interdisciplinary attention has been given to "talk about the body" as a cultural object, and to "talk of the body" as a phenomenological realm of subjective experience, "talk from the body" as dynamically embodied action in semantically rich spaces has received comparably little attention (qtd. in Mafe-Keane 2).

In this way the moving body in performance can therefore be the object of representation at the same time that it is a subject of its own experience (Cooper Albright 13). Performers thus achieve subjectivity both through speech and by "talking" *from* the body. Thus, given the complexity of the language question in US Latina/o performance outlined above, I am interested in how these limitations can be challenged by approaching an understanding of the ways in which Latina/o subjects are constituted through their speaking bodies. The speaking body is of central importance when speaking tongues become limited in their abilities to signify for, and communicate with, diverse audiences.

The Fourth Country and the (Speaking) Latina Body

In *Borderlands/La Frontera,* Gloria Anzaldúa allows Latina/os to take ownership over and pride in their bordered, hybrid, linguistic identity, born from what she identifies as the constant hemorrhaging that takes place as the First World grates against the Third World and "the lifeblood of two worlds merg(es) together to form a third country – a border culture" (3). The celebration of this interstitial space as one that is culturally valid and positively productive gives US Latina/os the tools with which to be able to confront their legacy of colonialism, racism, and the often-resulting economic disadvantage. However, as Anzaldúa points out in the above quote, the formation of a border identity and therefore of linguistic practices, is a direct result of processes of violence and loss, even as there has been growth and birth in this troubled union. It is therefore impossible to imagine an exchange between US Latina/o and Latin American theater artists, scholars and theater organizations that is not haunted by this issue of language. Furthermore, many scholars have theorized the border as a figurative and metaphoric space that is not necessarily attached to any geographical location although the actual fenced (and walled) space of the US-Mexican *frontera* is indeed an exemplary manifestation of such a space.[3] Additionally, despite the importance of the actual physical land, in reviewing scholarship that addresses the border as a de-territorialized concept, it is also helpful to imagine it as a permeable space through which bodies, commodities and information move bi-directionally. In this way, Anzaldúa's emphasis on the *mestiza* body (itself a hybridized construct) as the borderland/battleground, underscores the relationship between geographies and bodies. Not only is the border a space through which bodies pass, but the

[3] See Walter Mignolo, Renato Rosaldo, Néstor García Canclini

border can also be imagined to exist within one's own body, one's own tongue: the site of cultural and linguistic collision, cross-pollination and re-articulation.

I argue that while Anzaldúa's fractured body and border space of the "third country" is fundamentally crucial in understanding US Latina/os' relationship to language, it does not necessarily represent the only space where all exchanges between US Latina/os and Latin Americans take place. Rather, it is possible to stretch this already productive model. In addition to the bilingualism of the tongue, or what Anzaldúa calls "a forked tongue," or "a variation of two languages" (77), I believe there is also an embodied language that accompanies this simultaneous fusion and split, constituting an additional site, or modality, from which to "speak," what I call a "fourth country." The speaking body, moving between codes of signification, becomes hybrid and multilingual as it negotiates ideas signified by spoken words along with knowledge carried in the body. Anzaldúa specifically theorizes the body in her writings on "The New Mestiza," looking at the way that Chicanas have been oppressed *through* their bodies and should therefore look to embodied memory in order to dismantle this oppression, thus unlearning self-hatred that leads to a fragmented subjectivity. However, I seek to further this embodied exploration into the "fourth country" of gestural signification. In other words, I am looking at not just Latina/o identity as experienced through the body, but as performed through the body. This "fourth country" as I conceive of it, is the dynamic site from which transcultural, hybrid and multilingual identities are performatively established and explored. Additionally, while I am certainly interested in Latina/o identity as it pertains to Latin America, the focus of this project is very much on the liminality experienced by US Latina/os and Puerto Ricans in their perpetual state of being

ni de aquí ni de allá (from neither here nor there). Although Latin Americans are already a highly hybridized and diverse group in terms of race, class, ethnicity and nationality, and, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, code-switching between race and ethnicity happens within this context, for the purposes of this discussion, the "fourth country" is not bounded by geography, location, or space. Instead, it is itself a collection of performative *actions* and *processes*. Another way to think about the "fourth country" is in regards to the creation of a fourth dimension where time is added to the three-dimensionality of space, resulting in movement. In this way, in the "fourth country," movement through time and space is at the heart of subject formation and the instantiation of identity.

Far from being a utopian zone where the contradictions and complexities of bordered experience are rendered neutral, the "fourth country" is a site where the body is not understood simply as a biological construct but is simultaneously the product of social construction and lived experience. In short, the "fourth country" is the active speaking body itself. In other words, when the performing body finds itself in the space of the "fourth country" it can articulate both the ways in which a black Latina is racialized, through the way she speaks English *and* Spanish, while a white Latina is also racialized, albeit in a different way, from the moment she speaks Spanish in the United States. Race and language thus are intricately intertwined in a troubled and ever-shifting relationship. Zentella makes a statement that is particularly useful in thinking about identificatory processes and the construction of *Latinidad* when she writes that "as overt racism has become less acceptable in public discourse 'race has been remapped from biology onto language' allowing notions of inherent inferiority to be transferred to the

languages of racialized minorities with impunity" (*Building on Strength* 10). Furthermore, the performing body plays a crucial role in this process of racialization as, for instance, is the case with a white-looking Latina like myself, who can be read as white until I start, not only *speaking*, but *acting* in a way that conforms with dominant notions of *Latinidad* at which point my whiteness becomes suspect. Film critic and cultural studies scholar Isabel Molina Guzmán takes this notion one step further when she argues that *Latinidad* is gendered as a feminine construct that, already racialized as non-white (regardless of actual skin color), is further gendered as female, subservient, docile, and available (10). The body working within the "fourth country" engages these irresolvable contradictions and speaks through and about this embodied experience.

In focusing on these concepts, this chapter creates a conversation between the work of two artists: Teresa Hernández and Josefina Báez -- one working in Puerto Rico and one working in the United States -- in order to draw links between, not only specific performance practices, but also between given cultural moments. The bodies of these performers serve as liminal bordered spaces just as they describe and work from uniquely bordered geographic places: immigrant neighborhoods in New York City, and the island of Puerto Rico. In both of these loci language is the artery that runs alongside and across the imagined and constructed divide. While there are no simple or clear answers to the complicated questions posed by these issues of language, I propose that they take on new meanings when viewed in the context of performances that privilege corporeal signification.

The performances of Teresa Hernández from Puerto Rico will be examined first. I will analyze her work in the specific context of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans'

positionality as "not-quite Latin American" and "not-yet US Latina/o," a liminality that Anzaldúa would refer to as a "third country." Directly following nearly four hundred years of Spanish colonization, the 20th century US neocolonization project has infused Puerto Rican colloquial Spanish with a plentitude of Anglicisms, and Hernández's work plays with this in order to approach a more complex sense of what *puertorriqueñidad* means both within and outside the island. Her heavy reliance on a fusion of multiple physical practices will be theorized as providing the Puerto Rican subject with another language through which the body can speak its national and cultural position.

The second artist that will be examined is the self-identified Dominican York (Dominican from New York),[4] Josefina Báez. Her performance piece *Dominicanish* is an exploration of a young woman's process of transculturation as she learns to speak English upon moving to the United States from the Dominican Republic. In this work Báez weaves a mixture of English and Dominican Spanish (Dominicanish)[5] in a highly intricate manner that goes beyond a simple demonstration of verbal code-switching, while juxtaposing East Indian kuchipudi dance moves and traditional Dominican dance. She uses the body to both distance the spectator from common notions of Dominicanness while at the same time, through narration and the presence of her black othered body, embodies the resulting consequences of being black and Dominican in the United States.

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[4] According to Jorge Duany in *El Barrio Gandul, Economía subterránea y migración indocumentada en Puerto Rico*, the term Dominican York is rarely used by communities in the United States, preferring instead to call themselves simply "Dominican." Alicia Arrizón points out in *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance*, that Baéz's use of this term "operates as a transnational signifier that expresses movement and cultural survival" (44). Arrizón argues that by choosing this term that identifies the subject between spaces and cultures, Baéz gives name to an identity that is formulated through linguistic and cultural contact with other "minority cultures as well as with the wider US society" (45).

[5] Interestingly, I have heard this pronounced in different ways. One way emphasizes the word "Dominican" in the reading of it, while the other emphasizes the word "(Spa)nish" or maybe for some "(Engl)ish." The former actually is read through more of an English pronunciation, while the latter is more Spanish, as if one were going to say "Dominicana" and at the end they add "ish."

Her piece is therefore an exploration of the way in which she negotiates her ethnically and racially speaking body in relationship to normative whiteness in the United States, as well as the way in which she navigates her relationship to other ethnically and racially othered bodies in this country.

Furthermore, in thinking about these performances through the lens of speaking bodies it is clear that not only are they responses to contemporary struggles with language and identification, but that they also reference the history of a hegemonic denial of language in both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Given the education and literacy that was often denied Puerto Ricans and Dominicans through slavery and colonial oppression, Hernández's and Báez's physical performances stand as evidence of the way the body has served as a strategy for communication. While a silencing may have taken place on a verbal level, their speaking bodies performatively invoke this resistance on a physical level. Additionally, while this chapter focuses specifically on performances by an island Puerto Rican and a Dominican York, I find that their speaking Latina bodies can be useful in thinking about the transnational conversation between Latin American and US Latina/o performers and scholars. Furthermore, in choosing to look at Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic (via New York) as sites from which this type of performance is generated, I am drawing attention to what Guillermo Irizarry has called the "triangular relationship" between Puerto Rican identity, Dominican identity and white US identity (121). Not only are Dominicans and Puerto Ricans the two groups to experience the most poverty amongst Latina/os in the United States (Census 2000), but they also share a unique relationship due, firstly, to their parallel histories of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean and, secondly, to the recent explosion in Dominican

immigration to Puerto Rico. This relationship is fraught with tensions and contradictions that reveal deep-rooted issues that emanate from the presence of blacks within both of these nations, with Dominican blackness often serving as a surrogate for Puerto Rican blackness (Duany 25). As Jorge Duany points out in *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, while Dominicans in Puerto Rico are excluded from the narrative of the national body in the formulation of a nationalist discourse, these same discourses engage the rhetoric of an Antillean confederation as an avenue toward Puerto Rican independence (25-28). Furthermore, Dominican identity serves as an important point of reference in looking at the ways in which *Latinidad* is racialized both within and outside of the United States, because of how Dominican conceptions of blackness, whiteness and Indianness stand in such a stark contrast to those in the United States. Thus, examining the speaking bodies of these two Caribbean Latinas is a strategic move that aims to create links between performances of *puertorriqueñidad* and Dominicanness against the shared background of US cultural imperialism and racial formation.

Throughout this chapter I use the terms Latina/os, *Latinidad*, *puertorriqueñidad*, Dominicanness in order to address the particular ways that these performers' work is situated within a larger discourse of identity. In using the term *Latinidad*, I am aware, as Alicia Arrizón has pointed out, of the binary oppositions that its use invokes: Europe/America(s), white/brown, dominant/minority etc. and its potential for creating oversimplified circumscriptions (48). Nonetheless, the term is necessary to engage not only because of its highly marketable currency, but because it allows us to think about real relationships of power and difference. Thus, while *Latinidad* as it is commonly invoked may not account for the plurality of Latina/o experience and identity, and

whether is used strategically in a Spivakian sense for politically efficacy, or exploited for its symbolic value in the marketing and consuming of Latina bodies, it does ultimately signal the existence of a relationship between Latin Americans and US Latina/os, one that is unequal in terms of access to power and privilege. In her book *From Bananas to Buttocks: The Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, Myra Mendible writes about the construction of *Latinidad* through the use of the Latina body as a transnational signifier that facilitates the imagining of a northern mind and a southern body. "As metonym for Latin America," Mendible writes, "the Latina body has signaled a permeable racial and national border, a field of diverse oppositions between rationality and sensuality, culture and nature, domestic and foreign (8)." *Latinidad*, a construct largely symbolized and imagined through acts of representation, thus provides a lens for understanding how Latina/o bodies deploy, and are deployed, in negotiations of national, cultural, racial, gender and sexual identity. By focusing on performing Latina bodies in this way, this work further underscores links between embodiment, identity and representation.[6]

US Latina/o Theatre

In thinking about this paradigmatic counterposing of a sexualized, irrational Latina/o body and a rational North American mind, it is important to further outline some of the issues surrounding language in US Latina/o theater before moving into the discussion of the artists' work. In his essay "Looking for the Magic" Jorge Huerta traces the ways in which early Chicano and US Latina/o theater evolved from initially using more Spanish than English, to being bilingual with an equal use of Spanish and English,

[6] Although I do not address their work in this chapter, Latina performers Marga Gomez, Monica Palacios and Carmelita Tropicana have been groundbreaking in deconstructing the Latina body through performance.

to the contemporary trend of US Latina/o plays being written almost entirely in English with only a few superficial sprinklings of Spanish words. This latest trend incorporates Spanish into the world of the play in the form of proper nouns, swear words, or one or two choice words repeated throughout the production. Huerta explains that this is primarily attributed to the change from the collaboratively created community based works of the 1960s and 1970s to single-authored works targeting the theatergoers of today's professional regional theater circuit (41-43). In a critical essay on Nilo Cruz's Pulitzer Prize winning *Anna in the Tropics*, Fiet furthers Huerta's critique by describing the language used in these later works as, "un inglés estandar que 'casi siempre' conlleva como condimento nombres, palabras y frases en español que frecuentemente se traducen de inmediato al inglés dentro del texto" (*Preguntas* 12).[7] The word *condimento* read into the context of the widespread multiculturalism of the 1990s that both Huerta and Fiet describe, seems to capture precisely what is problematic about this kind of writing. Using the "condiment approach" renders less effective the promise of theater that serves a Latina/o community. Instead, Latina/os become a condiment, a flavor added on top of a well-established traditional, Euro-American recipe for theater and are not allowed to be the meat, the substance of the works, *disembodied* from the text. To further extend the metaphor, representations of *Latinidad* in theater become about consumption by, and the taste of, the primarily white audiences.[8] For instance, the deliberately calibrated presence of *Latinidad*, whether through Spanish or as I argue in this chapter, embodied practice,

[7] "a standard English that 'almost always' has, in the form of a condiment, names, words and phrases in Spanish that are frequently immediately translated into English within the text."

[8] We might think here also about the oft-touted and contentious claim that salsa has replaced ketchup as the condiment of choice in the United States, or what Jorge Huerta has called the "salsafication" of the United States (Personal Interview 5 March 2010).

may surpass the particular taste and level of comfort on the part of the audience, and end up being viewed as excessive or inaccessible. Thus we can see the insidiousness of a multicultural paradigm that promises "diversity" and "inclusion" but only as long as it is palatable and understood by those not considered minorities. Furthermore, in the case of the acclaimed *Anna in the Tropics*, the central premise- a Cuban lector reading a bastion of Western European literature (*Anna Karenina*) to a group of illiterate Cuban *tabaqueros*– works to re-inscribe the notion of Western/Northern dominance when it comes to language and literature.

I am not arguing that US theaters should avoid producing works about Latina/os that are written only in English, nor am I trying to linger here on a broader discussion of contemporary US theater practices in what is principally an examination of the code-switching body. However, I note that Latina/o plays in English should not be directed to non-Latina/o audiences to the exclusion of Latina/o audiences because this inadvertently works to decentralize the subject positions of Latina/o playwrights and audience members. Additionally, within the institution of "American theater" there should be a place for code-switching, bilingual theater that reflects the lived experience of the many bilingual code-switching Latina/os in the United States. Instead of the poetic bilingualism of a playwright like Cherrie Moraga audiences are often given stereotypes of Latina/o characters that speak in heavy, and generally disparate, accents.[9] Huerta surmises in his article "Looking for the Magic" that because Moraga's plays present a challenge to non-Spanish/English bilingual audiences, "she may, therefore, have to accept limited

[9] In my experience seeing Latina/o theater, there seems to be little attention paid to the regional specificity of accents. The distinction between Puerto Rican, Chicano, Mexican, Cuban accents is a very important element of performance that is often overlooked. Huerta also writes about this in his review of *Anna in the Tropics* "A Tale of Two Annas."

opportunities for this play [*Heroes and Saints*] since theater companies that have not developed bilingual audiences may be reticent to produce such a text" (44). Indeed, an empirical analysis that I conducted by looking at the 1992-2008 season offerings of the TCG member-regional theater companies reveals that Moraga's major plays were never produced by a regional theater.[10] While Moraga has certainly cultivated many followers, her plays are rarely produced, not even by non-regional theaters. I would add however that in addition to the language factor, this is also due to the politicized nature of Moraga's plays. By contrast, the Latino playwrights most produced at a national level, Nilo Cruz and José Rivera, take the "condiment approach" to writing plays about Latina/os. Further complicating the issue, there are plays which have a good deal of Spanish dialogue and have been quite popular and repeatedly produced, such as Edith Villareal's *My Visit With MGM*, and Luis Alfaro's plays *Electricidad,* and *Oedipus el Rey*. It should be noted however, that perhaps in part due to the fact that her work focuses on more traditionally accepted topics such as family, assimilation, history Latina/o theater companies have taken the lead in producing Villareal's *MGM*, playing largely for Latina/o (and thus more bilingual) audiences. Similarly, Alfaro's work, though more produced through the regional circuit, has perhaps been more legible to non-Latina/o audiences because of his reliance on the narrative structures and characters of Greek tragedies. Nonetheless, this selective "silencing" of the bilingual Latina/o voice in US theater points to the important role of the body in occupying and exploding this silence.

[10] Published in American Theatre Magazine editions 1992-2008.

However convincing the argument in favor of producing more fully bilingual plays may be, it still does not account for the many US Latina/os that do not speak Spanish. As outlined by Sandoval-Sánchez, language use depends on:

> the specific historical moment of Latina/o migration to the US; the length of time lived in the US; the linguistic and cultural resistance of immigrants to assimilation; the social construction of reality of a second generation conditioned by the experience of bilingualism and biculturalism; the levels of nonformal and formal education; and last, but perhaps most significant, the endorsement and internalization of an English-only Anglo-American identity by some US Latinos/as (*José Can You See* 103-104).

So, not only are boundaries created through language difference *between* Latina/os and non-Latina/os, but also *among* Latina/os both in the United States and in Latin America. This draws into question the ways in which Latina/os and Latina/o cultures are defined, or as Diana Taylor writes, it reveals the "danger of thinking that Latina/os occupy any *one* positionality (be it in terms of ideology, class, gender or sexual preference, or race) or that they occupy it in any *one* way… 'Sameness' cannot be assumed between those who share certain positions of proximity" (*Negotiating Performance* 6). So although language, along with religion, music, food, and shared ethnic heritage may be one of the signifiers most heavily called upon in hegemonic and popular stereotyping, the serpent-like ways in which it slides into and out of US Latina/o cultural practice is demonstrative of the way that identity formation is a constantly "negotiated ethnic, cultural, and political positioning" (Taylor and Constantino 3). As Taylor also writes in her analysis *The Archive and the Repertoire*

> multiculturalism, erroneously to my mind, held out the promise of cultural understanding. I propose we begin with the assumption that we don't understand, that we always engage in acts of translation. We are all equidistant from the multicultural repertoire of images (236)

It is helpful to keep in mind these continuous acts of translation, as we look at the way in which Spanish is overtaken by a dominant English paradigm as Latina/os immigrate to the United States. It is important to remember not only this current shift from Spanish to English, but also the colonial history of the Spaniards and the many indigenous languages that, resisting extermination in Latin America, struggle to survive and assert their presence in their dominantly Spanish societies much in the same way Latina/os in the United States negotiate their relationship to Spanish as they assimilate/integrate/transculturate. Not only were many indigenous languages lost or engulfed into Spanish, but also the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade serves as reminder of the way in which the African languages spoken by captured Africans were supplanted by colonial tongues in the Americas. While some indigenous and African languages remain more intact than others in the Americas (Nahuatl, Garifuna, Quechua etc.), their presence can be found within the Spanish, French and English spoken in the New World. This brings about another point: Spanish is a heterogeneous language that is itself a creolization, the result of syncretic processes that include *moros* and Greeks and it therefore further represents the diversity of what is termed "Latina/o" or "Latin American." This is something that is often overlooked in the production of US Latina/o theater in non-Latina/o settings or by non-Spanish speaking Latina/os, who allow the cultural specificity of Spanish to be subsumed into a single monolithic, yet unspecific way of speaking that in fact may undo the aim of providing a conduit to some "real" cultural practice. Therefore, it becomes much more about the *act* of speaking than a text written in Spanish, for language is as much an embodied act as it is an ordered system of significations.

Finally, and quite significantly, as indicated earlier, the relationship between language and racism should not be overlooked. The act of speaking can work to Other bodies through a combination of visual and aural signifiers. Visual markers and aural indications work together and separately in this process. For instance, the act of speaking in native-proficient Spanish has the potential to move the speaker from the category of white to non-white, just as hearing a Spanish-accented English speaking voice may draw upon racial stereotypes to conjure an image of a body speaking. The same can be said for Latina/os who attach racialized preconceptions of bodies to ways of speaking Spanish or even English.[11] Additionally the surprise expressed when bodies marked as black, Asian or white speak native-proficient Spanish serves as an indication of a normalized expectation for the tongue to somehow "match" the body. The audience's ability to distinguish between native proficiency and non-native intonations is actually therefore less important than how what they hear relates to what they see. In other words, what is significant rather, is how these different relationships to language are *performed*, irrespective of the individual actor's history. By demonstrating an assumed proximity to nativeness (*Latinidad*) in speaking, a distance from "whiteness" is also acquired. Performance then, has a unique ability to draw links between words, gestures, sounds, intonations and the performing body, unveiling the constructed nature of this relationship. Not only is skin color and assumed race a factor commonly used in interpreting the performer's use of a given language, but the use of the body, the gestural language employed, also actively contributes to this process of signification. Therefore,

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[11] See Nick DeGenova and Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas' study *Latino Crossings: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and the Politics of Race and Citizenship* for an interesting discussion on the way that Mexicans living in Chicago see learning English and becoming assimilated as a conflation with "becoming a minority" and thus approaching blackness.

stereotypical juxtapositions that assume a body's gestural language will be homologous with a spoken code, can be contested by exploring different relationships between these two vectors of signification.

Taking into consideration all of the above contradictions and relationships, the question for US Latina/o theater artists and scholars remains two-fold. As Fiet points out, with *Anna in the Tropics*, Cruz attempts to write a play that serves as a reflection of a given ethno-cultural history at the same time that it works to preserve a memory of origins within a dominant narrative that has hitherto excluded them (*Preguntas* 8). Firstly, the issues at hand require that US Latina/o theater artists find a way to create work that counteracts this exclusion. Secondly, these artists must find ways to avoid their work being co-opted by non-Latina/os in an effort to understand the Other present within the United States. In other words, there is a two-tiered project of creating community and cultural memory through performance at the same time that Latina/os are striving for visibility from those outside their community. The question of who the performers are and for whom are they performing has always been central to the discussion. The Latinas whose work is examined below, in fact exist outside on the margins of commercial, mainstream Latina/o theater in their respective locations. Although they have both received much critical acclaim, their approach to the issue of language sets them apart from the most renowned Latina/o artists even as it situates them within the issues I have outlined above.

Teresa Hernández

Fiet describes Teresa Hernández as, "la artista teatral más completa y compenetrante que trabaja en Puerto Rico hoy en día" (*Hernández* 1).[12] An exceptionally talented actress and dancer who creates, directs and performs her own work, Hernández is as prolific as she is persistent in her continuing attempts to produce work that pushes conventions of both form and content. Despite the fact that she has received so much critical attention, mostly from Latin American theater scholars,[13] her work and stylistic approach remain on the margins of the theatrical scene in Puerto Rico and fall more into the category of what Fiet defines as "*el otro teatro"* in Puerto Rico, one that is in part defined by a departure from text-driven performances and instead relies more on the body as a site for conveying meaning (*Reimaginado*). According to Fiet, Hernández's "texto hablado baila en la misma forma precisa y compleja que los gestos de su movimiento corporal dibujan las texturas imaginarias de un contexto específico social que es real y credible" (*Hernández* 1).[14] While much could be said about Hernández's work and the ways in which it engages contemporary issues of Puerto Rican subject formation, political corruption and economic destitution masked by an aggressive climate of consumption, it is her creative use of the body and linguistic experimentation with bilingualism, that are most pertinent to the discussion at hand.

The analysis of Hernández's work that follows is based upon seeing her perform live, watching videos of her performance, numerous reviews and critical articles as well as a published text of her performance. Susan Foster writes in her book *Reading Dance*

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[12] "the most complete and incisive artist (female) that works in Puerto Rico today."

[13] For instance she is listed as one of featured artists on the webpage for New York University's Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics.

[14] "spoken text dances in the same precise and complex manner as her corporeal gestures and movements draw the imaginary textures of a specific social context that is both real and credible"

about the limitations of using video to analyze dance practices. However, she concludes that the reluctance to use video has also contributed to the absence of critical analyses on dance (Foster xvi). Interestingly, this reflects precisely what Fiet has identified as the inability for US based academics to fully understand the lived experience of performance in Latin America, particularly when much of the value of this work comes from an embodied practice that cannot be transmitted through text. However, despite these potential shortcomings Hernández's work is crucial in demonstrating my idea of the "fourth country" and the signifying body. My own understanding of the context in which Hernández performs along with lived experience and literacy of the gestural referents of the corporal Puerto Rican vernacular she employs, inform and aid in reading the mediated depictions of her performances.

Although I have discussed at length the language issue in US Latina/o theater it is also necessary to briefly outline the specific political climate of language debates in Puerto Rico in order to foreground Hernández's work. The issue has been a source of much contention since US occupation in 1898, which began an endless series of campaigns to teach English to a highly illiterate population. Today, the language question is pivotal in the arguments for statehood as the supporters of annexation realize that this would be impossible for a population that cannot navigate an English-speaking world. Policies have vacillated between adopting English or Spanish as the official language while much of the population still does not speak English despite the great presence of US media. The cultural nationalists on the other hand adamantly defend the use of Spanish, the "mother tongue," as an identifying factor in their culture. Making this argument is problematic for a number of reasons. On the one hand, such a privileging of

the Spanish root of Puerto Rican ancestry tends to lend more credence to an already disproportionately Hispano-centric trend on the island. On the other hand, the issue is further complicated by the great circular migration between the island and the mainland United States that is part of the continual transnational flow of capital and culture. As we are reminded by Juan Flores in his book *The Diaspora Strikes Back*,

> the cultural experience of diasporas is shaped by the dialectic of continuity and change, tradition and disjuncture, the extension and prolongation of inherited cultural backgrounds on the one hand and ruptures and innovations stemming from life in the new setting on the other (17).

In other words, not only does Spanish language fluency fail as the defacto signifier of cultural identity, but the Anglicisms included in the "cultural remittances" (Flores *Diaspora* 33-49) of Diasporicans visiting or moving to the island, become an active part of performing Puerto Rican identity. This diasporic identity is one that is in addition to being shaped by contact with other Latina/o immigrants, is also clearly influenced by other non-Hispanic cultures from Euro- to African American. Finally, in terms of theatrical production, much as US Latina/o theater artists experience what Sandoval-Sánchez refers to as a "double-marginalization" (*José Can You See* 105) in their rejection and exclusion by both mainstream theaters and traditional Latin American theater, island Puerto Ricans are also doubly marginalized in their exclusion from US Latina/o theater as being "too Spanish" and from Latin American theater as being "too Americanized." I suggest that Puerto Rican performance should be able to live in *both* the context of Latin America and the United States, particularly when it utilizes the body's signifying ability as a means of existing between multiple borders.

Hernández is acutely aware of this double marginalization in her performances and discusses and represents it at length, yet she always comes back to a distinctly Puerto Rican Spanish replete with all of its Anglicisms, Africanisms and *taíno* words. Her verbal discourses are witty, charged with references to memory and history, demonstrating a familiarity with popular culture and humorous references that are so precise in their depiction of the most recent realities on the island that it becomes apparent that nothing in her text is absolute or fixed, always open to new adjustments and additions. Her vocal techniques are highly virtuosic, demonstrating an ability to change her voice completely across a wide variety of characters.

The intervention of a highly physicalized language is juxtaposed with these vocal innuendos. In her piece *Lo complejo del ser o el complejo de ser*,[15] performed at the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics 2001 conference in Monterrey, Mexico, she begins in a fat suit out of which her other characters crawl and metamorphose. Poised righteously at a podium, this first character, the obese,[16] subservient and amnesiac Senator Pardonme begins by saying:

> Sometimes when I speak 'officially' at some function, I don't know whether to say 'Welcome,' 'Hello,' 'Alou,' 'Hola'… and I get all confused. (*Her asthmatic breathing becomes more and more persistent and uncomfortable*.) It's such a mess, this thing with the…thing, what's it called…language. So, please, if anyone doesn't understand me, just tell me, I'll repeat it any way you'd like, it's my pleasure to be whoever you want me to be (*Holy Terrors* 388).[17]

[15] The complicatedness of the being or the complex of being"
[16] There is a great obesity problem in Puerto Rico. 62.8% of Puerto Ricans are overweight compared to 58% nationally and one in four are obese, leading to a high incidence of diabetes and heart disease.
[17] This appears as a translation from Spanish in *Holy Terrors* edited by Diana Taylor. However, as implied by the text some of the words do appear in English. In the video that I watched, her work is highly bilingual.

In Hernández's portrayal of the senator we see the common notion of the "confused Puerto Rican" who does not know who she is, who forgets things (history, cultural memory) but at the same time demonstrates the versatility that many Puerto Ricans may have in moving between languages.[18] Pardonme, though, is asphyxiated by the weight of her body and her own inability to take ownership over her "forked tongue." Her inability to manage her own body, her own breathing, represents the psychological prison and the lack of agency she has created for herself. Furthermore, not only does the character demonstrate her willingness to code-switch verbally, and in doing so switching identities, but she also shows how her body labors in this process of indecision. Literally unable to breathe, to produce the air that produces sound, verbal signification is arrested in the lungs. While it could be argued, if read out of context, that this complicated and complex-filled character is indicative of what some point to as the negative product of teaching bilingualism - subjects who are confused as opposed to being more culturally adept, and speak neither language proficiently - Hernández's subsequent performance demonstrates otherwise. Instead, her body is the site of this code-exchange, the medium through which the inarticulate tongue is transformed into a corporeal poetry. Perhaps, the fact that this character is so disconnected from her body is reflective of how cultural memory does not get transmitted purely through acts of oral transfer, but rather is also dependent on an

[18] Because the number of Puerto Ricans living outside of the island is now greater than the number of Puerto Ricans on the island it may be more likely to encounter diasporic Puerto Ricans that do not have a firm grasp of Spanish. This was also seen in August, 2008 when the Federal Court in Puerto Rico ruled in favor of a North American resident who had requested that the election ballot be translated into English. Taken as yet another example of colonial control and cultural imperialism, the court decision was met with criticism from cultural nationalists that this was simply a move to make Puerto Rico more easily assimilated into the United States and thus more desirable as a potential state. What the cultural nationalists did not take into consideration however, is the fact that there is a large percentage of non-Anglo families in Puerto Rico who report to speak primarily English in the home, indicating the progressively increasing influence that returning members of the diaspora are having on the island's culture. See Census 2000.

acknowledgement of the wealth of information carried through physical signification. Instead, the profusely apologetic Senator Pardonme's troubled relationship to her body as she struggles to speak and to remember her past, is indicative of the way that this transfer could take place as an embodied act transmitted through gesture and corporal memory. Highlighting the importance of what Taylor believes has over time resided in the "repertoire" (simply put, the body) alongside that which can be found in the "archive" (the annals of History), she writes, "Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behavior'" (*Archive* 2-3).

Following Senator Pardonme's antics, her sister Perpetua, the "petite singer" then crawls out of the fat suit, slithers across the stage and almost desperately grabbing the microphone, instead of singing, proceeds to dance, holding the microphone in her hand. She has replaced one body with another, or rather, found one body *within* another. Given the opportunity to speak (the microphone), Hernández chooses to first dance. Dancing with the microphone in her hand, she emphasizes the fact that her body is "speaking." Once she does use her voice, the Boricua opera singer in a slinky dress makes continual reference to her "petiteness" (a reference to the island's complex of smallness), forgets her songs (a lack of historical memory), and denies her "botched" Puerto Rican Spanish by affecting an accent that is somewhere between Italian and Portuguese.[19] She is a

[19] Puerto Ricans are known throughout Spain and Latin America and among Latinos as having "bad," "bastardized" Spanish that is difficult to understand. Puerto Rican news correspondents who work for pan-Latino networks such as Univision and Telemundo are asked to learn a more neutral, less specifically Puerto Rican Spanish for international broadcasts. According to the Alliance of Puerto Rican Artists and Support Groups, "Puerto Rican actors have lost their jobs because Univisión considers their accents "too Puerto Rican," clashing with the "internationalized" accents of the network's programming." www.prnewswire.com

singer who cannot sing and every time she announces a song, she dances passionately and intensely about the stage without making a sound. Or perhaps she simply *chooses* not to sing with her mouth. "Something" has happened to her vocal cords she tells the audience. Perpetua represents a type of voiceless Puerto Rican, relegated only to a bodily presence, unable to be heard when she attempts to hold the microphone to her mouth to sing, and silently objectified into sexiness. However, we could also say that Perpetua's passionate, and clearly, driven, dance sequence is attempting to re-inscribe her gendered body into a discourse of cultural belonging, a discourse that ruptures with that prescribed by standard narratives of Puerto Ricanness. Her inability to sing could mean that she cannot sing the song that she is supposed to sing, and likewise, her ability to dance with virtuosity means that this is how she is able to access that which actually allows the character to express herself. Furthermore, her inability to sing *opera* also works to issue a critique of this bourgeois art form with which very few Puerto Ricans have any experience or contact.

Interestingly, her speaking voice seems to be fine, rendering her vocal cords intact and healthy. The problem arises rather, when she tries to make an intervention on an artistic level by singing and expressing herself in a more abstract manner. It is also possible to read this selective muteness in relation to her "true" voice, where the speaking voice we hear is a ventriloquizing of someone else's rhetoric while her expressive self is voiceless. Because she cannot sing she must speak with her body and because Hernández is such a talented dancer, what follows shows a woman who, unlike Senator Pardonme, is centered in her body and is fully able to utilize it to express herself. While I have pointed out that this voicelessness can have the effect of objectifying Perpetua into *just a body* it

also signals the way that the body speaks where the tongue refuses to work, just as it shows how a body carries the effects of psychological and physical colonialism. This refusal of the tongue to speak could be read as a failure, a shortcoming. However it can also be read as a strategic silence that creates a space for the body, often relegated to a secondary position in relationship to the tongue, to become the principal avenue of signification. Thus, the tongue, a definitive part of the body, here strategically makes way for the body, acting as a hinge, which ultimately exceeds it, but is also a part of it. Finally, the tongue, positioned at the gateway to the digestive system, is further invoked through the fat character's excess and presumably overloaded digestive system.

In another piece first performed in 1992 at the University of Puerto Rico called *Kan't Translate* that explores the complexity of the use of Spanglish in Puerto Rico, Hernández is seen as the character of Isabella[20] joined by Ferdinand, an obvious invocation of the imperial Spanish couple. Notable not only for their symbolism as the Spanish parents of a New World of subjects, these two figures are of imminent importance to all of Latin America, as together they, perhaps more than even Columbus himself, stand upon the historical mark of 1492 and all of its subsequent repercussions that continue to resound across the world from the expulsion of the Muslims and the Jews to the genocides of the Americas. The satirical use of these two historical figures is significant because it came at a time when Puerto Ricans were being asked to celebrate 500 years since the "discovery" of the New World, something that was embraced by some as an opportunity for Puerto Rican visibility on a more global scale (Puerto Rico was one of the places Columbus first landed), while others protested the logic of such a

[20] Isabella is a recurring figure throughout her pieces, often represented as an erudite art critic.

narrative. Standing together on the stage as the quintessential symbol of colonialism, their heterosexual union having consolidated monarchic power into a narrative of biological reproduction, this couple waxes philosophical. They comically navigate their Puerto Rican Spanish of Anglicisms while discussing the idealist philosophies of Immanuel "Kan't," "multiculturalissm-o, postcommunissm-o, and salsa-ismo too" before finally ending up speaking a mix of English and German –which like Perpetua's Italian-Portuguese is read as more sophisticated than Puerto Rican Spanish- that is ultimately unintelligible gibberish (Fiet, *Reimaginado* 323). The title of "Kan't Translate" is important in several ways. Not only does it refer to the inability to translate words across cultures, but also concepts. In doing so, it directly calls into question Kantian philosophies of "universality" and Western concepts of "Reason."

> Isabella: Una emoción que no se puede traducir. (*Mira a Fernando*.) It's a feeling that I can't translate. [*looks at Ferando*.]
>
> Fernando: Well, you just did honey (*carcajadas ficticias*) [*fake laughter*]
>
> Isabella: Can't translate. Kan't translate. Kant tremendo filósofo. [Kant, amazing philosopher.]
>
> Fernando: ¡Oh sí! (*Ataque de erudición*.) Emmanuel Kant nace a mediados del siglo XVIII. Emmanuel Kan't es conocido como el padre del idealismo alemán. Un dato muy curiouso, su madre era puertorriqueña. [(Attack of eruditeness) Emmanuel Kant is born in the middle of the 18th century. Emmanuel Kant is known as the father of German idealism. A very interesting fact: his mother was Puerto Rican].
> (Hernández "Lo mío es otro teatro." Translations my own).

By complicating this narrative of origin, making Puerto Rico the mother of "German philosophy," this exchange between these two figures, highlights relationships of power in terms of knowledge and language, nation and gender. The fact that "feelings" cannot be translated through words is a reminder of the body's role in transmitting information,

translating emotions, and thus draws into question the supreme role of the mind and the way in which Western philosophy has exerted its dominance through a literal and symbolic obliteration of the colonial body. A body that is in this case, female and Puerto Rican. Isabella then is the Puerto Rican mother to European thought as opposed to the Spanish Reina Isabel who is figured as the mother to modern Spain and patroness of Latin America.

This play with language and identity is also explored in a 2006 performance of a piece called *Nada que ver*, in which one of her characters defines herself as a "Prusiana," someone who lives in P-R-U-S-A, spelling it out for the audience. Playing with the acronyms of the respective countries she fuses them into one subject who is the product of this colonial relationship, a subject who exists not between identities, not "on the hyphen," but without the hyphen, in both places at once. The joining of these two words serves as a reminder of the fact that "Puerto Rican-American" does not exist, nor is its Spanish cognate "*puertorriqueña-americana*" ever used. I argue that PRUSA forces us to reflect why such a hyphenation is oxymoronic and redundant, just as Chicana-American is similarly absent both on a vernacular and ideological level.

The title of the piece *Nada que ver (composiciones escénicas sobre el yo)* plays on the double meaning in Spanish which is used to mean "Nothing to do with (something else)," as in "Not alike" but literally means "Nothing to see." In addition to fracturing the notion of a singular narrative and thus single subjectivity, this title's decentralizing of the ocular calls for another kind of spectatorship on the part of the audience who is inevitably invited to the theater to see, hear and feel. In fact, it is precisely this type of spectator that Vivian Martínez Tabares writes about when she refers to Hernández's work as having an

anti-linear structure that breaks with temporal continuity, requiring non-passive spectators ("Cruces" 62). Hernández never ceases to be present in her body, but is continually sketching images and drawing upon cultural gestures as she dances, creating recognizable sounds and patterns that implicate the spectators and their particular positionality in their roles of interpretation. The audience then, influenced (albeit in unique ways) by the same strains of popular culture, sharing collective memories of colonization in their bodies, participate in their ability to read and follow the implications of her visual and verbal juxtapositions. Although audience members participate in this process of performance from subject positions informed by race, gender, class, and age, Hernández taps into different "structures of feeling" in Puerto Rico. The language of her speaking body is recognizable as vernacular Puerto Ricanness and thus interpreted, reflecting the body's role in communicating meaning to an audience. Likewise, linguistic signification falls on ears familiar with her particular brand of Spanish, able to capture the nuance and interplay of styles, accents, and slang that mark the different classed and raced bodies in Puerto Rico. Reading reviews of her work, it is clear that viewers are truly spell-bound by her performances. Watching and listening to Hernández, Pardonme, Perpetua, Isabella, along with other characters, we see the unfolding of an additional layer of language that is able to, with a keen precision, capture the very feeling, sound, texture, and contradictions within which Puerto Ricans live. She performs for her audiences to see themselves in her work. As Isabella the art critic says:

> Hay kilos de polvo encima de nuestros libretos nacionales, hay telarañas en nuestras mentes creativas y artritis en gestos corporales…Es como un televisor dañado, entra la imagen y luego es interferencia. Estamos interferidos todo el tiempo señores y esa interferencia cada vez se hace más grande y si no colocamos una antena a ese televisor, la interferencia

> nos llevará a una imagen que no vamos a poder reconocer (Fiet, *Hernández* 5).[21]

Her texts are notable linguistic achievements in their own right but without the accompaniment of her body, and the particular crafting of her gestural language, one is not able to *feel* the violation of the colonized body as they could in a performance by Hernández as she propels herself across the stage in leaps and bounds, in a way that belies her own physical effort, appearing as if she were being tossed around, violently manipulated. In *Nada que* ver she explores "the self," "*el yo*" or what she very aptly describes as "*el yo-yo*," signaling the way in which identity is a process that is continually in motion, bouncing between fixed points, but never arriving at any precise destiny. As part of a series of seven skits exploring the above topic, at one point, Hernández plays with the themes of *Latinidad*, the body and identity by using her voice to signify Mexicanness, while narrating her body's experience. This particular character, or persona, wears a Mexican *sombrero*, black shorts, black high heels, and reclines on a miniature *chaise lounge*, just inches off the floor. Waking from a dream she asserts in a Mexican accent that she does not want to die without her ego, grasping at the air and crying out to the police that her ego is being stolen, followed by a Ranchera rendition of a song with the lyrics "Como me va" interchanged with "Como le va."[22] The linguistic, aural, gestural, and sartorial markers of Mexicanness work together on multiple levels. Together they link "PRUSA" to Mexico and thus to other Latin American countries,

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[21] "There are kilos of dust on our national notebooks, cobwebs in our creative minds and arthritis on our corporeal gestures…It is like a damaged television, the image comes in and then due to interference of the signal, goes out. We experience interference all the time folks, and that interference is every time greater and if we don't put an antenna on the television, the interference is going to take us to an image we don't even recognize."

[22] "How is it going for me" "How is it going for you (formal)"

referencing the relationship between the Mexican Spanish language television watched on the island and the construction of pan-Latina/o identities. They also reveal the performer's strategic employment of code-switching techniques. Her move between Mexicanness and Puerto Ricanness, as she decries her lost "Self," demonstrates the relative constructed nature of these identities, even as she clearly privileges her own embodied, lived experience. The "ego" referenced has somehow escaped her body, and her performance of self has been exposed, leaving her body the primary signifier of identity. She ends this skit by remarking decidedly, as giving her profile to the audience, she lifts her bare legs from the miniature chaise lounge to create a V-shape with her torso, "mi corazón ha sido desplazado a mis piernas."[23] Her "heart," the center of her sentient self, resides in her legs: muscular, active, source of strength and movement.

In another skit of *Nada que ver,* entitled "Mi Cola,"[24] Hernández wears a black dress with a train of fabric extending several yards across the stage. She entangles herself in "her tail," walks on the path it creates, cartwheels around and over this excess of fabric. As she does this we hear the sound of a typewriter, which makes us think of the entrapment of the female body through secretarial work and through layers of clothing, while simultaneously reminding us that she is writing herself, scripting her experience, creating words through gesture, sentences through movement. She removes the tail from her dress, then the dress itself, hanging it on a wooden bar downstage left, leaving her in black stretch pants and a fitted shirt. The lighting creates a shadow of the silhouetted, hanging dress on the upstage wall that remains there for the rest of the performances, a

[23] My heart has been displaced to my legs
[24] "My tail"

ghostly reminder of this bodyless but gendered signifer. In this next piece, "Ella-él en mi,"[25] Hernández dances freely across the stage, exploring gendered movements, linking her hands between her crotch, forming a circle with her arms that extends vertically down the front and back of her torso, walking on her tip toes. She hangs on the wooden bar behind the dress, while her legs, the only visible part of her body, create a series of shapes that contrast with the delicacy of the silken black dress. She swings on the bar, half dress, half legs, drawing upon and deconstructing binaries of masculine and feminine through her moving body. With music playing she leaves the stage and returns almost immediately, this time in another black strapless dress, a repeated motif that speaks not only of elegant simplicity and the ability to create clean lines on a stage, but also of mourning, loss, and an affective disavowal of self-expression that accompanies the cultural practice of *luto*,[26] this time mourning perhaps the loss of "self." She continues her free-form exploration of movement, pausing to pant like a dog. At one point she places her hands on the ground and lifts her legs in a scissoring action that causes her dress to drape over her head, the skirt hanging such that it covers her face, hands and torso, and exposing her buttocks and bare muscular legs, literally inverting the image of the woman in a black dress. As the piece draws to a close, her panting has become more pronounced and she lies curled on the floor. She pulls the top of her dress down to her waist exposing her breasts, lifts herself up on her hands and knees, crawls a few steps, looks over her shoulder at the audience like an exhausted and suspicious street dog and melts into the floor as the lights fade to the sound of her panting. She has rendered the

[25] "Her-him in me"
[26] The period of mourning following the death of a relative or close friend.

"self" complete through an exploration of movement that ultimately leaves her exposed, physically spent, yet visibly satisfied. As Martínez Tabares writes, Hernández "think(s) with her body and translate(s) any intellectual material with her physical weapons" (*Holy Terrors* 395), performing "acciones" not "actuaciones" ("Cruces" 64).[27]

Caught in a colonized body, trapped within and between spoken languages, the body becomes a subject as it speaks its own language, signifying through gesture and dance. The subject is in the "third country" that Anzaldúa writes about, the border, the interstitial meeting place from which hybridity emanates, the site of linguistic code-switching, yet the body signifies and enacts that liminal identity from the "fourth country." By understanding this as coming from the "fourth country," this adds complexity to the act of signification and deepens the exchange of information between spectator and performer. Even as it is important to realize how in-betweenness reverberates verbally, it is also crucial to have a way to understand how this manifests itself through the body. The "fourth country" "translates" that which "Kan't" otherwise be accessed, that "feeling" for which there is no verbal homolog, "nothing to see." In Hernández's performances we see and experience the relationship between the bilingual tongue and the code-switching body as a seamless interplay. Her performing body critically engages and enacts constructions of *puertorriqueñidad* and *Latinidad* elicited through wordplay, while simultaneously countering those constructions with the fact of Hernández's embodied experience as a Puerto Rican woman. The bilingual tongue and the code-switching body, work in tandem, at times paralleling sound and image, at times withholding image in order to visualize sound or quieting the voice in order to hear the

[27] "actions" not "actings"

body. Furthermore, Hernández outlines instances in which the language of the tongue colonizes just as it has been colonized. Close examination of the US linguistic colonization of Puerto Rico only reveals the linguistic colonization of indigenous and Africa tongues by the Spanish language. Likewise, we can see how the tongue colonizes the body in turn, and how through logocentric understandings of communication, the *embodied act* of speaking has been underprivileged. Yet, despite this imbalance, the body in Hernández's work resists and interjects itself into the process of meaning-making and embodied speaking. Hernández then calls upon this "fourth country," the metaphorical "place" from which the body resists the tongue at the same time that it engages to act alongside and with the tongue. In doing so, she works to be able to circumvent the limitations of a colonized tongue and to actively signify her experience as a Boricua living *en la isla del encanto*.[28]

Working both as a solo-performance artist and also with other bodies on stage, Hernández's corporeal significations perform the constructs of a gendered, sexualized and through her light-skinned, red-haired, yet still racially ambiguous phenotype, racialized Puerto Rican identity. Instead of providing a facile "liberation" for the colonized body, Hernández's performances effectively frame a conversation that asks how these conditions create embodied responses that work at destabilizing relationships of power, though not actually overcoming them. Far from the naivety of thinking that a corporeal rhetoric can provide the "agency" necessary to combat the hard fact that these bodies exist within structures of power that cannot be dismantled without an accompanying paradigmatic shift, these performances draw attention to these

[28] Puerto Rico is popularly known as "the island of enchantment."

relationships of power and clearly outline the way that the code-switching body is a strategic response to such conditions.

Josefina Báez

Solo-performance is an especially useful medium for looking at the code-switching body. To begin with, the performance of multiple roles/voices/faces by one body works to demonstrate the performativity of identity, particularly in relationship to the life and experience of the performer. Solo-performance can allow the artist to theorize performance as an ontological exploration through which the individual's narrative of belonging is constructed and reconstructed, examined from multiple angles. This is particularly relevant to the recent work of Latina artists exploring their identity as transcultural subjects. In Alberto Sandoval-Sánchez and Nancy Saporta Sternbach's book *Stages of Life: Transcultural Performance & Identity in US Latina Performance*, solo performance is described as the "most highly original, irreverent and innovative theatrical art form Latinas are producing today" (95). Solo-performance artist Josefina Báez, in exploring her own Dominican York identity as a geographically un-tethered process of "locating" culture, creates work that is certainly "original, irreverent and innovative." Much like Hernández, in her performance piece *Dominicanish*, she dances her words, making language out of gesture and using her mouth to signify her experience as a black Dominican woman learning to not only speak and understand English, but to embody that language as well as her relationship to other racialized bodies. Her performance, a fragmented poem-dance-story, shuttles between identities, geographies and temporality. Through her embodied significations, Báez's body "permits the audience a reminder of the past… as it serves as a conduit to the future" (Sandoval-Sánchez and Saporta

Sternbach 96). She re-imagines bilinugalism and what it means to be Dominican in the United States and in the Dominican Republic, and, as Silvio Torres-Salliant writes in the introduction to *Dominicanish: A Performance Text*, Báez "disdains binary representations of ethnicity" (13). Therefore, not only is her approach to the notion of identity itself subversive, but also the form in which it is carried out, what her director Claudio Mir calls "an alternative theater which became our alternative to theater" (11).

Báez's work situates itself squarely at the confluence of identitarian processes and acts of representation. Stuart Hall, in writing about cultural identity and diaspora remarks that, "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside of representation" (392). Báez has a unique, non-traditional approach to performance that is process-oriented in its essence, making for a distinct theatrical experience. The "experimental," non-narrative, non-linear nature of Báez's work, although utterly frustrating for some viewers, is precisely what lends it an unfixed and moveable quality so aptly suited for exploring identity as process versus product. We can see an example of this in the way that the published versions of the same "performance texts" differ both from each other and from the live performance of these works.

As a testament to the way Báez privileges the process of performance over the product, most descriptions of her work recount feelings aroused, synapses connected, memories stimulated, and affective impact rather than actual citations of either the text or the performance. This speaks to an artistic inventiveness that makes it difficult to talk about her work in the standard theatrical terms often applied to at least the more

mainstreamed US Latina/o works. However, like Hernández, Báez also speaks to the way the performer's body and storytelling interacts with the spectator's own lived experience and identity. Mir writes, "*Dominicanish* is a non-linear story surrounded by a group of little stories, where your life experience is the element that defines your contact with dominicanishness" (12), engaging the question asked earlier: for whom is US Latina/o theater performed? The implication here is that with *Dominicanish* there is no particular audience that is unable to access this work because one will simply have a *different* relationship to the material. As opposed to neatly defining identities by a predetermined set of relations, Mir's description of "life experience" more aptly describes the interplay between Baéz's performing body, Dominican identity, and the active spectatorship necessary for engaging her performances. Furthermore, Taylor's caution to recognize that we are all equidistant from the "multicultural repertoire of images" ("Decipherability" 28) can be used as a reminder of how "Dominicanish," although enacted through a Dominican body, is a construct through which multiple, and often disparate, subjectivities are negotiated. This is evidenced in another example of Báez's exploration with identity by drawing on notions of the self and the other, the nation and the body, the image and the word, when she writes in a publication of a different performance text *Comrade, Bliss ain't playing*,

> I dentity. I dent it why? Indendity. A prioritized feeling that/ Photographs a nation./ Identity. Flagless nation./ Identity. A nation with no flag./ Identity./ Identity. A mere feeling./ Iden tity. I/Countless I, I, I, I./ iperform. Idance./ itele-youphone. Ianswer./ I.I.I. (Báez *Ay Ombe*).

The fact that Báez's work has resonated with broad audiences, being produced in New Zealand and across Europe, is, I argue, precisely because Báez's work de-centers

essentialized identities at the same time that it grounds itself in the lived experience of that performing body. Interestingly, according to reviews of international productions of *Dominicanish*, audiences did not always understand the Spanish spoken by Báez. However, the performance was able to convey significant meaning through what I argue is her use of corporeal rhetoric, or an inhabiting of the "fourth country." As with Hernández who uses her body to signify what the tongue does not, Báez's body works against *and* with her speech to transmit the transcultural, transnational experience of an immigrant moving between worlds, caught between reality as determined by words and shaped by embodied memory and experience.

Before moving into the discussion of the text and the performance of *Dominicanish*, I would like first to make a couple of important points about the notion of theorizing what Rosemary George calls, "chromatics" or the way that skin color is popularly read (32). In her article "'From Expatriate Aristocrat to Immigrant Nobody': South Asian Racial Strategies in the Southern California Context," George signals the importance of this discussion due to the fact that for most people outside of academia, skin color is the principal way in which race is articulated. She argues that placing importance on skin color is dismissed by academics as being potentially "essentialist," and that indeed within these academic circles models of social construction are the shorthand for discussing race. However, she points out, the reality of the countless daily interactions around and about chromatics, or what Sandoval-Sánchez and Saporta Sternbach refer to as "the politics of being dark in a white-skinned place" (30), should not be overlooked. In thinking about the academic value of theorizing these types of lived experiences, it is useful to recall the post-positivist realism outlined in the introduction to

this dissertation, whereby factors such as skin-color, gender, ethnicity, body type are seen as simultaneously objectively knowable and socially constructed. While *Dominicanish* works to disrupt essentialist notions of Dominicanness, signaling the construction behind this identity, Josefina Báez's lived experience as a black Dominican immigrant is shown to be one that has real consequences and is therefore significant in a way that would be different were she not read as black by the world around her, as is the case, for instance with Hernández's racial ambiguity. Not only does Báez re-tell this experience in her performance, but also because the piece has an open associative nature the audience is therefore asked to read Báez's body and skin color alongside other common associations that we might have with other bodies of her color. In my experience watching her, both in live performance and through video, Báez's body read to me as black, although interestingly reviewers' descriptions range from not mentioning her skin color, to referring to her as "dark-skinned," to quoting her own description of herself as "Negra."[29] Most important here seems to be Báez's self-identification as a "Negra" and her self-awareness that through her body, her performance of *Afro-Latinidad* is articulated alongside US blackness.

My own experience watching Báez's live performance of *Dominicanish* proved to be ephemeral and difficult to grasp in concrete terms, perhaps in part due to the lack of a clear narrative structure serving as scaffolding, or other bodies against which to read her own body. However, from the beginning of the piece she employs specific elements that help in stringing together a series of distinctly theatrical moments. The performance

[29] The term "Negra" in the Caribbean, although fraught with derogatory implications and problematic historical usages is also used as an expression of endearment, regardless of the person's skin color or imagined proximity to blackness.

begins with a video projection of a group of dancers performing Gagá, an Afro-Dominican carnival celebration. Here we see Dominican bodies in a traditional performance, one that directly references the history of African slavery in the Dominican Republic. However, as Ramon Rivera-Servera points out, this "traditional" body is "abruptly absented from view" as the projection ceases and Báez enters the stage, performing classical Indian kuchipudi dance ("Dominican York in Andhra" 153). This rupture with "tradition," with the Afro-Caribbean dance in its "native" form, replaced by an Afro-Caribbean body performing a "foreign" dance immediately interrupts the assumed relationship between how a body looks, particularly a black body, and how it moves. At this point Báez has not spoken, and yet her body has actively signified an identity recognizable as "different" than that on the screen. The kuchipudi dance with which Báez enters serves as a template for much of the performance that follows and she proceeds to use it as a means to, in José Esteban Muñoz's terms, "disidentify" from the images presented in the opening clip. For Muñoz, disidentification represents flexibility, straddling, and oscillation in a constant juggling of identities as a "survival strategy" (5). Báez accomplishes this when she chooses a dance form that does not immediately relate to Dominicanness. One reviewer's warning for audiences not to expect "fast-paced hip shaking music" (Waddell 69) is an indication of just what she is trying to deconstruct and the taste for what some multicultural theater projects may have created through precisely such "hip-shaking" performances.

Báez's decision to use kuchipudi dance is not accidental, as it reflects the larger connection between Indians and Caribbeans as the dark-skinned colonial subjects of European empires. Transculturally, African, Caribbean and East Indian cultures met long

ago when the British brought Indians to work in the Caribbean[30] and although the Dominican Republic was not part of this exchange, through an embodied signification Báez references the circum-Atlantic as a source of cultural memory, which for many today includes New York, collaborator in the term "Dominican York." New York, situated uniquely as the home for global immigration is what Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel refers to as "a symbolic, economic, and geographic extension of the Hispanic Caribbean reconfiguring traditional notions of classical insular experience" (322). This choice reflects the artist's own journey of visiting India, finding a guru and training in aesthetic practices that shape her physical practice and expand her movement vocabulary. At the same time, the particular way in which she employs it, takes her work beyond the nationalism of "culture" and "identity politics" into a negotiation of subjectivity that addresses global politics and transnationalism. She also, however, remains locally rooted to her personal experience as an artist and an immigrant, in effect destabilizing the traditional linking of territory and authenticity. Furthermore, Rivera-Servera notes that by performing kuchipudi dance, a dance that has until recently been primarily performed by Indian men, Báez presents a "history of intervention by women in a space traditionally reserved for men" ("Dominican York in Andhra"154). She uses the tradition of the Western stage to perform non-white Otherness. However, the most significant aspect of the kuchipudi dance as an embodied language is the way in which it allows both the performer and the audience to distance themselves from the words she is speaking and the stories she is telling. The audience is aware that the performer is performing a practice or identity that is not typically associated with her ethnic and cultural identity.

[30] Up to 40% of the population in Trinidad and Tobago is considered of "Indo-Caribbean" descent.

True to the postmodern moment out of which this work was born, Báez uses kuchipudi dance to show the audience that identities are not fully knowable, whether through language, movement or biological referents, and are instead constantly evolving *processes* that require critical engagement. In an interview she states, "If I give the obvious movement you will get bored and I will lose you. Since my movement is alien to you and you have to work as an audience member, you are more likely to listen to what I have to say" (Rivera-Servera, "Dominican York in Andhra" 157). I would add that the audience is also asked to *watch* more closely. When placed within the context of the issue of language in US Latina/o theater, this statement implies that "obvious" uses of both spoken and corporeal language are perhaps unproductive, except in overly facile terms, in presenting the Other to white and/or otherwise mainstream audiences.

The text of *Dominicanish,* which is spoken as Báez uses her purposefully limited vocabulary of kuchipudi dance steps, depicts the experience of a young Dominican woman learning to speak English. The language is fragmentary, mixing colloquial Dominican Spanish with the street English of other immigrants and black Americans. It is poetry that is self-referential and open-ended at the same time that it clearly locates itself geographically, temporally, racially, and ethnically. She dances with her tongue, teeth and lips, exploring the limits of sound by placing them in different relationships to each other as she performs the experience of contorting her mouth to make the sounds of a foreign language. When she says, "Gosh/ To pronounce one little phrase one must become another person with the mouth all twisted/ Yo no voy a poner mi boca así como

un guante,"[31] (*Dominicanish* 22) the spectator can see her exaggerated pucker and hear how her sounds change according to how she places her mouth, distorting the sounds that accompany the gesticulation. As if a glove were somehow a costume that hides what is beneath, reshaping the body around which it fits, lending "class" and "elegance," putting her mouth like a glove, involves not only the "dressing-up" of Báez's Dominican tongue, but in doing so, the concealment of her language, disfiguring the body that expresses, the hand that gestures.

In a style reminiscent of Guillermo Gómez Peña who writes, "Alien-ation/Alien-action/Alientated/Álguien ate it/Alien hatred/Aliens out there/ Hay álguien out there (90)," Báez plays in the liminal space between languages, to realize that she speaks Dominicanish, a product of her transcultural experience, one that is much more complex than fixed notions of pure English and Spanish or even simply speaking both.

> Sa Ri Ga Ma/Pa Da Ni Sa/Baseball has been very very very good to me/Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Da Ni Sa/Baseball has been very very/ very good to me/But you see/There's no guarantee/Now I'm another person/Mouth twisted/Guiri guiri on dreams/Guiri guiri business/Even laughing/Laughing in Dominicanish…..Here I am chewing English/and spitting Spanish (Báez, *Dominicanish* 47-9).

The notion of "laughing in Dominicanish" signals that language is not defined by words only, but also by embodied acts such as laughing. Furthermore, laughter, an expressive, emotive act is indicative of how the subject feels and physically responds to the world around her. We might ask then: how is "laughing in Dominicanish" different from laughing in English or in Spanish? When Báez says that she is "chewing English" and "spitting Spanish" we understand that she

[31] "I am not going to put my mouth like a glove"

ingests (literally macerates) one culture only to transform it into something different, flavored by her insides. Watching her say this, the audience can see the onomatopoeia of chewing one language versus spitting another.

One of the central themes of *Dominicanish* is education and the experience, not just of learning language and culture, but also of practicing it, performing it and thus embodying it. Sandoval-Sánchez and Saporta Sternbach write about a poetics of Latina theater that often involves a coming of age story where the protagonist finds herself juggling her informal education with her formal education and ultimately learns and remembers how to speak and be heard, thus becoming an active agent in her world (60-70). Although Báez's work is not discussed in their extensive study of Latina performance, this is precisely what happens in *Dominicanish.* After showing her difficulty, not in *learning* English, but in wanting to *speak* it as it was taught to her in school, Báez references her teachers the Isley Brothers on Soul Train when she says "now I don't care how my mouth look…I like what I say./ Dominican miracle, writing sentences in perfect syntax. Poetry that they taught me…/ the Isley Brothers. (*She raises her fist.*) Fight the power." (*Dominicanish* 28). When at school, teachers who are puzzled by her poetic ability in English, scold her for saying that "the professors Isley" taught her English. We see how her "informal" education clashes with her "formal" education. Báez refuses to shape her words to grammar taught in the classroom, saying that "I don't care how my mouth look" when it is informed by the Soul Train singers, insisting on how her "mouth look" as opposed to how it "looks." Her affinity for an African-American, Spanish-accented English vernacular, over that taught in the classroom, defines her

experience of learning about US culture. In this case, she chooses black US culture over the "proper" culture of the presumably white classroom. The raised fist accompanying "fight the power" also represents her identification with the Black Power movement and the black fist of resistance that became emblematic in the 1970s. Additionally, it shows the learning of a new gestural language invoking defiance, revolution and *action*, not just a spoken language.

The text in its entirety is full of references to an informal learning and an intercultural encounter with other racialized communities such as, "Con afro black is beautiful/ Black is a color/ Black is my color/ My cat is black" (26). The fact that many Dominicans do not self-identify as black until they come to the United States is a reality that many immigrants deal with. For instance, in Ginetta E.B. Candelario's recent study *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*, she outlines the way that Dominican indigenism has been used as an ideological response to anti-Haitian racism, US imperialism and Dominican nation building,[32] resulting in a clear distinction on the part of Dominicans between "Dominican" and "black." People who would be categorized as unquestionably black in the United States, in the Dominican Republic identify as "Indio" or simply Dominican. However, upon encountering a US model of racialization this ideology is often challenged and the immigrant response, Candelario argues, is to either limit contact with non-Dominicans, or to become socialized as African Americans.[33] In the instance of Báez's performance we see the latter. In finding solidarity with other black populations, she draws upon their vernacular

[32] Before, during and after the brutal dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo.
[33] For more on a fictional representation of the subject of Dominican immigrant racial identity see Junot Diaz's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

and gestural behavior, as well as a rhetoric of black pride that together serve as mechanisms of coping with US racialization (Bailey 1-5). Furthermore, Báez, as a transnational Dominican, speaks of taking her newfound words, gestures, and ideologies back to the island when she would visit.

However, Báez's "cultural remittances" did not just come from other cultures in New York but rather from a variety of Dominicans with unique and disparate experiences. In fact, the communities formed through this sharing of language as cultural practice are central in Báez's work. Despite creating a notable solidarity with African Americans, Benjamin H. Bailey points out how Dominican-Americans, particularly second generation immigrants, draw upon language as a primary signifier that distinguishes them ethnically in US practices of binary racialization (*Language, Race*). In her process of developing the piece, Báez would, in the style of the American Tupperware Party, have someone from the Dominican community host her rehearsal. In these workshops she would use the space of the house or the apartment and the feedback from the Dominican immigrants present to inform her work. For instance, on one occasion, finding herself in the bathroom, Báez sat fully clothed in the empty bathtub and began making rowing motions with her arms (Rivera-Servera, "Dominican York in Andhra" 157). For many Dominicans who left the Dominican Republic in small *yolas*, or boats, this gesture provides associations beyond those typically associated with rowing, conjuring up memories of the extreme danger and hardship that journey represents in their collective memory.[34] In this way, the work is very much about her individual

[34] The Mona Passage is the body of water that separates the Eastern coast of the Dominican Republic from the Western coast of Puerto Rico. It is one of the deepest trenches in the world and extremely dangerous to cross. Nevertheless, this is how the majority of undocumented Dominicans cross over to US territory. They

experience but also about a collective identification with being Dominican in the United States that moves beyond the stereotypical signifiers of *merengue*, *mangú*[35] and *plátanos*.

Physical gestures and motifs that are not necessarily codified dance steps are also important tools through which Báez conveys meaning. With an incredibly expressive face, Báez works to combine the eye movements of kuchipudi dance with other Dominican and African American cultural gestures. For instance, she points with her lips to indicate the location of something, purses her mouth while her eyes move from side to side. At one point when she describes her white school teachers catching her saying the phrases that she learned from the Isley brothers, she does a prolonged lip suck, common in the Caribbean as an expression for conveying disdain. In another instance, she performs the kuchipudi steps, shuffling her feet and marking geometrical shapes at the same time that her hands are held behind her back, wrists crossed together. Recalling the use of projections at the beginning of the piece, as the performance nears the end, images of urbanscapes in New York are projected against the back wall. The crossed-wrists, held behind the back is a powerful choice because it comes at a point where a projected image of an ice cream truck symbolizing summer, youth and innocence is replaced with images of riots in Washington Heights (a primarily Dominican neighborhood). While this is taking place, Báez talks about her realization that in New York, although things are certainly different than in the Dominican Republic, they are ultimately not so different because "aquí también los pantis se tienden en el baño."[36] This reference to the intimate interior clothes says something about a fundamental similarity between the two places

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typically make this journey with 30-80 people in small fishing boats intended for five to ten people. Many people die in this process and the rest are permanently marked by this experience.

[35] A Dominican dish made of boiled and mashed plantains.

[36] "here people also hang their panties in the bathroom"

despite the obvious differences. Underneath the outer dressings the underwear is still the same and the reference to the specifically female "*pantis*" not only demonstrates the pre-immigration Anglicized Spanish, but it may also reference an underlying commonality in the way women are treated. In both places, the proverbial "dirty laundry" is still kept within the safety of interior spaces, the access to which requires cultural belonging. Especially provocative, the kuchipudi image of her hands behind her back, as if held in place by handcuffs, alongside the projection of the photographs of the riots, conjures up images of criminalized, hand-cuffed Dominican bodies and by extension, the images of the alleged black American criminals so gratuitously prevalent in the media.

At this point, nearing the end of the 45-minute piece, having used the kuchipudi dance sequences as a framing device for the spoken text, Báez releases her hands and begins to move away from the classical Indian dance to perform movements that utilize the hips and polyrhythms more than the select kuchipudi sequences have done. Rivera-Servera refers to these places in the performance as "Signifying sequences" ("Dominican York in Andhra" 160). After having moved away from the gagá in the beginning in order to deconstruct dominant romanticized notions of Dominicanness, she is able to return to a dance sequence that resembles and echoes that projected in the beginning, signifying a Dominicanness that takes into account the complexities that reside in the bodies (both the individual and the larger group) of Dominicans. She performs her experience of being steeped in the culture of the Other (India) that is also represented as a marginalized subject in the United States. She not only embodies her own erasure from US culture, but through her reach through global "brownness," she also signals the muted, near-invisible presence in US society of a different Othered body. Thus, Báez works against cultural

erasure through a deconstructive strategy that leads her away from essences and toward individual experience that creates the knowledge that is the shared fabric of identity. Like Hernández, she "moves pleasurably to perform identity" (Rivera-Servera, "Dominican York in Andhra" 161) as she speaks of her community:

> Hablo como Boricua y me peino como Morena/ La viejita de abajo no e' vieja na'/ El super se esta tirando a la culona del 5to piso/ Jangueo con pájaro del barrio/ Me junto con la muchacha que salió preñá/ Salgo con mi ex/ Hablo con el muchacho que estaba preso/ Garabatié paredes y trenes/ City I pulled the emergency cord (43).[37]

In this passage she performs the multiple bodies (recognizable to many) of her Dominican York topography, un-fixing any one Dominican type, united through their marginality as African-American woman, Puerto Rican woman, pregnant teenager, old lady, gay man, ex-prisoner. The bodies of her community are marked in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, and age and yet she is at the center of these intersections, a complex subterranean map of tracks. Throughout her life, Báez has been navigating these identities, code-switching between them, giving them each their place in the fabric of her experience. In the last line she calls the city to action by pulling the emergency cord, asking for some recognition, for the train to stop, for the machinery that marginalizes these figures to grind to a halt.

Báez is a Dominican York who speaks neither English nor Spanish but rather, Dominicanish. She does not live between worlds but rather, like Hernández and her characters that ride currents of speech and movement, resides in many worlds at once, worlds that embody the third bordered space that Anzaldúa and others write about. Her

[37] I talk like a Puerto Rican and I do my hair like a black girl/ The old lady from downstairs ain't old at all/ The Super is hitting on the big assed woman from the 5th floor/ I hung out with the barrio fairy/ I get together with the girl that got knocked up/ I go out with my ex/ I talk to the guy who was in prison/I tagged walls and trains/City I pulled the emergency cord

use of dance and physical signification provides another language with which to speak creating an alternative potential "fourth country" for transcultural subjects to reside in or visit as they see fit. In this space, the transculturality of *Latinidad* is performed as a living process with multiple complex ways of communicating meaning, a meaning that can be understood despite and because of the languages one speaks with the mouth and with the rest of the body. Not surprisingly, the performance text has two different introductions, one in Spanish and one in English. Yet they are not translations of each other but rather homologous, parallel descriptions that provide linguistically unique though similar experiences for the bilingual reader. In this example we see Báez's unwillingness to see language, ethnicity and identity in binaries. Perhaps the greatest testament to her work as a transcultural, transnational, black, female, Dominican York artist is the fact that the strongest reaction to her work comes from Dominicans and Indians who demand she be "culturally pure" in her interpretations (Waddell 69). *Dominicanish* is at once subversive and reaffirming.

Conclusion

Anzaldúa writes that Chicano Spanish is "un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir" (77).[38] The artists discussed above, work within a language that corresponds to their way of living. Not only do they allow their tongue to be forked (sometimes multiply), fusing spoken aural languages and fluidly demonstrating the ways in which they move within and between them, but they also allow their bodies to speak and to convey meaning through shared cultural gestures, associations, dance and rhythm. In looking at these two women crossing boundaries between US and Spanish Caribbean

[38] "A language that responds to a way of living"

cultural practice and theatrical tradition, it is important to note the way in which they both center their work on bilingualism and how an embodied rhetoric also signifies their particular "way of living."

In juxtaposing the work of these two artists, we can see how their particular identities, thematic explorations, textual playfulness and physical commitment, are exemplary of what I have termed the code-switching, bilingual body. Besides noting the parallels between their respective work it is important to understand *what* has led them to work creatively in the way they do and how this form is serving their performative explorations of identity. Ultimately, it is of no surprise that these two women, working in different sites, should come up with similar strategies for performing their hyphenated, interstitial identity as Latinas from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. It is as if in searching, as the tongue does, around the corners of words, in the spaces between letters, in the shift from a Spanish "i" to an English "e," both of these women have come to rely on their bodies to complete the storytelling, to tell the full story. Having lived the experience of being simultaneously *aqui* and *alla*, they show us through performance the process of "being and becoming," how this is embodied, and most importantly, how embodiment relates to language. A deep exploration of bilingual identity through performance, can only ever lead directly to the body, because when we are not speaking with our tongues, we are still experiencing with our bodies which also speak and thus signify meaning.

The above analysis of Teresa Hernández, a Puerto Rican woman living and working in Puerto Rico serves an example of the complexity of Puerto Rican identity, one that, due to the island's political status is always already pre-national, and post-

colonial, caught in the space between Spain and the United States, haunted by the legacy of African slavery and subsequent racialized poverty and discrimination. Although Hernández works in Puerto Rico, while Báez works mostly outside of the Dominican Republic, the fact of hybridity persists as there is no clearly definable national, cultural or even racial identity to point to. Instead, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans are defined by the particular set of relations they engage in, which is what Hernández demonstrates in her performances. Subsequently, the performer outlines the different sites of complexity in the "complexity of being" Puerto Rican. Surely, the danger in using models of hybridity and hyphenated, bordered identities is the loss of difference, of the relative positions and relationships to power for instance, of "black," "white," and "brown" in *mestizaje*, and *Latinidad*. However, Hernández's work importantly accomplishes a challenge to this tendency in her privileging of embodied performance. She outlines the rhetoric of nation, culture, colonizer and colonized, setting up the framework through which Puerto Rican subjects construct their identity. Yet she subsequently expresses this through her own embodied subjectivity, performatively demonstrating how one individual navigates these different issues, or complexes, which act as the signposts against which she defines her actions. Hernández engages Puerto Rico, but does not *represent* Puerto Rico. Finally, while she does not explicitly address processes of racialization in Puerto Rico in the performances I have described, this is an implicit issue in any conversation or performance about Puerto Rican identity.

Like Hernández, Josefina Báez is an artist that works within a form that facilitates an exploration of her transnational identity. In this way, her work is part of what Liamar Durán Almarza refers to as "transnational and multiethnic communities beginning a

problematic dialogue with celebratory discourses on both US multiculturalism and narrow conceptions of Caribbeanness," creating a multi-dimensional "third space" (162). By adding the dimension of movement to the "third space," we encounter the "fourth country" that I have outlined here. Báez's work is certainly more autobiographically informed than Hernández who uses fictional characters, which in turn allows her a deeper exploration of her own embodied experience. However, when she uses kuchipudi dance steps to distance the spectator from assumptions about her body and thus identity, effectively performing herself through a "foreign" culture, she actively questions notions of Othering, cultural appropriation, and cultural belonging. Like Hernández, she defines the different codes she draws from, and defines herself through the way in which she mixes and switches the codes. Finally, and very importantly, when Báez draws attention to the fact of her blackness by actually calling herself black, she accomplishes two very important acts. First of all, she recounts the experience of coming to have a black identity in the United States, of knowing herself as black through processes of US racial formation. Secondly, she points to inescapability of her blackness, of the way that even if she were not to see herself as black, she is racialized from the outside gaze. No matter how she learns to "put her mouth," her body will be read as Other, marked not as Latina but as black.

Lowell Fiet writes about the way in which nationalist movements in Latin America were often accompanied by literary movements (*Preguntas* 15). I suggest that by focusing on embodied performance versus a text-based literary drama we inform our understandings of identity, of the complex and nuanced ways through which we come to understand nation, culture, race and class, gender and sexuality. The performance

strategies of these two artists could have important implications for a movement from a literary based theater to a more corporeally based theater. I thus suggest that if contemporary US Latina/o theater artists made more of an exploration within the physical realm described above, the issue of spoken language would not be *as* problematic. Certainly one cannot ignore the very real issue of inaccessibility to a language one does not understand, but as demonstrated above there is a different and yet cogent understanding that emerges through physicalized language. While there are many issues involved in performing bilinguality, many bilingual US Latina/os, like Anzaldúa, resist the complete loss of hearing their languages spoken by forked tongues. However, nor do they necessarily wish to be separated from non-bilingual audiences of Latina/os and non-Latina/os. In looking at the code-switching body as a site for signifying cultural identity and personal histories *alongside* the speaking of the forked tongue, our understanding of inter and intra-cultural performance can be enhanced.

Chapter Three

Facing the Island:
Teatro Diplo, Blackface Performance and National Identity in Puerto Rico

"The exclusion of black men and women from concepts of Puerto Ricanness operates not only on the basis of absences and silences, but also on presences which are celebrated as part of the island's national folklore."
-*Isar P. Godreau Santiago*

Diplo, Diplomacia, performer and performed, signifier and signified, black and white, poor and beloved, clever and lazy, heard and seen, rebellious yet hilarious, the essence of Puerto Rico, but with a Cuban accent. The persona of Diplo, played by actor Ramón Ortiz del Rivero, is the man Puerto Ricans loved for nearly twenty years, the celebrity who publicly advocated for Puerto Rican independence, painting his face black, donning black gloves, and performing his best black-voice *negrito*. Indeed, his impact was so great that although he prematurely died of a congenital aneurism at age 47 in 1956, his legacy continues to this day. In 2006 veteran performer Ramón "Moncho" Conde inaugurated a new theater space in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico in honor of "Diplo," memorializing this actor's contribution to Puerto Rican performance history. *Teatro Diplo,* which closed in 2009 due to financial struggles, significantly bore the name of the character-turned-persona, not the non-black actor Ramón Rivero.

In this chapter, I look at the memorializing of Diplo as a point of departure to engage the precarious and multi-layered relationship between race, class, nationalism and performance in Puerto Rico. I argue that the fact that Diplo's potency as a signifier remains intact 50 years after Rivero's death, is connected to a crisis within the ideology of the island's political situation. Furthermore, in looking at Diplo the public figure, and Rivero the performer, through the lens of the code-switching body, I draw upon what

Cristina Civantos calls the "race/class/language nexus" in early Cuban *teatro bufo*. I extend my articulation of the bilingual, code-switching body to look at how Rivero code-switches in his performances of black and working class identities in order to signify *puertorriqueñidad.* Although, as I have discussed earlier, it is clear that there is no essential "black" way of speaking, either vocally or in embodied codes, through the blackface and black-voice performances we see that racial identities are imagined through speech and embodied movements and thus recreated in performance. It is these constructed codes, their reproduction, manipulation and contestation with which I am concerned in this chapter. In the previous two chapters I have shown the code-switching body to simultaneously navigate multiple identities and codes of belonging as a strategy of resistance. However, in this chapter I wish to show how Rivero's embodied code-switching performances of blackface and black-voice employ this strategy in a way that absents black Puerto Ricans from any process of Puerto Rican subject formation. To honor Diplo by naming a theater after him, a particular Puerto Rican history is re-enacted. A given construction of *puertorriqueñidad* is re-performed, one in which blackness is cited, class is invoked, nationalist politics are centralized and masculinity is privileged. Yet, as I argue, Rivero's skill at code-switching, at moving in and around these varying identities, makes such a contradiction not only possible but extremely viable, a fact that reveals the racist foundations upon which official narratives of *puertorriqueñidad* are built. By demonstrating the way that the performing body invokes and interchanges codes of nation and race, substituting one for the other, I hope to underscore not only the interesectionality of social identities in Puerto Rican subject formation, but also how this is a process that largely circumscribes participation by Afro-Puerto Ricans.

This act of naming *Teatro Diplo* comes as Puerto Rico enters a second century of colonial occupation by the United States and while scholars continue to point to the covert racism that permeates the island's culture. For example, in her essay "La gran familia puertorriqueña 'ej prieta de beldá"[1] Arlene Torres writes about the notion of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* as a totalizing discourse that would envision Puerto Rico as a racially mixed and harmonious family while racial disparity in terms of education, employment and cultural representation remains firmly in place. She re-asserts José Gonzalez's claim that Puerto Rico is truly a nation of blacks despite the prevalence of a hegemonic discourse that portrays blackness as having been assimilated into the "reality" of the island's Hispanic heritage. Torres takes Gonzalez's argument one step further by stating that, "Puerto Rico is *mulato* as a nation *cuando nos conviene*" (Torres 288),[2] implying a strategic employment of the trope of blackness, one that has historically taken place in the realm of cultural expression.

In examining the figure of Diplo I am interested in the way in which blackness (and *mulatez*) is "conveniently" wielded through the remembered body of a white Puerto Rican. Given the historically symbiotic and simultaneously contradictory narratives of racial, national (i.e. political), and identities in Puerto Rico, a 2006 re-articulation of Diplo serves as a point of entry, an enactment of Tato Laviera's proverbial "U-turn," into the island's mid 20th century racial politics, a move that perhaps reveals just as much

[1] "The Great Puerto Rican family is really black." It is significant that this sentence is written to reflect a specifically working class/Afro-Puerto Rican accent.
[2] "…when it is convenient for us."
[3] In 1979 Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera wrote a collection of poems titled "La Carreta Made a U-Turn." The title is a reference to the famous 1940s play *La Carreta* by nationalist playwright René Marqués, in which

about the current racial-political climate and its intersection with performance.[3] Rivero's appropriation of the trope of blackface and its continued celebration is therefore at its core an issue of how Puerto Rico is narrativized and constructed as a nation and as a culture. His legacy is emblematic of the uneasy tension between the popularity of a visual and aural blackness and the painted, performing white body standing in for *puertorriqueñidad*. Furthermore, in this chapter, the *puertorriqueñidad* that Rivero performed in the theater, radio and television of the 1940s and 50s, is understood directly in relationship to his outspoken political stance advocating for independence. I will demonstrate how a statement such as "Creo en la independencia de Puerto Rico como creo en Dios,"[4] made by Rivero the citizen, was clearly "ghosted"[5] in Diplo's blackface performances of the Puerto Rican working class. Audiences inevitably read performances through their prior knowledge of an actor's past roles and/or personal life. By skillfully switching amongst and between codes of citizenship, national, racial and class belonging, Rivero belies the fact that although race can be read as a social construct enacted by a series of performances, black bodies in Puerto Rico cannot in fact successfully code-switch when it comes to race.

While using the notion of the "u-turn" to reach back over 50 years of history, I will also contextualize Diplo and *Teatro Diplo* within the contemporary context of performances of blackness, by concluding with an examination of the work of the Afro-

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[3] In 1979 Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera wrote a collection of poems titled "La Carreta Made a U-Turn." The title is a reference to the famous 1940s play *La Carreta* by nationalist playwright René Marqués, in which he traces the demise of a family as they move in their *carreta* (ox-cart) from the Puerto Rican countryside to the San Juan slums to New York's *barrio*. Laviera's "u-turn" therefore invokes a return to the island, and thus to its historical past, even as his bilingual poems anchor him in the present day reality of his identity as a Puerto Rican in New York.

[4] "I believe in the independence of Puerto Rico as I believe in God."

[5] For a discussion of "ghosting" see the first chapter of Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage* "The Haunted Stage: An Overview."

Puerto Rican actor/dancer/performance artist Javier Cardona. His solo performance piece *You Don't Look Like*… consciously employs the same racial tropes utilized by Rivero to demonstrate how his black body is racialized both within the profession of acting as well as in front of his audiences. His autobiographical performance piece stands as testament to the "ugly truth" of the persistence of racial stereotypes. Cardona the black artist here works in direct contrast to Rivero's artistry in performing blackness.

The persona of Diplo is especially fascinating for the way in which this constructed character moves between the ideological and the performed, thereby embodying the contradictions of an ideology of political independence from US colonialism. The construction of Diplo as a signifier that stands as an essential symbol of Puerto Rican cultural resistance, one that simultaneously racializes this movement, reveals the fundamental flaw in how *independentista* ideology would use the imagined body of a black Puerto Rican as a vehicle for identification to achieve a political end that ultimately offers no agency for blacks in Puerto Rico. The articulation of *independentismo*, a movement historically led by members of the Puerto Rican (white) elite, has always envisioned colonial oppression as a force that dominates all Puerto Ricans alike, leaving little to no space for issuing a critique of an intra-insular racism. However, to say simply that Conde naming his theater *Teatro Diplo* (and the subsequent public silence on the subject) is an act of racism, one that reifies a history of painful stereotypes and celebrates a culture of appropriation, would overlook two important factors. Firstly, the construction of blackness in Puerto Rico is a very complicated matter and one that cannot be read through the same lenses we use in discussing blackness and blackface within the context of US racial discourses. For instance, Barack Obama, the

first "black president" of the United States, would not necessarily be considered black in Puerto Rico; rather he would be seen simply as Puerto Rican, mulatto perhaps, but not unquestionably black.[6] Secondly, the Puerto Rican public adored Diplo the character, in part because he represented the underdog in a class struggle against US occupation and the creole elite's institutional power. However, despite the salience of Diplo's ability to win the hearts of the working class masses, it is important to understand that in an effort to underscore the differences in racial formation by Caribbean people versus by North Americans, the discourse of class has often taken precedence with questions of racial disparity being subsequently euphemized (Torres 288).

In examining the way in which the unfulfilled promise of independence is invoked in the figure of Diplo today, I am also looking specifically at the act of memorializing members of Puerto Rico's historical past. In addition to the racial-political charge that this figure carries he is also held up as one the "Greats of Puerto Rican History," thus becoming part of a hagiographic tradition that constructs a canon of historical figures. Diplo, the character through which we are to see Rivero the person, is figured as part of a History of which Puerto Ricans should be proud, proof of the existence of a "national culture," a requisite for having a place at the table of modernity. Thus, in a sense, the naming of *Teatro Diplo* capitalizes on a pre-existing public acceptance of Diplo (the painted Rivero) as an official member of Puerto Rican History,

[6] For an interesting example of this relationship between performance, blackness, Puerto Ricanness, and Barack Obama see the National Public Radio's episode of *This American Life*, aired on February 20, 2012. It tells the story of New York Puerto Rican Louis Ortiz who capitalizes on his striking resemblance to the president by becoming an Obama impersonator. In the story presented by Ira Glass, Ortiz recounts how the experience of being read as the "black president" made him not only the target of numerous incidents of explicitly anti-black racism, but it also made him aware of his own blackness in a way that had hitherto been unimportant, or simply absent in his own self-perception.

rendering Conde, the theater's founder, and the work produced in this space, an important narrative element of this history. This chapter therefore demonstrates how this normative "Puerto Rican History," is in fact constituted by the deep-seated privileging of narratives of anti-colonialism over a rhetoric of anti-racism. As both Rivero's nearly-invisible and Cardona's hyper-visible code-switching performances demonstrate, racial codes quite literally come to stand in for codes of national belonging.

From Cuba to Puerto Rico: Caribbean *Negritos*

To understand the implications of blackface and black-voice performance in mid 20th century and 21st century Puerto Rico it is necessary to look at the origins of this practice in the Americas, particularly as they are historically rooted in the performance of national and cultural identities. As Jill Lane writes in *Blackface Cuba*, "we find that the history of American theaters does not simply trace a teleology of the growth of 'national' expression…it is first a history of the struggle over performance as a site of power itself" (9). Lane's assertion that performance serves as a contested territory, the disputed vehicle for cultural expression, one that is at its core imbued with the politics of intercultural exchange, colonial exploitation and racial domination, is central to understanding the importance of Rivero's work. Blackface performance has thus served as a locus through which black/white, working class/slave, native/colonial relationships are performatively established. Furthermore, language and the speaking body are central in depicting and literally articulating the fluidity and limitations of these social identities. As Eric Lott argues in his study on blackface minstrelsy in the United States, *Love and Theft*, the immensely popular performance form was able to enact and formulate a "structure of feeling" that had previously resided on the edges of "semantic availability" (6). In other

words, this performance of an imagined blackness by whites embodied, and subsequently generated and perpetuated, feelings that audiences may not have previously been aware existed, giving them material with which to support and reproduce these inclinations. Where the vocabulary to describe these inclinations had previously been lacking, blackface performance brought into existence a whole set of relationships between signifiers that allowed for such an articulation. Looked at through this lens, in the case of Rivero's performances as Diplo, the visual and aural material he provided his audiences was sufficiently powerful to encapsulate a marked distinction between black and non-black Puerto Ricans, even as he came to stand in for a generic *puertorriqueñidad*.

Although I argue that Rivero's performances embodied that which may otherwise have remained on the edges of "semantic availability," the proximity and intimacy in which blacks and whites lived in mid-20th-century Puerto Rico complicates this binary. However, Lott and Lane provide important insights into understanding this phenomena in Puerto Rico, particularly given the fact that Rivero's performance troupe was initially inspired by watching Cuban *teatro bufo*. Both US blackface minstrelsy and *teatro bufo* enacted a form of cultural "borrowing" that was made possible by the material relations of slavery (Lane 16, Lott 3). In the case of Rivero's performances, while temporally separated from the abolition of slavery by more than half a century, material disparities continued to affect the descendants of these slaves, and I contend that any form of black ventriloquism is intertwined with this material reality. Furthermore, Lane points out that the assumed separation between the body and subjectivity of non-whites instantiated in blackface minstrelsy is precisely what allows for the production and maintenance of a separation that was fundamental not only to slavery but to the very idea of racial

difference (16). In mapping the way Rivero's blackface performances reenact this body/subjectivity split even as Diplo embodies racial unity (one figure, two races, all of *puertorriqueñidad*) we can see that the perpetuation of the idea of racial difference in its most insidious form lies beneath the boisterous humor of these acts.

The way in which blackness was imagined in relationship to the nation, however, is markedly different in Cuba and Puerto Rico than in the United States. According to popular theories, in the United States, an independent nation-state, blackface minstrelsy served as a way for European immigrants to become whitened as they were "Americanized," just as it allowed for the formation of a class identification through a distancing from the grotesque black Other (Lott 38-62, Saxton 67-85). In Cuba on the other hand, *bufo* was instrumental in creating performances that satirized Spanish colonials and emblematized the Cuban fight for independence (Lane). Through the character that came to be known as the *negro catedrático*,[7] or the black "intellectual" who failed at speaking "proper Spanish," Cubans mocked their colonizers at the same time they derided blacks and expressed an ever-growing fear of how the new nation would deal with the large presence of black bodies in Cuba (Lane 15-16). *Lo negro* then came to represent the nascent Cuban identity. For even as José Martí in his famous 1891 essay "*Nuestra América*" argued for the existence of a specifically *American* culture and identity, insisting that a distinction between races did not exist in Cuba, its rhetorical strategy was contingent on the presence of blacks and indigenous peoples within the stew of *mestizaje*. *Bufo*, then, served as the performative counterpart of Martí's manifesto,

[7] The *negro catedrático* can be compared to the character of Zip Coon, or the northern dandy that mocks blacks imitating whites.

showing how blacks failed at performing Europeanness thereby distancing the black/Cuban from an ideal of Europeanness and portraying them instead as possessing a unique identity somehow worthy of independence (Lane 4-5). Therefore, contrary to blackface performance in the United States, *bufo* in Cuba, while inextricably linked to a white fear of blackness, accomplished something beyond delineating a difference between blacks from whites and instead reflected an interest in defining Cubanness *as* blackness, sanitized and depoliticized.

Interestingly, Laurie Aleen Frederik and Yeidy M. Rivero[8] both argue that although the *negro catedrático* character was only one of the three stock characters in the typical *bufo* play (*la mulata, el gallego,* and *el negrito*), he became the most loved and the most representative of Cubanness. Subsequently, this is the character that later resurfaces in Puerto Rican interpretations of *bufo*. Lane writes that it was not the *negro catedrático* himself who was invested with the *cubanía* but rather the "communal laughter that he provoke(d)"(14). Without the mediation of laughter the *negro catedrático* represented a contradiction, embodying everything the new Cuban was rejecting at the same time that this figure allowed for the articulation of this new Cubanness. The *negro catedrático*'s failure in attempting to perform eruditeness, while provoking laughter, also reproduced the revolutionary, nationalist disdain for the lofty European ideals of old, while marking a visual distinction from the colonials through his painted face and a *body* that enacted blackness. Similarly, just as the boundary between Spanish colonials and revolutionary Cubans is clearly marked through the *negro catedrático*'s embodied

[8] This scholar is not a relative of Ramón Rivero the performer discussed in this paper. For the sake of clarity, she will be referred to by her full name.

performances, the distance between nascent Cubanness and Cuban blackness is established as his performative failure, one that is directly linked to the fact of his blackness. Lane's point about the importance of laughter is therefore especially insightful for the way that it distinguishes between the performer, the performed and the audience. In other words, the *negro catedrático*, although a hero for his audiences, was not in fact loved for his "blackness" but rather for the way in which he established a structure of feeling that delineated that which was otherwise semantically unavailable (Cubanness), albeit in a different way than it may have for whites in the United States. This becomes equally important in the case of Rivero's performances as Diplo, a character who created great love in his audiences by making them laugh (Rosa-Nieves, 6-7); a love that is today couched within a performance of malapropisms that mock blacks and simultaneously espouses a rhetoric of anti-colonial independence and cultural unity, an entanglement of contradictions enacted by the code-switching body.

Within the Puerto Rican context, Yeidy M. Rivero argues convincingly that Rivero's performances as Diplo directly follow in the tradition of the *negro catedrático*. Her argument however can be extended by examining the way in which Diplo's popularity as a *negrito*, a public love of the blackfaced character, is directly related, just as in Cuba, to the articulation of a love of nation. Pre-dating the arrival of *teatro bufo* one of the earliest instances of Puerto Rican theater that discussed the issue of slavery and race was *La cuarterona*, the 1867 play by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera. The first blackface performances on the island were not however until 1873 when visiting Cuban troupes performed for Puerto Rican audiences (Morfi 171, Ramos Escobar, "El teatro" 390).

Perhaps not coincidentally, this was the same year that slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico (Morfi 171). The now famous Tapia y Rivera play also had an interesting relationship to Cuba. A pro-abolitionist play, *La cuarterona*, one of the first Puerto Rican dramas to critically engage the theme of race, is the story of the tragic quadroon who is unable to marry her true love because the truth of her racial ancestry is discovered. The play is set in Cuba in an effort to distance the characters and the themes from the immediacy of the Puerto Rican cultural and political sphere. According to José Luis Ramos Escobar, a censor reading *La cuarterona* meticulously underlined the word "*coloniales*" every time it appeared in the text and concluded that the play could be presented without problem if the word "*sociales*" served as a substitute ("El teatro" 386). In this case, it is clear (literally underlined) how criticism about the cultural silence regarding the island's racial makeup was quickly read into a criticism of the colonial power, demonstrating the uneasy yet close relationship between constructions of race and imaginings of nation.

Censorship by the Spanish colonial government was not limited to Puerto Rico, for it was during this time (1869-1878) that the performance of *teatro bufo* was banned in Cuba, where it was deemed a subversive threat. This was also a time when Cuban and Puerto Rican intellectuals and revolutionaries worked together, combining forces to mutually support their parallel struggles in fighting for independence from Spain (Mirabal 57-72). Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodriguez de Tió's oft-cited proclamation that "Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro dos alas"[9] laid the symbolic groundwork for the

[9] "Cuba and Puerto Rico are, of one bird, the two wings."

creation of what would later in the 20th century become what Yeidy M. Rivero calls the "CubaRican" socio-cultural space (*Tuning Out* 28-32). Not surprisingly, then, Tapia y Rivera's stretch across to the "other wing" was later reenacted through the Cuban accent that Diplo affected, performatively re-establishing the relationship between Spanish language, Caribbean geographies, blackness, and nationalism. While the arrival of a company of *bufo* performers in Puerto Rico (at a time when this practice was banned in Cuba) may have been what sparked a practice that Rivero would inherit, it is important, however, to remember that shared discourses of race as well as performance tropes had already been circulating between Puerto Ricans and Cubans for much of the 19th century as they would continue to do well into the 20th century.

Not only were these *bufo* performances extremely popular in Puerto Rico but they also influenced the way in which theater productions engaged black characters onstage. Ramos Escobar writes about the important influence that *teatro bufo* had on 20th century Puerto Rican dramaturgy ("El teatro" 390-93). The arrival of Cuban blackface actors, in combination with the fact that black characters were beginning to appear in Puerto Rican plays, helped to create a bifurcation in the nascent national theater scene. Again, thinking about performance as the contested site of representation, we can see that Puerto Rican theater at the end of the 19th century began to develop in two distinct realms: institutionalized, elite and urban, versus more popular and rural spaces (Ramos Escobar, "El teatro" 389). The popular theater that developed in the late 19th century and early 20th century took place in plazas, town halls, and at times local theaters (Dávila-Santiago). With the onset of the US occupation of Puerto Rico, plays dealing with labor issues

proliferated and both black and non-black working class Puerto Ricans began to enter public spaces where they had not previously appeared. In the book *Teatro obrero en Puerto Rico (1900-1920)* Rubén Dávila Santiago comments on the increased numbers of head-wrapped women (*pañuelos de madrá*)[10] attending public performances in the town plaza (10). In this time period, non-urban elite theater utilized the burlesque quality of the *bufo* combined with its salient class critique in order for it to resonate with working class people attending these productions. Furthermore, the fact that these plays contained black characters, even if they were being presented in blackface, helped to attract the working class, many (or most) of whom were black and mulatto. Ramos Escobar argues that this genre, particularly the trope of the *negro catedrático*, directly influenced black character types in other plays. The inclusion of black characters that reflected this now-familiar trope, allowed for distinctly non-black audiences to be more comfortable with seeing black characters onstage (Ramos Escobar, "El teatro" 390). Thus, through *bufo*, blackness became (more) normalized as a subject for theatrical performance in Puerto Rico and yet the actual black bodies that were being invoked through these performances were largely absent on the stage, and even so, were limited to the realm of musical performance, a practice that continued well into the second half of the 20th century and arguably still exists today. On the one hand it is clear that this absence was the direct result of racially segregated public spaces (bourgeois theaters and night clubs). However, conversely, the very presence of a speaking black body (as opposed to a white body performing blackness) may have brought about questions of black subjectivity within

[10] "Pañuelos de madrá" typically refers to the headscarves worn by black women.

cultural production that represented a threat at the level of the anti-colonial politics espoused in the theater of the time.

It is clear that however the *catedrático* developed in Puerto Rico, it was in direct relationship to the figure of the *jibaro*. Yeidy M. Rivero writes that the trope of the *negro catedrático*, later known simply as the *negrito*, was also picked up by late 19th century and early 20th century *costumbrista*[11] playwrights and novelists who had developed the figure of the *jíbaro* as the essentialized and romanticized Puerto Rican that stood for independence (*Tuning Out* 35). Similar to the way in which Cubans delivered a rhetorical construction of Cubanness through the *negrito*, Puerto Ricans of the creole elite had formulated the identity of the *jíbaro* that represented both "the legitimization of the elite self as well as the reliance on the Other" (Guerra 66). The *jíbaro*, the whitened male peasant who represented the oppressed and bucolic Puerto Rican, came to stand as a symbol of nostalgia for a pre-US occupied Puerto Rico at the same time that it was endowed with the ideology of *independentismo*. Diplo and the other *negrito* characters played by Rivero stand alongside the figure of the *jíbaro*, the primary signifier for Puerto Ricanness for over a century. Most recently scholars and cultural workers alike have pointed to the constructed *jíbaro* as one of the primary sites for the erasure of blackness

[11] This genre of writing generally refers to a movement in the 19th century (first in Spain and later picked up by Latin Americans) that describes and interprets the daily life, customs, and manners of the society in which it was being created. *Costumbrismo*, which often a simplified and romantic vision of a given culture, was used by Latin American intellectuals to describe and therefore bring into being what they saw as their emerging identity, distinct from that of Spain's. Viewed as a pseudo-ethnographic practice, in many ways *costumbrismo* was responsible for the formulation of popular beliefs about cultural identities despite its highly essentializing and often fabricated "authenticity."

in Puerto Rican cultural politics (Dávila, Grosfoguel and Negrón-Muntaner). Lillian Guerra writes about the construction of the *jíbaro* as:

> principally a product of a mythifying process carried out by the elite that strove to intellectualize and thereby render less threatening, 'indeed less other,' the Puerto Rican popular classes. Within this process, elite intellectuals sought to draw the Other, namely peasants become workers, closer to themselves at a time when the world they had once known was crumbling, and the popular classes over whom they once dominated were asserting their dissent (9).

Interestingly, the Cuban elite construction of black-voice in the literature that would later develop into *teatro bufo* dialogues sought to assert a similar kind of domination through Othering. Simultaneously, black-voice writing relied upon a constructed Other for an identity of a Self that would be presented to those outside of Cuba (Lane 43). In the case of Puerto Rico, the creole elite used the whitened *jíbaro* archetype as a way of saying to the North Americans (who regarded the majority of Puerto Ricans to be of mixed race, and therefore subservient to US Euro-Americans) that Puerto Ricans were white, and therefore capable of governing themselves. Thus, as Guerra points out, "when Americanization increasingly insisted any Puerto Rican was simply Other, early-twentieth-century Puerto Rican intellectuals claimed the legitimacy of their 'true' Self in the Other" (47). It is in this context that the discourse of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* becomes a hegemonic ideology of racial democracy, a discourse that is entirely contingent upon acts of Othering, despite its attempt at supporting ethnic solidarity in the effort to create a solid anti-colonial movement. Most importantly, it is from this strategic employment of distinctly racialized nationalist tropes that Diplo's embodied code-switching performances emerge.

Upon coming into contact with the Cuban *negrito* characters, Puerto Rican *costumbrista* playwrights began to write dialogues between white *jíbaros* and black *jíbaros*. Although part of the *costumbrista* tradition, and admired for the "craft" of phonetically writing the incorrect and almost unintelligible Spanish of the *jíbaro*, the inclusion of a *negro catedrático jíbaro* involved still another level of affectation and illiteracy, one that was necessary to distinguish this jumbled "black" speech from the illiteracy of the white *jíbaro*. As Angelina Morfi points out, the white *jíbaro* and white *hacendado* characters would together mock the *jíbaro negro*, marking racial distinctions as well as those of class (113-31), a fact that becomes important in reading Diplo's performances. The fact that the *jíbaro negrito* was subordinate to the white *jíbaro* is central in understanding how Diplo came to be loved as an emblem of Puerto Rico. By performing a *negrito* stereotype that situated him in relationship to the working classes Rivero was directly invoking the *jíbaro* but in a distinctly urban (read black) context. It is impossible therefore to understand the full impact of Rivero's *negrito* without reading him alongside the figure of the *jíbaro*. By the 1930s when Rivero began his acting career, the *jíbaro* had not only been mythologized by *costumbrista* writers of all genres, but he had become the subject for a new generation of playwrights that would continue to use the *jíbaro* as a device for an identification of the Self (in this case *puertorriqueñidad*) in the presence of the Other (in this case US colonials), mitigating any US tendencies to read *puertorriqueñidad* as closer to blackness than whiteness. The white Rivero's code-switching performances of blackness thus assisted in this act of creating a Self (*puertorriqueñidad*) in the face of the black Other.

However, the popularity of the Cuban *bufo* companies in Puerto Rico seems to reflect a socio-political atmosphere prepared, not only to receive this type of performance, but also to actively engage it. Ramos Escobar reminds us that Cuban *bufo* created such a stir within the late 19th century Puerto Rican theater scene that Cuban companies, often incorporating Puerto Rican actors, actually began to perform *bufo* plays written by Puerto Ricans, namely playwright Rafael E. Escalona (390). In Escalona's plays black characters appeared either as the *negro catedrático* familiar to *teatro bufo* who was mocked in his attempt at speaking "proper Spanish," or in the figure of the *bozal*, or African-born slave, whose manner of speaking represented what linguist Peter Roberts has referred to as "a deviant form of Spanish" that gave the impression of the *bozal* as "not fully Puerto Rican" (qtd. in Fiet, *Reimaginado* 101). The racist and paternalistic constructions of blackness through the aural depictions of the *bozal* are seen even as early as the mid 18th century, prior to the arrival of *bufo* in Puerto Rico (Fiet, *Reimaginado* 101-4). Thus, *teatro bufo*'s attention to the *catedrático*'s performance of a less "deviant," but nonetheless hyperbolic, speech brings imagined blackness into a closer proximity with an idea of *puertorriqueñidad*. The *negro catedrático*'s improved Spanish in these plays, while causing him to be laughed *at* and therefore existing as a marginal subject, also provided a vehicle for some degree of upward mobility. However, as a response to the offensive *bufo* portrayals of black characters clumsily wielding their "big words," as in Escalona's play *Amor a la Pompadour*, the black Puerto Rican Eleuterio Derkes wrote a play in which the figure of the educated black was portrayed with previously unseen dignity (Ramos Escobar, "El teatro" 391). While Derkes' *Tio Fele* also includes the figure of the uncultured *bozal*, which serves as a direct contrast to

the more respectable *catedrático* Ricardo, the main character is finally accepted into what can be understood as the Puerto Rican family. Ricardo, whose proposal for marriage is initially rejected by the father of the young white country girl, is ultimately given a chance once it is discovered that not only does he have money, but he also *speaks* like a "*catedrático*." In Derkes' play, outward performances of whiteness are therefore understood to ultimately trump the fact of his blackness while an active distancing from blackness proves materially rewarding. However, as Puerto Rican theater and performance scholar Lowell Fiet insightfully points out, Derkes' use of the trope of the *catedrático* should be read as a combative gesture in the face of *teatro bufo*'s commercial success in Puerto Rico, as opposed to an imported and thus newly discovered archetype (*Reimaginado* 113). Fiet proposes instead that, in fact, the figure of the *catedrático*, whose experiments with white speech are fundamentally reflective of an Afro-Puerto Rican and peasant culture of orality and mimesis (a type of code-switching, I would add), finds its way into written dramas and literature by way of local cultural performance prior to the influence of Cuban *bufo* (*Reimaginado* 112-13). Therefore in considering Rivero's performances as directly influenced by the imported *bufo* it is also interesting to bear in mind the autochthonous contributions of his characters' marked relationship to "black speech."

Ramón Rivero

2009 marked the hundredth anniversary of Rivero's birth which was celebrated with television specials, public lectures, and with updated material on the website of *La Fundación Ramón Rivero*. He was born in the Eastern town of Naguabo and began acting in 1933 while working as a physical education teacher in the high school of a rural

mountain town. He and two of his students started the company *La farándula bohemia*,[12] which performed locally for a couple of years before starting to tour their performances to other theaters across the island, presenting opening acts before film screenings. Initially, the troupe's performances were characterized as "politico-burlesque" (Yeidy M. Rivero, *Tuning Out* 38) and engaged themes that reflected the political current of that historical moment. While I argue that references to a leftist rhetoric of nationalism were directly linked to the articulation of a structure of feeling surrounding blackness in Puerto Rico, Rivero's "white-face" performances between 1933-35 were replete with nationalist rhetoric nonetheless.

The 1930s in Puerto Rico represented an intensely charged atmosphere when it came to politics. It was during this time when working class Puerto Ricans, affected by the same economic depression felt in the United States, joined the elites in supporting a radical nationalist ideology. Having already experienced politicization in terms of organized labor movements in the first two decades of the 20th century, the working class now added a much-needed popular force to the nationalist movement (Santiago-Valles 95-115). This movement focused on the articulation of upholding Puerto Ricans' language, religion, cuisine, and cultural performances as productive sites of resistance against US colonialism. Rivero, then, steeped in the values of this ideology, played characters that would reflect these positions. The fact that the mouthpiece for this ideology would be a face painted black served to safely distance Rivero from the critiques he was issuing at the same time that it referenced and circumscribed the presence of blackness within *puertorriqueñidad*, reiterating the normativity of whiteness.

[12] The Bohemian Acting Troupe

The first time that Rivero donned blackface was in 1935 after seeing the Cuban *bufo* comedian Leopoldo Fernández perform with his company in San Juan. Apparently inspired not only by the blackface but by the Cubanness (the character of Diplo would eventually speak with a Cuban accent), Rivero's first blackface performance would be in the *Farandula bohemia*'s play *El chico mambí*. The word *mambí* was originally a derogatory term used to describe the slaves who fought in Cuba's Ten Years War (1868-78). It was later re-appropriated by the mixed-race, across-class coalition of Cubans *and* Puerto Ricans that fought off Spanish colonials on the eve of Cuban independence at the turn of the century. Because it was uncommon for a politics based on racial identification to merge with that of national identification, the word *mambí* is exceptionally unique in how it works to invoke an identity that both embraces blackness as it also rejects colonialism. Yeidy M. Rivero writes that in Rivero's appropriation of this term to describe a "*negrito* who stole chickens" it is depoliticized and "merged into Bufo's stereotypes of blackness…constructing a morally dubious black character" (*Tuning Out* 38). While I agree with Yeidy M. Rivero that black subjectivity is displaced through the paternalistic representation ("*chico*" as in small) of a lazy black man (the opposite of a revolutionary), I argue that the term was utilized precisely for the way in which it allowed for a nationalist rhetoric to be carried on the body of a black man, in this case a painted blackness. In other words, although representing a *mambí* as the "*negrito* who stole chickens" was an egregious offense to the pride blacks and mulattos felt in referring to themselves as part of the *mambí* army, the use of the term in Rivero's performance was not entirely emptied of its racial and political charge, even if its connotation of resistance was rearranged and inverted. The fact that other plays performed during the same period

narrate the events surrounding the independence movement, points to the likeliness that Rivero and his collaborator José Luis Torregosa's[13] use of the word *mambí* was aimed at invoking a shared struggle for independence. No longer working in sister struggles against the same colonizer, Cuban resistance nonetheless served as a point of inspiration for Puerto Rican independence.

In a 1936 play titled *Como será y como no será nuestra república*,[14] acting as the play's narrator, Rivero's blackface character, Alma Negra (Black Soul), finds that independence is the only solution to the island's economic and political problems. Much as in the case with 19th-century Cuban *bufo*, Rivero's blackface was used to issue a political critique while literally masquerading behind the guise of a black fool, a figure that was commonly assumed to lack the intelligence of the radical intellectual elite, the true source of an anti-colonial threat. While I have already underscored the direct relationship between Rivero's performances and Cuban *bufo* traditions that reenact a creole rejection of colonialism, the presence of the important mulatto Puerto Rican nationalist Pedro Albizu Campos also serves as an interesting point of reference. I argue that the character of Alma Negra stands as an indirect invocation of the "black soul" of the independence movement at the time. By laughing at Alma Negra's predictable shortcomings, enacted through performed blackness, any white leftist's uneasiness at the presence of Albizu Campos was mitigated. The threat of a truly intellectual and literate *persona de color* was channeled through a laughable act that maintained racial hierarchies while celebrating political desires for independence.

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[13] Torregosa, one of the founding members of *La farandula bohemia* is credited with having written most of their scripts.

[14] "What Our Republic Will Be and What it Will Not Be"

In her description of Rivero's early work Yeidy M. Rivero fails to mention the fact that it was precisely in the mid 1930s (when Rivero's blackface characters were being developed) that Albizu Campos was becoming widely recognized as the leader of the Nationalist Party. Having been jailed in 1936, accused of planning the death of two police officers, many of the Nationalist Party's subsequent actions were attributed to his orders, even while incarcerated. One of the most prominent black political figures in Puerto Rican history and one of the most celebrated leaders of the independence movement, Albizu Campos interestingly fought for a politics of strict anti-colonialism and did not in fact argue for any sort of racial solidarity or liberation. He harkened back to Latin America's *hispano* heritage as a unifying link between all Latin Americans and argued that *raza* was not biological but in fact cultural (Albizu Campos 181,Vasconcelos). Albizu constructed a liberation movement that imagined Puerto Ricans as members of "*la raza Latino Americana*." It remains unknown whether this platform, formulated through the lack of a pronounced *black* subjectivity, was strategically employed in order to downplay the threat of his blackness in a politics that ultimately promoted the politics of a white elite. What is clear though is that had he been articulating a politics of social equality for blacks within his anti-colonial stance, he would not have been so highly regarded by the *independentistas* he represented; to do so would stand in direct contradiction to the racial domination they perpetuated even as they resisted a colonial hegemony. In the figure of Albizu Campos then, we see the contradiction that exists in a black body achieving political independence in Puerto Rico while negating the need for racial equality. This contradiction is crucial to understanding the popularity of Rivero's *independentista* blackface characters, and ultimately, the

subsequent celebration of his quintessential character of Diplo. In both Albizu Campos' work on the political stage and Rivero's work in the popular stage, blackness was depoliticized while it was simultaneously used to garner mass support and invoke nationalism just as blacks continued to be marginalized within the imagining of that nation. Certainly, Albizu Campos' visibility in the 1930s, and beyond, was of critical importance to anyone thinking about and describing the political events of that time.

It was shortly after his performance as Alma Negra that Rivero developed the character of Diplomacia (Diplomacy) who would soon come to be known simply as Diplo. According to Yeidy M. Rivero's interview with Rivero's widow, Diplo was "an eloquent and politically informed poor black man who played guitar and begged for money in San Juan" (*Tuning Out* 40). This description is interesting for the way in which it contrasts two seemingly disparate states: eloquent and politically informed versus poor, black, and musician. I suggest that it was this contradiction, embodied in one character code-switching between these identities, that made him not only funny, but beloved. Much like Mexico's adored comedian Cantinflas (Mario Moreno), whose poor and illiterate *peladito* figure delighted his audiences by repeatedly tricking authority figures and questioning the status quo through his jumbled and nonsensical speeches (*Cantinfladas*), Diplo's buffoonery ultimately served as an avenue for critiquing relationships of power and valuing the perspective of the underdog. However, unlike Moreno, Rivero's code-switching racial performances utilizing blackface, complicates this relationship between love, laughter and politics. As blackness was a common signifier for an Othered state, by having the character be black and poor, audiences could relate to a shared sense of Othering whether it be in regards to class, colonialism, or in

fact race. Thus, the fact that he was "eloquent and politically informed" stood as a testament of resistance even as it provided for laughter in the seeming incongruity, a laughter that while it perhaps worked to think of oppression in *general* terms, did nothing to create more positive representations of black Puerto Ricans.

Following the creation of Diplo, any other blackface character played by Rivero was credited to Diplo, not Rivero. In other words, when it came to blackface, the identity of Rivero became subsumed with that of Diplo. Diplo became actor and author, ethnographer and humanitarian, ambivalently negotiating blackness and political and economic currents. When Rivero died in 1956, it was Diplo that was mourned as the newspaper article describing his funeral was titled "50,000 asisten a entierro de Diplo."[15] Diplo's work was considered authentic, credited with a true knowledge of "el pueblo" (the people). In one romanticized account of his early days touring around the island with *La farándula bohemia* he and his colleagues are described by Abelardo Díaz Alfaro thus:

> La vida premia a los que viven no como espectadores en los cómodos palcos; sino a los que llevan el drama en el alma. Comieron en las fondas de floreados manteles y tomaron el pocillo amargo en los cafetines sórdidos. Conocen los tipos que encarnan…Y por eso, Diplo, no es uno, sino muchos. Es síntesis, prototipo, El personaje ya no es Rámon Ortiz del Rivero, es propiedad del pueblo, que lo créo y les pertenece por filiación de amor (24).[16]

Diplo here is figured as being a "true" incarnation of the many different types of Puerto Ricans Rivero encountered on his travels, making up the map of *puertorriqueñidad*.

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[15] 50,000 people attend Diplo's funeral

[16] "Life rewards those that live, not like the spectators in the comfort of front-row seats, but rather those who carry the drama in their soul. [These people] ate in the roadside eateries of flowered tablecloths, and drank their cup of bitter coffee in the squalid kiosks. They know the people they embody…and because of that, Diplo is not one, but many. He is synthesis, prototype. The character is no longer Ramón Ortiz del Rivero, he is property of the people, who created him and to whom he belongs through bonds of love."

Additionally, because of this authentic trajectory he in turn *belonged* to the people as a symbol of someone who achieved visibility, recognition, and popularity despite his humble origins. The above quote however is also troubling for the way in which Rivero, and later Diplo, is figured as an ethnographer in his authentic, yet blackfaced (an obvious performance of the non-real), performance of *puertorriqueñidad*.

In further developing the above example, it is useful to look at how blackface performances in both the United States and in Cuba have also historically dealt with this issue of authenticity, albeit in a different way. As Lott informs us, in antebellum minstrelsy in the United States, performers were given more clout when they could be touted as being from the South or having some sort of proximity to Southern blackness and thereby a more legitimate understanding of the characters they were portraying (Lott 38-9, 43). Lane also writes about the issue of ethnography in early "black-voice" writing in Cuba. She describes the way in which the poor Galician immigrant Bartolomé José Crespo y Borbón made a "spectacular career" through poetry and plays that impersonated the figure of the *bozal* (19). Like Rivero and Diplo, Crespo would sign his writings as Creto, the *bozal* character he had created, and eventually Creto was considered the authentic source of knowledge on black customs in Cuba while Crespo quietly receded into the background. Creto not only parodied black speech, Lane writes, but the fact that he was "writing" that speech was represented as a an inherent parody in itself (49). By comparison, although his impersonations were taking place in a different sociopolitical climate, the fact that Diplo, and not Rivero, performed the blackface characters, somehow added to the parody and the authenticity, thus providing popular appeal. Ultimately though, this ventriloquizing gesture reflects the fact that blackness lacks what Lane refers

to as a "credible discursive center" or a "stable authorial 'I'" (54). Although Rivero's populist approach and appeal may have been commendable in some respects, a series of enactments that render blackness an empty signifier inhabitable by non-blacks and inaccessible to blacks displaces black subjectivity in his performances. Furthermore, in contrast to the supposed authenticity (or "street credit" in contemporary colloquial speech) that he gleaned from his experiences "amongst the people" Rivero's artistry is depicted as having descended from his *hispano* heritage even if Diplo himself is descended from "lineaje oscuro" (Díaz Alfaro 24).[17] Here we see how the simultaneous split and fusion of Rivero and Diplo is predicated on a disembodied intellect and culture that is associated with whiteness, while blackness, knowable through a visual marker, is perpetually tied to the body.

Perhaps some of Diplo's popularity came from the fact that he was able to, as Díaz Alfaro writes, "realiza(r) el milagro más grande…el milagro cotidiano de vivir sin trabajar."[18] Diplo was made a household name in the radio show *El tremendo hotel* that aired five days a week from 1946-1954, where he played the character of the *negrito* Calderón (for the characters were credited to Diplo even if the scripts were signed by Rivero and the checks were also paid to him). Primarily serving as the hotel's errand boy, the blackface and black-voice Calderón was known for being lazy at the same time that his cleverness was what allowed him to avoid work while still gaining materially. Among the deeds that were credited to him were: stealing the neighbors' chickens, getting out of doing work by convincing the other characters that he was dying, stealing the tires from a

[17] "dark lineage"
[18] "realize the greatest miracle…the daily miracle of living without working."

doctor's car that he was supposed to be watching, and persuading an American visitor to buy a horse that could read (Yeidy M. Rivero *Tuning Out* 42-44). Calderón was the show's protagonist, driving the narrative and providing material with which audiences could empathize. His success as the underdog was dramaturgically underscored by his centrality in the show and thus lauded by the public even as the direct connection between blackness, laziness, and an inability to speak properly was performatively reiterated. Although the *negrito* of *El tremendo hotel* was Calderón, he was connected to all of the qualities of the *negrito* Diplo. Recalling that Diplo was a well-informed and clever man, it is of note that Rivero's performance in *El tremendo hotel* ambivalently shifted between celebrating the ingenuity and skill of a black character while also capitalizing on a public taste for the derision of blackness.

Upon becoming a radio superstar, a couple of changes took place. First of all, where blackness had been previously signified aurally by the voice *and* visually by the face and body on stage, this process now relied solely on the broadcasted voice. However, because Diplo had been, and continued to be, so prominent as a public figure, audiences were well aware that the performances on the radio were by a white actor. Rivero was often pictured in the local paper in his appearances around town as Diplo with his face painted black. The fact that Rivero was so vocal as a humanitarian also brought him a great deal of visibility. He traveled to Panama to perform in blackface for Puerto Rican soldiers preparing to go to WWII, he led the first actor's strike on the island, he walked for four days from San Juan to Ponce to raise funds for cancer research, producing a sensation among the press and many photographs of both Rivero the individual and his blackface characters (Fundación Rámon Rivero). There is something

notable however in the way that the potency of Rivero's message changed as his career shifted from theatre to radio and later briefly to television. During his heyday on the radio much of the laughter provoked by his performances relied on malapropisms and the act of speaking an improper Spanish. Rivero's daily radio performances over eight years no doubt then served to cement a "black way of speaking" in Puerto Rican imaginings of race.

The other important shift that took place was that the political content of his performances changed. While the radio shows maintained a pointed political and satirical tone that critiqued local events and actively worked to define Puerto Ricanness through Diplo in contrast to other US and Spanish characters, Rivero's work in this period ceased to be so blatantly pro-independence. Yeidy M. Rivero cites a possible fear of the repression of nationalist activity on a local level as well as an increased censorship from the US government during this time as likely causes for this change (*Tuning Out* 41).[19] However, Rivero was quoted as saying shortly before his death "Creo en la independencia de Puerto Rico como creo en Dios" (*"PIP rinde"*)[20] and certainly actively critiqued US occupation through his work even if it was no longer mapping the activities of the independence movement. Furthermore, Rivero's characters stood for the working class of the increasingly populated capital city of San Juan. The celebration of Diplo as an underdog was another way in which Rivero's performances worked to delineate an identity based not only on *puertorriqueñidad*, but also on an equally important identity marked by class. As if to demonstrate the way in which politics and class intersected in

[19] For example, the Ponce massacre was where 19 nationalists were killed and another 235 people wounded in a public space by police officers had taken place in 1937, greatly angering as well as causing fear for the nationalists.
[20] "I believe in Puerto Rican Independence like I believe in God."

the figure of Diplo, at one point during the radio program of *El tremendo hotel*, an election was held in which Calderón was running for the mayor of a fictitious town of "Mirafanguito" and used the opportunity to express his views on the arts, Puerto Rican soldiers and a number of other topics.[21] Listeners sent their votes in to the radio station and to no one's surprise Calderón won and was paraded through the streets of San Juan in a motorcade, his face, of course, painted black (Yeidy M. Rivero, *Tuning Out* 53).

In an insightful juxtaposition between Rivero's *negritos* and the important figure of the *jíbaro* Yeidy M. Rivero points out the noted absence of the *jíbaro* in Rivero's works (*Tuning Out* 56). During the late 1940s, the *jíbaro*, the bucolic, non-urban (whiter) Puerto Rican, was once again called upon, this time to unite the working class under the party of the island's first Puerto Rican governor Luis Muñoz Marin, the founder of the *Partido Popular Democrático*. Originally a devout nationalist, Muñoz Marin was responsible for changing Puerto Rico's status from "territory" to "commonwealth" and his governorship therefore serves as a symbol for another historical moment in which hopes for Puerto Rican independence were yet again dashed as cultural nationalism replaced political nationalism. Yeidy M. Rivero argues that the hard working and largely symbolic *jíbaro* was contrasted against the lazy, clever *negrito* of the city who made a tangible daily presence in many households through the figure of Diplo (*Tuning Out* 56-57). While she marks a fascinating relationship between the two figures, and while she also writes that the *negrito* is nonetheless figured as individualistic and lazy even in his drawing of class alliances, I disagree with Yeidy M. Rivero's assertion that through the

[21] This combines the names of one of the wealthiest neighborhoods (Miramar) and one of the poorest slums (Fanguito) of San Juan, thereby uniting all Puerto Ricans regardless of class.

figure of Diplo *negritos* could be read as pro-independence advocates (*Tuning Out* 56). It is undeniable that Rivero's work resonated with the public in a palpable way that is not forgotten on the island to this day. Even if Rivero was performing a stereotypical and essentialized blackness that re-inscribed racist perceptions, perhaps through Rivero's performances Puerto Ricans were able to celebrate a *puertorriqueñidad* that included the blackness absent in the *jíbaro*. However, the obvious performative acts of Rivero painting his face, and altering his voice and speech served to *denaturalize* blackness and distance it even further from Rivero's whiteness, thus sending the message that Puerto Rico and *la gran familia puertorriqueña* was *not* black. The blackness could only be a façade, one that could be performed and then removed, conveniently utilized. Not only this, but the degree to which Rivero provided the disenfranchised working classes (black and non-black) with an audibility and visibility, voiced and performed by Diplo on a daily basis, was not reflected through any tangible political changes that would redress this silence and invisibility.

Rivero, Diplo, Calderón and the rest of the *negritos* may have been the pro-independence advocates that Yeidy M. Rivero writes about and yet the failure of the independence movement of the 1930s-1950s was marked by the absence of an ability to mobilize the working class (Negrón-Portillo 39-56). In turn Muñoz Marin's populist leadership garnered the support of the working class en masse. Rivero on his end harnessed the support of the working class through the figure of the *negrito*, not as a black Puerto Rican subject. In fact, he was able to provide audiences with humor and joy through performances that derided blackness in a way that would have been inappropriate

had it been about the (near-sacred) *jíbaro.*[22] Ironically, the tangibility of the urban black character in an increasingly urbanized culture contrasted with the remoteness of the romantic *jíbaro*, served to render blackness familiar at the same time that is was regarded as inferior. As Inés María Martiatu Terry writes about Cuban *teatro bufo* "en el enmascaramiento de las caras pintadas se oculta la fea cara de la explotación esclavista y racista de la colonia" (*e-misférica*).[23] I contend then that even through the vast popularity of Rivero's *negritos* blackness is still figured as something that exists on the margins, if not entirely outside of, the nation – independent or commonwealth.

As a testament to the unique relationship between Rivero, Diplo, blackness and Puerto Ricanness, Yeidy M. Rivero writes that following Rivero's unexpected death in 1956, subsequent stereotypical televisual representations of *negrito* characters in Puerto Rico were not met with the same popularity and did not result in the creation of icons similar to Diplo (*Tuning Out* 59). She argues that this may have been largely due to the fact that they lacked Diplo's intelligence as well as any significant political framework. Her statement then begs the following questions: was Diplo popular because he was able to demonstrate an intelligence not usually ascribed to blacks in Puerto Rico, or was the seemingly benign trope of blackness he employed simply an efficient masking of a political agenda? Furthermore, how is Diplo's cleverness and individualistic outlook distinct from the intelligence that is imagined to exist within Rivero's ideology of independence? Whose intelligence was being admired; Diplo's or Rivero's? In other

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[22] This being said it is important to remember that *jíbaros* were the source of much mockery and derision for their backwardness, however within a different context than the public space that would deride blackness.

[23] "hidden in the masking of the painted face is the ugly face of the colony's enslavement and racist exploitation."

words, was the "intelligence" in question that of the strategic survival of the underdog or was it the political savvyness and commitment of the performer? Certainly, it seems as though cleverness and political-mindedness worked in conjunction through the figure of Diplo. The regret at the fact that Rivero died just as he was entering the international market in terms of film and television was expressed as a disappointment that he would not be able to represent Puerto Rico on the world stage (Fundación Ramón Rivero), a nostalgia not only for the performer but for a Puerto Rican past. It is important to remember that this was during a time when the primary cultural export from Puerto Rico was limited to music (Aparicio, Quintero Rivera) and what Frances Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman refer to as "tropicalized"[24] ideas of the Other (*Tropicalizations*). Therefore, in Diplo people may have found a satisfying response to the colonizer, someone who was clever and tricky in the face of authority at the same time that he was devoted to his people with the nationalistic fervor of a true patriot. As one journalist wrote following Rivero's death, "he is an indication of how here [in Puerto Rico], native talent grows and is nourished, triumphant over the narrow limits of insularism" (Braschi qtd. by Fundación Ramón Rivero). His triumph over the dreaded insularism (colonial inferiority) to which many Puerto Ricans have pointed as the source of the island's troubled economic and political status,[25] stood as proof that Puerto Ricans could participate on the world stage in their own right. However, the fact that he was *painted* and obviously *acted* black may have in fact served to an outside eye to underscore the fact that Puerto Ricans were really like the white man who created the characterizations,

[24] A Latin American and Caribbean take on Edward Said's idea of *Orientalism*.
[25] See Antonio S. Pedreira's 1934 essay *Insularismo*.

for Rivero, not Diplo, was the one who truly possessed the talent. Furthermore black artists and musicians of the era could not easily escape what Frantz Fanon calls "the fact of blackness" and the way they were "sealed into that crushing objecthood" (109). Rivero's depictions of blackness did nothing to alleviate this objecthood. In the 2006 naming of *Teatro Diplo* then, the above questions re-emerge as theatre practitioners honor both Rivero the artist activist, as well as the stereotypical *negrito* Diplo who came to represent a Puerto Rican spirit of resistance in the face of poverty, even if this resistance did not extend to a rejection of racism on the island.

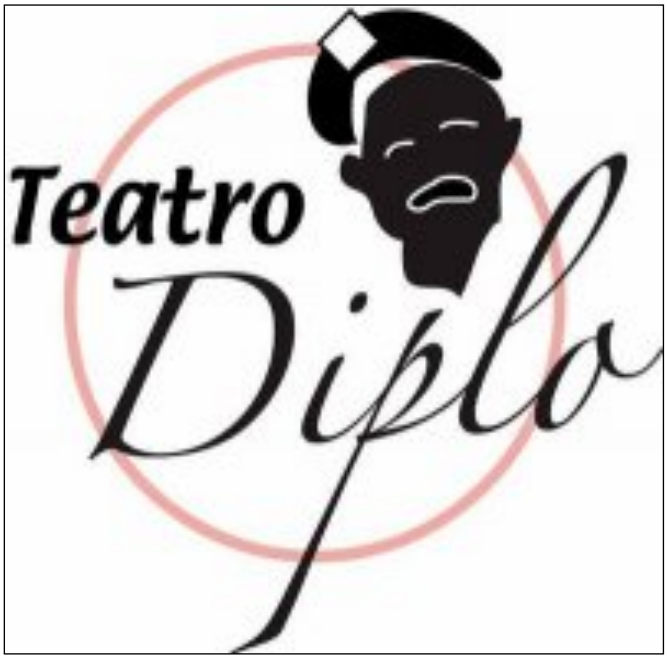

Figure 4.1: Facebook Logo for *Teatro Diplo*

Teatro Diplo

Even as Rivero's racist/racialized *negrito* Diplo continues to be celebrated, *Teatro Diplo* has been characterized by its distinctly working class roots. It was founded by the longtime *teatrista* Ramón A. "Moncho" Conde who hails from the nearby San Juan

arrabal[26] of Tokio. Conde began performing on the streets of his barrio through a type of popular theater known during the 1970s as "*Teatro pobre"* (Fiet, "Vamos a levantar"). For over two decades this self-taught artist was responsible for directing the company of *El Teatro Gran Quince*, a company that developed "métodos alternos de formación teatral y de representación, basados en la improvisación y en la pobreza de medios y la riqueza creativa" (Ramos Escobar 2008).[27] According to Conde then, *Teatro Diplo* was founded on the principle of a non-elitist, popular theater that promotes classes and access for the local community, particularly the youth who would otherwise have no exposure to theatrical performance (Fiet 2008).

The fact that Conde chose to open the theater in Río Piedras is significant in its own right and deserves some contextualization. Once considered its own municipality and a center of commercial activity, Río Piedras currently falls under the local jurisdiction of San Juan and since the mid 1990s has seen extreme economic depression. The central bus depot for transportation throughout the island, the town also hosts the largest *plaza de Mercado*,[28] on the island. Today though, a place to which people would once ride buses and drive from all over the surrounding areas in search of clothing and supplies, the shop-lined *Paseo de Diego* is home to crumbling buildings and struggling businesses. Another change over the last ten years is the shift in the overall demographic. During the consistent increase of particularly Dominican, but also West Indian immigration to Puerto Rico, many immigrants have gone to live in Río Piedras. In the meantime, San Juan politicians continue to spend great sums on the reconstruction of the

[26] Slum
[27] "Alternative methods for theatrical formation and representation based on improvisation and on the poverty of means, and richness of creativity."
[28] Produce and meat market with open stalls.

Paseo de Diego, with the hopes of reversing the so-called negative effects of a demographic shift and an economic depression.

Counterposing this de-gentrification of Río Piedras is the presence of the University of Puerto Rico, Recinto Río Piedras (UPRRRP) built in 1901, that lies just four blocks from the famed, and these days feared, *Paseo de Diego*. Fenced in but connected to the streets of Río Piedras by a walking bridge, members of the university population spill over into Río Piedras where they coexist with the barrio population. The same street that is lined with bookstores, also hosts apartment buildings into which large families of immigrants have been packed. Furthermore, in the same block where *casas de huespedes* abound, or boarding houses typically renting rooms out to students, *botánicas*[29] are also found. The walls of a bar blaring *bachata,* a type of music from the Dominican Republic,[30] are painted with pro-Independence slogans and the faces of Puerto Rican heroes of the independence movement. Around the corner, though, are graffiti taggings on the wall of the Post Office telling the Dominicans to go home. There are also very large old houses, some decrepit and others well maintained, that sit in the center of the surrounding chaos where some university professors as well as Río Piedras old timers reside. The environment in the immediate surrounding area of the former *Teatro Diplo*, therefore, is a mixture of several elements. Although one can walk down the street and see university professors and students having lunch or parents and students

[29] A shop where consultations of *santería* are performed and supplies relating to this Afro-Caribbean religion are found.

[30] In my personal experience, although *bachata* is appreciated by some people, it is held in disregard by many. Although many claim that it is personal taste, the discrimination against *bachata* is simply an extension of a very overt discrimination towards and resentment of Dominicans by many Puerto Ricans. For more about anti-Dominican discrimination in Puerto Rico see: *Migration and Immigration* by Maura Isabel Toro-Morn and Marixsa Alicea, and *Nation on the Move* by Jorge Duany

alike shopping in bookstores,[31] Río Piedras is not a particularly "artsy" area such as Old San Juan or areas of Santurce or Condado that more well-to-do Puerto Ricans frequent. There are no galleries or boutiques, though there is another small experimental theater space and a dance school. Also, live music featuring local talent can be heard in several bars within these five square blocks. It is here, between a bookstore and a building of offices, that *Teatro Diplo*, since converted into *Teatro Samuel Beckett*, was found.

The sign that hung over the door of the colorfully painted colonial style building read simply "*Teatro Diplo*." However, the image placed on the theater's Facebook profile advertised the blackfaced likeness of the famed performer. The fact that the theater is named for the character of Diplo and not for Rivero the performer, implies the particular appeal of this persona, one not shared by the performer. The blackface character is here being celebrated, perhaps for his success as an underdog, for his intelligence, for his wit, for his undying patriotism, or for his critique of colonialism and exploitation, but this commemoration is certainly not possible without the accompanying racial-political implications of black impersonation by a white man. Thus, the naming of *Teatro Diplo* also commemorates this more troublesome aspect of Rivero's legacy. Furthermore, one must think about this choice ("Diplo" vs. "Rivero") in relationship to a fading contemporary cultural memory of the performer. Having been dead for over half a century, the legacy of the performer Rivero may be less potent than the figure of Diplo himself. Therefore, the effort to re-inscribe this figure into a contemporary narrative may

[31] In Puerto Rico due to the very poor public education system, many families (lower middle class and up) send their children to private schools and must therefore buy their books. Bookstores therefore are successful businesses on the island.

be met with more success by calling upon the signifier of the character rather than the performer.

In the image seen above we are made aware of the particular way that Diplo worked to signify not only race but also class. The black face with the white outline around the eyes and the open mouth draws upon the stereotypical depictions of blacks seen in images of minstrelsy performance in the United States.[32] The white outlines distinguish this image from a simple silhouetted shadow that would allow the skin color of the figure to otherwise remain ambiguous. In other words, Rivero's blackfaced Diplo is used here as the recognizable signifier that both draws on popular memory, as well as works to visually perpetuate this image. Furthermore, the cap worn by the figure in the image conjures notions of a person in the service industry: a chauffer, a bellboy, or perhaps even a security guard of some sort. Given the fact that Diplo was best known for his tenure on *El tremendo hotel* as the hotel's errand boy it makes sense that he would be most easily identified by an image that referenced this character. Thus, in posting this image alongside the name "*Teatro Diplo*" we can see how it is meant to align the theater space with Diplo's supposed class and racial identification. Finally, the distinctly cursive writing for the name "Diplo" may gesture at the act of writing itself, implying hand movement and a performative gesture. The cursive of "Diplo" is contrasted against the block letters of the word "teatro" that imply a fixed, logocentric text as opposed to the more personalized, enacted performer. In the signature-like "Diplo" therefore, we see an authorial positioning for Diplo, one that thus lends the character the performer's subjectivity.

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[32] See http://www.iath.virginia.edu/utc/ for examples of these images.

Despite boasting an active group of young actors and local talent, according to Conde who made pleas for public support throughout 2008, *Teatro Diplo* was nearly forced to close due to what he called a lack of support from Puerto Rican actors and an anti-theatrical public addiction to cheap thrills (Fiet "Vamos a Levantar," Fullana). The theater received no money from the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* and was apparently able to stay afloat by volunteer work and ticket sales for which the theater charged five dollars (Fiet "Vamos a Levantar"). The issue of public and financial support for theater in Puerto Rico is both very prevalent and complicated and it is important to realize the context in which Conde's theater was being received. He was not alone in experiencing these challenges. Although *Teatro Diplo* was short lived and the building has now been refurbished to be the new home for *Teatro Samuel Beckett*, I wish to clarify that I do not think that *Teatro Diplo*'s financial troubles were related to the fact that Conde chose to name the theater after Diplo but rather this severe lack of funding is something that most theater artists on the island are forced to contend with. In contrast, I argue that invoking the figure of Diplo works as a symbolic gesture that possibly welcomes performances celebrating Puerto Rican independence, thus capitalizing on a public nostalgia for *independentismo* even as the silence around the racial politics of Diplo's performances persists.

For example, in 2007, Conde produced and performed at *Teatro Diplo* a new play/monologue which he commissioned from Viviana Torres Matey about the final days of the celebrated nationalist Pedro Albizu Campos, *Albizu, Todo o nada*.[33] Albizu Campos, whose mother was black and whose father was Spanish, became the leader of

[33] Albizu, All or Nothing

the Nationalist Party in the 1930s and remains the principle historical signifier for this movement. Despite being considered black in the United States when he studied at Harvard, and served as a soldier in WWI, Albizu Campos never explicitly self-identified as Afro-Puerto Rican. He hearkened back to Latin America's *hispano* heritage, and did not articulate a politics of social equality for blacks within his anti-colonial stance, as was done, for instance in the *mambí* army mentioned above.

The play *Albizu, todo o nada* was performed on three different occasions in 2007 to sold-out houses. Judging by the sheer amount of coverage by bloggers and newspapers, this performance appears to have been the most widely covered event at *Teatro Diplo*. While the reviews were mixed; one questioned Matey's research on Albizu Campos, and another simply praised Conde's acting, they reflected distinct relationships to the notion of independence. A more radical perspective found the play to lack true political import, while a more cautious viewer was relieved that the theater was not filled with angry university students. However, as is typical when discussing Albizu Campos' *independentismo*, nothing was mentioned in either review about the nature of Albizu Campos' relationship to race, to black politics, or lack thereof. The fact that Conde can read visually as mulatto may simply have been enough to satisfy an audience's desire for a verisimilitude between the actor and the character. In fact, both reviewers wrote precisely about how well Conde was able to embody Albizu Campos. By contrast, in a 2005 solo performance about Albizu Campos, *El Maestro*, the revered monologist Teófilo Torres, bearing a reportedly lighter-skinned semblance to the historical figure, insisted upon darkening his complexion with face-paint, despite director Nelson Rivera's wish for the performance to avoid replicating the most obvious signifiers of Albizu

Campos' physical persona, not for any particular stance on race and representation, but rather to get past the more "artificial" layers of this characterization (I. Rodríquez 59-60). The performer, in turn defended his choice to use this brown/blackface as an "honorary gesture" rather than an "implication of inferiority" (I. Rodríguez 61). So while Conde's performance in *Albizu, Todo o nada* at *Teatro Diplo* contradicts the earlier historical trend of a white(r) actor having to "black-up" in order to portray a "blacker" character, indicating that such measures are perhaps no longer necessary in *his* theater, the same cannot be said for the rest of Puerto Rican theater. Furthermore, we can also see that the racial code-switching employed in Rivero's performances of Diplo could not similarly work for Conde whose own instantiation of visual codes of blackness predicate an inability to be coded as white, even in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, by privileging codes of national belonging over those of race in his performance as Albizu Campos, Conde also works to normalize the invisibility of race/racism in narratives of Puerto Rican independence and, ultimately, Puerto Rican identity.

On the one hand, such a performance, in a space where the memory of Rivero's performances of blackness and nationalism were made present not only through the name of the theater but through the many photographs, newspaper cut-outs and nationalist memorabilia displayed in the narrow hallway that all patrons must inevitably encounter, could potentially be read as an act of resistance. It could be said that Conde's performance as Albizu Campos in *Teatro Diplo* is one that selectively honors Rivero's contribution as an artist at the same time that it negates the more painful aspects of his legacy, thereby directly countering the damage wreaked on the level of popular representation. This may well be an element at play here, and yet Conde, whose stated

goal is to engage Puerto Rican youth, seeks to reestablish the figure of Diplo in his former glory without an accompanying problematization of his hero status as a "Great Puerto Rican of History." In fact, although today the Afro-Puerto Rican actor may be able to play the black character (even this is questionable at times), little seems to have changed over the last 50 years when it comes to thinking about how Diplo's performed blackness is overlooked in favor of his humanitarianism and his stance on Puerto Rican independence, an independence that thus far promises little in terms of anti-racist politics. In an interview with Lowell Fiet, Conde describes his choice to name his theater after Diplo as stemming largely from a concern over the fact that Puerto Rican youth are no longer aware of this historical figure ("Vamos a levantar"). His work therefore can be read as a nostalgic remembering and re-articulation of a past in which Diplo was beloved by all and Puerto Ricans were entertained by this style of blackface and black-voice performance. Others apparently believe that Puerto Ricans may still find this entertaining. In the year 2000 the *Fundción Ramón Rivero* announced the possibility of reviving the character of Diplo for Puerto Rican television, something that, to date, has not yet happened.

In both Albizu Campos' work on the political stage and Rivero's work on the popular stage, blackness was depoliticized while it was simultaneously used to garner mass support and invoke nationalism, as blacks continued to be marginalized within the imagining of that nation. I have symbolically paired Diplo (Diplomacia) and Albizu Campos, who are imbued with the spirit of anti-colonial resistance, just as their bodies, representing Puerto Ricanness, are ultimately rendered white, thereby silencing a Puerto Rican spirit of resistance against anti-black racism, of which there is ample evidence.

Like the face of Ché, the national icons of Diplo and Albizu, two Puerto Rican historical greats, seem to stand in for an ideology of independence on a popular level, as opposed to an actual list of demands or an organized movement that addresses the needs of Puerto Ricans on a daily basis. However, in the work of Afro-Puerto Rican performer Javier Cardona, we clearly see not only a demonstration of the way in which Diplo's legacy of blackfacing persists in Puerto Rican theatrical and televisual representation, but also an act of resistance that attempts to create subjectivity for the performing black Puerto Rican body.

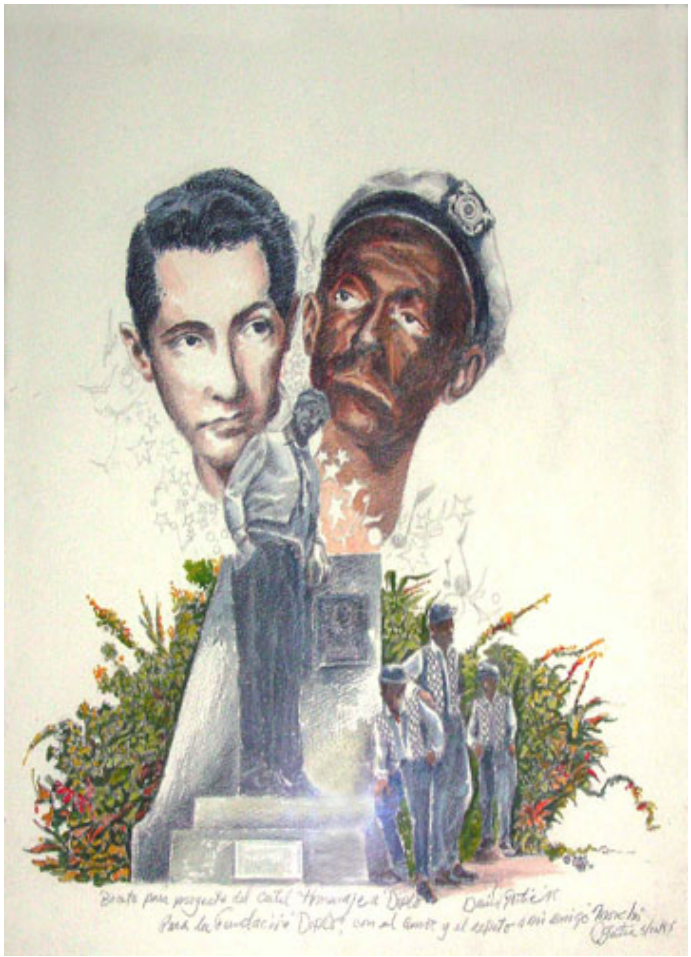

Figure 4.2: Statue in Naguabo built in honor of Ramón Rivero. In one body, two personas were celebrated. Note that the statue appears as the blackfaced Diplo, not the actor Ramón Rivero. Graphic "Homenaje a Diplo" by David Goitía made for and published by the Fundación Ramón Rivero.

Looking Black, Looking Puerto Rican

In 2005 I saw Javier Cardona perform his original solo piece *You Don't Look Like*,[34] in which he depicts the ways that a black Puerto Rican actor has to perform a stereotypical notion of blackness in order to be cast in "black" roles. On a larger scale, his piece demonstrates how these code-switching performances of race reflect deeply ingrained issues of race and racism in Puerto Rican society itself. Simultaneously, on the other hand, outside of Puerto Rico, he is visible as black, not as a black Puerto Rican, "cast" as a Puerto Rican only by erasing his racial identity, an erasure that through his embodied speaking, we see his body resist. Cardona points to the way that Puerto Rican society not only tolerates, but in fact also promotes, celebrates and enjoys, stereotypical depictions of blacks. These are roles that he eventually performs for the audience through dance movements and a series of projected photographs: a black savage, a rumba dancer, a rapper, a cane-cutter, the black wise man Melchor,[35] a *santería* priestess, a uniformed maid, a Rastafarian, and a basketball player. Although as an actor in Puerto Rico the number of roles for which he is considered is circumscribed by his blackness, his story ironically reveals that when asked to perform "blackness" at an audition for a toothpaste commercial, he is not black *enough*. *You Don't Look Like* is thus an expression of Cardona's frustration with Puerto Rican politics of representation, with the construction of blackness, *puertorriqueñidad*, Caribbeanness. His performance also achieves what Viviana Martínez Tabares refers to as the use of the body to "arrive at ontological

[34] The text that I will be using for the purposes of this chapter has been published in an English translation. However, the title of the original piece appears in English because it is based on what someone in the United States said to him. Quotes included here appear in English but it should be kept in mind that they are translations.

[35] The Three Wise Men are often depicted in Puerto Rico as representing the three major racial influences: Spanish, African, Taíno. Melchor is the black king.

freedom" ("Caribbean Bodies" 26), ultimately defining and resisting anti-black racism in Puerto Rico.

Cardona, unlike Conde, actually engages and code-switches the constructed racial codes of blackness, and although he is not able to later successfully perform whiteness as Rivero does, he draws audience attention to the fact that these are indeed *performances*, constructed codes not grounded in biological truth. Explicitly referencing the way that Cardona is trapped in the "objecthood" of his black skin, what Fiet calls the "dance-narrative" ("Cultural Confusion") begins with the performer digging into a backpack to pull out a mirror which he holds in his hand, asking it, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, I need to know if I am also…" The words that would complete the statement have been interpreted in different ways. Both Jossiana Arroyo and Martínez Tabares interpret that the "adjective-turned noun *black*" is the word withheld here (Martínez Tabares, "Caribbean Bodies" 25). However, Yeidy M. Rivero writes that Cardona told her in an interview that he was in fact referring to the notion of beauty, as in the fairy tale of Snow White ("Channeling" 344). Thus, from the beginning we see that Cardona's blackness is figured as less than beautiful and held in direct contrast to the beauty of the imagined Snow White (whiteness). Additionally, his male subjectivity is also destabilized as he draws upon the ideal standard of a white and female beauty. Furthermore, not only does the mirror represent an Othering gaze, but it also implicates the audience's spectator role in objectifying him.

Based on an actual experience, the meta-theatrical account of the audition that follows the opening question to the mirror, works to underscore the roles that Cardona is asked to play in the media, on the stage, as well as in his daily life as a Puerto Rican. He

tells us that upon arriving at the audition, at first pleased that they realized that "uno tambien se lava la boca,"[36] he realizes that he was in a room of actors who, for once, looked like him. He then starts to notice that they are not speaking clearly because they are being encouraged by the casting director to "put more spice into it…more feeling…this is the Caribbean, more…rhythm" when asked to read the lines "Bunga, bunga, agua" (Cardona 13). As Cardona imitates the casting director who stutters, hems and haws, struggling for the words to accurately describe what she means by "more feeling" "Caribbean" and "rhythm," the words are punctuated and interspersed with shoulder shakes, hip rolls, and movements where the head slides from side to side while the body remains still, all of which work individually and collectively to signify blackness. Playing with the multiple layers of performance taking place here – Cardona in his solo-performance piece, portraying the casting director, performing for him, the actor, how to perform in the toothpaste commercial intended for Puerto Rican audiences – works to establish the many registers through which these racialized movement codes are not only rendered legible but alternately embodied and disembodied by a performing black body. Furthermore, the gibberish "bunga bunga agua" requested by the casting director points to the verbal bilingualism expected to accompany black Puerto Rican embodied code-switching.

Despite being directed to *act* more black/Caribbean/exotic in the audition, Cardona later says that he is regularly mistaken for being from "the (Virgin) islands" and often asked if he is from Loíza.[37] These referents to the "exotic" and essentialized

[36] "We (blacks) also brush our teeth."
[37] The coastal town with the largest population of blacks in Puerto Rico and generally associated with blackness.

Caribbean are indications of the way that blackness in Puerto Rico has been constructed as something that exists outside the geography of the island itself, found only in folklore or in the margins of the society, knowable through visual and verbal representations not through actual Puerto Rican subjects. Cardona also reveals the way his own beliefs about blackness have been shaped by discourses that would position it outside of normative Puerto Ricanness when he "admits" to initially mistaking the strange "black" speech of the actors for that of Nuyoricans unable to speak Spanish properly.[38] Here we see the way the stereotypical verbalized performances of blackness that have been inscribed into a collective memory by the figure of Diplo and other *negritos* have affected common notions of "black speech." In this way, blacks are figured as foreign, knowable in their relationship to *afuera*,[39] just like the *bozal*, the African-born slave who cannot properly speak the language of her or his enslaver and is thus doubly marked as belonging outside the nation.

In Tomás Blanco's foundational 1948 essay "El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico"[40] he writes about the way in which racism in Puerto Rico can be seen as "mimetic" and "imported" from the United States. Following in the vein of other anti-colonial texts of the era, this essay worked to shift, not only the weight of racism onto the shoulders of the colonizer, but also by proxy the fact of blackness itself. In other words, the overtly racist tactics of lynching and segregation in the US South were counterposed against the more "benign" racism of Puerto Rico where the distinction between blacks and whites was much less clearly defined and thus less identifiable. Therefore, when drawing upon a

[38] It is typical for island Puerto Ricans to deride Nuyorican Spanish.
[39] "outside" Often the term used to describe the United States.
[40] "Racial prejudice in Puerto Rico"

reference to a non-culturally/ethnically specific, black body, the tendency may then be to imagine a non-Puerto Rican body. Cardona further explores this tendency when he tells the audience that whenever he travels outside of Puerto Rico he is also asked where he is from, what "he is," thus the title of the piece: *You Don't Look Like*. Despite the fact that the visual is here privileged (he did not choose to call it *You Don't Sound Like*), Cardona makes clear the way in which the aural and verbal intertwine with physical signification in portrayals of blackness.

As he describes his audition he acts as the casting director and asks the audience to perform the lines he was asked to read, forcing them to try to articulate and emulate this idea of blackness, revealing the ridiculousness and dehumanizing nature of the request. He tells us that he eventually ended up leaving mid-audition because he was so frustrated with the exploitation. Cardona then returns to his backpack from which he removes a silver-mirrored plate with packages of sugar attached to the rim. He proceeds to hand out packages of sugar to the audience, regular and diet, but no brown, a not-so-subtle reminder of a historical exploitation of the black body that is still taking place. Not only is the sugar "white-washed" but we also learn how this "sweetness" is harvested at the expense of the bitter truths that make such harvests possible. When Cardona says, "la morena no la tenemos porque ya no se está fabricando,"[41] in a polite, sickly-sweet, customer-service voice, we see not only the absenting of the metaphorically darker subject, but the cruel way in which the black subject must be the one to deliver and perform the erasure of this "moreno" identity. Although, the above remark was met by laughter when I saw the performance, as well as in a video filmed in 2003 (a point to

[41] "we don't have any of the brown sugar because its not made anymore."

which I will return later), the audience is clearly reminded of the fact that black Puerto Ricans were forcibly brought to the island through the importation of black slaves from Africa and other Caribbean islands, for the purpose of, amongst other reasons, working on sugar plantations. Thus on the surface this choice serves as a citation of the foundational role of sugarcane plantations in feeding and sustaining anti-black racism in the Caribbean, however, the disappearance of Cardona's black subjectivity as he plays the servile "host" underlines how the marriage of racism and colonialism predicates the impossibility of his enjoyment of the metaphorical "harvest" he and his ancestors have produced. The mirror platter to which the sugar packets are taped, re-invokes Snow White's hand-held mirror, that glamorizes and reflects in this case, only the whitest sugar.

Cardona then tells us that despite his own obvious disgust at the audition, the casting director in fact called him the next day to come in and try on a synthetic afro-wig that he would have to wear for the role. Furious and even more greatly offended, he decided not to return to the studio. He then proceeds to recite poetry in the romanticized style of *cultura negroide*, which emphasizes the supposed rhythmic quality of the Afro-Puerto Rican speech. By parodying this, Cardona questions voice and language as a signifier for race. As with the "bunga, bunga, agua" citation discussed above, his ability to switch in the next moment to the voice of an intellectual-type, "amigo de la cultura"[42] who advises him, demonstrates the "performed" and un-"natural" aspect of this essentialized portrayal of *negroide* poetry. This friend, who tries to help him with the consolation that he can help him get cast in a small role in a play, reminds him

[42] "A friend who works in promoting 'culture.'" In Puerto Rico, the colloquial use of "la cultura" is not used to describe the high culture of artistic movements, but rather a specific reference to promoting autochthonous Puerto Rican culture.

condescendingly that "there are no small parts, only small actors" (15). At this point the images of Cardona dressed as the male and female *negrito/a* types mentioned above are projected onto a screen upstage as a reminder to the audience of what these "small parts" in fact are. Throughout this sequence Cardona begins to hum Dominican Wilfredo Vargas' *merengue* "Mami que será lo que quiere el negro" as he begins to don an afro wig and apply black make-up. This song, officially titled "Al africano," was immensely popular in Puerto Rico during the 1980s, and is widely recognizable by a Puerto Rican public. By choosing to use a Dominican song he further signals the shared experience of blacks in the Caribbean just as he points to the way that black Caribbeanness has been constructed. The images being projected are specific to Puerto Rico but resonate throughout the Caribbean. The music for the Vargas song, here reappearing through Cardona's wordless hum, has served as an underlying motif since the opening of the piece, and though the lyrics are never uttered, he nonetheless invokes the song and its implied meaning as the "background" of popular culture against which his performing body is read. The lyrics which describe a little girl asking her mother what the black man wants, stand as yet another set of signifiers cementing the connection between blackness, pleasure and fear, or more precisely, negrophilia and negrophobia: "Mami el negro esta rabioso, quiere bailar conmigo, decicelo a mi papa. Mami que será lo que quiere el negro?"[43] Thus the choice of this song adds another layer to the narrative of how blackness, and in this case black masculinity, is constructed as a hypersexual threat, or source of desire, for the non-black.

[43] "Mom, the black man is crazy (rabid), he wants to dance with me, tell that to my father. Mom, what does the black man want?"

Once the wig is in place and Cardona has almost entirely covered his face with make-up, reminiscent of the black-faced Diplo, revealing his own slightly lighter black skin on his hands and neck, he begins to perform with his body the prescribed "black" roles that have been set before him in the projected images.[44] The movements he enacts are based upon the expected "African" pelvic thrusts, widened eyes, bodily citations of Caribbeanness, heat, *bomba*, *rumba*, blackness. At this point he becomes angry recounting the way people try to figure out how to categorize him racially and ethnically. Standing there in blackface he asks the audience: "What the f…am I supposed to look like? I don't look…Puerto Rican, I don't look…black, I don't look like this, I don't look like that. What am I supposed to look like?" (15). His artificially blackened face and hair perched on his black body positioned center stage is the response to his question: this is what the mirror/audience/Puerto Rican public has shown him he should look like.

He tells the small mirror that it has been broken all along, further calling into question the authority of the audience's objectifying gaze, and dances to liberate himself from this static image that suffocates him, responding viscerally using his entire body. In a post-show discussion of this piece, he remarked that he developed this movement sequence based upon images of blacks that he found in the newspaper, on television, in movies, in paintings. These bodily citations that include a handcuffed prisoner, a lynched body, a sugar-cane cutter, a dancing wild savage, a dopey looking man scratching his head, the use of hyper-sexualized hip gyrations, and wide toothy grins, are woven

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[44] While done in a different historical context, Cardona donning blackface is reminiscent of the way that African American performer Bert Williams painted himself to be able to perform in the popular US minstrelsy shows in early 20th century vaudeville. Like Williams, Cardona, although in a much more empowered and confrontational manner, self-referentially performs the same convention he simultaneously subverts (Forbes).

together through a dance that, as Martínez Tabares writes, "respects non-choreographed movements more than stylized ones" ("Caribbean Bodies" 26). He finally ends the piece by turning to face the audience, cheeks puffed out, hands pulling his ears out to look like a monkey, the animalized black body. He slowly releases his breath and asks the audience "Now am I black enough for you?" (16) and quietly walks off the stage. Instead of choosing to end with a blackout that freezes the performer in this state of question, he does not linger to hear the audience's response to the rhetorical question, but rather exits, demonstrating his own will and refusal to participate any further in such a conversation. Throughout *You Don't Look Like* Cardona has used his body to construct stereotypical images of blackness, employing an embodied code-switching that fails to interpellate him into the subject positions of either "Black," or "Puerto Rican." In this final sequence however, we see him deconstructing these bodily expectations as he literally resists and physically fights against embodying the images in his dance and movement sequences. He has recreated the stifling images, reflecting to the mirror/audience the anticipated and familiar tropes, yet he finally succeeds in liberating himself by exceeding the bounds of stereotypical blackness. His final question not only implores the audience to interrogate what their conception of "black" may be, but it also refers to the preceding movements and gestures as reflective of a move toward a black subjectivity. It is as if the body adds another, final statement after the question: I am black, this is blackness, not what that little mirror shows. His pedestrian and anticlimactic exit punctuates this statement not with defeat, but rather with the clear exhaustion of a laboring body working to become visible, audible, ontologically present.

Not only is Cardona's work entirely dependent upon the corporeal significations taking place on the stage, but the experience of watching Cardona's performance in Puerto Rico is not reproducible through a reading of the text. An audience response can be highly significant in how his work is understood within the context of popular Puerto Rican formulations of blackness. The humor of the piece is evident in the language of the script, just as the absurdity of the narrative gives cause to laugh. However, when I saw him perform for an audience of mostly university students, they were gleefully laughing throughout the slideshow of the images of black stereotypes. This seems to have been precisely Cardona's intent with this sequence. By eliciting the comedic response typically associated with those images, the work is all the more productive and provocative when the audience later realizes the problematic suppositions upon which the laughter was based. This was not the only instance of such a public reaction. According to Fiet, when Cardona performed this piece at an audience of academics for the conference *Caribe 2000: Hablar, Nombrar, Pertenecer*[45] the response was similar, one which was later chastised in a speech by Barbadian poet and novelist George Lamming who saw only the pain and the seriousness written on the performer's body as the slideshow played (Fiet, *Remimaginado* 342). Cardona's project then is one of performing his blackness, *puertorriqueñidad*, Caribbeanness in such a way that he makes the Puerto Rican audience aware of their complicity in celebrating and reproducing these damaging significations. The question of Cardona's success in deconstructing these images in a way that will prevent audiences from employing or perpetuating them is difficult to ascertain. What is clear however is the fact that he captures a structure of feeling that embraces, or

[45] To Speak, To Name, To Belong

at least accepts, rather than rejects, the types of images of blackness that were crystallized in the figure of Diplo and other *negritos*.

Conclusion

In thinking about Cardona's work in relationship to the legacy of Diplo it should be clear that the images projected in *You Don't Look Like* were not the exact images employed by Rivero. Rivero's blackface characters, while perpetuating derogatory ideas of blacks as lazy, tricky, inherently childlike, and perpetually driven by bodily desires and instincts, also reflect the performer's use of the mask of blackface to issue a social and political critique. This is a mask that created working-class solidarity at the same time that it defended the idea of Puerto Rican independence, interchanging codes of race and nation. Conde's choice to honor the political radicalism of Ramón Rivero through the figure of Diplo cannot therefore be dismissed as simply racist, particularly given his own subject position as a non-white Puerto Rican. Rather, this gesture is reflective of the way in which political independence, class reform and racial equality are not necessarily aligned in a single movement against hegemonic oppression, resulting in the continuous conflation of not only the movements themselves but the ways in which these social identities are rendered visible through performance. In looking at the history of Rivero's blackface performances within the context of this chapter, it is clear that these historical tendencies are still very much in place today.

However, even if the *negrito* Diplo were to be imagined as somehow more innocuous than the *rumbero* and the rapper images that we see projected in *You Don't Look Like*, in Rivero's performances the signifier of blackness is employed while actual black bodies are excluded from the discourse. What then happens to the black bodies that

are referenced through the figure of Diplo but denied subjectivity in representation, both through politics and performance, depicted popularly as frozen across time and space in these stereotypes? Rivero's non-black body advocating for Puerto Rican independence not only capitalizes on the signifiers of blackness but is an act predicated on circumventing the history of black slavery in an anti-colonial struggle. The fact that Rivero can perform multiple racial identities to the supposed end of creating Puerto Rican unity and uniformity, substituting race for nation, reveals these racial codes to indeed be nothing but constructs. However at the same time, it also shows the resultant deep and very real chasm that separates the bodies to whom these codes are ascribed, limiting the ability of Afro-Puerto Ricans to achieve a Puerto Rican subjectivity that addresses race in a meaningful, critical way. As Camille Forbes writes in her insightful reflection on the black US blackface minstrel performer Bert Williams, "While subscribing to the notion that race is a construct, however, I underscore that it is one that has gained its power through regulation and prescription of its manifestation and meaning. It is both culturally determined and historically contingent" (609). Cardona's work, reminiscent of Williams' in the sense that he strategically employs racial codes to emphasize their performativity, comes as a response to this history of exclusion, this inability to access the narrative of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* as an Afro-Puerto Rican, a narrative of inclusion that de-politicizes the continued exploitation of black bodies. His performative interrogation is one that forces audiences to see how black performers are pushed into pre-existing notions of blackness. Ultimately, however, like Rivero in his blackface performances of *puertorriqueñidad*, Cardona works to deconstruct this convention and inscribe an

alternate, if not entirely liberating, reading of blackness in Puerto Rico through his *body*. Referencing the centrality of the body in Caribbean performance, Fiet writes:

> Maintaining the body alive and relatively unscarred through the crisis [slavery and colonialism] has always been more than half the battle. …The urgency of life overwhelms theoretical discourse as such, and the lack of confidence in the theoretical reflects a stronger belief in the body… since it is the only thing that has not been denied and is the history of the majority of the Caribbean population ("Cultural Confusion" xvii).

To argue that Cardona achieves "freedom" through his embodied performances risks, much like arguing that Rivero's performances of Diplo are strictly racist stereotypes, over-simplifying the complex relationship between race, embodied performance, and history. For this reason it is important to understand Cardona's corporeal emancipation as one that points to the *possibility* for critical intervention, for questioning, destabilizing, and ultimately transforming. As Forbes writes, following Judith Butler's articulation of the performativity of gender:

> Although there is a potential or even a suggestion of freedom within the idea of "performativity," this occurs within historical contexts in which the body itself may be said to be 'an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities (Butler 272).' If freedom exists, it then relates to the 'possibilities . . . for the cultural transformation of [race] through corporeal acts (Ibid)' (609).

In a similar way, through Cardona's strategic and precise employment of embodied code-switching, his use of a bilingual body to create meaning in the interstices of identity, he as a body-subject is able to comment on, critically engage and question the construction of his own racialized body-object. Thus the emancipatory potential suggested by this corporeal performative strategy is not one that promises to undo, reverse or redress the objectifying, dehumanizing history of blackface performance in Puerto Rico, but rather to create an opening. Perhaps this is an opening that produces uncomfortable laughter in the

face of painful histories, or one that traces and exposes the construction of the cognitive link between blackness and inarticulateness, but most importantly, it is an opening through which the performer's body can remember, move, and shift.

To see pictures of Rivero's blackfaced Diplo in the lobby of *Teatro Diplo* is more than just a historical remembering of a great performer. It validates present-day performance that would engage in this self-distancing between a white performer and the signifier of blackness. The naming of *Teatro Diplo* endorses historical and contemporary practices of inhabiting blackness in order to escape whiteness, or more specifically to inhabit a "safely" whitened *puertorriqueñidad*. On the other hand, as we see in *You Don't Look Like*, blacks in Puerto Rico cannot escape the "fact of blackness" and find recourse in the whiteness promised by Snow White's mirror. Although interestingly, Cardona identifies himself as an *independentista* (Martínez Tabares, "Caribbean Bodies" 26), this piece in particular does not reference political emancipation. Instead, he seeks liberation from the prison of his objectified blackness, a stereotypical blackness that Diplo helped to construct, regardless of the way in which Rivero is cited in the service of a politics of social resistance.

It is notable that part of Conde's mission in creating *Teatro Diplo* was to provide a space for independent theater artists in Puerto Rico. Although he has received critical acclaim, namely by academics, Cardona certainly falls into this group of *teatristas* that exists on the margins of mainstream and commercial theater. However, given the issues that I have described above, were Cardona to perform *You Don't Look Like* at the former *Teatro Diplo* it would seem grossly contradictory. The fact that the ideologies of racial and political emancipation become mutually exclusive in the figure of Diplo would have

made it problematic, if not impossible, to use *Teatro Diplo* as a space for the exploration of explicitly anti-racist performances. Unfortunately, in celebrating the artistic contributions of the performer Ramón Rivero performances like *You Don't Look Like* are excluded. This is especially significant given the fact that this is one of the only performances to date[46] that actively critiques the historical practice of blackface performance in Puerto Rico,[47] marking it as a historically and politically unique theatrical intervention.

I do not suggest here that the figure of Diplo should simply recede into the archive of Puerto Rican performance history. On the contrary, it is important for Puerto Ricans to be aware of the significant role he played in sustaining and perpetuating stereotypical images of blackness, as well as of his tireless work as an anti-colonial activist on the part of the working class and artists in general. Ramón Rivero and Diplo present another opening, an excellent opportunity to unlock the conversation on the existence of racist practices in Puerto Rican politics and performance. Perhaps the most productive way to engage the naming of the *Teatro Diplo* theater space can be in provoking such a public conversation.

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[46] There may have been others historically, but they have not been documented as far as I am aware.

[47] Afro-Puerto Rican performer Sylvia del Villard vehemently decried the detrimental effects of the legacy of blackface performance in her personal life and onstage celebrated the contributions of Afro-Puerto Ricans to dance and theater (De la Torre). What is distinct here in Cardona's performance is the way that the topic is directly engaged in performance.

Chapter Four

¡*Habla*!: Speaking Bodies and Puerto Rican *Bomba*….in California

"What does it mean to speak with the body...Speak with the feet. No other language is required: song is redundant, words are superfluous."
-*Barbara Browning*

"'I move' is the clear knowledge that I, personally, am moving. The opposite of this is the sudden and astonishing moment when "I am moved." It is a moment when the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the Self to take over moving the physical body as it will. It is a moment of unpremeditated surrender that cannot be explained, repeated exactly, sought for, or tried out."
-*Mary Starks Whitehouse,* quoted by *Rafael Maya,* Director of *bomba* group Desde Cero, Puerto Rico

In this chapter I shift the focus of the dissertation from performances on the island of Puerto Rico and by Diasporicans on the East Coast, to an examination of how *puertorriqueñidad* is constructed and performed through the speaking body in communities on the West Coast of the United States. Specifically, I look at how the improvisational structure of the Puerto Rican drum and dance tradition of *bomba* operates as an embodied language that works to anchor diasporic Puerto Ricans around a shared practice, celebrating and reclaiming a collectively erased history through the body, and forming communities that are constructed via alternatives other than linguistic ability, culinary and religious practices, and other common signifiers of culture. At the same time, I show how these *bomba* communities have created a unique, shared space between West Coast Puerto Ricans and Chicanas, who together articulate a corporeal *Latinidad*, a

construction that is here understood as having a stated relationship to blackness and the history of slavery in the Americas, especially as it pertains to Puerto Rico and Mexico.[1]

I argue that the communities forged through these processes are not just imagined in the Andersonian sense of collectively imagining nations of disparate peoples through shared narratives and ideologies, but that they are also actualized, in a performative sense, through the every-day acts of embodied speaking particular to *bomba* practice and performance.[2] Thus, I refer here to "community" as something imagined "as a deep horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7) as well as something that operates in very material sense, and may or may not reflect such horizontality. As members of these communities construct narratives of belonging that extend across the diaspora and to their origins on the island of Puerto Rico,[3] via the non-linguistic signifiers of gesture, song, and rhythm, local political and cultural climates also shape the way that these narratives are understood and articulated. Thus, I attempt here to follow Suzanne Oboler's directive, articulated in her book *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives,* for "the need to provide second and later generations of Latin American descent with a broader framework for examining the meaning and implications of their respective national, racial, linguistic, class, and gendered diversity in creating this unity" (xix). Using the idea of the "Latino imaginary," or what Juan Flores describes as "'a community' represented 'for itself', a unity

[1] Until recently, the history of African slavery and subsequent spresence of Afro-Mexican people and culture in Mexico has been largely occulted. As I argue below, Chicana participation in *bomba*, brings them into conversations about Afro-Latinidad in ways that engage this emerging dialogue about Mexico.
[2] As Benedict Anderson reminds us in his influential study *Imagined Communities*, for as much as imaginings of nation are constructed they are also, in fact, "real." Furthermore, in thinking about the central role of print capitalism and the "fixing of print languages" (45) in creating an imagined community, counter-languages and alternatives to hegemonic linguistic practices (such as the embodied speaking I refer to here) are useful sites for understanding other modalities through which "community" is imagined and enacted.
[3] Or, as I discuss throughout the chapter, in some cases, their origins in other Latin American countries.

fashioned creatively, on the basis of shared memory and desire, congruent histories of misery and struggle, and intertwining utopias" (*Bomba to Hip-Hop* 198), I analyze the way that embodied *bomba* practices performatively suture, at least in the moment of creation, the unity between these disparate groups. Most importantly, I argue that while there is certainly a tenuous relationship between cultural appropriation, racial-masking, and ideas of authenticity, ultimately, *bomba* provides a site of resistance for Latina/os and Afro-Latina/os who continue to experience the material consequences of being racialized and Othered as marginalized subjects in the United States. For as much as we can point to differences in power and privilege among Latina/os, as Oboler reminds us, "the nation's [US] identity was forged in the 19th century partially through the creation of racialized perceptions that homogenized Latin America's populations and that in turn set the context for the later emergence of the label Hispanic in the twentieth century" (18). Additionally, in further articulating how *bomba* serves as a site of hegemonic disruption, I argue that traditional binary understandings of performances of gender as "masculine" and "feminine" are challenged and resisted by what I call the code-switching techniques of these *bomba* dancing bodies, actively engaging and rupturing masculinist and heterosexist constructions of *puertorriqueñidad, Latinidad* and blackness. Finally, by focusing specifically on *bomba* dance practice, I draw links between the personal and the popular, the private and the public, the historical and contemporary. In doing so, I outline why women in particular (Puerto Ricans, Chicanas, Afro and Euro-Americans) find a space for self-assertion and empowerment via the body, at the same time that they create ambivalent relationships to essentialist notions that performances of blackness provide avenues for "freeing up" and corporeally accessing some "natural" part of ourselves.

In what follows I draw upon ethnographic interviews with eighteen *bombera/os* (the majority of whom live and practice in California), personal conversations, as well as my own embodied experience as a Cali-Rican *bomba* dancer living and practicing in San Diego since 2004 and a participant in the larger *bomba* community that extends from San Diego to the Bay Area, Chicago to Texas to New York, and most of all, always to Puerto Rico.[4] While clearly this chapter provides a perspective that is only one small part of a complicated and multi-layered discourse that concerns a larger *bomba* community, using this methodology and approach serves this work in two important ways. First of all, it allows me to create an argument that privileges a detailed analysis of movement that I am uniquely positioned to engage through my own embodied knowledge of the form. Secondly, given the fact that I am writing about *bomba* practice as an avenue for creating communities and constructing identities in a geographical location that has not previously been addressed in scholarly treatments of this form, insight into the experiences of the practitioners that constitute this community is imperative.

I will recount the history of *bomba* in Puerto Rico and the diaspora as well as give a description of the form, before moving into my discussion of the *bomba* groups in California. However, I wish to first outline the stakes involved in discussing *Latinidad* in terms of blackness and coalition politics across Latina/o identities, particularly in its relationship to how the body is read in terms of race *and* ethnicity. *Bomba*, as an Afro-Puerto Rican tradition, and certainly part of a larger Afro-Caribbean tradition, lies at the

[4] Here I would like to comment that while Puerto Rico is seen as the site of origin for *bomba* and therefore a source place, a great deal of exchange takes place between Puerto Ricans on the island and those living in the diaspora, both nurturing each other in a not entirely hierarchical manner. Additionally, I argue that the demand of those in the diaspora for more and deeper pedagogy has contributed to the economic independence of some of Puerto Rico's top *bombera/os*.

nexus of this complicated relationship. While celebrated by cultural institutions in Puerto Rico as a signifier of the island's black heritage, something constructed as only a small part of a larger identity touted as *mestizo*, *bomba* and other Afro-Puerto Rican cultural productions are in fact distanced from the center of *puertorriqueñidad*, discursively relegated to the margins as a novelty to be commodified and possessed. Indeed, this discourse is so powerful, that despite different racial identifications, Puerto Ricans of all backgrounds are to varying degrees consumers of this commodified blackness. In other words, honoring black heritage can result in a reification of the objectifying and essentializing attitudes about not only black Puerto Ricans, but the construction of blackness itself. Isar P. Godreau reminds us of this deeply troubling relationship when she writes that:

> …this inclusion and celebration of blackness is not distinct but instead compliments ideologies of *blanqueamiento*[5] because it is rooted in the same ideological principles that distance blackness, geographically and temporally, from the imagined margins of the nation (Godreau 172).

Godreau then goes on to say:

> This distancing has the effect of locating the phenotypic and cultural signs of blackness 'somewhere else,' and in premodern times of idealizing black people as happy and rhythmic tradition bearers who still inhabit supposedly homogenous and harmonious communities (172).

Therefore, just as the performance and celebration of the *bomba* tradition holds great potential for the articulation of a liberatory politics in terms of creating public visibility of black heritage in Puerto Rico, such acts can often fail to recognize the contemporary lived experiences of the descendants of African slaves on the island. Or, equally

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[5] Whitening

disappointing, these performances produce overly simplified understandings of an essential blackness and whiteness, without asking how these constructions operate in relationship to larger structures of power. This example provided by Godreau above is only one of countless instances across cultures and throughout history where blackness is disembodied and affectively appropriated as a signifier for the nostalgic remembering of the pre-modern, uninhibited body. Much like the primitivist movement of the artists of the early 20th century avant-garde, who celebrated blackness and African cultural aesthetics as symbols for rejecting the strictures of modernity, relocating their own liberatory aesthetic in the always already distant past associated with black bodies (Schneider 126-152), the celebration of black traditions within narratives of Puerto Rican folklore has further entrenched the frozen linear temporality of contemporary black experience. Furthermore, by locating the black body as the *object* of premodern experience, this Cartesian distancing between mind and body precludes any possibility of addressing black cultural production as a site for subject formation, open to shifts in practice, location and approach. Thus, as I argue below, communities created around the practice of *bomba* (particularly as has been the case in some areas in the first decade of the 21st century), *can*, with varying degrees of success, work to redress the historical erasure of black history in Puerto Rico while also making *bomba* a contemporary practice that actively engages lived experience through its multiple trajectories of identification. Furthermore, by analyzing *bomba* practice in this way, we can also challenge the role that black cultural production has in defining not just discourses of *puertorriqueñidad,* but of *Latinidad*. Therefore, in thinking about the "intertwined utopias" of these Latino

imaginaries, we can think of these practitioners as negotiating three "polarities," which at times work in conjunction and at times pull against each other:

1) Claiming the essential black origins of *bomba*.
2) Using *bomba* as a means of cultural resistance for racialized minorities in the United States through education and the formation of community organizations and performance groups.
3) Nationalist claims that would mark *bomba* as primarily and strictly a Puerto Rican practice, not one to be practiced by other members of the African diaspora and/or other Latina/os.

As a way of further illustrating how these tensions pull on and against each other, I refer to the work of two influential scholar/artists who are also *bomba* practitioners. On the one hand, we see that *bomba*, when subsumed into a totalizing notion of *puertorriqueñidad*, becomes a folkloric signifier of national culture, ultimately dislocating blackness from the center. For instance, Melanie Maldonado Emmanuelli writes in her article, "*Bomba Trigueña*: Diluted Culture and (loss of) Female Agency in AfroPuerto Rican Music and Dance Performance," about her decision to never again wear the typical folkloric dress used in government sponsored events after overhearing someone say that she looked just like Aunt Jemima. Maldonado Emmanuelli concludes that *bomba* is effectively whitened, that is, emptied of its relevance to contemporary Afro-Puerto Rican experience, when female dancers, dressed in costumes that resemble slave-women and mammy stereotypes, perform *bomba* in spaces that celebrate *puertorriqueñidad* through this folkloric trope. The practice of *bomba*, and by consequence the historical conditions of the plantation society from which this tradition

emerged, is thus excised from contemporary life and presented instead as an object of the past. Furthermore, this "whitening" takes place in the name of shaping an over-arching Puerto Rican identity, of which blackness is only one small, largely symbolic not material, component. On the other hand, Raquel Z. Rivera, another *bombera* and scholar from New York who writes about Puerto Ricans being caught between constructions of *Latinidad* and blackness, points to the way that other members of the African diaspora, specifically in New York, are quick to dismiss *bomba* and other Afro-Puerto Rican traditions as being "Latin" and not "black." In her article "New York Bomba: Puerto Ricans, Dominicans and a Bridge Called Haiti" she writes about how Puerto Ricans who are often socialized as and amongst African Americans and other Francophone and Anglophone blacks, may share more in common with these groups than with other Latina/o Americans. Rivera warns of the inevitability of what is reported above by Maldonado Emmanuelli and goes on to argue that *bomba* should be valued, not as a signifier of *puertorriqueñidad*, but rather as an embodied practice that connects Puerto Ricans to their own black heritage[6] and to this experience as it is shared by other members of the African diaspora. She writes about Haiti simultaneously representing symbols of "Caribbean," "black," "resistance," and "freedom from slavery," concluding quite forcefully that it serves as "a mythical bridge… between Afro-Diasporic populations of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean who refuse to let their blackness be steeped in the bleaching waters of Latino self-denial" (195).

[6] While elsewhere Rivera does acknowledge the importance of skin color in terms of access to privilege, her argument here has less to do with looking black than with blackness as culture.

The connection between blackness and *Latinidad*, or rather the absence of a mutual exclusivity, though obvious to some, is only finally beginning to be addressed critically. Precisely because there has been an absence of dialogue surrounding the construction of *Latinidad* in relationship to the construction of blackness, respected Puerto Rican studies scholars Juan Flores and Miriam Jimenez, edited the 2010 anthology titled "The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States." The essays and critical research in this substantial collection attempt to understand and document how the words on either side of this hyphen co-exist, contradict and inform each other, especially for Afro-Latina/o subjects living in the United States where race is understood differently than it is in most of Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean. The latter is key, particularly important for the ways in which understandings of racial formation in the United States are taken back to the countries of origin through what Flores refers to elsewhere as "cultural remittances" (*Diaspora*). For some Afro-Latina/os, arrival in the United States marks for the first time self-awareness and visibility of their own blackness. Furthermore, in the 2011 PBS series "Black in Latin America," produced, written and presented by renowned African American scholar Henry Louis Gates, we see a gesture to address the need for a broader cultural understanding of this relationship. Although Juan Flores' reference to Gates in a public book talk[7] on the "Afro-Latin@ Reader" as apparently having "just discovered the fact that there are black people in Latin America," might indeed indicate a snide and troubled relationship between the leading scholars of Latina/o studies and African American studies respectively, I instead find the remark to simply further emphasize the importance of producing scholarship that critically engages

[7] April 19, 2011. University of California, San Diego

the key questions and arguments in both of these fields. There is thus a need to both attend to the particularities of Latina/o culture while also seeking out the places where identifying *Latinidad* as "culture" cannot account for the way that blackness is summarily erased. Embodied practices, in this case *bomba*, provide a very apt lens for such a discussion.

In fact, this centrality of the body and its potential for productive discourse is made evident in an unexpected manner in the opening scene of the first episode of Gates' long-awaited TV series. In this first episode, "Haiti and the Dominican Republic, an Island Divided," the narration begins with Gates talking about the history of the importation of African slaves to the island of Hispaniola, while the camera shows scenes of the countryside in the Dominican Republic. As this brief preface concludes, the camera cuts to an urban street setting with musicians and dancers. Gates, who then enters into the camera's view, locates the narrative in the Dominican Republic and goes on to say that we are witnessing Dominican *merengue* music and dance, a tradition that in fact originates from Haiti. However, for those viewers who are familiar with *merengue*, one of the most popular, and broadly recognized dance and music forms in Latin America, we can see from the dancers and hear from the music playing, that what we are in fact witnessing is not a *merengue* at all, but rather a Cuban *son*. Gates goes on to repeatedly reference *merengue* as the quintessentially Dominican form that it indeed represents, cutting to footage of other Dominican musicians talking about the importance of *merengue*, how it is danced by couples who stand very close together, how it represents an Afro-Dominican heritage, historical ties with Haiti etc., all the while interspersing the interviews, and the narrative, with clips of the Cuban *son* music and dance.

This glaring contradiction is not simply a mistake in editing (including the wrong musical clip with the given narrative), as Gates actually appears in the frame talking about *merengue* with the *son* playing in the background. However, we can glean two very important lessons from this resultant disconnect, regardless of the intentionality or lack thereof in this gross mistake. On the one hand, we may ask, why is it important to distinguish between the two forms? After all, both are popular forms of music and dance that are heavily influenced by Afro-Caribbean traditions. If the point of the series is to be able to read blackness across nations, then does such a distinction only serve to entrench cultural difference over racial difference? On the other hand, we could also argue that though the attempt to read Latina/os through a lens of blackness as understood in the United States is in fact a step in the direction of creating more complex and nuanced understandings of these identity categories, conflating *merengue* and *son* only works to essentialize blackness without attending to how it is variously enacted by the body in intersection with other identity formations. We see in this moment therefore, that the body is the site for not only the performance and celebration of cultural production that engages multiple identities, or "codes," at once, but also the site for deconstructing any truth claims about race and ethnicity as they are produced in "nature." Thereby, the body constructs "culture" and "race" even as it disrupts the former. I argue that in *bomba*, the body does this through "speaking." The body speaks *bomba*, not Dominican *salves* or Haitian *merengue*, or Cuban *son,* but *bomba*, not Spanish, or French, or English, but *bomba*. In doing so, the body, much like the Spanish speaker from Colombia who can communicate with the Spanish speaker from Mexico, draws upon the shared history of slavery and black cultural production with the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Haiti,

Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Belize, and, though overlooked by many, Mexico as well.[8]

We might then ask: What happens when you dance, sing or play *bomba* and you are not Puerto Rican but perhaps Chicana, Salvadoreña, Hondureña, African American, or for that matter a light-skinned Puerto Rican like myself? How does this interrupt the ambivalent relationship Homi Bhabha outlines between the pedagogical and the performative in discourses of nationness? Does the pedagogical object (the linear master narrative of origin) change when the performative subject transforms (the body engaging in *bomba* practice, performatively constructing nation)? In other words, is *bomba's* history of anti-racist, anti-colonial resistance somehow diluted or invalidated when it is enacted by diasporic bodies who cannot trace their ancestors to Puerto Rico, though they may share historical and contemporary struggles? As I suggest below, for *bombera/os* with any multiplicity of identities (Puerto Rican, non-Puerto Rican, diasporic, black, white, queer, woman etc), their body object, what Bhabha calls the "historical objects of nationalist pedagogy," becomes the "subject of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary national presence" (145) through *bomba* practice and performance. For even though one could rightly argue that non-Puerto Ricans and non-blacks are not in fact the historical body objects of this nationalist pedagogy, upon engaging in a practice such as *bomba*, charged with the discourses of race and nation, their performance still

[8] Recent studies on the African presence in Mexico have been important in creating links between Mexico's history of slavery and contemporary cultural practices. For more information see Anita Gonzalez's *Jarocho's Soul: Cultural Identity and Afro-Mexican Dance* and Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas' *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation, African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation*, both published in 2004.

constitutes a disruption of this narrative, one that is at least momentarily productive. Thus in doing so these bodies performatively decenter and destabilize not only as Bhabha would suggest, narratives of nation, but also binary constructions of identity in general.

Enter *Bomba*

The *bomba* dancer punches the elbow, *brap*, snaps the skirt quickly, *tun-tun*, drags the foot three times, *tun-brap, tun-brap, tun-brap* and then waits, suspending the sound, deciding how many measures she will let pass before closing the phrase on the one, choosing her next move as the lead drummer hunches over the rum barrel drum, also waiting, watching attentively to see what sound she will ask for next, what rhythm she will dictate to the drum, which part of her body will speak next: shoulders, hips, foot, elbows. The dancer executes a few more steps, the drum sounding a crescendo of slaps. She likes the way her dance has been aurally reflected back to her, enjoys the rhythm she has created, knowing she has been heard, seen and understood. Someone in the crowd, in the chorus, or sitting at the drums yells out "¡*habla*!"[9] She has spoken. She continues to dance, to speak in faster, shorter phrases until she is almost breathless, yet still fully composed. She has finished. She closes her *piquete* with a bow to the drums, thanking and respecting not only the one who plays the drum, but the drum itself and the history it represents. With an inclination of the head, the drummer also acknowledges and thanks the dancer for speaking with and through the drum.

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Bomba is a Puerto Rican music, dance, and song tradition that originated some time between the first arrival of African slaves on the Caribbean island in 1501 and its

[9] "speak"

first documentation in the 18th century.[10] Historically practiced among slaves on sugar plantations, it later continued to evolve in communities of free blacks and working class Puerto Ricans of mixed race. Long considered a "black" and "lower class" tradition, by the mid-20th century the public practice of *bomba* had been limited due to a racist climate that preferred to highlight the Hispanic cultural heritage of the island, forcing families of *bombera/os* to keep the tradition alive in private homes. However, in the beginning of the 21st century, *bomba* has become re-popularized. By re-popularized, I refer not only to its broadening visibility in the popular sphere, but also to the fact that it is practiced/performed by an ever-growing number of Puerto Ricans (especially youth), as opposed to only a few select "keepers of the tradition." Increasingly, instead of being performed in folkloric costumes replicating late 19th century slave attire, on large stages at government sponsored cultural events (Dávila),[11] individuals in pedestrian attire, of different racial and class backgrounds dance, play and sing *bomba* in bars, at restaurants, on the beach, at private parties, almost any day of the week. These *bombera*/*os* access and embody *bomba* by watching and enacting the dances, songs, and *toques* (drum beats) learned from the earlier generations of *bombera/os* who are credited with saving *bomba* from "extinction." In other words, *bomba* has shifted from being marginally practiced by the families whose oral traditions were directly responsible for its long term survival in what Diana Taylor refers to as the "repertoire" (*Archive* 1-52), to something which a

[10] Some sources say the early 18th century (Barton *Abakua to Zouk*) while others say the late 18th century (Alamo Pastrana)

[11] I must point out that these costumes, though perhaps an accurate depiction of the standard dress styles of one given historical moment in which *bomba* was practiced, they not only work to essentialize *bomba* practice temporally, but in a very specific historical moment. This claim as the "traditional" *bomba* dress is made despite the fact that *bomba* was practiced for centuries prior when *bombera/os* dressed in whatever clothes were appropriate to the historical moment in which they were living.

much broader population of Puerto Ricans claim as their own, celebrating and reclaiming a collectively erased history through the body. Furthermore, and most significantly in the context of this chapter, Puerto Rican communities across the diaspora have formed and maintained *bomba* drum and dance ensembles, hosting *bombazos*[12] (*bomba* jams) and creating a space for learning, exchange, and ultimately performing Puerto Ricannesss together.

This *bomba* revival, initiated in part by local introspective questioning of what it meant to be Puerto Rican as the centennial of the US invasion of the island was celebrated and duly contested (Alamo Pastrana), while operating discursively to rupture closed ideas of *puertorriqueñidad*, ultimately foregrounds questions of race in the Puerto Rican imaginary. Importantly, this questioning of traditional imaginings of Puerto Rican culture and identity did not commence in Puerto Rico only to be followed in the diaspora, but rather, happened simultaneously in both places.[13] Doubtlessly, this *bomba* "movement" has increased visibility and acceptance of Puerto Rico's "third (African) root" and provided a space for a more nuanced, though still ambivalent, treatment of Arlene Torres' claim that "la gran familia puertorriqueña 'ej prieta de beldá."[14] By bringing *bomba* into the public sphere, institutional control and codification of *bomba*, particularly by the *Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña* (*ICP*), has been loosened and de-

[12] This is a term that emerged in the late 1990s as part of the move to create community centered *bomba* events as opposed to concert style performances *de tarima* (on the stage), allowing for broader participation and a breakdown of spectator-performance relationships.
[13] In the late 1990s race began to be foregrounded in much of the Puerto Rican Studies scholarship both on and off the island, beginning with Hunter College's *Centro Journal*'s issue dedicated to race.
[14] "The great Puerto Rican family is really black." It is significant that this sentence is written to reflect a specifically working class/Afro-Puerto Rican accent. Arlene Torres writes about the notion of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* as a totalizing discourse that would envision Puerto Rico as a racially mixed and harmonious family while racial disparity in terms of education, employment and cultural representation remains firmly in place.

centered, thereby also allowing for an increased popular participation in creating and challenging Puerto Rican discourses of race and nation. The use of *bomba* as a corporeal signifying practice that is actively and openly practiced by black and mixed race Puerto Ricans, unmediated by state-sanctioned notions of "culture," therefore renders this centuries-old tradition a viable means to resist 21st century racism and colonialism, just as it was similarly used by slaves as a way to bodily enact freedom and through signification gain subjectivity. As Nadine George-Graves writes, slaves danced, "to hold onto their senses of selves" (*Urban Bush Women* 39).[15]

Certainly, as already indicated, much of the scholarship and archival material on *bomba*, (of which there is a noted scarcity), has focused primarily on the ways in which *bomba* celebrates African heritage, allows practitioners to perform ancestral traditions, thus simultaneously addressing what it means to have this heritage as well as to negotiate contemporary manifestations of anti-black racism. However, less attention has been paid to *how* this happens through the corporeal rhetoric unique to *bomba*. Furthermore, all discussions of *bomba* have been limited to examinations of *bomba* on the island, or in Puerto Rican communities in New York and Chicago. Thus, while these are productive sites of investigation, and certainly much more critical examination is needed to understand the historical and contemporary practices of *bomba*, I do not discuss the ways in which this plays out in these geographical locations. I expand the conversation geographically to include the West Coast and use the lens of embodied performance to focus on the particular ways in which *bomba* has been generative in confirming and

[15] George-Graves writes this in reference to slaves in the United States. While restrictions of drumming and dancing were markedly different in the Caribbean, the policing of *bomba* as a potential threat leading to slave rebellion, seems to have been a common practice (Alamo Pastrana). Therefore, while dancing may not have been *legally* prohibited, surveillance was certainly practiced.

asserting diasporic Puerto Rican and Latina/o identity in relationship to race, gender and language. In doing so, I follow the work of other scholars such as Frances Aparicio and Priscilla Renta who have written about the importance of salsa dance and music practices in constructing identity. Priscilla Renta in her article "Salsa Dance Performance: Latina/os in Motion" writes the following:

> Puerto Ricans and other Latina/os living in the US often employ salsa dance performances (along with language and music) to construct and affirm individual and collective sense of cultural identity… For Latina/os the need to affirm cultural identity grows in part out of their diaspora experience, which brings with it the pressure of assimilating and of being subsumed and homogenized by Euro-American culture that dominates US mainstream society (270-271).

Puerto Rican scholar and novelist Mayra Santos Febres writes about her own discovery of the liberatory potentials of salsa as "a participatory musical genre" that "resists binarisms of audience/artists, performers/consumers, founder/follower, subject/object," privileging both "continuity and rupture, order and hazard, sequence and simultaneity" (176-177). While I argue that *bomba* fundamentally differs from salsa music and dance practices not only because of the relationship between the dancer and the musicians (described below), but also because of the distinct ways in which they both circulate in popular culture, these parallels are nonetheless useful in thinking about how dance works to script identity affiliation. While both of these expressive genres are experienced and claimed largely by communities of working-class, non-white subjects, *bomba*, given its longer and more "forgotten" history lends itself more to narratives of "rediscovery" of the particular processes of what Latina/o dance scholars Celeste Fraser Delgado and José Esteban Muñoz refer to as the "identity affirming pleasures" of this dance (21). Thus *bomba*, as a cultural signifier rapidly gaining popularity and visibility among both Puerto

Ricans and other Latina/os in the United States,[16] can thus be figured as an important site of identity affirmation that provides an avenue for resisting complete assimilation to dominant US culture. As Delgado and Muñoz write "dance sets politics into motion" (9).

In the *Soberao*

Soberao is the word used to describe the circle created around the area where the *bomba* dancers will dance, the drummers, lead singer and chorus making up part of the circumference of the circle. In this way, the spectators surround the *soberao*, as opposed to being in a proscenium stage relationship to the performers, and actually help to create and shape the circle by standing in a loose circumference around the open area for the dancers. Also, dancers can emerge from the crowd, or from behind any of the drums at any moment, deciding to dance. The *soberao* is thus, similar to the "cipher" in which breakdancing takes place, the playing/dancing space, one that is constituted through a community understanding of the protocols. The creation of the *soberao* is ultimately a claiming of space. It also enacts community exchange that challenges clear distinctions between spectator and performer relationships even as it demarcates the performative space. The word itself has interesting etymological origins. In Castilian Spanish, the word *soberado*[17] refers to a space that is architecturally not habitable, or useless. In Puerto Rico, the current usage of "*soberao*" derives from the word used to describe the shared dirt floor space in a hut dwelling, and has come to be used interchangeably with the *taíno* word "*batey*" which describes an interior patio space. According to Arleen Pabón who in

[16] In referencing salsa dance and music practices in relationship to *bomba*, I do not mean that *bomba* will be nearly as popular and ubiquitous as salsa, however, I do wish to draw connections between the ways that these two embodied practices work to affirm identity.

[17] Recall here that colloquial Puerto Rican Spanish tends to shorten the syllables at the end of words, thus turning *soberado* into *soberao*.

her article "African Impact on Puerto Rican Domestic Architecture" writes about this private-public space over which home-owners took much pride, "the *soberao* proves you have a space of your own (even if you are an *arrimao* and the land belongs to another person), that you possess your very own dwelling locus" (140). In contemporary *bomba* practice, the *soberao* represents precisely this claiming of space, a simultaneous distancing from the "outside world" and a gathering of creative and communal energies. Thus the space is both, protected and open, private and public, and it is into the sanctity of the *soberao* that the dancer enters.

It should be made clear that though the focus of this discussion is on dancing bodies, *bomba* is an experience that is incomplete, and in fact inoperative, when one of the elements of song, drums or dance are missing, especially the latter two. This becomes important when considering how *bomba* is commodified for performance, or even as a consumable product in the space of a workshop. In my experience participating in dozens of group performances, different producers have demonstrated varying levels of interest in highlighting the musical *or* the dance aspects of the performance, indicating as much by lack of sound equipment or lack of enough space to create a *soberao*.[18] Alternately, the performance settings in California where *bomba* is valued as a "cultural art," or at community *bombazos*, tend to focus less on categorically "disciplining" the different elements of the form into "music" or "dance."

[18] On numerous occasions we have been asked to perform either just the dance *or* the music, have arrived at the performance site to find that we were intended as background music for a party, or have been asked to provide Cds instead of live instrumentation, either because of space restraints or because of economic concerns. It bears noting, however, that in most of these cases, audience members broke the imagined fourth wall imposed by the framework of the event, and ended up dancing with the drums before the performance finished.

While there are extremely skilled and nuanced *bomba* dancers, and truly understanding the intricacies of the drum/dance relationship takes many years, it is not a form that requires specific physical training, making the dance more accessible to a broader population. Understanding this fact is key to the sense of ownership and access expressed by the *bombera/os* I interviewed regarding their first encounters with *bomba*. These sentiments are also further illustrated by the fact that during the final song of a *bomba* performance, an invitation to the audience members to improvise dance steps for the drum has in my experience, almost always been met not only with enthusiasm, but with highly expressive attempts at imitating and recreating the performance they have just witnessed. It is in this way that I see *bomba* resonating as a corporeal language, a bodily way of speaking and performatively participating in cultural meaning-making. This meaning-making is not limited by physical talent, and, especially significant among Puerto Ricans in the diaspora who may or may not speak Spanish, is not conscribed by linguistic ability. Though many of the *bombera/os* with Puerto Rican heritage I interviewed are in fact Spanish-English bilingual, a number of them rely primarily on English. While this can present an issue in learning the lyrics for the responses to the lead singer (the chorus, or *coro*), something which I will address below, dancing requires an altogether different set of skills and experience level, predicated on rhythmic facility more than physical virtuosity. Learning to dance *bomba* has come to provide many Diasporicans with a space to not only be with other Puerto Ricans but to *be* Puerto Rican.

Speaking and language are repeatedly invoked as metaphors in the dance. Dancers are told not to go dance in the *soberao* unless they "have something to say;" the act of

entering the space in front of the drums, called the *paseo*,[19] is figured as the moment to say "Hello, how are you? This is who I am… " The dance phrases should be separated with "punctuation," "periods, commas, and exclamation points," otherwise they become unintelligible. Clarity and precision is the mark of a "good dancer." While attention is paid to visual elements such as elegance, posture, and style, the dance is privileged as a musical form; the sound it calls forth from the drum is equally important, if not more so, and thus the laudatory "habla" when something sounds good. Halbert Barton writes:

> *Bomba* drum improvisations and the dance movements that correspond to them are noted for having a speechlike quality—novice *bomba* dancers must not only internalize a movement vocabulary, with commonly used words, phrases, and punctuation marks, but also a grammar by which a sequence of movement combinations can make sense. To perform adequately, then, according to the standards of the *bomba* community, *bomba* dancers, and the *subidor* who gives sound to their movements, must learn to "speak" in a free-flowing way that is not stilted or repetitive, as in an ordinary verbal conversation (*Soberao* 82).

The ability to make the drum sound through movement, to become audible through visually interpreted actions, marks the exchange between the dancer and the *subidor*[20] (lead drummer) as exceptionally important in distinguishing the physical act of playing an instrument, in this case a drum, from the physical act of dancing *bomba*. Unlike embodied instrumentation where lungs, fingers, arms and legs work to produce sound on and through an object, and verbal expressions where the diaphragm, the lips, teeth and tongue push and shape air to create rhythm and tone, *bomba* dance movements arrive aurally only through communication with the drummer. There are conventions for how to

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[19] Loosely understood as a "promenade" as way of introduction. During the *paseo* the dancer does not ask for *piquetes*, for the lead drum to mark her/his steps.

[20] I have left the word in its masculine form, even though there are increasingly more female drummers. However, the number of lead female drummers who play the *primo*, the higher pitched lead drum, are still very few. The literal translation of *subidor* means "the one who raises it up."

mark certain moves, which the dancer learns to use strategically (movements with two hands are marked with both hands slapping the drum, foot taps are marked with a high pitched open-tone, hip movements are interpreted through a syncopated rumbling sound etc). However, while certainly the dancer controls the frequency and speed of hits, it is the drummer who ultimately decides how the dance will sound, and is responsible for interpreting the dance with *golpes*, or hits, that happen simultaneously. In this way, the *bomba* dance, much like speaking, is as much about conversational exchange as it is about self-expression.

As indicated, this music-making aspect of the dance relies on a deep sense of communication between the dancer and the *subidor*. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the dancer is not making music "to the beat of her/his own drum" but rather enters the *soberao* using a basic step that follows the rhythm that is being played and held by the other drums, the *buleadores*. Part of upholding the dance end of the conversation is to place the *piquetes*, steps that are asking to be marked on the lead drum, in the time dictated by the rhythm of the *buleadores*. The dancer should not "*jalar el tiempo*," or pull the overall tempo of the song, though certainly, as a dance builds in intensity, the lead singer who plays the maraca and controls the tempo, is sometimes moved to also accelerate the song, and visa versa. The conversation between the *subidor/a* and the dancer will quickly become incomprehensible if the *piquetes* are danced out of time. Although skilled dancers use the *contratiempo* in order to create more musically complex phrases, fully aware of the tensions they playfully create and break as they move in and out of the downbeat, steps danced without awareness of this dynamic result in cacophonous slaps from the *subidor/a*. In fact, while some *subidores/as* will "fix" the

sound of *piquetes* thrown off the repetitive downbeat pattern so that they do not ruin the overall dynamic of the rhythm, the convention is for the lead drummer to interpret the dancer's moves *exactly* as she/he executes them, thus reflecting back to them the relative effectiveness of their dance. In part this convention exists as a way to emphasize the fact that it is the dancer creating the rhythmic patterns, and should therefore be held responsible for creating intelligible, or interpretable, phrases. The moment a dancer hears their dance aurally interpreted differently than how she/he intended it to sound, she/he must rethink the clarity of her/his movements and question if the communication with the lead drummer is locked in. In other words, while the dancer can experience personal satisfaction and empowerment in dancing a solo, it is accomplished only as the result of cooperation and clear embodied communication. The initial entrance of the dancer to the *soberao* through a *paseo*, which is not marked by the *primo* player, gives this lead drummer a chance to solo or to underscore the more fluid, less percussive moves of the dancer with broader interpretive strokes. This is the time for the dancer and the drummer to come into the space together, to frame the conversation that is about to take place.

The *paseo* ends with a salute to the drummer, an inclined head, or a bow that bends slightly at the waist, maintaining an almost erect posture. At this point, eye contact is made and the first *piquete* is executed, from there the improvisation continues. While some *bombera/os* have figured this relationship as a "challenge" to the drummer on the part of the dancer, a *reto* (drummers will play the *primo* with relative amounts of enthusiasm depending on their conception of the dancer's skill level and general attitude), there is no *bomba* if the challenge is taken too far, if the dancer throws *piquetes* that are too fast, complicated or unclear. Because the *subidor* is attempting to mark the dancer's

moves with as much simultaneity as possible, clarity and control is paramount in together completing the act of signification. Thus a simple *piquete* is valued more than a series of movements that may *look* good, but do not land aurally. Firmness, or *firmeza*, one of the three cardinal rules of *bomba*[21] is also crucial in having clear *piquetes* because the strength and decided precision behind completing the move, enables the *subidor* to anticipate when a move is initiated and thus when it will be punctuated. The "challenge" or the "trick" can come in faking an anticipated *piquete*, by initiating a move, and unexpectedly suspending the closure, waiting to complete it. An example of this would be when the dancer lifts the hand to the shoulder as if about to draw a sharp line from the shoulder to the space out in front of the chest, the conclusion of which would be marked with a loud slap. Instead, the dancer either keeps the hand at the shoulder, forcing the *subidor/a* to catch her/himself from playing that which was expected, or alternately, the dancer throws the *piquete* with the other hand which may have previously been in a relaxed position on the hip with no indication that it was about to move. This dynamic is gradually developed throughout the improvised solo, interspersed with clear, strongly marked phrases. Typically the level of rhythmic intensity builds gradually until the *piquetes* are no longer interrupted by dramatic pauses or the traveling *paseo* that marks the basic step, and the movements have become faster and sharper. The dancer determines the end of the exchange with a closing salute.

"¡*Yo quiero bailar la bomba!*"[22]

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[21] *Figura, firmeza, elegancia* or, making a figure, firmnenss, and elegance
[22] I want to dance *bomba*. These are also the lyrics to a song called *Santa Sinfonía*.

As mentioned above, because many of the moves used in *bomba* dance appear pedestrian in their execution, individuals watching a performance or a *bombazo* are often inspired to try it out themselves. On the one hand, Puerto Ricans in California, who may or may not have contact with other Puerto Ricans, or who may or may not have established relationships with contemporary island culture, are moved to actively use their bodies to performatively invoke Puerto Ricanness. Whether it be because of an imagined idea of how this identity is constructed, or in response to the material reality of being racialized as Ethnic Other/Puerto Rican in the United States without an adequate narrative of cultural belonging, entering the *soberao* to "speak" *bomba*, marks entry into an "imagined community." Sounding the drum with bodily signification as simple as a foot stomp, singing the chorus of the call-and-response song, an encounter with *bomba* in California, for the first or hundredth time, is simultaneously an act of "speaking Puerto Rican"[23] "speaking black," "speaking Latina/o." Because *bomba* can be figured as a corporeal rhetoric in a different way than performances like *salsa* dancing,[24] much like speaking in the unique cadence of Puerto Rican Spanish, *bomba* dance is a unique speech-act that can instantiate this cultural and racial belonging, depending of course on the particular subject position of the person performing it. Therefore, *bomba* is performative both in an Austinian sense and in a Butlerian sense. Philosopher and linguist

[23] I am reminded here of the many times I was asked as a young immigrant from Puerto Rico if I knew how to "talk Puerto Rican," to which I would always exasperatedly respond, "I speak Spanish! We speak Spanish in Puerto Rico." In retrospect, I realize that the questions of my fellow classmates, for the most part unfamiliar with Puerto Rican culture and other Puerto Ricans, were in fact aiming to assess a relationship that extended beyond linguistic ability.

[24] When salsa dancing, though it involves improvising in the music, the dance is executed *within* the music, not distinguished as music-making itself. In other words, unlike *bomba,* the music is privileged while the dancer is expected to follow the music. Furthermore, it almost always involves dancing with a partner and following a set pattern of steps. There is much less active signification taking place, even though it is a very important example of embodied performance in Caribbean culture. In fact, salsa has some of its musical roots in the tradition of *bomba*, particularly with the *sicá* rhythm.

J.L Austin defines a "speech-act" as an utterance that accomplishes and enacts that which the words proclaim. Thus the body that speaks through dancing *bomba*, enacts the historical and communitarian relations described above. Furthermore, Judith Butler writes about the performativity of identity as created iteratively through complex citational practices. Thus in *bomba* practice and performance, Puerto Ricanness is not only constructed, but also through repeatedly citational performance, enacted. I invoke Butler's notion of performativity in relationship to gender construction in the interest of destabilizing potentially essentialist claims about Puerto Ricanness and performances of Puerto Ricanness. I wish to make it clear that just as anyone can learn to speak Spanish, and those who spend enough time in Puerto Rico or around Puerto Ricans can learn to speak with that particular accent, so too can they learn to dance *bomba*. I am referring here to *perceived* notions of belonging, which are important not for their relative truth claims, but rather for understanding how *bomba* operates within Diasporican communities. Non-Puerto Ricans who engage *bomba* accomplish something else, albeit not unrelated to the imagined community outlined here.

Though *bomba* dance is widely appreciated and practiced by both men and women, and while it is difficult to make empirical claims regarding gender participation in *bomba* practice, I argue that women (Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans) coming into contact with *bomba* for the first time, approach the opportunity to learn and develop skills as *bomba* dancers with a particular fervor and interest, which I describe and analyze below. I come to this conclusion based on my interviews with other California *bomberas* as well as my own personal experience as a female dancer and an instructor. Furthermore, while I make this argument about *bomba* practice in California, *bomba* historian Melanie

Maldonado Emmanuelli began doctoral work at Northwestern University that makes similar claims regarding *bomba* practice in other parts of the diaspora and the island. She points not only to the growing active participating of women in all aspects of *bomba* practice (dancing, drumming, and singing) but also works to recuperate the historical contributions of female *bomberas* in Puerto Rico. Thus, my own work is in part inspired and informed by the questions she poses in her research. Having regularly attended workshops where master teachers are brought from Puerto Rico and other parts of the diaspora to California, as well as hosting along with the San Diego-based group *Bomba Liberté* (previously known as *Areito Borincano*) a weekly dance class/*bombazo* over the course of six years, I have observed that there is always a majority of women interested in learning the dance. In fact, I would go so far as to say that there is an overwhelming underrepresentation of male dancers in the Puerto Rican diaspora of the West Coast. This may be for a number of reasons, not least of which is due to the culture of recreational "dance classes" in urban centers that are largely targeted at women. Interestingly, in Puerto Rico, where this similar culture does not exist, there are simply more male dancers, evidenced by the number of men who dance at public *bomba* events. However, even at *bombazos* in Puerto Rico, the women seem more driven to get up and dance, not wasting a second after someone finishes their *piquetes* to enter the *soberao* and speak. In large part this may be attributed to the relatively small numbers of female drummers, and although, as stated earlier, these numbers have increased significantly over the last couple of years, "tradition," in combination with the lack of entitlement women express at sitting

in the male dominated space behind the drums, still tend to relegate female participation in *bomba* to dancing and singing.[25]

I argue however, based on my personal experience and observation, that women find a particular kind of satisfaction in making the drum speak through their dancing bodies. This sense of empowerment and accomplishment, while also achieved by playing drums, is however distinct when it takes place through the moving, dancing body, precisely for how dance operates in relationship to discursive power. As Jane Desmond writes, "formal or informal instruction, quotidian or "dance" movement, the parameters of acceptable/intelligible movement within specific contexts are highly controlled, produced in a Foucauldian sense by specific discursive practices and productive limitations" (*Embodying* 37). Thus, in activating the drum through the speaking body the dancer is intelligible in an altogether different discursive register. By using visual signification (executing dance movements) to create audible patterns (hearing the specific dance choices reflected in the sound of the drums), the visual object of the female dancing body becomes an active subject through her own embodied movement choices and the communicative force of the drum. Additionally, the act of throwing the skirt with forceful, repetitive but precise flicks enacts a kind of controlled violence that causes the drums to sound louder at the same time that the heart rate of the dancer increases, releasing endorphins and adrenaline that cause physical excitement, creating a sense of physical release. Thus, the dancer enacts her subjectivity on physiological and phenomenological levels as she feels the effects of her dance moving through her body at

[25] Though the presence of female drummers has been notably increasing, at most *bomba* events on the island the drums are still for the most part played exclusively by men.

the same time that she is made aware through other sensory perception of this dance having created a visible/audible effect in the surrounding community/audience/spectators. Bomba master Norka H. Nadal from New York and Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, spoke to me about the evolving history of women's expressive *piquetes*:

> In the time of my mother and my aunts, their *piquetes* were very small, because women did not make big moves like that in public. My grandmother would raise her eyebrow and that would be her *piquete*. She would move her shoulder just a little. The primo player would have to be paying close attention (Personal Interview 7/15/2010).

As Nadal reminds us, the style and force of the *piquetes* executed by women are directly parallel to the gendered behavior dictated by the particular historical and social contexts in which they were living. Therefore, when thinking about the female subjectivity achieved through the solo improvisation of today's *bomba* dancers, it is important to keep in mind that demonstrating this degree of physical dominance in the *soberao* inevitably engages, and perhaps even calls into question, the expected norms for gendered comportment in public spaces. Yet clearly *bomba* dancing is also a practice that men can find empowering. Founding *bombero* of the Los Angeles based group *Atabey*, and a founding member of the San Diego group *Areito Borincano*, Victor Carmona[26] describes his experience of dancing in the following way:

> When I dance, its funny because I could be smiling when I'm dancing, but in my own mind I am very serious, and I feel very serious about what I am doing, it almost feels like, I can't even describe it, there is this energy that kind of pulls me, and I end up doing these movements and it's like *my* time, where like every movement is some kind of attitude that I am giving, but not because I like hate somebody or am pissed off that day. I could be totally happy but I love the feeling of getting to be aggressive and assertive in my movement, especially when the drum is following you and

[26] I have used psuedonyms of the California *bombera/os* in order to protect their identity.

> marking everything you do, it's like you lose yourself, or I lose myself on the dance floor (Personal Interview, 9/27/2011).

In addition to underscoring the cathartic effect of the dance on the dancer, it bears noting that this "aggressive" and "assertive" quality described by Carmona, has not always been available to women when they dance.

However, as *bomba* practice has continued to develop since the turn of the century, stronger and more forceful *piquetes* have also become the norm among female dancers. Strong *piquetes* for women may consist of any of the following moves. Using great force, the arms throw the skirt, beginning with the hands together, in front of the chest area, and ends with the arms openly extended, elbows slightly bent, muscles flexed, the skirt tensed and taut as an indication of the active work of the arms pulling against each other. Done quickly, this move can create the sensation of breaking through something, or tearing apart something that is bound. This final open pose is struck and held with *elegancia*, shoulders back, head high, even if slightly inclined forward at the waist. The move may be repeated, in double-time or triple time, building intensity, or may serve as a punctuating end to a series of other moves. Another example is the shoulder shrug. With hands in fists, wrists straight, not bent and thus creating an image of strength, knuckles placed on the hips, and elbows out to the side, the dancer lifts her shoulders up towards her ears and decidedly drops them, not passively letting them fall, but actively pushing them down to mark the *piquete*. She may lift the shoulders, and drop them again in a repeated series of shrugs, where the up and down motions are distinguished by the decided physical emphasis on the downward movement, which is accented by the drum. She may also lift the shoulders and suspend the forthcoming

piquete while the *subidor/a* plays a drum roll in anticipation of the dropping shoulders that will eventually break the building suspense, providing a cathartic sensation of relief and satisfaction.

The shoulder movement is a good illustration of the importance of creating space and tension between the beginning and ends of movements. The downward motion of the shrug is impactful only because it has a clear beginning, and likewise, the skirt that is opened, is only powerful because it started in a closed position. Alternately, the dancer may intersperse the shoulder shrug with elbow hits, which are executed while still holding the basic form with the fists on the hips. The elbows are pulled back, without popping the chest out or bending the wrists and maintaining the posture in the rest of the upper body, and simultaneously brought forward in a quick hit to mark the *piquete*, only until they are in the same plane as each other, not causing the chest to cave. These elbow hits could resemble other dances that imitate chickens were it not for the way in which the fists and tensed wrists were anchored at the hips, causing the elbows to move in isolation, their motion forward drawing up images of controlled precision as opposed to a more foolish looking flapping of arms. During both the shoulder shrug and elbow hits, it is common for the dancer to start creating tension by moving across the *soberao,* emphasizing the distance between the drummers and herself, whether several yards or a couple of feet, and gradually approaching the lead drummer as she builds in intensity. As she pulls her shoulders up and the drum rolls, waiting for her to drop them, she averts her gaze by turning her head away from the drum, as if to signal that she could be there all day. Her apparent relaxed and unhurried stance contrasted with the pending completion

of the phrase creates a sensation of control, power, and agency. The decision is hers when the slap will finally come.

In addition to using stronger *piquetes* with the skirt, in the last several years, women have also started dancing without the skirt, sometimes substituting it with a scarf, or simply using their arms to make *figuras*, or shapes, as the men do. It is very important however, that when dancing without skirts, women do not simply replicate the vocabulary of the skirt, *as if one were holding a skirt*. In other words, the skirt should not be a ghosted prop, but rather the arms should move freely with the hands extended and open. This also allows for more of a focus on elaborate foot-work, further expanding expressive possibilities without the gendered costume requirements. One of the strongest and simplest usages of the feet, whether wearing a skirt or not, comes with the foot stomp. The dancer lifts her foot, by lifting the whole leg as a unit, as if a puppet string attached to the slightly bent knee were being pulled, while maintaining the posture in the upper body, and then forcefully dropping the foot. Or, while holding the rest of the body in a pose in which the arms are engaged in a *figura* and the upper body is appropriately *elegante*, the foot is kicked back, like a horse stomping a fly, hinging at the knee, and quickly brought down with the sole of the foot landing soundly on the ground. While the foot may be making a sound as it hits the ground, the sound on the drum amplifies this gesture to a much louder degree. The foot stomp can take place at the same time as a shoulder shrug, elbow hit, or skirt breaking open, either increasing the force of any one of these individual moves, or serving as a connector between them. The foot stomp is interspersed with slides, toe taps, shuffles and foot crossing in a forward and backward direction in order to create a varied rhythmic pattern.

In addition to a movement vocabulary that embodies strength, and to some degree, aggressiveness, another potential factor contributing to women's noted interest in *bomba*, and one that repeatedly terrifies new students though they almost always come to look forward to it, is the fact that dancing in the *soberao* means dancing publicly, by themselves, an improvised solo. However, because, as I have described, this "solo" is in fact part of a shared conversation, it is more like dancing *with* someone than entirely alone, but a dance over which she has control. Stepping into the *soberao* to dance claims both the eyes and ears of those present. Precisely for this reason, depending on the tenor of the *bomba* event and the number of experienced *bombera/os* that are present, drummers and spectators do not receive all dancers with the same degree of enthusiasm, mostly because not all dancers execute the movements expressively while also attending to the specifics of *bomba* technique. To fail to adhere to certain norms of *bomba* dance is considered disrespectful to the form. And yet, exemplary of one of the most salient contradictions and tensions found in the study and practice of *bomba*, community elders and "teachers" still actively encourage "beginners" and other community members to enter the *soberao* to dance and express themselves.

The women I have talked to and observed through the course of my research have also indicated that they feel that they are able to express themselves sensually in a way that is safe and sanctioned. One regular San Diego student, Nancy Ortega,[27] remarked about how having the drum mark her hip movements was unlike anything she had ever experienced. "It is like the things you are always imagining when you dance to other music are actually happening… it's like having a good lover who knows what you want.

[27] Pseudonym

Responding to your every cue" (Personal 10/3/2011). Another student, Delia Chávez,[28] who for a long time did not want to dance a solo, although she expressed excellent mastery of the basic vocabulary, later told me that she was shy about dancing that way in front of the *primo* player (Personal Interview 9/25/2011). It should be mentioned that while there are some moves that involve moving the hips sensuously, or shaking the buttocks through a rapid patter of the feet, shimmying the shoulders that can result in breasts shaking, *bomba* is not explicitly hyper-sexual in the sense that it does not mime sexual acts. I suggest that it is the drum's response to the corporeal call that foregrounds question the female dancer's sexuality, whether through excitement or shame. Feeling the power of the response elicited by their bodies can lead to encountering an unfamiliar sense of strength and/or unexpected desire. The body here is a site of pleasure, and an instrument of power, challenging other formulations of this moving, sensual body as a site of shame.

Another student, Ana Vargas,[29] asserted that, "I love *bomba* because it's something that you don't have to be good at to enjoy. I feel like I can really express myself" (Personal Interview 8/9/2010). Likewise, *bombera* Eva Robles[30] responded to the question of whether or not *bomba* allowed her to express emotions saying that, "I find *bomba* is the best outlet for my anger. I can punch and stomp with force and know that I am being heard that that energy is going somewhere. The voice of the drum makes me feel like asking for more, until I get it out and I feel better." (Personal Interview 7/1/2010). Certainly, there is something in this dance form that is speaking to these

[28] Pseudonym
[29] Pseudonym
[30] Pseudonym

women. I do not wish to imply here that similar descriptions of empowerment and release are not found in many other forms of dance, particularly those involving live instrumentation, however, I am suggesting that controlling sound through the body is an unusual experience for women regardless of other types of agency that they may or may not experience in their daily lives. Furthermore, while women may regularly experience visibility achieved through an objectifying gaze on their dancing body, this accompanying public "voice" works to invert this relationship. As Sonia Stanlye Niahh writes in her book *Dancehall: from slave ship to ghetto* referencing another popular Caribbean dance form, "by inverting submissive dance forms and traditional notions of respectability and reputation, and demonstrating indifference to male consumption of their sexuality, women performers of raga use stage space to empower themselves" (6). Ultimately though, one must recognize that this performative subjectivity is certainly no substitute for achieving substantive gender equality.

As a *bomba* dancer I agree with and value the sense of empowerment expressed by the dancers I interviewed, however I am also troubled and intrigued by the way in which the notion of blackness as corporeally liberating lurks in the background of these conversations, employed as a kind of catch-all explanation for the liberatory potentials found therein. Although, *bomba* workshops and classes in California and elsewhere are usually held in some type of community center setting, removing it slightly from the dance studio setting of consumable ethnic dance, the students (Puerto Ricans and Latina/os of all different racial mixes, Euro- and African Americans) as well as many of the instructors, look to *bomba* as a way to connect to and/or consume an imagined blackness.

The equation of corporeal blackness with embodied freedom manifests itself in several different ways. Students comment on the drums connecting them to their "primal selves," and yet simultaneously others will complain that the erect posture and controlled moves required in *bomba* (in part so that the *subidor* can easily interpret the moves) marks it as "not African enough." One of the six rhythms most commonly taught and played, the *seis corrido*, or *rulé*, originates in the historical maroon village, and currently one of the only all black towns in Puerto Rico, *Loíza aldea*. The *seis corrido* is very fast-paced and is danced with more bending at the waist, closer to the ground and lots of pattering feet, and hip and shoulder shaking. Students often express an affinity for this dance because it is more "African." Such preferences reveal the belief that the other rhythms by default then are not considered "African," regardless of the fact that all the *bomba* rhythms originated from black communities in Puerto Rico and that the survival of those rhythms and dance styles is a testament to a particular history of struggle and resistance for black and mixed race Puerto Ricans. It is as if the *most* "African" rhythms are in turn most valued for their ability to provide an accompanying sexual and sensual liberation. In what appears to persist as the legacy of the modernist's primitivist impulse to sever representations of African-ness from black subjects, this discourse ultimately whitens the other *bomba* rhythms, equally descended from African traditions and the inter-Caribbean geographical relocation of black bodies. By doing so, this re-articulation of an earlier primitivist discourse, by *both* Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans, outlines two important points. On the one hand, an us/them, real-black/less-black dichotomy is perpetuated whereby *bomba* from Loíza is represented as the "pure," untouched past, and ironically more easily appropriated by the Other as a symbol of exotic, liberated bodies.

Though for early modernists primitivism was employed as a way to "wrest art away from museumification, into the realm of ritual or everyday experience" (Schneider 141), the opposite in fact takes place and instead Loízan *bomba* is the object of an effective museumification. On the other hand, it suggests that black bodies, from Loíza or elsewhere, are in turn somehow less able to engage the empowering qualities offered up by the "less African" rhythms of *bomba* because they are always already liberated.

Bomba's emphasis on posture, erectness, and composure is even more insightful in thinking about constructions of "Africanness," and its imagined opposite, "Spanishness," when seen through what Robert Farris Thompson termed "the aesthetics of cool." First written about in his 1974 book *African Art in Motion*, the "cool aesthetic," is described as an attitude that "combines composure with vitality" (43). Thompson identifies "cool" as an African cultural value, stemming from spiritual beliefs central to African aesthetic practices and later influential in the African diaspora. Although certainly European cultures have their own version of "cool," Thompson and subsequent scholars argue that it tends to be more about self-control in the face of stress, or even cold-bloodedness, and less about the pleasure found in the "juxtaposition of detachment with intensity" (Dixon Gottschild 13) or "hot" with "cool." Brenda Dixon Gottschild in her book *Digging the Africanist Presence* writes the following:

> The aloofness, *sangfroid*, and detachment of some styles of European academic dance are one kind of cool, but they represent a completely different principle from the Africanist cool. The European attitude suggests centeredness, control, linearity, directness; the Africanist mode suggests asymmetricality (that plays with falling off center), looseness (implying flexibility and vitality), and indirectness of approach. "Hot," its opposite, is the indispensable compliment of the Africanist cool…It is the embracing of these opposites, in being and

> playing the paradoxes, from inside out and outside in, and in their high-affect juxtaposition, that the aesthetic of cool exists (17).

The cool aesthetic of *bomba* can be seen in the way in which the torso shifts quickly from erectness in a vertical axis to breaking at the hip and leaning forward and to the side, even if ever so slightly (asymmetricality). It can be seen in the way that the dancer approaching the drummer looks towards the drummers and then away as if to indicate that though the dance is becoming intense, she is relaxed and unperturbed (indirectness). The looseness necessary for the wrists and hands to make the skirt flow delicately as they forcefully throw their arms to land in a taut and tensed *figura* demonstrates flexibility combined with strength and vitality. In fact, as an instructor, this can be one of the most difficult concepts to convey to students who either stiffly and strongly, or loosely and wildly, throw their skirt. The expressed preference for the "hot" elements of *bomba* dance, hip-shaking, foot pattering, shoulder shimmying, without taking into account how these work in concert with, and are in fact framed by, the cool elements of control and precision, undermines the complexity at play in *bomba* dance and reveals essentializing attitudes about blackness, Africanness, and movement. The notion of cool is further underscored in *bomba* master Norka H. Nadal's statement that, "In my family, you supposed to not even break a sweat when you dance. *Somos negros orgullosos*.[31] (Personal Interview 7/15/2010). Coming from a family that boasts generations of free blacks long before slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico, Nadal's interesting reference to pride and coolness, goes one step further in destabilizing notions of uncontrolled physical "freedom" as somehow attached to black bodies. Lack of excess physical exertion (no

[31] We are proud blacks.

sweat), while similar to European coolness in that in appearing to be carefree the person downplays and disguises this effort, is not in fact an imitation of the European approach of disdain and detachment. Rather it is a performance that purposefully highlights the tensions and contrasts created between the drums, dance and song.

I have described the principle elements of *bomba* dance, the particular ways that it has proved a productive site of empowerment for female dancers, and how this empowerment is at times mistakenly conflated with assumptions about the embodied superiority of black bodies and black cultural practices, by both Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans alike. I will now move to a discussion of the politics, intimacies, contradictions and collaborations that take place between the different bodies that perform *bomba*. Ultimately, I am interested in the stakes involved for the different subject positions involved, just as I wish to underscore the way that the speaking body works to link history, memory, community and communication.

Cali-Ricans, Chicanas and the Politics of Race

Farther from the island than a brief trip on the *guaga aerea,*[32] Cali-Ricans, represent a minority in relationship to the presence of Chicana/os and Mexicans in California. As a result, California *bombera/os* have found support among the larger Latina/o community in the way of audiences as well as interested participants. One Chicana who has learned to dance *bomba* describes the attraction thus:

> I know that I am not Puerto Rican but I still feel that as a Latina it speaks to me. I love being around you guys [other Puerto Ricans] and I feel that in a way because I am *Mexicana* I guess I feel that its okay for me to be dancing this cultural dance that isn't entirely

[32] "the air bus." A term used by Puerto Rican novelist Luis Rafael Sanchez to describe the constant back and forth travel by Puerto Ricans between New York and the island.

> my own. We share so much you know… (Delia Chávez, Personal Interview 9/25/2011)

Through shared claims to *Latinidad,* this *bombera* scripts herself into the California *bomba* community. Furthermore, as she points out, the step for the "*guembe*" *bomba* rhythm is a first cousin to the Afro-colombian *cumbia* step that is so popular among Mexicans. In her important study on the Afro-Mexican *son jarocho* movement, Micaela Díaz-Sánchez writes about Chicanos as part of the African diaspora, and the use of *son jarocho* to recuperate the erased history of African slaves on the Caribbean coast of Mexico. However, Díaz-Sánchez, and other Chicanas who have spoken to me about dancing *bomba*, do not draw on this particular history in discussing their participation in the community enacted through a cultural practice; instead they draw on shared experiences in contemporary life. Furthermore, for as much as the *son jarocho* and the *bomba* movements share, both in terms of embodied performances of *mestizaje*, as well as how they function politically, the differently racialized bodies that perform them stand in distinct relationships to anti-black racism. Yet, as the largest group of Latinos in California, Mexicans and Chicana/os are highly racialized and targeted as immigrant Others, a distinction that is not without significance.

Bomba en Califas

In 2001 an organization called Bay Area Boricuas hired Hector Lugo and Maria Elena García, Puerto Rican immigrants living in San Francisco, to found the first organized *bomba* group in California. Today, *Grupo Paulé* no longer exists, however there are four groups that regularly practice, perform, and teach *bomba* in California. There are two Bay Area based groups; *Grupo Aguacero* and the all-women's ensemble

Las Bomberas de la Bahia, the Los Angeles based group *Atabey*, and the San Diego group *Bomba Liberté*.[33] Of these groups, all but *Grupo Aguacero* have several members that identify as Chicana, and one of the groups is actually co-directed by a Chicana, who has also become one of the most widely recognized and respected female *primo* players, across the island and the diaspora, a topic that I address below. In addition to the Chicanas that sing, drum and dance *bomba* on stage and in the community, *bomba* workshops and performances are largely attended and supported by Chicana/os, often outnumbering Puerto Ricans in the audience. This does not include the *bombera/os* who have one Puerto Rican parent and one Mexican/Chicana/o parent, as has been the case with four San Diego group members, whose Puerto Rican fathers arrived to San Diego through the navy and ended up marrying Mexican women. Even the *Club Puertorriqueño de San Francisco*, where the *Bomberas de la Bahia* rehearse, founded in 1912 and claiming status as "the oldest Latino Organization in the United States," is situated in the heart of the Mission District, an historically Mexican and Central American immigrant neighborhood.

On the surface this is not so strange considering the predominantly Chicana/o, Mexican and Central American demographics in California in comparison to the numbers of Puerto Ricans. Additionally, the links between *bombera/os* and these other California Latina/os becomes more clear when you take into consideration the fact that the Chicana/o *bomba fanaticada* (group of fans), by actively identifying as Chicana/o,[34]

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[33] When the director of the San Diego group *Areito Borincano*, founded in 2001, moved in 2011, the group changed its name to *Bomba Liberté*. Though the name has changed most of the same group members remain.

[34] It should be clear that politicized Central Americans raised in California, while certainly identifying through lenses of nation and region, will also identify as Chicana/o in a politicized statement of affiliation.

marks itself as a largely politicized population that actively works to build community around issues of social justice, cultural production, and coalitional politics. It is a community that publicly articulates the relationship between poverty, immigration, structural racism and colonialism. In doing so, these communities also seek alternatives to their own highly commodified, overly folklorized staged performances of Mexicanness, finding inspiration in the invigorating and liberatory potential offered in the live cultural practices of *son jarocho*, for instance, and of *bomba*.

The above factors also collide with the common knowledge that Puerto Rican communities in California, though certainly sizeable, do not demonstrate the same levels of politicized grass-roots organization that we see in Chicago and New York, with the exception of the Bay Area, where it is still on a smaller scale. Home to hugely impactful organizations from the Young Lords to the Nuyorican Poets Café to the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights, East Coast and Midwestern diasporic communities of Puerto Ricans have created movements seeking to address racism, working and living conditions, educational justice and signaling cultural production as sites for community building. In recent years these organizations have also been instrumental in creating awareness about the environmental justice movement in the Puerto Rican island of Vieques, occupied until 2003 by the United States Navy, and in the movement to free Puerto Rican political prisoners. As I mentioned, these movements are met with more support in the Bay Area, where travelling speakers and exhibits from these projects are periodically hosted, but there are still no resident organizations dedicated specifically to these issues, and these travelling activists receive much less visibility in Southern California. Not only are these California communities less politicized in terms of these

historical struggles, but for many of these folks, *bomba*, mistakenly collapsed with *plena*,[35] is valued precisely because it is antiquated and anti-modern, useful only as a *disembodied* token reminder of the island's African heritage, more valuable for its service to constructions of *puertorriqueñidad* than for the community it mobilizes.

An example of this relationship can be seen with San Diego's House of Puerto Rico. The House of Puerto Rico is an organization that is housed in a small museum *casita* that lies in the center of the city of San Diego's large central Balboa Park. The House of Puerto Rico is one in a series of "International houses" that populate this public space, and is the result of many years of fundraising and organizing to gain recognition from the Park administration and the funds to build the *casita* (House of Puerto Rico, San Diego). The organization itself, which predates the acquisition of the *casita* is made up mostly of middle-class Puerto Rican immigrants, curates the small community museum dedicated to Puerto Rican war veterans, sponsors cultural events and organizes social gatherings. For Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Ricans in San Diego, whether second and third generation, recently immigrated or simply interested citizens, the House of Puerto Rico is the only cultural organization aimed specifically at teaching about Puerto Rican history and promoting Puerto Rican culture, and thus, one would imagine, serve as an ideal home for the local *bomba* group. However, this has not always been the case. The San Diego *bomba* community, though made up primarily of Puerto Ricans, found its home away from the bustling center of European Art museums and the International

[35] *Plena* is another Afro-Puerto Rican musical genre developed in working-class communities in the early 20th century, achieving vast and lasting popularity in Puerto Rico and the diaspora. Because of the racialization of both genres, until the recent increased interest in the specifics of *bomba* history and practice, *bomba* and *plena* have been largely undifferentiated, oftentimes collapsed into a single word *bombiplena*. *Plena*, incorporated into other forms of popular music, is played with three small hand drums and is a social dance for couples, where improvisation does not figure in any important way.

Houses, establishing itself instead in two cultural centers that lie on the margins of the park: the historic Centro Cultural de la Raza, the old water tank that was taken over from the City in 1970 by radical Chicanos/as, and its neighboring World Beat Center, dedicated to teaching and preserving African American traditions.

In my experience working with Chicana *bomberas* as well as in interviewing them for this project, several commonalities have repeatedly surfaced. To begin with, the fact that the interviewees all self-identify as Chicana (as opposed to Mexican-American or Mexican), is significant for the way that this naming enacts their cultural politics. Reminding us of the potency of this speech-act, Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram write "the Chicano movement provided the enabling conditions for us to come into representation and claim our existence as Chicanos by stating as the movement song states 'Yo soy Chicano' (I am Chicano)" (27). However, these two Chicana feminist scholars go on to critique the totalizing discourse of Chicano cultural identity, calling for a reframing of this category, even as they point to the productive, positive potential found therein.

> Chicano was ultimately a term we had coined for ourselves and which 'we' invested with new meaning: Chicano signified the affirmation of working class and indigenous origins, and the rejection of assimilation, acculturation, and the myth of the American melting pot. Implicit in the term Chicano was a strategic relation and a strategy of struggle that thematized the Chicano community and called for social struggle and reform. In retrospect…the notion of a Chicano cultural identity was itself often problematic (28).

Thus in actively identifying as Chicana, these *bomberas* reflect an awareness not only of how power and privilege work in shaping the material realities of their daily lives, but also of how their hybridized, border identities of being *ni de aqui ni de alla* create

tensions between their own narratives of origin and the daily experience of living as racialized others in the United States. Furthermore, as self-identified Chicanas who practice *bomba* they are also implicitly challenging essentializing discourses of *Chicanidad* that would assume this to be a static and unified category, showing it to be open to the flux and circulation of other political and cultural currents. Not only this, but in dancing and playing *bomba* within the space of the groups in California, these Chicanas verbalize and embody a kind of coalitional politics that draws on shared experiences of diaspora, citing the category of "people of color" and further, "Latina" as a common link. As *bombera* Delia Chávez says, "I do consider this as part of this heritage. That's why I embrace it. I have a right as a Latina. We have to support these different traditions. The Puerto Rican community here needs us." (Personal Interview 9/25/2011).

In addition to the *bomba* groups' cultural diversity, it should also be noted that in terms of the population of Puerto Ricans that sustain these communities, all the members are in fact quite diverse (age, class, phenotype, educational background, status as immigrant or second or third generation Puerto Rican). Nonetheless, there is a general consensus that the groups work to promote, preserve and educate about Puerto Rican culture and more specifically, Afro-Puerto Rican history. In other words, in defining themselves as explicitly *bomba* groups, and not Puerto Rican folkloric groups, California *bombera/os* align themselves with a politics of resistance that has a stated anti-racist position. By choosing to organize and sustain *bomba* groups, blackness is placed at the center of Puerto Rican history and experience as opposed to being an element of Puerto Ricanness. Thus in turn, *bomba* as a nationalist endeavor that categorically excludes non-

Puerto Rican participation is potentially subverted in favor of serving as a vehicle for engaging the local dynamics of inter-Latina/o subjectivities and the history of African slaves in Latin America.

This embodied participation in performances of *Afro-Latinidad* via the Puerto Rican tradition of *bomba* happens in a way that is particular to the speaking body. As Delgado and Muñoz remind us, Latin American dance can operate as cultural memory that is inscribed or choreographed on the bodies of performers who execute the movements (10-14). I liken this execution of movements to the articulation of spoken language in an accent particular to specific regions in Latin America. Chicana/o Studies scholar Rosaura Sánchez writes, "Spanish language use is today the key cultural difference that identifies Latinos. If, however, Spanish were no longer the language of over half of the Latino population, Latino identity would not necessarily disappear" (111). In other words, Sánchez reminds us that identification, a two-way process through which one is continuously identifying and being identified, takes place through alternative means. As I have argued, bodies speak history just as tongues enact affiliations of culture, class and nation. Learned through mimicry and immersion in a culture, for as much as the Spanish language marks the category of "Latina/o," the particular accents of Mexican versus Puerto Rican Spanish often work to mark the speaker. I bring this up for the ways that this accent presents itself as a clear marker of difference, distinguishing between the Puerto Ricans and the Chicanas in these groups, at the same time that it serves to complicate the way we understand the code-switching that the body enacts. I might add that accent is sometimes the primary signifier of difference,

as phenotypic differences are not always apparent.[36] As diasporic communities, the common language in all these groups is English although they all operate bilingually to varying degrees. One of the ways in which the differing Spanish accents are most noticeable, sometimes even a point of contention, is in singing the songs. Because all aspects of *bomba* (drumming, dancing, singing) are highly percussive the rhythm and meter in which the *coros* are sung is entirely contingent upon pronunciation of the words themselves. For instance, Puerto Ricans are known for cutting off and aspirating the ends of words, and thus many of the lyrics in the *coros* if sung without taking this convention into mind will fall out of time: "pa'l" instead of "para," "vamoh" instead of "vamos" or the replacement of the "r" sound with an "l" sound as in "matal" instead of "matar" or the most common, "Puelto Rico" instead of "Puerto Rico." I am reminded here of Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak's monograph *Who Sings the Nation State: Language, Politics, Belonging* where they examine how ideas of "the state" are challenged and subverted through singing the US national anthem in Spanish. Chicanas with Mexican accents singing Puerto Rican songs present a similar quandary in the sense that this enacts difference even as it performs shared community. Puerto Rican *bombera/os* have been adamant in insisting that the songs be delivered in a way that holds true to the form of the language (and accent) in which they were written or orally passed on. As a result, Chicana *bomberas* have learned to sing the lyrics with Puerto Rican accents although when speaking, quickly revert to their own Mexicanisms and California Chicana accents. Thus these Chicanas in addition to learning body bilinguality, also learn to code-switch

[36] An interesting example of this can be seen with Chicana *bombera* Denise Solis who has short very kinky hair. Because of this visual signifier of blackness, Puerto Ricanness is initially automatically assumed, as reported by many *bombera/os*, including myself. The point here is that while visibly Chicanas and Puerto Ricans may not be distinguishable often through accent they are.

their accents while also actively claiming *Chicanidad*, maintaining what Spivak and Butler call in their monograph a politics of "critical regionalism." In fact, in interviewing these women, the issue of Chicana pride came up repeatedly as they wished to make it clear that the fact that they participated in this Puerto Rican tradition did not imply a wish to distance themselves from their own Mexican heritage or diminish their own sense of self worth as Chicanas. Interestingly however, this clarification of self-identification more often surfaces in reference to spoken language than it does to the embodied language of the dance, which somehow seems to be less nationally marked, though it is certainly racially marked.

The fact that *bomba* dance can be used by Puerto Ricans (both diasporic and on the island) to enact participation in Puerto Rican identity and history, while it is simultaneously appropriated by Chicanas to enact participation in a *Latinidad* that includes *Chicanidad*, is indicative of how the body dancing *bomba* operates to signify identity through multiple lenses. However, I also propose that the difference between dancing and speaking is here significant for the ways that the dance is marked in its proximity to blackness, and thus articulates something which is otherwise semantically unavailable. In other words, dancing *bomba* activates *Afro-Latinidad* in ways that the singing does not. In addition to thinking about the history of black slaves on the Caribbean coast of Mexico and the communities of free blacks that subsequently were formed, scholars have addressed the intimacy between African Americans and Chicanos in Los Angeles particularly as pertaining to musical production (Álvarez, Loza, Macias). I would add that beyond looking at musical practices, dance is an important site for the exploration of this intimacy. Certainly, learning to dance *bomba*, just like learning to

speak involves learning the grammar of the form and learning how to adequately achieve expressive communication, is a process that will seem more or less relatively familiar to the dancer depending on their experience with dance in general and with Caribbean dance forms specifically. Interestingly, most of the Chicana *bomberas* interviewed had previously either performed Mexican ballet folklorico or studied other dance forms ranging from salsa to Afro-Cuban and West African Dance. Therefore, not only does this indicate a familiarity with using their bodies to engage culture (their own or otherwise), but it also shows an expressed interest in specifically African diasporic dance forms. Ultimately, I suggest that *bomba*, because of its categorization as Latina/o *and* African-derived, in combination with an improvisational structure that allows for self-expression in ways that choreographic dance cannot, has, instead of signaling a cultural masking, rather provided an avenue for these Chicanas to explore their own *Chicanidad*. Through an act of distancing and estrangement from the stereotypical markers of Chicana/o identity, these Chicanas come to understand their own histories through a fresh lens. Likewise, Puerto Ricans practicing *bomba* with Chicanas are forced to destabilize claims to an essential Puerto Rican identity and thus faced with asking themselves questions about their own *Latinidad*, their own relative blackness, their experiences as immigrants and racialized others in the United States. Creating *bomba* with non-Puerto Rican Latina/os, creates the space to actively reflect on what does and does not distinguish Puerto Ricans from the other Latina/os they live among as opposed to summarily dismissing them as outsiders. Of course, in creating this shared space, sometimes the distinct experiences and cultures are so prevalent that it would be impossible to overlook the different experiences in favor of a forced unity. Fortunately, thus far, the comm/unity

of *bombera/os* in California, distanced both geographically and communally from large groups of Puerto Ricans and therefore in a constant process of defining and understanding Californian *puertorriqueñidad*, has chosen to use these alliances as a base of strength that amplifies the promotion, preservation and education about not only Puerto Rican culture, but the relationship between *Latinidad* and blackness.

Queering *bomba*

What José Esteban Muñoz calls "disidentification" with dominant narratives of belonging is helpful in, as I have been arguing, complicating the way that we understand performances of *bomba* in relationship to national, racial and gender identity. As discussed in his book *Disidentifications*, Muñoz writes that "the now stale essentialism versus nonessentialism debates that surround the stories of self-formation" leave in their wake a need for a "reconstructed narrative of identity formation that locates the enacting of self at precisely the point where the discourses of essentialism and constructivism short-circuit" (6). Undoubtedly, given the lenses of political nationalism, afro-centrism, and pan-*Latinidad* used to read *bomba* practice, the gendering and sexual regulation of the form are inextricably linked to how these categories of identity are imagined, thus calling for a reexamination of these practices through alternative lenses. On the one hand, folkloric and traditionalist performances of identity are gendered through the hyper-feminization of women's restriction to dancing (as opposed to drumming) and in dancing expressly *as* women. At the same time these performances are heterosexist for the way that non-heteronormative behavior is silenced not only through how the tradition is performed (coupling of the dancers as they walk out together to *paseo* etc), but in the expected social behavior surrounding *bomba* events. California *bombera/os* therefore

work to explode the tensions between the tradition/innovation binary on multiple levels. Not only do they navigate insider/outsider status in regards to Chicana/o, diasporic and islander Puerto Rican identities, but they do so in ways that challenge the heteropatriarchy that comes as a result, not of the *bomba* form itself, but rather the way that the form has been utilized as a tool for nationalist politics. In what follows, I recount two distinct examples of the policing of gender and sexuality in *bomba* practice in order to underscore the importance of challenging these norms even as Afro-Puerto Rican history is excavated. The first examines the experience of a queer, male *bombero* in the San Diego group, the second examines the politics of having an all-women's *bomba* ensemble in the San Francisco Bay Area.

To think of "queering *bomba*" is more than to simply point to non-heteronormative performances of sexuality in this cultural practice, although to do so is certainly critical in making the *soberao* an equitable community space. Rather, it presents the radical potential of questioning and theorizing the fixedness of not only normative discourses of *sexual* identity but of thinking about how other social classifications such as culture, race and gender are constructed through performances of sexuality, and visa versa. Queer Studies scholar David Halperin writes that the term "queer" "demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" (62), marking more of critique than an identity. Similarly, Chicana feminist scholar Alicia Arrizón, in her book *Queering Mestizaje* points to the link between "querying" and "queer," citing actions that "probe" and "investigate" spaces of normativity, "rearticulating subaltern identities produced in processes of transculturation, emphasizing how such identities are marked, affected, and transformed" (3). Thus, in my articulation of queering *bomba* I am pointing

to how the body of the queer *bombera/o* issues queries regarding the gender and sexual politics of the cultural practice of *bomba* through the subaltern identities of "black," "Puerto Rican," "Latina/o" and "female." In doing so, I open a space for thinking about how practicing *bomba* in California is itself a queering of the *bomba* tradition and the dance itself.

¡Eso no es bomba![37]

In the group *Areito Borincano* that lasted from 2001-2011, for four years, one of the lead performers was a Puerto Rican dancer named Antonio Pérez.[38] Pérez is a queer, black Puerto Rican who in his mid-twenties ended up in San Diego after being discharged from the Marines for violation of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" legislation when a colleague disclosed his identity (Personal Interview 1/27/12). He got a job working as a medical assistant and decided to stay in California instead of returning to the island where he grew up. Looking for ways to connect to a Puerto Rican community and having a strong background in dance, both recreationally and as an adolescent dancing in two folkloric groups in Puerto Rico, he eventually found his way to the *bomba* group *Areito Borincano* in 2004. When I joined the group in late 2004, Pérez would always wear the large skirt women *bomba* dancers wear, both in teaching the weekly class and in rehearsal.[39] When dancing, he would use primarily the women's moves, accentuating hip articulation and "effeminate" hand gestures that would break at the wrist, bringing the thumb to the back of the middle finger's middle knuckle while fanning out and extending the other fingers. A skilled dancer and an equally powerful performer, Pérez was the

[37] That's not *bomba*!
[38] Pseudonym
[39] Because at one point Pérez was in fact the person with the most dance experience (in *bomba* and other folkloric Puerto Rican dances) he was put in charge of teaching the class.

example that many of the female students and group members followed. In performances, however, he wore pants and the hat typical of traditional costume for a male *bomba* dancer. Other members of the group though, especially the men, often complained that he did not dance "*como hombre*"[40] and that if people in Puerto Rico saw him dancing that way they would laugh him off the stage, despite Pérez's justification that he had danced in a folkloric group on the island as an adolescent, an experience others in the group did not share. He eventually left *Areito Borincano* because of personal differences with the group's director and issues with time commitment though he has since continued to actively support the *bomba* community (Pérez Personal Interview 1/27/12). I am interested in Pérez's narrative for what it reveals, albeit as one isolated example, about the ways in which the politics of gender and sexuality are deeply policed in *bomba* practice. At the same time, his story is exemplary of the way that diasporic spaces provide opportunities to push the governing logic of normativity as it relates to cultural tradition, accomplished ultimately through the speaking body.

For other group members, the most controversial aspect of Pérez's non-normative performances of gender and sexuality was his choice to wear the skirt in rehearsals combined with what was subsequently read as an effeminate dance style in his performance as a male dancer. The fact that he would occasionally dress in female drag for community *bombazos*, or as he says "throw on a wig, some lashes and some mascara and go out there and dance with the skirt" (Personal Interview 1/27/12) exacerbated the anxiety surrounding Pérez's "misrepresentation" of Puerto Rican culture and specifically of *bomba*. As one of the lead dancers of the group and a co-instructor with Pérez, I was

[40] "Like a man"

witness to many behind-the-scenes conversations where this behavior was decried, mostly by the other men in the group, as damaging to our reputation, and ultimately the product of our efforts as cultural workers. While everyone adamantly denied my accusations of homophobia, there was still a great deal of uneasiness surrounding Pérez's public performance of drag in the same time and space as his performance as a male *bomba* dancer.

However, Pérez's arrival to the San Diego *bomba* group had in fact been an initially liberating experience for him, one that opened new avenues into both his understanding of *bomba* as an improvised, embodied music making, and his ability to experiment with gendered performances of Puerto Rican culture. One of my first experiences with the group was being invited to a gay club where Pérez performed in a contest as a *bombera* dressed in the traditional female *bomba* costume, accompanied by another female dancer and the same male musicians who would later express anxiety about Pérez's public performance of the same. Although he had danced *bomba* (along with other folkloric dances of Puerto Rico) since he was an eleven-year old in southern Puerto Rico and was invited to be a member of the Department of Education's *Ballet Juvenil Puertorriqueño*, Pérez had never danced *bomba* to live instrumentation, in a community setting, and never with a skirt. He first started wearing it in order to assist the San Diego instructor when he first arrived (a Chicana who had learned *bomba* through travels to Puerto Rico) and eventually came to prefer dancing with the skirt than without it.

> *A mi me encanta bailar con falda. Es diferente a bailar sin falda porque yo creo que…Bailar sin falda para mi,*[41] is constricting. I don't have much to do. I know I can do the same thing without the skirt but it doesn't look the same. The skirt moves a certain way and creates lines and creates figures. It just looks prettier, to me….*Me gusta por la estética, y quizás es mi estética porque todo el mundo tiene una estética diferente. Pero yo creo que la manera en que yo me muevo*,[42] it looks better. *Sin la falda*[43] its so constricting. There's [only] so many things you can do with your feet, with your legs, there's [only] so many things you can do with your arms, you know your gestures, to create *el piquete*, but there's limitless things you can do with something in your hands, so many figures you can do, so many tones. (Pérez Personal Interview 1/27/12)

Pérez's expressed preference for the skirt is interesting when we consider, as I discuss below, that many women have rejected the use of the skirt precisely for the ways they feel this gendered clothing limits, as opposed to enhances, their dancing. Thus, the use of the skirt is seen to be as much about constructing gender through performance as it is about the range of possible vocabulary in the movements of the body and the skirt. Ultimately gender is revealed as a citational practice, a code-switching performance that Pérez discusses in the following way:

> Everybody tells you when you are a man, "dance like a man" even my choreographers back in the day when I was younger. It's like "you have to be strong" when I took ballet and when I took jazz you are dancing with a partner and they are like "you have to be the man." And I was like what does that mean? Does that mean I have to rough her up? *Me saliá pero*[44] it's all an act. What does it mean to dance like a man? Do you have to have a certain way that your hands have to be? Does your physiology have to be a certain way? Do you have to close your hands, do the fist? You know…*parate derecho, saca el pecho. Pero las mujeres tambien sacan el*

[41] "I love dancing with the skirt. Its different than dancing without the skirt because I think that….dancing without the skirt for me is…constricting"
[42] "I like it for the aesthetic, and maybe that's just my aesthetic, because everyone has their different aesthetic. And I think that the way I move…"
[43] "Without the skirt"
[44] "I could do it but"

> *pecho, pueden bailar con las manos cerrrada, abierta*,[45] its just the demeanor...I felt constricted. I felt cheated. I had to go out there and portray only one part of me. I feel that when you are a performer you want to go out there and give them everything you have. I had a certain thing that I was only allowed to show (Pérez Personal Interview 1/27/12).

As the *bomba* group's only male dancer at the time, and one of the most experienced dancers, Pérez feels that his flamboyance and refusal to cease to "be myself" was accepted in part because the group needed him, though he was directed to "*comportarte*"[46] (Personal Interview 1/27/12). Furthermore, although Pérez clearly dominated *bomba* dancing technique, his expertise was sometimes questioned and his authority undermined by concerns that he had not ever studied *bomba* as community music-making and instead performed a highly codified and presentational *bomba*. This was a model that the group was beginning to reject in favor of the *soberao*, and one that ultimately allowed Pérez the space to explore and utilize his own speaking body in ways that had not been previously available to him. For Pérez, his choice to continue as part of a community where his membership was conditional came from a desire to be around other Puerto Ricans, from a love of culture, a love of dance, music and performance. Ultimately, he was engaging in a type of disidentification, a solo-performance that works on, with *and* against dominant ideology. For despite the fact that Pérez's masculinity was continuously scrutinized in *Areito Borincano* and his use of the skirt was framed condescendingly as a "privilege" awarded him because of our distance from the island, his experience as a diasporic Puerto Rican was indeed different that it would be living on the island. When asked if he dances *bomba* while visiting Puerto Rico he responded:

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[45] "Stand up straight, stick your chest out. But the women also stick their chests out, they can dance with their hands open, closed…"
[46] "Behave yourself."

> I try to avoid it. Because it's a lot more chauvinistic than it is here. Because over there it is a lot more purist than they are here. And they have these rules and you have to dance a certain way because if you don't do it this way its not *bomba*. Listen, *bomba* is…*bomba* it is an expression of what you're feeling. You cannot restrict people to express their feelings, then it's not giving them a free range, it's constricting them to say what you want them to say. It's different. That's why I don't like to get involved in the scene back home because then I have to obey by what they want me to say (Personal Interview 1/27/12).

Once again drawing on the metaphor of speaking, Pérez's ability to manifest his subjectivity as a queer Afro-Puerto Rican was contingent upon the constructs of each of those identities (queer, black, male, Puerto Rican) and the ways in which they intersect. Therefore, his performance of embodied speaking in the space of the diasporic *soberao*, whether widely accepted or not, deconstructs while also making visible the many contours of these categories. The anxieties expressed by some of the San Diego *bomberos* revealed their understanding of *bomba* as "*una cosa de negros*"[47] or alternately "*una cosa de boricuas*,"[48] but most definitely not "*una cosa de maricones*."[49] So not only are blackness and *puertorriqeuñidad* constructed here as antithetical to queerness, but Pérez's queerness in this case trumps his positionality as a black *bombero*. His body is marginalized and his participation relegated to the very types of codified dancing critiqued by the rhetoric of the anti-folkloric, anti-essentialist discourse. In other words, by limiting Pérez's ability to corporeally speak freely in the *soberao* he is forced instead to perform in the presentational, choreographic style that in turn works to essentialize blackness and *puertorriqueñidad*. By demanding essentialized performances of masculinity, essentialized blackness and *puertorriqueñidad* are also exposed,

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[47] "A black thing."
[48] "A Puerto Rican thing."
[49] "A faggot thing."

undermining the empowering and productive potential of the *soberao* as an exploratory and liberatory space of self-realization and expression.

As a group, *Areito Borincano* had no aspirations or illusions of professionalism or virtuosic supremacy. Rather, the central purpose of the group was to provide community and a way to be around other Puerto Ricans. Many of the group's members lived away from their biological families and/or their homeland. Weekly rehearsals and classes, year after year, were not only sustained because of "*amor al arte*,"[50] but also for the strong sense of family created within the group. This idea of protecting the model heteronormative family was articulated by the concern that Pérez's visibility as an occasional cross-dresser would be confusing to the children of the community. Yet even so, in an effort to protect this family structure, efforts were made to "save face" and to tolerate, to a certain extent even accept, his disregard for the expected conventions. When Pérez eventually left the group, discussions about performances of gender and sexuality in *bomba* practice continued, and although other queer members joined, the stakes did not remain as urgent mostly because there was less of a perceived threat to the images of *puertorriqueñidad* and blackness being presented by the group. Unfortunately, his tenuous presence in the group and subsequent departure belied the potential for the construction of a *familia* that redefined heteropatriarchal structures of family. However, despite the failure of *Areito Borincano* to enact these alternate structures it is precisely the creation of this non-traditional family unit that lends itself to the possibility of disidentification, moving within normative constructions while simultaneously constituting and celebrating the non-normative.

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[50] "Love of the art."

Irune del Río Gabiola, in writing about literary interventions into the hegemonic narrative of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*, points to the way in which "non-normative sexual practices and gender bending are directly related to and displaced in the diasporic space" (78). As she writes, "given the movement of the subject out of the island, migration, exile and diaspora consequently disrupt the traditional conceptualization of the nation" (78). Gabiola analyzes literary characters that, like Pérez, defy the modern conceptions of the family unit and the trope of *la gran familia*, reinventing new modes of family and nation "while yearning for the archaic and imaginary state of home" (89). In other words, disruption of the assumed heteronormative family structure of nationhood does not preclude the simultaneous desire for some notion of "home." Queer diasporic *bombera/os* can therefore be empowered by disidentifying with normative heterosexist treatments of their cultural traditions without in turn having to whiten themselves, or otherwise assimilate into dominant US culture, including queer white strategies of resistance. If given the opportunity to realize the potential offered in the space of the *soberao* and through the embodied speaking of *bomba* dance, these *bombera/os* are able to strategically code-switch identities as a means of survival.

Members of *bomba* groups in the diaspora, particularly those in California where there is a more widespread (though hardly substantial) queer politics, stand in a position that particularly lends itself to actively disidentifying with folkloric notions of *bomba*, regardless of one's subject position. While important for people occupying multiple minoritarian subject positions such as Pérez, this strategy can and should be utilized by those who would be construed as normative in order to dismantle multiple sites of oppression. A variety of subjects with varying experiences in terms of age, gender, race,

class, nationality, sexuality should engage the essentializing cultural nationalism perpetuated by this chauvinist machinery in order to reformulate a practice that, while embodying a centuries-old tradition, rejects the foundational racist, sexist, and homophobic logic of nationalism itself, ultimately enabling new narratives of belonging. At their fullest potential, one that still remains to be fully realized, anxieties over "*eso no es bomba*" are instead turned into creative fuel for the exploration of all that *bomba* can become. As Pérez remarks below, the survival of the language of *bomba* is contingent upon such explorations:

> *A mi me gustaria ver mas gente*[51] pushing boundaries when it comes to *bomba*. I think that *bomba* is an art that is like a language, if you get stuck the language will die. That's why Latin died, that's why a lot of languages from the Old World have died, because they didn't evolve to accommodate people in today's world. But it's true. It just makes so much sense. Its really important for people to understand the roots but if you get stuck in the past you will never move forward and for us as Puerto Ricans and as a culture to keep this alive we have to evolve with the times. I know its uncomfortable, a lot of people don't like change, you have to embrace the change it's the only way, embracing the change so that it can be passed from hand to hand (Personal Interview 1/27/12).

Las Bomberas de la Bahia

The all-women's *bomba* ensemble, *Las Bomberas de la Bahia*, was founded in 2007 in Oakland, California with the intention to create a space for women's empowerment both through playing drums and producing artistic projects focused on women's involvement in *bomba* traditions and in Puerto Rico's cultural and political history. While their directorship and mentorship has shifted in the nearly five years of their existence, the group has maintained a core of about 5-6 members that have consistently performed and practiced with the group. Though there are other veteran

[51] "I would like to see more people…"

bombera/os in the Bay Area that perform and practice *bomba* as *Grupo Aguacero*; *Las Bomberas* play a particular role in the fabric of Bay Area cultural production. As an ensemble and an organization, *Las Bomberas* have worked to both preserve and educate about *bomba* tradition through regular performances in a variety of settings, even as they have ruptured and questioned some of the most fundamental defining parameters of the form. Needless to say, the group has for a number of reasons been the source of much criticism just as it has also raised a great deal of fascination, and ultimately respect, from *bombera/os* across the diaspora and the island. The fact that the group is co-directed by the *primo* player Denise Solis, a self-identified Chicana lesbian, the group's overall venture of dismissing gendered expectations in drumming and dancing, as well as their work to re-aestheticize costumes and dress-codes, all point to the unique interventions made by *Las Bomberas*.

As with a countless number of cultural traditions from across the globe, the stakes surrounding preservation and maintenance of a form passed down through orality and embodiment are always high, open to question and the source of much debate. I argue that *bomba* practice, in part because it has been so recently re-popularized, in part because of the open and largely democratic improvisational structure, and in part because it represents a history of resistance against anti-black racism, is a particularly charged territory when it comes to codification, politics of authenticity, and general policing and surveillance. In the Puerto Rican diaspora, particularly the California diaspora, at the same time that there is a drive towards exploring the form as an artistic genre, there is also a hyper awareness about "correctly" reproducing the tradition and policing its authenticity, precisely because of the insularity of the communities. In Puerto Rico,

where the *bomba* scene is increasingly more vibrant and ubiquitous, the same concerns are expressed but because practitioners find themselves immersed in a daily milieu of *bomba* practice, they are able to more directly cite and collaborate with other more "traditional" *bombera/os* as proof of their foundational training and ultimately their authenticity as *bombera/os*. Furthermore, because on the island, or even in New York, there are simply more *bombera/os* than in California, different styles legitimately co-exist and allow for a more diverse vocabulary and artistic approach to the form. In other words, the more broad-based the community, the greater incidence of variations that arise from personal interpretations and stylistic nuances, thus allowing the form to evolve without remaining only a static process of mimicry. In California, these stylistic touches often evolve outside the sanctioned space of the larger *bomba* community. Yet, for as much as it is publicly admitted or not, it is precisely this changing texture of *bomba* as it evolved from the slave plantation, to a *cimarrón* (maroon) community expression, to a practice at the brink of "extinction," to a folklorized form performed on stages at government sponsored events, and finally to a vibrant community expression and live cultural art, that has ultimately ensured its survival as song, drum and dance. Most relevant to the subject at hand, and most recently, it is precisely the altering of the costumed requirements and the dismantling of some of the more obtuse gendered restrictions, which have enabled *bomba* to find relevance in contemporary urban culture.

This changing of the form to adapt to contemporary audiences and practitioners, making it a live cultural art, while protecting its integrity and history, is referred to by the

Emmanuelli brothers,[52] *bombera/os* from a well-known family of practitioners, as the crossroads between *evolución* (evolution) and *distorción* (distortion) (Barton, *Soberao* 76). Certainly, any *bombera/o* with some degree of familiarity with the form, has experienced the horror at seeing what they consider a distortion, thus the knee-jerk "*eso no es bomba*." And surely, even if it was only practiced on the island of Puerto Rico thus limiting the participation of outsiders, for as long as *bomba* has been practiced, there has been someone to make the above declaration.[53] Clearly, non-normative gender and sexual identities are not new to the contemporary moment and although research into the possibility of an earlier historical queering of *bomba* dance and practice does not yield significant information, speculation leads us to question the origins of the policing of *bomba* practice to begin with. Thus in thinking about how *bomba* came to be protected, claimed and kept alive as a tradition by the important families of practitioners in the mid-20th century, we can also assume that the *bomba* they guarded and continue to guard serves a particular vision of tradition. The bottom line then becomes a question of just how much evolution is allowed before it becomes a distortion, and more importantly, Halbert Barton, a white New Yorker who works as *bomba* cultural worker, asks, "who gets to decide what counts as a contribution that helps to develop the genre? By what/whose criteria?" (*Soberao* 76). A question almost always asked with undertones referring to racial identity and with twinges of anti-diasporic prejudice, in California, the

[52] For the sake of clarification, the scholar cited earlier, Melanie Maldonado Emmanuelli, is married to one of the Emmanuelli brothers.

[53] In recent years, it has become more widely accepted that *bomba* in Puerto Rico was greatly influenced by drum, song and dance traditions brought with the arrival of Haitian exiles and their slaves following the Haitian revolution. Thus, in other parts of the Caribbean, there are traditional drum and dance forms that are very similar to *bomba*. In this way, *bomba* as a symbol of *puertorriqueñidad* is further destabilized.

question of cultural identity (being non-Puerto Rican *and* non-white) further complicates the matter.

Las Bomberas have worked diligently to bring *bombera/os*, particularly female master teachers from across the diaspora and the island to deepen their knowledge of the form as well as to increase their own visibility across the larger community. In doing so, these women have sought the respect of this community for both their skill level and their dedication to learning the history and many techniques of the form. Having a greater number of strong musicians than dancers, *Las Bomberas* focus their talents on developing complicated drum breaks and vocal harmonies, and often invite guest *bombera/os* to dance with them. They use contemporary urban clothing in their performances, mostly wearing pants and dancing with a scarf, or sometimes a *bomba* skirt over short skirts or pants. The ensemble is typically unified through color coordination, but each performer dresses in her unique style. In their solo dances they focus on footwork, imitating men's dance steps without explicitly dancing in male drag, drawing on a mixture of "feminine" and "masculine" dance aesthetics. In 2010 they were invited to perform at the biennial *Bomplenazo* in New York, the largest *bomba* event involving all *bombera/os* from across the island and diaspora, where they were received warmly by many, although others still reacted negatively to the fact that it was an all-women's ensemble, most, however, were puzzled by the group's co-director being a Chicana.

A highly skilled *primo* player, Denise Solis is widely respected as one of the most talented female *bomba* drummers, or what she and the young *primo* player Amarilys Ríos (the most well-known female *bomba* drummer from the island) together refer to as "*primas.*" From San Antonio, Texas, Solis' Chicana identity comes as a surprise to most

audiences (including myself the first time I met her) largely because of her kinky hair worn in a small afro, a visual signifier commonly found among Puerto Ricans, and broadly read as an indicator of African ancestry. The daughter of an Afro-Mexican accordion player, Solis, in citing her own Afro-Mexican ancestry, also gestures at the ancestry of other Chicana/os, suturing Chicana/o and Puerto Rican histories of slavery and colonialism, and performatively using *bomba* to enact this relationship. Simultaneously however, Solis, in her role as a "*prima*" and co-director of a group with a number of queer Cali-*Riqueñas* and Chicanas, foregrounds the central role of women in shaping and maintaining this history while also decentering the heteropartiarchy so prevalent in traditionalist interpretations and teachings. Solis along with co-director Sarazeta Ragazzi, carefully navigate and balance their need for recognition as "authentic" *bomberas* with their own work to push the boundaries of the standards of normative *bomba* practice and performance. Micaela Díaz-Sánchez, performance scholar and *bombera* who lived in the Bay Area around the time of the group's inception, narrates the following experience:

> A friend from San Antonio, this big old queen wanted to dance with a skirt. It was this watershed moment. He had been to multiple *bombazos* at La Peña [a cultural center in Berkeley, California] and different places…and this particular one was at Galeria de la Raza [cultural center dedicated primarily to Chicana/o Mexican cultural arts]. And so he knew the protocol and for some reason, I was still dancing with the skirt at that time, he wanted to dance with the skirt. You know, San Francisco too right, always contextualizing. Always thinking about *bomba* yes, *bomba* in diaspora yes, but *bomba* in San Francisco. And he went up and Ramón[54] was playing *primo*, Denise was on *buleador*, and I think Javier[55] was also playing *buleador*. And so, his name is Rafael,[56] Chicano, from San Antonio, had moved to San Francisco to be his big gay fabulous self. And

[54] Pseudonym
[55] Pseudonym
[56] Pseudonym

> so he went up there, he had my skirt and he went and saluted Ramón and Ramón just looked down. He looked down, he didn't even say "nah dude I can't do it" he looked down. I looked at Denise, and she was playing *buleador*, there was nothing she could do, she wasn't playing *primo* yet. It was a huge watershed moment. Because self-consciously or unconsciously many of us started dancing more with *pañuelos* or *rebozos* or whatever, and not the skirt, there was a moment after that. There were sort of two schools. There was a line drawn in the sand. (Personal Interview 10/23/2011)

This proverbial "line in the sand" distinguishing two schools, refutes the possibility that acts of disidentifying with codes of sexuality and gender are potential "*distorción.*" Thus *Las Bomberas* position themselves as cultural workers ensuring the artistic and political "*evolución*" of the form, an evolution shaped and enabled by California's particular cultural and sexual politics. Furthermore, the body's movement amongst and between these various codes of belonging (race, nation, gender, sexuality), a corporeally rhetorical move enabled by the structure and form of *bomba* itself, activates the liberatory potential that lies at the core of the tradition.

Conclusion

As I have shown, the moving, speaking bodies in California *bomba* communities work on several levels to engage tradition and history while performing and moving through multiple intersecting identities. Looking at the relationship between Chicanas and Cali-Ricans is insightful, not only for what it can tell us about relative constructions of *Latinidad* and blackness, but for how it activates community building that forces us to stretch and re-narrativize our own experiences as immigrants and the inheritors of the legacies of slavery and colonialism. When members of the *bomba* collective Proyecto Union, whose aim is to unite groups across the diaspora, came on a recent California tour from Puerto Rico, they commented on this phenomena, saying: "it is an honor for us on

the island to know that we have people all over the country keeping our tradition alive" (Rafael Maya 3/26/11). Frances Aparicio writes about the radical potential in the possibility of Latina/os from various national groups understanding their Latina/o counterparts, as "a knowledge that itself represents an alternative discourse given the silence about each other that has been our educational legacy" ("Jennifer as Selena" 94). Similarly, deconstructing the gendered and sexual politics of *bomba* practice makes visible the sedimented layers of oppression experienced by the bodies of queer Latina/o men and women, who through *bomba* learn to corporeally disidentify and code-switch. *Bomba* thus serves as an ideal site for exploring these alternative structures of belonging and *bomba* exchanges in California are powerfully exploding silences and revealing erasures.

In the last couple of years *bomba* performance has repeatedly appeared at the site of political protests, from the two-month long student strike at the University of Puerto Rico in 2010, to the Wisconsin protests in 2011, to Occupy Wall Street events across the United States in 2011 and 2012. The presence of *bomba* at these sites and in these movements, which have for the most part been largely lacking in articulating a critical racial politics, thus works to link the identities of "student," "Puerto Rican," "American," "99%," with African diasporic cultural practices and *Latinidad*. At the same time, this trend also demonstrates the ways in which *bomba*'s legacy as a subversive practice continues to serve the needs of the communities that perpetuate this tradition in contemporary diasporic sites. The collective gathering of black, brown and otherwise marginalized bodies through *bomba* performance at these sites of protest, instead of rendering them empty signifiers of a generalized resistance, shows these bodies to be

active agents with their own narratives of protest, performatively inscribing these narratives into the very discourses that would overlook the intersections between educational justice, class warfare, xenophobia, colonialism and structural racism. Thus in continuing the practice of *bomba* as a live cultural art, these *bombera/*os are actualizing the truly radical potential of creating links between performing bodies, history and politics.

Conclusion

Embodiment, Representation, Identity

In this dissertation I have traced the movement of the body through a variety of performative registers, through different loci of Latina/o identity, across borders and communities, making temporal and geographical turns, lingering in explorations of the topography of intersectionality and the incisive potential of experience. I have demonstrated how the embodiment of language is a representational strategy that is simultaneously the result of discursive power and the disruption of social construction, offering possibilities for resistance that are enacted on and against hegemonic currents of identity. I have articulated the many codes through which these processes are carried out, indicating the ways in which they weave, cross and overlap, questioning how they work together in one body and between bodies. In all four chapters I have endeavored to prove my fundamental claim that identity is performative while performance relies on the same signifiers that construct identity and in doing so I continue to insist that both performance and identity matter, in very important ways.

In writing about these performers and performance modes, I have discovered that the code-switching body is indeed difficult to pin down into any single behavior, any singe pattern of action. Perhaps in part this is due to the fact that I have chosen such a wide variety of bodies and events as sites of examination, or perhaps this is because, by definition, each subject encounters an entirely unique set of codes and intersectional identities that she in turn must strategically navigate in ways different from the next subject. Thus, I suggest that rather than trying to pin the code-switching body down into one totalizing definition or set of relations, it is best to use the code-switching body as a

way to pry open processes of meaning-making, employ it to interrogate liminality, hybridity, marginalization. I have used the idea of a speaking bilingual body to specifically understand processes of Latina/o identity formation and I believe that given the historical, geographic and experiential particularities of this construct, it will continue to be useful in examining *Latinidad*. However, as I have also shown, the concept of the speaking body is not unique to Latina/o experiences, for it will perpetually find resonance wherever there are performing bodies and performative constructs of identity. Rather, as I indicated in the introduction to this dissertation, it is precisely because *Latinidad* is so replete with interstitial ambivalences that the model of the code-switching body proves to be a useful strategy in delineating the many layers of signification that together operate through these bodies. Ultimately then, the relationship between the body and identity should be the critical lens for examining any case of individual subject formation, inter-subjective exchanges, and on the larger scale of community and even global politics. For just as performance and identity matters, the body also matters.

Well into the second decade of the 21st century, we can see that the issues of identity, power and politics have become more starkly pronounced than ever, despite attempts by both liberals and conservatives to inscribe narratives of having "arrived," of having achieved the status of post-race, post-gender, and indeed, post-identity politics. The stakes surrounding claims to identity, including who determines these categories and how they are determined, remain high, charged with the urgency of creating access to material goods and resources, basic human rights and ontological freedoms. In looking at the daily instances where this is made manifest both locally and globally, the body repeatedly appears as the primary site upon which these conversations are enacted and

these issues debated, also actively performing and participating in these conversations. Furthermore, even as we tread into the territory of cyber communication (a different, yet still possibly embodied process of meaning-making) language persists as an important vehicle for the instantiation of identity. In such a way, the model of the bilingual code-switching body will continue to be useful in excavating these sites of meaning-making, signaling the relationship between social power and personal experience, between conflicting narratives of belonging and communities of affiliation. As I conclude this dissertation I would like to point to three recent instances that are especially appropriate in outlining the continued salience of this topic: Republican presidential contender Rick Santorum's recent visit to Puerto Rico, rumors that Miami Cuban-American Marco Rubio will be chosen by the Republican presidential candidate to run as Vice-President, and the tragedy involving the shooting of Trayvon Martin. I bring up these events not necessarily to suggest their import as sites of performative analysis, but rather for the way in which they triangulate the urgency of the topics at hand.

In his February 2012 visit to the island, Presidential Candidate Rick Santorum mistakenly declared that in compliance with federal law, Puerto Ricans would have to adopt English as their principle language in order to become a state. Not only was this a mistake on Santorum's part because of the fact that no such federal mandate on language usage exists, but more importantly, because Puerto Ricans' vehement response to the remark crushed any political hopes for success in garnering delegates from Puerto Rico. Even the extreme right-winged, pro-statehood, Republican-identified[1] governor of Puerto

[1] The second in Puerto Rico's history. Most previous governors (since 1949), even from the more conservative *Partido Nuevo Progresista*, have all identified as Democrat even though they do not vote in US elections.

Rico, Luis Fortuño, disdained the statement saying that although he adamantly supports English language learning in Puerto Rico, at the end of the day he will still tell his wife he loves her in Spanish, still pray in Spanish "and no one from Washington should come down here and tell us how to go about it" (Gjetlen). This incident is insightful not only for how it re-stages the colonial relationship between US political interests and insular disenfranchised bodies, but also for how it frames "the language question" in Puerto Rico as one that is intimately connected to the embodiment of language. By Fortuño choosing to highlight love and prayer, examples that are accompanied by expressive *actions* as well as words, he poses *puertorriqueñidad* against "Washington" and connects this construction to the act of communication with emotions, personal bias and subjective behavior, thereby linking language, embodiment and identity. Language for Fortuño, as well as for the vast majority of Puerto Ricans who echoed his response, is therefore as much about personal identity, an ability to realize and activate subjectivity in spite of discursive power, as it is about national or cultural identity.

Another look into recent events reveals the way that *Latinidad* is bartered as a political poker chip without attending to the particularities of the complex, intersectional plurality of Latina/o identity. As the Republican presidential primary election draws to a close, speculations about vice-presidential candidates abound with one possibility being the son of white Cuban immigrants, Florida State Senator and Tea Party activist Marco Rubio. Rubio, who in very few ways, if any at all, represents the interests and experiences of the Latina/o voting block, lacking any articulation of anti-racist Latina/o politics, has reportedly declined any interest in the position (Gibson). However, the

GOP's strategy of courting Latina/o voters[2] through the body of this particular Latino points to the ways that *Latinidad*, for as much as we can cite its usefulness in mobilizing marginalized bodies, is also conveniently wielded by discursive power, subject to hegemonic interests and usages. Rubio's access to power and privilege in terms of codes of race, class, gender and sexuality is not erased by however he choses to enact and perform his cultural bilinguality through his own body.

Likewise, George Zimmerman, the "Hispanic" who admittedly fired the shots that murdered the black teenager Trayvon Martin, for as much as the media and popular opinion would insist, is not vindicated from charges of racist violence through his own minoritarian subject position. In the case of Martin's murder, Latina/o identity is simultaneously biological, conditional and constructed, while blackness is the ever-fixed signifier always already posing a luminous threat to the larger community Zimmerman imagines he serves and protects. *Latinidad* and blackness are here paradigmatically counterposed through the bodies of Zimmerman and Martin and codes of race, gender, nation, and culture permeate all aspects of the discourse surrounding this tragedy. By looking at Rubio, Zimmerman and Martin through the lens of the code-switching body, notions of empowerment aside for the moment, we come to understand how these codes interact and are played out in the public performances these bodies enact.

Finally, in addition to looking at the realm of politics and everyday enactments of identity constructions, imagining the body as bilingual and code-switching also promises to be productive in examinations of an infinite number of representational acts, from

[2] In the last election the GOP used Sarah Palin as a way to co-opt and activate gender politics in a similar fashion.

staged performance to cultural production. The continued relevance of the topics explored in this dissertation is apparent both the realm of popular culture as well as in other spaces of artistic production. For example, the reality television show recently launched by Univisión, *'Q'Viva!: The Chosen*, follows Latina/o superstars Marc Anthony and Jennifer López as they travel throughout Latin America in search of the most "authentic and talented" entertainers whose selection will culminate in a Las Vegas performance of "the greatest Latin show ever." Watched by over 30 million viewers around the world in its first two months (Huff), this show depicts an a vast range of Latin American talent, including musicians, dancers, and acrobats. *Q'Viva* is an incredibly rich site for the possibilities it offers in thinking about how *Latinidad* is constructed through embodied performance, how two Diasporicans are positioned as the purveyors and judges of tradition and authenticity, how identity is fundamentally cited as essential even as embodied theatricalized representations question this at almost every moment in the show. Its popularity among Latina/o audiences who seek to create "imagined communities" by watching and judging, inscribing their own narratives into the songs and dances of the televised performing bodies also presents fertile ground for the exploration of the code-switching body. Likewise, in the exhibit of woodcut prints that is currently being displayed at the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture in Chicago, visual artist Antonio Martorell explores a series of gestures and attitudes that he identifies as Puerto Rican and Caribbean, subjects who he sees as "consciously or not, speak[ing] with their bodies, rendering into images that which is unspoken" ("Antonio Martorell"). Thus the show "*Gestuario*/Gestures" is yet another example of how identity is imagined

and constructed through a body that speaks, as Martorell reminds us, both deliberately and unconsciously.

The body. My body, their bodies, your body have come together in the process of researching, writing and reading this dissertation, as both subjects and objects, as interpreters, as experience-filled, knowledge-producing beings in order to together deepen our understanding of how identity is rendered visible through performance. We can only hope that this is a visibility that translates materially into social, economic and political justice for marginalized people, for Puerto Ricans, for Latina/os, for Othered bodies. Or, at the very least, may it translate into a megaphone and a projection screen, an infinitely accessible stage and *soberao*, free of hegemonic interests, blasting the oppressive forces that would silence and render these bodies unmoving.

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