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2023

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Filmación Intencional: The Relationship Between Race and Space in the Works of Sara Gómez

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Kelsey Wardlaw

Committee in charge:

Professor José Fusté, Chair
Professor Patricia Ahn
Professor Sara Johnson

2023

The thesis of Kelsey Wardlaw is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mom, Dad, and Morgan - for their never-ending support through my academic career.

Dolores Calviño, Luciano Castillo, and the rest of the amazing staff at La Cinemateca de Cuba -
for their support and generosity.

Yara Castillo - for opening her home to me and supporting me during my whole research trip.

José, Sara, and Patty - for their guidance, patience, and understanding.

Aideé, Andrea, Michelle, and Jovana - for their friendship.

The UCSD Latin American Studies Program - for their guidance and support.

Devin Wright, Conor O’Herin, Shelby Thompson, Sydney Barksdale, Taylor Burrell, Roma
Bustillos - for everything.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Filmación Intencional: The Relationship Between Race and Space in the Works of Sara Gómez

by

Kelsey Wardlaw

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

University of California San Diego, 2023

Professor José I. Fusté, Chair

This thesis deepens our understanding of the work of Sara Gómez, Cuba's first woman director and one of the earliest-known Afro-Cuban filmmakers in history. As a celebrated participant in the 1960s vanguard aligned with Cuba's then recently created Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC), Gómez is best known for her only feature-length film, *De Cierta Manera*. Her thirteen documentary shorts have garnered less attention in scholarship and are conventionally read as aesthetically interesting pieces that follow the conventions of "direct cinema" and pre-1960s ethnographic films. Rather than analyzing them as hyper-realist "representations" of Afro-Cubanness, this thesis articulates a deeper reading of two

of her documentaries: *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* (1966), and *Iré a Santiago* (1964). I argue that these works combine quasi-ethnographic but also carefully conceived montages to slyly transgress the strictures of government censorship in the immediate post-Revolutionary period. They do so to convey open-ended poetic ruminations about the local complexities of Afro-Cuban lives, and their various locally based struggles to (re)define themselves and their historically racialized and marginalized communities.

CHAPTER ONE – TRACING THE USE OF ‘SLY POETICS’ IN SARA GÓMEZ’S

DOCUMENTARIES

During the month of September 2022, I traveled to Havana, Cuba and worked closely with leaders of La Cinemateca of Cuba - the parent company of El Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos (ICAIC). I had the opportunity to speak with Dolores Calviño, Vice Director of ICAIC, about her journey within the world of Cuban filmmaking. Calviño, who briefly worked with Sara Gómez before her death in 1974, told me that her late husband, ICAIC director Julio Garcia Espinosa, created a working group called “Grupo de Creación” [creation group] during the early years of the Institute. Given that he was one of the very few experienced film directors during those early years after the Cuban Revolution, this group was made to encourage a more democratic environment where there would be a team of people making decisions, instead of just one leader. Despite the existence of this group with admittedly good intentions, the priorities of the Institute were not to ensure that there was racial diversity amongst directors and the stories that were being produced. Calviño informed me that the Grupo de Creación was mostly men, and they did not always do all that they could for the Group to be its most democratic. The Group attempted to recognize and support women directors, however, as it pertains to Afro-Cubanness and women and the themes that accompany those identities, they were not priorities amongst many of the directors. At the time of Sara Gómez involvement with ICAIC, there were only three Afro-Cuban directors: Sergio Giral, Nicolás Guillén Landrián, and Gómez herself.

Today, Sara Gómez is remembered as the first female director in Cuban film history, and one of the first earliest-known Afro-Cuban filmmakers. I have been familiar with Gómez’s work

since my early undergraduate years, where her film *De Cierta Manera*, was featured on several of my course syllabi. My undergraduate Spanish professors in the small World Languages and Literature Department at Spelman College focused so much of their coursework on Third Cinema and the contribution those films had on the perception of various subjects of a nation. At this point, Sara Gómez's unconventional production techniques and the intentionality in her film's narratives became a staple in my interest in Afro-Latinx film. Although stories like her's and of people who look like her were not always at the top of the list of stories to tell, Gómez's revolutionary documentaries have captivated audiences with their narratives and visuals.

This thesis analyzes two of Gómez's documentaries, *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia* (1966) and *Iré a Santiago* (1964) to better grasp her unique way of resignifying the semiology of space and race in early post-revolutionary Cuba. These two films have completely different narratives; however, it is their similarities in their unspoken but visualized perceptions of what it looks like to be Afro-Cuban. They contributed a different way of representing Afro-Cuban peoples and places, and even of Gómez representing herself as a subject of her films. Until recently, analysis of Gómez's films tended to valorize her feature length quasi-fictional film *De Cierta Manera* as her truest work of film art. They thus tended to see her documentaries as primarily ethnographic and not so much artistic. Some have written about documentaries as works that followed the conventions of "direct cinema," in other words, as films intended to capture reality "as is" (García Mesa 205, Benson 228). Without a doubt, Gómez's films fix the camera lens of minute details about social life both in public and private spaces. But rather than pursuing a purely ethnological or realist ethnography, in the vein of some of her early ICAIC

elsewhere, Gómez blended ethnographic and auto-ethnographic filmmaking with poetic experimental cinematography and editing.¹

Here, I do not read Gómez's documentaries as either pre-scripted documentaries or as open-ended capture of social reality. Rather, I read them as doing something in between the poetic and ethnographic or auto ethnographic. I use the term "sly poetics" to refer to this open-ended artistic but also quasi-ethnographic intentionality.² I have defined that common intentionality with the phrase "sly poetics". I also argue here that this "slyly-poetic" intentionality had a practical origin and application: to bypass the scrutiny of government film censors on the heels of the 1959 revolution, and to allow her leeway in exploring the continuing collective and personal significance of Afro-Cuban identification in that period. Gómez's poetic aesthetic in her films was a way for her to familiarize herself with her own background. Her family members were of a lettered middle-class Afro-Cuban family of musicians who had internalized racism and classism, and who, in some cases, continued to hold on to such views after the revolution. Gómez's filmography as a director was released during the early years following the 1959 Cuban Revolution. During this time, Cuba "maintained a public veneer of

¹ Gómez's contemporary at the ICAIC, the Afro-Cuban director Nicolás Guillén Landrián, also blended ethnographic film conventions with poetic montages. According to Susan Lord, both Gómez and Guillén Landrián employed "the citizenship practices of decolonized ethnography that emerged in the 1960s (Lord 383).

² In fact, the scripts I analyze here are likely post-production scripts used for narration and possibly to guide editing choices. They were also required to pass the scrutiny of government censors: "When [Guillén Landrián] wrote a script, he would make two scripts always – one to get approval and the real one that he would film" (García Mesa 185). On the other hand, I also do not agree with purely open-ended way of reading Gómez's documentaries that draws from understandings of ethnographic film as something that merely represents "real" social complexity in a way that transcends verbal language. I argue here that the films convey meaning through the poetic use of signs about Cuba, race, and blackness. I refer to that register of potential authorial meaning-making and sign reading by audiences as a form of "sly poetics".

racial democracy while Afro-Cubans were denied access to important private organizations, schools, and professional organizations. The pattern of informal discrimination and formal inclusion became an essential part of the trajectory of Cuban racial politics” (Sawyer 36). Afro-Cuban private and professional organizations in question acted as both refuge and remedy to Afro-Cuban discrimination in Cuba. In *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*, Gómez conducts an interview with a family member who recounts pre-revolution Afro-Cuban life. This family member mentions the existence of elite Afro-Cuban social organizations, of which they were a part of. By the time of production of this film, these organizations had since been dissolved - since 1960, along with Afro-Cuban newspapers (Sawyer 66) - but the accounts of Gómez’s family member reveal the ‘sly poetics’ in motion, subtly revealing that these social organizations were unofficial ways to assimilated into Cuban society by Afro-Cubans. This is one example of the intentionality.

It should be noted that during the post-1898, early republican and pre-1959 revolution period in which Gómez was raised by her aunts—including her great aunt “Madrina—Afro-Cubans attempted “to assert their identity” by forging “transnational alliances among artists and intellectuals” (Sawyer 37). This was a period in which according to Sawyer, Afro-Cubans were “powerful agents of political, economic, and social change on the island; this agency is often cited as evidence of a color-blind Cuban national identity.” However, “Afro-Cubans’ political, economic, and social involvement has been motivated by their quest for citizenship and racial justice” while “many white elites sought to thwart Afro-Cubans’ participation, identity formation, and assertion of claims in profound and often violent ways” (37). The evidence of this participation is visually represented in Gómez’s films within the chosen spaces in which the film’s take place. Gómez’s position in these actions comes post-revolution, however, these pre-

revolutionary acts from the Afro-Cuban community is intentionally but sneakily represented in the shot and editing choices in her films analyzed in this research.

The post-1959 invisibility of Afro-Cuban organized civil society and struggles, combined with the revolutionary government's censorship of any politics that did not fall in line evidences why an early Afro-Cuban film artist like Sara Gómez would have resorted to a 'sly poetics': "[Gómez] began her documentary filmmaking practice in a period when the "double vocation" of artistic and political experimentation was the norm (López 1992, 46–47), and she continued to challenge conventions through Cuba's "gray years" of intensified censorship and control until her death in 1974" (Lord 372). The two of Gómez's films that I analyze in my chapters were both produced and released less than 10 years following the revolution. The censorship of any racial inequality in Cuba was bypassed by the intentional open-endedness of Gómez's films. The decision to have them take place in two physical locations integral to Afro-Cuban identity offers the visibility that was missing from Cuba society following the revolution. This is also outlined in an anthology on Gómez and her work; *The Cinema of Sara Gómez: Reframing Revolution*. In their eighth chapter, "Sara Gómez: *AfroCubana* (Afro-Cuban Women's) Activism after 1961", author Devyn Spence Benson states that "... there remains a gap in knowledge about revolutionary changes in the late 1960s and 1970s (Guerra 20212). In particular, more research is needed on how black and *mulato* Cubans who stayed on the island (and did not move into exile) found creative ways to have public and private debates about racial inequality despite the 1960 declaration that racial discrimination had been eliminated and repeated state attempts to silence public conversations about lingering racism in favor of national unity. Many of these Afro-Cubans, such as [Gómez], found outlets for addressing discrimination and fighting for racial equality in literature and the arts (de la Fuente 2013; Barquet 2011)" (225). This quotation is a

testament to how the invisibility of racial inequality was made visual by Gómez in her films using subtle but profound filmmaking methods that could also be interpreted by many as something that is simply an ethnographic representation of the physical spaces in which the films take place, and not an artistic statement on Afro-Cuban post-revolutionary realities.

Scholarly Contributions

During my search for secondary sources for this research, I noticed that there was a lack of literature that analyzed films by Sara Gómez that narrowed the analysis down to the relationship to race and space (i.e., abstractly speaking) or place (i.e., in terms of properly signified locations). I was able to find scholarship on the films of my choosing, *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* and *Iré a Santiago*, including that of my literature review for this thesis. However, that piece of writing does not focus on their scholarship on Guanabacoa and Santiago de Cuba as racialized places and how Gómez visualizes this in the films. Additionally, it includes other films besides *Guanabacoa* and *Iré a Santiago* and analyzes them and does not consider the elements of semiology within the film analyses. Finally, the accessibility to primary sources of Afro-Cuban films from the 1960s is limited. During my research time in Havana, I was allowed to view and photograph the original scripts of Gómez's films and use them for my script analyses. I have not come across literature that considers both the scripts and films as separate entities for analysis purposes. Considering the concept of 'sly poetics' within the methodology of this research, the access to the scripts of both films and my original analyses of both documents is essential to demonstrating that there are in fact 'sly poetics' at work within the two films.

According to George Lipsitz, the racialization of space and the spatialization of race is a two-way dialectical process. Applying this to Cuba, Afro-Cubans were historically segregated

(i.e., spatialized) and then the places they were known to be concentrated in were symbolically racialized, which then led to further segregation and further racialization. The Cuban revolution claimed to disrupt classism and thereby racism (as its purported corollary). However, Gómez's films contradict the notion that race ceased to be relevant when thinking of majority black and *mulato* places like her hometown of Guanabacoa or Santiago. Not only did they continue to be majority afro-Cuban (i.e., spatialized as such). They also tended to be discursively rendered as racially representative, either of Cuban blackness, or of a purportedly racially fraternal *mulato* Cuban nation. The analysis here concedes that there are multiple competing narratives that encode the racialization of places like Guanabacoa or Santiago.³ I also argue that Gómez deliberately intervenes in that process to creatively designify those locations and resignify them as multilayered and contradictory spatial canvases of signification.

Foundational Scholarship

In my efforts to find a scholarship that has covered Gómez's films and their narratives on race, I found myself searching the archives of existing literature on the cinema of Sara Gómez in La Cinemateca de Cuba. The text that became a foundation in my own contribution to the scholarship was *Sara Gómez: Un Cine Diferente* by Olga García Yero. The book was published in 2017 and contains three chapters. The focus of my foundation for this thesis comes from the

³ My film analyses are based on the workings of semiotics, outlined by Roland Barthes in chapter three of his book *Elements of Semiology*. According to this chapter, the relationships that form between linguistic terms occur within two planes: syntagms and associations. Within the realm of filmmaking, this can be observed by 'filmic signs', which are specific shots from a film that contribute to the narrative. The filmic signs are placed in the syntagmatic plane, and their meanings in relation to the narrative of quest for identity are in the associative plane. These signs, according to Barthes, "are associated in memory and thus form groups within which various relationships can be found..." (p. 58).

second chapter, where García Yero covers some of Gómez's documentary work, including sections on *Guanabacoa* and *Iré a Santiago*. This text is not a complete guide to the entirety of Gómez's filmography; however, this chapter does provide a brief film analysis of each of the films of my choosing for this thesis.

In the section of Chapter Two labeled, "Guanabacoa. Crónica de mi familia", García Yero pulls from interviews with other directors and those who worked with Gómez, such as director Gloria Rolando and Tomás González. Her focus in this section is mostly to elaborate on the details of the film's visual choices. García Yero tells of Gómez's perceived thought process on showing what made it into the final cut of the film. A similar approach is taken in the chapter to discuss *Iré a Santiago*. García Yero pulls from the film magazine of ICAIC, *Cine Cubano*, quotes on the foundations of the film, and even quotes from some of the production crew that accompanied Gómez on the journey of creating this film.

The Cinema of Sara Gómez

Sara Gómez was born on November 8th, 1942 in Guanabacoa, Havana, Cuba. During the 1960s and for several years after her death, she was the only Afro-Cuban woman director in ICAIC. Gómez directed 13 short films and documentaries, including ... *Y Tenemos Sabor* (1967) and *En La Otra Isla* (1967), and one feature-length film, *De Cierta Manera* (1977) before her death in 1974. Many of Gómez's films were made during the 1960s, directly after the Cuban Revolution and after a short period of serving as an assistant director. Her films are known for their unconventional filming techniques as well as editing choices and captivating narration from Gómez herself. As previously mentioned, this thesis focuses on *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* (1966) - which I often refer to as simply *Guanabacoa* - and *Iré a Santiago* (1964), Gómez first ever documentary. Each of these films has a unique characteristic about them; they

both focus on the significance behind the physical space in which they take place. *Guanabacoa* takes place in Gómez's birth place, the town of Guanabacoa in the city of Havana. Guanabacoa, at the time of the film's production as well as today, is known for its larger proportion of Black and mixed-race Cubans vis-à-vis the Province of Habana and most other provinces in central and western Cuba. The film highlights some of Gómez's family members that have resided there and their talents, almost all of whom are accomplished musicians. The film also features an interview with Gómez's great aunt, for which Gómez herself is featured in front of the camera, giving more of a conversational-style interview. I chose this film because of the significance Gómez places on the town of Guanabacoa to the memories of her family. She is also featured as the speaker in a voiceover, heard sporadically throughout the film. There is an undeniable importance to their being from Guanabacoa, and this is quickly recognized within the first few shots of the film. As opposed to *Guanabacoa*, *Iré a Santiago* is not about Gómez's family. This 15-minute film, the title based on the poem by F. Garcia Lorca, explores the city of Santiago de Cuba, where it began with respects to colonial history, as well as where it presently was during the year of the film's release. *Iré a Santiago* also features Gómez's voiceover throughout the film, more so than *Guanabacoa*. Each of these films highlights these spaces of Guanabacoa and Santiago de Cuba as key players in the history of Afro-Cuban culture. Each of the films explore the different ways Afro-Cubanness is seen in people's everyday lives as well as on celebratory occasions (particularly within *Iré a Santiago*).

Notes on Production

In my film analyses, I describe the shot sizes of the images seen in the frame of view in the films. Shot sizes range from "extreme closeup" to "extreme long". The description of many of the figures included in either of the film analyses includes the shot size of the image. In

Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia, Gómez includes many close-up shots and medium close-up shots of the featured individuals to introduce them. While in *Iré a Santiago*, more medium shots, long shots, and extreme long shots are used to visualize the space and the people in the frame. Below, I explain the details of the various shot sizes as well as provide a few figures taken from one of the two films I have analyzed as an example.

Medium close-up shots and close-up shots can be used to introduce a subject in a film or photo, as well emphasize an emotion coming from that person. Extreme close-up shots - where one specific feature on someone's face or body fills the frame - are typically used to emphasize someone's feature or an object that moves the film's narrative. Gómez's films that I have chosen to focus on include little to no extreme close-up shots.



Figure 1.1: Medium close up shot of a person featured in *Iré a Santiago*.

Medium shots have a range of sizes as well. In addition to a 'medium close up', there are also 'medium shots', and 'medium long shots'. 'Medium shots', with reference to a subject in the frame of view, show a person from their waist up, with space between the top of their head and the top of the frame. 'Medium long shots' show the subject from their knees up to the top of their head, once again with space between them and the top of the frame. Additionally, full shots show the subject's entire body. There are also shot sizes that show the full subject and their

surroundings called ‘long shots’. Shots that show the subject from far away are called ‘extreme long shots’.



Figure 1.2: A long shot of a person featured in *Iré a Santiago*.



Figure 1.3: An extreme long shot of several people featured in *Iré a Santiago*.

In addition to shot sizes, I refer to camera movements to describe scenes in each of the film analyses. Here, I define some of the movements I refer to: ‘Tracking’ is when the camera follows the movements of a subject or object in frame. For example, if someone suddenly walks into the frame and the camera follows them for the rest of the shot. ‘Panning’ or a ‘pan’ is when the camera moves horizontally within a shot, while a camera ‘tilt’ is when the camera moves vertically.

Chapter Breakdown

My chapters consist of script and film analyses that help understand how the narratives of each of Gómez's films make headway in a conversation on the relationship between race and space, which in this case is a physical location in which each of the films take place. Chapter One is on *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*. I begin this chapter with an analysis on the script or narration of the film. During my research with La Cinemateca de Cuba, I was allowed access to the archives of all the films produced by ICAIC over the years. This meant that I was granted access to the original write-up of the narration of *Guanabacoa*. I explore this separately from the film analysis that follows it. I extract the narrative from the film after viewing it in its entirety, then go back and observe each scene one by one and extract the corresponding filmic signs. I then break down each of the signs by describing them shot by shot (movements by movement, oftentimes with a figure to follow), and then provide my analysis. This methodology is also used in Chapter Two, which covers *Iré a Santiago*. From this, I come to find that these films have an undeniable connection with race and space. They are showing what each of these physical spaces have to do with parts of Afro-Cuban identity and how Gómez visualizes that to create two artistic reflections on the subject.

CHAPTER TWO – GUANABACOA: CRÓNICA DE MI FAMILIA

Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia, consists of a short documentary film, featuring Sara Gómez - as director, producer, and interviewer - and several of her family members - one of which is her Great Aunt, whom she refers to as “Madrina”. The film is 13 minutes and 21 seconds long and features b-roll footage as well as staged shots of Gómez’s family members, and a short interview with Madrina herself. In this chapter, I analyze the script independently from the actual film. My argument on the sly poetics at work in this film is demonstrated through a shot-by-shot analysis of the filmic signs that I have identified. I discuss how said shots contribute to the narrative that I have derived from the film itself, which is based on theories on the relationship between race and place outlined in the introduction. This chapter reveals different levels of analysis through both the script and film and analyses: Level one demonstrates the mainstream ways of re-signifying Guanabacoa as a place with large Afro-Cuban presence in which non-Afro Cuban events and people have one been present. Level two shows how Gómez’s ethnographic documentary film is not just about showing day to day realities of those present in the place, but reveals that the way that it’s edited and narrated evidences that she is also crafting a poetic narrative of multilayered contradictory ways of being Afro Cuban during pre and post-revolutionary Cuba. This is evident by her interview with her Madrina (pre-revolution), and the glimpses into the lives of her younger family members living their lives in a post-revolutionary Guanabacoa.

This chapter is divided into nine sections that deconstruct the sly poetics in the *Guanabacoa* script and film. The first section is titled “*Guanabacoa* Script Synopsis”. This section covers the synopsis provided at the beginning of the physical script of the film (this synopsis is not spoken by Gómez in the film). The section, “Narration - ‘Voz’” - covers the rest

Gómez's narration spoken over the film's visuals. The third section is titled, "Gómez's Filmic Testimony", which introduces the intricacies of the film analysis following the script analysis. The following six sections are groups of filmic signs that I have determined from the film. They have been grouped by their similarities as well as their context with the film's narration.

Guanabacoa Script Synopsis

The document's first page is a synopsis on the film which briefly describes the neighborhood of Guanabacoa, what it has and what it is to, presumably in the eyes of Gómez. This is the first example I provide on the evidence of sly poetics in Gómez's film, as this synopsis is not included in the narration of the actual film. This section covers what the script reveals about the various racialization of place in Guanabacoa, and how Gómez's filmic montages (introducing her family, and showing mundane and routine behaviors of those residing in Guanabacoa) contribute to said racialization. This chapter discusses the different ways Guanabacoa as a place is signified and read in relation to Afro-Cuban culture and identity. These signifiers include several signs evident in the script: The mentioning of Pepe Antonio and Hemingway acknowledging the conformity to Eurocentric discourse within the place (Guanabacoa). The acknowledgment of Villa del Brujo and "negros brujos" as well as mentioning the respectability surrounding being an Afro-Cuban musician moves the discourse towards being more Afro-Cuban centered. Finally, there is the poetic (open-ended representation) or re-racialization of Guanabacoa using words curated by Gómez.

The language of this synopsis on page one of the script is oddly specific, mentioning things like a monument of Hemingway and "musical Blacks". The first line begins with Gómez stating, "Guanabacoa, a village across the bay has traditions" ["Guanabacoa, una villa al otro

lado de la bahía tiene tradiciones”] (*Guanabacoa*). Considering the full title of the film, *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*, why would Gómez begin with speaking on the traditions of Guanabacoa? Is it perhaps to address the relationship or similarities between her Black Cuban family and the other Black Cuban families of the area? What traditions could she be referring to? She continues the synopsis with, “We walk through its streets, we are impregnated with the peace of its afternoons, and we see its history of ruined castles, a plaque for Pepe Antonio and a monument to Hemingway” [“Recorremos sus calles, no impregnamos de la paz de sus tardes, y vemos su historia de Castillos en ruinas, una tarja para Pepe Antonio y un monumento a Hemingway”] (*Guanabacoa*). Pepe Antonio was the mayor of Guanabacoa during the colonial era. A Spanish man, born in Cuba, destined to continue the legacy of colonization on the land of Guanabacoa. Ernest Hemingway - a novelist, who resided close to the community of Guanabacoa during his stays in Havana. Why use these men as markers of Guanabacoa? It appears as if Gómez is using them as landmarks, addressing Guanabacoa’s colonial history and one of Cuba’s most famous visitors of Sara’s time. Pepe Antonio and Ernest Hemingway, famous white men whose history of residing in the area is often pointed to by locals to give Guanabacoa prestige.” [Then add a footnote with the following: José Antonio Gómez Bullones, also known as Pepe Antonio, was a hero of popular resistance against the English occupation of Havana in 1762. His name appears in Guanabacoa’s municipal anthem. According to Cuba’s version of Wikipedia, ecured.cu, “es en Cuba sinónimo de libertad, valentía, amor al suelo patrio. Defensor ineludible de la integridad nacional, ha devenido leyenda a través de los siglos.” [“he is, in Cuba, a symbol of liberty, bravery, and love for his fatherland. A tenacious defender of national integrity, he has been a legend throughout the centuries”] (EcuRed). Ernest Hemingway lived on and off in Cuba for two decades between 1940 and 1960. With his earnings from his 1940 novel

For Whom the Bell Tolls, he bought a farm 3 miles south of Guanabacoa, and would thus frequent the town. That property is now a government-run Ernest Hemingway Museum. In 1959, he publicly supported the Cuban Revolution, and Castro publicly claimed Hemingway to be one of his favorite authors. In subsequent years, the post-revolution government turned the memory of Hemingway into a symbol of U.S. “yanqui” or allyship with the revolutionary process. The bust of Hemingway that appears in the film must have been fairly new since Hemingway died in Key West in 1961 and was thus unable to witness or comment on the revolutionary process that followed (Feldman 2019).

The script then continues to highlight another common association elicited by Guanabacoa’s reputation and widely shared memory: that of the Black symphonic and pretentious musicians” [“negro músicos sinfóninos y pretenciosos”]. In other words, the phrase sets the contrast between maligned spellcasters of a purportedly “primitive” or “savage” non-Catholic religion vis-à-vis lettered Afro-Cubans like those in her family who disidentified with that trope by emphasizing their respectability. The use of “pretenciosos” (pretentious) here could be but is not necessarily a negative ascription. It could also be a sympathetic statement of the complex, troubled personal and familial reactions provoked by the “negros brujos” trope so frequently associated with Guanabacoa. Using sly poetics in this writing, Gómez is addressing the contradictory nature between Afro-Cuban respectability politics and the declaration that racial discrimination was no longer an issue in post-revolutionary Cuba (De la Fuente 279). Although the negros brujos trope goes as far back as Cuban blackface minstrelsy—where it was one among a repertoire of stereotypes about Afro-Cubans—that widespread maligning of

practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions peaked in the two generations preceding Sara Gómez's.⁴ The film implies that Gómez's family was proximate to that "brujería," but that also kept an arm's length distance from it to mark their middle-class, or middle-class aspiring and Eurocentric respectability.

In the following paragraph, Gómez, at this point, finally addresses her family after giving context to the location and atmosphere of Guanabacoa: "This is the story of my family, a family of blacks - as can be the family of Bola de Nieve and Rita Montaner" [Esa es la historia de mi familia, una familia de negros - como puede serlo la familia de Bola de Nieve y Rita Montaner"] (*Guanabacoa*). Bola de Nieve was a Black Cuban singer and musician, as was Rita Montaner. Both individuals were famously from Guanabacoa. Here, Gómez appears to be indirectly telling the audience that she comes from a family of Black musicians. Gómez herself came from a family of classically trained musicians and played the piano. Likewise, Bola de Nieve was an Afro-Cuban jazz musician while Rita Montaner performed rumba - a music style with heavy Afro-Cuban influence. In other words, both were classically trained Black or *mulato* musicians (i.e., like Gómez's family members) who found a way to proudly perform Afro-Cuban music—including music associated with Afro-Cuban religions—before international audiences. They did so partly through cleverly infusing beats and harmonies from those traditions into a western classical or western popular music instrumentation and form (Moore 1997). By acknowledging these musicians with her own family history of musicianship contributes to the 'slyness' (intentionality) found within the script - it shows that Gómez recognizes the delicate engagement with respectability politics that came along aspiring to make a career out of their craft. Being

⁴ For more on the negros brujos stereotype as part of Cuban blackface, see: Lane, Jill. *Blackface Cuba*.

‘too much’ of an Afro-Cuban (i.e., in performing musical content and form racialized as Afro-Cuban) may limit a Black or *mulata* musician’s career opportunities. In pre-revolutionary Cuba, it would have required that person to walk a tightrope between blackfacing or a quasi-black faced performance, and playing “safe,” European or white-Cuban sounding music. Few were able to traverse that tightrope as cleverly and skillfully as Bola de Nieve or Montaner. After 1959, that practitioner of Afro-Cuban music may have been pigeonholed in the category of “folkloric” music, which in a limited way received official sanction from the Cuban state (Moore 2, 2006).

The script then moves on to telling stories of Gómez’s family of respectable, lettered, classically trained Black and *mulato* Guanabacoan musicians, specifically through revisiting memories of her family as told by elders, or as shown in family photographs. Through this methodology, she says that “one thing stands out” [“se destaca un único hecho”], pointing to the final line of the synopsis, “The need to be a different, overcoming, and assimilated Black” [“La necesidad de ser un negro distinto, superado y asimilado”] (*Guanabacoa*). This line, following Gómez’s brief introduction to the film and her methodology, begs several questions: Is she critiquing this “need” to assimilate and be a perhaps ‘desirable’ Black Cuban? Or is she simply addressing the unspoken but incredibly heavy weight that falls on Afro-Cubans of Guanabacoa? Did she do this herself while growing up with her family in Guanabacoa? Through the context of the synopsis, I explore the possibility that Gómez could be attempting to address all these questions; addressing the absurdity of the responsibility to please outsiders (perhaps a response to the fear mongering of “negros brujos”), making it known to those same outsiders and to those within the community, and recognize that this was the direction in which her life was originally going.

Narration - “Voz”

Following the synopsis, the script moves on to the word for word narration that appears in the film. The use of the word “narration” is intriguing because there is not much of what is meant to be spoken - a full page plus about three lines of text on a second page. This makes sense given the film lasts for less than 14 minutes. The word “voice” [“voz’] is used here, which would imply that the narrator – Gómez herself - would speak the following words through voiceover. The first line of narration is a simple list of names: “Carlos Manuel, Ramieo, Carlos my father [“mi padre”], Cuca, Julia, Carlota, Berta, Sara, mi abuela mima, Madrina.” This serves as a suspected introduction to some of Gómez’s family members, residing in Guanabacoa, as subjects of the film. The second line reads, “Es que nosotros somos Banquecen y Galainena”. The last two words of this line have no translation, so I assumed they were surnames. Upon further research, I found that Galainena is a Spanish last name. Perhaps Gómez is recognizing the colonial roots of her family through this statement. It makes sense considering that this line follows the introduction of her family members. “Banquecen”, is also most likely a Spanish last name since it has no literal translation, and it is listed alongside Galainena. This supposed recognition of colonial roots, I believe, adds substance to the narration that is true to the title of the film; *Crónica de mi Familia*. Here, Gómez is introducing the basics of her family: their names and parts of their roots. She continues with a memory about visits to her cousin’s houses: “I remember visits to the houses of old cousins with hard necks and bow ties, and huge and distinguished mulatto cousins; houses where they keep clarinets in old leather cases or yellow cloth covers. House where Madrina, now, with an effort of 80 years of memory, remembers....” [“Recuerdo visitas a casas de primos viejos con cuello duro y corbata de lacito. Y primos mulatas

enormes y distinguidas; casa donde conservan los clarinetes en viejos estuches de piel o amarillas fundas de tela. Casas donde Madrina, ahora, con un- esfuerzo de 80 años de memoria, recuerda”] (*Guanabacoa*). Gómez describing her cousins to have “hard necks” refers to their nerve or audacity. They may have been known by her as people who were seriously committed to their craft (musicianship). The “bow ties” being mentioned here suggests that they uphold a noticeable level of sophistication, presumably always since Gómez uses this as a defining characteristic of these cousins. They are also described as “huge and distinguished mulatto cousins”. This introduces the relationship between Gómez’s family and race. Could these cousins in question be the ‘stuck up’ and prestigious individuals Gómez was referring to in the synopsis? Since the film is a chronicle of her own family, do the supposed critiques on the community of Guanabacoa extend to Gómez’s cousins? This brings me back to the “musical Blacks” also mentioned in the synopsis. Gómez says that her cousins “keep clarinets in old leather cases or yellow cloth covers”. Their “hard neck” and prestigious nature seemingly extends to their musicianship. These “musical Blacks” in questions could have been a way to foreshadow key characteristics of Gómez’s family. Additionally, I wanted to recognize the use of writing strategies used in this part of the narration. Gómez mentions “old leather cases or yellow cloth covers” when referring to the clarinets of her cousins.

According to Courtney M. Bonam, et. al. “...physical space has been a tool for defining group boundaries and creating racial hierarchy” (Bonam et al 2). My interpretation of Gómez’s choice of words to describe her family is that she is voicing a “racial group boundary” (Bonam) that the elders in her family kept up until that revolutionary moment. This is a boundary that pushes against the broad racialization of Guanabacoa as a place. The boundary up until then was enforced around the walls of the home, in other words, of the place controlled by the family. But

just as the revolution attempted to dissolve class distinctions, Gómez's film dissolves the boundaries of the home, showing both the socio-economic vulnerability and shame of her family (which contradicts the family's narrative about their home) and the rich dynamism of the gamut of Black and *mulato* people's in Guanabacoa's streets (which contradicts well-work narratives about Guanabacoa as a place where either Afro-Cubans either do not do anything significant, or that they only do witchcraft or ill-reputed West African-sounding music).

Gómez describes so much within these few first lines of the narration. She is beginning to walk the viewer through that part of the house she refers to – The family's primary domestic space, that is, the home of the matriarch, Gómez's great-aunt also known as "madrina." In the narration and in the images presented in the film, *madrina* appears as the custodian of the family's memory as respectable lettered musicians, but also implicitly as the enforcer of that respectability. However, the interviews that Gómez does with *madrina*—which includes images of Gómez herself, thus breaking the "fourth wall"—evidence *madrina*'s proximity to poor Black Guanabacoans.

The final line from the initial statement from "Voz" in the narration, Gómez says that her godmother remembers something. This is followed by the first lines in the document from someone other than Sara Gómez herself: "Yes, through the door of Santo Domingo, there, through the big one, we would go and say: Ave Maria purísima: and the priest came with its sweet guava and apple trees" [Sí chica, por la puerta de Santo Domingo, por ahí, por la grande esa, nosotros íbamos y decíamos: Ave María Purísima: y vanía el cura con su pan y dulce guayaba y plátanos manzanos"] (*Guanabacoa*). This memory from *Madrina* is an incredibly profound recollection. Santo Domingo here refers to the doors of one of Guanabacoa's main churches. It essentially reveals that as a child, *Madrina* and her relatives would beg for food at

the doors of the church. She continues the following lines with, “We said: Oh, we're hungry, we're going to church, and we'd go, and they gave us....” [“Nosotros decíamos: Ay, tenemos hambre, vamos a ir a la iglesia y íbamos, y ellos nos daban....”] (*Guanabacoa*). There is little context given leading up to Madrina’s story, almost as if Gómez wants her audience to guess what is being spoken about. Gómez - referred to as ‘Voz’ in the script - follows this story with her personal sentiments: “I like to hear this story from her. She retains the same candor that once made her laugh at the awkwardness of a groom, at a wedding that was not her own” [“Me gusta oírle este cuento. Ella conserva la misma ingenuidad que una vez le hizo reír la torpeza de un novio, en una boda que no era la suya”] (*Guanabacoa*). After Gómez’s comments on Madrina’s first lines, she appears to continue her story: “Ah sí! Era un aguador, que cuando el cura le preguntó: ‘Si hay algún impedimento, manifestarlo con tiempo’, dice él: ‘Señor cura, yo soy aguador’.” [Ah, yes! He was a water carrier, who when the priest asked him: "If there is any impediment, manifest it in time," he says: "Lord priest, I am a water carrier."] (*Guanabacoa*). This is the beginning of more context from Madrina’s previous line. Gómez mentioned “a wedding that was not her’s”. This story also reveals madrina’s proximity to the poorest of the poor in Guanabacoa. If she was invited to the wedding, she was either related to the groom or bride or their friend. The humorous tone further humanizes madrina, as both a stern enforcer of respectability but also as a person who found humor in daily life, even inside a church setting, itself a symbol of stern moral observance.

Madrina and Sara Gómez then move on to talking about some of their kin. Thinking back on the wedding, Gómez asks: “En qué año era?” [in what year did that happen?]? Madrina responds with: “En qué año era? Figúrate que estaba Carlos chiquito. Ahora - cuando vayamos para allá te voy a enseñar donde, donde nació Berta” [What year was it? Imagine that Carlos was

small. Now - when we go there, I'm going to show you where, where Berta was born.] Here, Madrina mentions characters Gómez introduced at the beginning of the narration, Carlos and Berta. She indexes these names as they appear in her conversation with Madrina, which shows her proximity to them. This is important, because as the film later reveals—and as I further elaborate below—Berta was a close family member that held on to very different ideas about race, class, and respectability. It also indexes those family members as living proximate to the home of Madrina, which again, is representative of the efforts by Madrina and presumably some of the other elders that raised Sara Gómez, to enforce standards of respectability encoded as bourgeois and white, or if not, at least Eurocentric. There were two Carlos's mentioned, however I'm going to assume that she is referring to the one who is not Gómez's father. Madrina's choice of words suggest that she is skipping timelines and jumping around different stories and subjects without much context. But here, she implies that she and Sara Gómez are going to visit a specific area. Their conversation cuts off here with a short interaction:

“Pero aquí mismo en Guanabacoa?” [But right here in Guanabacoa?]

“Sí” [Yes].

The narration then moves back into a line from the ‘Voz’ (i.e., the narrator, Sara Gómez herself):

“Las misas de difuntos de la familia se hacían en la Parroquia de Guanabacoa, y entonces había que levantarse muy temprano. Mis tías cuando tenían luto, usaban zapatos de piel porque el charol no es luto, y mangas largas. Fueron reglas de conducta aprendidas de Madrina. Y a principios de siglo, cuando se bailaba la Mazucamba en los bailes públicos del Teatro Carral, Madrina no iba porque era una señorita decente, como ahora” [The masses for the family's dead were at the Guanabacoa Chapel, you had to get up very early. When my aunts were in deep mourning, they wore leather shoes because patent leather is not for mourning, and long sleeves.

They were rules of conduct learned from Godmother. And at the beginning of the century, when they danced the Mazucambas in public dances at the Carral Theatre, Godmother did not go because she was a decent lady, like now] (*Guanabacoa*).

By this point, it is apparent that Gómez has been navigating random memories and facts related to her family's life in Guanabacoa. The above cited line from the narrator (~~Gómez herself~~) has little to nothing to do with the interaction that just occurred between her and Madrina. The script shifts from memories from Madrina, to “rules of conduct” demonstrated by Gómez's aunts and Madrina herself during mourning and other times. The script then reveals Madrina's reasons for not attending the “mazucamba” in the Teatro Carral. This was a ball held in the town's main opera house at the closing of the fiesta in honor of “our lady of the Assumption.” Orchestras would play continuous dance music all night:

Madrina: Why not: Because it wasn't there. We were going to Progress to the Future [“Porque no: Porque no fué ahí. Nosotros íbamos al Progreso al Porvenir”].

Voz: They were societies for blacks, for certain blacks [“Eran sociedades para negros, para ciertos negros”].

Madrina: ...because I was colored [“...porque yo era de color”].

Here, madrina clarifies that she would not attend these popular dances associated with Afro-Cuban musical traditions. Instead, she would attend the more restrained dances of Sociedades de Color (i.e., Black mutual aid societies) like El Porvenir. It is as if she was saying that the societies were where she belonged, since she was and still was - at the time of filming - a ‘decent lady’, according to Gómez, this interaction connects previous ideas on ‘musical Blacks’ or ‘respectable Blacks’. Madrina's presence in this ‘society’ in question poses a question in the respectability politics within Guanabacoa and thus within Gómez's family.

The narration now moves away from the short interaction on conduct, and into an introduction to Gómez's cousin, Berta:

Voz: This is Berta, daughter of Manuel Hernández y Banquecer. Of all my cousins in Guanabacoa I prefer Berta, because as Cuca says she has no complexes [“Esta es Berta, hija de Manuel Hernández y Banquecer. De todos mis primos de Guanabacoa prefiero a Berta, porque como dice Cuca ella no tiene complejos”].

By stating that Berta “has no complexes”, Gómez is saying that she prefers Berta of all her cousins because she is satisfied with who she is and is not focused on what is considered ‘respectable’. The narration continues with the final line of writing on the last page amongst the script pages:

Voz: Do we have to fight the necessity of being a better and superior black? To come to Guanabacoa and accept the total history, a total Guanabacoa, and talk about it? [“Habrà que comatir la necesidad de ser un negro distinto, superado? Vanir a Guanabacoa aceptando una historia total, una Guanabacoa total, y decirlo?”].

This line serves as an interesting choice of an ending for the narration and thus the film. I also read these final few lines as a means of connecting all the scattered pieces of information given throughout the script. Since the first page, there have been statements on being or becoming a ‘respectable Black’ through actions such as membership into exclusive societies and musicianship. Gómez refers to the act of becoming a person with the title ‘respectable’ as a “necessity”. Why this word choice here? The year the film was made - 1966 - is not long after the Cuban Revolution, when Fidel Castro declared that Cuba was no place for racism and discrimination. Given these circumstances, is it likely that some political messages that did not toe this line needed to be encoded, or in this case poeticized. Perhaps through this film, and this

final line which ties everything together, is Gómez's way of insinuating that said racism and discrimination is still present, thus creating the "necessity" to be more than just Black, but a "better and superior black". Guanabacoa, Havana as Gómez describes it within this script, was the space to do that, through the presence of seemingly selective societies, musical ensembles, and meticulous rules of mourning the loss of a family member.

Gómez's Filmic Testimony

The following sections analyze the film *Guanabacoa* as Sara Gómez's slyly poetic filmic 'testimonies' about the various ways of being Afro-Cuban in Guanabacoa and the dynamic between them, rather than reading the film as a fully open-ended ethnographic portrait of quotidian Afro-Cuban life in Guanabacoa. Through the film, Gómez reveals her proximity to both ends of the Afro-Cuban identity: poor and stigmatized, as well as cultured and respected. She reveals the perceptions of Guanabacoa as a place through the interview with Madrina and through the memories Gómez herself recounts in her narration and chosen visuals. Gómez also gives spotlights and chosen screentime to certain family members, two of whom being her cousin Berta, and Madrina. This provides the audience with different ends of the spectrum of Afro-Cubanness in Guanabacoa and where some of Gómez's family members fall with said spectrum. Gómez shows Guanabacoa as a non-sensationalized and non-folklorized place of Afro-Cuban and non-Afro-Cuban culture and history, which contrasts with early ICAIC film's tendency to show Blackness in an over folklorized (fixed, homogenized, and essentialized) manner.⁵ For this chapter, I have identified various filmic signs from *Guanabacoa* such as the

⁵ In the 1960s, as the Cuban government shut down the "sociedades de color" [societies of color] while also suppressing religious practices, including Afro-Cuban religious practices, they

showing of the Guanabacoa Coat of Arms, the shots of orchestra practices, and other visuals and conversations between Sara Gómez and her Madrina, as well as her narration over the film. The production choices within *Guanabacoa* and the filmic signs produce the narrative of respectability; Gómez's family in Guanabacoa are living with the "necessity" of being "un negro distinto" [a better and superior Black] - according to the translated subtitles in the film. Sara's narration provides a cloaked critique of said narrative, and the film's visuals show the audience the relationship between the narrative and the theories on race and space. In this section, I identify a specific filmic sign and analyze the way in which it represents the narrative of the film. The identification of the film narratives is guided by the theories on race and space, outlined in the introduction.

"On August 7th, 1966, while I was waiting for the copy of this film, Godmother died." These are the words one sees on the opening screening to the film *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia*. The first few seconds of actual film is the beginning of a journey into Guanabacoa. The first shot after the opening text is the coat of arms of Guanabacoa. The following shot shows a bus driving past a sign that reads, "GUANABACOA" with an arrow leading travelers forward. The film continues to what appears to be a highway with lights that form large X shapes on the left side of the lanes. A sign is the foreground of the shot reading, "GUANANO CCENTRAL" with an arrow pointing to the top of the frame. The extra C in the word 'central' appears to be random. The sign also says "GUANABACOA" with an arrow pointing to the right. A single car

allowed for the secular folklorization of Afro-Cuban life. This was a double-edged sword, since it gave visibility to Afro-Cubans (including in ICAIC documentaries about Afro-Cuban folklore) while also circumscribing Black Cubans to the role of exotic entertainers. It did not elevate Afro-Cubans as longtime creators of art and intellectualism, partly within the colonial Eurocentric canon but also deeply within Afrodescended cultural traditions.

rides through the frame. The following shot is another road; what appears to be a gas truck is already midway through the frame. A person is standing next to a sign; however, the film quality is reduced here, making it mostly unintelligible. However, “GUANABACOA” with an arrow pointing to the left side of the frame is visible. 16 seconds into the film, the setting appears to have finally settled in Guanabacoa. A sign is shown sitting beneath a tree: “Villa de Guanabacoa” is written above “zona histórica y arqueológica” with an image of a lamp in the upper left corner, and the coat of arms in the bottom right corner. All these opening shots bring the audience into Guanabacoa through shots that differ ever so slightly, each lasting no longer than three seconds. The shot order appears to get closer to the actual location of Guanabacoa with each cut, forming a simple but effective introduction into this short, 13-minute film.

Coat of arms

The first filmic sign I have identified is the shot of the Guanabacoa Coat of Arms. Seven seconds into the film, after the first visuals are words that inform the audience of the passing of Sara’s Godmother, a three-second shot of the Coat of Arms is shown: An image of two small castles next to each other sitting over an image of a mountain. The text surrounding the image reads, “Escudo de Armas de la Real Villa de la Asunción de Guanabacoa Por el Rey Felipe V” [Coat of Arms of the Royal Villa of the Assumption of Guanabacoa by King Felipe V]. This shot of this image highlights the origins of the area of Guanabacoa, as we can see in the text written on the image. It acknowledges the former King of Spain, King Felipe V. This quickly establishes Guanabacoa as the ‘space’ in question in this film. The narrative of respectability is represented within this sign by visually acknowledging the colonial origins of Cuba and thus Guanabacoa -

this makes Guanabacoa a more respectable place to those trying to live up to the ‘respectable black’ narrative.

The short shot of the Coat of Arms shows a lot about what the colonial origins contribute to the narrative of respectability. Cuba’s colonial history with Spain, and the presence of African slavery on the island introduces another layer of the film’s narrative. The acknowledgment of the colonial origins of Cuba is Gómez’s way of saying that the history is part of what makes her family what it is at the time of production.

Family photos

Several times throughout the film, Gómez shows shots of family photos, including some of her, her grandmother, cousins, and presumably other family members whom she does not mention in her narration. Nineteen seconds into the film, after the audience is taken on a journey in Guanabacoa, there is a photo of Sara’s Godmother (Madrina). As previously mentioned in the script analysis of *Guanabacoa*, Madrina mentions that there were “rules of conduct” practiced among family member, particularly women, during times of mourning: “Las misas de difuntos de la familia se hacían en la Parroquia de Guanabacoa, y entonces había que levantarse muy temprano. Mis tías cuando tenían luto, usaban zapatos de piel porque el charol no es luto, y mangas largas. Fueron reglas de conducta aprendidas de Madrina. Y a principios de siglo, cuando se bailaba la Mazucamba en los bailes públicos del Teatro Carral, Madrina no iba porque era una señorita decente, como ahora” [The masses for the family’s dead were at the Guanabacoa Chapel, you had to get up very early. When my aunts were in deep mourning, they wore leather shoes because patent leather is not for mourning, and long sleeves. They were rules of conduct learned from Godmother. And at the beginning of the century, when they danced the

Mazucambas in public dances at the Carral Theatre, Godmother did not go because she was a decent lady, like now] I assume here that these rules of conduct extended beyond times of mourning, especially considering the narrative of the film in which is analysis is based on.

After observing the many photos shown in the film, I noticed that none of the family members featured in them are not smiling. Adults are mostly standing in the photos, and children and babies are seated. Despite the different physical positions of the people in the photos, no one is smiling. The featured photos are not playful family photos. There is not a lot of personality shown in each one. They are carefully choreographed and rather uptight. I understand that family photos, no matter the race and culture of the family, were done in this manner. For the sake of this film analysis, I assume these photos are meant to show a type of performance; one that says, “we are a family of respectable, better, blacks”.

Black Musicianship

The concept of “musical Blacks” was covered in the script analysis for *Guanabacoa*. This analysis directly correlates to the narrative established for the film because of what musicianship does for Blackness within the space of Guanabacoa and beyond. One minute and 19 seconds into the film, a high angle shot of a band is shown. Holding at 16 seconds, this is the longest shot that has been included in this final cut of *Guanabacoa*. At one minute and 36 seconds, a Black conductor is shown leading the band until one minute and 52 seconds. The following shots show medium shots of the musicians in the band: the trumpet, tuba, and percussion sections are shown before a medium closeup shot of an audience member is shown. Five shots of audience members are shown with shot sizes ranging from medium closeup to extreme closeup.



Figure 1.4: Medium shot of conductor in front of band.



Figure 1.5: Low angle shot of percussion section.

The following shot is a three-second extreme closeup of a woman's hands holding what appears to be a fan before cutting to a closeup shot of another audience member watching the performance. This audience member is identified by what appears to be the name "Raquel"

through the words printed below her face. The quality of the film most this label nearly unidentifiable, as there is another word accompanying the name in parenthesis, but the shot is too fuzzy to for it to be read. The next shot at two minutes and 37 seconds is a medium shot of two Black women audience members, one of which is fanning herself. They are not identified by name. At two minutes and 40 seconds, a closeup shot of a Black woman is shown wearing a printed dress and a headwrap. She is identified by the subtitles as “Berta”. From two minutes and 44 seconds to a fade-to-black at two minutes and 53 seconds, a medium shot of Berta next to other audience members is shown. This shot is also a reverse shot where the eyes of those in the frame leads the viewer towards the performance they are watching. This is the final shot of the scene of the band's performance.



Figure 1.6: Closeup shot of ‘Raquel’.



Figure 1.7: Closeup shot of Berta.

This scene, only lasting for one minute and 34 seconds, shows the viewer several visual aids of the narrative of *Guanabacoa*. The first two shots at one minute and 19 seconds after the fade-from-black being the longest shots thus far in the film are some of the first filmic signs of the ‘respectable Blacks’ narrative using human subjects. Highlighting such musicianship led by a Black conductor implies that the act of conducting this band is a reputable profession, evidenced to be a common occurrence in Guanabacoa and amongst Gómez’s family members.

Statue of Ernest Hemmingway

The presence of Ernest Hemingway in Havana is a popular “fun fact” of sorts about the city. The American novelist visited Havana during the late 1920s and early 1930s, then remained there from 1940 until the end of the Cuban Revolution in 1960. In the film, the appearance of his recently constructed bust could be interpreted as a filmic sign of public narratives about Guanabacoa, particularly state sponsored ones that highlighted the importance of a white

American novelist over the countless Black local artists whose lives are not publicly commemorated.

Three minutes and 31 seconds into the film, a long shot of a bust on top of a concrete slab within a pilar-like structure is shown. Two seconds later, a medium closeup shot of the bust is shown. Within these first couple shots, the bust appears to be no man in particular, however, the following shot reveals Hemingway's identity: At three minutes and 35 seconds, a closeup shot of the bust is shown. The film quality heavily darkens the image; therefore, the viewer cannot determine the bust's identity until the camera pans down on the words carved into the concrete slab in which the bust sits upon. The inscription reads, "Ernest Hemingway: 1898 – 1961".

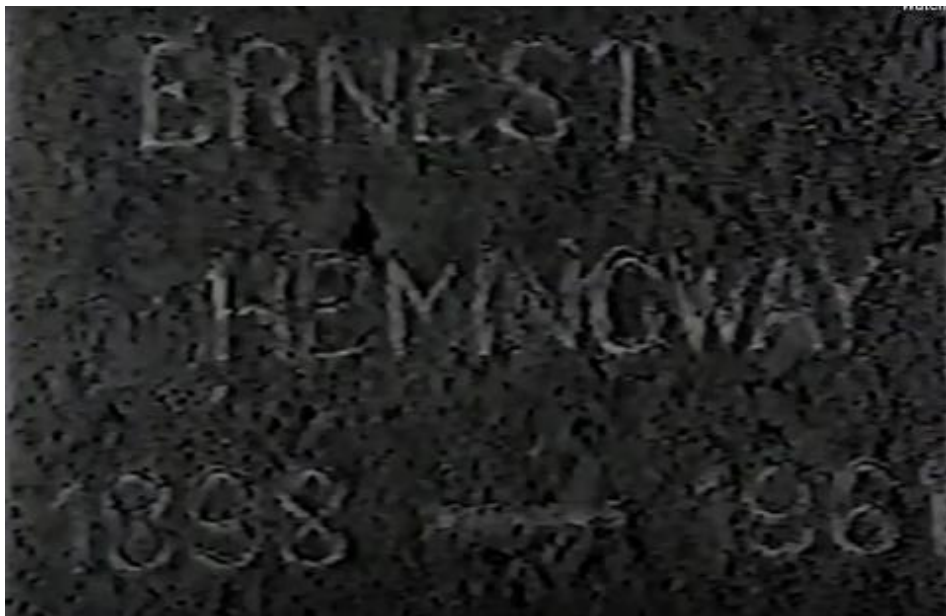


Figure 1.8: Ernest Hemingway's name and lifespan carved beneath his bust.



Figure 1.9: Medium closeup shot of the bust of Ernest Hemingway.

The appearance of this bust might also refer to something that a Black Guanabacoan aspiring to project the area's respectability by white or Eurocentric standards might have pointed to. If asked by outsiders where Guanabacoa was, they might have said: "where Hemingway used to live."

Religious Symbols

Directly after the audience is shown the bust of Ernest Hemingway, several religious symbols are shown. These are symbols of outward appearing, monumentally inscribed narratives of Guanabacoa as a place. They later appear in contrast to the private, domestic, less obvious resignifying sign that Gómez brings to the fore with her camera. At three minutes and 40 seconds, a low angle shot of a seemingly large cross placed on a hill is shown. At three minutes and 42 seconds, another cross is shown. This time it is a full shot of a white cross that is seemingly up on a hill or on top of a building. Behind it is a city view of what I believe is

Guanabacoa. At three minutes and 44 seconds, a close shot of the Star of David is shown. Following this shot, a wide shot of what appears to be a cemetery is shown at three minutes and 47 seconds. The following three shots are colonial ruins: The first two shots displaying this are medium shots of corners of the building. These short shots lead to a wide shot of the full building, revealing crumbling stairs, leaning towers, and a Cuban flag blowing in the wind. At three minutes and 55 seconds, what appears to be what is left of another colonial ruin is shown. It is seemingly separate from the building previously displayed. All the shots described in this section last for more than two seconds.



Figure 2.1: A full shot of the Loma de Cruz.



Figure 2.2: A closeup shot of the Star of David.



Figure 2.3: A wide shot of colonial ruins with a Cuban flag placed on top.

The Loma de Cruz, Star, and ruins were edited into the final cut of *Guanabacoa* could be interpreted to be slyly strategic. Like the mention of the Santo Domingo church in Madrina's interviews, they point to the outward facing religiosity that signifies Eurocentric respectability. Yet these are not the only signs of religiosity highlighted in the film.

Interspersed with these passing images of Euro-Asian, monotheistic religions, Gómez cleverly inserts images of Afro-Cuban religiosity that only those "in the know" would recognize. These are neither public nor private, but rather in between. One is the façade of Guanabacoa's Abakuá temple, one of the oldest in the island.⁶

Family Introductions

Within the first four and a half minutes of *Guanabacoa*, Black musicianship has been showcased once through the shots of the Black conductor and various musicians. Two of Sara's family members – Berta and presumably Raquel – have been introduced, first as audience members at the previously discussed band performance. Now, this loaded filmic sign combines the introduction of Black musicianship and a recounting of Sara's family to provide the audience with more of her family members, giving more context to the "family chronicle" in question within the film.

Four minutes and 32 seconds into the film, Black individuals are shown exiting a building. They cross into the street in front of them with no sense of urgency or much emotion at all. Four seconds later, a medium shot of five of these individuals reading from a piece of paper

⁶ According to Miller, "The Abakuá Society for men is derived from the West African Ékpè Societies of the Cross River region. It was founded in Havana, Cuba, in 1836 to resist slavery, and has since been active in many aspects of Cuban culture. Although hermetic and little known even within Cuba, an analysis of Cuban popular music recorded from the 1920s until the present reveals Abakuá influence in nearly every genre of Cuban popular music (Miller 2000).

is shown. The person holding the paper is shown from their profile along with the person behind them. There is another person next to them with two other people facing them who are also looking at the paper. My assumption is that these people are musicians that have just left rehearsal and they are reading from a piece of music. I say this because as they are looking at the paper, the person holding it moves their hand rhythmically, as if they are conducting a piece of music. The person in the foreground of the shot is also holding what appears to be some kind of horn. These shots, as well as the three previous ones, are the first shots in the film to have a score that is not a classical piece. There is a call and response performance happening - one person enounces a repetitive phrase followed by a group of people responding in unison, with the pattern repeating back and forth.



Figure 2.4: Musicians following along to a piece of music.

At four minutes and 41 seconds, a black screen with text appears. It reads, “Mi familia, la de Guanabacoa” [My family from Guanabacoa]. The following shot is of the legs, arms, and torso

of two people sitting down. It is unclear currently where they are, but there are other people behind them. Everyone's heads are cut out of the frame, as just to focus on the arms of those in the foreground and midground. The two people are moving their arms rhythmically as if they are following along to a piece of music, as they rhythmically sing solfege - the syllables associated with each note of a musical scale. The camera then pans up to reveal the face of the person in the midground. They are a young Black child with his gaze on a music stand in front of him. His name appears on screen as the camera pans up, however the film quality makes the name illegible. Once the camera stops on a medium shot of the child, a music stand is revealed to be right in front of him. He continues to sing and move his hand to the music on the stand. At five minutes and two seconds, there is a high angle shot that shows other band members who appear to be divided into sections by instrument. This is also the first shot in which we see the face and full body of the person singing along to the music next to the child. The band members appear to be a mix of younger children and young adults. Some of the other musicians are also rhythmically moving their hand to follow along with the music, but the audio suggests that the child and the adult next to him are the only ones singing solfege. These scenes all evoke extreme disciplining, almost of a military kind. There is a clear power dynamic and enforcement between conductors and musicians.



Figure 2.5: Medium closeup shot of the child musician following along to his music.

Once the piece they are singing comes to a resolution, the previous high angle shot is followed by a low angle medium closeup shot of a man dressed in a black suit and white shirt, with his hand bringing an object to his mouth. This audio is quite for one second, then a harmonica or a pitch pipe-like sound is heard. As the man blows into the pipe, two harmonious notes are heard. The next shot is a wide shot of a men's and women's choir. This is very centered shot with the women on the right side of the risers and the men on the left. The women are wearing white floor-length dresses and the men, like the man at the beginning of this scene, are wearing black suits and white collared shirts. Two seconds into the shot, the man who gave the starting pitches raises his arms to conduct. He cues the men to start singing and they all let out a strong first few notes. The conductor cues the women, and they follow with the same notes and lyrics. The first few seconds of the classical-sounding piece are a call and response from the men to the women. The song continues and at five minutes and 33 seconds, a low angle medium close-up shot of eight of the men are shown singing. The audio is a continuation of the piece,

however the man shown in the foreground of this shot appears to have been thrown off, as his lips are not moving along with those around him. The following shot is a low-angle shot of a Black man who is singing along with the choir. The subtitles reveal his name, which is illegible but appears to be Adrian'. At this point, I believe that this shot is not in sync with the audio, because although his lips are moving, 'Adrian's' mouth movements do not match with what is being sung.



Figure 2.6: Closeup shot of 'Adrian' singing.

'Adrian's' introductory shot fades to black, along with the audio of the choir. The following shot, fading from black, is what appears to be part of a full orchestra. The hands of a conductor can be seen on the left side of the frame. From left to right, one can see four saxophone players and two trombone players. On the right side of the frame is a bassist. They appear to be in a recording studio since behind them is a window showing into another room. They are playing Danzón, with a woman singing in an operatic style. At six minutes and two

seconds, another family is introduced; Carlos Manuel. He is shown through a medium closeup shot of him playing the tenor saxophone.



Figure 2.7: Medium closeup of Carlos Manuel playing saxophone.

Just after Carlos Manuel comes Roberto. He is introduced through a tracking shot of him coming through a door wearing a black suit and holding a bass clarinet.



Figure 2.8: Part of the tracking shot of Roberto.

Roberto makes his way into a seat with a band as audio of people murmuring to each other and tuning horn play over the shot. Once he is situated with his instrument, the following shot has the camera at a high angle over the band. It pans the room to clearly show each section and the conductor. Most of the shots in the film thus far have been stills, as there have rarely been tracking or panoramic shots. This shot of the band is the first of its kind in the film, assumingly to signal to the audience that a change in visuals is coming. The child playing the clarinet, from the beginning of the family introductions, is shown once again. He is sitting in a chair playing his instrument, following along to a piece of music in front of him.

The introductions of the family members display rather intentional editing choices. Many if not all of them are presented within their respective musical specialty and their musicianship is almost 'shown-off'. This is a blatant representation of their respectability as Black musicians. The shot of some of the musicians leaving rehearsal is easing the audience into what is about to

shown. The individual family members do not appear yet, but the audience has already been introduced to Black musicianship and now the film is about to be more specific with who has this privilege of being one of the most respected family members because of these learned musical skills.

The child playing the clarinet is one of the only people within these introductions who is shown individually before the rest of his environment. This editing choice along with the audio of him singing solfege represents his developing musicianship and thus his developing respectability, as the exercise is seemingly rigid and strict. The child is still young, but he is on the right track to become just like his cousins who came before him. The rest of the family members are shown with their fellow musicians surrounding them and are then emphasized through a closeup shot of them performing. This demonstrates that they are fully immersed into this lifestyle and are accepted as members of those small communities of musicians within Guanabacoa.

Since the screen reads “Mi familia la de Guanabacoa” [my family from Guanabacoa], the shots center Gómez’s family members in their artistic spaces. By then, several instrumentalists and even a singer have been introduced. The audience is thus familiarized with their faces and the instruments they have mastered. The introductory shots spanned from four minutes and 41 seconds to seven minutes and 17 seconds. At this point, the audio changes to a classical background song and the audience are now presented with still shots of photographs. The first one is of a family member named Manuel, who is pictured holding a trombone. A few seconds into the shot, the camera zooms out to reveal the whole picture: 11 musicians arranged into two rows posing with their instruments. Manuel is featured in the center back row. The next shot is of

what I am assuming is a family photo: A group of people standing in front of what looks like a wagon. After these shots of group photos, the film moves into stills of framed family photos.

The next minute and a half of footage consists of shots of the family photos, and Gómez's narration, previously analyzed at the beginning of this chapter. The first photo is a baby sitting in a chair: "Carlos Manuel.", says Gómez. Next is a baby picture of Ramiro, then Carlos (Gómez's father), Cuca, Julia, Carlota, Berta, and Sara (Gómez's grandmother). Two photos are shown of Gómez's grandmother: first a photo of her from childhood, then one of her as an adult. At this point, all the photos have been either baby pictures or childhood photos. The next photo is of Gómez's Madrina (her Great Aunt) during her young adult years. At first the shot is like many of the previous ones: A framed photo atop a solid black background. But then the camera zooms into a medium closeup of Madrina's photo to show her face more clearly. More family photos of Madrina and others are shown, and this is where the bulk of Gómez's narration begins.

As Gómez is discussing her memories of her uncles and cousins, photos of them appear in the frame. She is describing them exactly as she did in the narration. My analysis of the narration is solidified by the types of photos being shown at this point in the film. The photos are posed and none of the featured family members are smiling (except for one photo of what I assume is of Madrina). They are dressed in black suits and white dresses. The final family photos briefly flash in the frame, some of them side by side, then the screen fades to black. The next shot fades from black to reveal a medium closeup shot of Madrina sitting in a rocking chair smoking a cigarette. It is at this point that Gómez's narration, analyzed at the beginning of this chapter, begins to play over the film. Once she has introduced her family members through b-roll footage and stills of their family photos, she moves into an interview-like stage of the film with her Madrina. The interesting thing about this 'interview' is that Gómez herself is shown in the

frame, sitting along with Madrina. It is as if they are having a conversation that they would have on any normal day, except there happens to be a camera in front of them at this time. When she refers to the “big door of Santo Domingo”, a shot of a door of what appears to be a church appears on screen. While Madrina speaks to Gómez, telling the story of the wedding of the water carrier mentioned in the script analysis, b-roll of what appears to be a church occasionally appears on screen. When the story of the water carrier continues, a shot of priests beginning to pray at an altar is shown.

The film then reaches the point where there is matching footage with Gómez’s narration on the rules of conduct for mourning amongst her family members. At 10 minutes and 57 seconds, there is a full shot of women in a chapel being served communion by a priest. The following two shots are of women kneeling in the chapel while fanning themselves, wearing what appears to be appropriate clothing for mourning and worshiping: What appears to be black clothing and black scarves over their heads. All the footage from this point on is what is playing with Gómez’s narration. As per the narrative of the film, these rules of behavior were extended in many aspects of daily life. We can see the respectability of the family through their musicianship, worship, and through their method of mourning. The choice of having the interviewee (Madrina) and the interviewer (Gómez) in front of the camera together during some shots serves as an act of rebellion against the narrative. Madrina is smoking and slouched into a chair, falling outside of the suspect rules of conduct Madrina enforced herself.



Figure 2.9: Gómez and Madrina both in the frame.

After Gómez's conversation with Madrina, a full shot of a woman standing on a balcony is shown. The camera is positioned from inside of the space she is in, so only her back is showing. She then turns around and walks back towards the camera. When she turns around, she is revealed to be Berta, one of Gómez's cousins. For the next couple shots, Berta is shown moving around what I assume is her kitchen; opening the refrigerator to get food, preparing it, then pouring drinks – one for herself and one for someone out of the frame. At 11 minutes and 52 seconds, a profile closeup shot of her speaking is shown, but the audience cannot hear what she is saying.

The appearance of Berta's character here is significant because of her established deviation from the traditional morals and practices of Gómez's family. Of her, Gómez says that of all her cousins, she prefers Berta, "porque no tiene complejos" [because she does not have inferiority complexes]. In the film clips of the film, she is shown speaking, however, the film's soundtrack is edited over her voice. The music score in this part is recorded using western

classical instruments, but with an Afro-Cuban syncopated meter and melodic structure which harkens back to the “cantos de Orisha” (orisha songs). As the camera pans around Berta’s domestic space, it shows paraphernalia associated Cuba’s “regla de ocha,” (e.g., a statue of the Virgen de Regla) a widespread religion descended from the orisha-worshipping religion of ethnic Yoruba Africans brought to Cuba in chains. Ocha, or “santería” as it is also sometimes referred to due to its syncretism with popular Catholicism, is prevalent in Guanabacoa. Berta is the only family member within the whole film whose original audio is not used during her allotted time in front of the camera. This editing choice was essential to enforce the film’s narrative. It is saying that this family member does not have the same level of respect as others because of her lack of conformity to the respectable Black narrative. At the same time, by Gómez revealing her affinity towards Berta, the film also suggests that her cousin speaks through Gómez herself, perhaps because Gómez also does not have, or rather does not want to have “complejos” [complexes].

Conclusion

For Sara Gómez, this film is not only about Guanabacoa: It is about her family and their personal history as Afro-Cubans in Guanabacoa. It is additionally about Gómez herself, as an Afro-Cuban woman in the same place. *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* highlights the Gómez’s family and their lives as people of the revolution. The film recounts moments from pre-revolutionary Cuba through Madrina and many more moments experienced by the family post-revolution, in a time when former Cuban leader Fidel Castro declared that race essentially ‘no longer matters’ in Cuban society. What does this declaration mean for an Afro-Cuban family living in the first decade after the revolution in an area with a large Afro-Cuban population? According to the visuals and accounts analyzed in this chapter, for Gómez’s family, race is an

inescapable element in their lives. However, they – apart from Cousin Berta - have navigated their survival and visibility through the practice of respectability politics. Through this film, Gómez offers a poetic artistic reflection on her mixed feelings on being of a family of Afro-Cuban Guanabacoan, sometimes “pretentious” musicians, who can also be proud of where they are and where they come from. These feelings include the internalized anti-Blackness and classism that may have arisen from her upbringing in a middle-class Afro-Cuban family of musicians, and her sentiments on the burdens that arise from the over folklorized representations of her own people. At the same time, they include the humorous tales of local life, the recognition of their trajectories of life struggle, and the existence of family members who are unashamed of who they are. At this point (1966), Afro-Cuban private organization – as briefly mentioned by Madrina in the film – have now been dissolved, and in post-revolutionary Cuba, and Blackness is heavily folklorized, especially through a medium like film, sponsored by the government, from other ICAIC documentaries by non-Afro-Cuban directors to state sponsored folkloric dance companies. The lives of Afro-Cuban families like that of Gómez are not shown as they have been in this film: As skilled musicians and sharp lettered individuals, who hold their ground in Eurocentric cultural spheres (e.g., of classical music) but who also hold on to their Afrodescended, very much living local traditions (e.g., Berta as a practitioner of *regla de ocha*). *Guanabacoa* is about contemporary, contradictory, multi-layered, and deeply human blackness in contrast with fixed, folklorized, frozen-in-time Blackness. Gómez’s artistic approach shines in this deeply personal film, yet it was an approach that she began to hone in on in earlier documentary films, particularly in *Iré a Santiago*, the subject of the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE - IRE A SANTIAGO

Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia was Gómez's fourth short documentary. Two years before, she directed and wrote her second documentary, *Iré a Santiago*. Like her 1964 *Guanabacoa* film, this precursor utilized a similar slyly poetic quasi-ethnographic composite style, with footage resembling filmic portraits (medium close-up and close-up shots of individuals and groups) shot on streets interspersed with narration. One could consider *Iré a Santiago* a rehearsal, except this earlier example of Gómez's work did not deal with the conflicting thoughts and feelings about Gómez's family and local community in the province of Habana. Instead, it focused on a location 500 miles southeast: the city and harbor of Santiago, Cuba's oldest and second most populous city.

As a multilayered and contested symbol, Santiago is also often presented as a metonym for multiracial Cuban nationhood. The city is historically and contemporarily racialized (Censo de Población y Viviendas: Cuba 2012) and Gómez encounters that as a visitor, surveying the city and its famous sites, but also as a witness to other layers of signification that transcend both historical and dominant narratives as well as the official government narrative about race and nation in 1962. In the scripted narration, Gómez refers to Santiago as a multilayered and contested symbol, while Santiago is also often presented as a metonym for multiracial Cuban nationhood. In a sense, it is very different than *Guanabacoa*, which historically had a reputation for being a space of concentrated Afro-Cuban religiosity and its related musical cultures. Santiago instead has been typically represented as the birthplace of Cuban nationhood, both through the narrative about racial fraternity consummated in the independence struggles that started in Eastern Cuba in the 19th century, and the biological and cultural fusion that is evident in Santiago's most famous musical creation: Cuban son. Here. Gómez's narration and lens take

us above and beyond those superficial but widely held narratives. By zooming out and in, the film re-signifies Santiago as a place of many types of blackness, or also many shades of Afro-descendancy, both in terms of positionality but also history and ethnic descent.

Gómez makes references to two poems in the film, one being “Al Partir” by Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. “Al Partir” is a romantic nationalist homage that speaks on parting from an idealized home. The phrase “iré a Santiago” comes from a poem by Spanish poet Federico García Lorca titled “Son de Negros en Cuba”. This piece serves as a poetic entry point for Gómez, and she uses this phrase to bring the audience into the city of Santiago. This chapter analyzes how Gomez uses García Lorca's poetic encounter with Santiago to guide her own slyly poetic reflections about the city's past and present. The sly part here refers to the use of poetic documentary filmmaking to convey the enduring significance and multiple meanings of *mulato* and blackness in a period when the Cuban government's official line was that racism had been "solved." Thus, blackness or mulatez would no longer define a majority Afrodescended and multiply racialized place like Santiago. The film slyly deviates from that line without triggering any censorship interventions.

This chapter is divided into sections that reflect the ordering of the argument in this chapter. The first section, “Script Introduction”, analyzes the introductory portion of Gómez’s narration of the film. The following three sections are derived from the sections of the script itself, and analyze the content spoken by Gómez line by line. The sections include, “Santiago y Los Franceses”, “La Bahía y La Historia”, and “Intermedio Místico”. The chapter then moves into the film analysis, providing shot-by-shot analysis of the filmic signs chosen that best present the film’s narrative. I then discuss an analytical tool used to analyze the film, which I refer to as a “figurative map”. This ‘map’ visualizes the levels from which Gómez is moving the audience to

get a closer, more genuine look at the city of Santiago. The following eight sections group together filmic signs that show things like, a family in their home, locals of Santiago walking the streets, the meeting of two nameless characters, a renowned annual carnival, and tourist recommendations for the audience.

Script Introduction

The first page of the script of *Iré a Santiago* serves as an introduction for what the audience is about to hear. Like *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*, the script is more of a narration rather than dialogue between characters like you would see in a feature-length fiction film, such as *De Cierta Manera*. In the Spanish version of this duration, there are only three pages of text. The first page begins with a simply centered title of the film, "IRE A SANTIAGO", with the word "comentario" beneath it. The first line of text reads, "Sí... dicen que somos de una isla donde los mulatos huelen a yerba fresca, donde la tierra tiemble...." Here, Gómez refers to *mulato* individuals with a more general tone, perhaps to suggest that the entire island is made up of *mulato* people because of slavery and colonialism. She says that they smell of "yerba fresca", something that is not necessarily particular to Santiago, but to the entire island of Cuba. Her use of the words "we are from an island" is what led me to label this level as a generalization of Cuba as a nation, "where the earth trembles" referring to the revolution. Through this short line of text, Gomez is dropping characteristics of Cuba as a very brief introduction of the island within the introduction of this short film. This is the first conceptualization the audience receives of the space in which the film is essentially traveling within, where Gómez is acting as a tour guide.

The third line of text speaks of the streets of Santiago: “En las calles tenemos un mercado de color y pregones; de maiz la ‘ayaca’; el pan con ‘macho’” (*Iré a Santiago*). Gomez uses food within the text so the audience can visualize the streets of Santiago: “Aquí nos habituamos al calor bebiendo el jugo fermentado de raíces” [“here we get habituated to heat drinking fermented juice from roots”]. This likely refers to “Pru Oriental,” a drink made of fermented root extracts that was likely brought to Cuba by the diaspora of enslaved or free Blacks and *mulatos* that arrived in Santiago during the Haitian Revolution. She also mentions “pan con macho” which refers to a roasted pig sandwich typically sold in Santiago, especially during its famous July 26 carnival. Gómez additionally mentions “ayaca” (also spelled *hallaca*), which refers to “a local Santiago de Cuba version of fresh-ground cornmeal rolled with meat and stuffed into cornhusks, similar to *tamales*” (Garth 1). By specifying foods typical of Santiago, it gives the earlier part of the documentary a quasi-ethnographic quality, as if an anthropologist was representing specific details about a population unfamiliar to others. However, instead of “they,” there is the use of the first-person plural “we,” so Gómez is a visitor who reports on what she captures but she is also discovering something about her singular and plural self there.

The introduction of the script nears its end with the lines “Pero todo esto es casi una leyenda. Esto es el ‘mito-Cuba’ - construído en un Son” [But this is almost all a legend. This is the ‘myth-Cuba’ - built in a Son] (*Iré a Santiago*). Here, Gómez is insinuating that everything that she has said about Santiago thus far is a product of fantasy; a ‘mythical’ version of Cuba. Son is a type of music and dance, native to Eastern Cuba (Santiago). Gómez follows with, “Lo que pasa es que ahí está Santiago... y entonces, es cierto: ‘Cuba es una Isla de las Antillas’ y ‘mulato es un estado de ánimo’ [what happens is that there is Santiago... and then, it is true: “Cuba is an Island of the Antilles” and “mulato is a state of mind”] (*Iré a Santiago*). This is a key

pivot in the narration that gives the viewer a window into Gómez's poetic orientation, that is, away from conventional symbolisms ascribed to Santiago as a piece (dispelling legends, not just about Santiago, but the "mito-Cuba") in other words, of Santiago as a metonym for all Cuba. Gómez's narration makes it clear that her film is a departure from several popular symbolic encodings of Santiago introduced in the first half of the documentary. The first being the view of Santiago as the cradle of biological and cultural miscegenation epitomized by son, and the other being the identification of Santiago as an "ajiaco," a widely consumed stew akin to the melting pot narrative in the US as a symbol of cultural and biological mixed ancestry (symbolized by other ethnically encoded food items like ayaca (a Taíno word and food), pan con macho (bread and pig, encoded as Spanish), and the Pru drink, encoded as Black but also inter-Caribbean, specifically Franco-Haitian or perhaps also West Indian Black.

"SANTIAGO Y LOS FRANCESES"

The commentary then moves on to a subsection: "SANTIAGO Y LOS FRANCESES". At this point, the script and the narration turn towards topics that complicate the previously mentioned narratives of Santiago. Gómez does this through interludes that interrupt a linear way of describing her encounter with Santiago, either in terms of traveling through the region's geography, or in the retelling of the region's history, this section on the history of the 'relationship' between Santiago and the French. This section of the commentary gets to be more specific with Santiago de Cuba. Gómez begins by saying, "Esto es el entierro de Esperanza. La presidente de una sociedad de franceses. Porque Santiago tiene negro que se llaman franceses y bailan una baile de salón al ritmo de un Tumba a la - que llaman Francesa" [This is the funeral of Esperanza. The president of a French society. Santiago has Blacks who are called French, and

they dance to a French Tumba rhythm”] (*Iré a Santiago*). ‘Tumba Francesa’ follows the trope of Santiago’s Franco-Antilleanness, which contrasts with national Cubanness by underlining Santiago’s historical connections to neighboring island colonies and plantation societies: “Gómez emphasizes that, just as Cuban society cannot be homogenized as a singular whole, its racial and ethnic groups cannot be understood without taking into account their internal specificities provoked by the diverse cultural, political, and economic dynamics of the nation” (Casamayor-Cisneros 65). Gómez goes on to recognize that the existence of this French culture in Santiago is because of the Haitian Revolution. Gómez evokes that the French brought enslaved peoples to what is now Santiago and began cultivating coffee plantations. She continues to say that now, Santiago, with no French people or coffee plantations, just has the French Tumba left from that period. “Nevertheless, it is with a certain irony that Gómez reminds us that a century and a half later, Santiago no longer has French people . . . nor French coffee farms.” All that survives is the tumba, which, the narrator emphasizes, “they call French.” The traditions endure, and the new society cannot wipe them out to leave a clean slate” (Casamayor-Cisneros 67). This is the first piece of history on Santiago given by Gómez on what has shaped Santiago and its people into what she recognized them to be at the time the film was produced.

“LA BAHÍA Y LA HISTORIA”

The following section is titled, “LA BAHÍA Y LA HISTORIA” [The Bay and History]. It appears the commentary is moving backwards in terms of telling the history of Santiago, because the previous subject matter was on the French presence in the city and now, the script has moved towards the bay, signifying an arrival or a beginning. However, Gómez is highlighting pieces of information that are essential to one’s understanding of the culture within Santiago. She begins

by saying that history “always begins in the bay”. This is a return to the historical narrativization of Santiago: “Colón surca sus aguas en ‘La Niña’ [Columbus sails these waters in “La Niña”] (*Iré a Santiago*). “La Niña” refers to one of the ships used during Columbus’s voyage in 1492. It is in this section where the reader learns about Cuba (and thus Santiago’s) early colonization, including the fact that Black people arrived in Cuba through Santiago: “Por Santiago llegan los primeros negros a Cuba” [Through Santiago arrives the first Blacks in Cuba] (*Iré a Santiago*). From here, Gómez adds bits and pieces of Cuban history that occurred within or in relation to Santiago. At this point, Gómez references Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda in “Al Partir”. The sonnet reads as a lamentation upon Gómez de Avellaneda being forced to leave her home in Santiago, specifically in the year 1836 when she set sail for Spain. This piece is the beginning of Gómez de Avellaneda’s constant evocation of Santiago through her craft (di Lorenzo 29). Just as García Lorca’s poem serves as a poetic entry point into Gómez’s own visually poetic journey through Santiago, as does “Al Partir”, despite its brief mention in the script. Nevertheless, Gómez’ poetic journey through Santiago is very different, given not only her positionality as a Western Afro-Cuban visiting the east of her country, but also her generational standpoint post-independence and post-revolution. Thus, we can read García Lorca’s and Gómez de Avellaneda’s poetic works as points of departure for Gómez’s own witnessing of Santiago as a material and symbolic place, Gómez mentions that Gómez de Avellaneda wrote her “classic sonnet” about the waters of Santiago. Like García Lorca and Gómez de Avellaneda, Gómez is poetically re-witnessing Santiago as an outsider or a traveler and shares her poetic testimony through this script. It is both an arrival (like García Lorca) and a desire to go to Santiago. This is evident through Gómez’s continued use of first-person plural in the script - “Habitamos” [We accustom], “tenemos” [we have], and “nuestros hogares” [our homes].

The following line continues with pieces of Santiago's history: “Aquí surge el primer músico culto y el primer son anónimo. Nace Antonio Maceo” [Here arises the first cultured musician and the first are anonymous. Antonio Maceo is born] (*Iré a Santiago*). The first sentence of this quote is presumed to be referring to the rich culture of Afro-Cuban music that stemmed from Santiago, considering that the first Black individuals on the island arrived in this city. Gómez stating that the first of these musicians “are anonymous” implies that those musicians have not been properly recognized or credited for their contributions to Afro-Cuban music and Gómez knew it to be at the time of this film. Gómez then briefly mentions that Antonio Maceo was born in Santiago. Maceo was a guerilla general in the Cuban army of independence. A Cuban mulato, he famously fought for Cuban independence from Spain. These lines that mention a “cultured musician” as well as someone like Antonio Maceo, a pro-liberation General, following the mention of Gómez de Avellaneda serves as a subtle act of rebellion against the previous reach for white validation.

The last three lines of this section, Gómez highlights the arrival of essential items into Santiago: “Llega el primer contrabando de armas para la independencia y tiene lugar la batalla naval decisiva de la guerra Hispano-Cubana... Norteamericana, después de Santiago” [The first smuggling of weapons for independence arrives and the decisive naval battle of the Spanish-Cuban War takes place... North American, after Santiago] (*Iré a Santiago*). Gómez is recognizing Santiago as a key location during the quest for independence for Cuba. Highlighting the smuggling of weapons in the name of independence, once again, serves as a subtle act of resistance, recognizing the role Santiago has played in history to make Cuba what it was at the time of this film.

The earlier line about Santiago being the port of entry for the first enslaved Africans forced to work in Cuba also signifies the bay as a port of entry for arrivals of all types - Some through voluntary migration, or some through forced chattel labor. That experience of displacement, including through the violence of slavery or revolution, is what made Santiago's multi-ethnic population what it is. It thus re-signifies Santiago, not as an emblem of national unity, but rather as a place of cohabitation of people coming from different worlds and living in different positionalities.

“INTERMEDIO MISTICO”

The following section of the film is labeled as, “INTERMEDIO MISTICO”. The included English translation of the script found with the archives of La Cinemateca de Cuba translates this to, “Mystic Interlude”: “Se rumera, no se ha confirmado, que cada tarde aparece en las Múcaras una mujer en traje de baño y pañuelo de rayas anudado a la cabeza que desea comunicarse. Pero la historia ha comenzado de nuevo en Santiago...” [It is rumored, it has not been confirmed, that every afternoon in Las Múcaras a woman in swimsuit and striped scarf knotted to the head that wishes to communicate. But history has begun again in Santiago....] (*Iré a Santiago*). These are the only few lines within the Mystic Interlude. This section essentially sprinkles this legend of this woman as almost a mythical selling point. This story highlights the mystery that Santiago may come with. This especially makes sense considering the following and final section of the script is titled, “NOTAS PARA EL TURISTA”.

The final section of the script concludes Gómez's narration by offering her suggestion for tourists in Santiago. Gómez leading into this section by closing the “Intermedio Mistico” with “Pero la historia ha comenzado de nuevo en Santiago” implies that history is always restarting in

this place without a fixed origin or endpoint. She follows into the tourist recommendations by pivoting from the previous line to more quotidian locations and groups of people in Santiago: “Se recomienda, que si va a Santiago, no olvida subir... Al Morro. Y subir a Puerto Boniato” [It is recommended that if you go to Santiago, do not forget to go up... To Morro. And go up to Puerto Boniato] (*Iré a Santiago*). Gómez continues with the following lines: “Y aunque te duelen los oídos subir a la Gran Piedra. Y subir a la Catedral. Y a la Calle Pedro Pico no dejas de subir. Ni de subir a alguna casa Santiaguera” [And although your ears hurt, climb the Great Stone. And go up to the Cathedral. And to Pedro Pico Street, do not stop climbing. Or to go up to any Santiaguera house] (*Iré a Santiago*). The final lines of this section, and thus of the script, are Gómez’s final suggestions for tourists to see the University and the infamous carnivals of Santiago. This section, much like other sections of the script, reads like a commercial, almost urging people to take in as much of Santiago’s beauty and history as possible. However, Gómez uses the word “subir” (to move up) on multiple occasions in this section. This is urging those who visit to continue moving upward in the city, looking at Santiago from different heights and locations that are not ground level, “evident” scenes guided by conventional tropes about Santiago. Gómez’s tourist destination suggestions as well as the highlighted pieces of history throughout the script make the film appear to be a personally curated advertisement for Santiago, consisting of information that Gómez finds most essential for the audience.

Film Introduction

“Agradezco a Jorden Roos sus consejos de: Economía y Disciplina ” [I thank Jorden Roos for his advice on: Economy and Discipline]. These are the words over a black screen that are among the first few seconds of *Iré a Santiago* (1964). Nine seconds into the film, the

audience is met with a quote painted onto a brick wall: “Cuando llegue la luna llena iré a Santiago de Cuba iré a Santiago en un coche de agua negra” [When the full moon comes, I will go to Santiago de Cuba, I will go to Santiago in a black water car]. This is an excerpt from García Lorca’s poem. Suddenly, a woman walks in front of the quote and the camera is tracking her movements as she walks towards and then up a flight of stairs. As she ascends the stairs, the camera holds to show that “ICAIC presenta” is painted on the front of two of the steps. *Iré a Santiago* is then seen written on another step. The names of the film’s crew are painted on multiple steps and shown for the next several seconds. Finally, a pole in the foreground of a shot with the name “Sarita” painted onto it is shown next to a step that reads “Guion y Dirección ” [script and direction]. These opening credits are a small glimpse into the creativity demonstrated throughout *Iré a Santiago*.

In my previous chapter, I explained how I extracted a narrative from *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* then provided shot by shot analysis that pushed said narrative. The slyly poetic narrative arc that decipher in *Iré a Santiago* I ponders on representations of Santiago’s past and present as it complicates representations of Blackness in Cuba. As in her documentary of Guanabacoa, *Iré a Santiago* also depicts multiple experiences of blackness superimposed in a particular place through both the way race has been spatialized in Cuba, and the way Cubans, including Afro-Cubans represent each other. At first glance, this film appears to be a 15-minute collection of random and posed shots of people living their lives around Santiago de Cuba. However, upon analyzing the filmic signs of what made it to the film’s final cut, I have determined that each shot, their locations, and the narration playing over it is all done rather strategically to communicate the film’s narrative in rather unconventional ways for an early 1960s documentary production.

Figurative Map

The previous analysis of the script covers an introduction spoken by Gómez in the film. Through those lines, Gómez appears to be zooming into a map of Cuba. She provides a visual the closer the audience zooms into the figurative map. Here, I describe each ‘zoom’, per se, as a level of description. The first level begins on the first line of text; “Sí... dicen que somos de una isla donde los mulatos huelen a yerba fresca, donde la tierra tiemble...”. This is the broadest of all the levels of the map because it references Cuba as a whole.

The second level on the map begins with the second line of text which reads, “Aquí nos habituamos al calor bebiendo el jugo fermentado de los raíces.” Besides this being a mention of Pru, the drink that evokes inter-Caribbean Afrodescendance concentrated in Santiago, it also reflects a layer of meaning at the scale of the environment, or landscape, and the publicly evident public. The use of first-person plural also points to a national “we” that Gómez is to decipher for herself, almost as if she was pinning down her own position that symbolic map of a national ‘we’.

The third line of text also begins our third level of the map; the streets. Now that Gomez has described the islands left Cuba and generalized the Cuban population, we have now zoomed-in even further on the map to the streets of the nation: “En las calles tenemos un mercado de color y pregones; de maiz la ‘ayaca’; el pan con ‘macho’.” Gomez uses his food by personifying the dishes mentioned (plantain and ayaca). The next level proves to be an even more profound description of the Cuban people. Now that we as the audience have visualized the island of Cuba, established a personality to the Cuban people in general, and personified the streets of Cuba, this level humanizes the individuals that inhabit said streets. I have labeled this level as the

personality of the community: “Reímos y hablamos en voz alta con agresividad y orgullo. Nuestra mímica es exagerada y graciosa.” This personality generalization speaks of the typical personality of a Cuban individual, according to Gomez. She speaks of the people shamelessly laughing with pride while acting it in an exaggerated and ‘funny’ manner. It also gives Gómez a sense of togetherness, of someone who can come from a barrio in Western Cuba and find the same way of speaking and the same sense of humor on the streets of a city so far to the East.

The final level zooms in even further into the map into the homes of Cuban people: “Nuestros hogares son acogedores para recibir el ‘compadre’, el ‘hermano’.” In a way, this fifth level is almost a continuation of the previous level, because it does continue with a description of the personality of Cubans by stating the natural hospitality within the homes of the people, who are supposedly there willing to host a companion. The reason I put this on a different level than level 4 was because Gomez has pushed in even further from the personality of the general population, into their homes, which I find as a very intimate observation. This is also the level of opening the home (i.e., the private domestic sphere) through the introduction of the camera, if for a moment. The film does not imply that it reveals hidden details about private life. This, after all, is not like the Guanabacoa film in that it has no interviews. Also, the subjects are not Gómez’s family, and she marks herself as a visitor, as both a domestic tourist but also a kind of ethnographer.

House of La Santiaguera

Following the opening credits, several shots of people walking the streets of Santiago are shown. It is as if the camera operator is walking through a busy area during the middle of day to capture people at their most mundane: People are walking through the street, riding on streetcars,

approaching carts and vendors, and clutching onto their groceries. It is during this time that Gómez's narration begins. For the first few minutes and for the first part of the narration, these random movements of people, along with camera mugging (the noticing of the presence of a camera) is being shown. Then at around two minutes and 51 seconds, an Afro-Cuban man is shown sitting in the doorway of what I assume is his residence. The following shot is another man centered in the frame sitting on a rocking chair. However, the chair is facing the right side of the frame and the man sitting in it has his head turned to face the camera. Several individuals in rocking chairs are then shown for the next few seconds.

At this point, the film has moved from the chaos of the streets to the comfort of an Afro-Cuban home, just as the narration zoomed into a figurative map. The audience is moving inside of someone's home at this point. It is also at this point that a song by Bola Nieve, an Afro-Cuban musical legend, begins to play. This is perhaps a nod to Gómez's own hometown, as if she was recognizing the similarities between these homes and the ones she grew up in in Guanabacoa. Three Afro-Cuban women are posed in front of the camera together. One is sitting in a chair with a scarf on her head and wearing fashionable sunglasses. The other two women are looking off camera momentarily then they collectively laugh at an unknown source.



Figure 3.1: Medium shot of three women reacting to something offscreen.

Following this shot, at three minutes and 20 seconds, a woman is shooing away a child as she adjusts herself to be the center of the shot, sitting in a rocking chair. This shot added to the humorous tone within this household, as everyone featured in the frame laughed as if they felt silly for being filmed. It thus shows these individuals as happy and quirky, but also as candid.



Figure 3.2: Woman in a rocking chair shooing away a child.



Figure 3.3: The same woman from figure 1.2 now positioned in the center of the frame in a medium shot.

The showing of these families in the spaces they are comfortable in (their own homes) starts the film off with a personal element, a local element. Although the shots are obviously staged, those

who are featured are within a space where their history and culture radiate off their bodies and it is shown through their normal actions in which Gómez has captured on camera. Something that stands out is the breadth of color in those shown on screen. Gómez is not showing just a Santiago mulato, but many shades: The dark skinned and light skinned Santiago. She is showing generations of Afro-Cuban people who are not far from slavery. This is very young, post slavery, post-colonial, post-revolutionary Santiago. Through these shots, Gómez displays multiple historical experiences coexisting, particularly, inside one household.

Ojo Brujo Bar

The next filmic sign pulled from the film is three minutes and 33 seconds. A medium shot of what appears to be the entrance of a bar called “Ojo Brujo Bar”.



Figure 3.4: Still shot of the entrance to “Ojo Brujo Bar”.

During the early 20th century, non-Black Cubans began to fear those who practiced African spirituality or so-called “witchcraft”, also known as “negros brujos”. This fear became associated

with a series of murders of children. By naming this place of social gathering after this demonstration of blatant racism, it embraces this historical part of Afro-Cubanness, thus representing the artistic reflection of the past within this racialized space that is Santiago de Cuba.

Funeral of Esperanza

At four minutes and eight seconds, Gómez's narration has entered the "Santiago y Los Franceses" section. A song with an Afro-Cuban begins playing as the camera pans across a building. The following is a high angle shot of a moving vehicle of funeral flowers: large wreaths of flowers and their leaves with thick ribbons tied to the sides. A man is seen holding onto one of the large stacks of flowers, and as the vehicle moves forward, more people are revealed to be sitting on the back of the vehicle, their feet swinging along as they slouch forward. Gómez's narration reveals that what is being shown is the "funeral of Esperanza". Gómez's narration on this section is analyzed earlier in this chapter. The film reveals that during this section, people are seen walking the street wearing what appears to be white outfits (although the film is in black and white). Presumably a French tumba is playing in the background over singers while a woman is seen crying while being escorted along by the people surrounding her. A high angle shot is then shown of men sitting down and playing drums.



Figure 3.5: A man holds onto funeral flowers on a vehicle.



Figure 3.6: High angle shot of people walking through the street for Esperanza's funeral.



Figure 3.7: Low angle shot of men playing drums at Esperanza's funeral.

Although it is revealed that Esperanza was the President of a French society in Santiago, the visuals of all the Afro-Cubans walking the streets for her funeral as well as Gómez's comments on the arrival of Black people to Cuba because of the Haitian Revolution occurring during the presentation of this funeral reveals a unique combination of Santiago's past and the present as Gómez knew it. It is also currently that Gómez speaks about the enslaved peoples and their credit for the existence of coffee plantations in Cuba, along with visuals of what appear to be tools for cultivation. Blackness in Santiago is represented here in relation to the French colonial history that influenced the arrival of Black people onto the island, filling up the physical space of Santiago while living under a combined identity of Blackness, French influence, and Cubanness. Like in *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*, Gómez's filmmaking practice in *Iré a Santiago* attempts to move away from the over-folklorized versions of Afro-Cubanness in film: "This work sat in stark contrast to the contradictory images proliferating in revolutionary visual

culture that simultaneously welcomed blacks into the new nation and portrayed Afro-Cubans as in need of salvation and reform to be ideal citizens. It challenged moves by state cultural institutions, the ICAIC included, to position blackness in the past—as folklore” (Benson 223). “Santiago y Los Franceses” is a departure from that folklorizing documentary style. Instead, it’s a poetic rumination about how this purportedly “folkloric” remnant of past Afro-Cubans lives in the present, in popular culture, and in the streets.

The Bay

At this point in the film, we have reached the section on the bay of Santiago. The audience is met with silence, as opposed to the drumming, and singing mere seconds beforehand, and a still shot of a carved drawing of a ship. Nets lined along a platform are shown along with a long shot of nearby boats floating about in the water. As Gómez’s narration begins once again, the camera pans across houses that line the shores.



Figure 3.8: Two houses sitting along the bay of Santiago.

At seven minutes and four seconds, a long shot of a cargo ship piled with containers is shown moving through the waters. Gómez shows this right as she mentions the different items and the people that arrived in Santiago through those very waters. By using the cargo boat to represent objects and people, Gómez acknowledges the lack of humanity that was imposed upon those who fled the Haitian Revolution. It represents their movement into personhood onto the land of Cuba.



Figure 3.9: Long shot of a cargo boat moving through the bay of Santiago.

The final filmic sign from the section on the bay is at seven minutes and 41 seconds, where we see a full shot of men getting out of a recently docked boat. These men are wearing casual clothing and I presume that they are workers of some kind. This is the visual manifestation to the personhood previously mentioned above in relation to the shot of the cargo boat. Now that we have established where the enslaved peoples came from (inhumanity), the film has now acknowledged what they have stepped into as they arrived in Santiago.



Figure 4.1: Long shot of men getting out of a docked boat.

It is interesting that she says that the history always starts at the bay, however this section is in the middle of the film. This is an intentional filmmaking choice that signifies working backwards to produce the film's narrative. Gómez shows us what Santiago presently was during the time of filming, then moves the section on the bay and the beginning of Santiago's history so that the primary images associated with the space are visuals of thriving Afro-Cuban culture, influenced by the French and present in the space because of resistance to slavery. This part of the film signifies Santiago as a place of an eternal "nueva historia" (new history), always resetting and changing with the movement of people. The bay of Santiago is discussed here as a fluid; constantly receiving new people in a site of eternal opening.

Mystic Interlude

The editing choices to represent the "mystic interlude" from the script are highly experimental or the time period of *Iré a Santiago*. Gómez speaks of a woman who appears in a

swimsuit along the bay, signifying that she most likely drowned in the past and now she reappears in the area. The soundtrack of this scene a song from a *misa espiritual* (séance), possibly of the *misa de cordón* (a particular kind of spiritism-*espiritismo* from Eastern Cuba): “Onilé, onilé, adiós que ella se va” (Onilé is an orisha that represents dead ancestors). Once Gómez speaks the words “intermedio místico”, a shot of a docked boat with life preservers hanging from it appears. The following three shots are long shots showing a woman wearing exactly what Gómez describes in her narration: a swimsuit and a headscarf. In the first shot, she is sitting on a small wooden bench-like structure close to the water. The second shot has the camera in the same position and shows her standing closer to the shoreline of the water. Both shots are long shots of the woman and both shots show her with a seemingly expressionless face. The third shot is showing the area the woman was in – once again the camera has not changed positions – and then pans to the right to show the woman sitting in a chair staring towards the water. The three shots that show the woman in the swimsuit are all no more than three seconds long and the camera position does not change, giving the ‘mystical’ tone to the scene. These shots are cleverly edited to give the illusion that the woman is moving in non-human-like ways.



Figure 4.2: Long shot of a woman at the bay in a swimsuit.



Figure 4.3: Long shot of a woman at the bay in a swimsuit in a different position.

Gómez's tone quickly shifts after the shots of the mystery woman are shown. She continues with the phrase "pero la historia ha comenzado de nuevo en Santiago" [but history has begun again in Santiago]. This is a shift to the present, in terms of the film's narrative; we are

now moving to what Gómez and the people of Santiago know to be true. At eight minutes and 30 seconds, a marching band of what appears to be all women in skirts and jackets are shown marching down the street to a drum cadence. The camera moves through them, then showing the regularly dressed people carrying banners and flowers behind them, signifying that what we see here is some sort of parade. Then, at eight minutes and 54 seconds, we see people moving about in the streets with a banner hanging in the background that says “Viva el 26th del Julio” [Long live the 26th of July]. Gómez does not explicitly speak about the importance of this date in her narration. However, this day is celebrated as the day an army led by Fidel Castro attempted to overthrow army barracks in Santiago to kickstart the overthrow of Bautista. This completes the transition into the new history that Gómez spoke of after the Mystic Interlude. By doing this, the film highlights different layers of Santiago’s history: the mysterious, and the revolutionary.



Figure 4.4: A long shot of a marching band moving down the streets.



Figure 4.5: A man standing in the foreground with a “Viva el 26th de Julio” banner in the background.

The Locals

This film analysis reveals that Gómez added some narration to the film after the original narration was printed. For example, at nine minutes and 39 seconds, there is a medium shot of an Afro-Cuban man leaning against a wall eating what looks like a tamale. There are also other men on either side of him and he is having a conversation with someone off screen. During this shot, Gómez in her voiceover says, “El Santiaguero”, introducing the man as a local of Santiago. Immediately after this introduction, a medium closeup shot of a woman is shown. The camera tracks her movement as she walks along a brick wall, looking straight at the camera and smiling. Here, Gómez introduces this woman as, “La Santiaguera”, a local woman of Santiago. The following shots show the Santiaguero and the Santiaguera walking around more residential areas of the city. The shot sizes range from extreme long shots to medium shots of each person. They

are not shown together at this time, and the Santiaguero is usually shown lightly jogging or walking quickly while the Santiaguera leisurely walking.



Figure 4.6: Medium shot of El Santiaguero.



Figure 4.7: Medium closeup shot of La Santiaguera.

The purpose of these shots is to visualize the path of the locals of Santiago. Corresponding to the section “House of La Santiaguera”, this part of the film also displays shots of Afro-Cubans of many shades. *Iré a Santiago* thus far has discussed the city’s colonial past as well as the celebration of the present (up to 1964) and given us a glimpse into the homes of families. The July 26th celebration as well as the Mystic Interlude are not everyday things of Santiago, therefore by showing these two adults simply walking along in their city that they navigate quite seamlessly, and who appear to be chosen at random, Gómez adds a more personal element to the film: showing two locals living a normal life. Again, the film is inverting the public/private dichotomy inside out by exposing the private Santiago. The differing characteristics between these shots and those of the families earlier in the film is that the shots of the families were more obviously staged, with a large amount of camera mugging and posing.

Tourist Recommendations

Around 11 minutes into the film is where Gómez moves to the tourist recommendations. Most everything she suggests that was outlined in the script analysis is shown through one or several shots. Gómez in her narration frequently mentions for people to continue ‘ascending’ into the various attractions she is speaking of. This part of the narration is accompanied with several shots of ramps and stairs. As Gómez recommends tourists to visit the home of a Santiaguera, a long shot of children running across the frame and up a flight of stairs to pose and stare at the camera is shown, representing the home in question. The film also shows the University Gómez speaks of before moving to the next section of the film.



Figure 4.8: A wide shot of a woman mopping the stairs. One of many shots of stairs from this section.



Figure 4.9: Long shot of children posing on the step of the home of a Santiaguera.

The 'ascension' Gómez keeps mentioning and paired with the visualization of the stairs signifies an ascension in history for Santiago. By recommending many colonial landmarks as

tourist destinations and adding someone's home to the list of places to visit, Gómez combines the past with the present so that tourists may perhaps work their way up to the historical space where Santiago was at the time of filming. It began out of people arriving from the horrific conditions of slavery to people now owning homes and celebrating revolutions and the ending of an ugly but also beautiful past.

In this way, the film gestures towards viewing Santiago through both “zoomed in” (i.e., the private homes) and “zoomed out” (i.e., above typical representations of place, and more specifically racializations of Santiago's Euro descended mulatez. If one “looks form above” those narratives and the tourist sites that memorialize them, and if one pays attention to the layers that Gómez steers the attention towards, one gets a Santiago that is much more than that. Like the Santiago in García Lorca's poem, it is richly pleasant and tragic, a refuge of the lost but also a site of stolen enslaved peoples or people displaced by war. It is both *mulato*, Black, and Euro descended in a range of ways.

July 26th Carnival

The film has moved into its final section; the showing of the July 26th carnival. The introductory shots for the hurriedness of the carnival are shots of Afro-Cubans dressed in what appears to be traditional African clothing, as well as white head scarves and white hats with feathers on the front. The other introductory shot is a wide shot of a sign shaped like the island of Cuba that reads “Cuba trabaja y se divierte!” [Cuba works and has fun]. People are shown excitedly moving through the streets. They are drinking, singing, and dancing until the sun has disappeared, but they continue. At 13 minutes and nine seconds, a high angle shot of a man is seen smoking and singing along to the song with his arms in the air. In one hand, he holds a

rolled-up piece of paper, in the other he holds a cigar. Despite the chaos of the freely dancing crowds, the camera manages to capture a choreographed line dance of women moving amongst the crowd.



Figure 5.1: Medium closeup of a child dressed for the carnival.



Figure 5.2: Low angle shot of a sign that reads, "Cuba trabaja y se divierte!"

The film's final shot is of the previously shown Santiaguera. The camera is pointed at a mirror which shows her reflection, then the camera moves to show her dancing along to the music, moving her skirt with her body in a circular motion then moving to the far right. The shot fades to black and shows the words "fin".



Figure 5.3: La Santiaguera dancing at the carnival.

This last sequence of shots is meant to be a celebration of all that has been seen in Santiago within this film. Gómez took the audience on a shuffled journey that showed glimpses of some of the most important moments in Sanitago's history, including the arrival of Black people on the island of Cuba, and the attack that sparked the Cuban Revolution. She did not begin with slavery, as the tone of this film was to celebrate and appreciate all that Santiago has to offer. However, she recognizes the impact on what it made Santiago to be during the time of filming. The July carnival is a reminder of all that the space of Santiago has created within the rich history of Blackness in Cuba.

Conclusion

Iré a Santiago pieces together visuals of a city living with the remnants of Santiago's past. The narration and imagery create non-linear connections between the colonial and pre-revolutionary past, to the post-revolutionary, post-class, and "post-racial" Cuba. At this point (1964), the 1962 declaration that there are white or Afro-Cubans, just *Cubans*, has taken effect on Cuba's post-revolutionary society: "Cuba, el país latinoamericano que ha [...] suprimido la discriminación por motivo de raza o sexo, barrido el juego, el vicio y la corrupción administrativa, armado al pueblo, hecho realidad viva el disfrute de los derechos humanos al librar al hombre y a la mujer de la explotación, la incultura y la desigualdad social [...]" (Castro 1962). What Gómez does in this film does is show the audience that Afro-Cubanness is not an identity of the past. There are nested symbols of race and place through contemporary visuals of Blackness in Santiago: "*Iré a Santiago* clearly establishes the young filmmaker's marked interest in the history and identity of the African diaspora in the Caribbean, and particularly in Cuba. By focusing on the cultural and religious expressions of this diaspora and bringing them to the screen, Gómez performs a valuable documentary and archival task while bringing into play a theoretical reflection supported by the subliminal impulse afforded by the seventh art" (Martínez-Echazábal 344).

This film serves as a precursor for *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi Familia*, a more personal film for Gómez. *Iré a Santiago* is a less intimate, but not necessarily less personal, reflection of Sara Gómez as an Afro-Cuban woman navigating how to implement her culture and identity in a post-revolutionary Cuba: "There is no doubt that through this simultaneously visual and musical pilgrimage Gómez is underlining the fundamental place and historic cultural legacy of Santiago de Cuba within the Cuban nation" (Martínez-Echazábal 356). This is a particularly unique case

for her considering that she is the earliest-known woman and Afro-Cuban woman to produce film in Cuba. Through *Iré a Santiago*, she is reflection on *Cubanidad* – or ‘Cubanness’ – as either a fraternity (there are only Cuban siblings, separate from race), or as a Cuban melting pot. This is a reflection on contradictory feelings and thoughts about where she comes from (and using the documentary to resolve or at least explore that). This is not about her family or her childhood, but about her purported “national” family and “national” home, and what Santiago as a metonym for that shows her when she “visits” it and “witnesses” it visually and poetically.

CONCLUSION

Sara Gómez created her films during an essential moment in Cuban history. She began working with ICAIC in 1961, less than 2 years after the Cuban Revolution, where she directed 20 films. During her time with this Institution, Gómez was the only Afro-Cuban woman director. *Iré a Santiago* and *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia* were films that followed the 1962 declaration of the ‘ending’ of race in Cuba. However, the production choices in each of these films sneakily contrast this declaration. Gómez’s narrations and visuals in the two films deviate from the otherwise hyper-folklorized representations of Blackness in films produced by ICAIC. These hyper-folklorized images insinuate that Blackness in Cuba is frozen in the past, in other words, essentialized. Is frozen in the past, in other words, essentialized.⁷ Gómez’s two documentaries studied here transcend simplistic, essentializing representations of either Cuban *mulatez*, Blackness, or the places racialized through discourses about Afro-Cuban otherness vis-à-vis a future oriented “new Cuban” revolutionary identity. Both documentaries suggest that there are multiple, open-ended ways of being both Black and Cuban, that also look towards the past to process pain and internalized shame, but also to be a part of a collective liberation.

This thesis argues the presence of sly poetics in Gómez’s two films, meaning that there is evidence of direct intentionality and open-endedness found within the narration and visuals. The concept of sly poetics is not only used here as an artistic device, but as a means of making open-ended, original films in an era of increased censorship and silencing about the continuing relevance of both race and Blackness in post-revolutionary Cuba: “[Her life] and works illuminate tensions between opportunity and censorship in post - 1959Cuba, but they also

⁷ “...these folkloric practices are primarily those of Afrodescended people, this marginalization re-imposes racial difference on an already historically repressed group. Hence, Gómez’s films seek to reframe these cultural practices as popular subjects of and to history” (Lord 381).

demonstrate that, despite official government silence on domestic racism, black and *mulato* Cubans never lost sight of the Revolution's promise of racial equality" (Benson 225).

There is something to be said about Gomez's treatment of Afro-Cubanness as an identity that is not just out there, and therefore, worthy of documenting in the post-1959 period. It is also personal – as an Afro-Cuban woman – yet it is not something that can be definitively pinned down. For Gómez, Afro-Cubanness is an identity that varies according to each family member in a family like hers, hinging partly on their generation, their class aspirations, and their religiosity. For Gómez and her family, Afro-Cubanness can be observed from afar, but remains largely private, inside the homes of families of many hues.

I wanted to focus on two documentaries that touched on Afro-Cubanness in the immediate post-revolution period, albeit in a subtle, experimental way that toed the line between positivist filmic ethnography or documentary-making and experimental, proto-Cuban Third Cinema film. I was intrigued by the both the open-ended poetic ruminations on associations of race and place in Guanabacoa and Santiago, and at the same time, how they relate to Gómez's auto-ethnographic explorations. Besides Gómez, I am unfamiliar with any other Black documentary filmmakers in her era (the 1960s and early 70s), either in Cuba or anywhere else, using their own family to be subtle about contemporary Blackness where they are. Gómez even includes her own body into front of the camera. When it comes to the art of directing a documentary film, directors tend to keep their bodies, and personal lives, behind the camera. During my time with La Cinemateca in Havana, I watched and read content on Gómez's other films (...*Y Tenemos Sabor*, etc.), but I chose these two documentaries because they were the two that displayed that interest in the personal with remarkable sincerity. The first piece of literature pertaining to Gómez's filmography that I considered was the heavily referenced anthology, the

most comprehensive book about Gómez's work. I noticed the lack of analysis on *Guanabacoa: Crónica de Mi Familia*⁸

There is an essay in a recently published anthology about Sara Gómez's rich work, Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal touches on Gómez's filmic art packed with rich montages and possible symbolisms.⁹ Although rich in its reading of the film and contextualization, it only skims the surface of a seemingly short piece of film art. This is not because of any fault by the author but rather because of the complexity of montages and symbolisms contained in *Iré a Santiago*. The same could be said for *Guanabacoa: Crónica de mi familia* and the little that others have written about it (Casamayor-Cisneros). Both films broke ground in the world of Cuban cinema, and more broadly, Latin American, and Caribbean documentary filmmaking as it pertains to what is shown on screen and what is spoken through narration. By inserting her own poetic observations and filmic ruminations, the documentaries examined here offered viewers unprecedented montages of Afro-Cuban lives as seen through multiple geographic layers and perspectives. By doing so, Sara Gómez documented the open-ended complexity of what it was like to be and feel Afro-Cuban in the immediate post-revolution period.

⁸ The film is only discussed at length in Chapter Eleven – “Information and Education: Sara Gómez and Nonfiction Film Culture of the 1960s” by Joshua Malitsky. It is then mentioned several other times in comparison with other works of Gómez.

⁹ I have tried to add my own readings about the film and thus amplify Martínez-Echazabal's long overdue focused analysis of this film.

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